



Describing the extraordinarily varied ecology of the eighteenth-century English musical stage, Michael Burden reflects on the lack of public appetite for English-language opera in the Italian (that is, all-sung) style, while Estelle Joubert deals with a rather more productive encounter between homegrown German and imported Italian idioms in her account of Dittersdorf's *Doktor und Apotheker*. In small but telling ways, however, the collection works to nuance the concept of Italian dominance. For one thing, there is no chapter devoted to opera in Italy itself; in its place, Anthony DelDonna provides an account of opera in Naples. While it might be argued that Naples and Italy were, operatically speaking, all but synonymous from the 1730s onwards, the concentration on local genres – including dialect comedy and the peculiarly Neapolitan form of Lenten opera – may prompt the reader to reflect on the nature of Italian musical cosmopolitanism. More subversively, Louise K. Stein's and José Máximo Leza's rich account of opera in the Hispanic world has the effect of inverting the centre/periphery structure implicit in much opera historiography, reminding the reader that for a substantial period Italy (specifically Naples) was marginal with respect to the more powerful Spain. Stein and Leza give the reader much to ponder regarding the effects of and opportunities arising from the importation and exportation of operatic works, a topic that has been too little studied. In fact, the treatment of opera on the Iberian peninsula and in the New World emerges as one of the book's great strengths. The demonstration of the role of Spanish taste as a crucial mediating and conditioning factor in the dissemination of Italianate style ought to serve as a salutary corrective to the persistent north European focus of most opera histories.

Taken as a whole, this collection will do much to broaden its readers' outlook. However, the book is marred by problems of readability, at times requiring the reader to pick a way through prose that is anything but pellucid. Some awkwardness appears to result from over-literal and unidiomatic translation (and mistranslation: on a number of occasions, the Italian *melodramma* has been rendered, incredibly, as 'melodrama'). But mixed metaphors and tangled idioms are also a feature of more than one of the English-language contributions (the delicious 'this idealized sphere served as a platform' (187) deserves recording for posterity). Confronted with phrases such as 'staging this tale implies that action should prevail on abstract dichotomies' (72–73), the frustrated reader may be left wishing for evidence of more muscular editorial intervention.

MARTIN DEASY



Eighteenth-Century Music © Cambridge University Press, 2011
doi:10.1017/S1478570610000461

MICHAEL FEND

CHERUBINIS PARISER OPERN (1788–1803)

Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2007

pp. 408 + CD-Rom, ISBN 978 3 515 08906 7

In modern revivals, and in critical interest, a handful of Cherubini's French operas far outstrip his earlier output for major Italian theatres and London, as well as works composed after c1805. *Médée* has been appropriated for the Italian language (starring Maria Callas) with a Bavarian's recitatives, but it has also been revived with its original spoken dialogue. The long-lived Conservatoire director Cherubini may appear a sober fellow beside contemporaries such as Méhul and Lesueur, but in musical and theatrical terms his operas are no less compelling and possess virtues that may yet prove more enduring. Michael Fend's serious investigation of their aesthetic and cultural context, and of the works themselves, is thus most welcome.



Fend's first four chapters deal with twentieth-century reception, historiography of the period and theoretical discourse from the 1780s. Some of this argument was presented (in English) to the 1997 Congress of the International Musicological Society (published as 'The Problem of the French Revolution in Music Historiography and History', in *Musicology and Sister Disciplines: Past, Present, Future*, ed. David Greer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 239–250). In over one hundred pages of *Cherubini's Pariser Opern* he discusses the musical significance of 1789, noting the prior use of 'revolution' in discourse on opera, the aesthetic positions of composers, the use of Rousseau's much-quoted dictionary and the thinking of Diderot, Chabanon, Lacépède and others – though Cherubini was surely more affected by the actual practice of predecessors such as Gluck and Salieri. Cherubini was also conscious of his contemporaries' work. He composed in a competitive environment, and in retrospect he seems to have outstripped others who worked the same subjects in officially sanctioned rivalry, on the pattern of the *Iphigénie en Tauride* operas of Gluck and Piccinni. J. C. Vogel's *Démophon* was commissioned first but performed posthumously, after Cherubini's *Démophon* (1788), a markedly different adaptation of Metastasio's *Demofonte*. Fend discusses Vogel's opera in some detail before proceeding to a closer study of Cherubini's, but he only mentions in passing Rodolphe Kreutzer's rival, and initially more popular, *Lodoïska*. (*Eliza* by Peter Winter, unknown to *The New Grove*, is mentioned on page 218, note 2.)

