

## THE MANAGEMENT OF OPERA IN ISTRIA AND DALMATIA (1861-1918): A PRELIMINARY SURVEY<sup>1</sup>

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### *Abstract*

This paper aims to shed light on the issues surrounding the management of opera in Istria and Dalmatia from 1861 to 1918. The public and private subsidies received by eastern Adriatic theatres are discussed as well as the proposals of opera seasons and the negotiations by impresari as described in their letters. The tracking of the routes taken by artists and

the shipping of sceneries, stage costumes and scores are also mentioned.

**Keywords:** opera, management, eastern Adriatic coast, impresari, Habsburg Empire

**Ključne riječi:** opera, upravljanje, istočnojadranska obala, impresariji, Habsburško carstvo

To date, the mechanisms regulating the way opera was produced and organized in the Istrian and Dalmatian region have not yet been thoroughly investigated, above all for a historical period – that following 1861 – during which the Austro-Hungarian administration was engaged with both the Italian and Croatian elements. The intention of this paper is to bring to light some of the main themes connected to the management of opera performances in this area. It includes an

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examination of the correspondence between impresari and theatre managements, with the aim of understanding the nature of the main requests made by the impresari and the manner in which they formulated their offers of opera seasons. Mention is also made of the practice of denunciation (unfortunately present at the time and attributable to the fierce competition between impresari), of possible mediations on the part of agents, and of the strongly felt need to establish a network between theatres that might help to introduce money-saving processes in the engagement of opera companies. The transportation of materials and artistic personnel from one place to another is another key issue included in this article. Although the theatres discussed are different in importance and size, and present individual experiences, what they have in common is the attempt to tackle the growing difficulties that the organization of opera faced in that period.

»It is very tiresome being the director of these poor provincial theatres without endowment (*dote*), without audience and with very few people who understand what a theatre is«:<sup>2</sup> with these words – this was in 1913 – the manager of the Teatro Mazzoleni of Šibenik (Sebenico) expressed in a private letter all his discomfort about being at the head of a theatre that clearly produced continual worries: no public funding, hence reduced productions, fewer performances and scant attendance. However, at certain meetings of the shareholders of Šibenik the fact that the Teatro Mazzoleni received no subsidies from either the government or the city became almost a source of pride, given that they succeeded in organizing their opera seasons *in spite of* the lack of public aid. At such meetings a parallel would be made between the resources of the theatre Nuovo of Zadar (Zara)<sup>3</sup> – a theatre that had subsidies from both the municipality and the governorate, and had a sizeable audience, but which in a period of thirty months had amassed a large deficit – and that of Šibenik, which received no public funding at all. This prompted Giovanni Mazzoleni to say: »we are not running at a loss, and in itself this is a cause for satisfaction«.<sup>4</sup> In spite of the glowing publicity given in the newspapers (Teatro Mazzoleni Šibenik – The cherished refuge of the most distinguished aristocracy / Theatre of great elegance – Luxurious electric lighting / Large waiting room – Reading room – Buffet – Large smoking room / Always hosting big stars and attractions), the underlying organizational realities displayed a world that was somewhat less dazzling and in which there was no lack of difficulties.

<sup>2</sup> »È una gran noia fare il direttore di questi meschini teatri di provincia senza dote, senza pubblico e con pochissime persone che comprendono cosa sia un teatro«, letter from Giovanni Mazzoleni to Enrico Gallina, Šibenik, 19. 9. 1913, State Archive of Šibenik, HR-DAŠI-103, Kazalište i kino »Mazzoleni« – Šibenik (1863-1945), envelope 6.

<sup>3</sup> During the 1865-1882 period in Zadar were active two opera theatres: the Teatro Nobile and Teatro Nuovo (in 1901 named after Verdi). In this article mention is made exclusively to the Teatro Nuovo.

<sup>4</sup> »Noi non siamo in perdita, e già questo ci soddisfa«, letter from Giovanni Mazzoleni to Enrico Gallina, Šibenik, 1. 12. 1911, HR-DAŠI-103, envelope 1.

Along the Istrian and Dalmatian coastline running from Pula (Pola), Rijeka (Fiume), Zadar, Šibenik and Split (Spalato) down to Dubrovnik (Ragusa), in the period between 1861 and 1918 we have examples of both theatres without public funding and theatres subsidized by the city and governorate.<sup>5</sup> The endowment granted, however, was always voluntary, at the discretion of the institution providing it, and this was duly pointed out in the correspondence with the theatre managements. Hence, for example, the governorate of Dalmatia wrote as follows to the theatre Nuovo of Zadar in reply to a request for funding: »this subsidy is to be considered as completely voluntary and such that it could also be reduced or even completely suspended«. <sup>6</sup> We know from history that in Italy the state subsidy was stopped in 1868.<sup>7</sup> From that moment on, the decline of opera's organizational machine became even more pronounced and the area under examination here was no exception.

