



Proclamation of a Collective Viennese Identity— Aspects of the *Wiener Theaterzeitung*'s Reports on Giacomo Meyerbeer's *Robert le Diable* in the 1830s

Andrea Horz

Keywords

collective identity, opera, music
journalism, Vienna

DOI

[10.31577/forhist.2025.19.2.6](https://doi.org/10.31577/forhist.2025.19.2.6)

Author

Andrea Horz
Privathochschule für Musik, Stella
Vorarlberg
Reichenfeldgasse 9
6800 Feldkirch
Austria
Email: andrea.horz@stella-musikhochschule.ac.at
 0000-0001-5045-6274

Cite

HORZ, Andrea. Proclamation of a Collective Viennese Identity—Aspects of the *Wiener Theaterzeitung*'s Reports on Giacomo Meyerbeer's *Robert le Diable* in the 1830s. In *Forum Historiae*, 2025, vol. 19, no. 2, pp. 83–97, doi: [10.31577/forhist.2025.19.2.6](https://doi.org/10.31577/forhist.2025.19.2.6)

Abstract

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At the time Emperor Franz II was laying down the imperial crown of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation in 1806, reporting on social life in Vienna received a new impetus: the *Wiener Theaterzeitung* was established. This article will ask whether and how this theatre newspaper, which set itself the particular task of focusing on the sensibilities of the Viennese public, defined the national or collective identity of the city. With a focus on Giacomo Meyerbeer's extremely successful opera *Robert le Diable*, it will be shown how both the performances and the subsequent commentary on *Robert le Diable* were used to shape the nation, even as far as the specific Viennese character and the postulation of "Viennese taste" as a uniform cultural judgement. In this way, opera reporting became a means of collective formation.

In 1806, as Emperor Franz II was laying down the imperial crown of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, public reporting on Viennese social life received a new stimulus; the *Wiener Theaterzeitung* (hereafter *ThZ*) was established under the direction of Adolf Bäuerle. The periodical is characterised by the fact that it was the longest-lasting of the periodicals circulating in Vienna in the first half of the 19th century. While *Wiener Zeitung* was the vehicle for official announcements, it can be distinguished from the *ThZ* by a heavy focus on cultural life, with reports on cultural events and above all, from social life.¹ On the other hand, no other Viennese newspaper—publications such as *Der Wanderer*, *Der Sammler*, the *Wiener allgemeine Musikzeitung* and the like come to mind here—had the longevity of the *Theaterzeitung*, which was published from 1806–1860.²

- 1 Compare the characterisation by SCHOBLOCH, Fritz. *Wiener Theater, Wiener Leben, Wiener Mode in den Bilderfolgen Adolf Bäuerles (1806–1858). Ein beschreibendes Verzeichnis*. Wien : Verlag für Kunst und Wissenschaft – Hassfurter, 1974, p. 8. He distinguishes the issues from 1806 to 1817 as a purely specialist theatre journal, whereas in its heyday, from 1818 to 1848, it was a magazine with “general, entertaining and informative content” but as the “Political Courier” from 1848 to 1849, the decline of the journal began.
- 2 See the inclusion of the *ThZ* in the series of Viennese journals by SCHOBEL, Gudrun. *Beiträge zur Wiener Theaterkritik im Vormärz, unter besonderer Berücksichtigung von Bäuerles Theaterzeitung* (Ph.D. thesis). Wien : Universität Wien, 1951, pp. 31–40. For Bäuerles *Theaterzeitung* in general see also: KRETZER, Lieselotte.

Against the background of such a political and journalistic coincidence, it is all the more fitting to ask whether—and in what way—the theatre newspaper contributed to a specific Viennese sense of community. The first thing to bear in mind in this regard is the explicit focus of the reporting in Vienna, with an emphasis on the actions and events of five Viennese theatres: the Kärntner-Tor-Theater and the K. k. Hoftheater, as well as the so-called suburban stages: the Leopoldstädter Theater, the Theater in der Josefstadt and the Theater an der Wien. There were also articles about other cultural events. Of particular interest from a musical point of view are the Viennese dance events, which were not only announced but sometimes also honoured with a full report.

In the very first issue of the magazine, Bäuerle playfully postulated his desire for a critique that reflected the opinion of the audience as a “lament of the audience—theme with variations.” With the statement “I don’t know where I stand,” the voice of the audience expresses the requirement for a modest criticism that needed to be comprehensible and, in particular, a critique that corresponded to its own feelings but above all, should not lead to contrary opinions:

So it may yet come to pass that I say what I do not believe, assert what I do not mean, praise what I do not understand, imagine what I do not feel and do what I do not want, because—I do not know where I stand!³

Consequently, Bäuerle’s criticism was not intended to bring about a coup of local theatre management, but rather to reflect the mood of the Viennese theatre-going public, i.e. to capture Viennese public taste.

The present article will ask whether and how this theatre newspaper, which took the particular task of focusing on the sensibilities of the Viennese public upon itself, moulding the national or collective identity of the city. To this end, the study focuses on Giacomo Meyerbeer’s *Robert le Diable*, a fundamental milestone in the history of opera in the first half of the 19th century. The extremely successful work, both internationally and in Vienna, not only marks the leap from *opéra comique* to *grand opera* but also offers a unique opportunity to focus on specific aspects of nationality due to the composer’s German origin. It can be seen that here too, reporting on *Robert le Diable* thematises what was specifically German on a variety of levels and propagates the “Viennese.”⁴ Analysis of the discourse focuses on the way in which facets of the national and the Viennese identity come to light in the context of the opera reporting, which can be summarised under the following points: 1. Opera composition and nationality discourse; 2. Reporting on opera in other cities; 3. Opera reception in Vienna with a view of the production amongst the international competition reported

Die “Wiener allgemeine Theaterzeitung” Adolf Bäuerles, 1806–1860 (Ph.D. thesis). Berlin : Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Berlin, 1981.

3 BÄUERLE, Adolf. Klage des Publikums. Thema mit Variazionen. In *Wiener Theaterzeitung*, 1806, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 1–2, here p. 2: “So kann es noch wohl dahin kommen, daß ich sage, was ich nicht glaube; behaupte, was ich nicht meine; lobe, was ich nicht versteh; mir einbilde, was ich nicht empfinde und thue, was ich nicht will, denn—ich weiß nicht, woran ich bin!”

