

CHAPTER 2

PERFORMANCE PRACTICE: GENERAL ASPECTS

(1) Conducting at the Académie and other theatres

I have accepted the general conclusions reached by Carse in his historical studies, as far as they are pursued. A summary of the most important facts follows, expanded by several quotations from contemporary sources.

At the Académie the tradition of the notorious time-beater was dying out. J. B. Rey, who was the chef d'orchestre from 1781 to 1810, "was probably the last of the old-style French maîtres de musique or batteurs de mesure who even after the middle of the eighteenth century used to hammer out the beat for the choruses and dances audibly on the floor, a table, or a music desk."¹⁾ The time-beater at the Académie had other duties besides the normal dual control of the ensemble: that is, the keyboard-player and the violinist-leader. "In Paris it was the violinist-leader who exercised full control over the playing of the orchestra, but when a chorus or ballet were concerned, a time-beater was employed to beat time with a stick or baton. How they actually managed at the Opéra near the end of the eighteenth century is rather obscured by a lack of unequivocal contemporary information..."²⁾ "What we do not get from either Grétry or Castil-Blaze is a straightforward answer to the question: did they or did they not beat time with a baton throughout the whole opera, and not only when it was necessary for the handling of large bodies on the stage?"³⁾ Carse was, however, certain that the time-beater faced the stage directly, answered "the purpose of the prompter at our opera house,"⁴⁾ and that the responsibility for the musical direction was held by the violinist-

1) Carse/BB pp. 72-73

2) Carse/BB p.293

3) Carse/BB p.311

4) i.e. the King's theatre in London. Taken from George Smart's Journals, 1802, quoted in Carse/BB p.312



O Chute épouvantable et digne de mémoire !

"Les Dieux de l'Opéra"

leader.

The nearest approach to "unequivocal contemporary information" appears to be the statement by Meude-Monpas in defining the bâton de mesurs in 1787:

"C'est souvent un morceau de papier ... à l'Opéra c'est un morceau de bois, parce qu'il faut que les Choristes et les Danseurs puissent entendre la mesure que décide le Conducteur de l'Orchestre..." 1)

This strongly suggests a sporadic use of audible control, not a continuous one. Establishing the tempo and keeping multiple forces together seem to have been the chief reasons for its retention. According to an account of Rey by Castil-Blaze, merely controlling numerous performers must necessarily have preceded artistic subtlety or even dexterity of suggestion:

"C'était un homme de mérite, sans doute, mais qui ne pouvait s'élever au-dessus de son époque. Depuis quarante ans, la musique a marché d'un tel pas, que les anciens ont dû rester en chemin, quand la mort ne les a point empêchés de la suivre. Rey se démenait comme un possédé, courbait la tête pour la relever brusquement, frappait du pied, tendait les bras...." 2)

Grétry pointed out how a crowd of dancers situated down-stage easily obscured the singers' view of the conductor. 3)

Fortunately we are granted an extraordinarily vivid and intimate glimpse into the Académie orchestra in 1806 by virtue of the frontispiece to Joseph Berchoux's poem, La Danse, ou les Dieux de l'Opera. 4) See opposite The portrayal of Rey might almost have been designed to accompany Castil-Blaze's

1) Meude-Monpas/DICT. The importance of the rôle of the violinist-leader had evidently increased since the days of Rousseau, the sixth of whose reasons for the inferiority of the Académie orchestra rested on the great responsibility of the time-beater: "Sur le devant du théâtre et tout occupé des acteurs, [il] ne peut veiller suffisamment sur son orchestre, et l'a derrière lui au lieu de l'avoir sous les yeux." Article "Orchestre" in ENCYCLOPEDIE.

2) Castil-Blaze/ACADEMIE, Vol.II p.110

3) Grétry/MEMOIRES, Vol.I p.41

4) First edition, Paris, 1806. Engraving reproduced in B. Reade's catalogue Ballet designs and illustrations, 1581-1940, London, (HMSO), 1967. The gods were the rivals Auguste Vestris and Louis Antoine Duport.

description. Three points are easily clarified from the engraving. The first is the size of the baton which Smart spoke of in 1802 as "a small roll of wood." The second is that even if one conjectures that the violonist leader was in charge of the musical expression, the last thing that Rey appeared as was a simple time-beater. His gestures were expressive and energetic, and not at all our idea of a "prompter", as Smart saw him. Given his prominence he could hardly have failed to appear to and perhaps act upon his musicians in a manner akin to modern conductors. Thirdly, we see that he did not tap out the beat all through.

Carse may be modified as follows. The time-beater was more than a "human metronome" (p.311 of Beethoven to Berlioz); the beat was made audible probably only to establish or correct a tempo; and the implement was a baton rather than a "stick". Two observers provide circumstantial evidence that Rey did not perform in recitatives and airs. Grétry's cautionary tale in the Mémoires (Vol.I pp.53-6) documents the supremacy of the soloist, and Spohr noticed in 1820 that in the smaller Parisian theatres, orchestras showed skill in following the singers "who do not in the least adhere to the time, or the notes..."¹⁾

The increasing responsibility of the violinist-leader was bound to lead to a position whereby triple control would be reduced to double or even single control. The artistic responsibility of the composer having been established, it followed that interpretation of a complicated score could only be satisfactorily directed by one man. In Germany C. M. von Weber's vision of artistic unity in the theatre was to determine his career as opera composer, conductor and designer combined. In France, Rey's successors were themselves violinists who brought about the transition to

¹⁾ Spohr/AUTOBIOGRAPHY, Vol.II pp.116-7

a controlling chef d'orchestre. Persuis (chef 1810-17), Kreutzer (chef 1817-24), but above all F. A. Habeneck (chef 1824-46) made the position of musical director at the Académie an artistically respectable one.