The entire process of producing and organizing operas in the area depended on the raising of sufficient funds to support the productions right up to, and including, the booking of the artists and the staging itself. If we examine the archival documents of the theatres of the coastal regions, what immediately strikes one is that for the most part they are written in Italian. In fact Italian, right from the start of the Napoleonic domination, was established as the official language for the area. Subsequently its importance was to decline, in accordance with the policy of »de-Italianization« of Istria and Dalmatia promoted by the emperor Franz Joseph from 1866 onwards.<sup>8</sup> If, for example, we glance through the *Gazzetta Musicale di*

<sup>5</sup> For these theatres, for the period under consideration, there is a bibliography that describes their historical, artistic and architectural aspects, for the most part in Croatian. See for example, on the situation of Dubrovnik, the study by Miljenko Foretić (2008), for Split those by Mirjana Škunca (1991) or Duško Kečkemet (2007), and for Šibenik the book by Ivo Livaković (1984). On Zadar, see the contribution by Gastone Coen (1977) or the historical studies by Edgardo Maddalena (1923) or Giuseppe Sabalich (1904). For Rijeka see the work by Nana Palinić (2016) and Lovorka Ruck (2000); for Pazin (Pisino), Nerina Feresini (1983) and for Poreč (Parenzo), Ivana Gortan Carlin (2010); for Pula, Marcello Bogneri (1987) or Lada Duraković (2012), just to mention some of the studies.

<sup>6</sup> »Tale sovvenzione è da considerarsi come del tutto volontaria e tale da potersi anche eventualmente restringere ed anche del tutto sospendere«, letter from the district captain to the management of the theatre of Zadar, Zadar, 22. 2. 1897, State Archive of Zadar, HR-DAZD-252: Kazalište »Verdi« u Zadru 1863-1936, envelope 25.

<sup>7</sup> See Fiamma NICOLÒDI: Il sistema produttivo dall'Unità ad oggi, in: Lorenzo Bianconi, Giorgio Pestelli (eds.): *Storia dell'opera italiana*, vol. 4, Turin: EDT, 1987, 169-229. On the transfer of the state-owned theatres to the municipalities in 1868 and on the problem of the *dote* (endowment) above all in Milan, see Bianca Maria ANTOLINI: Teatri d'opera a Milano: 1881-1897, in: Bianca Maria Antolini (ed.): *Milano musicale*, Milan: LIM, 1999, 22-26.

<sup>8</sup> On 12 November 1866 Franz Joseph had ordered the Crown Council to resist the influence of the Italian element in a resolute manner: »Se. Majestät sprach den bestimmten Befehl aus, dass auf die entschiedenste Art dem Einfluss des in einigen Kronländern noch vorhandenen italienischen Elements entgegengetreten durch geeignete Besetzung der Stellen von politischen Gerichtsbeamten, Lehrern sowie durch den Einfluss der Presse in Südtirol, Dalmatien, dem Küstenland auf die Germanisierung oder Slawisierung der betreffenden Landesteile je nach Umständen mit aller Energie und ohne alle

*Milano* of 1862, we note that these theatres were still viewed as »theatres of Italy«, whereas in the years to come, all news concerning them in the Italian press would be found in the sections marked »Estero« (Abroad).<sup>9</sup>

While it is true that »to be an opera impresario was becoming less a profession than a disease«, to quote John Rosselli,<sup>10</sup> nonetheless many impresari continued to undertake the task of organizing opera seasons. The impresario would write to the theatre management to offer his services and, especially if he was making contact with a new management for the first time, he would have to be very careful about formulating his request correctly and making it as appealing as possible. From an analysis of many letters in the archives of the area we note that they have certain points in common. Certain questions are repeatedly made to the managers. Those who still had doubts about whether to offer opera seria<sup>11</sup> or something else would ask for information on the type of spectacle that would attract the biggest audience, because it went without saying that the impresario was expected also – indeed above all – to satisfy the public. Some impresari immediately specified the proposed operas in the first letter of negotiations, only perhaps to add »and if they should not please you, you may say what would be more acceptable if the repertoire were changed«. <sup>12</sup> They were therefore prepared to change the repertoire if it helped to win the contract. Some asked for the tender specifications, which perhaps they had failed to find published in the newspapers or at the agencies. Obviously the main requests for information concerned which the best period for giving a set of performances would be, what the duration of the season was, what the number of possible performances would be, and how many performances could be given per week. On the financial side, as well as information on the size of the deposit needed to guarantee the contract between theatre management and impresario (a contract without the lodging of a security had no value) and the government and industrial taxes, it was also necessary to know how much the endowment amounted to; in the final contract with the impresario, the endowment could still be provided along with the concession of a certain number of boxes. Another necessary piece of information was whether the boxes were privately owned or could be

Rücksicht hingearbeitet werde. Se. Majestät legt es allen Zentralstellen als strenge Pflicht auf, in diesem Sinn planmäßig vorzugehen.«, see the text of the session of 12 November 1866 in: *Die Protokolle des Österreichischen Ministerrates 1848/1867. V Abteilung: Die Ministerien Rainer und Mensdorff. VI Abteilung: Das Ministerium Belcredi*, Wien, Österreichischer Bundesverlag für Unterricht, Wissenschaft und Kunst 1971, 297.

<sup>9</sup> See the *Prospetto del movimento musicale nei teatri d'Italia*, *Gazzetta Musicale di Milano*, XX/21, 25. 5. 1862, 84-85.

<sup>10</sup> John ROSSELLI: *L'impresario d'opera*, Turin: EDT, 1985, 36.

<sup>11</sup> The term »opera seria« remained in use in the correspondence and in all the contemporary documents, to distinguish it from opera buffa, for which a different type of budget was envisaged.

