David Charlton. *French Opera 1730–1830: Meaning and Media*. Aldershot, Hampshire (U.K.), and Brookfield, Vt.: Ashgate, 2000. xii, 374 pp.

Reviewed by Julian Rushton

David Charlton's book is not a single-minded monograph but a collection of essays published in periodicals spread over the last quarter-century. This may explain its somewhat cryptic title; it must have been hard to think of anything more suitable—such as "Collected Essays on Aspects of French Opera"—that would not have been inappropriately bland. To assist discussion, it may be useful to list the essay titles in the order they now appear (signified by the Roman numerals used in the volume[1]), with their original publication dates:

I. The Romance and its Cognates: Narrative, Irony, and *Vraisemblance* in Early *opéra comique* (1997)
II. Continuing Polarities: Opera Theory and *opéra-comique* (1992; originally in German, first publication in English)
III. Orchestra and Chorus at the Comédie-Italienne (Opéra-Comique), 1755–1799 (1985)
IV. The Overture to Philidor's *Le bûcheron* (1763) (1996)
V. "Envoicing" the Orchestra: Enlightenment Metaphors in Theory and Practice (1997; originally in French, first publication in English)
VI. "Minuet-scenes" in Early *opéra-comique* (1999)
VII. Motive and Motif: Méhul before 1791 (1976)
VIII. Motif and Recollection in Four Operas of Dalayrac (1978)
IX. The French Theatrical Origins of *Fidelio* (1996)
X. Storms, Sacrifices: The "Melodrama Model" in Opera (1985)
XI. Ossian, Le Sueur, and Opera (1977)
XII. The Dramaturgy of "Grand Opera": Some Origins (1987)
XIII. On the Nature of "Grand Opera" (1988)
XIV. "A maître d'orchestre . . . conducts": New and Old Evidence on French Practice (1993)

Those who have followed David Charlton's pioneering work will probably find the essays concerned with eighteenth-century *opéra comique* (which form the majority) to be the most far-reaching in their implications. And those whose research is mainly confined to English-language periodicals

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will benefit most from the appearance of two major articles for the first time in English. Following Charlton's definitive study of Grétry (1986), these deep probes into aspects of a genre often considered problematic, if not actually unsatisfactory—due to the use of spoken dialogue and the at times extreme contrast between this mode of dramatic exposition and elaborate musical structures—constitute a major challenge to preconceptions, and a positive contribution to its critical revaluation.

However, the understanding of *opéra comique* is by no means all that is developed here. Late Baroque *tragédie lyrique* is not much considered, despite the starting date of 1730. But there are many implications for its late eighteenth-century descendants, not least the French operas of Gluck and his successors, and for the nineteenth century. In respect of its time-frame, the title in fact underestimates the scope of the contents. While essay XII, "The Dramaturgy of 'Grand Opéra': Some Origins," ends with a reference to Auber's *La muette de Portici* (1828), its sequel, "On the Nature of 'Grand Opera'," from Ian Kemp's Cambridge Opera Handbook on *Les Troyens* (1988), inevitably considers composers active later than 1830, such as Meyerbeer and Halévy, in establishing the generic context against which Berlioz's opera of the late 1850s can be read. Indeed, the view extends into the 1860s (*L'Africaine*). *Grand opéra* is an arena in which musicologists outside France have been vigorously engaged in recent years.[2] I have become aware of at least four recently completed English-language dissertations concerning *grand opéra*; the statistical probability is that there must be more. Published work by these younger scholars, including Benjamin Walton, Sarah Hibberd, and Cormac Newark, may be found in the recent collection of essays austerely titled *Reading Critics Reading* (Parker and Smart 2001).[3]