Nevertheless, it would be wrong to assume that in the matter of conducting it was only men in Germany and Habeneck in Paris who awakened the general consciousness of the modern rôle of the conductor. A remarkable passage from Le Sueur's writings indicates that at the very time when the standard of orchestral playing in Paris was reaching new heights and the interest in orchestral sound and instrumental combination had never been more widespread, the necessity for firm leadership by a conductor of sensibility was keenly felt:

[Et le rôle fut up à conduire, de l'ensemble - les voix et la Caméra - & l'orchestre]

"Qu'on réfléchisse un instant à ce que c'est qu'une simultanéité d'action qui s'y rencontre très-souvent entre les acteurs, les chœurs, les pantomimes et l'orchestre... Combien ce tact fin, combien ce génie de l'ensemble ne doit-il pas présider aux talents d'un chef d'orchestre! Il est le moteur de toute l'action musicale; c'est à lui à guider, retenir ou animer l'ensemble général: c'est à lui, par une certaine adresse de mouvement qui en imprime fortement le rythme et le caractère dans toutes les oreilles, de faire sentir où la phrase commence, où la phrase se développe, et où la phrase finit; c'est à lui de faire éprouver ce sentiment d'ordre périodique d'où découlent les plus grandes jouissances procurées par la musique.."¹⁾

This passage is the more pertinent to the situation at the Académie and Rey himself, since the whole tenor of Le Sueur's pamphlet is directed towards criticism of that institution. It is difficult to reconcile Le Sueur's demand for "tact fin" with Castil-Blaze's description of Rey. Le Sueur's view of the conductor's job was a completely 'modern' one; but we cannot assume that his opinions were shared by nobody else. Indeed, in many matters he was the spokesman of a sizeable lobby. The idea of a controlling artistic hand is certainly to be regarded as an extension of Le Sueur's continuing concern for unity in music, and as such is directly related to both the changing climate of opinion in France on the nature of instrumental

¹⁾ Le Sueur/GUILLARD p.65

music and to the future ideals of Weber.¹⁾

If the direction at the Académie from 1789-1810 was less than ideal, in the better of the smaller theatres in Paris the authority of the violinist-leader and subservience of the keyboard-player was not questioned. This violinist, moreover, was free to vary the methods he used in order to secure the performance desired. Carse reproduces Spohr's evidence from 1820 that exclusively visual time-beating was sometimes used at the Théâtre Italien.²⁾ Moreover, the kind of music written for opéra-comique was more liable to be experimental than that for the Académie. The very unexpectedness of many details in the better scores must have demanded closer attention by the violin-conductor than had been necessary before 1789; this would demand an approach more akin to that of the baton-conductor.³⁾

The baton seems to have been established and in use by conductors before the Revolution. In 1787 a Maître de Musique was defined as a "Musicien qui conduit un orchestre, sans jouer d'aucun instrument. C'est celui qui bat la mesure, en se servant d'un bâton...."⁴⁾ Carse/BB, not mentioning this evidence, stresses instead the use of a violin bow; there is reason to believe that this means was employed by many even past the middle of the nineteenth century.⁵⁾ In a small theatre pit the violinist conductor probably found the violin an ally too useful to reject.

1) Le Sueur was not a successful conductor, but his artistic successor may well be regarded as Spontini, who was. In fact, Spontini's gifts as a composer-conductor may not have been lost on Berlioz. P. Spitta has stressed this aspect of Spontini: "The few living musicians who remember the performance of Spontini's operas in Berlin between 1820 and 1830 know the kind of interpretation he used to give of them - one which by no means lay on the surface." Article "Spontini" in GROVE/I.

2) Carse/BB p.295

3) See p.75 below for written information on the execution of stage-music.

4) Meude/Monpas/DICT

5) Carse/BB p.313

Accounts of the standards of the above theatre orchestras were chiefly most favourable, and not the least impressive aspect of their personnel is the high reputation of their violin and keyboard directors. For example, from 1791 the Favart employed M. F. Blasius, an outstanding musical figure equally noted as a composer and professor of violin at the Conservatoire (from 1795) as a chef d'orchestre.¹⁾ The rival Théâtre de Monsieur, in 1789, took over the veteran La Houssaye from the Favart as violonist-leader, and possessed the composer G. G. Ferrari (as keyboard player), Rode, Baillot and Devenoy.²⁾ These various directors must have responded to the demands of changing musical style, and the following report of the Théâtre de Monsieur in the Almanach Général for 1791 indicates that here the ideal of an expressive ensemble was the aim. At this theatre and others like it the lesser number of performers than at the Académie made this ambition a more feasible proposition without the assistance of a time-beater:

"Point de teneur de bâton à ce spectacle, parce que les vrais Musiciens n'ont pas besoin qu'on leur indique la mesure; les Italiens sur-tout 3) sont si accoutumés à la précision, leur oreille est si sûre à cet égard, qu'ils croiraient qu'on se moque d'eux, si l'on voulait leur marquer la mesure ... l'Acteur attentif au bâton, et craignant toujours de manquer, sacrifie le goût, l'âme et le jeu, au mécanisme du chant."

Obviously the ideal was that the orchestra should follow the singer's tempi fairly directly, and devote the remainder of their attention to the notes and their expressive interpretation as indicated by the violinist-leader. The rôle of this person was further alluded to in an article in the next edition of the same year-book. Here the point should be additionally noted that the skill of La Houssaye himself as a leader was fully credited:

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- 1) Brook/SYMPHONIE, Vol.II p.116
 2) Giazotto/VIOTTI p.84. Ferrari sat probably at the fortepiano rather than the harpsichord. See p.126 below and Appendix 2.
 3) The orchestra names appear to be predominantly French at the time.

"Chez Monsieur, les effets d'orchestre sont tellement ménagés par les Musiciens, que l'auditeur ne perd absolument rien de ce qui se passe sur la scène ... Cela vient surtout de l'adresse de celui qui conduit, M. de la Houssaye ... personne ne possède au plus haut degré l'ensemble de son orchestre..." 1)

There is more to these latter statements than is immediately apparent. It was seen above that in 1789 the Théâtre de Monsieur took over La Houssaye from the Théâtre Italien, salle Favart, where he had been leader for at least a decade. It seems unusual that this veteran of the Italiens and the Concert Spirituel should have changed his allegiance to a very new company, however accomplished and ambitious, without good cause. Grétry provides a clue to what might well have been the musical reason for La Houssaye's move, one which is closely associated with the present discussion. Writing of the spontaneous alteration of notes in performance by the musicians at the Favart in the days when La Houssaye was employed there, he says:

"Si les comédiens donnent un jour un pouvoir moins limité à l'habile artiste (M. de la Houssaye), qui conduit l'orchestre, je ne doute pas qu'il ne réprime cet abus." 2)

