

## Pauline Viardot (1821-1910): An Overview of the Writings

Few women in the nineteenth century had more renown than Pauline Viardot. This polymath artist, a singer, composer, teacher, pianist, salonnière, art collector, and epistolarian, made music a weapon of cultural diplomacy, rallying around her person, whether in salons or on tours, the flower of musical, artistic, and political Europe in her times.

Though Viardot's corpus of public writings is slim indeed, her abundant private correspondence reflects a substantial investment in the written word, one that extended throughout her life. As far as we know, Viardot wrote for the public on only a handful of occasions, each time in order to affirm the principles of her teaching. In 1875, she explained her reasons for leaving her professorial post at the Paris Conservatoire in [a letter of resignation](#) addressed both to the Director, Ambroise Thomas, and to the press. This letter, published notably in the *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* and *Le Ménestrel*, would remain her most significant public statement. In 1880, she published with Heugel a singing manual, [Une heure d'étude : exercices pour voix de femme](#), prefacing the exercises used at the Conservatoire with a series of recommendations for her students. Finally, in the last years of her life, Viardot agreed to discuss her memories in the press, resulting notably in interviews published in *Le Temps* in 1900 and [Le Gaulois in 1905](#), which afford precious glimpses at her domestic and artistic life.

By contrast, Viardot's private writings (correspondence, diaries, notebooks, etc.) are rich and highly interesting for historians and musicologists. The correspondence reveals first of all the cosmopolitanism of this polyglot artist, equally at ease in French, English, German, Italian, and Spanish, and well-connected in various musical, intellectual, and political circles around Europe. It also reveals the republican political engagement of the Viardot couple and implicitly relays the feminist aspirations of her great friend George Sand. Viardot's hundreds of letters are mainly held in archives in Europe and the USA: the Bibliothèque nationale de France (Papiers de Pauline Viardot xix-xx<sup>e</sup> siècle), the Paris Conservatoire (Fonds Viardot-Duvernoy), and the Houghton Library of Harvard University (Le Cesne Collection–Pauline Viardot Garcia Papers, 1836–1905 and Bonyngé-Sutherland Collection–Pauline Viardot Garcia Additional Papers, 1838–1912).

Though the great majority of her known letters remains unpublished at present, the partial edition of her correspondence with Ivan Turgenev, George Sand, Charles Gounod, Julius Rietz, and Clara Schumann, has shed new light on her agency in the musical and cultural life of the nineteenth century. Henri Granjard and Alexandre Zviguilsky have reconstructed over forty years of artistic, literary, and political friendship between Turgenev and the Viardots, and the research of Thérèse Marix-

Spire has illuminated the quasi-filial relationship between Viardot and George Sand. [This latter correspondence](#), particularly rich, depicts the torments of Parisian society in the 1840s and confides the artistic, musical, political, social, and familial questions shared by two of the greatest artists of the century. Mélanie von Goldbeck's edition of the correspondence between Viardot and Gounod shows the extent of Viardot's role as a mentor, as well as the importance of their artistic collaboration for the genesis of the opera *Sapho*.

In recent years, edition projects of Viardot's correspondence have been picking up speed. [Her correspondence with Clara Schumann](#), edited by Désirée Wittkowski (2020), reveals a friendship of nearly sixty years and immerses the reader in the intertwined musical and familial worlds of these two artists. [The volume of letters between Viardot and the German conductor Julius Rietz](#), edited by Beatrix Borchard and Miriam-Alexandra Wigbers in 2021, is monumental both in size (663 pages) and in the number of anecdotes, many of them previously unknown, shared by Viardot with one of her closest confidants.

Other notable publications include the *Cahiers Ivan Tourguéniev, Pauline Viardot, Maria Malibran*, which in thirty-five instalments between 1977 and 2021, made available many letters to or from Viardot; her occasional correspondents included Eugène Delacroix, Pavel Annenkov, Gustave Flaubert, Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, and Jules Massenet. In her biographical work *Pauline Viardot au miroir de sa correspondance* (2008), Michèle Friang offers an anthology of selected letters that afford readers a glimpse into Viardot's sociability and intellectual-artistic world.

Since 2012, Christin Heitmann's online database [Pauline Viardot: Systematisch-bibliographisches Werkverzeichnis](#) (VWV) has catalogued Viardot's compositional and editorial work and made accessible a larger number of manuscript and printed sources. It complements the catalogue [The Musical Works of Pauline Viardot-Garcia \(1821-1910\)](#) by Patrick Waddington and Nicholas Žekulin, published online in a revised and expanded edition by the University of Calgary (2013).

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### **Further Reading**

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