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Luigi Cherubini è una di quelle importanti figure di musicisti italiani, vissute a cavallo fra Sette e Ottocento, che da un lato ha condiviso con diversi altri conterranei la diaspora verso altri paesi europei, dall'altro ha pagato caro il successo e la stima ottenuti in vita con un progressivo ridursi, sul piano storiografico, del riconoscimento del suo ruolo nella storia musicale europea.

Il volume, introdotto da uno sguardo complessivo alla drammaturgia cherubiniana di Helen Geyer, affronta la produzione operistica italiana di Cherubini dalla prospettiva filologica (Dellaborra e Faverzani) e da quella drammaturgico musicale (Mattei e Pantini), sullo sfondo dei mutamenti di gusto del tempo (Polin) o sulla scorta di documentazione archivistica (Rossetto Casel). Viene inoltre esaminato l'apporto cherubiniano ai rifacimenti di opere italiane approdate sulla Senna (Menchelli-Buttini) e alla fusione fra stili italiano e francese nelle prime esperienze nel contesto dell'*opéra comique* (Menchelli). La produzione operistica francese di Cherubini sollecita precisazioni di ordine filologico e stilistico relative alla *Elisa* (Arfini), riflessioni sulla vocalità di *Médée* (Zarrelli), indagini sui rapporti fra il musicista e lo scenografo Ignazio Degotti, attivo sulle scene del Feydeau (Cazzato).

Completano il volume una disamina della matura produzione di Cherubini nella prospettiva dei rapporti stilistici fra generi sacro e operistico (Pauser) ed un contributo dedicato all'evoluzione della carriera parigina di Cherubini alla luce dei sistemi produttivi, finanziari e delle convenzioni sociali della Francia post-rivoluzionaria e napoleonica (Fend).

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Luigi Cherubini • Il teatro musicale

Cherubini Studies 3



Luigi Cherubini

Il teatro musicale

a cura di
Maria Teresa Arfini
Francesca Menchelli-Buttini
Emilia Pantini

KÖNIGSHAUSEN & NEUMANN
STUDIO • VERLAG

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A Marco, che tanto tempo fa
mi spinse a un viaggio lungo e
solitario per sentire *Lodoïska*
Francesca



Indice / Contents

FRANCO PIPERNO	
Prefazione	5
HELEN GEYER	
Concetti in trasformazione: aspetti dell' <i>œuvre</i> di Cherubini	7
MARIATERESA DELLABORRA	
Indagine preliminare per un'edizione critica di <i>Mesenzio</i> (1782).	29
CAMILLO FAVERZANI	
Quale libretto per <i>Armida abbandonata</i> ?.	63
GIOVANNI POLIN	
<i>Alessandro nell'Indie</i> (Mantova 1784). Note sull'ultima esperienza metastasiana di Cherubini.	79
LUCA ROSSETTO CASEL	
Intorno a <i>Ifigenia in Aulide</i> : le fonti archivistiche	101
LORENZO MATTEI	
Cherubini buffo e la mescolanza tra i generi operistici. <i>Lo Sposo di tre e marito di nessuna</i> (Venezia 1783).	119
EMILIA PANTINI	
Piccinni, Paisiello, Cherubini: <i>La molinarella</i>	137
FRANCESCA MENCHELLI-BUTTINI	
Luigi Cherubini per <i>Il Tamburo</i> di Giovanni Paisiello (Parigi 1791)	153
PAOLO MECHELLI	
Fra <i>Lodoïska</i> e <i>Torvaldo e Dorliska</i> . Riverberazioni polacche e declinazioni semiserie	175
MARIA TERESA ARFINI	
Le due versioni del Finale II in <i>Elisa ou Le voyage aux glaciers du Mont (St.) Bernard</i> (1794).	195

GIOACCHINO ZARRELLI	
Aspetti della vocalità in <i>Médée</i> . Le recensioni di Fothergill Chorley	217
ELISA CAZZATO	
Ignazio Degotti Staging Luigi Cherubini. Making Visual Culture at the Théâtre Feydeau	225
MICHAEL PAUSER	
L'uno esclude l'altro? Considerazioni sulla musica sacra e teatrale di Luigi Cherubini <i>Surintendant de la musique du Roi</i>	243
MICHAEL FEND	
From Immigrant Musician to State Employee. Cherubini's Career in Paris in the 1790s	263
ABSTRACTS	279
INDICE / INDEX	287

Michael Fend

From Immigrant Musician to State Employee

Cherubini's Career in Paris in the 1790s

In summer 2018 Cherubini hit the Italian news headlines in an unforeseen context. The conductor Riccardo Muti, well known for his recordings of Cherubini's operas and masses, together with the mayor of Florence, and celebrities of the Italian art-world signed a petition to the Italian president Sergio Mattarella requesting the return of Cherubini's ashes from the Parisian cemetery of Père Lachaise to the Florentine basilica of Santa Croce, where a monument in his honour by Odoardo Fantacchiotti was erected already in 1869.

This petition, which has since attracted thousands of signatures, is still open-ended. It may remind us of a similar initiative back in 1844, when Richard Wagner organised the solemn return of the remains of Carl Maria von Weber from London to Dresden, where Wagner was Kapellmeister at the time. Already very ill, Weber had died unexpectedly in London three weeks after arrival. Cherubini, by contrast, had lived in Paris for more than 50 years. The only argument Muti could present in support of his petition was a note in the Parisian *Courier des théâtres* from 1842, two months before Cherubini's death and only two years before Wagner's initiative. It reads: "The 82-year-old Cherubini wants to revisit the country of his birth, embrace his children, and end his laborious career where he began; in the country of his genius: Florence".¹ There is no letter by Cherubini supporting this sentiment and only one of his three children had moved to Italy. More importantly, by 1842 Cherubini was far too frail to entertain the idea of such a journey. His long-term melancholy is expressed in his letters and captured in the magnificent portrait by Ingres from the same year 1842, one version of which is today in the Gare d'Orsay museum in Paris.