Exclusive focus on Cherubini does bring out a striking aspect of his oeuvre: its variety. *Démophon* is the last significant contribution to the reformed, post-Gluck but pre-Revolutionary *tragédie lyrique* of Piccinni, Salieri and Sacchini; Cherubini skilfully combined the lyricism and passion that defined the genre. His next important works were *opéras comiques*, with spoken dialogue. *Lodoïska* (1791) is traditionally identified as the first important 'rescue opera' of the Revolutionary years, and marks the inception of operatic romanticism, according to Dent. It and *Les Deux Journées* (1800) indelibly marked the *Leonora/Fidelio* operas of Paër and Beethoven. But the differences between Cherubini's works are at least as marked as any similarity, and rescue is a feature shared by *Eliza* (1794), where the forces of nature, rather than domestic or political tyranny, are the danger. If anything, the contrast between works and genres is even more marked with *Médée* (1797), the shorter comedies, and the *opéra-ballet Anacréon* (1803).

Fend's subheadings point to this variety, and his own corresponding variety of treatment. *Lodoïska* is discussed in chapter 6 under the rubric 'Parodie, szenische Illusion und "Musique d'effet"' (Parody, Scenic Illusion and 'Effect Music'), suggesting that the solemn romanticism of its literary source was subject to ironic treatment in this *comédie lyrique*. Selected arias and ensembles are analysed before a further excursion into the theory of 'musique d'effet'. The opera, directed towards a particular public response, is convincingly associated with the contemporary 'Gothic' novel, and so with the desire to shock, and a musical power unprecedented to audiences who did not yet know *Don Giovanni* or Act 2 of *Idomeneo*. With *Eliza* the rubric in chapter 7 is 'Literarische Motive, musikalische Form und die Suche nach dem "Erhabenen"' (Literary Motives, Musical Form and the Search for the 'Sublime'). Fend explores the generally agreed weakness of the poem and finds mitigating factors. The opera climaxes with an Alpine storm, prolonged thunder being carefully prescribed in the score. Fend concentrates his analysis on this scene, a passage of continuous opera that develops orchestral motives not for their own sake but to match the progress of the action. Rescue of a somewhat pallid hero makes a more satisfactory outcome than the tragedy originally intended. It is hard to see how this scene could be staged: it requires an illusion of great distance, with the hero and his rescuers in peril from an avalanche. Today only film could do it justice, yet it seems to have satisfied early audiences, and perhaps encouraged further horrors in the next opera.

The longest chapter is devoted to *Médée*, which only superficially recalls the pre-Revolutionary predilection for operas based on Greek myth. The sorceress, to whom modern Colchis (Batumi) has raised a statue, appeared in an Athenian setting in Quinault's *Thésée*, reset by Mondonville (1765) and Gossec (1780). An earlier episode in her career, culminating in the murder of her children, is the subject of Euripides's tragedy, which is the basis for Pierre and Thomas Corneille, Jean-Marie-Bernard Clément and Cherubini's librettist Hoffman, whose debt to his predecessors is carefully traced. *Médée* is indeed the 'Hauptwerk eines Komponisten des ernsten, hohen Stils' (masterpiece by a composer of the serious, high style) that Fend suggests



