Screening the Diva
Mary Simonson

in The Arts of the Prima Donna in the Long Nineteenth Century

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This chapter explores the most modern medial intervention available to the prima donnas in this book: early film. It seems astonishing to learn that early twentieth-century opera singers such as Mary Garden and Geraldine Farrar involved themselves in the silent film industry of the 1910s. What was an opera singer doing devoting time and energy to a performance format that by definition ignored her principal attribute? Simonson critiques Garden’s and Farrar’s portrayals on the silver screen of a variety of roles from Joan of Arc to Carmen, and observes a foregrounding of their bodies and exulting in physicality. Not just their screen exploits, but risks they endured while filming were written up eagerly by the press, suggesting that the prima donna became an important iconic figure in the emergence of, and discourse around, new female identities at the beginning of the new century.

Metropolitan Women
Jennifer Fleeger

in Mismatched Women: The Siren's Song Through the Machine

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Making their screen debuts little more than a decade apart, Geraldine Farrar and Marion Talley, both singers with the Metropolitan Opera Company, reveal the degree to which changes in the cinematic representation of the opera diva can be traced to larger cultural and technological shifts in the reproduction of music. Farrar’s earnings on her silent films were enormous, thanks not only to her devoted fan following,
but also to the way that her film image relied on signifiers of her opera roles. Marion Talley’s first film, a short for Warners’ new sound-on-disc system, the Vitaphone, flopped. Although it seems unbelievable that a silent screen diva would be more popular than an audible opera singer, the shift from live to recorded sound in film exhibition unraveled the requirements for representing singing women.

Reproducing Carmen in the United States
Michael Christoforidis

in Carmen and the Staging of Spain: Recasting Bizet’s Opera in the Belle Époque

Chapter 9 explains that Carmen proved an ideal vehicle for the new technologies of the twentieth century, embraced by the new recording artists whose prestige was borrowed from the operatic world. The young American opera star Geraldine Farrar, building on the legacies of Emma Calvé and Maria Gay, enjoyed an unprecedented and unmistakably modern celebrity as Carmen, born of her ability to exploit the confluence of operatic performance, recordings, and the silent film industry. In this context, the Metropolitan Opera’s attempt to stage a genuine Spanish opera in the guise of Enrique Granados’s Goyescas was undermined by comparison with the vibrant New York traditions of Carmen in the winter of 1915–16, when the fashion for all things Spanish was so intense that Carl Van Vechten dubbed it “the Spanish blaze.”

Carmen and the Staging of Spain
Michael Christoforidis and Elizabeth Kertesz

Carmen and the Staging of Spain explores the Belle Époque fascination with Spanish entertainment that refashioned Bizet’s opera and gave rise to an international “Carmen industry.” Authors Michael Christoforidis and Elizabeth Kertesz challenge the notion of Carmen as an unchanging exotic construct, tracing the ways in which performers and productions responded to evolving fashions for Spanish style from its 1875 premiere to 1915. Focusing on selected realizations of the opera in Paris, London, and New York, Christoforidis and Kertesz explore the cycles of influence
between the opera and its parodies; adaptations in spoken drama, ballet and film; and the panorama of flamenco, Spanish dance, and musical entertainments. Their findings also uncover Carmen's dynamic interaction with issues of Hispanic identity against the backdrop of Spain's changing international fortunes. The Spanish response to this now most-Spanish of operas is illuminated by its early reception in Madrid and Barcelona, adaptations to local theatrical genres, and impact on Spanish composers of the time. A series of Spanish Carmens, from opera singers Elena Sanz and Maria Gay to the infamous music-hall star La Belle Otero, had a crucial influence on the interpretation of the title role. Their stories provide a fresh context for the book's reappraisal of leading Carmens of the era, including Emma Calvé and Geraldine Farrar.

Preparation
E. Douglas Bomberger

in Making Music American: 1917 and the Transformation of Culture

The Fifteenth Regiment’s disciplined response to racial harassment during a two-week stay at Camp Wadsworth, in Spartanburg, South Carolina, earned it the right to be among the first units ordered to France. Nick LaRocca represented the Original Dixieland Jazz Band in a Chicago lawsuit to stop the unauthorized publication of the sheet music to “Livery Stable Blues” by former bandmate “Yellow” Nunez, but the judge ruled that all blues were the same and therefore not subject to copyright protection. The Victor Talking Machine Company, using the Boston Symphony Orchestra and the Philadelphia Orchestra, made the first recordings employing the full symphony orchestra. The concert seasons of orchestras across the country opened amid intense scrutiny of their repertoire choices and patriotism.