Under the ancien régime, therefore, it appears that the power of the leader was effectively limited at this theatre. The formation of a rival ensemble may easily have provided La Houssaye with the opportunity to exercise more control over the players than he had formerly enjoyed, and to help shape the band of the Théâtre de Monsieur to his standards.³⁾ I cannot confirm that he had official power to exercise greater authority in this orchestra; but the superiority of his new band was, for some, in little doubt:

"Mais, pour ce qui s'appelle la Musique Dramatique, le plus grand nombre des Amateurs convient que l'orchestre du Théâtre de Monsieur l'emporte sur toutes les autres..."⁴⁾

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- 1) ALMANACHI/I, 1792 p.107 et seq.
 - 2) Grétry/MEMOIRES, Vol. I p.38
 - 3) There may even be an indication that La Houssaye's move prompted reforms at the Favart. From 1793 onwards, SPECTACLES refers to Blasius and Lefèvre for the first time as "Chefs d'Orchestre" rather than simply as violinists. At the Feydeau, SPECTACLES refers to "Chefs de l'Orchestre" from 1791.
 - 4) ALMANACH /I, 1792 p.107

It was not simply that the Monsieur was a young and well-patronised troupe; Viotti and Cherubini were its musical directors, obviously musicians of great capability. It would seem clear enough that while responsible artistry and the ideal of the musical ensemble were being actively pursued here, standards at the Académie, at least according to Le Sueur and Grétry, were to be viewed in a comparatively poor light.¹⁾

The advantage to the developing art of orchestration of performance by an expert ensemble of manageable size under an authoritative conductor are obvious. The theatres Feydeau (as the Monsieur became) and Favart inevitably became the twin cradles of the new Parisian school because it was a sense of ensemble together with expressive playing that its music demanded most. It was no longer possible after 1790 for a Cherubini or a Berton to write for the orchestra without considering first the physical reality of the musicians of these two theatres. Their two orchestras played frequently, were not subject to seasonal closure, and attracted the best instrumentalists. Both provided Paris with a slightly new conception of the orchestra as well as a succession to the Concert Spirituel. The time-beater, the very symbol of the Académie, stood now for rigidity and tradition, mechanism and unmusicality. The 'new' orchestras were flexible, expressive, a single instrument "accoutumé à la précision."

(2) Pitch, tuning, tempo specification

Pitch: The French commission on pitch in 1859 noted the following figures from the Académie:

1713: a' equals 405.8 cycles per second
 1810: a' equals 423.0 cycles per second²⁾
 1858: a' equals 448.0 cycles per second.

¹⁾ At the Académie the chorus could not always hear the orchestra: "... chacun chante à l'oreille de son voisin..." etc. Grétry/MEMOIRES, Vol.I p.41.

²⁾ Rapport/DIAPASON p.32

According to Ellis, the court tuner in 1783 used a' equals 409 cycles.¹⁾
 Thus average Parisian pitch in 1790 might be taken as a' equals 415 cycles,
 which is our modern g' sharp.

A speech by the violinist Baillot before the Conservatoire in 1812 referred in part specifically to the pitch used at the pupils' concerts of that institution, implying that it was higher than that of the Académie.

"Le comité d'enseignement de l'Ecole de musique s'étant aperçu que l'extrême élévation du ton, adopté pour l'exécution des concerts du Conservatoire, gênait la voix des élèves et la mettait en danger d'être forcée ... On a comparé le diapason des orchestres existans à Paris, et l'on a pris un terme moyen entre celui du théâtre de l'Académie impériale de musique, et celui de l'Opéra-
 Buffa, de la chapelle de S.M., et des exercices des élèves du Conservatoire.." 2)

Baillot's speech suggests more than a straightforward continuation in Paris of the phenomena of varied and rising pitches. The Conservatoire conce: had assumed a leading rôle in the interpretation of instrumental music in Paris, and the most prominent composers of the capital were not only performed, but had a guiding hand in the organisation of the series. It may not therefore be too much to argue that the pitch of these concerts was not achieved accidentally, but that something of an extra brilliance of tone was felt to be appropriate for its particular repertory. That higher pitch made for more brilliance in instrumental music was agreed by the 1859 commission, which blamed instrument makers in part for the rise in pitch, seeking to make their instruments more effective.

Whether or not this was true, there had not, by 1824, apparently been any lowering. A commentator in that year ^(see overleaf) estimated the rise in pitch over the last fifty or so years at three quarters of a tone. Since this represents about 36 cycles per second a further rise in pitch beyond that of 1810 is implied, if the commission's figures were accurate. Moreover, he

1) Grove/V, article "Pitch" p.793

2) Pierre/CONSERVATOIRE p.911

offered the interesting explanation that the raising of pitch by wind players to attain greater brilliance in outdoor music had caused the general rise in pitch; these players, being unwilling to lower pitch when performing in pit orchestras in the evening, had eventually persuaded the strings to tune up. At that time as now (see section on "Tuning" below) a wind player was responsible for giving the tuning pitch to the rest of the orchestra.

"Si Gluck ou Piccini revenaient au monde, ils trouveraient les violons accordés trois quarts de ton plus haut qu'à l'époque où ils composaient leurs chefs-d'oeuvre ... Les musiciens qui se plaisaient le matin à l'éclat de leurs nouveaux instruments ne voulurent plus les abandonner le soir, dans les orchestres, si bien même à l'Opéra il fallut que leurs confrères, les violons, tendissent un peu leurs cordes pour se mettre d'accord avec eux."¹⁾

This is a valuable citation, because it is a rare and relatively contemporary allusion to the influences of festival and military musical performance on the traditional, and because it again suggests that rises in pitch were made in order to secure greater brilliance in wind instruments.

"... pour les rendre plus éclatants, plus sonores, on les haussa successivement de trois quarts de ton et plus." (ibid)

Moreover, the remark on the raising of violin pitch is corroborated by Baillot's testimony, quoted in section 3 below.

Tuning: The accounts of tuning of instruments given by Quantz and L. Mozart may be modified with respect to late eighteenth-century Paris.

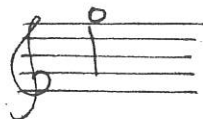
Quantz recommended the flautist to take an F, but said that the majority chose D.²⁾ Mozart wrote that when no keyboard instrument was present, "the pitch is taken from the wind instruments".³⁾ Vandenbroeck's horn tutor (ca.1789) says without ambiguity:

1) Article by L. Vitet in Le Globe, 25 December 1824, quoted in Fleischman/NAPOLEON p.272

2) Quantz/VERSUCH p.196

3) Mozart/VIOLIN pp.217-218

"Un cor donne ordinairement le La, sur le Cor en Ré en donnant le Sol audessus de la quatrième ligne,



et tout l'orchestre prend le La sur le Cor."

