

Resituating Transatlantic Opera: The Case
of the Théâtre d'Orléans, New Orleans,
1819–1859

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the production and reception of French opera in New Orleans in the first half of the nineteenth century, through a focus on the city's principal French-language theatre from 1819 to 1859, the Théâtre d'Orléans. Building on the small body of existing scholarship concerning the theatre's history and repertoire, here I draw upon a greatly expanded range of sources—including court cases, sheet music, and novels—in order to understand more about the ways in which operatic culture shaped and was shaped by city life in this period. New Orleans's operatic life relied on transatlantic networks of people and materials in order to thrive, and this thesis explores the city's place within growing global operatic systems in the nineteenth century.

The five chapters each reflect on different aspects of operatic translocation and its significance for New Orleans. The first two argue for the centrality of human agency to the development of transatlantic networks of production and performance by examining the management of the theatre and the international movement of singers in turn. Chapter 3 investigates the impact of French *grand opéra* on New Orleans, arguing that the genre provided a focus for the negotiation of local, national, and international identities among opposing critical (and linguistic) factions within the city, while also providing an impetus for the development of a material culture of opera. Chapter 4 explores opera-inspired composition in New Orleans through a focus on popular sheet music for the piano, in order to problematise our expectations of 'local creativity'. Finally, Chapter 5 examines travel writing from both sides of the Atlantic in which the Théâtre d'Orléans features, arguing that the 'idea' of opera—including the imagined experience of Parisian opera-going—played an important role in articulating the authors' perceptions of inter-cultural encounter in New Orleans.

This thesis, therefore, seeks to unpick the processes involved in transatlantic opera from a number of angles. I resituate New Orleans, arguing that the city was not simply on the musical periphery, but that it was instead an integral part of an increasingly connected operatic world, which nonetheless sustained its own individual theatrical culture. This work, therefore, helps us both to challenge and expand ingrained ideas about French centralisation, North American cultural development, and cultural transfer up to the mid-nineteenth century.

DECLARATION

This dissertation is the result of my own work. It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or is being concurrently submitted, for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University.

Material from the first half of Chapter 3, in which I explore the reception of Meyerbeer's *Robert le diable* and *Les Huguenots* in New Orleans, along with some factual information from the first two chapters, has been published as 'The Race for *Robert* and Other Rivalries: Negotiating the Local and (Inter)national in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans' in *Cambridge Opera Journal* 29/1 (2017), 94–112.

This submission does not exceed the limit of 80,000 words (excluding notes, bibliography and appendices) set by the Degree Committee of the Faculty of Music.

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NOTE ON THE TEXT

This dissertation refers frequently to nineteenth-century sources, many of which are in French (and, occasionally, Spanish). I have chosen to include the English translations of quotations in the main body of the text, while the original language is presented in footnotes. All translations are my own, unless otherwise noted. For ease of reading, I have decided not to preserve nineteenth-century spellings, and I have corrected minor typographical errors within my quoted material. Similarly, I have chosen to standardise the spellings of performers' names, which are often spelled differently in different sources ('Laggrave', 'de Lagrave', 'Delagrave', for example, are standardised here as 'Laggrave'), for clarity. There are numerous discrepancies in capitalisation and punctuation within my source material, and I update these to modern usage for ease of reading. Finally, I have taken the decision not to include publisher details in references to texts published before 1900, as this information is only inconsistently available.

ABBREVIATIONS

AAS – American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts

F-Pa – Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, Paris

F-Pan – Archives nationales de France, Paris

F-Po – Bibliothèque-Musée de l'Opéra, Paris

HJA – Hogan Jazz Archive, Jones Hall, Tulane University, New Orleans

HNOC – Historic New Orleans Collection

LARC – Louisiana Research Collection, Jones Hall, Tulane University

LSM – Louisiana State Museums

NONA – New Orleans Notarial Archives

NOPL – New Orleans Public Library

SCLSU – Special Collections, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana

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Figure 1 – The Théâtre d'Orléans. LARC, Albert Voss Collection, Series 5, Box 16

INTRODUCTION

The premiere of Meyerbeer's *Robert le diable* on 30 March 1835, at the Camp Street Theatre in New Orleans, was a cause for joy and dismay in equal measure. For the patrons of the city's first English-language theatre, the occasion was a triumph, and the local anglophone press noted with pride that director James Caldwell had 'spared no expense to render ... [the] scenery and costume[s] perfect'.¹ By contrast, there was severe disappointment among the city's francophone critics, who knew that the work was at that moment in rehearsal at the highly respected Théâtre d'Orléans, the French-language theatre that had been at the heart of social and cultural life in New Orleans since its opening in 1819. It would be another six weeks before the French theatre's own production of *Robert* reached the stage; the Anglo-Americans had beaten them to the first performance of this eagerly awaited new French *grand opéra*, not only wounding the francophone community's theatrical pride, but encroaching threateningly on their cultural heritage.

This uncomfortable incident, quickly buried though it was beneath the shifting sands of daily news reporting in nineteenth-century New Orleans, forms the heart of this thesis in various ways. On a literal level, my central chapter seeks to unpick this very incident and its legacy in far greater detail than is possible in the brief paragraph above. But what the moment represented in a broader sense can also be felt throughout this study: while these twin, contested productions shaped the city's operatic future, they also reflected some of the ways in which opera in New Orleans was bound up with a particular set of socio-political issues, especially those concerning the city's position in an increasingly connected world. Indeed, opera—itself an imported European product—played a key role in articulating questions of belonging and identity in New Orleans on local, national and international levels.

In many respects, opera is a fitting medium through which to explore nineteenth-century New Orleans: the operatic and theatrical qualities of the city itself were lost neither on visitors nor locals. A traveller describing the city in a poem in 1828, for example, wrote of it as being 'day and night a show',² while a local woman mused in her diary the day after attending an opera performance that the streets reminded her of a 'living parterre' of a

¹ *The Bee*, 7 March 1835.

² Colonel James R. Creecy, 'A Duel in New Orleans' (1829), published in *Scenes in the South and Other Miscellaneous Pieces* (Washington, D.C., 1860), 275.

theatre.³ Images of the city as extraordinarily vibrant and diverse—images that have endured into the present day—were therefore already well established in the first half of the nineteenth century.

From the very beginning, New Orleans was shaped by cultural, linguistic and racial mixing. Founded as a French colony in 1718, the city was initially populated principally with France's 'undesirables': petty criminals, prostitutes and the poor were sent across the Atlantic, accompanied by a group of Ursuline nuns, tasked with ensuring good behaviour from the new settlers.⁴ Between 1719 and 1721, Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne, Sieur de Bienville, the governor of the colony, succeeded in persuading wealthier, respectable people to make the journey, mainly by promising them land grants and slaves.⁵ Instead of the idyllic land of plenty they expected, the new immigrants found themselves in a small settlement on the banks of the mighty but unpredictable Mississippi, surrounded by marshland, where yellow fever and cholera flourished each summer. This somewhat motley assortment of white francophones joined the large number of slaves Bienville had imported from West Africa. In time, there also developed a significant population of free people of colour.⁶ Indeed, the city's black residents, who all learned to speak French during this period, outnumbered its white population until 1840. But racial diversity (and division) was only part of the city's multicultural history. In 1763, New Orleans and the surrounding Louisiana Territory were ceded to Spanish control, to the chagrin of the city's residents.⁷ Further upheaval took place in 1803, when Napoleon reclaimed the lands, only to sell them mere weeks later to the fledgling United States of America under President Thomas Jefferson, as part of the Louisiana Purchase.⁸

³ Diary of Clarissa Pierce Cenas, 12 December 1859. *HNOG*, MSS 649.

⁴ See Emily Clark, *Masterless Mistresses: The New Orleans Ursulines and the Development of a New World Society, 1727 to 1834* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

⁵ For a detailed account of the history of New Orleans from its founding to 1812, when Louisiana gained statehood, see Lawrence N. Powell, *The Accidental City: Improvising New Orleans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012). For information on the early settling of New Orleans and Louisiana (including the growth and bursting of the so-called 'Mississippi bubble' under the management of banker John Law and his Company of the West), see pages 7–128 of Powell's account.

⁶ Some of the free people of colour were former slaves, who had successfully petitioned the courts for their freedom, while others were refugees from unrest on Saint-Domingue and Cuba. See Loren Schweningen, 'Free People of Color', in *KnowLA Encyclopedia of Louisiana*, ed. David Johnson. Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities, April 28, 2011, (accessed 14 October 2017) <http://www.knowlouisiana.org/entry/free-people-of-color>.

⁷ The period of Spanish rule in New Orleans is explored in José Montero de Pedro, *The Spanish in New Orleans and Louisiana*, trans. Richard E. Chandler (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing, 2000).

⁸ For detailed information on the circumstances of the Louisiana Purchase and its effects, see *The Louisiana Purchase and its Aftermath, 1800–1830*, ed. Dolores Egger Labbé (Lafayette, LA: Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1998). Although the Louisiana territory became a federal

The French language still dominated public and private affairs in New Orleans at the time of the Purchase. The question of what it meant to be French in the city was already complicated, however, with new French immigrants joining white Creoles, as well as free and enslaved black francophones.⁹ During the period explored in this study, meanwhile, New Orleans underwent a new set of challenges: the first three decades of the nineteenth century saw a trickle of Anglo-American settlers from the northern states turn into a torrent, and by the 1830s French hegemony was severely threatened in the city.¹⁰ The ever-growing numbers of northern anglophone settlers, combined with influxes of German and Irish immigrants, and the waves of people who inevitably passed through this port city, meant that the first half of the nineteenth century saw rapid and fundamental changes to New Orleans's social structure. Indeed, the city grew almost tenfold from a population of 17,242 in 1810 to 168,675 in 1860, and between 1830 and 1860 it was in the top five largest cities in the United States (although it was only ever a fraction of the size of New York, the nation's largest urban centre).¹¹ In 1840, the number of non-French speakers exceeded the number of French speakers (including slaves) for the first time. This was a period, then, in which the future looked very uncertain for the city's francophones and their cultural heritage.

Nonetheless, the city was inescapably marked by its French origins. Throughout its expansion, the French Quarter, on the east bank of the Mississippi, remained roughly at the centre of New Orleans, developing an anglophone 'American Sector' to the south west and the Faubourg Marigny (which was historically a highly mixed area in racial terms) to the

territory of the United States after the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, it was not until 30 April 1812 that Louisiana became a state.

⁹ Carl Brasseaux explores French immigration to Louisiana in *The Foreign French: Nineteenth-Century French Immigration into Louisiana, Volume 1: 1820–1839, Volume 2: 1840–1848 and Volume 3: 1849–1852* (Lafayette, LA: Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1990). The term 'Creole' has become problematic to define, as Brasseaux has demonstrated: its meanings have changed enormously over time and have been both complimentary and derogatory. The term was originally used by French settlers to denote anyone who was born in Louisiana, regardless of their skin colour. It later came to mean specifically the descendants of white settlers, with the term 'Creoles of colour' denoting their black counterparts. More recently, certain writers have used the term to suggest people of mixed racial background, although this is not in keeping with its original meaning. Carl Brasseaux, *French, Cajun, Creole, Houma: a Primer on Francophone Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 88–98. For more of an overview of the city's demographics in the nineteenth century, see the essays by Joseph G. Tregle, Jr., Paul F. Lachance and Caryn Cossé Bell in *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization*, ed. Arnold R. Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992).

¹⁰ For more, see Joseph G. Tregle, Jr., 'Creoles and Americans', in *Creole New Orleans*, 153–60.

¹¹ For population figures, see 'Population of the 100 Largest Urban Places: 1810', US Bureau of the Census, 1810, (accessed 19 July 2017)

<https://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/tab04.txt>, and 'Population of the 100 Largest Urban Places: 1860', US Bureau of the Census, 1860, (accessed 19 July 2017)

<http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/tab09.txt>.

A Brief History of the Theatre in New Orleans

Theatre, and opera in particular, had in fact been a part of life in New Orleans since the late eighteenth century. Legend has it that the founding father of New Orleans theatre was Louis Tabary, who arrived in the city as a refugee from slave uprisings in Saint-Domingue in the autumn of 1791, along with his band of actors.¹⁴ This determined group performed wherever they could—in tents, in people’s homes, even out on the street—as there was no proper theatre in the city. Eventually, so the story goes, a theatre was built to house them. While the truth of this attractive creation myth has rightly been questioned, what we do know is that Louis Alexandre Henry bought the deeds to a plot of land on St Peter Street on 4 June 1791, and proceeded to build a theatre, which opened late the following year.¹⁵

We can be sure that French operas were known in New Orleans in the last decade of the eighteenth century, since the first record of an operatic performance in the city comes in the form of a letter from the Baron de Pontalba to his wife in Paris, in which he reports attending a performance of André Grétry’s *Sylvain* on 22 May 1796.¹⁶ From then on, opera and theatre were a constant presence in New Orleans, although they were almost always in a precarious financial and legal position. Nonetheless, by 1808, the city had two theatres, one on St Peter Street and one on St Philip Street: quite a feat for a town of only 15,000 people. These theatres, combined with innumerable balls, pleasure gardens, parades and visiting circuses, established New Orleans’s reputation as a city of entertainment, something which scandalised many northern visitors of more puritan tastes.¹⁷

The beginnings of my story, however, come a little later, when John Davis (like Tabary a Saint-Domingue refugee), opened his brand new theatre on Orleans Street in 1819. His Théâtre d’Orléans was not the first venture of that name in the city (its two previous incarnations under different owners had succumbed to flames), but it proved to be the most ambitious and by far the most enduring. For forty years, Davis and his team recruited a troupe annually from Europe and poured huge sums of money into high-quality productions

¹⁴ This myth is recounted by John Smith Kendall in *History of New Orleans*, Volume 2 (Chicago and New York: Lewis Publishing Co., 1922), 727; see also Andre Lafargue, ‘Opera in New Orleans in Days of Yore’, *Publications of the Louisiana Historical Society* 29 (1946): 662. Many others recount a similar tale, and details of these can be found in René J. Le Gardeur Jr., ‘Les Premières Années du Théâtre à la Nouvelle-Orléans’, *Comptes-rendues de l’Athénée louisianais* (1954): 70–2.

¹⁵ As Henry Kmen points out, Tabary would only have been a teenager in 1791, and it is unlikely he would have been managing his own theatre troupe. Kmen, *Music in New Orleans: The Formative Years, 1791–1841* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966), 57.

¹⁶ John Dizikes, *Opera in America: A Cultural History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 25.

¹⁷ Complaints that ‘the Sabbath in New Orleans exists only in its Almanacs’ can be found throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. This specific complaint was made by a James Davidson in 1836, quoted in Kmen, *Music in New Orleans*, 202.

of a wide variety of theatrical genres, from *opéra comique* to *grand opéra*, via *vaudeville* and *drame*. The troupe at the Théâtre d'Orléans was the first, and for a long time the only, permanent opera company in North America.¹⁸

Until the 1830s, late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century French *opéras-comiques* dominated its operatic offerings, with Grétry's *La Fausse Magie* (1775), François-Adrien Boieldieu's *Le Calife de Bagdad* (1800), and Étienne Méhul's *Une Folie* (1802) being among the most performed works.¹⁹ John Davis did make efforts to expand this repertoire—in 1822, for example, he returned from France with Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (which the company performed in French) as well as with a *corps de ballet*—but, on the whole, the core of principal composers remained very stable.²⁰

In the early 1830s, however, Davis began to include more French translations of Rossini's operas (*La Pie voleuse*, for example) and works by new composers, such as Ferdinand Hérold and Daniel Auber. *Grand opéra* was first heard in the city at this point, in the form of Auber's *La Muette de Portici* in 1831 (only three years after its Parisian premiere), but *opéras-comiques* such as Boieldieu's *La Dame blanche* remained the most popular repertoire. But, by the mid-1830s, the repertoire of the Théâtre d'Orléans began to change substantially, beginning with the controversial events concerning Meyerbeer's *Robert le diable*, to be discussed at greater length in Chapter 3. After this, the French theatre included more *grand opéra*, and by the 1840s it had become a central part of the repertoire, with works such as *Robert*, as well as *Les Huguenots*, Halévy's *La Reine de Chypre* and *La Juive*, Auber's *La Muette*, Donizetti's *La Favorite* and Rossini's *Guillaume Tell* regularly appearing on stage.²¹

Locals were well aware of John Davis's efforts to bring them the latest works and high-quality performers, with three of New Orleans's leading newspapers proclaiming in their obituaries after his death in 1839 that it was he 'who gave Louisiana a French

¹⁸ The next theatre to have anything approaching a permanent opera company was the Academy of Music, New York, founded in 1854: while not actually an in-house company, Max Maretzek's Italian Opera Company performed a season at the theatre every year from 1854 to 1878. It was not until after the Civil War that theatres maintained in-house, 'stock' companies. Katherine K. Preston discusses this throughout *Opera on the Road: Traveling Opera Troupes in the United States, 1835–60* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1993) and *Opera for the People: English-Language Opera and Women Managers in Late 19th-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

¹⁹ Kmen, *Music in New Orleans*, 63 and 74. Other French composers well represented in the early nineteenth century were Pierre-Alexandre Monsigny, Nicolo Isouard, Henri Berton, Pierre Gaveaux and Luigi Cherubini. See Kmen, *Music in New Orleans*, 82 and 92. Grétry's *Richard, Cœur du Lion* was also extremely popular, and was said to have been the favourite opera of President John Quincy Adams. Kmen, *Music in New Orleans*, 63.

²⁰ For more on Davis's additions in 1822, see Kmen, *Music in New Orleans*, 97.

²¹ Kmen, *Music in New Orleans*, 189.

theatre'.²² Davis was not content to please New Orleans alone, however: between 1827 and 1832, he took his company on large-scale tours of the North East, during the summer months when the unbearable heat and threat of yellow fever forced the theatre to close in New Orleans. During these tours, the troupe played a vital role in introducing New York, Boston, Philadelphia and Baltimore to a variety of French works, and gaining the theatre a reputation across the United States.

The Théâtre d'Orléans did not, however, stand unchallenged in its theatrical dominance in the city of New Orleans. In 1824, it gained competition in the form of James Caldwell's American Theatre, located on Camp Street in the city's American Sector. This new theatre aimed to provide a permanent supply of English-language theatre for the Anglo-American residents of the city, and it would in due course beat the French theatre to Meyerbeer's *Robert*. For four years prior to the opening of his theatre, Caldwell had also produced anglophone theatre on an itinerant basis, playing some nights at the dilapidated St Philip Theatre and some (when the French company was not performing) at the Théâtre d'Orléans itself. With the opening of the new theatre, however, he could now perform on the same nights as the French troupe.²³

In practical terms, the overlap between the two theatres' audiences was probably relatively small in these early years, although aspirational Anglo-Americans did attend the Théâtre d'Orléans, and advertisements for Caldwell's theatre suggest that he sought to impress the city's French residents too.²⁴ They also performed predominantly different repertoire, with Caldwell's stage being filled primarily by abridged Shakespeare and other English plays. He did include some musical and operatic works, however, and these consisted mainly of solo instrumental pieces and orchestral overtures, as well as heavily rearranged English or 'Englished' operas.²⁵ Two of the most popular operas of the 1820s,

²² The obituaries were those in *L'Abeille*, *The Daily Picayune*, and *Le Courier de la Louisiane*. See Kmen, *Music in New Orleans*, 85. Davis's role in the establishment of New Orleans's operatic culture will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 1.

²³ Unlike Davis, Caldwell also owned a number of other theatres in the South: at St Louis, Mobile and Nashville. See Felicia Hardison Londré and Daniel J. Watermeier, *History of the North American Theater: The United States, Canada and Mexico—From Pre-Columbian Times to the Present* (New York: Continuum, 1998), 114.

²⁴ Caldwell declared his intention to plan the repertoire of his theatres 'in obedience to the wishes of many respectable families, and particularly with a desire on his part of gratifying the expectations of the French population'. *Louisiana Gazette*, 14 February 1820, quoted in Nellie Smither, 'History of the English Theatre at New Orleans', *The Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 28/1 (1945): 107.

²⁵ 'Englished' is a term Katherine K. Preston uses in *Opera on the Road* to describe foreign operas that were translated into English (and often heavily rearranged). For more on English translations of operas and their enduring (if conflicted) position within operatic culture in the United States, see Katherine K. Preston, *Opera for the People* and Kristen Turner, 'Opera in English: Class and Culture in America, 1878–1910' (PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2015), 31–94.

for example, were based on Sir Walter Scott's *Guy Mannering* and *The Lady of the Lake*: they had first been heard in London and had scores constructed out of excerpts from Rossini's operas, combined with original pieces by Henry Bishop.²⁶

Further competition for the Théâtre d'Orléans arose late in 1835, with the opening of Caldwell's brand new St Charles Theatre in the city. Said to be the largest and one of the most expensive theatres built in America up to that point, the building cost an astonishing \$352,000.²⁷ The St Charles introduced Italian opera performed in its original language to New Orleans for the first time (previous performances had been in French or English translation), by engaging an Italian company from Havana. This was the first time that French opera had been seriously challenged as the most prestigious genre in the city's theatrical repertoire, and it served to destabilise French cultural hegemony even further. Now Caldwell and Davis were in direct competition for audiences, as the city's francophone citizens were fascinated by the influx of new Italian repertoire. Theatrical life in New Orleans, then, as indeed in the rest of America, was highly competitive: Caldwell and Davis constantly sought to win over and maintain audiences through promises of the latest works and lavish, novel productions. Indeed, it was not long before the French theatre began to add works by Bellini, Donizetti and Verdi in French translation to its repertoire in order to keep up with their rivals at the St Charles.

Following his retirement in 1837, Davis's son, Pierre, took over the running of the theatre, and he, too, arranged summer tours to the North East for the troupe. The tours undertaken in 1843 and 1845 during Pierre's management were perhaps even more ambitious in scope than those of his father, since the repertoire included a number of French grand operas, which required extensive scenery and personnel. Meanwhile, back in New Orleans, the 1840s saw a period of financial difficulties for the Théâtre d'Orléans, amidst great novelty in the city's musical life at large. The decade saw New Orleans play host to numerous international touring stars for the first time: while these illustrious visitors provided further competition for New Orleans's established resident companies, at the same time they also supported the local theatrical infrastructure by hiring theatre buildings for their concerts, as well as attracting excited theatre-goers from surrounding towns into

²⁶ Kmen, *Music in New Orleans*, 94. For more on Bishop's arrangements in London, see Christina Fuhrmann, *Foreign Opera at the London Playhouses: From Mozart to Bellini* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015). For information on the specific works mentioned above, Bishop's contribution to them, and their premieres in London, see F. Corder, 'The Works of Sir Henry Bishop', *The Musical Quarterly* 4/1 (1918): 78–97.

²⁷ Londré and Watermeier, *History of the North American Theater*, 114. This sum would be equivalent to roughly \$8,943,903 today (calculated using the inflation calculator at www.in2013dollars.com).

the city, some of whom also patronised the regular companies while they were there. The ballet dancer Fanny Elssler (who was on sabbatical from the Paris Opéra and who became embroiled in a legal battle with her employers after overstaying the terms of her *congé* in New Orleans), the Norwegian violinist Ole Bull, and the French soprano Laure Cinti-Damoreau were among the stars to visit the city in this decade, while Jenny Lind (the famed soprano nicknamed ‘the Swedish Nightingale’) visited in 1851.²⁸ All gave at least some of their performances at the Théâtre d’Orléans.

As Katherine K. Preston, Lawrence Levine, Joseph Mussulman and others have shown, opera was not generally viewed as an elite art in the United States in the first half of the nineteenth century, and the audiences at the Théâtre d’Orléans and other theatres in New Orleans were drawn from diverse groups within the city’s population.²⁹ Indeed, though the Théâtre d’Orléans was seen as the most prestigious of New Orleans’s theatres, for many years it was patronised not only by white francophones, but also by free people of colour and even, for a considerable period, slaves who, with their masters’ permission, were allowed to sit in the top tier of the theatre. Previous studies of theatrical life in New Orleans in the antebellum period have generally paid little attention to questions of race, and the subject demands further detailed investigation.³⁰ While it can only form one part of my focus in this thesis—and, indeed, some of the details seem to have been obscured beyond recovery—it is important to note that racial issues affected both the composition of the Théâtre d’Orléans’s audiences, and its theatrical productions. As Juliane Braun has remarked, ‘it is more often than not by understanding what has been omitted that a coherent picture emerges’.³¹

The racial geography of nineteenth-century New Orleans was far from straightforward: what it meant to be black, and who was considered or considered

²⁸ For more on Fanny Elssler in New Orleans, see Paul S. Hostetler, “‘Elsslermania’ in New Orleans”, *Theatre Survey* 10/2 (1969): 121–35. John Baron, meanwhile, has written about Ole Bull’s visit to the city in ‘Vieuxtemps (and Ole Bull) in New Orleans’, *American Music* 8 (1990): 210–26. Jenny Lind’s visit to the city in 1851 has been explored by Keith S. Hambrick in ‘The Swedish Nightingale in New Orleans: Jenny Lind’s Visit of 1851’, *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 22/4 (1981): 387–417.

²⁹ See Preston, *Opera on the Road*, Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of a Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1988), and Joseph A. Mussulman, *Music in the Cultured Generation: A Social History of Music in America, 1870–1900* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1971).

³⁰ An important exception is Juliane Braun, ‘On the Verge of Fame: The Free People of Color and the French Theatre in Antebellum New Orleans’, in *Liminale Anthropologien: Zwischenzeiten, Schwellenphänomene, Zwischenräume in Literatur und Philosophie*, ed. Jochen Achilles, Roland Borgards and Brigitte Burrichter (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2012), 161–82.

³¹ Braun, ‘On the Verge of Fame’, 164.

themselves to be black, was a very complex matter. As Paul F. Lachance has shown, a significant proportion of early New Orleans society was made up of free people of colour ('gens de couleur libre'), and they occupied a somewhat respected, if unstable, position as a skilled artisan class.³² Within the populations of free people of colour and slaves, there were further complexities, with terms such as 'quadroon', 'octoroon', and, more generally, 'mulatto' referring to different racial mixings.³³ Coupled with linguistic divisions across racial lines (there were large numbers of both francophone and anglophone slaves, for example) and other confounding factors such as slave-owning free people of colour,³⁴ the racial landscape of nineteenth-century New Orleans was extremely diverse. This was a period in which people in New Orleans were highly conscious of racial difference and categorisation, but in ways that can seem unfamiliar in the present day. As the century went on, attitudes to race in the city (and in the United States more broadly) began to change, as did the position of black patrons within the theatre. From a state of relative power and autonomy in the early nineteenth century (in comparison with free people of colour elsewhere in the United States, and especially in comparison with slaves working on plantations), New Orleans's free people of colour and slaves found their respective positions becoming increasingly difficult over time.³⁵ The ways in which changing attitudes towards race in New Orleans in these years were reflected both on and off stage at the Théâtre d'Orléans will be explored more fully in Chapter 1.

³² Lachance provides a useful graph showing the city's racial and linguistic composition in 'The Foreign French' in *Creole New Orleans*, 118. See also his even more detailed table in Paul F. Lachance, 'The Limits of Privilege: Where Free People of Colour Stood in the Hierarchy of Wealth in Antebellum New Orleans', in *Against the Odds: Free Blacks in the Slave Societies of the Americas*, ed. Jane G. Landers (London: Frank Cass, 1996), 68. He shows that free people of colour accounted for almost 44 percent of the city's population in 1810 and that they still made up 23.8 percent by 1840, even though the city had experienced largescale white anglophone immigration by then.

³³ For a book-length exploration of these terms, see Emily Clark, *The Strange History of the American Quadroon*.

³⁴ For more on linguistic division across racial lines, see Joseph Logsdon and Caryn Cossé Bell, 'The Americanization of Black New Orleans, 1850–1900', in *Creole New Orleans*, 202–4.

³⁵ For a short summary of the relatively privileged position of free people of colour in New Orleans as compared with free people of colour elsewhere, see Kenneth R. Aslakson, *Making Race in the Courtroom: The Legal Construction of Three Races in Early New Orleans* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2014), 1–16. For more on the position of free people of colour within New Orleans society as a whole, see Lachance, 'The Limits of Privilege', 65–84. Lachance demonstrates that although they might have been privileged compared with free people of colour elsewhere, they were still not able in general to achieve the levels of prosperity gained by wealthy white people. While it seems strange to argue that anyone held in slavery might have a privileged position (such privilege as might exist, of course, would only be in relative terms), Richard C. Wade has suggested that the urban environment and the demands made of slaves within it allowed them greater independence of movement and opportunities for human and educational contact than those afforded to plantation slaves, eventually leading to the erosion of the institution of slavery. See Richard C. Wade, *Slavery in the Cities: The South, 1820–1860* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).

Nonetheless, for much of its history, the Théâtre d'Orléans was by no means an exclusively white space, in much the same way as the operas it produced were not viewed as only for an elite audience. The theatre, therefore, played a vital role in the wider civic and social life of New Orleans, functioning as a focal point in the city and bringing together different social, ethnic, and economic groups under the same roof. And the theatres could reach large numbers of people: from 1819, the Théâtre d'Orléans seated just over 1,300.³⁶ Caldwell's Camp Street Theatre, meanwhile, seated 1,100, and his later St Charles Theatre seated 4,100, making it the largest hall in America at the time, and the fourth largest in the world.³⁷

In 1853, Pierre Davis passed his directorship to Charles Boudousquié, who continued to uphold the Orléans's reputation for giving the American premieres of many of the best-known European operas of the day. In the latter half of this decade, however, Boudousquié became embroiled in legal disputes over the lease of the Théâtre d'Orléans, leading to the founding of a company to build a new, dedicated French opera house in the city. Boudousquié was instrumental in setting up the new French Opera House, which opened under his direction in December 1859, with a troupe taken from the Théâtre d'Orléans. The opening of this new opera house marked the end of the Théâtre d'Orléans's prominence in city life: devoid of its troupe and large numbers of its regular patrons, it stumbled on with diminishing receipts until 1866, when it was claimed by fire.³⁸ Nonetheless, for a period of forty years, the Théâtre d'Orléans was at the height of operatic endeavour in both New Orleans and in the United States more broadly.

In order to assess opera's position within New Orleans society, this dissertation focusses on the production and reception of French opera there between 1819 and 1859: the years in which the Théâtre d'Orléans was a vitally important cultural institution in the city. I seek to understand more about the ways in which operatic culture shaped and was shaped by

³⁶ Juliane Braun, 'Petit Paris en Amérique? French Theatrical Culture in Nineteenth-Century Louisiana' (PhD diss., Julius-Maximilians-Universität Würzburg, 2013), 90.

³⁷ John Baron, *Concert Life in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans: A Comprehensive Reference* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013), 12.

³⁸ The French Opera House, having taken over from the Théâtre d'Orléans in 1859, provided for the city's insatiable love of opera for the next six decades until it too was claimed by fire in 1919.

city life at the time, by uncovering the networks of people and materials that enabled the creation of a thriving operatic culture for such a sustained period in New Orleans.

The small body of existing scholarship on the subject of music and theatre in New Orleans has laid important groundwork for the history of early theatrical institutions and the repertoire performed. Henry Kmen's monograph and his earlier doctoral thesis are key works on the early part of the century,³⁹ while John Baron's work provides extensive factual information gleaned from the local press about diverse aspects of the city's musical life.⁴⁰ Jack Belsom, meanwhile, has provided an introduction to the ways in which certain operas were understood in New Orleans during the period.⁴¹ All have been concerned with documenting what happened and when—valuable work in itself, for a topic on which few detailed studies exist—but pay little attention to questions of why these things happened. Moreover, they often pay almost no attention to the people who cultivated the city's operatic life or the processes by which opera, a European import, came to New Orleans, and nor have they considered how these might shape our understanding of what opera meant for and about the city in the nineteenth-century world.

In this thesis, therefore, I want to go further: to argue that opera's significance for New Orleans did not stop at the city limits or the Atlantic ocean. I explore the ways in which opera in New Orleans fitted into wider patterns in the transmission of opera outside of Europe in the first half of the nineteenth century, by uncovering how local people forged connections far beyond New Orleans as well as within it. Furthermore, I look at how these human agents contributed, alongside larger emerging phenomena such as international print culture, to the circulation of materials and ideas about opera. Looking simultaneously inwards and outwards in this way, I aim to investigate New Orleans's place within incipient global operatic systems.

Chapter 1 explores the interaction of individual human agencies and wider social and cultural systems on both sides of the Atlantic in order to understand the running of the Théâtre d'Orléans. Focussing on John and Pierre Davis, the theatre's managers, I examine how they forged international connections that enabled the daily running of the theatre. As I show, the Davises and their networks of contacts struck a fine balance between relying on practices from European theatre systems to sustain the Théâtre d'Orléans and developing

³⁹ Kmen, *Music in New Orleans*, and Henry Kmen, 'Singing and Dancing in New Orleans, 1791–1841' (PhD diss., Tulane University, 1961).

⁴⁰ See in particular, Baron, *Concert Life in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans*.

⁴¹ Jack Belsom, 'Reception of Major Operatic Premieres in New Orleans during the Nineteenth Century' (MA diss., Louisiana State University, 1972).

highly local aspects to the theatre's identity. Exploring processes of recruitment and the transfer of materials, as well as John Davis's responses to distinctively local linguistic and racial challenges, I examine the work of key human agents in the development and management of a system of transatlantic opera for New Orleans.

Human agency also plays an important role in Chapter 2, which explores the careers of some of the singers at the Théâtre d'Orléans. I argue that a close study of their career trajectories sheds light on New Orleans's position within the development of wider transatlantic (and even global) networks of operatic performance. The singers who came to New Orleans had enormously varied career paths, often marked by a considerable degree of movement. By uncovering the mobility of the performers (at French provincial theatres and abroad), as well as excavating traces of their performances, I challenge ingrained narratives of French cultural centralisation by revealing New Orleans to be part of an operatic world determined less by centres and peripheries than by sustained patterns of intra- and international circulation.

The third chapter investigates the impact of French *grand opéra* on New Orleans, arguing that the genre provided a focus for the negotiation of local, national and international identities among opposing critical (and linguistic) factions within the city. At the same time, I suggest it also provided an impetus for developments in print and material cultures of opera. Specifically, I explore the race to produce Meyerbeer's *Robert le diable* with which I opened this introduction, and, later, the reception of another of his grand operas that found global popularity in the 1830s, *Les Huguenots*. I argue that these works invited the construction of imagined communities of operatic spectatorship, by enabling opera-goers to relate themselves to Parisian audiences. Accessing this privileged position afforded francophone and anglophone audiences alike the means to negotiate some of the local socio-political issues (particularly the shift away from French cultural hegemony in New Orleans in the period) that I have introduced above. Furthermore, I suggest, New Orleans audiences used *Robert* to position themselves at an international level, temporarily casting aside established cultural hierarchies (whether Creole/Anglo-American or European/North American) and colonial legacies.

Chapter 4 challenges the oft-expressed viewpoint that imported French opera suppressed local creativity in New Orleans. Drawing on a body of opera-inspired sheet music that was written in New Orleans in the mid-nineteenth century, I explore the ways in which French opera permeated wider musical culture in New Orleans and invited diverse means of engagement. I argue that our definitions and expectations of 'local creativity' in

this period need to undergo a reorientation, and I suggest that opera-inspired parlour music should not simply be dismissed as trifling or uncreative, but instead provides important insights into the interaction of local, national and international musical cultures in this period.

The final chapter explores the importance of French opera for perceptions of New Orleans elsewhere in America and in Europe. By studying travellers' accounts of their visits to the theatre in New Orleans, as well as short stories published in Paris about the Théâtre d'Orléans and its people, I argue that the activities of the theatre played a vital role in shaping perceptions of New Orleans from both within and outside of the United States. I explore the use of scenes featuring operatic performance in three English- and French-language travel accounts as a device through which authors facilitated a particular kind of travel experience for their readers: one that offered a degree of escapism, but could also confront those (often European) readers with an uncomfortable familiarity. Furthermore, I argue that such scenes offer new perspectives on European visions of the United States and north-eastern perceptions of New Orleans in the nineteenth century.

From the local to the (trans)national: contextualising my approach

The 'city study' has taken on a special place within opera studies in recent years: opera's position within the urban milieu has proved fruitful ground for understanding its significance and its persistence throughout the nineteenth century. Such 'case studies' allow for a close exploration of the (often mutually influencing) connections between opera and society, as has been exemplified in work by Anselm Gerhard and Benjamin Walton, to give but two examples.⁴² In the case of French opera, and *grand opéra* in particular, studies of the relationship between opera and the city of Paris have even gone so far as to suggest that opera came to represent the French nation.⁴³

Within scholarship on opera in the United States, the city study has also come to play an important role, with many of the surveys of American operatic history comprising chapters on various urban locales.⁴⁴ Many of these have been primarily documentary, but

⁴² Anselm Gerhard, *The Urbanization of Opera: Music Theater in Paris in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Mary Whittall (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998) and Benjamin Walton, *Rossini in Restoration Paris: The Sound of Modern Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁴³ Jane Fulcher, *The Nation's Image: French Grand Opera as Politics and Politicized Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

⁴⁴ See, among many other examples, Ronald L. Davis, *A History of Opera in the American West* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1965); W. G. Armstrong, *A Record of the Opera in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1884); and Henry Lahee, *Grand Opera in America* (Boston: L. C. Page, 1902).

in recent years more interpretative accounts have emerged, such as those by George Martin, Vera Brodsky Lawrence and Karen Ahlquist, which all succeed in not only positioning operatic activity within the wider context of urban society, but in balancing local information with discussions of wider trends of operatic production and reception.⁴⁵ In the case of New Orleans itself, the most important account of the relationship between cultural life and the city is Juliane Braun's recent doctoral thesis 'Petit Paris en Amérique: French Theatrical Culture in Nineteenth-Century Louisiana'. Her study does not focus on opera, however, but on spoken theatre (she positions works written by four Louisianian playwrights in the context of changing francophone identity at various moments in nineteenth-century New Orleans), thus leaving space for opera-specific work in this area.⁴⁶

There is much to be gained from such detailed case studies, in terms of how opera functioned and was understood in the context of a specific local society. Yet while such an approach has great benefits—in particular, in the way it yields intricate and nuanced insights into the specifics of a local environment—it should also not be forgotten that it has potential pitfalls. A repeated focus on the relationship between opera and city in the case of Paris, for example, has yielded rich results, but has effectively served to tie French opera's significance and its meaning to the original contexts in which it was first performed and heard, thus providing little incentive for scholarship to look at how the significance and meaning of French opera might have been different outside of those contexts.⁴⁷ This problem is, of course, tied to much larger ideas of French centralisation, as I shall discuss later on, but its influence can be seen clearly in city studies. Meanwhile, case studies of American cities have frequently suffered from the inverse problem: they have not fully

⁴⁵ George Martin, *Verdi at the Golden Gate: Opera and San Francisco in the Gold Rush Years* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993); Vera Brodsky Lawrence, *Strong on Music: The New York Music Scene in the Days of George Templeton Strong*, 3 Volumes (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1988, 1995, 1999), and Karen Ahlquist, *Democracy at the Opera: Music, Theater and Culture in New York City, 1815–60* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

⁴⁶ Braun, 'Petit Paris en Amérique?'

⁴⁷ There are, of course, important exceptions to this, and I will give just a few examples here. For work on opera in regional France, see Katharine Ellis, 'Funding Opera in Regional France: Ideologies of the Mid-Nineteenth Century', in *Art and Ideology in European Opera: Essays in Honour of Julian Rushton*, ed. Rachel Cowgill, David Cooper and Clive Brown (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2010), 67–84, and her 'Paris and the Regions from the Revolution to the First World War', in *The Cambridge Companion to French Music*, ed. Simon Trezise (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 362–37. See also Katharine Ellis, 'Mireille's Homecoming? Gounod, Mistral and the Midi', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 65/2 (2012), 463–509, and Christian Goubault, 'La Décentralisation de l'art lyrique à Rouen (1830–1900)', in *Regards sur l'opéra: du Ballet comique de la reine à l'opéra de Pékin* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1976) [no editor listed], 47–88. For the performance of French opera outside of France, see Fuhrmann, *Foreign Opera at the London Playhouses*, 149–69, which traces the resonances of imported opera in London society and the ways in which that society shaped performances of those operas, focusses at various points on Meyerbeer's works.

explored the implications of opera as an imported European cultural form, and have paid little attention to the significance of this either for the audience or in wider contexts.⁴⁸

The approach to the city study I have taken in this dissertation, by contrast, has been influenced by the avowed aims of microhistorical scholarship, although nineteenth-century New Orleans can hardly be considered to be a microhistorical subject in itself.⁴⁹ That is to say, I have aimed, to borrow Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon and István M. Szi-jártó's terms, to put 'a microscope and not a telescope' to my historical subject, while at the same time never losing sight of the bigger picture: I have sought to bring my research to bear on the way we view opera and the nineteenth century more broadly.⁵⁰ While neither a detailed focus on sources nor a desire to address larger questions is an exclusive preserve of microhistory, and such aims are prevalent throughout historiography, I have seen microhistory as a complement to the more localised aims common to city studies. Indeed, particularly when it comes to American cities, the approach many existing studies have adopted is what we might well call 'local history', in the sense that they have sought to create a complete, highly detailed picture of, say, a particular village, town or individual for its own sake. Such a drive towards completism, of course, is utopian in itself, but it also does not allow for connections between cities and across continents to emerge. In contrast, my local focus here seeks to reveal that opera's internal significance within New Orleans was almost always bound up with wider-reaching concerns, allowing us to address much larger historical questions.

Part of my aim in this dissertation, therefore, is to explore the blurred edges of what defines a city study, by looking at the way that networks of contacts outside of New Orleans, both internationally and to a lesser extent within the United States, shaped operatic and social life in the city and can also shape the way we think about opera in the nineteenth

⁴⁸ John Dizikes's *Opera in America* is an important exception, and he is careful to contextualise much of his discussion in relation to European operatic practices.

⁴⁹ Carlo Ginzburg and Carlo Poni defined microhistory as the intensive historical investigation of 'a village community, a group of families, even an individual person'. See Carlo Ginzburg and Carlo Poni, 'The Name and the Game: Unequal Exchange and the Historical Marketplace', in *Microhistory and the Lost People of Europe*, ed. Edward Muir and Guido Ruggiero, trans. Eren Branch (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 3.

⁵⁰ Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon and István M. Szi-jártó, *What is Microhistory? Theory and Practice* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 4–5. Magnússon and Szi-jártó do indeed suggest that all microhistory should seek to answer 'great historical questions' (5). John Brewer has pointed out that microhistorians do not always practise what they preach, saying that they may well have turned to small subjects because 'they confess themselves dissatisfied with grand narratives', but nonetheless they 'still aspire to a notion of total history' (97). I believe, however, that seeking to elucidate larger historical questions through a detailed focus on a small subject is still a viable historiographical aim. See John Brewer, 'Microhistory and the Histories of Everyday Life', *Cultural and Social History* 7/1 (2010): 87–109.

century. By looking at the complex relationships between institutional context, musical production and reception, I seek to understand more about the connections and disconnections within the nineteenth-century operatic world. In this sense, New Orleans serves as a locus from which to draw out larger and diverse connections; movement and the dynamism of culture are both central to this project, as I explore how works and their performers travelled physically from Europe to America, and how their appearances and meanings shifted as they moved.

In this respect, Katherine K. Preston's *Opera on the Road* offers a salutary model for thinking about opera in the United States as a process of movement rather than as a static phenomenon.⁵¹ I build here upon the groundwork she has laid in relation to the movement of touring troupes within the United States by making transatlantic movement a key part of my study. In the last twenty-five years, scholars have made considerable efforts to begin to look beyond the level of individual nations in their historiography. Back in 1992, David Thelen's article, 'Of Audiences, Borderlands, and Comparisons: Toward the Internationalization of American History', set out a case for broadening historical enquiry into the United States (which had frequently been accused of parochialism) and for providing alternative histories that go beyond the confines of national boundaries.⁵² Since then, much literature has focussed on this same question, and, of course, much the same considerations have been explored beyond the United States. On a specifically musical level, David Gramit's article on transnational history and the development of musical culture in the Canadian city of Edmonton provides a useful example of such a transnational approach in practice in musicology. He explores the possibility that local and 'apparently unremarkable' musical practices can be seen as manifestations of a larger global process of 'settler colonialism', and thus begins to link the local explicitly with the global in a way that reconfigures ingrained perspectives of the national.⁵³

Indeed, the concepts of 'nation' and 'the national' remain important to this project: it is not my aim to dismiss or erase the nation, but rather to reframe its importance. As Prasenjit Duara and many others have suggested, the national need not be the end point of

⁵¹ Preston sees much of opera's history in the United States as fundamentally mobile, driven by touring troupes which established distinct pathways of cultural movement around the nation. Preston, *Opera on the Road*. For other examples of literature on touring opera, see Thomas Kaufman, 'The Arditi Tour: The Midwest Gets Its First Real Taste of Italian Opera', *The Opera Quarterly* 4/4 (1986): 39–52.

⁵² David Thelen, 'Of Audiences, Borderlands, and Comparisons: Toward the Internationalization of American History', *Journal of American History* 79/2 (1992): 432–62.

⁵³ David Gramit, 'The Transnational History of Settler Colonialism and the Music of the Urban West: Resituating a Local Music History', *American Music* 32/3 (2014): 272–91.

historical investigation, but rather can be seen as a relative and flexible concept shaped by networks of economic, cultural and social processes which exist outside the constraints of national borders.⁵⁴ Furthermore, Axel Körner has shown that self-consciousness about what constitutes the ‘national’ and its role is not necessarily simply a later historiographical construct, but could also be a part of public awareness in the nineteenth century. In his *The United States in the Political Thought and Imagination of the Risorgimento, 1763–1865*, for example, he explores how the transnational circulation of ideas shaped Italians’ imaginings of independence and nationhood.⁵⁵ In such a light, I therefore want to keep in mind the ways in which people’s perspectives of transnational movement and exchange at the time—in New Orleans and elsewhere—shaped how they understood themselves both locally and nationally. This dissertation thus aims to slip between registers of engagement, to show how the local, national and international were inextricably and productively entangled during this period. What I hope will emerge from this is a glimpse of some of the ways in which opera came to be performed in new, extra-European contexts, and of the wide variety of often contradictory roles that it came to (or was expected to) play in those contexts.

Positioning New Orleans

New Orleans offers particularly fertile ground for research following this approach: not only was the sustained nature of its operatic life remarkable by the standards of the period, but, historiographically, it has occupied a unusual position. New Orleans has typically been characterised as a ‘special case’ within the United States, and an outlier, both operatically and more generally, in a way that reflects present-day conceptions of the city as much as it

⁵⁴ Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995). Even large-scale world histories, such as Jürgen Osterhammel’s *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century* and Christopher Bayly’s *The Birth of the Modern World: Global Connections and Comparisons, 1780–1914* which focus on globalisation and on the ways in which political and social changes across the globe during the period were both interconnected and interdependent, still acknowledge the importance of nationalism to nineteenth-century intellectual thought, although they ultimately seek to write a history that moves beyond the borders of the nation state. Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Patrick Camiller (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), first published as *Die Verwandlung der Welt* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2009) and Christopher Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World: Global Connections and Comparisons, 1780–1914* (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 2004).

⁵⁵ Axel Körner, *America in Italy: The United States in the Political Thought and Imagination of the Risorgimento, 1763–1865* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017).

does nineteenth-century ones. There are, of course, good reasons for this: even leaving aside questions of the atmosphere of the city, or the distinctive architecture of the old French and Spanish area, Louisiana has significant differences from the rest of the United States in its legal system, which is derived not from British common law like the rest of the states, but from French and Spanish civil law.⁵⁶ In certain respects, then, New Orleans was and remains different from many other major American cities.

As a result, most existing accounts of theatrical recruitment and management in New Orleans have turned to French contexts to position the city's operatic life. Some have seen it directly in relation to Paris, while others have seen it in relation to other French colonies across the Atlantic. This latter characterisation positions the city as part of a 'circum-Atlantic' world, involving the circulation of goods and ideas between France, French North America, the French Caribbean and French West Africa.⁵⁷ Both models have their problems and their advantages. By privileging a relationship between New Orleans and Paris, in which the former relied on the latter for all its theatrical materials, the New Orleans–Paris relationship has all too often emerged as that of a periphery (New Orleans), serving a centre (Paris), as part of extended French centralisation. Such a model, of course, runs the risk firstly of overlooking New Orleans's other important connections both within the United States and Europe (and especially within France itself), and also of denying New Orleans a sense of a postcolonial identity.

On the other hand, positioning New Orleans within a 'circum-Atlantic' world, builds productively on ideas of Atlantic History, which has sought to break away from a Eurocentric historiography of early modern discovery and early colonial expansion, and to theorise the relationships between diverse peoples on the continents of North and South America, Africa and Europe and many of the islands in between.⁵⁸ As Horst Pietschmann explains: expansion history has 'tended to always stress the metropolitan [that is, European] point of view and for a long time saw contradictory evidence in faraway colonies as "exceptions"'.⁵⁹ The intention of Atlantic history, then, as a postcolonial strategy for exploring the beginnings of colonial empire in a broader way, is to provide alternative

⁵⁶ Mark F. Fernandez explores the history of Louisiana's legal system in *From Chaos to Continuity: The Evolution of Louisiana's Judicial System, 1712–1862* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001).

⁵⁷ For more on the positioning on New Orleans within a circum-Atlantic world, see *New Orleans in the Atlantic World: Between Land and Sea*, ed. William Boelhower (London and New York: Routledge, 2010).

⁵⁸ For a study of the history and development of Atlantic history, see Bernard Bailyn, *Atlantic History: Concept and Contours* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

⁵⁹ Horst Pietschmann, 'Introduction: Atlantic History—History between European History and Global History', *Atlantic History: History of the Atlantic System, 1580–1830*, ed. Horst Pietschmann (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2002), 19.

narratives to received histories. What is more, it emphasises process and movement (of goods, currency, ideas, language and culture) in a geographical plain, rather than in a static, top-down model of colonial power relations. Similar models, such as Joseph Roach's 'circum-Caribbean' approach seek to achieve a similar end: to destabilise the notion of any single place having overwhelming and unjustified historiographical weight.⁶⁰ Given New Orleans's early connections with Saint-Domingue and Cuba, positioning the city in relation to Atlantic and Caribbean models makes sense, to an extent, and provides a contrast to the dyadic relationship often posited between the city and Paris.

The Atlantic history approach, however, has typically been applied to studies of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and has been deemed less relevant in the nineteenth century, as nationalism has frequently formed the historiographical lens for that later period. Similarly, the concept of Atlantic history, when applied to the nineteenth century—a time when metropolitan centres had developed significantly across the continents—can all too often inadvertently perpetuate the very thing it had sought to avoid: namely, the privileging of 'centres' over 'peripheries'.⁶¹ This trend can be seen clearly in modern literature on New Orleans as, while many authors have taken great care to stress the role of the Caribbean and the West-African slave trade in the city's development in the eighteenth century, they have admitted that these particular connections waned quickly after the turn of the nineteenth century. As a result, the city in the nineteenth century has come to be characterised predominantly as a unique case, a 'little Paris' in the wilderness, unconnected to other American cities and customs.

The latter part of this characterisation and the question it raises—of how to understand New Orleans in relation to the rest of the United States—is one that recurs throughout this dissertation, albeit to a lesser degree than those concerning its transatlantic connections. There is, aside from work specifically on New Orleans, plenty of literature on the development of operatic and theatrical culture in the United States. Much of it, however, focusses almost exclusively on opera on the Eastern Seaboard, treating places such as New Orleans and San Francisco as side notes to the principal narrative. Ronald Davis's *A History of Music in American Life*, to give but one example of many, deals almost exclusively with

⁶⁰ Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

⁶¹ For a brief overview of the concept of Centre-Periphery Analysis, see Amy Turner Bushnell's entry on the subject in *The Princeton Companion to Atlantic History*, ed. Joseph C. Miller (Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015), 86–7.

the East Coast and, in particular, how the puritan sensibilities of the original settlers were reflected in the region's musical development.⁶²

Such works are problematic in several respects: first, they try to provide a single, coherent narrative of cultural development in the United States (impossible in itself, given the size and diversity of the nation). Faced with this impossibility, they then tend to privilege the North-East, thus replicating the inherited idea of the South as somehow backward, in a kind of United States-specific adaptation of the 'global South' narrative; as such, these authors have privileged certain cities, deemed to be 'operatic centres', over others ('operatic peripheries'), in their attempts to provide a coherent narrative.⁶³ They thus fail to appreciate the influence of differing local practices within the development of a broader, national culture, as heterogeneous as that might be. Even studies that attempt to bring typically 'peripheral' cities to the 'centre', such as Ronald Davis's *A History of Opera in the American West*, for example, have proved problematic in their failure to relate their histories of specific places to any kind of larger view of a developing operatic culture in the United States.⁶⁴

John Dizikes's *Opera in America: A Cultural History* avoids a number of these pitfalls: not only does he compare and contrast the conditions of operatic performance and reception in America with those in Europe, but he does not attempt to provide a single narrative of operatic development in the United States. Instead, he takes a kaleidoscopic approach (including places as diverse as New Orleans, St Louis, Santa Fe and Seattle, alongside the more familiar operatic centres of New York, San Francisco and Chicago) that allows a larger, if less unified, image of America's operatic history to emerge. While such an approach, of course, has ramifications for the amount of detail he was able to provide for each place, he offers a more multifarious vision for writing the operatic history of the United States.⁶⁵

⁶² Ronald L. Davis, *A History of Music in American Life, Volume 1: The Formative Years, 1620–1865* (Malabar, FL: Robert Krieger Publishing Company, 1982). Henry Lahee's *Grand Opera in America* is similar in its approach, and so too is *The Cambridge History of American Theatre, Volume 1: Beginnings to 1870*, ed. Don Wilmet and Christopher Bigsby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁶³ June Ottenberg's *Opera Odyssey: Toward a History of Opera in Nineteenth-Century America* (Westport, CT and London: Greenwood Press, 1994), while touching on many of the most important issues in the development of an operatic culture in North America, is particularly problematic in this respect; she attempts to create a teleological narrative history of opera in America which, necessarily, excludes alternative histories that lie outside of the principal narrative. Thus, although she calls New Orleans 'a major operatic centre of the new country' (33), the city is rarely mentioned in her study.

⁶⁴ Davis, *A History of Opera in the American West*.

⁶⁵ Indeed, he treats New Orleans and Havana together in a single chapter of just six pages. John Dizikes, *Opera in America*, 120–6.

In this dissertation, I wish to position my more in-depth study of New Orleans in relation to emerging developments in national operatic, musical, and print culture, albeit relatively briefly. Such an approach is particularly important and appropriate for studying opera at the mid-century, a time when ideas of an American national identity were starting to consolidate. That is not to say that I seek to erase New Orleans's status as a 'special case' and claim that its culture was firmly a part of the developing American 'mainstream'. Rather, I wish to use the city's unique operatic history in juxtaposition with traditional North-East-centred narratives of cultural history to problematise received ideas of America's operatic development: I hope to show that New Orleans was neither unaware of, nor immune to, the influence of cultural developments that took place in the rest of the country, especially in this period in which the city's involvement in the United States as a nation altered substantially, through its changing demographics.⁶⁶

As will quickly become evident, then, I do not see New Orleans as either simply a 'little Paris' or as a totally isolated case within the United States. Nor, however, do I believe that adopting a circum-Atlantic or circum-Caribbean model is necessarily the most appropriate way to position the city in terms of its operatic life during the nineteenth century, although I do wish to preserve the sense of movement and interconnection that lies at the heart of such approaches. Ultimately, I have sought not to situate the city within a pre-existing theoretical framework, but instead to permit the connections explored within this dissertation to emerge from the primary material I consulted. As a result, I hope to have allowed space both for nineteenth-century perceptions of the city's connections and perspectives based on later historiographical positions within this study. Furthermore, I have had no expectation that these perspectives should always align.

Approaching the archives: digital sources and working with fragmentary material

Previous studies of opera in New Orleans have tended to draw almost exclusively upon local newspapers for their information. This is an approach common to many studies of opera outside of Europe, as can be seen from Jean Fouchard's *Le Théâtre à Saint-Domingue* and his *Artistes et répertoire des scènes de Saint-Domingue*, both of which rely heavily on

⁶⁶ Many of the chapters in *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanisation* ed. Hirsch and Logsdon demonstrate clearly how New Orleans's distinctive demographics altered around the mid-century to become more in line with other American cities. For a discussion of the beginnings of an American national identity, see Lloyd S. Kramer, *Nationalism in Europe and America: Politics, Cultures and Identities since 1775* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 125–46.

newspaper reports, as well as, exceptionally, a few preserved personal letters.⁶⁷ In New Orleans, as in many of these other locations, the focus on published local newspaper sources most likely stems from a belief that few alternative traces of the theatre could have survived the myriad fires, floods and other misfortunes that have befallen theatre and city archives over the last 200 years. Relying on the local press as a principal source of factual information, however, has created a number of limitations in previous studies: first, the information contained therein was not necessarily factually accurate. Second, treating the press as a principal source of factual information has meant that existing accounts have performed almost no interpretative work on newspapers and the articles they contained. There has been little examination of the development of music criticism or of different critical voices, and reception studies have generally been limited to recounting responses to works, rather than interpretations of those responses.

It is true that there is no extant archive of the Théâtre d'Orléans (or any theatre in nineteenth-century New Orleans, for that matter), but one of my concerns in this dissertation has been to broaden the range of sources through which we are able to discuss opera in New Orleans, and opera outside of Europe more generally. In some cases, this involved expanding the range of press sources consulted. For example, I have drawn on European newspapers, and the Parisian press, in particular, to trace the European careers of performers, while previous accounts have relied solely on New Orleans newspapers. The internet, of course, has enabled such an approach: it would have taken far greater financial resources and exponentially longer periods of academic legwork for a study such as Kmen's (published in 1966) to have made use of European sources.

