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Book Reviews

Katherine Bergeron, *Voice Lessons: French Mélodie in the Belle Époque* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). xiv+400pp. $29.95.

With *Voice Lessons*, Katherine Bergeron raises anew the complex and delicate matter of *la mélodie française*.[1]

Focusing on the years 1890 to 1910, she profiles, in a precise and masterly manner, a particular poetics: the pursuit of song that represents the absence of melody, of a *diction* – *enunciation*[2] in English – a way of uttering that represents the absence of 'voice' and of emotion, of a supreme expressivity founded on the absence of externalization and on silence. Her consideration of the French *mélodie* commences with *La Chanson d'Eve* of Fauré (1910), continues with Debussy's *œuvre* and concludes with Maurice Ravel, showing how his *Histoires naturelles* (1906) and *Trois poèmes de Mallarmé* (1913) depart from the predominant model, as does Debussy with the *mélodies* following *Pelléas et Mélisande*: from pre-war to cubism, when another ideal superceded the impulse of the 20 years that, for Katherine Bergeron, constitute the core of *la mélodie française*. She does not strictly follow the chronological order of the appearance of the *mélodies*, because her purpose is less to write a history of *la mélodie française* than to determine their essential aesthetic foundations.

In this way, Bergeron's approach stands out from other approaches, most notably that of Dutch musicologist Fritz Noske, a trailblazer in the study of the *mélodie* and a pioneer in the analysis of the genre, who sought to embrace, at once, all of the nineteenth century.[3] Michel Faure, for example, has already remarked that the genre of the '*mélodie française*' saw a unifying revolution in the 1870s: between 1830 and 1870, all sorts of vocal pieces were called '*mélodies*', and sometimes it was difficult to distinguish between the *romance*, *hymne*, *cantique* and *chanson*.[4] For instance, some pieces published as '*melodies*' in this period differ considerably with respect to form, subject matter and even instrumentation. Indeed, '*romances*' continued to be published in the late nineteenth century, and some of them really deserve the name '*mélodie*'.

Katherine Bergeron does not enter into this debate, but suggests that the word '*mélodie*' must not be understood as 'a type of vocal piece', but as 'a vague and captivating quality of the voice' (p. 6). In doing so, she separates herself from

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[1] A companion website (http://www.oup.com/us/companion.websites/9780195337051/?view=usa) offers access to recordings of *mélodies* discussed in the book and performed by author Katherine Bergeron with accompanist Dana Gooley.

[2] *Enonciation*, in French, means the inscription of subjectivity in speech; it is precise and theoretical, and does not necessarily imply something audible.

[3] See Frits Noske, *French Song from Berlioz to Duparc*, trans. Rita Benton (New York: Dover, 1988), originally published in 1954 under the title *Mélodie française de Berlioz à Duparc* by North Holland Publishing Company, Amsterdam, and Presses Universitaires de France, Paris.

[4] Michel Faure, 'Mélodie', in *Dictionnaire de musique en France au XIXe siècle*, ed. Joël-Marie Fauquet (Paris: Fayard, 2003): 768–77.

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other observers who seek to characterize it by a more exacting relationship to the text, or by a type of musical accompaniment to the text. She thus also underscores the remarks of Graham Johnson, who reminds us, quite rightly, of the impact of Rousseauian theories, according to which words and music are intimately bound on the understanding of the *mélodie*.[5] Focused primarily on the voice and on the quality of enunciation associated with the *mélodie* beginning in the 1890s, she departs also from more sociological studies, like those developed by Michel Faure and Vincent Vivès in their *Histoire et poétique de la mélodie française*.[6] The aristocratic and '*salonard*' aspect of the French *mélodie*, little by little marginalizing the *chanson* toward the lower-class suburbs, means less in the view of Katherine Bergeron; she seeks to qualify the connection to speech that is operative in the French *mélodie* of those years. What does it mean 'to speak', what does it mean 'to sing' in this particular repertoire? These are the novel and extremely pertinent questions whose answers are the fruits of her labour. In this manner, she highlights a rupture that had been perceived by contemporary composers themselves: Saint-Saëns, for example, was perplexed by the evolution of his beloved student Fauré: 'I will never get used to listening to these singers sing … Allowing even if the interpreters pronounced, one hears nothing of what they say';[7] or again, regarding *Pénélope*: 'To force going through all the keys without ever stopping, one experiences an insurmountable fatigue.'[8]

The book unfolds in five chapters. Katherine Bergeron begins with a probing analysis of *La Chanson d'Eve* by Gabriel Fauré, which she positions as an epigraph of the genre: she shows how Fauré seeks the first song of the world, which is also the first word of the world, and which are words enunciated without reflection – 'that which sang' even before 'Eve' sang. All of Katherine Bergeron's efforts consist in explaining that primal quality of song, and define the *mélodie* as the construction of a type of subjectivity.

