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# ***‘D’un bel canto patrioto francese’*: On the Penetration of French Revolutionary Elements in the Spectacles of Republican Milan (1796–1802)**

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Following the arrival of the French army in April 1796, Milan became the capital of the Cisalpine Republic (1797–1802), a ‘sister republic’ of France—a stark transformation after decades of Austrian control. While disastrous in terms of economic exploitation, the French republican governments identified spectacle as an essential tool for propaganda, control, and education. Milan was a major centre for opera, but was rather conservative as to repertoire and practices, particularly in terms of rigid separation between theatrical and nontheatrical performances. This separation was challenged with the new republican festivities. Drawing upon archival material, this article examines how spectacular elements from revolutionary France and its republican festivals infiltrated Milanese opera’s ivory tower, and how operatic elements in turn seeped into the streets to celebrate republican ideals. In so doing, this article sheds new light on theatrical and musical encounters between revolutionary France and its sister republics.

**KEYWORDS** republican Milan, music, propaganda, republican opera, republican festivals, public spectacle, mobility

On 15 May 1796, General Bonaparte made his entry into Milan at the head of that young army which had just crossed the Bridge of Lodi, thus showing the world that, after so many centuries, Caesar and Alexander finally had a successor. The miracles of bravery and genius which Italy witnessed in the space of just a few months had the effect of awakening a slumbering people [...]. Suddenly, new, and passionate habits sprung up. [...] The citizens of Milan

had been plunged into the deepest darkness by [...] Charles V's and Philip II's possessive despotism; they overthrew these monarchs' statues and suddenly found themselves flooded with light (Beyle (Stendhal), [1839]1969: 9–11).

The opening of Stendhal's (1783–1842) celebrated novel, *La Chartreuse de Parme* [*The Charterhouse of Parma*] (1839), might not be historically reliable, but it gives an atmospheric impression of Napoleon Bonaparte's triumphal entry into Milan in 1796. This heavily choreographed arrival was staged to appear more as a non-invasion than an occupation, but it nonetheless triggered a series of deep social, political, and cultural changes in Lombardy, and, more generally, in Northern Italy. In later accounts, like Stendhal's, and in contemporary iconography, this day is often portrayed as the joyful and long-awaited moment in which a whole population awoke from apathy and vice, and turned to virtue and freedom. Yet, as this article will show, the reality was far more complex than these optimistic depictions suggest. To do so, I study the periods 1796–1799 and 1800–1802, when Milan was the centre of a sister republic to France. Drawing on approaches from the fields of war and mobility studies and scholarship on performance and the public sphere, a more complicated picture emerges of the cultural and musical legacy of Milan's time as the capital city of a republican state bound to revolutionary France.

The Revolutionary Wars had a profound impact on the Northern Italian States. Lombardy had been a province of the Austrian monarchy throughout the eighteenth century, but after 1796 Milan remained under French republican then imperial influence until the fall of Napoleon in 1814, bar a brief Austrian interlude from 1799 to 1800. One of the most dramatic changes was the transition from the lengthy and relatively pacific Austrian domination to the 'Jacobin triennium' of 1796–1799. During this period, Milan was forced to transform suddenly from a peripheral subject of the Austrian monarchy into the centre of two new republics. The first of these 'sister republics' founded by the French and local revolutionaries was the short-lived Transpadane Republic (1796–1797), which merged with the neighbouring Cispadane Republic to form the longer-lasting Cisalpine Republic (1797–1799; 1800–1802). This transition greatly affected the city's prominence, identity, and societal environment (Cantù, 1855; Grab, 2003). As the cultural and political powerhouse of French-controlled Northern Italy, Milan was a prominent venue for cultural encounters: new cultural and artistic products were often tested there before being disseminated to other Lombard cities. Given the city's rich musical history (Burney, 1773; Valery, 1839), Milan offers a fruitful case study to examine the negotiation processes and new musical products that arose from the encounter between local traditions and foreign importations around 1800.

Controlling Milan and the Milanese ideologically was a more problematic issue for the French and their proxies than republican propaganda outputs often suggest. Despite the greatly advertised gratitude that the Lombard people allegedly felt towards the French 'liberators' freeing them from foreign 'tyrants', the local population had not been that dissatisfied with Austria. Milan had become

Austrian Lombardy's proud capital city, and seat of the Habsburg Archduke Ferdinand Karl (1754–1806), the fourth-born son of Empress Maria Theresia (1717–1780); besides the occasional clash between local and central authorities, the Austrian governors were perceived as skilled rulers (Bertarelli & Monti, 1927; Gorani, 1989). During the Austrian domination, Milan had experienced a steady cultural and economic development (often described as a 'second Renaissance'), seeing the birth of institutions that would play an important role in the city's cultural and theatrical landscape in the following decades. In the 1770s, for instance, Empress Maria Theresia had founded the Brera Art Academy and Library on the site of the former Jesuit College (suppressed in 1773); the Academy became the main producer of artists, including many painters and scenographers employed in the city's theatres and for public celebrations (Carpani et al., 2010; Crespi Morbio, 2010).

