



his careful attention to details outside of statistics has corrected the flawed paradigms through which revolutionary theatre has been studied until now. With this monograph, Darlow has changed the landscape of musical scholarship on the French Revolution, and as such his work has serious implications for scholars who study French music.

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BÉATRICE DIDIER

LE LIVRET D'OPÉRA EN FRANCE AU XVIII^E SIÈCLE

Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2013

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Ever since the pioneering work of René Guiet, Patrick Smith and Cuthbert Girdlestone, the libretto has been recognized in eighteenth-century French opera scholarship as an important object of study in its own right. Béatrice Didier, author of *La musique des lumières* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1985), returns to opera in this, her first book-length study on music since that pioneering publication. The book is divided into various loosely defined areas. First is 'Les librettistes', which comprises some synthetic discussion of the cultural and social place of librettists in general, then an examination of the two major names – Quinault and Metastasio – before finally a study of four eighteenth-century writers who were also librettists (Fontenelle, Voltaire, Diderot, Rousseau). This is then followed by a study of the libretto itself, with chapters covering 'justifications' (by which Didier means both prefaces to operas and their literary sources), the different genres (the fifth of these, curiously, being entitled 'La période révolutionnaire'), languages and staging. Finally the question of myth is considered, with chapters covering the *merveilleux*, Rameau and 'Le premier romantisme'.

As this summary will hopefully have made clear, the book is structured as a survey of the genre of opera considered in its widest sense. Whilst 'though-composed' *tragédie en musique* is, of course, prominent, Didier does not neglect dialogue opera, ballet or other genres, and her chronological parameters allow for discussion of Revolutionary opera as well as revealing continuities across the whole century and into the nineteenth. This kind of broad-brush survey is increasingly rare in academic publishing, and here it does not prevent the author from giving close attention to under-represented examples, rather than remaining bound by the canonical works (which, however, also receive interesting comment, if not systematic readings). By grouping her material under these large headings, Didier is able to trace patterns across the period, for instance by looking into the dominant classical sources relied on by librettists: Ovid, naturally, but also Virgil and (to a lesser extent) Plutarch. Such patterns provide lines of enquiry for future research: that of a growing trend for Plutarchian texts after Rousseau, or a greater reliance on novelistic sources after mid-century, as compared with theatrical in the earlier period. French opera's long-standing but ambiguous relationship with Italian music is also considered here, with a sub-chapter on Metastasio and some more diffuse comments on the various quarrels which traversed the century. This Didier achieves without plodding over what, for specialists, is now very well-trodden territory. In this respect the book is a rare achievement: a wide survey that can also interest the expert. Indeed, on several occasions (pages 28, 36, 104) Didier reminds the reader that her aim is to illustrate certain tendencies rather than to offer a systematic analysis; the documents used to do so are often under-studied and bring fresh insights to the question, and the specialist will often notice connections that may previously have been overlooked. The first section,



concerning the status of the librettist, is typical in this regard, citing quite lavishly from various of the *règlements* of the Opéra, including from the (as yet unstudied) Thermidorian period, which surely only a handful of us have ever read.

There is, I feel, a price to be paid for such organization. Whilst the term Didier most often uses for her approach is 'sondages', this as often as not designates not case studies so much as assemblages of sources from disparate periods. Indeed, the evidence sometimes feels rather jumbled, and there is a danger of confusion for the reader not already acquainted with some of the material. Beaumarchais's experiences, for example, are invoked at the beginning of a section entitled 'censures', thereby skewing the rest of the chapter (all of whose references come from the post-1750 period) and creating the quite unwarranted sense that censorship was fundamentally a late eighteenth-century issue. The section on Rousseau the librettist discusses his less well-known *Pygmalion* and the texts concerning Gluck, both on the grounds of the superior quality of the former and the obscurity of the latter, and hardly mentions the *Devin du village*, which is reserved for brief discussion later (it does not cite Jacqueline Waeber's penetrating analyses of Rousseau's *mélodrame* either, which is doubly unfortunate). As a consequence, discussion of this work is not really grounded in Rousseau's wider aesthetics, which gives it a somewhat disjointed feel. Similarly, the section on the libretto is grounded on several fascinating prefaces, for instance by Pellegrin and Cahusac, but Grimm's article 'poème lyrique', although acknowledged as crucial by Didier, is mentioned only twice, in passing, in the entire book (152, note 189; for Grimm's article for the Diderot and d'Alembert *Encyclopédie*, volume 12 (1765), 823–826, see the University of Chicago's ARTFL Encyclopédie Project (Spring 2013 edition), ed. Robert Morrissey, <<http://encyclopedie.uchicago.edu>>), and Rousseau's articles for his own *Dictionnaire de musique* (1767) are never discussed. For such reasons, I wonder if the impact of some of Didier's points will be as full as it deserves to be.

