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Broadcasting the Italian voice's broadcasting: opera and Italy on the air, 1920s–1930s

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ABSTRACT

Within the early twentieth-century Italian radiophonic imagination, opera occupied a complex position. The overriding 'voice' of Italy and its radio empire under Fascism, opera supported the new technology as a political and cultural tool, even as it challenged it as a geographical and perceptual fantasy. This article has two aims. First, drawing on materials from 1920s and '30s radio magazines, it sketches a history of early radio listening that restores vision and touch to a more central position than they have had in previous scholarly accounts. Second, it investigates radio and the Italian operatic voice as two mutually broadcasting technologies, ones whose critical co-construction was more than an accident of the fraught political moment. Contemporary definitions of radio as *bel canto* and of *bel canto* as radiophonic rested on a subtler, conceptual alignment between the two media, each of which foregrounded a tension between sound and meaning and implied the radial dissemination of voice 'out' in all directions. This article thus seeks to answer two questions. Did opera, a fundamentally audiovisual genre, become invariably 'sonified' through radiophonic transmission? And what happened when that old broadcasting technology, the Italian voice, met the new communications medium?

RIASSUNTO

Nell'immaginario radiofonico italiano del primo Novecento, l'opera lirica occupa una posizione complessa. Se da un lato costituisce la 'voce' della nazione e del suo impero coloniale in epoca fascista, sostenendo il nuovo mezzo di comunicazione come strumento di propaganda politica e culturale, dall'altro mette in discussione alcune delle fantasie geografiche e percettive che lo caratterizzano. Questo articolo si propone due obiettivi. In primo luogo desidera ricostruire, sulla base dei materiali pubblicati nelle riviste radiofoniche degli anni Venti e Trenta, una storia dell'ascolto radiofonico che ponga al centro dell'attenzione non soltanto l'udito ma anche sensi quali la vista e il tatto, tradizionalmente dimenticati nella letteratura sull'argomento. In secondo luogo, l'articolo prende in esame la radiofonia e la vocalità lirica italiana in quanto tecnologie di comunicazione di massa strettamente collegate tra loro, e non solo a causa della situazione politica del momento. Se in questi anni radio e bel canto vengono spesso considerati sinonimi è anche perché sia l'una che l'altro si caratterizzano per una tensione tra suono e significato, e per l'idea di una diffusione 'radiale' della voce in tutte le direzioni. L'articolo pertanto tenta di rispondere a due domande. L'opera, in quanto genere audiovisivo, fu davvero ridotta a puro suono dalla radio? E quali furono i risultati dell'incontro tra la 'voce italiana' e il nuovo mezzo di comunicazione di massa?

KEYWORDS radio; opera; sound reproduction; silence; intermediality; multisensoriality

PAROLE CHIAVE radio; opera; riproduzione del suono; silenzio; intermedialità; multisensorialità

Take this page from the January 1926 issue of *Musica e scena*, an arts-and-theatre monthly published between 1924 and 1926 by Casa Musicale Sonzogno (see fig. 1). It contains an extract from the column 'Scena lirica', a bulletin that covered operatic news from all over Italy and abroad. Its layout recalls that of late nineteenth-century music periodicals, which routinely drew global geographies of opera by listing performances at local, national and international venues. This leaf, which spotlights almost exclusively Italian works, includes some comments on Giacomo Puccini's *La rondine* and Pietro Mascagni's *Lodoletta* (both 1917) made in response to the claims of a French newspaper; some remarks on opera productions in the Emilia-Romagna region, Bari and Turin; and more far-reaching reporting that stretches out to embrace the theatres of Paris, Barcelona, Egypt, New York and Chile. The material is arranged in two columns: each news item constitutes a separate paragraph and is introduced by a few words in block capitals.

This visual arrangement sustains the journal's aspiration – to quote its editor, the Milanese industrialist Piero Ostali – to cloth itself in 'a garb of absolute simplicity' and be the 'expression of honest theatrical reportage' (*Musica e scena*, January 1924, n.p.). 'Transparency' is at once the visual and the verbal rhetorical strategy of a publisher that, just like its main rival, Casa Ricordi, used its own periodicals to promote the operas to which it owned the rights and which it produced through direct theatre management.[1] Presented with miscellaneous information from various locations, we, the readers, can choose to drift with the flow of news or navigate the materials in whichever order we wish. Yet, something ends the operatic news stream abruptly: the paragraph entitled 'Giuseppe Verdi' in the bottom right corner of the page.

Written to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the composer's death, this short new section is constructed as an interruption to the flow of news both typographically and verbally. A thick horizontal line and the bold font style set it apart from the bulletin items, introducing a pause that is restated by the opening line: 'A moment of solemn recollection [*raccoglimento*] so that the mind may be free for the Great Italian.' The imperative governing 'a moment' is only implied, with the missing verb leaving the sentence floating between an evocation and an invocation of its object. The *raccoglimento* is not only represented but also *initiated* by that very emptying out of action. It involves a letting go of the 'voices' of the previous lines – a coming to a standstill after the geographical dispersion of global operatic activity. This (almost spiritual) point of silent, static receptivity coincides with a listening for and to things that would otherwise remain unheard.

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zione artistica del Wymethal. I critici dei quotidiani alzano inni di lode. Dopo la *Vestale* — grandiosissima — riportare una tale vittoria e tale successo con i *Gioielli*, è cosa davvero degna di nota

ORNITOLOGIA FRANCESE! — Il quotidiano francese d'arte *Comoedia* del 15 corr. portava questa noticina:

« *Une œuvre posthume de Puccini*, L'Hirondelle, *va être créée en France. Il existe déjà un drame lyrique en trois actes du compositeur Mascagni qui porte le même titre. Avec* Manon Lescaut, La Vie de Bohème, *c'est la troisième fois que le compositeur de* La Tosca *aura pris des titres déjà retenus par des confrères contemporains* ».

A quanto pare i colleghi della Senna sono poco al corrente della situazione lirica italiana! Anzitutto: perchè opera « postuma »? Se non erriamo *La Rondine* vola sui palcoscenici da ben dieci anni. Quanto poi alla confusione fra rondini e allodole il redattore della noticina dimostra di esser un... cacciatore poco encomiabile, poichè tutto il mondo sa che *La Rondine* di Puccini nulla ha a che dividere in fatto di parentela, neppur nominale, con la *Lodoletta* di Mascagni. Resta a vedersi fra « *hirondelles* » ed « *alouettes* » chi fa la parte del merlo: probabilmente il colto redattore di *Comoedia!*

DE « LA SULAMITA », l'opera nuovissima del maestro A. Zanella, abbiamo già parlato annunciandone l'imminente andata in scena al Teatro Municipale di Piacenza. Di essa parleremo ancora e più diffusamente nel prossimo fascicolo. Il « libretto », di Antonio Lega, è un dramma originale, attraverso il quale è rievocata la poesia del « Cantico dei Cantici » biblico. Le parti principali sono così distribuite: *La Sulamita*, soprano Fumagalli Riva; *Salomone*, tenore Mirassou; *Regina Asthis*, Albertina Dal Monte, *Elior*, baritono Morellato. Per questa interessantissima produzione è vivissima l'attesa.