The wave of nationalism that fans Muti's petition is a dark reminder of nineteenth-century ideology and one of the causes that brought the unlikely coalition of The Northern League under Matteo Salvini and the Five Star Movement under Luigi di Maio to power in Rome in June 2018. Italians have some legitimate cause to complain about the long-term drain of their most talented citizens. The picture galleries of Berlin, Paris, London, New York, Boston and elsewhere are full of Italian paintings which the northerners have acquired since the sixteenth century often by clandestine or outright illegal means. When in the winter months of 2018 the then Italian interior minister Salvini refused the mere lending of some paintings by Leonardo da Vinci for a major exhibition at the Louvre to mark the quincentenary of his death, Salvini exploited a deep-seated resentment among Italians

1 Vittorio Della Croce, *Cherubini e i musicisti italiani del suo tempo*, Torino 1983, vol. I, p. 506.

over their long-term cultural losses and unequal treatment. The French apparently had refused to lend them the Mona Lisa in return.

The composer Cherubini was one of these losses. But what Muti and his supporters had overlooked in their petition is the simple fact that Pere Lachaise cemetery not only holds the remains of the composer but also his wife, as well as their children and families. More importantly, returning Cherubini to Florence would run counter to the trajectory of his career, which gradually became fixed in Paris, and would deny the roots he had actively developed for himself and his family in France. Transporting ashes may be a moving political spectacle, but its nationalistic spirit is retrogressive and a denial of history. It has to be acknowledged that professionally and culturally Cherubini crossed borders. But the courage shown by this border crossing cannot make him a cultural hero in twenty-first century historiography.

Any twenty-first century biographical account of a professional musician would surely aim to access the subject's interior life through their social life, in the process widening the lens to include less central protagonists. Such an account should also be open about the composer's double-edged behaviour, without losing empathy for the strictures under which they may have operated. Apart from some notorious exceptions and in contrast to professional writers, composers have rarely revealed their feelings in society. One reason may be some sense of a gap between the sophistication of their musical expression of feeling and a lack of skill in thinking over their experiences through writing. My project nevertheless insists on a hierarchy of perception offered by Cherubini's professional biography. My defence is that I have noticed a tendency towards mutual isolation in our communicative freedom, which I see enacted in musicological essay collections as well as journals, where single references to authors in the index have become almost the norm, while references to canonical composers and authors have sharply decreased. The democratisation of authors we refer to may indicate a process of mutual alienation, although it might also hide a convergence in our discourse that is simply not reflected in the indices. My problem is nevertheless that the "death of the author" and the fragmentation of discourses may bring with it a fragmentation of understanding, memory, empathy, and possibly a decrease in shared concerns. I am resisting this tendency by keeping a historical author as my focus, but I am aware of some of the compromises this method entails.

The grand historical narratives of the French Revolution in 1789 have either been unsparing in their critique of the events, because by 1793 this revolution had descended into terror and provoked innumerable miseries, or the historians have been sympathetically disposed on account of the Revolution's overriding, long-term institutional achievements and promises.² Music historians, operating with less weighty matter, have often schematised

2 See, for example William Doyle, *Origins of the French Revolution*, Oxford 1999; Peter J. Davies, *The Debate on the French Revolution*, Manchester 2006; Paul R. Hanson, *Contesting the French Revolution*, Oxford 2009; Marisa Linton, "Terror and Politics", in: *The Oxford Handbook of the French Revolution*, edited by David Andress, Oxford 2015, pp. 471–486; Isser Woloch, "Lasting

their material around the question of whether the French Revolution caused a revolution in music as well, or whether there was musical continuity despite the political upheaval. Like most either-or questions, there are answers in both directions. But none of these narratives are particularly helpful when looking at the period from below, that is from the perspective of an individual, or group of individuals, who had decided to live and work in Paris as there was no better alternative. The Parisian career of Luigi Cherubini offers a particularly complex example because he transformed his originally foreign status, despite several set-backs, into the directorship of the Conservatoire by 1822.

During his Italian youth, Cherubini had been remunerated for his opera commissions within the *stagione* system, and his political status had been that of a “subject” in the Florentine principality. When he left Italy in 1784 at the age of twenty-four for economic motives, it simply meant that he had chosen to live abroad, just as so many eighteenth-century Italian composers before him, sometimes temporarily (as Piccinni and Paisiello did), sometimes for good (as was the case for Boccherini and Traetta). In contrast to his first destination, London, for which Cherubini had recommendations and a brief court employment, in Paris in 1786 he took up residence as a free artist, as Mozart had done five years earlier in Vienna, although the cultural and political journey from Salzburg to Vienna was shorter as we shall see. “Becoming a foreigner” and “going native” are two potentially complementary processes. Still, you can become a foreigner also in your own country, and living abroad does not necessarily mean you adopt the new country in your heart.

French people, however, would necessarily have seen Cherubini as a foreigner who wanted to carve out a professional career in their capital, as Gluck, Grétry, Mozart, Johann Christian Bach, Salieri, Sacchini and many others had attempted before him. To acclimatise himself Cherubini took three steps which marked him out from his musical predecessors with unforeseeable consequences. First, he took accommodation with the unmarried, well-established court composer Giovanni Battista Viotti in an expensive apartment in today’s second arrondissement of Paris.

Five years older than Cherubini, the solo-violinist Viotti must have possessed stage presence to complement Cherubini, who was a modest pianist and conductor, at least in the view of his later nemesis Berlioz. For the following six years Viotti and Cherubini would most likely have spoken Italian with each other, easing his new-arrived friend into unfamiliar surroundings. Second, Cherubini joined a masonic lodge, “Saint Jean de Palestine”, one of at least ten lodges in Paris, which brought together about 240 musicians in total. Together with subscription concerts and salons, masonic lodges became “social spaces for Parisian musicians to develop a collective professional identity”.³ In the lodge “L’Olympique de la parfaite estime”, which had asked Haydn for his Parisian symphonies,

Political Structures”, in: *The Oxford Handbook* (as above), pp. 590–606; Jeff Horn, “Lasting Economic Structures”, in: *The Oxford Handbook* (as above), pp. 607–624.

