

Review Articles

‘Der mächtigste Tanzmeister des Kaiserreiches’? Offenbach at 200

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Laurence Senelick, *Jacques Offenbach and the Making of Modern Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. xvi + 331 pp. ISBN 9780521871808 (hard cover); 9781108814027 (paperback); 9781108327046 (ebook).

Dominique Ghesquière, *La troupe de Jacques Offenbach*. Lyons: Symétrie, 2018. 470 pp. ISBN 9782364850668 (paperback).

Ralf-Olivier Schwarz, *Jacques Offenbach: Ein europäisches Porträt*. Vienna: Böhlau, 2019. 320 pp. ISBN 9783412512958 (hard cover).

M. Offenbach nous écrit: Lettres au Figaro et autres propos, edited by Jean-Claude Yon. Paris: Actes Sud, 2019. 480 pp. ISBN 9782330117276 (paperback).

The year 1863 was one of the few in which Jacques Offenbach premiered no major stage work. And while it is true that he contributed music to the *comédie* by Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy entitled *Le Brésilien*, his public output that year was overshadowed by the establishment by the Académie Française of the Prix Montyon, to be awarded ‘to French authors of works most beneficial for morality and commendable for their elevated and moral utility’.¹ Perhaps predictably, the last time the prize was awarded to a work on a subject related to music was in 1948, when it was conferred on Robert Pitrou’s *Musiciens romantiques*, a book that gave little space to French ‘Romantic’ musicians.²

But in the 1920s, the Prix Montyon was awarded twice to the same author: the music critic Louis Schneider, who received the prize for his biography of Jules Massenet in 1927 and for the first of two books on *opérette*, his 1923 biography of Offenbach.³ Schneider’s biography was the

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¹ ‘Aux auteurs français d’ouvrages les plus utiles aux mœurs, et recommandables par un caractère d’élévation et d’utilité morales’, <<http://www.academie-francaise.fr/prix-montyon>> (consulted 4 May 2020).

² Robert Pitrou, *Musiciens romantiques: Beethoven, Weber, Schubert, Chopin, Mendelssohn, Schumann, Berlioz, Liszt, Wagner* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1946).

³ Louis Schneider, *Offenbach, Les maîtres de l’opérette française* (Paris: Perrin, 1923). It was followed by a comparable work on Lecocq and Hervé: Schneider, *Hervé; Charles Lecocq, Les maîtres de*

first in French since André Martinet's *Offenbach: Sa vie et son œuvre* of 1887,⁴ and although it stands in marked contrast with, for example, Paul Bekker's *Jacques Offenbach* published in 1909, Schneider and Bekker constitute the first serious attempts at engaging with the birth of *opérette* and Offenbach's contribution to the genre.⁵

What Schneider manages to avoid is Bekker's elision of Offenbach, *opérette* and the perceived decadence of the Second Empire. Bekker had made his position very clear, summarizing his many eulogies to the composer by describing him as 'the musical comic-book of the Second Empire, the sworn enemy of boredom, the poet of the moment, who was sarcastically ironic, emotionally delirious'.⁶ And his very first sentence has Offenbach as the 'dancing-master' of the Second Empire:

From the inconspicuous rabbi's house in a Cologne alley to the luxurious Paris Salon, from the insignificant German musician to the celebrated matador of Europe, from the modest pupil of the conservatory to the most powerful dancing-master of the Empire – that was Jacques Offenbach's developmental path.⁷

Although he was writing as late as 1909, Bekker makes reference to Rudolf von Gottschall's *Paris unter dem zweiten Kaiserreich*, published in the immediate aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War, the siege of Paris, the Commune and the 1871 proclamation of the German Empire (especially relevant for Gottschall and Bekker) at Versailles.⁸

Schneider, writing 14 years later, has no interest in this type of critique, prefacing three chapters, organized chronologically, with a chapter entitled 'L'opérette: ce qu'a été, ce que doit être l'opérette'. And even the final section of this chapter, 'Les causes de la décadence' (to which one can imagine many turning in breathless haste), turns out to be concerned with the difficulties of successfully producing works by Offenbach and his contemporaries in the 1920s rather than punishing the Second Empire for its interest in *opérette*.

