

Ferdinand Hérold (1791-1833): Overview of Writings

The writings of Ferdinand Hérold are divided into principal sources: his correspondence written between 1804 and 1833, of which the seventy-two letters to his mother compose the largest ensemble known at present; and a [diary](#) kept from the end of 1814 to 1826. To these documents can be added a few reports destined to the administrators of the Théâtre-Italien and the Opéra de Paris, as well as a short piece, [*Cahier rempli de sottises plus ou moins grandes, rassemblées en forme de principes par moi*](#), a set of ideas, rules and prescriptive principles for operatic composition written in Vienna in 1815.

No volume offers a complete collection of this corpus. Several publications by Benoît Jouvin (1868), Arthur Pougin (1906), Julien Tiersot (1924), and France-Yvonne Bril (2012), among others, offer broad overviews. Two recent collections published by the musicologists Hervé Audéon in 2008 and Alexandre Dratwicki in 2009 contain similar selections of texts: large excerpts of the composer's correspondence and diary dating to the period of his two stays in Italy between 1812 and 1815 and in 1821, accompanied by editorial commentary. In the twenty pages of introduction for his volume, Hervé Audéon offers a precise description of the sources and brings up the problem of the sale of Hérold family archives in 1991, which were only partly acquired by the Bibliothèque nationale de France, the remainder of which is inaccessible to researchers. It is therefore no longer possible to consult Hérold's diary, a precious document for which there exists no complete edition. Entire swathes of the composer's correspondence were also missing from the state purchase.

Recipient of the prix de Rome in 1812, four years after Auguste-Louis Blondeau (1808) and eighteen years before Berlioz (1830), Hérold largely describes his formative travels in Italy between 1812 and 1815 in his writings, offering many autobiographical details as well as a survey of musical activity in the major cities of the peninsula, particularly Rome, where he was fascinated by Allegri's *Miserere* sung in the Sistine Chapel during Holy Week, and Naples, where his first opera was staged.

Undertaken in 1821, Hérold's second trip to Italy served as a hiring tour. Accompanist for the Théâtre-Italien, the composer was charged by Giovanni Battista Viotti, then the director of the Opéra de Paris, to recruit a *prima donna soprano* and perhaps a *buffo cantante* for the Théâtre-Italien, a task Hérold fulfilled perfectly with the engagements of Giuditta Pasta and Filippo Galli. Several letters and reports from Hérold, as well as different passages in his diary, offer precise descriptions of qualities and weaknesses of the principal interpreters active that year on the peninsula. As an example, a long and unpublished autograph letter to

the Intendant des théâtres royaux, Baron Louis-Victoire-Xavier Papillon de la Ferté, dated 11 May 1821 in Florence, offers numerous and precise details on Hérold's undertakings to strengthen the troupe of the Théâtre-Italien in Paris. Hérold describes over thirty Italian singers, both men and women then performing in the operas of Florence (Teatro della Pergola), Naples (Teatro San Carlo, Teatro del Fondo, Teatro Nuovo, Teatro La Fenice) and Rome (Teatro Argentina).

The "Italian" writings of Hérold are an interesting complement to Blondeau's *Observations sur les théâtres italiens* (1839) and *Voyage d'un musicien en Italie (1809-1812)*, as well as the chapters XXXII-XLIII of Berlioz's *Mémoires* (1870). As an ensemble, the writings of these three composers offer a coherent vision of musical life in Italy between 1809 and 1832.

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Further reading

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