(253). Fend sees Cherubini as attracted to a dramatic trope of which Medea is an extreme form: a character in an alien environment, imprisoned, thrust aside, but undefeated – in this case neither united (*Lodoïska*) nor reconciled (*Eliza*), but horribly avenged. Like Euripides's chorus, we feel Medea's pain, however much we deplore her actions, and the music rises to the occasion, causing accusations in contemporary criticism of 'musical terrorism'. In terms reminiscent of early Gluck reception in France, critics picked out the vehement orchestration and lamented a lack of lyricism (*chant*; see page 296), disregarding the inappropriateness of attributing charm to such a heroine.

It is hard to say whether it was this criticism, or the changed culture of a stable (imperial) regime, that caused Cherubini and his peers to change direction. Chapter 9 includes three pieces under the heading 'Auf der Suche nach der Komischen Opera' (Searching for Comic Opera), and the relatively short chapter on *Les Deux Journées* is 'Nostalgie zum Patriarchat', reflecting the paradox that (compare *Fidelio*) the person rescued is a nobleman while the rescue is accomplished by citizens of lower social standing. As in the pre-Revolutionary model, Grétry's *Richard Coeur-de-Lion*, and in *Léonore/Fidelio*, this allows an admixture of natural, rather than ironic, comedy. Despite romantic and postmodern fascination with *Médée*, *Les Deux Journées* was for long Cherubini's best-known work; but for Beethoven we might see it more often. As it is, the music most often heard is probably not even the overture, but the quotation in Hummel's trumpet concerto.

Although *Anacréon* (1803), an adventure in the 'erotic', failed badly, Fend pays careful attention to theorization of its genre and its literary antecedents. The final work before Cherubini temporarily left Paris, hoping perhaps for employment in Vienna or Eszterháza, was a successful ballet score, *Achille à Scyros* (1804). This goes outside the title's time-frame, but ballet is not opera, and discussion of this genre, scarcely less important in French theatre, reminds us of the importance of spectacle. Fend's conclusion picks up from there, and reviews questions raised earlier – the interpretations of Dahlhaus and Knepler, Cherubini's 'physical force' (citing Abbate) and the fact that the elements in the extraordinary operas of the 1790s (Méhul's as well as Cherubini's) that seem most interesting today were implicitly rejected in their later output and shunned as models in the developing pedagogy of the Conservatoire (see page 379), so that new waves of musical shock (Berlioz, for instance) continued to scandalize authority (Cherubini).

At his best, Cherubini was equal to the task of overcoming the threat to musical coherence presented by the dramatic requirements of villainy, storm and sorcery. Fend interrogates his perceived affinity with Austro-German instrumental music and the association of arias with sonata form (citing Rosen, Knepler and Dahlhaus), preferring a metrically based model, as he demonstrates for an aria in *Démophon*. He analyses the overture to *Les deux journées*, a typically operatic variant of the sonata dynamic (319), and treats orchestral music in the context of Cherubini's welding of poetry, music and drama which positions him securely in the line of dramatic musicians from Gluck to Wagner, even concluding (380) that he was 'an antithesis to Beethoven'.

The book contains an impressive bibliography of literary, aesthetic and historical sources. It is severe in design: the text is broken only by detailed tables, with three pages of music examples (pitchless for the *Démophon* aria mentioned above, and citing instrumental and vocal motifs from the storm in *Eliza*). Despite the emphasis on spectacle there are no illustrations, except for the title-page of *Médée* on the splendid bonus CD-Rom: this contains most of the works discussed, in original full scores (but a vocal score for *L'hôtellerie portugaise*), together with indices, handy for finding individual numbers. A French or English translation would be welcome, but citations from those languages are mostly in the originals, and Fend's German is distinguished by its clarity. This wide-ranging discussion and close reading of these remarkable operas should mark a defining point in modern Cherubini reception.

JULIAN RUSHTON