LA « FEDORA » recentemente rappresentata al teatro Piccinini di Bari ebbe accoglienze trionfali. Interpretarono i ruoli principali della possente opera giordaniana la Baldassarre-Tedeschi, il tenore Barra, il Ceresoli, il Fantino e la Verbini. Magnifico direttore d'orchestra si rivelò il M° E. de Vecchi.

DAL CAIRO ci giunguono notizie felicissime circa le rappresentazioni testè avutesi a quel Kursaal Dalbagni sotto la direzione orchestrale del nostro grande Mascagni *Cavalleria*, *Piccolo Marat*, *Barbiere* e *Rigoletto* ebbero, mercè sua, novella e splendida vita sulla scena avvincendo il pubblico sino al più delirante entusiasmo. Grandi — naturalmente — e commoventi le feste rese al celebre musicista nostro

CAVALLERIA E PAGLIACCI A TORINO sono andati in scena al teatro Balbo, sotto la direzione del maestro Alberto Conti, con una sala insolitamente affollata in ogni ordine di posti. Non sono mancati applausi ed evocazioni, alla fine di ogni atto ed a scena aperta, agli artisti, che formano un tutto omogeneo.

IL « BORIS » A PIACENZA. — Al Municipale è andato in scena *Boris Goudonoff*, di Moussorgski, nuova per Piacenza, in una ottima edizione curata dal maestro Armani. Il successo è stato entusiastico. Festeggiatissimo il maestro Armani.

DOPO I SUCCESSI TRIONFALI della « Cena delle beffe » a Barcellona, a New York e dovunque il celebre Titta Ruffo, che impersonò così genialmente il ruolo di *Neri*, farà in Italia una « tournée » di recite dell'opera di Giordano. Sarà una successione di alti godimenti musicali, a cui i vari pubblici accorreranno senza ritegno, per un richiamo intimo dell'anima desiderosa di accostarsi alle fonti più limpide dell'arte lirica.

È STATA CREATA A MODENA una scuola di scenografia. L'iniziativa ha tanto valore, in quanto l'arte scenografica ebbe a Modena un periodo d'oro, che rimonta all'epoca in cui venne al palazzo del Duca d'Este allestito un teatro che ebbe come scenografi Francesco Siringa e molti suoi discepoli. Da allora i fasti dello studio dell'arte scenografica continuarono quasi ininterrottamente ed ebbero momenti felicissimi. La scuola, che adesso si apre, è diretta da Enrico Ferrari, che è un allievo del Bocchi.

AL CILE si son susseguite con successi grandiosi le rappresentazioni di *Andrea Chénier*, *Pagliacci*, *Cavalleria*, ecc. Molto notato fu in esse opere il tenore Nino Piccaluga.

LA RIPRESA DEI « PAGLIACCI » ALL'OPERA DI PARIGI. — Il popolare spartito di Leoncavallo è ritornato all'*Opera*. Esso era stato « creato » per la prima volta nel 1902-03 all'*Académie nationale de musique*: in seguito emigrò all'*Opéra comique*. Attualmente l'opera vien recitata contemporaneamente nei due più importanti teatri lirici di Parigi. Gli artisti dell'Opèra l'hanno cantata sobriamente, un po' troppo forse — ma ugualmente molto bene. *Nedda* era la sig.na Jane Laval: altri interpreti furono il Büsser, il Ronard, il Thill, Cambon, Soria ecc. ecc.

« CAVALLERIA » AL REGIO DI PARMA. — La popolare opera mascagnana — che ha in sè, nella propria sincerità ed ispirazione, il segreto di una gloria non effimera — è stata presentata al Regio, in un'ottima, fortunatissima edizione. Diremo quasi che è stato il successo più sincero e pronto della stagione. Il Maestro La Rotella ha infuso nell'opera tutto il calore del suo caldo temperamento, ottenendo coloriti ammirevoli dalla orchestra e una aderenza continua del palcoscenico alla sua bacchetta. Valeria Manna ha avuto modo, nella parte di Santuzza, di mettere in piena luce le sue grandi doti di cantante e di attrice. Il tenore Radaelli, ha brillato per la sua voce molto adatta alla parte drammatica di Turiddu. La signorina Ines Guasconi è stata Lola efficace per canto e per scena. Compar Alfio, sicuro di voce e di scena, il bravo Tagliabue. Sufficiente la signorina Millon nella piccola parte di « Mamma Lucia ». Buoni i cori e sufficientemente colorito il movimento scenico. Poco decorosi gli scenari.

E AD ALESSANDRIA D'EGITTO: Sotto la direzione di Mascagni stesso l'Opera Bracale ha dato la *Cavalleria* con esito trionfale. L'illustre compositore diresse con foga giovanile, con ardore, con entusiasmo e dovette concedere il « bis » del preludio e della *Siciliana*, cantata con garbo e delicatezza dal Bertelli. Ha concesso anche il « bis » dell'*Intermezzo* ed ha comunicato la sua emozione a tutto il pubblico e agli artisti. Questi furono applauditissimi: Maria Mainardi ha potuto rivelarsi nella parte di *Santuzza*, incarnando con efficacia il personaggio e dando all'opera quell'impulso che la completa. E' stata festeggiatissima. Insieme a lei ha riportato vivo successo il tenore Nino Bertelli che, in ogni momento, è stato efficace, passando con facilità dalla romanza alle frasi violente, sempre con equilibrio. Il Faticanti ha creato un interessante tipo di *Compr Alfio*, vivificandolo con la sua bella voce baritonale, squillante e forte. La Masucci (*Lola*) si è disimpegnata con arte e con onore del suo compito. Ottimi i cori: una lode meritata, dunque, al M°. Naegel che li istruisce.

Giuseppe Verdi

Un istante di solenne raccoglimento perchè sia libero il pensiero al Grande Italiano.

Venticinque anni sono passati dalla sua morte. Si tacciono alfine critiche e discussioni. Il Genio ha fissato il suo posto di sicuro dominio. Amore e ammirazione lo circondano. Come faro luminoso tra scure e incerte nebbie, tra pericolose correnti e gorghi infidi, la sua Arte e la sua vita segnano la strada buona agli artisti degni, onesti, sinceri.

Figure 1. Extract from 'Scena lirica'. *Musica e scena*, January 1926, 14.

The subsequent lines take the commemorative gesture further, casting it as a primarily aural experience. 'Twenty-five years have passed since his [Verdi's] death. Finally all critiques and debates fall silent. The Genius has established his supremacy. Love and admiration surround him.' The ceasing

of all discussions is presented as a descriptive statement, one that nevertheless resonates with the prescriptive character of the exhortation to *raccoglimento*. The passage as a whole oscillates between these two writing modes, shaping silence into both an object of perception and a medium of auscultation. To this mostly immobile, hushed aural scene the final sentence then brings an element of chaos. Summoning a now visual metaphor, it assimilates Verdi's art and life to a 'bright beacon' – a signal – that, 'through dark and uncertain fogs, dangerous currents and treacherous vortexes', shows the way forward for worthy musicians.

