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»Nobles dans leurs attitudes, naturels dans leurs gestes«.

Singers as Actors on the Paris Grand Opéra Stage

Throughout the French Restoration and July Monarchy, flamboyant and costly performances of the prestigious Parisian opera houses attracted many inspired composers, musicians and listeners from Europe and beyond to light up the stages and fill the seats of the expanding cultural metropolis. A combination of imported excellence, new institutional education and lavish material investment was employed to guarantee the utmost quality in an attempt to redefine Parisian artistic identity after the upheavals of the Revolution and the First Empire. Composers like Gioachino Rossini, Daniel-François-Esprit Auber, Giacomo Meyerbeer, Fromental Halévy, Gaetano Donizetti and Adolphe Adam rose to the occasion collaborating with the best librettists and designers to create those masterworks of conceptual, musical and visual splendour which would set the standard for future generations. In order to adequately transmit these works to the demanding public, worthy protagonists were required at the major venues of the Opéra, the Opéra comique or the Théâtre italien, in particular excellent singers, often imported from abroad or – increasingly – trained locally in Parisian institutions. The success of this endeavour is well documented in music criticism of the time. For example, after the premiere of Eugène Scribe and Giacomo Meyerbeer's opera *Les Huguenots* in 1836, the French composer Hector Berlioz – among many other enthusiasts – praised the outstanding performances of lead singers Adolphe Nourrit and Cornélie Falcon:

»Pour Nourrit et Mlle Falcon, ils ont été admirables tous les deux; il faut les voir, il faut les entendre dans le fameux duo du quatrième acte, pour se faire une idée de la perfection avec laquelle cette belle scène est rendue. C'est bien la passion, l'amour, le désespoir, la terreur, l'anxiété qu'ils expriment, mais sans cesser d'être nobles dans leurs attitudes, naturels dans leurs gestes et sans que l'expression la plus véhémente ôte rien à la perfection de leur chant. Tous les deux se sont arrêtés juste au point, au-delà duquel il n'y a plus que la caricature de la passion.«¹

Berlioz's review dwells in detail on the singers' dramatic interpretation of their complex operatic roles. Corporal attitudes, gestures and expressions used to convey the protago-

1 »As for Nourrit and Miss Falcon, they were both admirable; one must see them, one must hear them in the famous duet in the fourth act, to get an idea of the perfection with which this beautiful scene is given. It is indeed passion, love, despair, terror, anxiety they express but never ceasing to be noble in their attitudes, natural in their gestures, and without letting even the most vehement expression affect the perfection of their singing. Both stopped just at the point beyond which there is only the caricature of passion.« Hector Berlioz: *Les Huguenots*, in: *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*, 6 March 1836, p. 77. (All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.)

nists' intense inner passions feature centrally in this account, guiding the reader's attention beyond the prerequisite of »vocal perfection« towards the performers' excellence as dramatic interpreters. While much has already been said about both compositional and visual aspects of French Grand opéra, the actual intersection between music and staging, as conceived by the authors and incarnated by the singer-actors, constitutes a much-neglected primordial nucleus of meaning within these operatic monuments. Thus the present investigation focuses on the aesthetic and theatrical codes dominating dramatic expression in Paris during the first half of the nineteenth century, examining how singers acquired and developed their acting skills and how these were effectively employed in the context of stage performance.

In the initial sentence of his review, Berlioz evokes a central methodological problem affecting all performance research before the advent of sound recording, photography and film: »one must see them, one must hear them« he cries, ironically suggesting the hopelessness of the opera critic's task. This enthusiastic invitation echoes tauntingly today, as we try to grasp the more subtle aspects of nineteenth century opera performance through an analysis of available sources. Only in the last decades of the nineteenth century did the development of audio and visual recording technologies make »hearing« and »seeing« historic performances a possible reality, enabling a direct transmission to future generations of such ephemeral properties as vocal colour or stage movement. The major part of nineteenth century performance remains therefore unhearable and unseeable – only re-imaginable to us through a detailed exploration of surviving descriptive sources.² The present article will propose a contextual interpretation of selected sources concerning the histrionic quality of opera singers' stage performance practice at the Paris Opéra during the first half of the nineteenth century. Written documents such as opera reviews, singers' biographies, pedagogical acting-singing treatises and staging manuals, as well as the iconographic evidence found in stage sketches, libretto illustrations or historical drawings and paintings will be taken into account, focussing particularly on the productions of Meyerbeer's three tragic French works *Robert le diable* (1831), *Les Huguenots* (1836) and *Le Prophète* (1848).³

- 2 Although some early twentieth century photo and video material is relevant to the understanding of nineteenth century performance practices, a study of these valuable documents involves complexities connected to the temporal distance between these later sources and the actual performances of early nineteenth century repertoire that cannot be addressed within the scope of the present article.
- 3 This article emerged within the interdisciplinary research project entitled »Sänger als Schauspieler, zwischen Gestikkatalog und Regieanweisung. Zur Inszenierungspraxis an den Pariser Opernbühnen in der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts« funded by the Bern University of Applied Sciences in 2010. A new project entitled »Moving Meyerbeer. Visual, acoustic and kinetic

Legends and Lives Charles Bouvet begins his 1927 biography of the French soprano Cornélie Falcon by lamenting the confounding lack of pragmatic information available concerning his illustrious subject.⁴ The title of the publication series – *Acteurs et actrices d'autrefois* – in which Bouvet's volume was issued suggests a typically twentieth century attitude in its desire to capture and analyse an individual performer's almost forgotten past. Indeed, the modern singer-star concept with its personality cult, wide media diffusion and atemporal celebration of brilliance was only just emerging in the early nineteenth century; therefore most singers active in Parisian venues between 1815 and 1850 were considered important public figures, amply criticized in the press and celebrated by opera goers, yet the details of their private lives, educational backgrounds or working conditions were of little interest, rarely documented, thus leaving sparse evidence for future generations to collect after the artists' disappearance.⁵ An occasional interest in nineteenth century singers' lives flared whenever they involved tragic events: the untimely death of Maria Malibran (1808–1836), the vocal collapse of Cornélie Falcon (1814–1897) or the devastating suicide of Adolphe Nourrit (1802–1839) each momentarily triggered a heightened interest which resulted in a more ample, though often overtly hagiographic documentation. But despite these difficulties, biographical notes, reviews and memoirs offer an indispensable, if subjective and fragmentary, access to the living, learning and performing individualities of nineteenth century opera.⁶

Before examining some biographical data more closely, an overview of the musical and theatrical pedagogical landscape in early nineteenth century Paris may be of use. Traditionally, the performing arts were taught in different ways according to what family, status and financial means a singer was born into: apprenticeships in troupes or theatres,

formulas in Giacomo Meyerbeer's music theatrical works« was approved by the Swiss National Science Foundation in 2012 and aims to pursue the research fields presented here.

- 4 Charles Bouvet: *Cornélie Falcon*, in: *Acteurs et actrices d'autrefois. Documents et anecdotes publiés sous la direction de M. Louis Schneider*, Paris 1927, vol. II, p. 10.
- 5 Rebecca Grotjahn has convincingly argued that a few singers such as Angelica Catalani (1780–1849), Henriette Sontag (1806–1854) or Jenny Lind (1820–1887) could already be considered ›stars‹ in the modern sense – popular legends rather than merely outstanding performers of their time. However these examples constitute the exception rather than the norm. See Rebecca Grotjahn: ›The most popular woman in the world‹. *Die Diva und die Anfänge des Starwesens im 19. Jahrhundert*, in: *Diva – Die Inszenierung der übermenschlichen Frau. Interdisziplinäre Untersuchungen zu einem kulturellen Phänomen des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Rebecca Grotjahn, Dörte Schmidt and Thomas Seedorf, Schliengen 2011 (*Forum Musikwissenschaft*, vol. 7), p. 74–97.
- 6 For a wealth of information on singers as actors throughout and beyond the nineteenth century see Susan Rutherford: *The Prima Donna and Opera, 1815–1930*, Cambridge 2006, especially chapters 6 and 7.

private tuition, personal imitation or knowledge transfer within artist families were all possible ways of learning the stage singer's trade. Beginning after the French Revolution of 1789 and following the subsequent political upheavals, a new concept emerged for a nationally unified means of teaching theatre and music: the Paris Conservatoire, founded in 1795 through the fusion of the military based Institut National de Musique and the pre-existing *École Royale (later Nationale) de chant*, was to become the model of institutionalised musical education, which would eventually be imitated throughout the rest of Europe. In the following years, varying political and ideological shifts affected the orientation of the Conservatoire in different ways, including its temporary closure after the fall of the Empire in 1815. But having survived the first three decades of its precarious existence, the school gradually became a widely respected institution offering professional tuition to the most talented instrumentalists, singers and actors recruited from across the country.

Although the Paris Conservatoire de musique and the Conservatoire d'art dramatique constitute two separate institutions today, acting and singing were originally taught within a single establishment. Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century lyric and dramatic performance continued to be perceived as two sides of a same coin based on a common core of knowledge and technique. The early Conservatoire curriculum foresaw a course in »maintien théâtral« for both singers and actors where the practices of stage bearing and gesture were taught alongside gymnastics, dancing and fencing. A second aspect of curricular emphasis centred on the so-called »cours de déclamation«. These declamation classes were divided into three different domains – tragic, comic and lyric – taught by professional actors or singers over several years, each developing the specific declamatory style of the dramatic genre under consideration. Reading and discussing canonical texts, practicing diction and inflection of several languages, as well as elaborating dramatic movements to suit each phrase, were some of the pedagogical methods employed to develop dramatic characters.⁷ In what follows, I will focus on the biographies of those singers most famously associated with Meyerbeer's Parisian works whose histrionic qualities were particularly celebrated in contemporary accounts, in an attempt to better comprehend their means of acquiring and transmitting dramatic singing practice.⁸

7 For a summary of the development of dramatic teaching at the Conservatoire see Noëlle Guibert: *Musique et Art dramatique. Le paradoxe de la formation de l'acteur*, in: *Le Conservatoire de Paris. Des Menus-Plaisirs à la Cité de la musique, 1795–1995*, ed. Anne Bongrain [et al.], Paris 1996, p. 151–168. For a subjective yet enlightening description of more specific teaching methods used by teachers of the Conservatoire during the nineteenth century see Leymarie Bernheim: *L'enseignement dramatique au conservatoire*, Paris 1883.

