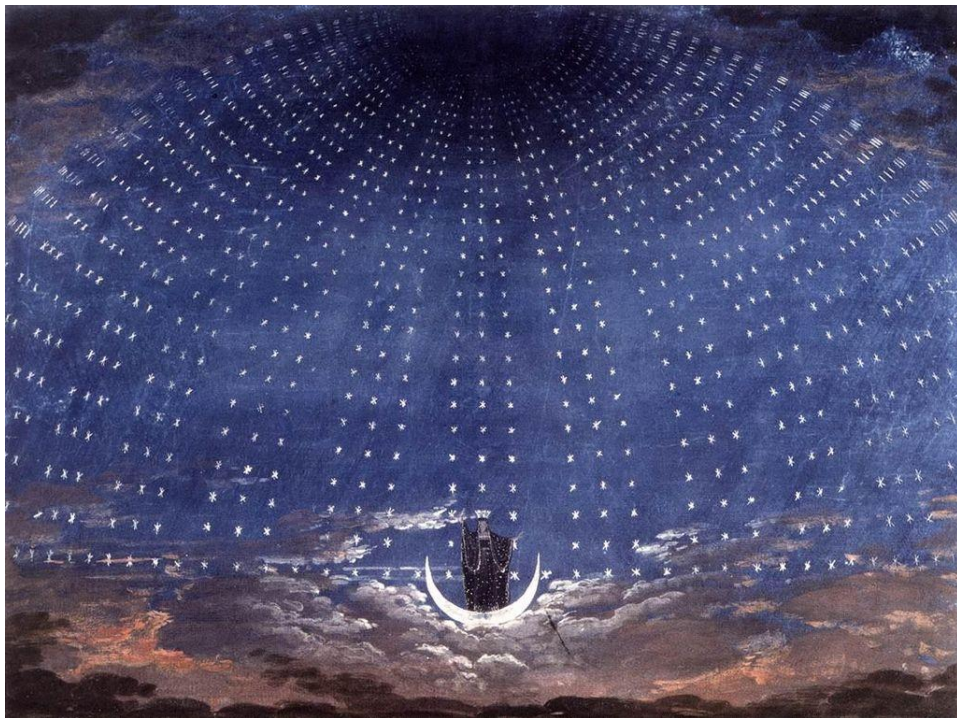


**Oxford Brookes University**

**Department of Music**

# **Opera Research Students Conference**



**The Willow Building**

**Oxford Brookes University**

**Tuesday, 17<sup>th</sup> June 2014 at 9.00 am**

**OXFORD  
BROOKES  
UNIVERSITY**

<b>9.00 – 9.25 am</b>	<b>Registration</b>	
<b>9.25 am</b>	<b>Welcome – Anna Maria Barry</b>	
<b>9:30 – 10.30 am</b>	<b>Session 1a - Performance Practices</b> (Chair – Michael Graham )	<b>Session 1b - Production and Creative Process</b> (Chair – Corrina Connor )
	<p><u>Matteo Paoletti, University of Genova</u> – <i>Giorgio Strehler’s pursuit of an “opera theatre of art”</i></p> <p><u>Anna Koukoullis, Oxford Brookes University</u> – <i>Operatic Face Lifts: the changing role of acting in opera</i></p>	<p><u>Emma Higgins, NUI Maynooth</u> – <i>Illusions of paradise: the truth about the status of the mezzo-soprano in early Third Republic Paris</i></p> <p><u>Simone Spagnolo, Trinity Laban Conservatoire</u> – <i>Italian experimental post-WWII opera and ‘It Makes No Difference’ as a means to reflect on the concept of openness to a plurality of interpretations</i></p>
<b>10:30 – 10:45 am</b>	<b>Tea and Coffee</b>	
<b>10:45 – 12:15 am</b>	<b>Session 2 - The Business of Opera</b> (Chair – Dr Alexandra Wilson )	
	<p><u>Alessandra Palidda, Cardiff University</u> – <i>Patriotic Theatre: La Scala and the new operatic experience in Napoleonic Milan</i></p> <p><u>Matthew W Elliot, Emmanuel College Cambridge</u> – <i>“L’ âge d’argent” : Finance and French Grand Opera</i></p> <p><u>Annabelle Lee, Royal Holloway College</u>– <i>Opera Marketing and the Metropolitan Opera in a Digital Age</i></p>	
<b>12:15 am – 1:15 pm</b>	<b>Lunch</b>	