<sup>12</sup> »[...] e se non le piacessero, la S.V. dica quali sarebbero più accette cambiando repertorio«, letter from the Agenzia Teatrale Ceruso of Milan to the theatre management of Split, Milan, 9. 1. 1898, City Museum of Split, HR-MGS: Kazalište 4/I-XVII.

rented by the impresa. Also of interest was what the theatre's expenses for an evening would be, with or without orchestra, and what the takings could be when the theatre was full, perhaps gathering this information from the *bordereaux* (artistic information sheets) of the previous years; not to mention how much the members of the local orchestra cost (and also what their pay was for opera seria and operetta – a distinction was made) and how the staff was paid.

Naturally it was indispensable to know how many players the local orchestra had and what its forces were, so as to know whether it was necessary to hire additional players. There was interest in knowing the numbers in the chorus for opera seria (as a rule the chorus for operetta came in as a fully formed unit), if there were stagehands (with respective equipment), chorus master, prompter, etc., what the dimensions of the theatre were (height, depth, width of the building, proscenium, stage, etc.) and the size of the scenery.

With the information obtained in the first contact the impresario could then proceed to draw up the formal project. In this preliminary contact the impresario never made any mention of sums of money. The meeting and negotiations (possibly in person) were left to a later occasion. The first stage consisted in the sending of a letter with a simple proposal of a production. Usually the production was proposed from one season to the next: for example, in May negotiations were started for the autumn. Some would propose the opera from one month to the next.

What did the impresari state in these letters? Basically, their list of artists and operas. The operas were then agreed with the theatre management, though in making its choices the management would have to gain the approval of the shareholders summoned to a meeting. If the shareholders were as many as 48, as at Zadar, one readily understands how long and difficult the decisions could be, as it was necessary to find an agreement among a considerable number of people.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> The shareholders paid for the opera and hence wanted a say in the matter. We have cases of shareholders who, after a poor season, were dissatisfied with the operas proposed and even asked for the reimbursement of the fee paid for the opera. A case in point is that of Innocente Monass, writing to the theatre management in Zadar: »Esteemed Management! On behalf of my wife, as owner of the box of Row I no. 10, some time ago I paid the fee of 40 crowns for the opera season of 1906. Seeing now that, following the failure of *Rigoletto* and the cancelled performance of *Lucia di Lammermoor*, the whole opera season was thus reduced just to the performance of *Mefistofele*, and confident that the impresario was denied any payment, given that he had not fulfilled his respective contractual obligations, I request that this esteemed Management return the said fee, especially in consideration of the fact that I understand that other box owners have, quite rightly and justly, also refused their contribution.« (»Spettabile Direzione! A nome della mia consorte quale proprietaria del palco di I ordine n. 10 ebbi tempo fa a versare il canone di corone 40 per la stagione d'opera 1906. Visto ora che in seguito all'insuccesso del *Rigoletto* venne anche desistito dalla rappresentazione di *Lucia di Lammermoor*, e che quindi tutta la stagione d'opera si ridusse alla sola rappresentazione del *Mefistofele*, e certo che all'impresario sarà stata negata qualsiasi sovvenzione non avendo egli corrisposto ai relativi suoi obblighi contrattuali, prego Essa spettabile Direzione a volermi restituire il suddetto canone, ciò tanto più in quanto mi consta, avere anche altri palchettisti rifiutato con piena ragione e diritto il proprio contributo.«). Zadar, 17. 11. 1906, HR-DAZD-252, envelope 22.

Some impresari had specifically prepared a brochure to be sent to the various theatre managements, to save the trouble of writing out by hand the same type of letter dozens of times. They consisted of pre-printed forms that were more or less detailed: on the first page, a brief request for information from the theatre; on the second page, the list of operas and the complete list of artists (for those who already had one), the number of orchestral players and chorus members and the ownership of the music, costumes, scenery and equipment. The third page included a sheet to be detached and returned to the sender, on which were listed all the months of the year: against each month the management was asked to indicate the days when the theatre was expected to be free.<sup>14</sup>

With the advent of photography there were also those who directly sent photos of the company as publicity material, as in the case of the *Celebre Compagnia Lillipuziana* directed by Ernesto Guerra.<sup>15</sup> This was a company of children that Guerra had assembled at the end of the 19th century, drawing his recruits also from poor backgrounds and then training them musically.<sup>16</sup> Photos of the children in their stage costumes for the different operas are preserved among the materials relating to the theatres in the state archives of Šibenik and Zadar. Such an advertising strategy naturally came with a cost, but it had the advantage of giving the theatre managements a more immediate idea of what was on offer. The *Compagnia*, which had a very wide repertoire, offered Zadar as many as seven operas in the spring season of 1906 alone. How could this be possible in a period when conditions were so critical? Given that it was a company made up of children from the age of ten to fourteen, the fees were certainly not those of an adult singer, which made it possible to save on what was usually the item with the greatest impact on the budget: the artists' fees. Their director Ernesto Guerra had succeeded in obtaining the first shows in Dalmatia in the early years of the 20th century thanks to the agent Enrico Gallina of Trieste. Subsequently Guerra was to deal directly with

<sup>14</sup> For example, this was the model adopted by the *Compagnia Internazionale di Opere* owned by Samuel Lewis and Wilhem Tom. Pietro Minciotti was its manager and administrator, HR-DAZD-252, envelope 5.