4 See *pars pro toto* on this subject in musicology: CELESTINI, Federico. Musik und kollektive Identitäten. In CALELLA, Michele – URBANEK, Nikolaus (eds.) *Historische Musikwissenschaft. Grundlagen und Perspektiven*. Stuttgart; Weimar : J.B. Metzler, 2013, pp. 318–338. In general: ASSMANN, Aleida. *Die Wiedererfindung der Nation. Warum wir sie fürchten und warum wir sie brauchen*. München : C.H. Beck, 2020.

above; 4. Opera reception in Vienna highlighting the reaction of the Viennese audience. It will be shown that the performance and the commentary on *Robert le Diable* were used to shape the national identity, even as far as a specific Viennese character and the postulation of a “Viennese taste” as a uniform cultural judgement. In this way, opera reporting became a means of collective formation.

Nationality and Opera Composition: Identities in the Description of Opera

Talking about opera has always reflected an endeavour to classify cultural works into national categories. It is therefore hardly surprising that this tendency is also reflected in articles of the *ThZ*. These are classes that, as it were, stereotypically refer to the nature of opera in different dimensions.⁵ They also serve to classify the respective opera in a particular direction.

In line with this tradition, Sigmund Schlesinger localized Meyerbeer's *Robert le Diable* in the first detailed report in the *ThZ* on 19 January 1832 on its success in Paris:

In Paris, where opera is not regarded as a colourfully jumbled aggregate of piquant vocal pieces as it is in Italy, the immense fortune that the ingenious Meyerbeer's latest creation has enjoyed in the great capital cannot be attributed to the music alone. Incidentally, the opera texts of the inexhaustible Scribe, who also created this one, have become so famous throughout Europe that one confidently expects a successful and situational libretto from his company in advance. May the esteemed readers judge from the brief outline which we dare to present to them here, to what extent our expectations are justified this time.⁶

The fame of the librettist Scribe is European and his name, and even more so his French nationality and Parisian success—as Schlesinger himself makes the stereotype propagated here explicit—lead us to expect a good libretto, a characteristic that one can expect less from Italian operas. At the same time, Schlesinger also takes a swipe at the French in saying as much as “there are very attractive and rewarding musical situations in this *Sujet*,” there is also no mistaking “the French elusiveness and sensationalism.”⁷ Elusiveness and sensationalism are, so to speak, the dark side of French productions—this has been established since the 18th century.

However, not only the lyrical level, but the music is also measured in its compositional structure from a national point of view. Schlesinger emphasizes the national element, as this quality is associated with the name Meyerbeer.

5 See, for example: HORZ, Andrea. “... the first singer, a born German” – Notions of Nationalities as a Field of Conflict in Operatic Music of the 1770s. In EDTSTADLER, Katharina et al. (eds.) *New Perspectives on Imagology*. Leiden : Brill, 2022, pp. 403–417.

6 SCHLESINGER, Sigmund. Robert der Teufel. In *Wiener Theaterzeitung*, 1832, vol. 25, no. 14, pp. 53–54, here p. 53: “Das ungeheure Glück, welches des genialen Meyerbeers neueste Schöpfung in der großen Hauptstadt erfahren hat, kann in Paris, wo man die Oper nicht wie in Italien als bunt durcheinandergewürfeltes Aggregat pikanter Gesangsstücke zu betrachten gewohnt ist, nicht bloß der Musik allein gelten. Uebrigens sind die Operntexte von dem unerschöpflichen Scribe, der auch Diesen geschaffen hat, in ihrer Art durch ganz Europa so berühmt geworden, daß man von seiner Firma schon im Voraus ein gelungenes und situationsreiches Libretto zuversichtlich erwartet. Mögen die geschätzten Leser nach dem kurzen Abrisse, welchen wir ihnen hier vorzulegen wagen, beurteilen, in wiefern unsere Erwartungen dießmahl gerechtfertigt werden.”

7 SCHLESINGER 1832, p. 54: “[...] in diesem *Sujet* sehr anziehende und dankbare musikalische Situationen gibt [...] die französische Flüchtigkeit und Effekthascherey.”

He concludes the article by pointing out that with the third act ("a veritable fairy kingdom of sound"), Meyerbeer is considered by connoisseurs to be Weber's "worthiest rival."⁸

The comparison with Carl Maria von Weber, which had already been established, was ultimately to run throughout any international evaluation—sometimes in a negative regard. For example, in the course of the report on the English quarrels surrounding the performance of the opera, the *ThZ* refers to *Galignani's Messenger*,⁹ who assessed the opera less euphorically: "He praises the choruses extraordinarily but says that the nature of the topic has produced a tendency towards the 'German school of Teufeley', which he does not like and reminds him too much of Weber."¹⁰ The article does not accept this judgement though and devalues the criticism by referring to the interventions.

When assessing the compositional practice of an opera composer, nationality is—still—an essential aspect. Though based on a French libretto, the music is considered German. Interestingly, the juxtaposition with Weber is formative for this assessment, and the depiction of the devilish in particular is considered German with regard to Weber.

German composers succeeded in Paris—the name Christoph Willibald Gluck immediately comes to mind, particularly for Viennese audiences. For like Gluck, whose genius, according to 18th Century Viennese journalism, is evident in his ability as a German to win over even French audiences, the German Meyerbeer succeeded in doing the same with *Robert le Diable*:

Robert's score is not only a masterpiece but a remarkable event in the history of art and seems to unite all the qualities necessary to raise the reputation of a composer to a position from which he can be regarded as a model of the German school. The Parisian public has appreciated the beauty of this work, it has received it with enthusiasm, the most brilliant success has crowned the efforts of the composer and it will be preserved for a long time, for the book also has interest, the spectacle is magnificent, the music solid, and can only continue to win with repeated listening [...]¹¹

In principle, the discussion revolving around *Robert le Diable* shows that despite the international situation—collaboration between the German composer and a French librettist at different performance venues—national categories are omnipresent in opera discourse, concerning the performance conditions at the venues, as well as genre- and music-analysis aspects or even the nationality of the composer.

8 SCHLESINGER 1832, p. 54: "[...] ein wahres Tonfeenreich [...] würdigsten Nebenbuhler."

9 *Galignani's Messenger* was a daily paper printed in English, even though it was published in Paris.

