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French music in the XIXth century

Arthur Hervey



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PREFACE

It is not the fashion nowadays to write long prefaces, any more than it is for composers to prefix long overtures to their operas. In the latter case, a short prelude is usually deemed sufficient, and some musicians even dispense altogether with an introduction and plunge at once *in medias res*. My sole purpose in making a few introductory remarks is to explain what my object in writing this volume has been, and so avoid possible misconception.

Briefly, then, I have endeavoured to take a bird's-eye view of the musical movement in France during the past century, dwelling chiefly on those composers whose influence has been most marked, those who have brought something new into their music and have contributed to the evolution of the art.

Music in France really means music in Paris, for although the great towns of the Departments

Preface

have of late shown signs of an increasing interest in the art, yet the capital has been, and is still, the musical centre of the country.

France has no provincial musical Festivals similar to ours. Long-winded oratorios do not appeal to Frenchmen. The theatre is more to their taste, and thus it is that music in France chiefly relates to music connected with the drama. From Méhul and Boïeldieu to Bruneau and Charpentier is a far cry, yet these composers have this much in common, that their music is eminently national and characteristic of their country.

Joseph and *La Dame Blanche* are as essentially French in style as are *L'Attaque du Moulin* and *Louise*.

Paris has been the birthplace of some of the most famous operas. It has ever been a recognised centre of art. Many celebrated composers of other lands have been attracted by its splendours and have brought thither the fruits of their genius, notably Lulli, Gluck, Piccinni, Sacchini, Salieri, Cherubini, Spontini, Rossini, Meyerbeer, Donizetti. Wagner himself endeavoured in his early days to win the favour of Paris.

Preface

In the meanwhile, French composers have manfully held their own, and in late years there has sprung up a school of musicians, admirably equipped for the fray, ready to do honour to their country.

The growth of musical intelligence has indeed been recently everywhere apparent. The Russian school, now so important, is only of comparatively recent birth. In England the outlook is much brighter than it was. Since the early days of what Mr. Fuller Maitland terms the Renaissance, great progress has been made, and we have many talented composers who are only waiting for opportunities to show what they are capable of doing. The concert-rooms are open to them. Unfortunately, so far, they are practically debarred from competing with their foreign colleagues in the field of opera, as London is still devoid of a national opera-house. Signs are happily not lacking that this want may some day be met.

In Paris it is different. The opera there forms part of the people's existence, and no Government would ever think of refusing to subsidise the two principal theatres where it is cultivated. The magnificent operatic harvest that has been gathered in Paris during the past century is eloquent of

Preface

the good that accrues from State intervention and speaks volumes in favour of Government subventions. It also points triumphantly to the great part taken by the French in the musical movement of the age.

During the first decade of the century, when Napoleon was autocrat, the muse was clad in a severe, classical garb and had as her spokesmen in Paris, Méhul with his *Joseph*, a masterpiece of classic beauty, Lesueur, with his long since forgotten *Les Bardes*, Spontini with *La Vestale*. Boïeldieu and Nicolo followed during the next decade with some of their *opéras comiques*, the former writing *Jean de Paris*, the latter *Joconde*.

A formidable advance was made during the twenties. Rossini, who had conquered in Italy, arrived in Paris and surpassed his former works with his *Guillaume Tell*, a supreme effort, after which he felt justified in laying down his pen. Auber's *La Muette de Portici* created as great a sensation as *Guillaume Tell*, which it preceded by a year; and Boïeldieu produced his best work, the classic *Dame Blanche*. On the other hand Berlioz, young, ardent and armed from head to foot, sprang wildly into the arena, and with his

Preface

“Symphonie Fantastique” struck dismay into the hearts of the older musicians, and revolutionised the orchestra.

Mille huit cent trente brought with it another change of régime, witnessed the development of the romantic movement, and inaugurated what has been termed the golden era of the Opéra. During the next ten years were brought out at the Grand Opéra, Meyerbeer's *Robert le Diable* and *Les Huguenots*, Halévy's *La Juive* and *Guido e Ginevra*, Auber's *Le Philtre* and *Gustave III.*; while at the Opéra Comique were produced several of the best works of Auber, *Le Domino Noir*, *Fra Diavolo*, and of Hérold, *Zampa*, *Le Pré aux Clercs*. Donizetti's *La Favorite*, Halévy's *La Reine de Chypre*, *Charles VI.*, *Les Mousquetaires de la Reine*, *Le Val d'Andorre*, Meyerbeer's *Le Prophète* belong to the forties, and it was before the abdication of the citizen king that Berlioz produced his *Damnation de Faust* with scant success, and that Félicien David leapt into fame with *Le Désert*. César Franck's *Ruth* also dates from this time.

The second half of the century was signalled by the appearance of Gounod, who in the course of the fifties brought out his *Sapho*, *La Nonne*

Preface

Sanglante, *Le Médecin malgré lui*, and, finally, *Faust*. Meyerbeer in the meanwhile made an incursion into the domain of the Opéra Comique with *L'Etoile du Nord* and *Le Pardon de Ploërmel* (*Dinorah*).

Gounod was again greatly to the fore during the sixties with his *Philémon et Baucis*, *La Reine de Saba*, *Mireille*, and *Roméo et Juliette*; Meyerbeer's posthumous opera *L'Africaine* was brought out; Ambroise Thomas triumphed with *Mignon* and *Hamlet*, while Berlioz obtained but a *succès d'estime* with *Les Troyens*; Mermet's *Roland à Roncevaux*, a spectacular opera, obtained a passing vogue; Verdi's *Don Carlos* was produced, and Bizet made his *début* with *Les Pêcheurs de Perles* and *La Jolie Fille de Perth*. This was also the period of Offenbachian *opéra bouffe*. Then came the Franco-German War, and after it the Renaissance of French music.

The seventies witnessed the production of Bizet's *Carmen*, of Massenet's *Le Roi de Lahore*, of Léo Delibes's ballet "Sylvia"; Saint-Saëns wrote his symphonic poems, obtained many successes in the concert-room, and produced his *Samson et Dalila* at Weimar; César Franck, Lalo, Benjamin Godard

Preface

began to be heard. During the eighties were produced the last operas by Gounod and Ambroise Thomas, neither the former with *Le Tribut de Zamora*, nor the latter with *Françoise de Rimini* increasing his reputation. The successes of this decade were Saint-Saëns's *Henry VIII.*, Reyer's *Sigurd*, Paladilhe's *Patrie*, Massenet's *Manon*, *Le Cid*, and *Esclarmonde*, Léo Delibes's *Lakmé*, Lalo's *Le Roi d'Ys*.

The last ten years of the century have brought about many changes. Wagner's music-dramas have at last been heard in Paris. A new type of "lyric drama" has been created by Alfred Bruneau with *Le Rêve*, *L'Attaque du Moulin*, *Messidor*, and the way has thus been prepared for Charpentier and his *Louise*. Saint-Saëns in his *Phryné* has returned to the *opéra comique genre*, and Massenet has written *Werther*, *La Navarraise*, *Sapho*, *Cendrillon*, while Reyer's *Salammbô* has worthily crowned the composer's career.

In thus cursorily running through the chief musical events that have occurred in Paris during the century, I have only mentioned some of the principal works at random, but these will be

Preface

sufficient, I think, to give an idea of what has been achieved in the French capital.

This volume has been divided into chapters, at the head of which has been placed the name of a composer whose individuality has reacted upon his contemporaries, or who has launched fresh ideas into circulation.

The musical outlook in France at the present moment is particularly bright. The younger French composers are mostly imbued with the desire to tread new paths and they are careful to avoid the well-beaten roads. The tardy triumph of Wagnerism in Paris has produced its effect and has disclosed fresh horizons. The period of transition and the half-hearted attempts to abandon the old operatic conventionalities seem ended, and an eminently national form of "lyric drama" has gradually been adopted. Not only on the stage but in the concert-room French composers are holding their own.

In the comparatively small space at my disposal it has been manifestly impossible to do full justice to the subject, and several composers who deserve more attention have had to be rather summarily dismissed. I trust, though, that in these pages there

Preface

will be found sufficient to convey a general idea of the characteristics of the chief composers whose works constitute the history of French music during the past century.

ARTHUR HERVEY.

CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
I. MÉHUL AND THE LAST OF THE CLASSICS	1
✓ II. THE ADVENT OF ROSSINI	29
III. MEYERBEER AND THE GRAND OPERA	41
IV. AUBER AND THE "OPÉRA COMIQUE"	69
V. BERLIOZ AND THE ROMANTIC MOVEMENT.	84
✓ VI. GOUNOD AND HIS INFLUENCE	108
VII. WAGNER IN FRANCE	132
VIII. OFFENBACH AND THE OPÉRA BOUFFE	151
IX. BIZET AND THE RENAISSANCE	163
X. SAINT-SAËNS AND SOME OF HIS CONTEMPORARIES	179
XI. MASSENET AND THE MODERN FRENCH OPERA	203
XII. CÉSAR FRANCK AND HIS FOLLOWERS	217
XIII. ALFRED BRUNEAU AND THE MODERN LYRICAL DRAMA	231
XIV. FIN DE SIÈCLE	247

CHAPTER I

MÉHUL AND THE LAST OF THE CLASSICS

MUSIC is the most progressive of the arts. Unlike painting and sculpture, it is ever on the move. If the ideal is the same, the means employed to attain it vary with every generation. Can even the greatest of musicians flatter himself with the idea that he has reached the goal beyond which there is no further progress? If so, he is only the victim of an illusion.

However great his genius, however striking his innovations, his life work will be treated by succeeding generations as the starting-point for fresh departures, for further incursions into the limitless regions constituting the domain of sound.

Music in its manifestations has ever been and always will be connected with the period of its conception. Its essence may be eternal, but its

Music in the XIXth Century

forms are ephemeral. It is from disregarding this fact that many men of high intelligence have fallen into the strange error of supposing that music could reach a point beyond which it was impossible to go.

The rules of former generations, which were once considered to bear the authority of dogmas, have gradually lost their prestige, and nowadays these bugbears are a terror to no one. There certainly still exist musicians whose minds are cast in a mould which renders them rebellious against any fresh departures from recognised forms, but these, like the poor, will always be with us. Let us be thankful that their number is growing smaller and their influence less powerful.

The evolution of the art of music in France during the XIXth century offers much food for thought. Alien influences have been frequent. Sometimes these have proved beneficial and sometimes the reverse. It can however with truth be said that they have never succeeded in obliterating the unmistakable characteristics of the French race. Those foreign masters who have at different times settled in Paris and brought out their works on French soil have themselves been influenced by

Méhul and the Last of the Classics

their surroundings. It has been a question of give and take.

At the present moment nationalism in music is very much to the fore, and, in so far as it tends to develop the internal resources of a nation and to bring out its marked characteristics, it deserves all encouragement. At the same time it must not be exaggerated to the extent of causing one to undervalue all extraneous influence.

It is certain that not one of the great nations has succeeded in building up its music without some aid from outside. This does not by any means imply weakness in its own powers of production. To take a recent example, the influence of Wagner may be said to be universal. It has made itself felt everywhere, in France and Italy as well as in Germany. Yet although modern French composers have all profited more or less by the wondrous innovations of the German master, they have not on that account overlooked their own national characteristics. The styles peculiar to the three nations may be said to be as markedly different now as they ever were. The same influence filtering through different channels has produced different results.

Music in the XIXth Century

Certain of the principles and innovations of Wagner had indeed been anticipated many years previously by two composers—a Viennese and a Belgian, both domiciled in Paris—Gluck and Grétry. Gluck, in his famous preface to *Alceste*, had firmly established the principles that should guide the dramatic composer. This preface is too well known to need quoting *in extenso*. The gist of it is contained in the following extracts: “I have sought to reduce music to its true function, that of seconding poetry in strengthening the expression of the sentiments and the interest of the situations without interrupting the action or chilling it by the introduction of useless and superfluous ornamentation. . . . I have taken care not to stop an actor in the midst of his discourse upon a favourable vowel either to allow him to show off the agility of his fine voice in a long roulade, or to wait for the orchestra to give him time to take breath for a *point d'orgue*.” This is enough to show how Gluck had anticipated ideas which are now universally accepted, although it is not so very long ago that they were still discussed.

The composer of *Alceste*, however, soon found that his principles did not meet with universal

Méhul and the Last of the Classics

acquiescence and he opened his mind again in the preface to *Paris et Hélène*, thus bitterly expressing himself: "I had dared to flatter myself that in following the road which I have opened people would endeavour to destroy the abuses which have been introduced into Italian opera, and which dishonour it: I own with pain that I have made a mistake. The pedants, doctors in taste, a species unfortunately too numerous, which in all periods has been a thousand times more pernicious to the progress of the fine arts than that of the ignorants, virulently attacked a method which if once established would annihilate their pretensions. . . . One of those delicate amateurs who have put all their souls into their ears will have found an air too harsh, a passage too strong or badly prepared, without thinking that in the situation these were sublime in expression and formed the happiest contrast. A pedantic harmonist will have remarked an ingenious negligence or a misprint and will have hastened to denounce one and the other as unpardonable sins against the mysteries of harmony; soon afterwards, voices will have united to condemn this music as barbarous, savage, and extravagant. . . . Similar obstacles

Music in the XIXth Century

will exist as long as one meets in the world those men who, because they possess a pair of eyes and ears, no matter of what kind, consider they have a right to judge the fine arts.”

The above words might have been written yesterday. Their truth is eternal, for the race of Beckmessers is not likely to die out.

With Gluck the drama was the first consideration, and he is reported to have said: “When composing I endeavour before all things to forget that I am a musician,” words which must not be interpreted too literally, but which denote the trend of his thoughts. It is curious to read the views expressed by Mozart on the subject and to note that they are diametrically opposed to those of Gluck, for he declares that “even in the most horrible situations the music must satisfy the ear; that, in fact, music must always remain music.” Also that “the poetry in an opera must always be the obedient daughter of music,” that “the Italian operas, notwithstanding the mediocrity of their libretti, please because music reigns there like a sovereign and makes the rest go down.” Did Mozart always adhere to this theory? Assuredly not, any more than Gluck or Wagner adhered to

Méhul and the Last of the Classics

theirs. Theories are very good in the abstract, but they often have to be modified in practice.

The composer of the *Nozze di Figaro* proved in many instances that strict interpretation of a dramatic situation was his chief preoccupation, witness *inter alia* the final scene of *Don Giovanni*. Nowadays it is universally recognised that the music in an opera must be as closely as possible in accord with the words and situations of the drama.

Even in Italy this has at last been acknowledged, and the composer who interrupted the action in order to allow a singer to indulge in vocal acrobatics would not stand a chance of success. It is true, however, that the *point d'orgue* still flourishes, and of this the vocalist takes all the advantages he can.

In a very curious article upon Gluck's *Alceste*, Jean Jacques Rousseau wrote that "it is a great and fine problem to solve, to determine how far it is possible to make speech sing and music speak. The entire theory of dramatic music rests upon a good solution of this problem." In the same article he gives as his opinion that truth of expression must occasionally be sacrificed to that

Music in the XIXth Century

which pleases the ear—"for music could only touch the heart by the charm of melody, and if it was only a question of reproducing the accent of passion, the art of declamation would suffice by itself, and music, become useless, would be rather in the way than otherwise." Here we have the two opposing theories of dramatic music which have caused so many endless discussions.

It will be seen that Rousseau's views coincide with those of Mozart. Let us, however, turn to his definition of the term Opera occurring in his "Dictionnaire de Musique." It reads thus: "A dramatic and lyrical spectacle, where the object is to unite all the charms of the fine arts in the representation of a passionate action, in order to excite by the aid of agreeable sensations, interest and illusions." He continues: "The constituent parts of an opera are the poem, the music, and the decorations. The poetry speaks to the mind, the music to the ear, the painting to the eyes; and all should combine to move the heart and convey to it simultaneously the same impressions through different organs."

Decidedly it would seem that Rousseau's ideal

Méhul and the Last of the Classics

of the music-drama was, after all, not so very different from that of Wagner!

The two paths along which dramatic music was to proceed were, it will be seen, already well outlined before the close of the XVIIIth century. Grétry,* one of the most prolific operatic composers of his time, seems to have had transient visions of future possibilities. His opinions, as recorded in his memoirs, were considerably in advance of his music.

“Woe to the artist,” he declared, “who, too much controlled by rule, does not dare to follow the flight of his genius.” He also predicted that “one day everything that is not strictly in accordance with the poem will be rejected by the educated public; singers who add vocal ornamentation to their parts will be sent from the theatre to the concert-room; roulades will seem so absurd that they will only be employed to imitate the nightingale.” It is interesting also to remember that Grétry, who certainly cannot claim to have been musically a precursor of Wagner, actually forestalled the idea of Bayreuth, and traced the plan of an ideal theatre in these words: “I

* Grétry (1741-1813).

Music in the XIXth Century

should like the auditorium to be small and capable of holding at most one thousand persons ; that there should be only one sort of seat everywhere—no boxes. I should like the orchestra to be hidden, and that neither the musicians nor the lights on the desks on the side of the spectators should be visible. The effect of this would be magical, and one knows that in any case the orchestra is never supposed to be there. I should like a circular auditorium, in tiers which would form a single amphitheatre, always ascending, and with nothing above save a few trophies painted in frescoes.”

Grétry, however, belongs essentially to the XVIIIth century, although he lived into the XIXth, and it cannot be said that his works were of sufficient importance to exercise any weight over the development of music. He wrote many operas, several of which achieved popularity. Two may be said to have survived, for *Richard Cœur de Lion* and *L'Épreuve Villageoise* have not altogether disappeared from the *répertoire* of French theatres. His musicianship was poor, and it was remarked that a coach and four could pass between the bass and treble in certain of his airs. Instru-

Méhul and the Last of the Classics

mentation he looked upon with contempt, and it is averred that some thirty of his works were scored by another hand. In this manner, and when we remember that his operas were constructed upon the simplest lines, his productivity need cause no surprise. At the same time, there is no denying to his themes a distinct charm, due to the fact that, whatever his shortcomings, Grétry was always sincere. He wrote as he felt and did not strive to grasp more than he could readily compass. In other words, he never went out of his depth, but avoided deep waters, where he would assuredly have been submerged.

The above observations will show the amount of interest evinced in the æsthetics of the musical drama at the period immediately preceding that which now concerns us.

Before going further it will be well to say a word respecting Gossec,* a composer long since forgotten, who died at a patriarchal age in 1829, and who wrote both operas and symphonies. To him were due many innovations in the composition of the orchestra. Among his works is a Requiem, the *Tuba Mirum* in which contains, in germ;

* Gossec (1734-1829).

Music in the XIXth Century

certain instrumental combinations employed later by Cherubini and Berlioz. It is for baritone solo accompanied by two orchestras, the second consisting of clarinets, trumpets or horns and three trombones, which sound the doom of the Day of Judgment.

Purely instrumental works had until this time occupied a meagre place in French music, and to Gossec must be accorded the honour of introducing the symphony into France. His efforts in this direction have long since vanished owing to the superiority of the symphonies of Haydn and Mozart—his contemporaries. Still, the good he achieved in furthering the progress of instrumental art, and his labours in helping to found the famous Paris Conservatoire, where for years he laboured as a professor, must not be overlooked. One of his symphonies, entitled *Symphonie de la Chasse*, is said to have served as a model to Méhul for his overture to *Le Jeune Henri*, which to this day remains an admirable piece of programme music and one of its composer's best works.

Among the French musicians who were to the fore at the commencement of the XIXth century

Méhul and the Last of the Classics

Méhul* undoubtedly occupies the first place. His operas *Stratonice* (1792), *Phrosine et Mélidor* (1794), *Le Jeune Henri* (1797), and *Ariodant* (1799), had already brought him fame. During the troublous days that followed the Revolution, he had in a way been the musician of the people, had celebrated their triumphs and sung their aspirations. He had composed a quantity of music for public occasions and had popularised his name by writing the *Chant du Départ*, one of the most famous of French patriotic songs. He was destined to achieve yet greater things.

During the first decade of the century he produced four operas—*L'Irato* (1801), in which he amusingly satirised the prevailing style of Italian *opera buffa*; *Uthal* (1804), the setting of a subject taken from Ossian where, in order to obtain a peculiar colouring in the orchestra, he dispensed entirely with violins; *Les Aveugles de Tolède* (1806); and finally *Joseph* (1807), which remains his masterpiece. Before speaking of this work it would be well to see how matters stood at the time with regard to the construction of musical stage works.

* Méhul (1763-1817),

Music in the XIXth Century

Broadly speaking, these could be divided into two categories, the *tragédie lyrique* and the *opéra comique*, the main difference between the two being that in the former the musical numbers were connected by recitatives and in the latter by spoken dialogue. Traditions often die hard, and these distinctions of form survived well into the latter half of the XIXth century. *Joseph* belonged to the second category, and was therefore styled an *opéra comique*. It is scarcely necessary to add that there was nothing comic about it except its denomination. The disciple and follower of Gluck, Méhul endeavoured in this work to tread in his master's footsteps. A libretto of extraordinary simplicity, founded upon the Bible narrative, which offers this peculiarity, that it does not contain a single female character, enabled him to compose one of the most remarkable operas of the time. *Joseph*, it may be stated, had originally been intended for the Académie de Musique, as the Grand Opéra was then termed, and had it been represented there the composer would have been obliged to connect the various numbers of his score with recitatives. Eighty-two years after the death of Méhul, at the close of the XIXth

Méhul and the Last of the Classics

century, *Joseph* was revived in Paris at the Grand Opéra as well as at the Opéra Comique. At the first of these theatres, recitatives had been added by M. Bourgault-Ducoudray, while at the second the work was performed according to the intentions of the composer, who had styled it "drame en trois actes, en prose, mêlé de chant."

It was in the original form that the work pleased best, which proves that it is safer not to meddle with or attempt to improve the masterpieces of past generations, even if the form in which these were conceived has become antiquated.

In the matter of construction it cannot be said that *Joseph* offered any striking difference from works that had preceded it. The music achieved its aim through the simplest of means. Always clear in design, its melodies appeared to be wondrously appropriate to the words and to the situation. The music was absolutely sincere. Even nowadays the very *naïveté* of its strains invests them with a rare and peculiar charm.

Like all really great artists, Méhul took infinite pains with his work, and a melody which seemed to be spontaneously conceived had possibly given him an endless amount of trouble. For instance,

Music in the XIXth Century

the well-known romance from *Joseph*, "*À peine au sortir de l'enfance*," a melodic gem of the purest water, was remodelled no fewer than four times. How little does the public imagine the inner workings of a composer's mind, or realise the amount of thought involved in what often appears so simple!

Whether the subject of *Joseph* was not stimulating enough or the music too serious, the opera did not achieve the immediate success it deserved. The composer, who was a man of simple tastes and never so happy as when cultivating flowers in his own garden, determined to leave the operatic field to his rivals and devote himself to the peaceful and doubtless gratifying pursuit of horticulture.

After five years absence his name reappeared again on the bills, but his later compositions have not survived and he remains known to posterity as the author of *Joseph*.

The only composers living in Paris who could be considered as his rivals at that time were Cherubini,* Spontini,† and Lesueur.‡ The greatest musician of the four was undoubtedly Cherubini.

* Cherubini (1760–1842). † Spontini (1774–1851).

‡ Lesueur (1764–1837).

Méhul and the Last of the Classics

A Florentine by birth, Cherubini was temperamentally the very reverse of the Southerner. In some ways he might perhaps be considered as a descendant of the older Italian contrapuntists, but he had little in common with the free and easy Italian operatic composers of the day whose works, then all the rage, have long since disappeared into oblivion. Neither, one might imagine, could his severe and rigid style have been particularly in accord with the light buoyant French nature. There was ever something of the schoolmaster about Cherubini, the stern disciplinarian ready to pulverise the unfortunate youngster who transgressed the sacred rules of which he was the guardian. Such a man was destined to be named director of the Conservatoire, where for several years he reigned supreme, respected, but feared, by all with whom he came into contact.

Berlioz, in his memoirs, has given some amusing descriptions of the cantankerous old master. That Cherubini should not have been able to appreciate Berlioz need scarcely cause any surprise. To the upholder of the strictest classical forms, the music of the young Frenchman must have

Music in the XIXth Century

sounded like the divagations of a maniac, and the idea of this revolutionist aspiring to teach harmony at the Conservatoire was naturally too staggering for words.

At the same time, Berlioz in his indignation against Cherubini has perhaps scarcely done justice to the memory of one whose reputation was so great that Beethoven deigned to submit to him the score of his Mass in D for approval.

The only opera by Cherubini which has not altogether disappeared from ken is *Les deux Journées*, produced in 1800. It was given in London in the seventies under the title of *The Water Carrier*, and is known in Germany as *Der Wasserträger*. Conceived in the form of the old French *opéra comique*, it is musically far superior to anything of the kind that had preceded it. Compared to the operas of Grétry it stands very high. It is an attempt to raise the style above the ordinary *opéra comique* of the period which was really but little superior to the vaudeville in musical importance.

Thus Cherubini may be considered as one of the pioneers of the French opera, although his stage works are with the above exception now forgotten.

Méhul and the Last of the Classics

His sacred compositions, however, have survived and are still frequently heard in the Mass.

Concerning these it is scarcely necessary to speak, as they did not appreciably influence the development of music in France.

It is, however, important to note that Cherubini counted among his pupils Boïeldieu, Auber, Halévy, and Adam—that is, four of the most popular French composers of the first half of the century. Adam has described Cherubini's character as a strange mixture of irritability and childlike simplicity. To the outer world he appeared brusque, but he was essentially kind-hearted and was adored by his pupils. Napoleon never could bear him, and lost no opportunity of letting him know his feelings. On one occasion he is said to have remarked to him that his music was too loud and that he preferred that of Paisiello which was soft and quiet. "I understand," replied the composer, "you prefer music which does not prevent you from thinking of State affairs!" The retort was witty, but Napoleon never forgave it.

A composer whose fame shone with radiant brilliancy during the first decade of the century and whose works have survived even less than

Music in the XIXth Century

those of Cherubini or Méhul, yet who was well worthy of occupying a place by their side, was Spontini.

There are certain points of similarity between Cherubini and Spontini. Both were Italians who found in France a soil appropriate to the growth of their genius. Both were influenced by Gluck and expressed themselves in a language different from that employed by their compatriots. Both met with appreciation in Germany, and it may be added that each master, while animated by absolute sincerity of purpose, was also not devoid of a certain rigidity of style which indeed seemed to accord with the Napoleonic period of pseudo-classicism.

Spontini's works contain many innovations which have proved profitable to his successors. His method of treating the orchestra was novel. Abandoning the old plan of dividing the instruments into separate groups, he obtained new effects of tone colour by blending the strings and the wind instruments. He also gave greater importance to the finales, and in this direction prepared the way for Rossini, Meyerbeer, and Halévy. The finale to the second act of *La Vestale*

Méhul and the Last of the Classics

is a masterpiece of its kind which has often been performed at the famous concerts of the Conservatoire, where I have been privileged to hear it. Spontini lived well into the XIXth century, and survived the popularity of his works by many a long year. In his own estimation, however, he had said the last word in music. Wagner, who took great trouble in mounting *La Vestale*, has recorded the following words spoken to him by the old master : “ In *La Vestale* I treated a Roman subject, in *Fernand Cortez* a Spanish-Mexican subject, in *Olympie* a Greek-Macedonian subject, and in *Agnes von Hohenstaufen* a German subject—all the rest is worth nothing ! ” and he added, “ How do you imagine that any one can invent anything new, when I, Spontini, declare myself unable to surpass my own works ? ”

Among those whom I have named the last of the classics, one must still be mentioned who, although long since completely forgotten, may be said to have exerted a certain influence over the development of French music—Lesueur, an artist who has, at any rate, a claim to be remembered, inasmuch as he was the teacher of Berlioz and of Gounod.

Music in the XIXth Century

It is possible still to hear works by Méhul and Cherubini, and even by Spontini, but Lesueur has entirely disappeared, not only from the theatre, but also almost from the concert-room, where very occasionally one meets with extracts from obsolete works.

And yet at the commencement of the century Lesueur occupied a very high place in the opinion of Parisian connoisseurs.

His opera *Les Bardes* vied in popularity with Spontini's *La Vestale*. The success of its first performance in 1804 was immense. Napoleon was present, and at the end of the third act sent for the composer, and after congratulating him, insisted upon giving him his own seat in the box. The enthusiasm was universal, and every token of admiration was bestowed upon the fortunate composer, the celebrated painter, David, writing : "When my brush and my soul begin to freeze, I will go and warm them both at the burning and passionate accents of your lyre." Not only in France, but in Germany, was Lesueur held in high esteem, notably by such masters as Beethoven and Weber.

Does not the complete disappearance of a com-

Méhul and the Last of the Classics

poser of such universally recognised worth seem strange? Reactionary movements, nevertheless, often take place, and if Lesueur's operas have had their day and are never likely to be revived, his sacred works, which are remarkable for a noble simplicity of style, may some time or other possibly be restored to favour. Like Gluck and Grétry, Lesueur was a theorist. He held that music should be imitative and descriptive, and that the composer's intentions should be previously explained to the audience. Clearly, therefore, he may be considered as one of the precursors of Berlioz and of modern programme music. In his desire to innovate he imagined that music might be enriched by the employment of old Greek modes.

What is more curious is to note the peculiar ideas he entertained with regard to description in music. In his capacity of *maître de chapelle* it was his duty to compose masses destined to be performed on the four great feast days of the year. He insisted that the music should be imitative and peculiar to the occasion. That is, that the music should be in accord with the event commemorated on any special day. Each mass thus became a species of sacred drama.

Music in the XIXth Century

On Christmas day, for instance, his *Gloria in Excelsis* commenced in march form, to suggest the idea of the shepherds advancing towards the manger, and in order to accentuate his intention he introduced into the accompaniment an old popular Christmas tune. "If a composer," he wrote, "in a mass destined to be performed at Easter were to compose to the 'Kyrie' music which would be appropriate (as is often the case) to people groaning under the weight of their woes, would he be fulfilling the proper conditions? Would this painting be suitable to describe Easter Sunday, the day when the Redeemer has risen?"

It will be seen that Lesueur's ideas were considerably in advance of his time. Whenever a work of his was produced he insisted on publishing a long explanatory programme of his intentions.

Theoretically he may in a measure be regarded as the spiritual father of the modern French school. His music, however, as far as it is possible to judge it nowadays, scarcely seems to explain the enthusiasm it aroused at the time of its production.

Méhul and the Last of the Classics

Ossian, ou Les Bardes strikes me in reading the pianoforte score as formally constructed, cold and lifeless. Doubtless its effectiveness must have been largely due to the scoring and the excellence of the performance.

The partiality shown by Lesueur for subjects of the remotest antiquity was further exemplified in his next opera—*La Mort d'Adam*.

Oddly enough, a work entitled *La Mort d'Abel* by Rudolph Kreutzer, a composer whose music has long been forgotten but whose name has been immortalised by Beethoven, had been accepted for production at the Opéra.

Eventually Lesueur's work gained the precedence, and its first performance was humorously announced to the press in the following terms: *Vous êtes priés d'assister au service & enterrement du sieur Adam, ancien propriétaire, qui se feront demain Mardi, 21 Mars, 1809, en l'Académie Impériale de musique, sa paroisse où il décédera. De profundis!*

A curious point may be noticed in the fact that whereas the composers of the early part of the century sought for inspiration in subjects taken from biblical, legendary, or classical lore, their

Music in the XIXth Century

successors of to-day have in many instances gone to the opposite extreme by musically illustrating stories of modern life. The ancient Greeks and Romans have been handed over to the mercy of purveyors of *opéra bouffe*, while Joseph and his brethren have had to make way for Louise and her companions in the *atelier de couture*. What has been said concerning the masters who flourished during the early days of the century will suffice to show that whatever their shortcomings, they were all animated by the noblest intentions and imbued with high artistic ideals. If the results of their labours fell somewhat short of their desires, the fault cannot altogether be ascribed to them, but may in part be attributed to the epoch.

Not one of the operas produced in Paris during the Napoleonic period can be said to have survived. The occasional resuscitation of *Joseph*, *La Vestale*, or *Les Deux Journées* means nothing. These and other works by the same composers have practically vanished from the operatic *répertoire*.

A German author once fixed the average longevity of a popular opera at forty years. This may be a rather short estimate, but experience has proved that of all forms of musical art the

Méhul and the Last of the Classics

dramatic is the most evanescent. The concert room happily preserves for us that which is most worthy, and certain famous dramatic composers of the past live in the present through the overtures to their operas.

Unfortunately the overture seems nowadays to be falling into neglect, and it may pertinently be wondered what will remain in the future of certain modern operas, or rather "lyric dramas," when these have vanished from the stage!

What killed the operas of the Napoleonic period was the arrival of Rossini and the substitution of the florid style of vocalisation for the declamation of the Gluck epoch, of which Spontini and Lesueur were the last representatives. Already in 1801 an Italian opera company had settled in Paris, and had obtained an enormous popular success. The light florid vapid music of the Italian composers was in strong contrast to the serious and sober strains of the followers of Gluck. It was in order to prove a Frenchman's capability of writing in this style that Méhul had composed *L'Irato*, which was applauded in the belief that the author was an Italian.