8 For further background information on the lives and careers of Parisian singers see also Mary

ADOLPHE NOURRIT (1802–1839) was born to a merchant family from Montpellier the same year his father Louis was admitted as a tenor to the Paris Conservatoire. Louis' two sons Adolphe and Auguste were not originally destined for the stage, but he nevertheless taught them basic music, singing and (presumably) acting skills. Despite their father's opposition, the younger Auguste became a successful tenor and opera director, while the elder, Adolphe, started taking lessons with another tenor, Manuel García (senior), who famously taught all of his children and many successful singers of their generation. In addition, Adolphe attended the declamation classes of Baptiste aîné (Nicolas Anselme Baptiste 1761–1835) at the Conservatoire. So although Louis Nourrit had been a pure product of the new institutionalised system, his son was taught in a more traditional manner through private tutoring and oral transmission within several artist families. Adolphe Nourrit made his debut at the Opéra in 1821 where he performed alongside his father in Gluck's *Iphigénie en Tauride*, before becoming a lead performer in the Parisian operas of Rossini, Auber, Meyerbeer and Halévy. In 1827 the Conservatoire hired him to teach »lyric declamation« thereby insuring that traditional teaching methods and institutionalised education fed back and forth into one another, transmitting knowledge to the following generations of singers. Ironically, it is probably Nourrit's tragic suicide – which occurred after he left Paris attempting to begin a second career in Italy – which most vividly captured the nineteenth century imagination and insured his posterity.

Published nearly thirty years after the artist's death, Louis Quicherat's comprehensive three volume biography of Adolphe Nourrit proposes to elucidate the singer's life, talent and character.⁹ In the first twelve pages of his chapter dedicated to Nourrit's »talent« Quicherat addresses not primarily the tenor's vocal quality, but rather his dramatic style, sensibility on stage and powerful acting expression, also attempting to explain how he came to acquire these talents:

»Talma et Mlle Mars furent les modèles accomplis qu'il étudiait. Après ces soirées si instructives, il s'inspirait de ses souvenirs, et tâchait de retrouver les intensions de ces maîtres de la scène, de reproduire les passages qui l'avaient le plus frappé.«¹⁰

Ann Smart's chapter: Roles, reputations, shadows. Singers at the Opéra, in: *The Cambridge Companion to Grand Opera*, ed. David Charlton, Cambridge 2003, p. 108–128, as well as her article: The lost voice of Rosine Stolz, in: *Cambridge Opera Journal* 6 (1994), no. 1, p. 31–50.

9 Louis Quicherat: *Adolphe Nourrit. Sa vie, son talent, son caractère, sa correspondance*, 3 volumes, Paris 1867. These rather surprising distinctions illustrate the biographer's pre-stardom attitude where social, private and artistic aspects are considered distinct objects of study. Volume one offers the expected, well documented, chronological perspective of Nourrit's life, which is further supplemented by the letters collected in volume three, while volume two contains the more intriguing sections dedicated to the artist's »talent« and »character«.

10 »Talma and Mlle Mars were the accomplished models that he studied. After those instructive evenings he would seek inspiration in his memories and attempt to recapture the intentions of

François-Joseph Talma (1763–1826) and Mademoiselle Mars (Anne-Françoise-Hippolyte Boutet 1779–1847) were tragic actors of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic generations celebrated for their expressive acting style, their ›natural‹ declamation and an interest in historical accuracy.¹¹ Nourrit's study of his older colleagues' performances, his imitation of their style and his subsequent introduction of similar elements at the Opéra, confirms that a fruitful exchange transpired between the tragic and lyric theatre stages. Nourrit's method of self-teaching is described here as the attentive observation of live performances, followed by the attempt to reconstruct the most striking passages from memory and thus recapture the best expressions or intensions of his masters.

In a similar way – still according to Quicherat – the visual arts participated in this environment of cross-fertilization, serving as inspiration for the dramatic practice of the time:

»Nourrit fréquentait notre Musée. Il avait un goût très vif pour la statuaire et la peinture. Ces visites non-seulement élevaient son esprit par le spectacle de la beauté idéale, mais elles lui fournissaient des notions précieuses sur les costumes anciens. Nourrit recherchait les grands talents: c'était un bonheur pour lui de leur exprimer son admiration. Il connut presque tous les artistes-peintres qui étaient alors ou qui sont encore la gloire de notre école, Ingres, Eugène Delacroix, Ary Scheffer, Delaroche, Lehmann, Amaury Duval, etc.«¹²

The notion of ›ideal beauty‹ appears to refer here to the general artistic awareness of classical aesthetics in painting and sculpture, including such concepts as ›contraposto‹, ›chiaroscuro‹ and rhetorical gesture. At the same time, Nourrit's interest in the art of his contemporaries suggests that realist and romantic aesthetics found in nineteenth century Parisian painting also nourished Nourrit's theatrical imagination, confirming the relevance of iconographic sources for the study of early nineteenth century stage performance, and implying that certain singers' choice of costumes, attitudes or gestures were fundamentally influenced by what they saw on canvases.¹³

these stage masters, to reproduce the passages that had struck him the most.« Quicherat: *Adolphe Nourrit*, vol. 2, chap. 7, p. 265.

- 11 Talma's own aesthetic ideals are summarised in his essay dedicated to the eighteenth century actor Lekain: François-Joseph Talma: *Quelques réflexions sur Lekain et sur l'art théâtral*, Paris 1825.
- 12 »Nourrit visited our Museum. He had a lively taste for sculpture and painting. These visits not only elevated his spirit through the contemplation of ideal beauty, they provided him with precious notions about ancient costumes. Nourrit sought out big talents: it was a joy for him to express his admiration. He knew almost all the painter-artists who were then or still are the glory of our school, Ingres, Eugène Delacroix, Ary Scheffer, Delaroche, Lehmann, Amaury Duval, etc.« Quicherat: *Adolphe Nourrit*, vol. 2, chap. 7, p. 267.
- 13 See Schaffer p. 41 of this volume.

The precise effects of this varied self-education on Nourrit's acting quality can only be surmised, yet contemporary criticism offers a glimpse at what the young tenor had achieved. For example in Quicherat's account of the 1831 premiere of Meyerbeer's *Robert le diable*:

»Pendant la délicieuse romance d'Alice, on voyait se produire un mérite éminent de Nourrit, celui de savoir écouter. Chaque parole se traduisait sur sa physionomie, et lui suggérait un geste naturel, expressif: dans ces occasions, l'auditeur était aussi éloquent que le narrateur.«¹⁴

Having just told Robert of their mother's death, Alice relays the dying woman's last words in her Romance »Va, dit-elle, va, mon enfant«. Still under shock, the stunned Robert is reduced to silence, leaving only his physical features to convey the full extent of his anguish. Through Nourrit's attentive stance and his »natural« and »expressive« use of gestures, his silent bearing becomes as »eloquent« as if he were speaking. This pantomimic quality of acting, particularly revealed in a mute scene like the one described above, appears to have been one of Nourrit's most appreciated »talents«.

Although there is, to my knowledge, no iconographic representation of Alice's first act romance, other scenes from the immensely popular *Robert le diable* provide material for analogy. One of these documents offering a rare visual impression of nineteenth century singers in action is, for example, the coloured lithograph from the *Album des théâtres* on the next page (figure 1).¹⁵ Robert's right fist is balled, barring off the dark glowering figure of Bertram; his left hand is open yet still defensive, warding off Alice whose right hand points towards the sky and possible redemption. The immediacy of Nourrit's acting is captured in this scene through the precise depiction of the actor's intensely knitted brows, his forward inclined torso and the taut stance of his legs, all indicative of a state of deep agitation – the moment has come to chose between good and evil. The music critic Théodore Anne further characterizes Nourrit's performance in the following terms:

- 14 »During the delightful ›romance d'Alice‹ one could observe one of Nourrit's eminent merits, the ability to listen. Each word was translated in his physiognomy, suggesting a natural, expressive gesture: in these occasions the listener was as eloquent as the narrator.« Quicherat: *Adolphe Nourrit*, vol. 1, chap. 4, p. 115.
- 15 Illustrations from the *Album des théâtres* have a higher claim to ›authenticity‹ than many other iconographic sources of the time; the editors explicitly indicate in their preface that these lithographs were completed only a few days after the performances and were destined to be used as references for future productions. Compared, for example, to François-Gabriel Lepaulle's famous rendition of this scene (*Musée de l'opéra*, Paris) this lithograph provides a more directly reliable documentary source for questions of performance practice. See also Anette Schaffer's contribution on p. 41 of this volume for the contextualisation and interpretation of iconographic sources relating to French opera in the first half of the nineteenth century.



FIGURE 1 »Que faut-il faire?« – Robert is torn between conflicting impulses epitomised by his virtuous half-sister Alice and his demonic father Bertram in the culminating melodramatic trio of the fifth act of Meyerbeer's *Robert le diable* (coloured lithograph, *Album des théâtres*, Paris 1837).



