

## EDITORIAL



Recently I was advising a small group of students who were preparing to take the national exam that would qualify them for the position of music teacher at a secondary school. One part of the exam involves a comparative commentary on three musical works relating to a topic chosen by the candidate. Everyone involved in music education in France knows that the Music Department at the National Education Ministry (Inspection Générale de la Musique) has always been concerned with combatting social and cultural inequalities, and that classical music must be presented to younger generations with the least possible chronological and historical context in the name of cultural relativism. (This remarkable ideal, filtered through each successive stage of the educational system, sometimes inspires students to write that Louis XIV ordered Lully to compose operas in order to reduce the nobility to slavery – a radical reading of Norbert Elias indeed. But this is not my topic here.)

I was right on the mark in proposing three musical works that might be related to Johann Sebastian Bach's music: Procol Harum's *A Whiter Shade of Pale* (1967), Anton Webern's 1935 orchestration of the six-part *ricercar* from Bach's *Musical Offering* and the first movement of the Third Brandenburg Concerto by the Swingle Singers (*The Bach Album*, Swing CD5, 1991). When the question arose as to what each extract had taken from Bach's music, the students unsurprisingly stated that the Second Viennese School's interest in Bach's counterpoint played a major role in the development of the twelve-tone system. They also stressed the mastery of Procol Harum's organist, Matthew Fisher, in transferring baroque stylistic features to a progressive-rock song. Furthermore, one of them compared the song to an unspecified sacred aria and attributed the amazing success of 'the most-heard recording in all public places during the past 75 years' (Paul Sexton, 'Procol Harum Tops "Most Heard" List', *Billboard* 121/16 (2009), 15) to its ability to evoke absolute love by using many musical topics associated with the expression of religious fervour. Indeed, the song's organ melody is said to refer to the 'Aria' movement from Bach's *Orchestral Suite in D major BWV1068*, as well as to the chorale prelude *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme*, BWV645. But one can recognize in this song the spirit, if not the letter, of many other arias from Bach's sacred music. Likewise, the mildness of the Hammond organ's sound at the beginning (a true principal 8'!) may remind us of Bach's sacred organ music, and of some *adagio* movements as well (for instance, from the *Toccatina, Adagio and Fugue in C major, BWV564*). Finally, all of the students recognized the swing qualities inherent in Bach's Third Brandenburg Concerto.

What strikes me with these 'popular' arrangements is that the musicians have captured something essential about Bach's music – phrasing in the case of Procol Harum, and rhythmic ingenuity in the case of the Swingle Singers – as well as, if not better than, many mainstream 'classical' performers. Moreover, these appropriations of Bach's music are highly creative, comparable to the best art-music appropriations from the twentieth century. Such creative and intimate responses to the music of the past are inconsistent with the sacralization of iconic composers, whose images and music are used as symbolic representations for political, ideological or commercial purposes. The ideology underlying the process of what is called *patrimonialization of culture* ('*patrimonialisation de la culture*') has raised a huge debate in France about the country's ability to maintain a lively and dynamic relationship between people and the art of the past.

How music of the past acts in the present is not only a postmodern debate. It was a central issue of public debate in eighteenth-century France, and it has long occupied musicologists and historians who study this period. Seminal in this respect is the work of William Weber. In "'La musique ancienne" in the Waning of the Ancien Régime' (*Journal of Modern History* 56/1 (1984), 58–88) Weber describes performances as late as the 1770s of operas by Jean-Baptiste Lully, André Campra, Jean-Joseph Mouret and others as a 'second-hand classical tradition' (59) that helped to discourage the programming of new works. After tracing the political and social origins of the old repertory at the Paris Opera, he points to the cultural isolation of France, 'the



weakness of its royal and aristocratic patronage', 'the system of developing new works' and, above all, to 'the role of the Opera as a symbol of the state' (61).

