

Mary Ann Smart, Berkeley Book Chats, March 20, 2019

Timothy Hampton: Welcome to Berkeley Book Chats. I'm Timothy Hampton, director of the Townsend Center for the Humanities. Berkeley Book Chats showcase a Berkeley faculty member engaged in a public conversation about a recently completed work. This popular series highlights the richness of Berkeley's academic community.

Today's conversation features Mary Ann Smart of the music department discussing her book *Waiting for Verdi: Opera and Political Opinion in Nineteenth-Century Italy, 1810-1848*. She is joined by Hannah Ginsborg of the philosophy department.

Hannah Ginsborg: Thanks so much. I'm really delighted to have been invited to participate in this. Mary Ann and I, a couple of times, have taught together a course in the Big Idea series, an undergraduate course, called Music and Meaning, where we've explored questions about music and meaning. As far as I recall, I don't think Verdi or any Italian opera, figured in that course at all.

Mary Ann Smart: That's right. We did do Wagner.

Hannah Ginsborg: We did some Wagner. I think that's maybe the only opera that we did.

Mary Ann Smart: I think, yeah.

Hannah Ginsborg: But it's been wonderful reading this book to see some of the themes that we discussed in that course in other contexts emerge. Actually, in a moment I'm going to ask Mary Ann to give us a sort of précis of what the book is about and what some of the main themes are that she wants to emphasize as coming out of the book.

Hannah Ginsborg: But one of the themes that really came out strongly for me, which I want to emphasize, is the idea that, putting it very crudely and briefly, music has meaning or can have meaning. That even though music is unlike language in that it doesn't have fixed, conventional meanings and so there is a kind of fluidity that a certain musical passage or musical trope that can mean different things in different contexts, it's a mistake to suppose that music can signify just anything.

Hannah Ginsborg: I should say it is the case as Mary Ann says in the conclusion of the book that words and music do not fit together any which way and she also points out that this is something that's very much recognized by critics and philosophers in the time that she's writing about.

Hannah Ginsborg: It's false to suppose that music can signify just anything, which amounts to saying that it's false to suppose that music cannot signify. That's one theme that really came through and which I'm hoping that we can discuss a bit. But before that, I'd like to turn things over to Mary Ann and to ask her to sketch what she thinks are the important themes of her book.

- Mary Ann Smart: Thank you, Hannah. Thank you so much for agreeing to read the book and talk about it. I'm just quickly trying to re-jig my sense of what the book is about in relation to music and meaning. When I think about it unprompted by a philosopher, I usually think about it in terms of history and politics because that's sort of the way musicologists, music historians have been oriented over the last decade or so.
- Mary Ann Smart: A really broad way of saying what I was trying to do in the book would be to say I was trying to show how a form of elite music, opera, made and mostly consumed by elites, and also a very sort of light entertaining form of music could make a difference to the concrete realities and power structures experienced by its first audiences.
- Mary Ann Smart: The opera is from the first half of the 19th century in Italy, roughly, and the situation that the audiences were in, there's many of ways of looking at that but the main one that features in this book and that generally comes up when people think about the kind of political efficacy or the political clout of opera in Italy is to do as national identity, articulation of a kind of shared voice among what I think most of you probably know was not, by any means, a coherent culture or nation at that point.
- Mary Ann Smart: Italy was not Italy. Many parts of it were under control of Austria. Other parts controlled by the Vatican, by the Spanish Bourbon monarchy or individual dukes and princes. It was very dispersed and linguistically as well. One thing that they had in common was opera.
- Mary Ann Smart: There's a tradition in writing about music of seizing upon that and using opera as a kind of channel for all kinds of arguments about Italian unification in the 19th century. The most frequent one probably has to do with Verdi. It begins and more or less ends with Verdi, which means from the 1840s up to the end of the 19th century.
- Mary Ann Smart: That mode of argument, which I'm responding to and kind of resisting quite a bit in the book starting with the title, mostly focuses on plots which are read as allegories of Italian experience. Various... You can pick almost any Verdi opera, especially from his first 20 or so, and find some sort of oppressed group struggling.
- Mary Ann Smart: Either a civil war situation with two populations fighting or an oppressed group and a dominating group which is usually configured negatively and sympathy for the underdog. It's kind of a romantic tendency anyway. But, a lot of the previous work on opera and Italian political identity had to do with representation, had a kind of representational orientation.
- Mary Ann Smart: This shows Italians what they're living through and kind of kicks them into a heightened consciousness which allows something to happen. My book is different from that in a couple of important ways. First of all, it starts earlier. I like messy, unclear situations in general, I think.
- Mary Ann Smart: The 19th century before the 1840s, I think in Europe in general but certainly in Italy, was a time when nobody really knew what to think. Northern Italy, where a lot of the cultural prestige and a lot of the operatic activity was, was completely run by the Hapsburg empire and a lot of people didn't really mind.
- Mary Ann Smart: It wasn't a situation of oppressors and a sort of evil colonial outsider. It was more a situation of Italians getting along, appreciating certain aspects of the situation,