Other crooks were occasionally used, but the D crook gave "le ton le plus sur et le plus juste".¹⁾

This is an unexpected reflection on the status of the horn, an aspect fully dealt with in chapter 4. It may imply that the newer rôle of the horn as a solo voice was being recognised. Alternatively it may reflect the reliability of the horn beside the woodwind instruments, which were not expected to have very long lives on account of humidity and temperature changes.

"Le basson d'un musicien de l'Opéra ou de la Comédie italienne ne dure que 5 à 6 ans. Cet instrument ne sort jamais de l'orchestre, il est enfermé ..." etc. 2)

At the same time the oboe was already established or becoming so as the pitch giver. "C'est ce la qui est le régulateur du ton dans les orchestres." 3) Vogt's reason for this was that being narrower than other instruments the oboe more quickly reached the temperature needed to give a constant pitch.

The violin-leader, however, had the authority to adopt a different pitch from that given. This might be in order to counteract changes of temperature in the theatre or concert room, which were by all accounts considerable:

"C'est au premier Violon à prendre son la un peu plus haut l'été que l'hiver, et à le prendre plus bas l'hiver; c'est le bon moyen d'avoir toujours l'orchestre de bon accord." 4)

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- 1) Vandebroecq/METHODE p.3. He had been closely in touch with Parisian performance practice since 1788; see MGG, article "Vandebroecq".
 - 2) French war ministry records, cited in Pierre/FACTEURS, p.375, footnote.
 - 3) G. Vogt, unpublished oboe tutor, ca. 1813: B.N. Ci.50, f.19
 - 4) Vandebroecq/TRAITE p.64

Tempo specification: If the goal of artistic unity in the orchestra was one acknowledgement of the need for the composer's will to be served, the early attempts in Paris to secure exact tempos furnish evidence of this consciousness from another direction. The "chronomètres" of Bréguet (1784) and Dubos (1787) and the "plexichronomètre" of Renaudin (1785) have been thoroughly expounded by Brook.¹⁾ None survives, and a scale of tempi corresponding to the Maelzel metronome cannot at present be established; but the remarks of the composer Davaux, three of whose symphonies appeared in 1784 with temp indications designed to be established with Bréguet's instrument, are instructive:

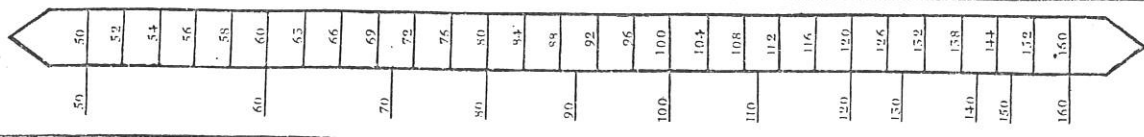
"le caractère d'un morceau qui tient essentiellement à son vrai mouvement ne sera plus dénaturé par une exécution trop lente ou trop précipitée, et la Musique sera entendue selon le véritable esprit de l'Auteur ... " 2)

The composer's authority is freely asserted against that of the interpreter. A single operatic score (not mentioned by Brook) was printed with similar indications: Paisiello's Le Roi Théodore à Venise (1787), otherwise not especially remarkable, possesses marks throughout, as for example, "No. 46 du Chronometre" (overture).

These mechanical contrivances, whether through impracticality or expense, did not attract the public. The notion of the composer's prerogative to fix a certain tempo, however, demonstrably persisted. Although no written trace of developments from the confined musical world of the Revolution and Empire has yet emerged, Boieldieu in St. Petersburg at the end of 1810 followed up the idea with a different solution. At the head of the score of Rien de Trop appeared a composer's note including the remarks:

1) Brook/SYMPHONIE, Vol.I pp.313, 502

2) Journal de Paris, 8 May 1784 p.559; quoted in Brook/SYMPHONIE, vol.I p.503



DIVISION DU TEMPS MUSICAL D'APRÈS LE METRONOME de J. MAÉLZEL.

TABLEAU N. 3.

| NOMS des COMPOSITEURS. | Indication des Mouvements ou moyen des autres mots. | Par le MÉTROMÈTRE. | | NOMBRE de BATTES. | NOMS des COMPOSITEURS. | Indication des Mouvements ou moyen des autres mots. | Par le MÉTROMÈTRE. | | NOMBRE de BATTES. |
|------------------------------|--|-----------------------|-----|-------------------------|------------------------------|--|-----------------------|-----|-------------------------|
| | | ♩ = | ♩ = | | | | ♩ = | ♩ = | |
| PAER | Alleg. ^{ro} Mod. ^{to} | 50 | 50 | C | MÉHUL | Alleg. ^{ro} Mod. ^{to} | 72 | 72 | C |
| | Alleg. ^{ro} Mod. ^{to} | 80 | 80 | | | | 72 | 72 | |
| CLÉMENTI | Allegro | 54 | 54 | C | MÉHUL | Alleg. ^{ro} Mod. ^{to} | 88 | 88 | C |
| | Allegro | 112 | 112 | | | | 88 | 88 | |
| CHERUBINI | Allegro | 50 | 50 | C | BEETHOVEN | Allegro molto | 176 | 176 | C |
| | Allegro | 126 | 126 | | | | 176 | 176 | |
| CHERUBINI | Allegro | 72 | 72 | C | MÉHUL | Allegro | 96 | 96 | C |
| | Allegro | 150 | 150 | | | | 96 | 96 | |
| CHERUBINI | Allegro | 72 | 72 | C | BEETHOVEN | Allegro | 224 | 224 | C |
| | Allegro | 160 | 160 | | | | 224 | 224 | |

"Dans un morceau de musique, le mouvement de l'auteur est assez difficile à transmettre, et depuis longtemps on a senti l'insuffisance des indications dont se servent les compositeurs ... [ce fait] m'a déterminé à employer un moyen sûr pour remédier à cet inconvénient en indiquant le nombre des minutes que doit durer tel ou tel morceau..." 1)

Less than two years after this a solely visual, pendulous type of metronome was recommended for adoption by the Conservatoire. It was described as a "régulateur, non moins nécessaire que le diapason ..." 2)

All these kinds of attempted control suggest that the orchestra was being thought of as a kind of composite instrument, more directly under the control (now even at a distance) of the composer than ever before. All are instances in the development of the idea that "the orchestra" might possess an unprecedented uniformity, become freed from considerations of location or derivation, and attain the capacity to perform widely divergent styles of musical composition.