<sup>15</sup> On the company, see the information in Carlo BOLOGNA: *Il teatro moderno e gli spettacoli areniani*, in: Enrico Paganuzzi et al. (eds.): *La musica a Verona*, Verona: Banca mutua popolare di Verona, 1976, 358. This was not the first time a company of children performed at the theatre in Zadar. In 1870 a song and dance company from Trieste entirely made up of children, directed by Giovanni Pascucci, had passed through. The prima donna was 16, the tenor 12.

<sup>16</sup> With regard to some performances by this company at the Teatro Biondo of Palermo the *Rivista di Roma* was to write: »From 3 to 10 November there took place at the Teatro Biondo of Palermo some delightful performances by the celebrated *Compagnia lillipuziana* directed by the worthy maestro Ernesto Guerra, who with his rare skill and patience has succeeded in turning a fair number of children saved from the streets into genuine and small wonderful artists« (»Dal 3 al 10 novembre hanno avuto luogo al Teatro Biondo di Palermo delle rappresentazioni deliziosissime della celebre *Compagnia lillipuziana* diretta dal valoroso maestro Ernesto Guerra, che con la sua rara abilità e pazienza ha saputo fare di un buon numero di bambini raccolti sul lastrico, dei veri e piccoli meravigliosi artisti«), see *Rivista di Roma*, [n.d.]1904, 698.

the theatre managements, thereby avoiding the mediation of an agent. Such dealings were possible at the time, though naturally they created considerable ill-feeling among the agents, who were thereby excluded from the negotiations. In the initial stages the impresario would rely on the services of an agency, then once he had got to know the theatre management staff *in situ*, he would deal with them directly. This meant saving on the percentage owed to the agent.



**Figure 1: The company of children »Celebre Compagnia Lillipuziana« directed and conducted by Ernesto Guerra**

For some the task of gaining a contract for a season could become a fight to the death, which could also lead to the practice of denunciation. Certain impresari wrote to managements with the sole purpose of warning them against allegedly unscrupulous colleagues, with the objective of then proposing themselves or – in the case of theatre agents – their own impresari as safe alternatives.

For an example, chosen from among many, we can again look to the theatre of Zadar. In 1885 the agent Alessandro Berti of Milan made contact with the theatre management saying that he was aware that the management had sent a contract for the upcoming season to the agent Sante Utili. Utili was himself also from Mi-

lan, hence a potential competitor. Berti immediately came to the point and declared that Utili »has no means« (»non ha mezzi«) – and then added: » I have a person who is solvent and you would have someone who could take on the contract with due guarantees«. Thus, after discrediting a colleague, or at the very least supplying unsolicited information, he went on to propose one of his own impresari.<sup>17</sup> Two years earlier the theatre of Dubrovnik had also received information on the same impresario and in the same manner. The letter was not anonymous:

»An impossible company of dogs is being organized by the impresario Razzani former dancer of inauspicious memory and Marchelli a refugee from New York at the doghouse of Sante Utili whose civil rights were revoked for their being *too honest*. This company will very soon come to howl in this theatre, so be on guard against such artists, impresari and self-styled Theatre Agent... a man forewarned is a man forearmed ...ps: they are full of debts [...] and trouble wherever they go.«<sup>18</sup>

In the case in question, it is worth adding, it appears that the 'warnings' were not wholly ungrounded. Utili was cheated out of 400 lira on the mediation by the impresario Razzani and even the theatre management had claims of credit to make, to the extent that both parts considered obtaining redress from the impresario's unsuspecting sons.<sup>19</sup>

Percentage-wise most of the proposing impresari were from Milan, which should not come as a surprise given that Milan was the capital of opera in Italy. As the second city of provenance, Trieste had its undisputed importance. In smaller numbers various other impresari came from Rome, Venice, Bologna, Florence or Naples.<sup>20</sup> There were also impresari that wrote and negotiated from towns like Bari or Ancona, which were apparently distant, but now made closer by the steamships.

<sup>17</sup> »Io tengo persona solvibile ed avreste chi assumerebbe l'appalto con la dovuta cauzione«, letter from Alessandro Berti to the theatre management of Zadar, Milan, 10. 3. 1885, HR-DAZD, envelope 5.

<sup>18</sup> »Una compagnia impossibile di cani si sta organizzando dagl'impresari Razzani ex ballerino d'inafausta memoria e Marchelli profugo di Nuova Jorche presso il canile di Sante Utili cui per essere *troppo onesto* furono interdettati i diritti civili. Questa compagnia quanto prima si recherà a latrare a codesto teatro perciò in guardia da siffatti artisti, impresari e sedicente Agente Teatrale...uomo avvisato mezzo salvato...ps: sono tutti disperati pieni di debiti [...] e guai ove capitano.« Thus »F. Cabussi« wrote to the theatre management of Dubrovnik on 26. 3. 1883, HR-DAZD, envelope 5.

<sup>19</sup> Letter from Sante Utili to the theatre management of Zadar, Milan, 9. 8. 1883, HR-DAZD, envelope 5.

<sup>20</sup> A register of the impresari active in the theatres of the Istrian and Dalmatian coastline, or who merely came into epistolary contact with the theatre managements of the area, is being prepared. The only list of Italian impresari in our possession, that provided by Rosselli in 1982 (*Elenco provvisorio degli impresari e agenti teatrali italiani dal 1770 al 1890*, preserved, among other places, at the Dipartimento delle Arti of the University of Bologna) and the list of agents from Milan provided by Livia Cavaglieri, however, contribute only minimally to our knowledge of the people – for the most part Italians – that worked in Istria and Dalmatia, either for chronological reasons (the impresari listed in the new register are those working in a historical period that extends up to the end of the First World War, whereas Rosselli's research considers a preceding period) or on account of the different sources used to obtain the materials.

