

# *Opéra-Comique*



*Opéra-Comique:*  
A Sourcebook

By

Robert Ignatius Letellier

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P U B L I S H I N G

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by Robert Ignatius Letellier

This book first published 2010

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

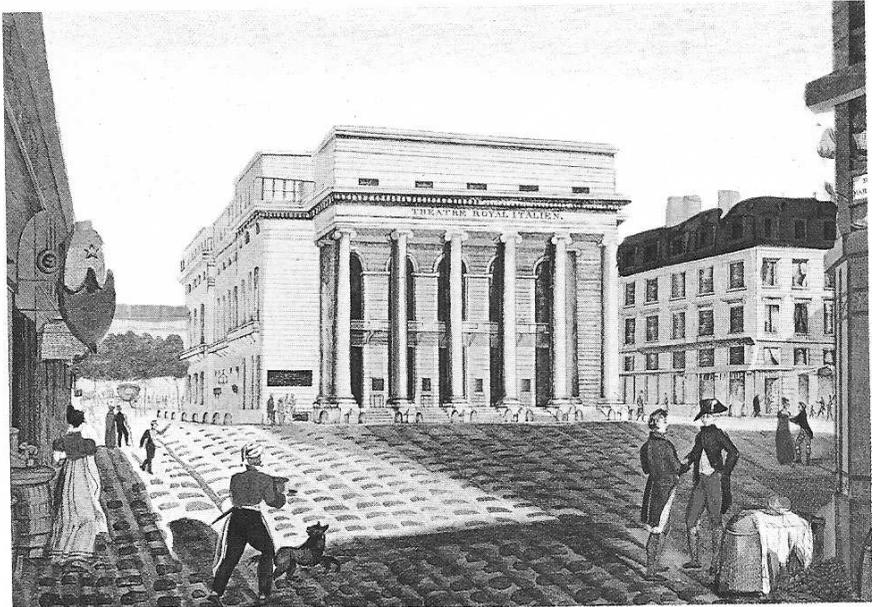
12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data  
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-2140-3, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-2140-7



The Théâtre Royal Italien (Salle Favart 1), later known as the Opéra-Comique, in Paris at the end of the 18th century.



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The composition of this sourcebook has been dependent on the work of generations of scholars—particularly the indispensable researches and records of Clément & Larousse (1867-1869, four supplements until 1881, further supplements by Pougin 1899-1904), Campardon (1877), Soubie & Malherbe (1892-1893), Wild & Charlton (2005), as well as Loewenberg (1943, 1955, 1978) and Parsons (1993). All are gratefully acknowledged.

The painstaking checking of the text, the detail and cross-referencing of the indexes, are the dedicated and admirable work of Elaine Thornton—most especially the listing of the singers who feature in the chronicles of *opéra-comique*. Her tireless efforts have been integral to the completion of this book. So has the work of Amanda Millar, the most patient and accomplished of composers. I am so much in their debt.

Robert Letellier  
Cambridge  
3 August 2010



## INTRODUCTION

*Opéra-comique*, like *grand opéra*, is a specifically French genre of *opéra* that emerged from the political changes and intellectual discussion that played a recurrent role in determining the nature of artistic expression and production in Paris.

### **The origins of *opéra-comique***

*Opéra-comique* is distinguished by its use of spoken dialogue to link the arias and sung parts, and its more restrained use of recitatives. Defining *opéra-comique* as a genre is challenging as the terminology is disputed. Some sources have claimed that *opéra-comique* is a quite literal term in the sense that it means a comic opera, but the genre of *opéra-comique*, despite its name, was not necessarily comic or light in nature. The most famous of *opéras-comiques*, Bizet's *Carmen*, is a tragedy. Because of its origins, the genre came to be confused with the 18<sup>th</sup>-century French version of the Italian *opera buffa*, which also emerged in the mid-century, and rapidly spread to France where it was known as *opéra bouffon*. This is different again from the 19<sup>th</sup>-century *opéra bouffe* which came to have special associations with the new form of *opérette*.

The *opéra-comique* emerged out of the popular entertainments called *opéra-comiques en vaudevilles* that were a feature of the suburban theatres held at the spring and autumn fairs (*foires*) of Saint-Germain and Saint-Laurent, and to a lesser extent, at the comedy playhouse, the Comédie-Italienne.

