

Adolphe Adam, Souvenirs of a Musician, Preceded by Biographical Notes Written by Himself (1857)

This posthumous publication is a compendium of twelve articles by the composer Adolphe Adam, collected after his death in 1856 by his widow Chérie Couraud. The anthology presents a modest selection, in light of the some 380 articles that Adam wrote for *L'Impartial*, the *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*, *Le Monde dramatique*, *Le Constitutionnel*, and *L'Assemblée Nationale*. This edition from 1857, lacking a critical apparatus, specifies neither the origin nor the date of the feuillets. The [*Derniers souvenirs d'un musicien*](#) would be published ten years later in the same condition.

The chosen articles are mainly biographical, in the romanticised mode of the monographs published in the *Revue et Gazette musicale* from 1835. The “Notes biographiques” opening the volume (vii-liv) correspond almost exactly to the autograph manuscript conserved at the Bibliothèque-Musée de l’Opéra de Paris (c. 1850, classmark Rés. 2141). They reveal the meandering course of Adam’s education and early career in Paris, prior to his European voyages undertaken for the sake of adventure; in this respect they partially justify the otherwise misleading title *Souvenirs*. They are supplemented by a chronological catalogue of his works.

The ensuing articles cover nearly 500 years of French lyric music, with studies of “Lully’s *L’Armide*”, Nicolas Dalayrac, Rameau, (“A Musician of the Eighteenth Century”, pp. 135–64), Rousseau, Boieldieu, and Hérold. Collectively, they offer an erudite view on the Enlightened century. The composer, Scribe’s contemporary, defends the *ramiste* theatre with its inventive dances, the naive simplicity of Rousseau’s *Devin du village* (pg. 198), and the “forthright, easy, natural melodies” of Dalayrac’s opéras-comiques (pg. 266). Coming from the son of Louis Adam, a harpsichordist and then piano-fortiste who worked with Gluck at the Académie royale de Musique, such a vision stands out as unusual in its time. On the other hand, one finds a gifted storyteller from the age of Dumas in the abundant anecdotes that embellish these scenes of ancien-régime mores. When it comes to Adam’s contemporaries, the study of Boieldieu, his composition teacher at the Paris Conservatoire, becomes a chance to mention various precepts of the French School under the Restoration; having submitted a wildly modulating exercise, the young Adolphe incurs his master’s retort: “But where are the fundamentals, tonality and a theme?”

Finally, three articles cast a revealing and amusing glance at the musical practices of Adam’s contemporaries. We learn of the “plague” of amateur music-making under the July Monarchy: “students, office workers, shopkeepers who prefer such gatherings to the cafés and pubs” (“The Concert of the Amateurs”, pg. 47). As for

the “Musicians of Paris” (pg. 51-63), they are placed within an almost sociological classification of the city’s professions, from the salon to the ball, the church to the opera, complete with comparisons to elsewhere in Europe.

The successive reissuing of the volume—in 1860 and 1868 by Lévy, 1884 by Calmann-Lévy—attest to the lasting popularity of the composer of *Le Postillon de Longjumeau*. But equally apparent is the interest in the “early” repertoire among a readership of connoisseurs, who satisfied their curiosity with regard to Enlightenment composers fallen out of the repertoire, as well as some who had not. During this half century the Parisian revivals of Boieldieu’s *La Dame blanche* and Hérold’s *Pré-aux-Clercs* surpassed a thousand performances.

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Trans. Tadhg Sauvey

Summary

Dédicace de Chérie Adam [au Docteur Louis Véron]

. Notes biographiques

. Boieldieu [*L’Impartial*, 11 octobre 1834, ii/283, p. 1-2.]

. Hérold [*Le Constitutionnel*, 11 septembre 1848, n° 255, p. 1-2.]

. Les concerts d’amateurs. Tribulations d’un musicien [*L’Impartial*, 3 février 1834, ii/33, p. 1-2.]

. Les musiciens de Paris [*L’Impartial*, 11 novembre 1833, I/72, p. 1-2.]

. De l’origine de l’opéra en France [*L’Impartial*, 25 juin 1834, ii/171, p. 1-2.]

. *L’Armide* de Lully [*L’Impartial*, 27 juin 1834, ii/173, p. 1-3 ; 28 juin 1834, ii/174, p. 1-3.]

. Un début en province [*Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*, 27 décembre 1835, ii/52, p. 421-426.]

. Le violon de fer-blanc [*Le Monde dramatique*, 1838, tome 6, p. 369-373.]

. Un musicien du XVIII^e siècle [« Un musicien il y a cent ans », *L’Impartial*, 8 mai 1834, ii/128, p. 1-3 ; 9 mai 1834, ii/129, p. 1-3.]

. Une conspiration sous Louis XVIII [*Le Monde dramatique*, 1837, tome 4, p. 67-72.]

. Jean-Jacques Rousseau musicien [*Le Constitutionnel*, 13 septembre 1851, n° 256, p. 1-3 ; 14 septembre 1851, n° 257, p. 1-3.]

Further reading

Matthieu Cailliez, « Adolphe Adam, porte-parole de "l'école française" de l'opéra-comique. Inventaire et étude synthétique de ses critiques musicales (1834-1856) », dans EVERIST, Mark (éd.), *Music Criticism Network Studies*, n° 1 : *Perspectives on the French Musical Press in the Long Nineteenth Century*, Lucques, Centro Studi Opera Omnia Luigi Boccherini, 2018.

Katharine Ellis, « The Uses of Fiction : *contes* and *nouvelles* in the *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*, 1834-1844 », *Revue de musicologie*, 90/2, 2004, p. 253-281.

Sabine Teulon Lardic, « Du lieu à la programmation : une remémoration concertée de l'ancien opéra-comique sur les scènes parisiennes (1840-1887) », dans TERRIER, Agnès, DRATWICKI, Alexandre (dir.), *L'Invention des genres lyriques français et leur redécouverte au 19^e siècle*, Lyon, Symétrie / Palazetto Bru Zane, 2010, p. 347-385.

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