The second chapter returns to the reconstruction of the French language in the 1880s. Proceeding from well-chosen examples, we are plunged into a cultural inquiry of France in that era. In a brand-new Republic, which had to erase the humiliation of defeat by Germany, construct an efficient educational system and then was quickly shaken to its core by the Dreyfus affair, Katherine Bergeron shows how attention paid by composers to the French language was rooted in a renewed desire to unify the French and pronunciation among the rural classes trained by the 'hussards noirs' of the Republic.[9] The notion of *sincérité*, to which

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[5] Graham Johnson, *A French Song Companion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000): 34–6.

[6] Michel Faure and Vincent Vivès, *Histoire et poétique de la mélodie française* (Paris: Centre national de la recherche scientifique [CNRS], 2000).

[7] Unpublished letter to Jacques Durand, 12 Mar. 1913, cited by Jean-Michel Nectoux in *Camille Saint-Saëns et Gabriel Fauré, Correspondance, 1862–1920*, 3rd ed. (Paris: Klincksieck, 1994): 26.

[8] Unpublished letter to Charles Lecocq, ibid.

[9] The term 'hussards noirs' refers to the cadre of public school instructors of the Third République, formed following the 1905 Law on the Separation of Church and State, which established secularism as a fundamental civil principle in France, and alludes to fifteenth-century Hungarian cavalrymen known for their devotion as well as their severity. The notion reflects a militant, anticlerical secularity, advocating the French Republic (revolutionary and Jacobin) over tenacious regionalism.

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she rightly accords capital importance for understanding the aesthetics of declamation, is an ideal that was cultivated in children and adolescents so that they might be able to judge the value of a work of art, and thereby, an ideal of democratic citizenship, characteristic of at least two generations before the cataclysm of 1914.[10]

The third chapter is devoted to the changing aesthetic of the 1880s. The novelty is not only musical but also poetic, and the *vers libre* must be understood in terms of what it brought to music. In a remarkable and rather innovative manner, despite the usual separation of poetry and music in research, Bergeron demonstrates how the aims of composers followed those of poets. She does not limit herself to the musical metaphor that dominated the Symbolist impulse of the era, as it concerned words or pictorial representation. She wishes to understand what the invasive musical metaphor really means: to bring about a new rapport with reality, that of its intrinsic self and not its eloquence. In this aesthetic, singing must be as close as possible to speech; but the poem itself rejects metric clarity, and, as with Verlaine, Rimbaud or Mallarmé, it was based on a new way of hearing, on phonemes specific to the French language: it functions, with the written word, to bring forth a language which is in direct link with meaning, at risk of ruin, as with Mallarmé, in chance and silence, or, as with Rimbaud, in madness. '*Sincérité*' implies evanescence. 'Music' must be 'spoken' to be 'true', but what is said is only silence – one really 'says' nothing and does not impose meaning.

Next, in the fourth chapter, Katherine Bergeron analyzes in a very convincing manner the relationship of these aesthetics with theatrical declamation of the era, that of Sarah Bernhardt for example, of which she shows that the grandiloquent monotony that one might reproach today is in fact an extremely precise attention paid to the pure potentiality of the pronounced word, a neutrality of will that has nothing of tedium because of its sheer presence.

The final chapter seeks to determine an endpoint for that aesthetic of truth, *sincérité*, of silence, of the *mélodie* without melody, the heart of the matter in *Pelléas*. Already within the *œuvre* de Debussy, after *Pelléas*, she analyzes the *Colloque sentimental*, an *adieu* to a passed love of which one remembers little, as an emblem of the history of the *mélodie française*. With Ravel, and the *Histoires naturelles* most notably, the notion of '*sincérité*' is no longer pertinent, and the relationship between the spoken voice (*voix parlée*) and the sung voice (*voix chantée*) is conceptualized differently, stressing the differences instead of seeking to erase them. In effect, 'l'ironie devient une nouvelle sincérité' – 'irony had become the new sincerity' (p. 335). Thus, she also re-reads Roland Barthes: whereas Barthes seeks to stand outside history, Katherine Bergeron wants to show how the art of the '*mélodie*' is deeply rooted in history, and especially in history of language. She also reminds us of one possible reading of Barthes, involving the semiologist's hearing of the baritone Charles Panzéra, which would highlight the history of diction more than the post-structuralist elaboration of the sign (pp. 62–4, 115–16, 186–7 and 250–51).