FIGURE 2 »Savez-vous qu'en joignant vos mains dans ces ténèbres« – Marcel agrees to wed the doomed lovers Raoul and Valentine in extremis in the fifth act trio of Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots*; the characters' poised stasis contrasts violently with what we know and hear to be occurring beyond the stage, as the massacre of the Parisian Huguenots progresses (coloured lithograph, *Album des théâtres*).

FIGURE 3 »Arrêtez! – Il prend ma défense!« – Pauline Viardot-García as Fidès and Gustave Hippolyte Roger as Jean de Leyde in the »exorcism« scene in Act IV of Meyerbeer's *Le Prophète*. Fidès kneels at her son's feet, begging for recognition from the would-be prophet. Jean is caught between his pleading mother and the menacing Anabaptists in the background, forced to make an impossible decision (lithograph printed in *L'illustration*, Paris November 1849).



»Tout cela avec Nourrit vous saisissait, vous tenait en émoi. Cette belle physionomie n'avait pas un éclair qui ne fut un éclair de haute intelligence; chaque muscle avait son expression particulière; les paroles étaient inutiles avec la perfection de cette pantomime; car Nourrit parlait avec sa figure et avec ses mains, et on comprenait tous ses gestes.«¹⁶

The critic focuses on the singer's »face«, »physiognomy« and »hands« as well as the detailed expression of »each muscle« in order to grasp what constitutes the somatic essence of Nourrit's art, his ability to achieve the »perfect pantomime« enabling him to move his audience without resorting to words.¹⁷

CORNÉLIE FALCON (1814–1897) was born in Paris to a family of modest means; her father was a tailor. From the age of six she was entrusted to a convent where she received her basic education and first singing lessons. In 1827 she entered the Paris Conservatoire from which she graduated four years later with a first prize in both singing and lyric declamation, a class that had been taught by none other than Nourrit. At that time, such results guaranteed an immediate employment at one of the prestigious Parisian venues. Louis Véron, who was newly appointed director of the Opéra after the July Revolution of 1830, did not hesitate to hire a young and promising soprano for his ensemble, thus Falcon first appeared to the public as Alice in the 1832 reprise of *Robert le diable*, performing alongside her former professor Nourrit. Her début was successful and she became famous overnight, subsequently enacting an impressive series of prestigious soprano roles over the next five years and becoming the best-paid singer in France.

Falcon's acting talents are rarely described in detail, whether in biographical notes or in the press. Rather it seems to have been the unique colour of her voice and her striking appearance that attracted the most attention. One does nonetheless find a few statements concerning Falcon's gestures and stage expressions, some of which are collected in Charles Bouvet's biography of 1927. For example, the distinguished impresario and critic Castil-Blaze (François-Henri-Joseph Blaze 1784–1857) describes Falcon's interpretation of Alice rather ambiguously as »[...] joué d'une manière très dramatique, il est vrai, mais qui n'est pas exempt d'exagération«, before concluding that this performance places her

16 »All this would catch your attention, hold your emotion. That beautiful physiognomy offered no spark which was not a flash of high intelligence; each muscle had its particular expression; words were superfluous with the perfection of this pantomime; because Nourrit spoke with his face and with his hands, and one could understand each of his gestures.« Théodore Anne: *Robert le diable*, in: *La France*, 3 December 1838, quoted in Quicherat: *Adolphe Nourrit*, vol. 1, chap. 4, p. 122.

17 For a broader contextualisation of dramatic terms and concepts within the Parisian theatre landscape of the time, and their role in achieving »visual comprehensibility« in Grand opéra see Manuela Jahrmärker: *Comprendre par les yeux. Zu Werkkonzeption und Werkrezeption in der Epoche der Grand opéra*, Laaber 2006, in particular chapter 4: *Die französische Schauspieltheorie und -praxis im 19. Jahrhundert*, p. 99–163.

on the rank of the best operatic actresses.¹⁸ While the qualification »dramatic« appears appreciative in this context, the term »exaggeration« suggests that the histrionic quality of Falcon's acting went somewhat ›beyond‹ what Castil-Blaze considered appropriate. Another review gives an unusually detailed account of the soprano's gestures in the role of Rachel in Fromental Halévy's *La Juive* (1835): »[...] ses gestes toujours rapides comme la pensée, dans l'empportement et la passion, n'ont jamais cependant rien laissé à désirer sous le rapport du naturel ou de la grâce.«¹⁹ Here again the intellect is emphasized: it is the singer's »thought« which regulates the speed of her movement in the expression of her »enthusiasm« and »passion«. At the same time a »natural« effect is achieved through this rational approach, which leaves us wondering exactly how dramatic excess, intelligent control and impulsive naturalness merged in the soprano's celebrated operatic performances.²⁰

Before losing her voice on stage during a performance of Louis Niedermeyer's *Stradella* in 1837 and being forced to retire at the young age of twenty-three – a tragedy that would not fail to capture the attention of the press and insure the soprano some lasting fame – Falcon achieved her final triumph with the role of Valentine in *Les Huguenots*, a part specifically created for her by Meyerbeer and – according to Berlioz and other contemporary critics – performed to perfection. The lithograph on page 18 (figure 2) captures the atmosphere in the gripping fifth act trio of *Les Huguenots*. Set during the French Counter-Reformation, this scene takes place on the eve of the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre of 1572. Huguenot veteran Marcel has been wounded in the first onslaught of violence and has come to warn his master Raoul de Nangis. The catholic Valentine de Saint-Bris, after having unsuccessfully tried to convince Raoul to flee and save his life, has adopted the protestant faith in order to stay by her lover's side. Since Valentine's betrothed, the Comte de Nevers, has just been killed in battle, nothing now stands in the way of the lovers' union, which Marcel willingly sanctifies. Anselm Gerhard has shown that the dramatic strength of this scene relies less on the protagonists' action on stage, than on what Meyerbeer's music suggests is happening off stage as the sound of the Lutheran choral is repeatedly interrupted by violent clashes.²¹ Accordingly it is the lack of physical expression or movement in this scene that creates its powerful impact:

18 »[...] acted in a very dramatic manner, it is true, but which is not exempt from exaggeration«, Castil-Blaze in *Revue de Paris* 41 (1832), p. 53.

19 »[...] her gestures always as quick as thoughts in energy and passion, never however left anything to be desired in terms of naturalness.« Anonymous review in the *Gazette Musicale de Paris*, 1 March 1835, p. 75.

20 These and further questions will be developed in more detail below.

21 Anselm Gerhard: *Die Verstädterung der Oper. Paris und das Musiktheater des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Stuttgart 1992, p. 174–175.

Marcel's simple gesture of benediction, the pain expressed on his furrowed brow, in combination with Raoul's calm confident pose and Valentine's quiet despair, her free hand resting near her heart. With the knowledge of what is still to come, this minimalistic use of codified theatrical communication – and the arising disjunction between gesture and music – achieves a highly dramatic effect that would be lost in more overt gesticulation.²²

These two spectacular ›tableaux‹ presented above would not be trios without the essential ancillary roles of Bertram in *Robert le diable* (figure 1) and Marcel in *Les Huguenots* (figure 2), both created for and by the celebrated French bass NICOLAS-PROSPER LEVASSEUR (1791–1871). Levasseur is not nearly as present in contemporary written sources as Falcon or Nourrit, although by all accounts, and judging by the roles written for him, he was a stunning deep bass and an expressive actor. He trained at the Paris Conservatoire and made his debut at the Opéra in 1813. His next engagements lead him to the King's Theatre in London and the Scala in Milan before returning to Paris for performances of Rossini's works at the Théâtre Italien – including the title role in *Moïse* (1818) which consolidated his reputation, insuring him a position at the Opéra where he stayed until his retirement in 1853. Both Rossini and Meyerbeer held Levasseur in high esteem, not only as a singer but also as an expressive and versatile actor, capable of achieving success in comic as well as tragic works, or in a role such as that of Marcel, where multiple expressive talents come together:

»Il nous faudrait bien des pages si nous voulions analyser en détail tous les beaux effets créés par Levasseur dans ce rôle de Marcel [...]. Pour ne parler que des effets les plus remarquables, nous citerons la manière brusque et hardie avec laquelle Levasseur dit la chanson huguenote.«²³

From the grotesque brusqueness evoked in this description of Act I to the solemn pathos portrayed in the lithograph above in Act V, Levasseur mastered the wide expressive range required for the interpretation of this complex role.

Following the immense success of *Les Huguenots* in the French capital and abroad, the Parisian public had to wait thirteen long years for the next Meyerbeer-Scribe chef-d'œuvre to appear on stage. Although first sketches for *Le Prophète* date back to 1835 and plans for *L'Africaine* were conceived as early as 1837, the lack of suitable French singers after the disappearance of Cornélie Falcon and Adolphe Nourrit initially postponed

22 On the conjunction and disjunction of gesture and music in *Les Huguenots*, see Mary Ann Smart: *Mimomania. Music and gesture in nineteenth-century opera*, Berkeley 2004, p. 101–131.

23 »We would need many pages if we wanted to describe in detail all the beautiful effects created by Levasseur in the role of Marcel [...]. To speak only of the most remarkable effects, we will cite the brusque and hardy manner with which Levasseur says the chanson huguenote.« Gustave Bénédict: *Levasseur*, in: *Galerie des Artistes dramatiques de Paris*, Paris 1841–1843.

further progress. Moreover, professional frictions between Meyerbeer, Scribe and opera director Léon Pillet, as well as general political tensions leading up to the collapse of the July Monarchy in 1848, soon made any attempt at a new collaboration impossible. After Henry Duponchel and Nestor Roqueplan became directors of the Opéra in 1847 and the disruptions of the third revolutionary wave subsided, *Le Prophète* was finally staged in 1849 with two unusual »créateurs de rôle« – Pauline Viardot-García and Gustave Hippolyte Roger.