Nonetheless, there are plentiful pitfalls awaiting the academic researcher in using online resources, both methodologically (in particular when it comes to the matter of encouraging predetermined arguments since, as Ted Underwood has suggested, large-scale text searching 'confirm[s] almost any thesis you bring to it') and ethically (in terms of how we so often hide our use of digital materials by referencing their printed forms).⁶⁸ The internet enabled many of the avenues this research has taken. Without the Bibliothèque nationale de France's Gallica digital library I would never have been able to trace the movements of many of the singers' careers that feature in Chapter 2. Indeed, with the

⁶⁷ Jean Fouchar, *Artistes et répertoire des scènes de Saint-Domingue* (Port-au-Prince, Haiti: H. Deschamps, 1988) and *Le Théâtre à Saint-Domingue* (Port-au-Prince, Haiti: H. Deschamps, 1988).

⁶⁸ Ted Underwood, 'Theorizing Research Practices We Forgot to Theorize Twenty Years Ago', *Representations* 127 (2014): 66. *Representations* ran a special issue in the Summer of 2014 entitled 'Search', which explores many of these issues.

exception of the Le Havre newspapers, all of the French newspapers I consulted were available online. Furthermore, without Google, I would never have found the novels by Charles Jobey that feature in Chapter 5. I hope, however, that my engagement with this material has allowed it to go beyond the level of Googled historical ‘quirk’: in many cases, the online work encouraged me to investigate wider contexts through more traditional archival means.⁶⁹ Indeed, it was only by searching through microfilmed newspapers and reconstructing troupe lists that I discovered Jobey’s connections with the Théâtre d’Orléans, transforming the significance of his stories for the way we think about nineteenth-century travel writing. Such vital information was not available online. There were countless other such instances of digital searches and more traditional archival work influencing each other in this project; an element of chance, of course, remains central to both online and traditional archives.

When it came to the traditional archival research, I found that there are indeed a significant number of materials—hard to locate and fragmentary as they often are—on both sides of the Atlantic. I began the archival research for this thesis in Paris, where I unearthed a variety of personal letters, audition requests and reports, and memoirs relating to performers who spent time in New Orleans.⁷⁰ Undoubtedly, regional French archives (particularly at Le Havre) would have furnished further materials, but, regrettably, they were beyond the scope of this work in its current form, owing to unavoidable questions of time frame and funding.

Unlike in Paris, where the centralised, state-funded archives are extensive, in New Orleans, relevant material was scattered across a mixture of publicly and privately funded collections: the lack of municipal centralisation of historical material meant that it was by no means an easy task to piece together information across collections. However, while the privately funded collections contained numerous personal memoirs and letters, some of the most influential materials for this work came from municipal sources, further confirming the centrality of the theatre in public life in New Orleans in the first half of the nineteenth century. The New Orleans Public Library houses court cases related to the theatre, while the Notarial Archives revealed contractual and procuration documents, as well as materials relating to the incorporation of the theatre. All of these provide insights into the running of

⁶⁹ Benjamin Walton addresses questions of the scholarly ethics and academic shame of historical quirks dug up online in ‘Quirk Shame’, *Representations* 132 (2015): 121–9.

⁷⁰ Some of this material was gathered from the *Dossiers d’artiste* at the Bibliothèque-Musée de l’Opéra, but other information was found in documents contained in various boxes from the AJ/13 and F/21 series at the Archives nationales.

the theatre and the careers of its performers that newspapers simply cannot, due to the non-public nature of the information. Furthermore, printed libretti and sheet music of various sorts allow for new, material-centred approaches to the history and influence of French opera in New Orleans.

This information, upon which Chapters 1, 2 and 4 are based, is by no means comprehensive, especially since my study covers a period of forty years: the lifespan of the Théâtre d'Orléans. In deciding how to handle this often incomplete material, I have drawn upon a number of published works. Miles Fairburn's *Social History: Problems, Strategies and Methods* brought into focus many of the historiographical issues relating to building arguments from fragmentary evidence.⁷¹ Pointing out that generalising from a few supporting examples is a common tactic for writing about the collective in social history, Fairburn shows the unreliability of such a technique, as he suggests that serious problems arise when we 'do not demonstrate that the small number of cases making up the fragment have a reasonable likelihood of typifying the whole aggregate'.⁷² The problem, then, is of being able to recognise exceptions from a body of fragmentary evidence.

In the case of my research, however, even the broader arguments I draw from my evidence are not on the scale that Fairburn has in mind. While he is concerned with the rise and fall of whole societies and social classes, the leap between the specific and the general is by no means so large in my thesis. Nonetheless, I have been conscious of my reliance on incomplete evidence in some areas, and John Putnam Demos's *The Unredeemed Captive: A Family Story From Early America* provided a particularly useful model for how to construct multiple plausible narratives from kernels of information. I have, therefore, always sought to emphasise the multiplicity of potential readings of the evidence when hypothesising agents' motivations and objects' significance.⁷³

By focussing on New Orleans's position between America and Europe, I draw comparisons with French theatre systems and performers (both in Paris and regional France) and also with growing American theatre practices. Thus I sought to create a pair of 'comparable cases' (to borrow Fairburn's term) against which emerging details of New Orleans's theatre system can be evaluated.⁷⁴ Having considered carefully how to draw out meaningful interpretations of the sources and how to frame my wider arguments, therefore,

⁷¹ Miles Fairburn, *Social History: Problems, Strategies, and Methods* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999).

⁷² Fairburn, *Social History*, 41.

⁷³ John Putnam Demos, *The Unredeemed Captive: A Family Story From Early America* (London: Papermac, 1994).

⁷⁴ Fairburn, *Social History*, 59–61.

I believe that the information provides us with more than simple snapshots into the Théâtre d'Orléans and is instead largely representative of many of the processes in which it was engaged. As a result, it can provide us with much greater insight into the ways in which the Théâtre d'Orléans relied upon transatlantic systems of operatic performance (and its position within them), as well as the ways in which the agency of individual performers contributed to the development of such systems. It is my hope that such an approach might prove useful for opera scholarship more generally, in the sense that it offers a substantial expansion on the (often press-centred) reception studies model of operatic history. By turning to a wider range of sources, both traditionally archival and digital, I hope to weave back together histories of operatic production and reception by focussing on human agency, material culture, and the wider circulation of ideas about opera across the Atlantic.

CHAPTER 1

The Théâtre d'Orléans and Its Agents: Developing a Transatlantic Cultural Institution

Having situated my explorations of opera in New Orleans within the realm of extended city studies in the introduction to this thesis, in this first chapter I want to zoom in further, and focus on the Théâtre d'Orléans as an institution. Few studies on opera in the United States have adopted such an institutional focus—there are no others covering the antebellum period, to my knowledge—for the very reason that in the case of many cities, theatrical or operatic enterprises were often so impermanent that they never really developed institutional status. Even in studies of New Orleans, the Théâtre d'Orléans has not typically been portrayed as having established systems or other institutional features. For John Baron and various others, the theatre is simply one part of a much larger study of the musical life of the city.¹ Meanwhile, although the Théâtre d'Orléans forms a far more central part of Henry Kmen's work, his exclusively chronological approach, recounting various incidents relating to its management in various years alongside a more comprehensive account of its repertoire, means that the picture that emerges from his work seems to be one of the theatre as a fragmented, somewhat ad hoc endeavour, or at least one that was constantly at the mercy of external circumstances.²

In this chapter, I seek to explore how the daily running of the Théâtre d'Orléans influenced and was influenced by diverse conditions in the city more broadly. But in other respects, an exploration of the Théâtre d'Orléans as an institution involves going beyond the boundaries of the city, to look at the influences of conditions (some theatrical, others not) from further afield. As such, an institutional history of the Théâtre d'Orléans has great potential to shed light on the processes that enabled and sustained transatlantic opera. While I have not sought to position this thesis in its entirety as an institutional history—indeed, such an approach would mask various important themes that lie outside of the Théâtre d'Orléans—the idea of institutional history can be extremely useful for helping us to

¹ John Baron, *Concert Life in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans: A Comprehensive Reference* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013).

² Henry Kmen, *Music in New Orleans: The Formative Years, 1791–1841* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966).

understand more about the workings and significance of the theatre, as well as its connections beyond the city of New Orleans.

In certain respects, of course, the Théâtre d'Orléans was far less tightly controlled as an institution than the majority of its European counterparts, especially its Parisian ones. For instance, surviving records give no indication that works were subject to any kind of censorship before they were able to appear on stage at the Théâtre d'Orléans, making it unlike many European theatres of the time.³ Also unlike many European theatres of the period—particularly in France—the theatre received no official subsidy towards its running costs.⁴ Indeed, it seems that the Théâtre d'Orléans was far less closely tied to the municipal government than these theatres, and it lacked some of the connections that helped to define many European institutions. Nonetheless, in many ways, the theatre had its own institutional structures, particularly when it came to recruitment, the acquisition of materials, production practices and its relationships with the wider social and political concerns of the city.

In this chapter, I explore some of the ways in which the theatre functioned both as a business and a cultural institution within New Orleans. By uncovering the established practices of the theatre and how they changed or remained constant over the forty years of its dominance in New Orleans, I want to understand more about the practicalities of transatlantic theatre. Furthermore, by positioning the theatre in relation to theatrical practices in France and the United States, as well as to non-theatrical local issues, I argue that we can learn far more about what transatlantic opera might have looked like or meant during this period, in a way that goes beyond former colonial connections, while at the same time keeping the Théâtre d'Orléans within its American context.

A potential pitfall that emerges in focussing on institutions or theatre systems is that it can appear as if these systems came into being without human input. Even Frederic

³ Hervé Lacombe outlines opera censorship in France in the nineteenth century in *The Keys to French Opera in the Nineteenth-Century*, trans. Edward Schneider (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), 14–7. For more on theatrical censorship in general in Europe during this period, see *The Frightful Stage: Political Censorship of the Theatre in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, ed. Robert Justin Goldstein (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2009).

⁴ Frederic Hemmings explains that the success of French provincial theatres was often a matter of local pride, and that support would be provided from municipal taxes. Since they provided financial support, local officials often supervised the theatre managers' spending of that money. See Frederic William John Hemmings, *The Theatre Industry in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 193–4. The Théâtre d'Orléans received no official municipal subsidy at all until 1836, when the Council of the First Municipality passed a resolution stating that the Mayor of New Orleans was required to buy shares in the newly incorporated Orleans Theatre Company, thus granting it a subsidy of sorts, but not of the kind granted to French theatres. For more on the resolution, see Edgar Grima, 'Municipal Support of Theatres and Operas in New Orleans', *Publications of the Louisiana Historical Society* 9 (1916): 43–5.

Hemmings's extremely thorough study, *The Theatre Industry in Nineteenth-Century France*, seems to position people simply as users of an established system (as audiences, performers, and playwrights) rather than as having an active role in animating that system.⁵ Instead of ascribing agency to an institution or, conversely, treating it as a set of mechanically self-perpetuating processes, here I want to foreground the people who forged a diverse range of international connections and enabled the development of the theatre in New Orleans. Focussing on the agencies of individuals embedded within the institution, in keeping with ideas of 'institutional entrepreneurship', I argue for the importance of these human agencies not just in establishing but also in maintaining and adapting the systems that brought the people and materials necessary for the theatre to New Orleans.⁶ Furthermore, I seek to balance the agency of these individuals with the wider socio-political or theatrical-systemic conditions in relation to which they acted, while still foregrounding the individual agents' responses to those conditions as crucial to the development of the institution. In particular, I want to focus on the agency of directors John and Pierre Davis, examining the ways in which they were able to maintain connections with Parisian theatrical practices and trends (particularly when it came to importing the latest works), while at the same time forging a distinctive identity for the Théâtre d'Orléans in response to local socio-political conditions.

The man behind the theatre: John Davis as impresario

As mentioned in the introduction, John Davis was the driving force of the Théâtre d'Orléans from its beginnings until his retirement in 1837. He has remained, however, a rather two-dimensional character to this point: very little has been written about him besides a few passing references to his business ventures and the occasional comment drawn from the New Orleans press about his investment in the theatre.⁷ While information on Davis himself

⁵ Hemmings, *The Theatre Industry in Nineteenth-Century France*. By contrast, Mark Everist illustrates well the way in which human agency can drive the development of an institution in *Music Drama at the Paris Opéra, 1824–1828* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 44–111.

⁶ 'Institutional entrepreneurship' as a concept has been explored in the fields of organisation studies and sociology, often to look at large companies in the present day. I do not engage with the details of this concept in this chapter, but I take the idea of exploring the agencies of individuals embedded within a larger institutional structure as an important point of departure. For an example of work on institutional entrepreneurship, see Raghu Garud, Cynthia Hardy, and Steve Maguire, 'Institutional Entrepreneurship as Embedded Agency: An Introduction to the Special Issue', *Organization Studies* 28/7 (2007): 957–69.

⁷ Kmen, for example, frequently mentions him, but never gives any biographical detail in his *Music in New Orleans*. Nor does John Baron in his *Concert Life in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans*. Juliane Braun gives a little more detail in the introduction to her thesis, but her information is brief and consists only of comments

is not plentiful, there are more sources that allow us an insight into this man and his relationship with the theatre than have previously been assumed.

He was born Jean Davis in Paris in 1773, to Jean Davis and Anne Marie Davis, but we know little of his early life.⁸ He arrived in New Orleans in 1809 with his two young sons, Pierre (b. 1807) and Henri (birth date unknown).⁹ Davis came to New Orleans indirectly from the French sugar colony of Saint-Domingue (modern day Haiti), as a refugee from the slave uprisings on the island, which, between 1791 and 1804, drove thousands of French colonisers and slaves alike to flee overseas from the violence.¹⁰ One account from the mid-nineteenth century suggests that Davis went to New York, working as a shipowner and merchant (and, perhaps also a bit of a smuggler and a pirate) before he came, 'burdened with years and dollars', to New Orleans.¹¹ Whether this was actually the case is uncertain, but we know that he, like so many of the other Saint-Domingue refugees, made his way to Cuba, as it was in Santiago de Cuba that at least one of his two sons was born in the first decade of the nineteenth century.¹² By the time the family left Cuba, however, Davis's wife, Marie Félicité Meunier had died, and, on 5 September 1810, not long after their arrival in New Orleans, tragedy struck once again when Henri also died and was buried in St Louis no. 1 cemetery.¹³ After such a difficult start, however, John and the young Pierre, along with many other refugees from Saint-Domingue, went on to establish themselves as prominent citizens in their adopted city.¹⁴

published in the New Orleans press. See Juliane Braun, 'Petit Paris en Amérique? French Theatrical Culture in Nineteenth-Century Louisiana' (PhD diss., Julius-Maximilians-Universität Würzburg, 2013), 29–30.

⁸ See death certificate for John Davis, 'Court of Probates, Davis, John, Estate of, 1839', *NOPL*, City Archives.

⁹ Davis, death certificate.

¹⁰ For more on the slave uprisings in Haiti from the perspective of the revolutionaries, see Carolyn E. Fick, *The Making of Haiti: The Saint Domingue Revolution from Below* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1990). For more on the impact of the Saint-Domingue revolution on New Orleans, see *The Road to Louisiana: The Saint-Domingue Refugees, 1792–1809*, ed. Carl A. Brasseaux and Glenn R. Conrad (Lafayette, LA: The Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1992).

¹¹ 'Ancien colon de Saint-Domingue, que la révolte des noirs chassa de son pays, cet homme, après avoir été armateur et négociant à New York, et, disait-on tout bas, un peu contrebandier, un peu corsaire, pendant les dernières années de la grande guerre universelle, était venu, chargé d'ans et de dollars, s'échouer à la Nouvelle-Orléans comme dans un port de refuge'. Charles Jobey, *L'Amour d'un nègre* (Paris, 1860), 37.

¹² Henri's gravestone lists that he was a native of Santiago de Cuba, while immigration records from a recruiting trip in 1827 give Pierre's date of birth as 1807 and his birthplace as the United States. 'Louisiana, New Orleans Passenger Lists, 1820–1945', accessed through www.familysearch.org by searching 'Pierre Davis, 1827'.

¹³ Henri (Henrico) Davis is listed as being buried in St Louis Cemetery no. 1 according to the cemetery index held at the Historical Centre of the Louisiana State Museums at the Old U.S. Mint.

¹⁴ For an exploration of the migration patterns of refugees fleeing Saint-Domingue, including the route that the Davises seem to have taken through Cuba, see *The Road to Louisiana*, ed. Brasseaux and Conrad. Before the slave uprisings, Saint-Domingue had a well-developed French theatrical and operatic culture, as has been explored by Jean Fouchard in *Artistes et répertoire des scènes de Saint-Domingue* (Port-au-Prince, Haiti: H. Deschamps, 1988) and *Le Théâtre à Saint-Domingue* (Port-au-Prince, Haiti: H. Deschamps, 1988), as well

Davis threw himself into the commercial life of the city, becoming close friends with politician Bernard Marigny (whom Davis persuaded to join him in setting up the resort town of Mandeville across Lake Pontchartrain).¹⁵ His entrepreneurial energy was immense: he owned hotels both in New Orleans and in Mandeville, gambling saloons, and the Théâtre d'Orléans with its adjoining ballroom.¹⁶ Davis's facilities played a central role in life in New Orleans, hosting all manner of important civic meetings, as well as entertainments.¹⁷ When the government house burned down in 1828, for example, it was Davis's rooms that were chosen as the interim location for all government meetings.¹⁸ While not all of his ideas came to fruition (indeed, his plan to demolish St Louis Cathedral in order to make way for a larger theatre was hardly greeted with universal acclaim),¹⁹ Davis gained a reputation for seeing almost anything as a business opportunity. In 1819, for example, he wrote a letter to the mayor and aldermen of New Orleans proposing that if they paid him \$400 each year he would undertake the upkeep of the road leading from the city to the Bayou St John.²⁰ Public spirited as this gesture might have seemed, that road most likely led to Davis's own hotel on the Bayou, and thus maintaining it was in his own interests.

The most detailed sketch of Davis's character comes from an unlikely source: a novel published in Paris in 1860 by Charles Jobey, a Parisian author and musician who had spent several seasons in New Orleans from the mid-1830s as principal bassoonist in the Théâtre d'Orléans orchestra. The novel itself, *L'Amour d'un nègre*, tells the story of a young man who moves from France to New Orleans in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, and will be explored in detail in Chapter 5.²¹ For our purposes here, however, it suffices to say that in the very early stages of the novel, there is a lengthy description of Davis. The protagonist, Charles Roger, makes his journey to New Orleans on a ship that is

as John Gustave Cale in 'French Secular Music in Saint-Domingue (1750–1795) Viewed as a Factor in America's Musical Growth' (PhD diss., Louisiana State University, 1971).

¹⁵ For information on the origins of Mandeville, see Anita R. Campeau and Donald J. Sharp, *The History of Mandeville: From the American Revolution to Bernard de Marigny de Mandeville* (New Orleans: Cornerstone Book Publishers, 2014).

¹⁶ Juliane Braun even suggests that Davis's business interests extended to cigar manufacture and furniture retail: 'Petit Paris en Amérique?', 29–30.

¹⁷ For a long time, for instance, Davis had the monopoly on gambling in New Orleans. See William Norman Thompson, *Gambling in America: An Encyclopedia of History, Issues, and Society* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2001), 86.

¹⁸ Stanley Arthur, *Old New Orleans: A History of the Vieux Carré, its Ancient and Historical Buildings* [1936] (Reprinted Westminster, Maryland: Heritage Books, 2007), 121–2.

¹⁹ Jean Boze to Baron de Sainte-Gême, 28 March 1836, *HNOG*, Ste-Gême Family Papers, MSS 100, Folder 267, 2–3.

²⁰ Letter from John Davis to the Mayor of New Orleans, 9 July 1819. *LARC*, Rosemonde E. and Emile Kuntz Collection, Series 4: Municipal Papers, A. New Orleans, 1817–24, Box 17.

²¹ Charles Jobey, *L'Amour d'un nègre*.

also carrying the singers and actors bound for the Théâtre d'Orléans and, when they finally reach the city, John Davis comes aboard to welcome his new troupe. Jobey's description begins as follows:

The director of the theatre of New Orleans was welcomed with the keenest joy by his *pensionnaires*, as soon as he set foot on the bridge of the [ship] Cécilia. This director, however, had nothing very likeable about him: he was a little stooping old man, broken, whose moody face, lined, sorrowful, had taken on a shade of Havanaise tobacco, smoked by the fumes of the twenty-five to thirty cigars that he had smoked every day for forty years ... Old John had learned so well to distrust men and things that, save for five or six of his old companions to whom he gave all his trust, the rest of his considerable number of employees were in his eyes parasites and a rabble who lived at his expense.²²

Jobey's account of Davis, published more than twenty years after his time in New Orleans, was hardly flattering. Indeed, while the preface to the novel assured readers that much of the detail was drawn from the author's own recollections, it may well have been the case that Jobey's 'memories' had been somewhat clouded by the strained relationship he had with the theatre administration during his time in New Orleans.²³ Nonetheless, another expressly non-fictional source suggests that there was at least some truth in Jobey's description of Davis: a letter from Jean Boze, a retired plantation manager living in New Orleans, written to the Baron de Sainte-Gême, Boze's former employer who had moved back to France, described Davis as 'the old dragon', although in the context of the letter there is also perhaps a hint of affection for his gruff manners.²⁴

²² 'Le directeur du théâtre de la Nouvelle-Orléans fut donc accueilli avec la joie la plus vive par ses pensionnaires, aussitôt qu'il eût mis le pied sur le pont de la Cécilia. Ce directeur n'avait pourtant rien de bien sympathique: c'était un petit vieux voûté, cassé, dont la face grimace, plissée, chagrine, avait pris une teinte tabac de la Havane, boucanée qu'elle était à la fumée des vingt-cinq à trente cigares qu'il brûlait par jour depuis quarante ans. ... Le vieux John avait tant appris à mépriser les hommes et les choses, que, excepté cinq ou six de ses anciens compagnons, auxquels il avait accordé toute sa confiance, le reste du personnel considérable qu'il avait chez lui était à ses yeux des parasites et de la canaille qui vivaient à ses dépens'. Jobey, *L'Amour d'un nègre*, 37–8.

²³ Jobey was chief among the ten signatories of a letter written by members of the Théâtre d'Orléans troupe to the Parisian *Gazette des théâtres* in 1840 which detailed their grievances against the theatre's management. This letter will be discussed at greater length later in Chapter 2. 'Encore quelques renseignements utiles aux artistes qui voudraient venir à la Nouvelle-Orléans', *Gazette des théâtres*, 5 July 1840.

²⁴ 'Cet ancien dragon'. Jean Boze to Baron de Sainte-Gême, 18 July 1834, *HNOG*, Ste-Gême Family Papers, MSS 100, Folder 243, 4.

Jobey, however, shows no such affection, going on to combine European attitudes towards slave holders and distaste for Americans' commercial interests in a caricature of a man consumed completely by greed:

He treated his entire world as a unit, men and women, *comédiens*, croupiers, cooks, dancers, musicians, masons, lamp lighters, architects, etc. This group of individuals cost him dearly and brought him a lot each month. That marked the limits of his administrative science and his artistic judgement. If we spoke to him of merit, of artistic talent? He turned his back with humour, or responded brusquely: 'Don't make me laugh, an artist is not worth the same as a negro! A negro never asks for money from his master; he receives only lashes of the whip and he says thank you ... When one no longer wants his negro, he sells him for a very good price at auction ... Have you tried to sell *comédiens*? One would not give even a gourde per head ... they are worth nothing, I tell you, not a bean.²⁵

Davis was undoubtedly a very rich man at times, with an exceptionally large income: a letter from 1829 states that his gross annual turnover that year was 200,000 gourdes (gourdes being the Haitian currency with which, as former colonists of Saint-Domingue, both Davis and the recipient of the letter would doubtless have been familiar), from which he claimed a personal income of 20,000 gourdes (about \$6,666).²⁶ To put the scale of this salary into perspective, it is perhaps worth noting that some twelve years later in 1840, the superintendent of the United States Mint in New Orleans—a highly respected position—

²⁵ 'Il faisait un bloc de tout son monde, hommes et femmes, comédiens, croupiers, cuisiniers, danseurs, musiciens, maçons, lampistes, architectes, etc. Ce bloc d'individus lui coûtait tant, et lui rapportait tant par mois. Là se bornait la science administrative et son jugement artistique. Lui parlait-on de mérite, du talent d'un artiste? Il tournait le dos avec humeur, ou répondait brusquement: 'Laissez-moi donc, un artiste ne vaut pas même un nègre! Un nègre ne demande jamais d'argent à son maître; il n'en reçoit que des coups de fouet, et lui dit merci... Quand on ne veut plus de son nègre, on le vend très cher à l'encan... Tâchez donc de vendre des comédiens? on n'en donnerait pas seulement une gourde par tête... Cela ne vaut rien, vous dis-je, pas un piment'. Jobey, *L'Amour d'un nègre*, 38.

²⁶ 'On fait riche ce directeur incomparable de plus d'une somme de 200 mille Gourdes qui lui assure annuellement une rente de 20 mille Gourdes dit-on!' Jean Boze to Baron de Sainte-Gême, 6 November–4 December 1829, *HNOG*, Ste-Gême Family Papers, MSS 100, Folder 150, 2. The rate of exchange of dollars to gourdes used here (1:3) is taken from that given for the year 1820 in Victor Bulmer-Thomas, *The Economic History of the Caribbean Since the Napoleonic Wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 538.

was only paid \$2,493 a year.²⁷ In fact, Davis's 1829 salary was more than that earned by all but one of the United States governors in the same period: he was surpassed only by the Louisiana State governor—the highest earning of any state governor by some \$2,500—who earned \$7,500 in 1831.²⁸

Davis seems to have linked his business interests explicitly with the theatre. In fact, the unashamed mixing of the commercial with the artistic in all kinds of respects seems to have been a feature of the Théâtre d'Orléans throughout its existence, since all of the facilities surrounding the theatre (gambling saloon, cafes, ballroom, etc.), which audience members could enjoy before, during and after their visit to the theatre, were owned by Davis.²⁹ So, too, were singers from the theatre frequently used to provide entertainment for guests at Davis's hotels. Fittingly enough for an institution that was bound up in a web of local commercial activity, when the auditorium was redecorated in 1837, the local press reported that the old stage curtain had been replaced by one decorated with a painting of the New Orleans cotton exchange.³⁰

Davis ensured, therefore, that the Théâtre d'Orléans was firmly implicated within the commercial sphere in New Orleans. Nonetheless, in spite of such connections and its general popularity, the theatre appears to have run almost constantly at a loss. Davis himself suggested as much when he wrote to the *Courrier de la Louisiane* in April 1835 in response to plans to open a second French theatre in the city, pointing out that financially it was difficult enough to sustain one theatre and that to open another would mean the certain demise of both enterprises.³¹ That he was often in financial difficulty is amply supported by the enormous number of mortgages and loan repayments recorded in Davis's name in the New Orleans Notarial Archives, not to mention the resulting court cases when he failed to make good on his financial promises.³² He resorted to large loans, first from friends among his fellow Saint-Domingue refugees, and later from the corporation of New Orleans

²⁷ The superintendent's salary is listed in *The American Almanac and Repository of Useful Knowledge for the Year 1841* (Boston, 1841), 121.

²⁸ The Louisiana State Governor's salary is given in *The American Almanac and Repository of Useful Knowledge for the Year 1832* (Boston, 1832), 274.

²⁹ While the mixing of theatre and gambling was unusual in the French system (although it did, of course, develop at Monte Carlo later in the century), it was common for Italian impresarios to subsidise opera seasons with profits made from running gambling houses. See Jutta Toelle, 'Opera as business? From impresari to the publishing industry', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 17/4 (2012): 448–59, especially 452.

³⁰ *Le Courrier de la Louisiane*, 7 November 1837. The curtain had been painted by Louis Dominique Grandjean Develle, the theatre's long-term stage designer, whose life and work will be discussed more fully later in this chapter.

³¹ *Courrier de la Louisiane*, 18 April 1835.

³² For example, Davis, John vs The Mayor, Aldermen and Inhabitants of New Orleans, 30 December 1820, *NOPL*, docket 3615 of the First Judicial Court.

itself. His finances fluctuated dramatically, with various letters recording that he was almost bankrupt and others suggesting that he was 'getting richer by the day'.³³

We can never know for certain why Davis fought so hard to keep the theatre open, when all his business instincts surely rebelled at the thought of preserving an enterprise that haemorrhaged money. The theatre presumably played a role in drawing people to his other nearby ventures, but perhaps it also did his ego and social status good to be seen as a patron of the arts. Perhaps also the influence of his friend, Bernard Marigny, a staunch defender of French culture and language in the city, was a decisive factor, or perhaps Davis's own gambling spirit drew him to the challenge of keeping the theatre afloat. Whatever the reason or reasons were, Davis persevered.

In spite of his French roots, Davis in many respects seemed closer to what nineteenth-century Europeans would have seen (sometimes uncharitably, as was the case in Jobey's writings) as the typical 'American' man of the period, in his desire to integrate the theatre into commercial life in the city on a variety of levels (even if his apparent willingness to continue in the face of financial loss seems a little at odds with the stereotype). His audiences, too, seemed willing to accept the enmeshed nature of opera and the commercial world in a way that French audiences of the period were perhaps not. While Frederic Hemmings, for instance, highlighted the resistance to theatre curtains containing advertisements in Paris from the 1850s, Davis's patrons did not seem to find anything strange in the link between the theatre and the cotton exchange.³⁴ In this sense, then, Davis seems to have cultivated an identity for the Théâtre d'Orléans that can be seen as distinct from the outlook—financial and aesthetic—that predominated in French theatres in the early part of the nineteenth century, especially since, unlike his fellow theatre managers in France, Davis could not rely on any kind of municipal subsidy to support the theatre.

Although Davis might have had 'American' traits in many respects, he was certainly not typical among American directors of the first half of the nineteenth century, most noticeably in the fact that he was not a man of the theatre himself.³⁵ While his rival at New Orleans's American Theatre, James Caldwell, regularly appeared in leading roles for his

³³ Jean Boze mentions that Davis was on the brink of bankruptcy in Jean Boze to Baron de Sainte-Gême, 20 July 1829, *HNOG*, Ste-Gême Family Papers, MSS 100, Folder 143, 7 and later that he was 'getting richer by the day' in Jean Boze to Baron de Sainte-Gême, 18 July 1834, *HNOG*, Ste-Gême Family Papers, MSS 100, Folder 243, 4.

³⁴ Hemmings, *The Theatre Industry in Nineteenth-Century France*, 58–9.

³⁵ For information on the life of theatre managers in America, see *The Theatrical Manager in England and America; Player of a Perilous Game: Philip Henslowe, Tate Wilkinson, Stephen Price, Edwin Booth, Charles Wyndham*, ed. Joseph W. Donohue Jr. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971).

company's productions, Davis's stage manager, Jean Colson, testified in court on one occasion in 1822 that 'M. Davis is not in the habit of coming to the theatre'.³⁶ Such statements, however, should not be taken to indicate that Davis was not personally involved in the running of the theatre, even if he did not follow the 'actor-director' model still predominant at other American theatres. In fact, he was actively involved in the process of recruitment on a number of occasions, as I will show later in this chapter. Nonetheless, Davis's relationship to his theatre seems to have been highly unusual among both European and American theatres at the time, and he created an important foundation upon which his son, Pierre, was later able to build.

By the mid-1830s, John Davis was slowing down, most likely as a result of ill health, and in 1834, he took the decision to enter into partnership in the running of the theatre with Pierre. Notarial records show the division of responsibilities between father and son in the new partnership.³⁷ According to the agreement, John and Pierre would each have equal rights, but Pierre was to dedicate himself full time to the theatre, taking charge in all practical respects (recruitment and contracting, purchasing materials, etc.). John, on the other hand, would be responsible in general for the finances of the theatre. In the case of taxes, repairs etc., the pair would share the expenses between them. The profits, too, were to be shared equally. The documents stated that the partnership would be reviewed every two years.

For the first two years they worked together but, when it came to the first renewal of the partnership, John decided to give up his share in the theatre, and in an important move away from the owner-impresario model, the Théâtre d'Orléans was incorporated for the first time on 14 March 1836, with Christoval Guillaume de Armas, one of the distinguished family of Creole notaries and businessmen in the city, as its first president.³⁸ Pierre remained the theatrical director. While John Davis had relied heavily upon his friends and associates for loans in order to keep the theatre open in earlier years, the new Compagnie du Théâtre d'Orléans could now rely on an official board of shareholders for support. On 11 May 1836, Davis agreed to hand over not just his lease to the theatre along with all its furnishings and equipment, but also the adjoining ballroom complex, including all the equipment for the gambling saloon and other facilities to the Compagnie du Théâtre

³⁶ 'Examination in chief', Davis, John vs Caldwell, James (1822), *NOPL*, docket 4622 of the First Judicial Court.

³⁷ 'Société entre Jean Davis et Pierre Davis', *NONA*, Theodore Seghers, Volume 8, Act 162, 27 March 1834.

³⁸ The documents detailing the handover are preserved in the New Orleans Notarial Archives. See *NONA*, Félix de Armas, Vol 48, Act 333, 11 May 1836.

d'Orléans. The date of the official sale was arranged for 1 April 1837.³⁹ After that date, John Davis seems to have retired altogether, with the \$275,000 he made from the sale of the theatre: a vast sum for the time.⁴⁰

The following year, John moved from the city to his house in Mandeville, on the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain, where he died on the morning of 13 June 1839, at the age of sixty-six.⁴¹ His body was returned to New Orleans and buried in St Louis Cemetery no. 2. In his will, signed at Mandeville on 8 April 1839, just over two months before his death, Davis left all of his property (which was not detailed in the document) to his 'dearly loved son, Pierre'. He left instructions for Pierre to look after a woman named 'Dédé' (who it appears looked after Pierre as a child), and also for him to free his father's 'spoiled' slave boy, Simeon, since Davis desired that 'he should have no other master'.⁴² The 'old dragon', it seems, did have a softer side when it came to his family.

The years after 1837: developing John Davis's legacy

In many respects, Pierre Davis remains a more mysterious individual than his father. Even his name is uncertain: he appears at times as 'Pierre', at others as 'John Jr.' and even sometimes by his nickname, 'Toto'.⁴³ The *Historical Sketchbook and Guide to New Orleans*, 'compiled and edited by several leading writers of the New Orleans Press' and published in 1884, contains what seem to be the only extant biographical remarks on Pierre:

This John, or 'Toto' Davis, was one of the most talented and accomplished men ever in Louisiana. Apart from a thorough classical education, acquired in one of the royal colleges of France, he had also gone through a complete course of musical studies, an artistic training which was of great service to him in the selection and formation of his opera companies in Europe.⁴⁴

³⁹ *NONA*, Félix de Armas, Vol 48, Act 333, 11 May 1836.

⁴⁰ *NONA*, Félix de Armas, Vol 48, Act 333, 11 May 1836.

⁴¹ See his obituary in *L'Abeille*, 15 June 1839.

⁴² Pierre duly freed Simeon, who went on to take his late master's surname as his own, and lived in the city as a free man until his death on 17 October 1872, at the age of 50. See Cemetery Index, Historical Centre of the Louisiana State Museums, Old U.S. Mint.

⁴³ Notarial records refer to him as Pierre, suggesting that this was his given name, but many other sources call him John: his father was so well known that it is very possible that it was easier to refer to him as John Jr.

⁴⁴ William H. Coleman, *Historical Sketchbook and Guide to New Orleans and Environs* (New York, 1885), 203–4.

The picture these remarks paint of the transition between John's management and Pierre's, then, is one of fundamental contrast: it seems that while John Davis was not a man of artistic inclinations, according to the account quoted above, Pierre had received considerable musical training. In Pierre's love of the theatre, then, we can perhaps find another possible reason for why John so desperately sustained the theatre through all its financial troubles: it was to be his lasting legacy to his son. Indeed, Pierre does not seem to have any of his father's business acumen, and the theatre appears to have been the only part of his father's commercial empire that Pierre was able to sustain.⁴⁵ Even so, the Théâtre d'Orléans entered a very troubled period in the late 1830s and early 1840s, with endless financial disputes between management, artists and shareholders.⁴⁶ It is very likely that the cost of paying off John Davis's \$275,000 for the sale of the theatre (which included a \$100,000 up-front payment, with the remaining sum to be paid off over a period of fifteen to twenty years, at a 5 percent interest rate) was causing problems for the new company.⁴⁷ It was only after a period in which a society of artists wrested control of the theatre from Pierre Davis that matters began to calm down.

While Pierre might not have been the businessman his father had been, however, his direction saw the theatre flourish artistically, as he was responsible for updating its repertoire (from older *opéras-comiques* to the latest Parisian *grands opéras*) and for establishing a new era of luxury in the Théâtre d'Orléans's productions, as I will explore in Chapter 3. He also developed the theatre's international prominence, by building upon the contacts and patterns established by his father, that allowed the theatre to benefit most fully from its interaction with Europe. At the same time, he cultivated its strengths locally. Even after his official retirement in 1853, and his move to Paris shortly afterwards, Pierre continued to assist Charles Boudousquié, the new manager of the Théâtre d'Orléans, with the development and maintenance of the transatlantic connections the theatre had come to rely upon. While the nature of this partnership seems to have remained unofficial, Boudousquié had most likely known Davis for a number of years through business interactions in New Orleans. That is to say, before he turned to the theatre, Boudousquié had worked as a notary in the city, and records show that he had been employed to record

⁴⁵ It was certainly not uncommon in the nineteenth century for theatre owners to feel pressure to sustain a struggling enterprise because of the devotion of a wife or other family member to the theatre.

⁴⁶ Mary Grace Swift mentions this period of financial troubles in 'The Northern Tours of the Théâtre d'Orléans, 1843 and 1845', *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 26/2 (1985): 157.

⁴⁷ Details of the financial transaction between the Compagnie du Théâtre d'Orléans and John Davis are listed in the handover documents: *NONA*, Félix de Armas, Vol 48, Act 333, 11 May 1836.

contracts between Davis and the theatre's performers in the 1840s.⁴⁸ Under Boudousquié's direction, the theatre troupes grew ever larger, and the repertoire expanded to include more operas by Verdi and other non-French works. Ultimately, Boudousquié shaped the future of the city's operatic scene by instigating plans to build the new French Opera House in 1859, but it was the Davises who developed many of the practices that gave the Théâtre d'Orléans its identity, which, as I shall discuss in the conclusion to this thesis, altered fundamentally after the move to the new opera house.

Establishing systems for recruitment: the link with Europe

The first part of this chapter has dealt at length with two of the most important individuals who were involved in establishing the Théâtre d'Orléans's theatrical practices, and I now want to explore those practices and the Davises' roles in developing them in more detail. First of all, I will explore the processes by which the Théâtre d'Orléans troupe was recruited—the performers themselves are the subject of Chapter 2—in order to shed light on the transatlantic connections of the theatre, and the ways in which the agencies of individuals interacted with and influenced larger systemic practices.

The Théâtre d'Orléans troupe was typically quite large, comprising up to twenty men and fifteen women, along with additional chorus members, two *régisseurs*, a *chef d'orchestre*, and an assistant *chef d'orchestre*, as well as the local theatre staff (the machinists etc. seem not to have been recruited abroad, since they never appear in the lists of personnel arriving in the city). The theatre season in New Orleans typically ran from the late autumn/winter through to the following June. At the opening of the Théâtre d'Orléans, John Davis had clearly hoped to keep the theatre open all year round, but early in the 1820s he made the decision to close in June on account of the excessive heat (and the ever-present threat of cholera and yellow fever that loomed over the city in the summer months).

The chief period in which the Théâtre d'Orléans administration sought to recruit its new troupe, then, was in the middle of the summer. The recruiter would generally arrive in Paris in June or July and would remain there until September when he would set sail for New Orleans with his new troupe; the season there would begin as soon as the troupe returned. In the early days of the Théâtre d'Orléans, this could be as late as mid-December, if the weather was unkind, but once steam crossings of the Atlantic became possible in the

⁴⁸ For example, a contract between Pierre Davis and the singers M. and Mme Richer was made in front of Boudousquié. See 'Contract between Pierre Davis and M. and Mme Richer', *NONA*, Charles Boudousquié, Vol 16, Act 239, 16 December 1844. For more on this contract, see Chapter 2.

mid-1840s, the troupes could generally be guaranteed to arrive in the early weeks of November.⁴⁹

Sometimes John or Pierre Davis went to Paris themselves. In 1822, for example, John posted a notice in a number of the city's newspapers informing his friends and clients that he would be departing for Europe imminently, and that they should arrange to see him to settle all their accounts before he left.⁵⁰ On 8 November that year, the *Courrier de la Louisiane* carried the following report, as audiences in New Orleans eagerly awaited the opening of the new theatre season:

The American ship, Cecilia, captained by A. Liberal, having left Le Havre on 16 September, entered la Balize last Tuesday morning,⁵¹ and arrived at 2 o'clock on Wednesday outside the Caeslar plantation, where it stopped to set down its passengers, who are afraid to enter the town at the moment [on account of a yellow fever epidemic]. M. John Davis, the director of the Théâtre d'Orléans, who had undertaken at great cost the trip to France in order to find actors to complete his troupe, was on board this ship, and brings with him twenty-five people attached to the theatre. We have learned with pleasure that M. Davis has obtained for us charming subjects for operas, comedies and vaudevilles, as well as a lovely troupe of dancers for ballets.⁵²

From the early 1830s, however, it became more usual for Pierre Davis to go to Paris than his father. The first recorded instance of Pierre making the journey comes in the summer of 1832, when he would have been twenty-five years old.⁵³ His trip to Europe coincides

⁴⁹ For information about the beginnings of transatlantic steam travel, see Aileen Fyfe, *Steam-Powered Knowledge: William Chambers and the Business of Publishing, 1820–1860* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 173–252.

⁵⁰ *Courrier de la Louisiane*, 8 April 1822.

⁵¹ La Balize was the town nearest to the mouth of the Mississippi River at this time, and its name was often taken to mean the mouth of the river.

⁵² 'Le navire Américain, Cecilia, capitaine A. Liberal, parti du Havre le 16 Septembre, est entré à la Balize mardi matin, et était arrivé mercredi à 2 heures après-midi devant l'habitation Caselar, où il s'est arrêté pour mettre à terre ses passagers, qu'on a craint de faire monter en ville dans ce moment. Mr J. Davis, le directeur du Théâtre d'Orléans, qui avait entrepris, à grands frais, le voyage de France afin de se procurer des acteurs pour compléter sa troupe, est le fréteur de ce navire, et amène avec lui vingt-cinq personnes attachées à son théâtre. Nous avons appris avec plaisir que Mr. Davis s'est procure des charmants sujets pour l'opéra, la comédie et le vaudeville, ainsi qu'une jolie troupe de danseurs pour monter des ballets.' *Courrier de la Louisiane*, 8 November 1822.

⁵³ 'Procuration from John Davis to Pierre Davis', *NONA*, Theodore Seghers, Volume 5, Act 129, 29 March 1832.

with a year in which the Théâtre d'Orléans made a summer tour to the North-Eastern United States, suggesting that Davis senior was otherwise occupied, and this was a chance for his son to prove himself.⁵⁴ From then on, Pierre seems to have had the lion's share of the recruitment responsibilities and, indeed, the notarial agreements concerning his partnership in the theatre with his father from 1834 show that Pierre's duties involved most of the theatrical legwork. It was clearly well known in New Orleans that Pierre was frequently given responsibility for recruitment, and in July 1834 a plantation owner in New Orleans wrote to his employer (an old acquaintance of John Davis's) in France to say that 'Mr Davis acknowledges your well wishes to him and to his son, who has been in Paris for several months, no doubt recruiting *comédiens* for this winter's performances'.⁵⁵ Pierre continued to make trips to Paris through his own period of directorship of the theatre and also when he handed control over to Boudousquié, later settling there permanently.⁵⁶

The Davises, however, did not complete their recruitment alone: since it involved almost a six-month round trip, it was not practical for the same person to recruit the troupe every year.⁵⁷ As a result, they also enlisted the services of a number of other people over the years, both from New Orleans and from France, to recruit performers. Sometimes, this person was the company's *régisseur*: Claude Bernard was responsible for recruiting the troupe in the summer of 1840 while he held that position, and the *Revue et gazette musicale de Paris* reported that the troupe had left Le Havre for New Orleans 'under the direction of M. Bernard' on 20 September that year.⁵⁸ Bernard, who had spent many years working in Paris (as director of the Odéon) and in provincial France, would have been well placed to seek out performers there, as he was doubtless familiar with the intricacies of the French recruiting system.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ For more on the tours, see Swift, 'The Northern Tours of the Théâtre d'Orléans', 168–71.

⁵⁵ 'M. Davis a été reconnaissant à votre souvenir et à celui pour son fils, qui se trouve depuis quelques mois à Paris pour y recruter sans doute des comédiens pour les spectacles de cet hiver', Jean Boze to Baron de Sainte-Gême, 18 July 1834, *HNOG*, Ste-Gême Family Papers, MSS 100, Folder 243, 4.

⁵⁶ While we cannot confirm the accuracy of many of the details in the story, the anecdote with which I began this chapter seems to confirm that Pierre Davis was visiting Paris as late as 1859 in order to recruit performers: A. Denis, *Le Nouvelliste*, 12 August 1851. The entries in Meyerbeer's daybooks and diaries discussed later in this chapter also confirm that Davis was in Paris in August 1854, the year after he handed over control of the theatre to Boudousquié.

⁵⁷ At the opening of the Théâtre d'Orléans in 1819, performers seem to have joined the theatre at various points during the year, but this pattern of recruitment was established from 1822. For more on the link between recruitment patterns and performers' contract length, see Chapter 2, 80–1.

⁵⁸ 'Chronique étrangère', *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*, 31 January 1841, 71.

⁵⁹ For an account of Bernard's directorship of the Odéon, see Everist, *Music Drama at the Paris Odéon*, 46–59. For more on Bernard and his reasons for going to New Orleans, see Chapter 2.

Others who went to Paris to help the Davises were not necessarily part of the theatre's regular personnel, but had connections within the artistic world. We have notarial records from 1819 and 1824, for example, in which John Davis granted power of attorney to Jean-Baptiste Sel to go to Paris and recruit the troupe for him.⁶⁰ Sel was not a professional musician himself (he was actually an artist), but he sought and contracted performers on Davis's behalf on several occasions. The A. Elie who was responsible for recruiting the troupe in 1838 (and for recruiting Claude Bernard himself), meanwhile, was most likely Adolphe Elie, a violinist in the theatre orchestra, who taught the young Louis Moreau Gottschalk before his departure for Paris.⁶¹ Elie also owned a thriving music shop in New Orleans, located at 12 Royal Street: his advertisements declared him to be an 'importer of musical instruments, Pleyel pianos, Italian and French strings, sheet music, and music paper'.⁶² Most likely, Elie was already making trips to Europe in order to secure deals on his imports, and so Davis took advantage of this and engaged him to recruit singers while he was there.

In fact, it seems that the Davises often made use of people who already had business in Europe to recruit performers: not only was this convenient, but these people were often well-connected within the Parisian musical community. Gustave Collignon, for example, was thanked for his efforts towards recruiting the troupe in a number of reports published in Parisian newspapers and journals in 1844, as well as in earlier reports from New Orleans itself. Collignon was born in Rennes in 1818, trained at the Paris Conservatoire (where he won first prize for harmony and composition, as well as for his piano playing), and became a composer and pianist in the French capital.⁶³ From the beginning of his involvement with the Théâtre d'Orléans in the early 1840s, he maintained contact with Pierre Davis, before moving with his family to the city in 1848, in order to become more involved with the city's musical life.⁶⁴ He established himself as a respected teacher and composer there, and

⁶⁰ See 'Procuration from John Davis to J. B. Sel', *NONA*, Félix de Armas, Volume 2, Act 271, 7 June 1824.

⁶¹ See S. Frederick Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 34.

⁶² These advertisements were printed in the programmes/libretti sold to accompany the Théâtre d'Orléans performances and can be found in many archives in New Orleans. Concert and opera programmes were no exceptions to the American desire to advertise on every available surface (a fact which is revealed by even a cursory glance at any of the newspapers published in New Orleans during the period: the front page of every broadsheet newspaper was filled almost entirely with adverts).

⁶³ A biography of Collignon can be found in *The Crescent City Illustrated: The Commercial, Social, Political, and General History of New Orleans*, ed. Edwin L. Jewell (New Orleans, 1873). This volume does not contain page numbers, but it is fully accessible and text searchable through Google Books.

⁶⁴ To give but one example, he was thanked as follows in *La France théâtrale*: 'Tout porte à croire qu'il en sera ainsi, car jamais notre ville n'a vu une troupe aussi belle que celle qu'a pris soin de composer M. Collignon, ce correspondant si habile de Paris. Les efforts de ce dernier ont été couronnés du plus beau succès,

maintained an association with the Théâtre d'Orléans for over a quarter of a century, spending the rest of his life in Louisiana. It thus seems that the theatre administration not only had contacts they could call to assist them with their recruitment, but that they had an influence on some of these people's later relocations to Louisiana.

What is perhaps surprising about the New Orleans recruitment system is that it seems to have made little use of professional theatrical agents. As Frederic Hemmings has discussed, by the third decade of the nineteenth century, an older model of theatrical recruitment in which provincial theatre directors would come up to Paris to sign contracts with new recruits in the Palais-Royal gardens had been replaced by 'bureaux de correspondance dramatique', run by professional theatrical agents.⁶⁵ Provincial theatre managers no longer had to come up to Paris to recruit troupes, but could write to these agencies and let them know of their requirements for the next season.⁶⁶ Certainly, this would have been the least time-consuming and, most likely, least-expensive option for the Théâtre d'Orléans management, and it was an option that was particularly common for the increasing number of companies based outside of Europe, both French and Italian: troupes for the Americas were frequently gathered in this way throughout the nineteenth century.⁶⁷ As John Rosselli has shown, Italian theatrical agents were willing not just to recruit performers, but to sell impresarios a whole 'theatrical package', which included costumes and props as well as performers, and it is likely that French agencies would have offered similar deals.⁶⁸

Nonetheless, the Davises seemed to prefer to rely on personal contacts to recruit on their behalf. There is no existing evidence that cuts were taken from performers' salaries to pay the 5 percent agent's fee that was customary for engagements abroad,⁶⁹ and no existing

merci et reconnaissance à M. Collignon'. *La France théâtrale*, 26 December 1844, n. p. Gustave Collignon and his wife and baby are listed in the immigration records as arriving in New Orleans on the *Espirance* from Le Havre on 7 November 1848, along with the new recruits for the Théâtre d'Orléans troupe. See Carl Brasseaux, *The Foreign French: Nineteenth-Century French Immigration into Louisiana, Volume 2: 1840–48* (Lafayette, LA: Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1990), 74.

⁶⁵ Hemmings, *The Theatre Industry in Nineteenth-Century France*, 194–5.

⁶⁶ Hemmings also points out how frequently performers were exploited by such theatrical *bureaux de placements* (*The Theatre Industry in Nineteenth-Century France*, 193–5). See also, Lauren R. Clay, 'Theater and the Commercialisation of Culture in Eighteenth-Century France' (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2003), 167 and 285.

⁶⁷ Rosselli points out that agents began to ask for 8 to 10 percent commission for arranging troupes for the Americas by the second half of the nineteenth century. John Rosselli, *The Opera Industry in Italy from Cimarosa to Verdi: the Role of the Impresario* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 143.

⁶⁸ Rosselli, *The Opera Industry in Italy from Cimarosa to Verdi*, 149.

⁶⁹ The fee was normally only 2.5 percent for engagements within France. See Hemmings, *The Theatre Industry in Nineteenth-Century France*, 195.

evidence that the Davises contacted a professional theatrical agent.⁷⁰ The closest we come to an indication of involvement with theatrical agents concerns the abovementioned Collignon: a description of him in a New Orleans periodical in 1842 as ‘le courtier des théâtres’ suggests that he might have been related to the owners of the Collignon Agence Théâtrale that operated in Paris during the 1830s and 1840s (it seems unlikely that Gustave Collignon himself was the proprietor of this business, since it was operating at least as early as 1835, when Collignon would have been only seventeen years old).⁷¹ Even if he was connected with the theatrical agency alongside his activities as a pianist and a teacher, he seems to have operated for the Théâtre d'Orléans as a private individual. In fact, he appears to have always worked alongside a representative of the theatre who was physically present in Paris, until he himself moved out to New Orleans: in 1842, for example, he was acting with Eugène Prévost, the theatre’s long-term *chef d’orchestre*, to build a troupe.⁷² Whether the Davises had any reason to distrust theatrical agencies is not possible to say, but it certainly seems to be the case that they preferred to go to the effort and expense of having networks of personal contacts to handpick performers.

That is not to say, however, that the relationship between the theatre administration and its agents was in any way ad hoc or informal, as notarial records show that legally binding agreements were made between John Davis and a number of his recruiters concerning the terms of their appointment. It is highly likely that he made similar legal arrangements with all of his ‘agents’, but the nature of notarial records in New Orleans during the nineteenth century makes a comprehensive search for them very difficult: it was not only common practice for clients to use a wide variety of notaries, but some of the notaries’ records have been damaged by fire or water.⁷³ In any case, the Théâtre d'Orléans company was in quite a special position, as it was both able and willing to bear the cost of sending someone to Paris for several months. Davis made a large financial gamble in doing

⁷⁰ It does appear, however, that certain performers might have signed up to theatrical agencies upon their return from New Orleans. Indeed, the names of several singers who had just returned from New Orleans appeared on lists of unemployed singers seeking work published in *La France théâtrale* from 12 September 1844 to the end of that year. Such lists were often placed in publications by theatrical agents who were linked with that journal.

⁷¹ ‘De l’Administration du Théâtre d’Orléans’, *La Lorgnette*, 17 July 1842. The Collignon Agence Théâtrale was listed at 9 Rue de Cléry by *Le Monde dramatique: revue de spectacles anciens et modernes* in 1835 (142). By 1845, Collignon himself was listed at that address as a piano teacher. See *Annuaire musical: contenant les noms et adresses des amateurs, artistes et commerçants en musique de Paris, des départemens et de l’étranger, par une société de musiciens* (Paris, 1845), 245.

⁷² ‘De l’Administration du Théâtre d’Orléans’, *La Lorgnette*, 17 July 1842.

⁷³ Moreover, it is only possible to search by index within individual volumes, meaning that a large-scale search of notarial records was beyond the scope of this project and remains to be carried out.

so, as, to give one example, the procurement documents for Jean-Baptiste Sel show that the appointed recruiter was given free rein to contract the performers for any sum he felt to be suitable, and to spend whatever he deemed necessary on materials related to the theatre.⁷⁴ The administration of the Théâtre d'Orléans clearly felt that the personal contact was needed, in order to persuade performers to make the arduous and sometimes perilous journey across the Atlantic.

The Davises, then, established a regular recruiting system and schedule, that was built not just around themselves, but involved an extensive network of personal contacts on both sides of the Atlantic. But what was particularly remarkable about this pattern, even beyond the fact that the Davises strove for the personal touch rather than settling for the services of a professional agent, was the fact that it did not correspond with the long-established main season of theatrical recruitment in France. That is to say, the administration of the Théâtre d'Orléans sought to contract people from late July onwards and ask them to leave almost immediately for New Orleans. Louis Placide Canonge, a playwright and music lover in New Orleans complained in 1842 that this was not a good system, saying that in order to find the best performers in France it was vital to be in Paris for the eight to ten days before Easter.⁷⁵ This, he claimed, was a well-known fact. Canonge's complaint formed part of a more extended article in his theatrical periodical, *La Lorgnette*, in which he wrote about the disjunction between the French model of theatrical recruitment and that of the Théâtre d'Orléans, claiming that New Orleans was left with Europe's 'dregs': performers who remained unemployed after the main recruiting period, or who could be lured away from their existing contracts. He argued that the Davises put neither enough time nor money into securing the best troupes for the city, and he clearly regarded Collignon as something of a swindler.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ The document states that Sel should act as follows: 'sur son prochain départ pour France de, pour le dit sieur Davis et en son nom, faire choix de tous acteurs, danseurs, et chanteurs ou autres que le sieur Sel croira capable de remplir le but [du théâtre], prendre avec eux tels arrangements, leur abonner pour leurs gages tels prix et somme, faire tels avances et de bourses qu'il croira à propos, s'obliger en tout et partout de la même manière que le dit sieur Sel la jugera convenable'. 'Procuration from John Davis to J. B. Sel', *NONA*, Félix de Armas, Volume 2, Act 271, 7 June 1824.

⁷⁵ Indeed, this was the long-established period in which provincial theatrical recruitment took place in Paris, until the use of 'bureaux de correspondance dramatique' became widespread. See Hemmings, *The Theatre Industry in Nineteenth-Century France*, 194.

⁷⁶ Of Collignon, Canonge has the following to say: 'M. Collignon, le courtier des théâtres et l'homme de confiance de l'Administration d'Orléans, à force de Robert-Macairisme, lui fait avaler des ténors enroués, des dramaturges d'un échevelé désespérant, des basses-tailles Bernardet [this is a reference to Bernardet, a singer whom we will encounter later in this chapter and in the next, and who seems to have had a very difficult relationship with the theatre administration], et des premières cantatrices sans dents'. 'De l'Administration du Théâtre d'Orléans', *La Lorgnette*, 17 July 1842.

What Canonge did not acknowledge—at least not until he himself took over management of the Théâtre d'Orléans after Boudousquié's company had moved to the new French Opera House in December 1859—was the fact that the Davises' model of theatrical recruitment was the most practical for local conditions.⁷⁷ Indeed, the personal approach adopted by the Davises meant that they had to rely either on themselves being able to leave New Orleans or on other people being willing to leave their regular employment and make the journey, and this was most possible during the unbearably hot summer months, in which the theatre was closed and anyone who could afford to would leave the city.