Certain aspects of the book are puzzling. Even on a second reading, I still do not fully understand why Francesco Algarotti is discussed alongside Pellegrin and Cahusac in a chapter on librettists (which does not include discussion of Quinault, who is saved for chapter 2, 'Nostalgies de grandeur'): as an opera theorist and the author of *Saggio sopra l'opera in musica* (1755), he naturally had much to say about 'reform' libretti, but little about librettists. The *querelle des bouffons* is described as absurd (62) and vain (111), which readers may find excessive, while regrettably Laura Naudeix's pathbreaking study of the dramaturgy of the *tragédie en musique* (*Dramaturgie de la tragédie en musique* (1673–1764) (Paris: Champion, 2004)) is never cited.

Any book on this kind of subject raises the question of how one analyses an opera libretto in the absence of the score. The term 'librettology' has been a recognized term since the work of Ulrich Weisstein and others (see, for example, Weisstein, 'Librettology: The Fine Art of Coping with a Chinese Twin', *Komparatistische Hefte* 5/6 (1982), 23–42). Sometimes here one has the impression that Didier's approach is akin to the more traditional view, that of Girdlestone (frequently invoked; see Cuthbert Girdlestone, *La tragédie en musique, considérée comme genre littéraire* (Geneva: Droz, 1972)) and others, according to which the libretto is a 'literary genre' deserving of attention in its own right. (We are told as much on page 54.) Certainly eighteenth-century readers read printed libretti, as we are reminded. But it does not follow that this is a particularly good test of what a libretto 'is', or that reading one away from the music is an 'épreuve à laquelle peu de livrets sauraient résister' (test to which few libretti are equal; 71). The point, surely, is the one made forcefully by Naudeix: that a libretto is, more than a 'literary genre', a 'potential' opera, whose dramaturgy is created in fusion with a score, and deserves attention according to this potential for music drama. But this implies a supplementary set of questions, such as attention to prosody and to what contemporaries called 'la coupe', or the 'cut' of lines for music, and also to structures of emplotment and to the design of text with particular codified musical forms in mind. Of these matters, unfortunately, readers will not find as much discussion as they might hope for in the present study, although there is a chapter entitled 'Langages et mise en scène', which comprises brief discussion of the general problem of writing text for music and some stylistic considerations.



The final section, concerning myth, tackles a subject on which Didier has already published: several of her published works contain discussion of what she names a ‘transfert du sacré’ (a transferral of sacrality) in the eighteenth century. *Le merveilleux* was of course constitutive of the genre of opera in all contemporary theoretical pronouncements, by contradistinction with spoken classical tragedy, but Didier is making a wider point, centred upon the ways in which opera was intrinsically concerned to ‘déréaliser’ (de-realize) characters (216), which I take to mean abstracting them from a realistic reading, and thereby keeping the material in a realm of fantasy. Music is seen as adding an ‘aura’ to words and allowing for multiple possible significations (223), and allowing opera, via myth, to attain metaphysical ‘vérités’ (truths; 232). Discussion of symbolism, abstraction, personification and allegory allows Didier to sketch a conception of opera which brings out the less restrained, fantasy elements of the form. It seems to me that this approach is in tune with various developments in cultural history, from the well-known ‘cat massacre’ discussed by Robert Darnton (‘Workers Revolt: The Great Cat Massacre of the Rue Saint-Séverin’, in Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (London: Penguin, 2001), 75–104, cited by Didier on page 224) to those recent studies interested in the less rationalistic sides of the Enlightenment. Among the latter, for instance, is Dan Edelstein’s recent volume in the series *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* (Dan Edelstein (ed.), *The Super-Enlightenment: Daring to Know Too Much* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2010)), which Didier does not cite, but which I take to be interested in a similar set of problems: bluntly, that the eighteenth century, far from exiling fantasy, magic or the occult in the name of some monolithic rationality, was actually traversed by precisely those more marginal but still present cultural and epistemological structures. For me, this final section is one of the more original and thereby rewarding passages of the book as a whole.

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BERTIL VAN BOER
HISTORICAL DICTIONARY OF MUSIC OF THE CLASSICAL PERIOD
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‘His music has been little studied’. This sentence and phrases like it (‘almost unknown’ or ‘little explored’) appear on nearly every page of Bertil van Boer’s *Historical Dictionary of Music of the Classical Period*. Indeed, one might do well to hand the volume to students looking for an eighteenth-century dissertation topic: unknown names abound. As I was browsing through the entries, I was struck once again by just how much our narrative of eighteenth-century music history rests on a small handful of composers, decades of research notwithstanding. Even without expecting to find an undiscovered genius lurking amidst the thicket of names, it is hard not to wonder how much richer and deeper our understanding of the period would be if we paid more attention to these ‘little studied’ musicians.

This *Historical Dictionary* is one of a series from Scarecrow Press relating to literature and the arts – currently fifty-nine of them, on art and architecture (7), cinema (19), literature and theatre (21), radio and television (5) and music (7). The music volumes cover choral music, sacred music, Broadway musicals, English music from 1400 to 1958, Russian music, modern and contemporary classical music and the current volume on the classical period. In the Preface, van Boer admits that attempting to compile a dictionary for this period is a ‘madman’s folly’ for a number of reasons, ranging from its ill-defined chronological