The Milanese were not campaigning for a free, independent Italian nation, nor for the radical social and political changes the French preached (see, for instance, Canzio, 1944; De Grada & Firenza, 1989). Indeed, Alberto Banti describes the changes triggered by the republican experience of 1796–1799 as the first spark of nationalism in the sense that would be used after the 1815 Restoration, during the so-called 'Risorgimento' decades (2004: vi), and that would eventually lead to Italian unification.

Milan's new republican government included local figures, coming from both the old generation of enlightened thinkers (e.g. Pietro Verri (1728–1797) and Giuseppe Parini (1729–1799)) and the more democratic, and arguably more opportunistic, group of younger aristocrats and bourgeois (e.g. Galeazzo Serbelloni (1744–1802) and Gaetano Porro (1764–1800)), who joined forces with the numerous radicals flocking to Milan from the other Italian states, Switzerland, and France (e.g. Francesco S. Salfi (1759–1832)) (De Sanctis, 1970: 14–15; Daolmi, 2001: 133–34). The executive power was placed, however, into the hands of French diplomats and military officers, especially those of the *Comandante della Piazza* (Commander-in-chief of the *Armée d'Italie*) (Pagano, 1994: 16–17; Tulard, 1989: 95). Among this government's main points of action was the development a systematic propaganda strategy, which had four main goals. Firstly, to establish and maintain the new regime's control; secondly, to convey an alien value system, which included the defamation of traditional political and religious authorities (Ottolini, 1956); thirdly, to distract the Milanese from the French plunder of the local area (Minola, [1799]: 26–30; Criscuolo, 1989: 84–85); and, finally, to change the traditional perception of spectacle, especially in terms of performance and public spaces. It is this final point which is at the heart of this article: by developing patriotic enthusiasm towards carefully selected objects and rituals, Milan's republican government re-codified the city's spaces as places associated with new republican symbols and celebrations. In so doing, they diminished the power of traditional secular and religious symbols and practices cultivated by the Austrian authorities (Fava, 1981: 98; Criscuolo, 1989: 9–10).

## Festivals in republican Milan

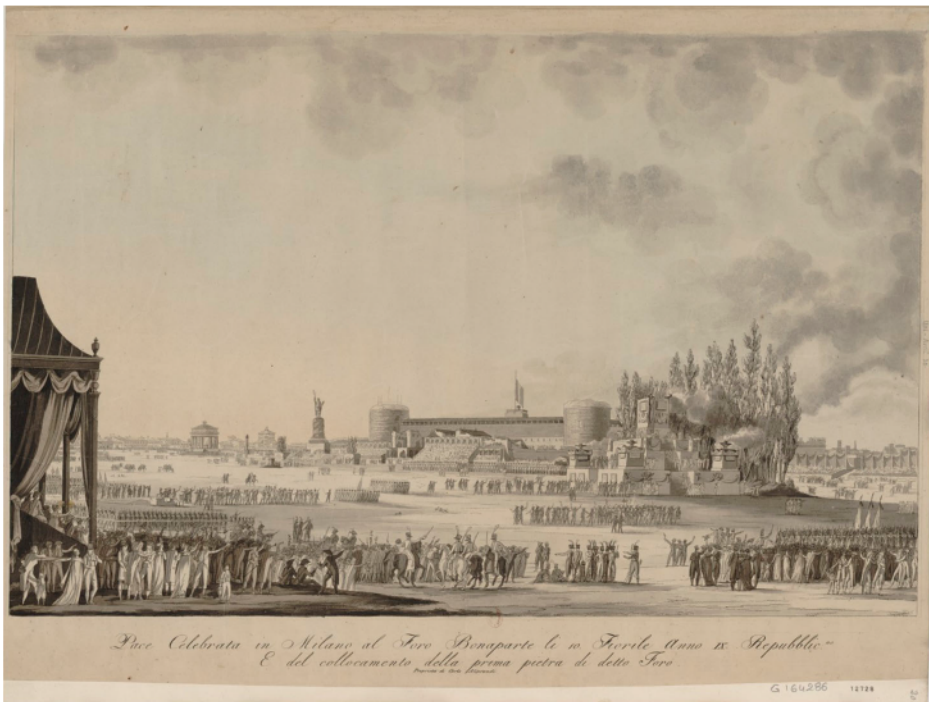
One of the republican government's first actions was to nominate specific commissions entrusted with implementing new cultural policies, events, and objects that soon dominated the cultural experiences on offer to the Milanese. The Ministry of Internal Affairs, for instance, established the *Commissione per le pubbliche feste* [Commission for Public Festivals], a working group of local officers to organize public festivals. While this *Commissione's* make-up would change over the years, its intense activity and access to copious funds and labour was maintained throughout the Cisalpine Republic (see *Spettacoli Pubblici Parte Antica*, folders 1 and 2, Archivio di Stato, Milan). Such was the importance of public festivals that they were included in the first Constitution of the Cisalpine Republic (Anon., 1797: 160–61).