- 3 Rebecca Dowd Geoffroy-Schwinden, *Politics, the French Revolution, and Performance: Parisian Musicians as an Emergent Professional Class, 1749–1802*, PhD diss., Duke University 2015, p. 82.

Cherubini could excel by fulfilling their commissions for two cantatas (*Amphion élevant les mures de Thebes au son de la lyre* and *Circé*) as well as *Dix-huit Romances* to texts from Florian's *Estelle*, noticeably all in French.⁴ In contrast to the medieval guilds, which had been organised around specific crafts, the eighteenth-century masonic lodges drew their members from different professions, clearly welcoming musicians, for whom no guild, let alone union existed. Even Cherubini and Viotti, who would have introduced him to Free Masons, did not belong to the same lodge. The form of association represented in masonic lodges did not follow from the social rank of potential applicants but their professional merits. For an accomplished foreign composer without commission, a lodge could offer a network of contacts and a platform for integration. One can hardly overestimate the importance for a musician to become part of a class of professionals that was separate from royal and church patronage.

Through his older Italian network, Cherubini had secured the commission of *Ifigenia in Aulide* for the Turin Opera in January 1788, while his new Parisian network brought him the commission to compose *Démophoon* at the most prestigious opera house in Paris, the Académie royale de musique in December 1788. For *Démophoon* Cherubini set a textbook by Marmontel, who had previously advised Piccinni in the setting of French prosody. Jean François Marmontel was one of the most prominent men of letters at the end of the *Ancien régime*. To have him as his librettist and advisor shows that Cherubini himself or somebody on his behalf was a good networker.

Third, most importantly, and thanks again to his flatmate Viotti, Cherubini found regular employment at the newly established Théâtre de Monsieur from January 1789 onwards. The Monsieur was Louis XVI's younger brother. In the Restauration after 1815 the Monsieur would return from his London exile as king Louis XVIII.

In 1789 there were not many Italian composers left in Paris, a factor that worked to Cherubini's advantage. At first, his job at the Théâtre de Monsieur was mostly hackwork. Over three years he composed about 50 new arias and ensembles for twenty-two Italian operas which had already been successfully staged in Italian opera houses but which were still perceived in need of adjusting to Parisian expectations. In this way Cherubini continued writing music as if he was still in Italy, except that he was now commissioned to improve the scores of his colleagues. Viotti had the contacts at court and felt sufficiently well connected in Parisian society in 1789 to act as frontman for a group of anonymous financiers who were keen to take over the entire group of Parisian theatres in exchange for a large loan to the almost bankrupt French monarchy. If successful, the takeover would have resulted in the abolishing of the system of crown privileges. Viotti and his financiers' double-edged offer was, however, cut short.

4 See Gérard Gefen, *Les Musiciens et la franc-maçonnerie*, Paris 1993, pp. 60–80; Emmet Kennedy, *A Cultural History of the French Revolution*, New Haven 1989, p. 20.

At the Théâtre de Monsieur Cherubini's engagement also stipulated that he would compose two new French operas per year.⁵ His annual salary of 4000 livres was more than he could have ever hoped for in Italy at the end of the eighteenth century. In addition, the composer, who adapted an existing score "received the entire 'droit d'auteur' [here specified as between 3 and 6% of box-office receipts, depending on the 1, 2, or 3-act nature of the opera], in exchange for a clean copy of the score".⁶ Whatever the shortcomings of being a hack-worker and however much behind musicians were in the contemporary debate about authors' right and intellectual property, the Théâtre de Monsieur offered its in-house opera composer near optimal working conditions in the world, because this Théâtre enjoyed royal protection, which freed it from the financial punishment and repertoire strictures that threatened other independent theatre foundations while the system of privileges was still in place. At the same time, the Theatre de Monsieur was run as a capitalist institution working for profits with directors and financiers having overall control.

Since August 1789 there was another reason why Cherubini could congratulate himself for having moved to Paris. In that month the "Declaration of the Rights of the Man and of the Citizen" was adopted by the National Constituent Assembly. Its first two articles gave the foreigner Cherubini political rights, unheard of outside France, except for the United States. The first two articles read: "Men are born and remain free and equal in rights; social distinction may be based only upon general usefulness". "The aim of every political association is the preservation of the natural and inalienable rights of man; these rights are liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression".⁷ There is nothing in these two articles that would not also apply to a foreigner. The enthusiasm, with which some foreigners greeted the "declaration of the rights of man and citizen", can be gleaned from a letter by an English tourist, Helen Maria Williams, reporting on the Fête de la Fédération of 14 July 1790, which marked the first anniversary of the storming of the Bastille:

You will not suspect that I was an indifferent witness of such a scene. Oh no! This was not a time in which the distinctions of country were remembered. It was the triumph of human kind; it was man asserting the noblest privileges of his nature; and it required but the common feelings of humanity to become in that moment a citizen of the world. [...] I too, although but a sojourner in their land, rejoiced in their happiness, joined the universal voice, and repeated with all my heart and soul, "Vive la nation!"⁸

5 See Cherubini, "Note relative à L. Cherubini, rédigée par lui même", in: Della Croce, *Cherubini* (as note 1), vol. II, p. 575.

6 Mary Elizabeth Caroline Bartlet, *Étienne Nicolas Méhul and Opera: Source and Archival Studies of Lyric Theatre During the French Revolution, Consulate and Empire*, Heilbronn 1999, vol. I, p. 20.

7 *The Portable Enlightenment Reader*, edited by Isaac Kramnick, London 1995, p. 467.

8 Helen Maria Williams, *Letters Written in France in the Summer of 1790*, London 1790, pp. 13–14, 21, in Michael Rapport, *Nationality and Citizenship in Revolutionary France. The Treatment of Foreigners 1789–1799*, Oxford 2000, p. 83.