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The sensory experience articulated in this passage caught my attention after reading about the soundtrack that a decade later accompanied the final hours of George V of England. As the king lay dying in 1936, the B.B.C. cancelled all radio programmes, replacing them with silent airtime – a broadcast interrupted only by a periodical update on the monarch's conditions.[2] But the airtime was, of course, silent only up to a point. The so-called static, against which the power of desired radio signals is defined, reached listeners with its typical combination of crackles and hisses produced by natural as well as manmade electrical interferences. In the early days of the wireless, this soundscape was believed to be filled with the voices of the dead, whose dispersed consciousness supposedly roamed in the ether (Sconce 2000). As the latter became crammed with signals with the expansion of broadcasting, static was then elevated to the ideal listening space to capture the voices of feeble, distant stations (Mowitt 2015, 153).[3] The B.B.C. experiment drew on both these conceptions of 'dead air'. As Margaret Fisher has noted, 'This royal silence, a technical simulation of the supposed quietude in the king's chambers and in his heart, forced the listener to imagine the true silence while recognizing the false as broadcast noise and as acceptable deception' (Fisher 2002, 61). Not only was the B.B.C.'s 'silence' not silent at all – an imperfect copy of the original; an acoustic impossibility, even, made audible by the very electric technologies that ought to have reproduced it faithfully – but it also subtly manipulated radio's primary aesthetic logic. Instead of reproducing indexically the absence of sound that enfolded the king on his deathbed, this virtual silence *stood in* for the sonic 'real'. It asked that one believe in, and simultaneously dismiss, the latter's artificial recreation – perhaps the only way of bringing silence (of a technically-produced kind) into awareness. A reversal of the standard relationship between signal and electromagnetic background took place that pushed the absence of sound – here the intended signal – entirely off the perceptual board, as a regime of 'creative' sonic simulation displaced a regime of 'transparent' sonic reproduction.

A similar if less conceptually provoking gesture to the B.B.C.'s had been put in place by the one-year-old Unione Radiofonica Italiana (U.R.I.) in January 1926, the same month that the aforementioned issue of *Musica e scena* was published. On the day that Queen Margherita of Savoy died –

the *Radio Orario* journal informs us with a suitably funereal notice – the U.R.I. suspended all musical programmes, as it would do again on the day of the funeral, in a double tribute prompted by 'deep Condolence' for the passing of the 'Venerable Woman' (see fig. 2). U.R.I.'s dead-air homage harked back to a tradition of collective silences that was at least a quarter of a century old. One- and two-minute pauses had been instituted as signs of national mourning in Britain, the U.S. and other countries during the 1910s, and a solemn quietness had enshrouded the death and funeral of Verdi himself in Milan in 1901 (Williams 2011).[4] These turn-of-the-century public responses to grief were persistently reported, if not coordinated, by the press. Verdi, whose *Nabucco* (1842) and other early 'patriotic' operas had long been associated in public discourse with the noisy uprisings of the Risorgimento, now seemed to produce the somewhat opposite reaction of a mute urban body, with Milan's newspapers detailing the atmosphere of silent mourning that pervaded the city.[5] Twenty-five years later, the paragraph from *Musica e scena* that commemorated the composer's death alerts us to the additional role of print media in *generating* a constellation of (however out-of-sync) individual silences during a period when sound communication technologies were starting to choreograph this acoustic-affective experience in ever more complex ways. If U.R.I.'s approach to the death of Queen Margherita retained a national and largely improvisatory character, the demise of radio inventor Guglielmo Marconi on 20 July 1937 spurred a flurry of synchronous international dead air. Two minutes of radio silence were observed contemporaneously by all major broadcasters in Britain, the U.S., Canada and other countries, while Italy's own national network paid him a silent tribute lasting five minutes (Raboy 2016, 653).

In morte della Regina Margherita

La Unione Radiofonica Italiana nel profondo Cordoglio per la morte di Margherita di Savoia, prima Regina d'Italia, ha sospeso le trasmissioni musicali il 4 Gennaio 1926, giorno nel quale è avvenuta il luttuoso evento, e parimenti si asterrà dal trasmettere i programmi del giorno in cui avverranno i funerali della Augusta Donna.

La sua dipartita che ha recato tanto dolore all'intiera Nazione, è stata particolarmente sentita nell'ambiente radiofonico, perchè Margherita di Savoia è stata una delle prime e più appassionate Radio-amatrici ed ha avuto più volte occasione di manifestare il suo interessamento per le trasmissioni italiane.

Figure 2. The Unione Radiofonica Italiana announces its tribute to the death of Queen Margherita. *Radio Orario*, 9 January 1926, 3.

To put the point to which I am heading more explicitly: the liminal historical position that the Verdi notice from Sonzogno's magazine occupies – its standing on the threshold of Italy's broadcast age – prods us to pursue its intermedial implications, as well as the metaphorical work of radio. Following Timothy C. Campbell's work (2006) on the intertwining of Italian literature and the wireless during the first quarter of the twentieth century, we could probe the paragraph's language and visual framing as instances of an integrated communications assemblage: an assemblage that bound radio (as concept and soundscape) and the written medium together.[6] In this reading, Verdi-the-beacon, who moves fearlessly forward to his followers-receivers, encapsulates a transnational historical imaginary of radio signals flashing through the ether among all kinds of interferences. The visual terms in which the metaphor is cast can be explained, as we shall see, by the multisensory character of early radio experiences, which required that listeners engage with a range of auditory, visual and haptic stimuli. At the same time, *Musica e scena*'s invitation to *raccoglimento*, a tuning into a silence that is simultaneously the medium of its own perception, finds its radiophonic counterpart in historical conceptions of dead air as a whirling abyss in which people could connect with their personal and with a broader, universal Spirit (Ariella 1930, 1934).

For my purposes in what follows, the invocation of silent listening above all raises questions about the perceptual regime of the new, 'blind' medium. A technology used to alternately reproduce and simulate reality, radio had, from the start, a complex relationship with opera, an audiovisual genre that time and again defied the medium's aesthetic possibilities. If, as a concept, radio symbolized aural omniscience and the power to pierce through silence, as a material device it was defined, in theory at least, by the lack of vision. What does it mean, I will ask as I examine Italian discourses on early opera broadcasts, to lend one's ears to singing voices separated from stage action? Did opera become invariably 'sonified' through radiophonic transmission? And what happened when that old broadcasting technology, the Italian voice, met the new communications medium?

Broadcasting the Italian voice's broadcasting

If ever an idea marked the beginnings of radio's history, it was that the new medium had conquered and destroyed space. As experimental wireless technologies came to public attention around 1900 and as broadcasting networks developed in Europe and the Americas from the 1920s, people across the world discovered that they were now connected in real time through sound. The experience was, to be sure, hardly new: the telephone (and, before it, the telegraph) had already enshrined the fantasy of bodiless contact at a distance, making it possible for listeners to consume musical

performances from concert halls and theatres while sitting comfortably in their wired apartments.[7] Listening to sounds issuing from remote locations was only one, however, of the attractions of radio. The new medium also allowed people to navigate the vast expanses of the ether almost at will. 'You are alone . . . at home, totally alone', described a *radioauditore* in 1929, 'and yet you're in touch with the whole world. A twist of the dial . . . here is Vienna! Another little twist . . . Munich, Budapest, Lubiana . . . Turn the dial backwards: Lubiana, Budapest, Munich, Vienna . . . ' (i. bi. 1929). Five years after the U.R.I. had aired its inaugural broadcast from its Roman transmitter on 6 October 1924, large portions of the globe had become audible and had given rise to what Susan J. Douglas, writing about early radio in the U.S., has dubbed 'exploratory listening' (2004). *Radioauditori* needed only to switch on and adjust the valves of their (typically home-built) receivers, and nothing less than 'the voice of the world' (momm. 1929), which for Italians still meant largely the European world, flew into their living rooms.