### **The Comédie-Italienne**

The historical Comédie-Italienne presented spectacles performed by professional Italian actors to the French-speaking public. At first, these actors performed *commedia dell'arte* in their native Italian, but later they worked with all the French playwrights of the era, from Molière to Marivaux. In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Comédie-Italienne was supported by the king. The original Comédie-Italienne did not operate from a building of its own. Rather, the theatrical troupe performed at either

the Théâtre du Petit-Bourbon or the Hôtel de Bourgogne, up to 1697. That year, the company was disbanded after having offended the king. The theatrical company returned to Paris in 1716 after being recalled by the Duke of Orléans.

## **The urban fairs of Saint-Germain and Saint Laurent**

The specific origins of the *opéra-comique* lie in small fair theatre performances in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. At the time, there was a distinction between so-called “legitimate theatre”, which could be performed in royally-sanctioned theatres, and the more lowbrow street theatre, which did not undergo the scrutiny of royal censors.

In 1714, when the high society of Paris was seen at the Comédie Française and the Opéra, small comedy plays were the preferred form of entertainment of the less well-off. Musicians, puppeteers and comedy singers would parody the great tragic classics and rewrite the text of the great operas.

The urban fairs had a large popular following, and their theatres were thus characterized by demotic interests and a vulgar tone. One of the chief concerns was poking fun at public officials associated with the larger established theatres. The plays were performed with intercalated popular songs that established an immediate rapport with the audience. The song composers drew on themes from French heritage but also ideas from foreign places, which added to their appeal for performance in other countries. Their satires on political figures, coupled with a burlesque and risqué performance, brought this early form of *opéra-comique* into disrepute at court. Louis XIV tried to end their influence by signing several ordinances against them and even boosting other theatres in the hope that these would appeal more to the public than the vulgarity of the saucy *opéras-comiques*. These more substantial theatres, like the Comédie-Française, were just as eager as the Crown to quash the fair theatres and the *opéra-comique*. Spoken theatre was banned at the fairs, but in so doing the authorities “unwittingly promoted the ingenious dodge of a comedy sung to popular songs, which then became a far more potent rival than that which had preceded it” (Daniel Hertz). When Louis died in 1715, the early *opéra-comique* was at last allowed some legitimacy and was left to flourish.

At this time the genre was distinctly associated with parody; it was characterised by comedy and satire, and accompanied by well-known vaudevilles. In the same year, an agreement between the fair *comédiens* and the director of the Académie Royale de Musique resulted in the

establishment of a new the institution or corporate body: on 26 December 1714, Catherine Baron and Gautier de Saint-Edmé set up this unusual company in the Théâtre de la Foire Saint-Germain, calling it the Opéra-Comique. But the company had a difficult start. It proved to be so successful that the Académie had it closed down in 1745, but it was reopened seven years later in 1752 by the director Jean Monet, who invited the famous author Charles-Simon Favart (1710-1792) at the Foire Saint-Germain to take charge of it. By giving the theatre its credentials, Favart made it a worthy competitor for the other theatres in the city.

The earliest creator of *opéra-comique* was Alain-René Lesage (1668-1747). He was the leading librettist for the two suburban fair theatres for a few decades, but his preference was for the traditional and topical vaudevilles. Two competing poets began to emerge: Alexis Piron (1689-1773) and Charles-Francois Panard (1689-1765). They began revolutionizing the infant *opéra-comique*, searching for more musical novelty, using the old airs less and less. Lesage reflected on this topical situation in his libretto *Les couplets en procès* (1729), written for the Foire Saint-Germain.

## The Guerre des Buffons

Between 1752 and 1754 a troupe known as Les Bouffons performed Giovanni Pergolesi's archetypal *opera buffa* *La serva padrona* (1733) and other Italian comic works in Paris. Their great success, and the growing enthusiasm for the fair theatres, led to a polemical war called the *Guerre* (or *Querelle*) *des Bouffons* (The War of the Buffoons), a clash, essentially literary in nature, centred on the confrontation between the solemn past (enshrined in Italian *opera seria* and the grand Baroque French *tragédie lyrique*) and the lively topical present (both the farce and sentiment of the newly emerged Italian comic opera and the unsophisticated popular vaudevilles). The Bouffons helped to introduce French composers to the idea that the libretto should serve to enhance the music, whereas in the fair theatres the composer had played a subservient role. The Bouffons also proved influential on musical content since many of the ariettes they used were initially borrowed popular pieces transferred to new works (in the process of parody), where they in turn then served as models for original compositions. The debate had a happy outcome in the emergence of a uniquely French form of opera—the *opéra-comique*—an amalgam of the fair theatre performances, the English ballad opera, the German *Singspiel* and the Italian *opera buffa*. While the debate had often been couched in nationalistic terms, subsequent compositions both by French composers and by a series of resident foreigners offered excellent examples of this

new genre.