Republican festivals borrowed heavily from the revolutionary models which had been codified in early 1790s Paris as a result of the debate on effective and morally edifying spectacles (see Ozouf, 1976; Mastropasqua, 1976). Still, they were redesigned to fit the Milanese context. A vast array of tools for propaganda, control, and popular engagement had been inherited both from pre-existing local civic and religious festivities, and from years of practice in revolutionary France (Balmas, 1989: 139–40; Ferrone, 1989: 27–29; Feldman, 2007: 120–23). The former Austrian and Spanish governors had organized public celebrations to mark, for example, dynastic events (see, for example, Carpani et al., 2010; Mignatti, 2017). Though systematically presented as antithetical to the values preached by the French, practices from these Austrian and Spanish celebrations were re-purposed for the republican festivals, such as modifying public space, using awe-inspiring spectacles like fireworks, and offering civic banquets (see, for instance, Parini, 1825; D'Amia, 2008). Like many other festive apparatuses of the Revolution, republican festivals were constantly moving between recreating and vandalizing existing traditions (Puppa, 1989: 172).

In both France and its sister republics, these festivals affected wider concepts of performance practices, spaces, actors, and audiences. Through these events, republican supporters enforced a model of audience gaze and participation that blurred the traditional boundaries between audience and performers, with all attendees equally contributing to the re-enactment of collective participation in civic life (Ozouf, 1976: 239–40; Ferrone, 1989: 38–39). Both the theorists and organizers of these events purposefully distorted the boundary between the individual and the collective, often advocating a quasi *tabula-rasa* approach to existing models of audience involvement (Mastropasqua, 1976; Livesey, 2001). In order to understand the reality of such practices, I will go beyond official descriptions (an approach advised by Ozouf, 1976: 29) and situate the Milanese examples within recent scholarship. For example, Christopher Balme's analysis of the 'theatrical public sphere' (2014) offers a new frame for studying how these festivals triggered an unprecedented level of permeability between theatrical and public spheres. And

the field of human geography has shown that public spaces participate in the continuous process of transforming abstract space into a series of subjective places (Merriman, 2012: 48–49). Finally, we need to examine properly how a foreign festival model was transferred to Northern Italy, identifying the differences of how these festivals worked in the Milanese (rather than Parisian) context, such as the stronger need for negotiation and control (Parker, 1990: 50).

The festival organized in April 1801 to celebrate the Peace of Lunéville and the proclamation of the second Cisalpine Republic allows us to extrapolate the complex nexus of encounter and adjustment. It was organized on Milan's former Castle square, now rechristened 'Foro Bonaparte' (Bonaparte Square). The familiar landscape of the esplanade facing the Sforza castle was altered by the partial demolition of the fortress's outer walls and the construction of several temporary structures. These included a colossal column decorated with bas-reliefs and crested by the statue of Peace, a circular temple dedicated to Victory, an amphitheatre, and an altar consecrated to the soldiers fallen in the latest campaign (Anon., 1801). The esplanade's final appearance (Figure 1) resembled what has been described as an 'orgy of symbols' (Bosisio, 2006: 247), overflowing with neoclassical and republican elements, with half-ruined vestiges of the old regime's authority in the background. This amalgamation is a particularly accomplished example of the continuous process of vandalizing and changing Milan's existing places in order to



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FIGURE 1 Foro Bonaparte during the 1801 festival, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

modify traditional associations and build new, appropriate performance venues (*Giornale storico*, 1797: 118–21; Giudicelli-Falguières, 1987: 268). This was also in line with the practices in other cities under French influence, such as Venice, Rome, and Naples (Vacca, 1988; Carlini, 2000; Traversier, 2004). Public space was thus turned into a tool for celebration through its theatricalization and its new associations (Mastropasqua, 1976: 18–19; Bosisio, 2006: 246). Events such as this one pushed the boundaries of the theatrical public sphere to new levels, affecting how these spaces gave value and identity to Milan's inhabitants.

In these reframed public spaces, republican festivals made systematic use of different tools of public engagement, entertainment, and ritualized solemnization resulting in complex and multi-layered events (Spettacoli Pubblici, P.A., folders 1 and 2). Amidst republican oratory, military parades, sporting competitions, and ritualized displays of goodwill towards the poor, music had a particularly important role. Music was thought effective for both exaltation and entertainment, and musical performances, especially theatrical ones, traditionally enjoyed a prominent role in the city (Carlini, 2000: 473–74). Since music was paramount to the public festivals, the members of the *Commissione* continuously experimented with its use.