The first European step towards uniformity of this kind took place in 1815 and 1816 with the distribution of Maelzel's metronome. A publicity pamphlet³⁾ was issued in Paris during 1816 from which some rough idea may be obtained of the French notions of tempo relative to those of Germany and Italy. In order to show the great divergencies of metronomic speeds to which European composers allotted identical Italian names, a table of comparisons was drawn up. (See opposite, no.3). From this, two sets of relatives may be distinguished.

In the first place it may be seen that French composers (including Cherubini) conceived certain given speeds as relatively slower than the rest of Europe, in terms of the usual instructions (Beethoven excepted).

1) Quoted in Pougin/BOIELDIEU p.130 (footnote)

2) Speech at the Conservatoire, quoted in Pierre/CONSERVATOIRE, pp.911-912

3) B.N. 8^o.B. 2894(4): "Notice sur le métronome de J. Maelzel"

| | | | | | |
|--------------|------------------|-----------------------------|--------|-----------|---------|
| ρ = 54 | Clementi | Allegro | d = 72 | Spontini | Presto |
| ρ = 50 | Clementi Paer | Allegro Allegro moderato | | Cherubini | Allegro |
| | | | | | Méhul |
| ρ = 104 | Cherubini | Andantino | d = 96 | Clementi | Presto |
| | | | | Méhul | Allegro |

Secondly, if one converts the five fastest crotchet tempi in table 3 to a minim metronome value and compares these empirically with the given minim markings (2/4 and 4/4 being closely comparable for expressive purposes) it is clear that 'French' speeds for given Italian terms were the quickest over the whole range from andantino upwards.

| | 'French' | 'German/ International' | 'Italian' |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------|
| Presto) Allegro molto) | 176 | 96 | 88 - 72 |
| Allegro | 126 - 96 (72 for Cherubini) | 69 - 50 | - |
| Allegro moderato | 88 - 72 | 63 - 58 | 80 - 50 |
| Andantino | 52 - 38 | - | - |

Further than this it is difficult to say; moreover the information given is not sufficiently extensive for absolutes to be extracted. However, Reichardt's observation below of the generally faster tempi of French performances here finds some corroboration.¹⁾

(3) String playing style

There is much to show that the sound and style of violin playing was fundamentally altered in France following the advent in Paris of the Italian virtuoso and composer, Viotti. Viotti arrived in Paris in 1782, only to give up public performance after 18 months in order to teach and conduct. His influence as a performer, however, was dramatic and long-lasting. He created the foundation on which the triumvirate of French

¹⁾ In 1820 Spohr found Parisian allegros taken at an "unreasonably quick" speed. Spohr/AUTOBIOGRAPHY, Vol.II p.119

soloists Rode, Kreutzer and Baillot were to build.¹⁾

E. Borrel has described how contrasted were the French and Italian methods of bowing in the eighteenth century. The French, unlike the Italians, played down-bows on the first beat of the bar whenever possible, and played their long-held notes with down-bows. The resulting short notes, played up-bow, made for a jerky, mannered style:



The Italians would take up and down-bows alternately, whatever the duration of the note, and as a result achieve smoother phrasing. A brief account of Kreutzer's playing bears witness to the Italianate style he evidently took over from Viotti:

"Kreutzer played all his passages legato, and always kept his bow on the string ... " 3)

Another account describes how the teaching of Viotti with regard to bowing inevitably spread to the second generation of his pupils, the students of the Conservatoire who formed the student orchestra:

"Formerly, the string players of an orchestra were individually accomplished players, but everyone had a different method of bowing ... The result was a totally different method of attacking the string and thus an inevitable lack of finish and perfection in execution. Today these drawbacks are erased ... the students of these three masters [Rode, Kreutzer, Baillot] all have a broad and energetic approach; the result is ... a unity of execution in the symphonies." 4)

Presumably those older musicians, contemporary with Kreutzer, who formed violin sections of professional orchestras also began to adopt the Italian style. Yet as the above report implies, in general there was inclined to be some lack of unanimity wherever the generations were mixed.

- 1) Schwarz/FRENCH p.198. Schwarz mentions A. Schering's view that the French violin concerto of this period was closely allied to the youthful works of Cherubini and Méhul. See chapters 8 and 9 below.
- 2) Borrel/MUSIQUE pp.21-22
- 3) Prod'homme/TREMONT p.378
- 4) Tablettes de Polymnie, April 1810, quoted and translated in Schwarz/FRENCH p.38

The breadth and energy described above would in no small measure have been assisted by the adoption of the Tourte bow. This had been perfected in 1780, and "rendered the old bows obsolete".¹⁾ The new kind of bow "made possible a better realisation of the new *cantabile*, more power [for soloists] to compete with the larger orchestra in concertos, and other musical demands related especially to the types of bow strokes".²⁾

The most immediate result of the Tourte bow and the Italian methods of bowing was for violin playing to become louder as well as more capable of versatility of approach.³⁾ In orchestras generally, the effect was probably as marked as a sudden increase in the number of violinists would have been. Yet there were other features which contributed towards an increase in violin tone at this time. Baillot's Conservatoire address already mentioned treated at some length certain physical developments that the violin had undergone since Viotti's playing became known, and to the effect of Viotti's influence on playing in general:

"Presque tous les violons de Stradivari ont été rebarrés, et tous ont eu besoin d'une restauration intérieure ou extérieure: le diapason, devenu plus élevé, en a d'abord été la cause; il a fallu sur-tout de nouveaux calculs d'équilibre depuis que le jeu du violon est devenu plus varié, plus véhément, plus majestueux, c'est-à-dire, depuis que le célèbre Viotti a reculé ses bornes et augmenté sa puissance par le fréquent usage de la quatrième corde ... " 4)

The experiments of a certain M. Baud were then described, whose adjustment of the proportions of the violin had resulted in "une plus grande vibration que dans les autres violons ... "

What all these developments really amounted to was the establishment of a modern performing style which was becoming consolidated during the period from 1789. It seems probable that the violins of the Théâtre de Monsieur,

1) Boyden/VIOLIN p.111

2) Boyden/VIOLIN p.312

3) Reichart observed the power of French playing in different contexts: for example, "Kreutzer spielte ... mit ganz ausnehmender Kraft und unübertreffbarer Bravour". Letter of 8 March 1803 in Reichardt/PARIS, Vol.III p.87

4) Pierre/CONSERVATOIRE, p.911; c.f. the couplet by de Piis, "Et roi des instruments, le violon sonore, vaincu par Viotti, devient plus fier encore", from L'harmonie imitative de la langue Française, 1785, p.11, quoted in John/REFLECTIONS p.142

under the guidance of Viotti himself and of Cherubini, played in the newer manner from the beginning, and that the discipline and sensitivity commented upon above in this orchestra was in part due to its successful adoption.

