

**Adolphe Adam: *Le Toréador ou L'Accord parfait*. [L'Opéra Français, Vol. 1], Paul Prévost, General Editor. Bärenreiter BA 8701 (full score) and BA 8701a (vocal score).**

There's something particularly gratifying in seeing a major German publisher like Bärenreiter undertaking an extensive critical edition of 19<sup>th</sup> century French opera. The discipline of musicology evolved largely in Germany during the late Romantic period, spurred on by the rediscovery of Baroque composers such as Johann Sebastian Bach, and by the forces of nationalism in the wake of German unification. This political aspect naturally (and sadly) infected the academic world, and to a large extent it still does, resulting in a disparaging attitude toward the Italian and French works which, then as now, dominated the operatic stage and enjoyed the greatest popularity with audiences the world-over (Germany included).

Unlike Italy, however, where the popularity of core works by Rossini, Donizetti, Bellini, and Verdi has always guaranteed a certain measure of respect for the music in terms of an ongoing cultural heritage and performance tradition, no country has treated its own Romantic patrimony more poorly than has France. The situation reached its absolute nadir in the 1950s and 60s, when the post Darmstadt avant-garde led by figures such as Pierre Boulez virtually assured the death of the French Romantic operatic tradition. The loss was tragic, and it will be many decades before this remarkable body of work, rich in color and invention, superbly crafted and elegantly finished, once again receives the attention that it deserves.

Bärenreiter's new edition, the first ten volumes of which are scheduled to appear by 2015, should go a long way towards redressing the balance. It will contain popular favorites, such as Bizet's *Carmen* and Gounod's *Faust*, as well as important and little-known works such as Lalo's *Fiesque* (next up for release). Grand opera will rub shoulders with Opéra comique, revealing the richness and variety of 19<sup>th</sup> century French theatrical genres. Bärenreiter's decision to issue not just large, cloth-bound full scores but also convenient piano/vocal reductions (in its Urtext series), along with the necessary parts, should help ease the return of the less familiar music to the international stage.

Adam's *The Toreador, or A Perfect Agreement* (1849) represents a delightful start to the edition. One of the most popular and successful Opéra comiques of its era, it enjoyed an unbroken run of some twenty years' duration from the date of its premiere, and sporadic revivals thereafter. The story is simple, silly, and charming. Coraline, a former operatic soprano, has married an aging ex-toreador, Don Belflor (baritone) and moved to Barcelona. She's bored and miserable. Tracolin, a young flutist who was in love with her in Paris and happens to be traveling through Spain, spots her and resolves to rekindle their youthful passion. He rescues Don Belflor from a staged street assault in order to befriend him for the purpose of fixing him up with an older woman. Belflor, vain and not too bright, falls in with Tracolin's plot.

Meanwhile Coraline, who suspects Don Belflor of infidelity anyway, threatens to leave him before Tracolin can declare his love and explain his plan to her. When she finally learns the details, the two of them set off to spy on Don Belflor, and Tracolin illustrates the various stages of his tryst by playing popular tunes to Coraline on his flute, the words of which describe the amorous goings-on. After the affair, Coraline pretends to be clairvoyant and at a card reading ceremony she accuses her husband of unfaithfulness. Don Belflor confesses, and at that point Tracolin appears and graciously offers to move in with the couple in order to ensure that they should all live together as a threesome in perfect harmony (*l'accord parfait*). The solution suits all parties, and they celebrate the fulfilling power of love.

The complete work is relatively short: it consists of an overture, an introduction, and ten individual numbers separated by aptly witty dialogue. Originally planned in one act, it turned out to be slightly long for continuous performance, so Adam quickly added a short entr'acte and split it into two parts. Its relative brevity, however, makes the work an ideal length for modern tastes, when performances often start at eight in the evening and ideally end before eleven (unless it's Wagner or a heavy-duty grand opera). The opera was recorded commercially not too long ago by Decca, a production starring Sumi Jo as Coraline and conducted by Richard Bonynge. Although you may not know the complete work, believe it or not you probably do know its most famous single item (seen here in a facsimile page from the original 19<sup>th</sup> century edition, samples from which accompany the new score):

Clar. Allegro moderato. **TRIO.** Solo. 101

Bons Solo. pp

pizz: pp

pizz: col Volo // // // //

pizz: arco pp

pizz: CORALINE. pp

Allegro moderato. Ah! vous dirai-je ma-man ce qui cause mon tour-ment depuis que j'ai vu Syl-

pizz:

Yes, that is the French folksong “Ah! vous dirai-je maman!” better known in English as “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star,” and famous as a set of piano variations by Mozart (from the 18<sup>th</sup> century), and later as the inspiration for Dohnányi’s deliciously sly *Variations on a Nursery Tune* (from the 20<sup>th</sup>). Adam uses the melody in a trio (No. 5) featuring some brilliant and insanely virtuosic coloratura variations for Coraline,

accompanied by Tracolin's flute (he seems always to have it out and ready to go at a moment's notice; just be glad he's not a traveling trombonist). As a separate number, these variations have appeared on quite a few coloratura soprano recital recordings, including releases by Beverly Sills and Edita Gruberova.

Indeed, many French operatic works of this period require a special combination of first-rate operatic voices trained in *bel canto* technique and, ideally at least, effective comic acting. Doubtless this accounts for their neglect as a genre in all but a few exceptional cases. There is such a strong prejudice in musical circles against comic works generally, as if being entertaining and funny doesn't deserve the same investment of time, money, effort and artistry as being miserable and tragic. And of course humor tends to date; in the case of *Le Toréador* there's also the special factor of the flute melodies that add an extra layer of humor. Contemporary listeners would have known their unsung words, whereas most modern listeners will not. However, this is a problem easily solvable through intelligent use of supertitles and the like, especially since new productions will take place in the original language anyway.

Adam scored *Le Toréador* for the standard full theater orchestra of his time: piccolo, pairs of woodwinds, four horns, two cornets (or trumpets), three trombones, timpani, triangle, glockenspiel, and strings, with an extra flute on-stage to assist in Tracolin's solos. Bärenreiter's full score is laid out very neatly, and the single volume contains not just the entire work, but also the critical commentary, the complete libretto in one piece, plus the bits of dialogue between the numbers in their proper place. This is particularly useful in explaining the comic bits involving Tracolin and his various flute tunes. The vocal score is also very clearly printed and easy to read, and should make life easy for the singers (and their accompanists).

A particularly useful and fascinating item included in the full score (as an appendix) is material from a contemporary production book, which discusses the work's staging, scenery, costumes and blocking on a scene-by-scene basis. It provides countless details on how the opera was actually performed, and these should prove extremely helpful to anyone interested in mounting a modern version. This material should not be seen as an invitation to slavish imitation of 19<sup>th</sup> century stagecraft, but rather as a key to the correct style of delivery and pacing that any contemporary adaptation should emulate. General Editor Paul Prévost, whose excellent preface is printed in French, German, and English, has certainly set a high standard for future volumes in this series, and we can only hope that the edition is greeted with the enthusiasm that it surely deserves from performers and the public alike.

David Hurwitz  
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