less and less so as time went on until a breaking point or a series of breaking points.

Mary Ann Smart: A lot of the political and cultural expressions came in submerged forms and forms that you really have to search for, also because there was just a lot of censorship and surveillance. I look at this period where opera that a lot of people didn't, including Hannah who admitted this to me the other night, don't find very significant, especially politically.

Mary Ann Smart: Rossini, Donizetti, even some less significant people like Mercadante. Probably the most important thing that I do in the book that's different from other people is to get away from that, the discourse of representation and a kind of parallelism between what goes on on the stage and what was going on in the political realities or the lives of the audiences.

Mary Ann Smart: Instead, I'm trying and I do this in different ways in different chapters, it's very ad hoc really depending on the sort of material, but I'm trying to get at things that the music or the combination of music and words, allowed people to think or feel in the theater, which then could be transmuted into values, statements, and discourses outside of the theater and then, at another remove and maybe even by other actors, could be transmuted into political action.

Mary Ann Smart: You get from opera to revolution, but you don't get there very directly. The phrase that I feel at best ambivalent about affect theory and all of that, but the phrase that kept coming to mind as I was trying to think about how to describe this was "structures of feeling."

Mary Ann Smart: That, at least in a couple of examples, a couple of case studies in the book, I try to show how particular innovations in the language of opera, in the drama or the music style, made possible new feelings or new relationships between the spectator and the fictional representation which then enabled people outside of the theater to really relate to each other in different ways.

Mary Ann Smart: Then very briefly, the third thing that the book does is that, although it's quite thoroughly about music and about composers and works, it's not about my interpretations of those works or at least my interpretations of those works are all the way through it.

Mary Ann Smart: But I try to be led all the time by what some contemporary critic or observer has noticed and ideally by a bulk, a critical mass of observations at the time about the works. The contemporary reception was always in the foreground when I was trying to figure out what matters about these operas.

Mary Ann Smart: To me, which parts of them are worth paying attention to now? I would be led by the wonderful, rich press of the 19th century. It's not always that much fun to read, but there is a lot of it.

Hannah Ginsborg: Thanks, thanks, thanks so much. One of the things, the book felt incredibly rich to me because it felt like you were telling this untold, really interesting social and political history. I felt like I understood so much more about what had been going on in Italy during that time and the role that opera played in this.

Hannah Ginsborg: But, I do think that it is just shot through with this very strong musical sensibility and appreciation that the importance of actual music and what music can do and I thought, as a way of continuing the conversation, we might look at some of the,

and listen to a couple of the passages that Mary Ann talks about in the book, which I found just particularly striking.

