

Resistance to Rossini and Government by Newspapers in Restoration Paris

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The term *révolution* was commonly used in France during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to denote how a fundamental change of musical style and taste might occur, often defined as *les progrès de la musique*. Derived from metaphors for the movements of heavenly bodies and tides, the term *révolution* was applied to the crises which occurred at the Académie Royale de Musique (the Opéra) when operas by Christoph-Willibald Gluck were introduced in 1774 and likewise with those of Gioachino Rossini in 1824.¹ This essay will show how memory of the first episode shaped the intense conflict in the second episode. Opposition to Rossini arose from the fear that Italian opera generally would destroy the traditions followed at the Opéra which, though involving works by foreigners, were deemed to represent distinctive French theater. Thus did national and cosmopolitan tendencies interact in complicated ways in this dispute. But what also drove opposition to Rossini—or rather, what was termed *rossinisme*—was the tendency among the same newspapers to oppose the government led by the comte Jean-Baptiste Villèle, prime minister of France under Louis XVIII and Charles X. The controversy brought by the *Courrier des théâtres*, the *Corsaire*, and *Le Figaro, journal non politique* helped keep Rossini from becoming director of the Opéra and in the process contributed significantly to the movement which opposed the regime at the end of the 1820s.

The issues surrounding repertory in the 1820s were interpreted through deeply-rooted memory among the public at the Opéra. Works by Jean-Baptiste Lully, Jean-Philippe Rameau and various of Lully's successors dominated the theater's repertory right up to the arrival of Gluck, laying down the first true canon in the European opera world.² Nowhere else in Europe had operas lasted as long and been defined as firmly in canonic terms as happened in Paris; indeed, everywhere else in Europe Italian opera dominated court or municipal theaters. By contrast,

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¹ Anselm Gerhard discusses such use of the term *révolution* in *The Urbanization of Opera*, 69.

² Weber, "La musique ancienne in the Waning of the Ancien Régime," 58-88; Ozanam, "Recherches sur l'Académie Royale de Musique," 273-372.

Gluck's compositions for Paris were hybrid in nature, since they integrated Italian, Viennese and French techniques in idiosyncratic fashion, stimulating the arrival of other foreign composers—Nicolò Piccinni, Giovanni Salieri and Giovanni Sacchini—who also adapted to local practices. Yet the new repertory was defined in national terms: the words were translated and commentators defined them all as “French opera”. Indeed, a canon also evolved among operas by André-Modeste Grétry—*Colinette à la Cour* (1782) and *Anacréon chez Polycrate* (1797)—and—by Jean-Jacques Rousseau *Le devin du village* (1752)—all of which were performed at the Opéra through the 1820s.³ The second *révolution* came about in that decade, since the prestigious status of the canon was threatened by Rossini's stunning success all around Europe, which brought about a process of change parallel to what had happened in the 1770s. We shall see that the crisis of the 1820s was resolved through a similar *querelle* and a new *hybridization* of French and Italian music.

From 1774 to 1824

From the onset of revolution in 1789 to the final departure of Louis Napoleon from French soil in 1815, the Opéra served as a remarkably stable institution in public life, since it did not experience a crisis comparable to the one which occurred in the Comédie-Française and the theater world generally during that period.⁴ Mark Darlow and David Chaillou have shown that the directors of the institution knew how to stay out of trouble during the turbulent shifts in governmental regime from 1789 through 1815. The generation of musicians and administrators which emerged from that period were not closely identified with the revolutionary tradition, though some such reputé did cling to the leaders of the Conservatoire de la Musique et de la Danse from its founding in 1795. Even though Napoleon Bonaparte brought the famed composers Gasparo Spontini and Ferdinando Paër on board, the great majority of new pieces were by Frenchmen, some of whom were on the staff of the Opéra in the 1820s.

Yet the reconstitution of the French state begun in 1814 proved deeply problematic for the Académie Royale de Musique, leaving the theater without clearly defined authority for a decade.⁵ Definitions of responsibility changed constantly among the appointed directors, the department heads who met as the Comité d'administration, and the ultimate authority of the Maison du Roi.⁶ Not only did the competence of the administration come under criticism, but also many of the singers were at retirement age and the old repertory seemed out of date. The assassination of Charles-Ferdinand, duc de Berry on February 13, 1820 made the situation far worse; ironically, the dying Duke was laid down between busts of Gluck and Grétry.⁷ Attendance in the theater collapsed, forcing its administration to find a new hall while royalists propounded that Liberals had planned the assassination.

Moreover, the situation was complicated when in 1801 public demand for Italian opera led to creation of the Théâtre-Italien separately, followed by its integrated somewhat into the governance of the Académie Royale de Musique in 1818. Connoisseurs agreed that the new theater offered a higher level of performance than the Opéra, especially since it offered a dozen pieces by Rossini along with popular older operas by Domenico Cimarosa and Giovanni Paisiello. Janet Johnson put forth a key argument for interpreting how the intricate relations between two theaters

³ Charlton, *Opera in the Age of Rousseau*; Arnold, *Grétry's Operas and the Public*.

