

Music and Theatre
in France
1600–1680

JOHN S. POWELL

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

While the dramatic arts reached a pinnacle of development in France during the course of the seventeenth century, several concurrent forces brought about a gradual but noticeable change in French lyric theatre. Beginning in the 1630s, the systematic application of rules and unities to serious drama forced the 'ornaments' (song, dance, instrumental music, scenic effects) to seek refuge in the less regular genres of comedy, tragicomedy, and the pastorale. By mid-century, the finest composers, dancing masters, engineers, painters, and architects in France were collaborating with dramatists to bring together all the visual and performing arts in multigeneric *pièces à grand spectacle*. As many of these same artists were also active in the production of ballets and Italian operas at court, it comes as no surprise that a certain amount of cross-breeding ensued between theatrical genres.

Yet despite the volumes of scholarly attention devoted to the drama and theatre of the *ancien régime*, aside from Molière the importance of music and dance in French theatre has been sorely neglected. Musicologists have long viewed the *comédie-ballet* and the *pièce en machines* as evolutionary stepping-stones leading to the creation of French opera. Some of these partly sung works (Corneille's *Andromède*, Molière's *Psyché*, de Visé's *Le Mariage de Bacchus et d'Ariane*) have been held up for what they announce, promise, or anticipate, rather than for what they achieve. However, the presumption that totally sung lyric theatre was the ultimate objective of these pre-operatic 'experiments' rests on shaky ground. For Henry Prunières, recitative in the French language presented a problem that had to be solved in these partly sung works before poets and composers could cast aside their *comédies-ballets* and *pièces de machines* and get on with the business of opera. Once lyric theatre evolved to its highest operatic form, one might expect that these sub-species would have become obsolete. Yet the Théâtre de Guénégaud continued to draw record crowds with their musical *pièces en machines* of the mid-1670s and competed with Lully's Académie Royale de Musique. Indeed, the enthusiasm of the public for these musical plays was so overwhelming that it took Lully's crushing restrictions on music and dance to bring about their demise, and, soon after Lully's death, French lyric theatre would be reborn in the musical comedies of Dancourt.

The musical and balletic practices of the Parisian stage cannot be established through the usual comprehensive literature review. Indeed, discussion of incidental music and dance has been excluded from standard works such as Henry Carrington Lancaster's *French Dramatic Literature in the Seventeenth Century* (1929–42) and Antoine Adam's *Histoire de la littérature française au XVIIIe siècle*

(1949), as well as from such important studies of comic and stylistic resources of the period as Robert Garapon's *La Fantaisie verbale et le comique dans le théâtre française du Moyen Âge à la fin du XVII^e siècle* (1957) and Roger Guichemerre's *La Comédie avant Molière* (1972). Deierkauf-Holsboer summarizes the musical and balletic practices of the French stage in three short pages in *L'Histoire de la mise en scène dans le théâtre français à Paris de 1600 à 1673* (1960), while in a 1958 article devoted to this subject ('La Musique au Théâtre au XVII^e siècle') Eugène Borrel reviews the known facts in twelve pages. Margaret McGowan's chapter on 'The Origins of French Opera' in the *New Oxford History of Music* (1975) and the two chapters ('The Comédie-Ballet and Related Genres' and 'The Pastorale') in James R. Anthony's *French Baroque Music* (1974; rev. 1978 and 1997) remain the best surveys of non-operatic musical theatre in France. Yet the spoken dramatic literature for the most part has remained unexamined for musical content. As recently as 1986, the distinguished Molière scholar Louis E. Auld announced that 'I have discovered only one or two plays which call for songs prior to 1648, and an equally small number which make use of rudimentary machine effects. There was no regular use of either songs or machines before that date'.¹ This turns out to have been a gross understatement; for, as shown in Appendix A, no fewer than fifty-seven plays published during 1600–48 feature music and dance, and no doubt many more remain to be discovered.

