

dissertations

Aubrey S. Garlington—*The Concept of the Marvelous in French and German Opera, 1770–1840*

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571 pp., University of Illinois diss.)

James D. Freeman

This is a careful and accurate study of the principal volcanic eruptions, magical rites, *dei ex machina*, snowstorms, ghosts, floods, battles, and other manifestations of “le merveilleux” in opera from Gluck and Mozart to Meyerbeer and Marschner. Garlington shows the marvelous (which in his discussion includes any sort of spectacular stage effect, natural or supernatural) to have been a consistently dominant trait in the history of French opera in addition to having provided the motivating force in the development of German Romantic opera. In accord with August von Schlegel and E. T. A. Hoffmann, he feels that fantasy, as much as music itself, lies at the heart of the nature of opera of all countries.

Garlington’s thesis is that the marvelous as a dramatic idea changes very little in these seventy years but that composers’ concepts of its musical significance are continually changing. His method is to trace the occurrences of the marvelous in the most successful operas of the era and to examine the developing relationship between music and the fantastic events on the stage. He produces a survey that treats some areas more conclusively than others. Late 18th-century France, for instance, receives very thorough coverage, while the same period in Germany, though teeming with Singspiel subjects on magic and fantasy, is largely brushed aside in deference to the importance of *Zauberflöte*.¹

His nearly complete abstinence from any discussion of Italian opera and its relationship to the North (*Idomeneo* and *Don Giovanni* are treated as examples of Mozartean rather than Italian opera) is partly to be expected in a dissertation dealing specifically with France and Germany. Yet Italian opera was still flourishing in Paris, Vienna, Dresden, and Munich and was, thus, an influential part of the operatic scene in both French- and German-speaking countries. Moreover, the Rossini craze that held northern Europe in a decade-long trance from 1820 on had a much greater effect on non-Italian music of all types than Berlioz, for one, would have liked; and even he was not entirely untouched by it.²

Garlington does deal briefly with Rossini’s French operas and revisions, of course; but such important Italian contributions to the concept of the marvelous as Carafa’s *Gabriella di Vergy* (1816), Pacini’s *L’ultimo giorno di*

Pompei (1825), Salvatore Viganò's spectacular Milan ballets, as well as Rossini's own *Mosè in Egitto* (the earlier version of the French *Moïse*) and *Semiramide*, go unmentioned. Concerning late 18th-century Italy, both opera seria and opera buffa had tended to avoid fantasy as an integral part of a dramatic work, the one because its best librettists most often treated fantastic events as off-stage occurrences to be pondered later in recitative and aria, the other because its subject matter was more often concerned with the intrigue of everyday life than with cataclysmic events. But Italian stage design had remained justifiably famous for its aesthetic as well as spectacular qualities.³ Italian audiences were certainly not unaccustomed to spectacular scenery when J. S. Mayr and some of his contemporaries around 1800 began to make use of French subjects that incorporated the marvelous directly and emphatically into the drama. Mayr's *Elisa* (1801) and his second setting of *Lodoiska* (1800), for example, were based on earlier texts used by Cherubini and Kreutzer in Paris. Stefano Pucitta's *Vestale* (1809) seems to have relied heavily on Spontini's opera of 1807. Some twenty years later, Donizetti and Bellini were often still borrowing from French sources but had begun to have their own special success with a type of spectacle that was peculiarly human and needed few stage accessories: the mad woman.

As Garlington notes, however, the effectiveness of the stage apparatus was usually at least as much responsible for an opera's success as was the music, whether in France, Italy, Germany, or anywhere else. In order to assure the most realistic and impressive sets, theaters sometimes went so far as to send their stage designers abroad to familiarize themselves with the machinery that other theaters had used for similar subjects or to acquire a first-hand acquaintance with the actual locale of a particular subject. Cicéri, the *Opéra's* *décorateur* for Auber's *La Muette de Portici* (1828), for instance, was sent on such a mission in order to prepare for the opera's final scene, an eruption of Vesuvius.⁴ Yet Garlington derives most of his information concerning stage action only from the plots of operas and from stage descriptions included in published scores. He does not concern himself with a systematic review of stage design and spectacle within the period he covers. He includes no pictorial examples of sets or machinery, very little discussion of development and change within the area of stage design, and most disappointingly, no attempt to unravel the relation of composer, librettist, designer, and impresario to each other and to the creation of the marvelous.