⁴ Darlow, *Staging the French Revolution*; Chaillou, *Napoléon et l'Opéra*; Jeremy Popkin pointed to a strong tradition of political moderation among conservatives and their newspapers, stretching from the 1780s through the culmination of liberal thinking in the late 1820s; see *The Right-Wing Press in France*.

⁵ Ozanam, “Recherches sur l'Académie Royale de Musique,” 31-32 and passim.

⁶ See the invaluable article by Everist, “The Music of Power.”

⁷ Roulet, *Notice historique*; Ozanam, “Recherches sur l'Académie Royale de Musique,” 58.

“expanded the artistic possibilities of the age, tending toward both the Italianization of French opera and the Frenchification of Italian opera,” which came about as a “direct outgrowth of the unusual and misunderstood relationship that bound the Théâtre-Italien and the Opéra from 1818 to 1827.”⁸

Even though the theaters were more or less managed on an independent basis, appointment of Rossini as director of the Théâtre-Italien in February 1824—and performance of his *Cenerentola* at the Opéra then on May 9—stimulated fears that Italian opera would be imposed wholesale at the Opéra. Thus did the *Courrier des théâtres* warn that: “un projet occulte de dégoûter le public de l’Opéra, afin de motiver une organisation nouvelle, en vertu de laquelle les ballets français seraient réunis à la troupe italienne dans la salle de la rue Lepelletier, exactement à l’instar du King’s théâtre de Londres.”⁹ Note that the King’s Theatre had since its founding in 1704 offered only pieces by Italian composers (with two failed exceptions), the exact opposite of what happened in Paris.¹⁰ The Théâtre-Italien drew both ultra-royalists and liberals but came under fire for its identification with the aristocracy.

The construction *les progrès de la musique* was used in this period variously either to defend or to attack the evolution of new works. In 1815 a monarchist periodical, *Le Nain jaune, ou Journal des arts, des sciences et de la littérature* attacked the traditionalists who wanted only a few worn-out operas and did not recognize their “physionomie antique” and “progrès désespérans.”¹¹ Contrariwise, another early periodical, the *Journal général des théâtre*, defended the old operas with an attack on those who claimed to see “les prétendus progrès de la musique, dont parlent sans cesse ceux qui sont intéressés à accréditer cette opinion.”¹²

Writers on painting or sculpture had by tradition felt free to identify artistic factions with those in governmental affairs. Stendhal and E.-J. Delécluze, art critic of the *Journal des débats*, used specific political vocabulary when discussing painters, and similar tendencies arose in commentary on Molière’s plays.¹³ That was less the case in opera and music generally: by tradition it had been taken for granted that the musical world should remain neutral in terms of state politics. That is why I choose to call the theater newspapers *quasi-libéral*, since they worked in the cause of such political figures without identifying with them directly. That happened in part because the politics of musical culture, the Opéra particularly, played so formidable a role in public life. Stendhal involved himself deeply in opera politics when in his *Vie de Rossini* of 1825 he confronted the traditional notion of *révolution*: “Une chose fort triste, qui est peut-être une vérité, c’est que le beau idéal change tous les trente ans, en musique. De là vient que cherchant à donner une idée de la révolution opérée par Rossini il a été inutile de remonter beaucoup au-delà de Cimarosa et de Paisiello.”¹⁴ We will not pursue here the debate over classical versus romantic aesthetic viewpoints, whose factions Elizabeth Della Zazzera has shown to have been fragmented in complicated ways.¹⁵

Still, musical commentators often employed terms conventionally used in governmental politics. The terms *rossiniste* and *rossinisme* evolved out of words used in the Spanish revolution,

⁸ Johnson, “The Théâtre italien and Opera and Theatrical Life in Restoration Paris, 1818-1827,” 69.

⁹ “Académie Royale de Musique et le Théâtre-Italien,” 2.

¹⁰ Weber, “Domestic versus Foreign Identities.”

¹¹ “Académie Royale de Musique,” *Le Nain jaune*, Feb. 1815, 347.

¹² “Théâtres lyriques,” *Journal général des théâtre*, January 22, 1816, 43.

¹³ Haskell, “L’Art et le langage de la politique,” 106-15; Kroen, *Politics and Theater*. Emmanuel de Waresquiel commented on such interaction between cultural and political spheres in *L’Histoire à rebrousse-poil*, 14-15.

¹⁴ Stendhal, *Vie de Rossini*. Paris: Le Divan, 1929, 17.