Within the past decade, scholars have begun to re-evaluate the essential role played by music and dance in seventeenth-century French theatre. Alain Niderst has taken a fresh look at incidental music in drama ('La Tragédie à intermèdes musicaux, 1650–1670'), while Perry Gethner has examined the role of the performing arts in the *pièce en machines* ('On the Use of Music and Dance in the Machine Tragedies'). *Littératures classiques* recently dedicated an entire issue to seventeenth-century musical theatre—featuring important articles on the early (and largely unknown) repertory by Charles Mazouer ('Théâtre et musique au XVII^e siècle'), Françoise Siguret ('Les Violons de la farce'), Edward Forman ('Musique et quiproquo: L'Ironie dans les intermèdes musicaux'), Georgie Durosoir ('Pastorales avec musique et pastorales en musique en France au milieu du XVII^e siècle'), and Bénédicte Louvat ('Le Théâtre musical au XVII^e siècle: Élaboration d'un genre nouveau?'). Clearly, the time has come for a comprehensive study of musical theatre during the *grand siècle*.

A critical examination of the dramatic literature together with the existing musical scores serves as the basis for this study. Ample evidence of musical performance exists in the texts of the plays themselves, and include (1) lyrics sung by a character in the play or by a chorus, (2) rubrics and staging directions supplied by the dramatist, (3) verbal cues in the speeches relating to singing and dancing,

¹ L. Auld, *Lyric Art of Pierre Perrin, Founder of French Opera*, 3 vols. (Henryville, Pa., 1986), ii, 3, n. 4.

and (4) critical commentary made by the play's characters. As an understanding of the place and function of these musical set pieces largely depends upon the dramatic contexts in which they are introduced, Appendix C consists of representative excerpts from the plays—which are cued in the main text by means of superscript letters.² Moreover, the descriptive booklets and *livrets* printed for machine plays and *comédies-ballets* offer further useful information on the musical and balletic practices of the stage, as well as on the artists who were involved in these productions.

The printed plays, however, paint an incomplete picture of the musical traditions that existed in French theatre. For instance, archival documents reveal that early troupes habitually performed viol music during the entr'actes of their plays. Published anthologies preserved the songs of the *farceur* Gaultier-Garguille, while contemporary plays preserve the lyrics sung by famous actors of the time: Jodelet, Hauteroche, de Villiers, and Molière (who sang in no fewer than nine of his own plays). Moreover, many seventeenth-century actors possessed sufficient dancing skill to perform ballet along with their spoken fare. By mid-century all three main repertory theatres in Paris were featuring music and dance in a number of their productions, for which they frequently hired professional musicians, singers, dancers, and choreographers.

That so little of the music composed for the French stage before 1650 has been preserved may be explained by the prevailing oral tradition existing among professional musicians of the time. Members of the Parisian musicians' guild no doubt drew upon their repertory of familiar tunes when a play called for a dance—which they would perform from memory. We also know that actors sang on-stage popular songs, *airs de cour*, *vaudevilles*, and *contrafacta* musical settings. Moreover, the two collections of theatrical songs published in 1626 by Jacques Mangeant (*Recueil des plus belles chansons des comédiens françois*) prove that some of this repertory dates back to the sixteenth century. However, around the mid-seventeenth century a change took place as court musicians became increasingly active in the public theatre. Dramatic lyrics set to music by Jean de Cambefort, Charles Coyneau (*dit* Dassoucy), Michel Lambert, Louis de Mollier, Robert Cambert, Jean-Baptiste Lully, and Marc-Antoine Charpentier can be found in contemporaneous anthologies of sung airs. Charpentier preserved the music he wrote for Molière's company in his 'Mélanges autographes', while André Danican Philidor, the royal music librarian, recorded much of the incidental music that Lully composed for court presentations. The publication of music from the theatrical works further asserts the new prestige granted to incidental music after 1660. The songs from Montfleury's exotic comedy *Le Mary sans*

² In general, the old spellings and diacritical markings (or lack thereof) are reproduced in these dramatic excerpts as they appear in the original sources—except that, when appropriate, 'v' has been substituted for 'u' (for example, as in 'oeuure'), and 'u' has been substituted for 'v' (as in 'vne').

femme (1663) appeared in a separate printed booklet (vocal parts only), while a 'trio grotesque' (attributed to Cambert) from Brécourt's *Le Jaloux invisible* (1666) was printed along with the farce. In the 1670s the Parisian publisher Robert Ballard would publish selected airs from machine plays (*Psyché*, *Circé*), and would continue this practice for musical comedies throughout the later seventeenth century. By the early eighteenth century the Comédie-Française was paying professional copyists to compile a multi-volume anthology of incidental music (entitled *Théâtre François*, of which only *Tome II* and *Tome VII* survive) used in original productions, as well as newer music introduced in later revivals.