But Bekker's view was the one that received a massive impetus from the work of his and Schneider's immediate successor, Siegfried Kracauer's *Offenbach und das Paris seiner Zeit*.⁹ Kracauer's book received significant attention as well as adverse critique in the years before the Second World War, but more importantly continued to be reprinted, re-edited and translated

l'opérette française (Paris: Perrin, 1924). His second prize-winning work was Schneider, *Massenet, 1842–1912* (Paris: Charpentier, 1926). Schneider, his contemporaries and his successors use the term *opérette* to encompass the wide generic range of *opéra bouffe*, *opéra bouffon* and similar types right up to the more fanciful 'ronde de nuit mêlée d'un peu de musique' (Adolphe Lindheim's *Appelez-moi sergent* to a libretto by Louis Lemercier de Neuville). *Opérette* is used here similarly to summarize a wide range of genres.

⁴ André Martinet, *Offenbach: Sa vie et son œuvre* (Paris: Dentu, 1887).

⁵ Paul Bekker, *Jacques Offenbach*, Die Musik: Sammlung illustrierter Einzeldarstellungen (Berlin: Marquardt, 1909).

⁶ 'Das Musik gewordene Witzblatt des zweiten Kaiserreiches, der geschworene Feind der Langeweile, der bald sarkastisch ironisierende, bald gefühlvoll schwärmende Poet des Augenblickes'. *Ibid.*, 67.

⁷ 'Vom unscheinbaren Rabbinerhäuschen einer Kölner Gasse bis zum luxuriösen Pariser Salon, vom unbedeutenden deutschen Musikanten bis zum gefeierten Matador Europas, vom bescheidenen Zögling des Konservatoriums bis zum mächtigsten Tanzmeister des Kaiserreiches das war die Entwicklungsbahn Jacques Offenbachs.' *Ibid.*, 1 (emphasis added).

⁸ Rudolf von Gottschall, *Porträts und Studien*, 6 vols. (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1870–6); vols. iii and iv (1871 and 1876) constitute *Paris unter dem zweiten Kaiserreich*.

⁹ Siegfried Kracauer, *Jacques Offenbach und das Paris seiner Zeit* (Amsterdam: Lange, 1937), trans. Gwenda David and Eric Mosbacher as *Orpheus in Paris: Offenbach and the Paris of his Time* (New York: Knopf, 1938), repr. as *Jacques Offenbach and the Paris of his Time*, with a foreword by Gertrud Koch (New York: Zone Books, 2002; subsequent references are to this edition).

well into the twenty-first century.¹⁰ As late as 1964, a new edition could subtly rephrase the title as *Pariser Leben: Jacques Offenbach und seine Zeit: Eine Gesellschaftsbiographie* – a ‘biography of a society’.¹¹ This was hardly unfair, given that Kracauer himself had ended the first paragraph of his preface with the words: ‘The following book differs fundamentally from such works [what he calls biographies that “depict the life of their hero”]. It is a biography not only of Jacques Offenbach but of a society.’¹²

One thing that all these biographers working in the first third of the twentieth century had in common was that they seemed to be studiously avoiding the centenary of Offenbach’s birth in 1919. True, there had been brief acknowledgements on both sides of the Rhine (by Georg Schünemann and Jean Chantavoine), but they were short reactions to the event rather than the sustained engagements from Martinet and Bekker, Schneider and Kracauer.¹³ By the centenary of Offenbach’s death things had changed out of all recognition: 1980 saw a blizzard of smaller contributions of a celebratory nature that were headed by no less than three biographies or lives and works in English alone (by Alexander Faris, Peter Gammond and James Harding); David Rissin’s *Offenbach, ou Le rire en musique*; a volume dedicated to the composer in the series *Musik-Konzepte*; and a short collection of epigrams published by the ‘Offenbach 1880 Committee’, apparently based at the Royal College of Music in London.¹⁴

The bicentenary of Offenbach’s birth has occupied much of the musical world. Indeed, in both Germany and France (more properly Cologne and Paris) it has received even more attention than the 150th anniversary of the death of Berlioz, also much promoted in 2019. For Offenbach, and *opérette* more generally, this has resulted in a range of performances that goes beyond the ritual productions of *Orphée aux enfers* and others of the composer’s larger works, to bring *opérettes* by Florimond Ronger (Hervé), Charles Lecocq and Robert Planquette back under the public gaze. Scholarly conferences and publications abound, although apparently what we have experienced in 2019 is not enough for some commentators: on the very first page of one of the books here under review there is the claim that, ‘The bicentenary is not very well

¹⁰ For a recent reinterpretation of Kracauer’s biography in the light of his other work, especially *From Caligari to Hitler* and *A Theory of Film*, as the basis for a theoretical reformulation of operetta on film, see Carolyn Abbate, ‘Offenbach, Kracauer and Ethical Frivolity’, *Operetta*, ed. Carolyn Abbate and Flora Willson, special issue, *Opera Quarterly*, 33 (2017), 62–86, esp. pp. 66–71.