Hannah Ginsborg: We have a hand out with musical examples. I am not sure... I've got more of them on this side. I want to leave one for myself and not sure if there are quite enough to go around. Some of you might have to share. But the first passage that I wanted to listen to is a number from "The Thieving Magpie", "La Gazza Ladro" and I'm actually going to ask maybe, would you like to say something about the context of this? Or maybe I will just play it first and...

Mary Ann Smart: It's a well-known tune. Some people will recognize it even if you don't know why you recognize it.

Hannah Ginsborg: Right. You may very well recognize because it figures in the overture to "The Thieving Magpie", which is very often played-

Mary Ann Smart: TV advertising as well and movies that have to do with, I don't know, blowing things up.

Hannah Ginsborg: But maybe just to set the scene, there is a servant girl who has been terribly, unjustly accused of stealing something which she didn't steal. It was the thieving magpie that stole it. But she's in prison and in prison, she is visited by the podesta, the mayor of the town who is going to serve as the magistrate.

Hannah Ginsborg: He has already determined to condemn her to death, but he attempts to get, basically to get her to have sex with him by promising her, I don't know if it's freedom or at least that she won't be executed. It's a horrible, dark scene and in a way, a tragic scene and a horrible scene of an abuse of power and that's something...

Hannah Ginsborg: What we hear is the cabaletta, the sort of end part of the mayor's aria. You hear him singing and then a bit later on, you hear people outside saying, "It's time for the trial to take place." But you hear him singing and I think the darkness of what's going on is important to bear in mind when you listen to the music.

Hannah Ginsborg: So, I'm just going to play it. It's about three and a half minutes.

Mary Ann Smart: That was a great plot summary.

Hannah Ginsborg: Oh, thank you. I think I'll stop it there because...

Mary Ann Smart: How does this work? This was a very controversial passage for critics right after Rossini wrote this opera in 1817. Rossini in general, you may find this astonishing because the music is sort of easily pleasant and popular and it was incredibly popular but it was also incredibly controversial.

Mary Ann Smart: This tells you something about the orientation of critics in the 19th century, the early 19th century, especially Italian critics, that they were kind of plagued with guilt or aversion to the idea that the music could be too pleasurable and not closely tied to the words.

Mary Ann Smart: Rossini in general often would toss off a tune that sounded good in the moment, but didn't have much to do with what the character was actually singing and this troubled critics a lot. I think they thought there was a danger of contamination by too much musical enjoyment.

- Mary Ann Smart: This was the worst of all of those crimes that Rossini committed because it's a moment of practically an execution. It's sort of the moment right before... She is, of course, saved before she's executed, exonerated. But it's a very dark moment in the plot and there's a lot of social forces to do with this miscarriage of justice that has a real, big social basis that the audiences would have understood as well.
- Mary Ann Smart: There's a lot of weight to this moment socially and politically. Rossini tosses in this waltz. Some critics said this just shows how terrible he is. He really isn't worth all of the enthusiasm that you're all wasting on him and others, including Stendhal, who was always the most fun to read on Rossini and on pretty much anything, said, "No, actually, this is a stroke of genius."
- Mary Ann Smart: Then, Stendhal, who doesn't care that much about consistency, said a couple of different things. He said, "The waltz is very appropriate because it communicates the sense that everybody is late for the trial. The trial is about to begin and we can feel that they're rushing or they should be rushing. They're not, because actually, the magistrate is lingering to try to seduce or brutalize this poor, young woman."
- Mary Ann Smart: But it's a sign of belatedness or hurry. Then he said, "Well, is the inexorability of fate." There were various explanations that he tried, but none of them made very much sense and the point that I make in the book about this moment is first of all that the effort people put into explicating these kinds of moments is, in itself, quite significant.
- Mary Ann Smart: That they didn't just go to the opera, as people have often said, they didn't just go to the opera for the fun of it or to chat with each other. That's often said about this period in Italy, that nobody was really listening anyway, they went for conversation, for eating, for gambling, and for admiring the singers.
- Mary Ann Smart: Then what they were actually listening to came last. This kind of debate makes it clear that there was more to it than that and it mattered what was going on. Then, at a kind of... There's quite a lot of explication between that point and this next point.
- Mary Ann Smart: But in the book, I use this example. To tie up a bunch of philosophical debates that were going on in the Milanese press at the beginning of the 19th century, to suggest that audiences were just beginning to be ready to take theater as having something to do with their real lives, that things had been...
- Mary Ann Smart: There was a kind of almost style that was somewhat like French classical drama. The dramatic unities were very piously observed on the Italian stage, even in opera until this moment. People wanted theater to be proper and predictable and mythological or allegorical, but they didn't want it to be urgent and real.
- Mary Ann Smart: This waltz, the kind of haste of this waltz and then the layering over it that you heard, I hope, of the anxious sounding chorus and trumpets and drums which are announcing the impending trial. The two layers together create this kind of collapse of dimensions, which allowed audiences to relate to this as a kind of real thing that they could care about.
- Mary Ann Smart: You have to have a lot of... You have to suspend disbelief or move back into an earlier moment of history or something to realize that there was a whole culture in which going to the theater didn't have anything to do with caring about what happened on stage. But that's what I'm sort of arguing, that this moment breaks through that and allows something different to happen.

