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William Weber with Beverly Wilcox, *Canonical Repertories and the French Musical Press: Lully to Wagner*. Eastman Studies in Music. Rochester, N.Y.: University of Rochester Press, 2021. 328 pp. Bibliography and notes. \$99.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 9781648250163; \$19.95 U.S. (eb). ISBN 9781800103290.

Review by Kerry Murphy, University of Melbourne.

Drawing on William Weber's previous works on canon formation, this new book examines how a number of musical works in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century France came to be seen as canonic and remain in performing repertoires. There are eight chapters, seven by Weber and one by Beverly Wilcox (from her unpublished doctoral thesis). Four of Weber's chapters have appeared or will appear elsewhere. The book is set out roughly chronologically; five chapters focus on the eighteenth century and three on the nineteenth century.

There is always the risk of a lack of coherency with books that put previously published articles together with new material, and a danger of the chapters not running smoothly into each other. An attempt has been made to draw connections and to create a sense of coherency by chapters deliberately taking up issues raised in the introduction. However, more could have been done. The title of the book and the blurb on the back cover suggest the focus is solely France. And by and large it is, except for sections on London in chapters one and four. I think these sections could have been taken out since, although interesting, they do not really contribute, except by means of comparison, to what is happening in France. Chapter one could then have been merged with chapter five since both cover similar repertoire at the Opéra. The title of the book also implies a centrality of the French musical press which is not there in every chapter, although prominently so in some.

The compilation genre can create other problems such as covering the same material in a number of chapters. This happens several times. For instance when Mark Darlow is introduced in chapters one, three, and four, the same quotation from his work is given each time in reference to the Gluck/Piccinni *querelle* as a "valve for the release of political tension" (pp. 31, 92, 105). There is internal repetition too in the introduction and in chapter three (see further below).

Weber carefully defines his terms; he is not talking about an immutable "Canon" of great composers of the past (chiefly mid-eighteenth and nineteenth-century composers, and mainly German), but about a neutral and flexible canon that it is applicable to musics of many genres, types, and times. He stresses the importance of defining "canonic" or "incipient canonicity" within a particular historical period, and shows how canons are not fixed but appear, disappear, and may

reappear again. His focus is on France because canonic repertoires occurred earlier there than elsewhere in Europe. He stresses the at-times divided loyalties in France between domestic and foreign music and that canonical repertory oscillates from one to the other. He demonstrates that the musical press was an important force in articulating and shaping changes in musical life.

The focus of the first chapter is to compare operatic repertoire performed in eighteenth-century France and England, particularly at the King's Theatre in London and the Académie Royale de musique (Opéra) in Paris. France and England saw a dynamic expansion in cultural life early in the century and both theatres were largely dictated to by the aristocracy. But in London, as in the majority of European theatres aimed at the "public entertainment of the upper classes," the preferred genre was Italian opera, with works rarely remaining in the repertory for more than five years. In France, however, apart from two brief periods when Italian troupes were in town, only works of "French" origin (Lully, then chiefly Rameau) were performed until 1774, many remaining in the repertory for fifty years. England had no such canonic repertory although Weber suggests that Corelli's *concerti grossi* held a similar canonic presence in London during the eighteenth century.

Beverly Wilcox's chapter, "Elements of Canon Formation at the Concert Spirituel," shows that the canonicity of eighteenth-century French operatic repertoire was paralleled at the Concert Spirituel concert series where, from 1725 to 1773, a canon was formed in particular by the *motets à grands chœur* of Michel-Richard de LaLande (amongst other works) and later by a frenchified Pergolesi *Stabat mater*. Wilcox argues that this canon was partly created by the discourse used by writers such as Evrard Titon du Tillet and later Pierre-Louis Daquin in describing composers who were performed at the Concert Spirituel, such as LaLande, Campra and Rameau. Daquin used such terms as "*Chef-d'oeuvre*," "*immortel*," and "*génie*" which created and reinforced the idea of greatness. Wilcox investigates a set of criteria for the establishment of canonicity in the context of her "particular time and place" (p. 47). Her criteria include musical attributes (the importance of genre), biographical attributes (distinctive personality), performances, association (with a person or event), music publishing, music journalism, and social discourse. In 1773, after a half-century of existence, the Concert Spirituel canon suddenly and dramatically ended. Wilcox gives a number of reasons for this, including a change of administration. Wilcox thus illustrates effectively Weber's point about canonical status being formed and lost. Her criteria for canonicity could prove a useful transferable model.

