

Land of opportunities – Pauline Viardot in England¹

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Pauline Viardot sang on the opera stage of every renowned opera house in Europe as well as performing in countless concerts. She is considered to be as great a diva as her sister, Maria Malibran. However, in her time she was not seen only as a diva. In the English press she was not referred to as a *singer* but as an *artiste*, using the French term. Her contemporaries also acknowledged her contributions to musical life as a composer, a pianist and a promoter of young talent. Her cultural activities, especially in England included even more: she rehearsed with singers and orchestras, was at times stage director and opera manager and was as actively involved in the revival of early music in England as she was in France.

England always played an important role in Pauline Viardot's life and career. In 1839, at the age of 18, she had her operatic debut in London at Her Majesty's Theatre. Her mother Joaquina García-Siches claimed from the very beginning the highest fees, which – together with the legacy of being Malibran's sister – catapulted Pauline Garcia into the spheres of the big stars. After two seasons, the then married Pauline Viardot toured through Europe for seven years and only came back to England in 1848. She was an internationally famous singer by then and spent every season in London until 1860. During the Franco-Prussian War 1870-71 she and her family went into exile to England before returning to France after the war.

¹ This article is partly based on chapter II.2 of my book *Pauline Viardot-Garcia in Großbritannien und Irland. Formen kulturellen Handelns*, Hildesheim: Olms, 2012 (= Viardot-Garcia-Studien, vol. 3).

From some of Viardot's letters we get an impression of her attitude towards England and its people. In the beginning, England clearly meant earning lots of money and Pauline Viardot had feelings of antipathy towards the country, the people and the climate. On leaving London at the end of her second season, in 1841, she wrote to her friend George Sand: 'J'ai laissé en Angleterre malaise et ennui, n'emportant que les guinées, qui sont malheureusement la meilleure chose que l'on y trouve.'² In another letter she described the English listener as bleak and cheerless, responding with the same phlegm and the same indifference to 'musiques bouffes et musique sacrée'.³

Over the years, England became the land of opportunities and she learnt to love and appreciate the country and the people. She changed her mind and although England was still important, especially because of its high fees, she acknowledged that the English listener paid for quality and, for example, for 'la grande musique ancienne qu'il préfère à toute autre'.⁴ As we will see, this enthusiasm for early music is one reason why Pauline Viardot always returned to England. Later, she thought differently of the English listener as well, as we can discern from this letter of 1852:

Il [l'Anglais] fait un voyage d'une journée pour assister à un Festival sans que rien l'y force. Il paie fort cher sa place, ne s'endort pas pendant la musique, ne bâille pas, demande même solennellement *encore* aux morceaux qui lui ont plu *intérieurement*. Il ne paraît pas éprouver la moindre fatigue après avoir eu cinq heures de belle et grande musique le matin, retourne chez lui dîner et se remet à sa place pour la musique du soir, où on lui donne quatre autres heures de musique.⁵

French opera in London – Viardot as opera manager

In England, Pauline Viardot was not only able to choose her own repertoire for concerts, but in the years 1849 to 1851 she was in the very special position of an opera singer being able to be part of the management of the opera at Covent Garden. This unique situation gave Pauline Viardot and a few other famous singers the power to organize the house according to their own interests.

Opened in 1847, the Royal Italian Opera at Covent Garden had enormous financial problems from the beginning. Not only had it to compete with the rival opera house Her Majesty's Theatre, which had been until then the only opera house presenting Italian operas, it also was not under the patronage of the

² Letter of 14 September 1841, *Lettres inédites de George Sand et de Pauline Viardot (1839–1849)*, edited by Thérèse Marix-Spire, Paris : Nouvelles Éditions Latines 1959, p. 128.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

⁵ *Ibid.*

aristocracy as most of the European opera houses were and therefore not subsidized. There were problems with the directors who could not deal with the huge amount of debt after the first season. By 14 July 1849 – the operatic season was not finished at all – they were adjudged bankrupt. The artists' salaries were no longer guaranteed and the future of the Royal Italian Opera was at stake.

Pauline Viardot had arrived in London four days earlier. She was meant to sing Fidès in Meyerbeer's opera *Le Prophète* which, having been performed in Paris in the previous months, had been the biggest success in her career. She wrote to her Russian friend Michail Wielhorsky:

Cher Comte, nous voici de nouveau dans les vilains brouillards de l'Angleterre, et dans ceux, non moins désagréables d'un malheureux théâtre qui périclète lentement, Covent Garden, dont les directeurs ont fait faillite, après s'être enfuis en emportant la caisse. Depuis ce temps ce n'a été que découragements, rages, désespoirs parmi tous les artistes auxquels on doit presque la totalité de leurs engagements. La seule chose qui aurait pu remettre les dettes à flot, ainsi que toute la machine, c'était *Le Prophète*. Il devait avoir été prêt à jouer pour le 10 de ce mois, époque de mon arrivée. Au lieu de cela, je trouve une société en désarroi, des artistes qui n'ont pas voulu travailler avant d'être payés, personne pour les payer, enfin un désordre universel, un naufrage général.⁶

The leading singers decided to form a committee, to produce the operas and to sing without a salary for the time being so that the smaller salaries and the running costs of the opera house would be guaranteed. Frederick Gye was to be head of the committee, which the press called the 'commonwealth' or the 'republic of artists'.