## The music of the festivals

A closer look at the 1801 festival reveals not only that the musical content was both prominent and varied, but also that musical elements were often mixed with extra-musical sounds and visual effects to realize ritualized and spectacular experiences. This combination created 'auditory images' or 'phono-symbols', which have been acknowledged as powerful tools of emotional engagement and popular education (Garrioch, 2003: 5–6). How carefully synchronized visual and sonorous elements created a highly ritualized spectacle in the theatricalized public space is exemplified in the 1801 festival, where one could see and hear the following:

Visual	Sound/noise
Civil and military officers climb the stairs leading to the amphitheatre; boys present them with olive branches.	Hymns and symphonies
Officers move towards the funeral monument	Funeral march
Officers reach the funeral monument; boys drape it with wreaths of flowers	Military sounds (gunfire, drums, etc.)
Officers reach the temple; boys affix laurel wreaths to the temple's columns	Explosions from the castle's ruins

(Anon., 1801: iii–v)

While the abundance of labels listed in the above programme evoke the variety of music and sonorous elements, it does not provide much detail about the actual musical content. Cross-referencing the surviving documentation from different festivals (Anon., n.d.; Minoja, n.d.) allows us to establish that the musical repertoire consisted of a mixture of pre-existing pieces, both Italian and French, and of new commissions modelled on revolutionary works. A particularly lavish cycle of celebrations was organized in May 1797 to celebrate the first anniversary of Bonaparte's victories in the Italian Campaign, which included the following musical performances (Anon, n.d.):

Piece	Performance venue	Performers
I. concertato chorus A. Minoja (1752–1825)	1. La Scala 2. outdoors (Palazzo Serbelloni)	25 choristers, 12 players the above plus band (12 extra players)
II. Chorus from <i>Il re Teodoro in Venezia</i> [ <i>King Theodore in Venice</i> ] G. Paisiello (1740–1816), arr. A. Rolla (1757–1841)	Outdoors (unspecified)	Choir and orchestra (La Scala)
III. patriotic hymn A. Minoja	outdoors (Porta Romana)	25 choristers 36 players
IV. symphonies, marches L. de Bailou (1736–1804)	outdoors (unspecified)	military bands + extra players

Comparing this information with that of other festivals, it is possible to infer that among the pre-existing pieces one could find operatic excerpts, mostly choral numbers chosen for their solemn character and catchy melodies. Their words and orchestration were often altered to make them more engaging and suitable for outdoor performances. The chorus mentioned above, for example, came from the 1784 heroic-comic opera *Il re Teodoro in Venezia* by Paisiello (1784). Band players joined the orchestra and choir of the Milanese opera, La Scala, which was already sizeable for the time (Fertonani, 2000: 866–67). The chorus's textual references to the instability of the world order (though originally meant in a comic tone) here portrayed the profound changes Bonaparte's victories had brought, and the fragility of traditional authorities:

The world is like a wheel,  
With those on top, and those on the bottom,  
And who was on the bottom before,



Comes back up,  
 Some rise, some fall,  
 Some go up, some go down; [...]  
 (Giovanni Battista Casti, 1788: 80)

While the fast, contrapuntal character of the chorus's first section made it very difficult (if not impossible) for the audience to join in, the piece triggered their immediate association to familiar musical forms. Moreover, the homophonic texture and upgraded vocal and instrumental forces of the ending made the overall performance very engaging (Paisiello, 1784: 213v–171).

Military-style pieces were particularly popular in the festival music both imported from abroad and composed especially for the event. The programmes for festivals in 1797 and 1801 both mention symphonies and marches coming from or modelled on the French festival repertoire including patriotic tunes brought by the French battalions and their bands (Pierre, 1899). These had already been exploited in Paris as tools of solemnization and engagement in both public festivals and theatres (Pierre, 1904: 9–11; Mason, 1966: 35). Various labels as '*chansons*'/'*canzoni*' [songs], '*hymnes*'/'*inni*' [hymns], '*airs*' [airs] and '*chants*'/'*canti*' [chants/songs], these tunes were not only sung, but also used as dance music or as an accompaniment for the military displays, soon becoming a constant of the city's soundscape (*Giornale storico*, 1797: 71; Criscuolo, 1989: 119). Some of the most popular French revolutionary tunes, such as the '*Carmagnole*', the '*Marseillaise*', and '*Ça ira*' ['It'll be fine'], became so ubiquitous that within the local collective imagery, they were placed side by side with Italian patriotic slogans, despite their French lyrics (see Figure 2).

The process of repertoire mixture and juxtaposition was constant. Eyewitnesses record how during a public celebration in 1798, one could see (and hear): 'dancers, both men and women, sober or completely drunk, singing *Ça ira*, 'Allons, enfants de la Patrie', the *Lodoiska*, and the *Carmagnole* all day long' (Fumagalli, 1831: 7). Here, 'Allons, enfants de la Patrie' refers to the '*Marseillaise*', while *Lodoiska* was a much-beloved theatrical subject. Indeed, it was the basis of two operas that premiered in Paris in 1791 (by Luigi Cherubini (1760–1842) and Rodolphe Kreutzer (1766–1831), respectively). These works were also combined into a pasticcio opera for Monza in 1793, and into a ballet performed in Milan during the 1794–1795 and 1796–1797 seasons (Castelvecchi, 2013: 162). Through the systematic introduction and imitation of foreign repertoire (made available thanks to the circulation of musical pieces, performers, and instruments occasioned by the military campaigns) that was juxtaposed and mixed with local and extra-musical elements, the musical experiences embedded in the public festivals further blurred the boundaries between public and theatrical spheres, and between celebration and performance. Additionally, we can see how this mixing of musical cultures within the festival setting created new associative chains for visual and sonorous symbols — a process that also affected the performances in the opera house.