¹¹ For the publishing history of Kracauer’s work and its reception by his Frankfurt School colleagues, see Mark Everist, review of Siegfried Kracauer, *Jacques Offenbach and the Paris of his Time*, *Music and Letters*, 85 (2004), 109–12.

¹² Kracauer, *Jacques Offenbach and the Paris of his Time*, 23. Such lines are echoed in the claim that Kracauer’s book ‘took operetta so seriously that it sought to sketch the entire “biography of a city” via the genre’s early career’ (Caroline Abbate and Flora Willson, ‘Operetta: A Note from the Guest Editors’, *Operetta*, ed. Abbate and Willson, 1–6 (p. 2)).

¹³ Georg Schünemann, ‘Jacques Offenbach: Zu seinen 100. Geburtstag am 20.6.1819’, *Deutsche Rundschau*, July 1919, 129–38; Jean Chantavoine, ‘Jacques Offenbach (1819–1880): À propos de son centenaire et d’une reprise de *La belle Hélène*’, *Revue hebdomadaire*, 13 December 1919, 221–40. See also Gabriel Grovlez, ‘Jacques Offenbach: A Centennial Sketch’, *Musical Quarterly*, 5 (1919), 329–37.

¹⁴ Alexander Faris, *Jacques Offenbach* (London and Boston, MA: Faber & Faber, 1980); Peter Gammond, *Offenbach: His Life and Times* (Speldhurst: Midas, 1980); James Harding, *Jacques Offenbach: A Biography*, The Opera Library (London: Calder; New York: Riverrun, 1980); David Rissin, *Offenbach, ou Le rire en musique* (Paris: Fayard, 1980); *Jacques Offenbach*, ed. Heinz-Klaus Metzger, *Musik-Konzepte*, 13 (Munich: Text & Kritik, 1980); *Offenbach 1819–1880: A Tribute* (London: Offenbach 1880 Committee, 1980).

celebrated in France.¹⁵ But many – and especially those who have been intrigued by performances of works by Hervé and Lecocq alongside those by Offenbach – might wonder what plans are in place to celebrate the bicentenary of Hervé's birth (2025) or indeed what happened to the celebration of the centenary of Lecocq's death in 2018.

Such celebrations serve as a diversion from understanding the broader context in which the works of the celebrated were created and consumed. At the simplest level, although Offenbach wrote around 90 works (the total depends on how the count is made), this is out of a repertory of around 1,600 compositions (a conservative estimate) created by a galaxy of librettists and composers every bit as important to the history of *opérette* and related genres – to say nothing of broader European theatrical cultures – as Offenbach and those of his works deemed worthy of attention. Publication of works dedicated exclusively to Offenbach simply reinforces the view that his *oeuvre* – or perhaps just the subset of works known in German-speaking circles as the *Offenbachiade*¹⁶ – represents the volume and complexity of the entire genre.

These obsessions with such a small part of such a large repertory also carry fundamentally unwarranted implications for the judgment of value. Such statements as, 'Hervé's compositions were mostly written for unsophisticated audiences and often hastily produced. Though the books and situations display considerable comic and satiric invention, the music lacks the sparkle and technical resource of Offenbach' are comfortable rehearsals of the status quo, but it is difficult not to be troubled by the fact that such commentaries – whether they are needed or not – are probably based on a knowledge of a tiny fraction of Hervé's output of around 130 *opérettes*.¹⁷ So – in juxtaposing Offenbach and Hervé – that deals with less than a quarter of the repertory; judgments of value are not even attempted for their contemporaries, and their librettists are ignored, to say nothing about the criteria on which such judgments might be made.

The year 2019 therefore brought two trajectories into alignment: the enthusiasm for writing biographies of Offenbach and a tradition of celebrating his birth and death in ways that are not accorded to his contemporaries. Both contribute not merely to the further canonization of their subject, but also to the further submerging of the rest of the repertory. Indeed, what the less charitable might see as the opportunistic republication of received wisdom further slams the lid down on the coffin of any chance of what has recently been opened up as 'taking operetta seriously'.¹⁸

The scholarly result of this elision of biophilia with bicentenary celebration is a more varied group of publications than that in 1980, and – it must be said – one that steers away from English-language potboilers. At the head of the list is Laurence Senelick's *Jacques Offenbach and the Making of Modern Culture*. Senelick is Fletcher Professor of Drama and Oratory at Tufts University and declares, even before he has properly started, 'This is not a book for musicologists, since Offenbach's music is not subjected to close scrutiny' (p. xiii). This is a statement that will leave many perplexed, and one has to cast one's mind back a very long way to remember a world where musicology was merely the study of musical works. Indeed, Senelick's interest in theatrical and musical cultures aligns perfectly with concerns that occupy large numbers of musicologists at the end of the second decade of the twenty-first century.

