

## Preface

This Companion is based on the assumption that ‘France’ is and has been a recognisable entity over many centuries. It is therefore of value to talk about a ‘French music’ even many centuries before the country that we now know as France existed. In truth, we are talking about activities that occurred within or in the vicinity of modern France, but will take the liberty of espousing the view that this activity is somewhat distinct from that of other lands now known by such unequivocal titles as Germany and Italy. Roger Price poses the question of when France might ‘be said to have come into existence’ and proceeds to answer it in detail over many pages. He tentatively offers the view at the outset that by ‘the late Middle Ages, a vague sense of loyalty to a particular dynasty might have been created and, derived from the Hundred Years War, a sense of being different from other peoples’.<sup>1</sup> This is a helpful guide, but many upheavals were to be undergone before the modern country, so beloved and yet seemingly so beset by problems, came into being. Nevertheless, the early ‘French’ polyphonists and many of their twentieth-century counterparts heard their music in the medieval splendour of Notre-Dame Cathedral built on the central island of Paris. We may also imagine a common thread in the country’s magnificent and diverse landscape with its mountains, vineyards, forests and medieval bastide towns looking down on valleys with small farms and elegant stone buildings. Qualities that constitute a French cultural identity, evident in a certain style of text-setting and general refinement, for instance, also encourage the belief that some things have retained a familiarity over many centuries.

The art of writing music history may have receded at this time of intense topical specialisation and anxiety about the very act of telling a historical story, but for this *Companion to French Music* it was revived in order to present a broad, chronological coverage of almost 2,000 years rich in incident and artistic productivity. Each author of the historical part (Chapters 1–9) and the section on opera (Chapters 10–11) was presented with the daunting task of writing about often great tracts of time in a few thousand words. They did so in a variety of ways. While some authors focused on broad institutional issues and the general character of repertoires, others sampled representative works in some detail. All these chapters offer revealing treatments of their subjects and – this was a priority – launch points for those who wish to explore further.

The division of the historical periods follows traditional practice, with the first break occurring at the advent of polyphony. After that the old markers have sufficed very well, up to the early modern period, when the sheer quantity of activity compressed the periods covered, to the extent that Chapter 8 is devoted to just thirty-two years of history (1914–45), in contrast to Chapter 1, which falls a little shy of 1,000. Opera has been so important in France that it seemed both more economical and effective to separate it from the chronological chapters; this separation allows two specialists in the field to dwell on the evolution of opera's institutions and repertoire, which would have been a tough call for the authors of Chapters 4–9.

Inevitably, this Companion's emphasis is on 'art' music, but when we hear of nuns writing religious music that is taken up in the streets by the general populace and sung raucously, and of monarchs, no less, who fancied themselves as shepherds or others in the rural community, adopting or adapting traditional instruments like the hurdy-gurdy, we realise that the familiar modern divisions between 'popular', 'traditional' and 'art' music can be misleading. So although traditional and popular music each have their own chapter, some of the writing encourages us to allow these stylistic boundaries to fade away, for it often seems unlikely that contemporary audiences and practitioners always shared our experience of stylistic demarcations.

Having entrusted nine chapters to a broad chronological survey rather than attempting to achieve the coverage through topical divisions (for example, 'motet', 'secular song'), the last part of the Companion focuses on five topics and themes that are crucial to an understanding of French music. While they are inevitably mentioned in the historical survey, making areas such as music at the court in the *ancien régime* and in the church after the Roman occupation the subject of detailed treatment enables the intricate relationship between musicians and society to be studied in depth. An added advantage of this approach is the opportunity in the chapter devoted to the church (Chapter 15) to explore the political evolution of Gaul through various early formulations that many centuries later evolved into the modern republic of France. Other chapters in this part deal with manuscript sources and calligraphy, the aesthetics of the *Siècle des Lumières* and music in Paris and the provinces in the nineteenth century, an essential corrective to the often Paris-centric emphasis of other chapters.

The long gestation of this Companion was darkened by three deaths. Frank Dobbins, in addition to assisting Fabrice Fitch with Chapter 3, wrote a highly detailed, potentially invaluable study of music publishing for this Companion. As it stood the draft chapter was too long for

inclusion and would have needed drastic pruning, so, as his health was failing, Frank requested leave to withdraw the chapter and make other use of it. Aspects of publishing are therefore discussed elsewhere, spread out among several chapters. Frank Dobbins died in 2012. Michael McClellan had produced a first draft of Chapter 6; he was about to start revising and adding to it when his sudden death was announced, also in 2012. With his family's agreement, I decided to attempt to finish the work myself. The completed chapter turned out to be roughly equal parts McClellan and Trezise. Finally, I have to mention the shock and hurt of my wife Debbie's very sudden death on 11 February 2010, which made any progress impossible for a long while.

Working with so many distinguished specialists in French music has been a great pleasure. It goes without saying that the project is indebted to their patience, diligence, freely offered advice and expertise. I am especially grateful to authors who came in late to the project in response to changes of mind and other circumstances beyond anyone's control. And I am sure we all wish to thank Vicki Cooper and Fleur Jones of Cambridge University Press for their unstinting support and encouragement. I would also like to thank Mark Flisher for picture suggestions, Julian Rushton for advice on Chapters 6 and 7, Sharon Krummel for some very helpful editorial suggestions, my colleague Michael Taylor at Trinity College for his constantly stimulating conversation, and Shauna Caffrey and Stephen O'Brien for helping with the index.

Simon Trezise

**Note**

<sup>1</sup> Roger Price, *A Concise History of France*, 2nd edn (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 14.

