

Appendix 1 - Henry Fothergill Chorley, *Music and Manners in France and Germany: a series of travelling sketches of art and society.*

London, 1841. Chapter 1 (extracts)

.....there is nothing now in Europe like L'Académie Royale.

It was late in the November of 1836, on a Monday evening—my first in Paris,— that this conviction burst upon me. After one night in the foreign mail, and two in the diligence from Calais,—with a gasconading American, a rude sprightly young moustache from St Omer's, a Swiss who would sing snatches of all the music he had ever heard most Swiss-ly out of tune, and a negro, by way of companions,—no one short of a Hercules could have much spirits or strength left for music. But on sitting down to dinner—my eyes burning for sleep, and my brain jarred with the ceaseless noises of the last thirty six hours—I got engaged, Heaven knows how! in a question which has often amused me in calmer moments of day-dreaming; namely, the possibility, or otherwise, of a woman producing a worthy musical composition.

The occasion of the debate was the third—at all events the last—performance of Mademoiselle Bertin's *Esmeralda*, which was to take place that evening. One of her defenders, at the top of his lungs, was expiating on her force and originality in instrumentation, and declaring that the orchestra, M Habeneck, its conductor included, had leagued itself in an ungallant cabal to play out of tune whenever *Esmeralda* was to be given. His antagonist, half a tone at least shriller, was indignantly replying that all that was good in the score was the work of M Berlioz ('He had peppered it,' were his precise words), and that the orchestra was right to withstand an overweening cabal made by the writers of *Le Journal des Débats*, with M Bertin de Vaux, Pair de France, chief proprietor and father of the composer, at its head. One might as well have been in Morocco, as unqualified to scold about Mademoiselle Bertin and M Victor Hugo. What will you have on't? (as Mrs Quickly's ghost said to Dr Goldsmith)—Seven o'clock found me at L'Académie.

.....On this my first visit being late and inexperienced, I fell by chance into a place vacated for me, in the centre of the pit, and, what was less to the purpose, fell into the midst of a host of claqueurs who, to judge from their grimy blackness might be devils belonging to M Bertin's Journal.

Under such circumstances of distraction it must have required cleverer music than Mademoiselle Bertin's to have graven a deep impression on my memory. But I have since learned more concerning her enterprises, which are remarkable enough, on the part of a woman, to merit attention.....

.....Mademoiselle Bertin seems from the first to have shown not only the boldest ambition, but also a tendency towards the dark and mysterious in subject. Before she wrote *Esmeralda* there were already on record against her an operetta *Le Loup Garon*, and an Italian version of *Faust*, the latter of course a failure—Mephistopheles and Margaret's lover being alike beyond the powers of music. But a paragraph is extant in the *Nachgelassene Werke* of Göthe (sic) concerning the score, which is in some sort of immortality; and I was told of a duet between Faust and Margaret in the street—in its beauty little less delicate and seductive than the duet *Segui o cara* which fills the same situation in Spohr's opera.

Undaunted by failure, Mademoiselle Bertin chose for her third essay the next intractable subject to the *Faust* which modern genius has produced; for *Quasimodo* is

scarcely more susceptible to musical illustration than the student or his familiar. Nor was Victor Hugo's romance made the fitter for the operatic stage, because Victor Hugo chose himself to dramatise it. The destruction which other librettists work on the most strongly-marked and simple subjects,— witness the operatic treatment of Scott's *Bride of Lammermoor*,—he has wrought himself. Skilful as he is in the management of stage effect, he knows not the secret of opera—how far, in spite of the trammels of the musician, situation may go, and character be drawn.

The scene of the first act was laid in *La Cour des Miracles* the squalid loathsomeness of which was, of necessity, so far mitigated, that its spirit was lost. The main feature of the second act was the scene at the pillory, which recalls to me at the moment of writing a chorus of women, pretty and piquant enough to have been a waif from Mademoiselle Puget's domain. The grand trio (which is now, it seems, an essential feature in every French Opera) was the terrible interview at Falourdel's tavern—the passion of which again was of necessity entirely tamed to suit the convenances of representation; while the fourth act—containing an effective bellringer's song for Quasimodo, said to be the contribution of M Berlioz, which was given with a rude energy by Massol—opened with a dungeon scene for Esmeralda, and closed in the Parvis of Notre Dame. There had been a fifth act, contrived by M Hugo, so said sarcastic journalists, to take place upon the towers of the cathedral—the personæ, Claude Frollo, the Hunchback, and certain owls: but this the management had retrenched as indiscreet, and had substituted the more practicable operatic tableau of the heroine dying on the steps of the cathedral, while the portal unclosing displayed the illuminated perspective beyond, with priests, choristers, censer-bearers, etc—a faint copy, in short, of the last decoration of *Robert le Diable*.

Thus the whole story was at once the slightest of the slight—the most melo-dramatic of melodrama. M Hugo's words for music were, moreover, not half so tractable as the clinquant which M Scribe gives to his partners, though the one is a poet and master of rhythm and lyrical climax, and the other but a manufacturer of long and short lines. Had I even not been very sleepy in the first instance, I must have yawned over the music so colourless and pretending—in spite of the luxury of a chorus, the like of which I had never seen before, and in spite of the *Esmeralda* and *Phoebus* and *Claude Frollo* of the opera introducing me to Mademoiselle Falcon, and MM Nourrit and Levasseur.

But weary though I was, and distracted from the stage by the commodious splendours of the house, by the brilliancy of the audience, and by the thousand sounds of Parisian animated life, then all new and amusing to me—the impression made upon me by the orchestra that evening, and deepened by every subsequent visit, will never fade away.....

But I grow wearisome, as all are apt to do on a favourite subject. How can an orchestra be described in writing? *Esmeralda* was over, and received with such coldness as amounted to a prohibition of its further performance, in spite of my neighbours the *claqueurs*; the brilliant, animated, motley audience poured out of the wide avenues,—to judge from their vivacious and impatient criticisms, of good Owen Feltham's mind, when he declared,

“I am confirmed in my belief. No woman hath a soul, at least as far as musical composition is concerned”.

Since that evening I have not heard a whisper or encountered one printed syllable concerning the further progress in music of Mademoiselle Bertin. Her fellow-labourer, however, has not forgotten her, as may be seen by the earnest epistolary confession—I mean the poem *Sagesse*, which closes Victor Hugo's last volume of fugitive verses *Les Rayons et les Ombres*.