PAULINE VIARDOT-GARCÍA (1821–1910) was the daughter of Manuel García (senior) and the sister of the famous singing theorist Manuel García (junior) and the soprano Maria Malibran; she was also a friend of George Sand, Franz Liszt, Ary Scheffer, Charles Dickens, and generally a central figure in the European nineteenth century cultural topography. Due to her political inclinations (she and her husband were notorious republicans), she was rarely seen in Paris during the Restoration and July Monarchy, although she was considered one of the greatest lyrical talents of her time, and the most direct proponent of the García singing tradition, following her sister's early death. Her acting was often compared to that of the celebrated tragic actress Rachel (Élisabeth Rachel Félix 1821–1858) who was considered the epitome of nineteenth century French theatrical art. After the Revolution of 1848, it finally became possible for Viardot-García to create the role of Fidès, to the delight of Meyerbeer who had hoped for many years to lure the Viardots back to Paris, and immediately proceeded to substantially lengthen and modify the role of Fidès to suit his protégées capabilities.²⁴

The tenor GUSTAVE HIPPOLYTE ROGER (1815–1879) was also chosen by Meyerbeer who was prepared to take a considerable risk with this novice to avoid that Gilbert Duprez – whose voice had started to fail under the strain of the thunderous tenor style he epitomised – be chosen to sing the part.²⁵ Roger was one of the few professional actor-singers of the time with an aristocratic background, because the profession of a public performer was not considered an acceptable upper-class occupation until later in the century. Indeed most nineteenth century singers, including the four others presented in this article, came either from artistic families or from modest backgrounds. Roger began his career secretly as a provincial theatre director before entering the Conservatoire. In 1838 he was first hired by the Opéra Comique, where he obtained considerable successes, before being summoned to the Opéra to interpret the demanding role of Jean de Leyde in Meyerbeer's *Le Prophète*, set during the religious wars of the 1530s and loosely based on the life of John

²⁴ See the most recent biography of Pauline Viardot-García, Barbara Kendall-Davies' *The life and work of Pauline Viardot Garcia*, 2 volumes, Newcastle upon Tyne 2004–2012.

²⁵ See letter of 25 September 1847, in: Giacomo Meyerbeer. *Briefwechsel und Tagebücher*, ed. Heinz Becker and Gudrun Becker, Berlin [etc.] 1959–2006, vol. 4, p. 314–317.

of Leiden. The image on page 18 (figure 3) is one of the many contemporary representations of the «exorcism» scene in the fourth act. The protagonists are drawn together by their gazes yet torn in opposite directions by the dramatic circumstances conveyed in the agitated alignments of their limbs and the pathos-laden expression of their bodies. Jean's attitude manages to convey both haughty assurance and deep unease, the outstretched position of his arms similar to that of Nourrit depicted in figure 1, but instead of leaning forward and furrowing his brow, Roger leans back, his face set in a tragic mask, pleading, yet at the same time denying any implication in the kneeling woman's destiny.

These «amuse-bouches» must suffice to convey a general impression of opera singers' biographical circumstances and dramatic education against the tumultuous backdrop of the Parisian Opéra in the first half of the nineteenth century, but I will return to some of these examples in what follows, attempting to draw closer to the melodramatic expertise of such Grand opéra masters as Nourrit, Falcon, Levasseur, Viardot-García and Roger – singer-actors at a crossroads between classical theatrical traditions and new impulses of the revolutionary era.

The Power of Pantomime In the context of experimentation and renewal after the French Revolution, many theorists sought to capture and redefine the precepts for musical education and performance, resulting in a vast output of theoretical material, treatises and manuals throughout the nineteenth century. While traditional systems of teaching relied mainly on oral transmission, the emergence of institutionalised education led to a proliferation of written sources designed to ensure the transfer of knowledge within and beyond these institutions. The first singing methods published by the Conservatoire offer valuable information in terms of both the performance practice presupposed and the intensions for future generations. However these methods tend to concentrate mainly on vocal technique, rarely addressing any details concerning singers' dramatic expression.²⁶ Acting manuals such as Aristippe's *Manuel théâtral* (1826) or James Rousseau's *Code théâtral* (1829) offer a compilation of personal notes and opinions about the aesthetics and practice of acting rather than a systematic pedagogical method.²⁷

Although, or perhaps precisely because, singers' acting was not distinguished from acting in general, one finds very few contemporary sources discussing the specificities of operatic stage performance. François Boisquet's *Essai sur l'art du comédien chanteur* (1812)

²⁶ See for example Bernardo Mengozzi [et al.]: *Méthode de chant du conservatoire*, Paris 1804.

²⁷ Aristippe (Felix Bernier de Maligny): *Théorie de l'art du comédien ou Manuel théâtral*, Paris 1826; James Rousseau: *Code théâtral. Physiologie des théâtres, manuel complet de l'auteur, du directeur, de l'acteur et de l'amateur, contenant les lois, règles et applications de l'art dramatique*, Paris 1829.

is notable in this context as it explicitly addresses the singer-actor and proposes a detailed methodical-pedagogical approach. The three hundred page treatise is divided into five books in which the author discusses a wide spectrum of subjects ranging from vocal physiology to acting exercises, thereby simply assuming the hybrid nature of the operatic actor-singer.²⁸ In the chapter on pantomime, he offers insight into the nineteenth century conception of singer's acting:

»Pour parvenir à exprimer [...], le comédien a deux moyens en son pouvoir, la pantomime et la voix. Pantomime. La pantomime consiste dans la pose qui doit peindre le caractère conçu, l'action donnée à cette pose, la physionomie qui convient à cette pose et qui se calcule d'après les passions. La voix. La voix, qui suit tous ces premiers calculs, et exprime tous ces effets, soit en marchant d'accord avec la pantomime, soit en semblant la contrarier.«²⁹

Boisquet defines »pantomime« as the comprehensive form of physical expression emerging from the basic »passion« of a scene. In this view, attitudes, gestures and movements are the fundamental components of stage expression to which »voice« is then added. The ultimate union between pantomime and voice can either occur straightforwardly, the voice doubling what is said through the body, or it can occur more indirectly, the voice apparently contradicting its corresponding gesture to create an additional level of meaning. In order to learn this art Boisquet suggests the following pedagogical method:

»Pour parvenir à s'instruire dans la pantomime, il faut y aller pas à pas. On commence par se rendre raison des poses, en cherchant à concevoir comment elles peuvent peindre l'état et le caractère du personnage; quand on le conçoit, on choisit trois poses: la première demandera le moins de force. A ce caractère vous joindrez une série de passions, que vous exprimerez sans sortir du caractère [...]. C'est cette comparaison qui vous aidera à trouver les nuances de chaque passion sur les différents caractères.«³⁰

28 François Boisquet: *Essai sur l'art du comédien chanteur*, Paris 1812. The five main chapters are entitled: I. De la voix; II. Des caractères; III. De la pantomime; IV. Jonction de la voix à ces matériaux et aux rôles; V. De quelques autres parties du chant.

29 »In order to express [...], the comedian has two means at his disposal, pantomime and voice. Pantomime. Pantomime consists of the pose that paints the conceived character, the action given to this pose, the physiognomy suitable to this pose and that is calculated according to the passions. Voice. The voice follows all these initial calculations, and expresses all these effects, either in accordance with the pantomime, or seeming to contradict it.« Boisquet: *Essai sur l'art du comédien chanteur*, 1812, p. 160.

30 »In order to instruct oneself in pantomime one must proceed step by step. One begins by getting to know the poses while attempting to conceive how they can paint the state and character of the person; when one has conceived this, one chooses three poses: the first will require the least strength. To this character you will add a series of passions, which you will express without leaving the character [...]. It is this comparison that will help you find the nuances of each passion on the different characters.« Boisquet: *Essai sur l'art du comédien chanteur*, 1812, p. 161.

Three »poses« of increasing intensity are chosen to portray the »character« one wishes to incarnate; only afterwards specific »passions« are added to the poses; through the combination of character-poses and passions a wide array of nuances are achieved.³¹ This approach stipulates that expressing a passion on stage begins with a series of »empty« physical poses, which are gradually filled with meaning, rather than starting with the expressive content of a text or melody before moving on to its physical manifestation.

Although early and mid-nineteenth century singing treatises tend to focus primarily on vocal technique and singing exercises, towards the last third of the century one increasingly finds treatises that include chapters on stage expression, acting and gesture. This multiplication of sources in the 1870s suggests that implicit traditions, which had continued to be orally transmitted so far, were gradually beginning to disappear, impelling singers and teachers of the older generation to produce a written trace of their knowledge. Two treatises in particular, published in Paris in the second half of the nineteenth century, contain extended chapters on operatic acting and gesture. At the end of his succinct singing method *L'art du chant* (1876), Jules Audubert provides a short treatise on »theatrical bearing« containing a series of commented illustrations with recommended stage attitudes, gestures and movements. The following figure from Audubert's treatise (figure 4) shows an actor conveying a »violent passion«. The actor is presented in half-profile, his feet turned outwards, his body weight unevenly distributed on both legs and the position of his arms asymmetric. A few simple gestural elements complete the picture: a hand on the chest, balled fists, legs far apart with one bent knee, a leaning torso, the head turned in the opposite direction, et cetera. With the final addition of »physiognomy« – the actor's facial features contracted downwards into a frown – this pantomimic pose effectively conveys the character's anger, agitation and indignation without resorting to the use of words or music. In the composition of these physical elements the influence of traditions reaching far back into the history of dramatic gesture practice remains tangible, although a rather simplified and direct form of expression emerges compared to the intricate poses of eighteenth century stage art.³²

31 When experimenting with these ideas in the context of a workshop hosted by the Bern University of the Arts in 2010, the singers-actor-participants were generally struck by the rapid impact and subtle nuances achieved through this method. See Edith Keller's contribution on p. 74 of this volume for an account of this workshop.