In view of the numerous performances of Lully's operas, the scarcity of new works and the absence of foreign composers, Weber's statement of a lack of renewal and creativity in the repertoire of the Paris Opera has become a commonplace in musicological writings, despite Rameau scholars' claims to the contrary and the more nuanced picture offered by David Charlton (*Opera in the Age of Rousseau: Music, Confrontation, Realism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012)). A similar claim of conservatism and of a canonical approach to programming has been made in the case of the Concert Spirituel, whose programmes incorporated many motets by Michel-Richard de Lalande (died 1726), Jean Gilles (died 1705), Joseph Bodin de Boismortier (died 1755) and Abel-François Fanton (died 1757) until the early 1770s (Debra Nagy, 'Music from the Regency to the Revolution, 1715–1789', in *The Cambridge Companion to French Music*, ed. Simon Trezise (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 88–110). I added my voice to this indictment in a study of the repertoire of the Royal Chapel, particularly in my focus on the 'quartier des morts' established in 1748 to perform motets by Lalande, Campra, Henry Madin, Charles-Hubert Gervais and a few others, which lasted until the 1780s (Thierry Favier, *Le motet à grand chœur (1660–1792): Gloria in Gallia Deo* (Paris: Fayard, 2009), 307–321).

However, it seems to me that the issue of creativity deserves further consideration with regard to the status of ancient works lingering in the repertoire. Were these works simply manifestations of 'political and social nostalgia', as Weber believes? Did they forestall innovation in the principal genres of French music? Were they considered to be the ultimate models, requiring young composers merely to imitate them? And did such interaction between modern and ancient music remain unchanging over more than fifty years?

Of course not. At the Concert Spirituel, for example, the programming of Lalande's motets, their manner of performance and the critical discourse they elicited never stopped evolving until the early 1770s. The opportunity to hear these works, previously restricted to the happy few who could attend the offices of the Royal Chapel, contributed to the popularity of the Concert Spirituel from its very beginning. For about twenty years the public heard an increasingly large number of Lalande's motets, performed more and more frequently. Symbolizing the musical art of the Royal Chapel but performed as published in 1729, these works were initially considered modern music. And they did not disappear even as the amazing success of Jean-Joseph Cassanéa de Mondonville's motets from the 1740s and the introduction of new motets by younger composers, some of them well trained in orchestral music, brought a breath of fresh air into the repertoire. On the contrary, Lalande's works were brought into compliance with modern expectations of the genre, testifying to a creative appropriation rather than a sacralization. Surviving scores show a variable number of deleted sections (up to fifteen, in a version of the *Miserere* performed around 1750!), changes in movement order and in voice types, the removal of vocal ensembles and the addition of new airs. No younger composer of motets enjoyed the success of Lalande and Mondonville, but by the 1760s only a few of the former's motets were still being performed, in their entirety and always taking pride of place at the end of a concert. Critics underlined the composer's iconic status and newly emphasized his connection with the political and religious values of Louis XIV's reign.

The same may be said about the repertoire of the Académie Royale de Musique, where in the 1750s new operas by Rameau and Mondonville were balanced by revivals of *tragédies en musique* by Lully and Pascal Colasse. Charlton has drawn attention to the 1757 revival of Lully's *Alceste*, which led to a complete reconceptualization of staging that opened the door to Gluck's neoclassicism. As with Lalande's motets at the Concert Spirituel, the scores used for revivals of Lully's opera during the following decades show many revisions and additions.

Much evidence suggests that, at least until the late 1750s, performances of Lully, Lalande and some of their contemporaries constituted a living tradition that must have stimulated, rather than inhibited, the creativity of younger composers. This seems to have changed in the 1760s, when hagiographic reports about performances of Lalande's motets at the Concert Spirituel, offering special praise for the composer himself, stood in sharp contrast with the works' infrequent appearances on concert programmes and their formal



presentation as masterpieces, based rather on routine than on experimentation. However, the exquisite motets by François Giroust programmed during this decade show respect for traditional features of the genre while introducing innovations, particularly in the use of the orchestra. It was only after 1773 that the Concert Spirituel progressively turned against the genre in the face of harsh accounts in the press.

May we finally discard the vision of a frustrated French nation suffering under the mounting pressure of an ossified tradition until Gluck's arrival in Paris finally caused the cork to pop, releasing a flow of modernity and cosmopolitanism? Or did Charles Burney accurately sum up the situation when he remarked of a performance he heard in June 1770 of Joseph-Nicolas-Pancrace Royer's opera *Zaïde* (1739) at the Académie Royale de Musique that 'it is somewhat wonderful that nothing better, or of a more modern taste, has been composed since' (Charles Burney, *The Present State of Music in France and Italy* (London: Becket, 1773), 30)?