10 ANONYM. Buntes aus der Theaterwelt. In *Wiener Theaterzeitung*, 1832, vol. 25, no. 51, pp. 203–204, here p. 204: "Die Chöre lobt er außerordentlich, sagt aber, daß die Natur des Stoffes einen Hang zur 'Deutschen Schule der Teufeley' hervorgebracht, die ihm nicht behagen will und ihn zu sehr an Weber erinnere."

11 ANONYM. Neuigkeiten. Wien. Robert der Teufel. In *Wiener Theaterzeitung*, 1833, vol. 26, no. 123, p. 494: "Die Partitur des Robert ist nicht nur ein Meisterwerk, sondern ein merkwürdiges Ereigniß in der Geschichte der Kunst und scheint nur alle Eigenschaften zu vereinigen, um den Ruf eines Tonsetzers auf einen Standpunkt zu heben, von welchem er als ein Muster der deutschen Schule betrachtet werden kann. Das Publikum von Paris hat die Schönheiten dieses Werkes zu würdigen gewußt, es hat sie mit Enthusiasmus aufgenommen, der glänzendste Erfolg hat die Anstrengungen des Compositeurs gekrönt und es wird sich lange erhalten, denn auch das Buch hat Interesse, das Spectakel ist großartig, die Musik gediegen, und kann bei öfterem Hören nur immer noch gewinnen [...]"

The Inside and the Outside: Reports on the Opera in other Cities

Despite the resounding success of Giacomo Meyerbeer's *Robert le Diable*, which premiered in Paris on 21 November 1831, a Viennese performance took some time in making it to the stage. It was first performed on 20 June 1833 at the Theater in der Josefstadt and on 8 October 1833 at the Kärtnerthortheater. Nevertheless, the interim period was filled with news about *Robert le Diable*. Contrary to the promise of a Viennese focus by the title, Bäuerle also informed his Viennese audience on international stage events—an approach that required specific justification in the early days of the newspaper.

Bäuerle felt compelled to defend the section entitled *Auswärtige Theater* (External Theatre)—i.e. the inclusion of reports on international stage events—which was present from the first issue. In the second issue of the newspaper, he added an explanation to the section, “Under this heading, we have the opportunity to talk about all theatres.”¹² This approach was by no means without controversy and around a month later, the editorial team felt compelled to offer its perspective:

Certain people should ask themselves how news from foreign theatres can be included in the *Wiener-Theater-Zeitung*, probably because they do not know how many events from abroad appear in the local court newspaper without it ceasing to be called the *Wiener-Zeitung* for that very reason. O the ponderer and explorer with dull eyes! They may like to say something, but they do not want to think, otherwise they would consider what newspaper means, and whether it is worth the trouble to speak of them. The Red.¹³

The Vienna news always included theatre reports from nearby cities such as Graz, Bratislava and Prague, as well as details on international performances from London, Paris, Amsterdam and other cities.

This approach to news commentary is revealing for the question of the Viennese identity reflected in the *ThZ*. After all, the focus on Vienna was only diverted to a limited extent by reports on foreign theatres, but this merely heightened the awareness of Viennese performances amongst a regional and international context. Properly informed on the content of the latest plays, readers could compare the repertoire staged in Vienna with those of other cities and categorise it in higher-level contexts, and in the case of more detailed reporting, even assess the quality of the productions. It is precisely through such comparative possibilities that distinctions can be made between Vienna's own repertoire and that of other cities.

In the case of Meyerbeer's *Robert le Diable*, the Viennese were told of the opera's success in the *ThZ*, which included listings of performances in different

12 [BÄUERLE]. Auswärtige Theater [Footnote]. In *Wiener Theaterzeitung*, 1806, vol. 1, no. 2, p. 31: “Unter dieser Ueberschrift haben wir Gelegenheit, von allen Theatern zu sprechen.”

13 REDAKTION. Auswärtige Theater [Footnote]. In *Wiener Theaterzeitung*, 1806, vol. 1, no. 7, p. 110: “Gewisse Leutchen sollen sich wundern wie in der *Wiener-Theater-Zeitung*, Nachrichten von fremden Bühnen aufgenommen werden können, wahrscheinlich kommt es daher, daß sie nicht wissen, wie viele Begebenheiten des Auslandes in der hiesigen Hofzeitung stehen, ohne daß sie gerade darum aufhört *Wiener-Zeitung* zu heißen. O der Grübler und Forscher mit trüben Augen! Sie mögen wohl so gerne etwas sagen, aber denken wollen sie nicht, sonst würden sie überlegen was Zeitung heißt, und ob diese es der Mühe werth finden soll von ihnen zu sprechen. Die. Red.”

cities. Around a month and a half after the premiere, on 19 January 1832, the aforementioned detailed report by Sigmund Schlesinger was published on the front page, which was devoted to an in-depth description of the content. This meant that people in Vienna were aware of the story and dialogue of the original Paris version from the very beginning, as well as the highlights. In this respect, Schlesinger pays particular musical tribute to the third act as a “true fairy realm of sound,”¹⁴ in which, among other things, Robert “inflamed even more by hellish spooks” steals the magical rose branch from the nun Rosalie’s grave.¹⁵ As Bäuerle expressly formulated it as a concern of the journal, readers were brought up to date on political events on a cultural level in Vienna.

However, it was not only the cosmopolitan knowledge of the latest opera trends in Vienna that led to international coverage, reports about the opera’s continued success in other cities signalled that foreign theatres were quicker than those in Vienna to take a chance on a Parisian success. Ultimately, this further stimulated the desire of the Viennese for the opera. On 12 March 1832, the *ThZ* informed its Vienna readers in detail about quarrels surrounding the opera performance in London. It was reported that three to four months after the Paris premiere, a dispute had broken out between three different theatres over the performance rights. The premiere took place in two theatres simultaneously, each under different titles—*The Demon* at the Drury Lane Theatre and *The Hostile Father* at the Covent Garden—and both with interventions in the music.¹⁶ These reports make it clear to the Viennese reader how keen the theatres in London were to stage this opera—making a Viennese performance all the more desirable.