FIGURE 2 *Stemma repubblicano* designed in 1798 by Giovanni Ranza. Milan, CRS Achille Bertarelli.

## Patriotism and propaganda at La Scala

While the republican festivals were largely an imported cultural object and thus a clean slate where musical experiment and cultural imposition could be exercised, more stringent measures had to be taken to control the more problematic space of La Scala. Scholars have recognized how Italian opera houses were mostly conservative, class-based spaces (Wiles, 2014: 174). The situation in Milan was particularly delicate as theatre support and management had long been the basis for a fruitful cooperation between the Habsburg governors and the Milanese, especially since the appointment of Archduke Ferdinand as Governor (Burney, 1773: 85; Hansell, 1980: 131–32). After the fire in the old Teatro Ducale (1774), La Scala was built thanks to Ferdinand's negotiation with his mother and a financial partnership between the Viennese court and the Milanese aristocrats. The latter received permanent ownership of the boxes in exchange for financially supporting the theatre's construction. The theatrical space of La Scala was thus part public, part private – a case unique in contemporary Europe (Cambiasi, 1899: 345–59; Giazotto, 1990: 7–12).

Implementing republicanism within the space of La Scala was problematic. Much republican propaganda in Milan was based on the idea of liberation and non-invasion, and the right to private property had been guaranteed since Bonaparte's first speech (Fava, 1981: 12); this limited how La Scala could be used as a site for propaganda. It is significant that in other Italian cities under French control, the relationship between the theatrical buildings and the old order was immediately and visibly challenged by re-christening the theatres (like other public spaces) with names declaring a supposed vicinity to republican concepts and rhetoric. In Naples, for instance, the Teatro San Carlo became the 'Teatro Nazionale' (National Theatre) and the Teatro del Fondo the 'Patriottico' (Patriotic Theatre) after the arrival of the French army in 1799 (Traversier, 2004: 45–46).

Such an aggressive line could not be taken in Milan, where, in order to devise and apply changes within the theatrical sphere, the government nominated another commission, the *Commissione per la Revisione dei Teatri* [Commission for the Revision of Theatres] (Cambiasi, 1889: 26–34). The first measure this Commission took while working on longer-term changes was to add French republican elements to pre-existing repertoires and practices. This mirrors the processes already in force for the Parisian theatres since the early 1790s (Pierre, 1904: 9–11) and the Milanese public festivals, as discussed above. Patriotic tunes thus started to be sung or played in between the acts or at the end of operas. On the evening of Bonaparte's arrival (15 May 1796), the newly constituted Municipality led by General Hyacinthe François Joseph Despinoy (1764–1848) forced La Scala's impresarios to open the theatre's doors to all citizens and French soldiers for a free evening performance. They were also ordered to perform *La Marseillaise* in between the acts of the programmed opera. The numerous and diverse audiences and the performance's

uncontrolled character made that evening one the most chaotic hitherto in the theatre's history (Tintori and Bezzola, 1984: 41).

In June 1798, a report by the *Commissione sui Teatri* officially stated that patriotic music had to be performed in between the acts of all works, and that, on public festival days, all theatrical performances held in the evening had to show a clear link to the festival's content (Anon., 1798c). This measure imitated a 1796 decree by the Parisian Directory (Pierre, 1904: 17), showing how the 'sister republics' could be considered French provinces expected to implement centralized cultural policies.

A better-documented example of how republican practices affected the repertoire and venue is the performances of *L'astuta in amore* [*The Cunning one in Love*] (1796), a comic opera with music by Valentino Fioravanti (1764–1837) and a libretto by Giuseppe Palomba (1765–1825), programmed for August and September 1796 (Chiappori, 1818: 53). The opera included a traditional happy ending in which triumphant love was celebrated with a choral number. The libretto shows, however, how a pre-existing French revolutionary hymn from Cherubini's *Chant républicain du 10 août* [*The Republican Chant of 10 August*] was artificially inserted into this final scene (Palomba, 1796: 58–59): the choir and characters suddenly declared how 'a nice French patriotic song' ('un bel canto patrioto francese') was the best way to show communal joy, and started singing Cherubini's hymn in French — mirroring the role operatic choruses played in the Milanese republican festivals. Interestingly, the score does not show any additions (Fioravanti, n.d.), suggesting that, as was customary in the Parisian theatres (Bartlet, 1992: 108–110), performers knew this repertoire by heart.

