

to risqué imagery with allusions to recent scandals involving academic nudes. In a clever, paradoxical play of suggested meaning, references to the visual arts and associated scandals served to heighten a ballet's perceived eroticism by evoking images of the naked female body while framing these same scenes with the conventions and trappings of high art to contain and sanitize them.

• **SONJA JÜSCHKE (Independent Scholar), Taking Centre Stage: 'Chorus Girls' in Late Victorian Popular Musical Theatre**

In late nineteenth century London, the so-called 'chorus girls' at the Gaiety Theatre or at Daly's Theatre enjoyed an immense popularity. Evidence of their success can be found in abundance in contemporary newspaper articles, in memoirs, and in the growing number of items featuring their photographic images, which were highly coveted by their countless admirers. Especially their beauty and (sexual) attractiveness are praised, which made critics of the genre raise the question if they were not hired for their singing and acting skills, but rather for their good looks.

Theatres arguably took advantage of these crowd favourites by strategically placing them centre stage as soon as the curtain went up, allowing the audience to gaze upon the 'chorus girls' in their highly fashionably costumes at their leisure right at the beginning of a work, as in Sullivan's *Utopia Limited*. However, Savoy opera and musical comedy alike tried very hard to present itself as a perfectly respectable, safe kind of entertainment, which could comfortably be enjoyed by the whole family. Theatres and (female) performers alike were walking a fine line between socially acceptable respectability and the 'forbidden' pleasures of thrilling sensuality — they were «Naughty but nice», as Peter Bailey phrased it so accurately.

Musical comedy focused on modern fashionable society; therefore, relationships between men and women who were not married (yet) are a must-have for every work. This paper analyses how courtship and flirtation are presented in such a genre in order to explore what was acceptable in late Victorian society — at least on a theatre stage. The lack of censorship concerning this aspect is quite remarkable. Furthermore, this paper examines the performance and (self-)presentation of female choristers, on and off the stage, concerning the considerable conflict between being desirable and respectable at the same time.

• **FILIFE GASPAS (CESEM / NOVA FCSH), «The French Mermaids Were Loudly Applauded...»: Feminine Subjects and Male Desire in Lisbon's Café-Concert (1857-1876)**

In Portuguese historiography, the years between 1851 and 1868 are known as 'Regeneração' (Regeneration). This was a time when the economic and the modernizing goals of the conservative right-wing governments that ascended to power during that period superseded the progressive democratic values at the core of the Portuguese Liberal experiment initiated in 1820. Suffice it to say, this was the scenery in which the bourgeoisie completed its ascension as the ruling class in Portuguese society. Regarding the cultural

panorama, the affirmation of the bourgeois status translated into the emergence of multiple philharmonic societies and numerous businesses dedicated to entertainment. Events like balls, theatrical performances, and concerts, held at public and semi-public venues began pullulating in Lisbon (and other major cities) thus providing alternative leisure spaces to this capital's upper class inhabitants. Between 1857 and 1876, the Café-Concert in downtown Lisbon was one of these cases. Departing from the reception in the printed press and examples of songs presented at this Café-Concert — the first of its kind in Portugal — my paper will focus on representations of women in and around this institution. Deprived from the social and political genealogy of the original Parisian café-concert, the Lisbon's counterpart invested, since its opening, in expressive practices attuned to bourgeois tastes and values. I will approach this matter discussing the idea that the Portuguese appropriation of the French café-concert served as one among many other platforms where male dominance was revalidated in the country's transition to a bourgeois' society. Not only were women subjects appearing in the 'chansonnettes' characterized as objects of male desire, but also the printed press used metaphoric figures such as the mythical 'mermaids' to describe the singers actually working in this hall. While analysing these materials, I will argue that, in this context, women functioned as a prop in staging the masculine identity of the target-spectators of the Café-Concert: bourgeois men.

### **Eroticism, Gender and Sexuality in 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Opera**

#### **• EWELINA CZARNOWSKA (Pilecki Institute, Warsaw), *Eroticism and Spirituality in Karol Szymanowski's «Król Roger»***

This paper concerns *Król Roger*, the second opera by Karol Szymanowski which had its world premiere in 1926. The model of the scenario is the story of King Roger II of Sicily, at whose court stayed Muhammad al-Idrisi, a great sage of his times, master of people who were initiated to the secrets of 'the whole world'.

The other two main characters are the Shepherd, and Roxana, Roger's wife. Libretto, written by the poet and writer Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz and the composer himself, is full of riddles that can be read on an erotic plane on account of the appearing dyads and multi-faceted systems connected with the psychopathology of royal, priestly and pastoral power, as well as their male and female modes of expression. This opera, relatively rarely staged, has began to be analysed from the gender perspective only long after the Second World War, mainly in Western countries but still requires a deeper research. During the composer's lifetime, it did not gain great popularity in the country — the contemporary authorities demanded a certain political and moral correctness from the creators — those who attempted to break away from the then existing religious, political or ethical patterns of behavior were somehow exposed to ostracism. Only few have attempted to introduce into the cultural circulation a discourse on sexual identities discovered in Europe by psychoanalysis. *Król Roger* provides many erotic messages encoded in the libretto, mainly intersexual and intrasexual motifs, as well as a sublime homoerotic theme and all this takes place against the background of the conflict between two gods: Dionysus and Apollo.