Under the nefarious influence of the decadent

Music in the XIXth Century

Italianism which flourished at that time, French music gradually lost much that was essentially characteristic and typical of the soil, gaining an artificial brilliancy at the expense of sincerity and simplicity. The composer who hastened the downward descent was Rossini, concerning whom a French writer* has said: "In imitating Rossini our artists learned to give more suppleness and a more elegant form to their thoughts; but they also learned the art of false brilliancy, of false grace, of melodic jingle, in fact of musical chatter."

* Lavoix *filis*.

CHAPTER II

THE ADVENT OF ROSSINI

NOWADAYS it seems difficult to realise the enthusiasm generated all over Europe during the second and third decades of the century by the operas of Rossini.*

In Paris the popularity of the brilliant *maestro* soon extended everywhere except to the Conservatoire, where the professors, trained in the rigid principles of the Gluck school, regarded the newcomer with marked disfavour. The younger composers, however, soon fell under the Rossinian spell, scenting the chances of success obtainable through the adoption of the methods employed by the idol of the day and eager to gain the applause of the multitude.

An explanation of Rossini's extraordinary success is perhaps not so very difficult to find.

* Rossini (1792-1868).

Music in the XIXth Century

The public had become wearied of the pompous dulness of the stilted operas brought out at the Académie. They craved for something new, more vital and inspiring.

Rossini gave them this. His operas, extemporised in haste, brimming over with the exuberance of youth, full of catchy tunes, overcharged with vocal ornamentation, drove every one wild.

The æsthetics of the operatic drama were forgotten, the appropriateness of the musical phrase to the situation became a matter of secondary importance ; the vocalist reigned supreme with the composer as his humble servant.

No wonder that the excellent professors of the Conservatoire were scandalised by the state of affairs. Jealousy, of course, was assigned as the motive of their opposition to the deity of the hour. Among the younger musicians, one alone protested against the invader, Hector Berlioz, who, burning with indignation, felt disposed to blow up the Italian Theatre and all its occupants on the nights when *La Gazza Ladra* or some other work by Rossini was being played. Boïeldieu, one of the most typical of French composers, had in the meantime gradually fallen under the fatal

The Advent of Rossini

Rossinian influence, and was wont to gather his pupils together and with them go carefully through every new score published by the *maestro*.

Rossini's success had gained him access to the Académie Royale de Musique, where three of his Italian operas, altered and improved, were successively performed—*Le Siège de Corinthe*, *Moïse*, and *Le Comte Ory*.

These were succeeded by the composer's last and greatest work, *Guillaume Tell*, which seemed to be the starting-point of a new departure, the promise of a rich musical harvest. Although not entirely free from the laxity of his early style, *Guillaume Tell* evidenced a veritably astonishing transformation and revealed a hitherto unsuspected power. Until then, Rossini had certainly shown genius as a composer of *opéra buffa*—his admirable *Barbiere di Seviglia* is a sufficient proof of this—but he had not proved that he possessed the depth of thought requisite to give adequate musical life to a truly pathetic theme.

There are doubtless passages in the operas belonging to his Italian period where he seemed to rise above himself, notably the prayer in *Moïse*,

Music in the XIXth Century

the touching aria, "*Assisa al piè d'un Salice*," in *Otello*. As a rule, however, he appeared to trouble himself but little about such matters as expressiveness and pathos, satisfied to provide his singers with the means of showing off their voices, aiming essentially at effect, and revelling in a veritable debauch of vocal ornamentation. If he by chance imagined a suave cantilena, he must needs spoil its simplicity by covering it with all the tinsel of vocal embroidery. Thus it was that Rossini dazzled by the brilliancy of his undoubted genius, but he rarely touched the heart. In this respect, be it said, he differed greatly from his compatriots Bellini and Donizetti, who were each for a time to hold the sceptre he had resigned.

Bellini,* the melodist *par excellence*, wrote from his heart. *La Sonnambula* and *Norma* may be old-fashioned, their construction may be of the simplest, but they contain really beautiful melodies, they appeal to the emotions, and one feels that they were written not solely for effect, but to express the composer's innermost thoughts.

Donizetti† again, in *Lucrezia Borgia* and *Lucia*

* Bellini (1802-1835).

† Donizetti (1797-1848).

The Advent of Rossini

di Lanmermoor, had his inspired moments when he found *la note juste* and touched the heart.

Rossini, on the other hand, seems to have been too much of a sceptic, and his music pursued its course brilliantly alert in very much the same manner whatever the subject he was treating. Gluck and Mozart had shown how they could put tears into their music. This did not seem possible to Rossini, whose device appeared to be that of Figaro—*Je m'empresse de rire de tout de peur d'être obligé d'en pleurer !*

In *Guillaume Tell* it must be admitted that Rossini showed himself in an altogether different light, and disclosed undreamed-of capabilities.

Before going further, however, it becomes necessary to mention an opera which preceded *Guillaume Tell* on the same boards, the work of a Frenchman who, imbued with the Rossinian ideas, yet remained typically national in his style—the *Muette de Portici* of Auber,* known in England as *Masaniello*.

Here indeed was a fresh departure both in text and in music. The rather stilted figures of the Napoleonic opera had disappeared, the classical

* Auber (1782–1871).

Music in the XIXth Century

subjects of old had been discarded. In place of these, here were simple fisher folk and a tale of the Revolution teeming with the spirit of the hour. The music again was absolutely in accord with the text. Previously, Auber had only written for the Opéra Comique, the theatre where he was ultimately to triumph. Rising to the occasion and putting forward all his skill, he surpassed his previous efforts and produced a work of wondrous brilliancy, replete with melody, admirably characteristic, and effectively scored. The diminished seventh with which the overture commences sounds as a defiance hurled against conventionality. In form Auber had adhered to consecrated models and he had adopted some of the vocal acrobatics of Rossini. But he had also displayed a pronounced individuality of his own, an extraordinary gift of tune, and distinct qualities of musical characterisation. It must be admitted that, in his subsequently well filled career at the Opéra Comique, Auber never approached the heights he had here attained.

Nowadays the score of *La Muette* naturally seems very old-fashioned. It is however of course not fair to judge it according to modern

The Advent of Rossini

ideas. Auber had nothing about him of the reformer. He simply wrote as he felt, and in the present instance he was undoubtedly well inspired. There is a sparkle and a dash about the music of *La Muette* which strikes one even now. Wagner fully recognised these qualities and always expressed the greatest admiration for Auber's masterpiece.

La Muette had been represented in 1828; *Guillaume Tell* followed the next year.

In France the enthusiasm kindled by Rossini's last and greatest opera passed all bounds. In England, where, of course, the overture has remained popular, it has perhaps scarcely met with the appreciation it deserves.

Certainly in *Guillaume Tell* Rossini had in a measure changed his style. On the other hand, it may be noted that already in *Le Siège de Corinthe* and in *Moïse* he had given proof of his capability to rise above the ordinary cavatinas and cabalettas which had brought him success.

In *Guillaume Tell* he displayed a sense of the picturesque which hitherto might have been vainly sought in his works, and he evinced real dramatic feeling. The hyperbolic language of praise called forth by this supreme effort of Rossini passes

Music in the XIXth Century

imagination. Just as Spontini fondly imagined that he had attained the limits of operatic art, just as a famous English critic was at the time of the death of Mendelssohn to exclaim despairingly that music was dead, just as on every occasion when some great composer has enlarged the boundaries of his art and opened out fresh horizons there will be similar predictions, so did *Guillaume Tell* seem to the Parisians to exemplify the last possible stage in the development of the musical drama.

Already a cry of alarm had been raised, *mirabile dictu*, apropos of *Le Siège de Corinthe*, a well-known critic of the time, while expressing his admiration for this work, accusing the composer “of having pushed his effects of harmony to such a degree of complication that it was permissible to wonder whether he had not rendered all further innovation impossible.”

Human imbecility is eternal, and identical sentiments have since been expressed concerning many of Rossini's successors. To one writer *Guillaume Tell* represents the ideal of French grand opera, and its appearance remains “the greatest event of the XIXth century and the date of a new era.”

The Advent of Rossini

That *Guillaume Tell* inaugurated a new era in French opera is saying too much. Rossini's work and Auber's *La Muette* may rather be considered as brilliant precursors of a *genre* which was to be illustrated in a far completer manner by Meyerbeer. Spontini had already shown the way in *La Vestale* and in *Fernand Cortez* by introducing martial pomp and piling up massive effects, besides, in the last of these works, making a sort of attempt to introduce local colour into his music.

The Rossini cult had, however, now reached a stage that bordered upon fanaticism. Adolphe Adam, the composer, did not hesitate to give it as his matured opinion that Rossini was the most complete musical genius the world had ever seen, placing him above Mozart, Beethoven, and Weber. The incense was kept burning before the master for the remainder of his life.

In the meanwhile the composer of *Guillaume Tell*, considering that he had done enough for his fame, settled down quietly to a bourgeois existence, content to idle away the remainder of his life, only emerging from his retirement on rare

Music in the XIXth Century

occasions, to produce his *Stabat Mater* and some years later, his *Messe Solennelle*.

The causes of Rossini's retirement from the active exercise of his profession before he had reached his prime, have been variously discussed and explained. Laziness on the one hand and jealousy of Meyerbeer's success on the other have been ascribed as the causes which induced him to lay down his pen. The first reason is probably more likely to be the true one. Of a naturally indolent disposition, Rossini had been in his early days obliged to work for his living. Fame and fortune having arrived, what could be more natural than that he should prefer to take his ease? For Rossini was not one of those artists who are impelled by an inward force to produce. This wonderfully gifted child of nature required incentives from without. The desire to concentrate his powers on a work of enduring value does not seem to have existed for him.

At least—who can tell, after all?

Is it not possible that having waited some time after the production of *Guillaume Tell*, Rossini may have thought of resuming work and found that his pen had grown rusty from want of use and that his

The Advent of Rossini

ideas had lost their freshness? Let it be remembered that during the early days of his career he deliberately frittered away his ideas in such profusion that he may in reality have exhausted his stock. In the meanwhile the world had progressed. A formidable rival had appeared in Meyerbeer, one whose musicianship he could not aspire to equal. An opera written in his early Italian style would not have gone down, one like *Guillaume Tell* would have demanded too great an effort.

Rossini was not a man to risk failure. "One more success," he is reported to have said, "would add nothing to my glory, whilst a failure might tarnish it."

Guillaume Tell was the culminating work of his career. It effectually closed an epoch and foreshadowed the next. Spontini, Auber and Rossini had prepared the way, and the man who was to profit by their innovations was not far off.

The first of these masters was now practically out of the running. His style was already antiquated, and he had abandoned the field to others. Auber was destined to achieve his successes on the boards of the Opéra Comique. The subsequent works he wrote for the Académie—*Gustave*, *Le Philtre*, *Le*

Music in the XIXth Century

Lac des Fées—could not compare with *La Muette* ; Rossini had given up writing ; Meyerbeer now appeared and had no difficulty in asserting his supremacy. The golden age of the Grand Opera was at hand.

CHAPTER III

MEYERBEER AND THE GRAND OPERA

EVERY great composer has had his antagonists, and Meyerbeer* has had more than his fair share of them.

The idol of the Parisian public, the monarch of the Grand Opéra, where he reigned practically supreme for over thirty years, Meyerbeer exercised an immense influence over music in France, an influence which may be said to have prevailed until comparatively recently. Clearly a composer of such standing is not to be passed by with a shrug of the shoulders, and if he was over-praised during his lifetime there is no doubt that he has since been considerably underrated.

A calm, dispassionate survey of the case is necessary in order to enable one to arrive at a just estimate of Meyerbeer's genius. In his "Primer

* Meyerbeer (1791-1864).

Music in the XIXth Century

of Musical History," Sir Hubert Parry treats Meyerbeer unnecessarily severely. In this he but follows the example of Schumann, who had gone still further in his dislike of Meyerbeer, whose *Prophète* he had, as a critic, significantly dismissed with a cross, ✝, inferring that burial was all that the work deserved. Of course this was no criticism at all, and it was even worse, for it conveyed the idea that there was not one redeeming feature in *Le Prophète*. The feeblest Italian opera of the period would surely have deserved more than this. If Schumann disliked *Le Prophète*, he was quite at liberty to give his reasons for so doing, as, indeed, he had already done *apropos* of *Les Huguenots*. What he published was at once too much and too little.

The antagonism of Mendelssohn and Schumann towards Meyerbeer can, however, to a certain extent be understood. The ideals of these two composers were different from those of Meyerbeer, and they considered the latter in the light of a renegade who had abandoned the cultivation of high art in order to sacrifice to Mammon and obtain popularity at any price. These two honest workers in music thus felt no compunction in

Meyerbeer and the Grand Opera

expressing their indignation at what they looked upon as the triumph of a false art. In so doing they were manifestly unjust, and they wilfully closed their ears to the many undeniable beauties of Meyerbeer's music.

With Wagner the case was rather different. At the commencement of his career the master declared himself an enthusiastic admirer of Meyerbeer. Subsequently, his views on the music drama caused him to adopt another attitude. It must, however, not be forgotten that he retained an immense admiration for the fourth act of *Les Huguenots*, which he considered one of the most beautiful works in existence. This does not accord well with Sir Hubert Parry's verdict.* With the example before them of the above illustrious composers, all the musical small fry have followed suit, and Meyerbeer's name and fame have been ruthlessly dragged through the mire, the composer of *Robert le Diable* being rendered responsible for all the artificiality and meretriciousness of the mid-century Grand Opéra style.

* It may be remarked that Professor Ebenezer Prout in his primer on Instrumentation, included in the same series as Sir Hubert Parry's, mentions Meyerbeer as one of the greatest masters of Instrumentation.

Music in the XIXth Century

It will be worth while to look a little more closely into the matter. Berlioz's remark, *Meyerbeer a le bonheur d'avoir du talent et le talent d'avoir du bonheur*, hits the nail pretty well on the head. With the instincts of his race, Meyerbeer sought to employ his great gifts so that these should yield an immediate return in popularity. The desire to achieve success had developed with him into a veritable craze. There is something pathetic in the spectacle afforded by this richly endowed man seeking to curry favour first with one then with the other, fearing to impose his ideas on the public, timorous of the opinion expressed by the obscurest journalist, ready to be the humble servant of the vocalist and to gratify the whims of any prima donna by supplying her with vocal acrobatics.

This unfortunate susceptibility to public opinion was Meyerbeer's bane. The point has been noted over and over again by writers on music, and has prevented many from rendering due justice to the master's qualities. With more strength of character Meyerbeer would have done yet greater things. He had at his command the genius and the opportunities, besides which his financial circumstances

Meyerbeer and the Grand Opera

were such as to ensure him perfect independence.

It must, however, be admitted that some of the accusations levelled at his head are manifestly unjust. He has been blamed for leaving his country in order to write for Paris. The same thing may be said of Gluck, Piccinni, Sacchini, Cherubini, Spontini, Rossini and others, while Wagner himself would be open to reproach owing to his early attempts to obtain a hearing in the French capital.

It may be noted also that Handel and Mendelssohn composed some of their best works in England, a fact which has not to my knowledge been considered detrimental to the fame of these masters. Again, rather too much has, I think, been made of Meyerbeer's search after effect, his fondness for sumptuous mounting. The desire to produce effect is after all the objective of every dramatic composer. Let me not be misunderstood. What is it that rouses the enthusiasm of an audience at Bayreuth? It is the effect produced by a wonderful combination of means employed by a master hand. Everything here conduces to effect, even the darkness of the auditorium. The

Music in the XIXth Century

composer who has succeeded in stirring the pulses of his hearers, in touching the chord of human sensibility, has achieved his object. He has produced his effect. It is this particular sort of effect, this legitimate effect that I mean, and which I claim has in several instances been attained by Meyerbeer, on account of which many obvious shortcomings may assuredly be pardoned.

Then, again, the confident manner in which some writers have denied unto Meyerbeer all semblance of sincerity has always surprised me. Sincerity is a word too often misapplied. A sincere composer would, I take it, be one who wrote as he felt, without paying any attention to exterior considerations, but solely desirous of giving the best that was in him.

In order, therefore, properly to apply the test of sincerity to a composer it would become necessary to know him well and to be able to penetrate into all the recesses of his mind, which amounts to a practical impossibility.

What is simpler, and, indeed, absolutely essential in any attempt to form an estimate of a composer is to take into consideration the nature of his talent, which can with a fair amount of accuracy

Meyerbeer and the Grand Opera

be gauged, and the character of the epoch during which he lived.

Now Meyerbeer's peculiar temperament was essentially dramatic, this much may be taken for granted. He was an eclectic, and his sojourn in Italy had considerably vitiated his taste. There he had, by adopting the Rossinian methods, been able to gain the ear of the public and obtain successes which scandalised and pained his old fellow-student Weber, who did his utmost to induce him to return to more legitimate ways. Then Paris claimed him for her own, and there he found the soil best suited for the growth of his talent. What may be regretted is that he should not then have shaken off all vestiges of Rossinian influence.

On the other hand, however, he brought certain elements to bear in the construction of his operas which were new at the time and fully entitle him to be considered one of the reformers of the lyric drama. That he did not go further is scarcely the point.

The question is not so much what a man might have done, but what he actually achieved.

The operatic situation in 1830 was complicated

Music in the XIXth Century

in the extreme. The stern classicism of the followers of Gluck was gradually losing its hold over a public intoxicated by the brilliant Rossinian strains. The wind of romanticism was in the meanwhile blowing from Germany. Weber's *Freischütz* had been performed in Paris and the symphonies of Beethoven were not unknown. Berlioz, young and ardent, was scandalising the worthy professors of the Conservatoire with his *Symphonie Fantastique*, indulging in the wildest flights of imagination, and revolutionising the orchestra.

Meyerbeer, the eclectic *par excellence*, the musician of compromise, now came forward and succeeded in amalgamating the apparently antagonistic elements of all these schools, while at the same time displaying in his works a remarkable originality of his own.

This eclecticism, which at the time was blamed in some quarters, undoubtedly conduced towards his success with the masses. It has been sufficiently criticised since.

Before proceeding further, I may remark that the accusation which has very justly been levelled at Meyerbeer of making too great a use, or rather

Meyerbeer and the Grand Opera

abuse, of vocal ornamentation, is one which may be made against many others, and it is scarcely fair that the composer of *Robert le Diable* should be perpetually singled out as the worst offender.

The *roulade* and the *fioriture* have now almost disappeared, even in Italy, but it is not so very long ago that these excrescences could be found in the majority of operas, and even at the present time there are people who delight in vocal acrobatics.

As a rule, however, music written for the mere purpose of displaying the agility of the voice is kept for the concert-room; the older operas in which such music occurs may remain, but the newer operas are constructed on a different plan. Is Mozart wholly guiltless of employing vocal ornamentation for no better purpose than that of pleasing a singer?

What about the air of the Queen of the Night in the *Zauberflöte*?

To go back further, there can be little doubt that Handel was one of the greatest culprits in this way. Yet crowds nowadays listen open-mouthed to the interminable runs which abound in all his oratorios, and do not seem shocked by

Music in the XIXth Century

any sense of incongruity. Did not Wagner himself employ vocal ornamentation in *Rienzi* and *The Flying Dutchman*, and Berlioz in *Benvenuto Cellini*?

Are not all Verdi's early operas full of vocal embroideries?

To come to later times, did not Gounod embellish the waltz song in *Romeo* with runs and shakes to please a singer? Did not Bizet in *La Jolie Fille de Perth*, Ambroise Thomas in *Hamlet*, more recently Léo Delibes in *Lakmé*, and Saint-Saëns in *Phryné*, write florid music?

If composers nowadays are more sparing than formerly in this respect, the reason cannot altogether be ascribed to a higher outlook, but rather to the fact that the public taste has changed.

Roulades and *fioriture* are no longer the fashion. Verdi had abandoned them in his later works, and it is more than probable that Meyerbeer would have done the same had he lived at a different period.

There are instances also, it must be admitted, where vocal ornamentation is not altogether out of place and where it may be utilised in a perfectly

Meyerbeer and the Grand Opera

legitimate fashion. Meyerbeer in several instances may be said to have dramatised the *roulade*, that is, to have employed it not merely for the sake of gratifying the vanity of the singer but as a means of expression. He had got so much into the habit in the operas he wrote for Italy of considering this as part of the operatic composer's stock-in-trade that he evidently saw no objection to its employment. In the *Crociato in Egitto*, the last of the Italian operas written by Meyerbeer, slight traces may be discovered of the individuality that was later on to assert itself. It was, however, in *Robert le Diable* that Meyerbeer really showed what he was capable of doing. This work produced a sort of artistic revolution in Paris. It seemed in a measure to combine all that was best in the various schools of music. Let it be remembered that in 1831 the Parisians were more or less ignorant of symphonic music, that Rossini was their god, and the extraordinary sensation produced by *Robert le Diable* need cause no surprise. Meyerbeer was gradually initiating the public in the understanding of a better class of music.

Instead of frightening the masses away, he

Music in the XIXth Century

attracted them. Now here is a point which I do not think has been sufficiently taken into consideration by the detractors of Meyerbeer. In their anxiety to cast ridicule upon the operatic style of the period, which is at present akin to flogging a dead horse, they overlook the fact that Meyerbeer was an innovator, that his operas contain great beauties, that he showed extraordinary dramatic perception and marked originality, that he devised new instrumental effects, and that he helped to prepare the way for the modern music-drama. Is it nothing to be the composer of the fourth act of *Les Huguenots*? See how many imitators Meyerbeer has had and what they have achieved. This is a true test.

Robert le Diable, Les Huguenots, Le Prophète, L'Etoile du Nord, Le Pardon de Ploërmel, (Dinorah), L'Africaine—these are the works which for a considerable length of time practically rendered Meyerbeer the autocrat of the operatic stage.

These operas indeed still maintain a certain hold over the public in Germany, France and Italy. In London they have, with the exception of *Les Huguenots*, gradually dropped out of the

Meyerbeer and the Grand Opera

répertoire, which is a pity, as the best works of every style and epoch should be preserved.

It may also be added that it is impossible to form an adequate opinion of the true value of *Les Huguenots* from the mutilated version played in London. Never probably has any opera been so cruelly maltreated.

Some of the finest scenes have been shorn of their best attributes. Whole passages have been lopped off apparently without rhyme or reason. The first, second and third acts especially have suffered ; as to the fifth act, it has disappeared altogether.

It may therefore be said that the Englishman who never crosses the Channel, if such an individual exists, is scarcely competent to form an opinion as to the worth of Meyerbeer's operas.

If a new version of *Les Huguenots* were to be prepared, the probability is that an entirely different plan would be adopted. Many portions which have been cut out would be replaced while certain concessions to the fashion of the epoch would be excised.

In *Robert le Diable* the Italianisms are more frequent than in *Les Huguenots*. The part of Isabelle is overloaded with *fioriture* and runs. For

Music in the XIXth Century

this reason the second act appears terribly old-fashioned. In the dramatic portions of this opera Meyerbeer has, however, achieved great things. The manner in which he has succeeded in characterising his *dramatis personæ* is admirable.

Let us, again, remember the date of the production of *Robert*, and marvel how in this, as in his subsequent works, he succeeded in creating a special musical atmosphere, and in typifying his characters.

We will find this still more exemplified in *Les Huguenots*, but in *Robert* the intention is already carried out with considerable success. Bertram, the spirit of evil, is personified in the orchestra by the deeper-toned instruments, the trombones, the ophicleide and the bassoons. In the famous evocation of the nuns, the trombones, trumpets and horns are employed with striking effect, accentuating the sombreness of the situation. The woodwind instruments, on the other hand, are reserved to describe the sympathetic character of Alice. How graceful and charming is the prelude to the air sung by Alice, "Quand je quittais la Normandie," scored for flutes, oboes and clarinets! Wagner, in *Lohengrin*, has in a similar fashion

Meyerbeer and the Grand Opera

delineated the character of Elsa. The score of *Robert le Diable* is indeed full of the most ingenious instrumental devices. More than this, however, it reveals genuine melodic invention and extraordinary dramatic power, always taking into consideration the *genre*. Bertram is a creation worthy to be placed by the side of Weber's Caspar. Listen to the Valse Infernale and try to imagine how new it must have sounded in 1831. Classically constructed, it is in its essence intensely emotional. Bertram is the evil one, but he is a fallen angel, and it may be presumed that he retains some of his former self. Meyerbeer's treatment of the character would lead one to suppose that he regarded it in this light. There is a fund of tenderness in the expressive phrase of the first act addressed by Bertram to his son Robert, "Tu ne sauras jamais à quel excès je t'aime!"

The satanic element, however, of course predominates, and it is in effective contrast to the purity and sweetness of Alice.

From a psychological point of view there is a great deal to be said about *Robert le Diable*, and those are mistaken who speak of it disdainfully as a work of little artistic import. The admiration

Music in the XIXth Century

it aroused at the time was not by any means confined to the masses, but was shared by the *élite* of thought and culture. Balzac, in his "Gambarra," waxed enthusiastic over its beauties and read in the music many things which nowadays people might be puzzled to discover.

Les Huguenots, the most generally popular of Meyerbeer's operas, dates from the year 1836. Notwithstanding the changes in taste brought about by time, it must be admitted that the work still survives, and that in spite of antiquated forms and concessions to vocalists, it possesses the power of stirring the imagination and of moving the heart. The entire fourth act remains a masterpiece, open to criticism perhaps as regards a few details, but admirable as a whole, a conception of the highest import. Those who deny all sincerity to Meyerbeer should listen attentively to this act.

Wagner's opinion of the great love duet is already known. Berlioz was roused to so high a pitch of enthusiasm by the *Benédiction des Poignards* that he was moved to express himself in these terms: "The effervescence of the emotions excited by this masterpiece makes one desire to be

Meyerbeer and the Grand Opera

a great man in order to place one's glory and one's genius at the feet of Meyerbeer."

It is curious to note the manner in which Meyerbeer has succeeded in characterising his types, hewing them as it were in marble. When Raoul de Nangis first makes his appearance, his arrival is heralded by a short orchestral introduction which suggests the chivalrous nature of the young Protestant nobleman. This scene has been cut from the version of the opera used at Covent Garden. See again how Meyerbeer punctuates the arrival of Marcel, Raoul's rough but sympathetic soldier servant, with a gruff theme allotted to the bassoons, violoncellos and basses.

The courtly Nevers, the noble-minded, impulsive Valentine, the sinister St. Bris, even the joyous page, all these are types, they stand out on the canvas. Then again in the matter of musical colouring Meyerbeer has done wonders.

The gay *insouciance* of the court of the Valois seems reflected in the bright strains of the first act, with its brilliant chain of choruses.

In the third act, the contrast between the two opposing religious parties is delineated with a master hand. The Huguenot soldiers troll their

Music in the XIXth Century

lustly drinking songs ; the Catholic women drone their litanies (note here the peculiar effect obtained by the chord of G minor with the third left out). The soldiers endeavour to drown the voices of the women with their drinking song, and the two themes are combined with admirable skill. Later on, the rival factions are again at loggerheads, and here Meyerbeer has succeeded wonderfully in depicting the agitation of the mob. This quarrelling chorus, again, cannot be judged by the Covent Garden version, where, in order either to save a minute or two or to simplify the piece, the scene has been mutilated in a shameful manner. This chorus, by the way, must have been in Gounod's mind when he wrote the quarrelling scene between the Capulets and Montagues in the third act of *Romeo*. There can be little doubt also that it must have served as a model to Bizet, when, in the first act of *Carmen*, the cigarette girls surround the officer Zuniga and denounce the offending heroine of this admirable opera.

It is easy enough to reproach Meyerbeer with having been influenced by his predecessors and contemporaries. At any rate he showed that he possessed a strong personality.

Meyerbeer and the Grand Opera

If he adopted certain forms and characteristics from others, he gave them the unmistakable impress of his own individuality.

Other composers have since done their best to equal him on his own ground ; they have helped themselves liberally to his devices, without, however, bringing forth anything of their own. *Les Huguenots* had proved the consecration of Meyerbeer's reputation. Meyerbeer now stood in a unique position, and was in a measure the arbiter of the operatic destiny. Weber was dead, Cherubini was old, Spontini had given up writing, Rossini had retired, Mendelssohn had, substantially, not attempted operas, Wagner, Verdi and Gounod were as yet unknown, Marschner's reputation was almost exclusively confined to Germany, while Auber, Halévy and Donizetti were scarcely formidable rivals, and Berlioz was altogether too thorough in his ideas to count seriously. Such was the situation in 1836.

Meyerbeer could then have done pretty much as he chose, and the lines to be pursued were clearly indicated to him by a woman of genius, George Sand, who in a long letter to the composer, after expressing all the admiration she felt

Music in the XIXth Century

for *Les Huguenots* had the courage to make the following observations : “ Allow me,” she wrote, “ to express a wish ! Why this consecrated form, why this *coda*, species of uniform and cumbersome framework ? Why this *trait*, equivalent to the pirouette of a dancer ? Why this habit of making the voice pass, towards the end of each piece, from the highest to the lowest notes of the voice ? Why these used-up and monotonous forms which destroy the effect of the most beautiful phrases ? ” Then later on she boldly apostrophised the composer in these words : “ You have not yet altogether disburdened yourself from the ignorance of the vulgar public and from the demands of unintelligent vocalists. You could not do it, I suppose ! Perhaps even you have only succeeded in making your most beautiful ideas acceptable by employing obligatory formulas. But, at present, are you not in a position to form your own audiences, to impose on them your wishes, to reveal to them a purity of taste which they ignore, and which no one has as yet been able frankly to proclaim ? These immense successes, these brilliant victories won over the public give you certain rights ; they possibly also impose upon you certain

Meyerbeer and the Grand Opera

duties; for above popular favour and human glory, there is the cult of art and the faith of the artist. You are the man of the present; master, be also the man of the future. . . . And if my idea is extravagant, my wish indiscreet, forget that I have said anything!"

What Meyerbeer may have thought of this letter is not recorded. That he did not profit by the advice it contained is unfortunately but too true.

Le Prophète, Meyerbeer's next opera, did not see the light until several years later, in 1849. In the meanwhile the composer had spent a good deal of time in Germany as *Hof-Kapellmeister* to the King of Prussia. It is to this period that belongs the composition of the incidental music to *Struensee*, which is from a purely artistic point of view one of Meyerbeer's most remarkable compositions. He was working simultaneously at *Le Prophète* and at *L'Africaine*, and is said to have written two complete versions of the latter, the last differing entirely from the first. M. Johannes Weber, who for some years was Meyerbeer's secretary, has stated in a volume of reminiscences that of all the composer's operas *Le Prophète* is the one which he

Music in the XIXth Century

wrote with the greatest amount of liberty. And yet he gives us at the same time examples of how even in this work Meyerbeer allowed himself to be dictated to by his interpreters.

It appears that Mme. Castellan, who was to take the part of Bertha, insisted upon having an air to sing when she first came on. There was nothing in the situation to justify this, yet Meyerbeer at once wrote two airs, of which Mme. Castellan selected the more brilliant, although the master preferred the other. All that Meyerbeer did was to forbid the insertion of this air into the published score. This lamentable weakness on the part of the composer was further exemplified in a rather amusing manner. Roger, who was to create the title rôle had, it appears, a light tenor voice, one scarcely robust enough for the exacting music. "Meyerbeer," writes M. Weber, "had sent me to Roger to accompany him on the piano and run through his part. Jean first appears in the second act ; this act went without trouble ; but in the third act the massacre commenced. Mme. Roger invariably assisted at the rehearsals. She was neither artistic nor musical, and she looked after her husband with an incessant motherly solici-

Meyerbeer and the Grand Opera

tude, rarely brooking contradiction. Roger had sung a great deal in the second act; Mme. Roger settled that in the third act he should sing but little! In the third act Jean had a very original and expressive air to sing. Hardly was this tried over than Mme. Roger declared it to be superfluous and said that it would have to be suppressed. Roger at first would not consent, as the air pleased him, but resistance was useless and the next day he told me that the air had been taken out! I expressed my regrets to Meyerbeer; he shrugged his shoulders: 'I will employ it elsewhere,' he said. He never did employ it, however, the air being absolutely in keeping with the situation." Meyerbeer had also composed an overture to *Le Prophète*. At the rehearsals this was stated to be too purely symphonic, and it was put aside. Such subservience on the part of one so richly gifted, and occupying a position so lofty, is absolutely incomprehensible. It is easy to imagine the sort of attitude Wagner would have adopted under similar circumstances.

The part of Fidès, it may be remarked, was not tampered with in any way. But Meyerbeer had as his interpreter Mme. Viardot, who was a great

Music in the XIXth Century

artist as well as a great singer. *Le Prophète* ranks in the opinion of many as Meyerbeer's masterpiece. Gounod, among others, was of this way of thinking. Certainly in the Cathedral scene the composer has attained great heights of emotional feeling. Here he seems to have concerned himself with nought else but the strict interpretation of the text, and his music, inspired by a wonderfully pathetic situation, has arisen to lofty altitudes.

Meyerbeer's method of endeavouring subtly to suggest a train of thought by repeating a melody previously heard is employed in *Le Prophète*. In the second act, where Jean relates his dream, the theme of the triumphal march which will be heard later on is softly played by the orchestra. The instrumentation of *Le Prophète* is rich and sonorous, and abounds in admirable combinations. It is, of course, not my intention to enter into detail concerning this, which some might consider the purely technical portion of the work. I should, however, like to mention the wonderfully ethereal effect realised in the fourth act, when Jean utters the words : " Que la sainte lumière descende sur ton front," by the combination of the violins divided

Meyerbeer and the Grand Opera

into three parts allied to three flutes and a *cor anglais*. The various instrumental effects discovered by Meyerbeer are so plentiful that I cannot here attempt to deal with them.