As Canonge—who, one senses from his extensive writings, delighted in provoking Pierre Davis and the Théâtre d'Orléans management—pointed out, it undoubtedly would have been preferable for the Théâtre d'Orléans to stick to the established French pattern of recruitment; still, the local environment meant that it was simply not the most practical solution for the theatre or the community it served. Nonetheless, such a localised approach was common to many French provincial theatres of the period which, as Hemmings has shown, arranged their seasons in accordance with such factors as the climate, local parliament terms, and other needs of the theatre-going community.⁷⁸

In any case, the recruitment pattern was not so rigid that recruiters from New Orleans were unable to be in Paris in the main theatrical recruitment period if there was a particular need for new performers (whether because they had proved unsatisfactory, or because they had succumbed to illness): in a letter dated 2 March 1836, for example, Jean Boze wrote to the Baron de Sainte-Gême in France that 'Mr Toto, the son of Mr John Davis is on his way to Paris on a boat going to Le Havre ... I think the aim of his trip is the recruitment of some good actors that are said to be lacking from the troupe here'.⁷⁹ Nonetheless, for the most part Canonge's fears that the out-of-season recruiting would leave New Orleans with Europe's dregs, seem to have been unfounded. It was a rare occurrence that Pierre or another recruiter had to make a second trip to Europe because the original troupe had been found lacking, and the Théâtre d'Orléans seems to have persevered

⁷⁷ For information on what happened to the Théâtre d'Orléans after Boudousquié's company moved to the new French Opera House, see Braun, 'Petit Paris en Amérique?', 40–1.

⁷⁸ Hemmings points out, for example, that many French provincial theatre seasons only ran in the winter months, while the season in Toulouse ran for many years from January to September, with a hiatus from March to June. Hemmings, *The Theatre Industry in Nineteenth-Century France*, 62–3.

⁷⁹ 'Mr Toto, le fils de Mr Jean Davis, a fait route pour France sur un bâtiment allant au Havre ... On pense que son voyage a pour but le recrutement de quelques bons acteurs qui manquaient, dit-on, ici à cette troupe.' Jean Boze to Baron de Ste-Gême, 2 March 1836, *HNOG*, Ste-Gême Family Papers, MSS 100, Folder 267, 3.

with its slightly idiosyncratic process until at least 1859. The Davises, therefore, set up an apparently reliable and unusually 'hands-on' system of recruitment for the theatre.

Music and Costumes

I will now turn to the materials for staging operas, and how they came to be in New Orleans. The image perpetuated in existing scholarship has been one in which New Orleans directly imported its theatrical materials from Paris, in much the same way as it imported the latest Parisian dresses or furniture.⁸⁰ In certain respects, this image rings true. On 20 February 1840, for instance, the *Revue et gazette musicale de Paris* reported that:

Some months ago, a boat left Le Havre carrying, carefully packaged and boxed, the music, costumes, accessories and sketches for the decor of the opera, *Les Huguenots*, which they wished to produce at the theatre in New Orleans.⁸¹

This brief report is significant for various reasons: first, it underlines the fact that the Théâtre d'Orléans's managers sought to reproduce Parisian operatic grandeur as closely as possible in New Orleans (especially when it came to *grand opéra*, which I will discuss in greater length in Chapter 3). It also reveals the way in which New Orleans's theatrical life continued to generate transatlantic interest back in Paris, decades after it had ceased to be under French colonial control. At the same time, though, while this brief notice allows us an initial insight into the processes of importing French opera to New Orleans, in its brevity it conceals more than it reveals, by focussing on a ship and its contents, and thereby depersonalising the process of cultural transfer. As in the case of recruitment, however, this is also a story of individual agents: here, the Davises and their personal contacts, who made the acquisition of materials for New Orleans possible. In a notarial act in which John Davis granted J.B. Sel and Maurice Abat power of attorney to recruit the troupe in 1819, for instance, Davis also expressly gave them the power to buy 'all the decorations and other objects' that they felt were necessary to the running of the theatre while they were in Paris.⁸²

⁸⁰ See, for example, Ronald L. Davis, *A History of Opera in the American West* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1965), 6.

⁸¹ 'Il y a quelques mois un bâtiment parti du Havre emportait, soigneusement empaquetés et encaissés, la musique, les costumes, les accessoires et les croquis des décors de l'opéra des *Huguenots*, que l'on voulait représenter sur le théâtre de la Nouvelle-Orléans'. *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*, 20 February 1840.

⁸² 'Procuration from John Davis to Maurice Abat and J. B. Sel', *NONA*, Philippe Pedesclaux, Volume 7, Act 196, 10 March 1819.

Even this model of the recruiter purchasing materials to be shipped back to Paris, however, obscures some of the manifold intricacies of the process: the people from whom the materials were obtained are worthy of consideration in themselves. Among them were some of the most important figures in the musical world in the first half of the nineteenth century. In September 1849, for example, the composer Meyerbeer drafted a letter to his agent in Paris, Louis Gouin. It read as follows:

Would you please tell Brandus [Meyerbeer's publisher] that I authorise the sale of the score [for *Le Prophète*] to Odessa and New Orleans, as he has asked me, but not to Trieste. In general, he may sell it everywhere except in Germany and Italy.⁸³

It therefore seems that someone in New Orleans had been in correspondence with Brandus, who asked for Meyerbeer's consent before selling his score. In this case, though, it is impossible to tell whether Brandus had received correspondence from the Théâtre d'Orléans administration directly, or whether it was an enquiry from one of the city's many music sellers on the theatre's behalf. We have other pieces of evidence, however, that suggest Meyerbeer's own personal involvement in matters relating to the Théâtre d'Orléans. On 28 August 1854, for example, his diary contained another revealing draft letter, this time to Brandus himself: 'I hereby authorise the sale of the score [for *L'Etoile du Nord*], as requested, to the theatre of New Orleans in America. The director of this theatre, Davis, is a very active and honourable man.'⁸⁴ Here, then, we have a definite indication that it was the theatre administration that made direct contact with Brandus to request the sale of the score.

While the practice of contacting the publisher to obtain a full score of an opera was quite normal, Meyerbeer's diaries reveal the much greater lengths Pierre Davis and the Théâtre d'Orléans administration went to in order to ensure the release of scores and to gain

⁸³ 'A propos Veuillez dire à Monsieur Brandus que je l'autorise à vendre la partition pour Odessa & la nouvelle Orléans ainsi qu'il me le demande, ~~En-général~~ mais pas pour Trieste. En général qu'il la vende partout excepté en Allemagne & en Italie.' [Autograph (La): SBB, PK, Musikabteilung, N. Mus. Nachl. 97, M/14]'. September 1849, letter from Meyerbeer to Louis Gouin in Paris. *Giacomo Meyerbeer: Briefwechsel und Tagebücher*, ed. Sabine Henze-Döhring, 8 volumes, Volume 5 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1998), 76.

⁸⁴ 'Dem Theater von la nouvelle Orleans in Amerika autorisire ich Sie hiedurch die verlangte Partitur zu verkaufen. Der Direktor dieses Theaters Davis ist ein sehr thätiger und ehrenwerther Mann.' [Autograph (Las): Bibl. Nat. de France, Dep de la Musique, L. a. Meyerbeer 115 (Vol 75, S. 183)]'. *Giacomo Meyerbeer: Briefe und Tagebücher*, ed. Sabine Henze-Döhring, 8 volumes, Volume 6 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002), 379.

a greater insight into the way that the composer's works were being produced in Paris. During the summers of 1849 and 1853, when Pierre was in Paris, it seems that he made a number of visits to see Meyerbeer, and meetings between the two are listed no fewer than five times in the summer of 1849 and three between mid-June and mid-August 1853.⁸⁵ The subjects of these meetings are revealing, as in some instances Meyerbeer seems to have assisted Davis with the recruiting of performers. For example, he wrote in his diary on Sunday 7 July 1849 as follows: 'Visit from the director of the theatre in New Orleans, Davis, and arranged for him to hear the singer Mme Moisson'.⁸⁶ Although Mme Moisson does not appear ever to have gone to New Orleans, Meyerbeer played a similar role in helping Davis to audition Anna Bertini, the New Orleans troupe's prima donna for the 1853–4 season.⁸⁷ In fact, an article published in New Orleans's *Daily Delta* newspaper on 6 November 1853 had the following to say on the matter:

Mme Anne Bertini is a young and beautiful woman, a pupil of Duprez, who succeeds Paola as first soprano singer. Mr Davis, it is related, called upon Meyerbeer last summer, and remarked that if he could not find a good [prima donna], the great maestro's operas would of course be butchered here. Such a hint was enough, and Madame Bertini was recommended.⁸⁸

Both Davis and Meyerbeer, therefore, seem to have had their respective international images in mind during their interactions.

While the Davises and their recruiters played a vital role in cultivating some of the theatre's most important contacts, however, the role that individual performers contracted to the Théâtre d'Orléans played in creating the transatlantic links that allowed operas to be produced in New Orleans should not be underestimated.⁸⁹ For example, we have evidence of a performer in New Orleans in the mid-1840s, the bass Bernardet, engaging the services

⁸⁵ See *Giacomo Meyerbeer: Briefe und Tagebücher*: 4:497; 5:20; 6:112, 134, 697.

⁸⁶ The visit was dated 7 July 1849. See *The Diaries of Giacomo Meyerbeer: 1840–49*, ed. Robert Letellier, Volume 2 (London: Associated University Presses, 1999), 357.

⁸⁷ Bertini played the role of Marguerite d'Anjou in the New Orleans premiere of Meyerbeer's opera of that name in April 1854, for example. It seems that the audition organised by Meyerbeer in 1853 was a re-audition, as Bertini had already sung with the New Orleans troupe, performing the role of Berthe in the Théâtre d'Orléans premiere of *Le Prophète* in 1850.

⁸⁸ *New Orleans Daily Delta*, 6 November 1853.

⁸⁹ This subject will be explored in more detail in Chapter 2.

of Jean-Louis Nonnon, costumier of the Paris Opéra.⁹⁰ A letter held at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, for example, reveals that Bernardet paid Nonnon 666 francs (a considerable sum) for his work in April 1842.⁹¹ That the arrangement had been made purely between the performer and the costumier, not the theatre management, is evidenced by the way Bernardet divulged his opinions so freely in the rest of his letter, stating that he had been ‘deceived by the directors’.⁹² Bernardet was clearly somewhat disillusioned with his New Orleans experience, as indeed were a number of other performers at the theatre in the early 1840s, as will become clear in Chapter 2. Costumes seem to have been one of the main points of dispute between the singers and the theatre management during this period of tension.

Principal singers were contractually obliged to supply their own costumes, in the same way as lead singers in Europe were responsible for providing their own performance attire.⁹³ A letter from a group of New Orleans singers to the Parisian *Gazette des théâtres* in 1840, however, reveals that they felt that the management was not paying them enough for the expense they incurred in sourcing suitable costumes:

There was an artist who, in order to complete a costume for the role of a *voltigeur*, spent \$16 or 84 francs. The women are obliged to pay fees to their dressmaker and hairdresser—the least still costs 40 francs a month—... Everything is at your expense, even the costumes for trouser roles; four years ago, when they put on *L'Eclair*, the person who filled the role of Georges (being obliged to by the lack of tenors at that period) was forced to pay for the costumes from her own pocket.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Jean-Louis Nonnon (1786–1852) was first employed at the Opéra as an assistant in the costume department on 1 August 1828. He was promoted to the role of ‘maître tailleur’ on 1 July 1829, and remained in that position until his death in 1852. His wife and daughter also worked in the costume department of the Opéra. See *Les Cancans de l'Opéra: chroniques de l'Académie royale de musique et du théâtre à Paris sous les deux Restaurations*, ed. Jean-Louis Tamvaco, Volume 1 (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2000), 129.

⁹¹ Bernardet to Nonnon, 1 April 1842, *F-Po*, NLAS-392.

⁹² Bernardet to Nonnon, 1 April 1842, *F-Po*, NLAS-392.

⁹³ That performers were obliged to buy their own costumes is evident from the contract made between Pierre Davis and the Richers, *NONA*, Charles Boudousquié, Vol 16, Act 239, 16 December 1844.

⁹⁴ ‘Il y a un artiste qui pour compléter un costume de voltigeur, a dépensé \$16 ou FF 84. Les dames sont obligées de payer à leur frais leur habilleuse et coiffeur, le moins est encore de 40 francs par mois. Hors les costumes de figurations tout est à vos frais, même les costumes de travestissements. Il y a quatre ans, lorsque l'on a monté *L'Eclair*, la personne qui remplissait le rôle de Georges (par complaisances vu le vide de ténors qu'il y avait à cette époque) a été forcée de payer les costumes de sa poche.’ ‘Encore quelques renseignements utiles aux artistes qui voudraient venir à la Nouvelle-Orléans’, *Gazette des théâtres*, 5 July 1840.

Of course, if the performers were adamant that their costumes should come from Paris, they came at a price. The desire to source costumes from Paris was not necessarily an indication of snobbery on the part of the theatre (at least in the early part of the period): newspapers from New Orleans at the time reveal that most upmarket shops selling clothing in the city in the early part of the nineteenth century imported their wares from Paris, so for the theatre to do the same was not a snub to local resources, but a natural way of procuring high-quality outfits.⁹⁵ Moreover, there are indications that French provincial theatres also made costume orders in Paris, at least for important and new productions. The Parisian *Tribune dramatique*, for example, reported on a production of F. Halévy's *Les Mousquetaires de la Reine* in Amiens in December 1846, writing of 'the luxury of costumes made by Nonnon of the Opéra'.⁹⁶ Clearly, Nonnon was used to receiving orders from the French provinces and further afield, and it was normal for theatres and performers to turn to Paris for costumes when they wanted a production to carry an air of luxury. Paris, it seems, was not just the centre of European fashion, but of global fashion, and the opulence of Parisian operatic productions made costumes produced there even more sought after.⁹⁷

It was a delicate balance, therefore, between local needs and European resources that led to the Théâtre d'Orléans's importing of music and costumes. This was not some impersonal transaction, however, but a process rooted in human contacts developed by both the theatre administration and its performers. While some were cultivated specifically with the Théâtre d'Orléans in mind (such as Pierre Davis's meetings with Meyerbeer), others were the legacies of previous associations, as performers turned to their favoured costumier, for instance. Indeed, John and Pierre Davis were not the only important agents when it came to establishing transatlantic relationships for the Théâtre d'Orléans, and, as we saw with the costumes, there could be conflicts of agency between the management and performers (particularly when it came to the attribution of responsibility by various parties).

⁹⁵ Indeed, Parisian fashion magazines were available in New Orleans during this period, as can be seen from copies of *L'Élegant: Journal des tailleurs* which was stocked (according to the lists of business subscribers on the back cover) in New Orleans by 'Ferdinand Fanis, coiffeur' throughout the 1830s.

⁹⁶ 'Le luxe des costumes faits par Nonnon de l'Opéra' 'Théâtres des Départements', *Tribune dramatique: revue théâtrale, artistique, littéraire et des modes*, 6 September 1846, 264.

⁹⁷ For more on the importance of Parisian fashion in the nineteenth century, see Agnès Rocamora, *Fashioning the City: Paris, Fashion and the Media* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2009).

Sets and scenery: creating a stable identity

Having focussed on the ways in which the Davises and other individuals cultivated transatlantic connections, I now want to look at how imported people and products flourished in New Orleans, allowing the Théâtre d'Orléans to develop a stable, individual identity as an institution, rather than looking across the Atlantic for all aspects of its work. Perhaps the best way to see this is through the history of set design at the theatre, as, unlike the costumes and music for the theatre, almost all of the theatrical sets were designed and made in New Orleans, save for occasional imported sketches.

In the early years of the theatre, the stage designer was an artist of Italian descent and long-term resident of the city, named Jean Baptiste Fogliardi, who lived at 231 Rampart Street, on the edge of the present-day French Quarter.⁹⁸ For most of the 1820s, Fogliardi's sets formed the basis of the theatre's productions, and he undertook other high-profile work in the city: his sixty-foot triumphal arch (constructed out of a painted canvas-covered wooden frame) took pride of place in the Place d'Armes (today the iconic Jackson Square) during General Lafayette's visit to the city in 1825.⁹⁹ Fogliardi was assisted in his work at the Théâtre d'Orléans by a talented pupil of his, a local man named Louis Pepite. The decorations during these early years of the Théâtre d'Orléans seem to have reflected the ambition for which the theatre was so well known, as, for instance, on 4 May 1821, the *Courrier de la Louisiane* published an advert for:

The first representation of the *Pied de Mouton*, a comic fairy melodrama in three acts, with grand spectacle ... ; there are twelve changes of scene and eighteen metamorphoses and transformations ... the decorations painted by Mr Fogliardi.¹⁰⁰

Even in the early years, then, the theatre was proud to have its own resident, and long-term, scenic artist.

More influential for the theatre's status on an international level, however, was Fogliardi's successor, Louis Dominique Grandjean Develle. Develle was born in Paris in

⁹⁸ See 'Fogliardi, Jean Baptiste', *HNOC*, Artist Database.

⁹⁹ He had created a similarly elaborate cenotaph to commemorate the death of Napoleon in 1821. See Jean-Marc Allard Duplantier, "'Nos frères d'outre-golfé': Spiritualism, Vodou and the Mimetic Literatures of Haiti and Louisiana' (PhD diss., Louisiana State University, 2006).

¹⁰⁰ *The Louisiana Courier*, 4 May 1821.

1799, and began his career there, under the tutelage of the famous set designer for the Opéra, Pierre-Luc-Charles Cicéri.¹⁰¹ In 1824, he was commissioned to decorate Reims cathedral for the coronation of Charles X, and in 1826 he took up a post at a theatre in Le Havre. From there, he was recruited to go to New Orleans in 1829.¹⁰² He settled in New Orleans, spending the rest of his life in the city, and after his death in 1868 he was buried in St Louis Cemetery no. 3.¹⁰³ Only a small part of Develle's oeuvre is publicly available today, including only a single example of his work for the theatre: one very rough design for a set exists in the holdings of the Historic New Orleans Collection.¹⁰⁴ However, the few of his sketches and paintings that can still be viewed reveal how deeply concerned he was with theatrical matters, and with the work of the Théâtre d'Orléans in particular. For example, he sketched a portrait of General Henry Clay to be included as an illustration in a short composition honouring the general by a member of the Théâtre d'Orléans orchestra during the 1850s, H. E. Lehmann (Figure 1.1).¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, his landscape painting, 'The French Market and Red Store' seems to reflect how his detailed knowledge of the theatre and of theatrical lighting affected his work as an artist more broadly (Figure 1.2).¹⁰⁶

Develle's contributions to operatic productions (and productions of *grand opéra*, in particular) in New Orleans were highly valued. Adverts for *Robert le diable* and *Les Huguenots* in the New Orleans press made his contributions a selling point of the productions, while reviews of *Les Huguenots* show that in one performance he was called onto the stage during the second act of the opera to take multiple bows, as the audience was overawed with his backdrop depicting the garden at the Château de Chenonceau.¹⁰⁷ An article in *L'Abeille* claimed that Develle's backdrops for the work were veritable *chefs d'œuvre* and reminded the people of New Orleans just how fortunate they were to have such a master among them. While the rough sketches for the *Les Huguenots* decor were, according to the *Revue et gazette musicale*, imported from Paris, Develle played a vital role in executing them in his personal style, giving the production both a sense of local

¹⁰¹ For a biography of Develle, see *Revue Louisianaise*, 5 April 1846.

¹⁰² Maclyn le Bourgeois Hickey, 'Louis Develle', in *KnowLA Encyclopedia of Louisiana*, ed. David Johnson. Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities, 10 December 2013, (accessed 8 October 2016) <http://www.knowlouisiana.org/entry/louis-develle>.

¹⁰³ Develle is listed as being buried in St Louis no. 3 in the cemetery index cards held at the Historical Centre of the Louisiana State Museums at the Old U.S. Mint.

¹⁰⁴ Louis Dominique Grandjean Develle, Theatre set design, *HNOC*, 1991.81.2.

¹⁰⁵ See H. E. Lehmann, 'Henry Clay's Grand March', *HJA*, Box 32, Folder 16. Lehmann and his work are discussed at far greater length in Chapter 4.

¹⁰⁶ Louis Dominique Grandjean Develle, 'The French Market and Red Store', *LSM*.

¹⁰⁷ 'Théâtre d'Orléans: *Les Huguenots*', *L'Abeille*, 8 June 1839.

individuality and Parisian grandeur. Furthermore, Develle also gained considerable praise from critics in New York when the company toured there in 1845, taking his sets with them; the Parisian press even printed a copy of one particularly laudatory review.¹⁰⁸

Develle might have trained in Paris, but it was across the Atlantic that he matured as an artist, and where he gained his fame. Indeed, unlike the singers who would often come to New Orleans on a shorter-term basis (as will be explored more fully in Chapter 2), Develle's thirty-nine years of service in New Orleans's theatrical life meant that he was as close to being a local as it was possible to get. Indeed, during his time in the United States he seems to have devoted himself entirely to New Orleans: there is no indication that he undertook work for theatres outside of the city. He also brought with him across the Atlantic a pupil of his, Léon Pomarede, who went on to spend the rest of his life in the United States.¹⁰⁹ In this way, it was not only the systems of recruitment (and other kinds of imports) that allowed the Théâtre d'Orléans a degree of institutional stability, but also the individuals who came to New Orleans through them and then created consistency within the theatre's productions.



Figure 1.1 – Drawing of General Henry Clay by Develle, as part of H. E. Lehmann's 'Grand March For General Henry Clay', HJA, Box 32, Folder 16

¹⁰⁸ 'Chronique étrangère', *Revue et Gazette musicale*, 24 August 1845. It is also remarkable to note that the company took their sets on tour with them: this is one of the very earliest instances of a whole production being taken on tour, rather than just the principal performers.

¹⁰⁹ Maclyn le Bourgeois Hickey, 'Louis Develle', in *KnowLA Encyclopedia of Louisiana*, ed. David Johnson. Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities, 10 December 2013, (accessed 8 October 2016) <http://www.knowlouisiana.org/entry/louis-develle>.



Figure 1.2 – 'The French Market and Red Store' by Louis Dominique Grandjean Develle, LSM

The impact of the Théâtre d'Orléans on local theatrical developments

Transatlantic theatre, then, operated on a local level as well as an international one: the Théâtre d'Orléans was not simply a Parisian or French transplant into New Orleans, but needed to work within and adapt to the rapidly developing local community. John Davis's agency in negotiating between his own priorities as a theatre owner and a businessman is particularly important in this respect. A number of specifically local factors shaped the activities and identity of the theatre at various points in its history. One of the most significant periods occurred in the formative years of the Théâtre d'Orléans: in the early 1820s, the theatre building was shared by the Théâtre d'Orléans company and James Caldwell's fledgling anglophone company. Caldwell arrived in New Orleans in 1820, with a small troupe of performers, but it was not until 1824 that he opened the American Theatre on Camp Street.¹¹⁰ The arrangement with the Théâtre d'Orléans was not simply one whereby Caldwell's troupe borrowed the theatre during the French company's off-season, as was sometimes the case with visiting troupes in provincial French towns.¹¹¹ In this case, John Davis, always on the lookout for a business opportunity, agreed to hire out the Théâtre d'Orléans to Caldwell on a long-term basis for the evenings when the French company was

¹¹⁰ See Kmen, *Music in New Orleans*, 93.

¹¹¹ For more on such arrangements in France, see Hemmings, *The Theatre Industry in Nineteenth-Century France*, 63–4.

not using it, from the autumn of 1820.¹¹² Under this arrangement, Davis's company would perform on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Sundays, while Caldwell's troupe took the other evenings of the week.¹¹³

The arrangement did not always run smoothly, though, and a court case from 1822 in which John Davis undertook proceedings against James Caldwell for violation of the terms of his lease of the theatre gives us a rare insight into the extent to which the two theatre companies shared facilities and the impact that this had upon the Théâtre d'Orléans's identity.¹¹⁴ It seems that while the companies had completely different staff—they each had their own directors, stage managers and performers—Caldwell's company was entitled to use the Théâtre d'Orléans's carpenter and scenery. This partial overlap between the two companies caused a great deal of trouble for Davis.

Among the documents are lengthy witness statements given by the manager of the American theatre, Richard Rupel, and from Jean Colson, the stage manager at the Théâtre d'Orléans. The documents clarify much about the daily running of the theatre: on the day of a production, a plan of the scenery required for the evening's performance (known as the 'plot') had to be given to the carpenter by midday in order for suitable scenery to be found (while some scenery was made for specific performances, the company had 'stock' scenery as well) and positioned in time for the performance to begin at 6.30pm.¹¹⁵ If a production required particularly complex scenery, its installation would have to begin the previous day: this was, obviously, problematic during periods when the theatre was in use seven nights a week.

Indeed, on the day under consideration in the court case, it appears that the French company's scenery was already being installed on stage for a performance the following day when the American company needed to use the stage for their own production that evening. On this occasion, the American company had been late in delivering its scenery requirements to the carpenter, and the manager was told that he could not have the scenery he required. The defendants said that they had contacted John Davis to rectify the situation, only to be told that such trifling matters were no concern of his and that they should

¹¹² Kmen, *Music in New Orleans*, 94.

¹¹³ Later, the Orleans troupe would also perform on Monday and Saturdays. Four of these five performances a week were dedicated to opera and vaudeville, while the performance on Sundays was traditionally a spoken drama. See Braun, 'Petit Paris en Amérique?', 31.

¹¹⁴ Davis vs Caldwell, 1823, *NOPL*, docket 4622 of the First Judicial Court.

¹¹⁵ There seems to have been a degree of inconsistency in performance start times in New Orleans, ranging from 6.00pm through to 7.00 or 7.30pm depending on the programme to be performed on a particular night. For a comparison with French theatrical start times, see Hemmings, *The Theatre Industry in Nineteenth-Century France*, 47–55.

communicate with Colson (the stage manager), St-Estève (the régisseur) and Leriche (the principal machinist) in order to resolve the issue.¹¹⁶

In the end, the version of events that the court accepted was that the American company was unable to use the scenery requested for that evening's performance of *The Belle's Stratagem* because it was undergoing repairs and had, in fact, been damaged by one of the American company's on-stage horses during an earlier performance.¹¹⁷ The plaintiffs complained more generally that the American company's love of equestrian displays (which were not, it seems, a regular feature of the French company's productions, but were an integral part of the 'variety'-style performances given at so many American theatres) frequently caused damage to the stage of the Théâtre d'Orléans and that this took both time and money to mend. The close proximity of the companies and the clash between their styles of management and production sometimes disrupted the running of the Théâtre d'Orléans organisation, forcing Davis's company to change its plans because of damage caused by Caldwell's company. Linguistically and culturally, the two companies were often at loggerheads.¹¹⁸

However, the other side of the business is revealed by the outcome of the court case, which Davis won: Davis and his staff had a huge amount of power, as they were able to prevent Caldwell's company from performing by declining to produce the materials they requested (even if the claims that the requests were filed too late or the scenery had been damaged were true). Thus, for the three-year period in which the two companies shared the same theatre building, Davis and his staff were able to exert a great degree of control over the city's theatrical life, to the extent that they almost had a monopoly on high-quality performances. Davis's decision to lease the Théâtre d'Orléans to Caldwell, then, contributed to its rise as the city's principal theatre in this period, by creating the opportunity for theatrical competition, but then carefully controlling the degree to which that competition was allowed.

¹¹⁶ Davis vs Caldwell, 1823, *NOPL*, docket 4622 of the First Judicial Court.

¹¹⁷ Davis vs Caldwell, 1823, *NOPL*, docket 4622 of the First Judicial Court.

¹¹⁸ Such localised theatrical conflicts foreshadow the largescale cultural and linguistic conflicts that came to a head between the city's anglophone and francophone populations in the 1830s, and which are discussed in Chapter 3.

Questions of race: the obscured local history of the Théâtre d'Orléans

There were also times in the Théâtre d'Orléans's history when Davis had to negotiate between his individual plans as businessman and wider socio-political trends in New Orleans. One of the most important ways in which the Théâtre d'Orléans developed a distinctively local identity in this respect—and one of the most unfamiliar in terms of comparisons with Europe—was through its response to changing contemporary racial issues. Here I want to focus on the ways in which the Théâtre d'Orléans (and John Davis in particular) reflected or reacted to changing racial attitudes within the city.

First, let us consider the demographics of the Théâtre d'Orléans's audiences. Older theatres in the city had traditionally comprised two tiers, of which white patrons occupied the first, and free people of colour the second. Davis's Théâtre d'Orléans, however, had three tiers, in order to seat larger numbers of patrons. Initially, the first was reserved for white families, the second for women, and the third for free people of colour, while single men stood or sat on benches in the parterre. Juliane Braun notes that free people of colour complained bitterly at what they perceived as oppression when they were told to occupy the third rather than the second tier in the new theatre,¹¹⁹ but, not long after the theatre's opening, John Davis was already developing other plans.

In 1820, he took the corporation of New Orleans to court because of restrictions it had imposed on the changes he planned to make to his theatre, restrictions that he claimed had lost him \$15,000.¹²⁰ The second tier of the theatre had originally been the preserve of white women, but Davis observed that it was almost never full (save for three or four performances a year). He wanted to allow free black citizens to sit there instead, as they often had to be turned away from theatre since the top tier was invariably filled to capacity. In a move that made the Théâtre d'Orléans very unusual among American theatres (and, of course, very different from European ones), Davis planned to allow slaves to sit in the third tier, so long as they had their masters' permission to attend the theatre (which normally meant that the slave had accompanied their master to the theatre). The town corporation, however, forbade such changes and said that if Davis found any free blacks sitting in the

¹¹⁹ See Juliane Braun, 'On the Verge of Fame: The Free People of Color and the French Theatre in Antebellum New Orleans', in *Liminale Anthropologien: Zwischenzeiten, Schwellenphänomene, Zwischenräume in Literatur und Philosophie*, ed. Jochen Achilles, Roland Borgards, and Brigitte Burrichter (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2012), 166.

¹²⁰ Davis, John vs The Mayor, Aldermen and Inhabitants of New Orleans, 30 December 1820, *NOPL*, docket 3615 of the First Judicial Court.

second tier, he should inform the police and have them removed.¹²¹ Davis responded to this by suggesting that the white residents of the city should patronise his theatre more regularly and thus remove the problem altogether; he pointed out that the Théâtre d'Orléans's ticket prices (50 cents for a parterre ticket, 60 cents for an unreserved seat, and 80 cents for a seat in a box were the prices given in the court case for 1820) were extremely reasonable compared with the price of theatre tickets in Europe.¹²² The case was thrown out of court over a year later: although Davis failed to recoup from the Mayor the \$15,000 he claimed he was owed, free people of colour occupied the second tier from the following season, and slaves were allowed to use the third.

It would, of course, be a step too far to assign any noble motivations of racial equality to Davis's move (after all, both he and Pierre appear to have owned slaves in their own right), but rather it seems to have been a good business prospect: slaves and free people of colour seem to have patronised the theatre enthusiastically, and their knowledge of French opera appears to have, at least on occasion, surprised European visitors to the city, if travel accounts are anything to go by.¹²³ An incident in 1837, however, in which a group of white men prevented free people of colour from occupying their usual seats in the second tier (the daughters of these white men apparently objected to the elegance and luxurious dress of the free women of colour), seems to have prompted a large-scale exodus of free people of colour from the Théâtre d'Orléans.¹²⁴ That same year, as Braun has shown, free people of colour founded their own theatre, the Théâtre Marigny, and it is uncertain whether the Théâtre d'Orléans ever regained their patronage. Nor is it certain for how long exactly slaves were permitted to remain in the third tier of the theatre. Nonetheless, we can see that at least until the late 1830s racial diversity among audiences was an important and distinctive part of the Théâtre d'Orléans's identity, and that John Davis was prepared to push against local racial regulations in order to ensure the success of the Théâtre d'Orléans.

There is another aspect to the theatre's handling of race, never really made explicit during the period, however, that has become further obscured by the passage of time: the treatment of black performers and theatre staff. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth

¹²¹ Davis, John vs The Mayor, Aldermen and Inhabitants of New Orleans, 30 December 1820, *NOPL*, docket 3615 of the First Judicial Court.

¹²² Davis, John vs The Mayor, Aldermen and Inhabitants of New Orleans, 30 December 1820, *NOPL*, docket 3615 of the First Judicial Court.

¹²³ In *L'Amour d'un nègre*, the novel by Charles Jobey mentioned earlier in this chapter, the protagonist is sent by his fiancée to a performance of Auber's *Le Concert à la cour* at the Théâtre d'Orléans, on the recommendation of her slave, Cora.

¹²⁴ Braun, 'Petit Paris en Amérique?', 122.

centuries, we can assume that free people of colour were a regular feature on New Orleans's stages: after all, much of the city's early theatrical tradition had been influenced by that of Saint-Domingue, where black performers frequently performed in theatrical and musical works. Juliane Braun has suggested that the year 1812 marked a turning point within New Orleans's theatrical community when actors at the early French theatre on St Philip Street wrote a letter of complaint to the mayor of the time that they were expected to share the stage with a black performer, when in earlier years they had done so without complaint.¹²⁵

After this date, Braun makes no further mention of black performers on stage, but it seems that there were some. In 1837, for example, the Parisian press reported on a young black actress and singer by the name of Cécily who was causing quite a stir at the Gymnase dramatique theatre that summer. Born in Guadeloupe, they noted that Cécily had begun her career 'at the French theatre in New Orleans', before coming to France. She was received with great admiration as well as curiosity in Paris that summer.¹²⁶ What became of her after that is unclear, but these reviews suggest that the Théâtre d'Orléans may well have had black performers on stage long after 1812.

Furthermore, the theatre also had black personnel well into the nineteenth century. In fact, the stage designer Louis Pepite, mentioned earlier as Fogliardi's pupil and long-term assistant at the theatre, was a locally born free man of colour.¹²⁷ He worked alongside Fogliardi from the early 1820s and apparently continued to work at the theatre after Fogliardi left and Develle arrived. Nonetheless, he never enjoyed the public acclaim of either of these artists and, after 1834, his name disappears from the records altogether. Indeed, while there is no evidence that Pepite was deliberately and explicitly marginalised, as a free man of colour his contributions to the life of the Théâtre d'Orléans were never foregrounded in the same way as those of his white, European-born colleagues. As a result, he was overshadowed by Develle, and his works and story have all but disappeared.

There may be many other very similar stories in the Théâtre d'Orléans's history, but they are hard to identify and even harder to uncover, especially in relation to such an historically white art form as opera. While excavating the contributions of free people of colour (and perhaps even slaves) to the life of the Théâtre d'Orléans proves a difficult task, and more work remains to be done on the subject than I can offer here, it is nonetheless

¹²⁵ Braun, 'On the Verge of Fame', 165–6.

¹²⁶ *Le Figaro*, 20 July 1837 and *Journal des débats*, 19 July 1837.

¹²⁷ Patricia Brady, 'Free Black Artists in Antebellum New Orleans', in *KnowLA Encyclopedia of Louisiana*, ed. David Johnson. Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities, 28 April 2011, (accessed 8 October 2016) <http://www.knowlouisiana.org/entry/free-black-artists-in-antebellum-new-orleans>.

important to note that they played a part in creating the local identity of the Théâtre d'Orléans, both by their presence and by their uncertain absence from existing evidence. Race had an impact on New Orleans's theatrical life, as it did in every other element of the city during the period.

Conclusion

For a transatlantic theatre to succeed in the nineteenth century required a careful balance between international connections and local interests or conditions. While in certain respects, the Théâtre d'Orléans tapped into existing European systems of operatic production (particularly when it came to procuring scores and costumes), in others it remained out of sync with these patterns. Furthermore, local conditions—some of which, such as racial tensions, were shaped by larger institutions in society, and others, such as the climate, were shaped by non-human processes—affected everything from the ways in which the theatre grew, to the repertoire performed, to the appearance of the productions themselves.

While these two apparent poles—the international and the local—are perhaps the mainstays of a transatlantic identity, it is important not to overlook the ways in which the Théâtre d'Orléans related to other theatres within the United States. Indeed, the theatre was by no means isolated from American theatres: in many respects, it embraced the capitalist, democratic spirit of North America during this period. Its audiences were consistently composed of a much wider cross section of society than any in Paris, since, in John Davis's eyes, racial diversity was welcome if it brought him profits. Opera in this sense, then, did not become the preserve of the city's wealthiest and best-bred citizens, but was available—at least initially—to a broad racial and social base. The balance between the international and the local that characterised transatlantic opera did not necessarily exclude wider national trends.

As an institution, then, the Théâtre d'Orléans was shaped by a series of more or less geographically distant connections. As I will explore in the following chapter, the theatre was not simply an isolated entity, but part of a larger world of French opera and theatre in the first half of the nineteenth century. I will therefore turn now to the theatre's role and influence within this world in more detail; we have already seen how on a local level the Théâtre d'Orléans was able to exercise cultural control (particularly through its interactions with Caldwell's company) and to push back in small ways against restrictive legislation in

wider society. By focussing on the agencies of individuals closely involved in the theatre—principally the Davises, but also the others with whom they were involved—it becomes clear that it was the interaction of such individual agencies with wider theatrical systems and social trends that allowed the Théâtre d'Orléans to grow into a major cultural institution in New Orleans, with influence extending even further afield.

 CHAPTER 2

Uncovering Networks of Performance: The Singers of the Théâtre d'Orléans

On 12 August 1851, the Parisian newspaper *Le Nouvelliste* printed the story of a poor, young *comédien* employed at one of the city's boulevard theatres.¹ With a family to support (and, the author implies, certain pretensions to grandeur), the young man begged the management to raise his salary to 1,200 francs, but his appeal was rejected, and he left the theatre in a state of despair. As he wandered dejectedly along the boulevard, however, he came across a friend, in conversation with an unfamiliar man outside a café. His friend hailed him as he approached, and the young *comédien* recounted his tale of woe. Suddenly, the stranger interrupted them: 'Monsieur, you have a good voice ... Can you sing?'. When the *comédien* replied that he had previously been employed as a singer of *basse-taille* roles, the stranger looked satisfied: 'If you would care to come with me ..., I will offer you 1,000 francs a month. Here are 500 francs now as a deposit'. Shocked and delighted by this sudden turn in his fortunes, the young man accepted at once. The enigmatic stranger, the author tells us, was Monsieur Davis, director of the French theatre at New Orleans.

While the author of this anecdote felt obliged in a later issue to clarify that Davis had employed this young *comédien* in the street not as a singer but rather as an actor in *dramas*, it raises some important questions about the backgrounds of the performers who came to New Orleans and their reasons for entering into a contract there.² Such questions have, as with the theatre's European connections more broadly, been little explored in previous scholarship. While Henry Kmen touched on the question briefly in his PhD thesis (material that was removed before the thesis was published as *Music in New Orleans*) and Juliane Braun points out in the introduction to her dissertation that the New Orleans newspapers indicated that some

¹ A. Denis, *Le Nouvelliste*, 12 August 1851.

² The author, A. Denis, clarified the situation as follows: 'Nous avons raconté lundi dernier la bonne fortune arrivée à un artiste remercié par son administration et engagé d'une façon inespérée par M. Davis, directeur des théâtres à la Nouvelle-Orléans. L'histoire est vraie, seulement M. Davis a engagé l'artiste en pleine connaissance de cause, pour jouer le drame et non l'opéra'. A. Denis, *Le Nouvelliste*, 19 August 1851.

artists might have come from provincial French theatres,³ most accounts have gone little further than Henry Lahee's 1902 claim that 'the Paris Opéra was the recruiting ground for New Orleans'.⁴ And beyond a couple of the Théâtre d'Orléans's best-loved performers—the soprano Julia Calvé and the *chef d'orchestre* Eugène Prévost—the performers' backgrounds have until now been almost entirely unknown, with little established sense of what their careers might have looked like outside of their time in New Orleans or, indeed, what the terms of their engagements in the city might have been.⁵

This chapter therefore focusses on the performers, piecing together the details of their engagements in New Orleans, their performances, and their wider operatic careers. While in the previous chapter I explored the agency of John and Pierre Davis in developing the Théâtre d'Orléans as an institution, here I examine the ways in which the performers were vital in sustaining and shaping that institution in lasting ways. Operatic performers have received a good deal of scholarly attention in opera studies at large, but most of this attention has been focussed on star singers—the Maria Malibrans, Henriette Sontags, and Jenny Linds of the world—and their role in the emergence of celebrity culture has been well explored.⁶ The performers under consideration in this chapter, however, never achieved such stellar levels of acclaim. Indeed, while a number of them did enjoy a considerable degree of success in their careers, they all were more 'workaday' performers than international celebrities, even if the reception they received in New Orleans might occasionally have caused them to think of themselves in such elevated terms.

³ Juliane Braun, 'Petit Paris en Amérique? French Theatrical Culture in Nineteenth-Century Louisiana' (PhD diss., Julius-Maximilians-Universität Würzburg, 2013), 34.

⁴ Henry Lahee, *Grand Opéra in America* (Boston: L. C. Page, 1902), 135.

⁵ John Baron gives a brief biographical study of Prévost in his *Concert Life in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans: A Comprehensive Reference* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2013), 179–83, and Mary Grace Swift has paid attention to the soprano Julia Calvé, who was much lauded in New Orleans, in 'The Northern Tours of the Théâtre d'Orléans, 1843 and 1845', *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 26/2 (1985): 168–71. Henry Kmen does little more than mention the surnames of performers in his otherwise very detailed survey of the theatre's repertoire in *Music in New Orleans: The Formative Years, 1791–1841* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966).

⁶ Susan Rutherford encapsulates the fascination with the prima donna as celebrity in *The Prima Donna and Opera, 1815–1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). Both she and John Rosselli in his *The Opera Industry in Italy from Cimarosa to Verdi: the Role of the Impresario* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), however, take an approach more similar to the one I adopt in this chapter, by treating the singers as a body of working musicians and investigating the practicalities of their careers as much as the ideas that were projected onto them.

Nonetheless, as I will demonstrate, the ways in which the performers worked with and shaped the Théâtre d'Orléans as an institution can help us to expand the contexts within which we understand the production of French opera beyond France, and in North America specifically. Instead of placing New Orleans in a dyadic relationship with Paris, an exploration of the performers and their careers reveals larger transatlantic networks of French operatic production in the first half of the nineteenth century. In this way, I hope to reshape received narratives concerning New Orleans's international connections by allowing new points of contact on both sides of the Atlantic.

The Troupes: an overview

As stated in Chapter 1, the Théâtre d'Orléans troupe comprised up to twenty men and fifteen women, along with additional chorus members, two *régisseurs*, a *chef d'orchestre*, and an assistant *chef d'orchestre*, as well as local theatre staff. As such, it was a similar size to many of the larger French provincial theatre troupes.⁷ From the mid-1820s, after the establishment of a regular theatrical season, the new recruits for Davis's troupe would generally leave France in mid-September each year (usually from Le Havre, but occasionally from Bordeaux or Nantes), undertaking a voyage of between six and ten weeks. After the early 1840s, the introduction of transatlantic steam boats kept the journey time consistently to the shorter end of this spectrum.⁸ Arriving in New Orleans in early November, the new performers would barely have had time to settle into their lodgings and unfamiliar surroundings before they were thrust into rehearsals, ready to greet an eager public at the opening of the season only two or three weeks later.

In the early years of the Théâtre d'Orléans, up until the 1830s, the performers employed by the theatre seem to have generally belonged to the 'types' from which the Opéra-Comique

⁷ The Parisian *Almanach des spectacles* and similar titles that were published sporadically throughout the first half of the nineteenth century list the names of members of French theatre troupes around France and abroad. While the lists are doubtless not entirely accurate (the ones for New Orleans sometimes miss names out), they can give us a general indication of the size of troupes. Only the most important French provincial theatres, such as those at Lyon and Rouen, had troupes that were significantly larger than the one at the Théâtre d'Orléans.

⁸ For information about the beginnings of transatlantic steam travel, see Aileen Fyfe, *Steam-Powered Knowledge: William Chambers and the Business of Publishing, 1820–1860* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 2012), 173–252. For more on the gradual shift from sail to steam, see Walter T. K. Nugent, *Crossings: The Great Transatlantic Migrations, 1870–1914* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), esp. 31–2.

company was made up in Paris, and were known collectively as *comédiens*.⁹ While a few seem to have been engaged primarily as actors and actresses for spoken drama, it seems that all the performers had some singing abilities: troupe lists show that they were employed based on the Opéra-Comique categories of *Dugazon*, *Trial*, *ténor*, *amoureux/-euse* etc.. It does not seem to have been the case, then, that the performers for spoken drama and *opéra-comique* formed two different troupes (as could be the case in regional France), but instead they formed a single, multi-purpose troupe. Madame Clozel, for example, who was a member of the company for a number of seasons between 1826 and 1839, was much applauded for her performances in the lead roles in *dramas*, but also appeared in less prominent roles in vaudevilles and also operas.¹⁰ Along with the *comédiens* of various shades, Davis seems to have employed a variety of *danseuses*, who formed a *corps de ballet* of sorts in the 1820s.¹¹

From the 1830s, however—most likely owing to the introduction of grand opera and, later, musically significant expansions of the *opéra-comique* genre—primarily lyric performers seem to have been employed for the first time (although the New Orleans press still seemed to refer to the troupe as *comédiens* for many years). Indeed, roles such as the *chanteuse à roulades* and *première chanteuse de grand opéra* started to appear. The role designations seem to have been important both within the organisational structure of the Théâtre d’Orléans and for the opera-going public: in the 1840s, for example, there was much debate over whether Julia Calvé, employed as a soprano for *opéra-comique*, could also perform the lead roles in grand operas. The issue seems to have been ultimately less one of vocal suitability (Calvé went on to be very successful in grand opera both in New Orleans and on the company’s tours) and more one of adherence to established categories of roles.

⁹ For more on role types in *opéra-comique*, see Olivier Bara, ‘The Company at the Heart of the Operatic Institution: Chollet and the Changing Nature of Comic-Opera Role Types During the July Monarchy’, in *Music, Theater, and Cultural Transfer: Paris, 1830–1914*, ed. Annegret Fauser and Mark Everist (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 15 and 20–1.

¹⁰ For more on Madame Clozel and her roles, see Baron, *Concert Life in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans*, 147–8.

¹¹ The theatre staged ballets and ballet pantomimes whenever it was able (and its productions of *grands opéras* also seem to have included ballets), but its *corps de ballet* seems to have been very unstable, varying in size and training. In 1829, Davis managed to engage a number of dancers who had previously been employed at the Théâtre de la Monnaie in Brussels, but they were quickly lured away by James Caldwell to his Camp Street Theatre. See Kmen, *Music in New Orleans*, 116–7. Much work remains to be done on the subject of ballet at New Orleans’s theatres.

Nonetheless, a theatre like the Théâtre d'Orléans which recruited overseas could not afford to be inflexible, since illness and other causes of indisposition meant that the management often needed to call upon performers to play roles outside of their 'role type'.¹² So too did the performers themselves have to be flexible, and adaptability—not to mention mobility—characterised their careers at large, as we shall see in this chapter. It was not the case that a certain 'type' of performer had a particular career trajectory before or after coming to New Orleans, and their paths and the terms of their engagements were extremely diverse.

Engagements prior to New Orleans

Paris was certainly a primary recruiting location for the New Orleans troupe, and performers seeking new contracts would gather there in order to meet agents and recruiters for theatres all over Europe and even further afield.¹³ But, as I have already suggested above through my illustration of the predominance of *opéra-comique* role types in the early days of the Théâtre d'Orléans, it was by no means the case that all of these performers had been contracted to the Opéra, or even to Parisian theatres, before they came to New Orleans. Even singers such as Gabriel Arnaud, for example, who went on to be a highly significant principal tenor for New Orleans, achieving great acclaim for his performances during the New Orleans company's tour to New York in 1845, appears never to have been engaged in Paris. Before he joined the Théâtre d'Orléans troupe in 1844, Arnaud was at the theatre in Lyon in 1841 and the theatre in Bordeaux in 1843–4, and after his time in New Orleans he was listed at the theatre in Toulon (1846).¹⁴ Similarly, the tenor, Heymann, who sang lead roles in New Orleans between 1834 and 1840 (including the role of Robert in Meyerbeer's *Robert le diable* and Raoul in the composer's *Les Huguenots*) was reported to have sung in Lyon and Amiens and a handful of other regional theatres before his departure for New Orleans, but never in Paris.¹⁵

¹² Similar issues most likely also affected regional French theatres to a degree. As we saw in Chapter 1, it appears that sometimes singers were even called upon in an emergency to play roles that fitted neither their voice type nor their gender.

¹³ See Frederic Hemmings, *The Theatre Industry in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 194–5.

¹⁴ E.L.R., 'Théâtres', *L'Artiste* (Lyon), 12 September 1841. For reports on Arnaud's performances in Bordeaux and Toulon respectively, see *La France théâtrale*, 12 September 1844 and *La France théâtrale*, 12 November 1846.

¹⁵ *Revue et gazette musicale de Paris*, 15 August 1839.

It was rare, in fact, for singers who went to New Orleans to have sung exclusively in Paris before they made the move across the Atlantic, although there were a few who had, principally by virtue of the fact that they had often not long completed their studies at the Conservatoire. Among them was Julia Calvé (Figure 2.1), who went on to become one of New Orleans's biggest stars.



Figure 2.1 – Julia Calvé, taken from Joseph Gabriel de Baroncelli, *Le Théâtre français à la Nouvelle-Orléans: essai historique* (New Orleans: Imprimerie G. Muller, 1906), 37

She was a prize winner at the Paris Conservatoire in 1833, who played minor roles at the Opéra-Comique until 1837, when she was recruited to go to New Orleans.¹⁶ Her career path was very much the exception rather than the rule (especially since she later married Charles Boudousquié, the theatre director who succeeded Pierre Davis, and went on to spend the rest of her life in New Orleans); it was more common for French singers of the period in general to undertake a combination of Parisian and provincial engagements during their careers.

The case of Théophile Rousseau-Lagrave (or simply Lagrave or Delagrave, as he was often known in the New Orleans press), is worth stating here, for the eccentricities of his early life as much as for his career path, which took in the provinces and Paris, before he moved to

¹⁶ Calvé's success at the Conservatoire was recorded in *La Gazette musicale de Paris*, 17 August 1834, 265–7. As for her engagement at the Opéra-Comique, her name appears regularly in adverts for that theatre printed in the *Journal des débats* throughout 1837.

New Orleans to sing with the Théâtre d'Orléans troupe between 1855 and 1858. Born in Château-Gontier in Brittany, the son of a watchmaker, Lagrave originally trained as a painter. An ill-fated love affair, however, apparently drove him to seek solace for a time in monastic life. After a period as a monk, he was lured from the cloisters by the temptations of the stage. He sang first in Rennes (1845), then Bordeaux (1849–51), and at the Théâtre-Lyrique in Paris in the 1851–2 season.¹⁷ He seems to have returned to Bordeaux in 1853, before performing at the Paris Opéra in 1854. While his engagement at the Opéra was said 'not to have left any great mark on the artistic world, or rather ... was like a shooting star' his performances at the Théâtre-Lyrique seem to have been rather more memorable: he was very well received in Donizetti's *La Favorite* and *Lucie de Lammermoor*, and it was on the back of this success that he went to New Orleans.¹⁸

Within the French provinces, further patterns of engagements start to emerge based perhaps less on artistic prestige than on practical considerations. For example, a seemingly disproportionate number of the singers who went out to New Orleans had contracts at the theatre in Le Havre both before and after their time across the Atlantic. In contrast with such important theatres as Lyon, Le Havre very much belonged to the second tier of provincial houses, and the Théâtre d'Orléans performers who spent time there had often had more high-profile engagements elsewhere. Eugène Prévost (Figure 2.2), the Théâtre d'Orléans's long-term *chef d'orchestre*, for example, had enjoyed success in Paris as a composer of *opéras-comiques* (and he had won the Prix de Rome in 1831), but he worked at Le Havre for several seasons before being recruited to join the troupe across the Atlantic.¹⁹ It is not clear whether singers were actively recruited there, and whether singers stationed themselves in the port town with the intention of being recruited for New Orleans or other international theatres, but nonetheless a number of singers moved from Le Havre to New Orleans. Besides Prévost, the celebrated contralto Anna Widemann also followed this course, as well as a number of less well-known singers such as Pierre-Jacques Chéret, Paul Cœuriot and M. Douvry, who all spent several years in the Théâtre d'Orléans troupe.

¹⁷ All of this information can be found in Auguste Laget's *Le Monde Artiste* (Paris, 1883), the sixth chapter of which focusses entirely on Lagrave and his career.

¹⁸ 'Le passage de de Lagrave à l'Opéra ne laissa point de trace dans le firmament lumineux du monde artistique, ou, s'il y fut remarqué, ce fut à l'état d'étoile filante'. Laget, *Le Monde Artiste*, 202.

¹⁹ Baron, *Concert Life in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans*, 179.



Figure 2.2 – Eugène Prévost, carte de visite. Image belongs to author

But the Théâtre d’Orléans recruitment was not limited to France. The theatre’s performers extended beyond singers and instrumentalists to dancers, and some of these had never performed in Europe at all, but only in the United States. Sarah Cohen, a child dancer, for example, was recruited by the Théâtre d’Orléans’s *régisseur*, Louis Fiot, in New York in 1846, after the administration had seen her perform at the city’s Park Theatre.²⁰ Whether Fiot had been sent to New York for the express purpose of recruiting performers or not is unclear: we know that on occasion Pierre Davis made his recruitment trip to France via New York, meaning that he would have had the opportunity to spot talent there on his way to Europe.²¹ Nonetheless, it is possible instead that he had seen Cohen perform while the Théâtre d’Orléans troupe was on tour in New York the previous summer.

²⁰ Contract letter written by L. Fiot, Cohen vs Davis (1846), *NOPL*, docket 00349 of the Third District Court.

²¹ A note from a New York correspondent to the Parisian *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* in 1846 reveals that Pierre Davis sometimes went to Europe via New York, saying: ‘M. Davis, le directeur du Théâtre-Français de la Nouvelle-Orléans, est arrivé ici et doit s’embarquer pour la France’. *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*, 26 July 1846.

International movement and peripatetic operatic careers

Performers who stayed in one place for long periods of time were very much exceptions. For most of the performers, New Orleans was but one stop in an itinerant career. Although some performers sang exclusively in France besides their time in New Orleans, their French careers are marked by movement between towns. Others, however, undertook greater degrees of transatlantic movement. In some cases, such as that of the tenor Paul Cœuriot, performers moved back and forth between France and New Orleans on a number of occasions. After beginning his career in Paris at the Opéra-Comique and then the Odéon, Cœuriot joined the New Orleans troupe in 1838, remaining there until 1840.²² He then returned to France and became a member of the theatre troupe in Le Havre, before returning to New Orleans from 1844 to 1845.²³ Perhaps he would have returned to France again at some point, but he died in New York during the Théâtre d'Orléans's tour of the North-East in the summer of 1845, surely just as he was about to finish his contract.²⁴

Others spent much longer periods in New Orleans marked by brief returns to France: the *chef d'orchestre*, Eugène Prévost, for example, having settled in New Orleans in 1838, returned only once to France, and that was from 1862 to 1867, when the privations of the Civil War drove him to leave Louisiana. He spent the period in Paris, conducting at Offenbach's Bouffes-Parisiens theatre.²⁵ Others still went on to develop substantial careers in other parts of America and did not return to France for any great period of time: Amélie Fleury-Jolly, for example, spent nine years (1843–52) as part of the Théâtre d'Orléans troupe, and went on to have great success with her own touring opera company, which it appears she started with a group of performers from the Théâtre d'Orléans troupe in order to deliver performances in

²² For Cœuriot at the Opéra-Comique, see the Art Lyrique database (accessed 8 October 2016) <http://www.artlyriquefr.fr/dicos/Opera-Comique%20Chanteurs.html>. For Cœuriot at the Odéon (and moving to Lille) see *L'Echo du soir*, 4 September 1826.

²³ Reports on Cœuriot's performances in Le Havre during this period appear in the Le Havre newspaper *Le Furet* (for example, 19 September 1841).

²⁴ Mary Grace Swift, 'The Northern Tours of the Théâtre d'Orléans, 1843 and 1845', 176–7.

²⁵ Baron, *Concert Life in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans*, 181. What Baron does not mention, however, is that upon his return to France in 1861, Prévost was the recipient of a letter, reprinted in several Parisian papers, and signed by an illustrious list of names, among them Rossini, Auber, F. Halévy, Ambroise Thomas, Meyerbeer, and Berlioz. They thanked him profusely for his services to their music in America, saying that he played a key role in their success, and assured him that no one in Paris had forgotten him during his absence. For one instance of this letter, see *Journal des débats*, 10 December 1861.

New York during the New Orleans off-season in 1852.²⁶ But, for many of the performers, their one or two contracted seasons in New Orleans were enough, and they never returned to the city again.



Figure 2.3 – Juliette Bourgeois as Rose Friquet from Aimé Maillart's *Dragons de Villars*, by Emile Desmaisons (1856). Bibliothèque nationale de France

Many artists did go on to have degrees of success in Paris after their time in New Orleans. Edmond Chazotte, for example, who sang in New Orleans in 1840, was on the books of the Opéra in 1851.²⁷ Others, such as Juliette Bourgeois (Figure 2.3 above), who was in the Théâtre d'Orléans troupe in the early 1850s, played on the fact that they had sung in New Orleans as a way to secure themselves an audition at the Opéra: she wrote on her own behalf to the administration of the Opéra in the 1850s, saying 'my repertoire contains all the Stolz and Falcon roles; I have previously been engaged at New Orleans, Rouen and Toulouse'.²⁸ Rouen and Toulouse were both first-class provincial theatres, so the fact that Bourgeois saw fit to list

²⁶ Vera Brodsky Lawrence mentions that a troupe from New Orleans, led by Fleury-Jolly, performed in New York in June 1852, and that they were the first troupe from New Orleans to do so since the last official tour of the Théâtre d'Orléans in 1845. Vera Brodsky Lawrence, *Strong on Music: The New York Music Scene in the Days of George Templeton Strong, Volume 2: Reverberations, 1850–1856* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 317.