By preparing the performance of *Le Prophète* in London, Pauline Viardot truly stepped outside the stereotyped frame of a diva. She rehearsed with singers, and with the orchestra – and discussed the staging. She wrote to Wielhorsky:

Mon arrivée leur a un peu remis le cœur au ventre, comme on dit, et les répétitions du *Prophète* ont commencé mardi dernier, sous ma *direction musicale*, bien entendu. Depuis ce jour nous travaillons comme des nègres, moi surtout. [...] Ce sera un grand tour de force, surtout si cela marche bien. Un ouvrage, pour lequel il a fallu 74 répétitions à Paris, monté à Londres en 14 jours! Il est vrai que le John Bull n'a pas les oreilles aussi délicates, que le badaud de Paris.⁷

And two days later:

⁶ Letter of 17 July 1849, in *Polina Viardo. Pis'ma k Matveyu Yur'evichu Viyel'gorskomu*, edited by A.S. Rozanov, *Muzykal'noe nasledstvo*, vol. II, part 2, Moscow: Muzykal 1968, pp. 5-134, here p. 77.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 77f.

Il faut que j'expédie cette lettre aujourd'hui, autrement je ne pourrais le faire qu'après *Le Prophète*, car d'ici là, je ne vois plus un instant de liberté. C'est moi qui dirige toutes les répétitions avec piano et de mise en scène. Costa se contente de tenir son bâton à la main, – il mériterait bien parfois d'en recevoir la caresse sur le dos.⁸

With *Le Prophète*, which was an immense triumph, operatic performance had reached new artistic standards. One critic even wrote that '[...] the Covent Garden management brought the musical drama to its highest point of completeness in the present century'.⁹ It definitely had saved the opera house from closure although the financial situation was still precarious. The season ended with three 'extra nights' with reduced prices, the proceeds of which were shared between the artists of the committee. This system of a 'republic of artists' was continued in 1850. In 1851 Frederick Gye took on the position of sole manager.

The main task of the 'republic' was to arrange the repertoire for the season and to engage singers. Of course this led to all sorts of intrigues and dissonances within the group. However, it also offered artists with vision, like Pauline Viardot, the chance to exert influence on the programme, on the taste of the audience or on operatic politics.

Pauline Viardot's great aim was to pave the way for French opera. Already in the new opera house's second season, in 1848, she was responsible for the success of the Meyerbeer opera *Les Huguenots*, which was the first step, as said a critic in the *Athenaeum*, 'towards establishing grand opera (as they use the word in France) in public favour.'¹⁰

Viardot had put all her energy into the rehearsals, as was remarked in the press. She had to fight against all kinds of intrigues and obstacles mainly caused by the other singers who did not want French opera to succeed. The *Athenaeum* critic Henry Fothergill Chorley, great admirer of Pauline Viardot and promoter of French opera, wrote in his memoirs:

Had it not been for Madame Viardot's engagement, we might never have made its [*Les Huguenots*] acquaintance, – for the Italian artists derided it then. [...] It may be said to have been produced 'against the grain', though no pains and splendour in preparation had been denied it, and the cast was a strong one.¹¹

⁸ Letter of 19 July 1849, *ibid.*, p. 79.

⁹ *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country*, September 1849, p. 342.

¹⁰ *The Athenaeum*, 26 August 1848, p. 861.

¹¹ Chorley, Henry Fothergill, *Thirty Years' Musical Recollections*, 2 volumes, London 1862, vol. 2, p. 31.

In 1849 and 1850 she secured as we have seen the triumph of another Meyerbeer opera, *Le Prophète*, while also singing the title role in *La Juive* by Jacques Halévy. This opera had had its première in Paris in 1835 but, as many other French operas, had never been performed in England. The critic of *The Times* wrote in 1850 at the end of the season:

[...] the Royal Italian Opera has opened a new mine of intellectual recreation, and [...] musical performances have taken place within its walls which have never been equalled in London, if they have ever been surpassed elsewhere. The school of grand French opera, which was almost a sealed book to the amateurs of this metropolis previous to the institution of the Royal Italian Opera, has been welcomed with avidity [...].¹²

Whereas the other opera house, Her Majesty's Theatre, continued to centre on Italian composers, at Covent Garden 'performances of French opera would eclipse those of Italian opera' in the years of the 'republic' and afterwards under Frederick Gye's early management.¹³ A main reason for this was that Gye was able to engage the greatest French singers, including Pauline Viardot. There is even a direct link between the proportion of French operas and the engagement of Pauline Viardot.¹⁴ In the early 1850s, performances of French operas increased greatly, suffering the first setback in 1852 when Pauline Viardot was unavailable (due to the birth of her second daughter Claudie).