Meyerbeer had been working at *L'Africaine* for years, but the opera was only produced after his death. It is, however, certain that the work in its present form belongs to the later period of his career. The exact time of its composition has, indeed, been fixed by Meyerbeer himself. On the manuscript score the master wrote down the dates, and we find that, with the exception of the romance sung by Inès, the first two acts were composed in 1857 and 1858, and the others from 1860 to 1863.

The story of *L'Africaine* is very silly, and the work has all the obvious shortcomings of the "grand opéra" *genre*. At the same time, the music is often in Meyerbeer's best vein. It is extremely picturesque, invariably ingenious, and occasionally, as in the finale of the first act, undeniably powerful. *Æsthetically*, it can scarcely be said to offer any advance upon the composer's former grand operas.

Meyerbeer had, between whiles, made an excur-

Music in the XIXth Century

sion to the Opéra Comique, the home of the typically French composer.

It can scarcely be said that he adapted himself altogether satisfactorily to his new surroundings. Accustomed to paint on a large canvas, he found himself hampered by the size of the framework. His labours were, however, not by any means unproductive of good results.

L'Etoile du Nord is a veritable musical kaleidoscope. Some of the music therein had already figured in *Ein Feldlager in Schlesien*, an opera written for Jenny Lind some years previously. The complication of means so often to be found in Meyerbeer's scores is here exemplified in the finale to the second act, where no fewer than three distinct bands are employed. To the ordinary orchestra are added a fife band and a brass band, both on the stage. The effect of these heard in combination, each playing a different theme, is certainly imposing.

Le Pardon de Ploërmel (*Dinorah*) occupies a special place among Meyerbeer's works. In some respects it is the most human of his conceptions. All the cumbersome paraphernalia of the "grand opéra" has here been laid aside. A

Meyerbeer and the Grand Opera

simple and pathetic Breton tale has inspired the composer often happily, although the music allotted to the heroine is overloaded with vocal ornamentation.

Meyerbeer's sole rival at the Grand Opéra was Halévy,* who was certainly not strong enough to prove a serious competitor.

A conscientious, hard-working musician, Halévy was one of the most prolific composers of his day. *La Juive*, *Guido et Ginevra*, *La Reine de Chypre*, *Charles VI.*, *Le Juif Errant*, and *La Magicienne*, were some of the works he contributed to the Académie.

Of these *La Juive* alone may be said to have survived. It contains some fine dramatic passages, and in the Scène de la Pâque the composer has been really inspired.

Guido et Ginevra (1838), *La Reine de Chypre* (1841), *Charles VI.* (1843) are long and ponderous works in which may be found some pleasing numbers, for Halévy possessed a certain melodic facility. They do not, however, reveal any particular individuality.

Donizetti's *La Favorite* (1841) was originally

* Halévy (1799-1862).

Music in the XIXth Century

brought out at the Grand Opéra, and has perhaps worn better than the composer's other serious operas.

Verdi's *Jerusalem*, an adaptation from *I Lombardi*, and his *Les Vêpres Siciliennes* (1856) did not achieve a permanent success. The fact remains that for some thirty years, from 1831 to 1861, Meyerbeer towered far above every other composer at the Grand Opéra. He was placed by French opinion on the highest pinnacle and was accepted as the incarnation of all that is greatest and best in the dramatic musician. Naturally the point of view has altered in France as it has everywhere else, and Meyerbeer has long ceased to be the model placed before the budding French composer. People are generally apt to fall into extremes, and if Meyerbeer has been unduly exalted, he has also been unjustly reviled. It has been my aim to steer a middle course and at the same time to lay stress on some of the master's great qualities, which are apt to be forgotten.

CHAPTER IV

AUBER AND THE "OPÉRA COMIQUE"

To many people French music in its most typically national form is represented by the "opéra comique."

It would be more correct to say *was* represented, for the old landmarks have been gradually obliterated, the operetta on the one hand and the lyrical drama on the other having usurped the place of the genuine article, and the theatre associated with the *genre*, while keeping in its *répertoire* the most famous examples of the past, now opens its doors to the boldest of the younger composers and welcomes the most unconventional manifestations of lyrical art. The older "opéra comique" was indeed but the French equivalent of the German "Singspiel" and of our own ballad opera.

Originally a mere *comédie à ariettes*, of which

Music in the XIXth Century

many examples may be found in the works of XVIIIth century composers, it gradually enlarged its scope, became more dramatic and approached nearer to the style of the "grand opéra," the presence of spoken dialogue being at last its only distinguishing feature.

As the public has become more musical the spoken dialogue has been curtailed until it may be said almost to have disappeared. Massenet in his *Manon* adopted a curious method in endeavouring to effect a compromise. He kept the spoken dialogue, although he reduced it to a minimum, but accompanied it with an orchestral commentary, a plan which has not met with much success.

Carmen was of course written according to the traditional method, in this respect at least, and the recitatives employed on the Italian stage do not figure in the original version.

Bruneau, in *Le Rêve*, was the first who practically revolutionised the ideas prevalent at the Opéra Comique and prepared the way for Charpentier and his *Louise*. But of these composers I shall have something to say later on.

Only recently the subject of spoken dialogue

Auber and the "Opéra Comique"

has been discussed by no less a musician than Saint-Saëns, who curiously enough tries to find excuses for the mingling of speech and song in opera. In the article entitled "The defence of the Opéra Comique,"* the French master thus expresses himself: "In order that this system of scenes alternately spoken and sung, so little rational in appearance, so displeasing to the judgment, should have lasted so long, should have had so much success, it must have had its use. It is indeed useful for several reasons. It affords repose to those hearers, more numerous than one is apt to imagine, whose nerves cannot well support several hours of uninterrupted music, whose sense of hearing becomes deadened after a certain time and renders them incapable of appreciating any sound. It permits one to adapt to the lyrical stage amusing and complicated comedies, the intrigues of which could not be developed without many words, and would be incomprehensible if these words did not reach the ears of the public without obstacle. The music intervenes when sentiment predominates over action, or action assumes a greater interest; certain scenes thus

* "Portraits et Souvenirs."

Music in the XIXth Century

placed in relief come out strongly in the *ensemble*." That a musician like Saint-Saëns should take this view may indeed cause surprise. It is, after all, surely not the business of the composer to think of people's nerves when he is writing an opera, or to calculate how much music certain spectators are likely to be able to endure!

That the French public nowadays shows a preference for consecutive musical treatment in opera scarcely needs demonstration; it is proved by the success in Paris of *Die Meistersinger*, *Falstaff*, *Hänsel und Gretel*, and *Louise*. Is it not possible that Saint-Saëns, eager to react against the subversive tendencies of the *outranciers*, has for this reason broken a lance in defence of a now obsolete custom?

Théophile Gautier showed himself more severe in his judgment of the "opéra comique": "We have no tender feelings for the opéra comique," he wrote, "that bastard and mean *genre*, a mixture of two incompatible means of expression, where the actors act badly under the pretext that they are singers, and sing out of tune under the pretext that they are comedians."

Here it may assuredly be said that the witty

Auber and the "Opéra Comique"

author rather overshot the mark. Assuredly the form of the older "opéra comique" is now out of date. It must, however, not be forgotten that many delightful works have thus been conceived, and it is well to remember that masterpieces such as *Fidelio* and *Der Freischütz* also contain spoken dialogue. Genius, as it has often been proved, asserts itself under all conditions.

To the untravelled Englishman the French Opéra Comique is almost a *terra incognita*. The names of those who have illustrated the *genre* are household words in France. Boïeldieu, Nicolo, Hérold, Auber, Adam, Halévy, Massé, Maillart, Ambroise Thomas, to name the most famous, have provided a *répertoire* which is dear to all Frenchmen. The classical example *par excellence* of the "opéra comique" is Boïeldieu's * *La Dame Blanche*, which since its production in 1825 has never ceased to attract. Once disdainfully alluded to by a well-known French composer as *un opéra tyrolien dont l'action se passe en Ecosse*, it has nevertheless succeeded in surviving the caprices of fashion, and its simple and placid strains have soothed the feelings of many generations of Parisians. Boïeldieu was

* Boïeldieu (1775-1834).

Music in the XIXth Century

undoubtedly one of the most typically national composers of France. His melodies have a true popular ring, a naïve and often touching simplicity. The enthusiasm he has aroused in his countrymen, it must be admitted, occasionally seems somewhat exaggerated. Is it not a fact, however, that one of his operas, *Jean de Paris*, was considered by Schumann to be one of the first three “opéras comiques” of the world, and placed by him side by side with Mozart’s *Figaro* and Rossini’s *Barbieri* ?

Boïeldieu, the direct descendant of Monsigny and Grétry, seems to have inherited from his predecessors the gift of tune and the art of expressing his ideas in the simplest manner.

La Dame Blanche deserves to live as a characteristic example of the national music of the time. It was about the last offshoot of the classical period of the Opéra Comique. Nicolo Isouard,* a composer of lesser talent than Boïeldieu, was the author of two “opéras comiques,” which for a long while remained popular—*Joconde* and *Les Rendez-vous bourgeois*. Hérold,† whose premature death occurred in 1833, is known by two operas, the last

* Nicolo Isouard (1775-1818). † Hérold (1791-1833).

Auber and the “Opéra Comique”

he wrote, *Zampa*, and *Le Pré aux Clercs*. His music is a curious combination of varied influences. In its essence it belongs to the French school of the period. It is evident, however, that Hérold had studied Weber with profit, and the romanticism of the time had not left him unmoved. He had also fallen under the sway of Rossini, and his operas testify to his admiration of this master's methods. Hérold's style, composed as it was of such different elements, was naturally lacking in homogeneity; yet, despite its hybrid character, it was not altogether devoid of individuality. *Zampa* reveals a decided dramatic temperament, and *Le Pré aux Clercs* contains many pleasing pages.

In certain instances Hérold evidenced a disposition to enlarge the *genre* and to approach the grand opera style.

After his death the history of the Opéra Comique was for some time bound up in the works of Auber, Halévy, Adam * and Ambroise Thomas,† who, during the succeeding twenty years, were the accredited purveyors to the establishment. The object of these composers was to

* Adam (1802-1856). † Ambroise Thomas (1811-1896).

Music in the XIXth Century

write music of a popular kind. They do not appear to have been actuated by any other desire than to turn out as many operas as possible on the accepted pattern. That they achieved their aim and gained the suffrages of the public is undeniable. In one sense, this period may be accounted a brilliant one. From an artistic point of view, however, there is little to be said in its favour. A set form had seemingly been accepted, and any departure from this would have been resented. The above-named composers either had not the strength or the inclination to combat the tendencies of the age, so they simply followed the current and found it profitable so to do.

Ambroise Thomas's best works, *Mignon* and *Hamlet*, of course belong to his later career, and will be dealt with in another chapter.

The king of the Opéra Comique at this period was undoubtedly Auber. The lightheartedness and gaiety of the French character seemed to be reflected in his music. In this respect he may claim to have been one of the most typically national of composers. Let it not, though, be forgotten that there are several sides to the French character, and that of these Auber only

Auber and the "Opéra Comique"

represented one. He was in all respects essentially a Parisian, and his literary counterpart may be found in Paul de Kock. The composer and the novelist may be taken as exemplifying the *bourgeois* spirit of the time. Nowadays their works are looked down upon, but possibly their merits are undervalued. An inexhaustible fund of melody, such as Auber undoubtedly possessed, is, after all, something which ought to count.

The following appreciation of Auber by M. Henri Lavoix* is remarkably just: "One must expect from Auber neither a profound dramatic sentiment, nor poetical outbursts, nor powerful effects, nor sensibility, nor tenderness, nor—especially—passion. Wit in the melody, wit in the general style, wit in the harmony, which is ingenious and distinguished, wit in the orchestra, notwithstanding more *brio* than brilliancy, more sound than sonority, wit in the rhythms, although these are sometimes vulgar, wit especially in the disposition of the scenes, wit ever and always, even when the heart should be moved—this is the predominating character of his talent." Nothing can be truer than these words.

* "Histoire de la Musique Française."

Music in the XIXth Century

Yet another appreciation of Auber may be quoted, this time the opinion of no less a musician than Richard Wagner, who wrote thus in 1842: "His music, at once elegant and popular, fluent and precise, graceful and bold, bending with marvellous facility to every turn of his caprice, had all the qualities to win and dominate the public taste. He mastered vocal music, with a keen vivacity, multiplied its rhythms to infinity, and gave the *ensemble*-pieces an *entrain*, a characteristic briskness scarcely known before his time."*

Among the many scores written by Auber for the Opéra Comique, two may be singled out as particularly representative of his talent, *Fra Diavolo* and *Le Domino Noir*. Light, graceful, pleasing and piquant, they give the best idea of Auber's abilities. With gay *insouciance* this gifted musician produced work after work, seemingly without effort, to the very end of his long life. There was no attempt on his part to participate in the great musical movement of the day. His operas were all cast in the same mould, and he was content to allow his ideas to flow

* "Richard Wagner's Prose Works." Translated by William Ashton Ellis. Vol. VIII. Kegan Paul.

Auber and the "Opéra Comique"

naturally without disturbing their course in any way.

Halévy did not possess his lightness of touch, his *esprit* or his individuality. Consequently the works he wrote for the Opéra Comique, such as *L'Eclair* and *Les Mousquetaires de la Reine*, although they obtained success at the time of their production and are still occasionally heard in France, have never acquired anything approaching the universal popularity which has accrued to the operas of Auber.

Just as at the Grand Opéra Halévy was overshadowed by Meyerbeer, so at the Opéra Comique he was not able to compete against his brilliant compatriot. An honest musical artisan, an indefatigable producer, Halévy wrote an immense deal in the current musical language of the day, without apparently endeavouring to emerge from the ruts of routine. Occasionally, it must be admitted, he hit upon graceful themes, and displayed dramatic feeling and even showed a certain amount of individuality. These instances were, however, but flashes in the pan which have not been able to ensure vitality to his works.

Adolphe Adam was a rather vulgarised edition

Music in the XIXth Century

of Auber. If the latter was essentially the composer of the *bourgeoisie*, Adam was the musician of the proletariat, the provider of *refrains* to be whistled by the man in the street.

Le Châlet, Le Postillion de Lonjumeau, Le Brasseur de Preston, Giralda, and numberless other scores proved the delight of the uncritical audiences during the reign of Louis Philippe. Many of Adam's "opéras comiques" would pass muster nowadays as better-class operettas. They do not offer any special features of interest or novelty of structure.

Ambroise Thomas's early efforts at the Opéra Comique are not of much value. The best of these was *Le Caïd*, an amusing *pasticcio* of the Italian opera style then in vogue. This work, which was produced in 1849, has a certain importance inasmuch as it seems in a measure to have foreshadowed the appearance of the Offenbachian "opéra bouffe."

Ambroise Thomas was, however, a very different musician from Offenbach. Of an elegiac temperament, he had none of the extraordinary animal spirits, or, indeed, of the strong sense of humour that characterised the works of the Cologne com-

Auber and the "Opéra Comique"

poser, although he of course far surpassed him as a musician. In later years he was to produce his best works in *Mignon* and *Hamlet*, and indeed it may be said that until these operas were brought out, Ambroise Thomas's position was but a subordinate one. It was, in fact, very much on a par with that of Victor Massé,* whose *Noces de Jeannette*, *Galathée*, and other works were successful examples of the *opéra comique* of the time; or of Aimé Maillart,† the composer of *Les Dragons de Villars*, which had a brilliant vogue, and of *Lara*. Neither Massé nor Maillart possessed any great individuality, and their works were constructed on the ordinary pattern. At the end of his career Massé certainly made an attempt to enlarge his style, and his *Paul et Virginie* and *Une Nuit de Cléopâtre* are conceived on a more ambitious scale. He was, however, more at his ease when musically painting a small *tableau de genre* like *Les Noces de Jeannette*.

Clapissou's operas have long since been forgotten, as have those of Monpou, Grisar, and Bazin.

Meyerbeer with his *L'Etoile du Nord* and *Le Pardon de Ploërmel* undoubtedly raised the standard

* Massé (1822-1884).

† Maillart (1817-1871).

Music in the XIXth Century

of the *opéra comique*, and prepared the way for the modern school. It is impossible, however, to regard these works as typically French. As time has progressed the *opéra comique genre* has necessarily undergone certain modifications. It is only, however, within the last decade of the XIXth century that the spoken dialogue, which formerly was *de rigueur*, has disappeared, two of the latest works in which it has been retained being Messenger's *La Basoche* and Saint-Saëns's *Phryné*.

In the meanwhile the *opéra bouffe* of the Offenbach period has made way for the *opérette*, illustrated by composers such as Lecocq, Vasseur, Audran, Varney, Planquette, a *genre* which may be said to have taken the place of the lighter operas of the beginning of the century. The growth of musical taste has asserted itself at the Opéra Comique as well as elsewhere. The best operas of Boïeldieu, Auber, Hérold are still performed there, but the new works include those of the more advanced members of the young French school. The ideal is no longer the same. Formerly any attempt at innovation was sternly repressed. Now it is encouraged.

Auber and the “Opéra Comique”

Thus has it come to pass that those composers who have something new to say are precisely those who find a ready welcome at the Opéra Comique.

“Quantum mutatus ab illo!”

CHAPTER V

BERLIOZ AND THE ROMANTIC MOVEMENT

THE reign of Louis Philippe, so prosaic in some ways, witnessed the victory of romanticism over the pseudo-classicism which flourished during the First Empire. What a galaxy of brilliant thinkers, artists, poets, writers, and musicians did this period contain !

The spirit of the first revolution, curbed and diverted into a saner channel by the stringent Napoleonic rule, purified through disasters at home and abroad, reasserted itself in another guise.

The liberty of thought and emancipation from authority claimed by the *jeunes France* of Théophile Gautier was intellectual in its nature, and had nothing in common with the unbridled license of an uneducated mob. The romantics of the epoch were aristocratic in their nature. Theirs was the aristocracy of the mind. Victor Hugo,

Berlioz

Alfred de Musset, Alfred de Vigny, Lamartine, Lacordaire, Théophile Gautier, Georges Sand, Alexandre Dumas, Balzac, Delacroix, Horace Vernet, Chopin, Meyerbeer, Berlioz, Félicien David were some of those who rendered the reign of the citizen king memorable.

If among the French composers of the XIXth century one deserves a place entirely to himself, it is surely Berlioz.* Everything about this extraordinary man was abnormal, and yet he was truly a child of his own generation, reproducing in his strains the feelings of a people intoxicated by its lately acquired liberty, and eager to assert its freedom. The great, the sublime, the horrible, the grotesque, the poetical, the idyllic, the fantastic, all may be found in his music, which occasionally brings to the mind the nightmarish horrors of the Wiertz Museum in Brussels, while at others it evokes the spirit of Shakespeare or Goethe.

Born in an obscure country town, with practically no opportunity of hearing any music during his childhood and early youth, then learning later on, at the Paris Conservatoire, the rudiments of

* Berlioz (1803-1869).

Music in the XIXth Century

his art under the tuition of honest but pedantic masters, Berlioz asserted his originality at the very outset of his career in a series of instrumental works which to the worthy professors of the period must have appeared absolutely anarchical. It is easy to imagine the amazement of the gentle Boïeldieu, fresh from writing *La Dame Blanche*, in listening to the "Symphonie Fantastique," or the dismay a work of this kind must have produced in the mind of Lesueur, who considered Beethoven's C Minor Symphony a dangerous model for a young composer to follow.

Berlioz was altogether too thorough in his ideas to meet with appreciation at this time, and his early reputation indeed clung to him through life. It is only since his death that his compatriots have endeavoured to make tardy amends for past neglect by apotheosising the master. In so doing they have possibly been stimulated by the growing popularity of a still greater musician, and eager to show that if Germany could boast of a Wagner, France was the native land of a Berlioz.

It is difficult to realise what the conditions of music must have been in the French provinces at the beginning of the century, when Berlioz was a child.

Berlioz

Towards 1810, the piano was still in an imperfect state, and its price was very high. It is said that General de la Valette possessed one of these instruments at Grenoble, and that this was the only piano in the entire department. The harp and the guitar, on the other hand, were both in great favour.

Until his arrival in Paris, at the age of nineteen, Berlioz had scarcely had the opportunity of hearing any music at all. Once in Paris, he was able to witness the operas of Gluck and Spontini, and from that hour dates the unbounded admiration he entertained for these masters during the whole of his life.

Strange, indeed, this enthusiasm for the ultra-classicism of the Gluckian opera on the part of one who was to prove so subversive in his own musical creations. But then Berlioz was, as Saint-Saëns has justly and quaintly said, "a paradox made man." With him everything was pushed to extremes.

In his enthusiasms and dislikes he was equally violent. A few bars by Gluck would cause him to faint with emotion, whilst his hatred of Rossini made him wish to blow up the theatre during the

Music in the XIXth Century

performance of one of the popular *maestro's* operas.

This exuberance of feeling, this enthusiasm, found vent in the "Symphonie Fantastique," with which he burst upon the world in 1828, after having already produced a few orchestral compositions of extraordinary daring. That a young man of twenty-five, who at the age of nineteen knew next to nothing of music, should have been able to conceive a work of such originality and absolute unconventionality seems wonderful.

In the "Symphonie Fantastique" Berlioz laid bare his soul, cried out his anguish, laughed with the bitter irony of one who already had experienced no little disillusionment. Not only did he express the feelings and aspirations of his own nature in his music, but he succeeded in evoking the spirit of the epoch and pointed the way to composers of the future by disclosing fresh horizons and foreshadowing the developments of the modern school. "This young musician," Alfred Bruneau has written, "impressionable to excess, who, in the five parts of this symphony, in the five changing scenes of this work, passes through the thousand alternatives of

Berlioz

sadness and of joy, of laughter and of tears, of happiness and of grief, of confidence and of jealousy, of light and darkness, of admiration and execration, of silence and of tumult, of the grotesque and the sublime, of earth and of hell, he is himself, and better still, he is the artist of his own time." The "Symphonie Fantastique" may be crude in parts, unduly eccentric, even vulgar, in others, yet it bears the stamp in every bar of the composer's sincerity and enthusiasm.

It is these qualities of sincerity and enthusiasm which helped to make Berlioz the great artist he was. Unlike so many of his contemporaries, he never bartered his talent for the sake of acquiring popularity. As he felt, so he wrote.

It is regrettable that Berlioz should not have passed his early years in a more musical *milieu*. Fresh impressions count for so much, and his musical genius by being fostered more gradually would doubtless have produced yet better results. For it must be admitted that if his works contain much that is admirable they also reveal many weaknesses. Berlioz was not gifted with a very rich vein of melody. His themes are often poor and trivial. Neither can it be said that he shone

Music in the XIXth Century

appreciably either as a harmonist or contrapuntist. It was in the domain of the orchestra that he reigned supreme. The most commonplace ideas were elevated by the wonderful treatment to which they were subjected. Berlioz indeed may be said to have inaugurated a new epoch in the art of instrumentation. Play his works on the piano and you cannot fail to be profoundly disappointed. Hear them performed by an orchestra, and you will be entranced. It may be said that this is scarcely a fair test, that it is not to be expected that a work written for the orchestra should sound well transcribed for the piano. Yet this test may be applied with success to some of the greatest masterpieces. The instrumentation is after all only the colouring of the musical picture. If the subject is not interesting in itself, or the drawing is imperfect, the most beautiful colouring will not serve to atone for these defects.

Now with Berlioz it may be said without fear of contradiction that the interest lies almost entirely in the instrumental colouring which he knew how to apply in so wonderful a manner. This may be one of the reasons why none of his operas has obtained a real success, recent efforts

Berlioz

to galvanise them into life having signally failed. Curiously enough, in his operas Berlioz did not seem imbued with the same progressive spirit which appeared in his works destined for the concert-room.

Neither *Benvenuto Cellini*, produced at the Paris Opera in 1838, where may be found pieces cut out on the ordinary pattern, and even airs embellished by runs and shakes, nor *Beatrice et Benedict*, a musical comedy written for the impresario of the Kursaal at Baden Baden in 1862, nor *La Prise de Troie*, nor *Les Troyens*, shows us Berlioz at his greatest. The two last-named works, which belong to the end of his career, prove that Berlioz remained to the last a faithful disciple of Gluck.

Certain scenes of these works in their simplicity, nobility, and expressiveness bring to the mind the style of the old master. It is not on the stage, however, that one must seek Berlioz, notwithstanding the fact that he was eminently endowed with a dramatic instinct which he showed in well-nigh all his concert and even in his sacred works.

The "Symphonie Fantastique" and its sequel, "Lélio, ou le retour à la Vie," the "Romeo and

Music in the XIXth Century

Juliet" symphony, with its beautiful love scene and its extraordinarily original Queen Mab scherzo, the "Harold in Italy" symphony, the colossal *Requiem*, the splendid *Te Deum*, and last, but not least, the dramatic legend *La Damnation de Faust* are his greatest creations.

It is this last work which has endeared the name of Berlioz to the English public, and it is in its pages that may be found some of the choicest of his inspirations.

Also in *L'Enfance du Christ* Berlioz, although an absolute religious sceptic, has produced one of his most attractive scores. However, notwithstanding the beauties that abound in the two above-named works, notwithstanding the splendours of the *Requiem* and the *Te Deum*, with its stupendous "Judex crederis," compositions such as the "Symphonie Fantastique," "Roméo et Juliette," "Harold," and the brilliant overture "Le Carnaval Romain" seem to be the most typical examples of the composer's genius.

Berlioz himself, in a letter addressed to his friend Ferrand in 1868, wrote that if all his works were to be burned save one, he would wish to save the *Requiem*. In his Memoirs, however,

Berlioz

he owns to preferring the Love Scene from "Roméo et Juliette" to all his compositions.

Unlike most musicians, Berlioz developed rapidly, and his style reached its maturity almost immediately. The scarcely fledged pupil of the Conservatoire asserted himself without delay as one who had something new to say. He spoke his strongest when still a young man. During his later years it would seem as if a reactionary spirit had come over him. A broken-hearted, disappointed man, he was, alas! not destined to taste the sweets of success, at any rate in his own country, but in Germany and Russia he was acclaimed as a great master. It must be admitted that his caustic disposition did not tend to render him popular. His criticisms were also sometimes unduly trenchant, although often remarkably just, invariably interesting, and generally witty.

There are certain points of affinity between Berlioz and another celebrated Frenchman, Voltaire, in the sense that the one equalled the other in causticity of spirit. Both were masters in the art of employing the shafts of ridicule.

Berlioz was as great a critic as he was a composer and, be it added, equally paradoxical in each

Music in the XIXth Century

capacity. Yet he lacked certain qualities that are considered indispensable to a good critic. Entirely guided by his own feelings and impressions, he could work himself up to the highest pitch of enthusiasm when writing about the music which appealed to him, witness the admirable pages he has left on Gluck's operas and Beethoven's symphonies. On the other hand, he showed a strong bias against those composers with whom he was out of sympathy. In many cases, indeed, he condemned without knowledge and in obedience to an intuitive feeling.

He seems, for instance, to have harboured a prejudice against Bach, whose music he scarcely knew.

An instance of this is given by Saint-Saëns, who writes: "I always recollect his (Berlioz's) delight at hearing a chorus of Sebastian Bach which I brought to his notice one day; he could not get over it that the great Sebastian should have written such things; and he owed to me that he had always looked upon him as a sort of colossal contrapuntist, a constructor of very clever fugues, but devoid of charm and poetry. In point of fact he did not know him." If he was ignorant of Bach

Berlioz

he had, on the other hand, thoroughly penetrated Beethoven and commented upon his symphonies, sonatas, and other works with love and enthusiasm. Among his best articles is the one consecrated to *Fidelio*.

Berlioz met Mendelssohn in Rome, and these two composers, so entirely different in every respect, seem to have become warm friends. The French composer appears indeed to have sincerely admired the talent of his German colleague, a compliment which the latter was unable to return. "His is one of those candid minds one so seldom comes across," Berlioz wrote of Mendelssohn; "he firmly believes in the Lutheran religion, and I sometimes scandalised him very much in laughing at the Bible."

Rossini and his Italian contemporaries were thoroughly distasteful to Berlioz, who, however, wrote a laudatory notice of *Guillaume Tell*. The Italian composer having published three choruses entitled "La Foi," "L'Espérance" and "La Charité," Berlioz thus wittily dismissed them: "His Faith will not move mountains! His Hope has deceived ours; as to his Charity, it will not ruin him."

Music in the XIXth Century

His admiration for Meyerbeer was very great, and he wrote enthusiastically about *Les Huguenots*.

If he was not able to appreciate Wagner, this may have been in some measure due to professional jealousy. He saw his German rival gradually coming to the fore. *Tannhäuser* had been accepted at the Opéra while his *La Prise de Troie* and *Les Troyens* were still unperformed

When Wagner conducted a concert of his works, Berlioz wrote a notice in which he praised the prelude to *Lohengrin* as a masterpiece, but declared that he could not make head or tail out of the prelude to *Tristan*.

In 1859 three new operas were performed in Paris, Gounod's *Faust*, Félicien David's *Herculanum*, and Meyerbeer's *Le Pardon de Ploërmel*.

He thus summed up his impressions of these works in a letter to his friend Ferrand: "The *Faust* of Gounod contains some extremely fine as well as some very mediocre parts; they have destroyed, in the libretto, certain admirable musical situations which would have had to be found if Goethe had not already found them himself. The music of *Herculanum* is desperately feeble and colourless; that of *Le Pardon* is, on the contrary,

Berlioz

written in a masterly, ingenious, piquant and often poetical manner. There is an abyss between Meyerbeer and these young men; one sees that he is not a Parisian, one sees the contrary with Gounod and David."

It is impossible to avoid thinking that personal feeling must have had something to do with an appreciation like this. Gounod and David were compatriots of Berlioz. They were his juniors and his successful rivals. Gounod had triumphed in his setting of the same subject which had inspired Berlioz with one of his most characteristic creations. He was destined, oddly enough, by choosing *Romeo and Juliet* for the ground-work of an opera, once more to enter into rivalry with Berlioz. As to David, whose music is now but seldom heard, he had a few years previously conquered in the concert-room with his cantata *Le Désert*, when *La damnation de Faust* had obtained a bare *succès d'estime*.

Berlioz was undoubtedly soured by want of appreciation. Possibly he expected too much. Anyhow, the triumph that awaited him was unfortunately destined to be posthumous. Disillusionment, intensified by a bad digestion, embittered the

Music in the XIXth Century

last years of his life. Saint-Saëns, who knew him well, states that he possessed qualities in direct opposition to his reputation. “. . . he was good, good to the verge of weakness, grateful for the least marks of interest one showed him, and of an admirable simplicity. . . . With a superior nature such as his, he could not like the vulgarity, the grossness, the ferocity, the egoism which play so considerable a part in this world, and of which he had been so often a victim.”

The battle which at one time raged over the merits of Berlioz's music has long ceased. The master has now had full justice done to him. He occupies an unchallenged place in the musical Pantheon by the side of the most famous artists of his time. If weaknesses are to be found in his works, these are more than balanced by many admirable qualities, by the Titanic power which everywhere reveals itself. In listening to his mighty compositions, the words attributed to Wagner unconsciously come to the mind: “Berlioz is a pupil, but so great a one that none of the great composers could have been his master.”

The following remark of Ehlert is also worthy

Berlioz

of note: "Even when Berlioz makes a mistake, his errors are those of a giant, and the errors of a giant have always had for me a superior interest to those of dwarfs."

A curious and singularly just appreciation of Berlioz is found in an article written by Adolphe Adam, of all composers, whose ideals were of course diametrically opposed to those of Berlioz.

The composer of *Le Postillon de Lonjumeau* and of so many other *opéras comiques* could scarcely have been expected to appreciate the genius of his formidable colleague. While professing a sincere friendship for Berlioz, he confessed that their musical principles were utterly at variance. This, indeed, makes his opinion all the more interesting. "Berlioz," he writes, "has, from the outset, broken with all the traditions of the past. People have talked of modifications in his manner: there are none. Since his first symphony, 'La Vie d'un Artiste,' until the *Te Deum*, it is the same system, the same will, the same power in the great effects of sonority, the same poetry in the conception, the same grandeur in the *ensemble*; but, let it be said, alas! the same weakness in the melodic production, and the same absence of clear-

Music in the XIXth Century

ness, charm and suavity. If his compositions are better understood nowadays, it is not that he has changed ; it is that we make light of the defects we are pretty certain to find there, and only seek for those fine qualities which we are almost sure to meet with, qualities which I have already mentioned in speaking of the elevation of his thought, the breadth and poetry of conception, and the magnificent effects of sonority he is able to produce by the combination of the masses.”

The influence exercised by Berlioz has been very great ; in some ways he may be regarded as the precursor of the entire modern school. It has, however, been rather indirect in its nature. Every musician has more or less profited by his innovations in instrumentation. He has emancipated music from the thraldom of obsolete rules, while upholding the fundamental principles of art, truth and beauty. In a general way he has, therefore, had many followers. It cannot be said, though, that his influence has been direct, like, for instance, that of Mendelssohn, of Wagner, of Gounod. The many composers who have derived advantages through studying his scores cannot in any case be termed his imitators. They may have borrowed

Berlioz

certain instrumental devices from him; but they have rarely gone further. And yet Berlioz has an unmistakable style of his own. But it is a style which is not easy to assimilate, one which is a curious mixture of the simple and the complex.