<p><b>1:15 – 2:45 pm</b></p>	<p><b>Session 3 - Cross-cultural reception</b> (Chair – Russell Burdekin )</p>	
	<p><u>Corrina Connor, Oxford Brookes University</u> – <i>Hard labours and bright songs: the arrival and revival of ‘Die Fledermaus’ in nineteenth-century London</i></p> <p><u>Zara Barlas, Heidelberg University</u> – <i>Dangerous Desires Amidst the Colonial Gaze: The ‘Nautch Girl’ Genre in British Musical Entertainments of the Long Nineteenth Century</i></p> <p><u>Catherine Hutchinson, Goldsmiths</u> – <i>Sémiramis: French taste and the recreation of Babylon</i></p>	
<p><b>2:45 – 3:15 pm</b></p>	<p><b>Tea and Coffee</b></p>	
<p><b>3:15 – 4:15 pm</b></p>	<p><b>Session 4a - Psychology and Listening</b> (Chair – Zara Barlas )</p>	<p><b>Session 4b - British Literary Adaptations</b> (Chair – Dr Gulliver Ralston )</p>
	<p><u>David Baker, Goldsmiths</u> – <i>Saliency and Memorability of Wagner’s Leitmotifs as a Function of Listener’s Experience</i></p> <p><u>Sebastian Bolz, LMU Munich</u> – <i>Opera and the masses: On the operatic chorus around 1900</i></p>	<p><u>Russell Burdekin, Oxford Brookes University</u> – <i>The genesis of the libretto for Loder’s ‘Raymond and Agnes’</i></p> <p><u>Michael Graham, Royal Holloway</u> – <i>‘But that’s a boy’s song...’: Shakespeare and Schubert in ‘The Knot Garden’</i></p>
<p><b>4:15 – 5:00 pm</b></p>	<p><b>Keynote:</b> Dr Alexandra Wilson (Oxford Brookes University) - <i>Your career in opera studies: how to get ahead in academia</i></p> <p>Discussion of future plans for the Opera Research Students' network</p>	
<p><b>5:00 pm</b></p>	<p><b>Social:</b> We have reserved an area at a local pub for those who would like to have dinner and/or drinks together</p>	

## ABSTRACTS

### **Salience and Memorability of Wagner's Leitmotifs as a Function of Listener's Experience**

David Baker, Goldsmiths College, University of London

The leitmotifs in Richard Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* serve a range of compositional and psychological functions, but these functions rest on the assumption that listeners can recognize them as they occur in real time.

Much attention has been given to Richard Wagner's use of leitmotifs with traditional musicological approaches, though what has remained largely unexplored is any empirical evidence to indicate how listeners with varying degrees of expertise perceive these leitmotives. As part of the larger *Transforming Musicology* project, a multi-institutional collaboration between Oxford University, Goldsmiths College and Queen Mary University, this research sets out to answer how listeners perceive Wagner's leitmotifs.

The first psychological study to come out of the Transforming Musicology project addressed what factors (formal music training, Wagner expertise, musical qualities of leitmotif) led to different recognition rates. In the experiment, listeners listened to a ten-minute musical excerpt from Act I, Scene II of Richard Wagner's *Siegfried*. After the listening period, participants were played a list of short musical excerpts containing leitmotifs from Richard Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, some which had occurred in the excerpt, some of which had not. For each excerpt, listeners also made judgments of various factors hypothesized to affect the recognition of each leitmotive.

After the listening test, participants were asked to fill out a questionnaire to assess their musical training, a self-report of their familiarity with Wagner, as well as an objective knowledge test on the music and life of Wagner. The objective Wagner knowledge score turned out to be the strongest and significant predictor of leitmotif recognition rate while coefficients for self-reported Wagner familiarity and musical training did not reach significance. This suggests that Wagner expertise may be a special kind of musical competence that can affect perception, regardless of formalized musical training.