Hannah Ginsborg: Although I had a second example, I think what I'd like to do is just play that bit again so that you can hear it again in the light of what you've just heard Mary Ann say and then I think we might just throw it open for questions. But here's Rossini again.

Mary Ann Smart: I think I'm convinced. The first sort of page of this, I was thinking, "Wow, that's an awful lot of meaning to put onto a really insignificant bit of music", but as it goes on, it gathers intensity and that's part of the point. I think I'm still somewhat convinced.

Hannah Ginsborg: I'm convinced. Why don't we throw this open to questions? Or comments or...

Audience: I have so many questions, I hardly know where to start. I guess number one would be the role of the waltz in society and how that might come in. Number two might be the role of the French revolution and Napoleon and how the Italians were reacting to that.

Mary Ann Smart: The role of the waltz in society, Stendhal refers to that briefly in this discussion. He says something like, "Oh, people find the waltz troubling right now because there's a kind of fad for waltzing, but they'll get over that." They're only going to be waltzing for the next 30 years or maybe he says they've been waltzing for 30 years.

Mary Ann Smart: But the significance of this effect will always be there, which is kind of a surprising thing for him to say but it's something like that. The point being that it's the pacing that matters and on a slightly larger scale and not the reference to a waltz. I think I would agree with that, although the triviality of it does contribute something, the kind of snappy rhythm.

Audience: I have another question related to waltzes. In Verdi's "Macbeth", there's a waltz in the scene where Banquo's ghost appears. I mean, yeah.

Mary Ann Smart: The witches. Are you thinking of the witches?

Audience: No, at the banquet when Macbeth is horrified by the appearance of the ghost and that whole scene is a waltz which seems incongruous with the drama of the scene but is extremely effective.

Mary Ann Smart: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Audience: Also, if you can talk about Macbeth at all, the very ironic triumphal march which finishes the opera and I wondered how contemporary critics reacted to that.

Mary Ann Smart: That, I really don't know. I mean critical reaction to that moment. I take the question about the banquet to really be a question about two things. One is triple meter in opera which is pretty rare. All of these composers, but especially Verdi, I think, defaults to various sorts of marches or even things that sound a little bit like polkas sometimes.

Mary Ann Smart: Triple meter is a special effect and it's often really difficult to tell what it's doing but it does, and sometimes I think it doesn't matter. There are moments when a mismatch between the situation and the music is perfectly fine. It would ruin most of opera if one tried to map these things in parallel all the time through the opera.