He is not a great inventor of themes, while his harmonies are often thin and crude. One is, indeed, constantly reminded in his works of the absence of *savoir faire*, a seeming want of talent, but never for an instant is one able to deny the presence of that which is rarer and more precious, genius.

Had Berlioz any special system, principle or doctrine to guide him in his life-work? The following profession of faith abridged from the famous manifesto he published at the time of the concerts given by Wagner in Paris, in 1860, may be taken as a *résumé* of his ideas.

“Music, to-day in the force of its youth, is emancipated, free. Many old rules have no more value. New demands of the spirit, of the heart and sense of hearing impose in certain cases the infraction of ancient laws. Divers forms are too old to be admitted any longer. Everything is

Music in the XIXth Century

good or bad according to the manner in which it is used. In its union with the drama, music must always be connected with the sentiments expressed by the words, with the character of the *dramatis personæ*, the accent and vocal inflection. Operas should not be written for singers; singers, on the contrary, should be formed for operas; those operas which are destined for vocal virtuosos are of a secondary order. The master remains the master, it is for him to command. Sound and sonority rank below the musical idea. The musical idea ranks below sentiment and passion. Runs, vocal ornaments, trills and rhythm cannot express a serious and profound sentiment."

These ideas are full of what must seem to every one nowadays ordinary common sense. In enunciating them Berlioz was but echoing the opinions of Gluck, Grétry and Méhul.

Berlioz may be said to have widened the boundaries of symphonic music, but he did not create a new form of musical art. This was reserved for Liszt, who by his admirable creation of the Symphonic Poem opened new paths for the composers of the future.

Whilst Berlioz was piling Ossa upon Pelion in his

Berlioz

search for big orchestral effects, another composer was quietly contributing his quota to music and enriching the art with choice treasures.

Chopin,* although partly French by his parentage, cannot, of course, be numbered among French composers. So much of his short life, however, was spent in Paris, and his career is so intimately connected with one of France's most celebrated novelists, that he cannot be omitted from a book purporting to treat of music in France. Although Chopin in his music was essentially the interpreter of his country's woes, the musical personification of Poland, yet he may be said also to have exercised in a way a considerable influence in France.

No two contemporary artists probably ever presented so absolute a dissimilarity as Berlioz and Chopin.

The one requiring vast executive means to realise his gigantic conceptions, dreaming of monster orchestras consisting of many hundreds of executants, even on occasions calling into requisition the sounds of artillery; the other, content with a mere piano as a medium of expression,

* Chopin (1810-1849).

Music in the XIXth Century

leaving to the world a large number of works which in spite of their comparative unpretentiousness are nevertheless worthy to be placed by the side of the greatest masterpieces of the art. While Berlioz thunders with his orchestras and compels attention, Chopin speaks to the heart with his peerless melodies, entwines himself round the affections with his soul-stirring harmonies. One is forced to admire Berlioz, but one cannot help loving Chopin. If Berlioz opened a vast field of possibilities to the composer by combating inane prejudices and clearing the atmosphere of false ideas, Chopin in his way achieved at least as much, for he quietly and unobtrusively introduced into his music new and entrancingly beautiful harmonies.

The Polish master has had no direct imitators, and yet his influence has perhaps been deeper than one might imagine, even more so than that of Berlioz, for if the latter showed musicians how to deck their ideas in the most brilliant instrumental colours, the former brought into the general circulation novel harmonies and striking modulations which have been a source of profit to many of his successors.

Berlioz

The name of Félicien David* is nowadays almost forgotten. His place in the history of French music is, however, marked. Of a romantic and mystical disposition, David embraced the doctrines of the Saint Simoniens with fervour, and being expelled from his country journeyed to the East. On his return to France he recorded his impressions in a musical work entitled *Le Désert*, wherein he essayed to evoke the silence of the desert, its calm and its storms, and, inspiring himself with Eastern rhythms, he introduced various songs and dances of an exotic and captivating kind. *Le Désert* obtained an enormous success, and the composer, previously unknown, at once became famous. The musical Orientalism so deftly exploited in the score irresistibly fascinated the public. The great charm of *Le Désert*, however, lies in the poetry of its conception, the picturesqueness of the music. David was rather a tone painter than a symphonist ; he made little or no attempt to develop his ideas, satisfied to record his impressions as they occurred to him. The musical tableau of sunrise in the desert is really wonderfully descriptive and quite modern in style. David never repeated the

* Félicien David (1810-1876).

Music in the XIXth Century

success of *Le Désert*. He tried a similar experiment in other cantatas and wrote several operas, *La Perle du Brésil*, *Herculanum*, *Lalla-Roukh*, without obtaining, save perhaps in the case of the latter work, more than a *succès d'estime*.

Although he cannot be termed a great musician, David was not devoid of individuality, even if this may, paradoxically, be said to have been borrowed. Still, it must be recorded of him that he introduced a new element into French music, that Orientalism which since his time has attracted so many composers.

Henri Reber * was scarcely a romanticist, but he deserves to be remembered as having been one of the only French composers of his generation who attempted to write symphonies. During the latter quarter of the last century matters have changed considerably and some remarkable symphonies have been produced by French composers, as we shall see later on.

The symphony had not, however, been looked upon in France with the same amount of seriousness as in Germany.

Although Méhul, Hérold, Onslow, a Franco-

* Reber (1807-1880).

Berlioz

Englishman, and others, had written symphonies, yet these did not count for much, while Gouvy, who was a very prolific composer, was more German than French. Neither were the worthy Henri Reber's efforts of a nature to cause their composer to be accepted as a successor of Beethoven. Simple in style and essentially classical in form, they seemed to have been modelled upon those of Haydn, and they carried with them an old-world flavour which may certainly have had its charm. It can, however, well be said that from 1830 to 1860, about the period when the establishment in Paris of the Concerts Populaires by Padeloup began to kindle an interest in symphonic music, there existed outside the theatre practically but one French composer, and his name was Hector Berlioz.

CHAPTER VI

GOUNOD AND HIS INFLUENCE

AMONG all the composers of the XIXth century, probably not one has appealed so much to the heart of woman as Gounod. The tone poet *par excellence* of the tender passion, Gounod created a musical language of his own, one of extraordinary sweetness, of wondrous fascination, the soft eloquence of which seemed to penetrate into the innermost recesses of the heart. No asperities of style, no startling outbursts of ill-repressed passion were there to mar the exquisite suavity of melodies floating in a troublous atmosphere of intoxicating harmonies.

The love expressed in Gounod's music is not that which conquers through sheer force, or the expression of a violent masculine spirit. It insinuates itself softly, and gradually asserts its

Gounod and his Influence

sway without needing to have recourse to the tearing of a passion into tatters.

Certainly, it is often averred that in singing of love Gounod did not vary his accents to a very appreciable extent, that the different lovers whose stories he illustrated expressed themselves in very much the same sort of musical language. There is possibly a certain amount of truth in this, but at any rate it must be admitted that Gounod throughout his career remained essentially himself, that he never consciously imitated any other composer, that in all he wrote could be detected the unmistakable mark of his own individuality.

There were two sides to his genius, the religious and the secular. At the outset of his career he had seriously thought of becoming a priest, and throughout his life he retained a firm belief in the mysteries of the Christian Faith. The sensuous side of religion seemed most to appeal to him. He had about him nothing of the ascetic. A religion of love, of mystic splendours, was more in accord with his ideas, and in all his works, whether sacred or secular, can be detected an amorous note—the keynote of his nature.

Very much the same remark might be applied

Music in the XIXth Century

to Massenet, who in many respects seems to proceed artistically from Gounod.

Music is probably the most disheartening of all the arts, and this owing partly to its evanescence. The master-work of a great painter appeals with equal force to other generations as well as to that which witnessed its birth. Its worth is immediately recognised, and any discussion concerning its technical achievement is generally confined to the *gens du métier*, the public only following its own instinct and not taking the slightest interest in knowing whether the combination of certain shades employed to produce a particular effect of colouring be legitimate or not. In music the case is very different. A composer who has something new to say finds at first that he is misunderstood. He has to work hard before he is able to vanquish the indifference of the public. Perhaps he may then produce his masterpiece and awake to find himself famous. Alas! to how many composers has this been denied? Having reached the top of the ladder, he experiences great difficulty in remaining there. Everything he writes is compared, and generally unfavourably, with the work which has brought him renown. Still, he is able

Gounod and his Influence

to live for some time on his reputation and to taste the sweets of success.

He is now universally recognised as a master, but his work which has become popular is spoken of by some with that familiarity which often is the precursor of contempt ; he is no longer so young, he has given forth that which was best within him and he shows a tendency to repeat himself. In the meanwhile a new generation has sprung up, fresh ideas have been put into circulation, the composer's mannerisms have been imitated *ad nauseam* by those who, having no originality of their own, trade upon that of others. The master perhaps lags behind, and is not able to keep pace with the times, either through disinclination or incapacity to employ new methods. Thus, in his old age he becomes more and more reactionary in his ideas, and forgetting the difficulties that beset him at the outset of his own career, the incomprehension he once had to combat, is inclined to dogmatise and to disapprove of the efforts of the younger men to strike out new paths. Every year his works appear older. They may still arouse enthusiasm, but the form in which they are cast is, in obedience to the inexorable

Music in the XIXth Century

laws of evolution, gradually becoming modified.

We have seen how this has happened in the case of the dramatic composers mentioned in the previous chapters, for, be it said, the above remarks apply mainly to musicians who write for the stage—how Spontini, Cherubini, Méhul, Rossini, Meyerbeer, Auber, have, after reaching the apex of glory, gradually descended from this lustrous position. What they have lost is not general esteem, but popularity, and this is not owing to want of genius, but to the relentless progress of time. By popularity I mean of course popularity equal to that which the above-named masters enjoyed during their lifetime.

In one sense this is very sad ; on the other hand, it is also decidedly stimulating, for it shows that music is a living art, ever on the move, absolutely unfettered, possessing limitless powers of expansion. A masterpiece remains a masterpiece, even if its form has become obsolete and the public has forsaken it.

Had music been incapable of progress or development it would not exist as an art. What is strange is the rapidity with which old forms

Gounod and his Influence

give place to new, or rather are transformed into new. Gounod's operas have not yet lost their hold over the public. Two of them, at any rate, *Faust* and *Romeo and Juliet*, remain popular, more especially the first, which occupies a unique place in the operatic *répertoire*. There is no denying, however, that Gounod's influence, once so powerful, has for some time been on the wane. Wagner's theories, so long combated, have at last taken root, and the tardy triumph of the German master in Paris has produced far-reaching results. Very much the same revulsion of feeling has occurred in France with regard to Gounod as in England respecting Mendelssohn.

The cases are, indeed, not unlike. The influence exercised by each master has been so great that it has permeated an entire generation, and the satiety engendered by the constant reproduction of special mannerisms on the part of imitators has reacted upon the original creators. Just as in England musicians are apt on occasions to allude disdainfully to Mendelssohn, so in France some of the younger men are inclined to adopt a contemptuous attitude towards Gounod.

In the meanwhile, the English public remains

Music in the XIXth Century

staunch in its admiration of *Elijah*, while *Faust* is still in the *répertoire* of every opera-house.

Faust indeed is generally accepted as the composer's representative work, and the one which contains the essence of his genius. This may be so, but if in his operatic version of Goethe's masterpiece Gounod appears at his best, he has also written many other works of different kinds which in their way are equally original. The bulk of Gounod's work is indeed insufficiently known, and many people would doubtless be surprised at the vast amount of music the French composer found time to write.

I have already alluded to the dominant note of love which resounds throughout his works, also to the strong religious bias of his mind, which imparts a peculiar mysticism to so much of his music.

The sentiment of nature was also one of his strong characteristics. Instances of this can be found in *Sapho*, his first opera, in the choruses he wrote for Ponsard's tragedy *Ulysse*, in *Faust* (think of the Reapers' chorus in the first act), in *Mireille*, where his music produces the effect of a warm sunny day. Many other instances might be adduced.

Gounod and his Influence

When Gounod first settled in Paris, after a sojourn in Rome and in Vienna, he had to fight with the difficulties that beset all musicians at the commencement of their career. It was at this epoch that he wrote some of his most beautiful songs, such as "Le Vallon" and "Le Soir."

Thanks to the recommendation of a great artist, Mme. Viardot, he succeeded in obtaining a hearing at the Grand Opéra, where his *Sapho* was produced in 1851.

Although this work has not maintained its place in the *répertoire*, yet it marks a date in the history of French music, not only because it served to introduce Gounod to the operatic public, but because it contained certain modifications of the then prevailing dramatic style.

We have seen how the system of Gluck aimed at securing an alliance as perfect as possible between words and music, also how this system had been corrupted by the adoption of the loose Italian methods of the early Rossinian epoch, when everything was sacrificed at the altar of vocal art, and common sense went to the wall.

In *Sapho* Gounod made an attempt to return

Music in the XIXth Century

to saner ways and to restore unto the opera its ancient simple dignity.

The following extract from an article on *Sapho*, written by Adolphe Adam, explains very clearly the different ideas concerning operatic construction existing at the time:

“We consider nowadays,” he wrote, “as a quality that which the masters formerly looked upon as a fault. Music for them consisted in the choruses, the airs, in everything which prepared a dramatic situation. But as soon as the situation arrived, the music ceased in order to give way to vocal declamation. To-day we do precisely the contrary. When a dramatic situation arrives, we begin our set musical piece. It is rather the first of these systems which M. Gounod has followed.”

In other words, the system then in vogue, the one followed by Adolphe Adam in his operas, prescribed that when the dramatic situation was becoming particularly thrilling, then was the time for the vocalists to turn the theatre into a concert-room and sing a set piece, although by so doing all continuity of action was destroyed.

There was nothing violently revolutionary in *Sapho*. In its style the music is refined, and

Gounod and his Influence

contained indications of the individuality which soon was to manifest itself. It differed, however, from any of the popular operas of the period, and by its affinity with works of a distant past it seemed to point the way to the future. The date of the production of *Sapho* is an important one in the annals of music. Whilst the French composer was making his operatic *début* with a work in which he in some ways departed from the ordinary conventions of the period, Verdi with his *Rigoletto* was introducing a more dramatic style into Italy, and Wagner, although an exile from his own country, was closing his early period and foreshadowing the next by the production of *Lohengrin* at Weimar. New ideas were in the air, and the wave of emancipation which periodically appears, no one knows why, was at hand.

With his next dramatic work, *La Nonne Sanglante*, Gounod did not make a step in advance; and *Le Médecin malgré lui*, a delightful *opéra comique* full of delicate touches, was appreciated by musicians but failed to captivate the public.

His next work was *Faust*, and although this was not successful at the outset, yet its many beauties gradually conquered the apathy of the public, and

Music in the XIXth Century

soon the name of Gounod became famous all the world over.

The master had now reached his goal. The only thing remaining for him to do was to be careful not to go too far below the standard of his own work, which certainly was not so very easy a task to accomplish. I am not, of course, attempting in these pages to write a biography of Gounod, but the position occupied in the history of French music by the composer of *Faust* is so important that it is necessary to take his operas chronologically in order to be able to express an opinion upon his music as a whole.

Faust had been produced in 1859. During the following ten years Gounod, if he did not greatly improve his position, at any rate maintained it with *Philémon et Baucis* (1860), *La Reine de Saba* (1862), *Mireille* (1864), and *Roméo et Juliette* (1867).

His subsequent operas, *Cinq-Mars* (1877), *Polyeucte* (1878), and *Le Tribut de Zamora* (1881), on the other hand, showed a marked falling off. Gounod seemingly did not realise that the movement he had helped to start had sensibly progressed, that what was new twenty-

Gounod and his Influence

five years before was now old and hackneyed, that it was worse than useless to try to galvanise obsolete forms into life, forms that had been called into existence through erroneous conceptions of operatic art. Unlike Verdi, who in his old age resolutely turned his back on the past and wrote *Otello* and *Falstaff*, Gounod attempted the impossible by endeavouring to stem the current of the times, and deliberately courted failure while seeking success. *Le Tribut de Zamora* was planned upon so old-fashioned a model and contained so little that the composer had not said, and better said, before, that it failed completely.

It was Gounod's last composition for the stage. The remainder of his life was devoted to sacred music, two of his most important works, *The Redemption* and *Mors et Vita*, being written for England.

By the above summary it will be seen that the years intervening between 1850 and 1870 constitute the most fruitful period of Gounod's productivity. During the first of these decades he displayed the freshness of his early inspiration in *Sapho*, *Ulysse*, the *Messe de Ste Cécile*, *Le*

Music in the XIXth Century

Médecin malgré lui, his genius finding its highest expression in *Faust*.

The compositions of the second decade include at least two works which are eminently characteristic of their author—*Mireille* and *Roméo et Juliette*.

During the last years of his life Gounod cannot be said to have greatly improved his reputation, notwithstanding the undoubted merit of *The Redemption* and *Mors et Vita*, and the charm of many of his minor vocal compositions.

It is doubtful whether people altogether realise the important part played by Gounod in the musical movement of the century.

Of late years it has been so much the fashion to look upon him as representing a reactionary element in music, that an altogether false idea of his position has been engendered.

There was nothing revolutionary in Gounod's methods. His nature was far too deeply imbued with reverence. To restore rather than to destroy was his aim. Sensitive and impressionable to an abnormal extent, he instinctively shrank from employing violent means in the expression of his ideas. The study of Palestrina and other ancient

Gounod and his Influence

Italians he had assiduously pursued in Rome, combined with the admiration he experienced for Bach, Beethoven, and Mendelssohn, had reacted on his nature and helped to form his style.

Individuality is the privilege of genius. The same theme may be treated by several masters and in each case it will present a different appearance. Who would accuse Wagner of plagiarism because a theme in the *Walküre* bears a strong resemblance to one in Mendelssohn's Scottish Symphony? Or Mendelssohn for having unconsciously in his *Midsummer Night's Dream* overture reminded one of Weber's *Oberon*? Gounod's works are not free from similar reminiscences. For instance, in *Faust* there are passages that recall Beethoven, Mendelssohn and Meyerbeer. But what does this matter? The few passing suggestions that occur do not in any way detract from the extraordinary individuality which permeates the opera from the first bar to the last.

Whatever may be said against Gounod's music, it is impossible to deny its originality. The composer of *Faust* spoke a new language to his countrymen, one of alluring softness and penetrating charm. He did not tickle their ears with

Music in the XIXth Century

trivial tunes like those of Auber and Adam, or startle their senses with violent outbursts like Berlioz startled them, but he found the way to their hearts by sincerely expressing his own feelings.

It would be easy enough to pick holes in his works, to point to instances where he manifestly made concessions to vocalists by introducing airs of a florid description, to find flaws in his style, to lay stress upon its want of virility, its cloying sweetness, the repetition of fatiguing mannerisms. But what would be the use of this? Is it not better to dwell upon the master's qualities than to magnify his defects?

Gounod's music is impregnated with sensuousness, and he may be said at once to have etherealised and materialised the tender passion. What indeed can be more poetical and at the same time more suggestive than the garden scene in *Faust*? I know that some will at once reply the second act of *Tristan und Isolde*.

Far be it from me to attempt to institute any comparison between two love scenes so different in character and so admirable in their respective ways.

The words I have used with regard to Gounod

Gounod and his Influence

could be equally employed in connection with Wagner's peerless love scene. There is, however, this difference, that Gounod's music being easier of comprehension necessarily has appealed to a larger circle. Any one who is fairly musical and possesses an emotional nature cannot fail to be thrilled by the soul-stirring melodies with which Gounod sings of the tender passion. The *Faust* garden scene has possibly been responsible for a large number of lapses from the path of virtue. In the second act of *Roméo* the love is more idealised. Nothing can be suaver or more refined. In *Mireille*, again, Gounod becomes rather idyllic.

But in how many detached songs has he not celebrated the power of love and spoken to the heart in irresistible tones? "Medjé," "Le Printemps," "Ce que je suis sans toi," "Maid of Athens," "O, that we two were maying!", and many other gems of the first water, if not the most ambitious of his works, are not by any means the least remarkable.

Even in Gounod's most unsuccessful operas may be found melodies of rare beauty.

Those who are insensible to their charm are much to be pitied. In the realm of music there

Music in the XIXth Century

are many mansions, and the smallest of these are often the pleasantest to inhabit on occasions.

“When, owing to the fatal march of time, in a distant future, the operas of Gounod will have entered for ever the dusty sanctuary of libraries, known only to students, the *Messe de Ste Cécile*, *Rédemption* and *Mors et Vita* will remain alive, and will teach future generations what a great musician France could boast of in the XIXth century.” Thus writes Saint-Saëns, than whom no one is better entitled to utter an opinion.

It is generally unsafe to prophesy, although it is perhaps as likely as not that the French master's words may turn out to be true. Certainly Gounod has imprinted his individuality as much upon his religious as upon his secular writings. *The Redemption* is a work quite *sui generis*. It differs entirely from the older oratorios in its style. A curious compound of mysticism allied to realism, in which a noble simplicity predominates, but occasionally gives way to sentiment of a theatrical kind, often touching in its accents, rarely powerful—in short, a work which exemplifies the composer's qualities as well as his defects, and the greatest fault of which is a certain purposely-

Gounod and his Influence

employed monotony of colour which engenders fatigue.

In England *The Redemption* has, as every one knows, met with an immense success, and, since its production at Birmingham in 1882, has been repeatedly heard in London and at our great provincial Festivals. *Mors et Vita*, although containing much that is worthy of attention, has not been so fortunate in obtaining public recognition.

Let us, however, return to *Faust*, which is, after all, the most typical example of the composer's genius, and see in what way it differs from the operas then in vogue. Let it be remembered that in 1859 Wagner was known in France only by name, and that the most extravagant ideas were current respecting what was satirically termed the "music of the future," that there were as yet no popular concerts of instrumental music in Paris, and that the public had not had the opportunity of becoming familiarised with the symphonic works of the great masters, that Meyerbeer still reigned supreme at the Grand Opéra, and that the cult of Italian music still prevailed.

The production of *Faust* may well be taken as heralding the dawn of a new era.

Music in the XIXth Century

Many self-constituted aristarchs of taste are prone to grumble at what they consider a desecration of Goethe's tragedy. At any rate, the countrymen of Goethe have shown in a practical way the admiration they feel for the French composer's opera.

The fact is that people are often apt to judge a work from a wrong point of view. They seek to find in it that which the author never intended should be there. The *Faust* legend had already inspired several other composers, notably Schumann, Wagner, Liszt, Berlioz. Gounod and his librettists, Michel Carré and Jules Barbier, saw in it the material for a good opera, nothing more, nothing less. And what a subject they chose! One full of human interest, to which the supernatural element serves to impart a touch of colour. The immense popularity which has accrued to *Faust* has in some respects done it harm, for it has vulgarised it, and has caused it to run the risk of declining to the level of a typical *prima donna* opera of the old school. This, of course, is not the fault of the work, but of the way in which it is often interpreted.

For instance, what can be more ridiculous than

Gounod and his Influence

the manner in which the meeting between Faust and Marguerite in the second act is usually performed? The market-place is crowded, and Marguerite is quietly passing through it on her way home. Faust comes forward and offers to accompany her. She modestly declines his arm and passes on. It is a mere episode, and ordinary common sense would lead one to conclude that it would create no sensation whatever in a crowd, but would be absolutely unnoticed.

And how, after all that has been said concerning stage realism, is this scene enacted at the commencement of the twentieth century? The moment that Marguerite appears, the crowd forms a semi-circle, and listens mute and attentive to the conversation between the two, only showing signs of life when the young girl has crossed the stage; all this in order to pander to the vanity of a *prima donna* and draw attention to her entrance.

Gounod would appear to have written *Faust* with a considerable amount of freedom, that is, without troubling himself much about following precedents.

The opening bars of the prelude, appropriately vague, strike a new note. They seem to convey a

Music in the XIXth Century

sense of longing, of yearning for some unattainable object. Then, mysteriously, a serpentine theme rises from out of the depths and seems to be searching for something round which to wind its chromatic coils. Suddenly its course is arrested, a curtain of clouds is apparently drawn back, the harps slowly and softly playing a scale passage, and one of Gounod's most entrancing melodies is disclosed, rising pure and serene to the loftier regions.

How many people who go to hear *Faust*, possibly many of them attracted by the desire of hearing some famous "diva" sing the jewel song, listen attentively to this beautiful prelude, or pay much attention to the first scene, or, indeed, the entire first act, of the opera? Yet it is here and also in other less appreciated pages that Gounod has shown the most genius. It is here that he has left the beaten operatic track and struck out new paths.

The detachable songs that abound in *Faust* are admirable enough in their way, I grant, but those portions of the opera where the composer has had to carry on the thread of the story or where the dramatic element prevails are, to my mind, of still

Gounod and his Influence

greater interest. Now, although *Faust* contains a number of pieces complete in themselves, yet these pieces succeed one another without producing the sensation of *décousu* one experiences in listening to many of the older operas ; the tedious recitatives of yore have entirely disappeared; a great step has here been taken towards the realisation of the modern music drama, and it is well that the fact should be recognised. With *Faust* Gounod practically created a new and special form of French opera, one composed of various seemingly conflicting elements, but eminently suited to meet the requirements of the time.

It was not long before the influence of Gounod began to make itself felt. We find it permeating the works of the entire succeeding generation of French composers. Bizet, Saint-Saëns, Massenet, Joncières, to mention some of the more famous, are, to a certain extent, all indebted to Gounod. In England his influence has also been very powerful, notably in the case of Goring Thomas.

What is more curious is that Ambroise Thomas, Gounod's senior by some years, should have fallen under the latter's sway. But for this it is doubtful whether we should have had *Mignon* and

Music in the XIXth Century

Hamlet. The earlier operas of Ambroise Thomas were altogether of a different type. Auber had hitherto seemed to be his model, although it is possible to detect in all his works a tenuous sentimental note and a measure of innate refinement. Of a timid, sensitive nature, Ambroise Thomas was not one of those to lead a new movement, but he discreetly followed the current of the times, taking care, however, not to break altogether with tradition.

Thus, if in *Mignon* and *Hamlet* we are able to trace the influence of Gounod, we also find characteristics of the older operatic style, and, be it said, a little of the composer's own individuality, recognisable in certain dreamy melodies.

I confess myself to a fondness for both these operas. How far this may be attributable to early recollections I cannot say, neither do I consider it necessary to apologise for the fact.

Mignon, heard in its proper place, at the Paris Opéra Comique, is a charming work of its kind. As to *Hamlet*, of course, it cannot be accepted as an adequate musical interpretation of the Shakespearian tragedy. Yet it has a fascination of its own, a certain colour which is not altogether in

Gounod and his Influence

disaccord with the subject. At any rate, thus it seems to me, and I do not, therefore, feel disposed to analyse my impressions too closely or apply the scalpel to a work from which I have derived enjoyment.

Ambroise Thomas was not a reformer, but, as Alfred Bruneau has truly remarked: "Certain portions of his last works are impregnated with a poetry which is occasionally touching and elegiac." After the death of Auber, Ambroise Thomas had been appointed to succeed him as director of the Paris Conservatoire. His duties naturally absorbed a great deal of his time. Nevertheless, in his old age he again entered the lists, and *Françoise de Rimini*, a work conceived on a large scale, was produced at the Opéra in 1882, without, however, obtaining more than a *succès d'estime*.

A ballet on the subject of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, given at the same theatre seven years later, did not prove more fortunate, and it is as the composer of *Mignon* and *Hamlet* that Ambroise Thomas will be known to a limited posterity.

CHAPTER VII

WAGNER IN FRANCE

THE foreign influences which have asserted themselves in the music of France have been many, as we have already had occasion to see. Not one of these, however, not even Rossini's, has been so powerful as that of Wagner. "The more French music learns to adapt itself to the actual needs of the *âme moderne*, the more will it 'Wagnerise'; one can safely predict that beforehand—it is already taking place sufficiently." Thus wrote Nietzsche, and the truth of the German philosopher's words cannot be denied. France began intuitively to Wagnerise even before she knew the meaning of the word, or rather I should say, imagined that she was "Wagnerising." Berlioz had long ago held up the banner of musical emancipation, and now came rumours from over the frontier of a composer whose revolutionary

Wagner in France

theories were even more subversive of the recognised order of things.

The orthodox, the *gens bien pensants* in musical matters, showed themselves hostile at the outset, before they had had the opportunity even of hearing a single note by the much-talked-of musician. Wagner became a suspect—musical no less than political. Was he not an outcast, an exile from his country? Had he not abused all the great composers of the past? Was he not reported to have the most exaggerated ideas of his own importance? Did he not contend that melody was an antiquated relic of the past, one that should forthwith be abrogated from all music worthy of the name?

It would have been needless to argue that this was wrong and that Wagner had never said any of the things attributed to him; the mud had been thrown broadcast at the master, and it is but natural that some of it should have stuck. Thus when Wagner appeared in Paris to conduct concerts of his own works in 1860, he was already branded in the opinion of many as a megalomaniac who considered himself the alpha and omega of music, a clever manipulator of notes, but one

Music in the XIXth Century

devoid of real inspiration and originality, who emitted crude theories because grapes were sour and in order to hide his own impotence. In justice to France it must be added that these ideas were prevalent in other countries as well, and nowhere more so than in the composer's native land.

Every one knows the history of Wagner's first sojourn in Paris in 1839. How the young composer, armed with a letter of introduction from Meyerbeer, vainly attempted to gain a hearing at the Opéra; how he wrote his *Rienzi* with that theatre in view; how he was forced to descend to the position of a musical hack, to make arrangements of other people's operas in order to live; how he was obliged to sell the book of the *Flying Dutchman* for another musician to set to music. All these things have been told over and over again by Wagner himself and by his numerous biographers with a prolixity worthy of Wotan when retailing his family history.

Wagner's next stay in Paris, some twenty years later, took place under other circumstances. The young musician had developed into a famous and much-discussed composer. He had come to make his works known and to explain his theories. In

Wagner in France

February 1860 he gave a concert at the Théâtre des Italiens. The programme included the overture to the *Flying Dutchman*, extracts from *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin*, and the prelude to *Tristan und Isolde*. The criticisms called forth by this concert are very strange reading. Abuse and an imcomprehension which nowadays may well seem extraordinary were the keynotes of the press notices. There were, of course, exceptions, for Wagner had his partisans, and in some cases an endeavour might be traced of an attempt to observe an impartial attitude. It would be profitless to reproduce the ephemeral expressions of opinion uttered at the time. The account of the concert given by Berlioz is, however, worth mentioning, because of the author's position. That Berlioz was sincere in what he wrote admits of no doubt. He was enthusiastic over the prelude to *Lohengrin*, which he dubbed a masterpiece. On the other hand, he declared himself completely nonplussed by the prelude to *Tristan und Isolde*. "I have read and re-read this strange page," he wrote, "I have listened to it with the deepest attention and a strong desire to discover any sense in it; well, I must own, I have not the slightest

Music in the XIXth Century

idea what the author is aiming at!" This at any rate was frank, however surprising it may seem to us that the composer of the *Roméo et Juliette* symphony should, of all musicians, have displayed so singular a want of comprehension. Composers are, however, proverbially bad judges of each other's works. The concerts given by Wagner had been much talked about and the master's music acridly discussed, but even the most violent enemies of the composer realised that here was a new and powerful force, one which for good or for evil was bound to be felt. Then came the memorable production of *Tannhäuser* at the Grand Opéra. Assuredly never did a fiasco create so profound a sensation. If the antagonists of Wagner had wished to do him a good turn they could hardly have acted more surely. The Parisian public never had a chance of pronouncing a verdict. Armed with whistles, the members of the Jockey Club mustered in force, determined to nip every chance of success in the bud. These thoughtless young men, the *fine fleur* of Parisian society, went with a light heart to heap insults on a man of genius and to prevent his work from obtaining even a fair hearing. Some of them, I believe, have since

Wagner in France

repented and may be seen expiating this crime of their youth ensconced in their *fauteuils* at the Opéra listening to *Die Walküre* and *Siegfried* in religious silence. May their sin sit lightly upon them! They certainly retarded the production of the Wagner operas in Paris, but on the other hand they gave a tremendous stimulus to the Wagnerian movement.

From that time may be said to date the extraordinary Wagnerophobia which prevailed for so many years in the French capital and which was fomented by the ill-advised publication of the silly satirical comedy, entitled "A Capitulation," written by Wagner after the disasters of the siege of Paris.

Saint-Saëns once wrote with truth that *La Wagnéromanie est un ridicule excusable ; la Wagnérophobie est une maladie.*

During the 'sixties there were very many people in Paris who had contracted this *maladie*. The Wagnerian spectre haunted them incessantly. Every new composer who expressed himself in an unconventional manner was charged with having fallen under the malignant influence of the enchanter.

Music in the XIXth Century

“Sont-ils drôles vos confrères avec leur rengaine Wagner,” said Bizet one day to a well-known critic, for the composer of *Carmen* had not escaped the accusation of being an admirer of the German master, and he had even been dubbed a *farouche Wagnérien*.

