has introduced a conspicuous French presence within this estimable line, may we expect to see similar honour accorded Ravel or Fauré?

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Hervé Lacombe, *The Keys to French Opera in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Edward Schneider (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2001). xv + 415pp. £27.95

Hervé Lacombe's *Les Voies de l'opéra français au XIXe siècle*, published in 1997, attracted an international readership before this generally admirable translation, which is the more welcome in that a French original (sad to say) is not accessible to much of the relevant Anglophone readership. For the book can be cordially recommended to students, and will also provide plenty of food for thought for established scholars. Its appearance is timely, since interest in the field is developing rapidly, and in every part of the spectrum from broad syntheses, such as a recent Companion to Grand Opera, to intense theatre-based studies of the Opéra or the Odéon.[1]

Lacombe's central and laudable objective is to reveal a century of operatic culture with a view to conveying how it really was, rather than how it seems through the Bayreuth-tinted spectacles of history. The effort is not less worthy because its goal is literally unobtainable. Unfortunately, the sweep of the work is such that one cannot consider it a piece of 'thick' historical description, and although Lacombe avoids the trap of presenting the entire century synchronically, as if it were an entity rather than a constantly evolving organism, it is possible that relatively uninformed readers may find his rapid passage back and forth through the years confusing. He is sometimes laconic: for instance, I had to remind myself (from *Opera Grove*) of the date of Halévy's *Le Juif errant*, the attempted 'super Grand Opéra', whose settings are described on p. 259; surely '1852' could have been tucked in somewhere? Regrettably, the dream of the last judgement (curiously reminiscent of Lesueur's *La Mort d'Adam*) is not illustrated here.[2]

Lacombe starts by modestly suggesting that, aside from *Carmen* and *Faust*, nineteenth-century French opera has a poor reputation. Yet he is able to refer to many composers known through performance and recordings of their operas (e.g. Massenet and Saint-Saëns); and the opera he chooses as a case study upon which to centre his remarkably wide-ranging survey is not *Carmen* but Bizet's earlier *Les Pêcheurs de perles*, a work which has received a number of modern stagings and is known, therefore, for considerably more than the famous duet. It seems an odd choice at first (why not *Carmen*, *Faust*, *Samson et Dalila*, *Manon*?), for it was not revived for many years after the first series of

1 David Charlton, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Grand Opera* (Cambridge, 2003); Mark Everist, *Music Drama at the Paris Odéon, 1824–1828* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, 2002). One might also refer to recent doctoral studies by Sarah Hibberd and John Drysdale, dealing with the Véron era, and at the other end of the century to Steven Huebner's *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism, and Style* (Oxford, 1999).

2 Nor I suppose is the music recorded: when it is, can we hope for a period saxophone quartet?

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performances. Justification for the choice is fully made in the discussion of genre, placed surprisingly late (eighth out of nine chapters), which students might usefully read first; but the argument is anticipated at several earlier points. It is that Bizet's opera, performed in 1863 at the Théâtre lyrique, epitomized a development towards a new genre highly typical of the Third Republic, and which Lacombe calls 'opéra lyrique'. It succeeded and to some extent synthesized traditions of *grand opéra* and *opéra comique*. With the dimensions of the latter but the stage accoutrements of the serious genre and sung throughout, it marks a break in the rigidity with which different theatres' repertoires were separated. The genre 'lyrique' acquired both *Faust* and *Carmen* when they crossed over into the repertoire of through-composed operas; in summary, it 'might be seen as the acclimatization of the German aesthetic to France – or as a German renewal of French opera' (p. 277). An alternative formulation might mention the abandonment of a dependence on Italian opera. Admiration for Rossini remained potent in criticism of new French operas, long before Wagnerian became a term of abuse. Several contemporary critics perceived French opera to be swinging from an Italian to a German orientation; few seemed to allow it an independent life. Yet it is possible to overrate Wagner's influence, even on passionate admirers such as Chabrier, and while one should not neglect the potent Italian influence earlier in the century, equally one should take into account earlier French repertoire, from Auber to Gounod, and French elements built into works by foreign composers, notably Meyerbeer.