32 Many sources confirm how seventeenth and eighteenth century painters, actors and singers used traditional gesture as a codified language and produced catalogues in which particular poses were attributed to each passion. Indeed, some of these earlier sources continued to be published and circulated in various editions and translations throughout the nineteenth century, for example

FIGURE 4 »Quand des passions violentes sont en jeu, il est nécessaire de faire des gestes des deux bras; chaque geste doit avoir sa signification particulière comme dans cette position. La main indiquant la poitrine veut dire: moi. Le bras gauche tendu, le poing fermé, exprime la colère, l'indignation. La position des jambes donne au corps une attitude mouvementée. Le port de la tête et l'expression de la physionomie viennent compléter le tableau.«

»When violent passions are involved, it is necessary to make gestures with both arms; each gesture must have its own particular signification, as in this position. The hand indicating the chest signifies: me. The left outstretched arm with balled fist expresses anger, indignation. The leg position gives the body a dynamic attitude. The carriage of the head and the physiognomic expression bring the finishing touches to the tableau.« Jules Audubert: *L'art du chant, suivi d'un traité de maintien théâtral avec figures explicatives*, Paris 1876, p. 278



Published as late as 1874, Enrico Delle Sedie's *L'art lyrique* contains detailed accounts of nineteenth century operatic bearing, including a comprehensive, illustrated catalogue of gestures. The three figures below (figure 5) present three different character poses all expressing the same passion: »agitation«. Delle Sedie's procedure is reminiscent of the pantomime method described by Boisquet sixty years earlier! By comparing these different sources, many references, allusions and similarities emerge. For example figure 5 [1] with its balled fists and restless leg position resembles Audubert's angry character from figure 4, the difference resulting mainly from the strong forward inclination of the torso suggesting a more directly focussed form of aggression compared to Audubert's tense, dialectic pose; at the same time both figures recall Nourrit's pose shown in figure 1, where aggression constitutes one of the many contradictory passions animating Robert's actions. So rather than a simple catalogue of passions and gestures, the superposition of these sources suggests a complex interaction between physical poses and their varying expressive-dramatic contents, influenced and nourished both by contemporary pantomimic understanding and the influence of earlier stage practice traditions.

Johann Jacob Engel: *Ideen zu einer Mimik*, Berlin 1786. Translations: French 1802, English 1807, Italian 1818. See Christine Pollerus' article on p. 124 of this volume for a discussion of analogous codified gestures in nineteenth century Viennese opera staging.



FIGURE 5 »Agitation« in Enrico Delle Sedie's *L'art lyrique. Traité complet de chant et de déclamation lyrique*, Paris 1874, quoted here from the trilingual edition (Italian, French, English), *Estetica del canto*, Livorno 1885, vol. 4, p. 36: »The figure 1 represents one of the phases of agitation of the mind when excited to vengeance; the illustration shows the man at the moment when he is preparing to execute this violent act. Figure 2 on the contrary expresses anxiety pushed to its extreme limits, either by an act of sudden violence against oneself or by tears. In the illustration 3, the same degree of agitation dominates; but the nervous excitement exhausts all strength.«

»**La mise-en-scène**« During the first half of the nineteenth century, certain aspects of staging practice were completely different to what they are today; in his *Code théâtral*, Rousseau exposes the hierarchy prevailing for the »mise en scène« of new productions in Paris at the time:

»Art. 1. Lors de la mise en scène d'une pièce nouvelle, l'auteur devra donner au machiniste l'indication du décor, et au magasinier la note exacte des accessoires.

Art. 2. L'auteur d'une pièce, sachant mieux que le régisseur le plus exercé ce qu'il a voulu faire, devra venir fidèlement aux répétitions.

Art. 3. Les auteurs mettant eux-mêmes leurs pièces en scène à Paris, l'emploi de régisseur-général y est une véritable sinécure.«³³

Staging is presented here as a fundamental part of the author's creative concept, whereby the »author« of an opera at this time can refer to the librettist or the composer; indeed, both were expected to attend and participate in stage rehearsals. The singers also collaborated in this process of creation, while the »régisseur-général« who began to appear in Parisian theatres in the 1820s fulfilled the mainly administrative tasks of coordinating rehearsals and insuring discipline.³⁴ In short, there existed no stage director in the modern sense of the word.

In his monumental *Mémoires d'un bourgeois de Paris*, Louis Véron – director of the Opéra from 1832 to 1835 – describes the stress of final dress rehearsals for the 1832 reprise of Meyerbeer's *Robert le diable*:

»Ce ne fut qu'après quatre mois de répétitions d'orchestre, de musique, de danse, que nous arrivâmes enfin aux répétitions générales. Les répétitions générales, à l'Opéra surtout, sont de grandes fatigues et de vives émotions pour tout le monde, pour les compositeurs, pour les artistes, pour les chefs de service et pour le directeur. M. Scribe, aidé des maîtres de chant et des maîtres de ballet, montre autant d'ardeur que d'habileté et d'esprit dans la mise en scène de ses ouvrages.«³⁵

33 »Art. 1. When the staging of a new play, the author will give the instructions of the décor to the stagehand, and the exact note of the accessories to the warehouseman. Art. 2. The author of a play knowing better than the most experienced director what he has intended to do must faithfully attend rehearsals. Art. 3. Since the authors stage their own plays in Paris, the job of general director is a real sinecure there.« Rousseau: *Code théâtral*, 1829, p. 77–78.

34 See similar situation at the Paris *Théâtre italien* described in detail in Frigau's Article on p. 87 of this volume. Indeed, despite differences between the two institutions in terms of organisation, repertoire and personnel, many parallels can be drawn regarding singers' theatrical education and the use of gestural codes.

35 »It was only after four months of rehearsals with the orchestra, the music, the dance, that we finally arrived at the dress rehearsals. Dress rehearsals, especially at the Opéra, involve great fatigue and vivid emotions for everyone, for the composers, for the artists, for the department managers and for the director. M. Scribe, aided by the choir and ballet masters, demonstrates as much ardour as ability and spirit in the staging of his works.« Louis Véron: *Mémoires d'un bourgeois de Paris*, Paris 1856, vol. 3, p. 161.

Not only the composer and the librettist, but also the singing master, ballet master and director were involved in organizing these final rehearsals. Furthermore, the singers themselves were deeply involved in the visual and musical creation of the works they interpreted:

»Nourrit était un bon juge et un bon conseiller aux répétitions générales, et ses propres rôles gagnaient toujours aux heureux changements qu'il proposait. Dans *Les Huguenots*, ce fut encore lui qui eut l'idée du grand duo de la fin du quatrième acte.«³⁶

Véron's description suggests that certain performers ›directed‹ their own stage expression and were sometimes involved in advising others as well. In this particular case, Nourrit's influence extended even beyond considerations of performance and staging, affecting and shaping the dramaturgical and musical form of the work itself.³⁷ Pauline Viardot-García was similarly implicated in the creation of *Le Prophète*: not only did she suggest changes to the score and help her colleagues rehearse their parts by accompanying them at the piano, she went on after the success of the Paris production to re-stage the opera for the production at Covent Garden the same year.³⁸ Overall such descriptions of collaboration and shared responsibility suggest that a high degree of autonomy was required of all the performers; rather than stage attitudes, gestures and expressions being prescribed by a director, singers were expected to know how to act their roles without relying on detailed instructions during rehearsals. As a case in point of this autonomy, one should remember that even the choice of stage costume was, until much later in the century, left entirely to the discretion of lead-singers and considered an integral part of the character he or she created.

In Parisian theatres the detailed documentation of staging practice began earlier than in other European countries as a result of an innovative copyright law established in the 1790s, which gave authors the right over their own compositions and performances. This resulted in an unusual type of written source attesting the staging specificities of operatic

36 »Nourrit was a good judge and a good advisor at dress rehearsals, and his own roles always profited from the opportune changes he proposed. In *Les Huguenots*, it was he again who had the idea of the great duet at the end of the fourth act.« Véron: *Mémoires d'un bourgeois de Paris*, vol. 3, p. 180.

37 For a detailed account of the genesis of this famous duet and the precise nature of Nourrit's influence, see Steven Huebner: Italianate duets in Meyerbeer's *Grand opéra*, in: *Journal of Musicological Research*, no. 8, 1989, p. 203–258, in particular p. 232–234.

38 Concerning Viardot-García's involvement in the production and re-production of *Le Prophète* see Melanie Stier: Pauline Viardot Garcia und die Oper »Le Prophète« von Giacomo Meyerbeer, in: *Musikgeschichten – Vermittlungsformen. Festschrift für Beatrix Borchard zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Martin Bick [et al.], Köln 2010, p. 107–117.

productions: so-called »livrets de mise-en-scène«. These fulfilled an important function for every restaging of a work, particularly outside the capital city; in the French provinces, local »régisseurs« would be charged with recreating every detail of a performance on the basis of such staging manuals. This obligation to copy the entire »mise-en-scène« of an opera for subsequent enactments may appear overbearing today, but in a context where stage direction as an individual creative profession had not yet come into existence, the staging of an opera was considered an integral part of its production together with the text and the music. Paradoxically it is through such seemingly uncreative »stage-reproductions« that the function of »régisseur« became more central to theatre production in the provinces and eventually established itself as an important artistic profession rather than just an administrative task.³⁹

Documents testifying this practice have been preserved in several library collections, in particular the archives of the *Association des régisseurs de théâtre* (A.R.T.) housed by the *Bibliothèque historique de la ville de Paris*. Robert Cohen has compiled a catalogue of their collection and published two volumes of selected staging manuals that contributed essentially to the rediscovery of this material among scholars.⁴⁰ In the case of particularly popular Parisian productions, the »livrets de mise en scènes« were sometimes printed and sold to theatres along with the librettos and scores, but many other examples survive only in manuscript form. A typical livret usually includes lists of accessories and costumes, sketches of the decors, as well as general placements and movements of the performers around the set. In some sources – often manuscript manuals written a few years after the original production – one finds more detailed descriptions of singers' individual attitudes, gestures or expressions.