Strange, indeed, is the irony of fate, for was it not Bizet's *Carmen* which several years later was to be specially singled out by Nietzsche as the most antithetical example of the Wagnerian drama! During the 'sixties, however, and even during the 'seventies, people did not take the trouble to sift the matter very closely. The old dilettanti saw with terror that a gradual change was taking place in the taste of the public and that the older Italian operas were losing their hold. The conventional absurdities of the operatic stage had not only been denounced by Wagner, they had been held up to ridicule by Offenbach in his “opéras bouffes,” and as nothing kills so quickly as ridicule, the prestige of the *maestri* of the past had suffered a great blow.

The next attempt to produce a Wagner opera in Paris took place in 1869, when Padeloup, the worthy founder of the Concerts Populaires, brought out *Rienzi* at the Théâtre Lyrique, thinking

Wagner in France

doubtless that, as this work had been written with a view to its production in Paris and as it was modelled on the Grand Opéra style, it would be more likely to attract than one of the master's later works. Here he made a great mistake, for *Rienzi*, with its crudities and heterogeneous mixture of styles, was calculated to give the falsest impression of Wagner's music.

Bizet in an amusing letter thus recorded his impressions : *Un mélange de motifs italiens ; bizarre et mauvais style ; musique de décadence plutôt que de l'avenir. Des morceaux détestables ! Des morceaux admirables ! Au total : une œuvre étonnante, vivant prodigieusement ; une grandeur, un souffle olympien !* The production of *Rienzi* did not in any way advance Wagner's cause in Paris.

Then came the war of 1870, after which Wagner not only celebrated the victory of Germany by composing the magnificent "Kaisermarsch," but descended to the pettiness of "A Capitulation," the wretched political lampoon to which allusion has already been made. Wagner's chances of success in Paris were now indefinitely postponed. It was no longer a question of art alone but of patriotism, a point upon which a Frenchman

Music in the XIXth Century

might well be excused for being over-sensitive after the days of *l'année terrible*.

So it came to pass that when the name of Wagner, which could not for ever be ignored, first made its re-appearance on the programmes of the Concerts Populaires, the strangest scenes were witnessed. The wonderful Death-march from *Götterdämmerung* was mercilessly hissed, and Padeloup found himself obliged to adopt an expedient in order to satisfy the Wagnerian section of his audiences. Addressing the spectators, he informed them that he would repeat the work at the conclusion of the concert, so that those who did not wish to hear it again could leave if they chose. By adopting means such as these, the valiant conductor was able to bring forward at intervals different extracts from the German master's operas. He thus laid the seed which was destined to yield so copious a crop and prove so valuable to his successors, Charles Lamoureux and Edouard Colonne.

The first of these conductors took up the Wagnerian cause with enthusiasm, and not content with bringing forward isolated pieces by Wagner, went a step further and performed entire

Wagner in France

acts from the music-dramas at his concerts. Thinking at last that the time was ripe for another attempt at presenting a Wagner work on the French stage, Lamoureux took the Eden Theatre and at his own cost mounted *Lohengrin*.

Alas, there came another hitch, and the final triumph of the Wagnerian opera was yet to be delayed !

This time the blame could not, as in the case of *Tannhäuser*, be ascribed to the spectators. The beautiful story of the Knight of the Grail produced a deep impression upon the audience. Outside the theatre, however, were crowds of loafers who, in the name of an outraged patriotism, indulged in hostile manifestations.

The government then in power feared further disturbances, and *Lohengrin* was withdrawn after having been played once. It is but fair to add that all sensible educated Frenchmen were disgusted at so outrageous a proceeding.

A short time before the production of *Lohengrin* at the Eden Theatre, it occurred to the director of the *Gaulois* to ask some of the best known French composers their opinion on Lamoureux's venture. Some of the replies he received are curious.

• Music in the XIXth Century

Gounod was appropriately vague in his answer and declined to commit himself to a decided opinion, saying: "We all know that Wagner is an important personality, whom many people have committed the error of wishing to imitate, as it is always on one's personal side that one remains inimitable and incommunicable. In addition, I consider that one should not judge the genius of the *artist* in connection with the repugnance one may feel for the *man*. The glory of the intelligence is not of the heart, and the insults of our national enemy have nothing to do with the homage due to his works."

Léo Delibes was not much more explicit, saying that his opinion was of no interest to anybody, but adding that it seemed ridiculous that, under the pretext of patriotism, Paris should remain the only capital of the civilised world where *Lohengrin* should not be in the *répertoire*, like *Le Domino Noir*, *Les Huguenots*, or *Il Barbiere di Seviglia*.

Ernest Reyer's reply was altogether more interesting than either of the above, and deserves to be quoted *in extenso*. The composer of *Sigurd* wrote thus: "The hatred that Berlioz felt towards him, and my affectionate admi-

Wagner in France

ration for Berlioz have not prevented me from going to him. His powerful genius has subjugated me, without, however, blinding me. I have felt, like so many others, the influence of his doctrines; but I do not dare to call myself his disciple, having been so careful not to be his imitator. And, while following him from afar in the luminous furrow he has traced, I have not renounced any of the delights that come to me from his glorious ancestors, from the masters to whom I owe, doubtless more than to him, the little that I have achieved. But no great musician will have excited more youthful imaginations and troubled more brains. His life work is immense, colossal. In France it will never adapt itself entirely to our temperament, and will never cause us to forget our fidelity to ancient recollections. He will have endowed his country with a new art, it is true. But his country is not ours !”

Paladilhe, the composer of *Patrie*, in his reply welcomed Lamoureux's attempt, which he considered ought to have been made long before. Lalo's reply was short and characteristic: “*Lohengrin* is a superb work; it is sad that Paris should be the only capital that does not know it. Wagner

Music in the XIXth Century

is a genius whom it is absolutely necessary to study, and we ought all to be thankful to M. Charles Lamoureux for his valiant initiation."

Victorin Joncières went into the subject at greater length, and stated that, qualified as a Wagnerian more than twenty-five years previously, when it required a certain courage to proclaim aloud one's admiration for the author of *Lohengrin*, he now passed as rather lukewarm, not having consented to enroll himself in the confraternity which would turn Wagnerism into a religion, excluding all criticism. Later on he pronounced himself thus: "If my admiration has remained as enthusiastic as ever for the early works of Wagner, I must own that while bowing before the sublime pages of the Trilogy, I make with regard to this last conception some rather serious reservations. Wagner is always for me the greatest musician who has appeared since Beethoven, but I should scarcely be prepared to admit his system in all its rigour. His legendary subjects appear to me puerile, and his genius, imprisoned in the narrow bonds of the *leitmotiv*, seems to me less brilliant than when, without any attempt at system, he wrote *Lohengrin*, which in my opinion will remain

Wagner in France

his masterpiece before posterity." The Wagner cause had now really been won, and every one knew that it was only a question of time before the master's works would be formally admitted to the Grand Opéra, the jealously guarded stronghold of French music, the *sanctum sanctorum* into which so few were ever allowed to enter, and these not invariably the most worthy.

The reaction came perhaps sooner than might have been expected. Four years later, *Lohengrin* was produced at the Grand Opéra. Disturbances were feared, but they did not take place. What had become of the manifestants of four years ago? They had disappeared altogether. The stupid agitation which for so many years had prevented Parisians from having a chance of hearing Wagner's works on the stage was at an end.

Lohengrin was but the harbinger of the master's other music-dramas, *Die Walküre*, *Die Meistersinger*, *Tannhäuser*, and *Siegfried* being successively mounted on the same boards; while *Der Fliegende Holländer* was given at the Opéra Comique, and Lamoureux had the satisfaction of conducting performances of *Tristan und Isolde* not long before his death. Since then the entire

Music in the XIXth Century

Ring des Nibelungen has been heard in the French capital.

It is curious, in the face of the enormous successes in Paris of the Wagner music-dramas, successes all the greater for having been so long delayed, to read the following words which end the notice on Wagner included in Félix Clément's book, "Les Musiciens Célèbres," published in 1868, "Whatever may happen to M. Richard Wagner, whether his career ends in honours or in exile, his attempt is judged and the *music of the future* will not recover from the verdict passed against it on the memorable evening of March 13, 1861." The date in question is that of the production of *Tannhäuser* in Paris.

Clément, unfortunately, did not live to witness the triumph of Wagner in France, although he may possibly have noticed signs of its approach, or he would doubtless have realised the fact that it is a dangerous thing to prophesy. The same Clément published a "Dictionary of Operas," in which may be found recorded the strangest opinions concerning Wagner and any composers who rightly or wrongly seemed to the writer to show Wagnerian tendencies. A few years ago a

Wagner in France

new edition of this work was brought out under the auspices of M. Arthur Pougin, who re-wrote the notices of the Wagner operas. This was really a pity, for Clément's opinions of Wagner deserve to be immortalised, if only to show how far crass ignorance and rabid animosity were allied in the minds of some of the anti-Wagnerites of those days. To give but one example, Clément declares himself unable to discover "a shadow of an idea" in the prelude to *Lohengrin*, which he considers "an audacious challenge against everything which up to the present has been known as music." *Ab uno disce omnes.*

In his new edition of the "Dictionnaire Lyrique," published in 1897, M. Arthur Pougin has, however, not deprived the world of some choice specimens of Clément's critical faculties and his prophetic instinct. We may read in the article on Ambroise Thomas's *Hamlet* that this composer has beaten his adversaries on their own ground, and that *Tannhäuser*, *Lohengrin*, and *Rienzi* will never attain as many representations as the above-named operatic adaptation of Shakespeare's tragedy.

Ambroise Thomas pitted against Wagner is not a little comical, but when later on our author

Music in the XIXth Century

declares that he doubts whether in the matter of "bold, distant modulations, learned and audacious constructions," any one will ever surpass the ability of Rossini, he fairly takes one's breath away.

After an enormity like this it is scarcely surprising to find that *Djamileh*, the exquisite little Oriental opera by Bizet, should have aroused the ire of this grotesque musical scribe, who accused the composer of having surpassed Wagner in eccentricity, and of having written music full of dissonances and cacophonous harmonies in comparison with which the bold attempts of Berlioz were but child's play. But enough of Clément, whose opinions were, after all, not more inconceivable than those of some of his contemporaries. Wagnerophobia raged in other countries as well as in France, for did not an English critic once write that Wagner was "not a musician at all?" It is not my purpose to rake up all the absurdities that have been written about Wagner, but to try to convey an idea of the state of feeling existing in Paris during the early days of the Wagnerian propaganda.

Scudo, the oracle of the *Revue des deux Mondes*, was as hostile to Wagner as he had

Wagner in France

always shown himself to Berlioz. His successor, Blaze de Bury, suffered badly from Wagnerophobia, and even discovered the influence of the German master in Gounod's *Mireille*! From that time on, every composer who strove to say something in a new way had to run the risk of being accused of Wagnerism, which implied lack of melody.

Even Verdi, with his *Don Carlos*, did not escape the charge of following in the footsteps of the much-abused German master.

As to the younger French composers, they were all supposed to be more or less tainted, the fact of their having obtained successes in the concert-room and being proficient in the art of writing for the orchestra rendering them all the more objects of suspicion. Thus, at the outset of their career Saint-Saëns, Massenet, Joncières, Paladilhe, Lalo, amongst others, had to fight against the prejudices of those who saw or fancied they saw in their works traces of the much-feared and much-hated influence.

The following is a curious instance of this. An operatic competition was instituted by the French Government in 1867, those who took part in it having to set a "libretto," entitled *La Coupe du*

Music in the XIXth Century

Roi de Thulé. It is stated that Massenet was one of the competitors. Among the jurors was Victor Massé, the composer of *Les Noces de Jeannette* and other comic operas. On being asked by a friend if he thought that Massenet had a chance of winning the prize, Massé replied in the negative, adding that there was in his work so great an abuse of Wagnerian formulæ that it engendered nothing but weariness and fatigue.

The above story has been related by the well-known French critic, M. Adolphe Jullien.

I may add that Massenet later on utilised several important portions of his opera in other works, notably in *Le Roi de Lahore*.

As the music of Wagner has become better known, so has his influence extended and become more real, as we shall be able to see. For the present, therefore, we may take leave of the master, with the knowledge that he will assert himself again before long, and turn our attention to another German composer who, in a totally different sphere, proved an important factor in the musical life of Paris during the Second Empire. I mean, of course, Jacques Offenbach, the creator of the "opéra bouffe."

CHAPTER VIII

OFFENBACH AND THE OPÉRA BOUFFE

DURING the 'forties, a young native of Cologne played the violoncello in the orchestra of the Paris Opéra Comique. Later on he became *chef d'orchestre* at the Théâtre Français, where he remained five years. The name of the young musician was Jacques Offenbach,* a name which was soon to be famous all the world over.

It was in the year 1855 that Offenbach became director of a small theatre in the Champs Elysées and seriously commenced his career as a purveyor of light operatic music. The word seriously is not altogether out of place, as at that time Offenbach held very exalted views as regards the art of music. These views he put into print, for it may not be generally known that the composer of *Orphée aux Enfers* and *La Belle Hélène* having

* Offenbach (1819-1880).

Music in the XIXth Century

first been an instrumentalist, then a conductor, for a time turned his attention to musical criticism.

His articles read very well and the opinions expressed therein would command unqualified approval at the present day. He shows himself in these uncompromisingly hostile towards those composers who write down to the level of the public, and severely condemns what he terms "mercantile music." He lauds Mozart and Weber to the skies, and, what is more curious, he writes enthusiastically about Berlioz. Offenbach the champion of Berlioz!

These articles were written just before he assumed the direction of his little theatre in the Champs Elysées, when he necessarily had to lay down the pen of the critic. The pieces performed here were mostly short operettas, and it may serve to give an idea of Offenbach's activity to state that in the space of twelve months he had produced twenty-nine pieces in one act, thirteen of which were by himself.

He now migrated to another theatre, the Bouffes Parisiens, and it was here that his first really great success was obtained with *Orphée aux Enfers* in 1858.

Offenbach and the Opéra Bouffe

From that time until his death, Offenbach never ceased writing, multiplying his scores with wondrous rapidity. Many of these awake pleasant memories: *La Belle Hélène*, *Barbe Bleue*, *La Grande Duchesse de Gérolstein*, *La Périchole*, *Les Brigands*, *Geneviève de Brabant*, *La Princesse de Trébizonde*, *La Jolie Parfumeuse*, *Madame Favart*—to name some of the best at random.

Offenbach not only contributed to the gaiety of the world, for which he deserves eternal gratitude, but he also played an important part in the history of music as I will endeavour to show. Before doing so, however, it is well to point out that Offenbach was not altogether satisfied with his position as the accredited purveyor of music for the masses. The influences of his childhood spent at Cologne, the aspirations of his youth, exemplified in the writings alluded to above, were destined to assert themselves and to haunt the mind of the much-adulated musician, who might well have been intoxicated by the triumphs he obtained with such apparent ease. He however cherished the ambition of proving that he was able to write something better, and he wished to be taken *au sérieux*, at any rate occasionally.

Music in the XIXth Century

Thus did his name appear at intervals on the bills of the Opéra Comique, with *Barkouf*, then with *Robinson Crusoe*, and *Vert-Vert*, and finally with *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*, his swan song. In the above works he appears not as the musical humorist of *Orphée*, but rather as a follower of Auber, Adam, and those composers who for so many years illustrated this peculiarly Gallic form of operatic art.

It was, however, rather too late to attempt to rejuvenate a style which was already *passé*, and Offenbach by creating the "opéra bouffe" had himself dealt a hard blow at the operatic forms of the period. Henceforth there were to be only two ways open to dramatic composers, the one leading to the "lyrical drama," the other to the "opérette." For some years afterwards many musicians of talent attempted a compromise, but gradually it has been proved that their efforts were vain.

"Happy is the man who is born excellent in the pursuit in vogue, and whose genius seems adapted to the time he lives in."

These words of Oliver Goldsmith are applicable to Offenbach who, by chance or ingenuity, succeeded in turning his talents to the best account,

Offenbach and the Opéra Bouffe

in this way resembling his countryman, the composer of *Les Huguenots*. By a curious irony of fate, however, Offenbach was one of those who were destined actively to discredit the forms of the Grand Opéra, of which Meyerbeer was the high priest.

The Voltairean spirit of satire finds a ready appreciation in France, where ridicule kills more quickly than anything, and Offenbach's collaborators are evidently entitled to share with the composer a goodly part of the success achieved, just as in the Gilbert and Sullivan operettas the author and the musician are inseparably connected. Yet who thinks of Offenbach's librettists?

Hector Crémieux and Ludovic Halévy are the authors of *Orphée*. The latter afterwards collaborated with Meilhac in *La Belle Hélène*, *Barbe Bleue*, and *La Grande Duchesse* amongst others.

Mr. Augustine Birrell, in one of his essays, talks of our passion for generalisation, saying that "we all of us have long ago endowed each one of the Christian centuries (to wander back no further) with its own characteristics and attributes. These arbitrary divisions of time have thus become sober realities; they stalk majestically

Music in the XIXth Century

across the stage of memory, they tread the boards each in its own garb, making appropriate gestures and uttering familiar catch words." Certainly each century has its peculiar characteristics. Time can even be subdivided into yet smaller sections, for each decade differs from another in its main attributes. If this is applicable to things in general, it is particularly so to art, music and literature. What, for instance, can be more characteristic of the period of the Second Empire than the light, witty and cynical "opéra bouffe" which Offenbach set to such effervescing strains? That period of transition when a spirit of easy-going scepticism, a reflex of the Voltaireanism of the preceding century, seemed to permeate society! When everything was approached with a light heart, possibly in order to hide any feelings of disquietude caused by the instability of the *régime*.

It was a moment when great changes were evolving in the world of thought. Old ideas were giving place to new ones. The orthodox were scandalised at the boldness of a Renan and, without having read his works, anathematised his opinions, for the prevailing scepticism was cloaked

Offenbach and the Opéra Bouffe

in the garb of religion. The Cæsarism of the day, based on a democratic foundation, fostered freedom of opinion and encouraged a spirit of levity. The moment was ripe for the parodist to look around for subjects on which to exercise the shafts of his wit.

The Olympian gods lent themselves readily to the purpose, and thus in *Orphée aux Enfers* the mighty Jove figured as "Papa 'piter," and Pluto in a disguise made love to Eurydice, who had another suitor in the person of one John Styx, described, for the sake of an atrocious pun, as *domestyx* to the deity of the nether world. In *La Belle Hélène* it was the turn of Homeric heroes, Paris, Menelaus, Agamemnon and Achilles.

Later on the vivacious Cologne musician and his librettists poked their fun at the small German courts with their old-fashioned *étiquette*, and *La Grande Duchesse de Gérolstein* drew all the royal notabilities present in Paris for the Exhibition of 1867 to the Théâtre des Variétés, where Mme. Hortense Schneider reigned supreme. It is said that one day this favourite actress was about to enter some enclosure reserved for the Imperial circle when she was stopped by a zealous func-

Music in the XIXth Century

tionary. "Mais je suis la Grande Duchesse de Gérolstein," was her prompt remark, to which the reply came, "C'est bien, passez, Madame."

These were bright, joyous days when there was no foreboding of the *débâcle* and the sorrows of *l'année terrible*. Offenbach gave the public what they wanted and, with a rapidity which seems veritably prodigious, produced work after work in quick succession.

If the public showered favours on Offenbach, the musicians on the contrary loaded him with abuse. Wagner and Offenbach were at this time the two most decried composers, for diametrically opposite reasons. Those who clung to the past noted with terror the approaching decline and fall of the older operatic style. They vaguely feared the revolutionary theories of Wagner, and when Offenbach proceeded to turn everything they held sacred into ridicule, they became still more alarmed. Writers like the fatuous Clément cloaked themselves in the garb of outraged virtue, and posing as the guardians of classical art, uttered solemn warnings.

There exist individuals who are incapable of appreciating any but the most serious music.

Offenbach and the Opéra Bouffe

These are terribly aggravating people, the Peck-sniffs of the art, who assume irritating airs of superiority and remain perched on their imaginary pedestals, posing as musical Simeon Stylites doing penance to atone for the errors of those benighted ones who are capable of enjoying music of every description provided it be good of its kind. Brahms is about the only modern composer who is recognised by these sham aristarchs of taste. It is not to such as these, therefore, that the following remarks will appeal. They would be incapable of appreciating the talent that pervades the works of Offenbach. To take one of the most famous of the composer's scores, *La Belle Hélène*, as an example, one is astonished at the extraordinary tunefulness, the wonderful *entrain* which never flags, the peculiar sense of humour, the real originality displayed in its pages. Surely qualities such as these are not to be discovered at every street corner. About the tunefulness and *entrain* of Offenbach's music there has never been any question. His originality is also patent to most.

For his humorous effects he often adopted curious devices, such as repeating and accentuating the last syllable of a word.

Music in the XIXth Century

A well-known instance of this occurs in the first act of *La Belle Hélène*, when the kings of Greece make their appearance :

Ces rois remplis de vaillance, 'plis de vaillance, 'plis de
vaillance,
C'est les deux Ajax, les deux, les deux Ajax,
Étalant avec jactance, t'avec jactance, t'avec jactance,
Leur double thorax, leur dou double thorax.

La Belle Hélène abounds in the most amusing skits on the old Italian and the Grand Opéra styles. The patriotic trio in the last act is a parody of the famous trio in *Guillaume Tell*. Considering the great esteem in which Rossini's opera was held at the time in Paris, the musician's daring may well seem remarkable. Nowhere has Offenbach shown his talent as a melodist to greater advantage than in *La Belle Hélène*. Such airs as "Au mont Ida," and "Amour divin" possess real charm.

Offenbach was, of course, destined to have followers in the path he had traced, and of these Hervé, the composer of *L'Œil crevé*, *Chilpéric* and similar musical buffooneries, was the most successful. After the war of 1870 the taste of the public appeared to undergo a change, and the "opérette," which seemed to combine certain characteristics of

Offenbach and the Opéra Bouffe

the "opéra bouffe" and of the older "opéra comique" came into vogue.

Lecocq's *La Fille de Mme. Angot*, a charming work in its way, accentuated the new departure. Then came Litolf, a musician of very superior gifts, with *Héloïse et Abélard*, and later on Planquette with *Les Cloches de Corneville*.

Offenbach himself followed suit with *La Jolie Parfumeuse* and *Madame Favart*.

The vogue enjoyed by Offenbach's works in Vienna possibly stimulated Franz von Suppé to write some of his merry operettas, and Johann Strauss to compete with him in the same field. In England the typically national Savoy operas may be said to owe something to Offenbach and his collaborators. Was not Sullivan once dubbed the "English Offenbach" by an indignant musician of the old school? The epithet was not applied in a flattering sense, and yet it was, in a way, a compliment, for after all Sullivan in his light works was doing for London precisely what Offenbach had done for Paris. The methods might differ in many ways, but the objects were identical. Both composers possessed a rare sense

Music in the XIXth Century

of humour, and employed it for the glorification of topsy-turvydom.

Offenbach was not by any means the consummate musical mountebank he is depicted. His works often disclose great delicacy of touch, and some of his melodies, like the lovely *Chanson de Fortunio*, reveal true sensibility.

Of late years many operettas have been brought out in Paris, but these need not detain us further. The *genre* is too unimportant to justify a lengthy disquisition in these pages. It would have been impossible, however, to pass over in silence the composer concerning whom Victorin Joncières once wrote: "Offenbach a pu écrire de la *petite* musique, mais c'était un *grand* artiste."

CHAPTER IX

BIZET AND THE RENAISSANCE

WHAT name can be more appropriately mentioned in connection with the Renaissance of French music than that of Bizet,* the gifted composer whose *Carmen* is a landmark in the history of opera, and who was stricken down practically on the eve of what would, without doubt, have been an exceptionally brilliant career?

Who can tell what the world has lost by the untimely death of Bizet, which took place on June 3, 1875, three months exactly after the production of *Carmen*, before this richly endowed musician had completed his thirty-seventh year?

Mozart, Schubert, Weber, Mendelssohn, Chopin, Schumann, Bellini, Bizet, all taken in the full maturity of their powers, consumed in all probability by the fire of the genius which burnt within

* G. Bizet (b. 1838 ; d. 1875).

Music in the XIXth Century

them. Had they produced their best work? Who can tell?

If Rossini had died after *Guillaume Tell* the world would have been scarcely any the poorer, and yet this opera seemed to foreshadow great things.

On the other hand, if anything had happened to Wagner or to Verdi at the age of thirty-seven, the loss would have been incalculable. None of the later Wagnerian music-dramas would be in existence, and the most famous of the Verdi operas would never have been written. It is profitless, however, to indulge in speculations as to what might have happened had circumstances been different.

Bizet during his short life achieved a great deal, and, judging by his last works, was on the high road to achieve a great deal more, for the barrier of prejudice that had impeded his progress at the outset of his career had gradually been removed, the horizon was clear, and the prospects of the younger French composers appeared particularly bright and hopeful.

At the commencement of the 'sixties, when Bizet had returned to Paris after his compulsory sojourn in Rome as winner of the Grand Prize, the musical movement which was to reach its

Bizet and the Renaissance

florescence a few years later had been already started.

The establishment of the "Concerts Populaires" by Padeloup had aroused an interest in the symphonic works of the great German masters. Occasionally some young French composer was able to find favour with the energetic *chef d'orchestre*. Bizet was one of the first to profit by Padeloup's enterprise, and a Scherzo of his composition figured on one of the programmes in 1863, not long before the production of his first opera, *Les Pêcheurs de Perles*, at the Théâtre Lyrique.

It was about this time that certain critics imagined they discovered traces of Wagnerian influence in his music, notably in the above-mentioned opera.

Les Pêcheurs de Perles may be unequal as a whole, but it was a remarkable achievement for a young man of twenty-five.

The Oriental colouring so vividly imparted to the music constitutes an undeniable charm. The languidly enervating melodies, full of luscious sweetness, are redolent of Eastern climes. The score is imbued with poetical sentiment, besides which it reveals a strong dramatic temperament.

Music in the XIXth Century

Bizet's next opera, *La Jolie Fille de Perth* (1867), cannot be considered an advance, the style of the work being altogether too mixed. It would seem as if Bizet had wished to protest against the accusation of favouring Wagnerian theories, as his score abounds in concessions to vocalists. It stands to reason that there are some portions worthy of the composer. Among these may be mentioned the irresistibly fascinating Bohemian dance, so wildly inspiriting and original in conception, suggestive of a frenzied dance of dervishes, which is now introduced into the fourth act of *Carmen*.

A well-known critic in his notice of this opera, having drawn attention to certain concessions to the bad taste of the public, received a letter from Bizet, whom he did not know personally, thanking him for his remarks, and in the following words, which I will not spoil by translating, expressing his feelings on the subject: "J'ai fait cette fois encore des concessions que je regrette, je l'avoue. J'aurais bien des choses à dire pour ma défense. . . . Devinez les! L'Ecole des flonflons, des roulades, du mensonge, est morte, bien morte! Enterrons la sans larmes, sans regret, sans émotion et . . . en avant!"

Bizet and the Renaissance

Do not these words typify the man? Do they not show him to us as he then was, young, ardent, fearless, enthusiastic, eager to fight the battle of true art, accepting in the best spirit the just observations of the critic, seeking no excuse for what was after all a pardonable weakness in a beginner, due probably to the exigencies of vocalists?

When Bizet again came before the public, he was in the full possession of his powers. His country had undergone a terrible ordeal and was barely recovering from the horrors of a foreign invasion and civil war. In a modest one-act work, *Djamileh*, he again evoked the splendours of the East, and this time expressed himself in a more personal manner. The delicate beauties of this exquisite little score were not grasped by the public. Yet in *Djamileh* and in the incidental music to Alphonse Daudet's *L'Arlésienne* Bizet far surpassed his previous efforts. These works reveal an extraordinary sense of musical characterisation, an indefinable poetical feeling, and the possession of a rich vein of original melody.

If in *Djamileh* Bizet enables us to inhale the fragrant perfumes of the East, in *L'Arlésienne* he

Music in the XIXth Century

carries us into the heart of Provence and allows us to bask in the genial warmth of the Southern sun. Later on, in *Carmen* he will take us to Spain and vividly bring before us the picturesqueness of the country which gave birth to a Cervantes and a Murillo.

What further delightful excursions might have been made in the fascinating company of Bizet had not death ruthlessly intervened, we can but imagine! Several works were sketched out by him, but these were left in so unfinished a state that they could not be completed.

Carmen, however, remains to us. Its influence has not only made itself felt in France but has extended to Italy and may be noted in the melodramatic productions that have for some years found favour in the land of song.

In this musical drama, for so it may in truth be termed, Bizet asserts his independence in a surprising manner. Although hampered to a certain extent by the forms of the Opéra Comique *genre*, he contrived to rise above them. *Carmen* appeals to the heart, it is intensely human. The characters are not artificial, they live and carry conviction. We have to do here with no mere operatic puppets but

Bizet and the Renaissance

with men and women, creatures of flesh and blood. The admirable book constructed by Meilhac and Halévy on Mérimée's story is palpitating with interest. As a drama it would in itself enchain attention. With Bizet's music its power is intensified a hundred times. *Carmen, c'est une belle page d'art sous une vraie tranche de vie*:—thus has a French writer* summed up Bizet's masterpiece.

It is very difficult to define precisely what constitutes the quality known as originality. In music such a thing as absolute originality does not and cannot exist, for reasons upon it which is unnecessary to insist, but which are perfectly obvious. Every composer must inevitably at the outset of his career be subjected to different influences. These will react upon his musical temperament in many varied ways. They will colour his thoughts, take possession of him in a manner, and possibly, however paradoxical it may sound, help him to strike out a path of his own. The spirit of eclecticism pervades the age, and there can be little doubt but that this is a good thing. Thus does German music find ready appreciation in Paris, while a reciprocal feeling exists in Berlin with regard to

* E. de Solenière.

Music in the XIXth Century

French music. In Italy, composers eagerly study the works of German and French masters, while England has of late not been uninfluenced by the music of Russia, which may possibly prove an effective antidote to the dull imitations of Brahms.

Through all this free trade in art music has unquestionably proved a gainer. It is no longer strictly encompassed by geographical boundary-lines. The cry for nationalism in art certainly still resounds, and it is right that it should do so, for no artist should wilfully seek to imitate the characteristics of an alien land. Rather should he study them, and if they are adaptable to his own nature, there is no reason why he should not profit by them. That a musician can do this while remaining absolutely national in his style has been already shown in the case of Gounod.

With Bizet the extraneous musical influences were at least as varied, with Saint-Saëns we will see later on that they have proved even more so. The above three composers are, nevertheless, thoroughly typical of their country.

By sending the winners of the Prix de Rome to spend three years in the Eternal City, it would

Bizet and the Renaissance

seem as if the intention were to induce young French composers to interest themselves in the music of Italy. Bizet's first operas certainly show that he was to some extent an admirer of Verdi, if the harmonic texture of these works suggests the refining influence of Gounod. Many of his compositions also divulge his fondness for masters such as Mendelssohn, Schumann, Chopin. Yet Bizet remains essentially personal and essentially national. Explain this how you will.

The composer's musical profession of faith was set forth in an article he contributed to the *Revue Nationale* in 1867.

In this he declared himself opposed to the spirit of system in art and to divisions, sub-divisions, classifications, "these definitions, sometimes obscure, always useless or dangerous." "For me," he writes, "there only exist two sorts of music—the good and the bad!"

This is all very well, but when will musicians agree among themselves as to what is good and what is bad?

Certain masters are universally recognised and placed beyond the pale of discussion. But when it comes to contemporary musicians, opinions vary

Music in the XIXth Century

considerably. The battle of words has raged over many composers. As it was formerly with regard to Wagner and Berlioz, so it is to-day with regard to Richard Strauss and Bruneau, and so it will be to-morrow with some other musician who expresses himself unconventionally.

The following passage, taken from the same article, conveys an idea of the enthusiastic, warm-hearted nature of the artist who wrote *Carmen* : “ No, beauty does not age ! Faith does not die ! . . . The artist has no name, no nationality ; he is inspired or he is not ; he has genius, talent, or he has none ; if he has some, he should be adopted, loved, acclaimed ; if he has none he should be respected, pitied, forgotten.”

In writing this Bizet did not, however, take into consideration the fact that genius is not invariably understood at once. He was, unfortunately, himself destined to be a victim of public incomprehension. In his case the fact is the more surprising for the reason that his music is so clear in design, so utterly devoid of needless complications. Of course, it must be remembered that as he died so young, the public had not, in his lifetime, sufficient time to know his works. Had he but lived

Bizet and the Renaissance

he would have found fame and fortune awaiting him, for the world did not take very long to discover the merits of *Carmen*.

Saint-Saëns, in writing about his great friendship for Bizet, alludes to the trait of out-spokenness which they possessed in common, and adds the following remark: "Otherwise, we differed in every respect, each pursuing a different ideal; he, seeking passion and life above all; I, pursuing the chimera of purity of style and perfection of form." Passion and life indeed overflow in *Carmen*, and cause one to forget the artificiality of the operatic form. The story unfolds itself to the accompaniment of music alternately light, strenuous, or pathetic as the situations demand it.