The reports in the *ThZ* also emphasise that smaller cities on the level of Vienna were already enjoying the performance, such as the Frankfurt audience in February 1833. It is striking that the extremely positive review emphasises the opera’s noble morals:

Let it be said that Robert’s faithful, pious, childlike singing and Alicen’s tender, angelic melodies lift the heart and mind and bear glorious witness to the triumph of the eternally good and true over the common and lowly.¹⁷

Was this intended to allay concerns about the content in Vienna? The opera was not without its explosive aspects. For the Viennese presentation of the opera, censors intervened in the libretto. In this respect, the Frankfurt report was likely to appease Viennese reservations among censors and audiences alike. In fact, some aspects of the play were too drastic for the Viennese censors—the depiction of the devil on stage was not permitted, and the seduction of nuns rising from the grave was also considered inappropriate.¹⁸ What about the criticism?

14 SCHLESINGER 1832, p. 54: “[...] wahres Tonfeenreich.”

15 SCHLESINGER 1832, p. 53: “[...] durch höllischen Spuk noch mehr entflammt.”

16 ANONYM 1832, pp. 203–204.

17 ANONYM. Aus der Theaterwelt. In *Wiener Theaterzeitung*, 1833, vol. 26, no. 35, p. 140: “So viel sey gesagt, daß Roberts gläubiger, frommer, kindlicher Gesang, daß Alicens zarte, engelsgleiche Weisen Herz und Gemüth heben und den Triumph des ewig Guten und Wahren über das Gemein-Niedrige recht herrlich bezeugen.”

18 See, for the Viennese adaption up to Nestroy’s parodie: WALLA, Friedrich (ed.) NESTROY, Johann. *Sämtliche Werke. Historisch kritische Ausgabe 6. Der Zauberer Sulphurelectrimagneticophoratus / Robert der Teuxel*. Wien; München : Jugend und Volk, 1985, p. 258; SPOHR,

The *ThZ* does not directly comment on censorial interventions. Still, it is partly thanks to reports already published in the Viennese press that the audience was more than aware of these differences between the Viennese performance and the original Paris version. The very first exposition of the libretto in the *ThZ* in 1832 makes it clear that Bertram was by no means the stepfather, as he ultimately was in the Viennese performance, but was Robert's father. It was also clear that Robert stole the magic branch from St Rosalie and that he was persuaded to do so by nuns who had risen from the grave, certainly not by unspecified spirits in a castle.

Differences between the Viennese and Parisian versions are also manifested in the available complete Berlin piano reduction (publisher: Schlesinger) by Pixis in French and German (translation by Th. Hell), which, according to the *Allgemeiner musikalischer Anzeiger*, was also available in Vienna.¹⁹ The Viennese review also reveals differences to Vienna, naming Bertram as Robert's father and the churchyard as the place of Robert's seduction. The changes made to the libretto for the Viennese stage performance for Christian reasons are, as it were, countered by the reporting and the presence of the French/German piano reduction.

The details of performances from other locations inevitably indicate that the opera was adapted to local conditions in each case. From the point of view of opera research, this seems natural, as opera is generally an open work. Nonetheless, it should be pointed out that these adaptations are also present in the *ThZ* reporting in Vienna, making it all the clearer that the adaptations mark differences between the locations. The Viennese stage performance is also demarcated in terms of the plot.

Yet this plural experience of one and the same story also exists in another respect, because the story of Robert is present in Vienna at the same time in different versions. Taking up an English article, the audience was prepared for the Viennese performance by an explanation of the historical roots of Robert's story. H. Meyer reports that the opera goes back to Robert of Normandy at the time of William the Conqueror, i.e. around the year 1065. In addition to this connection between the opera and the historically significant William the Conqueror, there is even a contemporary reference with a diabolical twist. According to popular belief, Robert the Devil in the form of a wolf is haunting a cave in Normandy.²⁰ In this way, the opera also has a historical core, which also contributes to a deeper understanding of the story and introduces the staging:

The following brief remarks may serve to provide a better understanding of the text of this opera and inform the audience about the historical name, place them in the correct position with regard to the events, the costume, the scenery, etc.²¹

Mathias. Robert der Teuxel oder: Die Konkurrenz zwischen Hofoper und Vorstadttheatern. In OBERZAUCHER-SCHÜLLER, Gunhild – MÖLLER, Hans (eds.) *Meyerbeer und der Tanz*. Paderborn : Ricordi, 1998, pp. 304–322, particularly pp. 319–320.

19 ANONYM. Robert der Teufel (Robert le Diable); Oper in 5 Acten, von Meyerbeer. Berlin, bey A. M. Schlesinger. Vollständiger Clavierauszug von J. P. Pixis, mit französischem und deutschem Texte, nach Th. Hell's Übersetzung. Preis: 12 Thlr.; ohne Finals 8 Thlr. In *Allgemeiner Musikalischer Anzeiger*, 1833, vol. 5, no. 23, pp. 89–91.

20 ANONYM. Robert der Teufel. In *Wiener Theaterzeitung*, 1833, vol. 26, no. 23, p. 89.

21 ANONYM. Robert der Teufel. In *Wiener Theaterzeitung*, 1833, vol. 26, no. 23, p. 89.

Although the libretto of the Viennese performance is modified to meet the specific requirements of Viennese censorship, it is more than clear to the attentive reader of the journal what these changes are, as the salient points of the story, which are also categorised as controversial, have already been reported in advance. The respective musical references in the original version are also easily accessible in Vienna thanks to the distribution of the piano reduction.

The Viennese interventions in the original opera are also dependent on another point—the idea of an “original” is by no means fixed in the minds of the audience. For one thing, the historical outline shows that the opera by Meyerbeer and Scribe is also a specific narrative of a historically anchored persona. By the same token, the plurality of the narrative of the story of *Robert le Diable* is inherent in the fact that other variants of the material were also performed on the Viennese stage during these months. The *ThZ* reproduced the plot of Raupach's romantic play *Robert der Teufel*, which differs from Meyerbeer's opera in its interpretation of the legend. There were musical interludes by Adalbert Gyrowetz (overture, chorus, three-part singing in the first act). There were also other versions of the material brought to the Viennese stage with the play by Mrs Charlotte Birch-Pfeiffer, *Robert der Tieger*.²² In short, the character of Robert was familiar to the interested Viennese in its different versions.