¹⁵ Zazzera, “Romanticism in Print.”

just as occurred with *libéral* and *libéralisme*. For example, the *Journal des théâtres* declared that “Nos concerts, même spirituels, sont envahis par Rossini, Pacini, bientôt par Caraffa et autres auteurs de même école.... L’engouement pour le *rossinisme* n’est cependant plus le même.”¹⁶ Writers for ultra-royalist periodicals participated in this polemical vocabulary even though they were loyal to Rossini. As early as 1820 the *Annales de la littérature et des arts* reported on “les nouvelles guerres dans l’empire de Polymnie,” regretting to say that “il maestro Rossini, l’ultra-montain, et Mozart le germanique, sont en hostilités ouverts. Le succès de Giovanni (*Don Juan*) est une véritable bataille perdue pour les Rossinistes.”¹⁷

Newspapers focused on the theater emerged in the 1820s as part of a major new kind of what might be called popular journalism. As *Le civilisation du journal* (2012) has suggested, the editors of such sheets aimed to influence public opinion by experimenting in in kinds of writing and argumentation. At any one point in that decade there existed three to five newspapers whose front page was devoted entirely to theater schedules and for whom commentary on the theater was central.¹⁸ The earliest such publications were the *Miroir des spectacles*, *Courrier des théâtres*, *Corsaire* and *La Pandore*, and a whole host of others appeared from 1825: *Le Figaro*, *journal non politique*, *Diable boiteux* and *La Lorgnette*. Much of the public which read theater newspapers probably came from middle-class as opposed to high bourgeois or aristocrats, people who could not afford to attend the Opéra or the Comédie-Française very often. Even though some could afford the cheapest seats at the Opéra (those on the fourth and fifth levels cost 3 or 2.50 fr.), they went more often to the “secondary” theaters, such as the Théâtre des Variétés (where the top price was 3.50 fr.).¹⁹ The newspapers helped such people keep abreast of what was happening at the Opéra, since that theater was so central to Parisian fashion in both musical and social respects.

Significantly enough, none of the theater newspapers identified themselves with the ultra-royalist faction in national politics or made open support for the government. To be sure, the papers which did support the government or the Ultras paid a great deal of attention to the theaters generally, since that world was so central to social and cultural life in the city. Portraying the theater schedules more or less implied a plebian orientation which conservative newspapers preferred to avoid (the *Miroir des spectacles* was an exception in advertising the schedules to a rather more learned public than the other newspapers). The willingness to attract attention in the new journalistic fashion brought attention upon the theater newspapers and thereby suspicion from the government. The journalists writing for the lesser periodicals made their way effectively despite efforts toward censorship, as is made clear in a booklet published in 1826 named *Biographie indiscrete des publicistes, feuellistes, libellistes, journalistes*.²⁰ By contrast, the leading liberal newspapers—*Le Constitutionnel* and the *Courrier français*—presented a more respectable image by following the usual format of the most prominent news outlets.

That the anti-Rossinian newspapers tended to be oriented toward a middle-class rather than elite public is confirmed by the strength of support for Rossini found in upper-class liberal salons. In his recent biography of General Sébastien Alexandre Foy, Jean-Claude Caron shows that many of people at the salons he attended felt that nothing affected their senses more powerfully than the music of Rossini. In his diaries, Foy keeps returning to the intense popularity for Rossini he found at the salons of the Maréchal Jean-de-Dieu Soult, Cathérine Grand-Duchess of Vicence and

¹⁶ “Dernier Concert Spirituel,” *Journal des théâtres*, Apr. 1, 1823, 2.

¹⁷ *Annales de la littérature et des arts*, vol. 1, 1820, 298-99. The critic was identified as *le vieux Amateur*.

¹⁸ *La civilisation du journal*, 326-39, 375-82, 1062, 1553-68.

¹⁹ Ozanam, “Recherches sur l’Académie Royale de Musique,” 196-97.

²⁰ *Biographie indiscrete des publicistes, feuellistes*.

Madame de Rumford, née Marie-Anne Pierrette Paulze, wife of Antoine Lavoisier, herself also a prominent chemist. It is significant that the word *libéral* appeared frequently throughout Foy's diary, indicating how strongly he and his political colleagues identified themselves with that denomination. Yet no such vocabulary arose in the *Courrier des théâtres* or *Corsaire*. It is doubtful that the term in and of itself would have been an object of censorship; indeed, the popular newspapers probably did not identify their readers through that vocabulary. Such division among social levels is confirmed by the class consciousness such as the General manifested in describing his social discomfort attending the Opéra-Comique:

Le soir je conduis ma Blanche à Feydeau ou on donne le *Déserteur* et le *Délire*, qui me paraissent du dernier mauvais, l'un dans le genre niais, l'autre dans le genre faux. Mes souvenirs juvéniles n'ont pû me préserver pendant la représentation du *Déserteur* d'un profond ennui qui a été jusqu'au malaise ... [l'Opéra-Comique] est pour des esprits si inférieurs.²¹

Reporting in the *Miroir de spectacles* bore similar implications of class divisions. The author of a piece on "Rossini et le *Journal du commerce*" declared horror that anyone from that bourgeois newspaper would choose to write about the Théâtre-Italien, since such a person should instead devote himself just to discussing practical matters, since "[s]a compétence est mieux reconnue à la Bourse qu'au Conservatoire, et la langue de Barème lui est plus familière que celle de Rossini."²² By contrast, a piece in le *Corsaire* stated that "Admet-on que ce théâtre est le rendez-vous de la meilleure société de Paris?"²³