The first battle of the *Guerre des Buffons* began in 1752, the year when Jean-Jacques Rousseau staged his one-act comic opera *Le Devin du village* (The Village Soothsayer) in the Court Theatre at Fontainebleau. Both libretto and music were his own. The music had been compiled in the manner of a *pasticcio*, reflecting the popular romances and vaudevilles being heard in the Parisian fairs. The score pleased both sides in the aesthetic debate, appealing to the French in its manner and sentiment, and to the Italians in its employment of recitative and continuously composed form. Rousseau had hoped to provide a model for the new French comic opera, but was not immediately successful. However, his achievement was developed, notably by the Neapolitan composer Egidio Duni (1709-1775), who settled in Paris in 1755, and began first assembling and then composing *opéras-comiques* after the style of Rousseau.

## The merger of the Comédie-Italienne and Opéra-Comique

Duni's arrival served as a catalyst of sorts. The similarity of the type of entertainment provided by both the Comédie-Italienne and the two seasonal fairs brought the two companies ever closer, until, decisively, on 3 February 1762 they amalgamated, and found a theatre for their joint productions, the Hôtel de Bourgogne, in the Rue Monconseil—the old home of the Comédie-Italienne (and thus known variously as the Comédie-Italienne, Les Comédiens-Italiens, the Théâtre-Italien, “Aux Italiens”, Les Comédiens Ordinaires du roi). The newly combined company kept on the name “Comédie-Italienne” until 1793. The type of entertainment offered by the new company, *opéra-comique*, combining existing popular tunes with spoken sections, grew rapidly in popularity and soon lent its generic name to the house. The house, regardless of its changing venue, would become inextricably associated with the genre acted there, and known as the Opéra-Comique. In 1783 a new building was constructed for the Opéra-Comique. This would be its final location, the one it still occupies today. The company moved to the Rue Favart where it nonetheless continued for the while to be known as the Comédie-Italienne, but also as the Théâtre de la rue Favart, and colloquially as the Salle Favart. In 1791 a rival company was established in the Rue Feydeau (the Théâtre Feydeau). This very soon ended in ruin during the dark days of the Revolution. Both houses were closed and then amalgamated in 1793, when the house and the company were decisively called the Opéra-Comique.

## The *couplets* and the dialogue

The genre exercised a powerful popular appeal because of its unique fusion of fixed musical form with fluid improvised dialogue. The well-known airs of the day, invariably strophic, came to be the staple medium of artistic expression for the genre (*couplets*). Here tension was heightened by the pull between the fixed melodic form and recollection of the original words, now replaced with new satirical ones, that generated an irony of comparison between old and new. The spoken dialogue similarly was not only important for the development of the plot, but provided occasion for topical and artistic licence in witty repartee among the actors who brought a vivid actuality to their improvisations. The genre thus not only made a social statement, but provided a medium for tacit and trenchant artistic observation. The success of *opéra-comique* was very closely tied up with the boredom of contemporary audiences with the current *grands opéras*. Before the arrival of the *opéra-comique* the people had been exposed to the stiff *tragédie lyrique*. The difference between the two genres attracted affectionate attention to the lighter *opéra-comique* and made it popular.

Other distinctions between *opéra-comique* and other *opéra* genres, apart from having spoken dialogue versus recitative, became institutionalized: *grand opéra*, for example, was extravagant in its performances whereas *opéra-comique* retained a greater simplicity of style and resources. Also, ballet was regarded as a necessity at the Opéra (fashionable expectation leading to generic definition); but ballet was not insisted upon at the Opéra-Comique which preferred crowd scenes involving choral writing. *Opéra-comique* also preferred a single leading soprano with a “lighter” supporting soprano, where the Opéra preferred having two dominant soprano voices. The hero in *opéra-comique* came to be associated with a lighter male voice.

The full identification with ‘comic opera’ per se, or with the type of *opéra bouffon*, was never sustained nor ever became established. There were many “hybrids” that derived from *opéra-comique*, such as *comédie*, *comédie lyrique*, *comédie-parade*, *opéra bouffon*, *drame lyrique*, *comédie mêlée d'ariettes*. Indeed, a major problem with correctly identifying *opéras-comiques* was that composers would often write down the wrong performance date, or sometimes not even record a date at all. Pieces would also frequently be mislabelled, or creators would sometimes even make up a new genre for their piece, calling it a *roman musical*, *complainte*, or *fantaisie lyrique*.