If orchestral musicians were needed in Dubrovnik or Split, sometimes they were engaged directly from Bari and hence came by sea. Epidemics, however, could be a deterrent, advising against the transfer of singers and musicians: in Dubrovnik for example, in the years 1910 and 1911, the arrival of artists from Bari was feared precisely on account of the cholera epidemic that had broken out there. Some made offers from the theatres of Osijek and Zagreb – Croatian impresari – but they were a minority and they rarely proposed productions of Italian opera.<sup>21</sup> In one case the company even came from Brno, with Johann Pistek, director of the municipal theatre there, proposing operas by Smetana and Tchaikovsky, but also certain Verdi titles. In this particular case, having proposed the season at the theatre in Split after the change in city government, the impresario was under obligation, by contract, to ensure that the performances were given in Croatian and not Italian.<sup>22</sup>

Many of these impresari dealt not only in opera but also in spoken theatre and, towards the end of the century, operetta and music hall entertainment as well. At the start of the new century cinema was also added. Hence any agencies they established were, so to speak, »multi-specialized«. As was customary at the time, some also owned artistic journals, which acted as the organ of the agency, and hence wrote to the theatre managements of the coastal regions also to ask for a subscription to the journal or a renewal. Examples were the theatrical agency Curiel with the journal *La Frusta Teatrale*, that of Francesco Lamperti with *La Rivista teatrale*, and that of Giovanni Simonetti with *L'Arte*, just to mention a few.

When writing to Istria and Dalmatia, agents and impresari took pains to guarantee a series of venues in the area – at least more than one. Given that the journey was a long one, attempts were made to organize a complete tour of the coastal towns, not just one date. The companies wished to be guaranteed or paid for a fair number of performances. At the end of the century the companies of a certain standing would not go to Istria and Dalmatia unless they were paid in lira, whereas the humbler companies and the music hall artists accepted engagements on the payment of a half or two thirds of the fee in lira and the rest in crowns. In order to engage the companies, therefore, advances in lira were needed that certain theatre managements could only make by changing the crowns into Italian lira.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> See the correspondence in HR-DAŠI-103, envelope 1, and the contract between the Teatro Mazzoleni and Leon Dragutinović, administrator of the Hrvatsko Narodno Kazalište u Osijeku, HR-DAŠI-103, envelopes 4 e 10.

<sup>22</sup> In Split the Italian municipal administration was succeeded by its Croatian counterpart in 1882. The new mayor Gajo Filomen Bulat was also the theatre manager, just as the preceding Italian mayor Antonio Bajamonti had been. See the contract between the theatre management of Split and Johann Pistek, letter »m« of art. 1, Split, January 1896, HR-MGS: Kazalište, 1/I, XII.

<sup>23</sup> Report from the theatre management of Šibenik to the Garrison Command, Šibenik, 5. 9. 1919, HR-DAŠI-103, envelope 4. On matters concerning the then existing currencies in relation to the opera house environment, see Michael WALTER: *Oper. Geschichte einer Institution*, Springer, 2016, in the chapter »Geld und Münzen«, 13-36.

At the present state of research it would seem that the companies tended rather to move from north to south along the coast more than the reverse. So those who got dates at the Politeama Ciscutti of Pula or the Municipal Theatre of Rijeka also wished to move down to Zadar or Šibenik for further performances.

As one might imagine, most of the trips from Italy were made by sea and steamship, for obvious geographical reasons. On average these journeys cost the impresari more than the equivalent spent by Italian companies working within the Italian peninsula. And considering that it was often not possible to increase the price of admission to the theatre, they represented a real economic risk. The advantages were not proportionate to the strong risk of losses.

The fact that most of the singers and scenery arrived by sea entailed major organizational problems when the weather conditions were bad. It meant that when the bora wind was blowing, the steamship from Trieste did not leave and the arrival of the artists at the venue could be delayed considerably. This happened also when leaving from Rijeka. We come across a number of telegrams in which delayed arrivals are announced, and there was little or nothing that could be done in the circumstances. The baritone Silveti<sup>24</sup> telegraphed the theatre management in Šibenik: »Unable continue journey because terrible sea will be delayed.«<sup>25</sup> The agent Gallina telegraphed from Trieste: »Chorus leaves tomorrow because horrible sea Thursday spotlights accessories leave.«<sup>26</sup>

The delivery of materials could also undergo delays. The scenery, which usually came from Milan, along with various other items like the scores, travelled directly by train as far as Trieste, or using the transportation of the Gondrand firm.<sup>27</sup> From Trieste they reached coastal cities by sea using steamships like the Lloyd Thetis. Complications and shipping errors were possible, as when certain materials, instead of being embarked with Lloyd for Šibenik, were put on the *Montenegro*, a steamship of the Navigazione Generale Italiana that was not going to Dalmatia at all. As a result, the chests – again in the words of the manager Giovanni Mazzoleni – made »a long pleasure trip« as far as Turkey and Greece instead of arriving at the proper destination in time.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Owing to lack of documentation it has not been possible to identify this singer.

<sup>25</sup> »Impossibilitato proseguire viaggio causa mare pessimo ritarderò«, telegram from the baritone Silveti to the theatre management of Šibenik, n.d, HR-DAŠI-103, envelope 8.