39 An overview of the development of operatic stage direction as a profession in the nineteenth century is presented in Arne Langer: *Der Regisseur und die Aufzeichnungspraxis der Opernregie im 19. Jahrhundert*, Frankfurt a. M. 1997. See also Marie-Antoinette Allevy: *La mise-en-scène en France dans la première moitié du dix-neuvième siècle*, Paris 1938; and Nicole Wild: *La mise-en-scène à l'Opéra Comique sous la Restauration*, in: *Die Opéra comique und ihr Einfluss auf das europäische Musiktheater im 19. Jahrhundert. Kongressbericht Frankfurt 1994*, ed. Herbert Schneider and Nicole Wild, Hildesheim 1997, p. 183–210, for more information on French staging practice.

40 H. Robert Cohen and Marie-Odile Gigou: *One hundred years of operatic staging in France. Catalogue descriptif des livrets de mise en scène, des libretti annotés et des partitions annotées dans la Bibliothèque de l'Association de la régie théâtrale de Paris*, Stuyvesant (N.Y.) 1986; H. Robert Cohen: *The original staging manuals for twelve Parisian operatic premières*, preface by Marie-Odile Gigou, Stuyvesant (N.Y.) 1991; and H. Robert Cohen: *The original staging manuals for ten Parisian operatic premières 1824–1843 in facsimile*, selected and introduced by H. Robert Cohen, Stuyvesant (N.Y.) 1998.

For Meyerbeer's *Robert le diable*, the A.R.T. catalogue lists five undated and unsigned staging manuals, three of which (R. 10 II, III and IV) contain practically identical scenic indications of the dramatic recitative and trio in the first scene of act V:

»Alice remonte le théâtre en tirant de sa ceinture le testament, elle descend entre Robert et Bertrand [sic], et présente l'écrit à Robert [...]. Bertrand fait un geste menaçant à Alice, celle-ci le regarde avec fierté et en levant les bras lui montre le ciel avec le doigt.«⁴¹

This description is strikingly coherent with the scene depicted in figure 1: Bertram's menacing attitude and Alice's proud stance concur, while Alice's gesture of pointing towards the sky is revealed as more than a symbolic metaphor used for iconic purposes: it is a precise indication of scenic practice. The most detailed of the five manuals is manuscript Mes. 26 which contains the longest elucidations of characters' movements and expressions for this scene:

»[Alice] descend vivement entre Robert et Bertram, et lui dit en présentant de la main droite l'écrit de la mère, qu'elle vient de prendre à sa ceinture en disant ›le voici«

Alice

Bertram

Robert

Robert prend l'écrit. Alice est triomphante elle jette un regard à Bertram et semble le défier, puis elle passe derrière Robert pendant qu'il lit et elle reprend sa place.

Bertram

Robert

Alice

Bertram fait un geste de fureur. L'émotion de Robert est à son comble.«⁴²

Alice's movements are »animated« and »triumphant«, while Bertram expresses his anger in »a gesture of fury« and Robert reaches a »peak of emotion«. The following section describes Robert's ensuing hesitation between good and evil:

41 »Alice moves up the stage drawing the testament from her belt, she descends between Robert and Bertrand, and presents the document to Robert [...]. Bertrand makes a menacing gesture to Alice, who looks at him with pride and lifting her arms points to the sky with her finger.« A.R.T. manual R. 10 II, p. 50; manual R. 10 III, Act V (no page numbers) and manual R. 10 IV, Act V (no page numbers). Manual R. 10 I is generally less detailed about gestures than the other three. Further staging manuals can be found in several collections of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, most notably at the Département des arts du spectacle and the Bibliothèque de l'Opéra. For example, a livret de mise-en-scène for *Robert le diable* can be consulted at the Département des arts du spectacle under the signature Rondel Ms. 672. This staging manual is very similar to the three examples from A.R.T. suggesting that all four manuscripts may be copies based on a common source.

42 »[Alice] descends energetically between Robert and Bertram, and says, presenting with her right hand the mother's document that she has just taken from her belt, ›here it is« [...]. Robert takes the document. Alice is triumphant, she throws Bertram a look and seems to defy him, then she passes behind Robert while he is reading and regains her position [...]. Bertram makes a gesture of fury. Robert's emotion is at its peak.« A.R.T. manual Mes. 26, p. 62–63.

«Quand Bertram parle à Robert celui-ci se tourne vers lui, et semble attiré par ses paroles, puis il semble le repousser et regarde de nouveau Alice. (On ne saurait trop étudier ces divers mouvements qui prêteraient au ridicule s'ils n'étaient exécutés avec la plus grande adresse.)»⁴³

The opposing influences of Alice and Bertram are not only symbolised by their position to the left and right of Robert on stage, but this tension is further expressed in the physical form of Robert himself through an intricate play of attraction and repulsion of these forces, the movements of the actor's body reflecting the wrenching conflict of his character's inner turmoil. No wonder the anonymous author of this manuscript, aware of the technical and aesthetic challenges presented by this pantomime, warns of possible »ridicule« and implies the high level of theatrical expertise needed to sustain such poise. Indeed his warning seems to foreshadow misgivings about historical staging today, where modern interpreters face the risk of being dismissed as exaggerated or old-fashioned when working with historic gestures.

Another scene involving a similar level of dramatic and physical investment is the fourth act duet of Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots*. In the first part of the duet Valentine tries to convince Raoul to flee rather than fight with his fellow Huguenots and face certain death in the attack prepared by her own father, the catholic Comte de Saint-Bris. Although she is now married to the Comte de Nevers, and continuously denies her love for Raoul, she is finally driven to declare her passion in a desperate ultimate attempt to save him (example 1).⁴⁴ Meyerbeer's composition builds up momentum in a series of mounting *crescendi*, which are suddenly cut short by Valentine's whispered *piano* confession. Mary Ann Smart has shown how the indications in the printed »livret de mise en scène« also become more exalted and detailed as the opera progresses, climaxing in the description of the lovers' melodramatic gestures for this scene.⁴⁵ Among the staging manuals listed in the A.R.T. catalogue, the manual H. 5 II contains a short but enlightening description of stage action in this dramatically heightened *accompagnato recitativo*:

»Valentine Raoul

Ainsi placée pour lui dire ces mots: »Eh bien, je t'aime« aussitôt qu'elle les a prononcés, elle se détourne déguisant sa passion. Valentine regarde à gauche du public pour l'Andante du Duo.»⁴⁶

43 »When Bertram speaks to Robert, [Robert] turns towards him and seems to be attracted by his words, then he seems to push him back and look again at Alice. (One cannot be too diligent in studying these diverse movements that would become ridiculous if they were not executed with the utmost adeptness.)« A.R.T. manual Mes. 26, p. 63.

44 See Gerhard on p. 116 f. in this volume for an analysis of this passage as a »parola scenica«; also Schaffer on p. 55–63 for a discussion of the iconographic sources documenting this duet.

45 Smart: *Mimomania*, the analysis of this duet on p. 126 f.

46 »Placed thus to say these words: »Indeed, I love you« as soon as she has pronounced them, she turns away disguising her passion. Valentine looks to the left of the public for the Andante of the Duet.» A.R.T. manual H. 5 II, end of act IV (no page numbers); the same indication is

The image shows a musical score excerpt from the fourth act duet of *Les Huguenots*. It consists of three systems of music. The first system is for the vocal part (V.), with lyrics: "ris, Je l'implore enfin pour moi-même; Car si tu meurs, j'en mourrais." The tempo markings are All°, Récit, All°, Récit, All°, Récit, All°, and Récit. The piano accompaniment features dynamic markings *fp* and *f*. The second system continues the vocal part with lyrics: "si! Reste! res-te! je t'aime! Tu m'aimes? tu m'aimes? tu". Tempo markings include All°, *ff*, *p*, Presto (♩=168), and Récit. Dynamic markings include *f*, *ff*, and *pp*. The third system is for the vocal part (R.), with lyrics: "m'aimes? Ah quel é-clair et quel transport! Quel mot du ciel s'est fait en-". Tempo markings are All° brillante (♩=132) and All° brillante. Dynamic markings include *p* and *f*. The piano accompaniment includes triplets and dynamic markings *p* and *f*.

EXAMPLE 1 Excerpt from the fourth act duet of *Les Huguenots*

Despite the increasing passion of the situation, Valentine turns away («elle se détourne») from Raoul as soon as she has pronounced the words «je t'aime», ashamed and confounded at having been forced to admit her adulterous feelings. Moreover the impact of this physical gesture of shame lingers on despite Raoul's amazed and overjoyed reaction, Valentine remaining distant and facing away from her lover throughout the whole *Andante* section of the duet («Valentine regarde à gauche du public pour l'*Andante* du Duo»). In this case, the conjunction between stage indication and musical gesture provides coherent expressive directives for the interpretation of a love scene that is so conflicted as to be hardly admissible, even in private.

also found in manual H, 5 IV manuscript insertion into the libretto at page 71. The expletive «Eh bien» («Indeed») in these notes is an addition of the author (or of the singer?) to the original libretto.