In a few pages of addenda and corrigenda, Charlton, acknowledging a comment from Steven Huebner, suggests that some inflections might be made in his taxonomy of *grand opéra*. Nevertheless, his chapter (essay XIII) stands up well as a summary of features essential to the genre. It does not quite convince me (perhaps it was not trying to) that *Les Troyens* arises from *grand opéra*, other than in its most superficial aspects. The processions and the very public suicides of its two heroines do indeed appear typical of the genre, but constitute outward signs of the tragic aspect of Berlioz's epic, rather than of its aesthetic essence.[4] But that is by the way. In the context of these collected essays, the six pages of essay XII, concerning the origins of *grand opéra*, offer no less acute observations on how the genre arose from the practices and preoccupations of the eighteenth century. In support, Charlton cites inter alia dramas by Goethe and Schiller and librettos by Michel-Jean Sedaine (Grétry's *Richard Coeur-de-Lion* of 1783—although it is an *opéra comique*), Nicholas-François Guillard (Sacchini

and Rey's *Arvire et Evelina*, Paris Opéra, 1788), and Etienne de Jouy (*Velleda*, which was never set to music). This sense of the continuity between the centuries proves something of a leitmotif of the collection as a whole, reinforcing the often quoted view of Friedrich Blume (1970) that classicism and romanticism are impossible to disentangle, or indeed the provisional conclusions arrived at earlier by Edward J. Dent (1976), who located so much of what we call "Romantic" (and, less convincingly, "Berliozian") in the music of the French revolutionary period.

Essays III, IV, and V form a core grouping, relating as they do to the expressive signification of orchestral music in the theaters of *opéra comique*. Completeness might have required the inclusion of one earlier piece (Charlton 1976), but its conclusions may have seemed to the author, by this time, provisional.[5] Essay III, whose title suggests no more than a useful exercise in gathering facts, proves indispensable to a sophisticated and developing argument. That essays III and IV both first appeared in *Festschriften*, and essay V in the French-language collection *Mozart: Les chemins de l'Europe* (in which one might not expect to find a treatment of the repertoire to which Charlton mainly refers), makes their gathering together here particularly useful. The Comédie-Italienne was the seedbed of *opéra comique*. Examination of the registers of personnel shows the modest size of its orchestral forces in a period when the genre was establishing itself (from 1755 and through the 1760s), and their subsequent growth in successive phases, which include the heyday of Grétry, the heady early years of revolution (to 1793), and the last years of the century, by which time the orchestra had tripled in size. Numbers and function of chorus and dancers are also considered. What seems most important here is the aesthetic consequence of the availability of more instruments. Yet Charlton is able to show that even early *opéra comique* showed considerable sensitivity to instrumental color and orchestral invention, and of course to their dramatic potential.

This point is well illustrated in essay IV, on Philidor's overture of 1763. *Le Bûcheron* (The Wood-chopper) gave Philidor another opportunity to indulge his interest in making orchestral noises appropriate to some rustic métier—the better-known example is *Le Maréchal ferrant* (The Blacksmith) of 1761. One wonders if the overture was omitted from the published score because its integration with the opera it preceded was too daring; as in essay VII, on Méhul's *Euphrosine*, and VIII, on Nicholas-Marie Dalayrac, we perceive how an operatic drama could accommodate significant instrumental gestures, well before the better-known Gluck examples (notably *Iphigénie en Aulide*).[6]

The significance of the orchestra in *opéra comique* is, however, most fully exposed in essay V, where its "envoicing" is discussed on a foundation