²⁷ See online Art Lyrique database of singers at the Paris Opéra, (accessed 8 October 2016) <http://www.artlyriquefr.fr/dicos/Opera%20Chanteurs.html>.

²⁸ Her letter can be found in *F-Pan*, AJ/13/453.

New Orleans before them suggests that she felt that the Opéra administration would be more impressed that she had sung there than by either of her important French provincial contracts.²⁹

Paris was not, however, the end point of most singers' careers: even those who spent some time working there seem to have continued to move around, suggesting that sustaining a career in the capital was not a viable or necessarily a desirable prospect for these singers. As well as the rounds of French provincial theatres, many worked at the biggest French theatres in other European countries, in particular those at Brussels, The Hague, Antwerp and Liège. Mademoiselle Uranie Cambier, for example, worked at the theatres in Brussels, Antwerp and Liège (as well as Orléans) before she went to New Orleans in 1855, while Eugénie Geismar worked at The Hague before she went to New Orleans in 1859, and at Ghent and Liège upon her return.³⁰ In fact, Geismar seems to have had a particularly mobile career, as she also worked at theatres in Nantes, Lyon, Bordeaux, Marseille, Toulouse, Rouen and Angers, as well as at the Paris Opéra.³¹

The nature of musical careers in this period meant that even the various performers who did remain in Paris after their time in New Orleans often diversified their activities considerably. Archille Lecourt, for example, sang tenor in New Orleans from 1842 to 1844 and seems to have sung at the Théâtre-Lyrique upon his return to Paris, before turning to theatre direction instead: he managed the Vaudeville de Paris from 1850.³² Some developed careers as librettists alongside their activities as performers, as the case of Jules-Henri Brésil goes to show. After his engagement at the Théâtre d'Orléans in 1843–4, he returned to Paris and turned to writing, collaborating most notably with Adolphe d'Ennery on the libretti for Adolphe Adam's *Si j'étais roi* (1853) and Gounod's *Le Tribut de Zamora* (1881). Among the cast for the premiere of Adam's *Si j'étais roi* at the Théâtre-Lyrique was the bass François Marcel Junca (playing the role of Prince Kadoor), who became a member of the New Orleans troupe in 1855.³³ A number of the artists who spent time in New Orleans thus went on to establish

²⁹ This Juliette Bourgeois should not be confused with the Juliette Borghèse (another of the names that Juliette Bourgeois sometimes went by) who sang Marie in the premiere of Donizetti's *La Fille du Régiment* at the Opéra-Comique on 11 February 1840.

³⁰ 'Correspondance', *Revue et Gazette musicale*, 10 October 1852 discussed Cambier's performances in Brussels. The same newspaper discussed her performances in Liège on 5 December 1852, for example.

³¹ For a biography of Geismar (who became Mme Écarlat-Geismar), T. Faucon, *Le nouvel Opéra: monument, artistes* (Paris, 1875), 295–6.

³² See *L'Argus*, 22 March 1851 for Lecourt's appointment as director of the Théâtre du Vaudeville.

³³ Charles H. Parsons, *Opera Premieres: An Index of Casts A–J*, Volume 13 of the Mellen Opera Reference Index (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), 5.

successful Parisian careers upon their return, if they had not already had some success there before they crossed the Atlantic.

Some singers' careers, however, extended to rather more geographically distant locations, sometimes encompassing French colonial theatres. Besides his time in provincial France and New Orleans, for instance, Gustave Blès spent at least one season in Guadeloupe.³⁴ Others travelled even further, and the Mademoiselle Fleury who was part of the New Orleans troupe from 1822–8 found herself singing French opera in Calcutta in 1836.³⁵ While these careers were global in range, however, they were limited to French opera. A small number of singers went even further, cultivating careers that crossed not just geographic, but also linguistic boundaries. Both Juliette Bourgeois (in her various guises as Giulietta Bourgeois/Euphrasia Borghèse) and Pauline Colson established themselves as singers of Italian opera in its original language, with Bourgeois singing at the Astor Place Opera House in New York with Max Maretzek's company in 1850, years before she came to New Orleans.³⁶ Colson sang with Maurice Strakosch's Italian troupe in 1858–9 when her time at the Théâtre d'Orléans came to an end, as did François-Marcel Junca.³⁷

While multi-lingual careers were unusual among French singers in the period, for singers who wanted to make a career in the United States, the ability to sing in multiple languages could prove very useful: by the middle of the nineteenth century, Italian opera had grown enormously in popularity (and increasingly in prestige) with American audiences, and the performance opportunities for Italian-language works were far greater than those for French-language works in this period.³⁸ Moving from a career based in France/New Orleans to a more broadly American one, then, made particular linguistic demands of performers.

³⁴ Blès sang at Bordeaux, Lille and Lyon in the French provinces. Information about his career can be found in *Almanach des Spectacles de 1831 à 1834* (Paris, 1834) and in Arnaud Detcheverry's *Histoire des Théâtres de Bordeaux* (Bordeaux, 1860). See also the lists of singers seeking work in Paris in *La France théâtrale* from 12 September 1844 to the end of that year.

³⁵ 'Theatricals', *Calcutta Monthly Journal and General Register*, November 1836, 630.

³⁶ Lawrence, *Strong on Music*, 2: 116.

³⁷ Vera Brodsky Lawrence, *Strong on Music: The New York Music Scene in the Days of George Templeton Strong, Volume 3: Repercussions, 1857–1862* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 143.

³⁸ Katherine K. Preston illustrates a different side (and one with strongly nationalist resonances) of how bilingual singers could flourish in the United States, when she argues that singers like Clara Louise Kellogg who were able to sing in both Italian and English were able to negotiate successfully many of the problems that befell foreign-language opera later in the century. See Katherine K. Preston, *Opera for the People: English-Language Opera and Women Managers in Late 19th-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

But what was perhaps most striking about these performers is not that they travelled around from engagement to engagement, nor even the distances they covered, but rather that they gained reputations as international artists. That is to say, when their activities were reported in the European press, it was their movement that was always emphasised. A news report in *La Sylphide* in 1841 wrote of Claude Bernard (who became *régisseur* of the Théâtre d'Orléans), saying that he was 'at this moment, singing *Les Huguenots* at New Orleans or Saint-Domingue'.³⁹ The fact that the author chose to leave these options open rather than being precise about Bernard's location (which, in all fairness, he perhaps did not quite remember) suggests that Bernard was seen as an international artist: performers were on the move so much that the press did not feel that they could be expected to keep up with the artists' constant peregrinations.

The example illustrating most clearly that artists were considered to be international is that, once again, of the tenor Théophile Rousseau-Lagrave. Lagrave was reported as having died in at least three different places at three different times. The Parisian paper *Le Ménestrel* felt obliged to quash rumours that he had died in New Orleans in the summer of 1858, by saying that the author knew that Lagrave was on his way to Paris from there, and preparing to sing at Le Havre and Rouen.⁴⁰ Although Lagrave had not died in 1858, the claim that he was coming to Paris was also untrue, as he was listed on playbills in New Orleans as late as December 1858. That same newspaper then published a statement in January 1861 to say that Lagrave's family had just heard the news of his death in New Orleans, 'where his health had been unable to stand the climate' (despite his having lived there for five years).⁴¹ Other accounts suggest that he died in the middle of the Atlantic, drowned in a shipwreck on the way home from his engagement in New Orleans.⁴²

³⁹ 'Ce dernier ouvrage, on se le rappelle, fut joué à l'Odéon il y a une vingtaine d'années, sous la direction de M. Bernard, qui à l'heure qu'il est, fait chanter les *Huguenots* à la Nouvelle-Orléans ou à Saint-Domingue'. *La Sylphide*, 1841.

⁴⁰ 'Plusieurs journaux ont annoncé la mort du ténor Lagrave. Ce bruit est complètement faux. Nous apprenons que cet artiste est en route pour Paris venant de la Nouvelle-Orléans, où il a chanté pendant trois ans. Il se propose de donner quelques représentations au Havre et à Rouen avant de se rendre à Paris, où nous le reverrons vers la fin d'octobre', *Le Ménestrel*, 26 September 1858.

⁴¹ 'Sa santé n'a pu résister au climat de la Nouvelle-Orléans et sa famille vient d'acquiescer la certitude de sa mort'. *Le Ménestrel*, 13 January 1861.

⁴² Karl-Josef Kutsch and Leo Riemens, 'Rousseau-Lagrave, Théophile', *Großes Sängerlexikon*, ed. Karl-Josef Kutsch and Leo Riemens, Volume 4 (Bern: Francke, 1987), 4038. Adolphe Orain, *Au pays de Rennes* (Rennes, 1892), 161.

A history book entitled *Seigneurs de Laval*, published in 1875, meanwhile, stated that Lagrave had been found dead in 1860 by the gates of Milan.⁴³ This story resonates with that told by Auguste Laget in his *Le Monde artiste*: he insists that Lagrave moved to Milan in the autumn of 1857, where he ‘having barely settled in, threw himself to the study of the language and of Italian songs’.⁴⁴ After his career as an Italian opera singer failed to take off, however, Laget reports that Lagrave sadly hanged himself a year or so later. While the dates of this story cannot possibly be correct, the details Laget provides about Marcel Junca (who had sung at the Théâtre d’Orléans at the same time as Lagrave) rushing to embrace his old friend’s body and making the funeral arrangements give the sorry tale an air of plausibility.⁴⁵ But, whatever the circumstances of Lagrave’s demise, the fact that he was reported as dying at different times in so many different places is testament to the degree of travel that characterised his career: he was immortalised (repeatedly) as an international artist.

The case of the Théâtre d’Orléans troupe, then, reveals that international operatic careers were becoming a regular way of life for a growing number of performers. This internationalism did not stem purely from Europe, and there are cases of performers who were born across the Atlantic and who began their careers in New Orleans, only later moving to Europe. Such a path, however, was considerably less common than that taken by the soprano Dolores Nau, who was born in New York in 1818, but moved to Paris in her youth in order to train at the Paris Conservatoire, before later returning to the United States to sing in New Orleans in 1855.⁴⁶ And yet some performers did manage to begin their careers in New Orleans before later moving to Paris. Eugénie Corès and Gustave Sujol, for example, were both born in New Orleans and established themselves there, before going on to have successful careers in Paris (at the Odéon in the case of Corès and the Théâtre-Lyrique in the case of Sujol) and in regional France (Corès spent at least one season in Lyon).⁴⁷

⁴³ Martin Foucault, *Les Seigneurs de Laval* (Paris, 1875), 131.

⁴⁴ ‘Il se mit courageusement à l’étude de la langue et du chant italiens’. Laget, *Le Monde artiste*, 205.

⁴⁵ Laget, *Le Monde artiste*, 208.

⁴⁶ For a brief biography of Mlle Nau, see Lawrence, *Strong on Music*, 2: 542.

⁴⁷ See obituary for Eugénie Corès in *Le Nouvelliste*, 22 January 1853. For Sujol at the Théâtre-Lyrique, see database at <http://www.artlyriquefr.fr/dicos/Theatre-Lyrique%20chanteurs.htm>.

The attractions of New Orleans

The careers of the performers before their time in New Orleans, then, were certainly varied, but what about their reasons for accepting an engagement in the city? A look at the French press in the first half of the nineteenth century provides us with twin characterisations—indeed, mythologies—of the kinds of singers who were believed to make the transatlantic trip. The first comes from the Parisian music periodical, *Le Ménestrel*, which wrote of ‘our celebrities who take to the New World their final note, their last breath, sometimes, alas! their last sigh—witness the illustrious and much-missed Sontag!’.⁴⁸ The other characterisation is illustrated by a story that appeared in a provincial French paper, the *Journal du Havre*, printed in July 1827. An article about the local theatres told the story of a young singer, M. Chéret, who had recently returned to Le Havre, where he had been employed nine years earlier. He seems to have had something of a success during his original engagement in the town, and one night ‘he lay down his head still dizzy and full of romantic ideas of making his fortune, of travel and of adventure’.⁴⁹ The story continues:

Sleep did not destroy his illusions; and in short, illusion upon illusion, it so happened one beautiful morning that the captain of a ship bound for New Orleans counted one extra passenger ... We do not know whether this new Figaro found on the banks of the Mississippi the fortune that he believed he would find there; but one thing is certain, that we have no complaints that, no doubt returned from his illusions, he has given preference to the banks of the Seine.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ ‘Nos célébrités qui vont porter au Nouveau-Monde leur dernière note, leur dernier soufflé, quelquefois, hélas! leur dernier soupir—témoin l’illustre et si regrettable Sontag!’ *Le Ménestrel*, 9 January 1859. Henriette Sontag died in Mexico of cholera on 17 June 1854 during her engagement with the Italian Opera there. Other singers made the transatlantic voyage in the very late stages of their careers: Laure Cinti-Damoreau toured the United States in 1844 with the violinist Alexandre Artôt and performed several concerts in New Orleans. She ceased singing professionally just four years later, but during her travels were followed keenly by the Parisian press.

⁴⁹ ‘Il y a huit à neuf ans qu’un acteur aimé du public se faisait applaudir sur le petit théâtre provisoire de la rue Charles X. Un soir, après avoir joué dans *La Tante Aurore*, il se coucha la tête encore étourdie et pleine d’idées romanesques, de projets de fortune, de voyages, d’aventures.’ ‘Théâtre du Havre’, *Journal du Havre. Commercial, Maritime et Littéraire, annonces légales et avis divers*, 27 July 1827, (accessed 10 December 2015) <https://dezedo.org/sources/id/4682/>.

⁵⁰ ‘Le sommeil ne détruisit pas ces illusions; et bref, d’illusions en illusions, il se trouva un beau matin que le capitaine d’un navire qui faisait route pour la Nouvelle-Orléans, compta un passager de plus. ... Ce contrebandier d’une nouvelle espèce ..., c’était Chéret, le Chéret qui a débuté avant-hier. Nous ignorons si le nouveau Figaro a rencontré sur les bords du Mississipi la fortune qu’il croyait y trouver; mais ce qu’il y a de

Here, then, we have two contrasting and equally romanticised images of the possibilities of a transatlantic engagement: on the one hand, the trip to New Orleans was characterised as an exotic (and, indeed, potentially fatal) swansong for an aging artist, and on the other, an adventure for the very young and naïve, who would later realise the folly of their ways. New Orleans certainly had its share of both: the baritone Gustave Blès was in his late forties when he arrived in 1842 and the *régisseur* Claude Bernard was forty-five at his arrival in 1838,⁵¹ while an article published in the Parisian *La Sylphide* reveals that Béatrix Person was only thirteen or fourteen years old when she tricked her mother into signing her contract.⁵²

For a select few, New Orleans's appeal lay simply in its distance from Europe. Claude Bernard, for example, had good reason for wanting to be as far away from Europe as possible: an amorous scandal had forced him to leave his position as director of the Paris Odéon in 1826 in the midst of his success. It seems that he never again felt entirely comfortable working in France, instead spending time in Belgium, at Liège, before leaving Europe altogether.⁵³ An engagement in New Orleans could help him to escape the shadow of his past. A few others, too, seem to have gone to New Orleans in order to escape from Europe. The apparent husband and wife pair Edward and Delphine Clozel arrived in New Orleans in January 1826, while Delphine was heavily pregnant. Closer investigation, however, shows that Delphine was not 'Madame Clozel' at all: although she was known by that name for her entire performing career, notarial records show that she was actually born Adèle Delphine Bolly, and became Mme Théologue, the wife of Jean Théologue of Paris. She already had three sons with another man, as well as a daughter with Théologue, but it appears that she deserted them all to flee to New

certain, c'est que nous n'avons pas à nous plaindre que, revenu sans doute aujourd'hui de ses illusions, il ait donné la préférence aux rives de la Seine.' 'Théâtre du Havre', *Journal du Havre. Commercial, Maritime et Littéraire, annonces légales et avis divers*, 27 July 1827, (accessed 10 December 2015) <https://dezede.org/sources/id/4682/>. Chéret also seems to have been a composer, as I will discuss in greater detail in Chapter 4.

⁵¹ For Bernard's age, see Carl Brasseur, *The Foreign French: Nineteenth-Century French Immigration into Louisiana, Volume 2: 1840–48* (Lafayette, LA: Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1990), 44.

⁵² Georges Bell, 'Mlle Béatrix Person', *La Sylphide*, 30 March 1855, 132–5. For more on child actors on stage in Paris in the early nineteenth century, see F. W. J. Hemmings, 'Child Actors on the Paris Stage in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries', *Theatre Research International* 12/1 (1987): 9–22.

⁵³ For the story of the scandal, see Everist, *Music Drama at the Paris Odéon*, 58–9. While Everist notes that Bernard moved to Liège, however, he makes no mention of the fact that he later moved on to New Orleans.

Orleans with Edward Clozel, with whose child she was pregnant.⁵⁴ The pair, therefore, seem to have felt that New Orleans was far enough from Paris to prevent too much of a scandal.⁵⁵

But such cases were as exceptional as the extreme differences in age mentioned above; the vast majority of performers fitted neither of the models suggested in the French press. It seems that it was most common for singers to take on an engagement in New Orleans at a relatively early stage in their careers. The somewhat patchy immigration records show that many of them were quite young when they made the journey: to give but a few examples, the baritone Aimé Bauce was twenty-seven years old when the ship he was on docked at New Orleans on 25 November 1843, the tenor Léon Fleury was twenty-eight when he arrived on 7 November 1848, and the baritone Émile Garry was twenty-six when he arrived to begin his contract on 9 November 1844.⁵⁶ The women of the troupe were often even younger, and the singer Mme Bamberger was only twenty-two when she arrived on 30 October 1838.⁵⁷ Such a pattern reflects broader trends of theatrical employment that had been established back in the eighteenth century, whereby women generally began their theatrical careers at an earlier age than their male counterparts.⁵⁸ Thus, New Orleans seems to have been a place that fostered young talent.

It is important also to contextualise the activities of the Théâtre d'Orléans within wider patterns of transatlantic movement. The youth of many of the members of the troupe reflected the overall patterns of immigration from France to New Orleans at the time: as Carl Brasseaux has shown, the largest segment of immigration to the city in the first half of the nineteenth century was made up of young men travelling alone, or young families travelling together.⁵⁹ They were moving, in the main, not out of a sense of adventure, but as economic migrants, in the classic hope of building better lives for themselves in America than they would have been

⁵⁴ See 'Ratification par Mme Delphine Bolly', *NONA*, A. Ducatel, Volume 14, 16 February 1840. Information about the couple's children can be found on various family history websites such as Geneanet, by searching for 'Jean Théologue'.

⁵⁵ Delphine later went on to marry Gregorio Curto, a singer and church musician who will be discussed at greater length in Chapter 4. See Baron, *Concert Life in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans*, 147–8.

⁵⁶ See Brasseaux, *The Foreign French*, 2:131.

⁵⁷ Brasseaux, *The Foreign French*, 1:22.

⁵⁸ For the origins of this practice in the eighteenth century, see Lauren Clay, 'Theater and the Commercialisation of Culture in Eighteenth-Century France' (PhD diss, University of Pennsylvania, 2003), 226. Frederic Hemmings also suggests that more young girls appeared on stage than boys in the nineteenth century. See Hemmings, 'Child Actors on the Paris Stage', 20–1.

⁵⁹ Brasseaux, *The Foreign French*, 1:xxviii–xxxii. Also, Brasseaux, *The Foreign French*, 2:xx–xxii.

able to have in Europe. Many were from the professional classes, others were merchants, while many others were attracted by the prospect of cheap land.⁶⁰ In contextualising the theatre's activities within this general pattern, we can see that an engagement in New Orleans could simply have been a good prospect for a young singer either alone or with a family to support.

Indeed, records show many instances of familial ties among performers at the theatre.⁶¹ For example, Mme Bamberger was accompanied during her stay in America by her husband, who was a cellist in the theatre orchestra.⁶² There were a number of husband and wife pairings in the troupe, and even M. Chéret (whose story was told in the *Journal du Havre*) seems not to have been the romantic stowaway the paper suggested, as Mme Chéret also joined the New Orleans troupe in 1819.⁶³ In the case of some long-term members of the troupe, their children also performed on stage: Eugène Prévost's daughter, Aimée, is recorded as performing as part of the Théâtre d'Orléans troupe in 1854, while M. Douvry and his daughter appeared on stage together as a father and daughter in Gregorio Curto's one-act opera, *Le Lépreux* in 1845.⁶⁴ There are also instances of more extended family connections in the troupe: Mme Fleury-Jolly and her brother-in-law, Gustave Blès, were in the troupe together from 1843–4.⁶⁵ Thus, in this

⁶⁰ See Brasseaux, *The Foreign French*, 2:xx–xxii. Brasseaux points out that an unusually large percentage of French immigrants to New Orleans in the 1840s listed themselves as 'farmer' on immigration records (some 69 percent of all French arrivals in the city in that decade), but suggests that these unusually high figures might be partly on account of lax book-keeping by the city port authorities. Brasseaux also reveals the way in which profiles of French immigrants to New Orleans changed across the first half of the nineteenth century, and notes that a far greater percentage of immigrants in the 1820s listed themselves as merchants than was the case in later decades, where more people listed themselves as professionals, shopkeepers and, of course, farmers. He suggests that the large preponderance towards French mercantile immigration to New Orleans in the 1820s was out of keeping with patterns of immigration to the United States more broadly in this period, which saw the vast majority of immigrants listing themselves as either farmers or artisans. See Brasseaux, *The Foreign French*, 1:xxix. The percentage of skilled workers arriving in New Orleans remained higher than to other ports in the United States throughout the first half of the century. See Brasseaux, *The Foreign French, Volume 3: 1848–52*, xv.

⁶¹ Kmen also mentions this briefly in 'Singing and Dancing in New Orleans, 1791–1841' (PhD diss., Tulane University, 1961), 223.

⁶² The immigration records showing the date of the pair's arrival can be found in Brasseaux, *The Foreign French*, 1:22.

⁶³ Kmen, *Music in New Orleans*, 92.

⁶⁴ Baron talks of Prévost and his daughter in *Concert Life in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans*, 179. Prévost's wife, Eléonore Colon was also a singer, and she was part of the troupe at Le Havre with Prévost, but she does not seem ever to have sung in New Orleans, even though she accompanied her husband there. For more on Curto and *Le Lépreux*, see Chapter 4.

⁶⁵ Blès was married to Amélie Fleury-Jolly's sister, Françoise Félicité. Neither she nor Mme Fleury-Jolly's husband were part of the Théâtre d'Orléans troupe, which makes it even more likely that Blès was Mme Fleury's connection to New Orleans: he seems to have been there for a season before her arrival, however, so it is unlikely they physically travelled together, even if he was her connection to the theatre.

light, New Orleans emerges as less of an extraordinary destination than press characterisations from the first half of the nineteenth century initially seemed to suggest.

Contracts

For the majority of performers who went out to New Orleans, then, the attractions were rather more mundane than we might have expected. It seems they believed the engagement to be secure and also a good financial prospect, as we can gather from occasional insights into the contractual process. Most accounts of the French theatre in New Orleans mention nothing about the performers' contracts, thus implying in a way that the process of engaging singers and musicians was something of an informal one, in the manner suggested by the anecdote with which this chapter began, rather than an organised and legally binding structure. As we saw in the previous chapter, however, the Théâtre d'Orléans and its procedures were far from ad hoc. While there is no single extant archive of the theatre's contracts, there are a number of sources that can give us a much more precise indication of the terms on which various performers were engaged, and how reasonable or unreasonable they ultimately found these terms when they went out to New Orleans.

Two court cases, for example, can give a detailed insight into the terms of two performers' engagements in New Orleans for eighteen months from January 1826. In both cases, John Davis took a performer to court for violating the terms of their contract. The two cases—John Davis vs Boniface Henri Warnet and John Davis vs Clozel—appeared in the New Orleans First Judicial Court. By 1825, this court had civil jurisdiction over the Orleans, Plaquemines, St. Bernard, St. Charles, St. John the Baptist and Jefferson parishes of Louisiana,⁶⁶ and thus it appears that a performer's violation of the terms of his contract was not simply a minor matter (which would have been dealt with in a parish court), but one requiring the jurisdiction of a higher power.

The case records give a number of useful details about the very similar contracts signed by Warnet and Clozel, and these can be seen as being representative of those signed by many of the performers in the 1820s at least. The pair signed their contracts within a couple of weeks

⁶⁶ Information on the court's jurisdiction can be found in the index to its records in the New Orleans City Archives at the New Orleans Public Library, (accessed 8 October 2016) <http://nutrias.org/~nopl/inv/1jdc/1jdcind.htm>.

of each other (9 September 1824 and 14 August 1824 respectively) ‘under private signature and executed by duplicate at Paris in France’.⁶⁷ They were counter-signed by Jean-Baptiste Sel, Davis’s appointed recruiter for the year. The terms stated that their engagements would begin from the moment the performers arrived in New Orleans and that they would last for eighteen months.⁶⁸ This meant that they would spend two full theatre seasons in New Orleans and one summer, before they were free to return home or move elsewhere. The court records list Warnet and Clozel’s arrival in New Orleans as 8 January 1825, and, thus, their engagements at the Théâtre d’Orléans were to terminate on 8 July 1826. An engagement of eighteen months seems to have been fairly standard for performers brought over from France during the period 1823–59, meaning that performers would spend two seasons in New Orleans and one summer break.⁶⁹ Since recruitment took place every year, some of the existing troupe would remain in America each summer to wait for the next season, while those who had completed their contracts would return to Europe, to be replaced by new recruits.

While eighteen months does seem to have been the usual period of engagement, the management of the theatre sometimes adapted their terms to secure first-rate performers and to suit the needs of the theatre. The soprano, Mademoiselle Cordier, for example, seems to have been contracted to New Orleans for a period of only six months in 1858–9: the French press reported that the Parisian director Nestor Roqueplan had granted her a *congé* of six months from her three-year contract at the Opéra-Comique, in order to be *chanteuse à roulades* in New Orleans, after which she would return to her contract in Paris.⁷⁰ Other kinds of performers, too, were offered shorter contracts, and Sarah Cohen, a young girl from New York,

⁶⁷ The contracts were signed in French, but most of the documents in the court dockets exist in both French and English. Thus, I have quoted directly from the English version. See Davis, John vs Warnet, Boniface Henri (1825), *NOPL*, docket 6699 of the First Judicial Court, and Davis, John vs Clozel (1825), *NOPL*, docket 6719 of the First Judicial Court.

⁶⁸ Juliane Braun has previously suggested that performers were routinely contracted for three years, but this is not the case. Braun, ‘Petit Paris en Amérique?’, 33. Henry Kmen, however, suggests that eighteen months was the usual term in his PhD thesis (in a passage that was removed before its publication as *Music in New Orleans*). See Kmen, ‘Singing and Dancing in New Orleans’, 220.

⁶⁹ The ten singers who in 1840 wrote a long letter about their experiences in New Orleans to the Parisian newspaper, the *Gazette des théâtres*, stated that they had all been contracted to the theatre for that length of time, too. ‘Encore quelques renseignements utiles aux artistes qui voudraient venir à la Nouvelle-Orléans’, *Gazette des théâtres*, 5 July 1840.

⁷⁰ ‘Mlle Cordier, une des brillantes élèves de M. Laget, l’excellent professeur du Conservatoire de Musique, vient de contracter un engagement de trois ans à l’Opéra-Comique. M. Roqueplan a accordé à sa nouvelle pensionnaire un congé de six mois, qui lui permet d’aller tenir l’emploi de chanteuse à roulades à la Nouvelle-Orléans.’ *Le Ménestrel*, 26 September 1858.

was engaged by the Théâtre d'Orléans as a *danseuse* for 'five to six months, at the discretion of the director, M. Davis' in 1846.⁷¹

The full details of Cohen's contract can be found in the letter of engagement, signed by Louis Fiot, the company's *régisseur* at the time, that is enclosed along with Fiot's witness statement as part of a court case brought by her father against Pierre Davis over payment. The contract is terse:

You are engaged in the role of *danseuse* at the Orleans Theatre. You will dance in all the works that the administration decides to mount, in *entr'actes*, ballets, pantomimes, similarly in the spectacular works, you will play the mime roles that are given to you, etc. You will submit like the other artists to the rules and usages of the said theatre. You should be in New Orleans next 1 November.⁷²

After that, it states her salary, rights to benefits performances and the sum she would have to pay (\$500) should she forfeit her contract.

This seems extraordinarily brief: the contract omits much basic information, such as how many times a week Cohen would be required to perform or what her rehearsal responsibilities were. The lack of detail is perhaps particularly surprising given that she was a minor, and the absence of prescriptive clauses effectively gave the theatre management free rein to exploit her. Cohen's father duly took Pierre Davis to court and was ultimately successful in his case that Davis had loaned Cohen to the city's American theatre but neglected to pay her adequately for this period of loan, instead claiming that she herself had broken the terms of her contract and taken employment elsewhere.

The contracts for the singers, actors and orchestral musicians, however, were not so brief. A blank printed contract pro forma has been preserved from the period of Pierre Davis's direction, and there is also a completed contract, handwritten in the notarial acts of Charles

⁷¹ Contract letter written by L. Fiot, Cohen vs Davis (1846), *NOPL*, docket 00349 of the Third District Court.

⁷² 'Vous vous engagez en qualité de danseuse au théâtre d'Orléans, danser dans tous les ouvrages qu'il plaira à l'administration de faire représenter, dans les entr'actes, ballets, pantomimes, paraître dans les ouvrages à spectacle, jouer les rôles mimes qui vous seront distribués, etc. Vous serez soumise comme les autres artistes aux règlements et usages du dit théâtre. Vous devez vous trouver à la Nouvelle-Orléans le 1er novembre prochain'. Contract letter written by L. Fiot, Cohen vs Davis (1846), *NOPL*, docket 00349 of the Third District Court.

Boudousquié (he was a notary before he took on the management of the theatre) on 16 December 1844, for two singers: the husband and wife pair, Monsieur and Madame Richer.⁷³ A comparison of the pro forma and the handwritten contract is productive in the sense that it gives us an initial insight into how contracts were adapted for particular performers.

The general terms of employment at the Théâtre d'Orléans are set out in both contracts in twenty-three clauses, and these were standard for orchestral musicians and singers/actors alike. A full transcription of the contract pro forma forms an appendix to this thesis.⁷⁴ Clauses one to six dealt with the artists' general professional conduct, clauses seven to nine with matters of indisposition in the case of illness, and clauses ten to fifteen with rehearsal and performance etiquette. Clauses sixteen and seventeen went on to deal with the conduct of dancers and orchestral musicians, and clause eighteen with matters concerning the arrangement of rehearsals. Nineteen forbade performers from talking about the theatre's business elsewhere, while clauses twenty and twenty-one respectively forbade principal singers from using the theatre's costume workshop (as they were required to provide their own costumes) and stated the fines to be imposed for late attendance at rehearsals. Clause twenty-two asserted the management's right to assign a performer any role in a work. Finally, clause twenty-three dealt with the management's right to end a performer's engagement.

The contract gives us great insight into the workings of this particular theatre, as well as the nature of nineteenth-century theatrical employment more broadly. The clauses specifying the behaviour of the orchestral musicians, for example, forbade them from climbing over the barrier between the orchestra area and the parterre to talk to friends during the intervals in performances (a problem that would have been particularly acute in a relatively small community such as New Orleans). Others deal with the behaviour of the domestic servant or slave that performers were permitted to bring with them to the theatre: the clauses make it clear that the performers were responsible for the conduct of their servant or slave, and that they

⁷³ Contract pro forma, 'Pierre Davis: Contracts', Rare Vertical Files, New Orleans Public Library. Handwritten contract between Pierre Davis and M. and Mme Richer, Charles Boudousquié, Vol 16, Act 239, 16 December 1844, New Orleans Notarial Archives. Other contracts are most likely preserved in notarial records, but the ways in which people employed the services of notaries during the period and the ways in which the volumes are indexed (individually by year) means that a more comprehensive search was not possible within the timescale of this project.

⁷⁴ See Appendix, 267.

would be fined if their servant or slave was found to be making noise in the corridors of the theatre during a rehearsal or performance.

This contract also allows us a glimpse of the employment conditions of the singers and other performers. The three clauses relating to sickness, for example, seem to be directed more to the protection of the management against loss than to the benefit of the indisposed performer. They do show, however, some of the problems a theatre director could face from his singers: the clauses state that if a performer were ill, having informed the management, they must stay at home or else be subject to a fine. On no account were singers who had declared themselves indisposed to go out on ‘trips to the countryside’, ‘supper parties’ or ‘to take pupils in town’. If a doctor certified that a performer had faked an illness or was malingering, the management would terminate their contract. The terms initially appear to give little to benefit the performer: indeed, they were presumably still subject to other terms in the contract that stated that if a performer caused a delay to the production of a scheduled work they would lose 36 percent of their wages for the month, or if they cancelled a performance of a work introduced to the theatre’s repertoire in the last four to six months with less than forty-eight hours’ notice, then they would lose all of their salary for the month. There is no mention at all of personal insurance or sick pay for performers, but this was typical in most theatre contracts of the time. Nonetheless, the fact that terms relating to sickness appeared at all meant that at least the performers were protected from being sacked for short-term illness (chronic illness, according to the final clause of the contract, was still a reason for the management to terminate a singer’s contract).

The Richers’ contract included all of the above basic terms, but also contained passages giving details that were specific to their engagement. Monsieur Richer was engaged to sing second or third tenor in all the operas produced at the theatre, while his wife was engaged as ‘seconde Dugazon’ (and to play principal roles if needed) and ‘seconde choriste’. According to the terms of their contract, both were obliged to play any role in comedies, vaudevilles, spoken dramas, *mélodrames*, spectacular performances or ballets allocated to them by the management. They agreed to play any role required: ‘young or old, serious or comic’ and to learn the chorus parts for their voice type in every opera produced. Furthermore, they agreed that they would change roles at any point in the preparation of a production at the discretion of the management.

The contract then goes on to mirror the pro forma with a section laying out a series of further artistic and professional expectations made by the Théâtre d'Orléans management of its performers. Monsieur and Madame Richer agreed that their work at the Théâtre d'Orléans would be their sole occupation for the duration of their engagement, and that they would not accept other work within or outside of the profession without the express permission of the management. Furthermore, they agreed to provide all their own costumes, promised to go wherever the theatre management chose to send the troupe, and agreed that in the case of new works to be performed, they would learn thirty-five lines a day, in addition to practising works that were already in their repertoire. For all of this, the Richers were to be paid \$185 (971.25 francs) a month for an initial six-month engagement and were to be granted half the proceeds of a benefit performance.⁷⁵

The contractual process at the Théâtre d'Orléans, therefore, was more formalised than previous accounts have suggested. Just how beneficial to the performer the contracts were seems to have varied: indeed, as the case of Sarah Cohen shows, it seems as if the management was prepared to leave significant gaps in the contractual agreements, which could later be exploited for profit. While a line in her contract states that Cohen would be subject to the same rules of the theatre as the singers, actors and orchestral musicians (suggesting that she might also have been subject to the terms in the pro forma), the fact that these rules were not explicitly stated in Cohen's contract (or included among the documents presented to the court) suggests that Davis had not taken as much care with the formalities of Cohen's contract as he did with those of adult performers. Nonetheless, it is important to recognise that the theatre had an official contractual process which offered protections of sorts to both the management and the performers.

Salaries

Alongside the formality of the contractual agreements, the salaries that singers at the Théâtre d'Orléans received seem to have made the move across the Atlantic an attractive possibility. Contractual evidence and newspaper reports can begin to give us an idea of the amounts the theatre paid its personnel and how far such money went towards the costs of daily life in New

⁷⁵ It is not clear whether they were to receive this sum each or between them, but, in order for their wages to be in keeping with the sums paid to other performers, they would have to have been paid the sum individually.

Orleans. Before performers even arrived in New Orleans, the Davises had invested a great deal of money in them, by paying for their passage to America.⁷⁶ A notarial act between John Davis and A. P. Holdridge, a ship owner, on 12 May 1826 gives us some insight into this process: Davis contracted Holdridge to bring his new recruits from Le Havre to New Orleans, promising him at least fifteen passengers.⁷⁷ The cost of the passage for each performer was 550 francs, of which at least 400 would be paid by Davis's agent (that year Jean-Baptiste Sel) before the ship's departure from Le Havre, and the rest upon arrival in New Orleans roughly sixty days later.

Not only was the cost of the passage considerable, but newspapers from the time suggest that Davis paid handsomely to make their voyages as comfortable as possible. An article printed in the Parisian *Gazette des théâtres* on 13 February 1835, for example, gives an account of life aboard the *Cécilia*, the ship that transported the new troupe to New Orleans in the autumn of 1834. Of the thirty-two passengers on board, twenty-nine belonged to the Théâtre d'Orléans and, as the author remarks, 'few voyages have been more agreeable than the one of our compatriots [ie. the performers], whom the son of the director, M. Davis, surrounded with the most delicate cares, all the possible attentions'. The article goes on to report that Pierre Davis organised lunches of twelve to fifteen dishes for his recruits on the voyage, with dinners of in excess of twenty dishes. In order to provide these luxurious meals, there was on board the following:

A cow, 350 fowls, 2000 eggs, twenty pigs and sheep, six calves, 300 crates of preserved products, peas, liver paté, 150 cheeses, six barrels of wine, forty cases of Bordeaux wine and Champagne, twenty cases of liqueur, 500 pounds of sugar, coffee, chocolate, etc.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ While it was common practice in France and elsewhere for an impresario to pay the transport costs of his recruits, the expenses incurred by the Davises in bringing their performers across the Atlantic are particularly striking.

⁷⁷ Agreement between J. Davis and Allen P. Holdridge, *NONA*, Carlile Pollock, Volume 19, 12 May 1826, 113–5.

⁷⁸ 'Le voyage des comédiens', *Gazette des théâtres*, 13 February 1835.

Every Thursday and Sunday evening, dinner would be followed by a ball. Thus, the Davises made a considerable financial investment in bringing performers across the Atlantic. They also promised to pay for return voyages at the end of performers' contracts.⁷⁹

In terms of their engagements upon arrival in New Orleans, performers were clearly paid according to the amount the administration felt that they were worth to the theatre: Boniface Henry Warnet, for example, was paid 1,000 francs upon signing his contract and 10,000 francs per annum, to be delivered in monthly instalments, while Edward Clozel was paid only 750 francs up front, with an annual salary of 6,000 francs to be paid in monthly instalments. Such information about their respective salaries correlates with the details about each performer contained in the court cases brought against them, as Warnet is described as 'one of the best performers', while Clozel is awarded no such praise.⁸⁰ Interestingly, the written details of the case brought against Clozel seem to have been copied exactly from that brought against Warnet, since the salary details given in Warnet's contract have been crossed out in Clozel's and amended. Furthermore, the phrase 'one of the best performers' used to describe Warnet is still just about legible in Clozel's contract, but it has been repeatedly crossed out: the lawyer drawing up the statements was clearly not aware of the differences in the performers' standings until they were pointed out to him, and he was forced to amend the document about Clozel.

In 1840, meanwhile a group of ten singers wrote to the Parisian *Gazette des théâtres* in complaint about their treatment in New Orleans, giving a detailed insight into the living expenses they incurred while there. This, combined with the salary details given in the response to their complaints that was published in the New Orleans paper *L'Abeille* on 16 September 1840, contributes significantly to our understanding of the financial position of the performers who came to New Orleans. The ten artists listed the monthly expenditure of an individual performer 'of the first rank' as is shown in Table 2.1.⁸¹ On top of these costs, they listed another

⁷⁹ That the singers' return voyages were included in their contracts is stated in a letter written to the Parisian press by a group of singers in New Orleans. See, *Gazette des théâtres*, 5 July 1840.

⁸⁰ Davis, John vs Warnet, Boniface Henri (1825), *NOPL*, docket 6699 of the First Judicial Court, and Davis, John vs Clozel (1825), *NOPL*, docket 6719 of the First Judicial Court.

⁸¹ 'Encore quelques renseignements utiles aux artistes qui voudraient venir à la Nouvelle-Orléans', *Gazette des théâtres*, 5 July 1840. The exchange rate from dollars to francs is given by the performers as 1:5.25, which is the same rate given in the court cases against Warnet and Clozel in 1825, thus revealing a great stability between the currencies over a period of fifteen years. Victor Bulmer-Thomas shows that this was not a unique instance of stability between currencies in this period, in a table that shows a similar relationship between the United States Dollar and various other European currencies across the nineteenth century. The franc-dollar relationship

\$80 or 420 francs of ‘unforeseen expenses’, which were presumably not monthly, but one-off expenses, and included clothing. The costs of such clothing, as given in the performers’ letter, can be seen in Table 2.2.

Table 2.1 – Monthly expenses of Théâtre d’Orléans performers

Expense (per month)	Cost in Dollars	Cost in Francs
Lodging	\$20	FF 104.80
Board	\$25	FF 141
Personal Laundry	\$5	FF 26
Theatre Laundry	\$5	FF 26
Domestic servant	\$12	FF 67
Money spent for pleasure	\$10	FF 53
Total	\$77	FF 407.80

Table 2.2 – Costs of clothing as given in the performers’ letter

Item	Cost in Dollars	Cost in Francs
1 Suit (‘habit de ville’)	\$45	FF 236.25
1 Pair of trousers	\$16	FF 84
1 Frock coat (‘redingote’)	\$33	FF 183.75
1 Cotton shirt	\$3	FF 15.75
1 Hat	\$5	FF 26.25
1 Pair of boots	\$8	FF 42
1 Waistcoat	\$12	FF 63

exchange rate is also included in this table. See Victor Bulmer-Thomas, *The Economic History of the Caribbean Since the Napoleonic Wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 496.

1 Pair of gloves	\$1	FF 5.25
1 Pair of socks	\$0.5	FF 2.55
1 Regular cravat	\$3	FF 15.75

The performers complained bitterly that in the face of such costs, they were not being paid enough to live on. The response to their complaints published in the New Orleans press, however, pointed out that none of the singers who had complained were actually ‘of the first rank’ as they had suggested, but lesser performers who were trying to live a lifestyle ill-suited to their means.⁸² Nonetheless, the author of this response pointed out that Paul Cœuriot, one of the plaintiffs and a tenor of the second order, earned \$190 (950 francs) each month, leaving him well able to cope with the expenditure stated. The author of the response (who signed his article ‘G.A.M.’) states that first-rank singers were paid an additional \$80 (420 francs) each month, giving them total earnings of 24,660 francs for a contract of eighteen months. Some clearly earned even more: the French press reported in July 1840 that Auguste Nourrit (the less well-known brother of the famous tenor Adolphe Nourrit) had been engaged by the Théâtre d’Orléans for 35,000 francs for what appears to have been a single season of six months, making his monthly earnings roughly 5,833 francs.⁸³ As in Europe, performers were able to add to their salaries with benefit performances and it appears that, at least in some cases, such benefit evenings were even written into performers’ contracts. Sarah Cohen, for example, was contracted for \$80 dollars a month (which would have amounted to an annual salary of \$960 or 5,040 francs) but she was also promised half of a performance during her five or six months of employment for her benefit, from which she would take a fee of \$200.⁸⁴

Singers’ salaries, then, seem to have been adequate to pay for comfortable living in New Orleans. If they were struggling to pay their way, the article in the New Orleans press in response to the singers’ complaints suggested, the men should stop ‘going to balls, gambling, and spending three quarters of their time in restaurants and cafés’ and the women should sacrifice some of their jewels and buy the latest dresses rather less frequently, since these

⁸² G.A.M., ‘Affaire théâtrales: Réponse’, *L’Abeille*, 16 September 1840.

⁸³ *Journal des beaux-arts et de la littérature*, 10 July 1840.

⁸⁴ Contract letter written by L. Fiot, Cohen vs Davis (1846), *NOPL*, docket 00349 of the Third District Court.

activities were what he suggests were causing their financial difficulties; just because audiences praised their work, the author argued, did not mean that performers had the right to act above their station.⁸⁵ Other articles, however, such as one published in the theatrical periodical *La Lorgnette* on 17 July 1842, for example, suggested that the salaries offered by the management were not high enough and would only attract mediocre performers.⁸⁶

As we can see from Table 2.3, the salaries paid to performers in New Orleans might not have rivalled the enormous sums paid to the best Italian opera performers at home and abroad, but the Théâtre d'Orléans performers were by no means badly paid compared with others in their position. In many cases, the salaries they received in New Orleans would have been better than those which they would have received at a number of Parisian theatres. Indeed, among the musical theatres in Paris, salaries varied dramatically (as one would perhaps expect, given the large state subsidies given to the Opéra and Opéra-Comique). For a performer who was not able to secure a position as prima donna or *premier ténor* at the Paris Opéra (whether through age, through want of talent or training, or through lack of opportunity), the financial possibilities of a trip to New Orleans must have looked very inviting. The fact that Clozel could earn 500 francs a month as a low-ranking performer shows just how good the salaries in New Orleans were by comparison with similar positions in French theatres.

Table 2.3 – Salaries paid to theatrical performers in Europe

Role/ Performer	Location	Monthly Salary	Year
Premier rôle ⁸⁷	Paris Odéon	FF 500	1829
Premier ténor ⁸⁸	Lyon	FF 416	1829

⁸⁵ ‘Mais lorsque la plupart de ces messieurs voudront, en pays étranger, faire plus de dépenses qu’ils ne le peuvent, singer les premiers sujets, aller au bal, jouer, passer les trois quarts de leur existence dans les restaurants et les cafés; lorsque ce dames à leur tour, voudront rivaliser d’élégance avec les premières dames de la ville, dans leurs robes et leurs bijoux...’, G.A.M., ‘Affaire théâtrales: Réponse’, *L’Abeille*, 16 September 1840.

⁸⁶ ‘De l’Administration du Théâtre d’Orléans’, *La Lorgnette*, 17 July 1842.

⁸⁷ A proposed budget for the Paris Odéon in 1829 allocated 6,000 francs a year for a *premier rôle*, either male or female, who would play tragedies, drames and comedies, but only 5,000 if they could not play tragic roles. Anne Martin-Fugier, *Comédienne: de Mlle Mars à Sarah Bernhardt* (Paris: Seuil, 2001), 59.

⁸⁸ In 1836, by contrast, the *premier ténor* at the same Grand Théâtre de Lyon received an annual salary of 30,000 francs for his services (2,500 francs a month), but this seems to have been an exceptional salary. See Martin-

Premier ténor	Le Havre	FF 833	1840
Première chanteuse	Le Havre	FF 1,166	1840
Comédie/drame/vaudeville performers	Le Havre	FF 416	1840
Premier rôle	Paris Opéra	FF 7000/8000	1840
Choriste	Paris Opéra	FF 45	1840
Giuditta Pasta ⁸⁹	Venice	FF 1,000 per performance	1833
Marietta Alboni ⁹⁰	Madrid	FF 2,660 per performance	1850

Moreover, to put the money at stake into perspective, it should be pointed out that all of these salaries (with the exception of those of the poor *choristes* at the Opéra) were generally vastly larger than those earned by people in other skilled employment. For example, a teacher in Paris could be expected to earn 1,800 francs a year by 1836,⁹¹ and a top professor could earn 4,000 francs a year in 1840.⁹² A journeyman typically only earned three to five francs per day

Fugier, *Comédienne*, 59–60. All of the information on French salaries in this table can be found in Martin-Fugier, *Comédienne*, 59–61.

⁸⁹ For information on the salaries paid to Italian opera singers see John Rosselli, *The Opera Industry in Italy from Cimarosa to Verdi*, 58–65. For information on Pasta, see 70. In 1827, Pasta was paid 57,500 francs plus a benefit performance for the April to July season in London. Rosselli, *The Opera Industry in Italy from Cimarosa to Verdi*, 64.

⁹⁰ Rosselli, *The Opera Industry in Italy from Cimarosa to Verdi*, 65.

⁹¹ This salary information is given in David Pinkney, *Decisive Years in France: 1840–7* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 84.

⁹² The information is based on the salary of a professor of Pharmacy at a Parisian College of Pharmacy as given by Robley Dunglison in *The American Medical Intelligencer*, Volume 4 (Philadelphia, 1841), 170.

for between ten and twelve hours' work, while a workman could expect a maximum of one franc fifty cents for his labours.⁹³ Meanwhile in Louisiana, 1840 saw the State Attorney General earning \$3000 (15,750 francs) a year and the superintendent of the United States Mint at New Orleans earning \$2,500 (13,125 francs), while a plantation overseer could earn \$425 (2231 francs 25 cents) annually.⁹⁴

The wages earned by the Théâtre d'Orléans performers, then, seem to have been high enough to place even second-rank performers into the highest wage brackets both in France and in the United States: the promise of such wages doubtless played a large part in any singer's decision to make the move across the Atlantic. In many ways, of course, the Théâtre d'Orléans needed to offer wages that appeared enticing on an international scale. Indeed, New Orleans had something of a reputation for its harsh climate and for 'horrific plagues', as the ten singers who wrote to the *Gazette des théâtres* pointed out; they complained that five members of the troupe had died of yellow fever since their arrival. They wrote their letter, they said, to 'give these words of advice to our friends and comrades, in order to put them on guard against the empty promises that [the administration] could make to them ... with no other thought than to save other artists from regrets and chagrin'.⁹⁵ The respondent in *L'Abeille*, however, was quick to say that the members of the troupe had not died of yellow fever at all, but sunstroke, caused by their not taking sufficient care in the heat.⁹⁶ Nonetheless, while the artists' words appeared in the Parisian press, his words were limited to the New Orleans press; although newspapers from New Orleans were read in France (particularly in port towns such as Le Havre, but also in Paris), the respondent's letter would not have reached them until well after the artists' complaint had been published. New Orleans thus had to struggle against its insalubrious

⁹³ For salaries in nineteenth-century Paris, see A. and W. Galignani, *New Paris Guide* (Paris, 1841), 119.

⁹⁴ The salary of the Attorney General is given in Merritt M. Robinson, *A Digest of the Penal Law of the State of Louisiana: Analytically Arranged* (New Orleans, 1841), 225. The superintendent's salary is listed in *The American Almanac and Repository of Useful Knowledge for the Year 1841* (Boston, 1840), 121. The salary of a plantation overseer was reported in a court case in which an overseer took his employed to court, arguing that he ought to be paid \$500 a year, not \$425. See Merritt M. Robinson, *Reports of Cases Argued and Determined in the Supreme Court of Louisiana, Volume 1: October 1841–March 1842* (New Orleans, 1842), 27.

⁹⁵ 'Nous donnons ces enseignements à nos amis et à nos camarades, afin de les mettre en garde contre les promesses éphémères qu'on pourrait leur faire, nous apposons notre signature en bas de cet écrit parce qu'il est l'expression de vérité, et pas un de nous n'a d'autre pensée en le signant que celle d'éviter aux artistes des regrets et des chagrins'. 'Encore quelques renseignements utiles aux artistes qui voudraient venir à la Nouvelle-Orléans', *Gazette des théâtres*, 5 July 1840.

⁹⁶ G. A. M., 'Affaire théâtrales: Réponse', *L'Abeille*, 16 September 1840.

reputation when recruiting performers, and the promise of substantial salaries might have served to palliate this fear a little.

Nonetheless, the artists who wrote to the *Gazette des théâtres* were by no means alone in feeling that they had been in some way cheated by the theatre administration. Bernardet, a singer in the troupe in the mid-1840s, wrote to Nonnon, costumier of the Paris Opéra, from New Orleans on 1 April 1842 complaining that:

I am still here ... for another month and a half. As soon as I leave this wretched place I will bring myself to Paris. ... I was deceived by the directors, I have made a loss of 8 percent, which is in fact 800 francs less than the engagement should have brought me, and that is without many other cases of filibustering that I have observed on the part of the direction, which finds itself at this moment in a state of total chaos.⁹⁷

His complaints about the loss of pay were shared by the artists in their letter to the *Gazette des théâtres* in 1840. First, they stated that they had only been paid for sixteen of the eighteen months of their contract, as the administration had failed to pay them for a couple of months over the summer. And second, they said that the administration would only pay them in promissory notes, not in cash, and, that in recent years (perhaps since the international financial crisis of 1837) banks had been reluctant to honour promissory notes.⁹⁸ As a result, in order to turn their monthly pay cheques into cash, the artists had been obliged to pay an 8 to 10 percent fee each time.⁹⁹ Although such a problem cannot be seen as completely the fault of the administration, the fact that the management saw fit to pass the problem on to the artists rather

⁹⁷ 'Je suis encore ici, mon bon M. Nonnon, pour un mois 1/2 . Si-tôt sorté de ce misérable pays, je me rends à Paris. ... J'ai été trompé par la direction, j'ai éprouvé une perte de huit pour-cent, ce qui me fait mille huit cent francs de moins que l'engagement [illeg.] m'aurait dû rapporter, et sans compter plusieurs autres filibustes que j'ai éprouvé de la part de la direction, qui se trouve dans ce moment dans une débine complète.' Bernardet to Nonnon, 1 April 1842, *F-Po*, NLAS-392.

⁹⁸ For more on the financial crisis of 1837, see Jessica M. Lepler, *The Many Panics of 1837: People, Politics, and the Creation of a Transatlantic Financial Crisis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) and Alasdair Roberts, *America's First Great Depression: Economic Crisis and Political Disorder after the Panic of 1837* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2012).

⁹⁹ 'Encore quelques renseignements utiles aux artistes qui voudraient venir à la Nouvelle-Orléans', *Gazette des théâtres*, 5 July 1840.

than paying a fee themselves on the artists' salaries perhaps suggests a bit of canny management.

There certainly are suggestions that the management of the Théâtre d'Orléans was not above sharp practice: the court ordered Pierre Davis to pay compensation to Sarah Cohen's father in the case of Cohen vs Davis, as the judge found Davis guilty of failing to honour Cohen's contract. But in other cases, it seems as if the management was wronged by its performers, as in both the cases of Davis vs Warnet and Davis vs Clozel the court accepted that John Davis had paid both performers fully and on time, and he was thus awarded damages for the inconvenience caused by the performers' violations of their contracts. The fact that such court cases exist reflects the way in which the employment of performers in New Orleans was a formalised process in which both employers and employees had rights, although it was, of course, doubtless considerably easier for Davis, a permanent resident of Louisiana and one of New Orleans's most influential businessmen, to take his performers to court than it was for them—strangers in a foreign land in a time before there was an established international legal system—to undertake proceedings against their employers.

While we ought not to absolve the Davises of their alleged sins too quickly, the disputes over salaries also hint at a problem faced by the burgeoning transatlantic theatre industry: currency conversion. Indeed, while the singers doubtless signed their contracts for the Théâtre d'Orléans based on their salaries given in francs, they were paid in U.S. dollars. As the performers writing to the *Gazette des théâtres* discovered, however, they faced further charges to convert these dollars into francs, and so when they sought to send money to their families in France (and, doubtless, to purchase costumes and other goods there), they found that their money was not worth as much as they had initially thought. While their wages were good by both New Orleans and Parisian standards, they did not necessarily account for the particular kind of expenses encountered by performers who were working internationally. Systems of international theatrical engagement were not without their teething problems.

Excavating the lost voices and personalities of the Théâtre d'Orléans

The quality of the performers contracted by the Davises and their recruiters surely played a significant role in the enduring success of the Théâtre d'Orléans. And yet it is the performances of these singers, and their voices in particular, that are hardest to recreate: in an age before

recording technologies, the essence of their operatic performance is largely unrecoverable. Mediated traces of their vocal qualities, however, can be pieced together from newspaper reports published in the locations in which the performers sang. While it is only ever possible, therefore, to ‘hear’ the singers through the filter of the critics (who always had their own personal preferences and agendas), these reports allow us to begin to work out the way these performers sounded and the significance they held for their audiences.

Previous scholarship appears to have emphasised the connection between the Théâtre d’Orléans and the Paris Opéra as a marker of the high quality of the performers who came to New Orleans, carrying as it does the tacit implication that these Parisian performers were somehow separate from (and, indeed, better than) provincial performers. As we have already seen, however, for the most part there was not a rigid division between Parisian performers and provincial performers, and singers moved regularly from engagements in the provinces to ones in the capital and vice versa. Furthermore, the underlying assumption that audiences in the French provinces would somehow be more satisfied by poor-quality singers than their counterparts in the capital is by no means the case. Performers in the provinces were rigorously scrutinised by local critics, and it is often from their reviews that we begin to get a sense of the strengths and weaknesses of some of the New Orleans performers.

The tenor Gabriel Arnaud, who sang in New Orleans in the early 1840s and who played the principal roles in many of the grand operas the Théâtre d’Orléans performed on its tour of the Eastern seaboard in 1845, had his *débuts* in Lyon in 1841 dissected in the town’s press. The critic for *L’Artiste*, for example, was not easily impressed, and he declared that of the tenor’s three *débuts*:

Guillaume Tell hinted at all the qualities and all the faults that we have already discussed. In *Lucie [de Lammermoor]* the *débutant* failed, especially in the finale of the septet ... and in *La Juive*, his success was complete. Largeness of sound can be developed with greater ease in this role than in almost all others.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ ‘*Guillaume Tell* a laissé deviner toutes les qualités et toutes les défauts que nous indiquons. Dans *Lucie* le débutant a échoué, au final du septuor surtout ... et dans la *Juive*, enfin, le succès s’est complètement décidé. La largeur du son peut se développer dans ce rôle avec plus d’aisance que partout ailleurs’. E.L.R., ‘Théâtres’, *L’Artiste* (Lyon), 12 September 1841.