The close relationship between Pauline Viardot and Giacomo Meyerbeer was of great importance to the new London opera house, which could gain significantly in its competition with Her Majesty's Theatre by concentrating on this new type of opera – the *Grand Opéra*. At the same time, Pauline Viardot could further establish her fame by campaigning for these large-scale operas with their spectacular staging and their new dramatic and scenic techniques. Being involved in the management, in the decision-making, as well as the rehearsals not only with singers but with orchestra and choir gave the diva the power to shape the performances according to her ideas.

The growing disagreement between the artists was the reason for the dissolution of the 'republic' in February 1851. Shortly after, the now sole director Frederick Gye travelled to Paris to discuss Pauline Viardot's engagement for the coming season. Again she advocated French opera by making it a condition of her engagement that the first opera of her protégé Charles Gounod, *Sapho*, would

¹² *The Times*, 2 September 1850, p. 8.

¹³ Gabriella Dideriksen and Matthew Ringel, "Frederick Gye and the Dreadful Business of Opera Management", *19th-Century Music*, 19 (1995), no 1, p. 3-30., p. 14.

¹⁴ See the graphic of the repertoire structure at the Royal Italian Opera from 1847 to 1874 in *ibid.*, p. 15.

be part of the repertoire. At that time, this composer was virtually unknown and *Sapho* had not even had its première in Paris.¹⁵

Viardot as promoter of Early Music

England was the country *par excellence* for Pauline Viardot's extraordinary versatile musical interest. The typical English music festivals in cities such as Norwich or Gloucester offered foreign singers the opportunity not only to perform oratorios with large choirs in beautiful cathedrals but also to sing works which were not being performed in France at that time, for example *Elijah* by Mendelssohn, which was performed in England every year from 1840. Viardot helped this oratorio to further fame by her unique interpretation:

The performance of *Elijah* at Exeter Hall last evening was rendered remarkable by the appearance of Madame Viardot, who gave an effect to several passages which no other singer has ever been able to reach. In the scene where Queen Jezebel denounces the Prophet, and commands the people to slay him, this great performer gave quite a new character to the music by the power and grandeur of her declamation.¹⁶

After having sung it several times in England she brought this piece to Paris:

[...] A part of Mendelssohn's *Elijah* is at last to be presented in Paris, - the first half of the Oratorio being in preparation, by the *Société des Jeunes Artistes*, for performance on St. Cecilia's Day. The principal singers will be Madame Viardot, MM. Jourdan and Stockhausen [...].¹⁷

In the following I shall focus on an area of Viardot's repertoire which she was passionate about and which was clearly influenced by the opportunities of English concert life: the music of Handel and Gluck.

Handel's music was not appreciated at all in France in the mid-nineteenth century. Pauline Viardot, however, had always shown enthusiasm and engagement for his compositions, much to the surprise of French connoisseurs. Berlioz, for example, wrote to a friend: 'Cette éducation *coloniale* [this means: italian] ne l'a pas empêchée [...] de s'éprendre même pour la lourde face emperruquée de ce tonneau de porc et de bière qu'on nomme Händel!'¹⁸

¹⁵ My recent edition of Charles Gounod's letters to Pauline Viardot gives an insight in the dimension of her influence on the career of the composer: *Lettres de Charles Gounod à Pauline Viardot*, présentée et commentée par Melanie von Goldbeck avec la collaboration d'Etienne Jardin, Arles: Actes Sud - Palazetto Bru Zane 2015.

¹⁶ *John Bull*, 25 June 1853, p. 412.

¹⁷ *The Athenaeum*, 14 November 1857, p. 1429.

¹⁸ Hector Berlioz, *Correspondance générale*, éditée sous la direction de Pierre Citron, vol. 5, Paris : Flammarion 1989, letter of 26 or 27 January 1857 to Toussaint Bennet, n° 2203, p. 418.

At the English festivals, Viardot had the chance to sing in complete Handel oratorios, which she did in such excellent manner that she soon was considered a Handel expert. One critic of the Norwich Festival in 1848 writes:

[...] Madame Viardot Garcia, too, showed the unbounded versatility of her talent by appearing as a complete Handelian, and a complete English singer, in the divine scene from the same oratorio [*Jephtha*], containing the recitatives 'Ye sacred priests', and the air 'Farewell ye limpid streams and floods'. I verily believe there has been nothing like it since the days of another foreigner, Madame Mara.¹⁹

She was able to give the arias a new character, which made the audience and the critics see Handel's music in a different light:

[...] – record must be made of the effect produced by Madame Viardot in the air 'Ye sons of Israel', – the finest singing of Handel in our experience: felt and re-demanded as such [...]. Were the airs in Handel's oratorios severally raised to this their due height by their respective singers, we should hear no more of his heaviness, no more of his antiquated forms [...].²⁰

While Viardot could sing Handel's oratorios at the festivals to her heart's content, she presented the concert-going public in London with arias from Handel *operas* that had been forgotten even in England. At the *Antient Concerts* in London she sang, for example, arias from *Rinaldo*, *Alcina* and *Giulio Cesare*. These concerts also gave Pauline Viardot a forum to broaden her repertoire of early music. She soon was famous for digging up forgotten works such as arias by Buononcini, Marcello, Paisiello, Lully or Graun.

