

The Management of Opera

An International Comparative Study

Philippe Agid and
Jean-Claude Tarondeau





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First published 2010 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN

Palgrave Macmillan in the UK is an imprint of Macmillan Publishers Limited, registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Palgrave Macmillan in the US is a division of St Martin's Press LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Palgrave Macmillan is the global academic imprint of the above companies and has companies and representatives throughout the world.

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ISBN 978-0-230-24726-0 hardback

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources. Logging, pulping and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Agid, Philippe.

The management of opera: an international comparative study /
Philippe Agid and Jean-Claude Tarondeau
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-230-24726-0 (alk. paper)

1. Opera—Production and direction. 2. Opera—Economic aspects.

I. Tarondeau, Jean-Claude. II. Title.

ML1700.A37 2010

792.502'3—dc22

2010027483

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11 10

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
CPI Antony Rowe, Chippenham and Eastbourne

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8

Tensions, Conflicts and Recent Crises

Opera houses are no strangers to the tensions, conflicts and crises that affect or can affect any organization in any field of human activity, in any part of the world and at any period of history. If several general directors of American opera houses use the French term *édifice complexe* among themselves to qualify the institutions they manage, it is probably because tensions and difficulties of all kinds are their daily lot. Eight opera houses, including one foundation comprising three houses, have faced or are currently facing crises of varying scales and durations, with effects that may be short-lived or longer-lasting: the Opéra National de Paris, Covent Garden, the Grand Théâtre de Genève, La Scala in Milan, the Oper in Berlin foundation, Oper Leipzig, the San Francisco Opera Association and the New York City Opera.

No opera house escapes professional and pay-related tensions with the people they employ under highly diverse arrangements. This chapter discusses the problems posed.

1. Eight recent crises

The first few crises examined here originated in change that was desired or imposed but poorly managed; the rest arose from disagreements between managers at the same opera house; often, both elements are combined.

Crises involving adjustment to desired or imposed change

Opéra National de Paris, 1989–94

From 1989 to 1994, the Opéra National de Paris went through one of the toughest, most complex crises in its history. The causes of the crisis went

deep; it originated in a combination of options and problems interacting with each other.

A new theatre for the Opéra National de Paris was considered necessary from 1976. The erection of a new 2,703 seat opera house – Europe’s largest, not counting the arenas at Verona and Orange – was the culmination of a process that began in 1976 when the French government requested an in-depth audit of the Palais Garnier (Bloch-Lainé, 1977, p. 7). The reasoning breaks down into three stages.

First, an official criticism of the Palais Garnier:

“The Opera’s theatre can no longer be filled and be the talk of the town as it was when first designed, nor even as in the past few decades. In the Second Empire, in a small affluent sector of society, it was the done thing to have a box at an Italianate theatre. Garnier built a large stage with a relatively small auditorium, set in the midst of vast foyers intended for society life. The high society aspect of the performances was the dominant element for a long time. Also, the Republic used the Palace for official festivities which consecrated it in a way that is rather peculiar to France; the general public has never felt at home there as much as they do in Italy and Germany. The true lovers of singing and dance who attended the opera between official ceremonies were chiefly interested in the artists’ technical feats. And so the institution existed, with neither great glamour nor great tragedy ...”

(Bloch-Lainé, 1977, p. 5)

Then a hesitancy over the city of Paris’ operatic vocation: “Must Paris,” wondered the auditors, “have an opera like all capitals have a zoo, and only do what it takes to compare honourably with the operas in other great cities? Or do factors exist in France and elsewhere that can make the arts of opera and dance one of the principal components of national cultural activity?” (Bloch-Lainé, 1977, p. 7).

A recommendation to build an opera theatre able to seat 3,000 spectators comes as a conclusion: “Opera must come out of the Palais Garnier. A naturally expensive art form, at the Palais Garnier opera finds the optimum conditions to combine minimum democratisation with maximum expense, the lowest number of spectators with the greatest pomp in performances, the highest operating costs with the smallest percentage of self-generated income despite charging the highest ticket prices” (Bloch-Lainé, 1977, p. 151).

“The [Bloch Lainé] mission is convinced that the answer lies in construction in Paris, in the heart of the city if possible, of a large, modern 3,000-seat opera house. Only construction of a facility of this kind can respond to the expansion of opera, multiplying the number of spectators by four while considerably reducing ticket prices.”

(Bloch-Lainé, 1977, conclusion)

But what would be done with the Palais Garnier?

Circumstances surrounding the start of the Opera Bastille project. The aim of creating the Opera Bastille was to bring into existence a “people’s” opera with large capacity and state-of-the-art stage and set facilities.¹ The new building’s stage and auditorium had to be suitable for between 250 and 280 performances a year. Several of the technologies on the new stage, such as the motorized, computer-controlled set-moving trolleys, had never been used anywhere else before. The fire curtains in the set assembly rooms below the main stage and the sprinkler systems also incorporated new technologies. The size of the stage area, with a 28-metre proscenium arch for the main stage, had far-reaching effects on production; the stage needed to be “occupied”, and stage directors faced challenges never encountered before: how should the enormous space of this new stage be filled? Its size generated production and performance costs that were partly proportional to the dimensions. In a comparison of the stages at the Vienna Staatsoper and the Opéra Bastille, Michel Bieisse, currently deputy technical director at the Opéra National de Paris, observes Paris’ technical disadvantage compared to Vienna. Under the cumulative effect of these technical difficulties, operations at the Opera Bastille took a long time to get off the ground, advancing gradually from 1989 to 1993. A learning period was necessary.

Ambiguous coexistence of the two theatres, Palais Garnier and Opéra Bastille, between 1989 and 1994. Ambiguity remained over the artistic purpose and specialization of the two theatres, as the Opéra National de Paris also runs a ballet company and offered at the time approximately 150 ballet performances on the Palais Garnier main stage. The Opéra Comique, also known as the Salle Favart, became independent and left the Opéra National de Paris umbrella body in 1989. The modular adjustable theatre planned at Bastille was not finished and probably never will be.² The problem lay in the juxtaposition of the Palais Garnier and the Opera Bastille. Everything progressed as though the designers of the new theatre were convinced that all operas produced by the Opéra

National de Paris in the future would be staged at the new Bastille opera house, as the Bloch-Lainé report had recommended. But some of the Opéra National de Paris traditional audience were very reluctant to abandon the traditionally magical venue of the Palais Garnier. In February 1989, Pierre Bergé, chairman of the Opéra National de Paris organization, could not contain his exasperation: "The Palais Garnier? It should have been torn down like the New York Met, sold, leased to the Japanese, opened to visitors like the Théâtre Gabriel at Versailles. Since we couldn't do that, we had to invent a national destiny for it..."³ Naturally, that national destiny was identified with the ballet company's future. The opera house's dance productions have been at home there for years, to the continuing satisfaction of all. Until 1994, the number of operas performed at the Palais Garnier could be counted on the fingers of one hand. Ballet lovers were quite satisfied with the new division of duties between the theatres, particularly as ballet was also successfully presented at Opéra Bastille. But admirers of the Palais Garnier could not bring themselves to accept the end of operatic activity there.