The book concludes with the swan song represented by Fauré's cycle *Mirages* (1919), which she analyzes in the musically and historically well-argued manner

[10] Carlo Caballero devotes the first chapter of *Fauré and French Musical Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) to the role of *sincérité* in that composer's art; see 1–56. Quoted by Bergeron on p. 54.

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of Jean-Michel Nectoux,[11] nevertheless faithful to her own issues, as a thoughtful farewell to the aesthetic that he had so powerfully contributed towards bringing into existence: 'These melodies would continue to project a confidence, or optimism – even sincerity – that neither Ravel nor Debussy could any longer seem to muster' (p. 321). But, in contrast to Nectoux, who insists on the unity of the work, she analyzes the final song, *Danseuse*, and its mechanical ostinato, in the light of the new world, that of the Faune, turned in 'well, a little cubist' (p. 336).

This very structured journey is convincing. One is moved by the analyses within, passing from the laboratory of l'Abbé Rousselot at the Théâtre Antoine, to the reading of the *letter* from *Pelléas* in the song 'sans en avoir l'air' of Mélisande, to the Verlainienne phonetics with the *Chansons de Bilitis* (pp. 163ff). Katherine Bergeron has succeeded in producing a coherent, yet complex project, at times apparently contradictory (since the *fin-de-siècle* aesthetic involves a diction of saying nothing, of uttering silence), nevertheless always remaining concrete. By doing this, she also provides tools for understanding the story of the reconstruction of language from the era of the first recordings. Saussure (a student of Rousselot) and Derrida are mentioned; Orpheus also, and the oxymoron that he represents: complete love for Eurydice cannot be eternal, completion of an intense desire can only be an illusion: the project of *la mélodie française* is situated at the heart of that first rift of language and desire.

But before addressing all of that, the remarks one might venture are not in the least critical: it is rather more a matter of initiating debate, which this book invites by its extraordinary richness. The identification, from an American viewpoint, of the specifically French character of this aesthetic of diction, itself arising thanks to the substantial contribution of interpreters of non-French origin, like Mary Garden, Maggie Teyte, Claire Croiza, Reynaldo Hahn, etc., and forgotten in the emergence of the consumer-oriented society wide open to Anglo-Saxon influences of the post-war period, is a most interesting phenomenon. In fact, one might probe its national, indeed nationalist character. It required someone from outside – in this case an American voice – to highlight the fact that this aesthetic of diction has a 'nationalist' character, even if it has been upheld as much by foreigners as the French.

One might also seek to resituate all of this in a larger context: the question of the line between the spoken and the sung also extends to all of Europe in that era: consider, for instance, *Pierrot Lunaire*, whose text dates from 1884 and whose music dates from 1912. The notion of timbre (on which *Sprechgesang* also rests) becomes that which distinguishes the spoken from the sung, since pitch and duration are no longer pertinent criteria. Symbolism, Expressionism, Impressionism, etc., are they not, also, the manifestation of a profound questioning and divided along the lines of that which is individual, and that which is the speaking individual – thus the core of the problem of enunciation? Where would these then be situated exactly, in the specifically French context, in order to understand the difference between the spoken and the sung? In other words, to what extent is all of this so specifically 'French'?

One might question the chronological boundaries. Bergeron explains them at length and in a very convincing manner. But already with Berlioz, who in

[11] Jean-Michel Nectoux, Gabriel Fauré: *Les Voix du clair-obscur* (Paris: Fayard, 2008): 568: 'cette utilisation discrète d'un motif cyclique rapproche *Mirages* des cinq ''vénitiennes'', de trente années antérieures'.