## The subject matter

Pierre-Alexandre Monsigny (1729-1817), more than any other composer, developed both the subject matter and musical style in *opéra-comique*. He helped to transform the genre from the *comédie en vaudevilles*, which used popular melodies, to the *comédie mêlée d'ariettes* (or *opéra-comique*), which used original music throughout. His earlier works, composed for the theatre fairs between 1759 and 1761, were all in the popular style of comic intrigue, with the statutory *buffo* elements of disguise, deception, misunderstanding, clarification and reconciliation. In *Le Roi et le fermier*, written in 1762—that decisive year for *opéra-comique*—the story mingled the classes, royalty and nobility with rural characters (the usual social stratum depicted in *opéra-comique*), and showed a king dealing kindly with his subjects. His highly influential librettist, Jean-Michel Sedaine (1719-1797), emphasized personal freedom, equality, and the virtues of common people, in the manner of the Enlightenment philosophers. These ideas were significantly extended in the most famous work of their collaboration, *Le Déserteur* (1769). This score also illustrates how Monsigny extended the musical vocabulary of the *opéra-comique*, as he dispensed with vaudevilles, and wrote original ariettes in their place, and also composed many vocal ensembles, some of them of complex vocal texture

French and Belgian composers readily adapted the new and increasingly dynamic variety of *opéra-comique*, and soon established its hegemony in the Parisian and provincial theatres. This astonishing development was by no means always confined to comic subject matter. Increasingly composers in this genre—like François-André Philidor (*Tom Jones*, 1765), Monsigny (*Le Déserteur*, 1769), André Grétry (*Richard Coeur de Lion*, 1784), Luigi Cherubini (*Lodoïska*, 1791; *Les Deux Journées*, 1800) and Étienne-Nicolas Méhul (*Joseph*, 1807)—were concerned with ever more serious content, and produced works full of progressive musical innovation that made ever greater appeal to audiences beyond the borders of France (especially the famous type of the ‘rescue opera’ that emerged from the political storm and stress surrounding the French Revolution). The genre, with its unique mixture of comedy and drama, its captivating musical fluency, its increasing handling of serious or Romantic themes—expertly crafted by its most famous librettist Augustin-Eugène Scribe (1791-1861)—became universally popular in the masterpieces of its heyday during the fifty years between 1820 and 1870: Adrien Boieldieu’s *La Dame blanche* (1825), Daniel-François-Esprit Auber’s *Fra Diavolo* (1830) and *Le Domino noir* (1837), Ferdinand Hérold’s *Zampa*

(1831) and *Le Pré aux clercs* (1832), Fromental Halévy's *L'Éclair* (1835) and Ambroise Thomas's *Mignon* (1866).

This was the situation, with an admixture of serious and even tragic elements, until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when Jacques Offenbach, writing at the time of Giacomo Meyerbeer's *L'Étoile du Nord* (1854), deplored the hybrid forms that were increasingly leaning more towards the traditions of *grand opéra*, and had led several composers away from the pure traditions of *opéra-comique*—a tradition he likened to a stream that had turned into a river and subsequently burst its banks. In fact, many pieces were called *opéras-comiques* only because they had spoken dialogue, the most significant examples being Auber's *Haydée* (1848), Meyerbeer's *Le Pardon de Ploërmel* (1859), Thomas's *Mignon* (1866), and Bizet's *Carmen* (1875). The original version of Gounod's *Faust* (1859) contained dialogue (although produced at the Théâtre-Lyrique), but by 1883 Delibes's *Lakmé* at the Opéra-Comique was entirely set to music. Conversely, there were pieces that were never labelled *opéras-comiques*, despite their lightness of touch.

### The different theatres

The most basic definition given to this genre is that the pieces were named *opéras-comiques* only because they were performed at the Théâtre de l'Opéra-Comique. The history of the various locations of the institution has played a significant role in the perception of the genre and the way of referring to it. As discussed above, the term 'Favart', or 'Théâtre Favart' (despite there having been three such houses) is enough to encapsulate the mystique of this type of opera and its history. The Opéra-Comique is still sometimes called the Salle Favart. The names of the various houses capture the chronology of the genre and its changing artistic face.