Industrial unrest and unplanned costs. Tensions and industrial unrest existed prior to the opening of the Opéra Bastille, but the difficulties intensified when the new theatre was opened. Even before 1989, the technical staff held two separate and conflicting visions of professional practice. At the Palais Garnier, the stage technicians were traditionally employed in fixed teams, on schedules set 1 year ahead regardless of the programming and production complexity. These practices were criticized as being inappropriate for the variability of artistic and technical production, and seen as expensive and lacking reliability. At the Opéra Bastille, there was a call for flexible working hours that could be modulated according to the workload, the specificities of productions and, the keystone of the new organization, "production continuity": the same technicians should take part in all phases of the same production, from preparation to each performance. In 1988, the baleful prediction went out that "the best people will go to Bastille". Successive industrial conflicts arose. In 1993, after strikes that sent out a negative image of the new Opéra Bastille, a professional agreement applicable to both theatres was signed. This agreement was costly in terms of the financial rewards for flexibility and legally risky because many of its clauses were open to contradictory interpretation, paving the way for more conflicts. It did not please the staff at the Palais Garnier, who contested the way work was to be organized at Bastille, and were concerned about the concentration of operatic activity outside their own theatre. The determination of

the numbers of back stage personnel led to more successive incidents. It was initially believed that given the latest technological equipment at the Opéra Bastille, only a small number of technicians would be needed. While the Palais Garnier was closed for renovations between 1994 and 1996, its previously disparaged technicians were sent as reinforcements to Opéra Bastille. The combination of the old hands from Palais Garnier and the new recruits at Opéra Bastille turned out to be explosive. One demand followed another, and the conflict led to a long, expensive strike in June 1995.

The small number of opera performances in 1990 and 1991 limited box office income, and that income was weakened by a determinedly low ticket price, in keeping with the “people’s opera concept” that prevailed at the time. The 1993 agreement had financial consequences of its own. Both the culture and finance ministries expressed their irritation at moves that were contrary to plans and had significant financial implications.

Unlikely governance. In this context, the governance of the Opéra de Paris was both a cause and a consequence of the troubles, with a cumulative impact. In late 1988, French President François Mitterrand personally selected the couturier and businessman Pierre Bergé to take over as head of Opéra National de Paris, replacing Raymond Soubie. Pierre Bergé did not intend to direct the opera himself, but wished to approve all the artistic choices to be decided. One of his first decisions was to dismiss Daniel Barenboim, who had been chosen by the previous management. The world of opera was in dismay. But at that time selection and appointment of all the opera’s highest executives was in the government hands. After a game of musical chairs that lasted through late 1988 and early 1989, Dominique Meyer in 1989 and 1990, Philippe Bélaïval from 1991 to 1993, Georges-François Hirsch, during the same period, Jean-Marie Blanchard, from 1993 to 1994 took up high-level posts. Unforeseen difficulties at the opera house racked up the tensions between these personalities. Internal conflict within the management was aggravated by the technical and financial difficulties and industrial unrest summarized earlier. They added their effects to a slack work organization, partly explaining the high management turnover. The French state retained the control, but had no expertise in organizing and running an opera house – especially a new theatre supposed to have popular appeal, and with state-of-the-art technology.

The chorus and ballet company were spared the confusion of the labour, professional and management disputes. Convinced that no

leader of similar stature would agree to succeed Daniel Barenboim, Dominique Meyer suggested to Pierre Bergé that they should engage a young and promising conductor, Myung Whung Chung. Chung worked successfully with the orchestra and chorus, achieving real progress. Meanwhile, Jean-Albert Cartier took care of the ballet. The ballet school, placed under the management of the Opéra National de Paris, was directed with an iron hand by Claude Bessy and kept out of the turmoil. The school provided regular quality additions to the company.

Emerging from crisis. Two events accelerated the course of events. The tragic collapse of a set in Seville during a rehearsal of *Othello* in 1992 left one member of the chorus dead and 40 others injured. This mishap dramatically revealed the difficulties of the opera house, which was not ready to take one of its productions touring to a foreign stage. Jacques Toubon, France's new minister of culture after the 1993 elections, brought in an undisputed professional, Hugues Gall, who at the time was the general director of Geneva's Grand Théâtre after acting as Rolf Liebermann's right-hand man at the Opéra National de Paris between 1971 and 1980. Gall agreed to the move, on condition that he would hold all artistic, administrative, financial and industrial relations powers, that this would be reflected in new by-laws and that the state made a commitment to provide the requested subsidy every year, based on a six-year business plan. None of the staff except himself (and in fact, the chairman of the board) would any more be appointed by government ministers; that power would be his alone. He intended to bring a more professional approach to management of the house, which had suffered from ambiguous relations between the opera house and the French state since the end of the Second World War. The opera directeur's contract would be for a six-year, renewable term. Gall himself undertook commitments for the same period on key figures for future results. He proposed a compromise on the respective lyric and dance vocations of the Palais Garnier and Opéra Bastille; two thirds ballet and one third opera at the Palais Garnier, and inverse proportions at Bastille. The French government, keen to put an end to the crisis that had begun in 1989, accepted the conditions laid down by the man it wanted to put in charge of the opera. In 2004 when Hugues Gall left, it could be observed that the commitments made on both sides had been honoured (Agid and Tarondeau, 2006).

The strong organizational and managerial assessment proposed by Hugues Gall which was accepted by the French government in 1994 appears in 2010 to have been efficient. From 1945, the Opéra National

de Paris had lost the reputation it had enjoyed until 1939. Daily management interferences between public administrations and the opera houses do not exist any more. The new directeur is both artistically and financially responsible for the opera house activities, which is not far from the American vision of an opera house general director, that is to say he has full responsibility to run the house. The new by-laws recognize that all executives are appointed by the directeur, not by the ministries as it used to be before. As in any correctly governed opera house, public administrations exert a global responsibility in ensuring that the opera house fulfils rightly the mission for which public subsidies are brought. The only but important traditional feature of the new organization remains the composition of a board strategically dependant from the French government and public administration.

Royal Opera House (Covent Garden), London, 1995–99

The post-Second World War history of Covent Garden is the story of an undisputed artistic and commercial success; led by just two directors between 1946 and 1988 (the Opéra National de Paris had 13 directors over the same period). Sir David Webster was at the helm for 24 years (1946–70) and Sir John Tooley for 18 years, receiving the greatest conductors, directors and singers of the period. Jeremy Isaacs succeeded him in 1988. The chairman of the board in early 1995, Sir Angus Stirling, had been in his post since 1991 and one of the trustees for 17 years.