- Mary Ann Smart: But, I think in that situation, in the banquet, there's a falseness that's being pointed to or especially from the perspective of the Macbeths, that maybe is being gestured towards. There's a festivity but it's not a felt festivity.
- Hannah Ginsborg: There is another, and if there aren't, there's another example of a more overtly political scene in a more overtly political opera, which I thought it might be interesting to listen to, not that I don't think that the Rossini is political in its own because of the way that it has to do with power. This is something that Mary Ann points out.
- Hannah Ginsborg: But there's an opera by Donizetti, Marino Faliero, about a rebellion against the doges that I think is led by one of the doges himself.
- Mary Ann Smart: Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Hannah Ginsborg: He's persuaded to and there's a sort of dramatic scene between two basses where the doge is persuaded to join the rebellion, but initially he resists. The second musical quote on the handout is from this opera, so I thought I would play it from a bit shortly before... Oh, they moved it. I think I can find it again. I'm playing it from a little bit before where you're...
- Hannah Ginsborg: Would you like to say something?
- Mary Ann Smart: The significance of this passage really has to do with the political philosopher and activist or leader Mazzini who wrote a short essay about opera in 1835, 1836. My starting point for this chapter, which is pretty much entirely about this quite little known Donizetti opera, was the fact that Mattsimmi, in this essay, his only essay on opera singled out Marino Faliero as Donizetti's best opera and the only opera that represented the kinds of goals that Mattsimmi thought opera composers should aim towards or the sorts of values that were desirable in a properly conscious revolutionary operatic style.
- Mary Ann Smart: He goes through a lot about Rossini, a little bit about Bellini, and then all of the Donizetti operas very briefly up until this point and says, "Well, Marino Faliero is the right kind of thing."
- Mary Ann Smart: This was very striking to me. I was fascinated by Mazzini because he is really the only explicit, the only figure in the period that I'm talking about in the book who says explicit things about political theory, who actually was a revolutionary and a leader, very briefly, a leader of the government in 1848 in Rome.
- Mary Ann Smart: He's politically active, he's obviously organizing a huge movement and he's writing about opera with specifics. He knows the operas, he cares about them, and he makes recommendations. I had to make this mean something, but it was a really bizarre choice because nobody listens to this opera. There's no good recordings of it. There's, I think, one recording period.
- Mary Ann Smart: Musicologists never pay attention to it either. That's the project for the chapter and then it's also Mazzini who leads us to this passage because he's not only counterintuitive in his choice of Marino Faliero, he's counterintuitive in his choice of bit from the opera and he talks entirely about [inaudible 00:32:23] in which a dock worker from the Arsenale comes to the doge and convinces the doge to basically conspire against himself.

- Mary Ann Smart: Some of you will know this story, that it actually happened in the 14th century and was told by all sorts of different people including Byron in a play. But, Mazzini is fascinated by that little violin passage that you can see on the middle stave of the music example, the top line of the piano, and said that it's like a dagger getting under the skin of the doge and that this is basically how you convince people, how you activate people politically, that it was a great musical representation of how you can make somebody do something and get them attached to a cause.
- Hannah Ginsborg: Yes, and there's another moment. I don't know if this is something that your reporting has pointed at, but the way in which when Faliero says, "The reasons that you have given, they're not enough. They're not enough for me to conspire against myself." The kind of movement to a remote key as if to signify the kind of stepping back.
- Hannah Ginsborg: I have to say it's the music and meaning theme. It's these sorts of... Mary Ann is talking about political context and I'm always saying, "Oh, look at the music. What's going on here?"
- Mary Ann Smart: Well, we're complementary then.
- Hannah Ginsborg: Yes, but just to hear again that stabbing melody and the sort of distancing.
- Mary Ann Smart: It's incredibly cool because Mazzini never heard this opera either. Great to listen to it again, I think. By the time he wrote this, he couldn't have heard the opera because he was in exile in Switzerland, the opera was only performed in Paris a few times.
- Mary Ann Smart: Another interesting part of this story to me, and I really got far too into this actually, was that he must have known about it from one of the librettists who had been one of his school friends in Genoa. They had gone into exile together and he may have received copies of the score, but he certainly received reports about what the opera was going to be like.
- Mary Ann Smart: It's kind of... I say I'm 75% convinced that part of Mazzini's essay was actually written by this other guy or at least that the ideas were drafted by this librettist. Opera is pretty central to the political project in that way as well.
- Hannah Ginsborg: Again, throwing the floor open to questions, comments, reactions. I'm going to ask Mary Ann, I'm kind of interested in the process by which you came to write the book. One aspect of it I'm interested in is to what extent did you become familiar with the operas that you write about by listening to them? Or how much were you reading the scores and...
- Mary Ann Smart: There's not very much music in this book that I haven't listened to repeatedly.
- Hannah Ginsborg: Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Mary Ann Smart: There may be a couple of pieces mentioned in passing that don't exist in recordings and then I would've played through them. But I mean, we're lucky enough to have excellent recordings of a lot of... Almost all of this music including some pretty obscure pieces that are recorded by this one British company, Opera Rara.