Having gained a reputation as a 'Handelian', she sang Handel arias at many important venues in Paris. This was even observed on the other side of the channel:

Madame Viardot has also been 'venturing,' in singing with English words Handel's 'Return, O Lord of Hosts,' at a chamber concert, thus doing her part to break in the French to due admiration of one of Music's strongest men.²¹

Just as she was most influential in the introduction of Handel's music to France, Viardot continuously worked on familiarizing the English audience with the music of Gluck. In the following I shall focus on the role she played in the revival of Gluck's (1714-1787) music in Britain in the second half of the 19th

¹⁹ *John Bull*, 16 September 1848, p. 601, review of the Norwich festival.

²⁰ *The Athenaeum*, 18 September 1852, p. 1009, review of the Birmingham festival.

²¹ *The Athenaeum* 14 February 1857, p. 220.

century.²² The music of this composer had never gained ground in Britain during his lifetime and almost all of his compositions were buried in oblivion shortly after his death in 1787.²³ Viardot's endeavours to revive and revitalise his music were noted in the *Athenaeum* by the influential Henry Chorley, who propagated and supported her intention with insistent and continued calls for performances of Gluck at the London opera houses.

Already in 1841, Viardot had caused a sensation with her concert repertoire – not, like other singers, with virtuoso arias from famous operas²⁴, but with the music of Gluck.²⁵ In the Ancient Concert on 28 April 1841 she sang music by Gluck, namely the recitative 'Andiamo, andiam' and the arietta 'Invano alcun desir' from the opera *Armida*.²⁶ Henry Chorley wrote in his review of the concert: 'And we must ask, and ask aloud, for Gluck's *Armida*, well aware that it contains music as grand, as the *arietta* sung by Madame Viardot-Garcia is fascinating.'²⁷ Queen Victoria, who attended this concert, was impressed by the simplicity and purity of the music and by the voice of the 19-year-old singer. In her diary she wrote:

[...] but the gem of all, was a beautiful little song sung by Garcia,²⁸ without orchestral accompaniments, only Chorus, from Gluck's 'Armida,' which he [sic!]²⁹ sang most beautifully, in such a simple, pure & touching manner. I

²² The following section is taken from my article 'The power of Gluck, and of his interpreter' – Pauline Viardot's Part in the British Gluck Revival, *British Postgraduate Musicology* 2011, Vol. 11, http://britishpostgraduatemusicology.org/bpm11/stier_the_power_of_gluck_and_his_interpreter.pdf [accessed on 6 January 2015].

²³ George Hogarth, *Memoirs of the Opera in Italy, France, Germany, and England*, vol. 2 (London: Richard Bentley, 1851), pp. 130-1, pp. 143-4.

²⁴ See the concert programmes of 1841 in: *Concerts of Antient Music as performed at the New Rooms, Tottenham Street (1783–1848), being programmes of the Concerts, with the words of the songs and choruses*, 65 vols. (London, 1783–1848).

²⁵ In one of her very first concerts in Paris, on 3 February 1839, Viardot had already sung the duo 'Viens, suis un époux qui t'adore' from *Orphée (1774)*: see *Revue et Gazette Musicale de Paris*, 24 March 1839.

²⁶ See the programme of the concert on 28 April 1841 in: *Concerts of Antient Music as performed at the New Rooms, Tottenham Street (1783–1848), being programmes of the Concerts, with the words of the songs and choruses*, 65 vols. (London, 1783–1848), here vol. 58, 1841.

²⁷ *The Athenaeum*, 1 May 1841, p. 346.

²⁸ In April 1840 Pauline Garcia had married Louis Viardot (1800-1883), French writer, journalist and former opera manager of the Théâtre Italien in Paris. In some reviews she was still called by her maiden name for some years.