Meanwhile, contributions from other places and the exuberant reactions to the piece clearly fuelled expectations for a performance on local stages. The *ThZ* noted, for example, that they wanted to draw the attention of the Viennese to the piece, “Friends and connoisseurs of the music” were to learn about the opera's previous fortunes in preparation for the upcoming performance in Vienna.²³

At the same time, the European dimension of the opera is revealed through press releases. In addition to information about the work itself, the accounts offer a framework in which one's own cultural life and opera practice can ultimately be integrated: How does the fortune of the opera in Vienna compare with that of other European cities? Are the local theatres and singers up to the task? How close is the Vienna performance musically and visually to the Paris performance? Ultimately, does the opera correspond to Viennese taste, i.e. does it meet with applause from the Viennese audience (as in Paris) or are they sceptical about the opera (like some voices in Berlin)?

The Viennese Production vs International Stagings

The vital importance of the international frame of reference becomes clear when discussing the local Viennese stage production. Here, the international stages are an authoritative point of reference—above all for an opera such as

²² See: the commentaries of WEIDMANN, F. C. K. K. Hofburgtheater. In *Wiener Theaterzeitung*, 1833, vol. 26, no. 55, pp. 218–219.

²³ See for example: ANONYM. Neuigkeiten. Wien. Robert der Teufel. In *Wiener Theaterzeitung*, 1833, vol. 26, no. 123, p. 494: “Da es bei der bevorstehenden Aufführung dieser Oper im K.k. priv. Theater in der Josephstadt für die Freunde und Kenner der Musik von einigem Belang seyn dürfte zu erfahren, welchen Erfolg dieses Meisterwerk, besonders bei seinem ersten Erscheinen in Paris hatte, so dürfte eine vorläufige Auseinandersetzung desselben, insoferne es der Raum dieser Blätter gestattet, hier am rechten Orte seyn.”

Robert le Diable, which is praised as the high point of opera history and at the same time demands the highest standards of realisation.

This is made clear by one of the first reactions to the production at the Theater in der Josefstadt, written by Eduard von Bauernfeld. He points out the essential theme that this opera brought with it as a *grand opéra*, namely the elaborate production, listing in detail what was needed and above all, what Paris offered in this respect, “The *couleur locale* of the *grand opéra*, the well-staffed orchestra, the choirs, magnificent costumes and decorations, the dance of the Taglioni and the Parisians who were keen to see and enjoy life as audiences”²⁴—not forgetting the correspondingly talented singers. At the same time, Bauernfeld also opens the discussion at the national level by mentioning the hesitant implementation in German theatres and finally, the not entirely favourable reception in Berlin, concluding “We Viennese would have liked to have seen and heard something so brilliant and splendid. But how?”²⁵ He tells the reader that there is no opera that is more expensive, more difficult to stage and more demanding for singers and orchestra. Add to this the demands of the Viennese audience, who, as Bauernfeld describes in this collective, are not particularly generous and if the story is not well received, will be content with simply reading the reviews. In short, staging this opera in Vienna is a particular risk in every respect—from the high demands on the performance and stage design to the Viennese audience itself.

Bauernfeld comments ironically on the rush of the Viennese to the first performance as a curiosity to see “how the good Stöger would ruin himself,” however even he would conclude that “he did not ruin himself.”²⁶ In Bauernfeld’s opinion, all aspects of the challenging production—from the decoration, the costumes, even the legendary dance scene in the third act was “skilfully rehearsed;” the orchestral performance, the singing of the choirs and the singers—everything was a success. The Viennese stage—the conclusion—proved to be up to the demands of the Paris play and was impressive in comparison internationally:

In general, one did not acquire just an empty concept from the opera, such as a lithograph instead of a picture—no, one acquired a real painting, and I do not know whether the painting is better anywhere else.²⁷

Vienna and the production at the comparatively small theatre in the Josefstadt were impressive. Unlike in London, for example, the demands made in Paris were met in Vienna.

24 BAUERNFELD, Eduard von. Stöger und Robert, der Teufel. In *Wiener Theaterzeitung*, 1833, vol. 26, no. 126, pp. 305–306, here p. 305: “Das Locale der großen Oper, das wohlbesetzte Orchester, die Chöre, prächtige Costumes und Decorationen, den Tanz der Taglioni und die schau- und lebenslustigen Pariser zu Zuhörern.”

25 BAUERNFELD 1833, p. 306: “Wir Wiener hätten gerne auch ein Mal so etwas Glänzendes und Prächtiges gesehen und gehört. Aber wie?”

26 BAUERNFELD 1833, p. 306. He refers to Johann August Stöger (1791–1861).

27 BAUERNFELD 1833, p. 306: “Überhaupt bekam man von der Oper nicht etwa blos einen leeren Begriff, etwa eine Lithographie statt des Bildes, - nein, man bekam ein wirkliches Gemälde, und ich weis nicht, ob man anderswo besser malt.” Although Bauernfeld restricts and holds on: “[...] wer *Robert der Teufel* nicht in Paris gesehen, wird von der Aufführung im Josephstädter-Theater vollkommen befriedigt seyn.” See also in regard to the Viennese public the reaction of LANGER, Johann. Bauernfeld und *Robert der Teufel*. In *Wiener Theaterzeitung*, 1833, vol. 26, no. 131, pp. 525–526.

If the local opera house proved to be up to the Parisian standards, then not only was the singing performance judged individually, but it was also explicitly evaluated amongst an international context. The reports documented which singers had Meyerbeer written each part for. This is how ability could be measured, since the stage personnel on site also had to master these parts. At the same time, the *ThZ* articles on *Robert le Diable* made clear that the London stages were not up to the Parisian standard due to the lack of appropriate singing talent, according to prevailing opinion.

How did the Viennese cast fare in this regard? Articles were written focusing on both Viennese productions. According to the critics, Karl Josef Pöck (1812–1869) stood out from the ensemble at the Theater in der Josefstadt for his portrayal of Bertram, and Breiting received great praise in the *ThZ* as Robert.

