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*Abstract*

Taking the example of Jacques Offenbach's arrangement of Gaetano Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore* for violoncello solo, the article discusses the nature and function of this popular genre of adaptations and contextualises it in debates on the authority of musical texts: how nineteenth-century music, and operatic music in particular, is to be understood in the context of the use different people made of it in a variety of cultural settings, from the private home and the salon to the concert hall. The article argues that in order to fully understand opera in nineteenth-century European culture, scholars have to take account of opera being performed offstage, in multiple forms and functions. Exploring Offenbach's interest in Donizetti, the article shows how operatic music penetrated and impacted different ways of making and consuming music beyond the theatre. Arrangements of Donizetti's many operas, written during a career that span just over two decades, offer a prime example for such an investigation.