Yet Helen Williams' spirit of universal brother- and sisterhood might well have come to a sudden stop when reading the third article of the "Declaration": "The source of all sovereignty resides essentially in the nation. No group, no individual, may exercise authority not emanating expressly therefrom".⁹ Here a contradiction between the natural rights of men and the absolute sovereignty of the nation had entered into this "declaration". No longer was the individual offered absolute value, which instead was absorbed by the French Nation.

Praise for the "nation" can be found in equal measure from the time around 1790, which Michael Rapport has summarised:

The people, whose interests patriots sought to promote, were referred to as the 'nation'. In 1789, the old ties of loyalty to king and province crumbled and, in their place, the revolutionaries expected to find their identity, their rights, and obligations through membership of the nation, the community of equal citizens. It was the nation, through its representatives, which was to decide the form and structure of the state. This elevation of the nation as the source of sovereignty did not, initially, entail aggression against foreigners.¹⁰

The nation acquired the value of loyalty, which the king and his representatives in the state from tax collector to local priest could no longer command.

The political philosopher Hannah Arendt has pointed out that "the practical outcome of this contradiction [between the first two and the third article of the declaration of 1789] was that from then on human rights were protected and enforced only as national rights".¹¹ In the first article the endowment of human rights was applied to all people, but the third article enthroned the nation as the absolute sovereign who can offer or dispense with any of the rights enshrined elsewhere in the declaration. This contradiction between the universal rights of any individual and the sovereignty of the nation is still an issue today, wherever autocratic regimes stifle opposition to their country's sovereignty. The 1789 declaration offered rights only to a small fraction of the French population, since the Assembly soon after developed the distinction between "active" and "passive citizens". Passive citizens were women, slaves, children, and foreigners. Women protested vociferously against their status as "passive citizens". For Cherubini the "declaration of the rights of man" was thus a declaration of inclusion and exclusion. He could claim to be no longer a "subject" dominated by a personal sovereign, but while he was subject to the laws of the French nation, as a foreigner, he was branded a passive citizen.

Investing in his own career, in 1789 Cherubini paid for the printing of the full score of his tragédie lyrique *Démophoon*, which would have been completely unheard of in Italy

⁹ *The Portable Enlightenment Reader* (as note 7).

¹⁰ Rapport, *Nationality* (as note 8), p. 4.

¹¹ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, London 1967, p. 230; quoted in Rapport, *Nationality* (as note 8), p. 7.

but was standard practice in Paris since Lully. This investment could have been a complete waste of money after the tepid reception of *Démophon* at the Académie royale, as no other theatre in France was in the financial position to mount such an opera. But the investment paid off well because he could immediately claim some property rights over his score.

By the end of 1790 Cherubini had proved to be a highly competent hack composer at the Théâtre de Monsieur. It is not known whether he attempted to compose two French operas in 1789, as stipulated in his engagement. What was worse, in 1790 his opera project, *Marguerite d'Anjou* was cancelled midway.¹² If performed, it would have been Cherubini's most provocative opera to date, less on account of its musical style than for its political subject matter. Marguerite d'Anjou was the wife of the English king Henry VI from the fifteenth-century War of the Roses between the houses of York and Lancaster.¹³ Marguerite d'Anjou's pitiful story losing her husband and son was evidently chosen in symbolic support of the beleaguered Marie Antoinette, wife of Louis XVI. An opera project in 1790 on the topic of a queen in distress provides a clear sense of how far the Théâtre de Monsieur, if not Cherubini personally, were still entangled with the royalists. Marguerite d'Anjou was not about celebrating the deeds of a foreign monarch, as Grétry had offered with his opera *Pierre le Grand*, in support of Louis XVI in the same year. Instead, Cherubini had been handed the far more arduous task of harnessing favour for the weakest link in the royal family, namely Marie Antoinette, herself of foreign descent and by then derided in hundreds of pornographic pamphlets. After Cherubini had completed the first act of *Marguerite d'Anjou* the administrators clearly realised that there was no longer public space for the message of a Queen absorbed by the caring for her family, which had been the message of official paintings of Marie Antoinette in the late 1780s by Élisabeth Vigée-le-Brun, especially her portrait of "Marie Antoinette de Lorraine-Habsburg Queen of France and her children" (1787) in Versailles.¹⁴

It is possible that the Theatre de Monsieur wanted to show its allegiance with monarchical France with the opera *Marguerite d'Anjou* in response to a proposal by a Parisian commission in April 1790 that the Monsieur should merge with the Théâtre Italien to reduce the theatres' collective massive debts. However, the librettists and composers at the competing Théâtre Italien, who, despite its name, keenly underlined their status as "national citizens", voiced their fury in public that its "national actors" would be disadvantaged at the hands of "foreign actors" from the Théâtre de Monsieur. Moreover, the personnel at the Théâtre Italien wondered, how the Théâtre de Monsieur, which had existed for just 18 months, could be given preference over them who had "proven their eagerness and patriotism over a hundred years" and who were handing out pensions to otherwise

¹² Luigi Cherubini, *Marguerite d'Anjou*, PL-Kj.

¹³ See Helen E. Maurer, *Marguerite d'Anjou. Queenship and Power in Late Medieval England*, Woodbridge 2004.

¹⁴ See Marc Fumaroli, *Mundus muliebris. Élisabeth Louise Vigée le Brun, peintre de l'Ancien régime féminin*, Paris 2015.

impoverished artists.¹⁵ In 1793 the Théâtre Italien consequently changed its name to the Théâtre de l'Opéra-Comique National.