“Here he stands unique, unmatched, unsurpassable.”²⁸ In the opinion of an anonymous critic, the role of Bertram is Mr. Pöck’s greatest triumph. He believes that Pöck’s Bertram is “the perfect image” of Meyerbeer’s imagination:

Truly, this is how Bertram must be sung and played in order to make people forget and to reveal the tool of dark powers in all its frightening, depraved nature. This is how Mayerbeer may have thought of him when his bold mind created this musical work, and surely his eye must recognize in Mr. Pöck’s Bertram the perfect image of his own imagination.²⁹

The critic rightly considers Pöck to be the favourite of the Viennese public, an audience that is known for its ability to judge.

In the opinion of the *ThZ*, Vienna also had a Robert who stood out amongst the international comparison: the singer Breiting from the Kärthnertortheater ensemble. The Parisian reference was made explicitly, and at the same time differences in the demands of the Parisian and Viennese audiences highlighted:

It is claimed that Meyerbeer wrote this part solely for Nourrit and that any German singer could boldly challenge him in terms of singing, but it is not taken into account that the Parisian public makes completely different demands on its singers than the musical audience in Vienna. Paris will not make the same demands on its national singer Nourrit,³⁰ who sang in the days of the glory and splendour of the French nation, as Vienna does on a singer, on a foreigner who is still almost a stranger to the Viennese heart and ear, on a singer like Breiting, who is gifted with such wonderful means.³¹

28 J.-R. Die Darstellung der Oper: ‘Robert, der Teufel’ auf der Josephstädter-Bühne betreffend (Eingesendet.). In *Wiener Theaterzeitung*, 1833, vol. 26, no. 201, pp. 807–808, here p. 807: “Hier steht er einzig, unerreicht, unübertrefflich da.”

29 J.-R. Die Darstellung, p. 807: “Wahrhaftig so muß Bertram gesungen und gespielt werden, um den Menschen vergessen zu machen, und das Werkzeug finsterer Mächte in seiner ganzen abschreckenden, verworfenen Natur erkennen zu lassen. So mag ihn Mayerbeer gedacht haben, als sein kühner Geist dieses Tonwerk schuf und gewiß, sein Auge müßte in Hrn. Pöcks Bertram das vollendete Bild seiner eigenen Phantasie erkennen.”

30 Adolphe Nourrit (1802–1839).

31 F. W-SS. Breiting als Robert der Teufel. In *Wiener Theaterzeitung*, 1833, vol. 26, no. 186, pp. 746–747: “Man behauptet, daß Mayerbeer diesen Part einzig und allein für Nourrit geschrieben und daß jeder deutsche Sänger doch jenem, was Gesang betrifft, kühn die Stirne bieten könne, man bedenkt dabei aber nicht, daß das Pariser Publikum ganz andere Anforderungen an seine Sänger macht als das musikalische Wiens. Paris wird seinen Nationalsänger Nourrit, der in den Tagen des Ruhms und des Glanzes der französischen Nation schon gesungen, nicht jene Anforderungen stellen wie Wien an einen Sänger, an einen Ausländer, der noch beinahe fremd ist für Wiener Herz und Ohr, an einen Sänger, wie Breiting, der mit solchen herrlichen Mitteln begabt ist.”

According to the critic, Breiting³² more than rose to the diverse demands of the role, which not only requires perfect singing, but also has to assert itself in a complex musical structure.

We can therefore boldly ask musical Germany: which German tenor currently alive will understand Robert's musical character in its entirety and perform it with such consistency, with such equal power of voice from the first to the last breath as Breiting?³³

In the author's opinion, Breiting, a German, has also done justice to the role intended for a French audience and for a French singer. What is more, Breiting has enriched the German opera repertoire with this vocal interpretation, because he presented the work as a complete whole, and this goes beyond all criticism of the opera based on music analysis:

Rellstab in Berlin and many foreign music connoisseurs have penetrated into the inner workings of the individual pieces of music themselves, and it would be useless to repeat once again what has been discussed, praised and criticised so much. We can only say that Breiting has delivered a complete whole in the strictest sense of the word, that he has created a true and faithful original from himself, and that he has enriched the German opera repertoire with a new, permanent, genuinely romantic character.³⁴

It is noteworthy that here the successful interpretation by a German singer is taken as an essential criterion not only to classify the opera as a complete whole, but also to recognise it as part of the German opera repertoire. The view here is that through his interpretation, Breiting accomplished both. Thus, the Viennese actors were not only able to master the individual roles, but also contributed to making the opera a tangible experience as a whole.

Collective Viennese Taste as a Benchmark

It has become clear that opera is categorised in a variety of ways and is observed in all dimensions from the perspective of national considerations. One parameter that is mentioned again and again in this context is the Viennese audience; their acceptance of a piece is a measure of the extent to which the opera corresponds to this local collective. This accuracy is all the more important in the reporting. Here, taste is discussed in terms of collective significance and the image of a uniform Viennese mood emerges in the articles. Conversely, an international opera such as *Robert le Diable* is a means of this discursive collective formation; as it is performed in different countries, the opera makes comparisons between different locations possible, bringing a collective-forming effect.³⁵

32 Hermann Breiting (1804–1860).

33 F. W-SS. 1833, pp. 746–747: "Kühn dürfen wir daher auftreten und die Frage an das musikalische Deutschland richten, welcher jetzt lebende deutsche Tenorist wird den musikalischen Charakter Roberts nach seinem ganzen Umfange so auffassen, ihn. Mit solcher Consequenz, mit solch gleicher Macht der Stimme vom ersten bis zum letzten Hauche durchführen wie Breiting?"

34 F. W-SS. 1833, pp. 746–747: "Rellstab in Berlin und viele ausländische tiefe Musikkenner sind in das Innere der einzelnen Musikstücke selbst eingedrungen, und unnütz wäre es das alte Vielbesprochene, Hochgepriesene und Vielgetadelte noch ein Mal zu wiederholen; wir können nur sagen, daß Breiting im strengsten Sinn des Worts ein vollendetes Ganze geliefert, daß er aus sich selbst ein Original wahr und treu geschaffen, und daß er das deutsche Opernrepertoire durch einen neuen stehenden, echt romantischen Charakter bereichert habe."

35 While reporting on *Robert le Diable*, the editor of the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, Gottfried

This unity of opera composition and its perfect fit with “Viennese taste” is expressed in a variety of ways. The frequency of performances is evident. For example, the opera was not only performed in two houses, but both locations were successful, and the stream of visitors never ceased. On the other hand, the opera performances were flanked by other cultural events at which this music could also be heard—the *ThZ* also provides information on this.

