

A Note from the Guest Editor

The following essays engage with our continual reshaping of the premodern world, its fragments, ruins, and myths as mediated and performed over time. They concern the frictions and debates between Classical antiquity and the modern world in opera and dance. In reimagining Classical drama, which was the Promethean spark igniting the genre of opera, the means by which composers and librettists might re-create the dramatic ideals of the ancients have repeatedly come into question. The Classical origins of opera have also served as a point of reference throughout the subsequent history of “opera reforms,” most familiarly through Gluck and Wagner, but, as these essays demonstrate, also by E. T. A. Hoffmann and George Balanchine. As the German literary critic Hans Robert Jauss reminds us, the process of imitating the ancients is never-ending; however, while Classical models are ever present, their “after-lives” “are only present where they are responded to.”¹ The works discussed in these essays respond to and draw upon these Classical models from new approaches to opera. In his essay on E. T. A. Hoffmann’s opera *Aurora*, John Hamilton reexamines the mythic, literary, and philosophical sources for this early Romantic opera, while Julia Randel’s reappraisal of Balanchine’s “Greek” ballets explores the silencing of opera through the choreographer’s reinvention of the all-too-familiar symbols of Orpheus and Apollo.

Significantly, both essays evoke the myth of Marsyas, that musical satyr who dared to challenge Apollo, only to end up skinned alive for his hubris. For each author, Marsyas’s appearance serves a different purpose, yet each one evokes the hubris of restaging the past. Hoffmann and Balanchine, in their invocations and reimaginings of the Classical world, pose challenges to audiences and critics: Hoffmann by charting a new approach to opera through the aesthetics of Romanticism, and Balanchine in denying a singing voice to the Orpheus in his ballet. Marsyas with his flute is also a reminder of the dangers of the mythic past. Both essays animate the agony and struggles of restaging antiquity on the modern stage.

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NOTES

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at history, queer studies, dance history, archaeology, and musicology conferences throughout North America and Europe.

1. See Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1982), 64.