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BOOK REVIEWS

David Charlton (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Grand Opera* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). 496 pp. \$29.99

This book 'is about nineteenth-century opera of a certain large-scale type; it provides a survey, arranged thematically, which contains more information about its subject than any previous publication in English' (preface, p. xiii). It is a bold claim and an ambitious book that, on the whole, fulfils the promises set out by its editor David Charlton. This collection of essays broadly covers not only French grand opera but also its transformation in the latter years of the nineteenth century in and outside of France, and even its contemporary reevaluation through recent productions by David Pountney at the Vienna State Opera.

Charlton offers an introduction that sets the scene for the emergence of grand opera in Paris, tracing the literary, artistic and musical climate as well as the institutional footing, the political and social context of the 1830 July Revolution and proceeding bourgeois monarchy that made way for the political, historical and even erotic content of grand opera. Charlton's editing, consistently referring the reader to other chapters of the book for complementary information, is unobtrusive, and his provision of a brief chronology and index across the articles of various important themes discussed (preface, p. xiv) is helpful. The book thereafter is divided into four clearly definite sections, which we will examine in turn.

Part I, 'The resourcing of grand opera', includes six articles that deal with the rise of the genre in the logistical context of the Parisian house. Hervé Lacombe's information-packed article deals with the running of the theatre and the mounting of grand opera as well as its economic, political, cultural and moral ramifications. He discusses subsidies, salaries, censorship and the appointment of contracting directors in step with the new era of liberalism, and describes grand opera as an expression of a new (bourgeois) collective identity, unlike the former (aristocratic) *tragédie lyrique*. His essay provides a firm foundation on which the rest of the section sits.

Nicholas White's discussion of Scribe's libretti (their literary and historical context as well as their formal procedures) follows. Simon Williams then provides a general overview of historical spectacle in grand opera – the post-Revolutionary fashion for visually thrilling melodrama, the importance of 'realistic illusion', and the emergence of the *metteur-en-scène*. James Parakilas examines the role of the chorus and its different types of intervention – conspiracy scenes, processional/ceremonial scenes, hymns. His stylish and finely perceptive analysis reveals the interaction of a divided chorus – representing opposed nations, social groups or political factions – and the individual characters, the way in which the latter position themselves on the map delineated by these groups and yet are able to manipulate opinion of these politically mobile bodies. He also addresses audience identification with the chorus, by means of which the nineteenth-century public could recognize the irresolvable dissonances of their own political/social order.

Marian Smith's chapter on dance breathes fresh air into the proceedings, taking musicologists off the beaten track to examine the influence of ballet-pantomime

on opera ballet. She discusses the blend of mute and sung roles and traces the careers of star performers. Most notably, she opens our eyes to the correlation between formal ballet and the society ballroom. Whilst most musicologists now recognize the dramatic impetus of ballet-pantomime in operatic (dance) music, many remain hermetic to understanding the function of the *divertissement*. In pointing out the close kinship between ballet and social dance – through musical arrangements, invited professionals mirroring *étoile* dancers, and opera balls (on which we would have liked to know more) – Smith's text helps us to comprehend contemporary access to and appreciation of such interludes.

Mary-Ann Smart's article on singers completes this section. It is perhaps the most problematic essay of the book, presenting all the difficulties of marrying reception history with the actual musical sources, leading to an edgy feeling of analysis forced to fit preordained conclusions. Her article, nevertheless, presents much valuable information on singers at the Opéra during the 1830s and 1840s, and helps build up the picture of collaboration between artists and composers.