In Italy radio broadcasting developed in tandem with the Fascist project of taking culture to the 'masses', an educational objective that was on the regime's agenda throughout the 1920s and 1930s. In this context, it was only fitting – perhaps inevitable – that the discourse of the new medium should tightly intertwine with that of opera.[8] Opera was Italy's most time-honoured and most politicized cultural form; a genre that, over three centuries and over myriad cultural incarnations, had acquired all the adaptability and endurability of national myths. Although by the mid-1920s, when Italian broadcasting began to develop, the country's operatic tradition was believed to be 'dead' – crushed by interweaving artistic, financial and institutional crises – its hold on both the national and global market and imagination was far from extinguished. Giacomo Puccini in particular had achieved an extraordinary international popularity thanks to an exceptionally mobile career. Far more than his predecessors, he had travelled far and wide to stage his works, which were performed in both highbrow and lowbrow contexts and were distributed worldwide through gramophone records. It is no coincidence that, by the time he died in 1924, he and his music were chief signifiers of 'homeland' among Italian travellers and expatriates, and their global dissemination even functioned as a metaphor for the seemingly limitless reach of radio.[9]

In 1925, the film critic Filippo Sacchi published a telling article on the subject for the *Corriere della sera*. He was on a ship in the Pacific Ocean, somewhere off the North American coast, when a pang of homesickness caught him and inspired him to write the following lines:

> vorrei fare un po' capire che cos'era per noi, per noi tutti di fuori, che viviamo o viaggiamo fuori dall'Italia, Puccini. *Non si immagina dove arrivava*. Puccini è stato certamente la formula artistica più universale, non parlo ora nel senso estetico, ma *proprio nel senso geografico*, che l'Italia abbia prodotto dopo la generazione di Verdi. Ci sono tanti paesi in cui non abbiamo console, tanti paesi

> in cui non troviamo la nostra bandiera. *Ma Puccini lo trovavamo dappertutto*. Nelle orchestrine dei transatlantici e negli organetti dei suburbi, nei grammofoni delle ville e nelle fisarmoniche degli emigranti, negli hotels e nei cinematografi, nelle sale da concerto e negli *estaminets*, era lui che ci veniva incontro … Era il 'país', il compaesano – il compaesano di tutti; era quindi, in questo senso, anche un po' la patria … (3, enfasi mia)

> I would like you to understand what Puccini meant for us, for all of us abroad, those of us who live and travel outside Italy. *One cannot imagine how far he reached*. Puccini has certainly been the most universal artistic formula – I am not saying in the aesthetic but *in the geographical sense* – that Italy has produced after Verdi's generation. There are many countries in which we do not have a consul, many countries in which we do not find our flag. *Yet we would find Puccini everywhere*. In the little orchestras of ocean liners and in suburban barrel organs, in the gramophones of mansions and in emigrants' accordions, in hotels and in cinemas, in concert halls and in *estaminets*, it was him who would come and meet us … He was the 'país', the fellow countryman – everyone's fellow countryman. He was, therefore, also in a sense [our] homeland … (3, my emphasis)

The event that prompted Sacchi's rush of nostalgia was the hearing of three lines from Puccini's 'Japanese' opera *Madama Butterfly* (1904), played by the 'magic box' – a portable radio – of a fellow passenger. The operatic excerpt was the opening of Cio-Cio-san's aria 'Un bel dì, vedremo' (from Act 2), broadcast in English from Kansas City, Missouri, some 4,000 km away. The theme was suitably maritime: Puccini's Butterfly, a former geisha, fantasizes that her absent lover, the American naval officer B. F. Pinkerton, will one day return to Japan. Her prophecy begins with the anticipation of a thread of smoke arising on the sea, far in the distance – 'Un bel dì, vedremo/levarsi un fil di fumo sull'estremo/confin del mare' – and then unfolds through a series of further visual and sonic images that emphasize the turning point between absence and presence. As Sacchi refracts Butterfly's imagined perception through his own present experience, however, the aria's opening image becomes sonified. 'A little voice, a little voice beyond the immense sea, a little voice beyond the immense land, arises': the wisp of smoke announcing Pinkerton's return to Puccini's heroine turns into the faint radio voice that signals homeland to the critic. It's an auditory cue that awakens Sacchi's bittersweet feeling of nostalgia: a disembodied, distant sound of the kind that haunt Puccini's late operas and that implicate them, as Arman Schwartz has put it, with the 'ontology of wireless transmission' (Schwartz 2012, 167). In Sacchi's experience, moreover, Italy replaces America as the object of loss and desire, or, to be more precise, the male lover on the high seas poignantly returns the yearning for reunion that in Puccini's opera remains a prerogative of the woman. The composer himself – via Butterfly's technologically reproduced and broadcast voice – is the communications medium that overcomes distance and puts the traveller back into contact with his country.[10]

Verdi-the-signal, Puccini-the-radio: opera chases the wireless metaphorically during a period when sound reproduction technologies were mediatizing the experience and extending the global reach of the artform.[11] The voice that Sacchi captured while at sea was the 'voice of Italy': a voice carrying the allure of, albeit not technically produced from, his homeland. In 1925, broadcasts from Europe could occasionally already be picked up from North America (and vice versa): typically at night, when fewer local stations were in operation, and with best results, owing to atmospheric conditions, during the winter months (Potter 2020, 21–36). Not only, however, were such long-distance transmissions almost invariably wanting in quality, but opera on the air had only just become a reality with the U.R.I. After its first trial broadcast in 1924, the company took to transmitting operatic excerpts alongside chamber music, popular music, news, political programmes, lectures and sport. Single numbers remained its only operatic outpouring until the spring of 1926, when its Roman, Milanese and (later) Neapolitan studios started transmitting complete operas.[12] Many of the peninsula's main theatres took up broadcasting between 1926 and 1927, with Milan's La Scala joining the new venture at the end of 1928, after lengthy negotiations with the Ente Italiano per le Audizioni Radiofoniche (E.I.A.R.) – the new private company that had replaced the U.R.I. During that year alone, the three operating Italian stations broadcast opera on more than three hundred nights and operetta on about half as many (*Annuario* 1929, 68). The repertoire hinged on *verismo* titles by Puccini, Pietro Mascagni, Umberto Giordano and others, as well as on new creations by young Italian composers.[13]

Nationalist politics, together with the need to generate revenue, influenced the U.R.I.'s and the E.I.A.R.'s decision to air plenty of Italian music from early on. Particularly after Benito Mussolini's brother, Arnaldo, entered the E.I.A.R.'s governing committee in late 1927, the regime and radio grew closer – a bond tightened in the name of the cultural education of the masses and of expanding imperial ambitions.[14] The close connection between opera and radio in contemporary discourse nevertheless reflected more than an opportunistic appropriation by Fascism of the country's most prestigious cultural tradition. The way the two media coalesced and bolstered each other also points to a subtler, conceptual alignment between the new technology and the so-called Italian voice.