Nietzsche has seen in *Carmen* the antithesis of Wagnerism; it is difficult to perceive why. The intimate connection between words and music is one of the great points insisted upon by Wagner, and this is precisely one of the prominent features of *Carmen*. Does not also the *leitmotiv* appear, somewhat tentatively, it must be admitted, in this work? That strangely alluring theme which is heard at the end of the prelude is identified throughout with the character of the heroine,

Music in the XIXth Century

and conveys an impression of impending doom.

Saint-Saëns had also toyed with the *leit-motiv* in his *Samson et Dalila*, a work which was written before the production of *Carmen*, although its first performance did not take place until two years later.

As I have before remarked, *Carmen* is constructed according to the usual operatic pattern, and it is all the more extraordinary that Bizet should have been able to vivify and enlarge the consecrated forms held in such honour at the Opéra Comique. In leaving this work as a legacy to the world, Bizet effectively pointed to the road which his successors were to follow in their search after dramatic truth.

The ideas concerning operatic reform, which had been germinating for some years, were gradually acquiring a hold in all countries. *Tristan und Isolde* and *Die Meistersinger* had been produced in Germany, and had evoked the strangest comments from those who had not heard them. In Italy the lead had been given by Verdi, who had practically turned his back upon the past by writing *Aida*. The appearance of Boïto's *Mefistofele*

Bizet and the Renaissance

had also caused a commotion, and the musical world has been waiting in vain ever since for a successor to this remarkable work.

Ponchielli, a composer who is not sufficiently known in England, was following the movement of the day. In France, as we have already seen, Gounod had gained a bloodless victory and cleared the way for eager followers.

During the period which preceded the production of *Carmen* several musicians who have since come to the fore were actively working, but they had not yet succeeded in obtaining any great celebrity as dramatic composers. Saint-Saëns had triumphed in the concert-room, and Massenet's sacred cantatas, *Marie-Magdeleine* and *Eve*, had brought his name prominently before the public. Joncières's two early operas, *Sardanapale* and *Le dernier jour de Pompéi*, had proved failures.

Ernest Reyer had, on the other hand, as far back as in 1861, drawn attention to himself by *La Statue*, an opera on an Oriental subject, but since then, excepting *Erostrate*, a work which, after having been brought out originally at Baden, had been accorded two performances at

Music in the XIXth Century

the Grand Opéra, soon after the Franco-German War, he had produced nothing.

Victor Massé had endeavoured to enlarge his style and adapt it to more modern requirements. His *Paul et Virginie* at the time of its production obtained more success than *Carmen*, but is now forgotten.

Paladilhe, whose "Mandolinata" was sung everywhere, had penetrated to the Opéra Comique with a little one-act piece, *Le Passant*, and *L'Amour Africain*, a charming and refined work in which some critics fancied they discovered the inevitable Wagnerian influences, though where these could be detected it is difficult to see. *L'Amour Africain* has the lightness of touch discernible in all Paladilhe's works. It belongs essentially to the time of its production, the 'seventies, and betokens its author's admiration for Gounod and Bizet.

César Franck and Lalo were little known, although they were both considerably the seniors of the composer of *Carmen*.

Léo Delibes had written the ballet of *Coppelia*, and was shortly to produce *Sylvia*, one of the most delightful examples of its kind. He had,

Bizet and the Renaissance

after writing a number of operettas, penetrated into the Opéra Comique stronghold with *Le Roi l'a dit*, in which he had proved himself a worthy successor of Auber.

In the meanwhile the excellent Padeloup, whose fame as a conductor was shortly to be eclipsed by that of his successors, Lamoureux and Colonne, was continuing his Wagnerian propaganda. Every Sunday afternoon his concerts at the Cirque d'Hiver were crowded. It became the correct thing to go either to the Conservatoire or to Padeloup's on Sunday afternoons, and as admittance to the former temple of art was extremely difficult to obtain, the latter profited thereby.

Society was beginning to show some interest in serious music, and when Colonne, in 1874, started his series of concerts at the Châtelet Theatre, he did not lack patronage. With great astuteness, this conductor realised that the time was ripe for bringing forward the works of Berlioz. Wagner was triumphing in Germany, why not attempt to make Berlioz triumph in his own country? The intention was a laudable one, and M. Colonne's venture was crowned with every success. *La Damnation de Faust*, which had landed poor Berlioz

Music in the XIXth Century

into pecuniary difficulties when he first produced it at his own risk, now proved a powerful attraction. The Berlioz cult progressed rapidly, and with it followed an increased interest in the productions of the rising French composers of the day. The subsequent chapters of this volume will show to what this has led.

CHAPTER X

SAINT-SAËNS AND SOME OF HIS CONTEMPORARIES

CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS* is the Proteus of modern music. He can assume at will all manner of disguises, but through each of these may be recognised the sharp outlines of his own strongly marked personality.

It is this extraordinary faculty of employing all the forms of the art, this facility of expression in the most varied musical idioms, this thorough-going eclecticism and versatility of taste, which often has puzzled the master's commentators and prevented them from appreciating the individuality which pervades his works.

The wonderful mastery of technique possessed by Saint-Saëns has, of course, won universal recognition. It asserts itself in all his compositions, yet

* Saint-Saëns, b. 1835.

Music in the XIXth Century

never obtrusively. In other words, he does not make a parade of his erudition but studiously cultivates lucidity of style. Saint-Saëns is an independent. He brooks no control and refuses to be bound by rules or to commit himself to the adoption of any definite system.

Thus has he fallen foul of the reactionaries on the one hand and the advanced party on the other. The *fond* of his nature is strictly classical. Yet his predilection for Bach, Mozart and Beethoven have not prevented him from ardently upholding the cause of Liszt and modern programme music.

He may say, like the bat in Lafontaine's fable :

“ Je suis oiseau : voyez mes ailes !
Je suis souris : vivent les rats ! ”

Of all musicians, he is perhaps the most paradoxical, and the expression he applied to Berlioz is really far more applicable to himself.

Saint-Saëns has been intimately connected with the musical movement of the age, and his name is everywhere known and honoured. It seems to have been his object to prove that he could shine in all styles. Thus has he entered the various

Saint-Saëns and Contemporaries

domains of the art, in all of which he has succeeded in leaving permanent marks of his sojourn. Saint-Saëns is the only modern master who may justly claim to have achieved success in all the great branches of music.

Other composers may equal or surpass him in this or that *genre*, but by the universality of his productivity, the marvellous power of adaptability which reveals itself in all he does, he stands absolutely alone.

A glance through the catalogue of his works will make this clear. With wonderful ease, Saint-Saëns has produced specimens of every kind of music, and if he has not in all instances been equally successful, he has rarely failed to be interesting. He may not have the rugged power of a Berlioz, the emotional feeling of a Gounod, the mystic fervour of a César Franck, the insinuating charm of a Massenet, but he possesses an extraordinary faculty for assimilation, and certain characteristics peculiarly his own. He has been taxed with dryness, with lacking that warmth of feeling which vivifies a work and establishes a communication between the composer and his audience. The fact is that of all composers, Saint-

Music in the XIXth Century

Saëns is the most difficult to describe. He eludes you at every moment,—the elements constituting his musical personality are so varied in their nature, yet they seem to blend in so remarkable a fashion! Whatever his shortcomings, Saint-Saëns occupies a place to himself in the history of music, and he exemplifies to a peculiar degree the argument I have put forward in an earlier chapter to the effect that alien influences are beneficial to a composer and do not prevent him from remaining essentially national in his style.

Certainly no one has exhibited alien influences to a greater extent, and yet no one is entitled to be considered more representative of his country's music than Saint-Saëns. Brought up on Bach, Mozart and Beethoven, he has nevertheless absorbed all the musical tendencies of the age and proved himself a thorough *enfant du siècle*, his early training and his classical proclivities preventing him from ever losing his self-control and falling into the excesses of what might be termed musical licence. Saint-Saëns is a typical Frenchman, particularly, one might add, a Parisian. He is pre-eminently witty, and has what his countrymen would term *une nature primesautière*. It is this

Saint-Saëns and Contemporaries

quality which has enabled him to attack the driest forms of the art and render them bearable. There is nothing ponderous about him. As he is in his person vivacious and alert, quick at repartee and somewhat caustic in retort, brilliant in conversation and thoroughly independent in thought, so he is in his music. The man and his works are thoroughly in accord. There is no discrepancy.

Saint-Saëns was a wonder-child. His first appearance in public as a pianist took place in 1848, when he was ten years of age, and he performed pieces by Handel, Bach, Mozart and Beethoven.

Nourished on such solid musical fare, it is not surprising that his first important work should have been a symphony, produced when he was a lad of seventeen, written in strictly classical form and imbued with the Mendelssohnian spirit.

His second symphony, composed in 1859 and published some twenty years later, also follows classical models and does not display any very decided individuality. It is otherwise with the third symphony, in the redoubtable and comparison-suggesting key of C Minor, Op. 78. This work, dedicated to the memory of Franz Liszt,

Music in the XIXth Century

which was originally produced in 1886 by the London Philharmonic Society, is one of the master's most remarkable compositions—more than that, it is one of the greatest of modern symphonies.

We have seen how, more than a hundred years previously, Gossec introduced the symphonic form into France. It must be admitted that for many years it languished there. Although the symphonies of Beethoven obtained the most perfect performances at the Conservatoire (was it not here that Wagner received his first adequate impression of the immortal Ninth?), yet French genius seemed more adapted to dramatic than to symphonic music, and Berlioz invested his great tone-creations with a dramatic sentiment. The symphony proper was only cultivated in a modest, unobtrusive fashion.

The two early symphonies of Saint-Saëns were pleasing works written in a somewhat archaic form, nothing more. The years that had passed since their composition had, however, been fruitful. Saint-Saëns had added to his love for the classics an enthusiastic admiration for Liszt. Following in this master's footsteps he had written four Symphonic Poems, and he was now at the zenith of his

Saint-Saëns and Contemporaries

fame and in the fullest possession of his powers. This was the moment when he turned his thoughts once more to the Symphony. Now, however, it was not to follow recognised models but to show that he was able in this most difficult form of composition to strike out a line for himself.

In this symphony, Saint-Saëns adopted a plan he had already followed in his 4th piano Concerto, also in C Minor, and in one of his Sonatas for piano and violin, of dividing his work into two parts instead of adhering to the conventional four movements.

An innovation in the instrumentation of the Symphony consisted in the introduction of the organ and of the piano. This was, I believe, the first time that the instrument of the household had been introduced into a symphony. Since then, Vincent d'Indy has employed a piano in his "Symphonie sur un Chant Montagnard." It also figures in César Franck's *Les Djinns*.

The organ is another unwonted participator in symphonies, and its introduction caused some comment at the time.

In no other work has Saint-Saëns displayed to greater advantage his mastery of technique. His themes are altered and transformed in many

Music in the XIXth Century

different ways, yet there is never any undue complexity. Everything is clear and limpid. A French writer and composer, M. Guy Ropartz, has written: "We must praise above all and without any restriction the perfectly beautiful orchestration of the work which now occupies us. M. Saint-Saëns nearly always employs means of great simplicity. The effects obtained are, however, of a surprising variety."

A German critic, Herr Otto Neitzel, also a well-known pianist and composer, wrote in 1898 that in his opinion this symphony of Saint-Saëns and T'schaikowsky's Pathetic Symphony constituted the best that had been achieved in the field of pure instrumental music during the twelve preceding years.

Saint-Saëns had long before the production of this symphony given to the world the four Symphonic Poems, which are undoubtedly his most characteristic orchestral works.

Though following in the footsteps of Liszt he cannot be said to have imitated him, for the above compositions are absolutely typical of his own nature. Programme music thus understood surely ought to appeal to all.

Saint-Saëns and Contemporaries

Le Rouet d'Omphale with its delicate gossamer-like instrumentation, is intended by the composer to represent "the triumphant struggle of weakness over strength." Omphale sits at her spinning-wheel with Hercules at her feet. The hero's theme of entreaty is first expressed by the lower stringed instruments. Later on this same theme will be heard rhythmically transformed into a mocking phrase intended to suggest the idea of Omphale's coquettish bantering.

In his opera *Samson et Dalila* the composer has intentions of a similarly subtle kind.

The second Symphonic Poem, *Phæton*, is also founded on a classical subject and graphically describes the erratic drive of the Sun's chariot by the offspring of Phœbus, and its fatal termination. The *Danse Macabre*, the most popular of the four works, is an admirable specimen of fantastic music. At the stroke of midnight a skeleton seizes a violin and gives the signal for a weird dance which grows gradually wilder until the crowing of the cock is heard and silence is restored.

In *La Jeunesse d'Hercule*, the most elaborate of the Symphonic Poems, the composer returns to

Music in the XIXth Century

mythology. The connection of the music with the subject is here scarcely so easy to follow as it is in the three other Symphonic Poems. The work, nevertheless, is extremely interesting and original.

Saint-Saëns's opinion on the value of so-called "programme music" is well known. "Is the music in itself good or bad?" he writes. "Everything lies there. Whether it be or not accompanied by a programme it will neither be better nor worse." In the case of his own Symphonic Poems he has taken care that the music should be good. Let others do the same, if they can.

Since I am not writing a biography of Saint-Saëns, but merely endeavouring to give an idea of his position in connection with the music of his country, I must perforce be brief and pass by many works by this richly endowed musician, over which I would gladly linger. Saint-Saëns is the first Frenchman who may be said to have successfully competed with German composers on their own ground, that is, in the domain of symphonic and chamber music.

I have already alluded to his Symphony in C Minor. His contributions to what is known as

Saint-Saëns and Contemporaries

chamber music are very numerous and are frequently performed. The Trio in F, the piano Quartet in B flat, the violoncello Sonata, to name only three of his best-known works, are almost classics. The same may be said of two of his piano Concertos, the second and the fourth, of his third violin Concerto, and of his violoncello Concerto.

Saint-Saëns, who besides being a remarkable pianist, particularly admirable as an interpreter of Bach, is also a famous organist, has of course written many sacred works. These and miscellaneous compositions, such as the oratorio, *Le Déluge*, the cantata *La Lyre et la Harpe*, numerous songs and various pieces for the piano and other instruments, I have no space to discuss.

His position as a dramatic composer, however, still remains to be considered. Like all his compatriots Saint-Saëns desired to write for the stage. His successes gained in the concert-room curiously enough seem to have rendered access to the theatre particularly difficult for him.

The reputation he had acquired of being a learned musician, coupled with the fact that he was suspected of harbouring Wagnerian tendencies,

Music in the XIXth Century

engendered a feeling of distrust. What could a man who wrote Symphonies and Concertos and who played the organ know about the stage? "As they will not have anything to say to us at the theatre," he used to remark to Bizet, "let us take refuge in the concert-room!" To which the future composer of *Carmen* was wont to reply, "It is easy for you to speak: I am not made for the Symphony; the theatre is necessary for me, I can do nothing without it!"

Saint-Saëns's operatic *début* did not take place until after the Franco-German War, and then with a modest one-act work, *La Princesse Jaune*, which the egregious Clément has in his Dictionary of Operas condemned as vehemently as he has the *Djamileh* of Bizet.

Saint-Saëns had previously written a fantastic opera, *Le Timbre d'Argent*, which was only to be produced some years later. The overture to this work is very brilliant, and it is strange that it should not be better known. He had also begun his *Samson et Dalila*, of all his operas the one which has acquired the most fame.

It was at Weimar, through the recommendation of Liszt, in 1877, that this work was represented

Saint-Saëns and Contemporaries

for the first time. A long while after, it reached the Paris Opera, where it has since remained in the *répertoire*.

According to the general verdict of the world, this Biblical opera remains the composer's dramatic masterpiece.

Owing to the absurd survival of the old Puritanical spirit, which clings to us with such persistency, *Samson et Dalila* has not been given on the London stage, although it has repeatedly been heard in the concert-room.

The subsequent operas of Saint-Saëns contain many beauties, but they seem to lack the element of vitality. Their names are *Etienne Marcel*, *Henry VIII.*, *Proserpine*, *Ascanio*, *Phryné*, *Les Barbares*.

The spirit of eclecticism which prevails over the music of Saint-Saëns and in a measure helps to give it its character, is responsible for certain weaknesses in the composer's dramatic methods. Desirous of running with the hare and hunting with the hounds, Saint-Saëns has in his operas endeavoured to effect a compromise between the old and the new schools, and his efforts to reconcile conflicting elements have not been altogether happy.

Music in the XIXth Century

In *Henry VIII.* he adhered strongly to the recognised forms of the Grand Opera, but adopted the *leitmotiv* system with considerable tact and skill. In *Phryné* he deliberately reverted to the style of the older Opéra Comique.

A musician so thoroughly equipped in everything that pertains to his art, one who is so versed in all the æsthetic ideas of the age, naturally sets to work in no tentative fashion.

The seeming contradictions in style that pervade the operas of Saint-Saëns are really perfectly in accord with his nature. The wide range of his musical vision embraces every style. He is on familiar terms with the old and the modern masters, he can—as Gounod once remarked—write an opera in any *genre*. Why therefore should he not do so?

Of course this implies, as some might say with a show of truth, an absence of conviction. Here again it would not do to be too certain. For what do we know of this? Minds and temperaments differ so widely!

So thoroughly independent an artist as Saint-Saëns is precisely one who will never brook dictation, he will consent to be the slave neither of the

Saint-Saëns and Contemporaries

partisans of obsolete operatic methods nor of thorough-going adherents of the modern musical drama.

If it please him one day to write in one style and the next in another, who should seek to prevent him?

Of course the public has the right to express approval or disapproval of the results of his labours, and this right is invariably exercised.

His theory of dramatic art he himself defined when he said that he believed the drama to be "progressing towards a synthesis of different elements, song, declamation, and symphony, blending in an equilibrium which leaves the composer free to avail himself of all the resources of art, while it affords the spectator the gratification of every legitimate desire."

This opinion is not unlike that expressed by Jean Jacques Rousseau in his definition of the term opera, which I have quoted in the first chapter of this volume.

The composer who allows himself to be bound by certain hard-and-fast rules is apt to become narrow-minded. There is something to be said in favour of all forms of art, and I am not going to

Music in the XIXth Century

imitate those who affect an air of superiority and venture to dictate to a master like Saint-Saëns the course he should pursue.

While retaining a secret preference for *Samson et Dalila*, one of the most beautiful music-dramas of modern times, I gladly record the great satisfaction I have experienced in listening to operas such as *Henry VIII.*, *Etienne Marcel*, and *Phryné*, which, in spite of certain weaknesses, contain much that is beautiful.

The versatility of Saint-Saëns has shown itself in other ways besides musical composition. His two volumes entitled "Harmonie et Mélodie" and "Portraits et Souvenirs" are admirable examples of witty, trenchant criticism, which cannot fail to interest, whether or not one is able invariably to agree with the opinions expressed therein.

In "Problèmes et Mystères" Saint-Saëns approaches metaphysics, and, as in his music, displays thorough independence in the expression of his views. The great problems of life, over which so much ink has been spilt, are tersely and lucidly discussed therein. Saint-Saëns has also published a book of poems entitled "Rimes

Saint-Saëns and Contemporaries

Familières.” And now I must leave the master and mention some of his contemporaries.

Of these Massenet and César Franck deserve special chapters to themselves. After them the first name which presents itself is that of Lalo.*

The vicissitudes attending a musical career have rarely been exemplified to a greater extent than in the case of this composer. His life was a perpetual struggle in search of recognition. An opera entitled *Fiesque*, written in the sixties, was offered to one manager, then to another, and was at one time actually in rehearsal, but something invariably occurred to prevent its production; and to this day *Fiesque*, the score of which has been published, has never been heard. The composer subsequently utilised a great deal of the music in other works.

Lalo was one of the composers who profited by the musical renaissance of the 'seventies, and his name often figured on the programmes of Pasdeloup's and Colonne's concerts. He was then, however, no longer a young man.

Just as in the case of Saint-Saëns, his reputation as a serious musician seemed to stand in his way

* E. Lalo, b. 1823, d. 1892.

Music in the XIXth Century

with operatic managers. Finally he was offered the "scenario" of a ballet for the Grand Opéra. He would doubtless have preferred something better, but was perforce obliged to accept, and the ballet *Namouna* was produced in 1881 with scant success.

A suite taken from this work has often been heard in the concert-room. It abounds in piquant effects, and is very picturesquely scored.

Success came to Lalo at the end of his career with the production of his opera, *Le Roi d'Ys*, at the Opéra Comique in 1888, the composer being then sixty-five years of age.

Lalo can scarcely be termed a very prolific writer. His best known works are the Violin Concerto, Op. 20, the Symphonie Espagnole, Op. 21, for violin and orchestra, the Rapsodie Norvégienne for orchestra, and the opera *Le Roi d'Ys*. He is also the author of an interesting symphony in G minor.

Although not possessing a very decided musical personality, Lalo was not devoid of originality. Like many of his compatriots, he knew how to mix the colours of his orchestral palette to the best advantage. His harmonies are always refined,

Saint-Saëns and Contemporaries

and he exhibits a partiality for uncommon rhythms.

Le Roi d'Ys, which is one of the most interesting of modern French operas, is constructed more or less on the old pattern, yet it is not by any means commonplace, but reveals both sincerity of purpose and knowledge of effect. It may be mentioned that Lalo had set the libretto of *Le Roi d'Ys* to music some years before his opera was produced. He appears to have practically rewritten his work, for at the time of its production in 1888 he wrote a letter to M. Adolphe Jullien, a portion of which appeared later on in the French papers. The following is a translation of this curious fragment :

“When, two years ago, I destroyed the first score of *Le Roi d'Ys* I had the desire of making it a lyrical drama in the modern acceptance of the term ; but, after some months of reflection, I drew back, frightened at this task which seemed so much too heavy for my strength. Until now the Colossus Wagner, the inventor of the real lyrical drama, has alone been strong enough to carry such a weight ; all those who have had the ambition to walk in his footsteps have failed, some piteously,

Music in the XIXth Century

others honourably, but always as copyists ; I know them all. It will be necessary to surpass Wagner in order to fight on his own ground with advantage, and the fighter capable of so doing has not yet revealed himself. As for myself I have realised in time my impotence, and I have written a simple opera, as the title of my score indicates ; this elastic form still permits one to write *music* without imitating one's predecessors, just as Brahms writes symphonies and chamber-music in the old form, without imitating Beethoven."

In preferring to adhere to the older operatic forms Lalo was perfectly in his right. It is difficult, though, to follow his reasoning. Certainly it would be worse than foolish for a composer wilfully to imitate Wagner, although many have done so, but there is no reason why he should not profit by the master's innovations. Individuality will assert itself, whether the form chosen by the musician for the expression of his thoughts be that of the old opera or of the modern lyrical drama. It has, however, been proved that all attempts to stem the tide of progress are doomed to failure. Composers will be wise if they bear this in mind, and look to the future rather than to the past.

Saint-Saëns and Contemporaries

Another contemporary of Saint-Saëns is Théodore Dubois,* the successor of Ambroise Thomas in the direction of the Conservatoire.

A very prolific composer, Dubois has attempted many styles of music, including the opera (*Aben Hamet*, *Xavière*, etc.), and the oratorio (*Paradise Lost*). He has also written instrumental works, notably the fine *Frithjof* overture, and in everything he has done has proved himself to be a worthy, conscientious musician in the best sense of the term. It is not given to every one to scale the loftiest heights, and there is plenty of room for the honest worker in the field of art.

Like his friend Saint-Saëns, Théodore Dubois has also distinguished himself as an organist, and he succeeded the composer of *Samson et Dalila* in that capacity at the Church of the Madeleine, a post which has since been filled by Gabriel Fauré.†

Between the last-named composer and Saint-Saëns there exist certain points of resemblance, one might say even certain affinities. Fauré was, I believe, one of the rare pupils of Saint-Saëns, and he has remained his devoted friend.

He is one of the few French composers of note

* T. Dubois, b. 1837.

† G. Fauré, b. 1845.

Music in the XIXth Century

who have not written operas. Fauré's talent is very exceptional and very individual. His music is characterised by ultra-refinement. He loves to wander through a labyrinth of uncommon harmonies, in which, however, he never loses himself. A song of his entitled "Perfume" exemplifies this tendency to a remarkable degree. Fauré has written some of the most exquisite songs of recent years, and has distinguished himself in the domain of chamber music, witness his two quartets and violin sonata. He is also the author of a symphony.

Another composer and organist may here be mentioned, Charles Marie Widor,* who is the author of an opera, *Maitre Ambros*, a charming ballet, "La Korrigane," organ and instrumental music.

Guilmant and Gigoux are two organists of note who have confined themselves to writing music for their instrument. The works of the former are known all over the world.

How many composers of real worth are compelled by the force of circumstances to work in comparative obscurity, and how many are debarred

* C. M. Widor, b. 1845.

Saint-Saëns and Contemporaries

from ever tasting the fruits of success? One who was both, was Louis Lacombe, the author of several works of large dimensions, notably *Winkelriede*, an opera which was only performed after his death. He must not be confounded with Paul Lacombe, who studied with Bizet and has written orchestral and chamber music.

A musician who may fittingly find a place in this chapter is Benjamin Godard.* The career of this distinguished musician affords another instance, as in the case of Lalo, of the many tribulations and disappointments that too often form the accompaniment of a composer's existence. And yet Godard cannot be said to have been altogether unsuccessful during his life. Gifted with a prodigious facility of production, he rather abused it and, partly in order to provide for the means of livelihood, he wrote incessantly at all hours and in every style, multiplying his works and passing from song to opera, from sonata to cantata with extraordinary ease. During the seventies, Godard was looked upon as an exceptionally promising composer. His "Concerto Romantique" for the violin, his violin sonatas, his songs and piano

* B. Godard, b. 1849, d. 1895.

Music in the XIXth Century

pieces revealed great talent and individuality. With his cantata "Le Tasse," produced in 1878, he at once leapt into fame, and at the age of thirty seemed to have acquired a sufficiently stable position. His subsequent works were many, but they do not appear to have greatly enhanced his reputation. Of his operas, neither *Pedro de Zalamea*, *Jocelyn*, *Dante* nor *La Vivandière* achieved more than a *succès d'estime*. Among his larger compositions, the "Symphonie Légendaire" and the "Symphonie Gothique" deserve special mention. His violin sonatas, which are rather suites than sonatas, and certain mood-pictures such as the "Fragments Poétiques," and "Études Artistiques," are exceedingly fascinating.

Godard's music has a distinct character of its own, it is often full of charm and breathes a gentle spirit of melancholy. The musician of the autumn, of the twilight hours, he can conjure up visions of the past, stir up memories of forgotten days. He was essentially a sentimentalist, something of a musical Alfred de Musset, and the best that was in him was perhaps expressed in works of small calibre, songs and pianoforte pieces.

CHAPTER XI

MASSENET AND THE MODERN FRENCH OPERA

THE composer whose name heads this chapter, is undoubtedly the most popular representative of modern French opera. His influence over his contemporaries has been very great, almost as great as that of Gounod, from whom he may in a measure be said to proceed.

Massenet* is essentially typical of his epoch and of his nation. In some ways an eclectic, who at times coquets with Wagnerism and at others shows some inclination to adopt modern Italian methods, Massenet remains heart and soul a Frenchman.

The affinity existing between him and Gounod does not reveal itself only in certain exterior details of musical form. Massenet, in a sense, continues

* Jules Massenet, b. 1842.

Music in the XIXth Century

the line of the composer of *Faust*, whose style he has assimilated and transformed into one of his own. The tender language of love employed by Gounod has been remodelled by Massenet, who has subtilised and refined it in its essence, thus practically renewing it; and, by the introduction of personal elements, he has created a new and fascinating form of musical expression.

Saint-Saëns has said that Massenet is to Gounod what Schumann was to Mendelssohn.

Like Gounod, Massenet has ever been at his best when delineating the tender passion. His female types certainly bear a strong family resemblance. This may be attributed to the fact that whether his heroine is called Eve, Mary Magdalen, Herodias, Manon, Esclarmonde, Thais, Sapho, she is always to him the personification of woman exemplified at her frailest. What matters the name or the epoch? Is not love eternally the same? Are not the passions more or less identical throughout the ages? Massenet does not seem to have set himself so much the task of specially individualising certain women as of celebrating the eternal feminine exemplified in one particular type.

The Modern French Opera

“Das ewig Weibliche zieht uns hinan :” Goethe’s words might serve as a motto to some of the French composer’s works. His female characters have all something of the modern Parisienne, and this is where Massenet shows himself so essentially a man of his time. His first successes in the concert-room were gained with the oratorios *Marie Magdeleine* and *Eve*. To the surprised delight of some and the scandal of others, the music of these works proved the very reverse of that which is usually associated with the term oratorio. Instead of dry fugues, arid recitatives, formally constructed choruses, Massenet provided strains of luscious sweetness and tender melodies of alluring charm. The young master conquered at least the feminine portion of Parisian society. This was in the early ’seventies, when he laid the foundation-stone of his reputation. The rest was speedily to follow.

Massenet’s oratorios are devoid of anything approaching to Biblical grandeur. The composer has seemingly avoided any attempt to rise to the heights of his subject. He makes Adam and Eve sing love duets very much as he would any pair of lovers. There is no doubt, however, that in the above *oratoriettes* Massenet proved that he had a

Music in the XIXth Century

style peculiarly his own, one which it was impossible to mistake. Like Gounod, he has his special mannerisms, and this is the reason why he has been so much imitated. The sensuous charm of his melodies is undeniable, and even in his least successful compositions his touch is unmistakable.

In considering his operas, we may pass over *La Grand' Tante* and *Don César de Bazan*, early works of no great import, to come to *Le Roi de Lahore*, produced at the Opéra in 1877. This opera achieved much success at the time, and was heard in other countries besides France. As the name implies, the story is laid in the East, and affords opportunities for gorgeous scenic display. It is an excellent example of the modern French opera, and its comparative neglect of late years is surprising. Every baritone has sung, or tried to sing, the famous "arioso" which Lassalle used to interpret so inimitably.

Hérodiade, Massenet's next opera, was produced in Brussels in 1881. The composer had returned to the Bible for inspiration, and this is probably the only reason why this work has not been heard in London, although two of its melodies have constantly been sung in our concert-rooms.

The Modern French Opera

Hérodiade was followed some three years later by *Manon*, the composer's most popular opera. Massenet's treatment of the Abbé Prévost's romance is wholly delightful. The subject was particularly suited to his muse. Nothing here is forced or unnatural, but music and text are intimately allied. Massenet is indeed much more at home in a work of this description, an *opéra de demi-caractère*, than when he is treating a heroic subject like that of *Le Cid*, which, however, met with success in Paris at the time of its production in 1885.

Esclarmonde, given in Paris during the Exhibition year of 1889, is not known in England at all, yet it is unquestionably one of Massenet's best works. The composer, while retaining his personal methods of expression, has here made a curious incursion into the domains of Bayreuth. There can be no doubt that in writing it he must have been haunted by Wagnerian phantoms. Guiding themes are employed in this work with much skill, one of these being singularly like a motive in *Die Meistersinger*. Yet the score bears the imprint of its composer's individuality in every bar.

Music in the XIXth Century

Werther seems to have been composed at about the same period as *Esclarmonde*, either just before or just after, though its first performance only took place in 1892, in Vienna. Goethe's book scarcely strikes one as particularly suitable for operatic treatment. The incidents are too few and the action is too restricted. At the same time, the romantic nature of the subject and the sentimental character of the hero were well calculated to captivate the composer, whose musical temperament particularly fits him to express emotions of a concentrated kind and who excels in imparting a soft mystic colouring to scenes of love and sentiment. Massenet seems here to have been actuated by the desire to produce a lyrical drama rather than an opera, and the construction of this work is remarkable in point of unity. He has not yielded to the temptation of writing any set pieces, duets or choruses, of the conventional pattern, and his music is expressive and emotional.

Le Mage, a five-act opera, produced at the Paris Grand Opéra in 1891, must count as one of the composer's failures.

Otherwise is it with *Thaïs*, given at the same

The Modern French Opera

theatre three years later, which has remained in the *répertoire*. Yet this work scarcely represents the composer at his best, for it cannot be compared to *Le Roi de Lahore*, *Manon*, *Esclarmonde*, or *Werther*, which are perhaps the composer's most remarkable operas.

In *La Navarraise*, the first production of which took place at Covent Garden in 1894, Massenet appears to have been actuated by the desire to rival Mascagni on his own ground, this work being of the same type as *Cavalleria Rusticana*, although here again the individuality of the composer asserts itself in a marked fashion. *Sapho*, an operatic adaptation of Alphonse Daudet's novel, *Cendrillon*, a musical fairy tale (was Massenet thinking of Humperdinck and his *Hänsel und Gretel* ?) *Griselidis* and *Le Jongleur de Notre Dame* are the latest operatic scores of this gifted and wonderfully prolific composer.

The above cursory survey will suffice to show that in his operas Massenet has not followed any special dramatic plan or been guided by any fixed ideal; yet his own individuality pierces through everything he writes, and is discernible in his operas as well as in his suites for orchestra, and other works.

Music in the XIXth Century

Among the younger French composers who have already distinguished themselves are several who were pupils of Massenet at the Conservatoire, where the master taught for some years. Their names are Alfred Bruneau, Georges Marty, Hillemacher, Paul Vidal, Missa, Pierné, Xavier Leroux, Savard, Kayser, Gustave Charpentier, Carraud, Silver, Bloch, Rabaud, Max d'Ollone.