According to contemporary periodicals and police reports, patriotic pieces could also be requested impromptu by the audience, which happened frequently thanks to the constant presence of French — and, from July 1797, Cisalpine — soldiers (Gaffarel, 1895: 36; Bellorini, 1907: 116–18). The tunes chosen for these ad-hoc performances in the theatre were — like Cherubini's *Chant républicain* or the pieces sung in the festivals — sonorous, engaging, and easily memorizable. Such pieces were arguably aimed at establishing communal singing as a strong political force — a practice also observed by Katherine Hambridge (2015), Gillian Russell (1995), and Eric Schneeman in this special issue in Prussian and British theatres. The practice had elicited visceral and contagious audience behaviour in revolutionary Paris (Wiles, 2014: 155–56); yet, until the arrival of the French, communal singing at the theatre had not been a common practice for the Milanese. This development thus reveals how the republican-propaganda measures rendered the local theatrical scene not only more reactive to the outside world, but also more politicized.

Adding patriotic songs to the evening's spectacle was easier than tampering with the actual repertoire of La Scala. Simply staging French operas in lieu of Italian works was unthinkable: the French operatic idiom would have appeared alien to local audiences and the Milanese aristocrats' control of the theatre made such blatant substitution impossible. The regime thus turned to pre-existing operas,

looking for topics that were easily exploitable in the current circumstances. Indeed, the government had learned from Parisian practices that episodes from classical and national history could showcase typically republican values allowing operas to become patriotic and particularly effective in supporting the Republic (Hibberd, 2012: 303–04; Wiles, 2014: 168).

Serious works, known as *opere serie*, were deemed more suitable for solemn celebration than their comic counterparts, *opere buffe* (Bosisio, 2012: 132–33). These serious works were traditionally performed in the Carnival season, which was the most prestigious and best-attended season. Morally edifying stories were systematically used from the 1797 Carnival (opening in late December 1796, thus the first since the arrival of the French troops) onward (see Table 1): plots were set in historical republican states and focused on civic virtues and the battle between tyrants and heroes. Thus, another cultural ritual was appropriated.

This programming, mirroring that in other French-controlled Italian operatic centres such as Venice (Feldman, 2007), encouraged audiences to forge links between the present and a past golden age of republicanism, patriotism, and freedom. This helped to introduce new models for collective emulation and to legitimize the advent of the republic in Lombardy, recasting it as an act of restoration of the original social order. In short, such propagandistic programming drew an explicit parallel between the real world and the stage.

As had been the case with performances of republican songs in the theatre, official measures were soon put in place. In 1798, a contract drafted for the new impresarios of La Scala, the government sympathizers Francesco Ricci (1732–1817) and Giovanni Gherardi (dates unknown, 17.–18..), stipulated that ‘No ballet, opera, comedy or tragedy will be performed prior to its approval by the government’; ‘The subject matter must be patriotic, lead to the triumph of virtue and completely adhere to the values of the democratic government’; and ‘The impresario cannot refuse to perform those patriotic works that will be given to him in due time,

TABLE 1  
OPERE SERIE PRODUCED AT LA SCALA, 1796–1802.

Carnival Season	Title	Libretto author	Composer
1797	<i>La congiura Pisoniana</i> [ <i>The Pisonian Conspiracy</i> ]	F. Salfi	A. Tarchi
1798	<i>Gli Orazi e i Curiazi</i> [ <i>The Horatii and the Curiatii</i> ] <i>Meleagro</i> [Meleagro]	S. Sografi G. Schmidt	D. Cimarosa N. Zingarelli
1799	<i>Il trionfo di Clelia</i> [ <i>The Triumph of Clelia</i> ] <i>Gli Sciti</i> [ <i>The Scythians</i> ]	S. Sografi G. Rossi	S. Nasolini G. Nicolini
1801	<i>Citennestra</i> [Clytemnestra] <i>I baccanali di Roma</i> [ <i>The Bacchanals of Rome</i> ]	F. Salfi L. Romanelli	N. Zingarelli G. Nicolini
1802	<i>I Manlii</i> [ <i>The Manlius Family</i> ] <i>I misteri eleusini</i> [ <i>The Eleusinian Mysteries</i> ]	S. Sografi G. Bernardoni	G. Nicolini S. Mayr

given that they are suited to the stage and do not cause excessive expenditure' (Contratto Ricci and Gherardi, 1798). The impresarios' work was thus heavily controlled by the government, and the measures applied in the theatre directly mirrored those enforced in public festivals. The work of the two *Commissioni* allowed for the realization of a wide-ranging propaganda campaign that was deemed necessary in republican Milan. It also facilitated the process of encounter between theatrical and extra-theatrical spheres. Their combined analysis reveals the importance entrusted to music as a tool of political control, expression, and display.