A site from the Enlightenment onwards of both 'lack' and 'excess' when heard from northern Europe, the Italian voice has since been praised for its sonic power to seduce, even as it has systematically been found wanting in its capacity for semantic signification – a mark of difference from the languages and literatures of, say, France or Germany. The mythopoeic character of the *bella voce*, as well as its musical specimen, *bel canto*, stems from its nature as a voice that is both more and less than language: speech *as* melody, and melody *as* speech (Casadei 2019). This sharp distinction between *phone* and *logos* is somewhat artificial, however.

As Alessandro Manzoni and others in the nineteenth century let it transpire in their writings, to the extent that the problem of the (re)production of national tongues in the pre-recording age lay in finding appropriate means to propagate correct pronunciation, then voice itself, with its material qualities, functioned as a powerful broadcasting technology: one that could disseminate given linguistic practices through face-to-face mimicry, thereby making them become the new standard (Vella 2021, 79–107).

As is well known, radio played only a partial role in Italy's linguistic unification, a long, complex process that was accomplished in earnest only after the advent of television in the 1950s (De Mauro 1970). The tension between sound and meaning that historically has characterized the Italian voice as an aesthetic ideal nevertheless was amplified by the new sound medium. In Sacchi's nostalgic reimagining of Butterfly's prophecy, the soprano's 'little voice' – which notably sings in English – matters less for what it sings about than for its beguiling and fragile existence qua sound, ever on the verge of fading away. Another Italianate female voice lies at the heart of early narratives about the emergence of radiotelegraphy, where it engages in a process of meaning production through vocal repetition. According to an anecdote narrated by Marconi's biographer Adelmo Landini, it was Anne Jameson, the inventor's mother and an Irish singer trained in Italy, who persuaded him to persevere with his wireless experiments at a time, in his youth, when he kept failing to obtain positive results. The two engaged in a peculiar conversation, with Anne's voice prompting a wireless communication *avant la lettre*: like a radio transmitter, her vocal organs picked up and sent back amplified her son's innermost, as-yet-unarticulated desires (Campbell 2006, 15–21).

Writing in 1955 but reflecting on an earlier period in the history of the wireless, Landini bequeathed to his readers the cultural fantasies of an era when radio communication was still two-way: a sending of messages into the ether *and* an invitation to respond upon reception. As broadcasting took hold in various parts of the world in the 1920s, the airwaves were re-imagined according to a shifted perception of the medium. No longer a technology meant to enable dialogue, radio became synonym with the launching of sound 'out' from a given point in all directions. The material reality of the Italian network was actually multi-centric, something that might give the lie to this centralized understanding of national broadcasting (Simon 2018, 83). As a concept, however, radio still enhanced the global spread of a distinctively Italian asset such as voice.

In 1931 Enzo Ferrieri, the E.I.A.R.'s artistic director, proclaimed what seemed to many an obvious truth. If 'radio is the foremost ambassador of each country', 'for each the affirmation of its own race', then 'for Italy it will be the messenger of *bel canto*' (1931a, 299–300) – a term, the latter, with rather specific (if elusive) musical meanings, but used here and elsewhere as a synonym for the Italian operatic voice, or even Italian opera tout court.[15] Ferrieri's conclusion seemed

indisputable: only a musical genre as deeply grounded in the power of the human voice as opera possessed the capacity to project the nation's interests far and wide into the air. Ideas of vocal flight and vocal dispersal had long populated writings on opera singers, and from around 1900 they had acquired new currency with the rise of commercial gramophone records that distributed operatic voices worldwide.[16] Now they received further impetus from a technology that placed the 'radial' dissemination of sound at the centre of its own constitutive spatial metaphor. In a 1934 article for the journal *Scenario*, the critic Edoardo Lombardi reassured his readers that 'our music' – he meant opera – 'flows and propagates across the skies of Europe' (Lombardi 1934, 534). A couple of years later, while describing the skirmishes between French and Italian stations that beset Corsica, a journalist for the *Corriere della sera* similarly argued that 'the voice of the Italian radio' could hardly be dissociated from that of *melodramma* – specifically Verdi and Bellini. For him, radio's voice coincided with the voice of Italy tout court: from Bastia, he explained, 'Italy can be seen and can also be heard' (Angioletti 1936, 3).

Sonifying opera?

According to these accounts, then, radio is *bel canto* and *bel canto* is radiophonic – two media in one. Re-imagined as a vocal entity, Italy itself is both the subject and the object of the communication activated by these two, mutually broadcasting technologies. Their critical co-construction was more than an accident of the fraught political moment. What the entangling discourses of early radio and the Italian voice reflected and simultaneously reinforced was not only a Fascist attempt to cater to the education of the masses, but also a notion of opera, particularly Italian opera, as a primarily musical, auditory object and set of experiences. Considered chiefly a literary and/or theatrical genre during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, opera has since the nineteenth undergone a process of gradual 'sonification' spurred by social, political and technological factors. The explosion of print culture in the early 1800s and the growing consumption of music in bourgeois homes meant that piano-vocal scores of single operatic numbers, and later full operas, became the primary means of experiencing opera outside the theatre. Nationalist movements across Europe meanwhile entrenched an idea of Italian opera as mostly vocal spectacle: a spectacle that differed from the visual lavishness of French opera and the orchestral richness of the German in significant ways. As Jonathan Sterne (2016, 162) furthermore reminds us, writing, in his case, less about nation-specific aesthetic trends than about the transcultural effects of sound recording technologies, 'any investment contemporary listeners have in opera as a fundamentally *acoustic* phenomenon is one that is historically specific'. His view is shared by scholars who have traced specific turning points or long-term developments in the

history of opera's mediatization. For Lydia Goehr (2016, 114) it was the telephone that 'turn[ed] opera into an art for the ear', while Emanuele Senici (2019) has stressed the role that the sound media of the mid to late twentieth century have played in how we have consumed and conceived of the genre until recently: in sonic more than in visual terms.[17]

An early dispenser of opera's acoustic component, just like the gramophone, radio might be thought to have supported the genre's sonification invariably. And yet, paradoxically, it did not contribute to this process in a straightforward way. For one thing, radio's 'blindness', a topic widely debated in the 1920s and '30s Italian press, had both advantages and disadvantages when it came to broadcasting opera.[18] The deficiencies of the medium in this respect were obvious. 'Who doesn't remember', asked one F. Zoppini in the *Radiocorriere*,

> l'ultima scena della *Butterfly* di Puccini, pagina musicale somma, che non solo commenta la tragedia che si svolge dietro il paravento di lacca, dinanzi ad un bimbo ignaro che si trastulla, e chi non ha sentito profondamente la mancanza della *visione*, riudendo le melodie che per essa, ed *esclusivamente* per essa, Puccini aveva composte? (1928, 5, enfasi nell'originale)

> the last scene of Puccini's *Butterfly*, a sublime page of music, which does more than comment on the tragedy that is unfolding behind the lacquer screen, in front of a child who, unaware of everything, fiddles around? And who hasn't felt deeply the lack of *vision* when rehearing the melodies that, for it, and *exclusively* for it, Puccini had composed? (1928, 5, emphasis in original)

