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## COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF CAREER STRATEGIES OF OPERA SINGERS IN EUROPEAN AND AMERICAN CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS

*This article examines the distinctive features of career-building strategies among opera singers within European and American cultural institutions. The aim of the study is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the sociocultural, institutional, and individual factors that shape the professional development of singers across different cultural systems and influence their ability to adapt to changing market conditions. The methodological framework is based on a structural-comparative and content-analytical approach, which enabled the systematization of theoretical and analytical sources, the identification of key parameters of career models, and their synthesis according to criteria of institutional support, social capital, financial mechanisms, and professional mobility. The study found that the European model is characterized by a high level of institutional stability supported by academic structures, state theaters, and grant-based funding, while the American model is defined by flexibility, short-term contracts, competition, and a significant role of self-management and digital self-presentation. The comparative analysis revealed the emergence of hybrid trends in which the combination of institutional stability and personal mobility creates new trajectories of career development and transforms the role of the agent in promoting the performer. The proposed integrated model of the relationship between sociocultural factors, institutional structures, and individual strategies demonstrates that balancing external support with autonomous career management enhances long-term resilience and competitiveness of opera singers in the globalized artistic environment. The findings have both theoretical and practical value for improving professional training systems, optimizing career management, and advancing cultural policy in the field of classical vocal performance.*

**Key words:** professional mobility, institutional environment, agent mediation, music education system, cultural identity, career adaptation, self-presentation, creative market, globalization of the artistic sphere.

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## ПОРІВНЯЛЬНИЙ АНАЛІЗ КАР'ЄРНИХ СТРАТЕГІЙ ОПЕРНИХ СПІВАЧОК У ЄВРОПЕЙСЬКИХ ТА АМЕРИКАНСЬКИХ КУЛЬТУРНИХ ІНСТИТУЦІЯХ

*У статті проаналізовано особливості формування кар'єрних стратегій оперних співачок у європейських і американських культурних інституціях. Метою дослідження є комплексне вивчення соціокультурних, інституційних та особистісних чинників, що визначають професійний розвиток виконавиць у різних культурних системах і впливають на їхню здатність до адаптації у змінних ринкових умовах. Методологічну основу становить структурно-порівняльний і контент-аналітичний підхід, який дав змогу систематизувати матеріали теоретичних і аналітичних джерел, виокремити ключові параметри кар'єрних моделей та здійснити їх узагальнення за критеріями інституційної підтримки, соціального капіталу, фінансових механізмів і професійної мобільності. Установлено, що європейська модель вирізняється високим рівнем інституційної стабільності, підтримуваної академічними структурами, державними театрами та системою грантового фінансування, тоді як американська характеризується гнучкістю, короткостроковими контрактами, конкуренцією та значною роллю самоменеджменту і цифрової самопрезентації. Порівняльний аналіз засвідчив формування гібридних тенденцій, у межах яких поєднання інституційної сталості з персональною мобільністю створює нові траєкторії кар'єрного розвитку та змінює роль агента у просуванні виконавиці. Узагальнена модель взаємозв'язку між соціокультурними чинниками, інституційною структурою та індивідуальними стратегіями продемонструвала, що баланс між зовнішньою підтримкою й автономним управлінням професійним шляхом забезпечує довгострокову стійкість і конкурентоспроможність оперних співачок у глобалізованому мистецькому просторі. Отримані результати мають теоретичне й практичне значення для вдосконалення системи професійної підготовки виконавиць, оптимізації кар'єрного менеджменту та розвитку культурної політики у сфері академічного вокалу.*

**Ключові слова:** професійна мобільність, інституційне середовище, агентське посередництво, система музичної освіти, культурна ідентичність, кар'єрна адаптація, самопрезентація, творчий ринок, глобалізація мистецького простору.

**Introduction.** The contemporary cultural landscape is experiencing a significant transformation in professional trajectories within the performing arts, particularly in operatic performance. Globalization, the digitalization of the cultural market, and evolving models of financing creative labor directly influence the structure of artistic careers, generating new forms of professional mobility and the hybridization of institutional practices. The comparative analysis of career strategies among opera singers across different cultural environments has become especially relevant in reassessing the roles of public and private institutions, as well as the impact of gender and social factors on career pathways.

