

From the Theater of Dionysus to the Opera House

As any Classicist who has lately been attending conferences will know, there has been a surge of interest in reception studies. A glance through the programs of recent CAMWS meetings bears witness to this trend. While the majority of these studies have explored the influence of ancient texts on later works of literature, there has also been a steady flow of papers and panels concerned with their reception into music. Thus, the meeting in Iowa (2013) included a panel on “Music and Myth” as well as a paper by Charles Muntz on Wagner’s use of Sophocles in the composition of the *Ring* cycle in a separate panel; the meeting in Waco (2014) a panel on the reception of Greek and Roman Antiquity in Heavy Metal bands; the meeting in Boulder (2015) a panel on “Reception in Music,” spanning composers from Claudio Monteverdi to the rock band Genesis; and the meeting in Kitchener (2017) a panel on “Teaching Latin Poetry with Popular Music.”

As this brief overview shows, operas has been a fertile subject for studies of musical reception, and the time seems ripe for a CAMWS panel dedicated entirely to instances of classical reception into that particular genre of music. This limitation has obvious advantages in terms of providing a sharper focus in which points of contact as well as meaningful differences between the various works treated in the individual papers can emerge more distinctly. In fact, in order to foster this sense of coherence still further, we have restricted our topic also on the other end of the process of reception, to instances of reception involving influence from Greek Tragedy. Despite these restrictions, however, the panel remains quite wide-ranging: it covers material from all three of the so-called great tragedians—Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides--as well as operas from three major periods--Baroque, 19th century, and modern--and also three countries--England, Italy, and Greece.

The panel consists of four papers, which will be presented in chronological order. Paper 1 shows that Handel's *Orestes* (1734), while creating at first the impression of being based on two tragedies by Euripides, in fact relies more strongly on material originating in Roman sources. Papers 2 and 3 take the opposite approach, demonstrating that Bellini's *Norma* (1831) and Verdi's *Don Carlo* (1867), two operas that have no obvious connection to Greek tragedy, nevertheless adopt elements from it in the shaping of certain of their central figures as well as their plot patterns. Paper 4 makes the case that in his *Antigone* Theodorakis seeks to refashion texts from Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides in an attempt to forge an opera that will help his compatriots to transcend their painful political past in favor of a sense of unity and hope.

We believe that the meeting at Albuquerque offers an especially good opportunity for this panel due to its geographic proximity to the world-famous Santa Fe Opera and because Albuquerque's own opera company is offering performances of *Norma* on two evenings during the time of the convention. In addition to appealing to fans of opera and classical music more generally among the participants at the conference, however, the panel is intended also as a pedagogical resource, offering the many instructors of Classics who teach courses featuring Greek tragedy in translation new ideas for bringing the subject to life or starting discussion by means of a clip from a movie or recording.