A new theatre was needed for the Royal Opera House: Covent Garden would be rebuilt on the same site

The decision to rebuild Covent Garden had been in preparation for 15 years. The theatre vitally needed modernization and safety work, and brand-new stage facilities incorporating the technological advances of the past 20 years. It was in a similar situation to the Opéra National de Paris 10 or 15 years earlier. The stage was on its last legs, and very promising architectural plans had been drawn up. A completely redesigned stage area would, as at Bastille, foster better productivity and facilitate alternation. The auditorium was to be renovated on the same layout. The faithful patrons of the Royal Opera House would still have the same beloved theatre. Two smaller auditoriums would be built for smaller-scale productions. A great hall, the famous Floral Hall now called the Paul Hamlyn Hall, would provide a venue for a very wide range of artistic and social events. The Royal Opera House sold several plots of land to reduce the cost of the redevelopment. The new urban complex at Covent Garden – the opera house, the charming market and the

restaurants all around – would still form a centre of artistic and tourist attraction unique in London and the world. The opera house was due to be closed from July 1997 to early 1999. Two years before the start of work, who would have thought that the Royal Opera House was possibly about to go through the most serious crisis of its entire existence? When the first difficulties emerged in 1995, who would have imagined how quickly matters would deteriorate? Lack of forward planning for the risks inherent to the closure led to a dual crisis: in finance and governance. In the end, a UK Parliamentary committee took matters into its hands and determined the necessary conditions for finding a solution. The Royal Opera House emerged stronger from the crisis, which provided lessons for the opera house's future management.

Insufficient forward planning for Royal Opera House operations during the closure triggered doubts over financing

The closure had been in preparation for several years without a sufficient evaluation of its overall costs. Jeremy Isaacs has admitted as much more than once in the book he wrote about the period. "We would have to demonstrate, before the second tranche of Arts Council funds was made available, that we had satisfactory plans for the closure period. We had not" (Isaacs, 1999, p. 275). In the "Après moi" chapter of his book, he adds "What is true is that at every stage my colleagues and I underestimated the real costs of closure" (Isaacs, 1999, p. 326). As early as March 1995, suspicion had developed between the chairman of the board and Jeremy Isaacs who was due to retire in September 1997 and who was asked to concentrate on the closure and, more precisely, the scheduling of work for the opera and ballet companies (Isaacs, 1999, p. 276).

Skeptical of the financial forecasts presented, the board requested that they should be revised and new cost savings plans devised. Even before the closure, the balance between box office income (ticket prices were among the highest in Europe), Arts Council funding and private donations was required, but soon appeared to be problematic. One after another, all the financial parameters whose stability had hitherto provided Covent Garden's sound financial basis faltered. News travels fast in London and financial uncertainties in one place seemed to feed financial uncertainties elsewhere. Executive's turnover developed as early as June 1996. External audits of funding requirements took place in 1995 and 1997, subject to some contestation. The Arts Council England was due to provide £78.5 million of funding in two steps from UK National Lottery profits, but before any payment it wanted to be certain of the Royal Opera House's financial viability, particularly regarding operating

income and expenses during the closure period. Covent Garden management was determined to maintain a high volume of opera and dance productions, with sound reasons: the vital need for ongoing box office income, and the equally important need to carry on working and continue artistic performances and training. But finding a venue for production and performance became a nightmare, because identification of possible theatres and the necessary agreements were not tackled far enough in advance. All of London's great theatres were considered, from the Palladium to the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane (the choice favoured by Jeremy Isaacs and his team), or the Lyceum which was too small (1,700 seats): although it was located close to Covent Garden, this would cause a loss of £7 million per season and also require 100 staff to be laid off. Then an apparently miraculous opportunity arose: from-scratch erection of a cheap, brand new 2,500-seat theatre on the Tower Bridge site, built to last up to 50 years. This project was the brainchild of architect Ian Ritchie, and was taken up by Jeremy Isaacs and the Royal Opera House board. Examination of the plans caused disputes and fell behind schedule. By the time permission was granted after a lengthy procedure, it was too late, and the project was no longer of interest to Covent Garden: the new theatre would only be ready in time for the last 10 months of the closure. In the end, the Royal Opera House companies staged performances in several different London theatres, and went on a number of tours, but operating income never reached the level a 2,500-seat theatre might have generated, nor did it match the forecasts established in 1995. Donations and private funding were down, which truth told was no great surprise. In the early 1990s, they had totalled an annual average of up to £7 million. In 1995, Covent Garden expected a drop in the order of £2–3 million. Vivien Duffield played a key role, raising funds for the renovation work with a target of £70 million and asking patrons to continue their normal donations and contributions. The second objective was more elusive than the first: donors' motivation declined during the closure.

A governance crisis alongside the financial crisis

In January and February 1996, the British TV channel BBC2 showed a documentary series (six 50-minute episodes) on Covent Garden, named "The House", which set the tone. Jeremy Isaacs had given the film crew led by Michael Waldman carte blanche: they had access to the stage area, the workshops and offices, with authorization to film whatever interested them and no say by the opera house in the final cut. Some of the scenes of management filmed as they happened, such as the

dismissal of a high-level executive, gave the impression that management were very uncaring. In Jeremy Isaacs's view, "what we did see was a skillfully mixed pot-pourri of incidents – funny, tense, contrasted, but wholly unrelated to any intellectual overview" (Isaacs, 1999, p. 244). In the context of the contemporary crisis, this series did not help the opera house's communication policy.

The governance crisis took four forms. First, it was reflected in a high turnover of chief executives. Sir Angus's term as chairman ended in August 1996 and he did not seek reappointment. Peter Chaddlington replaced him early in 1997 and preparation began for the post-Isaacs era. There were five chief executives between 1995 and 1998! Gennista Macintosh, former director of the Theatre Royal, took over in January 1997. Five months later, in circumstances that remain unclear, she was replaced by Mary Allen, former secretary of England's Arts Council which subsidizes the Royal Opera House. Allen took up the post in September 1997 but stayed less than 6 months. Pelham Allen, from audit firm Coopers and Lybrand, arrived in March 1998 following a report by the UK Parliament's Select Committee. In September 1988, the American Michael Kayser was appointed chief executive of the Royal Opera House. This coincided with the beginnings of a return to order. Second, there was some overlap of responsibilities between the chairman of the board and the chief executive (Sir Peter Chaddlington in practice occupied both functions between September 1997 and March 1988) and the ambiguous relationships between the Royal Opera House and the Arts Council (headed at the time by Grey Gowrie) were noted. Jeremy Isaacs has far from fond memories of relations with the Arts Council England: "I can remember virtually nothing of the meeting we had with the Arts Council on 21 December 1995; it was so horrible that I have suppressed the memory, having only a dim recollection of abuse and recriminations of men and women behaving badly" (Isaacs, 1999, p. 300). Third, the governance crisis also originated in the way the house was organized. Both Gennista Macintosh and Mary Allen stressed its dispersed, fragmented nature, as did Jeremy Isaacs. The opera and the ballet each enjoyed a high degree of autonomy, and the Royal Opera House was legally independent of the theatre. Several years later, Ruth Jarrat, then director of policy development at the Royal Opera House, took an identical view of the organization at the time: there were too many entities with too much independence in relation to each other.⁴ Fourth, a range of new solutions were proposed: should Covent Garden not be turned into a people's opera rather than an opera for the elite? Jeremy Isaacs comments: "You cannot have a People's opera unless the people

are prepared to pay for it" (Isaacs, 1999, p. 319). In 1997, the British Secretary of State for Culture, Chris Smith, suggested placing the Royal Ballet, the Royal Opera house and the English National Opera under the same management, and selling the Coliseum theatre to help finance Covent Garden. "This proposal was dead in the water" (Isaacs, 1999, p. 329).