Having said this, I should emphasize that Lacombe's book is not a history of nineteenth-century French opera. A chronicle of the riches of the genre – from *Les Deux Journées* and *La Vestale* to *Louise* and *Pelléas et Mélisande* – might well impress as the richest any nation could boast, Italy not excepted, but it could not bring it to life. Lacombe's first part discusses genesis, performance, and reception, with *Les Pêcheurs de perles* at the centre; details are filled out in seven appendices including sources, revisions, staging, and box-office receipts (which fell alarmingly at the eighteenth performance). The second section covers some of the same ground in 'The Construction of a Drama', and reaches towards the heart of the matter, which is theatrical experience, in chapters called 'Space and Time' and 'Poetic Expression and Musical Expression'. There are several nineteenth-century illustrations and caricatures, neatly tied in to the text, but by a self-imposed restriction, undoubtedly welcome to the publishers, there are no written music examples (let alone audible ones). Lacombe instead uses language to evoke the purposeful way in which music is used to support, even convey, the drama. On Nadir's entrance in Act I of *Les Pêcheurs de perles* he writes: 'The strange, sinuous radiance of the vocal line is brought out by the trembling of repeated notes in the strings, flutes, and clarinets, evoking the Orient in its full splendor, bathed in light and in the fragrant air the hero has breathed.' English ears might also find this music quintessentially (and of course appealingly) French, and of course it is not in the least authentically exotic, but the prose well represents the signals the music sends out. It thus runs the risk of tautology, for it conveys nothing that the music does not. At least Lacombe's observations, from a quick spot-check, are musically accurate, and his work is thus honourably descended from that of (for instance) Berlioz. But such passages make one ache for a digital version so that by a quick stab of the mouse one could *hear* what he is talking about – a theoretical possibility unlikely soon to be realized.

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In the third part, Lacombe treats society, genre (see above), and 'The Aesthetic Foundations', concluding the body of the book at p. 309.[3] There may be some advantage in reading the various sections separately, in that there is overlap, even repetition, and support for the argument is well marshalled. The theatre-going French public ignored music outside the theatre and heard it as a supplement to spectacle and drama. Music can play on the nerves and emotions, often without the auditor noticing this effect (as in a film).[4] The historical enterprise of *grand opéra*, obsessed by accurate visual representation, led to a little musical archaeology parallel to the architectural restorations of Viollet le Duc; in this weight of detail, this ridiculous pursuit of historical verisimilitude, lay the seeds of the genre's downfall and its replacement by the simpler plots, less contrived music, and more directly emotional appeal of *opéra lyrique*.[5] In any case, output was always more plentiful in lighter genres; the worship of Rossini blighted the reception not only of Berlioz but also of Gounod and Bizet, for the love of visual extravagance was somewhat inconsistently matched to a preference for musical simplicity, spun by the critics as 'reasonableness'.

There is one key to full evocation of what it was like to be at a nineteenth-century French operatic performance which Lacombe has largely overlooked: performance practice. The Performance chapter within Part I deals with manners before reaching the singers and swiftly moves on to audiences. There are good passages on tenors, including, but going well beyond, the bitter wit of Berlioz. The problem of head voice versus chest voice in high notes, especially those meant to be sung piano, is addressed under genre (p. 231) as well as performance, and Lacombe denounces with splendid resonance (p. 48) the monotony of late twentieth-century technique where the avoidance of any kind of falsetto wrecks Bizet's conception of Don José: 'Even in *grand opéra*, we cannot fail to deplore the bellowing often inflicted on us in works such as Halévy's *La Juive* or Auber's *La Muette de Portici*.' Bravo! Except that, alas, when Radames has wrecked the end of 'Celeste Aida', it is all too clear that 'we' (interpreted not as the elite scholarly community, but the majority of operagoers) can all too easily fail to deplore it. What is missing, however, is reference to the changed nature of the modern sound-world in vocal and instrumental production: questions of legato, portamento, and of course design and playing technique on instruments – strings with minimal vibrato, narrower-bored brass – which taken together must have produced a very different acoustic ambience.