<sup>26</sup> »Coristi partono domani causa tempo orribile [sic] giovedì partono riflettori accessori«, telegram from the agent Gallina to the theatre management of Šibenik, n.d, HR-DAŠI-103, envelope 8.

<sup>27</sup> The Milanese firm Gondrand, offering a »general service of transportation«, was founded in 1866 and still functions today. It opened branches in 19 Italian cities.

<sup>28</sup> For the failed delivery of a *scena parapettata* – for that was the item in question – damages were claimed from Casa Parisi of Milan, which had made a mistake in the shipment: »I enclose a copy of the letter that my brother today is sending to Casa Parisi of Milan in which he asks for compensation damages for the mishap of the *parapettata* that Signor Parisi instead of sending directly from Venice to Austria sent to make a long pleasure trip to Turkey and Greece and had delivered to Šibenik by the long route of southern Dalmatia.« (»Le inchiudo una copia della lettera che mio fratello oggi imposta alla

Among the materials travelling were also the stage costumes. The costume makers, mindful of increasingly frequent cases of their wares being confiscated in cases of insolvency on the part of the impresario, preferred to safeguard their goods by making it known whose property they were. This was done, for example, by the Antonio De Caro firm, the famous theatrical costume makers which served the theatre of Split in 1895. The firm took pains to stress that the clothing was its own property and that it had been hired out to the impresario in question. Hence no act of confiscation could be exerted on this material:

»[...] I therefore inform this hon. Management that not only the said wardrobe but also that which will be sent later to put on the other operas *is my exclusive property*, hired to Sig. Vecchi, and on these said goods no act of sequestration or other nature can be exercised for any reason.«<sup>29</sup>

Some even demanded a deposit as a guarantee for the return of the costumes, as in the case of the firm of Bonaventura & Hofstätter of Trieste, which hired its costumes to the theatre of Šibenik. The theatre manager Mazzoleni, however, writing to the impresario Giuseppe Ponzio, declared that a deposit should not be paid on principle and that such a request did not exist in theatrical practice. It would also create a precedent.<sup>30</sup>

casa Parisi di Milano colla quale richiede il risarcimento dei danni per il disguido della parapettata che il Signor Parisi invece di mandare direttamente da Venezia in Austria ha mandato a fare un lungo viaggio di piacere in Turchia, Grecia e fatto inoltrare a Šibenik per la lunga via della Dalmazia meridionale«), letter from Mazzoleni to Paolo Rocca, [Šibenik], 6. 2. [1909], HR-DAŠI-103, envelope 9.

<sup>29</sup> »[...] informo perciò codesta on.le Direzione che tanto il sud[detto] vestiario come quello che in seguito si spedirà per rappresentare le altre opere è *mia esclusiva proprietà*, noleggiato al sig. Vecchi, e sulla detta merce non può quindi esercitarsi alcun atto di sequestro od altro per nessuna ragione«. Letter from Antonio De Caro to Filomeno Bulat, manager of the theatre of Split. Milan, 24. 10. 1895, HR-MGS: Kazalište 4/I-XVII.

<sup>30</sup> »Write to that Signor Bonaventura that if the theatre management of Šibenik has had the trust to reserve the theatre for you without making you pay a deposit, as is the theatrical custom, the costume makers of Trieste can also have the trust to hire you those few items of clothing without the need of guarantees that do not exist in theatrical customs and that, on principle, also so as not to create precedents vis-à-vis the costume makers, the management cannot grant. An impresario like yourself, who is no longer a new person but someone for whom the management of the theatre of Lussino can give references, has the right to this small amount of trust from a theatrical costume maker. With this firm I have never done business, knowing it to be very expensive, but from no others have there ever been requests of this kind. It could be acceptable to request a guarantee from a first theatre, but not from following theatres, as one can never know what requirements Signor Bonaventura may have later at the return of the clothing. When they are dealing with managements, knowing that they are on safe ground, these supplier gentlemen create thousands of annoyances and have requirements of all kinds« (»Scriva a quel Signor Bonaventura che se la Direzione del teatro di Šibenik si è fidata di riservarle il teatro senza farLe versare una cauzione cosa che è nelle consuetudini teatrali, anche la sartoria di Trieste può fidarsi di noleggiarLe quei pochi vestiti senza bisogno di garanzie che non esistono nelle consuetudini teatrali e che la Direzione per principio e per non crear precedenti verso la sartoria non può concedere. Un impresario come Lei non più persona nuova ma della quale può dar referenze la direzione del Teatro di Lussino ha il diritto di questo poco di fiducia da parte di una sartoria teatrale. Colla

As regards the parts for the singers and orchestra, they were ordered from the publishers or their representatives by the theatre managements or impresari. Certain orders from the Adriatic coast were addressed to Carlo Schmidl, the representative of Casa Ricordi in Trieste.<sup>31</sup> The theatre management or the impresario would duly send the list of the required parts (instrumental and vocal). If Schmidl were short of any parts, he would order them directly from Milan. Other requests could be made also to Antonio Gallo, Ricordi's representative »for the Veneto and Illyria« (»per il Veneto e l'Illyrico«), or the Francesco Lucca firm. A hire contract was then drawn up that would be different from publisher to publisher.<sup>32</sup> In certain cases the scores were not made to travel on the steamship, but sent by ordinary post. The transportation costs for the music were borne by the impresa, which would have to leave a deposit as a guarantee for its obligations.<sup>33</sup> The impresa was also obliged to indicate the ownership of the scores on the posters, or be liable to a fine.<sup>34</sup>

The music was then sent and the delivery of the parts was accompanied by an itemised list. If the scores were ordered from Gallo, they made the journey from Venice to Trieste by Lloyd steamship, and then left Trieste for the various cities along the coast.