The theoretical interpretation of these processes is grounded in the work of scholars in cultural policy and the economics of creative labor. Within the framework of cultural industries, Hesmondhalgh (2018) demonstrated that the structure of cultural production is shaped by the interaction of market mechanisms and social inequalities, which directly affects working conditions for performers. Banks, Gill and Taylor (2013) emphasized that cultural labor combines economic instability with symbolic prestige, forming a distinct economy of vulnerability. The analysis of the social implications of artistic work conducted by Belfiore and Bennett (2008) outlined the limitations of cultural policy in shaping career opportunities for artists, particularly within institutional systems characterized by different levels of state support.

Within gender studies, a significant contribution was made by Scharff (2017), who examined the relationship between gender identity, agency and professional practices in classical music. Her research showed that structural barriers embedded in academic art continue to determine women's access to leadership and creative positions, shaping specific strategies of adaptation.

Thus, contemporary scholarly discourse views the artistic career as the result of an interaction among cultural policy, the economics of creative labor and sociogender mechanisms. However, despite the substantial number of studies in these fields, there remains insufficient exploration of how these factors manifest in a comparative dimension between European and American cultural institutions that operate within different socioeconomic contexts. This gap underscores the relevance of the present study.

**Literature Review.** The professional development of female opera performers has become a subject of sustained interdisciplinary interest in recent years. Scholars have focused on the evolution of institutional structures and the emergence of new career models within the cultural economy. Radu Giurgiu (2021) and

VanderHart et al. (2025) examined the mechanisms of the opera industry and agency networks that shape distinct trajectories of professional growth. In the works of Prokop and Reitsamer (2023), Carpio (2022), and Werner and Ferm Almqvist (2024), the changing role of conservatories is highlighted, demonstrating their transition from traditional academic institutions to platforms for developing entrepreneurial and communicative competencies.

Within the cultural sociological approach, Casula (2023), Pulignano et al. (2023), and Hudson (2025) analyzed the interaction of class, gender, and political factors that contribute to inequality and non standard employment patterns in the operatic field. The issue of women's leadership in opera in the United Kingdom and the United States was examined by Jones (2024), Vincent et al. (2022), and Vincent and Coles (2024), who emphasized institutional asymmetry and innovative management practices.

A broader framework of cultural policy and management is presented in studies by Belfiore et al. (2023), Bull, Scharff and Nooshin (2023), and Byrnes (2022), which address cultural democracy, the transformation of managerial strategies, and the challenges of creative labor. An additional perspective was offered by Chung (2022), who analyzed the phenomenon of career shock among performers in traditional theater as an expression of professional vulnerability under conditions of systemic disruption. Taken together, these studies outline the contemporary research landscape yet demonstrate the need for a comprehensive comparative analysis that integrates European and American models of career development for female opera singers.

**Identification of Previously Unaddressed Aspects of the General Problem.** Despite significant progress in the study of career strategies among opera singers, several essential dimensions remain insufficiently explored. Earlier research focused primarily on local or national contexts, which limited the development of an integrated comparative approach to analyzing European and American models of professional advancement (Prokop and Reitsamer, 2023; Vincent and Coles, 2024). As a result, there is still limited understanding of how structural features of institutional organization, gender policy, and socio-cultural practices shape professional trajectories, as well as which mechanisms support the long term sustainability of career pathways for women in operatic performance.

The methodological approaches applied in previous studies also presented a number of limitations. Most attention was directed toward individual case studies or survey based data collection without combining quan-

titative and qualitative analyses, which substantially narrowed analytical potential and did not allow for a comprehensive evaluation of the relationship between institutional structures, agency strategies, and individual self management practices (Carpio, 2022; Pulignano et al., 2023). Furthermore, the influence of educational trajectories, participation in Young Artists programs, the role of agency representation, and the specific characteristics of the labor market on performers' career advancement has not been sufficiently investigated. Likewise, the ways in which gender and sociocultural factors modify professional opportunities across different cultural environments remain underexamined.