The 'lanciamento radiofonico delle opere', as Zoppini called it, conflicted with the aesthetics of a genre that, in its full-blown, staged form, fuses words, music and stage action together. Puccini, whose later operas in particular abound in meticulous stage directions, signalled radio's reproductive limits incontrovertibly. Once again, *Madama Butterfly* served as a test case for highlighting what happens to audio-visual tensions inherent in given operatic scenes when these are remediated through a purely acoustic medium. In his 1925 article for the *Corriere della sera* in which he revisited Cio-Cio-san's prophecy – a prophecy that in the theatre is fully acted out, as if Butterfly's perception were true – Sacchi had reinvented Puccini's opening visual image as an auditory one, thus erasing the vocal invitation to look (at an absent object of vision) that generates Puccini's audience's scopic drive. Zoppini now selected a dramatic moment from that same opera in which the theatre audience is – crucially – again barred from seeing in order to underscore radio's aesthetic deficiencies, side by side with Puccini's music's near-cinematic qualities. Take that intentional, and highly visible, withdrawal of vision away, and the extent to which the opera's acoustic component is implicated in the goings-on behind the lacquer screen comes all the more to the fore.[19]

Despite his apparently negative judgment on opera broadcasts, Zoppini's overall view on the subject was indeed far from defeatist. In between his lines, one can even read a certain delight for the way that radio might in the future help to renew opera. Later in his article he explains how words, noises and silences, appropriately employed and amplified by librettists, composers and radio producers, might one day offer a radiophonic substitute for vision. Literary scholar Steven Connor has argued that 'the more we concentrate or are concentrated upon one sense, the more likely it is that synaesthesic spillings and minglings may occur' (Connor 2004, 153). Radio's 'lack' of vision, combined with the augmented, excessive listening it fostered, meant that early *radioauditori* often tried to visualize in their minds those operatic scenes that remained invisible to their eyes. Silence was particularly suited to evoke missing images or illusory realities. Whereas, when broadcast on commemorative occasions, it induced *raccoglimento* and allowed people to plug into the grand, spiritual circuitry of their souls and the universe, when employed within programme transmissions it created 'the immense backdrop against which all of the voices that come to us through radio elicit images, landscapes, events, [and] real or fantastic conflicts' (Ferrieri 1931a, 305).

Extracts from opera libretti and pictures of costumes and stage sets, all reprinted in contemporary radio magazines, imbued early radiophonic experiences with further visual stimuli. And not only that: the radio receivers themselves prodded listeners to engage with signals as embodied visually and physically in the dial, an analogue interface that captured the transient geographies of the ether and encouraged people to transfer them with their imagination onto the uncorresponding ones of the Earth (see fig. 3). Time and again, *radioauditori* described their auditory navigation of the radio spectrum in terms of a touch-based exploration of this key part of their radio apparatuses. 'Last night', began a certain Dottore Cattadori in 1926:

> abbiamo ripreso le audizioni alle 20 e 25 e sentimmo per la prima cosa una operetta tedesca per circa un quarto d'ora; poi mosso un pochino soltanto il condensatore fummo in sincronismo con una seconda stazione tedesca (?) indi, giunte le 21, misi a posto l'apparecchio per ricevere Milano e viceversa saltò fuori una stazione francese; insomma vi fu un momento che per aver spostato solo il condensatore per un tratto di 20 gradi si sentì prima *La Traviata*, poi la *Manon*, poi l'*Aida*, e infine trovammo Milano . . . (*Radiocorriere*, 24 aprile, 4)

> we resumed the auditions at 8:25 pm, starting with a German operetta, which we listened to for about a quarter of an hour; then, after moving the dial slightly, we were tuned in on a second German station (?); at 9:00 pm I once again adjusted the receiver in order to capture Milan, and instead a French station popped up. In short, there was a moment when, by merely twisting the dial by 20 degrees, we first chanced upon *La traviata*, then *Manon*, then *Aida*, and finally we found Milan . . . (*Radiocorriere*, 24 April, 4)

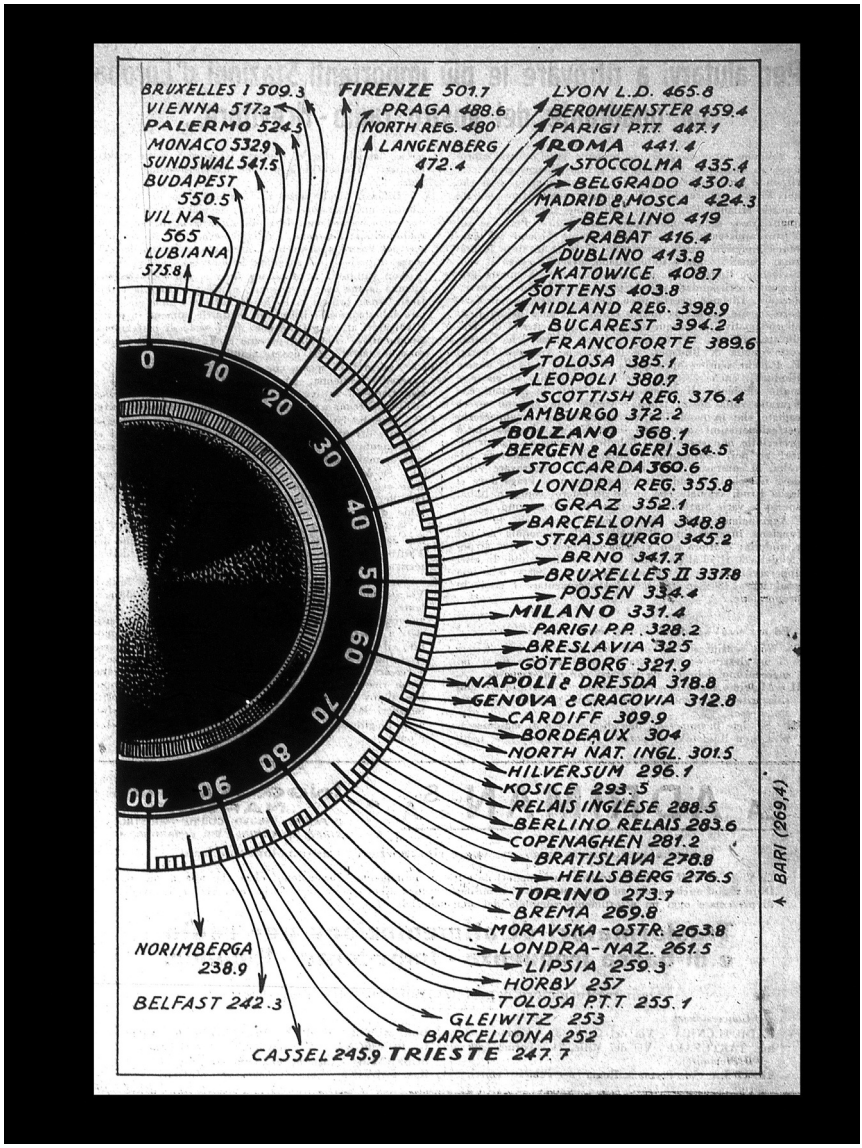

Figure 3. 'Map' of a radio dial. *La radio*, 18 September 1932, 7.