Part II is entitled 'Revaluation and the Twenty-First Century' and comprises David Pountney's recount of his approach to directing *Guillaume Tell* and *Rienzi* at the Vienna State Opera. The repertoire discussed justifies its placing at the centre (between parts I and III) of the exposition of grand operas of the 1830s and 1840s, but its revaluation of the genre through the lens of time, the history of operatic production and other artistic media such as film, as well as the directorial view presented, as opposed to a musicological one, gives one the sense that this article is misplaced in the volume – it should have been included as an important postscript or afterword to the volume rather than as an integrated part of the survey. Pountney delivers interesting considerations on the staging and designs for the two operas, and how he set about these tasks without falling into the trap of presenting an ironic commentary on the genre. For Pountney, much of grand opera inspires 'the same kind of ironic affection that we commonly reserve for those magnificent edifices of Hollywood high camp'. He also discusses how he dealt with the ballet episodes, showing himself to be rather dismissive of ballet in general and out-of-step with the revaluation that ballet is currently undergoing in musicology. It is a thought-provoking chapter, which argues for the revival and reappraisal of these much-forgotten works.

Part III, 'Grand Operas for Paris', examines the Parisian repertory in a series of excellent articles. Sarah Hibberd presents an impressive overview of the 'first' grand opera, Auber's *La Muette de Portici*. She sets the scenario in context, taking into account four early versions of the libretto, looks at the musical means that render comprehensible the mute Fenella's mime, discusses the role of popular melody and the chorus, and pinpoints the symbolic link between the mute heroine and an oppressed people. Fenella is seen to embody the action of the entire opera as, at the tragic climax, her emotion is extended from her gestures and music to the broader canvas of the *mise-en-scène* and chorus, the powerful language of grand opera lying in the combined effect and interaction of all its elements.

Herbert Schneider's informative but unstructured essay looks at Scribe and Auber's collaboration for *La Muette*, *Gustave III*, *Le Lac des fées* and *L'Enfant prodigue*, analysing Auber's formal procedures in duets and his gradual break with Italianate models and closed numbers towards a more dialogue style, distinct from that of Meyerbeer. Analyses of the latter's operas are assigned to two authors: Matthias Brzoska takes on *Robert le diable* and *Les Huguenots*, whilst John H. Roberts deals with *Le Prophète* and *L'Africaine*. Brzoska's impressive article looks

at aesthetic ideas on opera in the 1820s in order to fully understand the unprecedented success of *Robert* as a proto-*Gesamtkunstwerk*: a dramatic production combining the arts to create a stunning musical and dramatic impression; a balance of (Italianate) vocal virtuosity and (Germanic) musical integrity; a hero seen to embody a metaphysical duality emblematic of modern man. Through his analysis of *Les Huguenots*, Brzoska concludes that Meyerbeer discovered a musicodramatic style to express the modern historical conception that events are not the work of heroes but the result of socio-economic forces. Meyerbeer's two later operas receive short change, however, from John Roberts. It seems a strange rhetorical position to take, in the context of this 'positivist' study designed to rehabilitate a much maligned genre, to point out the failings of these operas and the faults in Meyerbeer's and Scribe's respective arts.

Diana R. Hallman deals with the operas of Halévy, which she knows well. Her article gives a satisfying overview of Halévy's formal procedures, orchestration and vocal forms across the operas *La Juive*, *Guido et Ginevra*, *La Reine de Chypre*, *Charles VI*, *Le Juif errant* and *La Magicienne*. Elizabeth Bartlett's well-documented and eminently readable chapter looks at those Italians who wrote for the Opéra, focusing particularly on Rossini's *Guillaume Tell*, Donizetti's *La Favorite* and Verdi's *Don Carlos*.

Part IV, 'Transformations of grand opera', provides a whole host of insights and information on Wagnerian, Czech, Russian and Italian opera of the second half of the nineteenth century. Thomas Grey's broad yet unpretentious text on Wagner's life-long, deeply conflicting confrontation – artistically and psychologically – with French grand opera surveys the composer's output and the move away from the genre that is gradually operated throughout his oeuvre.