Parliament intervenes with its own demands

Intervention by the House of Commons' Select Committee for National Heritage led by Gerald Kaufman managed to move the situation on. The Select Committee began interviews on 24 July 1997 and reported its conclusions on 3 December the same year. Sir Angus Sterling, the board and Jeremy Isaacs were criticized for poor planning ahead of the closure, and for failing to report adequately on the house's financial position for years. The same criticisms applied to Sir Peter Chaddlington, the Arts Council and Mary Allen. The Select Committee called for the resignation of the entire board and the chief executive. The Secretary of State for Culture was to appoint an interim manager. If the board members refused to resign, the Arts Council should stop all funding for the Royal Opera House.

Sir Peter Chaddlington and the members of the board duly resigned, and Pelham Allen, a consultant from Coopers and Lybrand, acted as chief executive officer until he was replaced by Michael Kayser at the end of 1998. Covent Garden emerged renewed and transformed, arousing pride and satisfaction. The new theatre was inaugurated in February 1999, and Tony Hall took over the reins in January 2000. The decisions that helped to bring the Royal Opera House out of the crisis reflect the scale of the underlying causes. A newly unified organization reporting to a single board of trustees replaced the separate components of Covent Garden that previously had their own boards and operated with relative autonomy: the ballet, the opera, the Society of Friends and sponsorship management. A single chief executive officer was now responsible for all activities in the house. Selecting a chief executive officer able to successfully manage and develop these activities and oversee appointment of the right key executives is the task of the board, as stated in the Annual Review for 2007–08. The lessons of the crisis have been learned. With hindsight, it is as if all the ingredients of Covent Garden's balance were in temporary but grave danger of breakdown: the management itself, the erosion of box office income which cast doubt on ticket price levels, the falloff in donations and private funding because donors were less motivated while the theatre was closed, the hesitancy

of the Arts Council, the doubts of certain trustees and questions over the very future of the Royal Opera House. At the height of the crisis, major decisions were taken to reduce overheads. Around a hundred permanent jobs were cut. Employment contracts were made more flexible. New measures were taken allowing Covent Garden to broadcast its productions on television and radio with no indemnity for musicians and house staff.

Ten years later in January 2010, Tony Hall is still chief executive. Covent Garden has regained stability. In economic and financial terms, the new Covent Garden model relies more than the old model on box office income, donations and private funding, and commercial income. The Arts Council now provides only one third of the total funding, compared to approximately 60 per cent some 20 years before.

Staatsoper, Deutsche Oper, Komische Oper in Berlin, 2003–10

On 16 February 2009, the German opera magazine *Opernwelt* held a public meeting in Berlin to discuss the future of the capital's three opera houses. Six hundred people attended, including Jürgen Flimm, appointed to take over as Intendant of the Staatsoper from 2010, Kirsten Harms, Intendantine of the Deutsche Oper, Andr as Homoki, Intendant of the Komische Oper, Stefan Rosinski, who had recently resigned from his duties at the Oper in Berlin foundation, and many other personalities from Berlin's political and musical circles, among them Klaus Zehelein, formerly the Intendant of Stuttgart's Staatsoper and the president of the Opernkonzert. G rard Mortier, who was still at the helm of the Op ra de Paris, announced amid general hostility: "The Staatsoper and the Deutsche Oper must be merged." Are Berlin's three opera houses in crisis?

A unique but fragmented opera offering

In 2007, these three opera houses staged a total of 471 performances of 124 opera productions: 98 revivals and 26 new productions!

The reader should bear in mind that these figures respectively concern three theatres (Berlin), one theatre (Covent Garden) and two theatres (Op ra National de Paris), excluding the activities of the smaller auditoriums in each one (Table 8.1).

All three Berlin opera houses have a world reputation. Held in fond esteem by the local people and with a history stretching back to 1742, the Staatsoper, which currently has Daniel Barenboim as its GeneralMusikdirektor, has one of the most admirable operatic traditions in Europe and also boasts a top-class orchestra, the Staatskapelle. The

Table 8.1 Comparison of key figures for three opera institutions

In millions	Berlin 2007 (one foundation, three opera houses, three main stages)	Covent Garden, London 2007 (one opera house, one main stage)	Opéra National de Paris 2007 (one opera house, two main stages)
Total budget	€158	£90.2	€175.36
Public subsidies	€109.15	£25.6	€99.33
Budget funded by subsidies	70%	28.4%	56.66%
Box office income	€22.7		€45.34
Budget funded by box office income	14.37%	37.14%	25.86%
Total spectators in the main auditoriums	689,873	620,805	666,613
Total spectators for opera	591,176	318,130	354,455 (93–97% occupancy)
Total spectators for dance	98,697	302,675	309,158 (100% occupancy)
Average occupancy rate	72.5%	93%	95%

people of Berlin are just as attached to the Deutsche Oper and the Komische Oper, which date from the early 20th century. Götz Friedrich, one of the most famous German stage directors of the last century, managed the Deutsche Oper for 20 years and in the late 1990s worked alongside conductor Christian Thielemann. Andréas Homoki runs the Komische Oper, and is not averse to engaging stage directors who unsettle and provoke audiences. The auditoriums have only low capacity: 1,396 seats at the Staatsoper, 1,885 at the Deutsche Oper, 1,208 at the Komische Oper. The combined average occupancy rate for the three opera houses was approximately 73 per cent in 2007, which is very low compared to several houses in major European capitals (90 per cent or over) but consistent with average levels for Germany. On the Berlin operatic scene, Daniel Barenboim has an aura resulting from his outstanding career as a conductor and player, as well as his initiatives for Israeli-Palestinian reconciliation, symbolized in the formation of an orchestra open to players from both communities. The Green senator Alice Ströevel jokes that Daniel Barenboim has perhaps Chancellor Angela Merkel's mobile telephone number, but she does not!

In 2003, the city of Berlin intended to reduce funding for the three opera houses and streamline their activities

Since the early 1990s, the city of Berlin has sought to cut the amount of funding provided to the three houses (it supplies 70 per cent of their budget on average), and rationalize their artistic activities.

In 2003, it announced that it intended to reduce by €35 million the total subsidy for the three houses, which at the time totalled close to €100 million; a cutback on this scale suggests that a massive restructuring will be required! Thirty-five million euros was also the value of the subsidy received by the Deutsche Oper. Could that mean that closing it was considered? Emotions ran high. Saving the Deutsche Oper became a concern. Following negotiations between the City and the Bund (federal authorities), the Bund agreed to take over funding for three other cultural institutions in Berlin, for a total amount of €18 million. In return, the City of Berlin promised to reduce its subsidies to the three opera houses by €16.8 million over 5 years, without closing the Deutsche Oper.

