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Mark Everist, *Music Drama at the Paris Odéon, 1824-1828*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002. xviii + 331 pp. Figures, tables, music examples, appendices, notes, bibliography, and index. \$60.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 0-520-23445-6.

Review by Jolanta T. Pekacz, Dalhousie University.

The subject of *Music Drama at the Paris Odéon, 1824-1828* is a history of the Théâtre-Royal d'Odéon in Paris--typically referred to as the Odéon--one of the four principal institutions that staged music drama in Paris in the first half of the nineteenth century. In contrast to the Académie Royale de Musique which staged productions of *grand opéra*, the Théâtre Italien, which produced Italian music drama in the original language, and the Opéra-Comique, which staged *opéras comiques*, the Odéon was allowed to produce public-domain *opéras comiques*, *pasticci*, and occasional works, as well as translations of foreign music dramas. The result--according to Mark Everist--was the importation into the French capital of music by Mozart, Rossini, Weber, Meyerbeer, and many other non-French composers, and the internationalization of music drama.

The book consists of nine chapters, divided into two parts: "The Institution" and "The Repertory." The first four chapters constituting Part I describe the "physical and material environment" in which the production of music dramas took place, including information about the city itself and general characteristics of music drama in Paris in the 1820s; the system of licensing that controlled operatic and theatrical productions; descriptions of the subsequent management of the Odéon; the financial operations of the theatre; the personnel (soloists, orchestra, composers, and writers); and finally the audience, and the operation of censorship. Part II consists of the description and analysis of the Odéon's repertory, including occasional works written for events associated with the royal family, *pasticci*, French *opéra comique*, and German and Italian music drama, followed by chapters on the reception of Italian and German music drama.

The author utilizes unpublished archival resources related to the operation of the Odéon, primarily from the Archives Nationales and the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris; printed primary sources, such as periodicals, libretti, and music scores; and a large amount of secondary literature, including reference material.^[1] The result is an extremely detailed and almost encyclopedic account of the Odéon's organization, operation, management, personnel, and the repertory during four and a half years of its history, from 1824 to 1828. The reader is presented with details of contracts, biographical data about the members of the personnel, enumeration of titles of music dramas and libretti, classifications of diverse genres into categories and subcategories, and, finally, tables ordering and comparing various data. All this makes *Music Drama* a rich repository of valuable material, some of it compiled from previously unpublished archival sources, most from contemporary periodicals and secondary literature. Everist demonstrates a fine command of sources, bringing an impressive range of literature to

bear on a thorough examination of music drama at the Paris Odéon. The book's bibliography is comprehensive, and the author's knowledge of music drama in 1820s Paris is solid.

But what is the point of it all? Why did the author want to write this book? What basic argument, theoretical framework, methodological approach, or historical claim does he want his readers to accept? On page 4, Everist states that the book "describes and analyzes the repertory, institution, personnel, audiences, critical responses to, and the social impact of the theater's activities," but he does not really tell us much about things such as the social impact of the theater's activities.^[2] Instead, he offers us a rather mechanistic presentation of his research findings and little more than a large quantity of information about the Paris Odéon during the four and a half years of its activities. The presentation takes precedence over the interpretation; most importantly, however, the book lacks a thesis.

Present-day readers of a book in cultural history are likely to look for something more than "music drama at the Paris Odéon"; they will expect a specific claim or theme and arguments that can sustain it. But to carry out such a purpose, an engagement with the broader scholarship on cultural history is necessary. Mark Everist declares that his approach is that of "thick description" with the aim of identifying the "web of culture," but he does not go beyond a ritualistic reference to Clifford Geertz in the introduction to *Music Drama* and rarely beyond description of empirical evidence in the body of the book. Unfortunately, enumeration, classification, and recitation of facts, dates, and names without interpretation to discern possible meanings does not constitute "thick description"; nor is the "web of culture" (or the "web of meaning" to which he also refers) likely to emerge from lumping together facts, dates, and names.

The author's fondness for lists, classifications, and tables can be jarring; there are eleven tables in the book including repertories, tenures of subsequent managers, repertory during the Christmas period of 1827-28, comparisons of details of music scores, and even cast changes for the performances of *Robin des bois* in 1824. In most cases these lists and long descriptive sections serve no evident purpose other than to present data, but they expand the length of the book considerably, taking up space that might have been otherwise used for the lacking interpretative work. Similarly, we learn how the Odéon's repertory can be divided into three categories, how diverse genres may be divided and subdivided into categories, how state occasions may be subdivided into two categories, and how the celebration of the king's name day fell into two categories, but what is the relevance of such classifications to the book's argument? Brief concluding sections at the end of each chapter do not compensate for the lack of a broad theoretical underpinning of *Music Drama* that would allow for a more thorough integration of the empirical evidence into the book's argument and wider context.

There are sections in *Music Drama*--for example on censorship and on the Odéon's audience--which offer a hint of a cultural analysis, as opposed to mere reporting, but the author drops such analyses almost as quickly as he introduces them and slips back to his descriptive mode. Why, for example, did the royal theatres depend on works that were several generations old? (p. 33) The "classicizing impulse behind the Théâtre-Français" that the author mentions begs for elaboration. What were the aesthetic or social issues at stake behind the clashes between the audience and the clique? Or, what made curiosities such as exotic animals "elements in the complex of entertainment of which music drama formed an integral part"(p. 36)? At other times, material that could catalyze an interesting analysis is relegated to a footnote (e.g., p. 36, n. 76; p. 153, n. 29). Finally, there are editorial problems. These include inconsistent punctuation where "however" and inserted clauses are sometimes separated by commas and sometimes not (e.g., pp. 1, 3, 19, 223, 225); inconsistent punctuation after clauses at the beginning of a sentence introducing a time frame (e.g., pp. 20, 273); and undeleted repetitions of the same word or phrase (e.g., pp. 3, 105). And does Everist really mean that the Odéon's public was "heterodox" (e.g., pp. 119, 129)? In the normal sense of the word, "heterodox" means departing from or opposed to the usual beliefs or established doctrines, especially in religion; inclining toward heresy; unorthodox.^[3] If indeed the

Odéon's public was "heterodox" (as opposed to being heterogeneous), one would like to know more about this heterodoxy.

NOTES

[1] For example, François-Joseph Fétis, *Biographie universelle des musiciens et bibliographie générale de la musique*, 2nd ed., 8 vols. (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1860-65); Pierre Larousse, *Grand Dictionnaire universel du XIXe siècle*, 15 vols. (Paris: Grand Dictionnaire Universel, 1866); *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart: Allgemeine Enzyklopädie der Musik*, 16 vols. (Kassel: Bärenreiter-Verlag, 1949-79).

[2] The proper assessment of the social impact of the Odéon's activities would have had to include an analysis of the memoirs and personal accounts of the Restoration—a task clearly beyond the stated purpose of *Music Drama*.

[3] *Webster New World Dictionary of the American Language*, Second College Edition (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1980), 658.

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