¹⁵ 'Le bicentenaire de 2019 est assez peu fêté en France.' *M. Offenbach nous écrit*, ed. Yon, 9, n. 1.

¹⁶ See Peter Hawig and Anatol Stefan Riemer, *Musiktheater als Gesellschaftssatire: Die Offenbachiaden und ihr Kontext*, Jacques-Offenbach Studien / Forum Musikwissenschaft, 6 (Fernwald: Burkhard Muth, 2018).

¹⁷ Andrew Lamb, 'Hervé' (2001), *Grove Music Online*, <<https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grove/music/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000012910>> (consulted 25 October 2019).

¹⁸ 'What does it mean to take operetta seriously?', ask Abbate and Willson in their 'Operetta', 1.

Any book like Senelick's has to be set alongside Jean-Claude Yon's magisterial and monumental (800-page) *Jacques Offenbach*, published in 2000 in Gallimard's prestigious series Biographies N. R. F. Gallimard, where the composer joined Molière, Proust, Aragon, Apollinaire, Montaigne, Flaubert and Chateaubriand.¹⁹ Yon's volume could lay claim to being the first documentary biography of the composer, which others would have to match. Senelick, cleverly, does not undertake the same task. In contrast to Yon's chronological survey (which takes us from Offenbach's youth in Cologne, through his early years in Paris, the creation of his Théâtre des Bouffes-Parisiens, the triumphs of the 1860s and his travels to Vienna, Berlin, Great Britain and the USA), the bulk of Senelick's book examines the reception of the composer's works in a wide range of cultural environments (St Petersburg, Stockholm, Latin America, Egypt, Australia and Japan) and with a chronological range that runs right up to the present. Senelick gives a carefully nuanced account of Offenbach at the hands of Max Reinhardt in Munich (pp. 198–219) and of Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko in Moscow (pp. 220–34), and during the reconstruction of Germany after 1945 (pp. 271–84). Perhaps the most absorbing chapter is Senelick's eleventh ('French without Tears', pp. 235–50; his chapter titles are witty and exasperating in equal measure), where he considers the status of Offenbach in France from the difficult time after the Franco-Prussian War, through some pretty unspeakable *fin-de-siècle* anti-Semitism (pp. 235–6) and anti-German (anti-Prussian) sentiment during the First World War, through to the re-emergence in the 1920s that explains Schneider's enthusiasm for the first wave of *opérette* during that decade.

The success of the last two thirds of Senelick's book comes at a price, however. He compresses a conventional life and works into a mere 140 pages, and with the best will in the world this was never going to deliver the level of intellectual and scholarly depth achieved in chapters 6–14. It is also a challenge to honour one of the implicit promises in the book's title: Offenbach's role in modern culture. This is barely defined, and the reader is left wondering if it means nothing more than the fact that – as the book ably demonstrates – the *opérettes* of Offenbach and his librettists outlasted their lifetimes and continued to have an effect up to the present, or at least at various moments during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. There are many ways in which Second Empire Paris has been, and continues to be, thought of as some sort of crucible of European modernism, and the idea that *opérette* might contribute to that is an intriguing one and an important counterweight to discourses around decadence and national decay. But nothing is forthcoming here, and one is left with just the slightest suggestion that Senelick's commitment to and understanding of modernism might be more an acknowledgment of scholarly orthodoxy than a contribution to its critique. And if one were to try to argue that Offenbach's *opérettes* themselves attempted a modernist rupture with the past, one would have to negotiate two serious obstacles: the first is the composer's own discursive swerves around the history of *opéra comique* as a justification for the creation of *opérette* in the first place;²⁰ the second is the fact that the genre owes so much to the pre-existing theatrical traditions of *pantomime*, *scène comique* and *comédie-vaudeville* that underpin both specific works and the genre as a whole.²¹

¹⁹ Jean-Claude Yon, *Jacques Offenbach*, Biographies N. R. F. Gallimard (Paris: Gallimard, 2000).