- Mary Ann Smart: There's a chapter of the book on operas about Tudor queens, Elizabeth I and Mary, Queen of Scots mainly and there's some really little-known operas on that subject as well as some very famous ones by Rossini and Donizetti. Even those are well recorded.
- Mary Ann Smart: Some of the choices I made, the process I described with Marino Faliero, was not really led by loving the opera, although I now love the opera and have decided that I want to make sure it gets recorded well in the near future. I think I might have the power to do that or the connections to do that.
- Mary Ann Smart: But most of the other chapters, I think, what I wrote about was led by the things that I liked the most, partly, certainly in the Tudor queens chapter.
- Hannah Ginsborg: I was going to ask you, do you like these operas?
- Mary Ann Smart: Definitely. Definitely like them.
- Hannah Ginsborg: Because many of them, frankly, most of them, I'd never heard of and a number of the composers that you write about, Bellini, Donizetti were people that I felt like... Even a lot of Rossini, I felt like I don't have much time for that. I'm a big Verdi fan.
- Mary Ann Smart: Now you're really going to get people going, I hope. This is probably a great way to stimulate some...
- Hannah Ginsborg: Reading the book dutifully, I feel like I should listen to some of these operas, so I found recordings of things and I just thought the stuff was wonderful. I feel like I'm completely converted-
- Mary Ann Smart: We're hearing this from somebody who listens to Schoenberg while walking around for fun.
- Hannah Ginsborg: I just think this is a wonderful trove of music, but the thing that puzzles me about the period is these composers, they were so prolific. You look at the lists and it was like, what were they? They were composing at a rate of one every six months, some of them it seems like.
- Mary Ann Smart: Sometimes it's more. I think Donizetti wrote about four a year.
- Hannah Ginsborg: Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Mary Ann Smart: And Verdi wrote about, in the first part of his career, three and then two a year. He really... Verdi is the only one who really chafed against this pace. Bellini did also. He wrote very few operas comparatively. But, Rossini and Donizetti just kind of did it and didn't trouble about it very much.
- Mary Ann Smart: Verdi fought to get to a point where he could slow down and be more in control of his own sort of livelihood and his own pace of composition. But that's a virtue. The bulk of material is part of what makes it possible to say cool things about this music, I think.
- Mary Ann Smart: Musicologists in general and I, in specific, are not very interested in a sort of very careful interpretation of one opera by Rossini because that would seem a bit indulgent or a bit too personal or something. But if you have five or ten and 10 or

20 or 30 observers saying things about them, then I think you can say something that has a bit more clout and sort of a bit more historical significance.

Mary Ann Smart: It really was a virtue for the project that there is so much music and so much of it is so similar. We usually think of that as a deficiency, but it's not in this case. I think Tony has-

Hannah Ginsborg: And also Nick.

Audience: I was wondering whether Norma had any political resonance for his period. You know, the Romans and the Brits.