I suggest that it would be wise to look more closely at the evidence. Consider that when Burney visited Paris, the Concert Spirituel was a place where music criticism flourished, but it was no longer a creative centre for the motet. Progressive works by Etienne Le Preux, Joseph Meunier d'Haudimont, Bernard Jumentier, Nicolas Roze, Nicolas-Jean Lefroid de Méreaux and others were rarely, if ever, presented by the organization. On the other hand, the wonderful collection of motets composed by Giroust for the Royal Chapel indicate that here modernity and tradition were still interacting profitably in the late 1780s. And what of the supposed French insularity vis-à-vis foreign composers? Such a view is out of line with the excellent account in the *Mercure de France* of a performance of Franz Xaver Richter's motet *Super flumina Babylonis* at the Concert Spirituel in 1769, just before the composer's appointment at Strasbourg Cathedral. Neither does it take into account the musical activities of Franz Beck in Marseille and Bordeaux from the early 1760s, or those of Antonio Lorenziti – whose father studied with Pietro Locatelli and served the Prince of Orange in The Hague – at the Cathedral in Nancy in the same period. Then, too, some well-informed amateurs had an astonishing number of foreign works in their private music collections.

It is also relevant to observe the small number of *tragédies en musique* premiered at the Académie Royale de Musique between 1758 and 1774. Charlton has pointed out the transformation of the traditional model into what he calls 'literary operas' (315), particularly those whose librettos turn towards politics and history, such as Pierre-Alexandre Monsigny's successful *Aline, reine de Golconde* (by 1766) and François-André Danican Philidor's *Ernelinde, princesse de Norvège* (1766). Charlton's work paves the way for a historiographical reconsideration of the period by taking into account sub- and mixed genres alongside the *tragédie en musique*; by crossing music with literary history; by favouring a multidisciplinary approach encompassing staging, scenery and performance practices; by accounting for connections between the *tragédie en musique*, the new *opéras comiques* and activities in private theatres; and by tracking steps in the 1760s 'towards European integration' (301).

But do we adequately understand the relationship between ancient and modern musicians when we consider the early 1770s as a turning-point not only for the repertoire of the two main musical institutions, the Concert Spirituel and the Académie Royale de Musique, but for French music as a whole? I imagine that some of my colleagues would say no! How, then, can we account for the persistence of this one-dimensional view of the role of tradition in eighteenth-century France? Part of the answer, I believe, lies in French musicology's recent past. The archivist Norbert Dufourcq, who was professor of music history at the Conservatoire National Supérieur in Paris from 1941 to 1975 and, as such, the mentor of numerous young French musicologists, wished to insert the music of the *Grand Siècle* into the national cultural narrative on the same terms as literature and the fine arts. His essentially patrimonial approach to music history had a significant influence on French musicology that is still felt today. Taking little interest in eighteenth-century music, Dufourcq considered that the permanence of works by Lully, Lalande and others was evidence of the era's artistic sterility and decadence, particularly with regard to sacred music. By contrast, scholars who were more influenced by social and political history considered the same phenomenon as evidence of the monarchy's conservatism and a major obstacle to musical progress. For years, any consideration of the status of ancient music in eighteenth-century French practice was caught between these two conflicting positions, or, to exaggerate somewhat, between a 'right-wing *Grand Siècle*' and a 'left-wing Enlightenment'. Since this



issue of ancient vs modern music was so often discussed in the eighteenth century, both sides in the debate could find good literary sources in support of their positions.

Nowadays no one still agrees with Dufourcq that the 'Concert Spirituel killed sacred music' ('La musique religieuse française: 1660–1789', *La Revue musicale* 222 (1953–1954), 109), and no one regards the conservatism of the Académie Royale de Musique in the late 1760s as merely a political commitment. The debate is over, and there seems to be little interest in reviving it. Yet I think that our understanding of the role of tradition in eighteenth-century French music needs to be furthered, and that this should be done in a more open way, by applying a variety of methodologies and drawing appropriate comparisons with situations in other locales. In a nutshell, our approach should be far from a patrimonial one.

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