²⁰ For Offenbach's manifesto for *opérette*, promulgated as part of the advertisement for his 1856 competition for new works, see Mark Everist, 'Jacques Offenbach: The Music of the Past and the Image of the Present', *Music, Theater and Cultural Transfer: Paris, 1830–1914*, ed. Mark Everist and Annegret Fauser (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 2009), 72–98.

²¹ To take just a single example, Offenbach's *La chatte métamorphosée en femme* (1858), to a libretto by Eugène Scribe and Mélesville (Anne-Honoré-Joseph Duveyrier), was based on the same authors'

The compression exhibited by the introduction and first five chapters results both in some elementary errors and (more dangerously) the unwarranted preservation of some received wisdom. As Senelick attempts to protect Offenbach from charges of being what he calls ‘either a courtier or a *carbonaro* in camouflage’ (an alliteration that some will enjoy), he argues that ‘Achille Fould [was] a minister who ran the Bureau des Théâtres’ (p. 8). This will be news to historians of the Second Empire who know Fould as the *Ministre d’État* from 1852 to 1860, arguably the most powerful politician of his day. More troubling is Senelick’s account of the technical resource of the *cascade*, which he simply takes to mean slapstick, making reference to Champfleury’s famous chapter ‘Trucs et cascades’ in his *Souvenirs des Funambules* (p. 24).²² But Champfleury is making reference to the Théâtre des Funambules and its star Jean-Gaspard Debureau who was active there from 1828 until his death in 1846, and although it was not published until 1859, Champfleury’s introduction is dated 1849, and everything in the book seems to relate to the heyday of the Funambules before Debureau’s death.²³ This matters because outside the Funambules and during the 1860s, the term *cascade* had a more narrow meaning: it referred to a ‘saillie improvisée, trait d’esprit bouffon, ajoutée par l’acteur à son texte’ (emphasis added).²⁴ In other words, the term refers to an improvisation on the printed text, one that posterity has great difficulty in identifying (since it leaves no written record); this is the context for the extract that Senelick gives from *La belle Hélène*, where Hélène demands of Vénus: ‘Dis-moi, Vénus, quel plaisir trouves-tu / À faire ainsi cascader ma vertu?’

These are small quibbles that are almost inevitable when the author not only tries to compress Yon’s 800 pages into 150, but also raises questions that are intriguing and important. Yet along the way, Senelick falls foul of some received wisdom which deserved far more than simple parroting. He cites a line from Peter Conrad’s 1987 *A Song of Love and Death* which describes the Palais Garnier, the exclusive home of the Paris Opéra from January 1875 until the opening of the Bastille in 1989, as a ‘luxurious and hedonistic inferno like that of Offenbach’s cancan girls’ (p. 10).²⁵ Senelick gently disagrees with this view – although he could have pointed out that the first Offenbach production at the Palais Garnier did not take place until the 1974–5 season, exactly a century after the Opéra’s opening. But this gives Senelick the chance to reinscribe a variant of Bekker’s claims about the elision of the failure of the Second Empire with ‘Offenbachian’ trivialities that Conrad sees in the Palais Garnier, and from which Senelick seems anxious to disassociate himself and his book. Readers might also be surprised to read the claim that Offenbach directed the Folies-Marigny in 1855 on the site of what is now the Théâtre Marigny and Studio Marigny (p. 247). This is not merely a typo. In the summers from 1855 to 1859, Offenbach directed his own Théâtre des Bouffes-Parisiens at the theatre on this site; it had previously been called the Salle des Champs-Élysées and, from 1848, the Salle Lacaze. But Senelick is partially right in that the Théâtre des Folies-Marigny – so important for *opérette* and related genres in the 1860s – occupied the same space from 1864 onwards; but Offenbach wrote not a note for it, and its directors were Louis Montrouge and, from 1868, Achille-Félix Montaubry.²⁶

folie-vaudeville of the same title première at the Gymnase-Dramatique in 1827. The story goes back to one of Lafontaine’s *Fables*.

²² Jules François Félix Fleury-Husson (pseud. Champfleury), *Souvenirs des Funambules*, Collection Michel Lévy (Paris: Lévy, 1859), 5–6.

²³ *Ibid.*, iv.

²⁴ *Trésor de la langue française informatisée*, s. v. ‘cascade’, <<http://atilf.atilf.fr/df.htm>> (consulted 25 October 2019).