The Académie, meanwhile, had increased the number of its violins from 16 in 1754 to 24 in 1773 and to 28 in 1789-90.¹⁾ This numerical increase may almost certainly be closely linked with the changes in violin technique described above in explaining at least partially the complaint made in two independent sources around 1790 that audibility of the singers' words was often difficult. Obviously, no single explanation of these two assertions may be unequivocally made, but since both make the point that it was the words that were difficult to hear, that is, the music during the recitatives and solos was too loud, it seems most appropriate to introduce this problem in the context of string performance practice.

The first complaints were voiced by Beaumarchais in the preface to his libretto Tarare (1787).

- (a) "Le public lassé dans l'Opéra de n'entendre point les paroles ... se tourne vers la Musique ... "
- (b) "Orchestre de notre Opéra! noble Acteur dans le système de Gluck, de Salieri, dans le mien! vous n'exprimeriez que du bruit si vous étouffiez la parole ... " 2)

The second commentary is taken from a report in the Almanach Général of 1792:

" ... à l'Opéra tout est sacrifié à l'orchestre; et l'on doit d'autant moins en faire un crime à celui qui tient le bâton, qu'il est entré là, avec le préjugé toujours dominant, que la musique est tout, et les paroles, rien; cela est si vrai que les pièces qu'on donne à l'Opéra, sont presque toujours nulles quant aux paroles.."

This was much more likely the result of badly-disciplined and fashionably forthright violin playing than of excessive volume from the wind instruments.

1) Carse/ORCHESTRA pp.25-26, SPECTACLES/1773 and Appendix 2.

2) Beaumarchais, Théâtre Complet, Paris 1964, pp.370, 377

3) ALMANACH /I, 1792 pp.107 et seq.

A detailed discussion of performance practice in the remaining parts of this orchestra follows on page 84 below, against which the evidence presented here may be compared.

Other stringed instruments would appear to have absorbed structural and stylistic innovations more slowly. There was a letter of August 1809 in the Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung which revealed that the standard of cello playing in younger Parisian musicians was not as high as that of the violins and wind instruments, for lack of a good teacher.¹⁾ Further observations concerning the lower strings have not been traced.

(4) Improvisation and Adaptation

H. Becker has alluded briefly to "a neglect and even deprecation of improvising additions by the players" around 1800,²⁾ but there is some evidence that improvisation was not extinct. The value of this evidence for a study of orchestration is limited, since there were obviously no rules that were followed, except for the adaptation of double-bass parts. Moreover, the kinds of improvisation that are traceable generally refer merely to octave-transposition. It is important nevertheless to correct any impression that orchestras of the late eighteenth century were ideal bodies of performers. The composer's will was never thought of as sacred, especially in his absence. But as orchestration moved beyond the simpler patterns of melody and accompaniment, opportunities for improvisation were naturally reduced.

Apart from instructions to harp players to improvise introductory passages,³⁾ which were not uncommon, the only reference in a score to an alternative reading (not an improvisation, although the composer may have

1) Quoted in Schwartz/FRENCH p.40

2) Becker/INSTRUMENTATION p.26

3) For example "Un prélude de harpe, ensuite la Romance": Méhul, Ariodant, p.152

been anticipating the habits of some players) is for possible upper-octave transposition by the violins in Nicolo's Le Déjeuner de Garçons (1805), p.17 (Example 6).

Grétry provides evidence of similar orchestral practice, but from before the Revolution.

"J'entends souvent les musiciens de la comédie italienne ajouter quelques notes par-ci, par-là, à mes accompagnements; ce qu'ils ajoutent est bien, mais j'aimerois mieux qu'ils le laissassent faire aux spectateurs, qu'il faut aussi amuser." 1)

Berlioz's broadside against Guillou, first flute at the Académie from 1822 to 1827 is better known:
2)

"il faut qu'il domine; il faut qu'on l'entende, et pour cela il transpose ce chant de la flûte à l'octave supérieure ... " 3)

Two writers mention the possibility of horn players altering notes for convenience rather than display. Vandenbroeck warned of the difficulties inherent in playing solo material in the three highest keys. This is interesting in that the horn in B flat alto enjoyed a Parisian renaissance during the early 1800's (see chapter 4, page 184).

"Ces trois tons [G, A, B flat alto] sont absolument proscrits pour donner des solo au Cors à cause de la dureté des Tons, et ... quand il arrive qu'un morceau en la est obligé, le 1^{er} Cor est souvent forcé de prendre le ton de ré, et par conséquent de transposer la quarte plus bas." 4)

This was essentially part of the problem of cor-mixte playing, described in chapter 4. The réflexions préliminaires to Domnich's horn tutor deal similarly with the difficulties caused through cor-mixte players using the minimum number of crooks. With the unauthorised use of a horn keyed in F for a solo designed for the C horn, for example, the wrong notes would emerge as stopped sounds, and conversely, some notes intended to be

1) Grétry/MEMOIRES, Vol.I p.37

2) Carse/BB p.75

3) Berlioz/MEMOIRES p.52. This habit was apparently still ubiquitous in 1860: "Les joueurs de Flûte ... transposent fréquemment des passages entiers à l'octave supérieure". Berlioz/TRAITE, 2nd edition (1860) p.311

4) Vandenbroeck/TRAITE p.8

stopped would sound as natural notes. More serious problems were encountered by the second horn player in such an instance:

"[il] rencontre quelquefois des notes absolument dépourvues de son, et qui ne rendent qu'un sourd frémissement. Pour éviter les inconvéniens de cette rencontre, il n'a d'autre moyen que de prendre l'octave au dessus; mais le premier Cor ne se déplaçant pas, il arrivé que la tierce se change en sixte, la quarte en quinte, la quinte en quarte, etc." 1)

This situation would have been exceptional in the three best orchestras, whose players were well-known and often professors of the Conservatoire.