One can identify a considerable variety of militant or defensive postures in regard to national identity in discussion of French music during the 1820s. First of all, a fairly small cénacle of musicians and journalists, most of them of older generations, took for themselves the name of *l'École française* by which to fight for French music in militant terms. They saw their interests seriously threatened by a major change in repertory and accordingly resisted it vigorously. Having established themselves in the Opéra in the 1790s, they were loath to help their pieces or their roles be abandoned and their income and status threatened in the musical world as a whole. This faction was identified the most often with the liberal journal named the *Minerve littéraire*, where Henri Montan Berton, the eminent composer and Conservatoire professor was the chief musical correspondent. He evolved as the most strident critic of Rossini and defender of the hybrid composing tradition in French opera.²⁴

Yet the journalists in the theater newspapers took in a more defensive posture, using languages historians might term *patriotic* rather than *nationalistic*, focused on protecting tradition rather than aggrandizing its prominence. The hybrid and cross-national nature of French opera likewise discouraged aggressive nationalism in French musical thinking. Robert Alexander suggested something similar in his paper on France and international relations at the time of the Spanish crisis: he argued that promotion of the nation could "possess a malleability that enables both proponents and opponents of military intervention to use patriotism for the pursuit of supra-national ideals or objectives."²⁵ Thus did patriotism and supra-national links intermingle in the

²¹ *Notes journalières du Général Foy, 1820-1825*, 15 Sep. 1823, vol. 2, 340; 29 Dec. 1823, vol. 2, 165.

²² "Rossini et le *Journal du commerce*," *Miroir des spectacles*, 20 July 1821, 2.

²³ "Don Giovanni," *Corsaire*, 30 Sep. 1823, 2.

²⁴ Berton, *De la musique mécanique*.

²⁵ Alexander, "Polar Opposites?"

canonic traditions which surrounded Gluck and Sacchini as they related to the roles played by the operas of Grétry and Rousseau within the Opéra's repertory. As we have seen, a compromise had been struck regarding native and foreign works at the Opéra in the 1770s, and that compromise was revived in similar form at the end of the 1820s.

Hector Berlioz acknowledged similar conflicted tendencies regarding patriotism in his 1823 piece in the *Corsaire*:

Eh! qui pourrait nier que tous les opéras de Rossini pris ensemble ne sauraient supporter la comparaison avec une ligne de récitatifs de Gluck, trois mesures de chant de Mozart ou de Spontini et le moindre chœur de [Ferdinand] Lesueur! Du moins c'est mon avis, et je ne suis pas fanatique de la musique française.²⁶

The son of a landowner living near Grenoble, Berlioz moved around politically in the periodicals for which he wrote: three pieces for the *Corsaire*, five for the liberal Catholic *Correspondant*, but weekly pieces 1833-35 for the conservative *Rénovateur* and also for the moderate conservative *Journal des débats* until the end of his career.

Theatrical Politics Versus National Politics

At an early date Gioachino Rossini proposed that he rewrite *Maometto II* (Naples 1820) as *Siège de Corinthe* for the Paris Opéra, a project which challenged commentators to come to grips once again with the hybrid nature of French opera. The *Gazette de France*, the official newspaper which tended toward ultra-royalist positions pronounced support for Rossini's plan, calling it

le premier ouvrage dans lequel M. Rossini, changeant la nature de ses travaux, et, pour ainsi dire, de ses précédentes combinaisons musicales, prendre place, en écrivant un poème français, à côté des Gluck et des Sacchini. C'est du moins l'opinion déjà manifestée par divers artistes, qui ont entendu des fragments de l'opéra du *Siège de Corinthe*. Espérons beaucoup de talent de M. Rossini: c'est une justice et un plaisir tout à la fois. Comment résister?²⁷

Three major periodicals opposed to the régime positioned themselves against the cult for Rossini. First of all, le *Miroir des spectacles, des lettres, des mœurs et des arts*, which began in March 1821, was unique among theater newspapers by covering politics and expressing blunt opinions about the subject. A group of well-known liberals directed it, most prominently Étienne de Jouy, author of librettos for Méhul, Cherubini, and Spontini. The government went after the newspaper with special vigor, which forced its editors to offer less opinion and dissuaded other periodicals from taking such risks. In 1823 it was renamed "*le Sphinx*" then "*la Pandore*".²⁸ As a general rule the periodical was more sympathetic to Rossini than the liberal *Minerve littéraire*, offering irony more than dogmatism, and its articles often seem as written by someone attending the elite liberal salons where Rossini was popular. A sense of social status cropped up occasionally,

²⁶ "Monsieur le Corsaire," signed by "Hector B...," *Corsaire*, Nov. 19, 1823, 3; Cairns, *Berlioz*, 129-32; Turner, *Berlioz*, 37-42.

²⁷ "Théâtre," *Gazette de France*, Jul. 21, 1821, 1.

