

Adam, Adolphe (1803-1856): brief presentation of his writings

As a prolific composer and undisputed representative of the *École française d'opéra comique*, Adolphe-Charles Adam (1803-1856) was the author of a substantial number of articles acting that act as a precious indicator of the musical life when European's specialised press was slowly building up. We are familiar with the collection of gathered and posthumously published articles by his widow (Chérie Couraud) in *Souvenirs d'un musicien* (1857) and *Derniers souvenirs d'un musicien* (1859). Their numerous reprints (until 1884) testify of the interest they raised. Nonetheless, other non-public writings were indirectly linked to press such as letters from Adam that also were posthumously published in *La Revue de Paris* (August-October 1903) and later reprinted by J.-M Fauquet (*Lettres sur la musique française*) in 1996. These letters from Adam were destined to his friend S. H. Spiker in Berlin, a writer for the *Spernersche Zeitung*, and they contributed as much to the French cultural influence as to his popularity on the other side of the Rhine.

These three works are only but a small portion of his writing and cannot eclipse the substantial number of unpublished articles. To mention numbers, more than 380 articles, covering the period from 1833 to 1856, came from twenty-four periodicals in which Adam gradually honed his style. He belonged to the editorial staff of the most representative journals, such as *Le Ménestrel*, *La France musicale* (1840-1850), *la Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* (1834-1856). After the bankruptcy of the Opéra-National which he founded (1848), Adam's motivations shifted from the media to financial concerns. He was obliged to devote himself "professionally" to criticism, successively for *Constitutionnel* (48 articles from 1848 to 1852) replacing Fiorentino, then for *L'Assemblée Nationale* (more than 160 articles from 1849 to 1856), a new daily newspaper resulting from the republican insurrection. To this substantial corpus were joined a few scattered paratexts (prefaces of methods), without omitting letters to institutional actors (E. Perrin, T. Gautier, etc.). All of this painted the picture of an artist constantly attracted to his musical passion.

This quantity of articles did not detract from their quality nor the diversity in terms of points of view: Critical, historical or "journalistic". If his report of Parisian lyric theatres is unsurprisingly predominant in the *Constitutionnel*, or as a "mardiste" of the *L'Assemblée Nationale*, he was also interested in other musical environments such as churches, orphéons, military bands, bals de Musard, gatherings, etc.. The popularisation of "early music" culture (from Rameau to Sedaine), the composer's curiosity for his contemporaries and the pragmatism of the entrepreneur formed the lines of force irrigating this substantial corpus. For his relations valued the social history of the musical world, past («*Les théâtres lyriques sous la 1^{re} République* », 1848) as well as present, in an open-mindedness that was that of an actor intuitively adept of the European free trade. His truly lively style allowed for

short stories (« *La jeunesse d'Haydn* ») nor the intriguing anecdote that held the reader spellbound as in for example, the time he collaborated on the opening of Boieldieu's *La Dame Blanche*. From the report of his trip to St. Petersburg and Berlin (1840) to the organological novelties (the saxhorns, the harmoniphon), from the backstage of theatres to the expectations of audiences, nothing escaped his observation.

Although he did not refuse to be confronted with his counterparts in the press (Castil-Blaze), his lucidity with regard to his fellow musicians was enforced with informed argumentation and convictions that flouted Romanticism. For our time, it shaped in hollow the aesthetic framework of the "middle genre" of the *opéra comique* (according to O. Bara's expression), which irreducibly set him against the artist and the critic Berlioz. However, this lucidity was nuanced by unrestrained admiration – for G. Rossini, G. Donizetti, D. F. E. Auber, G. Meyerbeer, J. Offenbach – or cautious (L. Cherubini, F. Halévy, G. Verdi), to the point of a certain restraint towards H. Berlioz, who willingly criticised him. His benevolence towards the younger (A. Thomas, F. Monpou) or his clear-sightedness regarding Ch. Gounod's first steps reflected the adaptability of a former Second Prix de Rome, quickly launched in his career. Finally, as a shrewd entrepreneur, Adam did not forget to promote himself with a certain naivety, by nevertheless associating himself with his partners such as the founders of companies ("*Société des concerts de musique vocale, religieuse et classique du prince de la Moskowa*", 1846), librettists, lyric and dance artists ("*Représentation d'adieu de Mlle Taglionï*", 1844).

During the Third Republic, Arthur Pougin restored an anthology of his articles as an appendix to the biography he devoted to him and summed up the spirit of it: "As a writer, he precisely displayed the qualities that distinguished him as a composer: a good-natured and unpretentious spirit, an easy style (less brilliant, however), movement, grace, and even that communicative emotion that captivated the reader as well as the spectator". (A. Pougin, *Adolphe Adam: sa vie, sa carrière, ses mémoires artistiques*, p. 264).

The historicising and social vision of the musical fact thus singled out Adam the critic in the French space. Confronting his writings with those of Berlioz, Castil-Blaze, Ortigue and their colleagues seemed fruitful for the history of musical taste.

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16/09/2017

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For further reading:

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Adam, Adolphe, *Derniers souvenirs d'un musicien* (Paris : Michel Lévy frères, 1859)

Adam, Adolphe, *Lettres sur la musique française (1836-1850)*, Joël-Marie Fauquet éd. (Genève : Minkoff éditions, 1996).

Cailliez, Matthieu, « Adolphe Adam (1803-1856) : inventaire et présentation de ses critiques musicales », présentation dans *Nineteenth-Century Music Criticism*, Centro Studi Opera Omnia Luigi Boccherini et Palazetto Bru Zane (Lucca, 2015).

Cailliez, Matthieu, « 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, SALA, Massimiliano (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.

Pougin, Arthur, *Adolphe Adam : sa vie, sa carrière, ses mémoires artistiques* (Paris : Charpentier, 1877).

Teulon Lardic, Sabine, « [Adolphe Adam et l'Allemagne : allers et retours Paris-Berlin autour de l'opéra-ballet *Die Hamadryaden*](#) », Agnès Terrier & Alexandre Dratwicki éd., *Art lyrique et transferts culturels 1800-1840*, colloque de l'Opéra-Comique de Paris, 2011. Online on Bruzanemediabase.

To quote this article : Sabine TEUDON-LARDIC, "Adam, Adolphe (1803-1856): brief presentation of his writings", Dictionary of Writings by Composers, Dicterco <https://dicteco.huma-num.fr/person/1988>, ed. E. Reibel, last edited : 28/01/2021