²⁹ This is almost certainly a mistake by Princess Beatrice who re-wrote her mother's Journals after the Queen's death and who perhaps thought 'Garcia' being Manuel Garcia, Pauline Viardot's brother.

never heard any thing so thrilling as her voice was in this simple, artless little air, which was 'encored' [...].³⁰

An important event in the musical world in 1853 was the opening of St Martin's Hall in its complete state on 1 December. It was inaugurated by a grand concert of vocal and instrumental music under the direction of John Hullah³¹. In the second part of the concert, act II of *Orfeo*³² with Viardot in the lead role was performed in its entirety. The critics were enthusiastic about the choice of Gluck's music.³³ According to the critic of the *Examiner*, the performance had sharpened the desire to hear the whole opera:

[...] and the second act of Glück's [sic] *Orfeo*, a work that we have long desired to hear in its completeness, and for which our desire is greatly augmented by the experience of Thursday night. How good an Orpheus Madame Viardot made, need any critic tell!³⁴

After having heard Viardot in a benefit concert for his wife, the director of the Théâtre Lyrique in Paris, Léon Carvalho, commissioned Berlioz to arrange the opera *Orfeo* for a revival. Viardot, who had been the first female interpreter to sing arias and scenes from *Orfeo* in concerts, was to sing the lead part.³⁵ Numerous letters of Berlioz to Viardot give an insight into the creative process of this 'Berlioz-Viardot version'³⁶, and into their close collaboration.³⁷ It was in this version of Gluck's opera, revived in Paris in 1859, that Viardot celebrated one of the greatest triumphs of her career.

The painter Frederic Leighton became acquainted with Viardot not later than 1856, when he visited Paris for study purposes. He quickly became a regular guest in Viardot's salon. In 1855-6 Leighton had painted *The Triumph of Music*:

³⁰ Queen Victoria's diaries, Royal Archives, Windsor Castle, RA/VIC/MAIN/QVJ/1841: 28 April. By kind permission to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

³¹ John Pyke Hullah (1812-1884), composer and conductor of the famous *Monthly Concerts* at St Martin's Hall.

³² The original version from 1762.

³³ One can assume the singer had chosen this piece of music. John Hullah knew her very well and following her suggestions, he had included four sacred compositions of Charles Gounod, a composer completely unknown at that time, in one of his *Monthly Concerts* in 1851. This concert had launched the career of the French composer who was in more than one way indebted to the support of Viardot. She had amongst other things collaborated on his first opera *Sapho* and had sung the lead part in it; see Stier, *Viardot in Großbritannien und Irland*, chapter II.2.

³⁴ *The Examiner*, 3 December 1853, p. 772.

³⁵ Hector Berlioz, *Correspondance Générale. Vol. 6: 1859-1863*, ed. Hugh J. Macdonald and François Lesure, (Paris: Flammarion, 1995), p. 16, footnote 2.

³⁶ Patrick Waddington, 'Pauline Viardot-Garcia as Berlioz's counselor and physician', *The Musical Quarterly*, vol. 59, no. 3 (1973), pp. 382-398, here p. 395.

³⁷ Berlioz, *Correspondance Générale*, Letters no. 2396, 2402, 2403, 2408, 2409, 2413, 2414.

Orpheus, by the Power of Art, Redeems his Wife from Hades, which was generally considered a failure. In 1864 he tackled the theme of Orpheus again. His canvas *Orpheus and Eurydice* was one of the paintings to which he owed his membership of the Academy.³⁸ The two paintings differ in one essential aspect with regard to their content: in the first version, Leighton, true to Virgil's and Ovid's Orpheus, depicted a dolorous Orpheus who begs actively for the restitution of Eurydice. In contrast, the painting of 1864 showed Eurydice desperately clinging to Orpheus. He tries to detach himself from her and avoids her imploring look. Thus, whereas in the first version Orpheus is the active partner and Eurydice is subject to his decisions, the second version gives a different interpretation of the myth through the active intervention of Eurydice.³⁹

What made Leighton resume the topic and at the same time interpret it differently? A closer look at the libretto of Gluck's opera⁴⁰ indicates that the painter was guided by this later version of the myth. In the opera, Orpheus is conjured by Eurydice to look at her ('un sguardo solo'), whereas in older versions of the myth the lovers do not exchange any words. Leighton was a great music lover, went to the opera and to concerts frequently and knew many famous musicians.⁴¹ In later years he was known for his annual grand musical soirées. In 1860 he attended a performance of *Orphée* in Paris and wrote afterwards to his sister:

My dear Gussykins, – You may have heard from Mamma that I went to Paris to hear Madame Viardot in 'Orphée.' What wonderful singing! what style! what breadth! what pathos! [...] Madame Viardot's acting, too, is superb – so perfectly simple and grand, it is really antique. [...] She enters heart and soul into her work; she said it was the only thing she ever did that (after fifty performances) had not given her a moment's ennui. I am afraid there is no chance of her singing it in England this year, if at all; I don't believe the Covent Garden audience would sit through it. [...]⁴²

According to Catherine Maxwell it is clear that this experience was formative for Leighton's later work: 'The liking Leighton had for Gluck, a liking which

³⁸ Catherine Maxwell, 'Robert Browning and Frederic Leighton: "Che farò senza Euridice?"', *Review of English Studies*, New Series vol. 44, no. 175 (1993), pp. 362-372, here p. 362.

