

REVIEWS



BOOKS

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RAMEAU, ENTRE ART ET SCIENCE

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The past few years have witnessed the arrival of several landmarks in Rameau scholarship, converging on the two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the composer's death in 2014. These include Cynthia Verba's study of Rameau's operatic dramaturgy (*Dramatic Expression in Rameau's Tragédie en Musique: Between Tradition and Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013)) and Sylvie Bouissou's life-and-works survey (*Jean-Philippe Rameau, musicien des Lumières* (Paris: Fayard, 2014)), as well as an ongoing research and performance project at the University of Oxford (The Rameau Project, directed by Jonathan Williams). Joining this group is the present collection of articles originating in a three-day conference held in Paris and Asnières-sur-Oise during March 2014, one of many events celebrating the 'année Rameau'.

The trope of 'between-ness' announced by the title – positing a Rameau who is caught or who navigates 'between art and science' – suggests the complexity of grappling with the composer and theorist. Whereas earlier scholars such as Cuthbert Girdlestone may have privileged musical works over theory, Rameau scholarship is now broadly characterized by efforts to establish connections between them, as if attempting to render an elusive and fractured subject whole. Such is the stated aim of Verba's 2013 study, for instance, several of whose key points are recapitulated in her contribution to this volume ('Aesthetics and Rational Design in Rameau's *Hippolyte et Aricie*: Implications for Performance and Production'). The idea of between-ness also highlights the tendency in Rameau scholarship to foreground contestation and mediation, whether in Rameau's exchanges with Rousseau and the *encyclopédistes* or in his confrontation with the tradition of the *tragédie en musique* and the musical tastes of audiences at the Paris Opéra.

One of the volume's strengths lies in its inclusion of historians of art and literature as well as musicologists and music theorists: taken as a whole, it presents a panorama not only of Rameau's prodigious output and activities but of the various methodologies and research programmes currently at work on this multifaceted legacy. In a short review of a text as substantial as this, a survey and assessment of each contribution would be impossible. In what follows, then, I would like to single out several main threads and issues that strike me as being significant for the current state of Rameau research.

If the 'whole' Rameau remains an elusive object of reconstruction and analysis, the dizzyingly complex source situation is partly responsible. Source studies have accordingly occupied a major position during the past several decades. Demonstrations of archival virtuosity abound in the volume. Prominent among them is the report by Bouissou and Pascal Denécheau on manuscript sources and copyists, which serves as a sort of prospectus and sample of the *Dictionnaire des copistes*, an online database under development that will serve the *Opera omnia*. Denis Herlin contributes a fascinating piece on a recently discovered manuscript source of the 1754 version of *Castor et Pollux*. Also valuable in its distillation of a complex topic is Isabelle Rouard's account of the sources of *L'art de la basse fondamentale* and this treatise's relationship with the *Génération harmonique* and the *Code de musique pratique*.



Perhaps one of the most obvious shifts in the field is the more immediate presence of Rameau in contemporary musical practices. As Thomas Christensen notes, his ‘music has moved from the fringe where it was known in the past to only a few specialists or connoisseurs’ (‘A Theorist for Our Times’, 329). Christensen lucidly sets out the scope of Rameau’s increasing relevance for music theory over the past two decades. A similarly synoptic vision of the production history of the stage works over roughly the same time span, charting the migration of at least several works from the ‘fringe’ into familiar territory, could have been an effective addition to the volume, perhaps as an introduction. It is surprising in this regard that Rameau’s comic operas *Platée* and *Les Paladins* pass by without sustained comment – but then, who can fully predict the outcomes of conferences? Even so, useful engagement with Rameau’s place in performance history does appear in Élisabeth Giuliani’s survey of Rameau discography between 1904 and 2014 and in Verba’s contribution, already cited, which assesses several scenographic choices in the 2013 Glyndebourne Festival production of *Hippolyte et Aricie*. A lingering impression after finishing the volume is that more work could be done to bring treatment of Rameau into dialogue with opera scholarship more generally, even granting the ‘siloiing’ effect of specialization that seems inevitable in this type of collection.

Several articles either attempt to realize a synthesis between theory and musical practice or reflect upon the terms of what a possible synthesis would entail – principally those articles placed in the book’s final section, titled ‘Méthodes d’analyse et interdisciplinarité’. Raphaëlle Legrand’s contribution here, ‘La théorie de Rameau: un outil d’analyse?’ (The Theory of Rameau: A Tool for Analysis?), examines several analytical readings in Rameau’s treatises and then perceptively considers the possibilities and limitations of forging links between his theoretical models – so often shaped by pedagogical objectives or ‘speculative reflection’ (464) – and his musical practice. As the article progresses, without quite arriving at the analysis of *Castor et Pollux* promised in the abstract, we see a larger and larger gap opening up between theoretical discourse and composition. Legrand’s discussion of Rameau’s readings of the monologue ‘Enfin il est en ma puissance’ from Lully’s *Armide* complements Béatrice Didier’s wide-ranging if somewhat scattershot survey of critical literature on the scene. Further consideration of polemics with Rousseau appears in Benoît Dratwicki’s copiously documented inventory of critical responses to operatic singing (‘Chanter Rameau à l’époque de Gluck (1764–1785)’) and Christophe Corbier’s discussion of exchanges between Rameau and Rousseau on the Greek tetrachord system, which helpfully clarifies both the terms and the significance of a highly technical argument.

Abstracts are given in both French and English at the back of the volume, along with an index of names and a select bibliography. A subject and title index, as well as biographical notes on the contributors, would have also been welcome. The volume’s utility for specialists is self-evident, for whom further research is aided by extensive documentation. For other readers, certain articles give a bird’s-eye view of aspects of the field, as with Christensen’s contribution and the opening of Legrand’s, or extend hermeneutic insights applicable to other repertoires (Vincent Dorothée, ‘Rameau, ou les virtualités d’une musique de l’œil’ (Rameau, or the Potentialities of Visual Music)). As a successor to *Jean-Philippe Rameau, colloque international* (Paris: Champion, 1987), which gathered papers delivered in Dijon on Rameau’s tercentenary in 1983, this volume fulfils an important task in offering working reports from the field and fresh sets of findings to perennial questions, mapping out a range of issues that face new generations of scholars.

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