The lengthy article dissected Arnaud's performances, discussing everything from the timbre of his voice (which the author felt was not properly that of a tenor or a baritone and would be 'an incessant obstacle to M. Arnaud's lyric career') to his use of chest voice for high notes (a part of his style that would greatly impress audiences in New York when the Théâtre d'Orléans troupe performed there, but which the Lyonnais critic felt was not as good as Duprez).¹⁰¹ Ultimately, however, the critic concluded that Arnaud was a 'great success' but that he would continue to study the singer and report on his vocal progress in the coming months.¹⁰²

The New Orleans press and public were in a somewhat different position from their provincial French counterparts. Provincial France operated a *débuts* system whereby performers had three chances to impress audiences and critics in a variety of roles: if they failed to please, they were frequently replaced with someone who did.¹⁰³ But the distance between New Orleans and the source of its performers meant that audiences and critics there were not afforded the same kind of power. While it seems that performers were occasionally replaced after their arrival in New Orleans—in March 1836, Pierre Davis made a trip to Paris outside of the usual recruiting period outlined in Chapter 1 in order to 'top up' a troupe that was said to be lacking—in general, once performers had arrived, audiences and critics had to put up with them for the season.¹⁰⁴

This did not mean, however, that singers received a kind of benign acceptance in New Orleans or that critics considered themselves to be any less discerning. Instead, since the same performers were heard night after night for a whole season, a kind of 'hot-house' atmosphere emerged in which singers gained devotees on the one hand and opponents who resorted to nothing short of ad hominem attacks on the other. Indeed, since the performers were contracted to take roles in all the genres offered by the theatre, they were bound to be stronger in some areas than in others. The performance of spoken dramas seemed to be a particular weakness of the troupe at various points in the Théâtre d'Orléans's history: in December 1834, the critic for

¹⁰¹ 'Cette voix gutturale ... n'a d'analogie ni avec le ténor proprement dit, ni avec le baryton ... ce timbre de voix sera l'obstacle incessant de la carrière lyrique de M. Arnaud.' E.L.R., 'Théâtres', *L'Artiste* (Lyon), 12 September 1841.

¹⁰² 'Nous ne voulons pas être les derniers à publier le très grand succès que M. Arnaud a obtenu.' E.L.R., 'Théâtres', *L'Artiste* (Lyon), 12 September 1841.

¹⁰³ For more information on the *débuts* system, see Hemmings, *The Theatre Industry in Nineteenth-Century France*, 195–8.

¹⁰⁴ Pierre's trip to Europe to recruit performers were lacking from the New Orleans troupe is mentioned in Jean Boze to Baron de Ste-Gême, 2 March 1836, *HNOG*, Ste-Gême Family Papers, MSS 100, Folder 267, 3.

the *Louisiana Advertiser* complained that by refusing to reengage Madame Clozel, the management was giving to the public ‘a caricature of dramas’, full of unsatisfactory acting across the board.¹⁰⁵

Such a feeling about the performances of spoken drama in the city seems to have resonated with wider debates of the time concerning the relative merits of French and English (and also American) theatres. For example, an American writer, having visited New Orleans, wrote:

Speaking of the French theatre, it is impossible to witness any representation on the French stage without being compelled to acknowledge that we are infinitely below France in many respects. Even the orchestras of Drury Lane and Covent Garden are inferior to those of the smallest theatres in Paris, and the choruses scarcely better. Under the head of correctness of costume, the best of our American theatres are a thousand miles behind the little French theatre in New Orleans. ... On the other hand, the French are compelled to admit, that in real tragic talent they cannot pretend to institute a comparison between their actors and those of England and America of the present day.¹⁰⁶

But if the critics’ uncertainty about the performers as tragic actors reflected wider cultural attitudes to French drama in comparison with English drama, even when it came to the matter of operatic performances critics could not agree.¹⁰⁷ The impossibility of accurately recreating the qualities of the performers because of the critics’ individual agendas frequently becomes clear, such as in the case of Heymann, a tenor who sang with the troupe between 1834 and 1840. Heymann was clearly considered to be good enough (and well liked enough) to have his contract renewed for a number of years, and in 1834 he was praised ‘for his excellent method,

¹⁰⁵ *Louisiana Advertiser*, 23 December 1834.

¹⁰⁶ Louis Fitzgerald Tasistro, *Random Shots and Southern Breezes*, Volume 1 (New York, 1842), 184.

¹⁰⁷ For more on the subject of debates about the respective merits of French and English drama in the nineteenth century, see John Bishop, “‘They manage things better in France’: French Plays and English Critics, 1850–1855”, *Nineteenth-Century Theatre* 22/1 (1994): 5–29. For more on British-French literary and theatrical relations more generally, see Elisabeth Jay, *British Writers and Paris: 1830–1875* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

his fresh and pure voice, his profound art'.¹⁰⁸ However, the following year, in a review of the first performance of Meyerbeer's *Robert le diable* at the Théâtre d'Orléans, a reviewer wrote:

His face is inexpressive; his features too often distorted; his mode of addressing the auditory too ridiculous; his falsetto intonations are frequently falsified tones, harsh and discordant; and his address is not often debonair. Still he often displays the conquest of scientific vocalisation over natural defects; and we think if he had less confidence in himself he might have more success.¹⁰⁹

These two descriptions might as well have been written of different singers, for all the resemblance to each other they bear. Indeed, such reviews undoubtedly reveal more about the reviewer than the person under scrutiny, or about the relationship between the two, since it is highly likely that performers and critics in a city the size of New Orleans would have known each other or at least moved in the same social circles.¹¹⁰ While we cannot trust them to give us an accurate picture of a singer's vocal qualities, they do, however, show us something of how the singers were perceived (and perceived themselves) within New Orleans society.

One particularly clear example of this is New Orleans's very own 'diva war' which took place in the spring of 1841. The Théâtre d'Orléans's two prima donnas that season were Mademoiselle Julia Calvé and Madame Bamberger. Calvé's fame was well established in New Orleans, as she had been singing at the Théâtre d'Orléans since 1837, while Bamberger had joined the troupe the following season and had been quietly rising through the ranks. Supporters of Calvé resented Bamberger as an interloper, while supporters of Bamberger believed that Calvé's ego was overinflated. Not only did the two groups spar across the pages of the local press, but tensions came to a head physically in March 1841 when supporters of Madame Bamberger dared to throw bouquets to her following a performance in which Calvé had played the star role. Calvé threw her own bouquet to the floor and stormed from the stage in a fit of pique, while minor scuffles broke out in the parterre. Two nights later, at the next

¹⁰⁸ *Louisiana Advertiser*, 23 December 1834.

¹⁰⁹ *The Bee*, 6 May 1835.

¹¹⁰ The development of operatic criticism in New Orleans will be explored in detail in Chapter 3.

performance, the singers' supporters were ready to continue hostilities. Calvé, her composure restored, came to the front of the stage to seek forgiveness, as the *Daily Picayune* reported:

Calvé came forward and apologised by saying that she had no intention of insulting the audience on Friday evening, but either the apology was not humble enough or else the people in the house were determined not to forgive her, for a terrible din was kept up every time she attempted to sing during the evening, and not a note she uttered was heard. On Bamberger's appearance she was received with the greatest enthusiasm and a perfect shower of bouquets.¹¹¹

The performers, then, inspired clear partisan loyalties. The gentlemen of the audience were known to lavish incredibly expensive gifts upon their most-beloved singers in ways that were reported internationally: the Parisian *Revue et Gazette musicale* stated on 10 May 1855 in an article about the theatre in New Orleans that people threw diamonds 'in the shape of a cross, in brooches, rings, in the most ravishing mounts' onto the stage for Mme Eugène Cambier after her performance in Fromental Halévy's *Charles VI*.¹¹²

Given such hero-worship, it is perhaps unsurprising that certain singers might have had delusions of grandeur of the sort bemoaned by the critic, G.A.M., when he responded to the singers' complaints in the Parisian *Gazette des théâtres* in 1840 discussed above. These performers, then, occupied a unique position within New Orleans's theatre-going society, which viewed itself as highly discerning. On the one hand, they were idolised and lavished with the most expensive of gifts, but on the other hand, they were simply providers of a particular kind of public service within the city: it would not be too great an exaggeration to suggest that access to theatrical performances in New Orleans in this period was almost seen as a citizen's right. In the case of the letter in the *Gazette des théâtres*, the singers had not only dared to question the integrity of Pierre Davis and of the theatre administration more generally, but they had chosen an extremely public forum to voice their displeasure: if they were not being listened to in New Orleans, they would effectively shame the city into responding by

¹¹¹ *Daily Picayune*, 30 March 1841.

¹¹² 'Nouvelle-Orléans', *Revue et Gazette musicale*, 20 May 1855.

appealing to the Parisian press as a mediator. Of course, their actions provoked a response, but in the course of his article G.A.M. reduced them from their deified status to that of (artistic) labourers, pointing out that they had a service to provide and that if they were not doing it satisfactorily, then they served little purpose. This precarious position offers a tantalising glimpse of the bind of the nineteenth-century operatic performer: operatic labour was at once construed very differently from the many other skilled labourers who crossed the Atlantic during this period, but at the same time the performers could not escape from reminders that they remained, in fact, dependent—and indeed disposable—employees of the theatre.

Conclusion: New Orleans and the operatic world

Over the course of its existence, the Théâtre d'Orléans developed into an institution with a degree of international prestige. The New Orleans public certainly viewed its theatre as worthy of attracting the highest calibre of performers. For example, the *Daily Picayune*, responding to rumours that the great French tenor Gustave-Hippolyte Roger was going to come to New Orleans, had the following to say in 1855:

New Orleans would be the place for Roger. Here, he would be appreciated and understood. But we confess that at present we are very content with what we have in his way here.¹¹³

Not only did the author of this snippet seem to view Roger as a viable acquisition for the Théâtre d'Orléans, but he was confident enough in the theatre's current standing to state that the services of such an illustrious performer were not even required.

Such comments were not purely bravado on the part of a critic, however, and we have evidence of New Orleans holding its own on an international level by the 1850s. Shortly before the new French Opera House opened in 1859, for instance, the secretary of the ministre de la Maison de l'Empereur in Paris wrote to the director of the Paris Opéra to recommend that they ought to audition a young tenor named Ecarlat, who was currently contracted to the French

¹¹³ 'Musical Intelligence', *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 14 December 1855.

opera at New Orleans for a period of six months.¹¹⁴ The administration of the Opéra heard the young man sing twice and, while they thought that he showed much promise (they declared his performance of an aria from Verdi's *Il trovatore* 'perfectly sung'), they ultimately decided not to offer him a contract: 'what prevented me from immediately proposing his engagement' wrote the administrator '... was that he would be obliged to pay a forfeit of 20,000 francs to the theatre of New Orleans' in order to be released from his existing contract.¹¹⁵ The Opéra was, therefore, obliged to wait for Ecarlat to finish his contract at the Théâtre d'Orléans and then at the new French Opera House. He did then return to Paris, and London magazine *The Athenaeum* reported that he was about to begin his trial at the Opéra in June 1861.¹¹⁶ The French opera in New Orleans, then, was able to hold its own on an international level, recruiting performers of a high quality whose careers took them all over the world, and forcing the Paris Opéra to wait its turn.

In this sense, New Orleans had become an integral part of international networks of French operatic production in its own right. Performers could accept engagements there knowing that they would be formally contracted and that they would receive good wages for their work. In fact, New Orleans was so integrated into international systems of French theatre that performers who attempted to take liberties by claiming they were underpaid and underappreciated were disappointed to find that they were unable to get away with it: New Orleans might have been several thousand miles from Paris, but the performers soon discovered that, in spite of the distance, neither the theatre management nor the public were naive.

An exploration of the agency of the performers and their career paths, then, offers a complementary perspective to Chapter 1 by focussing on a different aspect of what it took for an institution to thrive. While the Davises could provide incentives up to a point, the Théâtre d'Orléans depended upon the agency of the individual performers and their personal, highly varied reasons for coming to New Orleans in order to survive. As we have seen, New Orleans

¹¹⁴ 'Secrétaire générale du ministre de la maison de l'Empereur à Alphonse Royer', 9 September 1859, *F-Pan*, AJ/13/453.

¹¹⁵ 'Ce qui m'a empêché de proposer immédiatement son engagement à Votre Excellence c'est que pour se livrer aux nous il aurait été obligé de payer 20,000 francs de dédit au théâtre de la Nouvelle Orléans qui l'a engagé pour un saison de six mois'. 'Secrétaire générale du ministre de la maison de l'Empereur à Alphonse Royer', 9 September 1859, *F-Pan*, AJ/13/451.

¹¹⁶ 'Musical and Dramatic Gossip', *The Athenaeum*, 8 June 1861, 772.

was but one of many attractive stopping places for performers whose theatrical careers were marked by movement. A focus on the agencies of a diverse body of performers over a forty-year period, therefore, allows us to see the Théâtre d'Orléans as an institution constantly in flux, as a dynamic enterprise, rather than as a static operatic fixture.

Furthermore, positioning New Orleans within such mobile networks of performers allows us to reflect critically on the hierarchies and centralisation of French opera that we so often take for granted. In a model driven by transatlantic movement in both directions, Paris no longer seems the monolithic centre of the French operatic universe. Undeniably, the image of Paris was ever-present in any number of more or less subtle ways for management, performers, and audiences alike in New Orleans, but it did not dictate the shape of the city's operatic life in the manner that has long been assumed. If we allow them to, other rather more unexpected places begin to emerge as important participants in this story, as the case of Le Havre shows. Such places help us to rebalance not only New Orleans's relationship with Europe, but to challenge ingrained narratives of the centrality of cultural influence, offering the possibility that 'everyday' performers—not the big operatic stars—shaped the industry as much as individual institutions or large urban centres. New Orleans, therefore, was not simply an exotic periphery, but a part of a complex of French and pan-European systems of francophone opera, comprising both metropolitan centres and provincial French theatres in a mutually dependent relationship, sustained by the performers who moved ceaselessly among them.

 CHAPTER 3

The Impact of French *grand opéra* in New Orleans

On 4 July 1849, Giacomo Meyerbeer drafted a short letter in his daybook:

I have asked the directors of the Opéra to permit you to come on stage at the Opéra during the performance today and the one on Friday (which will be the last of *Le Prophète*), in order to be able to examine more closely the decor, the stage machinery etc.¹

This message is a rarity in Meyerbeer's correspondence, one of barely a handful of surviving instances in which the composer requested a 'laissez-passer' for anyone at the Opéra in the whole duration of his career. The honour would have allowed the recipient unparalleled insight into all of the elements, human and mechanical, that brought his vast *grands opéras* to life. Any number of composers and critics would doubtless have leapt at such an opportunity, but the recipient was neither of those things: Meyerbeer's correspondent here was Pierre Davis, in Europe for the summer to recruit a new troupe. We saw in Chapter 1 how Meyerbeer met with Davis on a number of occasions in the late 1840s and early 1850s, arranging for Davis to purchase the scores for his latest operas, as well as occasionally assisting with matters of recruitment for the Théâtre d'Orléans troupe. This letter, however, given its unusual position in Meyerbeer's correspondence, is surprising even beyond the other meetings with Davis. As such, it grants us an insight into the minds of both composer and director: on Meyerbeer's part, we can read it as a manifestation of his desire to control productions of his work outside of Paris. On Davis's part, the letter shows the lengths to which he went not only to obtain the materials for performing *grand opéra* in New Orleans, but to research the look and sound of the original productions.

¹ 'J'ai demandé à Messieurs les directeurs de l'Opéra que vous puissiez venir sur la scène de l'Opéra à la représentation d'aujourd'hui & à celle de Vendredi (que [*sic*] sera la dernière du *Prophète*) pour pouvoir examiner de près les décors, la machinerie etc. etc... mercredi'. In *Giacomo Meyerbeer: Briefwechsel und Tagebücher*, ed. Sabine Henze-Döhring, 8 volumes, Volume 5 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1998), 24.

In the 1830s, the Davises made a deliberate effort to introduce new, up-to-date works to the theatre's repertoire on an annual basis, alongside the older *opéras-comiques*—by composers such as Grétry, Méhul and Boieldieu—that had dominated the stage up to that point.² The introduction of this repertoire was most likely due to a number of factors: a combination of Pierre's increasing influence in the directorial partnership (and his apparently more specialist musical and theatrical knowledge), a demand for novelty from audiences, who were becoming bored of all-too-familiar older works, and, of course, the emergence of *grand opéra* as a new genre in Europe.

From this time on, audiences in New Orleans welcomed performances (frequently the American premieres) of many of the latest French *grands opéras* from across the Atlantic, as well as occasional local essays in the genre, such as Eugène Prévost's *Esmeralda* (1842) and the fifteen-year-old Ernest Guiraud's *Le Roi David* (1853).³ By the mid-nineteenth century, there was nothing short of an insatiable appetite for *grand opéra* in New Orleans. In many cases, the Théâtre d'Orléans was able to produce works very quickly after their Parisian premieres: *Le Prophète*, for example, the work Pierre had seen on stage at the Paris Opéra, was performed in New Orleans on 2 April 1850, just under a year after its Parisian premiere. The city's love of *grand opéra*, in fact, rivalled its popularity in many European capitals and lasted well into the twentieth century. By the time the New Orleans French Opera House, the theatre that superseded the Théâtre d'Orléans, was consumed by flames in December 1919, Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots* had been performed well over 200 times in the city; it was, appropriately enough, the last work heard there before the fire.⁴

² Both Henry Kmen and Jack Belsom provide detailed information on the Théâtre d'Orléans's repertoire at various points in its history. See Henry Kmen, *Music in New Orleans: The Formative Years, 1791–1841* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966) and Jack Belsom, 'Reception of Major Operatic Premieres in New Orleans during the Nineteenth Century' (MA diss., Louisiana State University, 1972).

³ The most enduring of the local attempts at *grand opéra* seems to have been Eugène Prévost's *La Esmeralda*, a *grand opéra* in four acts and seven scenes, which was frequently performed in the 1840s. It is unclear, however, whether Prévost wrote the work in New Orleans or whether he brought it with him from France when he moved from Le Havre to take up the position of *chef d'orchestre* in New Orleans in 1838. Nonetheless, the work was never part of the Parisian *grand opéra* repertoire.

⁴ Robert Ignatius Letellier, *Meyerbeer's Les Huguenots: An Evangel of Religion and Love* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 122. The fire that destroyed the French Opera House was not the end of opera in New Orleans: since 1943, the New Orleans Opera Association has brought performances to the New Orleans public most years.

Grand opéra's position in the life of New Orleans, however, was by no means straightforward, especially in the first decade following its introduction.⁵ The genre became a focus for debates about contemporary cultural and political issues: the discourses that developed around it allowed people from various linguistic and cultural factions within the city to negotiate a series of interlocking local, national and international identities for themselves. At the same time, it served as an impetus towards significant developments both in opera criticism and in the material culture of opera. In this chapter, I explore the arrival of *grand opéra* in the city, focussing in particular on the first productions of Meyerbeer's *Robert le diable* and *Les Huguenots*, teasing out concerns connected to issues of belonging: concerns that were both shaped by, and explored through, the reception of these works in the francophone and anglophone press in New Orleans. I then move on to consider *grand opéra*'s influence on the fundamental changes in New Orleans's operatic outlook that took place from the 1840s on, arguing that the significance placed upon *grand opéra* in New Orleans helped to drive the emergence of an operatic canon of 'great works' and a material culture to support it in the city.

The overlooked *La Muette*: introducing the New Orleans critical press

Given the importance New Orleans's residents came to place upon *grand opéra*, and the great efforts to which Davis and his team went to create lavish productions unlike anything ever seen before in the city, it might initially seem surprising that the genre's first appearance there drew little attention in the press. Daniel Auber's *La Muette de Portici* was first performed at the Théâtre d'Orléans on 29 April 1831—its American premiere—but drew little comment from reviewers. At the time, the city had two major newspapers, both bilingual: they had a French-language section and an English-language section, operating under a shared title that was translated accordingly for each section.⁶ When it came to *La Muette*, the city's longest-standing newspaper, the *Courrier de la Louisiane/The Louisiana Courier*, did not even review the

⁵ Scholarly accounts focussing specifically on the performance and reception of *grand opéra* in the city, however, are few and far between. Belsom, 'Reception of Major Operatic Premieres' and Sarah Hibberd, 'Grand Opera in Britain and the Americas', in *The Cambridge Companion to Grand Opera*, ed. David Charlton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 417–8, are the two most detailed accounts, but they are both relatively brief.

⁶ In the very early years of the nineteenth century, the English-language sections of these newspapers were often direct translations of the French sections; by the 1830s, however, they contained different material to suit the interests of the city's divided linguistic communities.

performance,⁷ while *L'Abeille/The Bee* stretched to two short reviews in the French section. The first of these simply assessed the performance of the singers who, at this late stage in the theatrical season (it had started in mid-November 1830), were already very familiar to audiences.⁸ The other review, meanwhile, consisted almost exclusively of superficial remarks about the 'large musical conception', and referred vaguely to the 'theatrical pomp and the decor', before concluding positively that '*La Muette* is one of the spectacles that one must see'.⁹ After that, no critic seems to have felt the need to comment further on the opera.

While such a brief response might seem surprising given the overheated critical excitement to be generated later over *grand opéra*, it is not necessarily out of keeping with the state of operatic criticism in New Orleans in the early 1830s. The city's newspapers were the principal sites for the printing of operatic and musical criticism in this period, but most often this amounted to little more than notices about which works were to be performed, theatrical gossip, and assessments of the troupe's European performers. Scattered among this running commentary were frequent reminders to the people of New Orleans that they were very lucky to have a theatre of such quality in their city.¹⁰ Newspapers, though there were many of them, suffered from the same degree of impermanence as the city's early theatres. Many lasted only a few months before either the enterprise ran out of funds or the editor lost interest in the endeavour and moved on to other things.¹¹ In 1831, no newspaper seems to have employed a specialist music critic for either its French- or English-language section, so they depended either upon the knowledge of the editor or upon articles submitted by readers for their theatrical news and reviews.¹²

⁷ For more on the history of New Orleans's newspapers in this period, see Samuel J. Marino, 'Early French-Language Newspapers in New Orleans', *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 7/4 (1966): 309–21.

⁸ See *L'Abeille*, 3 May 1831 and 21 May 1831.

⁹ 'Cette grande conception musicale'; 'L'un des mérites de cette pièce est dans la pompe théâtrale et le décor'; 'En somme, la *Muette de Portici* est l'un de ces spectacles qu'il faut voir', *L'Abeille*, 3 May 1831.

¹⁰ See, for example, *L'Ami des Lois*, 31 May 1823 and 7 June 1823.

¹¹ These papers were most often founded either by a sole editor or at most a pair. For more on the emergence and disappearance of newspapers during this period, see Edward Larocque Tinker, *Bibliography of the French Newspapers and Periodicals of Louisiana* (Worcester, MA: American Antiquarian Society, 1933).

¹² The *Louisiana Gazette* (1804–26), however, while it did not employ a full-time music critic, did employ a regular *feuilletonist*, Alexis Daudet, from 1819 until 1825; he happened to be closely connected with the French theatre. Daudet initially wrote his column on local poetry and arts, but by the end of his term had simply begun to reprint articles from Parisian newspapers. See Marino, 'Early French-Language Newspapers in New Orleans', 309–21.

The lack of professional music critics, combined with the dominance of the Théâtre d'Orléans and its familiar repertoire in New Orleans's cultural life, meant that, for much of the 1820s, there was little incentive for francophone reviewers to expand their critical vocabulary. In that decade, Caldwell's newly opened American Theatre and its repertoire of abridged Shakespeare and light comic works, interspersed by musical performances from an orchestra that was by all accounts incomplete and of poor quality, did similarly little to inspire any increased critical fervour or rigour among the francophone reviewers. Instead, they continued to remind New Orleans's French and Creole citizens to support the French theatre.¹³ The English-language sections of the papers, meanwhile, now had their own performers and theatrical gossip to discuss, and therefore paid even less attention to the activities of the French theatre than they had done previously, when they used to reprint translations of the French-language theatrical reviews. But it is nonetheless the case that Caldwell's American Theatre on Camp Street ultimately had an untold impact on musical criticism, and indeed on the success of *grand opéra* in the city, as became clear in 1835 with the premiere of *Robert le diable*.

Meyerbeer's *Robert le diable* was the second *grand opéra* to be heard in New Orleans, and the story of its arrival has since passed into the limited mythology surrounding opera in the city: Henry Kmen, Sarah Hibberd, and Catherine Jones have all discussed it to varying degrees.¹⁴ The importance of the production, as I hinted in the introduction to this thesis, is best understood in terms of the theatrical rivalries between the Théâtre d'Orléans and Caldwell's American Theatre.¹⁵ In the weeks before the French theatre's production of *Robert* in the spring of 1835, the city's francophone residents were apparently horrified to discover that the opera was not only in rehearsal at the American Theatre, but that the Anglo-Americans were going to beat them to the premiere of a French opera. *Robert* was performed in English at the Camp Street Theatre on 30 March 1835, finally reaching the stage of the Théâtre d'Orléans six weeks later, on 12 May. The French, so most accounts conclude, were shaken

¹³ See, for example, the article on this subject published in *L'Argus*, 7 January 1826.

¹⁴ Kmen, *Music in New Orleans*, 133–37; Hibberd, 'Grand Opera in Britain and the Americas', 417; Catherine Jones, *Literature and Music in the Atlantic World, 1767–1867* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 89–90. Jennifer C. H. J. Wilson discusses the reception of the Théâtre d'Orléans's production of *Robert le diable* in New York as part of their 1845 summer tour in 'Meyerbeer and the New Orleans French Opera Company in New York City, 1845: «How, therefore, Could New York Have Remained behind? »', in *Meyerbeer and Grand Opéra from the July Monarchy to the Present*, ed. Mark Everist (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016), 361–82.

¹⁵ The rivalry, of course, extended back beyond the opening of the American Theatre to the period in which the two companies shared the Théâtre d'Orléans building, as is evidenced by the court cases discussed in Chapter 1.

by this challenge posed by the Americans to their cultural supremacy, but took comfort in the fact that the Théâtre d'Orléans's production was of a higher quality.

The two productions existed as direct rivals for audiences, in a situation that mirrored the wider challenges facing New Orleans society at the time. The 1830s saw rapidly rising tensions between the city's francophone and anglophone populations, tensions that were raw in both the cultural and the commercial sphere. Following the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, New Orleans had seen ever increasing numbers of anglophone settlers from the northern states move to the city; the 1830s saw a particular influx of these Anglo-Americans, whose arrival irreversibly altered the social and cultural make-up of the city, thus initiating the process of its integration and assimilation into the ever-growing United States.¹⁶ This was a period in which the future of francophone citizens and their leading roles in commerce and government became much less certain, and French linguistic and cultural hegemony in the city was significantly challenged.

Such fundamental tensions doubtless shaped the race to stage *Robert*, but it is their considerable impact on the direction of operatic reception in New Orleans that will be my focus here. A detailed examination of the productions and their reviews allows us to understand some of the intricate ways in which the *Robert le diable* incident allowed critics to explore new avenues of operatic meaning, shaping the future of *grand opéra* criticism in New Orleans and also opera's place within the city's cultural imagination more broadly. In turn, such an examination enables us to delve into the nuances of cultural relations in New Orleans at the time.

Reconstructing the performances

One of the greatest challenges of research on opera in New Orleans is to work out how productions of operas actually looked and sounded in the city, given the fragmentary material evidence. It is only by piecing together details of the twin performances of *Robert* that we are able to get a sense of what exactly audiences and critics might have seen on stage in 1835; in

¹⁶ For more on the city's demographic changes during this period, see Joseph G. Tregle, Jr., 'Creoles and Americans', in *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization*, ed. Arnold R. Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 153–60. See also Carl Brasseaux, *The Foreign French: Nineteenth-Century French Immigration into Louisiana, Volume 1: 1820–1839* (Lafayette, LA: Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1990), xi.

turn, we can understand how critics' responses to the work were conditioned by aspects of the performances themselves, alongside the local socio-political biases and more widely circulating ideas about the opera that also inevitably influenced their perspectives.

In the case of *Robert*, the only surviving evidence for the twin first productions in the city comes in the form of the reviews printed in the local newspapers, but these nevertheless begin to give us an insight into the two theatres' productions, and the differences between them. The reviews are laden with snide, but often quite amusing, comments about particular directorial decisions in the productions, comments which were in some cases probably extremely biased when it came to reviewing the rival theatre's production. For example, one francophone reviewer complained about the decision to seat the nuns on 'a kind of footstool' in the American Theatre's production, and suggested that it might be better to place these 'parrot perches' in the niches around the back of the stage, or disguise them so that they resembled sections of columns; he suggested none too kindly that the sight of fifty dancers dressed as holy women, squatting on footstools, would have had Parisian audiences in fits of laughter.¹⁷ Similarly, an anglophone reviewer commented that although the French theatre had 'a greater supernumerary corps of ladies for nuns', those nuns disappointed him by proving themselves to be neither skilled ballerinas nor the slender beauties for whom he had hoped.¹⁸

Others, however, can give us more of a clue as to the structural and musical differences between productions. Both the American Theatre and the Théâtre d'Orléans maintained Meyerbeer's five-act structure, but it appears that within that, they both made alterations to the setting and also to the musical content. The American Theatre, for example, appears to have followed the original pattern for the first four acts, showing the Bay of Palermo in the opening act, then the palace, followed by the abbey and the palace again. The final scene of Act 5, however, was set not inside the Cathedral of Palermo, as for the Parisian original, but

¹⁷ 'Que signifient ensuite ces espèces de tabourets à un pied sur lesquels sont perchées les personnes qui figurent les nonnes? Ne valait-il pas mieux placer celles-ci dans des niches, ou bien entourer ces bâtons à perroquet d'une toile peinte imitant un tronçon de colonne? On rirait bien à Paris, où cette pièce a pris naissance, si l'on voyait ainsi perchées les cinquante danseuses qui représentent de si saintes personnes'. 'Théâtre de la Rue du Camp: *Robert-le-diable*', *Le Courrier de la Louisiane*, 1 April 1835.

¹⁸ 'The ladies who represented the nuns in one scene, and attendants on the princess in the next, excited our risible faculties—particularly in their skipping intended for a dance, when they showed they did not stand upon trifles [*sic*] or slender props', complained the reviewer for *The Bee*, 14 May 1835.

concluded with a representation of Pandemonium itself: Bertram's fiery demise was clearly given precedence over the potentially trite wedding scene for Robert and Isabelle.¹⁹

The reasons for this change of setting are hinted at in an article published in *The Bee* in advance of the American Theatre's premiere: the critic revealed that he was well aware of this alteration from the original, but also seemed to predict that this change would prove one of the biggest draws of the production. He wrote:

The drama, we understand, has been so worked as to give greater scope for the scene painter and mechanist than could be afforded by a merely literal translation from the original piece—A scene (the closing one we believe) embodying Martin's masterly picture of Pandemonium, is spoken of by those who have seen it, as likely to prove one of the most splendid scenic effects ever witnessed within the walls of the theatre in this or any other country.²⁰

When it came to reviewing the actual production, though, the newspaper reported that the scene of Pandemonium was simply 'admirably sketched': if the same reviewer was responsible for both articles, it seems that his high hopes must either have been disappointed or else his earlier comments had been inflated by a degree of pre-performance puffery.²¹

On the whole, however, the scenery seems to have been impressive, with an otherwise scathing French-language review of the American Theatre's production commenting:

As for the scenery, it is the part which seems the best turned out; in this respect, we cannot praise the artist responsible highly enough. The inside of the palace in the first act and the cloisters of the convent of Sainte Rosalie in the third were greeted with applause. The latter [scene] in particular, although poorly lit in certain places, seemed to us to be the best in the whole piece.²²

¹⁹ *The Bee*, 2 April 1835.

²⁰ *The Bee*, 14 March 1835.

²¹ *The Bee*, 2 April 1835.

²² 'Quant aux décors, c'est la partie qui semble avoir été le plus soignée; et à cet égard, on n'a que des éloges à faire à l'artiste chargé de ce soin. L'intérieur du Palais au premier acte, et le cloître du couvent de Sainte-Rosalie au troisième, ont été couverts d'applaudissements. Ce dernier décor surtout, quoique mal éclairé dans certains

The American Theatre had clearly invested a good deal of time and effort into the scenery: it had all been painted specially for the occasion, not locally, but by a Mr Smith of Philadelphia (or so the critic for *The Bee* thought).²³ Nonetheless, the francophone reviewer was disappointed that the props and other stage decorations did not measure up to the quality of the backdrops, pointing out that ‘the tombs, for example, are too straight, and the statue of Saint Rosalie could have been better drawn and painted’.²⁴

The Théâtre d’Orléans’s *mise-en-scène* was reported to be more extensive than the American theatre’s overall, but it does not seem to have been all new for the occasion. An advert for the production (Figure 3.1) suggested that the backdrop for the first act ‘representing the Lido, with the port of Palermo in view’ was newly painted by the theatre’s scenic artist, Develle, for the occasion, as was the second tableau of the third act (showing the ‘galleries of the cloister of Saint Rosalie’), and also the backdrops for both scenes of the final act, one of which showed the entrance to Palermo cathedral, and the other the interior.²⁵ The other backdrops, showing ‘a room in the palace of the King of Sicily’, ‘a sombre landscape in the rocks of Saint Irene’, ‘the bedroom of Princess Isabelle’, and the stage curtain displaying a ‘hellish scene’ for the occasion, were presumably served by stock scenery. While the scenery was generally viewed as impressive, this more extensive *mise-en-scène* led to its own problems: reviewers complained about the long breaks between acts as the scenery was reset, stating that sometimes the breaks between acts could last as long as half an hour, when the city ordinances prescribed that they should last for a maximum of thirteen minutes.²⁶ As the reviewer for *The Bee* put it, not only were the periods between the acts ‘intolerably long’, but they were ‘in palpable violation of the ordinances of the city, and the order and comforts of the audience’.²⁷

endroits, est ce qui nous a paru le mieux de toute la pièce.’ ‘Théâtre de la Rue du Camp: *Robert-le-diable*’, *Le Courrier de la Louisiane*, 1 April 1835.

²³ *The Bee*, 2 April 1835.

²⁴ ‘Il est fâcheux pourtant que les accessoires ne répondent point aux objets principaux; les tombeaux, par exemple, sont trop étroits, et la statue de Sainte Rosalie pourrait être mieux dessinée et mieux peinte.’ ‘Théâtre de la Rue du Camp: *Robert-le-diable*’, *Le Courrier de la Louisiane*, 1 April 1835.

²⁵ Advertisement for *Robert le diable*, *L’Abeille*, 11 May 1835.

²⁶ See *The Bee*, 13 May 1835 and 16 May 1835.

²⁷ *The Bee*, 13 May 1835.

Théâtre d'Orléans.
MARDI 12 Mai 1835.
On commencera à 7 heures précises.

Première représentation de
ROBERT LE DIABLE.

Opéra en cinq actes à grand spectacle, parole de MM. Scribe et G. DeLavigne, musique de M. Meyerbeer.

Cet ouvrage dont le succès a été prodigieux dans toutes les villes de France, compte plus de 900 représentations sur le théâtre de l'Académie royale de musique.

Pendant l'introduction, un rideau infernal.

1^{er}. ACTE—Le théâtre représente le Lido, avec le port de Palerme en vue, décoration nouvelle, peinte par M. Develle.

2^{me}. ACTE—Une salle du Palais du Roi de Sicile.

3^{me}. ACTE—1^{er}. Tableau. Un paysage sombre dans les rochers de Ste. Jrene.
2^{me}. Tableau. Une des galeries du cloître, du monastère de Ste. Rosalie. Décoration nouvelle, peinte par M. Develle.

4^{me}. ACTE—La chambre à coucher de la princesse Isabelle.

5^{me}. ACTE—1^{er}. Tableau. Le Vestibule de l'Eglise.
2^{me}. Tableau. L'intérieur de la Cathédrale de Palerme.
Ces deux décors sont neufs et faits par M. Develle.

Pendant le 5^{me}. acte les chœurs religieux sont accompagnés par un orgue d'église.

Tous les costumes sont neufs et pareils à ceux de Paris.
La scène se passe en Sicile.

Figure 3.1 – Advertisement for Robert le diable, L'Abeille, 11 May 1835

It seems, therefore, that the Théâtre d'Orléans made no major structural alterations to Meyerbeer's opera, but there is the implication that the American Theatre's alterations might have been more substantial. Such an approach seems to have fitted with the American Theatre's general approach to productions, as it had a reputation for adapting works heavily and for combining them with other entertainments. Indeed, while the French theatre presented *Robert* as a whole evening's entertainment (and with breaks between scenes and acts sometimes stretching to half an hour, it would have been a lengthy evening too), on at least one occasion the American Theatre's production was billed alongside a 'Jim Crow' minstrel show performed by 'Daddy' Rice.²⁸

²⁸ See, for example, *The Bee*, 3 April 1835.

This attitude seems to have applied equally to the theatres' respective approaches to the music of the opera. Both productions seem to have omitted some of the music from the established Parisian version. The reviewers noted that the production at the American Theatre omitted Isabelle's Cavatine at the start of the second act, along with the duet for Robert and Isabelle in Act 2 Scene 3, while the Théâtre d'Orléans apparently omitted most of the 'music of the princess [i.e. Isabelle] as performed at the American Theatre'.²⁹ It is not clear exactly what the music to which the critic referred here was. Besides the Cavatine in Act 2 Scene 1 (which the critic states had been cut from the American Theatre's performance), Isabelle has little by way of solo music in Meyerbeer's original that could have been noticeably cut or abridged: she sings briefly in Act 2 Scene 2 (after she has read Robert's note) and again in Act 2 Scene 5 (as an aside to bemoan Robert's absence), but nowhere else. Indeed, aside from the Act 2 Cavatine, her most musically significant passage is the grand duet with Robert in Act 4 Scene 2. It is hard to imagine how the French theatre might have cut Isabelle's music from this scene without impeding both the flow of the music at large and the plot, or why.

Instead, we perhaps ought to consider that 'the music of the princess as performed at the American Theatre' was not necessarily Meyerbeer's music: it was common practice at the American Theatre to add music (often popular songs, or favourites from other operas) in to works, and this could be what the critic implies here.³⁰ As we shall see later on, however, English-language reviewers generally implied that the American Theatre had, unusually, altered *Robert* relatively little in its performance. It is perhaps more likely, then, not that the performer playing Isabelle was singing music from outside the opera, but that she may either have been singing music borrowed from another character in the opera, or else another character in the opera performed music originally belonging to Isabelle. This kind of rearrangement seems to have taken place fairly extensively in the American Theatre's production. One reviewer pointed out, for example, that in Act 3 Scene 1 of the American Theatre's production, the duet that was originally for Bertram and Raimbaud had been made a duet for Alice and Raimbaud instead.³¹ Similarly, that same reviewer noted that although Mrs

²⁹ *The Bee*, 14 May 1835.

³⁰ For more on practices of inserting popular songs into operas at the American Theatre, see Kmen, *Music in New Orleans*, 177.

³¹ *The Bee*, 14 May 1835. Presumably the text for this moment was rewritten, in order to avoid the incongruity of Alice singing Bertram's devilish thoughts: 'Ah, L'honnête homme!/ Ah, le pauvre homme!/ Mais voyez comme/

Wood was initially a very pleasing Alice at the American Theatre, ‘she afterwards represented the princess, and transferred most of the best music of Alice’.³² It seems, therefore, that at the American Theatre in particular, the music and text were redistributed or arranged as necessary.

Of course, it is worth pointing out here that the American Theatre’s production may well not have considered such textual liberties to be fundamental changes to the opera: after all, a necessary process of adaptation had already taken place in the translation of the French libretto into English for their performances. One review gives us a glimpse of how exactly certain moments of the American Theatre’s performance compared to Scribe and Delavigne’s libretto, as the critic provides the translation of certain sections as performed at the American Theatre, alongside the translations as performed at London’s Covent Garden and Drury Lane.³³ To give but one example, the chorus from Act 1 Scene 7 appears in the French original as:

O fortune, à ton caprice,
Viens, je livre mon destin;
A mes désirs sois propice,
Et viens diriger ma main.
L’or est une chimère,
Sachons nous en servir:
Le vrai bien sur la terre,
N’est-il pas le plaisir?

En mes filets/ Je me prendrais/ Si je voulais!/ Faiblesse humaine/Que l’or entraîne,/ Que l’on enchaîne/ Par des bienfaits’. *Robert le diable*, Act 3 Scene 1.

³² *The Bee*, 14 May 1835.

³³ *The Bee*, 16 May 1835. While it might seem surprising that the critic was able to quote at length from other productions, he may well have been able to find this information from the London newspapers that found their way to New Orleans. He might also have been able to obtain the information directly from Thomas Reynoldson, the director of the American Theatre’s production, as he had previously performed the role of Bertram in the opera at Covent Garden and the King’s Theatre in London (see the reviews listed in footnote 51 for more information). He had also translated the libretto afresh for the American Theatre’s production. Supplying information about the various translations would have been in Reynoldson’s own interests, since the critic used them in order to stress the originality of his production.

This was rendered at the American theatre as:

Gaily now our moments telling,
 Fortune lend thy pow'rful aid;
 Pleasure ev'ry care contolling,
 Brightly glitt'ring ne'er to fade.
 Gold is a profitless treasure,
 Not worth our anxious care;
 Wine and beauty give pleasure,
 That with nought on earth can compare.

Meanwhile the translations for Covent Garden and Drury Lane were given as follows (Figure 3.2):

Covent Garden	Drury Lane
Fortune, queen of joys o'erflowing, Hear, and all my vows command, Come thy kindest smile bestowing, And direct thy votary's hand! What are heaps of treasure, If no inspiring bliss we share? Here there's nought but pleasure, Worth a fleeting moment's care.	Fortune! Be not so capricious, On her will still hangs our fate: She may ever be propitious, And her favors [<i>sic</i>] on thee wait. Gold is but a bubble, Unless it bliss can buy; What relief from trouble, Is there but in joy?

Figure 3.2 – Text as sung at Covent Garden and Drury Lane, quoted in *The Bee*, 16 May 1835

The American Theatre's translation, then, was an even less literal translation of the French than either of the London versions: it maintained neither the vocabulary nor the rhetorical structure of the original (since it dispensed with the question that ends the stanza), but it did maintain the rhyme scheme. It does not appear to have drawn heavily on either the Covent Garden or the Drury Lane translations (this pattern continues in the other examples given in

the review). Thus, the American Theatre's production of *Robert* appears to have been original in textual terms, and not simply a copy of other successful English-language versions. In its poetic take on Scribe and Delavigne's libretto, it was also distinctively different from the French original. It was likely the reviewer's intention to stress this originality when he decided to go to the trouble of quoting from several different productions.

The American Theatre also seems to have taken greater liberties than the Théâtre d'Orléans when it came to the orchestra. Indeed, the American Theatre orchestra had a reputation for not being of a particularly high quality, and this was reflected in the reviews of *Robert*. One scathing francophone account had the following to say:

First of all, we will ask the veritable connoisseurs if they believe that an orchestra of fifteen or sixteen musicians is enough to execute an opera which, at the least, requires forty, and which furthermore should not have any gaps in the instrumentation for a skilful rendering.³⁴

Similarly, while the Théâtre d'Orléans had at its disposal a large church organ, which was called into service in the fifth act, the American Theatre had no such impressive resources.³⁵ Nonetheless, even the celebrated Théâtre d'Orléans orchestra seems to have needed to employ a few reinforcements in an attempt to do justice to a work of such scope. Indeed, while the 'orchestral arrangements and accompaniments were in general very efficient', one reviewer felt that 'too often there appeared a deficiency of wind and bass instruments'.³⁶ The productions, therefore, must have sounded and looked quite different: while it appears that the French theatre stayed close to Meyerbeer's original, but with locally painted scenery, the American Theatre's production took greater liberties in textual, musical and scenic terms.

³⁴ 'Nous demanderons d'abord aux véritables connoisseurs s'ils croient qu'un orchestre de quinze ou seize musiciens suffit pour exécuter un opéra qui, pour le moins, en exige un quarantaine, et qui en outre d'une exécution habile, ne doit montrer aucun vide dans l'instrumentation.' 'Théâtre de la Rue du Camp: *Robert-le-diable*', *Le Courrier de la Louisiane*, 1 April 1835. The American Theatre's orchestra had generally been thought of in all sections of the New Orleans press as inferior to the one at the Théâtre d'Orléans, but by the early 1830s even French critics conceded that the American Theatre was capable of presenting operas in a reasonably good style, with an orchestra 'only a little inferior to the Orleans orchestra'. *L'Abeille*, 28 February 1834, quoted in Kmen, *Music in New Orleans*, 129.

³⁵ *The Bee*, 16 May 1835.

³⁶ *The Bee*, 13 May 1835.

Nonetheless, the American theatre appears to have stayed truer to the original than was typically the case at that theatre.

***Robert le diable* and developments in operatic criticism**

The dual productions of *Robert le diable* in 1835 generated far more critical attention than any previous theatrical premieres in the city. Between the English- and French-language sections of *L'Abeille* and the *Courrier de la Louisiane*, one can count some twenty-one articles, many of which were lengthy. Only six of these appeared in the French-language sections of the papers; the rest were in English. The number of related articles is remarkable, but so too is the fact that some of the English-language articles discussed the Théâtre d'Orléans's production and vice versa. Furthermore, the large number of English-language reviews calls into question an impression conveyed in many of the later accounts of the productions that the French, intent on decrying the American performance of *Robert* and promoting their own production, generated much of the interest surrounding the affair. Even Kmen's examination of the reception of the opera, the most detailed to date, draws almost entirely on the two reviews written by the French critic for the *Courrier*, making only passing mention of *L'Abeille*'s French- and English-language reviews.³⁷ Indeed, no scholar to my knowledge has paid significant attention to the English-language reception of *Robert* in New Orleans. Yet it is these English reviews, not the French ones, that reveal to us the way critics used the work to help them make the first tentative movements away from the old school of dramatic criticism that had been prevalent in the city.

Significantly, in contrast to the early operatic criticism in New Orleans outlined above, in the English-language reviews of *Robert*, we can see the beginnings of what appears to be a work-centred, rather than a largely performer-centred, opera criticism.³⁸ Particularly significant in this respect is a pair of articles published in *The Bee* in advance of the work's first performance at the American Theatre.³⁹ These were not simply notices advertising or puffing the upcoming performance, but lengthy articles designed to introduce the reader to the

³⁷ Kmen, *Music in New Orleans*, 133–7.

³⁸ For an exploration of a similar shift in the periodical press of Milan at the beginning of the century, see Emanuele Senici, 'Delirious Hopes: Napoleonic Milan and the Rise of Modern Italian Operatic Criticism', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 27/2 (2015): 97–127.

³⁹ *The Bee*, 27 March 1835 and 28 March 1835.

opera and the historical events that formed the background to the story. The first to appear, on 27 March 1835, did not discuss the opera itself (although it promised it would be treated in a separate article very soon), but instead gave a detailed account of the historical figure of Robert, Duke of Normandy. The second article, from the next day, sketched out the opera's plot, and included quotations from the libretto of key choruses. In showing a concern for understanding the operatic text, rather than the way in which it was performed, these articles mark a departure from the familiar patterns of contemporary theatrical reporting in New Orleans. Their appearance in *The Bee* is particularly conspicuous in that they were printed on the front page, surrounded not by other articles on historic or artistic events but reports on local legislative news and bills passed by the Louisiana Senate. These were, in other words, deemed worthy of a place alongside the city's 'official' news.⁴⁰

There are two distinct avenues to explore when considering how the English-language critics in New Orleans might have arrived at this new approach to *Robert*. The first relates to a set of distinctively local issues, as *The Bee* had for several years been railing against the practice of 'puffing' visiting star singers at the city's American Theatre, complaining that the 'ov[er]-rehearsed eulogies' or outright scorn afforded to such performers was childish.⁴¹ They called instead for a new style of theatrical criticism that was 'unbought and impartial', and we can perhaps read their approach to *Robert* as an outgrowth of this debate: here was a work never before performed in the city that they could explore in ways distinct from their usual focus on performers.⁴² This is not to say that the English-language critics drew a dichotomy between 'event-based' and 'work-based' composition (to use the somewhat loaded terms Carl Dahlhaus employed to describe audience expectations in the nineteenth century), but more simply that they saw this as an opportunity to connect the performance with the thing being performed.⁴³ Indeed, they felt that *Robert* could pave the way to a greater appreciation of music in the city, and went on to remark that the event was a reminder that there were 'excellent

⁴⁰ It was (and remained) highly unusual for theatrical news to be reported on the first page of the paper, which normally carried mainly news on legislature and notices about auctions (among other advertisements). Daily news of all sorts usually appeared on the second page.

⁴¹ *The Bee*, 21 May 1831.

⁴² *The Bee*, 21 May 1831.

⁴³ See Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), in particular 8–15.

opportunit[ies] for the organisation of Philharmonic societies' in New Orleans.⁴⁴ Fundamentally, however, their approach avoided the two extremes of flattery and evisceration characteristic of reviews focussed on star singers.

Beyond this, it is very likely that the critics' newly angled concern for *Robert* was influenced by a set of debates about adapting the opera that had emerged in London when the work was first performed there in 1831–2.⁴⁵ The circumstances surrounding these early productions of *Robert* in London provoked vocal outrage from Meyerbeer, lengthy copyright proceedings, and discussions in the press about fidelity when adapting works, as Christina Fuhrmann has shown.⁴⁶ While there is no concrete indication in the New Orleans reviews that they had definitely read about the situation in London, their assessments of *Robert* suggest that the possibility was highly likely. Indeed, the English-language critics explored at length the version in which *Robert* reached New Orleans. The critic for the *Courier*, for example, proudly explained that Thomas Reynoldson, the Englishman who directed the production, had been able to procure a copy 'of the original score as produced at Paris', not directly from Europe, but on loan from Pierce Butler of Philadelphia.⁴⁷ The statement, then, validated the American Theatre's production as 'authentic' by signalling its connection with Meyerbeer's original. Such 'authenticity', as we have seen, could by no means be taken for granted in New Orleans at this time. By stressing the faithfulness of this production of *Robert* to the original, therefore, the English-language critics aimed to elevate it far above the level of the theatre's usual offerings.

The reviewers claimed with particular pride that Reynoldson had not even rearranged Meyerbeer's score, as he had done when he produced a melodrama version of the work in New

⁴⁴ *The Bee*, 15 May 1835. As John Baron shows, there had been references to 'Philharmonic Societies' in New Orleans since 1825, but these early examples seem to have been informal groups that did not last beyond a concert or two. In December 1835, there was a drive for the creation of a society with formalised bylaws and officers. The society began to meet in 1836, but it was not until 1837 that it gave its first concert. Both Gregorio Curto and H. E. Lehmann, who will be discussed in Chapter 4, were leading members of this society. For an account of the foundation of Philharmonic Societies in the city, see John Baron, *Concert Life in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans: A Comprehensive Reference* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013), 68–76.

⁴⁵ Regular examples of operatic criticism from London and Paris would have been available to both francophone and anglophone critics in New Orleans during the 1830s: reviews and theatrical articles from the foreign press were often reprinted in New Orleans's own newspapers.

⁴⁶ Christina Fuhrmann, *Foreign Opera at the London Playhouses: From Mozart to Bellini* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 146–69.

⁴⁷ 'For the *Courier*: Opera of *Robert le diable*', *The Louisiana Courier*, 30 March 1835. Butler was the husband of British actress and diarist Fanny Kemble.

York,⁴⁸ but had ‘merely curtailed the parts of those instruments which he has not under command in his own orchestra’.⁴⁹ In their eyes, then, this might have been Meyerbeer with holes, but it really was Meyerbeer. Such ‘authenticity’, of course, was very much a relative concept (as we have seen, it appears there were in fact some changes to the score), but the fact remains that these reviewers made Meyerbeer’s wishes much more prominent in the reception of *Robert* than those of any composer before him.

The critics’ discussions of fidelity, however, were perhaps less concerned with Meyerbeer as a composer and more with the geographical associations they made between him and the French capital. Indeed, the writer for the *Courier* stated that when *Robert* was ‘acted at the patent theatres of London, only the melody performed was original’, but took pains to point out that at the American Theatre in New Orleans, ‘the original music [was] ... for the first time presented outside of Paris’.⁵⁰ In such a light, the questions of authenticity extended beyond the composer and his score, revealing aspirations to the artistic status of Europe’s great metropolitan cultural centres. Indeed, the reviewers pointed out that Reynoldson was well qualified to direct the American Theatre’s production because he had ‘seen the work performed in Paris under the inspection of the composer’ and had later performed in the opera himself at London’s Covent Garden and King’s Theatres.⁵¹ He could therefore be relied upon to produce the work in New Orleans with faithfulness to the versions enjoyed in these cultural capitals.

The reviewers’ phrasing suggests yet another nuance to their positioning of the American Theatre, one which appears to create an international hierarchy of cultural centres. That is to say, in their above formulation, fidelity to the Parisian production ranked above fidelity to the London ones, even though the American Theatre’s performance bore more obvious similarities to those in London, given that it was in English and given Reynoldson’s connections with the London productions.⁵² While this turn to Paris might seem natural, given that it was a French opera under discussion, London was the English-language reviewers’ touchstone for theatrical excellence, and to compare a production favourably with London was

⁴⁸ For a brief insight into Reynoldson’s adaptation of the score for the melodrama version in New York in 1834, see Wilson, ‘Meyerbeer and the New Orleans French Opera Company in New York City’, 366–7.

⁴⁹ ‘For the *Courier*: Opera of *Robert le diable*’, *The Louisiana Courier*, 30 March 1835.

⁵⁰ ‘For the *Courier*: Opera of *Robert le diable*’, *The Louisiana Courier*, 30 March 1835.

⁵¹ ‘*Robert le diable*’, *The Bee*, 1 April 1835 and ‘For the *Courier*: Opera of *Robert le diable*’, *The Louisiana Courier*, 30 March 1835.

⁵² See *The Bee*, 3 April 1835 and *The Louisiana Courier*, 30 March 1835.

usually considered exceptional praise indeed. Here, though, the reviewer proudly notes that the American Theatre had surpassed London in that all-important question of authenticity. Reynoldson, who was reported to have personally overseen every aspect of the production (not only was he translator, director and editor, but he ‘taught the vocal corps and superintended the instrumental’, as well as performing the role of Bertram), seems to have verged on cultural hubris: while Meyerbeer was known for meticulously presiding over the European productions of his own works, Reynoldson’s fastidious attention to detail at the American Theatre almost ‘out-Meyerbeered’ the composer himself.⁵³ For the anglophone reviewers, the American Theatre’s production was comparable only with Paris.

In drawing such a link, the review’s significance was twofold: on the one hand, the critic posed a challenge to the local francophone community which had longstanding cultural ties to Paris. On the other, the review indicates that Anglo-Americans felt at home enough in New Orleans to imagine the city’s international position as their own, even if the way in which they were able to do that was through *grand opéra*: a borrowing from French culture. Importantly, however, it was a piece of French culture newly arrived from France, rather than something well established among New Orleans’s French and Creole communities. A battle over established cultural territory would have marked a purely local struggle, but the adoption of *Robert* (which was new to both the majority of the city’s francophone population and its Anglo-Americans) as the contested point reveals a new cultural confidence among the city’s Anglo-American residents. In the discourse surrounding *Robert*, *grand opéra* became the representative of Anglo-American dreams of cosmopolitanism.

In the same moment, the francophone citizens lapsed into near silence in the face of increasing challenges to their sense of national identity posed both from within and without. Of course, the American Theatre’s production predictably rankled the French-language critics, resulting in an excoriating review in the *Courrier*.⁵⁴ But when it came to the French theatre’s production, the same critics had little to say,⁵⁵ with their comments tending towards non-

⁵³ See *The Bee*, 1 April 1835.

⁵⁴ ‘Théâtre de la Rue du Camp: *Robert-le-diable*’, *Le Courrier de la Louisiane*, 1 April 1835. So venomous were his comments that even the critic for *L’Abeille* felt compelled to defend the American Theatre, saying that it had ‘made great progress’. ‘Le théâtre de la Rue du Camp, on ne peut le nier, a fait de très-grand progrès’. *L’Abeille*, 3 April 1835.

⁵⁵ The *Courrier* printed one review and a biographical article about Meyerbeer copied from the Parisian press, while *L’Abeille* managed just a single review. ‘Théâtre d’Orléans: *Robert le diable*’, *Le Courrier de la Louisiane*,

specific praise, such as ‘never has theatrical pomp been pushed to such a degree at this theatre’.⁵⁶ Nowhere did they attempt a comparison with the American Theatre’s performance.⁵⁷ Instead, they focussed on growing internal divisions within the francophone community: plans were afoot for a new francophone theatre—a Théâtre Louisianais—in the city, which would promote the work of local composers and authors.⁵⁸ While these plans never came to fruition, their subtext was clear: the Théâtre d’Orléans was not doing enough to promote young and, more importantly—local—artists, instead focussing on recreating Parisian works.⁵⁹ A split was beginning to emerge between populations who located their francophone identity back in France and those who located it in the Creole milieu of Louisiana. In a moment of such cultural confusion, the French theatre’s production of *Robert* seems, perhaps conveniently, to have slipped from the forefront of francophone critical attention.

Les Huguenots

If the English-language reviews of *Robert* in 1835 had driven the early critical fervour for *grand opéra* in New Orleans, by the time *Les Huguenots* received its first performance at the Théâtre d’Orléans on 30 April 1839, the situation was very different. French/Creole and Anglo-American tensions had developed in the four years since the race to stage *Robert*, and had been formalised in 1836 through the division of New Orleans into three distinct and semi-autonomous municipalities, each with its own council, taxes, schools and other services.⁶⁰ The

14 May 1835; ‘Théâtre d’Orléans: *Robert le diable* (2)’, *Le Courrier de la Louisiane*, 18 May 1835; ‘Théâtre d’Orléans’, *L’Abeille*, 14 May 1835.