³⁹ Maxwell, *Browning and Leighton*, pp. 363-4.

⁴⁰ Gluck used the version by Euripides, but modified it: see Maxwell, *Browning and Leighton*, p. 369.

⁴¹ Michael Musgrave, 'Leighton and Music', *Frederic Leighton: Antiquity Renaissance Modernity*, ed. Tim Barringer and Elizabeth Prettejohn (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1999), pp. 295-314.

⁴² Letter from 12 March 1860, quoted from: Mrs Russell Barrington, *The Life, Letters and Work of Frederic Leighton*, vol. 2 (London: George Allen, 1906), pp. 52-3.

becomes an influence on his work, seems inseparable from the part Pauline Viardot plays in the revival of the composer's music at this time.⁴³

One can only assume that the performances of *Orphée* in Paris which caused such a stir in the international opera world were the reason for an increased interest in Gluck's operas in Britain. 1860 seems to mark the beginning of a Gluck renaissance: on 25 January, Charles Hallé conducted a concert performance in Manchester of *Iphigenia in Tauris* in the English translation by Chorley.⁴⁴ The *Athenaeum's* critic described this concert as 'one of those successes which may possibly mark a period in this country's music'.⁴⁵ He went on: 'In this Manchester has outstripped London. So long as the cause of great music marches, no matter where the march begins!'⁴⁶ The concert was attended by 3,000 spectators and its success was such that it had to be repeated on 8 February. A concert performance of the same opera was given in London in St James's Hall, again conducted by Hallé. This performance was as great a success as the concerts in Manchester.⁴⁷ At the close of the year 1860, Chorley wrote that new ground had been broken in terms of music in Britain. It had been, in his words, 'the year, for England, of Gluck's disinterment'.⁴⁸

In September 1860, Viardot went on tour together with other opera singers. They were travelling to Dublin, Manchester and Liverpool. In Dublin, *Orphée* was not previously known in either of the versions, thus the performance was rated as an 'event of importance in the world of art'.⁴⁹ Apparently in Dublin it was seen as risky to stage an unknown opera from the previous century. Viardot, however, convinced the critics with her performance:

All praise is due to Madame Viardot for her highly wrought and classical representation of *Orphèe* [sic]. It required a vocalist at once eminent in the florid, modern style of music, familiar with the ancient models, and an actress possessing the very height of ideal conception, to sing and personify *Orphèe*. Madame Viardot accomplished this, – at times simple, pathetic, and impetuous, as in the air which terminated the first act, which but for her perfect execution would probably prove of little effect.⁵⁰

⁴³ Maxwell, *Browning and Leighton*, p. 367.

⁴⁴ *The Lady's Newspaper*, 28 January 1860, p. 67.

⁴⁵ *The Athenaeum*, 21 January 1860, p. 100.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *The Athenaeum*, 23 June 1860, p. 861.

⁴⁸ *The Athenaeum*, 22 December 1860, p. 879.

⁴⁹ *Daily Express*, 22 September 1860, p. 2.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

The opera was an enormous success even though it was performed in French. Viardot was adorned with superlatives by the Irish critics and celebrated with flowers and shouts of joy by the Irish public:

Never, perhaps, was a triumph so manifest, so brilliant on any stage. The house rose, one and all, to greet her with every imaginable manifestation of delighted applause. Bouquets, in unparalleled number, were flung on the stage at her feet.⁵¹

In the review of the *Freeman's Journal* it was reported that there had been an exceptionally great number of connoisseurs in the audience, who were not present at performances of contemporary works such as Verdi's operas, but who would not want to miss out on Viardot's interpretation of a 'classic lyric drama'.⁵²

The opera company travelled on to Manchester where *Orphée* was performed on 6 October. The critic of the *Manchester Guardian* put Viardot on a pedestal next to the famous actresses Sarah Siddons, Rachel and Adelaide Ristori. In comparison with these, Viardot's interpretation of Orpheus was even more sublime, according to the critic:

Yet it is greater than any of these; because they had simply to act and declaim; while Garcia has to act, to declaim, and to sing; and it is impossible to say in which she is greatest. In acting and declamation she is Ristori herself; in singing, she is – Viardot Garcia; for no one has ever excelled her, if, indeed, they have approached her, in this element.⁵³

Orphée was performed in Liverpool on 12 October 1860. By then, news of the opera's success had reached London. Several newspapers and periodicals reported on the sensation caused by *Orphée* in the North.⁵⁴ But the public never had a chance to enjoy a Gluck opera starring Viardot on the public London stage.⁵⁵

⁵¹ *The Freeman's Journal*, 22 September 1860.

⁵² *The Freeman's Journal*, 28 September 1860.

⁵³ *Manchester Guardian*, 6 October 1860.