The theatre contractor paid for the delivery of all these materials and had a number of other expenses as well, more than those he would have had before 1861. They would consist in the payment of the safety services (including firemen) and

stessa io non ho fatto mai affari sapendola molto cara, ma mai da nessun altra vennero richieste di questo genere. Poteva andare una garanzia richiesta da una prima piazza, ma non dalle piazze successive, inquantochè non si può mai sapere che esigenze può avere più tardi il Signor Bonaventura alla restituzione dei vestiti. Quando si tratta di direzioni sapendo di andare su sicuro creano mille noie e hanno esigenze d'ogni genere questi signori fornitori«). Letter from Mazzoleni to the impresario Giuseppe Ponzio, 8. 4. 1911, HR-DAŠI-103, envelope 10.

<sup>31</sup> See for example the correspondence relating to the hire of *Poliuto* in Zadar in 1914, HR-DAZD, envelope 24; or Giovanni Mazzoleni's requests made from Šibenik for *Trovatore* and *Traviata* in 1909, HR-DAŠI-103, envelope 9. Carlo Schmidl in 1889 founded the firm of Carlo Schmidl & Co., which he then ceded to Ricordi in 1902. For Ricordi in 1901 he opened a branch office in Leipzig and managed it until 1906; see the entry »Carlo Schmidl« in: *Dizionario Enciclopedico Universale della Musica e dei Musicisti*, vol. 7, Turin: EDT, 1983, 5.

<sup>32</sup> Antonio Gallo, though belonging to Ricordi, had his own form for the hire agreement of an opera score, which was different from that used by Casa Ricordi, and naturally different from that of Casa Lucca. In the agreement were specified the dates of the beginning and end of the period in which the parts would be used, together with the cost of the hire. There was a fine for the late return of the parts, a sum that would increase week by week. See for example the score hire agreement stipulated between the Francesco Lucca firm and the impresario Carlo Vianello in Zadar in 1875, HR-DAZD, envelope 27.

<sup>33</sup> In 1909 Mazzoleni (who that year was acting as impresario) paid Schmidl 100 lira as a deposit for the parts of *Trovatore* and *Traviata*, costing 400 lira.

<sup>34</sup> According to the clauses, a fine would be imposed also on those who copied the music, either wholly or partially. It was understood that if the composer should make any additions to his music for a specific performance, these would have to be ceded to the publisher. The librettos were purchased directly from the publisher and could not be printed locally.



Figure 2: Traviata performed in Croatian at the Theater Mazzoleni in Šibenik (1914)

compliance with new legislation, such as the 10% tax on the gross takings from performances.<sup>35</sup>

A further expense for the impresario came from the hiring of additional artists. Not everything could be found locally, for indeed in this area – as was also the case in other theatres in the Italian peninsula – the orchestras were semi-professional and there was a constant need of external players.<sup>36</sup> Nor was there any

<sup>35</sup> The 10% tax on the takings of theatrical performances was introduced with Law no. 4480 of 19 July 1868. This tax was confirmed at the end of the century with the Law of 4 July 1897, no. 414, thus imposing a direct burden on the proceeds raised by the operator. As mentioned by Antonio Di Lascio and Silvia Ortolani in *Istituzioni di diritto e legislazione dello spettacolo*, Milan, Franco Angeli, 2010, 58 »at the end of the century the taxes and expenses affecting the performing arts were numerous: the property tax, the licence tax, the tax on personal estate, the 10% tax on gross revenue, the tax on notices and posters, rental of the theatres, authors' and composers' rights [...]« (»alla fine del secolo, le tasse e le spese che incombevano sullo spettacolo erano numerose: l'imposta lorda sui fabbricati, la tassa di licenza, l'imposta sulla ricchezza mobile, la tassa del 10% sull'introito lordo, la tassa sugli avvisi e sui manifesti, l'affitto dei teatri, i diritti degli autori e dei compositori [...])«.

<sup>36</sup> For a comparison with the opera orchestras of the Italian peninsula, see for example Franco PIPERNO and Antonio ROSTAGNO: *The Orchestra in Nineteenth-Century Italian Opera Houses*, in: Niels Martin Jensen and Franco Piperno (eds.): *The Opera Orchestra in 18th- and 19th-Century Europe*,

real chorus: it might seem strange, but the theatre of Zadar in 1884 listed only three male singers and not a single female singer.

All things considered, over the years there were ever-increasing expenses, compounded by a decrease in subsidies. Some of these expenses could have been reduced if there had been a close network between the theatre managements. That this was a type of cooperation that was sorely needed already in 1870 is attested by these lines sent to Mazzoleni from an as yet unidentified colleague:

»[...] and we will always go from bad to worse for as long as unity is lacking between the various Presidencies of the theatres, never, no never, will any good come out of it and always by leaving things to the last minute we shall have to pay for rotten merchandise instead of good, and cast more and more discredit on poor Dalmatia. 'Unity makes strength' and we are disunited. All the worse for us.«<sup>37</sup>

In 1884 an attempt had been made by Pietro Ciscutti, founder of the Politeama of Pula (later named after him) to create an agreement between the theatres of Pula, Rijeka and Zadar in the hiring of productions. The idea had been largely accepted by the theatre management in Zadar, and even Dubrovnik and Šibenik later agreed to the idea of creating a network. Unfortunately, however, the conditions for consolidating the system were not there. As for the impresari, they were perfectly aware of the risks and of a situation that by then tended to be unfavourable. In spite of this they continued to get involved and repeatedly offered their services to the theatre managements.