### **Dangerous Desires Amidst the Colonial Gaze: The 'Nautch Girl' Genre in British Musical Entertainments of the Long Nineteenth Century**

Zara Barlas, Heidelberg University

As British interactions with India developed during the long nineteenth century, so too did cultural products deriving from the transcultural relationship. The Indian 'nautch girl' (dancing girl) was a particularly captivating figure for artists of all formats, leading her to

become a central theme in numerous works. Since the British used the term ‘nautch girl’ so reductively, the category encompassed a variety of Indian dancers, singers, musicians, prostitutes and courtesans, making her a controversial entity. The popularity of the nautch girl as a subject of nineteenth-century British art solicits investigation within the colonial context. This paper explores how the nautch girl was depicted in various musical entertainments, though primarily in Edward Solomon’s *The Nautch Girl, or the Rajah of Chutneypore* (1891). It expounds how the female body was appropriated in the visual music of imperial Britain to promote a politically laden narrative and examines the intentions of the works in both their production and reception. A comparative analysis of these musical works alongside the numerous contemporary paintings and sketches of nautch girls reveals similarities in theme and analogy that suggest an imperialist narrative that transcended artistic forms. Additionally, by locating a beautiful, lustful and often corrupting female body in an “exotic” setting, British art of this period could evade the controversy of eroticism on the canvas and stage through spatial and cultural distance. Considering the basic notions of Orientalism, furthered by conceptualisations of musical exoticism, this research contributes to our understanding of the political significance of cultural products of imperialism.

### **Opera and the masses: On the operatic chorus around 1900**

Sebastian Bolz, Ludwig Maximilian University, Munich

Despite being a traditional element of opera, the chorus has mostly been neglected by opera studies. If examined, it is considered as “the people’s voice” or is discounted as mere “sounding scenery”. More in-depth research is sparse due to alleged musical undercomplexity and stereotype subjects.

This paper suggests a new perspective: it aims at understanding the operatic chorus as a medium of reflection for group or mass dynamics. This account provides a fresh theoretical background for thinking about the chorus in music and on stage, as it links the discussion to the disciplines of sociology and psychology.

The years around 1900 seem particularly apt to examine the potential of this connection, as the investigation of social complexity attained new interest then: With scholars like Georg Simmel and Max Weber, sociology was established as an academic discipline in Germany. Following Gustave Le Bon’s widespread writings, the field of mass psychology proposed interpretations of the group and ways to influence it.

Of particular interest for the study of the opera chorus is the connection of this genuinely modern discourse to the contemporaneous repertoire in Germany. Most of it has been discarded as overcome and epigonic ever since, obviously lacking contemporary topics and sites like urbanity and social upheaval. This paper aims at challenging these notions of the anachronism of German opera around 1900, as it points out its specifically modern signature in discussing the chorus in terms of social theory.

## **The genesis of the libretto for Loder's *Raymond and Agnes***

Russell Burdekin, Oxford Brookes University

2015 is the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Edward Loder whose opera, *Raymond and Agnes* (1855), to a libretto by Edward Fitzball, has been claimed as the best English opera of the first half of the Victorian era. Efforts are underway to stage and/or record the opera during the anniversary and the following paper is part of the research to provide a detailed historical and musicological background to it, as well as asking how such operas can be successfully staged today.

Any synopsis of the opera cites it as based on Matthew Lewis's notorious Gothic novel *The Monk* (1796), which records the spectacular fall from grace of the monk Ambrosio. Running alongside the lurid tale of his descent into evil is the more sober, although still quite startling, account of Raymond and Agnes that saw constancy, if not always virtue, rewarded and it is this subplot that has been most fertile in spawning adaptations.

The paper describes the complex journey from novel to opera by way of "pantomime ballet" and melodrama while recognising the debt to Weber's *Der Freischütz* of some 30 years earlier. The opera's failure is discussed in terms of the broader question of the failure of English opera to establish itself in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in which the lamentable librettos, the inability to move beyond its early operatic models, the lottery of its ramshackle organisation, the difficulty of finding a steady audience and their mutually destructive interaction all played a part.

## **Hard labours and bright songs: the arrival and revival of *Die Fledermaus* in nineteenth-century London**

Corrina Connor, Oxford Brookes University

The first London performance of Johann Strauss's *Die Fledermaus*, at the Alhambra Theatre, took place on 18 December 1876, more than two years after the premiere at the Theater an der Wien. Despite the performances at the Alhambra being the first occasion on which a London audience was introduced to Strauss's theatre pieces, the event was neither exuberantly heralded by the press, nor extensively reviewed, but documents related to the early reception of *Die Fledermaus* in London illuminate the great vivacity and variety of operatic culture in the city, while demonstrating that Strauss's operetta did not become the immediate popular staple of theatres and opera houses that it did in European and North American cities. My paper will examine the reception of two stagings of *Die Fledermaus* in London – the productions of 1876-1877 and 1895 – and discuss how musical and historical events may have affected the reception of these stagings.