There were not only the plays mentioned above, which presented the same material as Meyerbeer’s opera, but also parodies that satirised both the libretto and the music, the most famous of which is *Robert der Teuxel* by Johann Nestroy. This opera parody is set in the surroundings of Vienna with striking pieces of music, such as the *Valse infernale* at the beginning of the third act, newly created by composer Adolf Müller. This piece ran at the same time as the performances in both houses in the autumn of 1833.

The sounds of *Robert le Diable* not only filled Viennese squares as a stage play, the melodies could also be heard in the ballroom. In the summer of 1833, Johann Strauss (Senior) created the *Robert-Tänze* (Robert-Dances), in which he turned parts of the opera into waltzes. The dances became another attraction of his events, as they were mentioned in advertisements for the dance festivals. For example, it was written under the title *A Night in Venice* that the entire Augarten was to be turned into a large dance hall. The halls as well as the large rondeau and the main avenue were to be “brilliantly lit,” “so that the whole thing would resemble a veritable sea of fire.” New waltzes were also played “based on Meierbeer’s popular opera, entitled: Robert Dances”—Strauss’ dance interpretation of the opera was therefore a memorable feature of the event.³⁶ A report on this event states that Strauss performed it twice in front of a packed dance hall and that the echoes felt were quite clear. The commentary states that “his imagination was not particularly inventive in its composition,” but that it was “received with applause and repeated.”³⁷

The extent to which Meyerbeer’s opera was recognizable and used accordingly by Strauss in dance events is also evident in a report on Strauss’ stay in Baden, where a *quodlibet* with Meyerbeer’s “*Devil’s Thoughts*” left a lasting impression:

In general, the whole *quodlibet* appealed to everyone, and it deserves this appreciation in every respect; for the beautiful variety of the most popular motifs from the most famous operas, the gentle, melancholy *arioso* from the [Bellinis] ‘*Straniera*’ mixed with the ‘*Devil’s Thoughts*’ by Meierbeer: all of this forms such a happy contrast that the effect increases more and more, reaching its climax at the end of the *quodlibet*, where the most heterogeneous thoughts are merged into one and executed at the same time, and the composer must win general applause.³⁸

Wilhelm Fink, wrote about what constitutes taste in cities. He distinguishes good taste from fashions (“*Moden*”), which arise from the different composition of cities. Good taste is a matter for the educated, as they have enough financial means to be able to “hear and see old and new things well presented.” The size of the place is irrelevant, and greater pomp can even be detrimental to the formation of taste. FINK, Gottfried Willhelm. Sonderbares. In *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, 1833, vol. 35, no. 41, pp. 677–679: “[...] gut vorgetragen hören und sehen.”

36 ANONYM. Telegraph von Wien. In *Wiener Theaterzeitung*, 1833, vol. 26, no. 150, p. 604: “[...] auf das glänzendste erleuchtet sein [...] so daß das Ganze einem wahren Feuermeere gleiche [...] nach Meierbeers beliebter Oper, betitelt: Robert-Tänze.”

37 ANONYM. Telegraph von Wien. In *Wiener Theaterzeitung*, 1833, vol. 26, no. 153, p. 616: “[...] bei deren Composition [war] zwar seine Phantasie nicht allzu erfinderisch [...] jedoch mit Beifall aufgenommen und wiederholt.”

38 PROCH, Heinrich. Baaden, am 19. August 1833. In *Wiener Theaterzeitung*, 1833, vol. 26, no. 172,

The opera was not only well received in the opera house, but also enthusiastically recognised in other social contexts. This is more than proof that Meyerbeer's piece was well-liked by the Viennese public, proving that it kept with Viennese taste.

The popularity of the opera is most evident from the fact that Viennese publishers brought melodies from the opera to the public in all forms. This shows, in turn, that the opera was also heard in a more private setting. For example, Carl Czerny offered arrangements for piano, which is evidence that the opera was very popular in Viennese circles. In short, social life was filled with the sounds of *Robert le Diable*, and the plethora of Viennese reporting on this opera and the musical offerings reinforced each other.

The broad and clearly positive reception of the opera in Vienna has become the subject of international comparison. Two things are very clear in such comments. Firstly, the attention of the critics themselves is focused on comments from abroad and compared with their own experience. Secondly, people in Vienna see themselves as a collective unit with their own "taste," i.e. a common Viennese feeling for what pleases, which can certainly differ from other cities.

The comparison of the reactions in different cities is interesting in the case of *Robert*, in that although the piece was a resounding success in Paris, it was negatively reviewed by German critics³⁹ such as Ludwig Rellstab, the leading critic of Berlin at the time. In his eyes, the opera was not only not well received in London,⁴⁰ he was also not convinced by the Berlin performance. On occasion of the Berlin premiere, he reported in the *Vossische Zeitung* that the libretto was not very suitable, and that the composer Meyerbeer in particular did not understand how to give the work any meaning. He condemned the "garish, over-the-top, often even repulsive instrumentation" that was contrary to nature, and voices that were pushed to the limit in order to achieve the desired effect.⁴¹ Rellstab further reinforces his opinion with an assessment of the piano reduction in *Iris*. He begins the detailed review with the devastating words that "nothing, not even a piece such as the present excerpt offers us, is capable of securing the opera or the composer the reputation of an outstanding talent, or even of a genius,"⁴²

p. 691: "Überhaupt sprach das ganze Quodlibet allgemein an, welche Würdigung es auch in jeder Beziehung verdient; denn die schöne Abwechslung der beliebtesten Motive aus den bekanntesten Opern, die sanften schwermüthigen Ariosen aus der 'Straniera,' vermischt mit den 'Teufelsgedanken' von Meierbeer, alles dies bildet einen so glücklichen Contrast, daß die Wirkung immer mehr und mehr gesteigert, ihren Glanzpunkt am Ende des Quodlibets erreicht, und die heterogenen Gedanken in Eines verschmolzen und zugleich exequirt werden, und dem Compositeur den allgemeinen Beifall erringen müssen."

39 See: REHM, Jürgen. *Zur Musikrezeption im vormärzlichen Berlin. Die Präsentation bürgerlichen Selbstverständnisses und biedermeierlicher Kunstanschauung in den Musikkritiken Ludwig Rellstabs*. Hildesheim; Zürich; New York : Georg Olms Verlag, 1983, p. 133. Rellstab also reports a lukewarm reception to the opera in London.