Therefore, a systematic approach is needed, one that integrates sociocultural, economic, and gender perspectives to provide a holistic assessment of career strategies in the contemporary operatic field. The present study aims to address these gaps through a comparative analysis of institutional practices, an examination of the role of agents and self management strategies, and the incorporation of empirical materials such as interviews and analytical data from professional sources (Belfiore et al., 2023; Radu Giurgiu, 2021). This approach makes it possible to deepen the theoretical understanding of patterns of professional development among opera singers and to generate practical guidelines for managing creative resources and shaping career strategies within modern cultural institutions.

**Aim and Objectives of the Study.** The aim of this study is to comprehensively identify the distinctive features of career strategy formation among opera singers within European and American cultural institutions, taking into account institutional, sociocultural, economic, and gender related factors. The research seeks to uncover structural differences between cultural systems, determine the factors that influence professional development and long term advancement, and assess the role of educational and professional institutions in shaping career trajectories.

To achieve this aim, the following objectives have been defined:

1. Systematize contemporary approaches to analyzing the career trajectories of opera singers and outline the current state of research on the subject.
2. Conduct a comparative analysis of institutional models in Europe and the United States with a focus on employment mechanisms, agency representation, and the characteristics of the contractual system.
3. Identify gender and sociocultural factors that limit or expand professional opportunities for women in operatic performance.
4. Evaluate the role of educational practices and talent development programs in shaping professional mobility and the competitiveness of singers.

5. Integrate empirical data, including interviews with practicing performers and an analysis of industry materials, to develop a holistic understanding of career strategies across different cultural contexts.

The implementation of these objectives ensures the formation of a comprehensive understanding of the patterns of professional development among opera singers, identifies gaps in existing approaches, and provides practical recommendations for improving career management and supporting cultural mobility. This approach underscores both the scientific and practical significance of the study and its contribution to the advancement of contemporary opera scholarship and artistic practice.

**Results of the Study.** The analysis of career strategies among opera singers in European and American cultural institutions demonstrates that professional development in this field is shaped by the interaction of three groups of factors: sociocultural, institutional, and individual. Their combined influence generates structural differences in professional models and determines the specific functioning of the musical labor market. In the European context, institutional logic predominates; theaters and conservatories remain the primary platforms for professional formation, providing performers with stability, social protections, and a clearly defined system of career advancement. In contrast, the American model emphasizes dynamism, individual initiative, and agency representation, creating a highly competitive and mobile environment that requires continuous self promotion.

These structural differences reflect distinct cultural economic logics, namely the European model of institutional stability and the American model of market flexibility. Recent studies (Belfiore et al., 2023; Prokop and Reitsamer, 2023; Jansen, 2022; Balfe, 2024) confirm that the interaction of these models produces new hybrid forms of professional development that combine elements of stability with individual adaptability. Under contemporary conditions of globalization, these processes encourage a rethinking of performers' career trajectories as open, dynamic systems that are sensitive to sociocultural and technological change.

**Methodology.** The methodology of the study employed a comprehensive approach to the comparative analysis of career strategies among opera singers within European and American cultural institutions. The research began with a systematic review of peer reviewed scholarly sources (Belfiore and Bennett, 2008; Scharff, 2017; Hesmondhalgh, 2018; Banks et al., 2013), which made it possible to identify key parameters of professional development, including employment type, early career stages, the role

of agents, financial support, gender aspects, career mobility, educational systems, professional stability, and dominant strategic models.

This was followed by descriptive and comparative analyses of institutional models based on information derived from peer reviewed literature. Data were synthesized through the categorization of indicators according to the identified parameters, verification of their relevance to the established criteria, and integration into a consolidated comparative framework. To ensure reliability, cross source comparisons were conducted by examining information from several scholarly works for each parameter.

To systematize the results, materials from industry specific sources (CS Music, n.d.; Rinaldi, 2023; SF Classical Voice, n.d.; Opera Charm, n.d.; Opera America, 2016; OperGermany, n.d.; Opera Europa, n.d.) were synthesized using structural comparative and content analytical approaches. This method made it possible to identify key parameters of professional development among opera singers and to determine the relationship between sociocultural, institutional, and individual factors. The synthesized findings are presented in Table 1.