of encyclopaedist and other eighteenth-century aesthetic and philosophical thought. The essay starts by citing Batteux (1747), who made a distinction between music which imitates "lifeless noises" and that which "expresses animate sounds and . . . relates to feelings"; he calls the latter "le tableau à personage," translated as "the picture containing human character."[7] Charlton relates this striking assertion, which however does not distinguish vocal from instrumental music, with two other ideas: the "material" reading of eighteenth-century theorists, and the language of both *opéra comique* (after 1758) and of Gluck's operas, as "material examples, which enabled writers to synthesize new and pregnant formulations regarding the aesthetic operation of instrumental music itself" (V/1). Reading "materially" is compared by Charlton to one way in which science advances: "In considering, say, Newton's experiences with the apple, or Becquerel's discovery of radiation, we happily accept that a material experience—not discounting that of reading another scientist's results—will have led to a theoretical advance that becomes a point of future reference" (V/2). This is a rich and convincingly argued discussion, which, if not exactly easy reading, is continuously gripping. At the end one is left in no doubt that the philosophical project concerning opera in mid-eighteenth-century France was by no means confined to the *tragédie lyrique* and other repertoire of the Académie Royale de Musique. It is true that potent and much-discussed examples of orchestral expressiveness in a dramatic context occurred there before Gluck; besides Rameau, one thinks of Philidor's pioneering *Ernelinde* (1767), which Charlton does not mention, in which a particular orchestral effect (horn crescendo) imitated the imagined (but animate) sound of a ghost, and played a role in determining the emotions and later actions of the eponymous heroine.

But Charlton makes clear that their origin lay in the less august theaters where Philidor and others developed their craft. He develops his argument through authors such as François-Jean Marquis de Chastellux, Jean François Marmontel, and André Morellet (the last two of whom were later actively involved in the Piccinniste project), and through composers such as Grétry, before turning to Gluck. Particularly fascinating here is to read Marmontel, the arch anti-Gluckiste, alongside comments from the Gluckiste Arnaud and examples from Gluck's French operas. This tends to confirm my view that the "Querelle des Gluckistes et des Piccinnistes" was itself less about deeper aesthetic principles than its protagonists believed, and more about the musical style appropriate to rendering feelings at the Opéra; on the theory of expressive potential of music, there is a surprising measure of agreement, but Marmontel, for one, did not appear to hear music in the way his theoretical writings on this aspect of it, at least, might lead one to expect.[8] The argument moves to the point where discussion of

the orchestra relates to the concepts of "voice" through which several writers, following Carolyn Abbate (1991), are sensitively reinterpreting the potential of dramatic and narrative music.

This marshalling of eighteenth-century evidence is well weighted with reference to contemporary scientific publications; but the risk of drowning in a sea of allusion is a small price to pay for the rewards of this wide-ranging survey. The history of the orchestra in the eighteenth century has too often been written solely in terms of purely orchestral music (the Mannheim symphony, Haydn and the Viennese) and it needs radical reconsideration in view of Italian opera—an alternative scholarly project—and of what happened in France, not least in operas, which were, after all, known to Mozart and Beethoven.

This essay (V) overlaps with others that may be related to style (as it is related to genre) and to topical analysis, after Ratner (1980).[9] These include the redemption of the *romance* (essay I), hitherto generally dismissed as something a little bit primitive but here shown to possess considerable semiotic potential. The discussion of Minuet scenes in *opéra comique* (essay VI) most obviously impinges on Allanbrook's Mozart study (1983), demonstrating, along with recent studies of other Italian opera, how Mozart's originality consisted in creative development of multi-stranded traditions.[10] The twelve-note chord in Jean-Paul-Egide Martini's *Sapho* is the centerpiece of an essay (X) on more extreme forms of operatic expression—one is tempted to say expressionism. This chapter ranges beyond French opera to include analyses of Benda's melodramas, in which tonality and large-scale planning are demonstrated and compared to scenes in Gluck, notably the relatively neglected *Armide*. Melodrama—formally, declamation over or punctuated by music—is clearly related to orchestrated recitative (*recitativo obbligato* or *récitatif obligé*). It is well established that Mozart's experiment in *Zaide* led to enrichment of his technique in *Idomeneo* and *Die Entführung*; but it is too easy to assume that this was a personal development that can be considered in isolation. It is therefore good to be reminded how composers interact with each other. Charlton brings in Piccinni and Méhul, and the lesser known Rodolphe Kreutzer and Jean-Frédéric Edelmann, as well as later composers, into his richly referenced discussion; Edelmann's Ariane, like Martini's Sapho, flings herself from a cliff into the sea, anticipating the death-leaps of later operas such as *La muette de Portici* and *Tosca*.