⁵⁶ ‘Jamais pompe théâtrale n’avait été poussée à un aussi haut degré à ce théâtre’. ‘Théâtre d’Orléans: *Robert le diable*’, *Le Courrier de la Louisiane*, 14 May 1835.

⁵⁷ The English-language critics, however, were quick to point out that the French theatre’s production, though good, had not been quite as luxurious or polished as they had expected. That they had the confidence in their own theatre’s production to feel justified in criticising the French theatre’s is particularly remarkable, given that in the months preceding the *Robert* affair the same critics had advised audiences to go to the French theatre’s production of *The Barber of Seville* rather than the American Theatre’s heavily rearranged version, since there they would ‘see and hear it properly done’. *The Bee*, 5 March 1835.

⁵⁸ A call for subscribers for this new theatre appeared in *L’Abeille*, 2 April 1835.

⁵⁹ The authors claimed that the francophone citizens of New Orleans had a need for such a Théâtre Louisianais to help young artists foster their genius and to ensure that they were given the place they deserved in history. *L’Abeille*, 2 April 1835. John Davis felt compelled to respond to this challenge, publishing an article in which he stated that the city would not be able to sustain two French theatres and pleaded with the francophone citizens to devote their patronage to his theatre. See *L’Abeille*, 17 April 1835 and *Le Courrier de la Louisiane*, 18 April 1835. For more on the issue of local creativity, see Chapter 4.

⁶⁰ For more on the municipalities and Creole/Anglo-American tensions at this time, see Virginia R. Domínguez, *White by Definition: Social Classification in Creole Louisiana* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1993), 110–32.

municipalities were divided not only along linguistic but also (unofficially) along racial lines. The First Municipality, covering the French Quarter and oldest parts of the city, was home predominantly to the white Creoles and French immigrants, while the city's Anglo-American population occupied the Second Municipality to the south. The Third Municipality, covering the old Faubourg Marigny and other areas, was home to many francophone free people of colour, as well as growing populations of German and Irish immigrants. While this is, of course, an over-simplification of New Orleans's demographics in this period, it is a useful illustration of the way in which large-scale social, economic and cultural divisions between the different sections of society were solidifying.

The city's theatrical scene had also undergone some important changes. The American Theatre, located in the Second Municipality, had not continued its direct challenge to the Théâtre d'Orléans after *Robert*, but had returned to its usual repertoire of spoken drama and less ambitious musical works, as well as a variety of heavily rearranged operas given by visiting English-language companies. *Robert* might have been simply a publicity stunt on Caldwell's part, but his theatre's lack of stability means that we cannot be sure he did not originally intend to create a more sustained rivalry with the French. The new English-language St Charles theatre, meanwhile, had opened on 30 November 1835 (also in the area that became the Second Municipality), again under the management of Caldwell, and each summer had played host to a visiting Italian opera company from Havana.⁶¹ Their performances introduced audiences in the city to Italian opera in its original language and vastly expanded the repertoire known to the New Orleans theatre-going public. Up to this point, as we saw in the Introduction, Italian repertoire in the city had been limited to a handful of works by Mozart and Rossini, performed either in French translation or arranged and translated for the English theatres.⁶² The Théâtre d'Orléans's position in the life of the city as a whole was now even less certain: as the formation of the municipalities created more concrete cultural divisions, the appeal of

⁶¹ For more on the history of the St. Charles, see Lucille Gafford, 'A History of the St. Charles Theatre in New Orleans, 1835–43' (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1930). This theatre also played host to a number of visiting English-language companies, some of whom attempted versions of *grands opéras* (*Masaniello*, *Gustave III*, and *The Jewess*). These performances by visiting companies do not seem to have provoked the same level of critical engagement as the 'home-grown' challenge made by Caldwell's *Robert*. See Kmen, *Music in New Orleans*, 163.

⁶² Information on theatrical repertoires in the city in the first half of the century can be found in Kmen, *Music in New Orleans*. For a full list of all opera performances in New Orleans between 1796 and 1841, see Henry Kmen, 'Singing and Dancing: A Social History of Music in New Orleans' (PhD diss., Tulane University, 1961), Appendix III.

internationally reputed Italian operas lured French/Creole theatre-goers across municipal boundaries to the St. Charles.

Les Huguenots nonetheless received a lot of critical attention and drew full houses throughout the remainder of the 1838–9 season. Although *Robert le diable* had also generated excitement, the situation this time was different. While the English-language critics had felt the need to build up to the first performance of *Robert* with information about its plot, libretto and historical context, *Les Huguenots* clearly needed no introduction. The opera and its composer had entered the public consciousness of both francophone and anglophone residents well before its first performance in the city. Indeed, in December 1838, the recently founded English-language paper, *The Daily Picayune*, printed a fictional vignette entitled ‘Fireside Talk—No. IX’. The story features a family, gathered in their sitting room one evening. The daughter plays a piece at the piano, about which she says the following:

[It] floated in my brain for months—I heard it in my sleep—it was with me all day, like a divine presence. I tried to sing it, to touch the notes on the piano, but the moment I made an audible attempt, the fairy creation left me like a startled fawn. I was obliged to relinquish all attempts to embody it, and until this day, it has slept in my heart and memory, like a sacred trust. Tonight I find it among the collection of music sent me from Paris. It is from ‘Les Huguenots’—I prize it as I would a manuscript from Pompeii.⁶³

Her mother, the author goes on to recount, kept ‘silence for a minute’ following the performance, eventually breaking the reverie to point out that the opera would be performed ‘in fine style’ at the French theatre some months hence, and that they would soon have the ‘opportunity of luxuriating amid the beauties of the entire opera’.⁶⁴

Here, then, we have an indication of the way in which *grand opéra* had entered the popular imagination in New Orleans by 1839.⁶⁵ While the family still looked forward to being

⁶³ ‘Fireside Talk—No. IX’, *The Daily Picayune*, 9 December 1838.

⁶⁴ ‘Fireside Talk—No. IX’, *The Daily Picayune*, 9 December 1838.

⁶⁵ While space does not permit me to do so here, in Chapter 5 I focus more on literary presentations of opera. For more on the creation of literary spheres of operatic experience, see Cormac Newark, *Opera in the Novel from Balzac to Proust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

able to see the opera at the theatre, ‘the work’ had achieved an identity outside of its on-stage form. For the girl to prize the score (presumably either reduced for piano or arranged as drawing-room *morceaux*) as an object, and to describe the musical experience in such poetic terms, opens up a very different aesthetic avenue for the reception of *grand opéra* from any seen before in the city. Her description takes on an intensely Romantic quality, as she recalls the interiority of a musical experience for which she has heretofore been unable to find an external outlet. Since French opera in New Orleans had, at least in journalistic sources, almost always been discussed in terms of a theatre-centred experience until this point (discussions of *Robert*’s plot and historical context can be understood to have been intended to enhance the reader’s impending visit to the theatre), such an interiorised approach was strikingly new.

The focus here on subjective experience rather than the details of a particular performance reflects, I suggest, a reconfiguration of the ways in which *grand opéra* was being imagined spatially and with regards to nationality among New Orleans’s anglophone reviewers. In fact, it reflects a paradox of national identity within the city more generally during this period: while the city’s linguistic and, to an extent, racial divisions solidified in physical form through the separate municipalities, culturally speaking, the lines became blurred in many ways. The family in this story seems to be of French descent: the father is called Adolphe, while his wife is described simply as ‘La Madame’. At a first glance, then, this simply raises the question of why the *Daily Picayune*, an English-language newspaper, would print a story of Creole life. Was this some kind of nostalgic evocation of the French diaspora?

But the matter grows in complexity. The couple’s children, both young adults, do not have French names: one is called Magnus, the other Boleyna, and, unlike their parents, they do not litter their speech with French phrases. In fact, on the one occasion that Magnus uses a French word, he immediately follows it with ‘as mother calls it’, thus distancing himself from the French language of his parents. Furthermore, Boleyna’s score might have come to her from Paris, but she tells her father that she first heard the music of *Les Huguenots* on the family’s visit to Hoboken, the New Jersey port town, the previous summer. Far from this being a story of a Creole family clinging desperately to the culture of the ‘old country’, then, this is *grand opéra* representing movement and culture across national boundaries. A sense of timelessness and spacelessness is evoked by her valorising the score through a comparison to the classical world, by way of Pompeii. In this light, the paper’s evocation of this apparently Creole family

perhaps has more to do with their status as cultural aristocracy within New Orleans than to do with any specific questions of nationality. The anglophone critics presented *grand opéra* as crossing national and linguistic boundaries, but positioned it within an elite cultural sphere.⁶⁶

***Les Huguenots* at the Théâtre d'Orléans**

When it came to talking about the Théâtre d'Orléans's production, *The Bee* printed an anticipatory article on the day of its premiere, in which the author talked of the cost of ensuring that this was the most lavish production possible (the cost, he claimed, amounted to 'upwards of \$12,000', a phenomenal sum for the time).⁶⁷ Describing the success that the opera had achieved in Paris, the author declared that he expected it to achieve similar success in New Orleans. And with that, the English-language press said no more about the work, apart from printing advertisements for performances. Such a dearth of English-language critical reporting perhaps affirms not a lack of interest in *grand opéra* on the part of the Anglo-Americans, but rather the elite cultural status the English-language press fashioned for the genre: wealthy Anglo-American families in the city made sure that they and their children spoke French as well as English, marking them out as part of the highest class of society (perhaps by virtue of the fact it was the language of Paris, or perhaps because it was increasingly becoming a minority language in New Orleans).⁶⁸ Thus they were able to read French-language theatrical reports anyway. They positioned *grand opéra* above the arena of local tensions, on a cultural plane accessible to supranational elites.

The French-language critics, on the other hand, perhaps mindful of their lack of interest in *Robert* four years earlier, published numerous articles about *Les Huguenots*. *L'Abeille*, for example, included several full reviews of the opera, along with related correspondence from

⁶⁶ For an account of the formation of distinct elite and popular artistic spheres in America later in the nineteenth century, see Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of a Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1988) and Joseph A. Mussulman, *Music in the Cultured Generation: A Social History of Music in America, 1870–1900* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1971).

⁶⁷ 'Les Huguenots', *The Bee*, 30 April 1839.

⁶⁸ The Anglo-American Eliza Ripley, writing at the start of the twentieth century of her childhood in the 1830s and 1840s, noted that 'French was the fashion then' among high society in the city, and it was looked down upon to be 'horribly English' (69). She also wrote of Anglo-American girls going to French-speaking schools in the city, and of the French teacher who went from house to house giving lessons in the American sector of the city (7–10). Eliza Ripley, *Social Life in Old New Orleans: Being Recollections of my Girlhood* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1912).

readers. Also in contrast with the reception of *Robert*, this news was not (for the most part) squashed between legal and commercial reports. Instead, particularly lengthy reviews were sometimes set apart in a dedicated arts feuilleton.⁶⁹ This partly reflects the perceived importance of *Les Huguenots*, but is also reflective of the fact that *L'Abeille* had, in 1839, employed a dedicated music critic for the first time, and was keen to advertise that fact through the creation of a feuilleton, which presented separate operatic reviews.⁷⁰ All of this provided the francophone reviewers space to influence how the genre articulated local, national and international identity.

They did not always do this in ways that would appear most obvious to a modern reader, however. There were numerous resonances between the dramas which unfolded at the theatres in this moment and the situation in which the New Orleans francophones found themselves. For one thing, the fact that the plot of *Les Huguenots* revolves around a struggle between opposing Catholic and Protestant factions might have provided critics with ample points for comparison with the current local situation, even if the Catholic francophone community saw themselves as the oppressed rather than the oppressors. What is more, in the same week as the *Les Huguenots* premiere, the Théâtre d'Orléans also premiered a local spoken drama by the playwright Auguste Lussan called *Les Martyrs de la Louisiane* about the attempts of the eighteenth-century French citizens of New Orleans to resist occupation (albeit, in this instance, occupation by the Spanish).⁷¹

To be sure, reviews of *Les Martyrs de la Louisiane* included references to 'the mother country' and appealed to the francophone residents' feelings of resentment towards another culture's intrusion into their own. The critics did not, however, draw explicit connections between the francophone population and the Catholics in *Les Huguenots*: not a single review analysed the plot of the opera.⁷² Instead, discussions of the 'local' took place through examination of the performers and the work's scenery and spectacle, focussing in particular on the work of the scene painter, Develle, who was first mentioned in Chapter 1. That Develle's contribution to the production was perceived as being central was evident even before the

⁶⁹ See for example, 'Feuilleton. Théâtre: *Les Huguenots*', *L'Abeille*, 7 May 1839.

⁷⁰ Baron, *Concert Life in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans*, 303.

⁷¹ For an analysis of this work, see Juliane Braun, 'Petit Paris en Amérique? French Theatrical Culture in Nineteenth-Century Louisiana', (PhD diss., Julius-Maximilians-Universität Würzburg, 2013), 87–97.

⁷² See *L'Abeille*, 4 May 1839 and 7 May 1839, for example.

opera's first performance. In fact, advertisements for the work in the press gave little indication of its musical contents, but listed the locations in which the acts were set, having informed the readers that all of the scenes had been painted by Develle specifically for the occasion.⁷³

Develle's work was so integral to the impression of the whole that in one performance he was called onto the stage during the second act of the opera to take multiple bows, as the audience was over-awed with his backdrop depicting the garden at the Château de Chenonceau.⁷⁴ An article in *L'Abeille* even claimed that Develle's backdrops for the work were veritable *chefs d'œuvre* and reminded the people of New Orleans just how fortunate they were to have such a master among them.⁷⁵ Not only had the theatre imported large amounts of key material, but it also had the resources locally to implement and indeed add to them. The city's francophone critics were proud of this achievement: justly so, given the fact that productions of *grands opéras* in many European cities and towns frequently lacked the resources to create a sense of spectacle.⁷⁶ Develle, then, became a figure through whom the press could express their pride at the quality of New Orleans's production of *Les Huguenots* and, moreover, mark the success of the work as specifically French within the city.

While the critics focussed on the local dimensions of the production, they also used *Les Huguenots* as a way of transcending the local in their discussions, much as the anglophone critics had done in the reception of *Robert le diable*. They did this particularly through their detailed discussion of Meyerbeer's music, which in and of itself revealed a significant development in their critical practices: while Meyerbeer's score had been a source for discussions of fidelity in the reception of *Robert* in 1835, nowhere had the critics attempted to provide much by way of musical analysis. In contrast, the reviews of *Les Huguenots* dwelt at great length on the score and the role that Meyerbeer and his 'prodigious talent' had played in the work, placing his importance above that of Scribe and his libretto.⁷⁷ Certainly, Meyerbeer

⁷³ *The Daily Picayune*, 30 April 1839.

⁷⁴ 'Théâtre d'Orléans: *Les Huguenots*', *L'Abeille*, 8 June 1839.

⁷⁵ '(Communiqué) Théâtre d'Orléans: Bénédiction de Mr Develle', *L'Abeille*, 28 May 1839. See also 'Feuilleton. Théâtre: *Les Huguenots*', *L'Abeille*, 7 May 1839.

⁷⁶ See Cormac Newark, "'In Italy we don't have the means for illusion": Grand opéra in Nineteenth-Century Bologna', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 19/3 (2007): 199–222.

⁷⁷ 'Talent prodigieux'; 'Le poème de Scribe n'est ni plus ni moins insignifiant que tous les poèmes de l'opéra. Il a été pour Meyerbeer un prétexte à musique et voilà tout'. See 'Théâtre: *Les Huguenots*, Opéra en cinq actes de Meyerbeer', *L'Abeille*, 3 May 1839.

as composer was perceived to be fundamental to the opera's identity as a work, with his music contributing the vast majority of the opera's artistic worth.

Although the critics were keen to focus on the music, many of the reviewers expressed difficulty in judging the score satisfactorily, on account of both its size and complexity.⁷⁸ It was only after repeated hearings, they claimed, that the work could be fully understood, and the critic for *L'Abeille* noted with pleasure that at the final performance of the season the work was performed to 'a serious, attentive public ... brought together by an understanding of the creations of genius'.⁷⁹ Such work-orientated remarks do not, of course, reveal very much about the critics' personal experiences of *Les Huguenots*. What is most striking about them is less their surface description than their rhetorical construction, and specifically their similarity to the opera's initial Parisian reception three years earlier. We only need to glance at Berlioz's comments that 'several attentive listenings are required in order to understand such a score completely' to begin to see where these similarities might lie.⁸⁰

While the new analytical bent of the reviews could well have been partly to do with the fact that the recently employed full-time music critic for *L'Abeille* had greater technical expertise than his predecessors, there is also a sense in which the critics in New Orleans deliberately and self-consciously emulated both the details and the attitudes of the Parisian reception in their own printed assessments of the work.⁸¹ In so doing, they tapped into a vein of international critical rhetoric: a trend had developed in Paris (and was taken up in other European capitals) for reviewers to describe operas that they felt would enter a newly developing repertoire of 'great' works in such terms of musical uncertainty, thus signalling them to be worthy of repeated listenings and canonical longevity.⁸² By couching their responses to *Les Huguenots* in such international operatic discourse, then, the New Orleans

⁷⁸ See 'Feuilleton. Théâtre: *Les Huguenots*', *L'Abeille*, 7 May 1839: 'Nous avouons humblement qu'il nous serait difficile encore de porter sur la partition gigantesque de Meyerbeer un jugement définitif. ... Notre première analyse a été et devait être nécessairement incomplète'.

⁷⁹ 'C'était pour nous un bonheur indicible de voir ce public sérieux, attentive ... s'associer par l'intelligence aux créations du génie'. 'Théâtre d'Orléans: *Les Huguenots*', *L'Abeille*, 8 June 1839.

⁸⁰ Quoted in Thomas Forrest Kelly, *First Nights at the Opera* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 193. For an exploration of Parisian responses to Meyerbeer's works, see Cormac Newark, 'Metaphors for Meyerbeer', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 127/1 (2002): 23–43.

⁸¹ Jennifer C. H. J. Wilson reveals that similar comments featured in the New York reception of *Les Huguenots* following its premiere there in 1845 by the Théâtre d'Orléans troupe, but they belong within a very different local context. See 'Meyerbeer and the New Orleans French Opera Company in New York City', 371–3.

⁸² Newark explores this in 'Metaphors for Meyerbeer', 42.

critics asserted through their very language that New Orleans was at once capable of mounting productions of international repute and of understanding them within the sophisticated critical frameworks developing in Europe. As with the Anglo-American reviewers' responses to *Robert*, in the francophone reception of *Les Huguenots*, grand opéra once again became a means of projecting international ambitions, but now for a very different sub-group within society.

The question of what exactly this self-conscious evocation of international critical rhetoric might have meant to the francophone critics of New Orleans is not, however, as straightforward as it might initially seem. And nor was it as straightforward as the Anglo-Americans' self-positioning had been in relation to *Robert*. Indeed, the 'international' sphere of music criticism to which they alluded in their reviews was, after all, French, and it is clear that reviewers felt somewhat uncertain as to quite what the 'old country' and its musical output meant for them. A review of *Les Huguenots* in *L'Abeille* and the impassioned response it provoked from a reader illustrate this particularly well.⁸³ The review begins boldly with the old quotation from Rousseau that 'the French will never have music',⁸⁴ going on to justify the claim by stating 'that is to say an indigenous music, national, absolutely its own', since French composers 'from Lully to Meyerbeer, have always followed in the wake of the great composers of Italy and Germany'.⁸⁵ For the reviewer, even music accepted as French (and he gives Rameau's works as an example here) is not as purely French as it might seem.

This opinion is refuted strongly in the letter from the reader, however, who argues that 'things that were written in France and on French libretti are French': 'the tree', he points out, 'might be exotic, but the fruit is indigenous'.⁸⁶ Lest such an argument not be satisfactory, he also turns to the writings of Madame de Staël, reminding his readers that if 'genius has no sex', nor does it have a 'patrie'. For him, musical genius is in its very essence cosmopolitan, but such cosmopolitanism can bear national fruit.⁸⁷ The letter writer, then, saw the line between

⁸³ For the review, see *L'Abeille*, 18 May 1839, and for the reader's letter, see *L'Abeille*, 27 May 1839.

⁸⁴ 'Les français n'auront jamais de musique'. J.-J. Rousseau, quoted in 'Théâtre d'Orléans': 3ème représentation des *Huguenots*, *L'Abeille*, 18 May 1839.

⁸⁵ 'C'est-à-dire de musique indigène, nationale, absolument à elle'; 'En effet, la France à toutes les époques, depuis Lully jusqu'à Meyerbeer, a toujours marché à la remorque des grands compositeurs de l'Italie ou de l'Allemagne'. See 'Théâtre d'Orléans': 3ème représentation des *Huguenots*, *L'Abeille*, 18 May 1839.

⁸⁶ 'L'arbre est exotique, mais le fruit est indigène'. See 'Au M. le rédacteur de *L'Abeille*: de la musique en France', *L'Abeille*, 27 May 1839.

⁸⁷ 'Madame de Staël dit quelque part: « Le génie n'a pas le sexe »; ajoutons aussi qu'il n'a pas de patrie'. See 'Au M. le rédacteur de *L'Abeille*: de la musique en France', *L'Abeille*, 27 May 1839.

the national and the cosmopolitan as permeable: the national could become cosmopolitan in the hands of a genius and, importantly, the cosmopolitan could become national through the same process.

Questions over Meyerbeer's nationality and what that meant for *grand opéra* had abounded in the initial Parisian reception of *Les Huguenots*, but the letter writer's conclusions here open up the possibility of a particularly suggestive position for *grand opéra* in New Orleans. Both the French-language and English-language press in the city read *Les Huguenots* in relation to ideas of cosmopolitanism, but with significant differences. For the anglophone author of the story in the *Daily Picayune*, the cosmopolitanism exemplified by the grand opera was an ambition of cultural elites: the preserve of people able to appreciate it within an emerging 'highbrow' cultural sphere, which transcended time, place and, above all, nation. Meanwhile, for the French-language press, cosmopolitanism remained firmly tied to the idea of nation, as mediated through their local experience of anglophone-francophone tensions. In their eyes, the grand opera could be read as both cosmopolitan (meaning its prestige exceeded boundaries, both local and national) and specifically French (and, therefore, a francophone cultural product rather than an Anglo-American one). By relating to grand opera's cosmopolitanism through a deeper sense of heritage, the francophone community sought not only to confirm their entry into an international cultural sphere (as the Anglo-Americans had done with *Robert*), but to maintain local 'ownership' over the material on account of their French descent.

***Grand opéra's* legacy in New Orleans: Fiot's editions and the development of a material culture for opera**

While grand opera might have served as a focus for the exploration of francophone-anglophone tensions at a particular moment in New Orleans's history, its impact on the local press culture of opera was equally profound. Operatic criticism in the city's bilingual newspapers expanded rapidly in an attempt to come to terms with the significance reviewers read into these new works. The result was a move towards a work-based criticism, at least for early productions of new operas, although few were as extensively discussed in the mainstream press as *Robert* and *Les Huguenots*. Moreover, the years following the introduction of *grand opéra* to the city saw the emergence of a number of arts journals and music periodicals, in which works could be

discussed at greater length than in the newspapers, and in a vocabulary suited to a readership of dedicated amateurs. Publications such as *Le Franc Parleur* and *La Créole: Gazette des salons, des arts et des modes* emerged in the 1830s, before *La Lorgnette* and *La Revue louisianaise* were founded in the 1840s, leading to *La Loge de l'opéra* and others in the 1850s.⁸⁸ While many of these publications were as impermanent as the city's early newspapers, they reveal an engagement with opera that grew out of the style of criticism developed in *L'Abeille* and the *Courrier* in response to *grand opéra*. As this more specialist reception culture grew, the city's principal newspapers continued to print theatrical news, but relieved themselves to an extent of any major critical duties, instead providing mainly advertisements and short articles about theatrical matters more generally. Grand opera, therefore, contributed to the emergence of new avenues for opera criticism in New Orleans.

It is not only in the newspapers, however, that we can see the influence that *grand opéra* had on the city's operatic culture: the genre encouraged the development not only of new cultures of meaning, but also of a material culture of opera. In the 1840s, Louis Fiot, the stage manager at the Théâtre d'Orléans, began to issue a series of bilingual opera libretti.⁸⁹ Catherine Jones mentions these, suggesting that 'the series reinvigorated the tradition of bilingual publication in New Orleans that had its origins in lawmaking and the need to disseminate information to French and English speakers in the territorial area'.⁹⁰ This is without doubt an important context within which to situate these libretti, given the struggles of French speakers against the increasing dominance of the English language charted earlier in this chapter, but they are also, of course, operatic documents. As such, a closer investigation of these libretti, both in terms of their content and their materiality, can tell us much about the way *grand opéra* came to be valued in New Orleans, and the ways in which it shaped attitudes to opera more broadly in the city.

Fiot designed a series of thirty libretti, released between the mid-1840s and the mid-1850s, which he grandly entitled 'Chef-d'oeuvres [*sic*] of the French Opera'. The libretti were

⁸⁸ A comprehensive account of the emergence of specialist periodicals and journals can be found in Tinker, *Bibliography of the French Newspapers and Periodicals of Louisiana*. Surviving examples of all of these periodicals can be found at the Louisiana Research Collection and the Howard-Tilton Memorial library at Tulane University.

⁸⁹ Examples of these libretti can be found in the Special Collections at Louisiana State University, the Louisiana Research Collection at Tulane University, and the Historic New Orleans Collection. Information on Fiot's life and background has not proved forthcoming, and even the date of his arrival in New Orleans is unclear.

⁹⁰ Jones, *Literature and Music in the Atlantic World*, 91.

not, however, grand in themselves: they were simply small pamphlets with bright paper covers, available in green, red and yellow among other colours (see Figure 3.3 below).⁹¹ Yet they appear to mark a key turning point in the material history of opera in New Orleans, as they are the earliest surviving examples of anything akin to an opera programme in the city. From the period before 1845, there are only very occasional surviving examples of playbills, which were printed on long, thin strips of fragile newsprint paper, and contained nothing more than the bare essentials for advertising a performance.⁹²

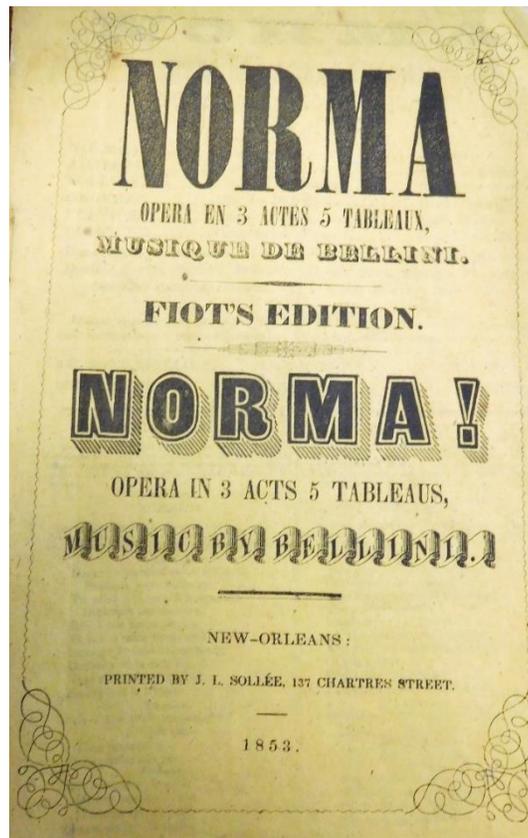


Figure 3.3 – Cover of Fiot's edition of Bellini's *Norma*, New Orleans 1853. LARC, Albert Voss Collection, Manuscripts Collection 856, Series 1, Box 1 Folder 2

⁹¹ The size of the libretti is similar to modern A5 paper.

⁹² These essentials usually amounted to the date, time, information for obtaining tickets, a cast list, and a few words proclaiming the merits of the work (usually through reference to the very great success it had obtained in Paris). A number of playbills can be found in archives around New Orleans. See, for one example, a playbill for *Les Diamans de la Couronne*, 24 January 1843, HNOG, ML1850.075 1843.

Unlike these earlier playbills, Fiot's editions marked themselves out as items that were not purely functional. While they never attained the level of luxury (thick, card-like paper with elaborate borders and numerous lithographed images) of the programmes that were printed in New Orleans for concerts given there by Jenny Lind in 1851 (see Figure 3.4),⁹³ they nonetheless seem to have been designed to be kept, souvenir-like, and even collected.⁹⁴

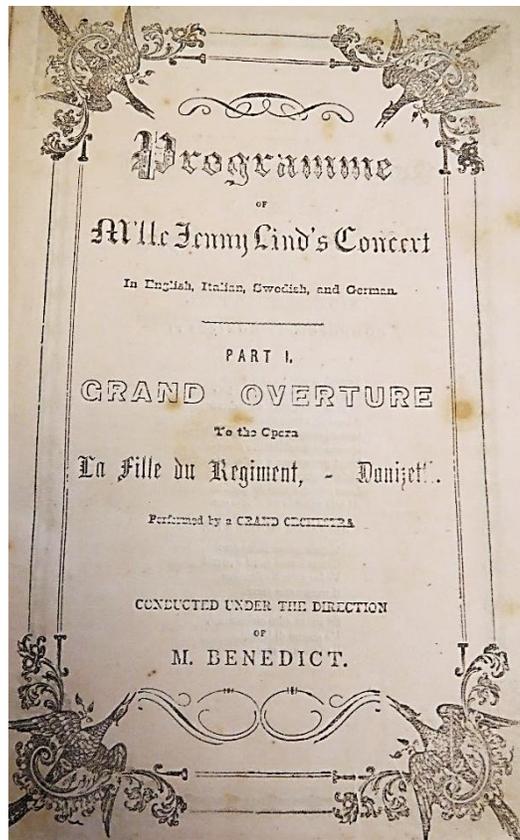


Figure 3.4 – Title page of programme for one of Jenny Lind's concerts in New Orleans 1851. LARC, 976.31 (780.73) S136p

⁹³ These programmes were doubtless created at the instigation of publicity master P. T. Barnum, who was the impresario behind Lind's American tours.

⁹⁴ Some of them, it seems, were not simply kept on a shelf, but were used: a number of them contain pencil markings, and a copy of the libretto for *Robert le diable* held at the Historic New Orleans Collection contains numerous doodles and illustrations of devilish characters. 'Librettos of operas performed in New Orleans', *HNOC*, ML48. A2.

Indeed, Fiot's own comments in the preface to his 1853 edition for Mozart's *Don Giovanni* (as *Don Juan*) reveal that he intended for the libretti in the series to be collected and treated as a complete set:

The editor begs leave to inform the public that he will continue this publication, uniform with the pieces already issued, in order that the different pamphlets may be bound together in volumes. ... Encouraged by the liberal patronage extended by the public to his publication, the Editor will spare no pains or expense, to deserve the continuation of their favour. Henceforth, each piece, whatever its size or title may be, will be sold at 25 cents. The complete series, bound in two volumes, and containing 30 pieces, \$5.00. A discount of 20 percent will be allowed to booksellers and agents, by applying to the General Depot, at Mr PAYA & Co, 56 Chartres Street.⁹⁵

Offering a reduction of \$2.50 on the price of buying the libretti individually, Fiot encouraged his customers to buy the full set. Even if they did not buy the complete, ready-bound collection for \$5, it seems that amateurs sometimes had their own personal selections of Fiot's libretti bound together in a hardbacked book, as is evidenced by a volume of eight of the libretti held at the Historic New Orleans Collection.⁹⁶ Furthermore, a substantial number of loose libretti still survive in archival collections around Louisiana: I have been able to locate copies of nineteen of Fiot's thirty published libretti, and there are duplicates to be found of many.⁹⁷ The fact that a relatively large number have survived is particularly remarkable considering how fragmentary most of the material traces of French opera in New Orleans are, and suggests that Fiot's customers did indeed collect and care for them.

Fiot's libretti might not have been obvious keepsakes for their material properties, but the information within them seems to have been designed with posterity in mind. The libretti were not uniform in their presentation—it seems that Fiot experimented in an attempt to find the perfect format—but they all contained a keen awareness of both the local and wider history

⁹⁵ Mozart, *Don Juan*, Fiot's Edition. SCLSU, ML50. M939 D523 1854 LARA.

⁹⁶ 'Librettos of operas performed in New Orleans', HNOG, ML48. A2.

⁹⁷ The libretti I have located are marked with a star on the table of libretti on 140–1.

of the work they presented. Most of them, for instance, gave the date of the work's first performance in New Orleans, and many others listed the names of the New Orleans cast for performances in the season during which his edition of the libretto was published. In the case of many of the later works in the series, this was the cast of the work's New Orleans premiere. Occasionally, the libretti also contained a lithograph of a key performer in the local productions. Fiot's edition of Rossini's *Sémiramis*, for example, contained a sketch of the theatre's principal contralto, Anna Widemann, in the role of Arsace.

As well as recording the local history of the work, many of Fiot's libretti also listed details of the work's Parisian premiere, and sometimes even the Parisian cast, alongside the New Orleans performers. In certain cases, this served to highlight names originally associated with the work that were also well known to New Orleans audiences. The 1856 libretto for Adolphe Adam's *Si j'étais roi*, for instance, listed the casts not one on top of the other as was often the case, but side by side, as follows (Figure 3.5):

DISTRIBUTION.		
	PARIS.	NOUVEL LE ORLEANS
ZEPHORIS,.....MM	{ TALON CARRE.	DELAGRAVE.
LE ROI DE GOA,.....	P. LAURENT,	
KADOOR,	{ JUNCA, MENGAL,	GRAAT, GUILLOT,
PIPEAR,	MENJAUD FILS,	DEBRINAY,
ZIZEL,.....	{ LEROI, NEVEU,	DUTASTA,
ATAR,	LEMAIRE,	MATHIEU,
LE MEDECIN,.....	ROUVEY,	{ CHOL, ERNEST,
NEMEA,	{ COLSON, SOPHIE NOEL,	COLSON,
ZELIDE,.....	ROUVRAY,	{ DULAURENS, DELATOUCHE.

Seigneurs et Dames de la cour de Goa, Pages, Officiers, Soldats, Grand Conseil, Ministres, Brahmes, Pontifes, Sacrés, Omen, Sbires, Gondoliers, Jeunes Filles, Bayadères, Esclaves, Pêcheurs, Hommes et Femmes, etc.

Figure 3.5 – Cast list inside Fiot's edition of *Si j'étais roi*, New Orleans 1856. LARC, Albert Voss Collection, Manuscripts Collection 856, Series 1 Box 1 Folder 1

It would surely have immediately struck local readers that Mme Pauline Colson had premiered the role of Nemea both in Paris and in New Orleans; they would most likely also have recognised that Neveu, who played the role of Zizel in early Parisian performances had been a part of the New Orleans troupe from 1836 to 1840, and that François-Marcel Junca, although

he did not apparently reprise his role as Kadoor for the New Orleans premiere, was a current member of the Théâtre d'Orléans troupe.⁹⁸

There are two important points to note from all of this: first, that the libretti sought to position the New Orleans premiere alongside its Parisian equivalent (placing the two in a kind of historical continuum) and encouraged the reader to draw connections between them. Second, it served to fix the libretto and the work to a particular moment in time: had the libretto been published simply with a list of roles and not with a cast list, it would have appeared timeless, but by including the cast of the New Orleans premiere, Fiot in a sense fixed the libretto's meaning (and, by extension, the work's as a whole) to that moment. The libretto was designed to be kept by its owner, but it would not be long before the list of performers would no longer serve as a helpful guide to performances at hand.

Instead, it would have become a monument to a past cast, to be remembered nostalgically alongside the great performers of the Parisian premiere. In certain cases, the memorial link was made even more explicit by the inclusion of a review of the Parisian premiere, such as the page-long review of Verdi's *Jérusalem* from *La France musicale* that Fiot reprinted in his edition of the work's libretto.⁹⁹

The repertoire Fiot selected perhaps holds the key to understanding both his aims for the series and the significance of the editions. The first eight works he chose for publication were *grands opéras* (for a full list of Fiot's libretti, see Table 3.1) and among them, of course, were *Robert le diable* and *Les Huguenots*, as well as the initially overlooked *La Muette*. There are no examples of the late-eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century *opéras-comiques* that had previously formed the mainstay of the theatre's repertoire, but nor were all the works modern (indeed, Mozart's *Don Juan* was one of Fiot's selections). Instead, there is a sense that the operas he selected were in some way 'great works', worthy not only of the title '*chefs d'oeuvre*', but of immortalisation.

⁹⁸ Junca was part of the troupe from 1855 to 1859.

⁹⁹ Verdi, *Jerusalem*, Fiot's Edition. *HNOC*, ML50.V4 J4 1850.

Table 3.1 – *Fiot's thirty libretti*

Number	French title	English title (as listed in libretto)	Words by	Music by
1	Les Huguenots	The Huguenots	E. Scribe	Meyerbeer
2	La Juive	The Jewess	E. Scribe	Halevy
3	Robert le Diable*	Robert the Devil	E. Scribe	Meyerbeer
4	La Favorite	The King's Mistress	Gust. Vaëz	Donizetti
5	Guillaume Tell	William Tell	De Jouy	Rossini
6	La Muette de Portici	The Dumb Girl of Portici	E. Scribe	Auber
7	La Reine de Chypre	The Queen of Cyprus	De St. George	Halevy
8	Les Martyrs	The Martyrs	Scribe	Donizetti
9	Anne de Boulen	Anna Bolena	Castil Blaze	Donizetti
10	Les Mousquetaires de la Reine	The Queen's Musketeers	De St. George	Halevy
11	Charles VI	Charles VI	C. Delavigne	Halevy
12	Lucie de Lammermoor*	Lucia di Lammermoor	D. Vaëz	Donizetti
13	Lucrece de Borge*	Lucretia Borgia	E. Monnier	Donizetti
14	Norma*	Norma	E. Monnier	Donizetti
15	Othello*	Othello	Royer and Vaez	Rossini
16	Ne touchez pas à la reine*	Hands off the Queen	Scribe and Vaez	Boisselot
17	Puritains	I Puritani	E. Monnier	Bellini
18	L'éclair*	Lightning	De St George	Halevy

19	Le Somnambule*	The Somnambula	E. Monnier	Bellini
20	Haydée*	Haydee	E. Scribe	Auber
21	Jerusalem*	Jerusalem	A. Roger, G. Vaéz	Verdi
22	Le Prophète*	The Prophet	E. Scrib	Meyerbeer
23	Le Caïd*	The Caïd	T. Sauvage	A. Thomas
24	Les deux Foscari*	The Two Foscari	The brothers Scudier	Verdi
25	Sémiramis*	Semiramis	[?]	Rossini
26	Don Juan*	Don Juan	E. Deschamps, C. Blaze	Mozart
27	Moïse*	Moses	[Etienne de Jouy]	Rossini
28	Marguerite d'Anjou*	Marguerite d'Anjou	[T. Sauvage]	Meyerbeer
29	L'Etoile du nord*	The Star of the North	Scribe	Meyerbeer
30	Si j'étais roi*	If I were king	Dennery and Brésil	Adolphe Adam

Note on contents of table: the contents of the table are exactly as printed in Fiot's libretti, spelling mistakes and unusual translations included, as well as the acknowledgment only of the French translator rather than the original librettist in cases where the libretto was translated. Numbers 1–23 reflect the order of publication as listed on the back cover of the booklet for *Le Caïd*. The order of the final seven libretti in the set is not certain, as these libretti contain the date of the year of publication, but do not specify whether this was the date of the first edition or a later reprint. The information in square brackets was not provided on the printed libretti, but has been supplied by me, in keeping with the information in the rest of the table. Asterisks next to an opera's French title indicate that I have located a copy of that libretto.

Fiot's selections, then, suggest important parallels with the shift from performer-centred to work-centred music criticism in the wake of *grand opéra*'s introduction to New Orleans that I discussed in the earlier part of this chapter. Even Fiot's language when describing his edition carried resonances of the reviewers' discussions of *Robert* and *Les Huguenots*. For example, in his general preface to the edition, we find the following passage:

This Edition is unique in its kind, as it is printed on two columns, presenting the French text on one, and the literal translation into English, line for line, on the opposite column. *This being the only edition which is in perfect conformity with the score*, it will be of great advantage to Opera amateurs for following the performance.¹⁰⁰

While stressing the uniqueness of the edition was, of course, a convenient sales tactic, the fact that Fiot emphasised that it was 'in perfect conformity with the score' suggests a system of values behind the publications that placed the music above all other elements. The libretto's role, as Fiot positioned it, was to help people better follow the music, and his, he claimed, would do so perfectly.

Fiot's editions can tell us even more about the city's changing approach to opera in the years following *grand opéra*'s arrival. Indeed, the libretti hint at an increased standardisation of operatic performance in this period. In contrast to the cuts and alterations that seem to have taken place in the premieres of *Robert le diable* at both the French and American theatres in 1835, for instance, Fiot's libretto is almost completely identical to the version used in Paris after the initial alterations made after the work's premiere, and bears no trace of any local adaptation of the libretto, or of cuts or alterations to the structure of the work. In other words, over the years between the opera's premiere and the publication of Fiot's libretto in the late 1840s, *Robert* had perhaps become increasingly fixed as a work in New Orleans, to the point where no alterations were permitted, at least not within Fiot's editions.¹⁰¹ We cannot be sure,

¹⁰⁰ This preface is printed in a large number of the publications; the italics are mine.

¹⁰¹ It should be pointed out, however, that it was still seen as acceptable for acts of the work to be performed individually at the Théâtre d'Orléans on occasion, particularly for singers' or theatre personnel's benefits. See, for example, the advertisement for the theatre in *L'Abeille*, 12 May 1845, which lists the second act of *Robert le*

of course, that Fiot's vision and actual theatrical practice were always one and the same, but his intention, as stated in the preface, that his editions should correspond exactly to the performances on stage, at least gestures towards such a shift.

It would perhaps not be too much of a stretch to suggest that Fiot's editions were closely involved with a kind of emerging canon formation in New Orleans: not only did they reflect changes in critical discourse in the city, but they also played a role in driving these processes by creating a collection of the 'greatest' works that could be bought and returned to repeatedly.¹⁰² It was surely the establishment of *grand opéra* in New Orleans, and the new, work-based focus it inspired, that prompted Fiot to begin his simultaneous materialising and monumentalising of important works.

One of the most noticeable things about Fiot's series, however, is the fact that not all of the repertoire included within it was French, although it was all heard in French and mediated through the Paris Opéra (even works which had been premiered elsewhere sometimes had the date of the Parisian premiere printed on them alongside the New Orleans one). Indeed, in contrast to earlier periods in which the theatre's repertoire had been almost exclusively French, by the 1840s and early 1850s, when Fiot published his editions, the theatre's repertoire seems to have included a growing number of Italian works in French translation, ranging from Rossini, through Donizetti and Bellini, to Verdi. Even Mozart eventually made it into the series with *Don Juan*: a fact that is particularly surprising, given that earlier in the century Théâtre d'Orléans audiences had expressed dislike for all of the Mozart works the management had attempted to produce.¹⁰³ Fiot's publication of the libretto does not necessarily reflect the fact

diable and the second act of *Lucie de Lammermoor* as part of a benefit concert for M. Colin. The event was reviewed in *L'Abeille* on 13 May 1845.

¹⁰² As the theatre's *régisseur*, Fiot likely had a degree of control in a very literal sense over the relationship between performances and the sales of his libretti, hence my comment above that the libretti both reflected and drove processes of canon formation. For more on the varied nature of operatic canon formation and its cross-historical manifestations, see James Parakilas, 'The Operatic Canon', in *The Oxford Handbook of Opera*, ed. Helen M. Greenwald (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 862–81. For an exploration of the complexities and problems of operatic canon formation in the nineteenth century with a focus on France, see William Gibbons, *Building the Operatic Museum: Eighteenth-Century Opera in Fin-de-Siècle Paris* (Rochester, NY: Rochester University Press, 2013) and Flora Willson, 'Operatic Futures in Second Empire Paris' (PhD diss., King's College London, 2013).

¹⁰³ Indeed, Henry Kmen points out that *Les Noces de Figaro* was withdrawn as a failure after only a single performance at the French theatre c.1830, but fared better at Caldwell's American Theatre. See Kmen, *Music in New Orleans*, 125–7. Mozart's operas seem to have been popular at the St Charles Theatre, where they were performed from the mid-1830s in Italian. Kmen, *Music in New Orleans*, 139 and 163. Concert excerpts from Mozart's operas seem to have found favour much earlier on, and the Overture to *The Magic Flute* was listed on a concert programme in the city as early as 1806. See Kmen, *Music in New Orleans*, 219.

that public taste had changed (although he surely would not have chosen to sell a libretto for an opera of which no performances were given), but rather that the work was now seen as being ‘great’ and worthy of immortalisation in this manner.¹⁰⁴ Instead of developing an exclusively French operatic canon for New Orleans, then, as Fiot could well have done (especially given the struggles to preserve a French culture in New Orleans discussed earlier in this chapter), it seems he sought to create an international canon (albeit in French translation), to correspond with other emerging canons in Europe.

Tracing the influence of Fiot’s libretti on how the public thought of opera in New Orleans is, of course, more difficult. We can, however, gain something of an idea through the sales figures: demand for libretti seems to have been high, encouraging Fiot to produce several editions. As he pointed out in the preface to his libretto for *Don Juan*:

One hundred thousand copies of the Chef-d’oeuvre [sic.] of the French Opera, in both languages, have already been printed, and yet, this publication meets with a daily increasing success. Several exhausted editions have been corrected, revised and republished.¹⁰⁵

The idea that 100,000 copies of these libretti had been sold between c.1847 and 1853 is remarkable, especially since the total population of New Orleans in 1850 was only 116,375.¹⁰⁶ In spite of their obvious specifically local features (such as the cast lists discussed above), however, these libretti had a far wider sphere of influence. They were sold in New York as well as in New Orleans: libretti printed in 1848 listed the address of the ‘New York Depot’ as ‘Mr Corbyn’s Dramatic Agency Office, 4 Barclay Street’, while by 1850 the retailer was given as ‘Douglas, 11 Spruce Street’.¹⁰⁷ The fact that the libretti were sold in New York can perhaps

¹⁰⁴ For more on the issue of changing Mozart reception in Paris and the idea of making his operas canonical, see Gibbons, *Building the Operatic Museum*; Rachel Cowgill, ‘Mozart Productions and the Emergence of Werktreue at London’s Italian Opera House, 1780–1830’, in *Operatic Migrations: Transforming Works and Crossing Boundaries*, ed. Roberta Montemorra Marvin and Downing A. Thomas (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 145–186; Fuhrmann, *Foreign Opera at the London Playhouses*.

¹⁰⁵ Mozart, *Don Juan*, Fiot’s Edition. SCLSU, ML50. M939 D523 1854 LARA.

¹⁰⁶ See ‘Population of the 100 Largest Urban Places: 1850’, US Bureau of the Census, (accessed 5 May 2017) <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/tab08.txt>.

¹⁰⁷ See, for example, Bellini, *La Sonnambule*, Fiot’s Edition. LARC, Albert Voss Collection, Manuscripts Collection 856, Series 1, Box 1 Folder 1, and Thomas, *Le Caïd*, Fiot’s Edition. LARC, Albert Voss Collection, Manuscripts Collection 856, Series 1, Box 1 Folder 1.

help us to understand both the inclusion of local details and the standardisation of the operatic text in Fiot's editions. If they were to serve as cultural ambassadors in the north east, shaping the operatic tastes of consumers there, then Fiot would likely have wanted to make sure that the canon of works he advocated bore the distinctive marks of New Orleans (which included, in the case of the Italian works, the 'local' stamp of the French language). That is to say, he might have been promoting a developing international operatic canon, but he was keen to reveal the influence of New Orleans as a leader in operatic taste, from which the people of New York could learn.

We can perhaps, then, see Fiot's libretti as continuing in material form (and with an expanded international repertoire) the work begun by the Théâtre d'Orléans tours of the North East from the late 1820s, which introduced New York and other major cities to many French operas for the first time. The most recent of these tours had taken place in 1843 and 1845 respectively and, in this light, the printing of the New Orleans cast lists in these libretti also seems to have served as an attractive sales tactic. Indeed, New York audiences would likely have remembered some of these performers from the troupe's performances there, even if they had not heard them in the particular operas monumentalised by Fiot. For example, while the Théâtre d'Orléans troupe did not perform Bellini's *La Sonnambule* on either of the full-company tours to New York in the 1840s, a number of the cast listed in Fiot's libretto, which was on sale in the city in 1848—such as Léon Fleury, Mme Fleury-Jolly, and Mme Lecourt—had performed regularly in other works on those tours.¹⁰⁸ While the standardisation of the repertoire in Fiot's editions, then, might have suggested changing attitudes to opera in New Orleans, the more local elements of the libretti had significance both in the city itself and further afield.

Conclusion

Fiot's libretti laid the way for other series of libretti in New Orleans, such as those published by Jean Schweitzer later in the 1850s, and thus they led to the continued development of a

¹⁰⁸ Bellini, *La Sonnambule*, Fiot's Edition. LARC, Albert Voss Collection, Manuscripts Collection 856, Series 1, Box 1, Folder 1. For the names of the performers who went on the 1843 and 1845 tours, see Mary Grace Swift, 'The Northern Tours of the Théâtre d'Orléans, 1843 and 1845', *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 26/2 (1985): 192–3.

material culture for opera.¹⁰⁹ None, however, attempted to strike quite the delicate balance between functionality and commemoration, local and international, work and performer that Fiot managed to achieve in all of his libretti in various ways. His series also reveals the way that material culture and operatic reception could be mutually influencing; *grand opéra*, with its keen reliance on the latest innovations of the day, both vocally and in terms of technology, was, of course, the perfect repertoire to encourage such quintessentially modern behaviours.

It was through *grand opéra*, therefore, that diverse groups of New Orleans's population began to assert their theatre's (and, by extension, their city's) status within the global operatic world. While much of this status was still constructed in various ways in relation to Paris, both literally (in terms of the movement of performers, scores, and costumes) and metaphorically (in terms of the idea of Paris as both capital of the operatic world and the nineteenth century at large), we can see through Fiot's editions the ways in which New Orleans sought to have an influence on wider American operatic culture. Unlike in Europe, where opera had its origins as an elite art, in the United States, there was little sense of a cultural hierarchy until well into the second half of the nineteenth century: the prices for opera performances were generally no higher than those for other kinds of theatrical productions, and opera often became a kind of 'variety entertainment', to be rearranged at will. Fiot's editions, at least in theory, promoted a new sense of operas as 'works', less easily rearranged or interrupted. As such, we can perhaps tentatively read them, and their sale in the North East in particular, as foreshadowing the repositioning of foreign-language opera from a popular entertainment to an aesthetically elevated, elevating and, by extension, elite art in the United States in the second half of the century.¹¹⁰ While the rise of opera as high art in America has typically been tied to Italian- and German-language works, Fiot's libretti provide us with a hint of the influence French-language

¹⁰⁹ As with Fiot's libretti, many of Schweitzer's libretti survive in the Special Collections of the Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, the Louisiana Research Collection, Jones Hall, Tulane University, and the Historic New Orleans Collection.

¹¹⁰ This is as opposed to English/'Englished' opera, which remained a popular form. Lawrence Levine has discussed the emergence of a cultural hierarchy in the United States in the second half of the nineteenth century, both in terms of the changing status of Shakespeare's plays, from a democratic sphere to one of elite high culture, and also in terms of a similar process in the production and reception of Italian opera (from the early days of the García family's tours to New York, to the Astor Place Riot of 1849). Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow*. See also Mussulman, *Music in the Cultured Generation*, which interprets the process as being less driven by wealth and more by cultural ideals, and Joseph Horowitz, *Wagner Nights: An American History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), which argues specifically for the role of German immigrants and their cultural ideals on the development of a highbrow/lowbrow divide.

materials and operas might also have had on this process, albeit perhaps to a less-obvious extent.

Grand opéra's significance in New Orleans, then, extended far beyond the boundaries of the city, to entangled levels of national and international import. The genre seems to have played a significant role in helping to reshape the ways in which New Orleans produced and, even more importantly, thought about opera, as well as how it was able to project those ideas. By positioning New Orleans's operatic life both internationally and in an American context, as well as seeing it as something that was individually local, the critics and, later, Fiot used grand opera as a means through which they could simultaneously assert their city's position as a cultural leader and also play out anxieties from close to home about the future of francophone cultural influence.

 CHAPTER 4

Rethinking ‘Local Creativity’: The Influence of The Théâtre d’Orléans on Composition in New Orleans

So far in this dissertation, I have focussed on the movements of European operas, the people who performed and produced them, and their reception; indeed, it might seem as if the Théâtre d’Orléans performed only works that had previously been heard in Paris, which would in certain respects seem to confirm the centre–periphery dynamics that I sought to complicate in my earlier chapters. It would be easy to leave this image unchallenged, such were the numbers of Parisian works (and, later, Italian operas in French translation) being performed in New Orleans, and scholars to date have tended to confirm it by focussing on the best known.¹ The omission of non-Parisian works in these accounts has led to the impression that the extensive imported operatic culture in New Orleans killed off, or at least removed a need for, local operatic creativity.²

Such an impression, of course, mirrors the dominant picture of musical composition in the United States at large during the nineteenth century. The *Grove* article on the USA, summarising its musical history, states that, in an environment ‘dominated by European entrepreneurs and performers, there was little or no place for American composers of art music. ... Even in the largest cities, barely one or two composers – musicians who could “detail with the pen, on paper, the abstract sonorousness and expression of musical effects” – could be found. Outside the cities there were no composers at all.’³ The ‘problem’ of local creativity, then, is by no means one that was unique to New Orleans, but the vibrant

¹ Indeed, although Henry Kmen briefly addressed the subject of local composition in his PhD thesis, this information was largely removed when he revised it as *Music in New Orleans*. Henry Kmen, ‘Singing and Dancing in New Orleans, 1791–1841’ (PhD diss., Tulane University, 1961), 222–3; see also Kmen, *Music in New Orleans: The Formative Years, 1791–1841* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966). The reason for removing this material seems to have been simply that the two pages of discussion of local composition in his thesis did not fit well into the more streamlined chronological approach of the book.

² One such account that draws this conclusion from a reading of Kmen’s *Music in New Orleans* is Sarah Hibberd, ‘Grand Opera in Britain and the Americas’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Grand opéra*, ed. David Charlton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 418. Kmen himself states that ‘The strong, almost frantic, effort to keep the opera a cultural tie to the old homeland and the policy of importing talent were deterrents to the development of any truly indigenous activity’. Kmen, *Music in New Orleans*, 200.

³ Richard Crawford, et al. ‘United States of America’, *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, (accessed 4 August 2017)

<<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/28794pg1>>.

and sustained nature of its operatic life provides us with a point of departure from which to unpick the matter further.

Nineteenth-century sources also seem to support the impression that there was a growing awareness (at least in certain circles) of a lack of opportunity for local creativity in the city. As I mentioned briefly in Chapter 3, plans were floated in 1835 to set up a Théâtre Louisianais in order to allow the works of the 'citizens of this country' to take precedence over foreign works.⁴ An article about the plans for this theatre published in *L'Abeille* stated confidently that 'in giving local young people the means to create works conforming to their own tastes, we will see a host of works of genius bursting forth, which, without this [theatre], would remain buried in the dust of storerooms, or in the dusty paperwork of notaries or lawyers'.⁵ Only the works of local citizens, they suggested, could truly satisfy the needs of local audiences. In both these characterisations, the Théâtre d'Orléans and its activities are seen as preventing local operatic composition.

Even a fairly cursory glance at lists of the Théâtre d'Orléans's performances between 1819 and 1859, such as the one compiled by Kmen himself as an appendix to his PhD thesis, however, shows that the question is not so simple as whether imported European opera 'killed' creativity in New Orleans.⁶ Indeed, throughout the period, we see names and works that are unfamiliar from the Parisian opera repertoire in adverts for performances at the Théâtre d'Orléans: Chéret, Cristiani, Curto, Johns, Laroque, Prévost, and so on. The presence of these names, even if they are far outweighed by the number of familiar Parisian works, invites a further set of questions: what exactly do we mean by 'local creativity'? Who or what counted as 'local' both for people of the time and for the historian? And what do we expect from such creativity in terms of the kind of works it produced and their reach?

There has been relatively little work on the subject of composition in New Orleans, especially in the first part of the nineteenth century. Kmen and Baron each mention new works written in the city, but, clearly assuming that no materials exist and that there must, therefore, be little to write about, they do not make more than passing mention of them.⁷

⁴ See page 124 of this thesis.

⁵ 'En facilitant à notre jeunesse les moyens de faire des œuvres conformés à ses goûts, nous verrons jaillir une foule de génies qui, sans cela seraient restés ensevelis dans la poussière des magasins ou dans les paperasses poudreuses d'un notaire ou d'un avocat'. 'D'un nouveau théâtre français', *L'Abeille*, 2 April 1835.

⁶ Kmen, 'Singing and Dancing in New Orleans', Table III, 275–449.

⁷ New works are frequently mentioned in passing throughout Kmen, *Music in New Orleans* and John Baron, *Concert Life in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans: A Comprehensive Reference* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013).