#### Location

Hôtel de Bourgogne  
 First Salle Favart (Favart 1)  
 Théâtre Olympique  
 First Salle Favart (Favart 1)  
 Théâtre Feydeau (Feydeau)  
 (former Théâtre de Monsieur)  
 Salle Ventadour (Ventadour)  
 Place de la Bourse (Bourse)  
 (Théâtre des Nouveautés)

#### Dates

3 February 1762—4 April 1783  
 28 April 1783—20 July 1801;  
 23 July—Oct. 1804;  
 2-23 October 1804  
 24 October 1804—4 July 1805  
 16 September 1801—12 April 1829  
 20 April 1829—22 March 1832  
 28 September 1832—30 April 1840

Second Salle Favart (Favart 2) Place du Châtelet (Châtelet) (former Théâtre Lyrique)	16 May 1840—25 May 1887
Théâtre du Château-d'Eau	15 October 1887—30 June 1898
Third Salle Favart (Favart 3) (present building)	26 October—25 November 1898 7 December 1898—

## The chronology and other rival theatres

The aim of this study is to provide a record of the flowering of this uniquely French genre from its beginnings until the First World War, a period of 152 years. After a chronology of the works presented during this period, which provides the most helpful overview of the theatres and works involved, the main section of the book is devoted to an alphabetical listing of the relevant composers, with their operas presented chronologically. Occasionally this composer list contains works not found in the chronology of the Opéra-Comique. Such works are included either to provide greater comprehensiveness of the composer's oeuvre (like the works of Grétry given at the Académie Royale de Musique), or because they represent the genre of *opéra-comique* in a distinct or notable way. Rousseau's *Le Dévín du village* is the archetypal influence on the genre, but was never presented at the Comédie-Italienne. Several important 18<sup>th</sup>-century works were given at the Royal palace or in the homes of rich patrons without a later Paris performance. Several famous earlier *opéras-comiques* (especially by Cherubini) were produced at the rival establishment set up in the Théâtre Feydeau (1791-93) and during the full 19<sup>th</sup>-century flowering, many important works of the genre were given at other theatres. These houses include Adolphe Adam's failed Opéra-National (which saw the premiere of his *La Poupée de Nuremberg* in 1852, one of his most famous *opéras-comiques*, yet never produced at the house of that name); and also the rather more long-lived Théâtre-Lyrique (which saw the premieres of all of Gounod's most famous works, including *Faust*, *Roméo et Juliette* and *Mireille*). These alternate houses became temporary rivals to the Opéra-Comique, and in the case of the Théâtre-Lyrique, played a significant role in the evolution of the synthetic genre that came to dominate late 19<sup>th</sup>-century mainstream French opera—the *opéra lyrique*. This drew together the two distinct genres that had hitherto dominated the tradition, *grand opéra* and *opéra-comique*. Apart from *Faust* which became a *grand opéra*, most of Gounod's works were later taken up by the Opéra-Comique, and in their lyricism and through-composed style were decisive in establishing this emergent genre of *opéra*

*lyrique* that found its most famous later expression in Massenet's work.

## **The native repertoire and production of foreign operas**

The vast majority of operas produced at the Opéra-Comique have been forgotten now. Many composers are remembered by name, but their works, or most of them, are neglected (like those of Félicien David and Victor Massé, regarded in their time as of decisive importance for the future of French opera). Other composers are still famous but hardly ever performed (Grétry, Boieldieu, Auber, Hérold, Halévy, Thomas). A handful of the composers from the later century still have works in the international repertory (Gounod, Bizet, Offenbach, Delibes, Massenet). All of them contributed to forming the history of one of the most vibrant and influential of the world's opera houses, that has left a legacy crucial to the musical heritage of France, and of great importance to the history of opera. The nature of this record is a type of para-history of the culture of France, and a testimony to the vibrancy of opera as an art form.

The repertoire of the Opéra-Comique (OC) also provides a gauge of the nature and popularity of foreign influences in the musical life of France, particularly the number of Italian and German operas that made their way to Paris and established a place and influence on operatic culture. The role of the *opera buffa* in the 18<sup>th</sup> century is germane to the history of *opéra-comique*, and one notes the recurrent representatives of the classic comic tradition among the visitors, from 1793 until 1931 (Paisiello, Cimarosa, Mozart, Rossini, Verdi). But some famous works assumed an importance of their own in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries by their French adaptations for the Théâtre-Odéon (TO) and the enterprising Théâtre-Lyrique (TL) long before making their way to the second house of Paris. It is interesting to see just when they were produced at the Opéra-Comique, and how this late chronology reflects the gradual weakening of the closely preserved native French tradition of this house (and its indigenous mixed genre) and a corresponding acceptance of exogenous through-composed works onto the boards, like the engagement with *verismo* (Puccini, Leoncavallo) following on *Carmen*. The situation further predicates the increasingly narrow international repertory of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Paisiello: *Le Barbier de Séville, ou La Précaution inutile/Il barbiere di Siviglia, ovvero La precauzione inutile*, **OC 1793**;