The new foundation (Stiftung) "Oper in Berlin" organizes governance relationships that preserve the independence of each of the three opera houses

Berlin's three opera houses belong to this Stiftung, which was created in 2003 by a Berlin senate law. Sets, costumes and props for all three houses are made in workshops belonging to a single organization called the Bühnenservice. The ballet companies of the Staatsoper and Deutsche Oper were merged to form the Staatsballet, performing alternately in both theatres. A general manager was appointed for the foundation, and he also directs the Bühnenservice.

The Stiftung's decision-making system is very strict. The mayor of Berlin/president of the Stiftung appoints the *Intendant* and *GeneralMusikdirektor* of all three houses. Decisions with financial consequences, whether or not they directly concern the three opera houses, the ballet or the set and costume-making unit, first require a consensus among all members of the foundation's management committee (*Stiftungs Vorstand*), which includes the four *Intendant* and the four *Geschäftsführer* – the four financial officers of the three opera houses and the ballet -, and must then be ratified by the chairman of the board (*Stiftungsrat*), who under the statutes is the mayor of Berlin and happens to be in charge of culture at the Berlin senate. In fact, the functions of the main fund provider and the head of the foundation are currently exercised by the same person.

Strategic decisions are made by the Stiftungsrat, whose six other members are: the senator in charge of finance, four members elected by the Berlin senate and an employee representative. Some members of the opposition pointed out that only one member of the board, Sir Peter Jonas, a former Intendant of Munich's Bayerische Staatsoper, has any skills and experience as an opera house director.

A second crisis paradoxically arose from an increase in funding for each of the three opera houses

The city of Berlin decided to increase funding for the three opera houses as part of the plans for the Staatsoper. In 2007, the Bund and the city of Berlin adopted a plan for the renovation of its buildings.⁵ The stage facilities were showing their age, the buildings were in poor condition and the foyers were too small. Work should begin in 2010 and will cost €240 million: €200 million will be funded by the Bund and €40 million by the city of Berlin. On top of this sum, a further €20 million approximately will be needed to renovate the Schillertheater, which the Staatsoper will use during the renovations until their completion scheduled for 2013. Plans to raise the height of the building and therefore add 400 seats have been abandoned as the project has advanced.

The city of Berlin has undertaken to provide the Staatsoper with an annual subsidy of €41 million, a rise of almost €5 million. This decision went against the cutback policy which has formed the basis and *raison d'être* for the Oper in Berlin foundation. So as not to put the other two opera houses and the ballet at a disadvantage, or, taking a different viewpoint, to bring their funding up to date, they too were granted additional funds: over €5.5 million per year for the Deutsche Oper, over €4 million for the Komische Oper and over €0.5 million for the Staatsballet. The Staatskapelle orchestra would receive a further €1.7 million a year to offer its musicians salaries on a level with the best-paid German orchestras.

At the Staatsoper, this welcome extra funding available from 2008 paradoxically led to a serious crisis due to disagreement over the allocation of the subsidies granted. The *Intendant* Peter Mussbach was in favour of devoting equal amounts to stage direction and to the creation of sets, costumes and props, against Daniel Barenboim, who wanted more resources to be devoted to music.

Presenting a common budget and resolving the internal conflict at the Staatsoper proved impossible, and Peter Mussbach resigned. In the autumn of 2009, the general manager of Oper in Berlin was removed from his post by the mayor of Berlin.

Can we talk of a crisis in respect of the Berlin opera houses situation?

No, say those who believe that the difficulties and episodes arising since 2003 were provoked solely by the city of Berlin's interventionism. There is less certainty on the part of those who understand the city's need to limit or reduce subsidization of opera in Berlin, and are forced to admit that the subsidy cuts policy has been rendered ineffective.

Through a rational approach, the current situation at Berlin's three opera houses raises three very different questions. At first, the Berliners' affection for each of their three opera houses is in fact comparable to the Parisians' attachment to the Palais Garnier. Each house has its own history and traditions, its own artistic and technical teams, its own audiences, and this was the case well before the Berlin Wall went up. Many of the opera house *Intendant* and *GeneralMusikdirektor* have enjoyed or currently enjoy great fame in Berlin, in Germany and worldwide: Götz Friedrich in the past, Daniel Barenboim today. Each of the three houses has strong support in the capital's population. The Opera in Berlin's Stiftung has no clear restructuring action plan, and is permanently under suspicion. The administrative external control exerted on the Stiftung does not handle its strategic issues.⁶

In terms of restructuring, no strategy can be carried out without sufficient resources. The Stiftung is not a very appropriate body for dynamic action. All the clues suggest that in 2003, the aim was to reduce public subsidies, and very probably reduce the number of opera houses to two. Was it realistic to seek to rationalize the artistic activities and operating methods of three opera houses in Berlin, simultaneously cutting their costs and reducing their public funding, while in practice leaving three general managements to operate independently? And without appointing an authority, a person or institution with the power if not to restructure, at any rate to coordinate activities and operating methods, programming, artistic production and marketing for their theatres? Apart from two reorganizations for the Staatsballet and Bühnenservice, the experience of the last 5 years shows that it was not realistic. On 1 February 2009, Gérard Mortier confronted his German friends on this point.⁷ And in a final telling paradox, public subsidies were raised whereas the Oper in Berlin Stiftung was supposed to serve an objective of reducing public funding.

How, then, should the Staatsoper renovation project be considered? The building is in poor condition, the stage and scenery facilities outdated and mediocre, and the acoustics below par for such a prestigious opera. Where is the problem? It is certainly not in the acknowledged

need to upgrade the auditorium, the foyers, the stage and set facilities. There is never any shortage of arguments to justify rehabilitation of an old, possibly dangerous theatre, and they are reinforced by emotional attachment to a part of the national heritage – which is what the Staatsoper is. The contradiction in the project lies in the combination of enormous cost (€240 million)⁸ and a small auditorium size (1,396 seats), which there are no plans to modify. The renovated Staatsoper will enjoy enhanced prestige. But it will be unable to count on an audience comparable to those at Covent Garden, the Liceu, La Scala, the Opéra Bastille or the large American auditoriums to cover a significant part of its operating costs. And ultimately, once the German state and the Berlin senate have spent €240 million on the renovation, how many years will it take before the question of concerted action by the three opera houses arises, with or without the benefit of any architectural solution? More than that, the same rehabilitation scenario might occur in a few years at the Deutsche Staatsoper, built after the Second World War.

These three questions form a strategic equation that the city of Berlin must address for the organization of its operatic life, one of the most prestigious in the world.