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La Captive, for instance, invents a declamatory posture of 'absence', by a very subtle play between that which would be the 'sung' and that which would be the 'spoken'; the *Chanson de Marguerite* from *La Damnation de Faust*, like that of Mélisande, must be impersonal, an air sung by a disinterested singer; the *Nuits d'été* also play in a very subtle fashion with all that will be developed by Massenet, Fauré or Debussy, and might also include irony (cf. 'les pleurs d'argent de l'arrosoir' in *Le Spectre de la rose*). It is from Verlaine that Ravel gained the ability to emphasize consonants over vowels. Perhaps, then, she might be able to refine her analysis: it is clear that the genre '*mélodie*' does not mean precisely the same thing in the time of Berlioz, or Gounod or Fauré. Bergeron makes this obvious in a most convincing manner with specificity in regard to the era immediately preceding the war, concerning the generation of compositeurs who immediately followed Saint-Saëns, Chausson and Franck. But is even that division so very clear? It would be necessary to demonstrate this isolation over the whole of the repertoire. Furthermore, why exclude Poulenc with these chosen chronological boundaries? And does *L'Horizon chimérique* (1921) of Fauré not return completely to the aesthetic which she describes, although it appears much later? Katherine Bergeron thus invites us to rewrite a more subtle and expansive history of the genre of '*la mélodie française*', one more orientated towards the conception of declamation than has been the case up until now. And she raises a new question: in what way is the French language itself an intrinsic carrier of this aesthetic of 'nothing', of 'silence'? The type of diction that is associated with the *mélodie*, and which she describes so aptly, existed before and continued beyond those chronological boundaries that she has given herself. How, then, should one appreciate the nationalist character and identity, thus dated, to which she refers? The aural differences among the great range of '*mélodies*' are striking, but one awaits a second volume that refines again the categories that she implements and further illuminates the originality of the 20 years studied.

In seeking to capture the global spirit of an *époque*, Katherine Bergeron escapes the traditional dichotomy between the 'spoken' and the 'sung' according to which 'melody imitates declamation', or inversely, 'declamation is very musical', phenomena that one encounters in the era of Lully listening to Champmeslé, as well as Proust listening to Sarah Bernhardt. Methodologically, it is a very important and very stimulating point: she succeeds at escaping the 'text/music' dichotomy, a dichotomy in which Barthes, exploring the notion of expression, risked going astray. This is an obstacle over which many commentators stumble when they seek to situate poems set to music in the literary hierarchy, or when they commit themselves to finding an almost Schenkerian coherence (sometimes very illuminating) to musical development, ignoring the words. If one leaves a methodological opposition between the 'spoken' and the 'sung', as is often the case, one cannot go very far. Seeking, on the contrary, a specificity of the general conception of the language of a given era, which may be declaimed in the theatre or in the opera, Katherine Bergeron proposes to us a model of an approach, which remains to be extended and refined.

In addition to aesthetics, Katherine Bergeron also describes a method of singing and of diction, in reality much more extensive, of which one might wonder about its relationship with contemporary French singing (which utilizes the microphone) as well as melodramatic declamation. The author of this review is able to attest that, in the 1980s, Irène Joachim, that eternal Mélisande, still taught the art of singing the 'silent *e*' ('*e muet*') in order to make them ring without 'the bellowing of bovines' (French cows, by the way, say 'meuh euh euh'!); Christiane Eda-Pierre passed on the art of detoning the voice in order to

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render it intimate and impalpable, 'but without breath', in certain moments of certain *mélodies*. The declamation that Katherine Bergeron describes is an exacting art, above all one in which the listener does not miss a single word that is sung: she recalls the exaggerated rolling of the 'r', (an 'r' articulated on the hard palate (without too much nor too little breath support), which renders it audible without shifting the voice; but she thus invites a much more global study of that declamation. For instance, one might add the art of pronouncing the non-aspirated 'h' to let it be more felt than heard, in order to permit the hiatus to be clearly audible (e.g. to pronounce the word 'Thaïs', one says, in fact, 'Tha*(h)*ïs'). Beyond that, what of the conception of consonances, or the study of tonally coloured vocal projection lacking vibrato, or the art of sounding the nasals (an, on, en, in, um, ain), most notably the accented instances, a practice that has been progressively swept away by other tastes, according to a chronology that is barely known. That art of diction, lost today, which completely preserves the intelligibility of the text, had been mastered by the great singers of the past and perhaps lasted longer than the appearance of Ravel or the beginning of the twentieth century. One need only hear Andrée Esposito in Massenet's *Thaïs*, recorded in 1959, to be convinced of its survival.[12]