Weber: *Robin des bois, ou Les Trois Balles/Der Freischütz*, TO 1824, **OC 1835**, O 1841;

Mozart: *Le Mariage de Figaro/Le nozze di Figaro*, TL 1858, **OC 1872**;  
 Mozart: *La Flûte enchantée/Die Zauberflöte*, TL 1865, **OC 1879**;  
 Rossini: *Le Barbier de Séville/Il barbiere di Siviglia*, TO 1824, **OC 1884**;  
 Verdi: *La Traviata/Violetta*, TI 1856, TL 1864, **OC 1886**;  
 Mozart: *Don Juan /Don Giovanni, ossia Il dissoluto punito*, TL 1866, **OC 1896**;  
 Verdi: *Falstaff*, **OC 1894**;  
 Wagner: *Le Vaisseau fantôme/Der fliegende Holländer*, **OC 1897**;  
 Beethoven: *Fidelio*, TL 1860, **OC 1898**;  
 Puccini: *La Bohème*, **OC 1898**;  
 Humperdinck: *Hänsel et Gretel /Jeannot et Margot*, **OC 1900**;  
 Puccini: *La Tosca*, **OC 1903**;  
 Puccini: *Madama Butterfly*, **OC 1904**;  
 Leoncavallo: *Paillasse/ I pagliacci*, **OC 1910**;  
 Cimarosa: *Le Mariage secret/Il matrimonio segreto*, **OC 1931**.

## The *opéra-comique* and cultural history

The history of the *opéra-comique* reflects the political and cultural life of France from the last days of the *ancien régime*, the tumult of the Revolution and Napoleonic era, through the ongoing saga of France's search for the right mode of governance, and the decisive battle between monarchy and republicanism that found its watershed not in the revolutions of 1789, 1830 and 1848, but in the defeat by Prussia in the Franco-Prussian War (1870-71). The mentality that had fostered the steady evolution of the *opéra-comique* from 1762 was altered forever by these traumatic events. The victory of Prussia, the proclamation of the Second Reich in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles, that symbol of French ascendancy in the apogee of Louis XIV's golden reign, marked a change of direction in French thinking, a turn away from the type of musical theatre represented in the authentic traditions of *opéra-comique*, and a search for a new intellectualism and abstraction in both music and art. The strand of popular culture was to flow into a reduced and more vulgar form of comedy and satire in the new genre of the operetta (a process initiated in 1858 by Offenbach's brilliant parody of the fashion for neo-classicism and aesthetic intellectualism in *Orphée aux enfers* staged in his own theatre, the Bouffes-Parisiens). Sentimentality and risqué manners would dominate the operetta after 1870, and confirm its break with the Opéra-Comique and its establishment as a new genre. The *opéra-comique*,

already challenged by the growing seriousness of its subjects and the fusion of grand and comic generic elements into the *opéra-lyrique*, suddenly almost ceased to exist in terms of its old identity. The Opéra-Comique no longer determined the nature of its own genre, but became a custodian of tradition, on the one hand, and, on the other, the venue for the new experiment in dramatic music initiated by the fundamental changes brought about by Richard Wagner and his music dramas.

Apart from some isolated works that sustained a brilliant recollection of the old traditions while establishing their own popularity and lyricodramatic influence—like Bizet's *Carmen* (1875) (a progenitor of Realism and *verismo*), Offenbach's *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* (1881), Delibes's *Lakmé* (1883), Massenet's *Manon* (1884)—new operas by the younger generation of musicians were now French adaptation of the Wagnerian aesthetic. Here the record of success is very thin, and hardly any native French works in this imitative mode premiered at the Opéra-Comique between 1870 and 1914 have survived. Gustave Charpentier's *Louise* (1900), with its startling realism and lyrical fluency, achieved a measure of popularity in its presentation of a romanticized portrait of Bohemian Paris that is both sentimental and fashionably alluring. Only with the musical equivalent of the pictorial genre of Impressionism was a new masterpiece discovered in Claude Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* (1902), but it remained a solitary achievement, as did Maurice Ravel's more robust one-act farcical comedy with strong local colour, *L'Heure espagnole* (1907). The Opéra-Comique had become a secondary house, increasingly neglectful of the operas of its glory days, hospitable to the somewhat arid achievements of the younger generation of composers, and the place where the masterpieces of German and Italian opera were presented, with a handful of ballet adaptations. After the First World War, the ancient traditions of the house were almost entirely forgotten, and the Salle Favart became just a convenient stage space for ordinary repertory pieces (from an increasingly bland selection of international favourites) and the host to touring companies from Italy.