²⁸ *Histoire générale de la presse française*, vol. 2, p. 71, 72, 82; *La civilisation du journal*, 214, 319.

as we saw in the diary of General Foy. An article on “Rossini et le *Journal du commerce*” declared how improper it was for anyone from so socially inferior a world to write about the theater where sophisticated aristocrats went to amuse themselves. Such a person was better off writing about what was happening at the Bourse rather than the Conservatoire.²⁹

The *Courrier des théâtres* acquired considerable prominence thanks to the aggressive leadership within the press generally which was exerted by its editor, Charles-François Maurice.³⁰ The son of a jeweler of the Palais Royal, Maurice acquired government support as a writer under Napoleon and enjoyed support from François Guizot early in the Bourbon regime. He published a sequence of similar theater newspapers: *Camp volant* (1818-19), *le Journal des théâtres* (1820-22) and *Courrier des théâtres* (1823-42). As Gustav Vapereau suggested in his 1861 *Dictionnaire biographique*, Maurice “s’est fait un nom dans la critique littéraire par un esprit vif, mordant, parfois acerbe, qui lui fit beaucoup d’ennemis.”³¹ His reputation emerged chiefly as the most prominent leader among authors of vaudevilles, many of whom exerted strong liberal opinions in their works. In 1824 the conservative newspaper called *La Quotidienne* pointed out that tendency in political terms when discussing his relationship with the Théâtre de Vaudeville: “Ce théâtre lutte péniblement contre la mauvaise fortune que lui ont suscitée les journaux libéraux, qui ne pouvant en faire un des instruments de leur parti, ont fini par en faire une de leurs victimes.”³²

Indeed, Maurice once received a kind of benediction from liberals who wrote for the *Minerve littéraire*. An article called “De la littérature distincte de la politique” raised a tough question: “le *Journal des théâtres* est réputé littéraire: n’eut-il pas été politique sous le règne de cet empereur romain, comédien couronné? Qu’est-ce donc que la politique?”³³ Maurice naturally drew upon traditional anti-clerical slogans, as when he attacked “une musique du signor Rossini, que tout Paris a supplié de n’en plus faire, au nom de Dieu, de la Vierge Marie, Saint François de Paul, et pour le repos des âmes du purgatoire, qui étaient ce jour-là en enfer dans la salle du Théâtre Louvois [the Théâtre-Italien].”³⁴ Even though Maurice was more discrete in voicing political opinion than the *Minerve littéraire*, he made clear his opinion on the monarchy when, upon the death of Louis XVIII on September 14, 1824, he offered no eulogy, simply announcing that “une Relâche à tous les théâtres jusqu’au nouvel ordre.” In 1832 Maurice was convicted of corrupt and partisan acts done during the July Days but escaped prison thanks to a letter from the new King.³⁵

The campaign against *rossinisme* became the hallmark of Maurice’s articles on the Opéra and the Théâtre Italien, predicting their formal union as strictly Italian opera. The newspaper derided the aristocratic public which dominated the Théâtre-Italien, especially the *dilettanti* which claimed special knowledge about opera: “Mais non, [les dilettanti] donnent trois salves d’applaudissement à un air de Rossini, il n’en a fait retentir que deux pour un air de Mozart; ... et voilà le parterre déclare *Rossiniste*.”³⁶ On another occasion Maurice declared regarding the Opéra that “ce théâtre est national; eh bien nous serons patriotes!”³⁷ Still, Maurice took a moderate

²⁹ “Rossini et le *Journal du commerce*,” Jul. 20, 1821, 2.

³⁰ Maurice, *Histoire anecdotique du théâtre*; Ginisty, “Anthologie du Journalisme,” www.Médias19. His family’s surname was Descombes.

³¹ Vapereau, *Dictionnaire universel des contemporains*, II, 1189.

³² “Théâtre de Vaudeville,” *La Quotidienne*, Jan. 12 1824, 2.

³³ Darnin, “De la littérature distinct de la politique,” 21.

³⁴ “Théâtre Royal Italien,” *Camp volant*, May 20, 1819, 2.

³⁵ Descombes, *À Louis-Philippe, roi*; The *Biographie indiscrette* spoke of “les erreurs et les préjugés répandus dans la société ... qui puissent arriver à M. Charles Maurice,” 83; see also 108-09:

³⁶ “Théâtre-Italien,” *Courrier des théâtres*, Sep. 30, 1823, 2.

³⁷ “Académie Royale de Musique,” *ibid.*, Oct. 1824, 2.

position on the fate of the widely-challenged canonic repertory. Even though he defended the French tradition in general, he avoided identifying his views with dogmatism of “l’École française” or with critics who valued the canonic repertoire above any new style. A comment made in 1823 summed up his point of view, arguing that “les partisans de la nouveauté s’irritent, par les contradictions, et deviennent injustes à l’égard des anciens génies.”³⁸

The campaign against Rossini and Italian opera grew in prominence and influence, rather as did liberal ideas themselves, and the theater magazines, the *Corsaire* most prominently, became more frank about their political positions. After the Sacre de Charles X on May 29, 1825, the *Courrier des théâtres* published an article by the liberal lawyer Amédée Tissot which made a harsh criticism of the poetry written in honor of the event, calling on writers to “relever la monotonie résultante infailliblement d’un panégyrique perpétuel.”³⁹ Another political event in Rossini’s French career came, as Aurélie Barbuscia pointed out, when Rossini composed a set of pieces for the meeting of government delegates in Verona in 1822, in effect the second Congress of Vienne.⁴⁰ That little was written in the French press about this highly partisan international event makes one wonder whether French citizens might have been quietly suspicious of Rossini for aiding renewed influence from foreign monarchs, indeed while foreign troupes remained in some parts of their country.