²⁵ Peter Conrad, *A Song of Love and Death: The Meaning of Opera* (New York: Poseidon, 1987), 239–40.

²⁶ Nicole Wild, *Dictionnaire des théâtres parisiens au XIX^e siècle: Les théâtres et la musique* (Paris: Amateurs des Livres, 1989), revised and enlarged as *Dictionnaire des théâtres parisiens (1807–1914)*, Collection Perpetuum Mobile (Lyons: Symétrie, 2012), 73 (page nos. refer to the 2012 edition).

If Senelick's book gives us a genuinely global and chronologically wide-ranging approach to the question of Offenbach reception, Ralf-Olivier Schwarz contributes 'a European portrait' of the composer in *Jacques Offenbach: Ein europäisches Porträt*. This is much more narrowly conceived than Senelick's study and reads very much like an updated version of the serried ranks of works from 1980. Each chapter deals with about half a decade and focuses on places and institutions, so that the fifth chapter is divided between Paris, Vienna and Bad Ems, while the sixth concerns itself with Offenbach's work for the Théâtre des Variétés, the Théâtre du Palais-Royal and the Opéra-Comique. These are the strongest parts of the book, which is hardly surprisingly since Schwarz's doctoral dissertation both focused on *comédie-vaudeville* and *opérette* and targeted the Théâtre du Palais-Royal.²⁷

But there is something of a gap when the reader looks for the purpose of Schwarz's book. There is no foreword or introduction (Senelick's has both), and a search for original material brings very little that is new. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the book was expressly written neither to document, detail and clarify (which is the greatest achievement of Yon's *Jacques Offenbach*) nor to take Offenbach and his works into unexplored worlds (which is where the strongest parts of Senelick's book lie), but really just to add to the number of pages to 'celebrate' the composer during his bicentenary year. This view is supported by the book's overall plan and scope, and by issues of detail. Just to take a single example, the section on the years 1860–1 (pp. 97–106) deals with *Le carnaval des revues*, *Le papillon* (Offenbach's only ballet and his only work for the Paris Opéra), *Daphnis et Chloé*, *Barkouf*, *La chanson de Fortunio*, *Le pont des soupirs* and *M. Choufleuri restera chez lui*. The librettos of *Le papillon*, *Barkouf*, *La chanson de Fortunio* and *M. Choufleuri* are all given one-paragraph synopses, and the material is generously illustrated with quotations from Offenbach and his contemporaries. But every single one of these primary sources is quoted from Yon's 2000 biography – in German translation (needless to say) and without even the original language given. Despite this, the unattributed text on the back of the book closes with the claim, 'Der vorliegende Band fasst zum ersten Mal seit Jahrzehnten den neuesten internationalen Forschungsstand zusammen' ('For the first time in decades, this volume brings together the latest international state of research'). It is unclear how translating large parts of Yon's monograph constitutes 'bringing together the latest international state of research', and to look at Schwarz's bibliography is further to witness a reluctance to consider work in any language other than German; in the first section of the *Sekundärliteratur*, the only non-German work is Senelick's book, run on rather uncomfortably (perhaps an addition at proof stage) with a work by Schwarz himself (p. 308); and even René Leibowitz's 1957 chapter on Offenbach's parodies of *grand opéra* is cited only in its 1980 German translation.²⁸

If there is something of a mismatch between the aims and achievements of Schwarz's book, the same cannot be said of Dominique Ghesquière's *La troupe de Jacques Offenbach*. This book consists of short sketches of 22 of the artists with whom Offenbach worked during his career, and while the individual accounts are meticulous and documented to a fault, the collection is a

²⁷ Ralf-Olivier Schwarz, 'Vaudeville und Operette: Jacques Offenbachs Werke für das Théâtre du Palais-Royal' (Ph.D. dissertation, Hochschule für Music und Darstellend Künste, Frankfurt am Main, 2007), published under the same title as *Jacques-Offenbach-Studien*, 2 (Fernwald: Burkhard Muth, 2007).