Sometimes, it is not clear whether these authors are necessarily aware that a work was written in New Orleans rather than in Europe. Beyond their surveys, there are several works that present short biographies of New Orleans composers, but give little detail, such as Louis Panzeri's *Louisiana Composers*, and an earlier pamphlet of limited circulation with the same name by Gladys Pettit-Bumstead.⁸ Alvin Duain Wolf's MA thesis from 1968, *Nineteenth-Century Louisiana Composers*, has a little more biographical detail for a number of composers and also offers a degree of musical analysis, but the large time frame of his study and the lack of surviving primary material mean that he is unable to go into great detail.⁹

The only serious recent attempt to look at composition in New Orleans is Jacqueline Leary-Warsaw's 'Nineteenth-Century French Art Song in New Orleans: A Repertoire Study', a valuable and in many ways ground-breaking survey of song composition in New Orleans over the whole of the nineteenth century.¹⁰ Leary-Warsaw discusses a body of some 100 French art songs (selected, she states, from over 200 that she was able to locate) written in New Orleans, including opera arias, devotional songs, patriotic songs, and romances. Her work gives glimpses of the ambition and the originality of certain song composers, as well as an overview of the kinds of vocal composition that were taking place in the French language in New Orleans, but it does not try to explore the extent to which the Théâtre d'Orléans shaped the development of the city's compositional life up until 1859. Furthermore, she focusses wholly on commercially published material, ignoring the small but significant body of unpublished materials relating to opera and art song composition in New Orleans.

In this chapter, then, I want to explore the role the Théâtre d'Orléans played in shaping compositional life in New Orleans, suggesting that it did not necessarily damage or suppress it, but that the theatre instead fostered a variety of avenues for creative endeavour, as part of a larger culture of musical production, education and transmission within the city and beyond. I want to dig deeper into the matter of 'local creativity' to suggest that a reorientation of our existing definitions and expectations of such a phenomenon would help us to see the significance of particular 'types' of composition or

⁸ Louis Panzeri, *Louisiana Composers* (New Orleans: Dinstuhl Printing and Publishing, 1972) and Gladys Pettit-Bumstead, *Louisiana Composers*, compiled with the assistance of Louis Panzeri (New Orleans: Louisiana Federation of Music Clubs, 1935).

⁹ Alvin Duain Wolf, 'Nineteenth-Century Louisiana Composers' (MA diss., North Texas State University, 1968).

¹⁰ Jacqueline J. Leary-Warsaw, 'Nineteenth-Century French Art Song of New Orleans: A Repertoire Study' (PhD diss., Peabody Institute of the Johns Hopkins University, 2000).

repertoires that have previously been overlooked. Furthermore, I argue that the opening up of repertoire allowed by such a reorientation would also afford us a fuller understanding of how opera-inspired composition in New Orleans in the mid-nineteenth century evades easy categorisation as wholly local or national, but instead reveals the city's participation in an international sphere of musical composition and marketing.

The question of local creativity

Defining 'local creativity' is central to understanding how New Orleans's compositional life was positioned at the time and has been since. The question of who or what counted as 'local' was a particularly fraught one. Indeed, the advocates of the Théâtre Louisianais wanted to promote the works of 'the citizens of this country' over and above the works of foreigners.¹¹ But what exactly they meant by 'the citizens of this country' is not at all clear: did they mean anyone, regardless of ethnic, national or linguistic background? As a group of francophones, and given the francophone/anglophone tensions in New Orleans at this point, it seems likely that when they spoke of 'the citizens of this country', they actually meant 'francophone citizens of this country', rather than Americans more broadly. 'Local', then, could be an ideologically loaded term, meaning something more complex than 'anything from this place'.

Nonetheless, these francophone exhortations might appear at first to chime with wider cultural ambitions in both the city of New Orleans and the United States more broadly in this period. A glance at *The Bee* in the early months of 1835 shows that the matter of 'American' creativity (and not necessarily specifically musical creativity) was on the minds of English-language critics as well. A letter printed on 17 March 1835 advised the public to go and see a new drama entitled *The Mistletoe Bough*, which the author hoped would be well received because it was 'the production of a native American' (by which, of course, he meant a playwright born in America).¹² The author claimed that he had perused the manuscript and found it to be of good quality.

Other comments from that same month, however, were rather less positive about the state of American creativity. On 13 March 1835, for example, the following complaint could be found:

¹¹ 'D'un nouveau théâtre français', *L'Abeille*, 2 April 1835.

¹² 'To the Editor of the *Bee*', *The Bee*, 17 March 1835.

Mr [John] Howard Payne [the American actor, poet and playwright, who wrote the text to the famous song 'Home, Sweet Home!'] has written four tragedies, six comedies, twenty-one dramas, five operas and nine farces; only two of which—*Therese* and *Clari*—have been for a long time performed at the theatre in this city; from which a benefit of some thousand dollars is to be derived. Of these forty-five plays, not a single one of them is original, and not one of them relates to an American event, or contains an American character—not even (we have heard) the most remote allusion to America. Yet Americans must display their gratitude and generosity, because those short-lived prodigies were translated chiefly from French dramas or ballets; were written in Europe; and were the originals of subsequent translations and adaptations.¹³

The English-language critics, then, like their French counterparts, seemed to despair that America was apparently utterly dependent on Europe for its theatrical and operatic repertoire. In this case, the critics suggested that in English-language theatre, even works that were passed off as 'original' were actually translations or adaptations of European works,¹⁴ and were seen as lacking a distinctively American character. Indeed, a few days later, on 20 March 1835, another complaint appeared in *The Bee* that Payne could not be considered a national dramatist, because 'he has not contributed to augment the literature or elevate the character of his native country'.¹⁵

Such comments, of course, suggest that contemporary critics were hoping for 'locally marked' works. And when it came to spoken drama, there certainly were a number of attempts to create 'local' dramas around the history and social issues of New Orleans. As Juliane Braun has shown, Thomas Wharton Collens's *The Martyr Patriots* (1836), Auguste Lussan's *Les Martyrs de la Louisiane* (1839), and Louis Placide Canonge's *France et Espagne ou La Louisiane en 1768 et 1769* (1850) all explored the 1768 rebellion of New Orleans's francophones against their Spanish governors, while Lussan's *La Famille*

¹³ *The Bee*, 13 March 1835.

¹⁴ Arguments along these lines continued to rage more widely in the United States, leading William Henry Fry, a budding composer, to declare in the mid-1850s that the United States was in dire need of 'a Declaration of Independence in Art'. Richard Crawford, et al., 'United States of America', *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, (accessed 4 August 2017) <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/28794pg1>>.

¹⁵ *The Bee*, 20 March 1835.

créole explored the integration of a French family into American life after their move to Louisiana.¹⁶

There seem to have been very few operas written using anything that could be considered local subject matter, however, but the libretto for one such work does still exist. The opera was entitled *Le Capitaine May et le Général de la Vega sur les bords du Rio Grande* (1847); its libretto was by Félix de Courmont and its music (now lost) was composed by Fourmestreaux, principal oboist of the Théâtre d'Orléans (Figure 4.1).¹⁷ While the subject matter was not local in the same way as the spoken dramas I mentioned above, the Mexican war of 1846–8—which formed the basis for the plot—was reported on extensively in New Orleans and followed avidly by the public.¹⁸ Thus, the subject matter had a certain local resonance, but, unlike the *dramas* written on local subjects, it seems not to have been well received: following its premiere on 27 May 1847 at the Théâtre d'Orléans, no paper seems to have reviewed the work (and, in fact, Edward Larocque Tinker has suggested that the work brought an end to Courmont's career as a writer).¹⁹ 'Local' subjects, then, were not necessarily the way to win over the New Orleans public.

While Fourmestreaux's music for the opera seems to have been lost, the musical elements of opera afford yet another opportunity to re-assess our expectations of what might be considered 'local'. As we have seen repeatedly in discussions of musical nationalism and exoticism, it becomes very tempting to expect musical characteristics to play a role in marking works as 'local', as well as textual and extra-musical aspects. But, as a great many of these studies have shown, supposedly 'local', 'regional' and 'national' musical stylistic traits—especially those claiming heritage as folk music—can turn out to

¹⁶ Juliane Braun explores all of these plays in 'Petit Paris en Amérique? French Theatrical Culture in Nineteenth-Century Louisiana' (PhD diss., Julius-Maximilians-Universität Würzburg, 2013). So too has Edward Larocque Tinker explored the rich history of French-language writing in Louisiana in his *Les Écrits de langue française en Louisiane au XIX siècle* (Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, 1932), 66–73, while Maxine Seller has examined ethnic theatre more broadly in her *Ethnic Theatre in the United States* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983).

¹⁷ Little is known about Fourmestreaux, but his likeness was captured in the caricature shown in Figure 4.1. In it, Fourmestreaux is shown sitting inside an ophicleide. It is unlikely that he played both the oboe and the ophicleide for the theatre orchestra, but the caricature is perhaps a reference to the cramped conditions in the orchestra area of the Théâtre d'Orléans, or some other in-joke. For the libretto, see *Le Capitaine May et le Général de la Vega sur les bords du Rio Grande* (1847), HNOG, ML50.F6 C3 1847.

¹⁸ For more on press reporting on the Mexican War, see Tom Reilly, *War with Mexico!: America's Reporters Cover the Battlefield* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2010).

¹⁹ Tinker, *Les Écrits de langue française*, 98.

be notoriously non-specific.²⁰ We would be naive to assume that music can be a clear marker of place in stylistic terms.²¹



Figure 4.1 – Caricature of Fourmestreaux, *La Revue louisianaise* 4/10 (1 August 1848), LARC

It is hard to determine what might have constituted a more broadly ‘American’ musical style in a period in which Europeans frequently accused the United States of being a land without culture and Americans themselves were becoming increasingly self-conscious about what might define them and their nation. Even leaving aside such large questions, however, it is no easier to pin-point a single way of defining New Orleans, musically or otherwise.²² As Leary-Warsaw has pointed out, there is a small body of art

²⁰ For just two of many discussions in this area, see Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 305 and Richard Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 765–6.

²¹ When it comes to the case of North America, the situation is particularly complex, as Michael Beckerman and others have illustrated in their discussions of ‘American music’ in Dvorák’s ‘New World’ Symphony. Michael Beckerman, ‘The Master’s Little Joke: Antonin Dvorák and the Mask of Nation’, in *Dvorák and His World*, ed. Michael Beckerman (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 134–54.

²² For more on European criticisms of the United States as lacking culture and taste, see *The Rise of Anti-Americanism*, ed. Brendon O’Connor and Martin Griffith (London: Routledge, 2006), 13–14. For contemporary accounts, see Philarète Chasles, ‘Les Américains en Europe et les Européens aux États-Unis’,

songs based on Creole melodies with texts in Louisiana Creole from the final quarter of the nineteenth century (including 'Mo aimé toué', by Gregorio Curto, whom I will discuss later in this chapter), but there does not seem to have been much in a similar vein before the 1870s: the turn to Creole material at this point may well have been part of a nostalgic look back to a dying way of life.²³ Musical style, then, turns out—as so often—to be a deeply problematic marker of place, and I suggest that in order to understand composition in New Orleans we need to move beyond any expectation that it should have a unique or 'authentically local' sound.

I want to add a further question mark to our expectations of what might constitute a 'local' composer by considering musical education of the period. It is not clear exactly how either the francophone or anglophone commentators at the time defined a 'local' composer: should they have been born and bred in New Orleans? Could they have moved there from Europe on a long-term basis? Or could they be there on a less permanent basis so long as their creative efforts did not consist of simply translating or copying European works? The first expectation, of course, was most likely unreasonable. Much early musical training for both boys and girls took place in New Orleans, through the private teaching of individuals who were often connected with the Théâtre d'Orléans. Gregorio Curto, for example, who first came to New Orleans in 1830 to sing as a bass at the Théâtre d'Orléans, spent the rest of his life in the city, and, as well as leading local choirs in his various positions at churches in the city, he taught privately and at local schools.²⁴ The much-loved prima donna, Julia Calvé, also became a renowned teacher after she retired from the theatre and married Charles Boudousquié, the Théâtre d'Orléans director from 1853.²⁵ Many of the theatre's orchestral musicians, too, taught privately: to give but two examples, H. E. Lehmann, whom I will discuss later in this chapter, seems to have had brass and piano

Revue des deux mondes, January 1843, 446–76, and Jules Janin, 'Rachel et la tragédie aux États Unis', *Journal des débats*, 15 October 1855, which took American criticisms of the *tragédienne* Rachel as evidence of a lack of culture in the United States. For another assessment in the same vein as Janin's, also relating to the American treatment of Rachel, see Léon Beauvallet, *Rachel et le nouveau monde, promenades aux États-Unis et aux Antilles* (Paris, 1856).

²³ Leary-Warsaw, 'Nineteenth-Century French Art Song of New Orleans', esp. 182–3.

²⁴ For biographical information on Gregorio Curto, see John Baron, *Concert Life in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans*, 146–63. For an earlier account of Curto's life, see *The Crescent City Illustrated: The Commercial, Social, Political, and General History of New Orleans*, ed. Edwin L. Jewell (New Orleans, 1873). This volume does not contain page numbers, but it is fully accessible and text searchable through Google Books.

²⁵ John Baron points out that Calvé 'conquered New Orleans as a professor' after her retirement from the stage. Baron, *Concert Life in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans*, 466. Baron frequently mentions concerts given by her pupils. See, for examples, 479, 500, 504, 510.

pupils, while Léopold Carrière, the theatre's principal flautist, advertised his services as a teacher on the inside cover of some of Fiot's libretti in the 1850s.²⁶

It was, however, very common for wealthy francophone young men to go to Paris to receive a higher education. This was particularly the case when it came to advanced musical education, as New Orleans itself (like most cities in the United States, with the exception of Boston), did not have a conservatoire until after the Civil War.²⁷ Aspiring young musicians would go to Paris to study and, having integrated themselves into the rich musical life of a city that was many times larger than New Orleans, would rarely return to the city of their birth. This pattern is perhaps best illustrated by two of New Orleans's most famous musical sons: Louis Moreau Gottschalk (1829–69) and Ernest Guiraud (1837–92). Both men were born in the city and received their early musical training from musicians at the Théâtre d'Orléans. Gottschalk began his piano studies with F. J. Narcisse Letellier (a tenor in the Théâtre d'Orléans troupe) and took violin lessons with Adolphe Elie (a violinist in the theatre orchestra, who also owned a music shop and, as we saw in Chapter 1, on occasion went to Paris to recruit the new troupe).²⁸ Guiraud, meanwhile, studied with his own father, Jean-Baptiste Guiraud (himself a former Prix de Rome winner who became a violinist in the Théâtre d'Orléans orchestra).²⁹ Guiraud *filis*'s first opera, *Le Roi David*, was premiered at the Théâtre d'Orléans in 1853, when he was just sixteen years old. It received great acclaim, and the young Guiraud left the city soon after to study at the Paris Conservatoire. Gottschalk, too, went to Paris at the age of thirteen.³⁰ Although Gottschalk passed through New Orleans on his tours later in life, neither man ever returned to the city to live.

While these are doubtless the best-known examples, there must have been numerous other promising young composers (as well as instrumentalists) who went to Paris to train, and never returned to their city of birth. The same was true for artists of other sorts: Louis Placide Canonge, so staunch in his advocacy for local creative artists that he went on

²⁶ See, for example, Mozart, *Don Juan*, Fiot's Edition. SCLSU, ML50. M939 D523 1854 LARA.

²⁷ For more on music education in the United States in this period, see Richard Colwell, et al., 'Music education', *Grove Music Online*, *Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, (accessed 31 August 2017) <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/A2242324>.

²⁸ See page 42 of this thesis.

²⁹ Information on Gottschalk's early musical education is given in Vernon Loggins, *Where the World Ends: The Life of Louis Moreau Gottschalk* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1958), 9–46 and S. Frederick Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 34.

³⁰ For information on the early life of Ernest Guiraud, see Hugh Macdonald, 'Guiraud, Ernest', *Grove Music Online*, *Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, (accessed 4 August 2017) <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/12004>.

to found the Athénée Louisianais society, also left his beloved homeland for a number of years in order to receive an education in Paris.³¹ Without any established institutions of higher musical education in New Orleans, then, it is perhaps somewhat unreasonable to expect that local creativity in the city should have been sustained entirely by composers who were born and raised there. Indeed, given the degree of interconnection in the nineteenth-century musical world that I trace in the first two chapters of this thesis, it would be reductive to expect isolation or even complete autonomy in the compositional life of the city. By removing the imperative for geographical origin to determine who can or cannot be considered a local composer, then, and turning our attention to works that were written and performed in the city, we can begin to understand something of the significance of these works and the importance of the Théâtre d'Orléans in the city's compositional life.

Operatic composition and the influence of the Théâtre d'Orléans: a brief overview

Several figures who have already featured in this dissertation played an important role in opera composition in New Orleans. Some, such as Pierre-Jacques Chéret—the young stowaway from the theatre at Le Havre whom we first met in Chapter 2—were performers in the Théâtre d'Orléans troupe. In the early days of the theatre in the 1820s, Chéret seems to have had a number of works produced at the Théâtre d'Orléans.³² His *Le Prince d'occasion* premiered there on 8 February 1820, and the last work of his to be performed in the city seems to have been his *Pavilion des fleurs* on 10 January 1826.³³ At least three other *opéras-comiques* by him were produced in the intervening years.

Other composers were musicians in the theatre orchestra. Eugène Prévost, for example, the *chef d'orchestre* of the Théâtre d'Orléans from 1838, wrote a number of operas during his time in New Orleans. Unlike the young Chéret, Prévost had already enjoyed a degree of status as a composer in Europe before he arrived in New Orleans. Having studied composition at the Paris Conservatoire with Jean-François Lesueur, he won the Prix de Rome in 1831, on his second attempt (his first, in 1829, had seen him take second prize in a year when no *grand prix* was awarded, while Berlioz's submission—his fourth entry—received no recognition).³⁴ Several of his works were performed in Paris

³¹ For a biography of Louis Placide Canonge, see Tinker, *Les Écrits de langue française*, 66–73.

³² See pages 77–8 of this thesis.

³³ Kmen, 'Singing and Dancing in New Orleans', Table III, 275–449.

³⁴ For basic information on Prévost and the Prix de Rome, see Jean Mongrédién and Hervé Lacombe, 'Prévost, Eugène-Prosper', *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, (accessed 18 September 2017) <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/22330>. For

before he left for New Orleans, with *Le Grenadier de Wagram* and *L'Hôtel des princes* receiving their premieres at the Théâtre de l'Ambigu-Comique in 1831, while *Cosimo*, *Les Pontons de Cadix*, and *Le Bon garçon* were performed at the Opéra-Comique in 1835, 1836 and 1837 respectively. He seems to have remained respected by the Parisian musical community throughout his life: in December 1861, the Parisian *Journal des débats* printed an open letter to Prévost signed by 'G. Rossini, Auber, F. Halévy, Carafa, Ambroise Thomas, L. Clapisson, H. Reber, V. Massé, Félicien David, Grisar, Meyerbeer, Berlioz, G. Kastern, and A. Elwart, *secrétaire*' thanking him for his devotion to performing their works in the United States.³⁵ During his time in New Orleans, he wrote a number of operas for the Théâtre d'Orléans stage, some of which were *opéras-comiques* (such as *La Chaste Suzanne* (1845) and *Alice et Clara* (1846)), and others of which were *grands-opéras* (such as his *Esmeralda* (1840), which enjoyed considerable success). Save for the Civil War period in which he returned to France, serving as conductor at Offenbach's Bouffes-Parisiens theatre, Prévost spent the rest of his life in New Orleans, and he died there in 1872.

Operatic composition was by no means confined to people employed by the Théâtre d'Orléans at the time of their works' premieres, but involved a more extended web of connections. Gregorio Curto, for instance, initially came to New Orleans in 1830 to sing as a bass in the Théâtre d'Orléans troupe, having made a successful debut at Paris's Théâtre-Italien earlier in the year. He remained in the city for the rest of his life, dying there in 1887. But, after a couple of seasons, he gave up his career on the operatic stage (although it seems he continued to give concert performances), in favour of positions as a church musician: first as the organist at St Louis Cathedral, later at St Theresa's and St Patrick's Churches on Camp Street, and then at St Anne's Church on St Philip Street. During the years in which he was a church musician, however, he not only wrote a large body of masses and other liturgical works, but he completed a number of operas. Of these, an aria to be sung in the opera *Tancredi* still exists in published piano and vocal score (Figure 4.2), along with one entitled 'Myrrha' from his *La Mort de Sardanapale*.³⁶ Another of his works, *Le Lépreux* (1845) to a libretto by Louis Placide Canonge, still survives in full score in the collections

Berlioz's failure in the Prix de Rome in 1829, see Hugh Macdonald, 'Berlioz, Hector', *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, (accessed 18 September 2017) <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/51424pg2>.

³⁵ *Journal des débats*, 10 December 1861.

³⁶ It is unclear if Curto ever wrote the rest of *Tancredi*: I have not found any record of its performance. *Le Mort de Sardanapale*, on the other hand, was performed at the Théâtre d'Orléans in May 1849.

of the American Antiquarian Society at Worcester, Massachusetts: it consists of a single act in the style of a French grand opera, complete with a climactic religious apotheosis.³⁷

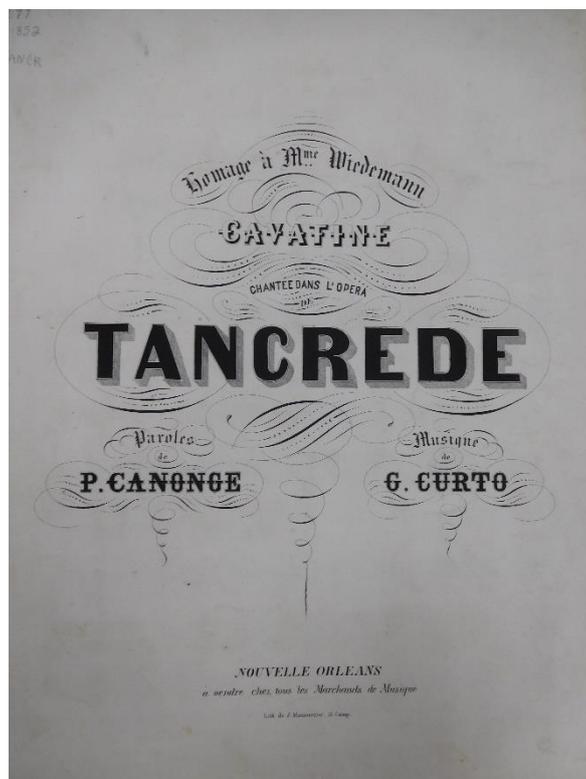


Figure 4.2 – Cover of the published 'Cavatine' from Curto's *Tancredi* (1852), HJA, Maxwell Sheet Music Collection, Volume 42: Emilia Carriere, Item 7

Other composers, such as Paul Emile Johns, had informal but no less enduring connections with the Théâtre d'Orléans. Born in Poland at the end of the eighteenth century, Johns was well established in New Orleans by 1820 and he lived there for over forty years, albeit with frequent trips abroad.³⁸ He owned a music shop in the city and, as well as importing Pleyel pianos from Paris, his business was responsible for some of New Orleans's earliest music publishing. A highly accomplished pianist, Johns's name frequently appeared on the programmes of concerts held at the Théâtre d'Orléans (often for the benefit of performers in the theatre troupe or orchestra) as both a soloist (it seems he was the first person to perform a Beethoven piano concerto in the United States) and, more frequently, as an accompanist.³⁹ He was also a keen composer, and concert programmes from the 1820s and 1830s are dotted with works written by him, including, on one occasion,

³⁷ *Le Lépreux*, AAS, Louisiana Collection, 1779–1937.

³⁸ For a biography of Johns, see Baron, *Concert Life in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans*, 164–8.

³⁹ Baron, *Concert Life in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans*, 164–5.

a substantial piece entitled *A Warlike Symphony*. An *opéra-comique* in one act composed by Johns—*Séjour militaire, ou la double mystification*—was premiered at the Théâtre d'Orléans on 17 February 1824.⁴⁰

Although these composers were not born in New Orleans, during their (often lengthy) time in the city they all played an important role in shaping local cultural life, both through their work at the theatre and through their other performance, educational and business activities. While Johns was involved in developing a local publishing industry—producing music as well as books and newspapers—all four men seem to have taught children and adults privately.⁴¹ Curto and Prévost also taught at local girls' schools, educating the next generation not just in music, but in an essential part of being a refined young lady in the nineteenth-century world.⁴² All, therefore, shaped in various ways the society of the city in which they were long-term residents, and it seems unreasonable to discount them as 'local' opera composers on the basis only that they were European immigrants to New Orleans.

Théâtre d'Orléans: commissioning and encouraging new composers

In material terms, little evidence of most of the works written for New Orleans survives beyond their names and occasional reviews, buried in newspaper columns.⁴³ It is hardly a surprise, however, that little by way of operatic composition survives: operas were typically not published in full score, since the expense incurred in producing them would never have been recouped in sales, so locally written operas would have existed solely in manuscript form. In the case of Curto's *Le Lépreux*, the extant manuscript score contains a number of pencil markings for cuts and alterations to tempi, suggesting that it was not even a presentation copy, but probably served as the conductor's score: it may well have been the

⁴⁰ Baron, *Concert Life in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans*, 165.

⁴¹ Peggy C. Boudreaux discusses Johns's publishing activities in 'Music Publishing in New Orleans in the Nineteenth Century' (MA diss., Louisiana State University, 1977), 6–11.

⁴² For information on the role of music (and the piano in particular) in female education in the Old South, see Candace Bailey, *Music and the Southern Belle: From Accomplished Lady to Confederate Composer* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2010), and Candace Bailey, 'The Antebellum "Piano Girl" in the American South,' *Performance Practice Review* 13/1 (2008), Article 1: 1–44. DOI: 10.5642/perfpr.200813.01.01, (accessed 25 September 2017)

<http://scholarship.claremont.edu/ppr/vol13/iss1/>. See also, Julia Eklund Koza, 'Music Instruction in the Nineteenth Century: Views from "Godey's Lady's Book", 1830–77', *Journal of Research in Music Education* 38/4 (Winter, 1990): 245–57.

⁴³ Besides Curto's *Le Lépreux*, the only other extant opera score I have come across by a composer connected with the Théâtre d'Orléans is for Prévost's *Blanche et René*, which was written in 1873, and which is held in the same collection of papers as *Le Lépreux* at the American Antiquarian Society.

only copy (Figure 4.3). Similarly, orchestral parts would have been copied by hand (and this was almost certainly the case for most of the repertoire the company performed, not just for operas written in New Orleans, since it was also common practice in Europe at the time), rather than printed, and these would have suffered from wear and tear over the years.⁴⁴ The fires and floods that frequently afflicted the theatre and city of New Orleans would have further caused the destruction of original documents. The lack of material legacy, then, should not be conflated with either a lack of ambition or a lack of significance among composers in New Orleans.

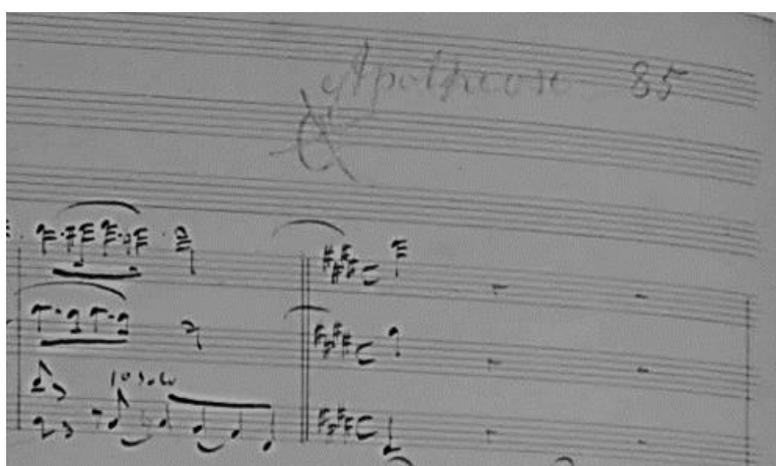


Figure 4.3 – Example of a cut marked in pencil in manuscript score of Curto's *Le Lépreux*, AAS, Louisiana Collection, 1779–1937

Nor should we necessarily seek to judge these works in terms of their longevity in the Théâtre d'Orléans repertoire. It seems that the majority of the works mentioned above were at least relatively well received in New Orleans (Courmont and Fourmestreaux's *Le Capitaine May et le Général Vega* aside). Chéret's first opera, the three-act *opéra-comique*, *Le Prince d'occasion*, for example, received the following comments as part of a review in *Le Courrier*, which, while not uniformly positive (and, indeed, downright scathing about the libretto),⁴⁵ at least suggest that the music was promising:

⁴⁴ In the case of *opéras-comiques*, the situation becomes doubly difficult as the music and the spoken text often existed in separate documents, so the likelihood that both survive becomes even more remote.

⁴⁵ The libretti written for operas composed in New Orleans seem to have regularly reused stories that had been used for operas in Europe (as indeed within Europe there tended to be numerous operas written on popular subjects). In this case, *Le Prince d'occasion* had been the subject of an opera composed in 1817 by Manuel García (better known for his pursuits on stage as a tenor), which received favourable reviews. James Radomski, *Manuel García (1775–1832): Chronicle of the Life of a Bel Canto Tenor at the Dawn of Romanticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 125–7. For more on theatre directors' responses to

An intrigue twenty times repeated, a spiritless and often diffuse style, some 'rhymed prose' and three deathly acts, would make the *Prince d'occasion* a most detestable poem, were it not sustained by music that is full of expression and grace; the adagio of the overture is rich in harmony, however, the wind instruments dominate a little too much in the rest; but the first rondo, the quartet of the first act, the duet between the valet and the chambermaid in the second act, and finally two choruses, although badly executed, have proved to the amateurs of good music that through his efforts Mr Chéret promises masterpieces.⁴⁶

The reviewer, then, seems to have been able to overlook the deficiencies of the plot and libretto on account of Chéret's music, and the piece was well received enough by the public to have been performed for a second time on 24 February. Other local operas seem to have been popular with the public when they were performed: Curto's *Le Lépreux* was reported to have received a 'fine and very rightful success' at its premiere on 10 May 1845, and the critic for *L'Abeille* predicted that the work would need no assistance to draw a large crowd for its second performance three days later.⁴⁷

Nonetheless, no local operas seem to have entered the repertoire on a more permanent basis, and many appear to have been played only once or twice, in spite of their apparent success with audiences and critics. Of course, to the proponents of the Théâtre Louisianais as well as to scholars since, this might seem like a snub to locally written music, but there may well have been good reasons for this lack of longevity in the theatre's repertoire. For instance, since there was a relatively high turnover of performers in the Théâtre d'Orléans troupe, and rehearsal periods seem to have been limited (the theatre season would often open little more than a week or two after the troupe's arrival from

popular subjects, see Hervé Lacombe, *The Keys to French Opera in the Nineteenth-Century*, trans. Edward Schneider (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), 15.

⁴⁶ 'Un intrigue vingt fois répétée, un style lâche et souvent diffus, quelque prose rimée, et trois mortels actes, feraient du *Prince d'occasion* un poème insupportable s'il n'était soutenu par une musique pleine d'expression et de grâce; l'adagio de l'ouverture est riche en harmonie, cependant les instruments à vent dominant un peu trop dans le reste; mais le motif du premier rondeau, le quatuor du premier acte, le duo du valet et de la soubrette au second, enfin deux chœurs, quoique mal exécuté, on prouve aux amateurs de la bonne musique que dans ses coups d'essai, Mr Chéret promet des coups de maître.' *Le Courrier de la Louisiane*, 11 February 1820. This translation is my own, but the passage is also quoted in Wolf, 'Nineteenth-Century Louisiana Composers', 9.

⁴⁷ *Le Lépreux* 'a obtenu à la première audition un beau et si légitime succès. Cette nouveauté seule devrait attirer la foule; car elle possède un mérite incontestable ... voilà certes plus qu'il n'en faut pour attirer la foule à la salle d'Orléans. See 'Théâtre d'Orléans', *L'Abeille*, 13 May 1845.

France), it perhaps made sense for the theatre to direct its efforts into keeping on top of the latest European works. These were, after all, the works that singers recruited in France could be expected to know: producing locally written works would perhaps deplete already short rehearsal time as a new troupe needed to learn them from scratch each year. A lack of longevity in the Théâtre d'Orléans repertoire, therefore, did not necessarily mean that a work had been poorly received, but may well instead have reflected the ways that an increasingly international operatic world led to a solidification of core repertoire which was shared by mobile singers. Similarly, audiences aware of the reception of new works in Paris may well have demanded to see these works for themselves: as I showed in Chapter 3, it was important to audiences in New Orleans to be able to view themselves as part of an international operatic world. If new works only received a few performances, then, it was not necessarily a fault of the Théâtre d'Orléans specifically, but a reflection of wider developments in theatrical practice.

Nonetheless, the Théâtre d'Orléans did provide openings for composers to have works premiered. It appears that the Davises made efforts, at least on occasion, to commission new works for the Théâtre d'Orléans. On 24 September 1824, for example, a singer and opera composer, Esteban Cristiani (c.1770–c.1829), wrote in the Mexican newspaper *El Sol* that he had just arrived from New Orleans, where 'they were performing the melodrama *El Solitario*, which was extraordinarily well attended by the public, and Mr Davis, impresario from that theatre, suggested that I should make the play into an opera, showing me the printed libretto. I read it and knew that it was excellent, and could bring me glory, but my health did not allow me to pursue this enterprise in New Orleans, and I decided to come to Mexico to finish my opera'.⁴⁸ The completed opera, it seems, was performed in Mexico City in December of that year, and John Davis never heard the work he had encouraged Cristiani to write.

⁴⁸ 'Me hallaba en Orleans a la sazón que se ejecutó el melodrama del Solitario con una concurrencia extraordinaria del público, y el Sr Davis, empresario de aquel teatro, me insinuó lo útil y agradable que seria que yo le pusiese una nueva música a la ópera del Solitario cuyo libro impreso me mostro y yo leí con mucho interés conociendo en realidad que merecía la pena de ponerlo en música y que este trabajo podía llenarme de gloria; pero como mis asuntos y mi quebrantada salud me impidieron continuar por más tiempo en Orleans, determiné dirigirme a México para restablecerme asistiéndome siempre la idea de concluir aquí mi opera del solitario.' 'Anuncio teatral', *El Sol*, 24 September 1824. I am grateful to José Manuel Izquierdo König for drawing my attention to this passage. The *El Solitario* mentioned here was presumably Pixérécourt's three-act melodrama, *Le mont sauvage, ou le solitaire*. Cristiani was an Italian, who spent the later part of his career in Latin America.

Indeed, it seems that the theatre actually provided opportunities on occasion for composers and librettists who had struggled to have their works performed elsewhere. The preface to the printed libretto of a one-act vaudeville, *La Femme en loterie*, by E. de Lauc-Maryat, which premiered at the Théâtre d'Orléans on 6 May 1850, illustrates this well:

To Monsieur Davis.

Sir,

I would have liked to have written a serious work, in order to dedicate it to you; one day, perhaps, more inspired, less fearful, I will dare to produce, under the protection of your name, a work more worthy of both you and the public who visit you every evening with so much loyalty than *La Femme en loterie*.

If the vaudeville that I deliver today for advertising owes its *being* to me, it owes its *life* to you ... as without you it would still be buried in the depths of my desk, sleeping the sleep of innocence, next to its elders, poor stillborn children. However meagre the value of this *Femme en loterie*, you wanted, sir, to put it in the limelight, doubtless to toughen up the guilty author, in putting him face to face with the *parterre*...! Well, it turned out that this *parterre* was in a good mood; it dignified to renounce its rightful severity for once, it welcomed with favour, I mean, with indulgence, my first sin. There was an encouragement to which I was not mistaken and which I will try to justify later.

But it was you, sir, who gave me the first word of hope, it was you who was the first to give me a friendly hand, aided by your advice, protected by your experience, to you [I give] thanks. Only men of your intelligence and your heart can soften the skies of your beautiful Louisiana for a foreigner, further invigorating the sun of your freedom.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ A Monsieur Davis,
Monsieur,

Je désirerais avoir fait une œuvre sérieuse, afin de vous la pouvoir dédier; un jour peut-être, mieux inspiré, moins craintif, j'oserai placer sous la protection de votre nom, un ouvrage plus digne que *La Femme en loterie*, et de vous et du public, qui vous rend visite chaque soir avec tant d'exactitude.

Si le vaudeville que je livre aujourd'hui à la publicité, me doit *d'être*, il vous doit de *vivre*, c'est-à-dire plus et mieux, car sans vous il serait encore enfoui dans les profondeurs de mon bureau, dormant du sommeil de l'innocence, à cote de ses aînés, pauvres enfants morts nés! de quelque maigre valeur que soit cette *Femme en loterie*, vous avez voulu, monsieur, lui faire affronter le feu de la rampe, sans doute pour

The preface continues in this somewhat panegyric vein for a few more paragraphs. Who exactly Lauc-Maryat was is not clear (although he went on to write a few theatrical reviews for the New Orleans press in the early 1850s), but it seems from his words in the preface that he had relatively recently arrived in Louisiana, as he talked of himself as 'a foreigner'.⁵⁰ He had clearly not been able or had the confidence to have his earlier efforts performed, and his preface comes across as almost absurdly grateful to Pierre Davis for this opportunity. Being a foreigner with a French name, it is entirely possible that Lauc-Maryat had attempted unsuccessfully to have his earlier works performed in France before coming to New Orleans. Certainly, his reference to 'the sun of your freedom' suggests a greater degree of theatrical opportunity in New Orleans than he had previously experienced.

Instead of reading 'local' composition in New Orleans as something isolated from the rest of the world, then, perhaps we ought to see it as responding to wider international issues: the stages of centralised France were perhaps so inhospitable to aspiring composers that New Orleans provided a creative outlet.⁵¹ Indeed, the aforementioned Chéret returned to France and later found success as a composer of romances and 'dramatic scenes' ('scènes dramatiques') in Paris.⁵² It seems, however, that he never had an opera performed in France, while operatic compositions were his principal output during his time in New Orleans (he wrote at least five during his nine years in the city). There was a sense then in which New Orleans actively offered opportunities to opera composers who might not have had such opportunities elsewhere, even if it was not able to incorporate them into a more permanent part of its repertoire.

aguerrir le coupable auteur, en le mettant face à face avec le parterre ... or il s'est trouvé que ce parterre était en belle humeur; il a daigné abdiquer pour une fois sa juste sévérité, il a accueilli avec faveur, je veux dire, avec indulgence, mon premier péché. C'est là un encouragement auquel je ne me suis point trompé, et que j'essaierai de justifier plus tard.

Mais c'est vous, monsieur, qui m'avez dit le premier mot d'espoir, c'est vous qui le premier, m'avez tendu une main amie, aidé de vos conseils, protégé de votre expérience, à vous donc merci!—il appartient aux seuls hommes de votre intelligence et de votre cœur, de faire plus doux à l'étranger le ciel de votre belle Louisiane, plus vivifiant le soleil de votre liberté.

Preface to *La femme en Loterie*, vaudeville en un acte (New Orleans, 1850). *F-Pa*, GD-45386.

⁵⁰ Edouard de Lauc-Maryat seems to have served as editor of a local newspaper, *L'Orléanais*, for which he wrote theatrical criticism c.1850. See Robert Clemens Reinders, *The End of an Era: New Orleans, 1850–60* (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing, 1998), 231.

⁵¹ David Grayson explores how French composers who had been unsuccessful in Paris sought to have their works performed abroad (and sometimes in the provinces). His focus is on 1875–1900, but this issue was certainly already a pertinent one by the mid-century. See David Grayson, 'Finding a Stage for French Opera', in *Music, Theater, and Cultural Transfer: Paris, 1830–1914*, ed. Annegret Fauser and Mark Everist (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 142–8.

⁵² Over 100 of Chéret's *chansonnettes*, *mélodies*, and *romances* can be found at the Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Beyond the stage: parlour music and opera

The Théâtre d'Orléans fostered local composition in many respects, by providing performance opportunities (even, on occasion, actively encouraging composers to write works for the theatre) and bringing together networks of people with creative ideas, who also taught future generations. Nonetheless, we should not confine our discussions of the Théâtre d'Orléans's role in local creativity to the composition of full operas. By privileging aesthetic elevation and technical excellence, as well as large-scale, public performance, as criteria for studying local creativity, it would be easy to overlook whole genres that can give us a much fuller picture of musical composition in New Orleans in the mid-nineteenth century. In the rest of this chapter, therefore, I want to focus on a repertoire of unashamedly popular music, which has received relatively little scholarly attention, but which can give us a very different perspective on the nature of local composition and of opera's role within it.

The repertoire in question is a body of music for solo piano, comprised principally of polkas, waltzes, schottisches, and quadrilles, which were written and published in New Orleans between the mid-1840s and 1850s by Hermann Edward Lehmann (1805–66). Born in Berlin, Lehmann seems to have moved to New Orleans in the early 1830s as a trumpet, cornet and horn player in the Théâtre d'Orléans orchestra. He also became prominent in city life as a music teacher and as the conductor of an orchestra that played for balls (in the Orleans Ballroom among other places) and concerts.⁵³ Unlike the majority of his contemporaries writing in the city, many of Lehmann's works survive (see Table 4.1 below). They are all parlour works for solo piano (although reports from concerts in the local press suggest that he wrote for ensembles too), and a number of them are arrangements of French (and occasionally Italian) operas. I suggest that this wordless repertoire can offer different perspectives on opera's role not just in local composition but New Orleans society more broadly.

Table 4.1 – H. E. Lehmann's surviving works (all are 'polkas de salon' unless otherwise listed; opera arrangements are marked with a star)

Title	Year	Dedication
La Châtelaine	n. d.	Madame P. Marsoudet
* <i>Gastibelza</i> (Maillart), polka mazurka	n. d.	Charles Ducros

⁵³ Lehmann's name occurs on various occasions in Baron, *Concert Life in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans*.

Souvenir de Paris	n. d.	Mlle Estelle Tricou
La Valentine	n. d.	Anaïs Boudousquié
Henry Clay's Grand March (with portrait of H. Clay drawn by "G. Develle")	1844	Ladies of Louisiana
L'An de grâce, polka mazurka	1849	Aux belles louisianaises
New Orleans Lancers' Quadrille	1849	Mrs Chas. Edw. Johnston
Souvenir de Georgetown	1851`	Mme A. le Mat
Le Bijou	1852	Mlle Augusta Slark
Carlsbad, mazurka du salon	1852	Mlle Amélia Byrne
Le Carnaval, cottillon galop	1853	Aux abonnés
La Poblana, valse espagnol	1853	Mme Louise Larue
La Fleur d'oranger	1853	Mlle Herminie Pardie/o
Le Lilas blanc	1853	Mlle Heloise Cenas
Le Lys, polka mazurka	1853	Mlle Lasthenie Devergés
L'Héliotrope/Esmeralda	1853	Mlle Delphine Forstall
L'Hortensia, Redowa polka	1853	Mlle Fortunée Giraud
L'Œillet, schottische	1853	Mme Amélie Guyol
Pelican Polka	1853	The Pelican Club of Louisiana
Sandilee	1853	Mlle Pauline Matthews
Le Bouton de rose, schottische de salon	1853	Mlle Louisa Lewis
La Camélia/Esmeralda	1853	Mme Louise Chiapella
Le Myosotis/Esmeralda	1854	Mlle Malvina Goulon
Le Jasmin blanc, polka mazurka	1855	Mme Fanny A. Clark
* <i>L'Etoile du Nord</i> , Grande Polka (Meyerbeer)	1855	Mon ami Gottschalk
* <i>La Couronne impériale de L'Etoile du Nord</i> (Meyerbeer)	1855	Mlle. Aline Du Clary
* <i>Le Campe Russe de L'Etoile du Nord</i> (Meyerbeer)	1856	Mlle Henriette Collignon
* <i>Si J'étais roi</i> , grande polka (Adam)	1856	Mlle Magda von Lotten
* <i>Les Amours du diable</i> , polka mazurka (opéra de Albert Grisar)	1856	Mme Pauline Colson
* <i>Les Amours du diable</i> , polka (Grisar)	1857	Mme Adèle Duvert
* <i>Les Amours du diable</i> , Schottische (Grisar)	1857	Mlle Emilie Benoit
* <i>Azucena du trovatore</i> (Verdi)	1858	Mlle Amelie Bourgeois
* <i>Les Enclumes du trovatore</i> (Verdi)	1858	Mlle Louise L. Hunt

It is not immediately obvious how best to approach repertoire of this sort. Studies of American popular sheet music from this period have typically focussed on cover illustrations and subject matter, seeing these scores as decorative objects or reflective of contemporary vogues.⁵⁴ Other lines of inquiry have involved exploring the layout and function of bound collections of parlour music. Candace Bailey, for example, has explored binders' volumes in terms of domestic music making and gender, arguing that these albums functioned alongside the common-place book as an essential part of the upbringing of young girls in the antebellum period, schooling them in the feminine ideals of the period.⁵⁵ James Davies's work on ready-compiled musical annuals, meanwhile, has shown that not only was the repertoire closely entwined with the social ideals of the time, but that it was a highly modern one, linked to new, commercialised processes of gift giving.⁵⁶ Parlour or 'light' music of this sort, then, has been explored in relation to contemporary social trends in various ways, but its identity as music and its context within the musical world have received little examination: after all, this repertoire frequently confounds our expectations of ambition and originality in musical composition and, as such, seems to resist analytical treatment.

I want to offer another set of approaches to this repertoire here. Building on the focus of the earlier sections of this chapter, I want to explore this music through the lens of 'locality', uncovering what exactly might be considered local about this repertoire, while at the same time arguing that it was part of an emerging musical culture and, indeed, industry, that extended far beyond New Orleans. Furthermore, I wish to position Lehmann's opera arrangements as a distinct subset of works within his oeuvre, arguing that a closer investigation of these pieces as a group and also as individual works can offer us a deeper insight into the ways in which opera functioned and was understood within city life.

⁵⁴ See, for example, David Tatham, *The Lure of the Striped Pig: The Illustration of Popular Music in America, 1820–1870* (Barre, MA: Imprint Society, 1973) and Daniel H. Foster, 'Sheet Music Iconography and Music in the History of Transatlantic Minstrelsy', *Modern Language Quarterly* 70/1 (2009): 147–61. For an example specific to New Orleans, see Florence M. Jumonville, 'Set to Music: The Engravers, Artists, and Lithographers of New Orleans Sheet Music', *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* (1995): 127–44. Meanwhile, Lester S. Levy's *Grace Notes in American History: Popular Sheet Music from 1820 to 1900* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967), looks not only at cover illustrations, but at popular (sometimes topical) subject matter and at the history of individual songs.

⁵⁵ Candace Bailey, 'Binder's Volumes as Musical Commonplace Books: The Transmission of Cultural Codes in the Antebellum South', *Journal of the Society for American Music* 10/4 (2016): 446–69. For more on domestic music making and femininity in this period, see Julia Ecklund Koza, 'Music and the Feminine Sphere: Images of Women as Musicians in "Godey's Lady's Book", 1830–1877', *The Musical Quarterly* 75/2 (1991): 103–29.

⁵⁶ See James Davies, 'Julia's Gift: The Social Life of Scores, c.1830', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 131/2 (2006): 287–309.

Parlour music and the international market

At a first glance, it might seem strange to approach this popular musical repertoire as 'local'. As Derek Scott has shown, polkas, waltzes, schottisches and quadrilles arguably became an international repertoire in the nineteenth century.⁵⁷ They were immensely popular in urban social life across Europe and the Americas, often casting off their original national or class associations and becoming part of an aspirational middle-class musical culture at home in the parlour as much as in the ballroom.⁵⁸ Adapted as easily-manageable piano pieces, these popular genres provided the perfect fodder for the new class of amateur pianists that emerged with rising domestic piano sales on both sides of the Atlantic during this period.⁵⁹

Moreover, the state of the publishing industry in New Orleans in the first half of the nineteenth century meant that little music was published in the city, even if it had been written there. Prior to the 1850s, there were no dedicated music publishing companies in New Orleans.⁶⁰ Instead, music shops frequently forged deals with northern publishers, and their names were added as secondary imprints to printed sheet music.⁶¹ While firms like E. Johns et Cie (the company founded by the Paul Emile Johns discussed as a composer earlier in this chapter) established a lithography department that printed some sheet music in the city in the 1830s, it remained far more common for the business to sell music that had been lithographed by others. In the 1840s, larger music publishing businesses started to establish themselves in the city—William T. Mayo bought Johns's music shop in 1846 (he later sold it to Philip Werlein in 1852), and in the next few years A. E. Blackmar and Louis

⁵⁷ Derek B. Scott discusses the emergence of international music markets and repertoires in *Sounds of the Metropolis: The Popular Music Revolution in London, New York, Paris and Vienna* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), esp. 43–57 and 131–43.

⁵⁸ Scott mentions the rise of middle-class domestic musical culture in *Sounds of the Metropolis*, esp. 18–19 and 133–4. For an account of the polka's origins and its transformation into an internationally popular genre in both public and domestic settings, see Gracian Černušák, et al., 'Polka', *Grove Music Online*, Oxford Music Online, Oxford University Press, (accessed 25 September 2017) <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/22020>.

⁵⁹ The real piano boom, of course, took place in the second half of the nineteenth century, but its beginnings can certainly be seen in the decades leading up to the mid-century. For more on these repertoires and the rise of domestic piano playing across Europe and the United States, see Alfred Loesser, *Men, Women and Pianos: A Social History* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1955).

⁶⁰ For more on the emergence of a music publishing industry in New Orleans, see Boudreaux, 'Music Publishing in New Orleans in the Nineteenth Century', 1–16.

⁶¹ Nonetheless, from the 1830s, we start to find examples of early music printing in New Orleans. The earliest examples are perhaps a series of songs printed in the journal *La Créole: Gazette des salons, des arts et des modes* (1837–8), of which a few issues survive. The cover was printed at J. Sollée's print shop on Chartres Street, but the music itself was printed by the recently established lithography department of the newspaper, *L'Abeille*. These can be found in LARC, 976.3 (051) C911.

Grunewald also established music publishing businesses—but it was not until the later 1850s that any large volume of sheet music started to be published in New Orleans.⁶²

The song 'Dis-moi' ('Tell me'), by Eugène Chassaignac, a composer who came to New Orleans from Paris and who owned a music shop in the city as well as helping to recruit the Théâtre d'Orléans troupe, provides a good illustration of these processes.⁶³ The song exists in multiple and different editions. The earliest, it seems, was a bilingual version, with the English text printed above the French text, and it was entered into copyright in 1850, by A. Fiot, a Philadelphia publisher.⁶⁴ W. T. Mayo was listed as the secondary imprinter, suggesting that the arrangement between New Orleans music shops and northern publishers persisted even into the beginning of the 1850s.⁶⁵ Not only was 'Dis-moi/Tell me', first sold in Philadelphia as well as New Orleans, but the surviving copy can also give us a glimpse into the further dissemination of this music: the cover of the copy held at the Historic New Orleans Collection bears a retail stamp from Joseph Bloch's Music Store in Mobile, Alabama (Figure 4.4).⁶⁶ Music written in New Orleans, therefore, did not necessarily remain local in its dissemination.

Furthermore, there are three other extant editions of this song by Chassaignac, which were published not in New Orleans but in Paris (by Colombier, J. Meissonier, and Mme Vve Launer respectively), solely in French.⁶⁷ The existence of these editions suggests the popularity of the song (it was, after all, taken on by three different publishers) and also reveals that the work was sold in provincial France: the Colombier edition shows that the music was also sold in Nantes 'Chez Lété'. Unlike their Philadelphian counterpart, these French editions bear no copyright registration details, but their inclusion within Chassaignac's volume of his own works held at the Louisiana Research Collection, Tulane

⁶² Much of the engraving for these later prints was done by Clementine and Henri Wehrmann, whose fame extended beyond New Orleans to other parts of the United States. Florence M. Jumonville discusses the Wehrmanns in 'Set to Music', 127–44.

⁶³ Chassaignac was reported by the *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* to be visiting Paris in September 1857 and thanked for being 'an active and zealous correspondent' of the journal. 'La Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris comptera dans M. Chassaignac un correspondant actif et zélé', *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*, 6 September 1857.

⁶⁴ It is not clear whether this Augustus Fiot was any relation of Louis Fiot, the Théâtre d'Orléans *régisseur*, whose libretti I discussed in Chapter 3: I have been unable to find biographical information on either man.

⁶⁵ Fiot appears to have been one of the northern publishers with whom New Orleans music sellers most frequently entered into partnership.

⁶⁶ Eugène Chassaignac, 'Dis-Moi/Tell Me', *HNOC*, M1621.C48 T4 1850.

⁶⁷ The three editions are all bound into Chassaignac's own album of some of his own music, which is at the Louisiana Research Collection, Tulane University, while copies of two of the editions also exist at the Bibliothèque nationale de France. The BnF catalogue speculatively dates the two editions as c.1852 and 1854, but their inclusion in Chassaignac's bound volume suggests that they might date from closer to 1860 (as almost all of the dated music in that collection comes from 1860–5).

University suggests that they were all on sale in the same period.⁶⁸ For consumers in Paris, there was no way of knowing that Chassaignac's song had originated in New Orleans. Indeed, a lack of international copyright laws and copyright imperatives within particular countries meant that a number of different publishers could easily reprint works without any expense.⁶⁹ This, of course, contributed significantly to the international identity of popular songs, romances, and piano music.

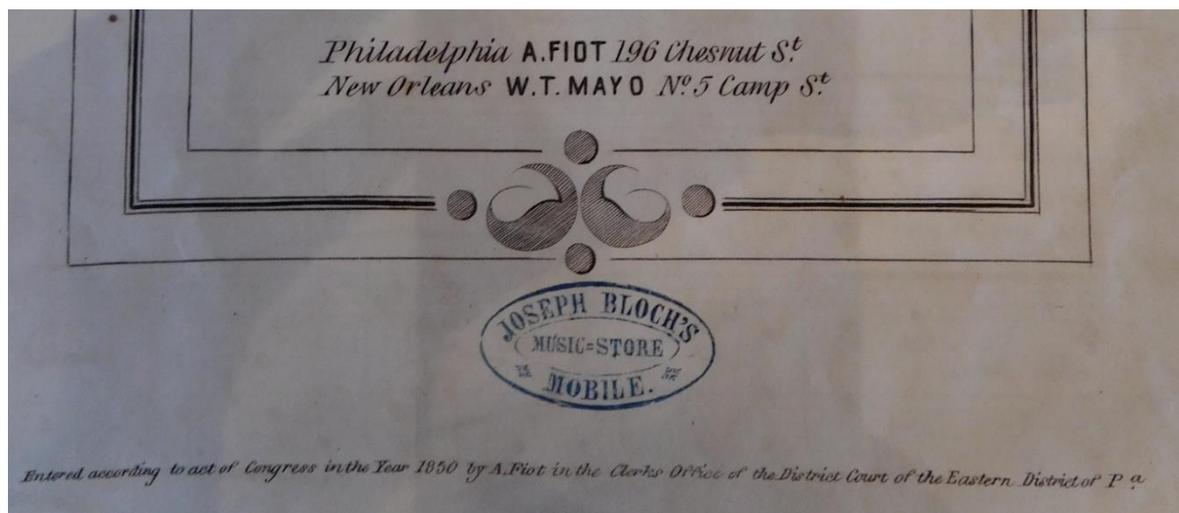


Figure 4.4 – Detail from cover of Eugène Chassaignac, 'Dis-Moi/Tell Me', HNOC, M1621.C48 T4 1850

Uncovering the local in Lehmann's music

Lehmann's music seems to have emerged from this internationalised world of musical composition and transfer. And yet his music also reveals highly specific local connections. Unlike Chassaignac's song and so much of the rest of this repertoire, most of Lehmann's works were self-published (with the exception of his 'L'An de Grace' polka (1849), which lists P. Werlein of New Orleans as the publisher on the cover) in the city of New Orleans. The composer himself was responsible for registering the majority of his pieces for

⁶⁸ This volume, donated by Mrs Mary R. de Gravelle, can be found at the LARC, 976.31(786.4)C488X. There are, of course, important differences between the appearance, if not the content, of the American and French publications, as the works seem to have become more highly decorated in their journey across the Atlantic. While Fiot's cover features only a decorated border around the title and other printed information, the three Parisian versions feature intricate, lithographed cover illustrations: the illustration on the Launer cover is signed by Célestin Nanteuil, who had been director of the Académie des Beaux-Arts since 1848. The increasingly picturesque decorations on these covers reveal the need for saleable design in a saturated sheet music market, with the name of a prominent illustrator adding further to their attractiveness.

⁶⁹ The Berne Convention, which set out international copyright agreements, was not signed until 1886. Before this, there was no formal mandate to preserve copyright between nations.

copyright in Louisiana. This self-publication points to a principally local circulation for his works, in spite of their internationalised generic context.

Indeed, while Lehmann clearly capitalised on the international popularity for the genres in which he wrote, there are also some distinctive local contexts for his music, which I wish to unpick here. Through a study of the dedications of his works, we can begin to trace webs of social relations in New Orleans, as well as to construct a more nuanced picture of the uses for this music. Almost all of Lehmann's pieces were dedicated to young ladies of high social status in the city. His 'Le Lilas Blanc' polka, for example, was dedicated to Mlle Heloise Cenas, the daughter of a notary.⁷⁰ Others too were dedicated to relatives of socially influential notaries, and 'La Valentine' (c.1852) was dedicated to Mlle Anaïs Boudousquié (niece of Charles Boudousquié), who would have been about twenty-one at the time. Charles himself had been a notary before taking over the direction of the Théâtre d'Orléans, and there were a number of other family members in the profession.⁷¹

The dedications to these young women propose a particular social context for these pieces within courtship rituals in the city. Indeed, Peggy Boudreaux has suggested that young men who did not possess musical skills themselves would often commission local composers to write a piece for them to present as a gift to their beloved, for her to play at the piano.⁷² The composer would then be free to publish and sell the piece as he saw fit. It seems likely that many of Lehmann's short pieces might have been commissioned in this vein: as such, they could be seen as belonging to a wider economy of courtship, which simultaneously demarcated a domestic, feminine musical sphere in which the pieces could be played, while also offering numerous commercial opportunities for the willing composer.⁷³

⁷⁰ Heloise Cenas was the sister of Clarissa Pierce Cenas, whose diary is held at the Historic New Orleans Collection (MSS 649). They were the daughters of Hilary Breton Cenas, a notary public in the city from 1834 to 1859 (Clarissa's diary begins in the aftermath of her father's death that year, recording the family's grief at that time). The United States Census for 1870 lists Heloise and 'Clarisse' Cenas as living with their mother (Margaret Cenas) and siblings in New Orleans. This information can be found by searching for 'Heloise Cenas' and a date range from 1800 to 1890 in www.familysearch.org.