Using a mixture of critical and popular responses to *Die Fledermaus* at the time of its premiere, and the productions of 1876-1877 and 1895, I shall illustrate the arrival of *Die Fledermaus* into a London scene saturated by the operettas of Offenbach – which like Strauss’s work were subjected to translations and musical interpolations by prominent figures in the London theatre scene – while discussing the extent to which London’s opera-going culture was transformed by productions of German-language opera by touring companies, and the significance of the ‘other’ Jubilee of the 1890s, second only to Queen Victoria’s.

### **“L’âge d’argent” : Finance and French Grand Opera**

Matthew W Elliott, Emmanuel College, University of Cambridge

I hold a BA in Comparative Literature from King’s College London, an MPhil in European Literature & Culture from Cambridge, and have a background in the technical aspects of theatre and opera production. My research focuses on the interplay between technical and institutional aspects of the production of opera and the artistic product, aiming towards an understanding of opera as an artwork grounded both in material circumstances of production and in specific historical iterations of the culture industry.

In my paper, drawn in part from my MPhil thesis, I will outline the mechanisms by which the Paris Opera was run from the beginning of the July Monarchy onwards, focusing on the interplays of private, royal, and state power influenced the house’s output. I will focus in particular on the specific ways in which the Opera was financed during this period, drawing out the social, economic, and political conflicts imbricated in the Opera’s productions from the financial specifics of the Opera’s accounts. In understanding the complex relation of Grand Opera as a genre to the financial circumstances of its production, I hope to shed light on the ways in which institutional frameworks govern the creation of artistic works, and the ways in which these works come to reflect and subvert the competing ideologies which govern their production.

This paper aims to offer a starting point for understanding the unique pressures on opera production created by (generally) state institutions and the impact of differing business models on the production of opera.

### **'But that's a boy's song...': Shakespeare and Schubert in *The Knot Garden***

Michael Graham, Royal Holloway College, University of London

Michael Tippett's operas depict an array of male and female characters, explore the complications and consequences of human relationships, and demonstrate his fascination with the inconsistencies and ambiguities of gender and sexuality. Remarkably, however, there has so far been little discussion in the scholarly literature of matters relating to

gender and sexuality in Tippett's works. This paper will offer a partial redress to this oversight through a discussion of Flora and Dov, two characters from Tippett's third opera, *The Knot Garden* (1966-9).

*The Tempest* is the central metaphor in *The Knot Garden*, a work which contains a plethora of literary and musical allusions. The opera follows the attempts of six troubled people to achieve individuation in the contemporary urban world with the assistance of Mangus, a psychoanalyst and pseudo-Prospero figure. Flora (Miranda) is an adolescent girl on the verge of womanhood who is pursued by her guardian, Faber (Ferdinand). Dov (Ariel) is an androgynous gay musician with whom Tippett expressed an autobiographical affinity.

My exploration will focus particularly on a crucial scene from the end of Act II, when Flora and Dov are left alone together and sing to each other to alleviate their emotional distress. Flora pointedly quotes a short passage of Schubert's 'Die liebe Farbe' from *Die Schöne Müllerin*, while Dov composes his own song, beginning a journey that would only be completed in Tippett's later song cycle, *Songs for Dov* (1970).

## **Illusions of paradise: the truth about the status of the mezzo-soprano in early Third Republic Paris**

Emma Higgins, National University of Ireland, Maynooth

At many points in music history, the rapid development of a specialist repertoire suggests the presence of great performers, and many others who will continue their legacy, but this is not always the case. The early decades of the French Third Republic saw the formation of the core French mezzo-soprano repertoire, with operas such as *Carmen*, *Samson et Dalila* and *Werther* premiering during this time, but the mezzo-soprano singer within the major opera houses of the Third Republic was conspicuous in her near-absence. The state-funded opera houses of Paris, the Opéra and Opéra-Comique, either had no category for the mezzo-soprano, or consistently cast sopranos and contraltos in leading mezzo-soprano roles, with a mezzo-soprano sometimes functioning as an understudy. The institutional practices of these companies were such that there was simply no mechanism in place for singers to establish a consistent 'mezzo repertoire'.