A particularly effective example in this light is *La congiura pisoniana*, the opera seria commissioned to open the 1797 Carnival season and written by the composer Angelo Tarchi (c.1760–1814) and dramaturg Francesco Salfi, one of the most influential theatre theoreticians, journalists, and political activists of the time. This opera can be considered the first systematic application of the principles of 'republican' musical theatre in the Italian republics and a model for reframing classicistic plots (De Sanctis, 1970: 93; Tintori and Bezzola, 1984: 43; Bosisio, 2012: 132). Salfi intervened in many aspects of this plot about a conspiracy against Roman emperor Nero, altering historical events to fit a triumphant, patriotic ending and characterizing both figures exclusively by their respect or disregard of republican values. His theatrical and musical style blended familiar and repurposed features to respond to the necessities of borrowing and inverting existing associations (Feldman, 2007: 324) and to communicate the new morality in a direct and emotionally engaging way (Ketterer, 2006: 104–05). The libretto's stylistic and metrical forms echo the traditional model developed by Pietro Metastasio (1698–1782), but the spotlight was carefully directed towards the characters' republican virtues or tyrannical vices: while Piso and Eucaridis pledge to die fighting for Rome's liberty, Nero viciously orders the destruction of the city and the extinction of its citizens' freedom (Salfi, 1797: 14, 20–23). This allowed for a powerful display of republican oratory that echoed the speeches, hymns, and oaths in the festivals.

*La congiura pisoniana* also illustrates how musical idioms were selected to underpin the republican rhetoric in the text: it imitated features of the music resounding in Milanese public spaces during celebratory events. One of the most notable examples was the systematic use of choruses and ensemble pieces to express communal voices and sentiments (De Sanctis, 1970: 94). For instance, great musical attention and investment were placed on the chorus 'Everybody swear on the tyrant's body / To either live in freedom or die', depicting Piso and the conspirators using the language of republican slogans and oaths, and singing to music described as 'sonorous and boisterously rhythmical' (Salfi, 1796: 44; Anon., 1797–1798; De Sanctis, 1970: 104).

Throughout the republican years, we can see a progressive shift from solo towards larger-ensemble or choral numbers in the operas created for La Scala — a development also found in French opera (Arblaster, 1992: 47–48). While each act conventionally closed with a choral scene, the chorus was now more

consistently used as a voice stressing the patriotic sentiments of a certain group, celebrating the achievements of the republican heroes, and providing the audience with moral guidance; emulation was easier to achieve in group than as an individual (Rossini, 1993: 127–28; Traversier, 2004: 45–46). The operas show a strong shift from individual deeds to collective action, a psychological transition akin to that observable in the ritualized spectacles of the republican festivals.

In comparison to *opere serie*, the commissioners and impresarios dedicated considerably less attention to the comic genre of *opera buffa*, which occupied a subordinate position within the theatrical hierarchy and did not trigger many new commissions (Viale Ferrero, 1989: 100). That said, while the backbone of the comic repertoire at La Scala did not change significantly during the republican years, some *opere buffe* showed an attempt to harness this genre for the republican cause. Works such as *I matrimoni liberi* [*The Free Marriages*] and *La città nuova* [*The New City*] (both performed in the Autumn season of 1798) infused the well-established contrast between old and idiotic, and young and cunning characters with contemporary themes such as freedom, despotism, and bravery. In *I matrimoni liberi*, the female lead Clarice actively fights for her freedom against an arranged marriage (1798a: 9; 20), while *La città nuova*, set in an idyllic republican community, discusses the importance of fair legislation (1798b: 9–10).

The government interventions also impacted ballets. These works were traditionally less prescriptive in terms of subject matter, often set in allegorical and mythical realms (Tintori and Bezzola, 1984: 89–90; Moiraghi, 2001: 16). Still, the genre systematically used models from the ancient, classical tradition paired with highly propagandistic topics and settings (see Table 2).

Particularly interesting is the infamous 1797 pantomime *Il General Colli in Roma*, which also illustrates the French-Cisalpine cooperation: Salfi supplied the *argomento*, while the music is attributed to the orchestra's leader Ferdinando Pontelibero (1770–1835), and it was choreographed by the French dancer Dominique Lefèvre (17...–1812) after the notorious Gasparo Angiolini (1731–1803) had refused due to the topic's anticlericalism (Sasportes, 2011: 150). Using a rhetoric and narrative similar to that employed in the republican newspapers, Salfi's *argomento* distorted the recent defeat that the army of the Papal States had suffered against Bonaparte in Faenza (1797: 1–2). The work culminated in a tableau where visual and musical elements were carefully coordinated to depict the entry of the French into Rome: at the sight of the victorious army, Pope Pius VI (1717–1799) was pictured proclaiming the superiority of republicanism to Catholicism, replacing his mitre with a Phrygian bonnet and dancing a *périgourdine* (a country dance from Dordogne) with the soldiers (Salfi, 1797: 10). The pantomime quickly became known as the *Ballo del Papa* [*The Pope's Dance*]; it virulently defamed traditional religious authorities to such an unprecedented degree that it shocked everybody but the most committed republican supporters. After a few evenings, performances were suspended, abruptly ending Lefèvre's career in Milan (*Giornale storico*, 1797: 4; Paglicci Brozzi, 1887: 108).

TABLE 2  
SELECTION OF BALLETS PRODUCED AT LA SCALA, 1796–1802.