The *Corsaire* was directed by a much less prominent journalist than Charles Maurice or les editors of the *Miroir des spectacles*.⁴¹ A lifetime journalist, Jean-Louis Viennot seems to have led the periodical throughout its history, guiding it into the most open political opinion among the theater newspapers. His name was linked with the *Corsaire* in a governmental action against the periodical in 1838, citing him as its principal *propriétaire* and *directeur*, and he probably had been active in it since the beginning. The only published piece of writing attributed to Viennot was a short story elsewhere attributed to another author.⁴² Viennot ran the newspaper up to at least 1838 and seems to have revived it for a while in the early 1850s. In 1854 he tried unsuccessfully to obtain an “Indemnité littéraire,” the grant given to worthy authors by the government.⁴³ Viennot earned great respect from high-ranking liberals when his newspaper was censored in 1828. Judicial advice was given to him by Albin de Berville, a lawyer widely known for defending liberal journalists who wrote for the *Minerve littéraire* and *Le Constitutionnel*.⁴⁴ Viennot spent two weeks in jail and was fined three hundred francs.⁴⁵ The *Corsaire* indeed went farther than the *Courrier des théâtres* defending *l’École française*, especially an article called “sur l’engouement et les Rossinistes,” which denounced “les fanatiques” who did not sufficiently respect the canon of French opera:

³⁸ “Académie Royale de Musique: *Iphigénie d’Aulide*,” *ibid.*, Aug. 15, 1823, 3.

³⁹ Tissot, “Poésie: L’Avènement et le Sacre de S. M. Ch. X,” *Courrier des théâtres*, May 31, 1825, 2. See also *Biographie indiscrete*, 119-20; Tissot, *Les gémissements de la presse opprimée*.

⁴⁰ Barbuscia, “Le Congrès de Vienne.”

⁴¹ *Histoire générale de la presse française*, vol. 2, 71, 91, 102, 103, 146; *La civilisation du journal*, 326-29, 376-77, 799-801.

⁴² *Le projet d’un crime* (Paris: Office correspondance de De Vigny, 1843).

⁴³ F/18/332: Ministre de l’Intérieur, Direction de l’Imprimerie et de la Librairie, 2e Division, Journal supprimé: *Le Corsaire*, carton 9, 1828. He was cited in regard to the *Corsaire* also in 1832 and 1838. He applied to the fund that granted money to retiring cultural works in 1852 and 1854: F/17/3236: Viennot (J.C.): Secrétariat, 1er Bureau: Indemnités littéraires.

⁴⁴ *Le Constitutionnel* is said to have sought Berville’s pieces to attract new subscribers: *Biographie indiscrete*, 26. He also defended Pierre-Jean de Béranger, the revered scholar of the *chanson*.

⁴⁵ F/18/332, Carton 9; *Gazette des Tribunaux*, Jun. 27, 1829, 3; Rader, *Journalists and the July Revolution*, 20, 63,

Nous osons cependant lui déclarer que les fanatiques du balcon des Italiens, ne représentent en aucune manière l'opinion éclairée de la capital. Ils regardent Grétry comme un faiseur de points-neufs, écorchent exprès les noms de Méhul, de Berton, de Catel, de Boieldieu, font semblant d'ignorer entièrement ceux de Dalayrac et de Nicolò, ne jurent que par Rossini, et se pâment trois fois par semaine au balcon de l'Opéra-Buffera.⁴⁶

Likewise, in 1827 Rossini's preparation of a new version of *Moïse* unleashed from the newspaper grim predictions that the repertory at the Opéra would be completely Italianized: "M. Rossini mènera toute la machine; les artistes français seront mis à la porte, et les Italiens les remplaceront. On ne conservera que trois opéras du répertoire: *la Vestale, Orphée et Alceste*, parce que ces opéras ont leurs paroles italiennes."⁴⁷

Religious issues basic to liberal politics became increasingly apparent in the *Corsaire* from early 1825. The old kinds of attacks on *les Jésuites* were revived against the ultra-royalist newspapers, chiefly the *Drapeau blanc* and *La Quotidienne*. In early 1827 an article posed a harsh attack on the Institution Royale de la Musique Classique et Religieuse, which was widely respected in non-partisan terms:

Est-ce une pépinière d'enfants de chœur pour les cathédrales, ou bien serait-ce une façon nouvelle d'enseigner les saintes écritures? ... Ou nous sommes bien trompés ou quelques-unes de ces voix célestes seront quelque beau jour enrôlées au service de Satan, et rossignoleront les gammes chromatiques de M. Rossini.⁴⁸

Ironically, Choron had been Régisseur general at the Opéra in 1816 and as such began planning for elimination of the old canonic operas, a project François Habeneck revived when he became the Opéra's director in 1821. Whereas Choron initiated the Institution to perform old sacred works, Habeneck began the Société des Concerts du Conservatoire in 1828 to present orchestral concerts of what was already called *musique classique*.⁴⁹ Thus did entirely different canonic traditions evolve in concerts and in the opera world.