This paper aims to discuss this phenomenon through the lens of house casting trends, which explains how French composers were writing for singers who were either not present in companies, or not at a high enough level within the house hierarchy to take on a leading role, and how these singers created stable careers and sometimes succeeded in taking on these roles in spite of their company's policies. It will use examples of operatic productions and mezzo-soprano singers to show how two opera companies which could have gained reputations as specialists in a popular voice-type ignored this in favour of following what they believed were their patrons' preferences.



## ***Sémiramis*: French taste and the recreation of Babylon**

Catherine Hutchinson, Goldsmiths College, University of London

Rossini's *Semiramide* was performed regularly in Paris over a period of almost fifty years in the 19<sup>th</sup> century until 1874. An important revival was the lavish 1860 production at the Paris Opéra, *Sémiramis*. It was created as a vehicle to show off the talents of Carlotta and Barbara Marchisio, who had been singing to acclaim in North Italy. The opera was specially restructured to suit French tastes, with a new translation into French, and ballet music by Michele Carafa inserted into the score. No expense was spared on the sets and costumes, which were based on the Assyrian artefacts, newly arrived in the Louvre.

Yet critical opinion was divided. On the one hand, this *Sémiramis* 'grew with each performance'; and the 'fusion' of the Marchisios' voices recalled the best days of the Théâtre Italien. On the other hand, the opera had become 'heavy' and unlike Rossini; and the sisters did not compare with the opera's great interpreters, such as Pisaroni and Malibran.

This paper will examine the features of the 1860 *Sémiramis* and the reasons behind its mixed reception. These revolved around questions of French musical taste and what was desirable in singing, as well as France's ambivalence towards its own archaeological discoveries in Mesopotamia. Examining these issues will shed light on reception of *Semiramide* in France generally, and help to explain why the Marchisios, who were well received in Italy and Britain, were less well received in Paris.

## ***Operatic Face Lifts*: the changing role of acting in opera**

Anna Koukoullis, Oxford Brookes University

Over the last thirty years canonical operatic works have undergone theatrical 'face-lifts'. As a consequence debates surrounding production issues in opera have largely focused on how directors are re-fashioning operas, and how this may shape an audience's understanding of a work. Most recently, David J. Levin has argued that we must 'map' a new language to assess stagings as part of a performance practice debate. However, if operatic stagings are to be considered within a larger performance practice debate, should we not also consider how these new stagings have had an effect on the dramatic expectations of the performers?

While scholars have sought to dissect the aesthetic reasoning behind new productions, they have not adequately addressed how this has changed the role of the singing actor. Indeed, they have only made fleeting reference to the fact that opera singers now have to look and act the part.

This paper aims to investigate whether modern production styles in opera have effected how singers are trained as actors. In particular I look at how three pioneering operatic directors, Walter Felsenstein, Wieland Wagner and Jean Pierre Ponnelle were influenced by developments in acting in the mainstream. I illustrate how their revolutionary theories have fed into modern productions, and how this has instigated a change in the way singers are expected to act on stage today. I will conclude my study with an investigation of the tuition currently being offered to opera singers by opera faculties within conservatoires across the UK.

## **Opera Marketing and the Metropolitan Opera in a Digital Age**

Annabelle Lee, Royal Holloway, University of London

With the exponential growth of social media for purposes such as recreation, mainstream news and PR, many within the classical music industry contribute to the wider media ecosystem by advertising performances on social media. No less among these actors is the Metropolitan Opera (Met). Specifically, its e-strategy arises from Peter Gelb's appointment as General Director in August 2006, through which he launched several digital technological initiatives aimed at 'revitalizing opera and connecting it to a wider audience.' For example, the website's redesign in 2006 as an editorial destination caused substantial increase in web traffic and online ticket sales. Currently, the role of social media within opera marketing is a growing area of research, yet there remains a paucity of literature on the Met's strategies. The finding is overlooked by commentary on other organisational projects, notably, The Met: Live in HD cinema broadcasts. This is surprising because the Met exemplifies e-marketing in light of Gelb's objectives and the broader 'death of classical music.' To do this, the Met utilises an 'advanced interactive' strategy drawing on contemporary culture for online content. This paper evaluates the role of social media within opera marketing via a case study of the Met's website design, social media networks, audio-visual resources and e-brochure. Subsequently, the author provides practical recommendations to the Met and similar organisations.