²⁸ René Leibowitz, 'Jacques Offenbach ou les déguisements du Grand Opéra', in *Histoire de l'Opéra* (Paris: Buchet-Chastel, 1957; repr. 1996), 168–81 (page nos. refer to the 1996 reprint), trans. Heinz-Klaus Metzger as 'Jacques Offenbach oder die Verkleidungen der Grossen Oper', *Jacques Offenbach*, ed. Metzger, 5–16.

long way removed from an account of the complex network of artists with whom the composer worked. It stands at the opposite end of the spectrum from a work such as Annie Ledout's 2001 dissertation, which gives a list of every single artist working at the Théâtre des Bouffes-Parisiens and the works in which they appeared. (Ghesquière does not provide a bibliography, but there is no apparent reference made to Ledout's seminal work.²⁹)

Ghesquière's concentration on individuals means that, for example, the first entry in the book is dedicated to Jean-François Berthelier, who was Offenbach's first tenor at the Bouffes-Parisiens in 1855 and created roles in *Les deux aveugles*, *Une nuit blanche*, *Le violoneux* and *Ba-ta-clan* (pp. 21–40). But he moved almost immediately to the Opéra-Comique, where he stayed until 1862, when he signed a contract at the Théâtre du Palais-Royal. Berthelier was borrowed back from the Palais-Royal by the Bouffes-Parisiens for Emil Jonas's *Avant la noce* in 1865 before rejoining Offenbach himself at the Bouffes-Parisiens in 1868. In other words, a lot of the story has very little to do with Offenbach. This is all presented in a casual prose style in which the detail is submerged by what might be thought to be witty *aperçus* and asides. Ghesquière's control over the detail is impressive, however, giving us the detail of the marriage contract between Berthelier and Estelle Frasey, for example. But his obsession with detail leaves unasked the sorts of questions that this level of attention permits: what did it mean for a tenor to move from the Théâtre des Bouffes-Parisiens to the Opéra-Comique? Were the styles of singing and acting the same? What does such an apparently effortless move say about the relationship between, for example, Offenbach's *Ba-ta-clan* at the Bouffes-Parisiens and Bazin's *Maître Pathelin* at the Opéra-Comique (Berthelier's first première there)? Ghesquière has all the material to answer these questions, but seems more concerned with the types of antiquarian issues that the press and the *actes de mariage* and *décès* can illuminate. Unlike Ledout's mere listing of names, Ghesquière at least gives the detail that allows these sorts of questions to be answered, but neither work comes remotely close to explaining the network of relationships between Offenbach, his contemporaries and their librettists, their singers and the anatomy of the works they wrote.

Since it was published in 2017, it is not really fair to wrap up Senelick's *Jacques Offenbach* with the zealotry associated with the Offenbach bicentenary, and the work shows all the signs of having been many years if not decades in gestation. Schwarz's *Jacques Offenbach* was published in the centenary year itself, Ghesquière's *La troupe de Jacques Offenbach* carries a *dépôt légal* date of December 2018, and both betray the signs of the haste that works written to these deadlines entail. The final work under review here raises different questions. Jean-Claude Yon, the *doyen* of Offenbach studies, brings together and presents in *M. Offenbach nous écrit* a collection of texts by and about Offenbach published in the newspaper *Figaro* (entitled *Le Figaro* after 1866) between 1854 and the composer's death in 1880. In a preliminary essay – most of which has been published previously – Yon draws our attention to the very close relationship between Offenbach and the publisher of *Le Figaro*, Hippolyte Villemessant, who were exact contemporaries and country-house neighbours on the Normandy coast. It is hardly surprising that Offenbach was therefore able to use *Le Figaro* as an unfettered organ for his views, as Berlioz had done with the *Journal des débats* thanks to his similar friendship with members of the Bertin family (pp. 9–34). Yon's collection includes a lot of texts that are already well known: Offenbach's manifesto for *opérette* that was published as part of the publicity for his 1856 competition for new works at the Théâtre des Bouffes-Parisiens (pp. 43–55); his account of his

²⁹ Annie Ledout, 'Le théâtre des Bouffes-Parisiens, historique et programmes, 1855–1880', 3 vols. (Ph.D. dissertation, Université de Paris IV, 2001), iii, 606–86.

masked ball that parodied Verdi's *Il trovatore* the following year (pp. 65–9); and his 1869 diatribe against Wagner (pp. 168–70). Less well known, perhaps, is *Le Figaro's* wide-ranging eulogy for the composer published after his death in October 1880 (pp. 364–403).