The plays examined here employ music and dance to varying degrees—ranging from a single drinking-song, serenade, or a dance to the more extensive musical episodes found in machine plays, *comédies-ballets*, and other multigeneric works. Indeed, seventeenth-century theatre was far more lyric than is generally recognized by modern scholarship. The popular appeal of musical episodes encouraged acting companies routinely to add songs, dances, and even entire ballets to their dramatic performances. Contemporary accounts of performances in the public theatre sometimes describe elaborate episodes of music, dance, and scenic effects that are not called for by the plays' texts. This may in part be explained by the fact that before mid-century such elements of production did not come within the purview of the dramatist—whose primary responsibility was to furnish the spoken verse. However, as plays during 1650–75 began to rely upon rapid set-changes, machine effects, operatic singing, and balletic episodes for their impact, these 'ornaments' increasingly began to inform dramatic structure.

For the sake of argument, it has been assumed here that when a dramatist has chosen to introduce musical episodes within the context of a play—in other words, when he goes out of his way to include songs, dances, and commentary on the performance by the other characters—this is an action of some dramatic significance, a conscious striving after a particular musico-dramatic effect. Consequently, we must consider how music contributes to the *douce illusion* of theatre. In what way do musical prologues or entr'acte entertainments relate to spoken plays? What purposes do songs and dances serve within the play, and at the play's end? Are musical episodes introduced as a realistic performance by the play's characters, or within a hyper-real context in which song acts as a metaphor for heightened speech and dance-pantomime represents some supernatural action? What kinds of characters are normally granted musical and balletic abilities? What distinguishes spoken verses from sung lyrics, and *chansons* from operatic discourse? In which contexts would purely instrumental music have been introduced, and to what dramatic end? These and other related issues will be addressed in the thematic chapters of Part II.

I have limited the boundaries of this study to the years 1600–80: that is, from

the establishment of repertory theatres in Paris at the turn of the century to the formation of the Comédie-Française in 1680. Furthermore, the main focus will be on secular drama as performed in the public theatre, with secondary consideration given to court theatre and ballet. With the exception of the opera pastiche *Les Fêtes de l'Amour et de Bacchus*, Lully's *tragédies-lyriques* will remain beyond the scope of this study. The three main parts of this book will treat the history of incidental music in French theatre from historical, aesthetic, and utilitarian perspectives. Part I traces the history of public theatre in Paris from the beginning of the seventeenth century to the reorganization of Parisian theatre under Louis XIV and Colbert. Part II examines the place and function of music, dance, and performance spectacle in comedy, tragicomedy, and the pastoral genres which led to the creation of *comédie-ballet*, the *pastorale en musique*, and French opera. Part III is devoted to various aspects of the musical theatre of Molière. Appendix A provides a listing of plays during the period under consideration, for which evidence points to musical and/or balletic performance; Appendix B is an alphabetic index of incipits to sung lyrics culled from early printed editions of these plays.