(5) General performance style

a) External evidence: The Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung commented in June 1809 that the allegro movements of Haydn's and Mozart's music were played too quickly in Paris, faster than the tempos actually selected by these composers in their Viennese performances.

"As a rule, German music should not be played with French tempos."²⁾ Certainly much music written in Paris between 1790 and 1800 is highly emotive and spontaneous in style, and it is easy to imagine that fast tempos would have been typical then. French interpretations of German music would naturally isolate those elements of style felt to be common to music of both nationalities. As a corollary, French music of the period had limited time for slow music, the gradual unfolding of an extended melody. For this it had to be encouraged (in opera) by Spontini and his compatriots, and by Mozart's example. There are notable exceptions, such as Cain's air, "Doux sommeil" in act 3 of Kreutzer's Abel (1810, but written several years previously), but often the Romance style was the closest that the French approached to the operatic adagio.

1) Domnich/METHODE p.vii

2) Schwarz/z/FRENCH p.37

Carse¹⁾ drew attention to Reichardt's report of the concerts at the rue de Cléry, in which he said that the orchestra lacked the intermediate shades between fortissimo and pianissimo, but that the energy and brilliance of French players was unsurpassed elsewhere.²⁾

Under the Consulate and Empire, Napoleon constantly brought Italian musicians, chiefly singers for his private performances, to the capital. In the public sphere, however, it was he alone who was responsible in 1804 for establishing firmly the Italian opera troupe that had consistently foundered from its setting up in 1801.³⁾ The exclusive employment here of Italian singers (but not orchestral musicians according to ALMANACH/II, 1809) appeared to the critic Suard to have tempered the "exaggeration" of French performance at the Académie and set an example of musicality and ensemble feeling to French performers generally.

"Les Italiens nous ont surtout donné l'idée d'un ensemble, d'une précision d'exécution, qui chez eux ne sent ni la contrainte ni le calcul, mais qui tient à une organisation musicale vive, sûre et naturelle."

(Concerning Gluck's Armide at the Académie:)

"... les chanteurs français et l'orchestre sont tenus en garde contre l'exagération des moyens, contre l'excès de force par le voisinage et la concurrence de l'opéra italien; on reconnaît enfin à l'opéra français qu'on doit chanter, qu'on y peut chanter." 4)

b) Internal evidence: There are printed instructions as to dynamics in several French opera scores that corroborate Reichardt's report and date

1) Carse/BB p.89

2) Reichardt/PARIS, Vol.II pp.33-34: "Dieses Orchester, das aus den vorzüglichsten Tonkünstlern von Paris und einigen ganz ausgezeichneten Dilettanten besteht, hat das vollkommenste Fortissimo und das eben so vollkommene Pianissimo in seiner Gewalt, aber die Mitteltinten fehlen ... man wird nichts mit der Ruhe und gehaltenen Fülle, aus der eine Art von stiller Größe hervorgeht, vortragen hören, wie man es wohl von unsern besten Orchestern zu hören bekommt ... "

3) Fleischman/NAPOLÉON pp.346 et seq.

4) Le Moniteur Universel, 11 December 1810 and 15 June 1811, quoted in Fleischman/NAPOLÉON pp.352 and 277

from the same time. All are set out at the beginning of the scores in question, and have general application to the works, which are all opéras-comiques. The first to appear, in Della-Maria's Le Prisonnier (1798), is also the most elaborate.

"Les Citoyens maîtres de musique et premiers violons, sont priés de faire exécuter les accompagnements le plus Piano possible, ne réservant les Forté que pour la fin des Airs. Les Pianos doivent faire l'effet d'un Orchestre qui jouerait dans les coulisses.

Le Mouvement de l'Ouverture est extraordinairement vif; celui du Duo 1) entre Blinval et Rosine, à peu près comme les menuets d'Hayden dans ses Simphonies ... "

The request for an extended, even exaggerated piano, and a dramatic, applause-catching forte at the end is repeated by Isouard in both Les Confidences and L'Intrigue aux fenêtres (1803, 1805), and by Gaveaux in the same way in L'Echelle de soie (1808). Both Gaveaux and Isouard additionally link the desire for piano playing with audibility of the words, which echoes both the Empire taste for comedy and an Italianate lightness in orchestration.

The fondness for these particular effects, however widespread their application in and perhaps after the early years of the century, cannot be documented in France before Le Prisonnier. References to an orchestral pianissimo even at this time, however, may justifiably allow us to assume its execution and include this test of orchestral proficiency in an estimate of the orchestra of the Théâtre Feydeau.

The desire for brisk tempos combined with piano playing was expressed by Gaveaux in 1804 and 1808 as well as by Della-Maria's "extraordinairement vif" a decade previously:

1) The first page of which forms Example 7. This vivid reminder of the currency of Haydn's symphonies appears to be a unique cross-reference between the genres. The instruction provides incidental proof, if any were required, that offstage music made a very similar effect in 1800 to that it makes today.

"Je prie MM. les maîtres de musique de serrer tous les mouvemens en général ... " 1)

No doubt these instructions were stimulated by an elementary sense of musicianship; they bear witness nevertheless to continued exploration of the orchestra and of orchestration.

Dynamic markings: A great number of dynamic markings are found in scores of all kinds, especially in the period 1790 to 1794. This is in strong contrast to the manuscript and printed scores of the immediately preceding period, during which a score of a tragédie lyrique, for example, might continue for several pages without dynamic markings at all.

R. M. Longyear²⁾ has correctly associated the genre of opéra-comique possessing "rescue" plots with a new stage in the development of orchestral writing, and has generalised as follows:

"The music was intended to be performed vehemently, and in an exaggerated manner ... "

This is a reasonable assumption. No indication of the possible reasons for this manner of performance is ventured, however. In my view, the relationship of opéra-comique of the 1790's to the music of the melodrama is crucial, although not extensively demonstrable.