## **Patriotic Theatre: La Scala and the new operatic experience in Napoleonic Milan**

Alessandra Palidda, Cardiff University

Following the Napoleonic occupation in 1796, Lombardy, a Hapsburg province throughout the eighteenth century, became a Republican State for the first time in its history. Its capital Milan, a major and celebrated venue for operatic performances, had seen a particularly strong bond being established between local society and the opera house; subsequently, musical theatre and opera houses were immediately identified by the Republican authorities as effective tools and venues of control, influence and propaganda.

La Scala had established and maintained a very classical repertory; similarly, operatic performances and practices of theatre attendance were highly standardized and codified. Under the pressure of the new regime, the operatic repertory showed fewer changes than expected, partly for its conservative character, partly because the Napoleonic authorities could hardly match their republican propaganda with the radical transformation of such a celebrated tradition. Nevertheless, the broader musical repertory performed in La Scala and the very experience of the opera house attendance were effectively transformed by introducing new occasions for musical performances and new works specifically commissioned and composed for republican celebration.

After describing the historical and musical context in depth (also using original documents from Milanese archives), I move to the analysis of different elements impacting upon both the musical repertory and the opera house attendance in Napoleonic Milan. Descriptions of innovative phenomena (e.g. new genres, musical occasions etc.) will be supported by dedicated case studies also employing primary musical/archival sources, thus offering a precious insight into a very complex and still widely unexplored context.

### **Giorgio Strehler's pursuit of an “opera theatre of art”**

Matteo Paoletti, University of Genova

Though the activity of Giorgio Strehler (1921-1997) has long been studied, few scientific works have focused on the operatic stagings of the director, which have often been considered a minor production compared to the results he reached in the straight theatre. Nowadays the availability of new archive documents allows us to study Strehler's contribution in the European opera scenes in a more problematic perspective. In 1993 David L. Hirst observed: “In looking through the catalogue of musical works he has staged we are struck by their affinity with Strehler's tastes in straight theatre”; now we can say that the director himself considered his operatic production the natural complement of his research in the dramatic theatre. Strehler frequently exchanged themes and solutions among operatic and straight scenes, and sometimes used the rich resources of the great opera houses to explore solutions which were impossible for his Piccolo Teatro.

The aim of my research is to summarily reconstruct Giorgio Strehler's operatic activity, focusing on his pursuit of a “teatro lirico d'arte”. Theorized by the director in the 70s, “lyrical theatre of art” is an operatic staging produced following the practice of the straight theatre and forcing the routine procedures of the opera world. Strehler's pursuit failed in the main opera houses in which he worked and in 1989, during the rehearsal of *Fidelio* in Paris, he decided to definitely walk out. In 1997 Strehler tried to reform the opera productive system by staging in his Piccolo Teatro a brand new *Così fan tutte*, created following the scheme of the dramatic institutional theatres, but the director died during the rehearsal and no one ever studied his work.

## **Italian experimental post-WWII opera and *It Makes No Difference* as a means to reflect on the concept of openness to a plurality of interpretations**

Simone Spagnolo, Trinity Laban Conservatoire

This paper discusses how Italian experimental post-WWII operas such as Luciano Berio's *Opera* and Sylvano Bussotti's *La Passion selon Sade* are based on Umberto Eco's concept of *opera aperta* (open work) and the philosophical idea that art works are open to multiple interpretations. Also, it explores such concepts in relation to the narrative structures of both Italian avant-garde opera and my operatic spectacle *It Makes No Difference*, a self-composed multi-narrative work representing an evolution of contemporary Italian operatic experiments.

I suggest a consideration of post-WWII Italian opera in conceptual terms, whilst highlighting a unique creative trend and contributing to the current academic literature on this topic, which seems to be modest and fragmented in discussions of either individual authors or works. Concomitantly, this paper implicitly criticises those scholars maintaining that post-WWII Italian opera lacks unity and uniqueness.

In pursuit of comprehensive research, my discussion extends into a number of fields and disciplines that include not only the interdisciplinary topics proper to the genre of opera but also literature, prose-theatre and philosophy.

The discussion on *It Makes No Difference*, on the other hand, provides an overview of my work's narrative structure and notational system as musico-theatrical parameters able to epitomise the concept of Openness. Also, my argument presents *It Makes No Difference* as a new operatic work arisen from a practice-as-research process.

Please visit [www.obertobrookes.com](http://www.obertobrookes.com) to find out about the annual OBERTO conference, which will place on Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> September. This year's theme is

**Beyond black tie and bubbly: rescuing opera from stereotypes.**