Season	Ballet
Autumn 1796	<i>Lucrezia, ovvero L'espulsione dei Re da Roma</i> [Lucrezia, or the Expulsion of the Kings from Rome]
Carnival 1797	<i>Guglielmo Tell, ossia La rivoluzione svizzera</i> [Guillaume Tell, or the Swiss Revolution] <i>Lucio Giunio Bruto</i> [Lucius Junius Brutus]
Lent 1797	<i>Il general Colli in Roma</i> [General Colli in Rome]
Autumn 1797	<i>Il buon patriota</i> [The Good Patriot] <i>I patrioti repubblicani</i> [The Republican Patriots]
Carnival 1798	<i>Amor fra l'armi</i> [Love in Arms]
Advent 1798	<i>L'Italia rigenerata</i> [Italy Regenerated]
Carnival 1799	<i>Reclutamento in un villaggio</i> [Village Recruitment] <i>La vera giustizia nei patrioti</i> [True Justice of the Patriots]
Lent 1799	<i>Il Bruto Milanese, ossia La congiura contro G. M. Visconti</i> [The Milanese Brutus, or the Conspiracy against G. M. Visconti] <i>I Francesi in Egitto</i> [The French in Egypt]
Autumn 1801	<i>Cleopatra</i> [Cleopatra]
Carnival 1802	<i>Agamennone</i> [Agamemnon] <i>La morte di Piro</i> [The Death of Pyrrhus] <i>Il tamburo notturno</i> [The Night Drum]

The arrival of the French in 1796 and the ensuing republican practices disrupted Milan's operatic environment whose repertoire and attendance habits had remained static for decades. The environment was republicanized through the reframing of works' subject matters and the musical and dramatic focus on specific characters and situations. Regardless of their historical or geographical location, settings started featuring trees of liberty, community halls, and temples dedicated to various allegorical deities. The sets prescribed for *La congiura pisoniana*, for instance, demanded a group of statues representing Brutus in the act of killing Caesar and an altar dedicated to Revenge (Salfi, 1796: 23), while the opera *Ademira* (1796) contained a square 'adorned for the return of the victorious warrior, with a triumphal arch visible in the distance' (Moretti, 1796: 7). Similarly, the *opera buffa* *La città nuova* was set in a utopic city in North America whose main square featured a House of the Commune with walls covered in patriotic proclamations (1798: 7), while the ballet *L'Italia rigenerata* (1798) ended with the allegories of Italy and France dancing in a Temple of Liberty decorated with 'French and Italian flags, broken chains, and shattered symbols of royalty' (Schmidt, 1978: 55). This not only imitated the Parisian stage (Wiles, 2014: 151), but also the temporary structures erected in the urban spaces for public festivals in Milan, developing a Milan-inflected republican aesthetic. The cross-fertilization between the theatrical stage and the landscape of the republican festivals was facilitated and underpinned by employing many individuals (such as painters, decorators, scenographers, etc.) both inside and outside the opera house. Artists such as Andrea



Appiani (1754–1817), Luigi Canonica (1762–1844), and Alessandro Sanquirico (1777–1849), who were all linked to the Brera Art Academy, contributed to the scenic materials used in La Scala and in the outdoor celebrations, giving rise to a neoclassical aesthetic which would dominate the early nineteenth century (Viale Ferrero, 1983; Crespi Morbio, 2010).

In terms of sound, we have seen how public festivals in Milan incorporated (French) republican tunes, operatic elements, military sounds, and band instruments. Thanks to the abundance of military heroes, war settings, and solemn choral scenes, they found their way onto the theatrical stage and into the auditorium — as they had done in Paris (Bartlet, 1992: 133). The abundance of military bands in Milan, owing to the presence of occupying French troops and the newly established Cisalpine forces, provided the necessary resources in terms of both players and instruments. With La Scala's orchestra and chorus performing together with military bands in the public festivals and on the theatre's stage, we can see the disintegration of boundaries dividing the theatrical and extra-theatrical spaces in terms of sound worlds and performers.

The walls of the opera house were traditionally quite impenetrable in terms of repertoire, conventions, performers, and audience. During Milan's republican years, however, government intervention meant they became progressively more permeable, allowing for significant exchanges. Some of these exchanges were arguably problematic, although the fragmentary nature of many musical sources and the governmental control over printed reviews and chronicles makes it hard to decipher local reception and/or resistance. Still, as the article has shown, the Milanese experiences both inside and outside the theatre provide a clear example of how French revolutionary festivals could act as cultural vehicles and media, and could generate meaningful interactions with local specificities. While many musical products were short-lived and might be considered occasional works, the cross-fertilization between Parisian and Milanese cultural practices turned out to be very fruitful in expanding traditional conventions and in introducing elements that would be further developed in later years. Such examples include the use and importance of the chorus, the ability of opera to represent national or group virtues and sentiments, and the renewed possibilities of vocal and instrumental ensembles. The republican years, often dismissed as a period of political hysteria and low-quality art, can, on the contrary, be considered as a conflictual, yet necessary transition to a new, more receptive theatrical world.

## Notes on contributor

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