Is such a conclusion relevant? Some of our German friends suggested that we should consider the part of irrationality in Berlin's present situation. Global irrationality lies with the sociological patchwork of so many diverse and opposite sensibilities in Germany's capital. There is still some persistent nostalgia of the former East Berlin musical culture, and the Staatsoper as the Komische Oper are part of it. There is probably some pride about what West Berlin opera life was before the reunification of the two cities, and the wish to preserve it by any means. Irrationality lies with the contradiction between Berlin's public debt of €80 billion, the second highest in Germany after Bremen, and the cost of uncertain projects as the Staatsoper. The rebuilding of the Schloss viewed as a part of Germany's historical heritage has though been either postponed or cancelled in the spring of 2010, as part of reducing public spending in Germany, which means that irrationality in Berlin is not a fatality. All of them are part of constructing a new historical image of Berlin, though strongly connected with its past. In this respect, the view exists that no significant reorganization could appear in the Berlin opera houses' panorama before 50 or 100 years. Here, optimism would just be to say that the Stiftung acts as an invisible link between the three houses and might possibly become a useful restructuring tool in the future.

Internal management crises at opera houses: power struggles between managers

Just a few years apart, three opera houses have experienced power struggles between their general managers and their musical or artistic directors: the Opéra National de Paris, 1994–95, La Scala, Milan, 2003–04 and Leipzig Opera, 2005–06.

Power struggles between general managers and music or artistic directors

Before leaving his post as chairman of Opéra National de Paris, Pierre Bergé renewed the contract with conductor Myung Wung Chung for a five-year period. Bergé knew he was to be succeeded a few months later by a new team and that Hugues Gall would be the true manager of the house. The new contract gave Myung Wung Chung the right to programme four operas per season, and have a say in the casting. Chung's acknowledged talent in getting the orchestra back to work was one of the successful aspects of Pierre Bergé's directorship. Neither Pierre Bergé nor Myung Wung Chung could fail to know that the rights awarded to the conductor in the new contract would be challenged by Hugues Gall – who had not been asked for his opinion. The contract had to be approved by the French government, which let it pass. When the time came, Hugues Gall proposed that Chung should conduct at a higher number of performances per season, but give up the prerogatives conferred by Pierre Bergé. The conductor refused and was fired. A public quarrel ensued that ended in a lawsuit, with the court awarding Chung an indemnity. Hugues Gall popularized the motto "Power can be delegated but not shared" and remained sole master on board. For anyone who knew his uncompromising character, this was not a surprising outcome. The French minister of culture could only watch and accept the financial consequences of the court decision. Chung received compensation as if his contract had been cancelled.

At La Scala in Milan, there was a long cohabitation between Carlo Fontana, Sovrintendente and Riccardo Muti, the artistic and music director. In 2003, the stage and set facilities had just been magnificently modernized. Relations with the musicians remained tense. Riccardo Muti attracted unprecedented media attention when, during an orchestra strike, he conducted *La Traviata* from a piano used to replace absent musicians. Relations between the Sovrintendente and the artistic and music director deteriorated publicly. Riccardo Muti was forced to leave at the request of La Scala's board members, which also dismissed Carlo Fontana before the end of his contract. The Frenchman Stéphane Lissner

was appointed *Sovrintendente* after a long recruitment process. These decisive management issues were solved by the board. Lissner then appointed Daniel Barenboim as principal guest conductor.

When Henri Maier became *Intendant* of Oper Leipzig in 2003, the position of *GeneralMusikdirektor* was vacant. Like the mayor of Leipzig, Henri Maier naturally wished that the fame of the *GeneralMusikdirektor* to appoint would be equal to the worldwide reputation of the Gewandhaus orchestra and raise the overall quality of the opera house. The Gewandhaus is not part of the opera house, but the agreements signed under the supervision of the city of Leipzig require the orchestra and its conductor to give a fixed number of performances at the opera house. With the full support of the mayor of Leipzig, Henri Maier actively lobbied to attract Riccardo Chailly. But after he had invited the conductor to join the Leipzig opera's artistic team, the relationship between the two men went downhill. The mayor renewed Henri Maier's contract for 5 years. Shortly afterwards, Riccardo Chailly let it be known that working with the *Intendant* was a problem for him. At the mayor's request, Henri Maier resigned, but continued to be paid under the terms of his contract.

The contexts differ in each of these three conflicts. In Paris, given the sequence of events in time, the outgoing chairman felt totally at liberty to introduce a future division of artistic power between the musical director already in place – Chung – and Hugues Gall, appointed general manager from July 1995. He knew it would not his job to manage this power-sharing arrangement. Pierre Bergé did not check whether the contents of the renewed contract were acceptable to Hugues Gall, who would have to work with it.

The conflict in Milan was a typical clash of personalities and power struggle, with each protagonist seeking to triumph for their own benefit. Each was well known in his own field: Carlo Fontana was considered one of the very greatest *Sovrintendente* of La Scala since the end of the Second World War. Riccardo Muti had a reputation as an unrivalled concert and opera conductor. They had become unable to share responsibilities and power – to work together – in the same opera house. The board members of La Scala drew their own conclusions. Stéphane Lissner, the chosen successor to Carlo Fontana, only agreed to take over on the condition that he would hold full artistic and financial powers. This followed the example set a few years earlier in Paris by Hugues Gall.

In Leipzig, there was probably no future for cohabitation and teamwork between Henri Maier and Riccardo Chailly. At first, Henri Maier and the mayor of Leipzig were convinced that Riccardo Chailly's

appointment was an excellent initiative. Ultimately, Riccardo Chailly forced Henri Maier's departure. The Paris and Leipzig cases share a common factor: high opportunity costs – which are paid by the taxpayers.

Conflict of interests between the city of Geneva and the Grand Théâtre

In the spring of 2006, there was unrest in the Grand Théâtre workshops after the promotion of a staff employee whose style and methods were considered inappropriate. In August 2006 the tension mounted following the suicide of a technician belonging to a different department in the theatre. Nearly half of the 320 members of the Grand Théâtre's staff have the same municipal employee status as Geneva city staff.⁹ Many of them took their complaints to the Geneva city councillor in charge of culture. In 2007, the city gave the Grand Théâtre a subsidy of CHF 29.4 million, almost 63 per cent of its total budget.¹⁰ A first governance conflict erupted. The Geneva city councillor in charge of culture took the initiative of holding meetings with the personnel and union representatives at the theatre, neither with the theatre management nor with the chairman of the foundation board. The theatre's general director Jean-Marie Blanchard asked the foundation board to have an audit carried out. All this gave the impression that Geneva's city council was taking over responsibility for dealing directly with the problem, bypassing the theatre's governance bodies. Audits were ordered, and several of them were made public. Without ignoring any communication problems inside the theatre, none of the audits called into question the overall management or the quality of artistic work at the opera house. Bruno de Preux and Robert Roth, respectively chairman and vice chairman of the Grand Theater's board, resigned in public protest about the methods used. The dominant aspect of this crisis is the link between incidents arising between personnel with municipal employee status, and the direct intervention of the Geneva city management which bypasses the roles and action of the governance bodies and the opera's management itself. The city of Geneva did not renew Jean-Marie Blanchard's contract when it expired in July 2009. It appointed a new chairman and made several changes to the management team. The crisis is now considered settled.