The *Corsaire* proclaimed its political position openly for the first time when on April 17, 1827, Charles X announced that he had been forced to cancel a proposed law for stricter control of the press, an event which rallied the opposition triumphantly. The lead story that day, "Une bonne nouvelle!" called for

actions de grâce au Tout-Puissant [probably Villèle] Vivat! Vivat! hommes de lettres, libraires, imprimeurs, journalistes, etc., etc., poussez des *hourras* d'allégresse, IL EST RÉTIRÉ!—Quoi donc? Eh! parbleu! le projet d'amour! Dieu! que m'apprenez-vous là! Adressons alors des actions de grâce au Tout-Puissant [...].⁵⁰

⁴⁶ "Sur l'engouement et les Rossinistes," *Corsaire*, Nov. 19, 1824, 3.

⁴⁷ "Académie Royale de Musique," *ibid.*, May 17, 1825, 2.

⁴⁸ "Institution de musique religieuse," *ibid.*, Mar. 24, 1827, 2-3.

⁴⁹ O 1 637, Comité d'Administration, Jun. 15, 1814 to Dec. 30, 1817.

⁵⁰ "Une bonne nouvelle!," *Corsaire*, Apr. 18, 1827, 2.

The Compromise Accomplished in the Press

The contrasts between theater newspapers took new form after 1825. Once the *Miroir des spectacles* became *La Pandore*, the newspaper tended to promote the cult for Rossini more aggressively than had happened before. Assuming a role done by no other theater journal, it in effect spoke for liberals of high society who attended salons together; for example, Louis-Philippe, comte de Ségur, wrote pieces anonymously for *La Pandore* and *Le Constitutionnel*.⁵¹ In December 1823 there appeared an article called “Affinités” which linked what was going on in politics and the world of chemistry, making reference to the salon of Madame de Rumford. *La Pandore* adroitly established a balance in its criticism between support for Rossini and for the canonic repertory which dated back to the 1770s. As was the case with the *Miroir des spectacles*, the *Pandore* offered a literary style aimed at a sophisticated public which favored irony more than ideology. The nature of this public allowed the editors of *La Pandore*, different from the *Corsaire* or the *Courrier des Théâtres*, to actively criticize the taste of the public. One article mocked the public for being “sourd et aveugle” because it preferred a new ballet rather than canonic pieces which had proven their aesthetic worth. Open support of liberal opinions became increasingly frequent in *La Pandore*; in 1826, for example, an article praised an “encyclopédie progressive” to which Benjamin Constant, François Guizot and François Fourier had contributed.

The première of Rossini’s *Siège de Corinthe*, on October 9, 1826, marked a critical turning-point in the rivalry between partisans and enemies of the great composer. The campaign against *rossinisme* being waged by the *Courrier des théâtres* and the *Corsaire* forced the hand of journalists supporting his operas to adopt a more diplomatic language. These critics began to comport themselves in more moderate terms when praising the new opera. The critic of the *Gazette de France*, whose opinions were highly respected, seems to have recognized the growing unhappiness regarding the threat to French tradition at the Opéra. He therefore exercised restraint in praising *Le Siège de Corinthe*:

Mais, si la gloire de M. Rossini ne semble pas aujourd’hui plus éclatante qu’elle n’était hier, va-t-on conclure, avec les partisans outrés de l’école française, que le cygne de Pesaro n’a plus trouvé ni chaleur, ni verve, pour composer, chez nous, une tragédie lyrique? Non, certainement, ce serait une folie.⁵²

Interestingly enough, a year later the critic for the *Gazette* (identified in later publication as A. Delaforest) raised pointed political objections to the libretto written by Michel-Jean Sedaine for Grétry’s setting of *Guillaume Tell* back in 1791, finding “les inspirations de cette époque” which reminded him of what he deplored about the revolutionary theaters generally.⁵³ A more ironic commentary on Rossini came from a newly-founded theater newspaper, *Le Figaro*, *journal non politique*, which called the opera “ce lourd pasticcio,” reporting that orchestral musicians complained that it demanded “les bras de fer et des corps d’acier” and that singers found themselves “assassinés par le rossinisme.”⁵⁴ *La Pandore* continued in the *rossiniste* faction, its articles gushing about the production in less professional language than was becoming conventional in that time: “Jamais opéra ne fut attendu avec plus d’impatience.... La brillante

⁵¹ *Biographie indiscrete*, 114.

⁵² “*Le Siège de Corinthe*,” *Gazette de France*, Oct. 11, 1826, 1.

⁵³ Delaforest, *Théâtre moderne*, I: 981.