The features which Longyear describes as defining the category of "rescue opera" - the near-elimination of comic elements, the presence of sentimentality, the frequency of political protest and allusion, and the powerful influence of realism in the depiction of either historical material or contemporary incidents - are all derived from the melodrama. Although many writers have dealt with the subject-matter and dramatic techniques of melodrama, the extreme rarity of surviving examples of the music written as an integral part of this mode of theatre has hitherto discouraged dis-

1) Gaveaux, L'échelle de soie (1808)

2) Longyear/RESCUE

cussion of various composers' contributions to it.¹⁾

One of the very few scores of melodrama music still preserved is that of H. Joseph Rigel written for Les Amazones (1788, performed 1789).²⁾ In this score, which is a typical one so far as may be judged, many instructions to players are found, such as "très marqué et fou", "marqué", "majestueusement". Many of the thirty-two movements additionally possess a characteristic title, for example, "marche lugubre", "air menaçant et vif" and "tempo di marcia"; these obviously conferred an important additional interpretative dimension. Further, the sections of directly descriptive music were explained by the stage characters themselves, as for instance during the storm sequence in act 1: "c'est le signale de la tempête", "les éclairs deviennent plus fréquents", "les flots se soulèvent", and so on.

The aim of the composer of melodrama was to make as vivid an impression as possible in the most concise way; sometimes only eight bars of music had to suffice in conveying the required expression in music. The instrumental playing had necessarily to be instantly expressive, resulting in a multitude of written markings on the score.³⁾

It is almost certain that the style of the popular art of melodrama, which had been developing as an art-form in parallel with opéra-comique, played a conscious part in the formation of the musical language of Revolution opéra-comique, now also a popular art. The two had had practically identical origins, and there had been links in subject-matter, personnel and political involvement with the government even under the ancien régime.

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- 1) For particular discussion of the melodrama, see chapter 8, page 394.
 2) This valuable autograph score is not listed in any standard reference book or dictionary of music: B.N. (Musique) MS 7647.
 3) For example in the overture to Beck's melodrama Pandore (1789), where "Rinf", "Cal", "Smorz", "R", "SF", and "P" follow one another in the space of four bars.

The many written instructions in melodrama music, therefore, were carried over, and there can be little doubt that the essentials of performance style in the music were likewise transferred. Emphasis on homophony, breadth of effect rather than detail, quickness of response to the dramatic action and reliance on differences of instrumental timbre were common to both genres.

The most common instructions in opéra-comique were the various combinations and juxtapositions of piano and forte, and different indications for accented notes, chiefly rinforzando and sforzando. The sign 'R' (rinforzando) was copiously employed from 1789 to 1798, although an exceptionally early use of this instruction was made in the overture to Dalayrac's Le Corsair (1783), of which the printed score was made ca. 1785.

There were variations and extensions of these markings. Le Sueur's Télémaque, p.5, calls for pppp strings and bassoon; Berton ends the sixth number of Le délire with the same marking. On the other hand the overture to Lemoyne's Les Prétendus is headed "Allegro con molto strepito" and Boieldieu asks the full orchestra for "le plus fort possible" in the recognition scene of La famille suisse. Innumerable further examples between these extremes could be quoted. A particularly characteristic one was "sec", which was used chiefly by Le Sueur in La Caverne and Paul et Virginie.¹⁾ This apparently new instruction was placed by single chords, and clearly signified a short and clean orchestral attack.

The use of many and explicit markings in orchestral music became a permanent feature of French full scores even when musical fashion changed after 1800. Any page of a score after this date was likely to contain expressive markings, and a far wider range of detailed indications of phrasing and articulation than before 1789. The scores of Spontini and

¹⁾ The occasional use of "forcé" against chords before 1789, for example in N. Piccinni's Iphigénie en Tauride, pp.203-204, may be noted.

Méhul, in particular, exhibit a very great meticulousness in this respect. The Italians imported new markings such as "con trasporto", in Spontini's Milton, p.125; and by the time of this work (1804) orchestral style had so evolved that it could no longer exist without many changes of dynamic. The changes in the manner of marking scores, in fact, represent a faithful mirror of the changing style of orchestration at this time.

Individual instrumental markings: There were far fewer expressive and technical instructions in contemporary operatic scores directed specifically at wind players than there were at string players. The difference in number and kind is most marked.

In a partial statistical enquiry into the incidence of instructions to players in which those of either specific or unusual content were noted, it was found that whereas operas after 1789 containing such instructions to wind or percussion players numbered twelve,¹⁾ those with instructions to the strings (nearly always the violins) numbered at least thirty-four. Some of these instructions are analysed below, chapter 9, pages 416-419. During the decade 1779-1789 there was also a proportionately lesser number of instructions to the stringed instruments than to other instruments, in comparison with the succeeding ten years.

These facts point to a special concern for the sound of the strings, as if the sounds engendered by the newer bow and style of bowing were being absorbed into the orchestral palette. Although instructions to stringed instruments are more fully discussed later, it may be noted here that these cover several different aspects of technique and expression. Technical demands often concerned bowing, such as "a punta d'arco", "sur le chevalet" or "sur la touche", although in a few cases a specific fingering or left hand position was indicated. The instruction "caessant la corde" appeared

1) Discounting the many operas in which the ubiquitous "levez les pavillons" occurs. This was a commonplace. Various instructions for muting any instrument are likewise not included in this estimate, but are treated in chapter 7.

by the following passage in Isouard's Un jour à Paris:



On the whole, written instructions to the violin aimed at securing local effects of emphasis or articulation rather than a smooth line or a special balance with other instrumental parts. They suggest the cultivation of an Italianate liveliness and precision.

The relative paucity of wind instrument instructions reflects an evident satisfaction with their existing tone-colours in performance. Their written instructions were not of a technical nature except concerning muting. In direct contrast with those for the strings, they aimed at securing cantabile qualities, and this tendency is an obvious pointer to the greater emancipation of the winds in the nineteenth century. It was not a common feature of earlier scores. In 1797, Dalayrac asked the bassoons to "Nourrissez et soutenez le son" (La maison isolée, 1797, p.87) and two years later Persuis anticipated Meyerbeer's instruction to the cellos in Les Huguenots by telling the bassoons "Imitez la voix" (Fanny Morna, p.67). In Berton's Le délire (1799) single horn notes are marked "expressionne" (p.48).