The next chapter continues to focus on the Concert Spirituel, this time through the lens of reviews of their concerts by critics for the *Mercure de France* and an exploration of the literary contexts in which such criticism emerged. This is largely what the chapter does, although there are various interesting and exceedingly well-referenced excursions on the way (indeed the references to the scholarly literature become a little overpowering at times), but not everything relates to the narrative. Sentences are sometimes repeated: for instance, "Reviews were published almost entirely in the *Mercure de France*, though we will discuss two pieces in other periodicals" (p. 78) is repeated verbatim (p. 81), and there are at least seven other small repetitions.

The chapter charts the changes in language in the *Mercure de France* from a descriptive listing of pieces on a programme to, by 1750, more evaluative, analytical or normative language with sophisticated commentary on the music from the 1780s onwards. There is a valuable description of how the language of polite culture in reviews related to contemporary salon discourse. The *Mercure de France* was taken over in 1778 by the press magnate Charles-Joseph Panckoucke. He

transformed critical commentary by appointing critics who reinforced the change in focus in the reviews by the end of the century to the music and performers.

The book's introduction highlights the term "incipient canonicity" (originally used in biblical exegesis), used by Weber for some years to refer to the canonic authority given to a highly regarded composer during his or her lifetime. In chapter four, Weber uses the term to explore the hugely successful performances of Haydn's symphonies at the Concert Spirituel in 1780s Paris. He suggests that Haydn's early symphonies appeared almost as a new genre, and created a new horizon of expectations which caused critics to go beyond conventional vocabulary, forcing them to evaluate rather than merely to report. The chapter ends with a comparison with Haydn's reception in London later in the century.

Weber concludes that, because Haydn's early symphonies did not fit the aesthetics of the early nineteenth century, his music lost its incipient canonicity which it did not recover until the twentieth century. The demarcation between "incipient canonicity" and "the Canon" is a little blurred here since Haydn, by the twentieth century, indeed earlier, was widely seen as a member of "The Canon."

Chapter five addresses the parallel canons at the end of the ancien régime at the Paris Opéra and the Comédie-Française, both government-based institutions with monopolies over public performance. It claims that the focus on old works, chiefly the operas of Lully and Rameau and plays of Corneille, Molière and Racine, was unique in Europe and gave the French a "robust sense of cultural identity and heritage" (p. 128). This changed in 1774 when the Opéra introduced a new canon of sorts with the works of Gluck, Piccinni and Sacchini, alongside Rousseau and Grétry, which lasted until the 1820s. Meanwhile, the Comédie-Française, despite introducing some new works, also perpetuated its original canon which remained until the early years of the revolution.

This chapter is based on extensive quantitative research in the archives of both institutions and provides extremely useful tabulations of its findings. Some are startling. For instance, in 1765-1766, 100 percent of the repertoire performed at the Opéra was by dead composers yet, by 1781-1782, it was a mere 3 percent. Weber proposes that the Opéra survived the revolutionary period because it developed a new repertoire and adapted to public opinion. Conversely, the Comédie-Française's failure to engage with the rethinking of genres and expansion of its audience led to its losing its monopoly over spoken theatre in 1793. It took another two decades for it to reconstitute itself.

The book moves into the nineteenth century for the last three chapters. Chapter six examines canonic repertory at the Paris Opéra from 1815-1830 and focuses on factions amongst opera-goers during this period: from supporters of Rossini (appointed director of the Théâtre Italien in 1824) to those who continued to defend the canon of Gluck, Sacchini and Grétry. The disputes were adopted by the expanding and influential Parisian press, particularly in the 1820s, many of the newspapers speaking for a growing middle class who were behind the continuation of the old repertoire and against Rossini. This was particularly the case with the new and more popular theatre journals such as the *Courrier des Théâtres*. Weber shows that the old repertoire at the Opéra only started to be seriously excluded with the appointment of Vicomte Louis François Sosthènes de la Rochefoucauld as director of the Department of the Beaux Arts in 1824. The important role the Vicomte played, not just at the Opéra, but in artistic administration and

cultural leadership in general is emphasised—as it has been in other scholarship on this period.[1] Rossini's new works written for the Opéra and his reshaping of earlier works for its stage were important in the changing of its repertoire.

Weber again uses the archival records of the Opéra to produce detailed tables outlining changes in programming. Tables can be dull, but a claim such as “Grétry's operas continued to be played during the Bourbon restoration” comes vividly to life when informed by the figures (pp. 173-174). For instance, there were 316 performances of Grétry operas during this period, including 157 of *La Caravane de Caire*. Performances of the old repertoire gradually dissipated, and factions evaporated by the 1830s. The middle-class newspapers were also beginning to discuss the need for compromise or accommodation between Italian and French musical styles, which would lead to the genre of grand opera.