The question of the silent '*e*' merits an entire conference. This French phoneme comes from the Latin feminine 'a', and, as the *Chanson de Roland*, rhyming only with itself, attests, it already had a phonetic specificity. Its pronunciation clearly separates, even today, the north of France from the south. Katherine Bergeron dedicates several analyses to it, and in doing so goes right to the heart of French *mélodie*, as it is a matter of a phoneme that one hears without hearing it. Let us not forget, however, that it also represents a problem of accent and not only of vocalic pronunciation. French is accented on the penultimate syllable, except if a word ends in an '*e*': 'une sour/is', 'un sour/ire'. Identifying this problem of accent would render much more clearly the passage where Katherine Bergeron has perfectly heard a precise instance in the diction of Claire Croiza (p. 232). But there it is not just a matter of the addition of a silent '*e*': that which she describes is simply an intensely or expressively articulated accent, different from the tonic accent, well analyzed musically by Vincent d'Indy, for example.[13] Besides, it really is necessary first to agree on what is meant by the silent 'e': in her analysis of *Histoires naturelles* of Ravel (p. 282), she misses the most important thing ('elle n'est pas venué'), for the 'e' of 'que' is not a silent 'e'. All this is to say that Katherine Bergeron raises an immense problem, that of the notion of *accent*. Evoking Rousseau and Saussure, Helmholtz and Rousselot, Verlaine and Rimbaud, she touches at the heart of the history of aural comprehension of the French language. Knowledge is still rather far from being sufficiently precise in this domain.

The magnitude and importance of the debate into which this book enters attests to its very high quality: it brings well-argued and documented weight to essential questions that touch at the heart of speech. Its most important contribution consists in the problematization that Katherine Bergeron has succeeded in constructing around the French *mélodie*, a problematization that is original and appropriate: she outlines the notion of genre, as well as its sociological aspects, wherein the technical question of the relationship between the text and the music becomes a

[12] *Le Chant du Monde* Records, LDC 278 895/96, CM 202.

[13] Vincent d'Indy, *Cours de composition*, vol. 1 (Paris: Durand et fils, 1903): 29–46, and *Appendice*, 'Notions générales sur la Prosodie dans la musique vocale': 355–9.

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conceptual problem of diction and language. By doing this, she puts her finger on that which explains how this genre, if dated, remains so vibrant. Let us hope that her *Voice Lessons* might soon appear in a French translation to further the discussion.

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David Damschroder, *Thinking About Harmony: Historical Perspectives on Analysis*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). ix+331pp. $100.00

David Damschroder's *Thinking About Harmony* focuses on the history of harmonic theory and its practical applications for analysis in music from the first half of the nineteenth century. The book presents a kaleidoscopic view of the varied conceptions of harmony and harmonic analysis in a broad and comprehensive survey, centred primarily on nineteenth-century France and Germany, but temporally spanning the eighteenth through the early twentieth centuries and geographically spanning the British Isles to Bohemia. The theories and analyses presented therein are illustrated with many examples from primary sources, lavishly annotated and clearly explained.

The canonical early harmonic theorists, Jean-Philippe Rameau, Georg Joseph Vogler and Gottfried Weber are best represented, followed by Johann Christian Lobe, Simon Sechter and a core group of about four dozen other writers on music whose ideas reappear throughout the book. An appealing feature is that the works of many lesser-known theorists are considered, including a few of the 400 or so that were excluded for reasons of space from Damschroder and Williams' extensive history-of-theory bibliography,[1] such as Jean-Baptiste Rey, José Joaquín Virués y Spínola, Johann Anton André, Daniel Jelensperger and François Durutte. Also given their due here are the harmonic theories of Johann Gottlieb Portmann, who is included in Damschroder and Williams' bibliography but not in *The Cambridge History of Western Music Theory*,[2] and is better known for his writings on sonata form than those on harmony. Brief biographies of the theorists discussed are provided at the end of the book.

The preface borrows the words of Augustus Kollmann, written just over two centuries earlier, explaining that the work is 'calculated for the use of those who wish to *study* musical composition, to *teach* music with propriety, or to *judge* of the music they hear, practise, and encourage' (p. vii). Damschroder describes his hoped-for audience as all performers and scholars of music, but admits that a more realistic view of his potential readership comprises graduate students and professionals in the fields of music theory and musicology. Certainly *Thinking About Harmony* would serve as an excellent text for a history of theory course or a supplement to enrich a tonal harmony course at the graduate or advanced undergraduate level, as well as a valuable resource for music scholars and analysts concerned with issues of harmony. The biographical appendix of theorists is a potentially useful quick reference tool.

[1] David Damschroder and David Russell Williams, *Music Theory from Zarlino to Schenker: A Bibliography and Guide* (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1990): xiii.

[2] Damschroder and Williams, *Music Theory from Zarlino to Schenker*, 236–7; Thomas Christensen, (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Western Music Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

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