⁵⁴ Note, for example, *The Athenaeum*, 13 October 1860, p. 489; *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 21 October 1860, p. 9.

⁵⁵ On the private performance of *Orphée* at Lord Dudley's with Viardot in the lead part see Stier, *The Power of Gluck*, p. 7. Yvette Sieffert-Rigaud writes misleadingly of the great success of Viardot's Orpheus at Covent Garden, see Yvette Sieffert-Rigaud, 'Pauline Viardot: Mythe et Réalité', (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Rouen, 1991), p. 252. She passes on a mistake made by Mrs Russell Barrington whose memories in this point aren't correct: '*Orphée* was produced at Covent Garden, and the great artist, Madame Viardot, sang in it superbly. The opera was given after one or two acts of a well-known work, and I can vouch for the fact, having been one of the audience, that the house was very nearly empty at the close of "*Orphée*," Lord

It is not an easy task to evaluate whether and how Viardot actually influenced or changed the taste of audiences and thereby advanced – together with others such as Chorley and Hallé – the revival of Gluck's operas. An article by Charles Villiers Stanford from 1921 on the occasion of the centenary of Jenny Lind, Viardot and George Grove sheds some light on the matter. Stanford divided musicians into two categories: 'those who work for their art, and those who work for themselves'.⁵⁶ According to Stanford, the task of every true artist – such as Viardot and Jenny Lind – is as follows: '[...] their business is to direct taste, not to follow it, to give the lead to their hearers of what they ought to like to hear, and not to play flimsy or inferior work merely because the public, perhaps after one hearing, momentarily prefers it.'⁵⁷

In her book *Interpreting the Musical Past* (2005) Katharine Ellis specifies 'four overlapping concerns' which can be seen as explaining the popularity of a composition of early music: 'stylistic value (the museum spirit), technical/educational value, ritual value, and familiarity. These forms of value influenced modes of listening [...], modes of signification among those who claimed to represent, while guiding, public taste [...].'⁵⁸ By regularly including Gluck's music in her concert programmes, Viardot gradually created familiarity with music that the public had previously found strange. She did not hesitate to confront her listeners with new or in fact rather old and unfamiliar sounds: 'She followed a path diametrically opposed to that of routine, and despised the hackneyed "effects" which the habitués looked forward to at certain places in her roles.'⁵⁹

Pauline Viardot's image in the English press

As regards Pauline Viardot, the press always differed in opinion. Whether it was her physical appearance, for example, or her operatic debut in 1839, there was praise as well as harsh criticism to be found in the newspapers. In her early years she also had to bear comparison with her sister, Maria Malibran. A fervent admirer and supporter of her, from the very beginning, was the influential music critic of the *Athenaeum*, Henry Chorley, who dedicated long articles full of praise to her and also reviewed her compositions. The following reviews,

Dudley and a very few true lovers of music only remaining in the stalls to the end.' Barrington, *Frederic Leighton*, vol. 2, annotation to p. 52.

⁵⁶ Charles Villiers Stanford, 'Three Centenaries: Jenny Lind, Pauline Viardot-Garcia, George Grove', *Music & Letters*, vol. 2, no. 1 (1921), pp. 29-34, here p. 29.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Katharine Ellis, *Interpreting the Musical Past. Early Music in Nineteenth-Century France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 10.

⁵⁹ Charles L. Graves, *Post-Victorian Music. With other Studies and Sketches* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1911), p. 174.

demonstrating the ambiguous attitude in the press, all refer to the same topic: her unorthodox approach to a role.

[...] It is not difficult to see that it is not impulse which presides over Madame Viardot's impersonations. [...] Turning her keen and thoroughly appreciative mind over the whole range of a character, she catches all its bearings and features, and then, with fine fancy in the conception, and infinite skill and delicacy in the execution, embodies them in an objective creation [...] with the most perfect and genuine truth to nature [...].⁶⁰

Neutral, but slightly negative, is this review in the *Musical World*:

Madame Viardot gives importance to every phrase, every word she has to utter [...]; it is impossible not to be conscious that Madame Viardot is acting; since no one can deny that deep study, rather than impulsive genius, is the secret of the effect she produces.⁶¹

Back in 1841 the public was not used to this expressive acting and singing, as is shown by the review of Viardot's interpretation in Cimarosa's *Gli Orazi e i Curiazi*:

It was hardly possible for anguish to speak in more appealing tones than in Viardot's low and wailing outpouring of the air "Nacqui è ver fra grandi eroi", [...] or for despair [...] to be painted more vividly to the eye, or to ring more piercingly on the ear, than in the attitude and upbraiding shriek with which she dared her brother in the last scene [...]. Yet they but slightly shook the audience from their apathy.⁶²

The review goes on about the national anthem, 'God save the Queen', which often was sung after the performance, and which 'caused no little laughter throughout the house' because of Viardot's 'forcible expression'.⁶³ *The Times*, to give another example, compared her impersonation of Rosina with:

[...] the painting of a Dutch interior. Every incident, every turn, is accurately noted and defined – nothing is merely suggested, scarcely anything left for the imagination of the spectator to supply. [...] her Rosina [is] one of those portraitures that start out from the dramatic canvass with the most intense sharpness and reality. It may seem hypercritical or perhaps paradoxical to say that if it were less highly finished it would be much more natural.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ *Morning Chronicle*, 28 July 1851, p. 5.