Garlington points out a continually growing tendency throughout this period for the composer to write more exciting music for spectacular stage events in order to achieve a more immediate connection between stage and orchestra. He rightly considers an undramatic musical treatment of a fantastic event to be old-fashioned after 1780. Unfortunately, his natural preoccupation with the marvelous often leads him to judge an entire opera on the basis of its use of the marvelous, even though such use sometimes consists of a page or less of music. Some serious exaggerations result. Carafa's *Masaniello* (1827), for instance, on the same subject as Auber's

La Muette and produced only two months prior to Auber's opera, is dismissed by Garlington as "a complete failure" (p. 192). Yet Loewenberg claims 136 performances for Carafa's work, hardly a sign of a failure;⁵ and the *Revue musicale* of 1828 mentions several times that the opera was having a long and quite brilliant success.⁶

In a similar comparison between Cherubini's *Lodoïska* and Rudolphe Kreutzer's opera on the same subject, Garlington condemns the Kreutzer work because of its less interesting battle music. He adds that "since this opera was performed scarcely a month following Cherubini's triumph, Kreutzer obviously had little time to piece the work together if he intended to capitalize on public sympathy for this type of story" (p. 93) and that the attempt to compete with Cherubini's opera "was as foolhardy an act as can be found in the annals of operatic history" (p. 86). Actually, the two operas were produced exactly fifteen days apart, surely too little time for Kreutzer, librettist, and stage designer to compose an imitation opera that also still needed rehearsal time. Much more likely, the two productions were prepared more or less simultaneously. Moreover, Fétis states that Kreutzer's *Lodoïska* was received with enthusiasm;⁷ and, in fact, it would seem that Kreutzer's work actually enjoyed a greater success than Cherubini's, at least in France.⁸ In any case, its production was clearly far from being a foolhardy venture.

Garlington's analyses of the music for stage spectacles often tend to be overly simple, sometimes naive. For example, the music for the marvelous in Cherubini's *Lodoïska* and *Elisa*, Rossini's *Tell*, and Marschner's *Vampyr*, as well as the storm in Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony*, is each in turn described as being nothing more than an extremely involved development section that has neither exposition nor recapitulation. There are some good reasons why descriptive music for battles, storms, floods, etc., tend to be continuous rather than periodic, but Garlington does not state them.

Despite the occasional oversimplification and exaggeration, however, Garlington has written a basically sound, scholarly, and useful work. There are a few obvious errors of dates and attributions, but these seem to be proofreading slips in a work otherwise well written and carefully prepared. The majority of his ideas are well taken; there is some very thoughtful consideration of the relation of fantasy to Romanticism; and the author is obviously quite familiar with the thorough bibliography he presents. Finally, Garlington makes it clear that a study of "le merveilleux" does, indeed, provide a valid and effective perspective on the rapidly changing ideas and styles of emergent Romanticism.

NOTES

¹ Garlington discusses Dittersdorf's *Hieronymous Knicker* and mentions Hiller's *Die Jagd*, André's *Das wütende Heer*, Neeffe's *Zemire und Azor*, Winter's *Unterbrochene Opferfest*, and Wranitsky's *Oberon*. Unmentioned but among the most successful works dealing with fantasy

or the marvelous are Benda's melodramas *Ariadne auf Naxos* and *Medea*, Winter's *Das Labyrinth*, Zumsteeg's *Geisterinsel*, and Süssmayr's *Spiegel von Arkadien*.

² For an opinion on this see Edward Dent, "The Romantic Spirit in Music," *Proceedings of the Musical Association* (1932-33) 59:92.

³ See Edward O. D. Downes, "The Operas of Johann Christian Bach as a Reflection of the Dominant Trends in Opera Seria," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation (Harvard University, 1958), p. 115.

⁴ *Revue musicale* (1827) 1:574.

⁵ Alfred Loewenberg, *Annals of Opera* (Cambridge, 1943), col. 710.

⁶ 2:548, 565, 605. There was clearly a certain amount of competition between the *Opéra-Comique* (Carafa) and the *Opéra* (Auber) concerning the production of these two operas. Auber's work had been scheduled for performance early in 1827 but was continually delayed by the lack of progress of the *décorateurs*. Reports on their progress in 1827 refer to the opera as "Mazzaniello," but after it becomes known that Carafa is producing an opera with the same title, Auber's opera becomes *La Mulette*.

⁷ *Biographie universelle des musiciens*, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1860-65), V, 106.

⁸ Loewenberg, *op. cit.*, col. 491.

Roger Jacques Kamien—*The Opening Sonata—Allegro Movements in a Randomly Selected Sample of Solo Keyboard Sonatas Published in the Years 1742-1774*

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Thomas Warburton

Roger Kamien has contributed a valuable service to musicology by showing how one might apply statistical methods to a study of sonata-allegro movements. In his dissertation he has methodically observed specific qualities in a random sample of seventy works. These have been drawn from a total population of 1090 works published between 1742 and 1774. Many previous studies of sonata-allegro movements have involved either the historical evolution of the concept of the sonata in general or the tonal dispersion of musical materials in particular. Kamien, by contrast, has attempted to bridge the gap between the specific and the general.

Having surveyed previous discussions of sonata movements, Kamien observes a lack of objectivity among writers in their descriptions of sonata form. He deplores the inexactness of such terms as "rarely found" or "not uncommon" or "frequently appear" to qualify the occurrence of musical properties. He even refrains from using the term "sonata form" past his second chapter. Through an application of statistical methods, he hopes to determine and describe the incidence of musical events in a more precise language. (In Appendix II he describes the specific technical procedures he has employed.) Further, he attempts to attain a frame of reference with