

## **Adolphe Adam, Derniers souvenirs d'un musicien (Last Souvenirs of a Musician, 1859)**

The second posthumous volume of Adam's writings released by the publisher Lévy, this work is a compilation of eleven articles by the composer-critic. Like its predecessor *Souvenirs d'un musicien* (1857), the articles are taken from the various periodicals for which Adam had written between 1835 and 1849, including *La France musicale*, *La Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*, and *Le Constitutionnel*. They were chosen by the publisher, doubtless at the behest of the composer's wife Chérie Couraud-Adam, with no critical apparatus nor indication of source.

The selection criteria—biographical in nature, as with the earlier volume—chiefly concern lyric composers active from the Enlightenment to the Restoration: Rameau, Monsigny, Gluck, Gossec, Berton, Boieldieu, Cherubini. Adam's trademark in his feuilletons was to combine biographical anecdotes with a thorough knowledge of the works under consideration. His remarks on musical style shows a surprising analytical acumen, as for example in his discussion of the recitatives, airs, dances, and symphonies of three stage works by the then-neglected Rameau (pp. 52-67). His descriptions are romanticised, even theatricalised, as seen in his account of the genesis and preparation of Gluck's *Iphigénie en Tauride* (pp. 86-92) in the presence of the young Méhul. Here, the narrative (published in the *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* in 1835) may have drawn on the recollections of Louis Adam (father of Adolphe), a keyboardist close to Gluck at the Académie royale de Musique.

Among the various composers discussed, Adam had arranged works by Monsigny and Berton for revival at the Opéra-Comique and Opéra-National (1847); promoting these two therefore represented an effort to maximise the staying power of this repertoire. Adam took Monsigny's *Le Déserteur* as an opportunity to expound a "profession of faith" according to which "theatre music properly conceived . . . must not be judged and appreciated by its intrinsic value alone, but as a poetic expression of an action which it is to enliven by its movement, warm with its rays" (pg. 140). The reader traversing these articles will find pathways that cut across the grain of styles and periods: from Rameau to Méhul via Gluck, from Monsigny to Auber via Cherubini and Boieldieu, and so on. Without saying as much, Adam positions himself as their direct descendant, by virtue of his knowledge of his forerunners.

Leaving France behind, an excursion to Vienna in "La jeunesse d'Haydn" follows the progress of a headstrong youth in his escape from the sordid chapels where choirboys are exploited and then thrown away. Is it possible to detect the influence of the serialised novel in this tale? Adam had been the playmate of Eugène Sue in

their youth, and at this time *Les Mystères de Paris* (1842) held sway over every genre of journalism and literature (see for example Albéric Second's *Les Petits mystères de l'Opéra*).

The curiously narrow selection of contemporaries does not do justice to Adam's interest in his own times, but explains the otherwise misleading title of *Souvenirs*. Here the Italians—Rossini, “the most complete musical genius to have ever existed” (pg. 256) and Donizetti—claim all the attention, along with Boieldieu. For the benefit of his study of the latter's *La Dame blanche*, Adam the former Conservatoire student deploys a juicy anecdote about the work's overture, whose creation in the course of a single night is credited to the Boieldieu's students, probably Théodore Labarre and Adam himself. Adam offers glimpses into the inner workings of the theatres, the “exacerbated classicism” of the Conservatoire in the 1820s, and the system of production that drove composers to write quickly (as in Donizetti's *La Favorite*). Attention to the social role of music reaches a peak in “Le concert donné par A. Marrast à l'hôtel de la présidence” (1849), at which event Conservatoire laureates and workingmen's brass bands fraternised under the watch of the citizens of the Second Republic. In the course of these articles there emerges a sociological vision of musical life, ahead of its time if one recalls the date of first publication.

The popularity of these vignettes is attested to by the volume's reissuing in 1871, by the same publisher. Its strategy of informing while entertaining has appealed to generations of readers.

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Trans. Tadgh Sauvey

### **Summary**

. La jeunesse d'Haydn [*Le Constitutionnel*, 6 octobre 1848, n° 280, p. 1-2 ; 9 octobre 1848, n° 283, p. 1-2.]

. Rameau [« Études musicales : Rameau », *La Revue contemporaine*, 15 octobre 1852, tome 4, p. 135-153.]

. Gluck et Méhul.- La répétition d'*Iphigénie en Tauride* [*Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*, 24 mai 1835, ii/21, p. 173-180.]

. Monsigny [« Études sur quelques musiciens français du xviii<sup>e</sup> siècle. Monsigny », *La France musicale*, 9 avril 1843, vi/ 15, p. 121-123.]

. Gossec [*Le Constitutionnel*, 15 février 1849, n° 46, p. 1-2 ; 16 février 1849, n° 47, p. 1-2 ; 17 février 1849, n° 48, p. 1-2.]

. Berton [« Berton. *Montano et Stéphanie* », *Le Constitutionnel*, 8 juin 1849, n° 159, p. 1-2 ; 9 juin 1849, n° 160, p. 1-2 ; 10 juin 1849, n° 161, p. 1-2.]

- . Cherubini [*La France musicale*, 20 mars 1842, v/ 12, p. 109-111.]
- . Rossini.- Le *Stabat Mater* [*La France musicale*, 7 et 28 novembre 1841, iv/ 45 et 48, p. 385-387 et 417-419.]
- . *La Dame blanche* de Boïeldieu [*Le Constitutionnel*, 8 juillet 1848, n° 190, p. 1-2.]
- . Donizetti [*Le Constitutionnel*, 2 mai 1848, n° 123, p. 1-2.]
- . Concert donné par A. Marrast à l'hôtel de la présidence (1849)

### **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 (ed.), *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.

Emmanuel Reibel, « Entre histoire anecdotique et littérature : le genre des "petits mystères" de l'Opéra », dans FERON, Séverine, TAIEB, Patrick (dir.), *Écrire l'histoire du théâtre. L'historiographie des institutions lyriques françaises (1780-1914)*, Territoires contemporains - nouvelle série [en ligne], 27 novembre 2017, n° 8, disponible sur : <http://tristan.u-bourgogne.fr/CGC/prodscientifique/TC.html>.

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<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Lyon, Symétrie / Palazetto Bru Zane, 2010, p. 347-385.

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