⁶¹ *Musical World*, 28 June 1851, p. 409.

⁶² *John Bull*, 13 March 1841, p. 129.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *The Times*, 21 June 1858, p. 10.

Apparently, 'such variety of power', as Henry Chorley puts it, 'is a quality perversely undervalued by the average playgoer.' They only want 'the repetition of a few looks and gestures [...], or of a c above, or of a c below, the line'.⁶⁵ However, the connoisseur especially appreciated these features, as is stated in the distinguished literary journal *Fraser's Magazine*: '[...] These studies of sentiment, in look, tone, or gesture, springing up like flowers where unexpected, are the last poetical refinements of opera, and address themselves to the highest taste.'⁶⁶

Praise and criticism seem to have stimulated Pauline Viardot. Over the years, Pauline Viardot managed to conquer not only the connoisseurs but the broader English audience and the critics in the press became more and more homogenous, until they even came close to the opinion of Chorley, who repeatedly stated that 'nothing in any respect approaching to [her] has been seen on the stage in our time'.⁶⁷

On one point though the various newspapers were in complete agreement throughout the years: and this was the general image of Pauline Viardot being a multi-faceted and multi-talented *artiste* not only at home in all different kinds of genre and schools but also having many other extraordinary talents. The following citation is from Henry Chorley, but its sentiments are repeated with the same emphasis in many other journals:

[...] no vocalist in our experience has so intimately penetrated to the very heart of every school of vocal music – whether it be grave or gay, ancient or modern – no matter what the difficulty, no matter what the language; – and not merely understood, but rendered the same so admirably as she.⁶⁸

Another characteristic of Viardot's image was her interest in contemporary English music. In her repertoire in England she included songs by English composers that were not yet well known and thus helped them to get attention. There are several composers who have written music for her, such as Michael Balfe, who had already composed an opera for Maria Malibran. As early as 1842, Balfe had written a cantata for Pauline Viardot in Paris and his *Scherzo* dedicated to her was part of her repertoire in England. Her English seems to have been so excellent that, as a critic of *The Times* said in 1856, English singers could learn a lot from her articulation and expression. This went so far that some critics asserted that she was 'born and partly brought up in London'.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ *The Athenaeum*, 23 June 1855, p. 738.

⁶⁶ *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country*, 1850, 2, p. 323.

⁶⁷ *The Athenaeum*, 28 July 1849, p. 771.

⁶⁸ *The Athenaeum*, 19 July 1856, p. 902.

⁶⁹ *John Bull*, 14 August 1847.

When the opera house at Drury Lane, which concentrated on English operas, was taken over by the Frenchman Louis-Antoine Jullien in 1847, there was rumour that Pauline Viardot would be engaged. Viardot finally had to answer to this in the press:

[...] Madame Viardot (Pauline Garcia) has addressed a letter to the Paris journal *Le Siècle*, contradicting a statement, which had appeared in several Paris and London newspapers, that she had made an engagement for the next season with the management of the new English Opera at Drury Lane. This we regret, as Madame Viardot would be the greatest acquisition that we can imagine to an English musical theatre; combining, as she does, the highest amount of genius and foreign cultivation with a perfect knowledge of our language, derived from her English birth and education.⁷⁰

Now that Viardot was a real star, the English seemed to monopolize her as being one of them.

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As we have seen, England and the English audience were a challenge for Pauline Viardot, but at the same time this country and its musical structures and institutions opened up new paths for her to broaden her repertoire, to extend or even cross the acceptable boundaries of a diva and gain experience in areas normally not accessible to a singer. Pauline Viardot was not only enriched by the English culture but also in turn contributed to and influenced the musical life of the British Isles in the nineteenth-century and thereby promoted cultural transfer.

Her brother Manuel Garcia, who, back in 1849, decided to move to England for a few years, surely then shared with her his attitude towards the English. On the occasion of his departure, Viardot writes to George Sand: 'Le pauvre garçon se meurt d'antipathie pour les Anglais. Mais comme il fait des affaires d'or comme on dit, il souffre pour gagner une vie meilleure.'⁷¹ Manuel Garcia did not stay for a few years, but became a British citizen and lived in London until his death almost 60 years later. He obviously had changed his mind. So had Pauline Viardot.

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⁷⁰ *John Bull*, 18 September 1847.

⁷¹ Letter of 7 August 1849, in: *Lettres inédites de George Sand et de Pauline Viardot*, p. 286.