It is impossible to do justice to every essay in this collection, in which a supplementary value is that one can replace those tattered offprints, and photocopies of doubtful legality, with a solidly-bound volume. Charlton's work is densely argued (I caught a few places where a fresh sub-editor might have suggested an alteration). But it all repays rereading; the ar-

ticles newly Englished are a considerable bonus, not because one might not understand them in the language of their original publication, but because they have been revised, updated, and lengthened to become, in effect, new work. The same is true of "Storms, Sacrifices" (X); despite its original publication being in English, it too is expanded and reprinted.

The publishers are to be warmly commended for bringing this material, widely scattered and originally published in three different languages, together in one volume. Where the articles were originally in English, they are not reset or revised (apart from the four pages of addenda and corrigenda). Instead they are presented in facsimile from the source publications, with the original pagination (not necessarily starting at one), and in some cases with hand-copied musical examples. This leads me to mention another strand to Charlton's work: the study of instruments and how they are played (see also Charlton 1973, 1988). This is represented by an article on conducting (XIV), taken from *Early Music* and therefore printed in columns. It is graced with seven illustrations, but because of the periodical's more generous page-size, the reduction to the format of this volume makes them hard to appreciate. It is thus harder to reread the article, which is otherwise an intriguing documentary consideration of an aspect of performance practice frequently neglected or discussed with more dogmatism than documentation, a deficiency which Charlton's article makes inexcusable in the future.

There are positive aspects to Ashgate's publication procedure; for one thing, there will be no need to seek out the original versions in libraries for precise bibliographical reference. Each essay is identified by a Roman numeral which appears on every page, so that the volume is not difficult to navigate. Presumably such facsimile assemblage reduced the costs of preparation, and if this is not reflected in the price (which may reflect the publisher's estimate of the likely sales), at least some expense went into preparing a complete index to a volume of which no-one involved in opera of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries should remain unaware.

Notes

1. Multiple pagination is used, for reasons explained on page 242. Page references appear as Roman numerals, to locate the essay, followed by the page number (Arabic).

2. See, for instance, Fulcher (1987), Lacombe (1997), and Gerhard (1998). Mark Everist (1994, 2002) has published on the related repertoire of the Odéon. See the review of the recent English translation of Lacombe (1997) by Mary Jean Speare in this issue of *Current Musicology*, pp. 245–49.

3. The bibliography of Parker and Smart (2001) contains no fewer than seven titles by David Charlton, of which only two (essays I and XIII) appear in the collection under review. The others (Charlton 1982, 1987, 1989, 1990, 1993), as well as

with Charlton's 1992 essay on "rescue opera" further demonstrate the extensiveness of Charlton's work in both the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries.

4. See Rushton (2001:324–37).

5. This presentation to the Royal Musical Association (Charlton 1976) followed close on the completion of his comprehensive treatment of this material in his Ph.D. thesis, *Orchestration and Orchestral Practice in Paris, 1789 to 1810* (1974).

6. Dalayrac is a composer who, like Grétry, has suffered from the fall in his nineteenth-century reception (including an ambivalent reference in the first chapter of Berlioz's memoirs: "cher d'Aleyrac [*sic*]! Et le peuple oublieux des musiciens se souvient à peine de ton nom, à cette heure!") and whose reputation Charlton, in this article and in the *New Grove*, has done much to restore.

7. The translation cited (p. V/1) is from Thomas (1995:19).

8. The primary, though not the only, contemporary documentation of the Querelle was reprinted in Lesure (1984). My own first experience at addressing the Royal Musical Association in London, comparable to Charlton (1976), was "The Theory and Practice of 'Piccinnisme'" (Rushton 1971–72).

9. Among other classic texts of topical analysis cited are Allanbrook (1983) and Agawu (1991).

10. See, for instance, Rice (1998) and Hunter (1999).

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