In the summer of 1790 Cherubini left the heat of Paris to spend time at the château de Breuilpont in Normandy among the nobility. Here he composed the motet *Domine, salvum fac regem* (Lord, Save the King). This prayer was traditionally performed at the end of every mass in the Versailles chapel and came closest to a French national anthem, resembling the British anthem "God save the Queen". It had earlier been set by Jean Mouton, Jean Baptiste Lully, Charpentier (25 times), François Couperin, and Jean Philippe Rameau among others. Cherubini's version adopts the stateliness of a hymn, entrenching his political alignment with the monarchy by deed and probably by inclination.¹⁶

In December 1790 the Théâtre de Monsieur and Cherubini signed a contract to pay him an advance of £2000 livres for his still unfinished opera *Lodoïska*. In return Cherubini agreed that the completed score would become the Théâtre's property. By these contractual procedures the Théâtre sidestepped the practice by which it had procured most of its operatic repertoire from Italy since its doors had opened, namely by theft. In the late eighteenth century Italy had no copyright, so composers' scores were unprotected from copying. At best they were traded for a small fee. The contract for the prospective acquisition of *Lodoïska* was co-signed by an administrator of the Théâtre, Destrenez, and by Viotti. Selling the performing rights for *Lodoïska* was an ambivalent move, because the ownership of a score would have enhanced Cherubini's status as a citizen. His relatively stable professional situation is reflected in the country at large in 1790, when the distribution of power between the Constitutional Assembly and the King was momentarily balanced, as Louis XVI was still "the holder of a provisional veto, although this was more theoretical than actual".¹⁷ But the political trajectory of the plot of Cherubini's *Lodoïska* was very different from that of his *Marguerite d'Anjou*. In *Lodoïska* the people, here presented by the Tartars of the Ukrainian forests, have been empowered to liberate the hapless Floreski and his unfortunate lover Lodoïska against the lecherous representative of the nobility, Dourlinski.

Cherubini's adoption of French compositional practice can be exemplified from his settings of women in anguish. In his 1788 *Ifigenia in Aulide* the heroine had verbalised her anxiety in a flurry of textual metaphors and, musically, in an extended coloratura which transformed her fear into an act of vocal bravura. Three years later, the central protagonist in *Lodoïska* shows her anguish in a strident melodic line to the orchestra's syncopations and compressed periodic structure. Whereas the heroine's aria in *Ifigenia* was composed

15 *Le Spectateur national*, 1 April 1790, pp. 1–2, quoted in Alessandro di Profio, *La révolution des Bouffons. L'opéra italien au Théâtre de Monsieur 1789–1792*, Paris 2003, pp. 349–350.

16 Luigi Cherubini, *Domine, salvum fac regem*, PL-Kj. "Lord, save our King and hear us in the day in which we shall call upon Thee. Glory to the Father and the Son [...]".

17 François Furet, *Revolutionary France 1770–1880*, Oxford 1992, p. 92.

with the technique of figurative imitation, Lodoïska expresses her distress in a musically far more disruptive manner.¹⁸

In April 1791 the recently elected president of the National Assembly, Honoré Gabriel de Riqueti, comte de Mirabeau died at the age of 52, according to some sources after a pleasure session with three ballerinas from the opera, but more likely as a result of various illnesses. This forced the Théâtre de Monsieur to close for three days. A “volcano” in his youth on account of his scandalous erotic and financial life-style, which several imprisonments did not curb, Mirabeau’s forceful political writings of the 1770s and 80s had propelled him to popularity. He was generally perceived as the strongest available force for reconciliation between the monarchy and the revolutionary parties. Mirabeau’s death provoked national mourning. A print was rushed out just in time with the title “Mirabeau on his death-bed occupied in his last moments with the happiness of his fellow citizens”.¹⁹ It shows a Herculean Mirabeau surrounded by revolutionary France on his left with the cocarde and royal France on the right with their *fleur de lys* emblem. Mirabeau became the first French person to be buried in the Parisian abbey of Sainte-Genevieve, recently transformed into the Panthéon, which would later also house the ashes of Voltaire, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Victor Hugo, Émile Zola, Marie Curie, Simone Weil and others. The Panthéon’s role in France is comparable to London’s Westminster Abbey.

The Théâtre de Monsieur marked the death of Mirabeau six weeks later with a one-act “fait historique” which dramatised this print of Mirabeau on his deathbed, *Mirabeau à son lit de mort*, to a text by Jean Baptiste Pujoux to capture the febrile atmosphere that was sweeping through Paris.²⁰ Conspicuously overlooking fellow French composers, Cherubini, as the Théâtre’s in-house composer, was asked to contribute three choruses with orchestral accompaniment to this “fait historique”. The choruses were intended to recreate the “cries of the people” in their hour of distress. Singers and orchestra were placed “behind the stage” to add mystery to the performance.²¹ Their urgent plea to the heavens to save Mirabeau’s life gravitated, perhaps inevitably, towards an operatic style. The final chorus dramatised the people’s reaction to Mirabeau’s death. Scintillating despair in the style of Gluck was here interchanged with silence, which was filled by a melodrama acted by two of Mirabeau’s attending friends, the physiologist and later professor of the history of medicine Pierre Jean Georges Cabanis and the biologist Jean Baptiste Lamarck, who recounted Mirabeau’s last moments interrupted by cries of “ô ciel” from the chorus. Cherubini solved the problem of closing such a frightening scene with a busy, not to say

18 Luigi Cherubini, *Lodoïska* (Paris [1792]), edited by Charles Rosen, New York 1980 (Early Romantic Opera 33).

19 F-Pn, Département Estampes et photographie, reserve QB-370 (11)-FT 4 (ark:/12148/btv1b69431393).

20 See Jessica Goodman, *Commemorating Mirabeau. ‘Mirabeau aux Champs-Élysée’ and Other Texts*, Cambridge 2017 (Modern Humanities Research Association Critical Texts 58).

21 Luigi Cherubini, *La Mort de Mirabeau*, Pièce donné à Feydeau l’anne 1791, PL-Kj, Mus. Cherubini Aut. 100; *Notice des manuscrits autographes de la musique composée par feu M. L.-C.-Z.-S. Cherubini*, edited by Auguste Bottée de Toulmon, Paris 1843, p. 12.

banal fugue “allons, allons, montons, montons” (arise, arise). It comes to an abrupt ending with more painful exclamations of “ô ciel”.