But unlike the other two works that also seem to have been written expressly for the 2019 bicentenary, Yon's collection raises wider issues relating to access to material, to the status of what is today called the 'digital humanities' and to the relationship between the two. Every one of the texts in Yon's collection is available through the online portal of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (*Gallica*), which digitizes every issue of *Le Figaro* from 1854 to 1942. Finding the digital copy of *Le Figaro's* eulogy, for example, took less than a minute, and a search yields 431 texts that mention the composer up to his death in October 1880, as opposed to the 107 that Yon prints.³⁰ Yon's introductions summarize but do not explain, and one reason for reprinting these articles in book form might have been the extensive critical apparatus that could have underpinned them, but the format of this work means that this is impossible. It is difficult not to feel sorry for Yon, stuck between the obvious attractions of, on the one hand, the ease of the digital edition provided by *Gallica* and, on the other, the possibility of a fully annotated scholarly edition of these texts. Yon laments, in his introduction, the absence of a complete edition of Offenbach's correspondence (pp. 9–10), and it is easy to imagine his passion for a parallel, say, to the elegant Flammarion volumes of the Berlioz *Correspondance générale*. But *M. Offenbach nous écrit* falls between these two stools, with neither the space for the critical commentary that Yon could have written and that readers would have welcomed, nor the free, digital and searchable access to the same texts afforded by *Gallica*.

Senelick's final chapter, 'Conclusion: Taking Offenbach Seriously' (pp. 285–302), focuses, rather than on drawing threads together, on post-war productions of the composer's works, especially the Powell-Pressburger film *The Tales of Hoffmann* (1951) and Josef Svoboda's production of *Les contes d'Hoffmann* for Prague in 1946, and then tails off into some conventional observations on modern Offenbach scholarship. There are some welcome comments about which of Offenbach's works still appear in what some like to call 'the repertory'; none of this will come as anything of a surprise, however, and what is really missing is the sense that Offenbach was the tip of a cultural and musical iceberg. He may well have become a synecdoche for the colossal network of librettists, composers, impresarios and other agents that populated the culture of *opérette* and related genres in the third quarter of the nineteenth century and – as Senelick's book shows – beyond, but 'celebrating' his bicentenary has the effect of allowing scholarly practice (publications, conferences) to freeze this corner of the canon. Needless to say, the academy has regularly been the target of claims that it determines canonic discourses, and the current group of publications is proof of such assertions, but it has to be wondered what the history of music in the French nineteenth-century theatre might look like with a balanced understanding of the key role played by *opérette* and related genres.

Such a history could certainly try to eliminate the crude binary divide that separates the study of *opérette* and related genres from 'opera studies'.³¹ But it could go further to site all activity related to music in the nineteenth-century French theatre – from Verdi's *Don Carlos* to the music accompanying acts of prestidigitation and juggling – in a single frame; this could then identify networks of practice and of individual actors that would cross artificial boundaries in pursuit of an understanding that aligned more closely with nineteenth-century experience.

³⁰ Bibliothèque Nationale de France, *Gallica*, <<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb34355551z/date.langEN>> (consulted 25 October 2019).

³¹ The point is made with striking eloquence in Abbate and Willson, 'Operetta', 1.

This would permit a critical practice that could recognize that, for example, the authors of the libretto to Ambroise Thomas's blockbuster at the Opéra, *Hamlet* (1868), not only had been writing together for the Opéra-Comique since the early 1850s, but also had collaborated on a *comédie-vaudeville* – *L'amour mouillé* – in 1850 that they then reworked with new music by Édouard de Hartog and presented at the Théâtre des Fantaisies-Parisiennes only three months after the première of *Hamlet* itself.³² And this recognition would directly bring the most prestigious institution and genre in European 'opera' into alignment with some of the least recognized and – for the moment – least understood organizations and types of music and theatre.

With a coherent historiographical framework in place, collapsing *opérette* into Offenbach alone begins to look more and more limiting – misleading even – and the role played by the celebration of anniversaries and the resulting publications considered here even more culturally loaded than it initially might seem. So even within the domain of *opérette* and related genres, critique would not merely be restricted to the history of music at such theatres as the Bouffes-Parisiens, Folies-Marigny or Fantaisies-Parisiennes, but would also reflect on their impact on such other houses as the Opéra-Comique, the Théâtre-Lyrique and the Opéra itself as well as on European theatres and 'opera houses', those of larger macro-regions and ultimately those across the globe.

³² The libretto to Ambroise Thomas's *Hamlet* was written by Jules Barbier and Michel Carré, and the work was premièred at the Opéra on 9 March 1868. The two authors had first collaborated at the Opéra Comique on Victor Massé's *Galathée* (14 April 1852) shortly after having produced the *comédie-vaudeville* *L'amour mouillé* at the Gymnase-Dramatique (5 May 1850), reworked with music by Édouard de Hartog as an *opérette* with the same title and presented at the Théâtre des Fantaisies-Parisiennes (30 May 1868).