While the musical and balletic traditions upon which Molière drew were firmly in place in French theatre, few seventeenth-century dramatists were as successful as Molière in exploiting dramatically the nuances of all forms of artistic expression. As Stephen Fleck aptly observed, 'in the late comedy-ballets we have, quite simply, the finest comic musical theatre before that of Mozart and Da Ponte'. Much has been written on the *comédies-ballets* as they were presented to Louis XIV, dressed up in their court finery, but little consideration has been given to the manner in which they appeared in town at the Palais-Royal and the Hôtel de Guénégaud. Chapters 15, 16, and 17 examine the performance history of four *comédies-ballets*, with a view toward external factors that brought about revision and change in public revivals. Two of these chapters originated in journal articles: 'Le Mariage forcé and the Self-Fulfilled Prophecy', *Early Music* (May 1993), 213–30; 'Charpentier, *La Sérénade pour le Sicilien*, et le crépuscule de la comédie-ballet', *Revue de musicologie*, 77/1 (1991), 88–96; and 'Charpentier's Music for Molière's *Le Malade imaginaire* and its Revisions', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 39 (1986), 87–142. I am gratified to have had this opportunity to correct, revise, and expand upon my earlier work. Chapter 18 is a revision of a more recent article, 'Musical Practices in the Theater of Molière', *Revue de musicologie*, 82/1 (1996), 5–37, which addresses the practical considerations of seventeenth-century theatrical production: who sang and danced on-stage; how many and what kind of instruments comprised the orchestra, how the parts were distributed, where the orchestra was situated in the theatre; which instruments played the *basse-continue*, and which musical numbers called for keyboard continuo; who choreographed the dances and conducted the orchestra; and what was the capability of the Théâtre du Palais-Royal for sudden set-transformations

and machine effects. The final chapter, which explores the interconnections between Lully's first opera and Molière's final *comédie-ballet*, is based on my earlier article 'Appropriation, Parody, and the Birth of French Opera: Lully's *Les Festes de l'Amour et de Bacchus* and Molière's *Le Malade imaginaire*', *Recherches sur la musique française classique*, 19 (1998), 5–28.

This study would have been impossible without the prior research of a number of scholars, for which footnote references cannot adequately express their influence on my own work. The nine volumes of H. Carrington Lancaster's *A History of French Dramatic Literature in the Seventeenth Century* remained my *vade mecum* throughout the writing of this book, while the early chapters on Parisian theatres rely heavily on the exhaustive archival research of S. Wilma Deierkauf-Holsboer, Madeleine Jurgens, Elizabeth Maxfield-Miller, Pierre Mélése, and Georges Mongrédien. Similarly, the documentary studies of Nutter and Thoinan (*Les Origines de l'opéra français*) and Henry Prunières (*L'Opéra italien en France*) were indispensable for understanding the complicated prehistory of French opera, while Étienne Gros's 1928 article ('*Les Origines de la tragédie-lyrique et la place des tragédies en machines dans l'évolution du théâtre vers l'opéra*') remains the single best discussion of the *pièce de machines*. More recent research by Louis Auld, Edward Forman, and Perry Gethner helped shape my views on the place and function of music and dance within the dramatic repertory, while Anne MacNeil's study of the role of music in Italian Renaissance pastoral drama, in turn, gave me a new perspective on French pastoral plays of the seventeenth century.

Support for this project has been provided by the American Council of Learned Societies, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the American Philosophical Society, and the University of Tulsa. I would like to thank various archivists who have allowed me to consult rare musical and dramatic sources, and who have provided other assistance over the years: Catherine Massip of the Bibliothèque Nationale, Marie-Françoise Christout of the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, and Noëlle Guibert and Odile Faliu of the Bibliothèque-Musée de la Comédie-Française. Also, I owe a debt of gratitude to the superlative efforts of the Interlibrary Loan Service at the University of Tulsa, who obtained for me many hard-to-find secondary source-materials. Thanks are also due to various of my friends and colleagues, who read early drafts of these chapters, provided useful advice, and were willing to lend a sympathetic ear: Barbara Coeyman, Steve Fleck, Carolyn Gianturco, Claudia Jensen, John Rice, and Andrew Walkling. I would also like to thank my colleagues Reginald Hyatte, Véronique Conway, and especially Perry Gethner, who advised me on problematic French passages. Most of all, however, I would like to acknowledge the continuing love and support of my wife Helen, and my son Christopher—whose birth marked the beginning of this project.

J.S.P.

*Que fera-t-il de magnifique,
S'il n'a pas pour l'oreille et les yeux
Ni pompe de ballets; ni charmes de musique?*

(Prologue to *l'Inconnu*)

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ABBREVIATIONS

The following are used in the tables and music examples.

- F-B Bibliothèque Municipale de Besançon
 F-Pn Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris
 F-Pcf Bibliothèque-Musée de la Comédie Française