40 RELLSTAB, Ludwig. II. Ueberblick der Ereignisse – London. Meyerbeers Oper. In *Iris im Gebiete der Tonkunst*, 1832, vol. 3, no. 26, p. 104.

41 RELLSTAB, Ludwig. Robert der Teufel. In *Vossische Zeitung*, 22 June 1832, p. 114: "[...] grelles, überladenes oft sogar widerwärtiges Instrumentieren."

42 RELLSTAB, Ludwig. I. Ueberblick der Erzeugnisse. Robert der Teufel. Oper in 5 Acten, Text von Scribe, übersetzt für alle deutschen Bühnen von Theodor Hell, componirt von Meyerbeer. Berlin, bei A. M. Schlesinger. Vollständiger Klavierauszug. Pr. 12 Thlr. Derselbe ohne Finale's Pr. 8 Thlr. In *Iris im Gebiete der Tonkunst*, 1832, vol. 3, no. 27, pp. 105–108, here p. 106: "[...] nichts, auch nicht ein Stück welches der vorliegende Auszug uns darbietet, im Stande sey der Oper oder dem

a judgment that Rellstab believes to be established in the introduction alone. “Every music expert,” says Rellstab, would have “sworn a physical oath after hearing this movement” that “the work that will follow does not come from a great man.” While the *Valse infernale*, which is still famous today, still receives some praise—“for example, some parts of the scene where the chorus of invisible infernal spirits is active are good, after all, who wouldn’t want to invent a few strange turns of phrase in a waltz?”—the depiction of evil in the preceding duet between Raimbaud and Bertram seems to him “completely wrong and almost ridiculous,” because according to Rellstab, evil is not portrayed correctly musically.⁴³

Nevertheless, the opera as a whole and the individual parts criticized by Rellstab were very well received in Vienna the following year. Not only was the *Hell Waltz* a worthwhile basis for new devices for parodies, for dances and instrumental arrangements as well, but even the parts that Rellstab had severely criticised, such as the duet between Raimbaud and Bertram, were considered by the Viennese critics and the musicians who drew inspiration from the opera to be remarkable parts that they were happy to take up in the most diverse forms of opera arrangements. Vienna and Berlin therefore seem to have contrasting collective tastes.

This discrepancy between the obviously positive Viennese reception and Rellstab’s derogatory attitude from Berlin is made explicit by a “Berlin reporter in Vienna” in the *ThZ*:

Although the *Robert* has already been performed very frequently in this theatre and recently also in the one next to the Kärntherthore, the house was so full that only a small space remained on the ground floor! What do you say to that, my dear Herr Ludewig Rellstab in Berlin, who disparaged this masterpiece; isn’t the Viennese audience bad! To give absolutely nothing to your criticism, not to be misled by any surging judgments or rather prejudices, to defy you, to dare to think the opera is good, to visit them so numerously and with so much joy and love, even individual ones, to give choruses a round of applause, and to receive most of the numbers with the liveliest ovations! [...] Isn’t that right, my dear, the Viennese public doesn’t have to have any aesthetics, since they don’t respect your voice.⁴⁴

The apparent difference between the Berlin criticism of the influential Rellstab and the Viennese behaviour was taken up in order to contrast a collective “Viennese taste” with the Berlin aesthetic judgment. In this way, the reception of an opera in a city is not only summarised as a response in the local magazine,

Komponisten den Ruf eines ausgezeichneten Talents, vollends eines Genies zu sichern.”

43 RELLSTAB 1832, pp. 106–108: “[...] jeder Musikverständige [...] nach der Anhörung dieses Satzes schon einen körperlichen Eid abgelegt haben würde, das Werk welches nachfolgen werde, röhre von keinem großen Mann her [...] so sind z. B. einige Stellen der Scene gut, wo der Chor der unsichtbaren höllischen Geister tätig wird; allein wer wolte nicht einige seltsame Wendungen in einem Walzer erfinden? [...] völlig verfehlt und fast lächerlich.”

44 S-M. Gastrollen eines Berliner Kritikers in Wien. Siebentes Debüt: “Robert der Teufel”. In *Wiener Theaterzeitung*, 1833, vol. 26, no. 204, p. 817: “Wiewol ‘der Robert’ bereits sehr häufig in diesem Theater und in letzterer Zeit auch auf dem nächst dem Kärntherthore gegeben wurde, so war das Haus doch dermassen gefüllt, daß nur im Parterre noch ein kleiner Raum übrig blieb! Was sagen Sie dazu, mein geehrter Herr Ludewig Rellstab in Berlin, der Sie dieses Meisterwerk verunglimpt haben; ist das vom Wiener Publikum nicht recht arg! So gar nichts auf Ihre Kritik zu geben, sich durch keine aufwallende Urtheile oder besser Vorurtheile irre leiten zu lassen, Ihnen zum Trotz sich zu unterstehen, die Oper gut zu finden, sie so zahlreich und mit so viel Lust und Liebe zu besuchen, selbst einzelne Chöre zu applaudiren, und die meisten Nummern mit dem lebhaftesten Beifalle aufzunehmen! [...] Nicht wahr mein Lieber, das Wiener Publikum muß keine Aesthetik besitzen, da es Ihre Stimme nicht achtet.”

but an attempt is also made to instrumentalise these reactions to an opera as a barometer of the different mentalities of places. Opera performances are described in the reporting as the response of a collective, also with regard to their audience reception, and are also used in a political sense to differentiate communities from one another.

Conclusion

The example of *Robert le Diable* shows that the international distribution of an opera, particularly with the help of newspaper reporting, can serve to define a local collective, such as a “Viennese audience.” This collective is not only formed by the communal experience of an opera in all locations, rather, the productions can compete with each other. In reporting, the musical and cultural achievements of the locations—i.e. the stage design, musical and vocal performance in Paris, London, Berlin, Frankfurt or Vienna—are compared critically. What is more, the comparison is taken even further as the respective audience reactions are also differentiated from one another. In this way, opera performances contribute to individual cities being described and perceived as a collective—united in a common sense of taste—and ultimately also being appropriated in the 19th century.