⁵⁴ “Opéra,” *Le Figaro*, Jan. 7, 1827, 6.

réputation du célèbre maestro qui fait depuis si longtemps les délices du Théâtre-Royal-Italien justifiait cet empressement.”⁵⁵

The tempering of language about *Siège de Corinthe* marked a calming down of ideological tensions related to the reconfiguration of the Opéra itself in the long term. Interestingly enough it was a nobleman from one of the most powerful old families who nurtured this process: François-Louis Sosthènes de La Rochefoucauld, who was given authority over the Division of the Beaux-Arts in August 1824 as part of the program of the ultra-royalists for the regime of Charles X. Even though La Rochefoucauld had allied with that faction at the onset of the Restoration, he failed to gain the confidence of Villèle or the new king and ended up as a hard-working civil servant. One reason for the king’s displeasure was the vicomte’s bungled effort to set up a competition for new works at the Opéra. He attempted to impose the ideas of Louis de Bonald—then both a deputy and a minister—by requiring that the librettos had to show respect for religion and the principals of monarchy and high morality.⁵⁶ Only one newspaper supported the project fully: the ultra-conservative *Drapeau blanc*, led by the wild-eyed polemicist Alphonse Martainville who had been dragged into court by the government two years before.

But La Rochefoucauld learned from the experience, since he ended up as an effective civil servant such as Emmanuel de Waresquiel and Benoît Yvert have termed “un ministère de culture avant la lettre.”⁵⁷ Not only did he guide production of Rossini’s five works from 1825 to 1829, he also can be credited for developing the works which became known in the early 1830s as *grand opéra*.⁵⁸ Indeed, the *Siège de Corinthe* can be seen as one of the “pre-grand operas”, along with Weber’s *Euryanthe* and Donizetti’s *Lucie de Lammermoor*.⁵⁹ At the same time, the vicomte successfully pacified the lobby for French music, by talking about bringing to the Opéra *La Dame Blanche*, Adrien Boieldieu’s spectacularly successful *opéra-comique*, which was accomplished in 1835. Finally, La Rochefoucauld kept on good terms with the traditionally-minded public while removing the old canonic works from repertory in the last four years of the decade. Though continuously ridiculed in the press, his diplomacy helped bring moderation in the world of opera and to bring about the second *révolution* at the Opéra.

A new age began at the Opéra in the year 1828 as works crafted in hybrid fashion—Rossini’s *Guillaume Tell* and Daniel Auber’s *Muette de Portici*—pointed French opera in new directions. The disputes over repertory and national styles faded away quickly, as the works broke records of attendance. Two new newspapers, *Le Globe* and *Jeune France*, ignored the old dispute as they turned musical thinking toward the future.⁶⁰ Commentary on Rossini moved to a higher level intellectually as the idea arose that he and the recently deceased Ludwig van Beethoven represented “twin styles” mingling fascinating similarities and differences. As Benjamin Walton

⁵⁵ “Académie Royale de Musique,” *La Pandore*, Oct. 10, 1826, 2.

⁵⁶ “Ordonnance du Roi: Ministère de la Maison du Roi,” *La Quotidienne*, Nov. 30, 1825, 4.

⁵⁷ Waresquiel and Yvert, *Histoire de la Restauration*, 367. An anonymous pamphlet published in 1826 defended La Rochefoucauld in convincing terms: *De l’administration des beaux-arts en France* (Paris: A. G. Brunet, 1826). See also Cazenave, *Une Camarilla sous la Restauration*; Alexander, *Re-writing the French Revolutionary Tradition*, 136, 193, 198-99; *Memoires de M. de La Rochefoucauld, duc de Doudeauville*, 14 vols. (Paris: Michel Levy, 1861-64); Yon, “La politique théâtrale de la Restauration,” 281-94.

⁵⁸ *De l’administration des beaux-arts en France*; Cazenave, *Une Camarilla sous la Restauration*; Bruson, *Rossini à Paris*. 56-63; Ozanam, “Recherches sur l’Académie Royale de Musique.”

⁵⁹ Hibberd, *French Grand Opera*, 3.

⁶⁰ “Musique,” *Le Globe, journal littéraire*, Oct. 12, 1826, 134; “Revue théâtrale,” *La Jeune France: Journal de philosophie, littérature, sciences, arts, spectacles, etc.*, June 15, 1829, 7.

suggested in *Rossini in Restoration Paris*, this was “the only, and certainly the last, point in which Beethoven and Rossini would ever be so well balanced in European culture.”⁶¹

In a historiographical discussion of *grand opéra*, Sarah Hibberd suggested that recent writing on the Restoration and the early July Monarchy has “revealed a more diverse political discourse than previously acknowledged, one linked intimately with ways of thinking about the past”.⁶² Thus we have seen how opposition to Rossini and to the government arose from a middle-class public that did not follow the lead of *rossiniste* bourgeois liberals, since the journalists wanted instead to prevent the collapse of a canonic repertory inherited from the eighteenth century. Thus did theater newspapers serving the middle-class public oppose the ultra-royalist government in their own terms, which can thus be seen to as *quasi-libéral*. One is impressed to see how these newspapers rallied followers of tradition but contributed to change in the process. A compromise was struck in the press between supporters and opponents of Rossini during the late 1820s which made way for the renewed hybridization of French and Italian opera practices in productions which were soon called *grand opéra*. Looking at the two *révolutions* in the Opéra today, one is impressed at how the institution was able to change and evolve in the course of these disputes, brought as a particular kind of compromise usually called *les progrès de la musique*.

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⁶¹ Walton, *Rossini in Restoration France*, 254.

⁶² Hibberd, *French Grand Opera*, 1.

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