Pamela Rosenberg's time at the San Francisco Opera, 2001–06, and how Gérard Mortier refused the New York City Opera, 2007

The recent histories of these two American opera houses have several common characteristics, despite their differing styles and traditions. In both cases, symbolic, reputed and respected general managers retired

and needed replacements: Lofti Mansouri in San Francisco and Paul Kellogg at the New York City Opera. Lofti Mansouri tended to be conservative in programming, while Paul Kellogg opened up the New York City Opera to baroque opera and showed eclectic taste in his artistic choices throughout his career. The trustees of both opera houses wanted to breathe new life into their institutions. Even before Lofti Mansouri's departure, the San Francisco Opera was suffering from the difficult economic situation in California, made worse by the events of 9/11. The German-American Pamela Rosenberg had worked part of her career in several German opera houses. She was invited to head the San Francisco Opera in November 2000, "to bring the house from the 19th into the 21st century".¹¹ She planned to put on Berlioz's *Les Troyens*, *Le Grand Macabre* by Ligeti, and *Die Soldaten* by Zimmerman. Even before the fateful date of 9/11, Pamela Rosenberg soon realized that the funding position of the house was not as brilliant as she had expected. Were the trustees aware that it had deteriorated? Had they failed to inform her? Nine years later, Pamela Rosenberg is still not really sure. It was the beginning of long months of unanticipated difficulties: attempting to convince donors to continue, if not increase, their contributions, finding new sponsors, convincing people to accept programming and a type of production for which not all the audience was ready, then implementing a cost-cutting policy and dropping several productions! With the help of several trustees, Pamela Rosenberg achieved financial recovery: after a loss of some \$11 million for the 2002–03 season, results were positive for 2003–04 and remained positive for the rest of her time as general director. The total amount of resources earned and contributed increased from \$56 million in 2002–03 to \$61.7 million in 2005–06. True, they increased further to \$70 million during successor David Gockley's first year. Who will ever know how far these results were influenced by a poor economic environment and an artistic programme that marked a partial break from her predecessor's practices? Pamela Rosenberg chose not to renew her contract in 2006.¹²

History did not quite repeat itself when in 2007 the representatives of the New York City Opera asked Gérard Mortier, who was due to end his time with the Opéra de Paris in July 2009, to take over at New York's famous second opera house. The environments appear similar: Gérard Mortier was called in to renew and modernize artistic policy at the New York City Opera, while Peter Gelb, who replaced Joseph Volpe at the New York Metropolitan Opera in 2005, had brilliantly succeeded in the first stages of his artistic vision. But were the New York City Opera board of trustees, presided by Susan Baker, really unanimous in selecting

Gérard Mortier? Like Pamela Rosenberg in California after the events of 2001, Mortier was faced with the initial economic effects of the worldwide crisis in 2007. Also, and no doubt to a greater extent than his counterpart a few years earlier in San Francisco, he had to deal with particularly high overheads. Maybe, given Pamela Rosenberg's recent experiences on the west coast, Gérard Mortier could not fail to know that there is no comparison between globalization of the negotiation process for a European opera's public funding and the fragmentation of negotiations with a high number of private donors. In November 2008, Gérard Mortier decided against succeeding Paul Kellog. The recovery of the New York City Opera is today in the hands of George Steel, after Michael Kaiser, who had worked on planning for the Covent Garden renovation, advised the New York City Opera board of trustees.

2. Social crises or "Meeting Venus"

Istvan Szabo's 1991 film "Meeting Venus" is a clever, pertinent summary of the tensions and social conflicts which were disrupting operations and complicating management at the time in opera houses in certain European countries. An opera house somewhere in a European capital is preparing to stage a production of *Tannhäuser*. Glenn Close (with Kiri Te Kanawa's voice) and Niels Arestrup as a famous conductor play the production's title roles. The daily difficulties between the conductor, the diva, the management, the back stage staff and the musicians build up to the point that they threaten the premiere to occur. It does in the end take place, but as a concert version. This depiction of a labour relations crisis at an opera house in Europe is reminiscent of the real events of the late 1980s.

In Europe and the USA, the history of opera houses and companies is studded with tensions and conflicts of all kinds – professional issues, labour relations, wages – and crises on varying scales, depending on the time and place, emerging between management and contributors to the operas, that is, the singers, musicians, dancers sometimes and technicians. Lully, the very first director of France's Académie Royale de Musique, the ancestor to the Opéra National de Paris, had to face disciplinary problems with his musicians between 1669 and 1680!

The history of opera's divas naturally emphasizes anecdotes of temperamental behaviour that made the news, but things have moved on today. Most opera singers live for and by their art. The vast majority of them are professionals who can get along perfectly well with the people they mix with in the opera houses. Very few become famous for being

difficult, demanding and oversensitive. Joseph Volpe, who headed New York's Metropolitan Opera between 1990 and 2006, opted to deprive his opera house of singer Kathleen Battle's talents rather than give way to her demands. In December 2006, when Roberto Alagna walked off the stage during *Aïda* at La Scala because of the audience's hostile reaction to his performance, the management asked him to leave the production.¹³ Such cases remain unusual.

Taking an overview of the history of all opera houses, in the first two thirds of the 19th century the singers' fees were among the largest cost centres of opera houses, companies or occasional producers of operas. As the industrial revolution progressed, generating overall wage rises in all economic activities, musicians, dancers, chorus singers, and then back stage and administrative staff, all traditionally low-paid, in turn demanded pay rises and better working hours and conditions. This brought about deep-seated changes in the format of budgets. The relative cost of musicians, chorus singers, dancers and stage crews began to follow a steady upward trend. Turning points were reached everywhere in the late 19th century or early 20th century. "At the end of the nineteenth century", writes John Dizikes, "the Metropolitan paid orchestral players fifty dollars per week for seven or eight performances, choristers fifteen dollars. Four conductors drew a total of twenty thousand dollars for the year. The company's entire ballet corps collectively received half that amount. At this time, Caruso and Melba each made between two and three thousand dollars a performance, and also took part in strike-breaking" (Dizikes, 1993, p. 526). Dizike recounts how during a performance of *Faust* at the Metropolitan Opera in 1905, the choristers decided to stop singing unless they were given a raise, then describes the turbulent reception given to general manager Heinrich Conried when he came onstage during the first interval to explain his opposition to the singers' demands. A compromise was reached shortly afterwards.

These tensions are solved sooner or later through negotiations. They sometimes end up in open crises. There are several explanations. First, opera houses face the same labour relations and management problems as any firm with large workforces – which is what they are even though their staff often have highly specialist skills. But their specificity also lies in the great diversity of specializations, skills, levels of responsibility and hierarchical levels to be found. In restricted geographical spaces – opera houses, stages, rehearsal rooms, orchestra pits – coexist men and women with highly diverse talents, from the divas to the stage technicians, via the musicians and chorus singers; all have clearly defined roles to play

in production and performance, with widely varying working and pay conditions.

The greater the vertical integration, that is, the greater number of permanently employed people, the greater the associated variety and complexity. The quality, precision and credibility of management play a major role in an opera house's labor relations.

