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‘TO BETTER PERFORM MY DUTIES AS A DAME PATRONESSE’: PAULINE VIARDOT-GARCÍA’S PHILANTHROPIC WORK

Virginia Sánchez Rodríguez

Introduction

Pauline Viardot-García (1821–1910) stands as one of history’s most multifaceted female musicians. Throughout her life, she partook in piano performance, music composition, and teaching, while simultaneously securing a visible position among the most prominent social and cultural circles of her time, particularly—although not exclusively—in Paris. Above all, though, she was widely acclaimed as a singer¹. This latter activity is not surprising considering it has been one of the most accepted musical activities for women: ‘Because of the long-standing female vocal tradition in art music (not to mention the need for female voices), singing was considered a more socially acceptable career for a female musician, and many women had profitable careers as opera singers or soloists’². Moreover, female singers were the most numerous performers and garnered the greatest fame and prestige in the nineteenth century when compared to their female performing counterparts, as Nancy B. Reich explains:

Of all the professional women performers in the nineteenth century, the largest number were singers. Most prominent were those who sang opera, but many great vocalists also appeared in public concerts and church music. The opera singers were the great stars of the period: lionized

This article has been carried out within the framework of the project "The Musical Heritage of Early Modern Spain (17th-18th centuries): Transfer of Results and Social Projection". Proof of Concept Projects. Ministry of Science and Innovation (PDC2021-121092-C21). Virginia Sánchez Rodríguez is Associate Professor of Musicology at the University of Castilla-La Mancha (Spain) and a researcher at the Centro de Investigación y Documentación Musical (CIDoM), in association with the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC). She obtained her Ph.D. in Musicology at the University of Salamanca (2013). Her doctoral dissertation explored the connection between music and female characters in Spanish cinema during the Franco Regime and won the 2013 Best National Ph.D. Dissertation Award from the Spanish General Society of Authors and Publishers Foundation. Her fields of study have been primarily focused on European women in music during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Spanish film music, and Spanish folk music. Author of six monographs and numerous articles, she is the recipient of national and international prizes for her research, including the ‘Rosario Valpuesta’ National Research Award (2015) and second prize for the ‘Victoria Kent’ International Research Award (2018). She currently serves as editor-in-chief of *Cuadernos de Investigación Musical*.

1. This performative facet, coupled with her personal life, are the most developed in the ‘classic’ antecedents of her biography, for example, April Fitzlyon, *The Price of Genius: A Life of Pauline Viardot* (London: Overture Publishing, 2011 [1st ed., London: John Calder, 1964]); Austin B. Caswell, ‘Pauline Viardot-Garcia’, in *Historical Anthology of Music by Women*, ed. James R. Briscoe (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 152–157; Nicole Barry, *Pauline Viardot* (Paris: Flammarion, 1990, and Michèle Friang, *Pauline Viardot au miroir de sa correspondance* (Paris: Hermann Éditeurs, 2008). For her operatic career, see Angela Faith Cofer, *Pauline Viardot-Garcia: The Influence of the Performer on Nineteenth-Century Opera* (DMA thesis, University of Cincinnati, 1988).

2. Rachel Lumsden, ‘Women’s Leadership in Western Music Since 1800’, in *Gender and Women’s Leadership. A Reference Handbook*, ed. Karen O’Connor (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2010), 2:918.

her involvement with this organisation began earlier. Contemporaneous press accounts further substantiate that among her various tasks was that of selling tickets to the annual ball held in the Opéra-Comique, one of the methods to finance an institution set up to ensure a respectable future retirement for French artists.

Finally, based on the findings presented in this article, I can affirm that Viardot-García's dedication to charity work remained unwavering throughout her life. Despite carrying her second daughter, Claudie—a circumstance which noticeably limited her social life and inhibited the fulfillment of her *dame patronesse* duties with the same efficacy as in previous years—she nevertheless endeavored to continue, within limits, her activities, especially those pertaining to patronage and charity. Future research will surely reveal new facets concerning this remarkable woman in music history.

English Abstract

Pauline Viardot-García remains one of the most recognised female musicians, commensurate with her talents as a singer, composer, pianist, teacher, and member of the European sociocultural elite of the time. Less well-known, however, is her philanthropic role as a *dame patronesse*. Working outward from a close study of her unpublished letters to include other selected correspondence, periodicals, and secondary sources, this article first offers a closer understanding of Viardot-García's connection to the Association de Secours mutuels entre les artistes dramatiques. Likewise, it explores the relationship between Viardot-García and a musician forgotten by history—known only by his surname, Desmarests. Finally, the work of the *dames patronesses* in the mid-nineteenth century is addressed.

French Abstract

Pauline Viardot-García demeure l'une des femmes musiciennes les plus reconnues, à la hauteur de ses talents de chanteuse, compositrice, pianiste, enseignante et membre de l'élite socioculturelle européenne de l'époque. Son rôle philanthropique de *dame patronesse* est cependant moins connu. En partant d'une étude approfondie de ses lettres inédites et en incluant d'autres correspondances sélectionnées, des périodiques et des sources secondaires, cet article propose tout d'abord une meilleure compréhension du lien entre Viardot-García et l'*Association de Secours mutuels entre les artistes dramatiques*. De même, il explore la relation entre Viardot-García et un musicien oublié de l'histoire, connu seulement par son nom de famille, Desmarests. Finalement, nous abordons le travail des *dames patronesses* au milieu du XIXe siècle.

German Abstract

Pauline Viardot-García stellt mit ihrem umfassenden Talent als Sängerin, Komponistin, Pianistin, Lehrerin und Mitglied der damaligen europäischen soziokulturellen Elite eine der anerkanntesten Musikerinnen ihrer Zeit dar. Weniger bekannt ist jedoch ihre philanthropische Rolle als Patronin. Ausgehend vom eingehenden Studium ihrer unveröffentlichten Briefe und unter Einbezug weiterer ausgewählter Korrespondenzen sowie von Zeitschriften und Sekundärquellen bietet dieser Artikel zunächst ein genaueres Verständnis von Viardot-Garcías Verbindung zur *Association de Secours mutuels entre les artistes dramatiques*. Gleichzeitig untersucht er die Beziehung zwischen Viardot-García und einem Musiker, der von der Geschichte vergessen wurde – bekannt nur unter seinem Nachnamen Desmarests. Abschließend wird das Wirken der Patroninnen in der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts thematisiert.