While it cannot be concluded from this *fait historique* that the Théâtre and Cherubini were gradually turning towards the Revolution, its eight performances within one month were more successful than similar Mirabeau memorials by other theatres, showing that playwright and composer had struck a common nerve. Now, he was not merely working for Parisians’ entertainment but had become their musical representative in an act of national mourning, alongside Cabanis and Lamarck. Performances of *Mirabeau à son lit de mort* came to an abrupt end only after the next jolt to the nation’s psyche, the flight of the royal family to Varennes on 20 June 1791, when it had tried unsuccessfully to run away from France.

On 29 March 1792 Cherubini signed a second surviving contract with the Théâtre de Monsieur which by now had been moved to a new theatre and was renamed Théâtre Feydeau. This contract affirmed the hackwork he had evidently carried out since 1789 but also required him to annually compose two French or Italian operas. It specified his rights in the choice of opera textbooks. It offered him a 50% pay rise to 6000 livres and a further 2000 livres for every third opera he would produce in a year. Only after he had completed the obligatory two operas could he write for another theater. Moreover, any additional work would be the property of the composer.²² Cherubini would almost never succeed in composing two operas in a year.

In the first days of September 1792 thousands of people from the nobility and priests were massacred in Parisian prisons on suspicion of counter-revolutionary activities. More dangerous for them, they had been suspected of being in cahoots with an imminent Prussian invasion against France. It was the motivation for Rouget de Lisle to write the *Marseillaise* with the evocative lines: “Listen to the sounds in the fields; the howling of these fearsome soldiers. They are coming into our midst, to cut the throats of your sons and consorts”.

The contemporary writer Restif de la Bretonne has left an account of what he saw during these Parisian massacres:

There had been a pause in the murders. Something was going on inside [...] I told myself that it was over at last. Finally, I saw a woman appear, as white as a sheet, being helped by a turnkey. They said to her harshly: “Shout *Vive la nation!*” “No! No!” she said. They made her climb up on a pile of corpses. One of the killers grabbed the turnkey and pushed him away. “Oh!”, exclaimed the ill-fated woman, “do not harm him!” They repeated that she must shout “*Vive la nation!*” With disdain, she refused. Then one of the killers grabbed her [...] she fell, and was finished off by the others. Never could I have imagined such horror. I wanted to run, but my legs gave way. I fainted. When I came to, I saw the bloody head. Someone told me they were going to wash it, curl its hair, stick it on the end of a pike, and carry it past the windows of the Temple. What pointless cruelty! The number of active killers who took part in the

22 See Della Croce, *Cherubini* (as note 1), vol. II, pp. 21–23.

September massacres was only about one hundred and fifty. The rest of Paris looked on in fear or approval, or stayed behind closed shutters.²³

Restif's account is a clear testimony of the decline of the French revolution into terror, even if we take account of his emotive style.

At the beginning of the September massacres virtually all Italian singers at the Théâtre Feydeau dispersed, some returned to Italy, others emigrated a second time to England. Cherubini, however, perhaps feeling protected by his recently signed contract and internally promoted to be head of the Italian troupe at the Feydeau, decided to stay despite all the horror. His flatmate Viotti, more tarnished by his links to the queen, escaped to London where he would write popular violin concertos, but with his career as administrator and performer basically over.²⁴

With the beginning of the war of the coalition of England, Austria, Prussia, and Russia against France in the same autumn of 1792, the treatment of foreigners began to change. Every foreigner was now considered a potential spy or an enemy and many were imprisoned. Moreover, as soon as the nation was identified with the Revolution, every emigrant, and most notably the King after his flight to Varennes, became an "enemy of the people". Simultaneously, any political participation became the preserve of French nationals.

In this increasingly hostile environment of autumn 1792 Cherubini was commissioned to write the opera *Koukourgi*, conceived by the courageous playwright and politician Honoré Nicolas Marie Duveyrier. It would have been the politically and aesthetically most challenging opera of the revolutionary period, but the project was cancelled when the score was almost complete, and it was premiered only in 2010!²⁵ Duveyrier himself escaped from prison by the skin of his teeth just a day before the September massacres started. The plot of *Koukourgi* took on the eighteenth-century convention of inverting the hierarchy between a degenerate nobility and a valiant lower class but turned its fashionable version as rescue opera into a farce: a socially superior protagonist reveals himself as a coward. Dramaturgically similar to Salieri's and Beaumarchais' opera *Tarare* (1787), the dissolution of a traditional political power structure is sharply corrected in the finale when the authorities of the military, the ancestral family, and religion are re-established.

This project was as ill-conceived as Cherubini's *Marguerite d'Anjou* had been in 1790. A penchant for militaristic rhythms of sometimes Offenbachian lightness supporting a farcical plot, *Koukourgi* inevitably would have confused and strongly antagonised French audiences, if the work had ever been performed. After France had declared war on Britain and Holland in February 1793, when recruiting officers enforced a levy for 300 000 men from around the country, when the insurrection in the Vendée was at its height and Lyons

23 Nicholas Edme Restif de la Bretonne, *Les Nuits de Paris* [1793], Paris 1960, pp. 247–253, my translation.

24 See Warwick Lister, *Amico. The Life of Giovanni Battista Viotti*, Oxford 2009, pp. 174ff.

25 Luigi Cherubini, *Koukourgi*, edited by Heiko Cullmann, Berlin 2010.

was taken over by Girondins and royalists, there was no aesthetic space for a parody like *Koukourgi*.²⁶

In the same year of 1793, the committee of public safety under Robespierre started to send more and more people to the guillotine. In its wake, the definition of who was a “foreigner” in France became increasingly ambiguous. This new state of affairs has been lucidly summarised in Rapport’s above mentioned *Nationality and Citizenship in Revolutionary France*. Rapport writes:

By August 1793, when the Republic was struggling for its very survival against the coalition [of England, Prussia and Austria] and its domestic enemies, it was no longer a matter of liberating peoples, but of defending the only nation which incarnated the principles of liberty against a conspiracy which incarnated the principles of despotism. If this meant that the interests of humanity were bound up with those of France, then there were two implications: either all foreigners, by the simple fact of not being French, were enemies, or those foreigners who supported France were friends to humanity and, therefore, to the nation. If one choses to believe the latter, then, given the fact that there were also French people who opposed the Revolution, the battlelines of friend and foe cut across nationality. Foreigners, therefore, were not simply those from countries outside France. French people opposed to the Revolution were also referred to as ‘foreigners’: quite literally, by their very opposition, they had stepped outside the regenerated community of citizens. Louis XVI, the nobility, the rebels of the Vendée, and then republican opponents of the revolutionary government were therefore liable to be destroyed as foreign enemies.²⁷

How was Cherubini affected by this mayhem? From a legal perspective, the status of foreigners in the new republic had seemingly been settled in articles 2 and 3 of the French Constitution of 1791. Article 2:

French citizens are those who have been born in France with a French father; those who were born in France with a foreign father and have their residence in the kingdom; those born abroad with a French father, and have come to live in France and have taken the civic oath; finally those, who were born abroad and are descended in some way from a French man or woman in exile for religious reasons, and who have come to live in France and take the oath.

Article 3:

French citizens are those who were born outside the kingdom of foreign parentage, and who live in France, become French citizens after five years of continuous

²⁶ See Furet, *Revolutionary France* (as note 17), pp. 123–126.

²⁷ Rapport, *Nationality* (as note 8), pp. 9–10.

residence in the kingdom, provided they have acquired property or married a French woman, or have created an agricultural or commercial business, and take the civic oath.²⁸

But by 1793 constitutional regulations did not necessarily prevent incarceration or the guillotine, as all-too-many contemporary accounts testify. Cherubini for one went to ground in the Chartreuse de Gaillon outside Rouen, owned by the theatre architect Victor Louis. Subsequently, he took shelter with friends in Le Havre, the Channel port now teaming with would-be emigrants and spies. He clearly had come to the end of the rope. But fulfilling his contractual obligations, in his hiding places he worked on two new opera projects, *Eliza, ou Le voyage aux glaciers du Mont St. Bernard* (which would be performed in 1794) and *Médée* (1797).

Apart from escaping the “terreur” period in Rouen and Le Havre, Cherubini was thrown a lifeline by the completely separate activities of Bernard Sarrette (1765–1858), an accountant of the Garde Nationale, which had been founded in 1789. Sarrette turned a regiment of the Garde into a regiment of musicians, favouring wind players whose performances were an essential element at the “fêtes nationales”, during the glorious first years of the Revolution. In early 1792 a group of instrumentalists from the three Paris opera houses proposed to the Committee of Public Instruction the foundation of an elementary music school. These instrumentalists echo several prominent writers, such as Mirabeau, Abbé Grégoire and Talleyrand, all advocating a complete restructuring of education.

Among these pedagogical reformists was Nicolas de Condorcet (1743–1794) who acted as permanent secretary of the académie des sciences before the Revolution and as deputy in the Legislative assembly after 1789. At the “fêtes révolutionnaires” Condorcet became aware of music’s powerful effect on the masses and he proposed that instrumental skills should be promoted in new institutions of learning substituting the cathedral schools of the Ancien régime.²⁹

At the end of 1793 the Committee of National Instruction eventually adopted Sarrette’s proposal for the foundation of an “Institut nationale de musique” which mutated by August 1795 into the “Conservatoire national de Musique” for tertiary musical education. According to Geoffroy-Schwinden there was a clear connection between the social fabric created in Masonic lodges before the Revolution and the musicians gaining state employment at the Conservatoire at the beginning of the Directoire in 1795: “99 of its 115 faculty members appointed to the Conservatoire in 1795 definitely or very likely held pre-revolutionary Masonic affiliations”.³⁰

28 Quoted in Sophie Wahnich, *L'impossible citoyen. L'étranger dans le discours de la Révolution française*, Paris 2010, p. 68, my translation.

29 See Claude Manceron, “Nicolas de Condorcet”, in: *L'Etat de la France pendant la Révolution (1789–1799)*, edited by Michel Vovelle, Paris 1988, p. 271; Nicolas de Condorcet, *Cinq mémoires sur l'instruction publique*, edited by Charles Coutel and Catherine Kintzler, Paris 1994, p. 248.

30 Geoffroy-Schwinden, *Politics, the French Revolution* (as note 3), p. 87.

Cherubini went “native” in a political sense, when adopting French nationality in 1794. In October 1793 he addressed a letter to the general secretary of the Théâtre Feydeau to “citoyen Miramone”, signing himself as “votre concitoyen Cherubini” and he used the same term “concitoyen” in a further letter to the Théâtre Feydeau in summer 1794. On an institutional level, his entering the National Guard in 1794 was possibly more important than his contract at the Feydeau. Given the low number of performances of his operas, composition alone could not provide him with subsistence. On a personal level, he went “native” through his marriage to Anne Cécile Tourette, whom he must have known since 1792, when he dedicated the romance “L’amitié” to her. Their marriage certificate of April 1794 does not indicate his residential status. But we can assume his French citizenship from his identity card, probably dated 1795, that describes him as “citoyen Cherubini” and from the dozen revolutionary hymns, among them the *Hymne du Panthéon*, which was highly unusually printed as an orchestral score by the Conservatoire’s own publishing house.³¹

In his matter-of-fact autobiographical account written much later in the 1830s Cherubini summarised the turn of his fortune:

I would have been without position, if, happily for me, the order of the National Convention of 8 November 1793, which created the Institut de musique, and subsequently the law of 3 August 1795, which changed the title of the Institute to that of the Conservatoire de Musique, had not already secured me the place of teaching inspector in that establishment, which came together with a salary of 5000 franc as well as housing.³²

At this point Cherubini had become a state employee on the staff of the Conservatoire, when it employed hardly any foreigners. Succumbing to a need to conform, on 21 January 1796 he conducted a music band (*corps de musique*) to mark the anniversary of the beheading of Louis XVI three years earlier. In 1796, he also wrote to the general director of public education, Ginguené, asking whether Napoleon’s victorious troops could help transfer the exceptional music library of Padre Martini in Bologna to the Paris Conservatoire, which had a shoe-string budget but enormous pedagogical ambitions.³³ While this effort in 1796 appears to have floundered, it is well known to what length Vivant Denon, the so-called “eye of Napoleon” and from 1802 till 1815 director of the Louvre would go in robbing Italian churches, palaces, and galleries of their treasures to bring them to the Paris museum.³⁴

31 See Della Croce, *Cherubini* (as note 1), vol. II, pp. 30–32. See also Constant Pierre, *Les Hymnes et chansons de la Révolution. Aperçu général et catalogue*, Paris 1904.