Union's organizations vary from country to country, and from opera house to opera house as the negotiation processes differ across continents, given the social history and traditions of each individual country. They vary greatly, but unions or corporate bodies are present everywhere. Agreements between management and employee representatives can be local, regional or, as in Germany, for example, national in scope. Negotiation is no easier in North America than in Europe, but the comparative duration of agreements has its value. Four-year agreements are not unusual in the USA, where negotiations may be tough but once agreements are signed they are generally respected as long as they are in force. The quality, precision and credibility of management play a major role in an opera house's labour relations.

Unsuccessful industrial negotiations develop into open, public crises when they jeopardize operations or quite simply bring them to a standstill through strikes or a lockout.

In 1980, a conflict between the management at the Metropolitan Opera and the orchestral representatives caused an 11-week closure. The management had given its consent in principle to the orchestra's negotiators for reduction of the mandatory number of weekly performances from five to four, but then went back to its initial position. The stalemate was such that the management decided to close the opera house until an agreement was reached. Joseph Volpe has told the tale (Volpe, 2006, pp. 82–91) of how he came to be the management's chief negotiator even though his responsibilities did not cover relations with the orchestra. Unusually, the then US President Jimmy Carter designated a federal mediator, Wayne Horvitz, to help find a solution. The initial consent by management was confirmed and the musicians agreed to an extra four hours of rehearsal time per week. The season opened on 10 December with Mahler's second symphony: Volpe takes care to remind his readers that "Resurrection" is the subtitle of this symphony.

Twenty years later in Paris, strikes prevented over 30 performances from taking place or taking place in normal conditions, in the specifically French context of the move to a 35 working hours per week new public law. The year 2000 had got off to a good start for the orchestra "the most important man in opera", as Hugues Gall used to say, then for

the ballet and the chorus who received improved wages following the pay rises that had been awarded to the choirs and orchestras of Radio France. This led all the other categories of personnel to seek new benefits in terms of working hours and pay. The government appointed a mediator, Daniel Lejeune, and an agreement to end the crisis was reached on 21 December 2000. It was to cost €10 million (Agid and Tarondeau, 2006, pp. 240–2).

3. What do we learn from these crises?

Many among the described crises have had positive results

At the Opéra National de Paris, the 1989–94 crisis ends up with an in-depth reshuffling of the previous and negative interferences between the opera house and the national state administration. It becomes clear that from 1994, there is only one boss in charge of the house, and management professionalism becomes the key word. After the Hugues Gall era, this vision and the newly designed by-laws are equally well received by Gérard Mortier and, today, by Nicolas Joel. At Covent Garden, the board of trustees is more than ever aware of its overall strategic responsibility on the Royal Opera House future, and this is solemnly written in the annual review 2007–08. The different entities of the Royal Opera House are now under the board's full responsibility. Never again should negative events of the sort of the 1995–97 period ever occur. At La Scala, the board decided to put an end to the Sovrintendente/musical director conflict and offered full artistic and financial responsibilities to Stéphane Lissner.

Lack of forward planning is a frequent and decisive cause of crisis

This is one of the major explanations for crisis situations in opera houses. While at the Liceu after 1994, at Covent Garden in 1995 and at La Scala after 2002, the time required for renovation work was assessed realistically and the schedule was respected, in London the agreements for the alternative venues to be used during the closure were signed too late. This lack of forward planning triggered a series of consequences that led to a financial crisis, and before long a governance crisis. In Paris, many of the aspects of opening the new Bastille opera were not anticipated: they included teething difficulties with the new stage technologies, the running costs of stage and scenery facilities, division of roles between Opéra Bastille and Palais Garnier, the need for stable,

professional organization, and the emergence of labour tensions that were costly to resolve – all on top of governance problems.

The strictly financial aspect of these crises is often spectacular – but it is more a reflection of the lack of forward planning than a cause in itself. However, disrupted environments such as that of the period following the events of 9/11 in the USA, or economic crises such as the one that began in 2008, can have a significant effect on opera house funding – no doubt more so in North America than in Europe.

Construction and reconstruction of new theatres and new stage facilities are central to several European crises

The size and design of the auditorium/stage areas exert major influences on artistic, commercial and financial issues of an opera house or company. At the Liceu, Covent Garden, and La Scala later, it was decided to design and completely rebuild the stages and back stage areas with new technologies that increased productivity. All three auditoriums were preserved in their original form, but repainted, redecorated and air-conditioned. As luck would have it, they were sufficiently large for commercial operation to be viable. In Paris in 1989, there was no explicit political choice to locate all opera production activities at the new Bastille theatre, but the scale of the ballet company's activities justified keeping the ballet at the Palais Garnier. In 1994, Hugues Gall proposed a compromise of presenting opera and dance in both theatres. In Lyon in the early 1990s, reconstruction of a new opera house, adding an attractive external architecture but making no changes to the dimensions of the stage and auditorium, is now seen to be inappropriate: the stage lacks back stage and wing space, and the auditorium is notorious for being too small. Doubt exists about the future seating capacity of the Berlin's Staatsoper to be rebuilt between 2010 and 2012.

Governance effectiveness is nearly always a problem

Weak governance bodies have difficulty in preparing for changes considered necessary, and this is where we find a lack of forward planning; serious crises then reveal their weaknesses. Conversely, strong enough governance methods and responsible managers/board members or trustees can turn awkward situations around.

In Europe, it is quite normal for crises to be settled by the city administrations or regional or national authorities, regardless of whether the opera houses have their own governance bodies. At the Royal Opera House, the authorities did not merely appoint new managers, they

required a complete change of board and management. The Covent Garden crisis of late 1998 is unusual in the creation and role played by the Parliamentary Select Committee, its powers of investigation and its freedom to make recommendations.

The rules of the game are different in France and Germany. In Paris between 1989 and 1994, and in Berlin since 2003, political leaders – the government in France, the mayor and the Berlin Senate in Germany – have had the power to appoint opera house managers because of their crucial involvement in funding. The main evolution in the Opéra National de Paris crisis-solving process of 1994 was not only for the government to choose a professional new director, but also to accept the new governance rules he proposed. Would these new rules not have been accepted, Hugues Gall would have refused the Opéra National de Paris management. In Leipzig, the mayor settled the conflict between Henri Maier and Riccardo Chailly. In Berlin, the future is open.

In the Geneva Grand Théâtre crisis, two issues have to be considered separately. One was the interference between the foundation board's and the city of Geneva's responsibilities in managing the conflict. This interference is supposed to be overcome. The other is the existing and remaining situation created by a part of the staff under a city status when the other part is managed under the foundation's own rules. Similar examples exist in different European countries.

In the American opera houses, the boards rule supreme. Intervention by a Parliamentary committee, a government or the federal state would appear pointless today although cities, states and the federal state itself are attentive to crises (the New York Metropolitan in 1980, Los Angeles Opera in 2009–10). In the USA, prevention and management of crises depends on the trustees' judgement and management qualities, often on their unity, sometimes on their doubts.

Communication on crises in opera houses unsurprisingly directs the spotlight at their managers. The end of a crisis almost always coincides with the appointment of new managers, who are handed these *édifices complexes* and expected to put the house in order.