The perspective on this radical cultural change is reflected in the attitudes governing taste and the understanding of musical history at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, preeminently as embodied in the great French dictionary of opera compiled by Félix Clément and Pierre Larousse (1897), and then edited by Pierre Pougin (1905). This survey of operas is a record of a past age, a cautious and reserved point of view covering the first 300 years of operatic history from a late 19<sup>th</sup>-early 20<sup>th</sup>-century perspective, but one whose insights into the French repertoire contain information, attitudes and opinions of interest and importance. Details of

forgotten composers, their operas—performance dates, plot summaries, the singers who created them, notable numbers in the work from libretti and scores that are now either to be found only in the Paris libraries, or are lost completely, and often with observations about the reception of the work, the effectiveness of its dramaturgy and music—all constitute a resource that is invaluable to historians of opera, music, culture and convention, from the late 18<sup>th</sup> to the early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The conservative attitudes expressed in the resumés and criticisms not only provide a fascinating account of an older aesthetic, but in the process present a specialized survey of an era in the history of opera, one that reflects the radical challenges to musical traditions and mores in the exciting events of French history from the mid-19<sup>th</sup>-century until the advent of Wagnerism, Realism, Impressionism and Expressionism in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The record of the fortunes of the Opéra-Comique in this period provides a way into the changing culture and artistic values of an age.

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Departure of the Comédie-Italienne (1697)



Hôtel de Bourgogne (Comédie-Italienne)



Favart



Duni



Monsignor



Philidor



Sedaine



Grétry



Marmontel



Cherubini



Méhul



Boieldieu



Scribe



Auber



Mélesville



Adam



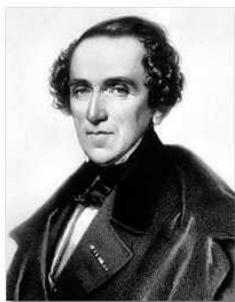
Héroid



Halévy



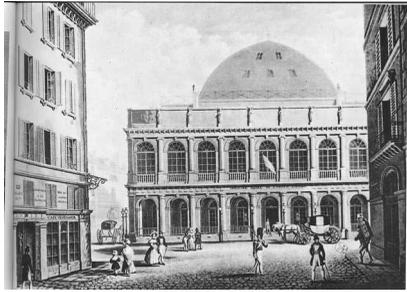
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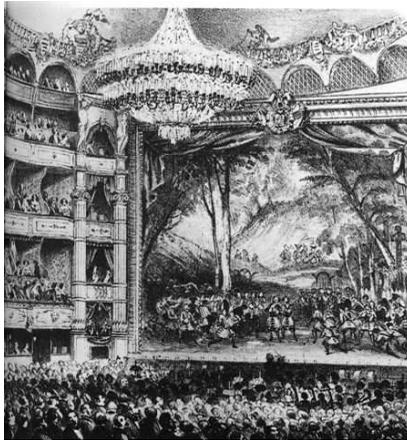
Meyerbeer



Offenbach



Salle Ventadour (1830)



Salle Favart 2 (1840) (internal)