Mary Ann Smart: Yeah, I know what you're talking about. It certainly did later. The Guerra Guerra chorus became something a little later on but I think not at its initial performances. I don't recall anything in the sort of early reviews or early talk about the opera where people picked up on that, which is kind of surprising.

Mary Ann Smart: Bellini in general was a part, was seen as on a different plane, as much more sort of wispy and detached from everyday life, really.

Hannah Ginsborg: Yes, there's a question right there.

Audience: Thank you. You mentioned finding cool things in the course of your research. I wonder if you could tell us a couple of the cool things that you found that you tucked away on rare pages of the book.

Mary Ann Smart: Well, the whole business about the spy network in 1830 among opera people in the 1830s is probably the coolest thing. There was some sort of covert revolutionaries among the circle of Mazzini who were spread among initially Switzerland and then Paris and then London. Completely dispersed outside of Italy by force.

Mary Ann Smart: There was a lot of surreptitious communication about political things among them and then the business network of opera was full of sympathizers, so they were also communicating. There's actually an instruction I found in Mazzini's letters where somebody says, "Write your message in lemon juice and send it to this address" which is where Donizetti was living in Paris.

Mary Ann Smart: His business agent will pick it up and will understand the secret, will know how to read the secret message on the letter. The guy who was handling all of Donizetti's dealings with theaters in Paris was part of this network and he was part of Mazzini's inner circle but he was also a spy for the Vatican, almost certainly.

Mary Ann Smart: There are these sorts of double agents who crop up here and there and it's incredibly difficult to figure out who was doing what and what they meant.

Hannah Ginsborg: Did Nick have his hand up?

Mary Ann Smart: Let's go to Nick after Frances.

Frances: You made a glancing reference to the long tradition of audiences not paying attention to what was happening on stage. I wondered if you'd say any more about that, about when it was first noticeable that there was some real response to...

Mary Ann Smart: My theory would be that people were always paying attention and always not paying attention. I mean, I guess some time after 1830 or 1840, the kind of thing that we do now where the theater is dark, the darkened theater actually came quite a bit later than that even.

Mary Ann Smart: But the kind of thing that we do now where silence is expected and absorption in the performance is the norm, that started maybe in the 1830s. The general theory is that it started as a reaction to Beethoven who made things so difficult that you had to pay attention.

Mary Ann Smart: I think that kind of works. There's a pretty good documentation about that. But it didn't happen during Beethoven's lifetime. It was kind of gradually afterwards. But at the same time, I think people continued to go to opera for all of those other reasons and continued to do all of those other things.

Mary Ann Smart: The opera houses in Italy in the 19th century, some of them at least in Florence in particular, would not have been able to exist, and Naples, would not have been able to exist if they weren't also casinos. You could gamble in the lobby between acts or during the opera.

Mary Ann Smart: But people were paying attention selectively and they went so often. I think this is the key point. They went so often to the same opera in a very short space of time that they didn't have to listen to the whole thing on any given evening. They could kind of piece it together over multiple performances.

Mary Ann Smart: Let's do Nick.

Nick: I have a question about... You mentioned, it's actually relevant to what you were just saying. You mentioned that it would be indulgent or something to do a close reading of a single opera even though, of course, people used to do that quite a lot.

Nick: If they said they were doing music and politics or opera and politics, that's one of the main ways in which political meanings were sort of extracted was this face-off between critic and some operatic text. Obviously in your book, you're quite sensitive to things that, I guess, in another context could be described as media diversity.

Nick: All the different places, not just the theater, in which you might encounter music. When Hannah says, "I went off and listened to this music", what she also means is I went and I found a recording of some people who played it a while ago and then I pressed play or put it on my phone or whatever.

Nick: Actually, there are all these layers of mediation that allow that music to affect Hannah in a particular way that are different from the 1830s or whatever. I'm wondering what, in your book, you can conclude about what's distinctive about the way that music travels?