32 Luigi Cherubini, “Note relative à L. Cherubini, rédigée par lui-même”, quoted in Arthur Pougin, “Cherubini. Sa vie, ses œuvres, son rôle artistique”, in: *Le Ménestrel* 47 (1881), p. 378, my translation.

33 See Cherubini, “[Letter] to Ginguené”, 2 July 1796, in: Della Croce, *Cherubini* (as note 1), vol. II, pp. 33f.

34 See Reinhard Kaiser, *Der glückliche Kunsträuber. Das Leben des Vivant Denon*, München 2016.

With the foundation of the Conservatoire National de musique the social, political, financial and artistic order governing musical learning drastically changed. This institution was historically unprecedented in various ways. The Conservatoire had a director, a committee of inspectors, male and female students, its own building, a curriculum of studies, its students gave public concerts, and it commissioned 12 “official methods” for instrumental teaching (“méthodes officielles”) which were published between 1800 and 1814 by an in-house press, the imprimerie du Conservatoire. As composer of mainly vocal music, Cherubini was mostly affected by the new treatise on “Singing”.

The privileging of practical skills, which are administered by a centralised institution and fuelled by missionary ideology, represented a pattern across disciplines of tertiary learning in France’s revolutionary period. Musicians of the Conservatoire attempted to endow the treatise for their instrument with the authority of the State. Theorists outside the institution lacked such an “imprimatur”, by way of which French ideologues consciously or unconsciously adopted printing practices known in theological literature.

In musical areas with entrenched traditions the interference of the State authority was used to distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable taste. In the treatise on “Chant, Singing”, primarily written by the Italian singer and composer Bernardo Mengozzi (1758–1800) and published in [1800], the Conservatoire played a decisive role in the direction of the official singing style in France. This treatise on singing resulted in the banishment of revolutionary opera from the just ended decade and a rejection of its aesthetics. Piccinni, Sacchini and Gluck were presented as the most modern composers and as models for upcoming singers before examples from even earlier operas by Jommelli, Galuppi and Traetta. However, all these operas favoured a singing style markedly different to 1790s French opera. The highly expressive style of Cherubini’s, Méhul’s, and Lesueur’s operas, which Grétry had famously dubbed as the “barking of dogs” was now completely eradicated from collective memory.³⁵ Ironically, as co-author of the treatise, Cherubini was asked to present the results of the group’s deliberation to the Conservatoire’s assembly and sign off the results. His strenuous efforts to become musically French had become outdated and his comic operas from the late 1790s, but most of all his immensely successful rescue opera *Les deux journées* (1800) indicate his acceptance for renewal.

The Conservatoire’s preference for Italian opera in the singing treatise was grounded in politics but also showed a strong belief in the separate teaching of instrumental and vocal music. At the Conservatoire a conflict returned to the forefront between 1800 and 1803, which had its forerunners in the early 1790s, when several authors, swimming on a nationalist wave, wanted to use the Revolution for the creation of an autonomous French music. Its goal would be to rely no longer on Italian or German composers and instrumentalists in opera repertoires and orchestras. Between 1800 and 1803, the politics of musical nationalism had their most strident voice in François Lesueur.

35 Michel Noiray, “L’opéra de la Révolution (1790–1794): un ‘tapage de chien?’”, in: *La Carmagnole des muses. L’homme de lettres et l’artiste dans la Révolution*, edited by Jean-Claude Bonet, Paris 1988, pp. 359–379.

He had fervently hoped that the Conservatoire would establish an entirely “French School of Music”. “Foreign genius”, he wrote, “should not be found in the [French] Conservatoire except to surpass it”.³⁶ But Lesueur’s vision of amalgamating the two institutions of the Opera and the Conservatoire so that the teaching at the Conservatoire would serve the performances of a national Opera, was rebuffed by Sarrette, seemingly for administrative reasons. Financial cuts by the government between 1799 and 1801 resulted in “almost every faculty member who had expressed support for Lesueur” losing their employment at the Conservatoire.³⁷ Cherubini, unsurprisingly, had not sided with Lesueur. To keep his job as composer, teacher and administrator in Paris, Cherubini’s musical and political adaptations were not confined to the 1790s. They would drag on through the Empire and the Restoration.

This essay intended to distinguish four strands in Cherubini’s career in Paris in the 1790s.

1. He composed operas with radically different success and music for civic ceremonies.
2. He gained institutional employment at the Théâtre Feydeau and later at the Conservatoire.
3. The Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Constitution of 1791 offered him both inclusion and exclusion.
4. He acquired French citizenship through marriage.

My biographical approach to the topic offers the inclusion of all these strands, but for reasons of space I have omitted musical discussions. The concepts of musical or aesthetic autonomy seem unsuited to describe this career, nor would it be sensible to say that his career was entirely heteronomous. Instead, he participated in projects started by others. It would be an abnegation of his struggles if his ashes were transferred back to Florence. His professional life in Italy was preparatory. His career in France did offer him French citizenship with fluctuating political rights but no professional security. It required intellectual and emotional openness to the challenges which his chosen, second home provoked.

36 “Lettre de Jean François Lesueur à monsieur Langle”, 22 janvier 1800 [2 pluviôse an VIII] (F-Pn, VM BOB 21337), quoted in: Geoffroy-Schwinden, *Politics, the French Revolution* (as note 3), pp. 110ff.

37 Geoffroy-Schwinden, *Politics, the French Revolution* (as note 3), p. 26.