As was happening in the whole of Europe, other forms of entertainment were coming to this region too, and various theatres were turning into cinemas. The survivors were those who managed to change with the times: those who, like the impresario Josip Karaman<sup>38</sup> succeeded in adding to their letterheads, alongside the terms »impresario« or »agent«, the name of some new *Kinotheater*, or phrases such as »photographic articles« or »authorized advertising enterprise«, if possible also in Croatian and German.

All the documentation collected, allows us – even in the difficulties – to trace presences, transfers and even significant absences of impresari on the coast. What

Berlin: BWV, 2008, 15-62, together with various contributions that Renato Meucci, in the 1980s and 90s, dedicated to the adoption of various instruments in the orchestras and to the orchestral sound.

<sup>37</sup> »[...] e sempre andremo di male in peggio, mentre mancando l'unione fra i vari corpi Presidenziali dei Teatri, mai e poi mai avremo alcunchè di buono e sempre riducendoci agli ultimi momenti dovremo pagare per buona, mercanzia avariata, e screditare sempre più la povera Dalmazia. 'L'unione forma la forza' e noi siamo disuniti. Dunque peggio per noi.«, letter from [Ant. Jeoli?] to Paolo Mazzoleni. Split, 6. 10. 1870, HR-DAŠI-103, envelope 1.

<sup>38</sup> Josip Karaman, from Split, was an impresario and theatrical agent, but is today mainly remembered as a film director and photographer, having achieved fame for having filmed the coronation of King Nikola I of Montenegro, see Gian Piero BRUNETTA: *Storia del cinema mondiale*, Turin: Einaudi, 2003, 1331.

remains more difficult to approach is actually the reconstruction of the same opera seasons. The amount of archival material in this regard in the various theatres is uneven. If, as is normal, we find more archival material for theatres with public subsidies, for others the documentation is more fragmentary. Getting to the truth of the historical data is sometimes complex as you cannot always give credit to a theatre programme announcing an opera, or an article in a newspaper that anticipates a season. The difference is often made by the letter of the impresario, who - thanks to his communications with the theatre management - clarifies how the events actually took place, revealing any changes made at the last moment. This cross-checking of sources at multiple levels, while complicating and slowing down research, on the other hand is absolutely necessary as it provides the basis for a correct interpretation of events. Only by having a complete mapping of the movements and the operatic programming of the coast, connected with that of similar theatres, it is possible to trace trends, lines of development over time, macro-stories, beyond the single micro-stories of the individual theatres.

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*Sažetak*UPRAVLJANJE OPEROM U ISTRI I DALMACIJI (1861-1918):  
PRELIMINARNI PREGLED

Dosad nije bilo mnogo istraživanja o temama vezanima za upravljanje operom u kazalištima na istočnoj obali Jadrana, osobito u povijesnom razdoblju između 1861. i 1918. Kazališta o kojima je riječ u ovome tekstu bila su različita po važnosti i veličini; dapače, mogla su dobivati subvencije od vlade i grada, ili samo od dioničara. Proučavanje korespondencije između impresarija i kazališne uprave pomaže nam u razumijevanju glavnih zahtjeva i pitanja koja su postavljali impresariji u želji da organiziraju opernu sezonu. Impresariji su obično tražili obavijesti o pitanjima poput iznosa potpore (*dote*) ili poreza, o tipovima predstava koje bi privukle što veći broj publike, o trajanju sezone ili broju loža koje im stoje na raspolaganju. Prema informacijama iznesenim u preliminarnom ugovoru impresario bi nastavio sastavljati cijeli projekt. Natjecanje između impresarija bilo je intenzivno, a katkad je rezultiralo i denuncijacijama. Najviše zainteresiranih impresarija dolazilo je iz Milana (u to vrijeme glavnog opernog središta Italije), ali i iz drugih gradova poput Rima, Venecije ili Bologne, a bilo je i ponuda iz Osijeka, Zagreba ili Brna. S obzirom na to da se radilo o dugom putovanju, organizacija se nije zaustavljala samo na jednome gradu, nego je nastojala turnejom obuhvatiti više priobalnih gradova. Činjenica da je velik dio pjevača, scenografije, kostima i partitura stizao morskim putem, izazivala je velike organizacijske probleme kada su vremenski uvjeti bili loši. Impresariji su plaćali za isporuku svih materijala, a imali su i brojne druge troškove, više nego što bi imali prije 1861. Neki od tih troškova mogli su se smanjiti ako bi između kazališnih uprava postojale uhodane mreže. Ovakav oblik suradnje bio je iznimno potreban već 1870. godine. Pietro Ciscutti, utemeljitelj Politeame u Puli, pokušao je tako utvrditi sporazum između kazališta u Puli, Rijeci i Zadru – koji su prihvatila i ona u Dubrovniku i Šibeniku. Ipak, uvjeti za konsolidaciju takvog sustava nažalost nisu bili ostvareni.