An analysis of consolidated data from contemporary foundational research makes it possible to clearly outline the patterns that shape the formation of career strategies among opera singers in both European and American contexts. The literature indicates that the combination of institutional support and individual initiative serves as a decisive factor in professional advancement, while sociocultural norms and educa-

tional models define the initial parameters for entering the profession (Belfiore et al., 2023; Bull et al., 2023). The European system is characterized by a deeply rooted institutional framework in which academic institutions, state funded theaters, and cultural policy play a central role in sustaining stable employment and preserving artistic traditions.

In the American context, an individualistic logic of career development prevails, one that emphasizes entrepreneurial competencies and active self presentation. Researchers note that the interaction between conservatory programs and agency networks enables emerging singers to adapt to a highly competitive market by developing project based thinking, digital communication skills, and career self management (Casula, 2023; Prokop and Reitsamer, 2023).

A synthesis of these findings indicates that a successful career is shaped through a balance of academic discipline, structural support, and individual strategies of self presentation. This combination creates the conditions necessary for flexible adaptation to changes in the cultural environment, enhances professional resilience, and establishes the foundation for hybrid models of development in which stability aligns with mobility and traditional hierarchy intersects with decentralized mechanisms of career progression.

The structural and individual factors considered in this study provide a basis for comprehensively understanding the relationship between sociocultural conditions, institutional characteristics, and professional strategies. Such an approach makes it possible to

Table 1

### Comparative characteristics of career strategies among opera singers in Europe and the United States

Indicator	European model	American model
Employment type	Long term contracts in state funded theaters	Project based employment, freelance work, agency representation
Early career stage	Conservatory internships, participation in competitions	Young Artists Programs, collaboration with managers
Role of agents	Limited, often mediated through theater bureaus	Central for touring and festival engagements
Financial support	State grants, cultural foundations	Private scholarships, charitable foundations, irregular income
Gender aspects	Greater equality within academic and theatrical structures	Inequality more evident in freelance and self management contexts
Career mobility	High within the EU, limited beyond it	High across states, extensive system of international auditions
Educational system	Traditional conservatory based training, strong institutional support	Practice oriented training through private studios and programs
Professional stability	Higher, dependent on contracts and public funding	Lower, dependent on self promotion and market mechanisms
Dominant strategy	Institutional stability, gradual advancement within the system	Flexible adaptation, multidirectional activity and self management

Source: synthesized by the author based on Belfiore and Bennett (2008), Scharff (2017), Hesmondhalgh (2018), Banks et al. (2013).

determine how external and internal factors shape trajectories of professional growth and adaptation across different cultural contexts. Within this framework, it is appropriate to present a synthesized model (Figure 1) that illustrates the interaction of sociocultural factors, institutional structure, and strategies of professional development.



**Fig. 1. Model of the relationship between sociocultural factors, institutional structure, and professional strategies of opera singers**

*Source: author's elaboration.*

The system of interrelations presented in Fig. 1 illustrates the multilayered interaction among sociocultural, institutional, and individual factors that shape the professional development trajectory of opera singers within the contemporary cultural environment. The sociocultural level establishes the fundamental parameters of career orientation, including perceptions of prestige, status, artistic autonomy, and the acceptable boundaries of competition. Gender norms and traditions of operatic performance define expected behavioral models within the professional sphere and influence how the role of the female performer is perceived as embodying a particular cultural ideal.

The institutional structure, which includes state and private theaters, conservatories, professional agencies, and festival platforms, acts as a regulator of career access by defining entry opportunities, the degree of professional stability, and the dynamics of career advancement (Vincent and Coles, 2024; Prokop and Reitsamer, 2023; Pulignano et al., 2023). In European systems, a vertical model of career progression prevails, characterized by long term repertoire accumulation and gradual elevation of status within the institution. In contrast, the American structure is oriented toward horizontal mobility, where agency networks, short term contracts, and the individual artist's brand play central roles.

