

Reyer, Ernest: Notes de musique (1875)

This [collection of musical criticisms](#) by Ernest Reyer was published in 1875 by the booksellers and publishers, Charpentier and Co. In its preface the composer candidly admits the reason for this publication, that "Today, more than ever, musicians have plenty of leisure time for more than music." This disillusioned comment is perfectly justified from his personal experience. After the success of his ballet, *Sacountala* (1858), on a libretto of Theophile Gautier, followed by that of his comic opera, *La Statue (The Statue)* in 1860, which was performed sixty times before Reyer stopped its run in a fit of anger over the slovenliness with which the director, Leon Carvalho, allowed it to be performed, the composer did not see his works performed in France for almost twenty-five years. His opera *Erostrate* was rejected by the director of the Paris Opera, Alphonse Royer, but was performed in August 1862 for the opening of the new theater that Edouard Benazet had built at the Casino of Baden Baden. That same theater brought out Reyer's *Maitre Wofram* the next year and invited him to conduct a concert in 1865. However, the Franco-Prussian war of 1870 put an end to the composer's activities in Germany. In the aftermath of the Commune (1871), the artists of the Paris Opera, now organized as a self-governing body, put on *Erostrate* inexpensively and with very poor staging. The work was dropped after two performances. Reyer, who was then working on his opera *Sigurd*, was unable to have it accepted by the successive directors of the Paris Opera. This long dry period ended in 1884 with the very successful creation of *Sigurd* at the *Theatre de la Monnaie* in Brussels, which was followed by performances in Covent Garden, Lyon, Monte-Carlo and finally Paris in June of 1885. By publishing this collection of his writings, Reyer, who could not get his works performed, was perhaps trying to remind his colleagues of his existence, while striving to be elected at the *Académie des Beaux-Arts*. He had withdrawn his candidacy in 1869 in favor of that of Felicien David. In 1872, Victor Massé was chosen instead of him and so was François Bazin in 1873. He was elected in November 1876 to the seat previously occupied, first by Hector Berlioz, then by Felicien David.

By illustrating his artistic preferences, this book is much like a portrait of Ernest Reyer. It is composed of three parts: first, a fictional story, *Histoire d'un musicien (Story of a Musician)*, which has many autobiographical aspects; then a section entitled *Voyages (Travels)*, which underscores Reyer's taste for trips abroad, such as *Souvenirs d'Allemagne, (Souvenirs of Germany), Voyage au Caire (Travel to Cairo)* and for hikes in the countryside: *L'Alsace. - Les Vosges (Alsace. - The Vosges)*; then comes *Études et Portraits (Studies and Portraits)* where there are no less than three articles on Berlioz, and a series of single articles on Rossini, Auber, Fétis, Carafa and Théophile Gautier, as well as studies on *Struensée (Meyerbeer)*,

Lohengrin (Wagner), *Fidelio* (Beethoven), the *Requiem* of Verdi and Reyer's own *Erostrate*. As a postlude, entitled *Petites Notes (Small Notes)*, the composer gives us eight amusing anecdotes.

Following the publication of this collection there appeared a long article by Ernest Legouvé in the *Journal des Débats* on [May 4](#), 1875, two notices in the *Revue et Gazette Musicales de Paris* on [April 18](#) and [April 24](#), 1875 and two notices in the *Figaro*, one on [April 26](#), 1875, in which the preface of the book is reproduced, and the other on [April 28](#), 1875, in which the last anecdote of the collection is quoted. Unless I am mistaken, there does not seem to be a translation of *Notes de musique* in any language. Despite the success of this collection, which prompted the publisher to issue a second edition in the same year, Reyer did not publish a second volume of his critical writings. Shortly before his death in January 1909, he allowed his friend Emile Henriot to publish another volume which appeared the same year at Calmann-Lévy under the title [Quarante ans de musique \(Forty Years of Music\)](#).

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