

Abstract

## **A crisis of the singers' market?**

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In the summer of 2017, the question "Why do stars like Adele keep losing their voice?" became a headline in The Guardian, discussing the state and handling of crisis for vocal performers in the world of pop as well as classical music and drama. Apart from reproducing lines of argumentation from the past (such as pleading for the "right" singing technique instead of undergoing vocal surgery from a medical as well as an aesthetic standpoint), more fundamental and structural questions were roused. They are worth to be given closer consideration. For instance, the question is justified whether a critical condition is to be diagnosed for the market of singers. Basically and sounder than before, this market is liable to the laws of supply and demand. Whereas voices in certain repertoire corners were formerly regarded as scarce or even luxury goods, vocal performers nowadays tend to be as replaceable on the job market (by both opera companies and casting agencies) as most other performing artists in the entertainment industry. This is also a result of the isomorphic development of musical genres, styles and training, setting performers from every continent quickly on the track of their precursors. And this goes often hardly noticed by the audience except from specialists and/or fan groups. Even more so, career paths seem increasingly and seriously limited. Not that factors like ensemble work, recording sessions or touring as in earlier decades have changed so much: The curricula leading from certain sub-genres or *fach* classifications are still existent and it is a cliché that artists and/or their management tend to burn themselves out in the search of fast success. What needs to be examined instead, are the mechanisms behind this observation – such as the decline of the audiences' attention and thereby the limits of marketing for performers within a time span of several years in the same genre or repertoire. In addition to these public aspects, when it comes to job models and career concepts, this paper intends to focus on comparing historic and contemporary circumstances of young singers' engagements as cheap labour forces (signed formerly as *élève*, nowadays in opera

studios) and career endings/transitions as *impresari* then, and artists managers today. Whether the current "crisis" leads away from or rather back to the origins of the singing profession in the modern age, still remains to be found out.