Saint-Georges



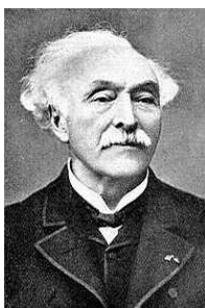
Barbier



Carré



Gounod



Massé



Bizet



Delibes



Massenet



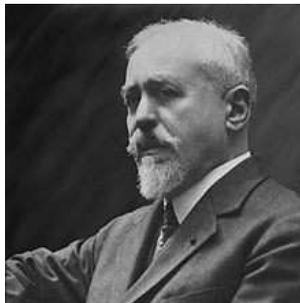
Saint-Saëns



Paladilhe



Debussy



Dukas

# A CHRONOLOGY OF THE OPÉRA-COMIQUE (1762-1915)

## Merger of the Comédie Italienne and the Opéra-Comique de la Foire

### HÔTEL DE BOURGOGNE

3 February 1762 - 4 April 1783

#### 1762

- 3 Feb *Blaise le savetier* (Paris, Foire St Germain, 1759) Philidor  
3 Feb *On ne s'avise jamais de tout* (Paris, Foire St Laurent, 1761)  
Monsigny  
3 Feb *Le Vauxhall hollandais* (Paris, Th. Italien, 1761) Anon.  
3 Feb *La Nouvelle Troupe* (Paris, Th. Italien, 1760) Anon.  
4 Feb *Armide* (Paris, Th. Italien, 11 Jan 1762) Div. comp. and vaud.  
5 Feb *La Fille mal gardée ou le Pédant amoureux* (Paris, Th.  
Italien, 1758) Duni  
5 Feb *Le Gondolier vénitien* (Paris, Th. Italien, 21 Jan 1762)  
Riggieri  
6 Feb *Le Peintre amoureux de son modèle* (Paris, Foire St Laurent,  
1757) Duni and vaud.  
8 Feb *Le Maître en droit* (Paris, Foire St Germain, 1760)  
Monsigny and vaud.  
10 Feb *Le Maréchal ferrant* (Paris, Foire St Laurent, 1761) Philidor  
and vaud.  
10 Feb *Le Caprice amoureux ou Ninette à la cour* (Paris, Th.  
Italien, 1755) Ciampi and div. comp.  
11 Feb *Les Amours de Bastien et Bastienne* (Paris, Th. Italien,  
1753) Vaud. arr. Sodi  
13 Feb *Le Cadi dupé* (Paris, Foire St Germain, 1761) Monsigny and  
vaud.  
15 Feb *Annette et Lubin* Div. comp.  
20 Feb *La Cantatrice italienne* (Paris, Th. Italien, 1761) Anon.  
21 Feb *Le Bal* (Paris, Th. Italien, 1749 or 1755) Div. comp.  
26 Feb *Les Troqueurs* (Paris, Foire St Laurent, 1753) Dauvergne

- and vaud.
- 5 Mar *Le Soldat magicien* (Paris, Foire St Laurent, 1760) Philidor
- 5 Mar *La Nouvelle École des femmes* (Paris, Th. Italien, 1758)  
Ruge and anon.
- 10 Mar *Soliman II ou les Trois Sultanes* (Paris, Th. Italien, 1761)  
Gibert
- 10 Mar *Le Couronnement de Roxelane* (Paris, Th. Italien, 1761)  
Anon.
- 18 Mar *Les Fêtes basques villageoises* (Paris, Th. Italien, 1761)  
Anon.
- 19 Mar *Le Jardinier et son seigneur* (Paris, Foire St Germain, 1761)  
Philidor
- 29 Mar *La Servante maîtresse* (Paris, Th. Italien, 1754, French  
version) Pergolesi
- 19 Apr *Les Amusements champêtres* (Paris, Th. Italien, 1749 or  
1753) Desbrosses or Sodi
- 22 Apr *Mazet* (Paris, Th. Italien, 1761) Duni
- 22 Apr *La Bohémienne* (Paris, Th. Italien, 1755) Clément and div.  
comp.
- 24 Apr *L'Isle des foux* (Paris, Th. Italien, 1760) Duni
- 25 Apr *Le Médecin de l'amour* (Paris, Foire St Laurent, 1758)  
Laruelle and vaud.
- 5 May *Le Docteur Sangrado* (Paris, Foire St Germain, 1758) Duni,  
Laruelle and vaud.
- 6 May *Les Amants jardiniers* Anon.
- 19 May *La Plaideuse ou le Procès* Duni
- 24 May *Pygmalion* (Paris, Th. Italien, 1760) Anon. vaud.
- 31 May *La Servante justifiée* (Paris, Foire St Germain, 1740) Vaud.
- 1 Jun *La Soirée des boulevards* (Paris, Th. Italien, 1758) Anon.  
and vaud.
- 3 Jun *L'Amant corsaire* La Salle d'Offémont
- 6 Jun *Les Talents à la mode* (Paris, Th. Italien, 1739) Blaise
- 16 Jun *Les Bouquetières* Anon.
- 20 Jun *Les Amants trompés* (Paris, Foire St Laurent, 1756)  
Laruelle, anon. and vaud.
- 23 Jun *La Nouvelle Italie* Duni, Rigade, Traetta
- 8 Jul *Sancho Pança gouverneur dans l'Isle de Barataria* Philidor
- 8 Jul *La Bergère jalousie* Anon.
- 14 Jul *Cendrillon* (Paris, Foire St Germain, 1759) Laruelle, Duni  
and vaud.
- 22 Jul *Les Deux Soeurs rivaux* Desbrosses