That the appended biographies are only of composers puzzles this reader; many of them are discussed only in passing, and other key players on whom information is generally harder to obtain, notably librettists but also scenic artists, directors, and performers, might have been treated similarly. So for that

[3] The remaining 106 pages includes the aforementioned appendices and biographical sketches of composers.

[4] The most valuable resource for the study of nineteenth-century operatic criticism is probably the series of 'Dossiers de Presse parisienne' in the series *Critique de l'opéra français du XIXème siècle* (Heilbronn, 1995–). The area is also being opened up by the Répertoire Internationale de la Presse Musicale, of particular value since few critics other than Berlioz (*Critique musicale 1823–1863*, ed. H. Robert Cohen and Yves Gérard, Paris, 1996–) are likely to be honoured by a complete edition.

[5] Some of the arguments here can be paralleled to an earlier study, duly acknowledged, by Anselm Gerhard, *The Urbanization of Opera: Music Theatre in Paris in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Mary Whittall (Chicago, 1998).

matter might the critics, since the book is so much grounded in their reactions. The introduction lists several authors who were also composers or literary figures such as Stendhal, but the text, rightly, has recourse to more obscure hacks. More information is needed to evaluate the remarks of such people as Scudo, Fiorentino, Escudier. Who was Xavier Aubryet, cited on p. 274, whose refreshing desire to get rid of tedious musical symmetry echoes Schumann: 'Is it not true that, three-quarters of the time, a composer's phrases complete themselves automatically as you hear them?'[6] It is good to find Berlioz, too often quoted as if he were the only authority, among his fellow toilers in journalism; we also get quite a bit of Wagner. Indeed, a handsome review of this book in *19th-Century Music* by Annegret Fauser suggests that Wagner's ghost stalks through these pages (challenging us 'on how to read operas created during Wagner's lifetime and after his death') and so partially qualifies Lacombe's achievement in trying to take a Franco-centric view of French phenomena.[7] She is of course right and yet, since Wagner and his potent influence cannot be undone, it might equally have falsified the enterprise had Lacombe suppressed his role of critic or his musical and dramatic influence, perceptible if not overwhelming, on 'opéra lyrique'. Unexpectedly, it could emerge that the critics who found Wagnerism in *Carmen*, Nietzsche notwithstanding, and however much they disliked it, may have been the perceptive ones.

These, however, are but small carp in a large pond, and they do not undermine the foundations of Lacombe's enterprise, which are essentially concerned with imaginative empathy, achieved with a mixture of fact and evocative writing which is refreshing and frequently entertaining.

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Julian Rushton, *The Music of Berlioz* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). xv + 363pp. £50 (hb) £21.99 (pb)

In his preface, Julian Rushton expresses his love for the music of Berlioz (or nearly all of it). Following my performance of much of his music involving choral forces (*Les Francs-Juges*, *La Damnation de Faust*, *Lélio*, *Roméo et Juliette*, *Benvenuto Cellini*, *Béatrice et Bénédict*, *Scène héroïque*, the Requiem, the Te Deum, and even Berlioz's 1841 French version with recitatives of Weber's *Der Freischütz*) as a member of the Chœur de l'Orchestre de Paris in their three-year Berlioz bicentenary cycle culminating in 2003, my own appreciation of Berlioz has become increasingly emotional, visceral (and so some would argue, unintellectual). And Rushton's book is about 'music first, including associated texts and, I hope, "meanings"; it is not a biography, nor is it a work of musical

[6] Schumann went further, in his review of Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*: 'Italian melody – the sort that we know perfectly even before it starts'. Cited from Ian Bent, ed., *Music Analysis in the Nineteenth Century*, vol. 2: *Hermeneutic Approaches* (Cambridge, 1994), 187. Laconically, Lacombe tells us that Aubryet's outburst was published on 7 October 1863, and we are left to assume that it was inspired by Bizet's opera, which by then had been performed three times.

[7] Annegret Fauser, Review (also of Huebner, *French Opera*), *19th-Century Music*, 26/3 (Spring 2003): 278–85.

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