Through vision and touch, and not only through 'audile technique' (to borrow Sterne's well-known expression), listeners tuned in to more or less distant countries and cities, each implicitly equated in the passage above with a particular opera. Opera's global dissemination as well as its steadfast rootedness in local, urban contexts aligned with the possibilities of a medium poised in between the global and the local. Even if as a concept or fantasy radio collapsed distance and flattened local differences, as

a cultural practice enacted by the dial it heightened geographical awareness, a chief concern of Fascism during the 1930s (Atkinson 2013).[20] The micro-geographies of the hand and the eye supported the travels of listeners' imagination, helping them to domesticate culturally the exotic places they ended up visiting through their home-based acts of dial-twisting.[21] Recommendations that *radioauditori* visualize, even materially inscribe, the locations from which the sounds originated further help to make the point. As the *Radiocorriere* put it (8 May 1926, 6), 'for the full efficiency of reception, one should make contact, whether on a globe or on an ordinary map, with the name of the station they wish to listen to'. Other visual cues, such as luminous devices called *indicatori di sintonia*, aided the tuning, thus reinforcing the early radio experience as one that took place within an intersensory dimension (Tucci 1936, 281).[22]

Aside from highlighting the vibrant geographical imagination that underpinned the medium, the 'map' of the dial in fig. 3 puts centre stage the Machine. It establishes a complex, fragile relationship between the ether and the thingness of the receiver, alerting us to aspects of the contemporary epistemology of radiophonic sound that subtly subvert historical notions of opera. As John Mowitt (2015, 151) explains, 'a certain perplexity characterized thought about the radiophonic medium' in the late 1920s, when the term 'air' became a metonym for 'radio'. 'Was the medium of transmission *part* of the device', he asks, echoing contemporary uncertainties, 'or was the device part of the medium of transmission?' When listeners praised the 'purity' and 'clarity' of opera broadcasts, adopting a rhetoric of fidelity and transparency that accompanied early twentieth-century acoustic technologies more broadly (Thompson 2002; Sterne 2003), were they purporting fidelity to what? of what? whose transparency? On the one hand, radiophonic sounds were deemed to be captured at source and delivered through a silent, non-obtruding medium; on the other, as countless, incredibly detailed accounts of the type of equipment employed by listeners demonstrate, it was the receiving device that was held responsible for the quality of reception. Mistrust in the working of receivers was ever lurking and could lead to considerable misjudgements. In England in 1926, some stations changed their wavelengths without notice and listeners lost their broadcasts as a result. Instead of considering that the stations might have changed frequency, people embarked on desperate operations of dismantling and reassembling of their radios 'in search for the presumed malfunction' (*Radiocorriere*, 6 November 1926, 9). Put differently, and to state the obvious, radiophonic sound was hard to locate, its physiology hard to pin down, for by its very nature that sound involved multiple sources and levels of mediation. 'Purity' and 'clarity' were thus projected alternately on the receiving apparatus, or on the broader radio network – a network that conveyed a fetishized sonic elsewhere.

The opera house was a prime example of such fetish. The contemporary Italian advertising iconography regularly featured it next to radio receivers (see fig. 4), imitating the way that early twentieth-century gramophone magazines pictured celebrity singers and gramophone records or record players side by side, in order to convey their supposed equivalence (Sterne 2003, 215–25). The juxtaposition was part and parcel of the discourse of radio as a 'vanishing mediator' (Sterne 2003, 218): of the 'as-if' experience – 'as if you were in the theatre' – of mediated listening. It was also a marketing strategy aimed at promoting both radio and stage performances at a time when the advent of national broadcasting was intensifying anxieties about the long-standing crisis of the theatres. Another set of advertising materials draws attention to broadcasts from specific opera houses (see fig. 5). The title of the work to be transmitted on a given evening was not usually announced in advance, which explains why these illustrations show a throng of operas clustered around the announcement of a single scheduled transmission. Represented as little cards pouring out of a receiver or surrounding and radiating out from the theatre, operas – these pictures suggest – are delivered from the featured locations directly into the ears of listeners. Particular elements of this iconography recall nineteenth-century lithographs in which sketches of selected operatic scenes or operatic characters emblazoned the portraits of famous composers. Yet, the symbolic capital of the oeuvre is here replaced by the more encompassing concept of the repertory. In fact, these collections of radiophonic opera cards do not just amount to compilations of well-known operatic works from the performing canon: they stand for *the sounds of* the San Carlo, or La Scala, or the Carlo Felice. A centuries-old conception of opera as inextricably bound up with place, as deeply rooted in the social and physical environment of theatres, is recast, within the new techno-cultural context, as a sonic, dematerialized connection with those locations.[23] The buildings' material and perceptual reality is now at best relocated in the physical properties of illustrated radio magazines and the sensory stimulation provided by radio receivers.

'When the acts are finished'

Opera, therefore, occupied a complex position within the early twentieth-century Italian radiophonic imagination. The overriding 'voice' of Italy and its radio empire, in the 1920s and '30s it supported the new technology as a political and cultural tool, even as it challenged it as a fantasy of collapse of geography and unmediated access to the voice of the world. Opera broadcasts were caught up in multiple relationships: between old works and new media; flimsy signals and sturdy objects; rootedness in place and placeless

Figure 4. Advertisement from *Radiocorriere*, 13 January 1929, 34.

wandering in the ether; blind listening experiences in theory and multisensory ones in practice. The contemporary advertising iconography and the paratextual materials that accompanied these broadcasts allow us to sketch a history of early radiophonic listening that restores sight and touch to a more central position than they have had in previous scholarly accounts. Debates around radio's 'lack' of vision, furthermore, emphasize the medium's nature at

Figure 5. Advertisement from *Radiocorriere*, 11-17 January 1931, 49.

the midpoint between a technology of aesthetic reproduction and one of aesthetic simulation, with implications that can hardly be overestimated for broadcasts of opera.

I would like to end with one last historical account that beautifully captures the unexpected possibilities radio opened up for opera through social and listening experiences now long defunct. This text is an extract from an

article published by the painter and writer Anselmo Bucci in the *Corriere della sera* in 1932. Originally from Fossombrone, in the Marche region, Bucci describes the soundscape of a village that is clearly his own hometown:

> Qui la piccola cittadina dorme. Ma un crocicchio, illustrato di sghembo da due fanali, vive. C'è la radio. Questa radio comunale è un carrettone, tirato da una rozza tossicolosa, che va per ghiaie e fanghe di una stradaccia, in cui ci son due rotaie. Di tanto in tanto le imbrocca, e scivola avanti. *Son i binari della Tosca*. Mentre Scarpia perora, il carro traversa l'alveo di un torrente, irto di ciottoloni. Ma già tre ombre estasiate son giunte al mio fianco; e si fermano. Altre si appoggiano ai muri. *La Tosca fila un bel pezzetto; e poi deraglia*. Un sopraggiunto si ferma con un gesto transitorio, lezioso: come un manichino nella vetrina. Le donne scrutano pian piano con gli occhi neri le facce scure degli uomini. Siamo una piccola folla oramai, tagliata a spicchi dalle due lanterne, accatastata nelle cavità, con le spalle le teste curve, *sotto il pondo delle campane di Roma, raffreddate*. Chi era diritto, si appoggia sopra una gamba; poi al bastone, poi alla muraglia; siede sopra un paracarro; sopra un gradino; si piglia la testa con una mano; con due. *Le scariche elettriche, le raffiche metalliche, durano un bel po'. E quando son finiti gli atti*, quelle ombre mute ad una a due a tre se ne van via; e c'è chi sospira. (29 novembre, 3, enfasi mia)