In Ernest Reyer* we find a composer of a different type from Massenet. The friend and follower of Berlioz, Ernest Reyer has not acquired a great popularity outside his own country. He is nevertheless one of France's most gifted operatic composers, a musician of sincerity and courage, who has never gone out of his way to court popularity, but having nailed his colours to the mast has not retreated from his position, and, instead of making advances to the public, has waited with calm indifference until the public should come to him. For this he has had to exercise patience, but he has conquered at last. His early success with *La Statue*, in 1861, had been forgotten, and *Erostrate* had not brought him any further fame.

* Ernest Reyer, b. 1823.

The Modern French Opera

It was only in 1884 that his true worth was recognised, with the production of *Sigurd*, in which he entered into formidable competition with Wagner, the subject of his opera being identical with that of *Götterdämmerung*.

Although not uninfluenced by the German master in his style, Reyer cannot be classed among his imitators. He employs representative themes in a modified way, but in form his operas are more of the early Wagner (*Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin*), type, with suggestions of Weber, Meyerbeer, and Berlioz. *Salambo*, an operatic version of Flaubert's novel, contains some very beautiful music and is instinct with dramatic feeling. It has met with much favour in Paris, and is up to the present the composer's last dramatic work. Reyer succeeded Berlioz as musical critic to the *Journal des Débats*, to which paper he remained a contributor for many years.

Certain operatic composers now forgotten have had their hour of celebrity and deserve a passing mention: Mermet, whose opera *Roland à Roncevaux* created a great sensation in the sixties: Membrée, composer of *L'Esclave*; Duprato, Semet, Ferdinand Poise, who all cultivated the opéra

Music in the XIXth Century

comique *genre* with more or less success. Lenepveu, who is an esteemed professor at the Conservatoire, is the author of *Velleda*, an opera performed at Covent Garden in 1882 with Mme. Patti in the principal part. Paladilhe, whose name has been mentioned previously, took Paris by storm in 1887 with his *Patrie*, a work constructed more or less on Meyerbeerian lines.

Victorin Joncières has made several attempts in opera. One of the first adherents of Wagner in Paris, he has not followed the master's lead too closely, although his music shows signs of his early admiration. His operas possess sterling musicianly qualities, but are not very individual in character. They are essentially works of transition. The varied influences of Wagner, Gounod, Meyerbeer, may be detected in his *Dimitri*, which created a certain stir in the seventies, in *La Reine Berthe*, and in *Le Chevalier Jean*. The composer's most recent opera, *Lancelot du Lac*, shows no change in his methods.

Salvayre is the author of several operas, *Le Bravo*, *Richard III.*, *Egmont*, *La Dame de Montsoreau*, which have not remained in the *répertoire*.

Emanuel Chabrier, a composer with an exube-

The Modern French Opera

rant personality, wrote two operas, *Gwendoline*, a work in which may be detected Wagnerian influences, and *Le Roi malgré lui*, a brilliant specimen of the modernised opéra comique. His premature death was a real loss.

Ernest Guiraud,* the intimate friend of Bizet, was an honest, hard-working musician. His ballet "Gretna Green," his operas *Piccolino* and *Galante Aventure*, contain many pleasing and graceful pages, and he was an adept in the art of instrumentation. An unfinished opera of his, *Frédégonde*, was completed by Saint-Saëns and played a few times with moderate success at the Grand Opéra. Guiraud lacked the individuality which stamps the man of genius. Léo Delibes,† on the other hand, had a decided personality of his own. No one has written more beautiful ballet-music. "Sylvia," produced at the Opéra in 1876, is a veritable masterpiece of the *genre*. In his operas *Jean de Nivelle* and *Lakmé* he adhered to the conventional forms of the Opéra Comique. Melodious, graceful, poetical, refined, Delibes was very typically French in his music, and a more

* E. Guiraud, b. 1837, d. 1892.

† L. Delibes, b. 1836, d. 1891.

Music in the XIXth Century

delightful composer in his own particular line never existed.

All the operas produced in Paris between 1870 and 1890 show the serious efforts of French composers to keep abreast of the times without abandoning certain consecrated forms of the past. The *leitmotiv* is timidly employed here and there, while Wagnerian harmonies and instrumental effects are largely drawn upon. Meyerbeer, Wagner, Berlioz, and Gounod are the prevailing influences of this period. The French, so go-ahead in some ways, are curiously conservative in others. The conventional forms of the Grand Opéra style, for instance, seemed to have acquired the fixity of the laws of the Medes and Persians, until the Wagnerian music-dramas were played in Paris. The introduction of a ballet into every grand opera, whether or not the situation demanded it, has led to curious incongruities, such as the presence of a valse and a mazurka in Gounod's *Polyeucte*, an opera dealing with the early Christians, and a Scotch ballet danced at Richmond in Saint-Saëns's *Henry VIII*. At the Opéra Comique, as I have already pointed out, the spoken dialogue remained *de rigueur* for many years.

The Modern French Opera

The institution of the *claque* is another remnant of the past which must assuredly soon disappear. It was bad enough in the days of the old Italian operas, when it was customary for singers to bow their thanks, and for the performance to be interrupted by "encores"; but nowadays, when people are supposed to take an interest in the plot of an opera, this obsolete custom has no *raison d'être*, unless it be to gratify the vanity of vocalists.

Paul Lindau, the well-known German writer, once wrote an amusing account of this system, from which I extract the following: "The *claque*, let it be known, is organised in a thoroughly military manner. In the centre of the house sit the staff; around, at regular distances, the twenty to thirty captains, having each under their orders a company of ten or twelve soldiers. This army corps, therefore, consists of about three hundred old guards. The captains require to be very intelligent, and to have great experience, in order to be able to seize immediately the intentions of their general, and to guess by his look the *nuances* of the applause."

Whether the system is still carried out in this fashion I am unable to say.

Music in the XIXth Century

I have yet to deal with the latest phase of the modern French "lyrical drama," but before doing so there is an artist who claims attention, one who, a Belgian by birth, elected to become a naturalised Frenchman, whose fame during his lifetime was not widespread, although his great worth has now been recognised, but who has exercised a great and lasting influence over the present generation of French composers—I mean César Franck.

CHAPTER XII

CÉSAR FRANCK AND HIS FOLLOWERS

CÉSAR FRANCK* occupies a unique place in the history of music. During his lifetime he was practically ignored. The public knew not his name. With a sublime indifference to worldly matters, careless of adopting any means to gain popular suffrage, César Franck spent his existence partly in the organ-loft of the church of Ste. Clotilde, partly in teaching and in composing. Living in Paris, yet untroubled by the turmoil of the busy city, this sincere and good man, who was also a very great artist, worked incessantly and with no other desire than to produce the best that was in him.

M. Guy de Ropartz has written of him: "He stands out from among his contemporaries like a man of some other age; they are sceptics, he was a believer; they are self-advertising, he worked in

* César Franck, b. 1822, d. 1890.

Music in the XIXth Century

silence; they seek glory, he was content to await it; they aim at an easily acquired reputation by daring improvisations, he built enduring monuments amid the calm of a retired life; they shrink from nothing if only they may attain—concession, compromise, meannesses even, to all those they consent; he unhesitatingly performed his mission without yielding, without counting the cost, leaving us, indeed, the very finest possible example of artistic uprightness.”

In the midst of a prosaic age Franck stands out a magnificent figure of disinterestedness, alike to some of those wonderful artists of the Middle Ages.

A naturalised Frenchman, he was born in Belgium and came of German stock, which may serve in a measure to explain the contemplative nature of his genius.

His first important work *Ruth*, a short oratorio, was performed in 1846 and attracted some attention. Twenty-five years were, however, destined to elapse before it was heard again. In the meanwhile Franck had become absorbed in his various duties of organist and teacher, also composing church music on occasions. *Ruth* is a simple

César Franck and His Followers

work full of delicacy and charm. Its revival after a quarter of a century seemed to fire the composer with enthusiasm, for he took up his pen with renewed vigour and produced in succession all the works which have procured him fame, and which therefore belong to the latter portion of his life.

The oratorios or sacred cantatas, *Rédemption*, *Rebecca*, *Les Béatitudes*; the Symphonic Poems, "Le Chasseur Maudit," "Les Eolides"; the Symphonic Variations, the Symphony in D; the piano Quintet, string Quartet, violin Sonata; these are the works which have consecrated the reputation of César Franck.

As a young man the master wrote a comic opera, *Le Valet de Ferme*, which was never heard, and he left two operas, *Hulda* and *Ghiselle*, both of which have been performed since his death, at Monte Carlo. The latter, being unfinished, was completed by several of his pupils. *Les Béatitudes* will probably be considered by posterity as Franck's masterpiece. Begun in 1870, it occupied him about ten years. It is inexpressibly sad to think that the composer should have died without having heard a complete performance of his work. *Les Béatitudes*

Music in the XIXth Century

may be described as a species of musical paraphrase on a large scale of the Sermon on the Mount. To a man so profoundly religious and so unquestionably believing as César Franck the subject must necessarily have appealed with particular force. Madame Colomb, the author of the book, took the eight Beatitudes as the groundwork of a poem sufficiently varied in form, and well suited to allow the composer to display all the resources of his art. The eternal conflict between good and evil furnishes the keynote of the work. The poor, the weak, and the suffering cry out their anguish, and the voice of Christ breathes words of consolation and peace. Satan exhorts to hatred, revenge and warfare. Again the divine voice replies: "Blessed are the peacemakers," and the spirit of evil is silenced.

It is difficult to find words to describe the wonderful manner in which Franck has treated the sublime theme. The profound humanity, the depth of feeling, the transcendental beauty of the music, all combine to render *Les Béatitudes* one of the greatest masterpieces of the art.

The consummate mastery of technique reveals itself everywhere, but one forgets to think of this

César Franck and His Followers

in listening to the music, which is at one moment exquisitely tender and plaintive, at another crushingly powerful. A short prologue of bewitching sweetness introduces the theme associated with Christ, and the angelic choir softly enters with an effect as simple as it is entrancing.

In the first Beatitude, a vigorous chorus describes the search after wealth and pleasure, the straining after worldly and material joys, which bring but sadness in their wake, and the Voice of Christ softly speaks of the true wishes of the heart. The third Beatitude, with the sad wailing of the bereaved, is profoundly touching. In the fourth Beatitude, Franck has surpassed himself and attained the sublime. "Blessed are they that thirst after righteousness."

Ernest Chausson, a composer of great talent, whose career was unfortunately prematurely cut short and who was a pupil of Franck, has written as follows about this ;

"The fourth Beatitude certainly surpasses all other French music in sublimity. One would be obliged indeed to go back to the very first classical masters to find so powerful an expression of the soul's despair, its appeal to

Music in the XIXth Century

Divine justice, its striving after the ideal, after holiness.”

After a calm expressive opening, a melody of surpassing loveliness gradually arises, and at the words, “Come Truth, oh come!” it bursts forth in all its splendour. The music then gradually dies away, and again are heard the consoling words of Christ.

The appearance of Satan is described in a vividly dramatic fashion. The last section, which depicts the triumph of Christ, is also one of the most beautiful in the work. Here we again have the “Christ motive,” now in the radiance of its fullest development. The work concludes with a magnificent choral outburst, the angels and the redeemed singing their Hosannahs of praise.

M. Georges Servières speaks with justice of *Les Béatitudes* as “this grand musical work, where the severity of the oratorio form is tempered by the tenderest inspiration ; where Christian mysticism expresses itself with a wonderful suavity, without the melodic grace ever degenerating into mawkishness or insipidity ; where is revealed a sincere compassion for the humble, the suffering and the afflicted ; where the depth of feeling is

César Franck and His Followers

only equalled by the most consummate contrapuntal science, the purity of style, the elegance and boldness of the harmony ; where the employment of scholastic forms and polyphonic complexity blend in a stream of exquisite melodies.”

If César Franck brings to the mind some of the older masters, particularly John Sebastian Bach, by the wonderful ease with which he employs polyphonic methods, he is also a modern of moderns in the boldness of his modulations and what might be termed the chromatic nature of much of his music. His learning is not expended in a mere barren show of knowledge, but is the handmaiden of his inspiration. He can at times be vague in the expression of his thoughts, obscure in his meaning, but the innate romanticism of his nature prevents him from ever being dry.

In his Symphonic Poems he has followed the tendency of the age and written several highly interesting examples of descriptive or programme music, while his admirable Symphony in D is one of the finest modern works of its kind.

His chamber compositions are imbued with the same romantic spirit, and are wonderfully bold

Music in the XIXth Century

and new in conception. The Violin Sonata is one of the most characteristic of Franck's compositions. It combines a beautiful melodic simplicity with a restlessness of spirit, a feeling of yearning suggested by an ever shifting tonality.

César Franck's two posthumous operas, *Hulda* and *Ghiselle*, have so far only been performed at Monte Carlo, of all places. Concerning the first of these, M. Georges Servières says: "As regards the dramatic system *Hulda* presents no innovation. The form of the scenes is judicious, the dialogue is reduced to the strictest limits, the ensembles are the logical outcome of the situations, but the musician, without binding himself to the old operatic forms, does not noticeably avoid them. As to the *leitmotiv*, Franck, who has made use of it in his oratorios, his symphonies, and even in his chamber music, does not employ it in *Hulda*. It has, however, seemed to me that there is a Vengeance theme, heard first at the end of the fifth act, which re-appears whenever this feeling inspires *Hulda*. *Ghiselle*, Franck's second posthumous opera, was left in so unfinished a state that it can scarcely be accepted as representative of the composer.

César Franck and His Followers

The influence of César Franck has been twofold. In the first place, by his example, by his noble character, his absolute integrity of purpose, his lofty ideals, his vast erudition, he has contributed largely to raise the standard of musical thought, he has turned the ideas of many of the younger French composers into more serious channels, and has upheld the banner of true art against the ever existing philistinism of the masses.

On the other hand, some of his followers have occasionally wandered into tortuous paths, and in endeavouring to be transcendental have often only succeeded in becoming incomprehensible. In their praiseworthy desire to avoid the commonplace, they have lost some of the qualities of their race, clearness of design, and straightforwardness of expression.

Not in France alone indeed, but in all countries, have musicians at the close of the XIXth century developed a tendency to be obscure and to avoid directness of utterance, forgetful of the fact that very few are fitted to wear the mantle of Elijah and that ambition is apt to o'erleap itself.

The influence of César Franck has however, on the whole, been beneficial, even if it has brought a

Music in the XIXth Century

little mist into the clear atmosphere of the fair land of France.

Many French musicians have studied their art under César Franck. Among these, Vincent d'Indy* is perhaps the best known. A musician of very high ability, he has followed his master's lead in refusing to lend his talent to any but the worthiest ends.

Wallenstein, a symphonic trilogy; *Sauge fleuri*, *La Forêt enchantée*, *Istar*, are some of his best-known orchestral works. He is also the composer of *Le Chant de la Cloche*, a cantata which won for him the prize given by the City of Paris; *Attendez-moi sous l'Orme*, a one-act opera; and *Fervaal*, a musical drama produced in 1897.

Few composers have acquired so great a mastery of the art of writing for the orchestra, and it may be added that d'Indy's music is invariably cleverly constructed, if occasionally rather nebulous and lacking in spontaneity. *La Forêt enchantée* is a romantic and poetical composition redolent of the spirit of the woods. *Istar* is the title of a set of Symphonic Variations, the form of which is extremely curious, probably unique; a species

* Vincent d'Indy, b. 1851.

César Franck and His Followers

of Symphonic Poem, it is intended to illustrate a story taken from the Babylonian "Epic of Izdubar."

Istar's lover is dead, and she goes to the Dread Abode to seek him. She has to pass through seven doors, and at each of them the keeper takes from her some article of attire. When she arrives at the seventh door, she passes through it entirely denuded of all garments.

In order to illustrate this curious story, the composer has adopted the course of reversing the usual order of things, and instead of a theme followed by variations, he has written variations followed by a theme. This last is ultimately played in unison, and is presumably intended to depict the venturesome Istar when she has reached the last stage of her journey.

In his *Fervaal*, Vincent d'Indy follows the lead of Wagner, too much so it may be said, for not only does he rigorously adopt the *leitmotiv* system, but the subject of his work, which by the way is styled *action musicale*, bears an affinity to both *Parsifal* and to *Tristan*.

The influence of Wagner in France, as I have before had occasion to remark, has been immense.

Music in the XIXth Century

It has also been beneficial so long as the composers have been content to profit by the master's innovations without competing with him on his own ground, and without abandoning the characteristics of their own race.

Alfred Bruneau,* the composer whose works and tendencies I intend to discuss later, lays stress upon this point in an article on *Fervaal*, where he thus expresses himself:—"The day is near when Wagnerian music and poems, I mean those imitated from Wagner, will become impossible, on account of their frequency and the triumph of their models; on account also of the incessant evolution of snobbism. Every one has a right to follow the prodigious German poet in his glorious flight towards the infinite and to adopt the plan of reforms which he has so magnificently traced, but on the express condition of opening roads on one's own ground, of applying to the national genius the ideas that are on the march; in a word, of creating, of advancing, guided by the young inspiration which flows from the inexhaustible springs of the race."

In the instrumentation of *Fervaal*, Vincent

* Alfred Bruneau, b. 1857.

César Franck and His Followers

d'Indy has employed an orchestra of unusually large proportions, in which figure certain instruments not in general use. A set of chromatic kettledrums enables the composer to obtain a complete chromatic scale. A double-bass clarinet figures in the score, which also contains four saxophones and eight bugles or saxhorns, in addition to the instruments constituting the usual full orchestra.

Though the vast amount of talent revealed in *Fervaal* is indisputable, the work can scarcely be accepted as typically representative of French music.

Alexis de Castillon,* another pupil of César Franck, died young, and from all accounts appears to have been a singularly gifted composer. His works include a Quintet, a string Quartet, a piano Quartet, a Violin Sonata, and a Symphony.

A tragic fate befell Ernest Chausson, one of Franck's best pupils. The author of a Symphony, a Poem for violin and orchestra, and other works, Chausson possessed a thoroughly artistic nature. A bicycle accident unhappily put an end to his promising career.

* De Castillon, b. 1838, d. 1873.

Music in the XIXth Century

Guy de Ropartz and Pierre de Bréville have both distinguished themselves, and have followed the example of their master, César Franck, by cultivating the more serious forms of the art and devoting themselves to music of the best kind.

Silvio Lazzari, though not a Frenchman, spent some years in Paris and studied under Franck. A composer of high and noble talent, he has written orchestral works and chamber music, while his opera *Armor* has been produced at Hamburg with success.

There are many others who doubtless might be mentioned did space permit. The name of César Franck is, however, destined to be handed down to posterity not only as that of an admirable teacher, but, what is better, as that of one of the great composers of the past century.

CHAPTER XIII

ALFRED BRUNEAU AND THE MODERN LYRICAL DRAMA

MUSIC in its alliance with the drama is ever in a transitory condition, and we have seen how evanescent are its forms. The Wagnerian theories have haunted the minds of numberless composers, who have tried to apply them in a modified manner while not altogether breaking away from tradition.

Soyez de votre temps et de votre pays are words which I believe Saint-Saëns once addressed to the younger musicians of France.

If there is a composer who has realised this, he is assuredly Alfred Bruneau, for he is essentially up-to-date in his ideas and methods. Indeed he is rather in advance of his epoch, which is all in his favour, and at the same time he is typically representative of his country.

Music in the XIXth Century

Coming at a moment when all sorts of attempts were being made to shirk the recognised operatic forms without abandoning them altogether, Bruneau resolutely put his shoulder to the wheel, and adopting the system of representative themes in its entirety proceeded to employ it in his own way. He has proved that it is quite possible to follow the example of Wagner without in any way becoming an imitator of the German master. He has fully recognised that the old operatic forms have had their day, that to attempt to revive them is worse than useless, and that "each epoch lives in its art," to quote his own words.

Although an enthusiastic admirer of Wagner, he has realised the folly of attempting to write legendary music-dramas of the Bayreuth type. With Emile Zola as his collaborator, he has inaugurated practically a new departure in opera and created a fresh type of lyrical drama. The ideal aimed at by the author and musician had best be told in their own words.

Emile Zola has related how comparatively late in life he began to take interest in music through having met Alfred Bruneau, whom he describes as—*une des intelligences les plus vives, un des*

The Modern Lyrical Drama

passionnés et des tendres les plus pénétrants que j'ai connus.

“The French lyrical drama”—he writes—
“haunts me. When a despotic and all-powerful genius like Wagner appears in an art it is certain that he weighs terribly over the succeeding generations. We have seen this in our poetry; after Hugo, Lamartine and Musset, it would seem to-day that lyricism is for ever exhausted. Our young poets torture themselves desperately in order to conquer originality. Likewise, in music, the Wagnerian formula, so logical, so complete, so exhaustive, has imposed itself in a sovereign fashion, to that extent that outside it, already for a long time, one may believe that nothing excellent and new will be created. . . . Since my friend Bruneau has made me care for music, I sometimes reflect on these things. To neglect Wagner would be childish. . . . All his conquest must be acquired. He has renewed the formula, it is no longer allowable to turn back and to accept another. Only instead of remaining stationary with him, one can start from him; and the solution is certainly not elsewhere, for our French musicians. . . . I see a drama more

Music in the XIXth Century

directly human, not in the vagueness of the Northern mythologies, but taking place amongst us, poor men, in the reality of our miseries and our joys. . . .

“I should like the poem to be interesting in itself, like an engrossing story that might be told one. . . .

“I conceive that the lyrical drama should be human, without repudiating either fancy or caprice, or mystery. All our race is there, I repeat it, in this quivering humanity of which I desire that music should express the passions, the sorrows, the joys.”

Alfred Bruneau has been animated by this spirit in composing his works.

“A fervent admirer of Richard Wagner,” he writes, “I have never ceased in my works and in my criticisms to defend the cause of French art. In composing *Le Rêve*, *L'Attaque du Moulin*, *Messidor*, not legendary, but contemporary dramas, very French in action and sentiments, I have had the constant and firm desire—singing the tenderness of mystic love, the abomination of unjust wars, the necessity of glorious labour, of acting as a Frenchman, and I am proud to have been helped in this task and to be so still by the master of our literature, by my dear and great

The Modern Lyrical Drama

friend Emile Zola, who is not only for me a collaborator, but a veritable inspirer."

The above extracts will show how entirely of one mind were Emile Zola and Alfred Bruneau, and how well fitted to work together for the regeneration of the musical drama in France. Briefly, their theory amounts to this. The old-fashioned opera, with its airs, duets, trios, and concerted pieces, has had its day; the Wagnerian system of representative themes must be accepted in its entirety; a fresh departure must be made, starting from Wagner, and Zola says: "The races are there, which differentiate the works when the same creative breath has passed over the world." Germany is essentially the land of legends. Has not Wagner exclaimed: "How much must I not love the German people, who even to-day believe in the marvels of the most naïve legend!" Bruneau would paraphrase this, and make a French composer exclaim: "How much must I not love the French people, who even to-day believe in the sun and in life!"—in other words, no legends for French composers, but subjects taken from the life of to-day.

There is another important innovation made by

Music in the XIXth Century

Zola and Bruneau which has raised a considerable amount of discussion—the substitution of prose for verse in the “ lyrical drama ” of the future:

This question had been mooted many years ago. Berlioz and Gounod both seemed to think that a libretto written in prose would be an advantage to a composer, and the latter even began to set one of Molière's comedies to music in order to test his theories. It was reserved, however, for Zola and Bruneau to make the first real attempt in this direction with *Messidor*.

A great deal of ink was used at the time in the discussion of verse *v.* prose, Saint-Saëns writing an article in which he strongly condemned the abandonment of the former in favour of the latter. Bruneau has explained what he considers the advantage of prose in the following words: “ It is the liberty which prose brings to the composer in the large folds of its ample and generous phrases. Liberty of the dialogue establishing itself, developing itself without any sort of constraint or trouble over the instrumental texture, becoming intimately allied with it: liberty of the never interrupted symphony, singing, roaring, calming itself according to the fancy of the musician, according to the

The Modern Lyrical Drama

necessities of the drama ; liberty of expression—this is more precious still than the others—offered by the precision of the word ; illimitable liberty of the infinite melody coursing alert, grave, superb, tender or powerful, certainly joyful to be able to escape from the imprisonment of the cadence and the rhyme ; liberty of the phrase, liberty of inspiration, liberty of art, liberty of forms, liberty complete, magnificent, and definite.”

The literary weakness of the typical operatic “ libretto ” of the past has often been a matter of comment. Only the future will be able to decide whether prose is more suitable than verse for opera. One thing, however, seems certain, that under present conditions, now that an absolutely consecutive musical treatment is *de rigueur* in an opera, prose gives more latitude to the composer, leaving him free and unfettered in the expression of his ideas.

Alfred Bruneau's first opera, *Kérim*, founded on an Oriental subject. was produced at the Théâtre du Château d'Eau in 1887. Already in this work the composer displayed considerable originality and independence. The system of representative themes is consistently employed in *Kérim*. We

Music in the XIXth Century

have seen how, in *Carmen*, Bizet intensified the dramatic situation by the occasional repetition of the pregnant theme associated with the heroine of his beautiful opera, how Saint-Saëns in *Samson et Dalila* and *Henry VIII.*, Reyer in *Sigurd*, had gone a little farther and shown a disposition to recognise the value of the *leitmotiv* (*Henry VIII.* affords a particularly interesting study on this point). In *Kérim*, however, Bruneau went farther than his predecessors. Without any attempt at compromise, he constructed his opera on a symphonic basis of representative themes. Considering that Wagner's works had at that time not been admitted into the *répertoire* of the Paris Opéra, and that Bruneau was only a beginner, the fact deserves notice. *Kérim* is a very interesting score in many ways, but as space is limited I must perforce pass on to the composer's later and more representative works.

I shall never forget the deep impression made upon me the first time I heard *Le Réve*, which was performed at Covent Garden in the *régime* of the late Sir Augustus Harris during an autumn season in 1891, the same year as its production in Paris. It was a revelation. The originality of

The Modern Lyrical Drama

the music, the departure from recognised conventionalities, the deep sincerity of the work, its emotional feeling, its peculiar mystic charm, combined in an irresistible appeal. Every one was not of the same opinion. Like all original works, *Le Rêve* provoked many discussions. It had its enthusiastic admirers and its violent detractors.

Emile Zola's beautiful novel upon which Brueneau's opera is founded occupies a special place in the great French writer's works. It is full of mystic charm, and it is precisely this which is so admirably reflected in the music. Realistic if you will, in the sense that the impression conveyed is one of reality, that the story and music combine together and impart a sense of truth and sincerity. Exquisitely poetical in the idealisation of the characters; deeply touching in the tenderness of its accents; profoundly moving in its heart-stirring strains, *Le Rêve* is a work of quite exceptional fascination, and it is high time that it should be revived.

When it was first given in London, the style of the music seemed so unconventional, and the harmonic treatment so bold, that many people doubtless did not realise the value and beauty of the

Music in the XIXth Century

work. It was different on the occasion of the production of *L'Attaque du Moulin* in 1894. This admirable musical drama, in which author and composer have evoked the horrors of the Franco-German War, was received with a chorus of approval and hailed on every side as a masterpiece.

Here was a work which seemed destined to be incorporated into the *répertoire* side by side with the best known operas. Although Bruneau had adhered to his system, yet his music was so melodious and its appeal so wide that great popularity might have been predicted for it. This will probably come to it yet. Matters move slowly in music, and the real masterpieces are generally those that have taken the longest time to acquire recognition.

In *Le Rêve* the action takes place in an old cathedral town, and the musician had to depict scenes of dreamy mysticism, to suggest the internal conflict of contending sentiments. In *L'Attaque du Moulin* the subject is in direct contrast to that of the former work. Here the conflict is external, the contending forces the French and German armies.

“Oh, la guerre ! héroïque leçon et fléau de la terre.”

These words, declaimed by Marcelline, furnish

The Modern Lyrical Drama

the keynote of the work, or rather point its moral.

In *Le Rêve* and in *L'Attaque du Moulin* Bruneau was able to create a special atmosphere. The two works are totally dissimilar, and yet there is no mistaking their authorship, for Bruneau has a distinct style of his own.

Messidor, the next work due to the collaboration of Zola and Bruneau, which was brought out at the Grand Opéra in 1897, marks a new departure. We have not to do here with a libretto taken from a novel and arranged for operatic purposes by an outsider, but with an absolutely new work. *Messidor* is entirely written in prose. It is partly realistic, partly symbolical—its theme being the glorification of labour, and its four acts typifying the four seasons of the year.

Zola described his intention in the following words:—"To give the poem of labour, the necessity and beauty of effort, faith in life, in the fruitfulness of the earth, hope in the rich harvests of to-morrow. To imagine in our land of France a village, mountains, where the streams bear gold and the inhabitants of which have up to the present lived in collecting this gold; and then to

Music in the XIXth Century

make one of these seize the gold, by turning the streams from their course, and thus ruin the entire village ; then, in a catastrophe, destroy the gold, restore the water to the stony uncultivated land from which will rise the August harvest of corn, when from seekers of gold the men will become labourers.”

This represents the fundamental idea of the prose-poem, round which of course is entwined a story of life and love.

It must be admitted that the groundwork of *Messidor* has something of the legend about it, a fact which is accentuated by the introduction of an allegorical ballet symbolising the power of gold, for which Bruneau has written marvellous music. The characters of the work are also rather symbolical. Guillaume, the hero, the honest labourer, sowing the fertilising grain, personifies labour ; Mathias, the dishonest workman, may be accepted as typifying Anarchy ; then there is a shepherd, a delightful creation, whom we may take as the type of a contemplative nature ; Maître Gaspard is the employer of labour ; Véronique represents superstitious feeling, and

The Modern Lyrical Drama

Hélène, the bride, destined to become the type of womanhood.

Although the *dramatis personæ* in *Messidor* are peasants, they are refined and idealised, and, it is needless to say, do not express themselves in the language adopted by the sons of the soil described by Zola in "La Terre" and "Germinal."

Bruneau has in his turn stated his intentions in composing *Messidor* thus:—"On a symphonic ground I have wished to leave in its true place, that is to say in the first, the human drama of which I have only been the servant. I have endeavoured to translate in as simple, as faithful a manner as possible the sentiments of the characters, and I have desired that the public should not miss any of the words."

Bruneau has done this and more, for he has produced a work of high and lofty inspiration, in which the originality of conception is equalled by its successful realisation. His score is a veritable masterpiece, alternately powerful, tender, fantastic, the work of a great musician, who is also a poet, and as sincere an artist as ever lived.

That *Messidor* did not achieve the success it

Music in the XIXth Century

deserved is not surprising. A work so entirely novel, so thoroughly out of the ordinary operatic track, could scarcely be expected to appeal to the *habitués* of the Grand Opéra who were disconcerted by the unconventionality of book and music exactly as their predecessors had been scared by *Tannhäuser*.

Messidor, however, was warmly discussed, and, as in the case of *Le Réve*, had its enthusiasts and its detractors. That it will be revived is more than probable, and its great worth cannot then fail to be recognised.* The last "lyrical drama" written by Bruneau in collaboration with Zola is entitled *L'Ouragan*, which was produced at the Opéra Comique during the first year of the present century. Here, again, the subject is an entirely original one, and perhaps more purely human than that of *Messidor*, although it also has a symbolical signification. A passionate drama of love, the scene is laid by the seaside on the coast of an imaginary island. The storm rages without, and seems to accord with the inward feelings of the characters. A simple and beautiful undulating

* As I write these words comes the news of the successful production of *Messidor* at Munich.

The Modern Lyrical Drama

theme is associated with the sea, and is in a measure the *leitmotiv* of the work. Bruneau's score teems with passionate exuberance, and contains a love scene of quite extraordinary power. Here, again, he has been able thoroughly to realise the atmosphere of the play and to create types.

Le Rêve, L'Attaque du Moulin, Messidor, L'Ouragan, these four admirable works, so original yet so dissimilar, are sufficient to stamp Bruneau as one of the most gifted musicians of the age. His great collaborator Zola, snatched away in so tragic a manner, has left him the book of a "lyrical comedy" entitled *L'Enfant Roi*, the production of which will be awaited with the greatest interest. Among Bruneau's other compositions, I would mention the fine *Requiem* performed by the Bach Society a few years ago, the Symphonic Poem "Penthésilée," for voice and orchestra, a bold and highly-coloured work, the quaint and charming *Lieds de France* and *Chansons à danser*. Bruneau is also an admirable critic, and has published two volumes in which his views are expressed in language of great beauty, and where he discusses the various manifestations of

Music in the XIXth Century

musical art with enthusiasm tempered by invariable common sense.

In the full force of his creative ability, Bruneau is not likely to rest upon his laurels. He has already produced four masterpieces, and he may be counted upon to add to these. I have not been able to enter as much into detail as I should have wished concerning works I admire so much, the dimensions of this volume imposing limits that had to be respected. I hope though to have said enough to give an idea of the important place occupied by Bruneau in the operatic evolution of the century.