As a final example, let us return to the »exorcism« scene in the fourth act of *Le Prophète*, where the staging manuals describe the confrontation between Jean and Fidès in the following terms:

»La physionomie de Fidès exprime la douleur et l'étonnement mais lorsqu'elle entend ces mots, Femme à genoux ... l'indignation se peint sur tous ces traits, et se retournant vivement vers son fils, elle les fixe d'un regard courroucé, Jean qui toujours a les mains étendues, attache alors ses yeux sur ceux de sa mère et semble dire à celle ci par le regard seulement ... (*ah! ma mère pardonnez à votre coupable, mais malheureux enfant, c'est par amour pour vous qu'il ne peut vous reconnaître publiquement, son cœur souffre, ma mère, mais ce cœur comprimé vous adore et vous vénère toujours ...*) Fascinée par les regards de son fils sur lesquels elle ne cesse d'attacher les siens, Fidès peu à peu tombe à genoux.«⁴⁷

This offers another example of exalted »mise en scène« notes, where the author elaborates indications beyond technical requirement to include detailed accounts of scenic expression and significance, thereby confirming and completing the information gained from the score and illustrations of the same scene (see figures 3, 6 and 7) while clarifying issues of gestural performance and pacing. After Jean orders Fidès to kneel, eleven bars of slow instrumental *ritournelle* are heard before she actually drops to her knees, suggesting the kind of physical stamina and histrionic amplitude required to accomplish this movement. Similarly Jean's depicted pose – leaning back with outstretched hands – lasts for at least twenty bars after he decides to reject his mother, thus offering a sustained iconic representation of the protagonist' paralyzing psychological situation. Between these two pathos-laden, drawnout gestures, a connecting line is drawn in the look exchanged between mother and son: incomprehension, fascination, culpability, desperation, suffering and love are all conveyed through a single, lingering gaze.

Nobility, »Naturalness« and Caricature⁴⁸ Although such sources offer an essential access to some of the subtleties of historical staging, the interpretation of these texts and images

47 »The physiognomy of Fidès expresses pain and astonishment, but when she hears these words, Woman on your knees ... indignation paints all her features, and turning energetically towards her son, she fixes them with a wrathful look, Jean who still has his hands stretched out then attaches his eyes upon those of his mother and seems to tell her through his look alone ... (*ah! my mother forgive your guilty yet unhappy son, it is out of love for you that he cannot recognise you publicly, his heart suffers, my mother, but this compressed heart adores and worships you always ...*). Fascinated by the looks of her son on which she never ceases to attach her own, Fidès gradually falls to her knees.« (The linguistic idiosyncrasies are from the original; underlines in the original are set in italics.) The A.R.T. catalogue lists no less than fourteen printed and manuscript staging manuals for Meyerbeer's *Le Prophète*: P. 9 I to XII, Mes. 25 (4), Mes. 38 (1) and Mes. 66 (1) A.R.T. This quote is from manual P. 9 IV, the three last pages of act IV (no page numbers).

48 In French *naturel* can be used both as an adjective in »le jeu naturel de l'acteur« or as a noun in »le naturel de l'acteur«. In English I have translated the noun form as »naturalness« which seems the most correct, though somewhat heavy translation.

are themselves dependent on a series of concepts that stand in relation to the general aesthetic and socio-historical context in which they are used. In his attempt to capture the impact of nineteenth century singers' physical presence, Berlioz drew upon aesthetic notions that imply more about Restoration stage practice than his eloquent review superficially suggests. Indeed the adjectives »noble« and »natural« occur frequently in criticism of the time in both praise and censure of singer-actors' movements; however the meaning of these terms remains highly equivocal.

One of the most common uses of the adjective »noble« in the context of nineteenth century lyric drama is in relation to generic distinctions: Grand opéra is categorised as the most noble genre, »opéra comique« is considered slightly less noble, while »vaudeville«, »mélodrame« and other popular genres occupy the lower ranks. This hierarchy has consequences not only for the venue, price and frequentation of a performance, it also determines whether a work will be tragic or comic, whether dialogues will be sung or spoken, what types of costumes will be worn and, presumably, what movements, gestures and expressions are appropriate. The corresponding entry in François-Antoine Harel's *Dictionnaire théâtral* (1824) focuses almost exclusively on aspects of social status.⁴⁹ In his *Manuel théâtral* (1826) Aristippe sums up his preoccupation with nobility in a pun: »[...] les hommes de la plus belle noblesse sont quelquefois privés de toute noblesse.«⁵⁰ Rather than discussing nobility in terms of theatrical parameters, these authors polemicize about the political and moral structures of their society. Questions of social status must have resonated more strongly than we can imagine with the Parisian public of the time, caught between revolutionary and conservative impulses, between a desire for egalitarian renewal and reliance on hierarchies from the past.

On stage, Grand opéra singers were often required to interpret aristocratic characters such as Raoul de Nangis and Valentine de Saint-Bris in *Les Huguenots*. Noble poses, gestures or expressions had to be recognised as such, providing a visual coherence with the appropriate costumes, settings and musical characterisations of a scene. By contrast, Raoul's servant Marcel is clearly characterized as belonging to a lower social class where signs of aristocratic bearing could be considered inappropriate or insulting. Levasseur's rendition of the »Chanson Huguenote« described as »brusque and hardy« suggests how rough diction, gruff expression and a robust physical stance may have been used to incarnate his lesser degree of nobility.⁵¹ But Aristippe's pun implies further possible

49 François-Antoine Harel: *Dictionnaire théâtral ou Douze cent trente trois vérités sur les directeurs, régisseurs, acteurs, actrices et employés des divers théâtres; confidences sur les procédés de l'illusion; examen du vocabulaire dramatique; coup d'œil sur le matériel et le moral des spectacles*, etc., Paris 1824, p. 222.

50 »[...] men of the utmost nobility are sometimes deprived of all nobility.« Aristippe: *Manuel Théâtral*, p. 288.

51 Bénédit: Levasseur, 1841–1843, see quote on p. 21 above, footnote 23.

levels of interpretation: although Marcel's status requires him to move like an ordinary veteran soldier rather than a nobleman, there are situations where his inner nobility of character may overrule his social status, possibly provoking certain tensions within the actor's body, between a more ›noble‹ carriage corresponding to his attitude and the original physical bearing implied by his social standing.

Another recurring association in definitions of nobility is its connection to physical beauty: Harel argues that: »la beauté des formes et la régularité des traits du visage ne sont pas des conditions inséparables de la noblesse« referring to Lekain as an example confirming his claim. But although Harel negates the necessary dependence of nobility on beauty, his formulation suggests the two concepts are intimately linked in the nineteenth century mind; the reputedly ugly eighteenth century actor Lekain (1729–1778) – famous interpreter of the plays of Voltaire (1694–1778) – is only one brilliant exception to this general rule.⁵² Nevertheless, physical beauty is not considered a fixed quality, but can be attained or at least approached through certain theatrical means. Aristippe explains that nobility consists of »a fortunate concordance of dignity, grace and elegance.« Furthermore he says: »[...] la noblesse vient de la perfection du geste, plus que de toute autre chose; de la position des épaules et du mouvement du col sur son pivot.«⁵³ So noble stage presence is not just a social or physical absolute, but may be achieved through heightened attention to, and a perfect realisation of, gesture, pose and movement, a position of the shoulders, a poise of the head and neck. By contrast Aristippe describes how actors sometimes failed to achieve nobility:

»Si des acteurs et des actrices tragiques croient, en mesurant leurs pas et en entrant par secousses cadencées sur la scène (surtout dans des moments de douleur et d'abattement), se donner de la dignité ou de la noblesse, ils se trompent beaucoup.«⁵⁴

Spasms or faltering steps are not compatible with nobility; fluidity is required at all times when moving across the stage, even in situations where pain or distress would realistically call for some signs of physical affliction. With the overthrow of the French nobility a redefinition of these aesthetic paradigms appeared inevitable: in the course of the nineteenth century the ideal of beautifully stylised expression was increasingly challenged by

52 »The beauty of forms and regularity of facial features are not the inseparable conditions of nobility: Lekain, though ugly and deformed, was very noble.« Harel: *Dictionnaire théâtral*, 1824, p. 222.

53 »[...] nobility comes from the perfection of gesture, more than anything else; from the position of the shoulders and the movement of the collar on its pivot.« Aristippe: *Manuel Théâtral*, p. 285.

54 »If tragic actors and actresses believe, by measuring their steps and entering the stage with rhythmical shakes (especially in moments of pain and dejection), to be giving themselves dignity or nobility, they are much mistaken.« Aristippe: *Manuel Théâtral*, p. 285.

a desire to convey more tangibly the physical intensity of realistic situations, thus destabilising the delicate balance between imitation and artifice, between nature and art.