Nick: If you're interested in structures of feeling, what different spaces can it inhabit? How can it be passed around and how is that important for its politics in this period?

Mary Ann Smart: Great question. Hard question. I mean, there's some really obvious things like novels. You have people like Robert Darnton from an earlier period talking about

how books traveled, books could be printed cheaply and traveled and ideas could move around.

Mary Ann Smart: I'm taking the question to be partly what does music do that is not that and the first obvious thing is that people tended, back then, people tended to be together when they heard it, pretty much had to be because somebody had to be performing it. Either you were performing it for yourself with your family and friends or you were performing it for a group of people in public or in semi-public or whatever.

Mary Ann Smart: The part of the book that deals explicitly with this is a part about songs written for performance in salon, in Parisian salon which were full of references to opera and sort of secret messages that I think also have something to do with the reality of Italian exiles at the time.

Mary Ann Smart: There, the performance setting was a group of initiates who had a set of shared assumptions and the fact that they knew each other and knew some of the same things would be important. What the book doesn't talk about, mainly for lack of reliable documentation from the period, is the sort of village bands and performances in the piazza.

Mary Ann Smart: There's a lot of very beloved sort of urban legends about cleaning ladies singing Verdi in Milanese apartment buildings and things like that. That may or may not have gone on. I did try in the chapter on Verdi to track as closely as I could the first moments when Verdi was mentioned in relation to political protests, actual moments where people went out in the street and marched and either sang Verdi or talked about Verdi.

Mary Ann Smart: There's traces of documentation about that and also about people commandeering bits of opera, changing the words, or changing the setting or applauding at the wrong moments, making certain things pop out that weren't meant to and sending covert messages that way.

Mary Ann Smart: But there's not a lot of documentation about those things and I feel like that's possibly a separate project that has to do with popular appropriations of opera tunes as political song which is something I would like to do but haven't done in the book.

Hannah Ginsborg: I don't know. Do we have time for a question, another question?

Speaker 7: You have one minute left.

Mary Ann Smart: Since he's close to the mic, yeah.

Audience: I have one from a different angle. When you were listening to that, for example, the violin moment which is compared to the dagger in that. Just thinking about metaphorical devices coming from amore literary perspective. How standardized is that? Along the lines when you think through that repertoire, is there a standardized set of musical devices used as rhetorical devices that are meant to produce, obviously in that case, a certain affect?

Mary Ann Smart: Well-

Audience: And how much is standardization and experimentation with that part of what causes do?

- Mary Ann Smart: Wow, that's a great question. The musical language is very conventional and very standardized. Everything you hear somewhere, you will hear a whole bunch of other places but not the very same notes, just the same kind of texture, the same kind of pacing or melody.
- Mary Ann Smart: This exact example doesn't remind me of very much else in Donizetti. The fact that you have the orchestra leading and the voices coming along after, that's very typical. To suggest change or to suggest a kind of flow in the social relations between the characters, I don't know if you would call that something as clearly marked as a rhetorical device.
- Hannah Ginsborg: But I feel like interjecting to say that even though these are kind of conventionalized and that you'll hear them again and again, they can bear different meanings like the waltz can mean so many different things in certain contexts.
- Mary Ann Smart: The pattern, the rhythmic pattern here and the kind of constant, slow, upward motion which is poking, that is very specific to this situation. That's not a standardized gesture. There's some very interesting combinations of textures and rhythms though that suggest things like gossip.
- Mary Ann Smart: There's a whole gossip topos, but I don't think there's a rhetorical device as specific as here's how to get somebody to change their mind and join your cause. This is really a one off.
- Hannah Ginsborg: I think it's time to stop, but thank you all so much for coming.
- Mary Ann Smart: Thank you, great questions.
- Timothy Hampton: We hope you enjoyed this Berkeley Book Chat and we encourage you to join us in person or via podcast for future programs in the series.