Marina Frolova-Walker's essay boldly attempts to construct a new historical narrative by investigating the impact of the French grand opera tradition on Russian opera. She discusses Glinka's use of the external features of grand opera to update the genre of magic opera with *Ruslan and Lyudmila* (1841), The Five's love/hate relationship with Meyerbeer, and Mussorgsky's revisions of *Boris Godunov*, which made large concessions to a grand opera style that the Imperial theatres wished to see, before coming even closer to the genre, and in particular to *Les Huguenots*, with *Khovanshchina*. Tchaikovsky's *The Maid of Orleans* is seen to mirror closely Meyerbeer's *Prophète*, but the composer's own libretto is criticized as inferior to that of Scribe (already severely criticized by John Roberts earlier in the book!).

Jan Smaczny reviews the attempts of the Prague Provisional Theatre, and then National Theatre, to provide Czech audiences not only with performances of French grand opera but also with an indigenous form of opera, preferably sung in Czech. Šebor's *The Templars in Moravia* (1865) more fully embraced the external aspects of grand opera than Smetana's eclectic *The Brandenburgers in Bohemia* whilst containing less explicitly political material than the latter opera. The influence of Meyerbeer and particularly Gounod's *Faust* was largely felt in the following decades, as Dvořák's *Vanda* and his hugely popular 1882 grand opera *Dimitrij* bear witness.

Fiamma Nicolodi identifies the characteristics of Italian *opera-ballo* of the 1860s to 1890s, as distinct from French grand opera, concluding that the Italian genre presented a good blend of the traditional and the innovative for an increasingly lower-class public emerging after Italian reunification. She thereby traces various currents in operatic writing that were concurrently taking place elsewhere in Europe – an increasingly prose-like style of libretti breaking down the links

between poetic and musical structure; transformation of closed musical forms to a more free-flowing discursive and declamatory style; the influence of *verismo* and decadent literary movements shifting the typical dramatic shock concept of grand opera from the external action to the inner psyche, thereby disrupting the process of audience identification with the on-stage characters that was an aesthetic basis of earlier nineteenth-century opera. Indeed, without doing so in as many words, this erudite article sums up the evolution of European opera during the second half of the century.

Sarah Hibberd's brief attempt to write a history of grand opera in Britain and the Americas deserves mention, although this vast subject remains largely unexplored. That London audiences preferred heavily reworked adaptations of French operas (often consisting of 'Italianate' simplifications of plot and style) over the originals themselves comes as no surprise in a fiercely different social and political climate.

In musicological terms, the range of authors presented in this book is broad and generally satisfying. For a survey of French grand opera, however, one might have hoped for more articles by non-musicologists – specialists in theatre history, stage design, and so on. There should have been more than just one article dedicated solely to libretti, and more than one chapter written by a French person! The book is elegantly illustrated with copious tables and musical examples. Its designed readership is obviously an informed one, but the book is not out of reach of the amateur-connoisseur, and, as Charlton claims, its publication marks a significant landmark in the reconsideration of a historically important genre that has frequently been granted insufficient recognition in the history and canon of operatic works.

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Kristina Marie Guiguet, *The Ideal World of Mrs. Widder's Soirée Musicale: Social Identity and Musical Life in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Gatineau, QC: Canadian Museum of Civilization, Mercury Series, Cultural Studies Paper 77, 2004). xvi + 154pp. Canadian \$24.95.

This study is strikingly original in systematically studying programmes given in domestic concerts in the middle of the nineteenth century. Kristina Marie Guiguet looks in depth into a soirée musicale given in Toronto in 1844 by Mrs Elizabeth Widder, wife of a leading businessman and political figure, and in addition one given in London in 1849 by a society lady, Mrs Sandeman. Programmes given in homes have been studied even less than those given in major concert halls, but this pithy book asks how the 'programmer's toolkit' served as 'a box of cultural building blocks' by which musicians and patrons went about their business (p. xv). Guiguet examines the programmes within a broadly defined context, showing how they fit within the political and social evolution of Upper Canada and how gender practices defined many aspects. What results aids the progress of an extremely important area of musical study.

The programme given in the Widders' home, Lyndhurst, on 12 March 1844 (the book contains pictures of the Corinthian-columned room where the concert took place) had a carefully designed, highly symmetrical structure. Each of the two halves of ten pieces included five opera solos or ensembles, four songs, and an