Indeed, the adjective *naturel* was possibly even more popular among nineteenth century critics than the term *noble*. In his *Dictionnaire historique et pittoresque du théâtre* (1885), the music critic Arthur Pougin (1834–1921) extols the virtues of »*naturel*« acting:

»*Naturel*: Qualité précieuse chez un comédien. Le théâtre devant nous offrir avant tout le reflet exact des événements, des incidents et des émotions de la vie ordinaire, tout excès, toute exagération dans un sens ou dans un autre est choquante pour le spectateur intelligent et délicat. Il ne faut pas toutefois que, sous prétexte de *naturel*, le jeu de l'acteur dégénère en une familiarité qui n'est souvent qu'un signe de mauvais goût, et qui serait aussi bien de nature à tuer l'illusion que l'emportement le plus fâcheux.«⁵⁵

Pougin praises what he calls a »*naturel*« quality of acting which allows the theatre to fulfil its presumed goal of reflecting ordinary life on stage. He presents this ultimate quality as a »*juste milieu*« between two extremes, on the one hand an »*excessive*« acting style that is »*shocking*« to an intelligent public, and on the other a »*familiar*« acting style which serves only bad taste and kills the essential illusion of stage performance. A generation earlier however, both Harel and Aristippe insist that the most natural kind of acting is that which has been most artfully prepared: »*C'est ici que les extrémités se touchent. L'art, porté à son comble, devient nature, mais la nature négligée ressemble souvent à l'affectation.*«⁵⁶ The paradox of recreating natural attitudes in an artificial stage context is compounded by a dialectic tension between natural, unfettered talent, which, if neglected, resembles »*affectation*« and an artificial type of »*naturalness*« that can only be achieved through hard work. As we see, this central debate – famously discussed by Denis Diderot in his *Paradoxe sur le comédien* – is avidly pursued into the nineteenth century.⁵⁷ In his theatre dictionary of 1878, Alfred Bouchard proposes one of the most original concepts of naturalness on stage:

»Au théâtre, où tout est de convention, la nature suit la même loi. L'acteur doit donc être *naturel*, non par lui-même, mais par convention. C'est le rôle qu'il remplit, le lieu et l'époque où la scène se passe, l'*ACTION* du drame et son but qui commandent le *naturel* auquel il doit atteindre. Ainsi le *naturel* d'un

55 »*Naturel*: precious quality in a comedian. The theatre serving to offer above all an exact reflection of the events, incidents and emotions of ordinary life; each excess, every exaggeration in one direction or the other is shocking for the intelligent and delicate spectator. It must not be however that, under the pretext of naturalness, the actor's performance degenerates into a familiarity that is often just a sign of bad taste, and would be just as likely to kill the illusion as the most awkward outburst.« Arthur Pougin: *Dictionnaire historique et pittoresque du théâtre et des arts qui s'y rattachent*, Paris 1885, p. 542.

56 »This is where the extremities touch. Art brought to its summit becomes nature, but nature neglected often resembles affectation.« Aristippe: *Manuel théâtral*, p. 282.

57 Denis Diderot: *Paradoxe sur le comédien*, Paris 1773 (published posthumously in 1830).

roi, d'un financier, d'un bourgeois, d'un mendiant, n'ont rien de commun entre eux. C'est le travail, l'étude, l'observation seuls qui peuvent donner au comédien le talent voulu pour rendre naturellement chacun de ces différents types.»⁵⁸

For Bouchard, nature is convention; natural acting consists in the ability to observe a set of conventions defined by a particular place, time and role, and then recreate an accurate imitation of the character portrayed on the basis of these conventions.

Although Berlioz's depiction of the singers' »noble attitudes« and »natural gestures« relies on two seemingly contradictory concepts – noble taken to mean aristocratic or stylised, and natural meaning simple or unaffected – when it comes to stage performance the two antithetical terms become intrinsically linked, natural expression resulting from an elaborate study of conventional gesture, nobility ensuing from the simple ease with which conventions and context cohere. Nourrit's quest for noble beauty in contemporary art as a means of achieving natural expression on stage illustrates how this fusion of systems continued to occur.⁵⁹ And there is yet another sense in which a simultaneously »noble« and »natural« effect can be achieved: in his review of *Robert le diable*, Castil-Blaze praises Cornélie Falcon for her ability to perfectly accord her pantomime with the melody she is performing.⁶⁰ He seems to be implying that musical and physical inflection are intimately connected, and that it is the overall conjunction between body and voice that lead to her naturally embodied operatic performances. Two communication mediums, sound and movement, singing and acting, sustain each other in interaction, each thought informing the actor's poses and movements, each detailed gesture carrying the singer's voice to its ultimate level of expression.

Of course this difficult task does not, and never did, invariably succeed. Although I have focussed here on the positive reception of nineteenth century operatic acting, there are at least as many examples of negative reviews by contemporary critics describing singers as rigid, old-fashioned, inappropriate or simply ridiculous. Pauline Viardot-García was not only a brilliant opera performer, pianist and stage director, but also a skilled composer and even a talented amateur artist, who had toyed with the idea of

58 »In the theatre, where everything is done by convention, nature follows the same law. The actor must therefore be *natural*, not by his own means, but by convention. It is the role he fulfils, the place and time where the scene occurs, the ACTION of the drama and its goal that command the *naturalness* which he must attain. Thus the *naturalness* of a king, a banker, a nobleman, a beggar, have nothing in common between them. It is only work, study, observation that can give the comedian the necessary talent to render *naturally* each of these different types.« Alfred, Bouchard: *La langue théâtrale, vocabulaire historique, descriptif et anecdotique des termes et des choses du théâtre, suivi d'un appendice contenant la législation théâtrale en vigueur*, Paris 1878, p. 180 (all italics and capitalisations are from the original).

59 See quotes on p. 15–17 above, footnotes 10, 12 and 14.

60 Castil-Blaze in *Revue de Paris* 41 (1832).

becoming a painter before opting for a musical career. Her drawing below (figure 6) depicts the composer Giacomo Meyerbeer in animated conversation with the director of the Berlin opera, Karl Theodor von Küstner (1784–1864).⁶¹



FIGURE 6 Drawing by Pauline Viardot-García: »Meyerbeer expliquant à l'intendant des théâtres de Berlin la position de Fidès aux pieds de Jean de Leyde (Le Prophète)«.

FIGURE 7 »L'Exorcisme« in Act IV of Meyerbeer's *Le Prophète* (printed in *Le daguerréotype théâtral*, Paris, March 1850)



61 The location of this original drawing is currently unknown, but it was published in an article by Henri de Curzon in the periodical *Musica* (February 1903), p. 68. For more information see also Gunther Braam: *The Portraits of Giacomo Meyerbeer. Gedanken zu einer Komponisten-Ikonomie*, in: *Giacomo Meyerbeer, Le Prophète. Edition – Konzeption – Rezeption*, ed. Matthias Brzoska, Andreas Jacob and Nicole K. Strohmann, Hildesheim 2009.

Draped hastily in a humble cloak Meyerbeer is demonstrating the gesture he imagined for the interpretation of the powerfully dramatic scene of his new opera – the «exorcism» of Fidès in the fourth act of *Le Prophète* – at which Küstner draws back aghast in his crown and noble robes. With just a few simple elements of costume and gesture Viardot-García unmistakably refers here to the scene depicted in figure 7 (the same scene also shown in figure 3 above): the composer’s kneeling position, his face turned up towards the opponent, his hands opened and raised in an imploring attitude; the intendant’s pulled-back head, his arms raised with palms facing outwards in denial and rejection, all these elements impeccably mirroring the figures of Fidès’ and Jean de Leyde in the contemporary lithographs. The comic effect of this caricature is ultimately achieved through the transposition of highly codified, melodramatic bearings from a setting where they are appropriate – a mother’s desperate plea in view of her son’s rejection and impending stage death – to a context – mundane negotiations between a composer and an opera director – where such gestures exceed all reasonable proportion. Although the situation and characters portrayed in the caricature are completely different from the stage lithographs, the analogy functions perfectly through a reference to common dramatic attitudes, gestures and expressions.

Thus one final concept in Berlioz’ review of *Les Huguenots* resonates profoundly both then and now: «Tous les deux se sont arrêtés juste au point, au-delà duquel il n’y a plus que la caricature de la passion.»⁶² This subtle notion, deeply entwined with the sensibilities of a contemporary audience, implies a search for the furthest possible instance of expression, a commitment to reach, yet never exceed the brink of caricature, the moment just before a gesture becomes ridiculous and humour sets in. At the height of a dramatic operatic tableau, it is precisely the dangerous proximity to caricature that gives each scene its most poignant expressivity. Despite the risk of falling into derisive exaggeration, the most successful singers of the first half of the nineteenth century seem to have achieved stunning visual impact through a heightened form of physical expressivity sought in a combination of stylised acting traditions and the melodramatic aesthetic sublime of nineteenth century Parisian Grand opéra.

62 »Both stopped just at the point beyond which there is only the caricature of passion.« Berlioz: *Les Huguenots*, in: *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*, 1836, p. 77.

Inhalt

- Florian Reichert und Edith Keller** Einleitung 7
- Laura Moeckli** »Nobles dans leurs attitudes, naturels dans leurs gestes«.
Singers as Actors on the Paris Grand Opéra Stage 11
- Anette Schaffer** Der beredte Leib. Das Bild und die französische
Schauspielpraxis des 19. Jahrhunderts 41
- Edith Keller, Stefan Saborowski und Florian Reichert** Gesten auf dem Prüfstand.
Ein Werkstattbericht 74
- Céline Frigau Manning** Staging and Acting Without a Director.
Expressive Gestures at the Paris Théâtre Royal Italien 87
- Anselm Gerhard** Zugespitzte Situationen. Gestische Verständlichkeit und
»parola scenica« in der französischen und italienischen Oper nach 1820 111
- Christine Pollerus** »Zeichen der innern Empfindung«.
Zur Gestik in der Wiener Oper 1800–1850 124
- Sigrid T’Hooft** in an interview with **Laura Moeckli** Using Historical
Treatises and Iconography in Opera Staging Today 142
- Stephanie Schroedter** Städtische Bewegungsräume auf der Bühne.
Giacomo Meyerbeers Grands opéras im Kontext urbaner Tanzkulturen 151
- Namen-, Werk- und Ortsregister** 186
- Die Autorinnen und Autoren der Beiträge** 191

SÄNGER ALS SCHAUSPIELER

Zur Opernpraxis des 19. Jahrhunderts in Text, Bild und
Musik • Herausgegeben von Anette Schaffer, Edith Keller,
Laura Moeckli, Florian Reichert und Stefan Saborowski

MUSIKFORSCHUNG DER
HOCHSCHULE DER KÜNSTE BERN
Herausgegeben von Martin Skamletz

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