

The goal of this project is to reveal the historical significance of Poland within Europe's operatic culture in the Enlightenment. The issues under study consider operatic production and reception during the reign of King Stanisław August Poniatowski (1765–95) and the early post-partition decades (up to 1830), set against the backdrop of extensive dissemination of Italian, French, and German operas, mobility of job-seeking performers and proliferation of vernacular-language operas. Throughout the research process, it becomes evident that, with Warsaw as its cultural centre, Poland does not conform to the belittling generalisations that are often present in opera studies. The project challenges, in particular, fixed centre-periphery stereotypes by showing Poland's opera and operatic culture through the lenses of their specificity and transnational connections.

The methodological approach is based on national contexts, taking into account the particular character of the Polish Enlightenment. These provide an essential backdrop to musical analyses and encompass deliberate Enlightenment-driven or pro-liberation undertakings during the Stanisławian and post-partition periods, respectively. Accordingly, the project examines the production and reception of opera in unique reformist, sociocultural and political circumstances, and places a special focus on ideological and aesthetic aspects of the flourishing of Polish-language opera (1778–1830) in order to trace originality labelled as "national opera". Furthermore, the project takes a broader perspective by contextualising Poland within the wider European landscape, examining the circulation of opera, the migration of singers, and the emergence of national operatic subgenres in different countries. The transnational contexts enable the highlighting of involvement in and contribution to the shared cultural space, as well as effective translation of research findings into general musicological discourse.

The project addresses the following four major research questions:

- 1) Why was opera imported and produced in Enlightenment Poland? The emphasis is on Poland's active rather than passive involvement in the European opera scene, and on the specific character of emerging Polish opera.
- 2) How were the Italian and French performances in Poland similar or different from those given elsewhere? Poland is presented as both an interconnected participant in shared practices and a specific recipient of the circulating Italian and French repertoires.
- 3) Was Poland a centre of Mozart opera performance? The focus is on Poland's role in the early dissemination of German opera through its participation in a geographically and culturally limited, yet nevertheless influential, German theatre network.
- 4) How original was "original Polish opera", and why "Polish" or "national"? The objective is to analyse Polish opera, which found little fame outside Polish territories, as a distinctive manifestation of the Enlightenment and national aspirations.

In this way, the project demonstrates how Enlightenment Poland developed its own unique operatic traditions, having initially contributed to the wider dissemination of opera. By mapping the relations between various European stages that go beyond the static centre-periphery division, the scope of musicological research is expanded, opening up new perspectives on Enlightenment operatic culture as a truly pan-European phenomenon.