CHAPTER XIV

FIN DE SIÈCLE

It was unlikely that the road traced by Zola and Bruneau would not be followed, and the very last year of the XIXth Century witnessed the production of a work which was based upon the theoretical ideas alluded to in the preceding chapter, the *Louise* of Gustave Charpentier. The success which has attended this opera, or rather *roman musical* as the author terms it, has been veritably prodigious. In an enthusiastic article on his colleague's work, Alfred Bruneau welcomes this as "one of the most curious, most significant, most beautiful artistic manifestations that have been produced at the theatre for a long time." With characteristic modesty, however, Bruneau omits to mention how he had himself prepared the way for Charpentier by writing *Le Rêve* and creating what might be termed the

Music in the XIXth Century

musical drama of contemporary life. *Louise* is certainly a work of great interest and unquestionable fascination. Its production came precisely at the right moment. Ten years previously it would probably not have been understood. The system followed is practically the same as that inaugurated by Zola and Bruneau. The mixture of realism and idealism here is very curious and perhaps a little disconcerting, for Charpentier has not only chosen the present time for the period of his work, but he has laid the scene at Montmartre, and introduced rag-pickers, policemen, cab-drivers, work-girls, street-vendors and pursuers of various popular industries clad in the garb of the present day. Louise is the daughter of a worthy working man, and is engaged during the day at a dress-maker's establishment. Father and mother have refused the hand of a young artist for their daughter, who thereupon determines to leave hearth and home and fly to her lover. The young couple are lodged in a charming little house on the heights of Montmartre commanding a beautiful view over Paris. The father having fallen ill, the mother induces her daughter to return home. In a highly dramatic scene, the

Fin de Siècle

father entreats Louise to leave her lover and remain with him. Finally, seeing that she is still of the same mind, he turns her out of the house in a fit of ungovernable fury, but as soon as she has left, he runs after her and vainly calls her back, finally shaking his fist menacingly and despairingly in the direction of Paris.

This simple tale, so full of true human feeling, has been treated by Charpentier with extraordinary skill. The drama unrolls itself on a symphonic groundwork of representative themes, while in the orchestration the composer has achieved wonders and imagined many new effects. The street cries of Paris are brought in with great ingenuity, and altogether the work is extremely interesting and unconventional. Charpentier has here, as well as in his *Impressions d'Italie* and *La Vie du Poète*, asserted his claim as one of the most talented composers of the day.

Certainly the success obtained by *Louise* would appear to show that Paris is decided to be in the forefront of the modern musical movement. The attitude adopted by the younger French composers proves indeed that they are anxious to be *dans le mouvement*, not to lag behind

Music in the XIXth Century

or to spend themselves in vain efforts to renew obsolete forms. They evince a wholesome dread of writing anything that may be considered *vieux jeu*. Some are bolder than others, and perhaps in their search for novel effects may lay themselves open to the accusation of cultivating eccentricity at the expense of simplicity, but at any rate they rarely allow themselves to be *banal*.

The last decade of the XIXth Century has seen many prejudices die away, it has witnessed the triumph of Wagner at the Grand Opéra, and an immense spurt of activity on the part of French composers. The musical situation in France has probably never been so promising. In all branches of the art there is evidence of progress and an absence of stagnation.

I have in the course of this volume already mentioned many composers who have illustrated the musical history of the past century. Several of these are happily still on the active list, and may be counted upon to increase yet further their reputation. Some names, however, still remain to be mentioned. Among these is that of André Messager, who is equally well known in London and in Paris. A very prolific composer, a

Fin de Siècle

musician of a graceful and refined talent, Messenger has written a number of light operas. His two best works, however, are *La Basoche*, which has obtained a great success in London, and *Madme. Chrysanthème*, a charming "lyrical comedy" after Loti's novel. In *La Basoche*, which was written for the Paris Opéra Comique, Messenger did not sensibly depart from the style of music associated with that theatre. His work is brilliant, melodious, effective, and may count as one of the best modern examples of the *genre*.

Raoul Pugno is another musician whose name is familiar in London. One of the greatest of modern pianists, he is also a highly gifted composer. Pugno has written an oratorio *La Mort de Lazare*, an admirable *mimodrame* entitled *Pour le Drapeau*, several light operas, besides much music for the piano, including a sonata of great beauty.

Camille Erlanger is one of the rising composers of France. He is already known by his dramatic legend *Saint Julien l'Hospitalier*, and his operas *Kermaria* and *Le Juif Polonais*. The first of these operas obtained only a *succès d'estime*, owing mainly to the fact of the story upon which it is

Music in the XIXth Century

founded lacking dramatic interest. It was different with *Le Juif Polonais*, an operatic version of *The Bells*, which was one of the successes of the Exhibition year of 1900 at the Opéra Comique, M. Maurel playing the part associated here with Sir Henry Irving. In this work Camille Erlanger has displayed real talent. The music and the drama are closely allied, and the impression conveyed is one of truth and sincerity. This interesting work has not yet been heard in England. The same, unfortunately, may be said of many of the best French operas of recent years, of Reyer's *Salambo*, of Massenet's *Esclarmonde*, of Bruneau's *Messidor* and *L'Ouragan*, of D'Indy's *Fervaal*, of Charpentier's *Louise*, of Debussy's *Pelleas et Mélisande*, a work which has only recently been produced in Paris, and has created a great sensation owing to the originality of the music.

Debussy is certainly a coming man, a composer of individual talent, an impressionist whose ideas are spread out on a moving canvas of varying tonalities, who wanders dreamily through a maze of ever changing harmonies, the fitting interpreter of Dante Gabriel Rossetti and of Maeter-

Fin de Siècle

linck. His *Prélude de l'après midi d'un Faune* is one of the most curious of modern orchestral works. *La Demoiselle Elue*, the "Nocturnes," respectively entitled *Nuages* and *Fêtes*, are also exquisitely poetical and suffice to stamp Debussy as a musician of very uncommon gifts. André Wormser, the author of *L'Enfant Prodigue*, the delightful musical play without words which has met with so much success, must not be forgotten. Neither must Paul Vidal and Xavier Leroux, two talented composers who studied under Massenet, and have not been uninfluenced by their master's style. They have both written for the Grand Opéra, the former *La Burgonde* and the latter *Astarté*.

Samuel Rousseau, with *La Cloche du Rhin*, and Georges Hue, with *Le Roi de Paris*, have also had the honour of being performed on the same boards. The erudite Bourgault-Ducoudray, Charles Lefebvre, Henri Maréchal, Hector Pessard, René de Boisdeffre, are musicians of talent who have distinguished themselves in various ways. The brothers Hillemacher offer this peculiarity that they always compose their works together. How they manage it I do not profess to know. They both obtained the "Grand Prix de Rome," and are

Music in the XIXth Century

the joint authors of several operas. Francois Thomé's works have obtained a great vogue. His piano pieces, so graceful and refined, are everywhere played. Gabriel Pierné is a prolific composer who has already made his mark. Alexandre Georges, the author of the beautiful *Chansons de Miarka*, Arthur Coquard, Paul Pujet, Lucien Lambert, Véronge de la Nux, Chapuis, Rabaud, Max d'Ollonne, Carraud, Silver, Büsser, Paul Dukas, a symphonist of rare ability, and several more might be cited among the active members of the French musical army. Then there are the ladies, the Vicomtesse de Grandval, author of two operas, Madame Augusta Holmès,* who is of Irish extraction and has distinguished herself by the production of many orchestral works of large dimensions, and an opera *La Montagne Noire*, and Madame Cécile Chaminade, whose songs and piano pieces are so popular in England.

I have doubtless left out many deserving names, but if all the above-mentioned composers have an opera or two in readiness, the lyrical theatres of Paris need not lack novelties for many a year.

* As I write these words, the news comes from Paris of the death of this gifted lady.

Fin de Siècle

From 1800 to 1900 the distance is immense, and we have been able to see how, gradually, music has progressed in France, and how the simplest operatic forms have in the course of time slowly been metamorphosed, and the old opera of the past has become the musical drama of the present. We have also been able to see that the genius of French music has asserted itself rather in the direction of the drama than of the symphony.

There can be no denying the fact that programme music has everywhere practically taken the place of purely abstract music. Few composers nowadays write symphonies. In Germany Brahms seems to have no successor, Richard Strauss having followed the road traced by Liszt. Everywhere the tendency has been the same. The symphonic forms of the past are not likely to disappear altogether, but it is curious to note an ever increasing disposition to discover some meaning or veiled intention in all orchestral works.

A strong dramatic tendency asserts itself in most French music, and to this must be added a marked feeling for the picturesque. Berlioz, by the choice of his subjects and in his methods, has

Music in the XIXth Century

accentuated these characteristics to a remarkable extent, and his successors have followed suit. It is natural, therefore, that the peculiar genius of the race should have displayed itself in two other branches of the art besides that of the opera—the ballet, and the *mimodrame*.

The ballet in France has long occupied an important place, and the best composers have not disdained to apply their talents in this direction. We have already seen how the ballet is even now considered an essential factor of every opera written for the first lyrical theatre of Paris. More than this, however, the ballet is often an entirely independent work, a terpsichorean drama, the apotheosis of the poetry of motion.

As long ago as in 1646, the Abbé Marolles thus defined the ballet: “A dance consisting of several persons, masked and clad in rich garments, composed of divers *entrées* or parts, which can be distributed into several acts and which are agreeably connected to form one whole, with different airs, to represent a subject where laughter and the marvellous are not forgotten.”

The modern ballet is but a development of this old *ballet de la cour*. It is in reality a play in

Fin de Siècle

dumb show in which dancing occupies the place of honour. The French have proved past masters in the art of writing ballet music, and they have also excelled in the *mimodrame*. Some of the best examples of the latter are *L'Enfant Prodigue*, by André Wormser; *Pour le Drapeau*, by Raoul Pugno; *Pierrot Assassin*, *Colombine Abandonnée*, *La Révérence*, all by Paul Vidal.

I have in these pages endeavoured to show that France is at present particularly rich in musical talent. What the future may bring forth no one of course can tell. The editor of a French musical paper * not long ago asked several French composers their opinion as to what was likely to be the music of to-morrow. Alfred Bruneau in his reply welcomed the independence of thought now existing and considered that an era of absolute liberty was being approached. André Messager expressed the hope that French composers might regain the qualities they seemed to have lost, clearness, gaiety, grace and tenderness. Camille Erlanger suggested that a composer should follow his own ideal and develop his own personality.

* *Musica*.

Music in the XIXth Century

Everything certainly seems to show that the French composers of the present intend to profit by the freedom they have acquired, each one pursuing his own way, and without forsaking the typical qualities of their race, they will doubtless in their operas devote their best efforts to realise the intimate union of words and music. They will probably also follow the symphonic movement of the times and enrich the concert-room *répertoire* with brilliant and fanciful works, profiting by the examples of masters such as Berlioz, César Franck, Lalo and Saint-Saëns.

The future of music, indeed, seems everywhere to be promising. What is required is the development of a reciprocal feeling in art. Let each country develop her own resources to the best of her ability, let her encourage the national sentiment as much as possible; but let her not show herself indifferent to what goes on beyond her frontiers, let her take interest in the music of other lands as well as of her own.

There should exist a species of freemasonry amongst musicians, a feeling of brotherhood that should bind them together in the worship of true art. The petty quarrels of schools, the wrangles

Fin de Siècle

over insignificant musical details, the jealousies, the hasty and ill-considered expressions of opinion, all these do an incalculable amount of harm. Instead of bringing harmony in its train, music thus often produces nothing but discord. What is required is a larger outlook upon things in general, a wider and more comprehensive survey. The present century is yet in its infancy. Let us hope that as it proceeds towards maturity it will witness a growing interest on the part of all nations in each other's music, that England will be more recognised on the continent as a musical nation than she has hitherto been, and, I may add, that we in our turn may become more and better acquainted with the music of France, concerning which it has been my privilege to write.

INDEX

- ADAM, 19, 73, 75, 79, 80, 99, 116, 122, 154 ; *Le Châlet*, 80 ; *Le Postillon de Lonjumeau*, 80, 99 ; *Le Brasseur de Preston*, 80 ; *Giralda*, 80
- Auber, 19, 33, 34, 37, 39, 59, 69-83, 112, 122, 131, 154, 177, VIII., IX. ; *La Muette*, 33, 34, 35, 37, 40, VIII. ; *Gustave*, 39, IX. ; *Le Philtre*, 39, IX. ; *Le Lac des Fées*, 40 ; *Fra Diavolo*, 78, IX. ; *Le Domino Noir*, 78, 142, IX.
- Audran, 82
- BACH, J. S., 94, 121, 180, 182, 183
- Balzac, 56, 35
- Barbier, Jules, 126
- Bazin, 81
- Bellini, 32, 163 ; *La Sonnambula*, 32 ; *Norma*, 32
- Berlioz, 12, 17, 21, 30, 44, 48, 50, 56, 59, 84-107, 122, 126, 132, 135, 142, 148, 149, 152, 172, 177, 178, 180, 181, 184, 210, 211, 214, 237, 255, 258 ; *Damnation de Faust*, 92, 97, 177, IX. ; *Enfance du Christ*, 92 ; *Carnaval Romain*, 92 ; *Symphonie Fant.*, 48, 86, 88, 89, 91, 99, IX. ; *Bienvenuto*, 50, 91 ; *Beatrice et Benedict*, 91 ; *La Prise de Troie*, 91, 96 ; *Les Troyens*, 91, 96, X. ; *Lélio*, 91 ; *Romeo*, 91 ; *Harold*, 92 ; *Requiem*, 92 ; *Te Deum*, 92, 99
- Beethoven, 18, 22, 37, 48, 94, 95, 107, 121, 144, 180, 182, 183, 184, 198 ; *Fidelio*, 73, 95 ; *C Minor Symphony*, 86
- Birrell, A., 155

Index

Bizet, 50, 58, 129, 138, 139, 163-178, 190, 213, 238, X. ; *Jolie Fille*, 50, 166 ; *Carmen*, 58, 138, 163, 168, 169, 170, 174, 176, 190, X. ; *Djamileh*, 148, 167, 190 ; *Les Pêcheurs de Perles*, 165, X. ; *L'Arlésienne*, 167

Blaze de Bury, 149

Bloch, 210

Boieldieu, 19, 30, 73, 74, 82, 86, VI., VIII. ; *La Dame Blanche*, 73, 74, 86, VI., VIII. ; *Jean de Paris*, 74, VIII.

Boisdeffre, de, 253

Boito, 174 ; *Mefistofele*, 174

Bourgault-Ducoudray, 15, 253

Brahms, 159, 198, 255

Bréville, de, 230

Bruneau, 70, 88, 131, 172, 210, 228, 231-246, 247, 252, 257, VI., XI. ; *Le Rêve*, 70, 234, 238, 239, 240, 241, 244, 245, XI. ; *L'Attaque du Moulin*, 234, 240, 241, 245, VI., XI. ; *Messidor*, 234, 236, 241, 242, 243, 244, 245, 252, XI. ; *Kérin*, 237, 238, 252 ; *L'Ouragan*, 244, 245 ; *Requiem*, 245 ; *Penthésilée*, 245

Büsser, 254

CARRAUD, 210, 254

Carré, Michel, 126

Castellan, Mme., 62

Castillon, 229

Cervantes, 168

Chabrier, 213, *Gwendoline*, 212 ; *Le Roi malgré lui*, 212

Chaminade, Mme., 254

Chapuis, 254

Charpentier, 70, 210, 247, 248, 249, 252, VI., XI. ; *Louise*, 72, 247, 248, 249, 252, VI., XI. ; *Impressions d'Italie*, 249 ; *La Vie du Poète*, 249

Chausson, 221, 229

Cherubini, 12, 16-20, 22, 45, 59, 112, VI. ; *Les deux Journées*, 18, 26

Chopin, 85, 103, 104, 163, 171

Clapisson, 81

Clément, 146, 147, 148, 158, 190

Index

Colomb Mme., 220
Colonne, 140, 177, 195
Coquard, 254
Crémieux, 155

DAUDET, 167, 209

David, 22

Félicien, 85, 96, 97, 105, IX. ; *Herculanum*, 96, 106 ; *Le Désert*, 97, 105, IX. ; *La Perle du Brésil*, 106 ; *Lalla Roukh*, 106

Debussy, 252, 253 ; *Pelleas et Mélisande*, 252 ; *Prélude de l'après midi d'un Faune*, 253 ; *La Demoiselle Elue*, 253 ; *Nocturnes*, 253

Delacroix, 85

Delibes, Léo, 50, 142, 176, 213, X., XI. ; *Lakmé*, 50, 213, XI. ; *Coppelia*, 176 ; *Sylvia*, 176, 213, X. ; *Le Roi l'a dit*, 176 ; *Jean de Nivelle*, 213

Donizetti, 32, 59, 67 ; *Lucrezia Borgia*, 32 ; *Lucia di Lammermoor*, 32 ; *La Favorite*, 67, IX.

Dubois, 199 ; *Aben Hamet*, 199 ; *Xavière*, 199 ; *Paradise Lost*, 199

Dukas, 254

Dumas, A., 85

Duprato, 211

EHLERT, 98

Erlanger, Camille, 251, 252, 257 ; *Saint Julien l'Hospitalier*, 251 ; *Kermaria*, 251 ; *Le Juif Polonais*, 251, 252

FAURÉ, 199, 200

Ferrand, 92

Franck, César, 176, 181, 185, 195, 216, 217-230, 258, IX., X. ; *Les Djinns*, 185 ; *Ruth*, 218, IX. ; *Rédemption*, 210 ; *Les Béatitudes*, 219, 220, 221, 222 ; *Le Chasseur Maudit*, 219 ; *Les Eolides*, 219 ; *Le Valet de Ferme*, 219 ; *Hulda*, 219, 224 ; *Ghiselle*, 219, 224 ; *Rebecca*, 219

Index

- GAUTIER, THÉOPHILE**, 72, 84, 85
Georges, A., 254
Gigoux, 200
Gilbert, 155
Gluck, 4, 6, 7, 14, 23, 27, 29, 33, 44, 87, 91, 94, 102, 115, VI. ;
Alceste, 4, 7 ; *Paris et Hélène*, 5
Godard, 201, 202 ; *Le Tasse*, 201 ; *Concerto Romantique*, 201 ;
Pedro de Zalamea, 202 ; *Jocelyn*, 202 ; *Dante*, 202 ; *La
Vivandière*, 202
Goethe, 85, 126, 205, 208
Goldsmith, O., 154
Gossec, 11, 12, 184
Gounod, 21, 50, 59, 64, 96-97, 100, 108-131, 142, 149, 170, 175,
181, 192, 203, 204, 206, 212, 214, 237, IX., X., XI. ;
Romeo, 50, 56, 113, 118, 120, 123, X. ; *Faust*, 96, 113,
114, 118, 120, 121, 122, 123, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129, 204,
X. ; *Sapho*, 114, 115, 116, 117, 119, IX. ; *Ulysse*, 114,
119 ; *Mireille*, 114, 118, 120, 123, 149, X. ; *La Nonne
Sanglante*, 117, IX. ; *Le Médecin malgré lui*, 117,
120, IX. ; *Philémon et Baucis*, 113, X. ; *La Reine de
Saba*, 118, X. ; *Cinq-Mars*, 118 ; *Polyeucte*, 118, 214 ;
Le Tribut de Zamora, 118, 119, XI. ; *Redemption*, 119,
120, 124, 125 ; *Mors et Vita*, 119, 120, 124, 125 ; *Messe
de Ste. Cécile*, 119, 124
Grandval, Vicomtesse de, 254
Grétry, 4, 9, 10, 11, 23, 74, 102 ; *Richard Cœur de Lion*, 10 ;
L'Épreuve Villageoise, 10
Grisar, 81
Guilmant, 200
Guiraud, 213 ; *Gretna Green*, 213 ; *Piccolino*, 213 ; *Galante
Aventure*, 213 ; *Frédégonde*, 213
- HALÉVY, LUDOVIC**, 19, 20, 59, 67, 73, 75, 79, 155, 169, IX. ;
La Juive, 67, IX. ; *Guido*, 67, IX. ; *La Reine de Chypre*,
67, IX. ; *Charles VI.*, 67, IX. ; *Le Juif Errant*, 67 ; *La
Magicienne*, 67 ; *L'Eclair*, 79 ; *Les Mousquetaires de la
Reine*, 79, IX. ; *Le Val d'Andorre*, IX.

Index

- Handel**, 45, 49, 183
Harris, Sir A., 238
Haydn, 12, 107
Héroid, 73, 74, 75, 82, 106 ; *Zampa*, 75, IX. ; *Le Pré aux Clercs*, 75, IX.
Hervé, 160 ; *L'Œil crevé*, 160 ; *Chilpéric*, 160
Hillemacher, 210, 253
Holmès, Mme. A., 254 ; *La Montagne Noire*, 254
Hue, 253 ; *Le Roi de Paris*, 253
Hugo, Victor, 84, 233
Humperdinck, 209 ; *Hänsel u. Gretel*, 72, 209
- INDY**, V. D', 185, 226, 227, 252 ; *Symphonie sur un Chan
Montagnard*, 185 ; *Wallenstein*, 226 ; *Saugefleuri*, 226 ;
La Forté enchantée, 226 ; *Le Chant de la Cloche*, 226 ;
Attendez-moi sous l'Orme, 226 ; *Fervaal*, 226, 227, 228,
229 ; *Istar*, 226, 227, 252
- Irving**, Sir H., 252
- JONCIÈRES**, 129, 144, 149, 162, 175, 212 ; *Sardanapale*, 175 ;
Le dernier Jour de Pompéi, 175 ; *Dimitri*, 212 ; *La Reine
Berthe*, 212 ; *Le Chevalier Jean*, 212 ; *Lancelot du Lac*,
212
- Jullien**, 150, 197
- KAYSER**, 210
Kock, Paul de, 77
Kreutzer, R., 25 ; *La Mort d'Abel*, 25
- LACOMBE**, LOUIS, 200 ; *Winkelriede*, 201
Paul, 201
Lacordaire, 85
Lafontaine, 180

Index

Lalo, 143, 149, 176, 195, 196, 197, 198, 258, X., XI. ; *Fiesque*, 195 ; *Namouna*, 196 ; *Le Roi d'Ys*, 195, 196
Lamartine, 85, 233
Lambert, 254
Lamoureux, 140, 141, 143, 144, 145, 177
Lassalle, 206
Lavoix, fils, 28, 77
Lazzari, 230 ; *Armor*, 230
Lecocq, 82, 161 ; *La Fille de Mme. Angot*, 161
Lefebvre, 253
Lenepveu, 212 ; *Velleda*, 212
Leroux, 210, 253 ; *Astarté*, 253
Lesueur, 16, 21-25, 27, 86, VIII. ; *Les Bardes*, 22, 25, VIII. ;
La Mort d'Adam, 25
Lind, Jenny, 66
Lindau, 215
Liszt, 102, 126, 180, 183, 184, 186, 190, 255
Litolf, 161 ; *Héloïse et Abélard*, 161
Loti, 251
Louis Philippe, 80, 84
Lullé, V.

MAETERLINCK, 252

Maillart, 73, 81 ; *Les Dragons de Villars*, 81 ; *Lara*, 81

Maitland, J. A. Fuller, VII.

Maréchal, 253

Marolles, Abbé, 256

Marschner, 59

Marty, 210

Mascagni, 209 ; *Cavalleria*, 209

Massé, 73, 81, 150, 176 ; *Noces de Jeannette*, 81, 150 ; *Galathée*, 81 ; *Paul et Virginie*, 81, 176 ; *Une Nuit de Cléopâtre*, 81

Massenet, 70, 129, 149, 150, 175, 181, 195, 203-216, 252, X., XI. ; *Manon*, 70, 207 ; *Sapho*, XI. ; *Le Roi de Lahore*, 150, 206, 209, X. ; *Werther*, 208, 209, XI. ; *Marie Magdeleine*, 174, 175, 205 ; *Eve*, 174, 175, 205 ; *Thais*, 208 ; *Griselidis*, 209 ; *Le Jongleur de Notre Dame*, 209 ;

Index

- La Grand' Tante*, 206 ; *Don César de Bazan*, 206 ; *Le Mage*, 208 ; *Cendrillon*, XI., 209 ; *Hérodiade*, 206, 207 ; *Le Cid*, 207, XI. ; *Esclarmonde*, 207, 208, 209, 252, XI. ; *La Navarraise*, 209
- Maurel**, 252
- Méhul**, 1-28, 102, 106, 112, VI., VIII. ; *Stratonice*, 13 ; *Phrosine et Mélidor*, 13 ; *Le jeune Henri*, 13 ; *Ariodant*, 13 ; *L'Irato*, 13, 27 ; *Uthal*, 13 ; *Les Aveugles de Tolède*, 13 ; *Joseph*, 13, 14, 15, 16, 26, VI., VIII.
- Meilhac**, 155, 169
- Membrée**, 211 ; *L'Esclave*, 211
- Mendelssohn**, 36, 42, 45-59, 95, 108, 113, 121, 163, 171, 204 ; *Elijah*, 114 ; *Midsummer Night's Dream*, 121
- Mérimée**, 169
- Mermet**, 211, X. ; *Roland à Roncevaux*, 211, X.
- Messenger**, 82, 250, 251, 257 ; *La Basoche*, 82, 251 ; *Mme. Chrysanthème*, 251
- Meyerbeer**, 20, 38, 39, 40, 41-68, 79, 81, 85, 96, 97, 112, 121, 125, 132, 155, 211, 212, 214, VI., IX., XI. ; *Le Prophète*, 42, 52, 61, 63, 64, IX. ; *Les Huguenots*, 42, 43, 52, 53, 54, 56, 59, 60, 96, 142, 155, IX. ; *Robert le Diable*, 43, 49, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, IX. ; *Crociato*, 51 ; *L'Etoile du Nord*, 52, 66, 81, X. ; *Pardon de Ploermel*, 52, 56, 81, 96, X. ; *L'Africaine*, 52, 61, 65, X. ; *Struensee*, 61 ; *Feldlager*, 66
- Missa**, 210
- Molière**, 236
- Monpou**, 81
- Monsigny**, 74
- Mozart**, 6, 33, 37, 49, 74, 152, 163, 180, 182, 183 ; *Don Giovanni*, 7 ; *Nozze di Figaro*, 7, 74 ; *Zauberflöte*, 49
- Murillo**, 168
- Musset**, A. de, 85, 202, 233
- NAPOLÉON I.**, 19, 22, VIII.
- Neitzel**, 186
- Nicolo**, 73, 74, VIII. ; *Joconde*, 74, VIII. ; *Les Rendezvous bourgeois*, 74

Index

Nietzsche, 132, 138

Nux, V. de la, 254

OFFENBACH, 80, 82, 132, 150, 151-162 ; *Orphée aux Enfers*, 151, 152, 155, 157 ; *La Belle Hélène*, 151, 153, 155, 157, 159, 160 ; *La Grande Duchesse de Gérolstein*, 153, 155, 157 ; *Barbe Bleue*, 153, 155 ; *La Périchole*, 153 ; *Les Brigands*, 153 ; *Geneviève de Brabant*, 153 ; *La Princesse de Trébizonde*, 153 ; *La Jolie Parfumeuse*, 153, 161 ; *Madame Favart*, 153, 161 ; *Barkouf*, 154 ; *Robinson Crusoe*, 154 ; *Vert-Vert*, 154 ; *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*, 154

Ollonne, d', 210, 254

Onslow, 106

PAISIELLO, 19

Paladilhe, 143, 149, 176, 212, XI. ; *Patrie*, 143, 212, XI. ; *Le Passant*, 176 ; *L'Amour Africain*, 176

Palestrina, 120

Parry, Sir H., 42, 43

Pasdeloup, 107, 132, 140, 165, 177, 195

Patti, Mme., 212

Pessard, 253

Piccinni, 45, VI.

Pierné, 210, 254

Planquette, 82, 161 ; *Les Cloches de Corneville*, 161

Poise, 211

Ponchielli, 175

Ponsard, 114

Pougin, 147

Prévost, Abbé, 207

Prout, E., 43

Pugno, 251, 257 ; *La Mort de Lazare*, 251 ; *Pour le Drapeau*, 251, 257

Pujet, 254

Index

- RABAUD**, 210, 254
Reber, 106
Renan, 156
Reyer, 142, 175, 210, 211, 238, 252, XI. ; *La Statue*, 175, 210 ;
Erostrate, 175, 210 ; *Sigurd*, 211, 238, XI. ; *Salammbô*,
211, 252, XI.
Roger, 62, 63
Ropartz, Guy de, 186, 217, 230
Rossetti, 252
Rossini, 20, 27, 28, 29-40, 45, 59, 74, 87, 95, 112, 132, 148, 160,
164, VI., VIII. ; *La Gazza Ladra*, 30 ; *Le Siège de*
Corinthe, 31, 35, 36 ; *Moïse*, 31, 35 ; *Le Comte Ory*, 31 ;
Guillaume Tell, 31, 33, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 95, 160, 164,
VIII. ; *Otello*, 32 ; *Il Barbiere di Seviglia*, 31, 74 ;
Stabat Mater, 38 ; *Messe Solennelle*, 38
Rousseau, Samuel, 253 ; *La Cloche du Rhin*, 250
J. J., 7, 8, 193
- SACCHINI**, 45, VI.
Saint-Saëns, 50, 71, 72, 82, 87, 94, 98, 124, 129, 137, 149, 170,
173, 174, 175, 179-202, 204, 214, 231, 236, 238, 258, X.,
XI. ; *Phryné*, 50, 81, 191, 192, 194, XI. ; *Samson et*
Dalila, 174, 187, 190, 191, 194, 199, 238, X. ;
Symphonies, 183, 184, 185 ; *Etienne Marcel*, 191, 194 ;
Henry VIII., 191, 192, 194, 214, 238, XI. ; *Proserpine*,
191 ; *Ascanio*, 191 ; *Problèmes et Mystères*, 194 ; *Rimes*
Familiales, 194 ; *Le Rouet d'Omphale*, 187 ; *Phaeton*,
187 ; *Danse Macabre*, 187 ; *La Jeunesse d'Hercule*, 187 ;
Le Déluge, 189 ; *La Lyre et la Harpe*, 189 ; *La Princesse*
Jaune, 190 ; *Le Timbre d'Argent*, 190 ; *Les Barbares*
191 ; *Harmonie et Mélodie*, 194 ; *Portraits et Souvenirs*,
194
Salieri, VI.
Salvayre, 212 ; *Le Bravo*, 212 ; *Egmont*, 212 ; *Richard III.*,
212 ; *La Dame de Montsoreau*, 212
Sand, Georges, 59-61, 85
Savard, 210

Index

- Schneider, Hortense, 157
Schubert, 163
Schumann, 42, 74, 126, 163, 171, 204
Scudo, 148
Semet, 211
Servières, 222, 224
Shakespeare, 85
Silver, 210, 254
Solène, 169
Spontini, 16, 20-22, 27, 39, 45, 59, 87, 112, VI., VIII.; *La Vestale*, 20, 21, 22, 26, 37, VIII.; *Fernand Cortez*, 20, 37; *Olympie*, 20; *Agnes von Hohenstaufen*, 20
Strauss, Johann, 161
 Richard, 172, 255
Sullivan, 155, 161
Suppé, 161
- THOMAS, AMBROISE, 50, 73, 75, 76, 80, 81, 129, 130, 131, 147, 199, X., XI.; *Hamlet*, 50, 76, 81, 130, 131, 147, X.; *Mignon*, 76, 81, 129, 130, 131, X.; *Le Caid*, 80; *Françoise de Rimini*, 131; *The Tempest*, 131
 Goring, 129
Thomé, 254
Tschaikowsky, 186; *Pathetic Symphony*, 186
- VALETTE, GENERAL DE LA, 87
Varney, 82
Vasseur, 82
Verdi, 50, 59, 68, 117, 119, 149, 164, 171, 174, X.; *Jerusalem*, 68; *Les Vêpres Siciliennes*, 68; *Falstaff*, 72, 119; *Rigoletto*, 117; *Otello*, 119; *Don Carlos*, 149, X.; *Aida*, 174
Vernet, Horace, 85
Viardot, Mme., 63, 115
Vidal, 210, 253, 257; *La Burgonde*, 253; *Pierrot Assassin*, 257; *Colombine Abandonnée*, 257; *La Révérence*, 257
Vigny, A. de, 85
Voltaire, 93

Index

- WAGNER**, 3, 35, 43, 45, 50, 54, 59, 78, 86, 96, 98, 100, 101, 117, 123, 125, 126, 132-150, 158, 164, 172, 177, 197, 198, 211, 212, 214, 227, 228, 232, 233, 234, 235, 238, 250, VI., XI. ; *Rienzi*, 50, 134, 138, 139, 140 ; *Flying Dutchman*, 50, 134, 135, 145 ; *Lohengrin*, 54, 96, 117, 135, 141, 142, 143, 144, 145, 147 ; *Meistersinger*, 72, 145, 174, 207 ; *Tannhäuser*, 96, 135, 136, 141, 145, 147, 244 ; *Tristan*, 96, 122, 135, 145, 174 ; *Walküre*, 121, 136, 145 ; *Siegfried*, 136, 145 ; *A Capitulation*, 137, 140 ; *Kaisermarsch*, 140 ; *Götterdämmerung*, 140
- Weber**, 22, 37, 47, 48, 55, 59, 152, 163, 211 ; *Der Freischütz*, 48, 73 ; *Oberon*, 121
 Johannes, 61, 62
- Widor**, 200 ; *Maitre Ambros*, 200
- Wiertz**, 85
- Wormser**, 253, 257 ; *L'Enfant Prodigue*, 253, 257
-
- ZOLA**, 232, 235, 236, 239, 241, 243, 247

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