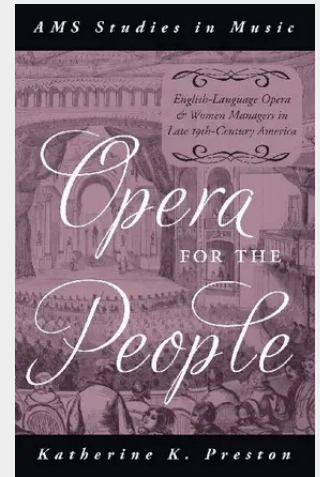


## Opera for the People

English-Language Opera and Women Managers in Late 19th-Century America

Opera for the People is an in-depth examination of a forgotten chapter in American social and cultural history: the love affair that middle-class Americans had with continental opera (translated into English) in the 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s. Author Katherine Preston reveals how-contrary to the existing historiography on the American musical culture of this period-English-language opera not only flourished in the United States during this time, but found its success significantly bolstered by the support of women impresarios, prima-donnas, managers, and philanthropists who provided financial backing to opera companies. This rich and compelling study details the lives and professional activities of several important players in American postbellum opera, including manager Effie Ober, philanthropist Jeannette Thurber, and performers/artistic directors Caroline Richings, Euphrosyne Parepa-Rosa, Clara Louise Kellogg, and "the people's prima donna" Emma Abbott. Drawing from an impressive range of primary sources, including contemporaneous music and theater periodicals, playbills, memoirs, librettos, scores, and reviews and commentary on the performances in digitized newspapers, Preston tells the story of how these and other women influenced the activities of some of the more than one hundred opera companies touring the United States during the second half of the 19th century, performing opera in English for a diverse range of audiences. Countering a pervasive and misguided historical understanding of opera reception in the United States-unduly influenced by modern attitudes about the genre as elite, exclusive, expensive, and of interest only to a niche market-Opera for the People demonstrates the important (and hitherto unsuspected) place of opera in the rich cornucopia of late-century American musical theatre, which would eventually lead to the emergence of American musical comedy.

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