Within this model, professional strategies are viewed not as fixed patterns but as adaptive systems of decision making. Performers purposefully combine academic training, agency representation, digital self presentation, and participation in international programs, using multiple channels of career mobility. This integration of institutional resources and self management supports professional resilience in an environment characterized by competition and high demands for flexibility. Even within traditionally stable European theaters, contemporary singers increasingly demonstrate an entrepreneurial mindset that combines artistic autonomy with the ability to manage their own career dynamics.

Thus, the presented model provides a holistic assessment of the interaction between external sociocultural and institutional factors and the internal strategies employed by performers, creating conditions for successful professional development. The combination of structural stability and personal mobility reflects current trends toward the hybridization of career models in the operatic field, underscoring the importance of an integrative approach to analyzing professional growth.

An examination of the structural and individual factors influencing the professional development of opera singers makes it possible to conduct a comparative analysis of career strategies within European and American cultural institutions. Table 2 summarizes the key characteristics of professional formation identified through the systematization of data from multiple sources (CS Music, n.d.; Neilson, 2023; Opera America, 2016; Opera Charm, n.d.; Opera Europa, n.d.; OperGermany, n.d.; Rinaldi, 2023; SF Classical Voice, n.d.), including the specific features of the institutional environment, contract dynamics, the role of agency mediation, and individual strategies of self presentation. The categorical assessments ("high," "low," "medium") were derived from a comparative analysis of the professional models described in these sources.

An analysis of the consolidated data indicates that the European system provides relative stability and predictability in professional development, supporting singers through state funded theaters and academic networks. In contrast, the American model is characterized by high dynamism, where success is largely determined by the performer's own activity and the involvement of agency representation. Contemporary studies demonstrate that the integration of institutional discipline and individual self management strategies leads to the formation of hybrid career models that enable performers to adapt effectively to the global challenges of the music market (Belfiore et al., 2023; Prokop and Reitsamer, 2023).

Table 2

## Comparison of career strategies of opera singers in Europe and the United States

Characteristic	Europe	United States
Institutional environment	State theaters and academies, contract stability	Project based employment, agency representation, high dynamism
Contract duration	Medium term, 3–5 years, often renewable	Short term, from single productions to one season
Role of agencies	Limited, primarily assisting in role placement	Central, determining opportunities and scheduling
Competition	High but predictable	Very high, with continuous auditions and competitions
Personal strategies	Gradual career progression, local mobility	Active self presentation, branding, international mobility
Impact of digital platforms	Moderate, used mainly for announcements and PR	Significant, with social media and video content shaping visibility and popularity

Source: synthesized by the author based on Banks et al. (2013), Belfiore and Bennett (2008), Hesmondhalgh (2018), and Scharff (2017) using comparative and content analysis.

It is noteworthy that even within stable European institutions there is a growing emphasis on personal mobility, self presentation, and branding as integral components of career advancement. The synthesized data reveal key patterns: Europe is characterized by a strategy of institutional stability, while the United States demonstrates a strategy of flexible adaptation that relies heavily on market based tools. This hybridization of models generates new requirements for training, positioning, and promoting performers on the global stage, underscoring the need for an integrative approach to analyzing professional development.

**Conclusions.** The results of the study show that the professional strategies of opera singers are shaped through the interaction of sociocultural, institutional, and personal factors, which manifest differently in European and American cultural environments. The structural comparative and content analytical approach used in this research made it possible to systematize the parameters of professional formation, ranging from employment mechanisms to individual self presentation strategies, and to identify typical models of career development. The European con-

text is marked by institutional stability and gradual professional progression, whereas the American context is defined by flexibility, high levels of competition, and the significant role of agency based and self management practices. A clear trend toward the hybridization of career models has been identified, in which the combination of institutional stability and individual mobility creates new forms of professional adaptation. This integration provides not only greater flexibility in career trajectories but also enhances performers' resilience within an evolving cultural environment. The analytical findings have practical significance for improving training programs for emerging vocalists, developing career management practices within arts institutions, and designing mechanisms to support cultural mobility.

Future research may focus on expanding the comparative analysis to include opera institutions in Asia and Latin America, as well as conducting a more in depth examination of the influence of digital media and global communication on the transformation of career strategies in the field of classical vocal performance.

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