> Here the little village sleeps. But a crossroads, lighted up crookedly by two lamps, is alive. There is the radio. This communal radio is a cart pulled by a coughing nag, which walks down a gravelly, muddy road with two tracks. Every now and then it gets onto them and slips on. *They are Tosca's rails*. While Scarpia perorates, the cart crosses the bed of a brook, full of pebbles. Three enraptured shadows have come next to me and stopped. More lean on the walls. *Tosca [La Tosca] goes on for a good while, and then derails*. A man who has just arrived stops with a transitory, affected gesture, like a dummy in a shop window. The women, with their black eyes, slowly inspect the dark faces of the men. By now we are a little crowd, divided into smaller groups by the two lights, and stacked in the holes [of the road]; people's heads and shoulders [are] bent *under the weight of Rome's bells, [by now] cooled*. Those who were standing straight lean on a leg, then on their walking sticks, then on the walls; someone sits on a bollard, [others] on a step; they hold their heads with a hand, [or] with both. *The electric discharges, the metallic gusts, last for quite a while. And when the acts are finished*, those mute shadows leave, in ones, in twos, in threes. Some people sigh. (29 November, 3, my emphasis)

Bucci's passage is laden with semantic ambiguities, the most striking of which concerns the referent of 'Tosca'. This is hard to pin down: is 'Tosca' the radio cart? the nag? the opera? the operatic character? the broadcast? Are all these things, subjects and events substitutes for each other? Could we, in our media-saturated world, envision an operatic experience in which it may be possible to slip into and out of each of Tosca's realms – into and out of 'live' and 'reproduced', content and medium – without buying into a rhetoric of fidelity and therefore loss that, each time we cross the line between the two, inevitably celebrates one at the expense of the other?

Tosca's journey, and her derailment, are a graphic embodiment of opera's countless geographical and technological relocations over history. Just as evocatively, Tosca's lack of a clear signified opens a radical new perspective on the meanings and values upheld by at least some of Italy's early opera broadcasts. Bucci's constant, implicit sliding from one level of signification to another suggests how encompassing, and even how emancipating, encounters with opera 'on' radio could be. The extinguishing signal *as* opera – opera dying away together with, rather than beneath the discharges of, the moribund receiver – sheds a light on the artform and/as technology that is at once more and less bleak than that cast by Verdi-the-beacon in *Musica e scena*'s otherworldly vision.

Notes

1. On *Musica e scena* and the Sonzogno publishing house, see Capra (1995).
2. Every fifteen minutes, the following medical bulletin was repeated by the announcer, Stuart Hibberd: 'The King's life is moving peacefully towards its close.'
3. Until after World War II, the B.B.C. used static, in combination with conventional sound tones, also to separate programmes and thereby discourage 'tap' listening (Cohen 2012, 580–1).
4. Early memorial silences were observed in Britain for the death of King Edward VII in 1910; in the U.S. for the sinking of the *Titanic* in 1912; in South Africa during World War I; in Farnham, Surrey, for Britain's war dead in 1916; in the U.S. during President Theodore Roosevelt's funeral in 1919; and again in Britain on the anniversary of Armistice Day (11 November) first celebrated that same year.
5. Williams (2011, 125) nevertheless also notes that a series of political 'virtual noises' linked with the myth of Verdi's contribution to the 1848 revolutions were re-inscribed by contemporary writers, such as Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, in the silences that dominated the composer's funeral. For the latest and most nuanced overview of scholarly debates on Verdi's role in the Risorgimento, see Smart (2018, 6–12, 152–5 and 179–83).
6. For some engaging reflections on the intermedial status of the B.B.C.'s weekly journal, the *Listener*, see Cohen (2012).
7. For a discussion of one of the earliest telephone broadcast services, the French *théâtrophone*, see Van Drie (2015). On the telephone as a precursor to radio in Italy, see Balbi (2010).
8. Simon (2018) has discussed early Italian opera broadcasts in relation to other forms of Fascist theatre of and for the masses, such as the Carri di Tespi.
9. On the transnational dimension of Puccini's career and popularity, and the mixed reactions these aroused, see Wilson (2007, 155–159, 185–193) and Senici (2016, 14–18).
10. Sacchi's equation of America with Italy opens up an interesting new perspective on Puccini's opera compared to those pursued in recent studies. Typically, *Madama Butterfly* has been interpreted either as an orientalist depiction of Japan (and Italy as/through it) or as a specifically Italian, negative portrayal of early twentieth-century American culture. Rindom (2022) offers a nuanced reading of the opera's intercultural politics.

11. On Italian opera and the gramophone, see Suisman (2009, 107–49) and Rindom (2022).
12. By the end of the decade, and following the first transmitter installed in Rome, radio stations had opened in Milan (1925), Naples (1926), Bolzano (1928), Genoa (1928) and Turin (1929).
13. For a chronology of broadcasts during the 1930s, see Gualerzi and Marinelli Roscioni (1981). As late as 1936, about fifty per cent of the Italian broadcasting hours were still devoted to music; see Cannistraro (1972, 144). For an overview of opera on early Italian radio and a compelling discussion of the technical challenges posed by broadcasts from both studios and theatres, see Simon (2018).
14. Simon (2020) has challenged the standard view that Italian broadcasts consisted of either propaganda or entertainment, showing how all radio programmes, and even Italy's radio aesthetic as a whole, were always political during Fascism.
15. For an overview of the multiple, shifting historical connotations of the term *bel canto*, see Stark (2008). For a discussion of this concept in relation to aural attitudes to language in the late nineteenth century, see Vella (2021, 79–107).
16. Cruz (2012) has examined *bel canto* as 'an ideal of song and singing' reformed by modern technologies of recording, transmission and reproduction.
17. According to Senici, this understanding of opera as sound, which was by no means produced by technologies alone, reached its apex between the 1950s and the 1990s, thanks to LPs and CDs. Electric sound recording and radio contributed to it earlier in the century. DVDs, YouTube and HD simulcasts have now all started to reverse this trend of opera's sonification, allowing more and more people to experience opera as an audiovisual spectacle also outside the theatre.
18. A number of contemporary views on the subject were collected by Ferrieri in his 'Inchiesta sulla radio' (1931b).
19. Puccini's operas have indeed often been discussed as proto-cinematic; see, for example, Franklin (1994) on *Tosca*.
20. On the geographical imagination associated with early radio elsewhere in Europe, see Scales (2016, 111–57).
21. Fickers (2012) has discussed the role that the dial played in the domestication of both the world and the material reality of the radio set itself.
22. Talking about telegraphy, Sterne (2003, 142) has argued that, as media scholars, we need 'a shift in focus from the sensory classification of media to the history of the deployment of the senses through and around media', an invitation we can take up and extend also to other technologies.
23. For a recent collection of essays that explore the opera house as a physical, social and cultural environment from different geographical, historical and theoretical perspectives, see Aspden (2019).

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