The title of chapter seven, “Tracing the evolution of *le vieux répertoire* at the Opéra-Comique in the nineteenth century,” is misleading since the chapter also examines and makes comparison with the *vieux répertoire* at the Opéra.[2] Its material on the Opéra-Comique is the most intriguing, however, since it demonstrates that a canonic repertoire lasted at the Opéra-Comique from the 1760s until the 1890s, at which point the canonic repertoire involved three cohorts of composers: Monsigny, Grétry, Dalayrac; Boieldieu and Isouard; and Hérold, Adam and Auber. Weber argues that there was, however, no conscious historicist revival until the 1889 Universal Exhibition.

Weber raises the possibility that the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century repertory of *opéra-comique* survived because it was identified as particularly French, unlike grand opera, which was considered more cosmopolitan and less specifically French, but he concludes that “people took the national identity of the [Opéra-Comique] for granted” (p. 206). However, the *opéra-comique* as a genre was known popularly as *le genre national* throughout the century, not only in France. It was term used with pride as well as with a certain derision. Berlioz, for instance maintained a nostalgia for the *opéras-comiques* of Dalayrac, Grétry and Méhul and reviewed them whenever he could, such works representing for him something charming, fresh and quintessentially French. On the other hand, he felt that the later *opéras-comiques* by Auber and Adam and Herold had been infected by Italian influences and, while still awarded the epithet of the “national genre,” it was with a sneer.

I was intrigued by Weber's point that the less affluent part of the public was particularly attached to the old repertoire at the Opéra-Comique—and that old repertoire was performed during the summer months when the affluent public usually left Paris. This chapter's proposition that there was an incipient *opéra-comique* canon established during the late eighteenth century to the late nineteenth century is very compelling.

The final section of the book is titled “Richard Wagner, Concert Life and Musical Canon in Paris, 1860-1914.” This chapter shows that, despite official and public resistance to staging Wagner's operas in Paris over the nineteenth century, his music nevertheless became well-known in different contexts, namely at benefit concerts, orchestral concerts and to a lesser extent, through informal performances of a more popular nature, including arrangements for brass band.

At benefit concerts, the type of music performed was mostly piano transcriptions and fantasies of Wagner operas performed alongside vocal excerpts from opera and *opéra-comique*. Weber

points to the importance and frequent performances of the Liszt and Wilhelmi arrangements of Wagner's operas for piano and violin respectively. In the orchestral concerts, such as those run by the conductors Edouard Colonne and Charles Lamoureux, Wagner performances started with opera overtures and vocal excerpts performed alongside mainstream "classical" repertoire and then ventured into performances of entire acts of opera and sometimes programmes devoted only to Wagner excerpts. I found this chapter particularly interesting since I, along with a colleague, have done research on the same phenomenon in late nineteenth-century Australia, where we saw Wagner's music becoming known and immensely popular not in the opera house (there were no professional opera companies at the time) but through performance of excerpts, mainly by choral societies, the Liedertafels, and the Philharmonic choirs, and also through orchestral concerts.[3] As in France, the performance of excerpts developed into performances of entire acts of operas.

This book is informed by meticulous quantitative analysis, something we have come to expect from Weber. Two other features of his writing that are in evidence here are a consummate control of the scholarly literature from many fields, in both French and English, and a concern for careful definitions of conceptual terms. There are places, however, where the book could have benefited from a firm editorial hand. I also note the rather unusual footnoting which gives only surnames, abbreviated titles and page numbers—a compromise perhaps between publisher and author?

French music may not feature in "The Canon" but in this book Weber and Wilcox have eloquently shown us just how many canonic repertoires were established at various points in French music history from the eighteenth to nineteenth century, and how extraordinarily long-lasting there were. The book also demonstrates how the musical press developed over the eighteenth century and broke from literary polemics to reviewing actual concerts, composers and performers. The press played a role in articulating canonic repertoires but were themselves stimulated by the repertoires to become more evaluative. To give Weber the last word, "when all is said and done it was in France that canonic repertoires played central roles for the longest period of time" (p. 267).

NOTES

[1] For example, see Peter Bloom, "Berlioz and Officialdom: Unpublished Correspondence," *19th-Century Music* 4/1 (October 1980): 134-146.

[2] The title of the original version published in 2012 is more accurate: "The Opéra and Opéra-Comique in the Nineteenth Century: Tracing the Age of Repertoire," in Sabine Chaouche, Denis Herlin and Solveig Serre, eds., *L'Opéra de Paris, la Comédie-Française et l'Opéra-Comique: approches comparées (1669-2010)* (Paris, Éditions CNRS, 2021).

[3] Kerry Murphy and Suzanne Cole, "Wagner in the Antipodes," *Wagner Spectrum* 2 (2008): 237-268.

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