⁷¹ Anaïs Boudousquié, aged 20, appears in the United States Census of 1850 as residing in New Orleans with her parents (Antoine and Sophie Boudousquié). Her father was the elder brother of Charles Boudousquié. Anaïs is listed as the daughter of Antoine in the United States Census of 1850. This information can be found by searching for 'Anaïs Boudousquié' and a date range from 1800 to 1890 in www.familysearch.org.

⁷² After the initial fee that the commissioner would most almost certainly have paid to the composer for his time, he may well have also paid a fee to have the work published. Once published, the composer could then make further money from them from sales. Peggy Boudreaux mentions this commissioning process in her 'Music Publishing in New Orleans in the Nineteenth Century', 2.

⁷³ James Davies has suggested that musical gifts served as a subtle means of controlling young women, by encouraging them to conform to contemporary models of femininity. See Davies, 'Julia's Gift', 296–9.

But if we look a little more closely, this is not the whole picture, and the reach of Lehmann's pieces was certainly further than the circles of young-adult courting. Indeed, some were not dedicated to individuals at all, but to groups of people, and they seem to have been funded by subscribers. This was certainly the case with Lehmann's 'General Henry Clay's March', which was performed in its original version 'for fifty brass instruments' in a Grand Concert for Lehmann on 7 November 1844. Notices printed in the local press advised the 'subscribers to Henry Clay's Grand March' who had not yet collected the tickets that they were owed for their subscription to go to the Théâtre d'Orléans box office.⁷⁴ This march was dedicated not to an individual, but to the 'Ladies of Louisiana', and was later rearranged for piano and published for sale, complete with a lithographed image of Henry Clay by Develle, set designer at the Théâtre d'Orléans (Figure 1.1 in Chapter 1).⁷⁵ Another work, the 'Pelican Polka', was dedicated to the Pelican Club of Louisiana at whose Grand Ball it was premiered in 1853. The names of the fifteen club members who seem to have commissioned the work are listed on the title page of the sheet music for solo piano (Figure 4.5).⁷⁶

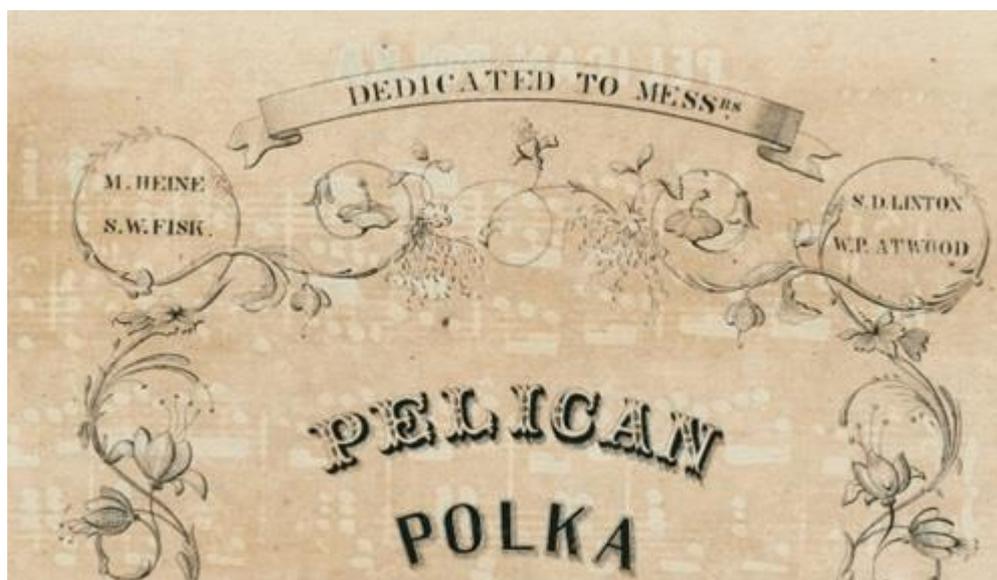


Figure 4.5 – Detail from cover of the 'Pelican Polka' by H. E. Lehmann (New Orleans, 1855), HNOC, M31.L4 P4 1855

⁷⁴ 'Orleans Theatre Grand Concert', *Daily Picayune*, 5 November 1844. Similarly, Lehmann's 'Le Carnaval: Cottillon Galop' was dedicated 'aux abonnés'. See H. E. Lehmann, 'Le Carnaval: Cottillon Galop' (New Orleans, 1853), *HJA*, Box 32 Folder 9. Available online via Tulane Digital Library, (accessed 26 September 2017) <https://digitallibrary.tulane.edu/islandora/object/tulane%3A19225>.

⁷⁵ H. E. Lehmann, *Henry Clay's Grand March*, *HJA*, Box 32, Folder 16.

⁷⁶ The dedication names the following club members: Messrs. M. Heine, S. W. Fisk, D. D. Withers, S. T. Harrison, J. Magee, J. Campbell, S. D. Linton, W. P. Atwood, Fr. Rodewald, W. H. Jackson Jr., Ed. Shiff, Fr. Wood, David Urquhart, Thos. Rogers Jr., and Bayard Milligan. See H. E. Lehmann, 'The Pelican Polka' (New Orleans, 1855), *HNOC*, M31.L4 P4 1855.

'General Henry Clay's March' and the 'Pelican Polka' also hint at another important feature of Lehmann's music: its wide appeal. Since the Pelican Club seems to have had a predominantly Anglo-American (and German) membership and General Henry Clay has been described as 'the quintessential American politician', it seems that Lehmann's music was not simply written for a small, self-contained francophone community in New Orleans.⁷⁷ Indeed, his 'polka de salon' on *Il trovatore* was dedicated to the anglophone-sounding Louise L. Hunt, suggesting that his music in general reached an audience that extended beyond the Creole and French immigrant communities in the city.

While these pieces might not have had anything distinctively local about them in a musical sense, then, they reveal local patterns of musical commissioning, performance, and social interaction. But there are other ways in which this music reveals its links to specifically local contexts, beyond the dedications. In New Orleans, for example, the majority of this music was most likely performed at balls: Lehmann proudly signed himself on the cover of his works as the 'chef d'orchestre de soirées, bals, et artiste du Théâtre d'Orléans', suggesting that it was those positions that would give him most sway with his intended buyers. Similarly, the cover of the 'Pelican Polka' states that the work was 'executed for the first time in 1853 at the Grand Ball given at the Pelican Club', presumably by an orchestra, before it was reduced for piano.⁷⁸

As Henry Kmen has shown, balls played a vital role in the social and musical life of New Orleans (there were balls for all classes and races within society, not simply for wealthy white people);⁷⁹ it seems likely in fact that at least some of Lehmann's compositions started out as orchestral music for balls, before he rearranged them and published them for piano. Indeed, there are indications that Lehmann's pieces could be used both in the home and for dancing, as some include separate passages marked 'introduction de salon' and 'introduction pour danse'.⁸⁰ This was a repertoire, therefore, that not only bridged linguistic communities in the city, but also bridged the public and private spheres, bringing public dance repertoires into the home, and, conversely, perhaps positioning the ballroom as an extension of the parlour in nineteenth-century New Orleans, where private activities (such as courtship) could be enacted publicly.

⁷⁷ Although Lehmann was German himself, it was within this francophone community that he lived and worked in New Orleans.

⁷⁸ H. E. Lehmann, 'The Pelican Polka', *HNOC*, M31.L4 P4 1855.

⁷⁹ Kmen, *Music in New Orleans*, 3–55.

⁸⁰ See, for example, H. E. Lehmann, 'Les Enclumes du *trovatore*' (New Orleans, 1858), *LSM*.

All of this seems to point to a wider range of social connections for Lehmann's music than we might initially assume: although in its printed form this repertoire became parlour music, it preserved links to the ballroom and the public sphere, and the dedications reveal that both individuals and groups within local society were commemorated in these publications. The (female) performer of this music in the domestic sphere, then, was invited to imagine herself in relation to local, public social events (sometimes highly specific ones, in the case of the 'Pelican Polka') when she performed this music at home, while simultaneously being able to position herself more broadly within an international community of performers playing a widely popular repertoire. Lehmann's music, then, had a complex web of social contexts: literal and imagined, local and international, public and private. It is within these contexts that I now wish to position his opera arrangements specifically.

Lehmann's opera arrangements: compositional ambition in the parlour

The opera arrangements form a distinct subset within Lehmann's oeuvre. Out of the thirty-three works by Lehmann of which I have managed to locate copies, eleven of them are arrangements of operas or, in one case, music for a non-operatic stage work. The ten opera arrangements are based on just five operas: Meyerbeer's *L'Etoile du Nord* (three arrangements), Verdi's *Il trovatore* (two arrangements), Adam's *Si j'étais roi*, Grisar's *Les Amours du diable* (three arrangements), and Maillart's *Gastibelza*. The other arrangement is of Montaubry's music for Théodore Barrière and Lambert Thiboust's 'drame mêlé de chant', *Les Filles de marbre*, which, although it was not called an opera, featured plenty of songs, some of which seem to have become very popular, judging by the number of arrangements it prompted.⁸¹

It seems that Lehmann composed most of his arrangements rapidly after the New Orleans premieres of the works on which they were based. Meyerbeer's *L'Etoile du Nord*, for example, received its premiere at Paris's Opéra-Comique on 16 February 1854, reaching New Orleans just over a year later, where it was first performed at the Théâtre d'Orléans on 5 March 1855. It was received with great enthusiasm and was performed six times in the first two weeks after its premiere there, as Jack Belsom has noted.⁸² Only just over a month later, on 17 April, *The Bee* carried a notice thanking Lehmann for his 'brilliant

⁸¹ H. E. Lehmann, 'Les Filles de marbre, polka', *HNOG*, M31.M65 P6 1854.

⁸² Jack Belsom, 'Reception of Major Operatic Premieres in New Orleans during the Nineteenth Century' (MA diss., Louisiana State University, 1972), 147–8.

and beautiful polka on a theme from *The Star of the North*. It is dedicated to L. M. Gottschalk'.⁸³ The first of Lehmann's three arrangements from the work, then, appeared rapidly after its premiere in New Orleans, with a further arrangement being written later that year, and the final one the next. In the case of the 'grande polka' dedicated to Gottschalk, meanwhile, it appears that Lehmann sought to capitalise both on the initial enthusiasm surrounding *L'Etoile du Nord* and on the fact that Gottschalk was visiting the city at the time: it seems unlikely that Gottschalk would have commissioned such a work himself, but to have dedicated a piano arrangement of a new opera to him at a time when he was visiting the city would undoubtedly have brought Lehmann increased sales.⁸⁴ Other arrangements by Lehmann also followed closely behind the New Orleans premiere of their source opera: Lehmann's arrangements of *Si j'étais roi*, *Les Amours du diable*, and *Les Filles de marbre* were all published in the same year as their source works' premieres in the city.⁸⁵

Although the arrangements themselves belong to the same genres as Lehmann's other works (five polkas, three polka mazurkas, two schottisches, and one waltz), in many respects these works are different from his pieces that are not based on operas. His non-opera-based works rarely exceed two or three pages of music plus a single title page, as this, after all, was relatively cheaply published, since it could be printed on two folded sheets of paper (furthermore, if it ran to just two pages, would not require any page turns from the performer). His opera compositions, on the other hand, are generally substantially longer. His 'La Couronne impériale de *L'Etoile du Nord*, grande valse', for example, consists of seven pages of music in five discrete, short movements, while his 'Si j'étais roi, grande polka' stands at seven pages.⁸⁶

⁸³ *The Bee*, 17 April 1855.

⁸⁴ For information on what turned out to be Gottschalk's final visit to the city of his birth, in the spring of 1855, see Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 206–8.

⁸⁵ In fact, the only exception to this rule seems to be the arrangements of *Il trovatore*, which were published the year after the work's Théâtre d'Orléans premiere. Indeed, it is also quite unusual in the respect that, where Lehmann used French for the titles of all of his other works (and the writing on most of their covers was in French), and in spite of the fact that the work had been performed in 1857 at the French theatre as *Le Trouvère*, Lehmann decided to preserve Verdi's Italian title.

⁸⁶ Unlike any of Lehmann's short compositions, this latter work also features multiple changes in time signature (C to 12/8 to 2/4) between sections.



Figure 4.6 – Second page of 'L'Etoile du Nord, grande polka' by H. E. Lehmann, dedicated to Louis Moreau Gottschalk. HJA, Maxwell Sheet Music Collection, Box 420, Folder 29

The opera arrangements present the performer with a greater range of technical challenges than Lehmann's other works. The majority of his short pieces featured relatively straightforward, repetitive accompaniment patterns (often using a kind of 'um-cha-cha' or 'um-cha-cha-cha' rhythm with a single bass note followed by a leap to two or three repeated chords depending on the meter) and melodic figuration constructed along scalar or arpeggiated lines. Most are in either D major and G major. The opera arrangements, however, are more varied in all respects. The '*L'Etoile du Nord, grande polka*' dedicated to Gottschalk (Figure 4.6 above), for example, feature more varied accompaniments, including flowing semiquaver and triplet semiquaver patterns beneath an expressive melody played in octaves. While the piece is not virtuosic as such (at least not in the manner of Gottschalk's own compositions), it, perhaps unsurprisingly given its dedicatee, required more than a modicum of technical skill.

Lehmann was not, of course, the only composer writing parlour music based on operas and other stage music in the period, and a brief comparison between some of his arrangements and others on sale in New Orleans at the time proves instructive. In the mid-1850s, while Lehmann's arrangement of the 'pièces d'or' from *Les Filles de marbre* was on sale in New Orleans, another version by Charles Bizot was on sale at Blackmar's Music Store. The *Les Filles de marbre* polka was not among Lehmann's most difficult works, but still the comparison with Bizot's version is useful, especially since both arrangements are based on the same section of Montaubry's music for the work. While both Bizot and Lehmann's pieces use versions of the typical polka accompaniment figure, Bizot's is arranged in such a way that the figure can be played for the most part with the left hand in a single position, as almost all of it fits within the compass of an octave and the 'chords' are generally only dyads (Figure 4.7). Lehmann's version, however, requires the left hand to be more athletic and to 'stride' between the bass notes and the thicker chords that follow them (Figure 4.8).



Figure 4.7 – Detail from Bizot, 'Les Filles de marbre Polka', HNOC, M31.M65 P6 1865



Figure 4.8 – Detail from Lehmann, 'Les Filles de marbre Polka', HNOC, M31.M65 P6 1854

Similarly, while Bizot writes straightforward scalar passages in the melody, Lehmann adds thirds to the same passages in his arrangement, thereby increasing the difficulty for the right hand. On a musical level, too, Lehmann's piece is more intricate than Bizot's: he marks nuances in the dynamics, while Bizot only marks step changes in level. He also leaves decisions open for the performer, such as passages of optional doublings at the third or the

octave in the melody line, while Bizot prescribes exactly how the performer should play his arrangement. Moreover, Lehmann clearly had an eye for marketing his works, as he made sure to add a novel element to this piece in the form of a rhythm part for coins—the 'pièces d'or' themselves—marked above the stave and labelled 'la monnaie' (see Figure 4.8 above), which would have served to differentiate his arrangement from Bizot's and others on the market.

What all of this shows us, then, is that we perhaps ought not to treat parlour music automatically as an homogeneous body: a comparison between Lehmann and Bizot reveals that there can be considerable differences in compositional input, ambition, and technical difficulty in performance. All of this is useful in the fact that it helps to remind us that, popular as this music may have been, and based as it was upon works that had already been composed, there is still room in our understanding of it for the role of the composer. They might not have played the role that we might expect from a 'serious' composer, in the terms being defined exactly at this time in the nineteenth century, but they were nonetheless present, making decisions about the intended audience or performer, the material to include, and how it should be presented, adapted or embellished.

On the whole, then, it seems that Lehmann's opera arrangements represent a greater degree of compositional ambition than his other works. This is perhaps reflected in the fact that a few of the arrangements bear dedications to other professional musicians, unlike any of his other works, suggesting that they might have musical rather than primarily social aims. Not only was the 'grande polka' on *L'Etoile du Nord* dedicated to 'son ami L. Moreau Gottschalk', for example, but his 'polka mazurka' on Grisar's *opéra-comique Les Amours du diable* was dedicated to Mme Pauline Colson, who had created the role of Urielle in Paris in 1853 and then went on to reprise that role for the New Orleans premiere in 1856, after which Lehmann seems to have written this arrangement.⁸⁷

A comparison between his three works based on *L'Etoile du Nord* and another polka based on the opera that was written by P. A. Frigerio, 'professor of piano and singing' and published by P. Werlein in New Orleans (also in 1855) shows us more of Lehmann's input as a composer in this respect.⁸⁸ Frigerio's polka is very straightforward, relying principally on two melodies from Meyerbeer's opera taken from large choruses in the first act: the

⁸⁷ Charles H. Parsons, *Opera Premieres: An Index of Casts A–J*, Volume 13 of the Mellen Opera Reference Index (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), 309.

⁸⁸ Frigerio is listed as 'professor of piano and singing' on the cover of this piece, which is held in the 'Music Collection of New Orleans Imprints', SCLSU, LLMVC M1 .M86 LARA, Box 6, Item 2a.

'Rondo bohémienne' from the finale to the act and the second half of the drinking song from the opening complex of scenes.⁸⁹ Both are treated very straightforwardly: Frigerio makes no effort to add to them with an introduction or coda, and the same passages are repeated throughout the four pages of his polka in almost uniform pairs of eight-bar passages.

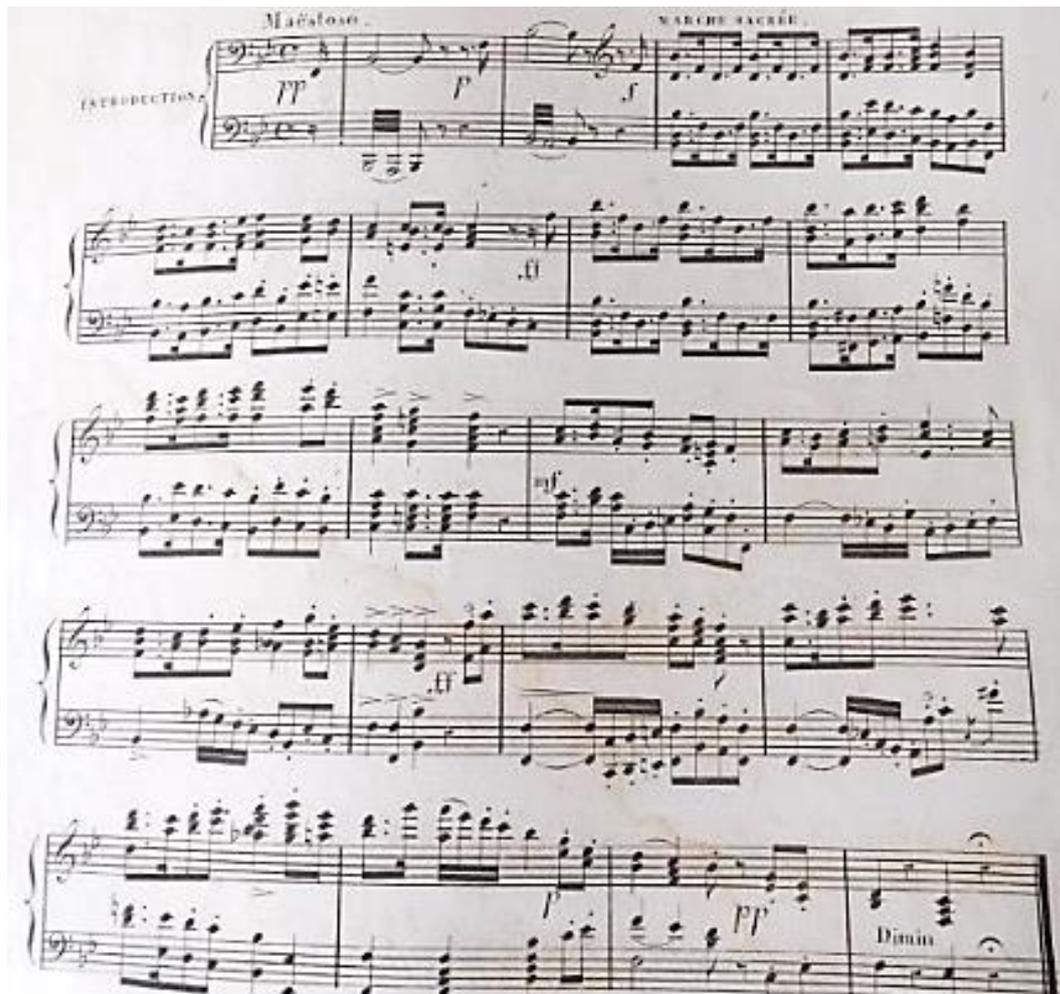


Figure 4.9 – Introduction to 'La Couronne impériale de L'Etoile du Nord, grande valse' by H. E. Lehmann. 'Music Collection of New Orleans Imprints', SCLSU, LLMVC M1 .M86 LARA, Box 5, Item 15

⁸⁹ Steven Huebner summarises the plot of the opera thus: 'Tsar Peter the Great (bass) has disguised himself as a carpenter who plays the flute; he has fallen in love with Catherine (soprano), sister of George (tenor), also a carpenter and flautist. George is recruited into the army but Catherine takes his place, telling Peter before she goes that he must distinguish himself in battle before she will consider marrying him. In the second act, set in a military camp, Peter (still disguised) appears as a captain in the same regiment as Catherine, [who is] now dressed as a man. He becomes drunk and does not recognize her when she is brought before him for a misdemeanour. She flees before his memory of her is revived. A conspiracy against the tsar brews among the troops. Peter boldly reveals his true identity to them at the end of Act 2, the dramatic highlight of the opera, and urges them to advance intrepidly against the enemy. In the last act Peter longs for Catherine. He learns that she has gone mad and in a successful bid to restore her reason arranges for the village from Act 1 to be reconstructed and earlier scenes to be re-enacted'. Steven Huebner, 'L'Etoile du Nord', *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online, Oxford University Press, (accessed 18 September 2017) <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/O002263>.

In contrast, Lehmann's 'La Couronne impériale de *L'Etoile du Nord*: grande valse' is a piece of greater complexity, in relative terms at least.⁹⁰ Instead of beginning with a customarily lively opening gesture and launching straight into the dance rhythms, Lehmann chooses to begin 'maestoso' with the pianissimo motif—a low sustained note over a rumbling bass—that begins Meyerbeer's opera. This then turns into the solemn 'marche sacrée' from the Act 2 finale, which continues for some eighteen bars, before Lehmann brings the introduction to a close with a fade to silence (Figure 4.9 above).

Following this, we have another introductory gesture—now 'Allegro', but still sustained and 'pesante'—with the music from the beginning of Act 2. The passage is marked 'introduction obligée' (Figure 4.10), in contrast to the previous section, which was marked simply 'introduction'. The implication is that the performer can start at the 'obligée' passage, thus cutting down the piece. It can function as an 'introduction pour danse' (like those in some of Lehmann's other arrangements), but it can also serve as a transition from the stately 4/4 of the longer introduction into the waltzes that form the main body of the piece, creating continuity between the sections. Indeed, unlike many of the 'introduction pour danse' passages, this passage does not set up the waltz accompaniment rhythm very clearly, instead allowing the repetition of dotted minims and their grace notes to imply the momentum of the waltz to come. In other words, the setting up of the waltz here is rather more subtle than in much parlour music.



Figure 4.10 – 'Introduction obligée' to 'La Couronne impériale de L'Etoile du Nord, grande valse' by H. E. Lehmann. 'Music Collection of New Orleans Imprints', SCLSU, LLMVC M1 .M86 LARA, Box 5, Item 15

Following this short introduction, Lehmann begins with the first waltz, which is a very literal rendering of Catherine's music from the end of Act 1, as she leaves the wedding party (it is in the same key and a similar tempo). Each of the first four waltzes (and Lehmann numbers them individually) focus on music from a single part of the opera: the second uses music from the extended finale of Act 3, in which Catherine has an episode of

⁹⁰ H. E. Lehmann, 'La Couronne impériale de L'Etoile du nord: grande valse', 'Music Collection of New Orleans Imprints', SCLSU, LLMVC M1 .M86 LARA, Box 5, Item 15.

madness, and the third uses the music of Danilowitz the *patissier* from Act 1, while the fourth uses the music that Péters (or Pierre le Grand) sings while he and Danilowitz are drinking in the army camp in Act 2. While all of these are waltzes and follow typical waltz accompaniment patterns, Lehmann creates variety in phrase structure that is completely absent from Frigerio's polka: he expands the second section of waltzes two (to twenty bars), and four (to twenty-four bars), for instance.

These self-contained 'character' waltzes are then followed by a coda that incorporates music from throughout the opera. This begins with reminiscences of the Finnish music, followed by a reprise of Catherine's music used in the first waltz, then the 'étoile du nord' music that is heard whenever someone mentions the dying words of Catherine's mother. Finally, we hear a passage taken from the Act 2 finale after Péters has revealed himself to be the Tsar. Unlike the shorter waltzes earlier in the piece which were clearly in the typical binary waltz form, this is a longer, more continuous structure, as one theme slips in after another. The relentless parallel octaves of the final twenty-three bars create a dramatic build, but they cause the waltz feel to fall away. The piece builds to a *fff* climax before the rumbling bass in the final three bars eventually fades away to silence. This piece, then, is more than simply dance music transcribed for the piano, but represents an attempt to create a more extended work in a widely appealing style. In comparison with much of the parlour music repertoire, Lehmann's is a creative and not entirely straightforward treatment of the material.

Lehmann and opera's roles in nineteenth-century New Orleans

Not only do Lehmann's opera arrangements show a degree of compositional ambition that goes beyond the level of other examples of parlour opera arrangements from the period, but it is evident that he also took care to retain explicit and close reference throughout his extended arrangements to the operas on which they were based. This adds another level of complexity to these works and can give us further insight into the ways in which opera could be understood and experienced in New Orleans in this period. To continue with the *L'Etoile du Nord* arrangements, it is again worth setting Lehmann's approach against Frigerio's: while Frigerio never identifies the melodies he uses, Lehmann makes a point of labelling each melody or even rhythmic figure he takes from Meyerbeer. Instead of labelling passages by act or by aria (or other reference from the text of the libretto), which he could quite easily have done, Lehmann sometimes labels them specifically in relation to

action happening on stage when the music was heard. Passages in the 'grande valse' are labelled 'the madness and sorrow of Catherine', 'the departure of Catherine', and 'the song of farewell', to give but a few examples. In other instances, the connection takes the form of a focus on a particular character and their music: Lehmann wrote a whole arrangement based around the music of Azucena in *Il trovatore*. Furthermore, there are sometimes explicit links back to the original orchestration on occasion, such as at the start of his 'grande schottische', 'Le Camp Russe de *L'Etoile du Nord*', where he labels a rhythmic figure 'drum' ('tambour') and a rising arpeggio figure 'cornets'.

While it would be something of an exaggeration to suggest that Lehmann actively engaged with the narratives of the operas or sought to cast the story in any explicitly new way in these arrangements (indeed, the positioning of the melodies within these works seems mainly to be as a result of musical convenience and composerly whim), Lehmann clearly sought to preserve a closer connection than many of his contemporaries between his works and the operas on which he based them. It certainly seems that Lehmann was concerned with both drama and novelty in his music more generally, as on 16 July 1855, the *Daily Picayune* carried a notice for a concert he was to conduct at the Washington Hotel Gardens on the shores of Lake Pontchartrain. As part of programme containing excerpts from operas by Rossini, Meyerbeer, Donizetti and Halévy, there was to be:

a striking novelty by Lehmann, which he calls the 'Grand Danse Infernale', and that is performed by the brass instruments, aided by such accessions to the orchestra as bells, pistols, rattles, whips, musketry, whistles, owls, gongs, chains and other noisy auxiliaries. This odd symphony is divided into three parts, the idea seeming to have been caught from the famous temptation scene in 'Robert le Diable'. The listener is to presume the garden a vast cemetery by night. Souls in pain (we quote Mr Lehmann's *affiche*) wander about sadly. Bell tolls 11. Evil spirits set the souls polking. Midnight. In the second scene spirits carry off the victims, and the vaults of perdition resound with their hideous orgies. In the third scene 'the Supreme Being at length takes pity on the erring souls; he abashes Satan and his powers, and precipitates them to the depths of their gloomy empire. The souls, effulgent with peace, return in quiet to their sleep in the tombs'. And all this done in music? Of

course! And why not? 'Be not ye faithless, but believing'. Imagination has been known to do wonders ere this, and will, we may safely predict, achieve a great many more.⁹¹

Lehmann, then, seems to have been invested in creating a sense of operatic drama in his more extended compositions, even if this 'symphony' as the *Daily Picayune* called it, probably consisted of the same dance forms as his arrangements and shorter compositions (not only did Lehmann call it a 'grand *danse infernale*', but the description of the souls' 'polking' suggests exactly the kind of dances the listener might encounter). Lehmann's concern to appeal both to his audience's love of balls and music for dancing as well as the dramatic impetus of the stage is an interesting phenomenon that should be considered in his opera arrangements. Indeed, it lets us see something of the way in which he was thinking of opera. On the one hand, these were entertaining melodies that could be excerpted for dancing and then played in the home as a memory of those social events, but on the other, opera appears to have been in their eyes very much a theatrical form. As we have seen in both Lehmann's opera arrangements and in his 'grand *danse infernale*' inspired by *Robert le diable*, he felt the need to preserve something of the drama that was taking place: these were not simply dance tunes where the opera was mentioned in the title but never explicitly referred to in the score (such as in Frigerio's polka on *L'Etoile du Nord*), but maintained a link (in the material form of the sheet music, at least) to the drama of the stage work.

These two ways of understanding opera—as a primarily social event—and as a theatrical work whose meaning was tied to the on-stage drama, were not necessarily competing: both, after all, seem to position opera as predominantly for entertainment, whether that be inside or outside the opera house. But, of course, this was a status in stark contrast with the image of operatic music in the home that we saw in Chapter 3, where the Creole family were held in enraptured, quasi-religious silence by the sounds of Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots*, which had been sent to them in a collection of piano music from Paris.⁹² If that status (and indeed, the status afforded to *Les Huguenots* in the New Orleans press) suggested that opera was to be valued for its aesthetic uplift, Lehmann's works showed an altogether different approach. In fact, his compositions could be thought of as bridging the

⁹¹ *Daily Picayune*, 16 July 1855.

⁹² See pages 122–3 in this thesis.

gap between opera as high art and opera as simple entertainment and, furthermore, of opera as theatre and opera as a primarily musical form.

This is particularly important if we consider that opera-going in America until after the middle of the century was still more of a democratic experience than in Europe: while the performance of foreign-language opera eventually drove prices up, causing opera to become the preserve of an elite, until into the second half of the century opera was still seen as an accessible art form, often performed in combination with other stage works and variety entertainments.⁹³ At the same time, as we saw in Chapter 3, ideas of opera as an aesthetic experience were emerging among certain sectors of society (both in Europe and in the United States), in contrast with its former image as entertainment, but for an aristocratic elite. Lehmann's works, then, can be seen as reflecting the beginnings of a process in which a division emerged between high and popular culture.⁹⁴

Moreover, we can see the ways in which Lehmann's operatic works reveal a further blurring between the public and private spheres. In his works, opera, a public genre, was reinterpreted through dance music (given the close physical proximity of the Théâtre d'Orléans and the Orleans ballroom, and Lehmann's links with both, it seems only natural that favourite parts of operas would be adapted for the balls alongside newly composed dance music) for the private (but no less performative) space of the middle-class parlour. Indeed, the idea of 'middleness' can help us to understand the position of these works. Lehmann's arrangements of operas are, of course, domestications of those operas, but they are also in a sense domestications of the virtuosic opera fantasia which rose to great prominence in the salons of nineteenth-century Europe.⁹⁵ Such works would most likely have been common currency in New Orleans: we know that Gottschalk, for example, included virtuosic opera fantasias in his tours in 1853 and 1855, as did Ole Bull, Henri Vieuxtemps, and Alexandre Artôt during their performances in the city in 1844.⁹⁶ The many

⁹³ See Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of a Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1988). Levine also argues that Shakespeare was seen as popular culture in the United States in the first half of the nineteenth century.

⁹⁴ This process gathered momentum after the middle of the century, as Joseph A. Mussulman has discussed in *Music in the Cultured Generation: A Social History of Music in America, 1870–1900* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1971). See also Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow*.

⁹⁵ Thomas Christensen has discussed the domestication of opera in, 'Public Music in Private Spaces: Piano Vocal Scores and the Domestication of Opera', in *Music and the Cultures of Print*, ed. Kate van Orden (New York and London: Garland Publishing Inc., 2000), 67–95.

⁹⁶ Starr, *Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, 140–3 and 206–8. John Baron mentions the performances of opera fantasias by Vieuxtemps, Bull, and Artôt in 'Vieuxtemps (and Ole Bull) in New Orleans', *American Music* 8 (1990): 210–26.

many other touring virtuosi who visited New Orleans in the period (such as Henri Herz and William Vincent Wallace) would surely have performed similar pieces.

Albums of sheet music from the period also reveal that at least some opera fantasias (particularly ones based on Bellini and Donizetti works) were imported from Europe and were available to buy in the city's music shops, providing ample challenges for New Orleans's more ambitious amateur pianists.⁹⁷ *Soirées-musicales*—evenings of musical entertainment held at home for a few invited guests—were extremely important in (Creole) musical culture in New Orleans during this period, as Leary-Warsaw has shown,⁹⁸ and it seems that such domestic gatherings (which would likely have been occasions for the performance of Lehmann's arrangements) may well have functioned as a kind of bourgeois salon: they provided a semi-public site (within the private location of the home) for musical and cultural performance. As such, Lehmann's opera arrangements can help us to see something of the role local composition played in creating intersecting public and private images for opera in New Orleans during this period.

Conclusion

As this chapter has shown, local creativity existed in many and varied forms, and opera remained at the heart of much of it. The 'local' did not have to be found in musical style or even subject matter, but could be evoked through the people for whom works were written and the situations in which they were intended to be performed. Furthermore, the local was not a stand-alone concept: as Lehmann's pieces illustrate, it was entirely possible for compositions to be both local and international at the same time, as part of an international culture of marketable music, and simultaneously reflective of local social and musical tastes and needs.

Overlooked as piano music within the parlour repertoire has typically been, I hope to have shown here some of the potential ways in which it can be investigated, both contextually and musically. Contextually, it can show us much about the ways and means through which opera passed from the stage into social and domestic life, and, of course, about how opera was valued. As such, this repertoire provides a valuable bridge between the public sphere in two different forms—the theatre and the social dance—and the private sphere of the home. In particular, Lehmann's approach to this repertoire allows us to see

⁹⁷ See, for example, *HJA*, Maxwell Sheet Music Collection, Volume 7: Rita Lamothe, which contains a number of fantasias and other works based on operas.

⁹⁸ Leary-Warsaw, 'Nineteenth-Century French Art Song of New Orleans', 73–80.

something of the complexities of this relationship in New Orleans. With some of his pieces designed in ways that allowed for both domestic or public use, these works hint at the way in which the categories were blurred in the social life of the city.

Unashamedly commercial though this repertoire was, it was not devoid of compositional vision or intent. Lehmann's opera-based pieces were not only greater in scope and ambition than other parts of his oeuvre, but also compared with similar opera-based pieces that were published or on sale in New Orleans in the 1850s. In these works, he showed himself to be a dedicated craftsman, transforming favourite operas into saleable products for amateur performance at a variety of different levels. The parlour repertoire, then, can be a good means through which to challenge our own expectations of the role of the composer, as both originality and virtuosity were necessarily limited in favour of widespread appeal. Nonetheless, the ways in which composers sought to cultivate that appeal musically and more broadly can grant us an insight into a culture of composition in which the local and international became inextricably entwined, as composers wrote for an audience that crossed boundaries: national, linguistic, generic, and between high and popular art.

Given opera's prominence in nineteenth-century New Orleans, and Lehmann's role within the Théâtre d'Orléans, it is no surprise that he should have used operas as the basis for his most extended works: opera's personal significance for him as well as for the local community clearly formed a large part of the impetus for these more ambitious works. But the question of what opera becomes in these works (and indeed how opera was understood in New Orleans) is an important one. If opera was thought of as a primarily theatrical form rather than a musical one for many decades of the nineteenth century in Europe (in the London press, for example, it was almost always reviewed in the theatrical columns rather than the musical ones), to take operatic music from the stage was fundamentally to alter what it meant. Nonetheless, the traces of Lehmann's attempts to preserve something of the drama of the opera in his pieces allow us an insight into the more complex position that opera occupied in this period. They form an avenue of study for Lehmann's works, offering us one of a number of ways into a repertoire that stubbornly refuses to yield results under the techniques of traditional 'musical analysis'.

The question of local composition in New Orleans, then, is much less straightforward than it might initially seem. While there was not space in this chapter to go into issues of composition in the United States more broadly and the particular issues faced in trying to establish a North American school of composition, it is clear that even in

discussing such national endeavours we ought to keep in mind the ways in which they connect with the local and the international. Many francophone composers in New Orleans did of course write patriotic pieces for either the United States (during the war with Mexico in the 1840s) or the Confederacy (later, during the Civil War), and these pieces, as Leary-Warsaw has suggested, show that these composers had national sympathies that went beyond any kind of francophone separatism in the city.⁹⁹ Nonetheless, it is more productive to move beyond classifications that position works as either local or national, French or American, national or international and, by extension, high or low art. In an ever-more connected world, composers in New Orleans in the first half of the nineteenth century increasingly sought to participate in an international music market in which innovation and aesthetic ambition had to be moderated against commercial demands, even as discourses of 'national' and nationalist music gained prominence.

In such a climate, the Théâtre d'Orléans remained a steady presence. It might not have provided institutional support to composers in any codified or official sense, but the theatre was the reason for many of the 'local' composers' coming to Louisiana in the first place, and later played a role in enabling them to have their works performed. In the case of Lehmann and his musical activities, the Théâtre d'Orléans and its premieres seem regularly to have been the impetus for his compositions. Instead of imported French opera becoming a hindrance to local composition, then, the Théâtre d'Orléans served as the locus for an expanded kind of 'local' creativity within a growing international music market.

⁹⁹ Leary-Warsaw, 'Nineteenth-Century French Art Song of New Orleans', 271–83.

 CHAPTER 5

Reimagining New Orleans: Operatic Travelogues

‘Let us go to the theatre!’ said the doctor ... From the cemetery to the theatre! And of a Sabbath evening, too! Both the time and the contrast are equally characteristic of the city I describe. So true it is, that the manners and opinions of a people are best studied in the most common and every-day acts of life.¹

So wrote Edward H. Durell, a New Englander who visited New Orleans in the 1830s, recalling his trip in a memoir published in 1845. He, like many travellers in the city in the first half of the nineteenth century, found himself at the Théâtre d’Orléans: the theatre was, naturally, a tempting prospect for visitors seeking an evening of high-quality entertainment. While Chapters 3 and 4 of this dissertation examined what opera meant for the people of New Orleans as part of an international world, I now want to explore what opera might have represented about the city for visitors and how they in turn used the city’s operatic tradition to express their travel experiences.

Like Durell, a number of travellers left a record of their experiences in the city, either in the form of personal diaries or published memoirs, and it is this latter category that will form the focus of this chapter. Everyone from the Duke of Saxe-Weimar Eisenach, who visited in 1825, to Eliza Potter, a black hairdresser from New York working in New Orleans during the early 1850s, seems to have committed to paper their opinions both about the city at large and also the Théâtre d’Orléans.² What to make of their accounts of the theatre, however, is not immediately clear. Most are brief, offering little more than a description of the building and auditorium, the title of the work performed, and a short summary of the author’s reaction to the experience. In this chapter, however, I want to focus on three rather more extended recollections of the theatre and its performances:

¹ Didimus [pseudonym of Edward Henry Durell], *New Orleans as I Found It* (New York, 1845), 51–2.

² Bernhard, Duke of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach, *Travels Through America in the Years 1825–6* (Philadelphia, 1828). Eliza Potter, *A Hairdresser’s Experience in High Life* (Cincinnati, 1859). Biographical information on Eliza Potter can be found in Quincy T. Mills, *Cutting Along the Color Line: Black Barbers and Barber Shops in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 57–8. While Potter wrote of the ‘enchanted music’ she heard at the theatre in the 1850s (292), the Duke seems to have been less pleased by the performance of spoken drama he attended in 1825, proclaiming that the ‘dramatic corps was merely tolerable, such as those of the small French provincial towns’ (57).

Durell's memoir (*New Orleans as I Found It*) and two works—*Le Lac Cathahoula* and *L'Amour d'un nègre*—by a Frenchman, Charles Jobey, which were published in Paris in the early 1860s.

Charles Jobey came to New Orleans in 1834. Born in Rouen in 1812 or 1813, he seems to have lived most of his life in France, save for the period of six years he spent in Louisiana, as principal bassoonist in the orchestra of the Théâtre d'Orléans from 1834 to 1840. Once back in France, he turned to writing, publishing novels, short stories, and non-fiction works on the subject of hunting and fishing, as well as contributing to Parisian periodicals, such as *Le Monde illustré*.³ Published in Paris two decades after his transatlantic trip, *Le Lac Cathahoula* (which was published in 1861 as part of a collection of short stories entitled *L'Amour d'une blanche*) and *L'Amour d'un nègre*, like so many of Jobey's writings, were inspired by his time in New Orleans.

Edward Henry Durell, meanwhile, was born in 1810 in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, and he went on to read Law at Harvard, becoming fluent in German, French and Spanish. The visit to New Orleans in 1835–6 recorded in *New Orleans as I Found It* was his first: at the time, he was working at a legal practice in Pittsburgh, Missouri, having moved from the north only a few months previously, but he soon decided to move permanently to Louisiana.⁴ While the visit of which he wrote lasted only three days, by the time he published *New Orleans As I Found It* in New York in 1845, Durell had been living in New Orleans for several years.

These texts were part of the boom in travel writing that took place in the mid-nineteenth century: the advent of mass-market literature made the publication of travel accounts commercially viable,⁵ and a burgeoning tourism industry increased their appeal, for eager 'armchair tourists' as much as for those with the financial means to travel in real life.⁶ In recent years, travel literature in general has received a good deal of scholarly

³ Jobey's time at the theatre does not seem to have been particularly happy, however, as is evidenced by the fact that his signature appears on the letter of complaint against the theatre management discussed in Chapter 2, as well as by the damning description he published of John Davis that was explored in Chapter 1. For a biography of Jobey, see N. N. Oursel, 'Jobey (Charles)', *Nouvelle biographie normande* (Paris, 1886), 496.

⁴ Having practised law in the city for a number of years, Durell went on to hold the position of mayor for a period in 1863, and he served as district judge from 1864–74. 'Biographical Directory of Federal Judges: Durell, Edward Henry', History of Federal Judiciary, Federal Judicial Center, n. d., (accessed 5 February 2017) <https://www.fjc.gov/history/judges/durell-edward-henry>. For more information on Durell and his career, see Charles Lane, 'Edward Henry Durell: A Study in Reputation', *The Green Bag* 13/2 (2010): 153–68.

⁵ Carl Thompson gives an overview of the history of travel writing with a particular weighting towards writing from the early modern period onwards in his *Travel Writing* (London and New York: Routledge 2010).

⁶ For more on the growth of travel writing, see Tim Youngs, 'Introduction: Filling the Blank Spaces', in *Travel Writing in the Nineteenth Century: Filling the Blank Spaces* (London, New York, Delhi: Anthem

attention;⁷ it has been examined from a range of critical perspectives, foregrounding such issues as gender, ethnicity and imperialism. Indeed, investigations into the role of hegemonic relations in travel literature have driven much of this scholarship. Sara Mills, for example, has discussed gendered restrictions on discursive practices in women's travel writing in the nineteenth century,⁸ while Robert Clarke has written about the way in which Aboriginal people have been construed in travel writing about Australia up to the present day.⁹ These are, of course, but two examples of many. By far the most commonly discussed subject in the study of nineteenth-century travel writing, however, overlapping with many of the other angles for exploration, has, unsurprisingly, been imperialism: Mary Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes* was the seminal work exploring how European subjects constructed 'the rest of the world' through their travel writing.¹⁰ Many others since have explored the subject, such as Barbara Korte, who has argued that the promotion of the values of empire was central to the mission of European travel writing.¹¹ Whatever the perspective we choose to adopt (and, indeed, an account's author adopted), travel writing is necessarily and unavoidably an articulation of processes of cultural encounter: both the process of writing about travel and the resultant accounts can be seen, as James Duncan and Derek Gregory have argued, as the 'translation of one place into the cultural idiom of another'.¹²

As yet, however, there has been little work on travel writing about music and musicians. Nor has there been much attention to travel accounts in which opera or other

Press, 2006), 1–18. The nature of travel itself was of course fundamentally altered during first half of the nineteenth century, with the advent of steam transport. The growth of the railways meant that opportunities for travel became more widely available (and economically viable) for more of the population on both sides of the Atlantic, while the introduction of steamships reduced the time it took to cross the ocean. Entrepreneurs such as Thomas Cook in England capitalised on this, introducing affordable tours from the 1840s. For more on the emergence of tourism, see Lynne Withey, *Grand Tours and Cook's Tours: A History of Leisure Travel, 1750–1914* (London: Aurum Press, 1997).

⁷ It is only in recent years, however, that scholarly attention has turned to travel and travel writing, as Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs have pointed out. Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs, 'Introduction', *Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, ed. Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1.

⁸ Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993).

⁹ Robert Clarke, *Travel Writing from Black Australia: Utopia, Melancholia, and Aboriginality* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016).

¹⁰ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, Second Edition (London: Routledge, 2008).

¹¹ Barbara Korte, *English Travel Writing From Pilgrimages To Postcolonial Explorations* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000).

¹² James Duncan and Derek Gregory, 'Introduction', *Writes of Passage: Reading Travel Writing*, ed. James Duncan and Derek Gregory (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 5. As Tim Youngs rightly points out, 'Travel writing is not a literal and objective record of journeys undertaken. It carries preconceptions that, even if challenged, provide a reference point. It is influenced, if not determined, by its authors' gender, class, age, nationality, cultural background and education. It is ideological.' Youngs, 'Introduction: Filling the Blank Spaces', 2–3.

theatrical activities play an important role, or to how writing about these subjects might relate to travel writing's more long-standing preoccupations, despite there being a large and relevant body of literature to study.¹³ Many accounts were written by musicians themselves: often these were virtuoso performers, who had undertaken lengthy concert tours abroad. The Parisian pianist Henri Herz, for example, published an account of his travels in America,¹⁴ while the composer and pianist Louis Moreau Gottschalk regularly published his travel notes in *La France musicale* and other European papers.¹⁵ Less obvious, but no less important, are writers for whom music and its performances played a vital role in the experience of travel, even if they were not professional musicians themselves. Indeed, for some, attendance at a performance of opera, or even the very idea of opera, fundamentally shaped their perception of the place in which they found themselves. This, as we shall see, was the case for both of the authors I will consider in this chapter, albeit in different ways.

The accounts that Jobey and Durell left of their time in New Orleans are unusual compared with most travel writing about the city for containing extended passages on operatic performance. Nonetheless, their extraordinary perspectives invite further exploration into what exactly the function of opera is within the texts: to what ends did the authors invoke operatic performance, and how do these works contribute to our understanding of the ways in which visitors perceived and portrayed New Orleans in the nineteenth century? Furthermore, in this chapter I will ask whether foregrounding opera can expand our understanding of nineteenth-century travel writing beyond what has already been achieved through imperialism and other frequently adopted lenses. I argue that these texts can help us rethink the ways in which opera and operatic performance outside of Europe were perceived in developing North American cultural centres as well as established European ones, thus affording new perspectives on the significance of operatic mobility in this period. The readings I propose here are, of course, in no way exhaustive, but I hope that they afford new avenues for further study.

¹³ Although ethnomusicologists such as Martin Stokes have recently discussed the concept of musical tourism, travel literature has not typically formed a large part of their considerations, which have also had an overwhelmingly twentieth- and twenty-first-century focus. See, for instance, Martin Stokes, 'Music, Travel and Tourism: An Afterword', *The World of Music* 41/3 (1999): 141–55. See also the other essays in this special, travel-orientated issue of *The World of Music*.

¹⁴ Henri Herz, *Mes voyages en Amérique* [Paris, 1866], trans. Henry Bertram Hill as *My Travels in America* (Madison, WI: State Historical Society of Wisconsin for the Dept. of History, University of Wisconsin, 1963).

¹⁵ Jeanne Behrend gathered many of these together and published them as Louis Moreau Gottschalk, *Notes of A Pianist*, ed. Jeanne Behrend (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1964).

Travel literature's potential: Jobey, Durell, and spaces 'in-between'

Before we explore the specific role of opera in these texts, it is worth taking a moment to contextualise Jobey and Durell's accounts within travel writing about New Orleans, and nineteenth-century travel writing more broadly. Although the two authors came from different sides of the Atlantic (and they wrote in different languages), their texts are in many ways complementary. Both authors had an enduring association with New Orleans; neither was a casual visitor—a 'tourist' in the pejorative sense the word came to acquire—but rather they were men who resided in the city for extended periods of time and who worked there (indeed, Durell was still living there when he published his book).¹⁶ As such, they gained very different perspectives on life in the city from those of people who were simply passing through, and they played a role in shaping the society they went on to describe.

Neither account is typical of travel writing about New Orleans: even temporarily leaving aside their lengthy sections on opera, they are more complex on a literary level than most other accounts from the early and mid-nineteenth century. The above-mentioned Duke of Saxe-Weimar Eisenach's account of his time in the city (published in Philadelphia in 1828), for example, makes a productive point of comparison here. It takes the form of an expanded diary in continuous prose, in which he records in a systematic fashion the details of everything from his arrival in the city to the activities he undertook there, the people who invited him to those activities, and his responses to his experiences, including along the way some more general reflections upon local manners and customs. This was by far the most common style for travel accounts about the city across the first half of the nineteenth century: not only was it straightforward for a reader to tackle, but it would have taken relatively little effort for the author to transform his or her personal notes (most likely recorded in a diary) into a manuscript for publication. Many of these accounts tended to involve the same activities in New Orleans (the top 'must-see' sights and 'must-do' activities for visitors to the city), and these common sets of activities can be seen as leading to a degree of 'scripting' of the experience of visiting New Orleans.¹⁷ While these accounts

¹⁶ Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan explore the distinction between the tourist who seeks 'instant entertainment' and the traveller, who is apparently 'nonexploitative' and travels on account of their 'insatiable curiosity about other countries and peoples' in *Tourists with Typewriters: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Travel Writing* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1998), 2.

¹⁷ The idea of 'scripting' is explored by Derek Gregory in 'Scripting Egypt: Orientalism and the cultures of travel', *Writes of Passage: Reading Travel Writing*, ed. James Duncan and Derek Gregory (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 114–50. For more on the places and activities sought out by visitors to New Orleans,

record an author's personal experiences of the city, there is also a sense that shared patterns of activities and discursive practices allowed these accounts to serve as 'guidebooks' of a sort for future travellers.¹⁸

Jobey's *Le Lac Cathahoula* and *L'Amour d'un nègre*, however, are very different in their approach. Indeed, both of his texts that I consider here are overtly works of fiction, described by their author as '*romans*'.¹⁹ As such, they might appear at first to be closer to the realms of exotic fiction—which grew dramatically in popularity in the nineteenth century through works such as Hugo's *Bug-Jargal* (1826) and, later, Flaubert's *Salammbô* (1862)—rather than travel writing per se.²⁰ Nonetheless, from the very start there appears to be a tension between the stories' identity as novels and Jobey's professed desire to represent real life within them. In the preface to *L'Amour d'un nègre* (1860), Jobey makes the following claim:

This book contains true descriptions of the country in which I lived for six years of my life. The background and details of the novel you are about to read are of the greatest exactitude; the names of many people who figure are real; if I have changed something, it is because I thought it necessary to protect certain sensibilities or to avoid pricking certain egos ... But, apart from the prudence to which an honest man is bound, I have written what I have seen and heard; that is my sole merit.²¹

see Florence Roos Brink, 'Literary Travellers in Louisiana Between 1803 and 1860', *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 31/2 (1949): 399.

¹⁸ Scholarship on travel writing has traced an emerging distinction in the nineteenth century between guidebooks and travelogues. The guidebook 'implies repeatability, laying down an itinerary others can follow', to borrow David Seed's words, while the travelogue typically presents itself as a perspective unique to the author. In practice, however, the distinction between them is by no means always clear cut. David Seed, 'Nineteenth-Century Travel Writing: An Introduction', *The Yearbook of English Studies* 34 (2004): 1–5. Florence Roos Brink has pointed out that many visitors who wrote about New Orleans in the first half of the nineteenth century were highly familiar with their predecessors' accounts, and modelled their own after them. See Brink, 'Literary Travellers in Louisiana', 398–9.

¹⁹ Jobey, *L'Amour d'un nègre* (Paris, 1860), 3.

²⁰ Jennifer Yee discusses both of these novels in *Exotic Subversions in Nineteenth-Century French Fiction* (London: Legenda, 2008).

²¹ 'Ce livre contient des descriptions vraies du pays que j'ai habité pendant six ans de ma vie. Le fond et les détails du roman qu'on va lire sont aussi de la plus grande exactitude; les noms de beaucoup de personnages qui y figurent sont véritables; si j'en ai changé quelques-uns, c'est que je me suis vu dans la nécessité de respecter certaines susceptibilités, d'éviter de froisser certains amours-propres, ou de faire saigner des cœurs dont les blessures ne sont probablement pas encore cicatrisées à cette heure. Mais, en dehors des ménagements auxquels doit s'astreindre un honnête homme, j'écris ce que j'ai vu et entendu: voilà mon seul mérite.' Jobey, *L'Amour d'un nègre*, 3.

In the preface to *L'Amour d'une blanche* (the volume of short stories of which *Le Lac Cathahoula* was a part) the following year, Jobey revealed more of the reasons for his claims to factual detail:

We have always thought that it was indispensable to have travelled in order to talk of distant lands, to write on the habits and customs of the people who inhabit them. We were wrong, we now recognise, as we see every day people who have never gone beyond the boundaries of Paris writing very amusing stories of which the scenes take place four-thousand leagues from here.

This incontestable progress, owing to the initiative of our contemporaries, has encouraged us and led to us making this natural reflection: 'Since armchair travellers have acquired a reputation, we say to ourselves, let those of us who have travelled and lived for a long time in America try to recount something about it'. From that point of departure, dear reader, we have written some American Tales; the welcome that you give them will let us know whether we should be silent from now on or indeed take up the pen again to tell you other stories.²²

Jobey's claims to real-life detail, then, seem to be part of his sales tactic: his books could convey precise details of a faraway place but still immerse the reader in a good story. As such, Jobey positioned his works on the cusp between documentary writing and exotic fiction. This stance was not, of course, unique to Jobey, as fictional travel accounts had long since existed, while exotic fiction (such as Chateaubriand's *Atala* (1801), *René* (1802), and *Les Natchez* (1826)) had previously claimed true-to-life details.²³ Thematically the

²² 'Nous avons toujours pensé qu'il était indispensable d'avoir voyagé pour parler des pays lointains, pour écrire sur les mœurs et les usages des peuples qui les habitent. Nous nous étions trompé, nous le reconnaissons, car nous voyons tous les jours des gens n'ayant jamais franchi le mur d'enceinte de Paris écrire des histoires très amusantes, dont les scènes se passent à quatre mille lieues de là. Ce progrès incontestable, dû à l'initiative de nos contemporains, nous a encouragé et amené à faire cette réflexion bien naturelle: « Puisque des voyageurs en chambre, nous sommes-nous dit, se sont acquis une réputation, essayons, nous qui avons voyagé et habité longtemps l'Amérique, d'en raconter quelque chose. » Partant de là, cher lecteur, nous avons écrit les Contes américains; l'accueil que vous leur ferez nous apprendra si nous devons nous taire dorénavant, ou bien reprendre la plume pour vous raconter d'autres histoires.' Jobey, *L'Amour d'une blanche* (Paris, 1861), iii–iv.

²³ While Chateaubriand's novels were supposedly based on his experiences in the United States in the 1790s (which he later detailed in *Voyage en Amérique* (1821)), scholars have long questioned not only the veracity of some of his descriptions, but also whether he even travelled to all the places he claimed to have done. See,

overlap between exotic fiction and travel memoirs was considerable: travel, geographical distance and cultural encounter were essential themes of both. Nonetheless, Jobey's explicit figuring of the position of these stories grants them a distinctive, liminal position: not quite a true story, yet only partly fictional: not quite a travelogue, but more than simply exotic fiction.²⁴

Durell's *New Orleans As I Found It* can be seen to occupy a similarly intermediate position. The book, for example, provides relatively little by way of detailed factual description, avoiding for the most part the 'must-see' sights that appeared in many New Orleans travel accounts (the Théâtre d'Orléans is an exception to this, but, as we shall see, the way in which Durell treats the visit is unique). Instead, he seeks to capture the essence of New Orleans through lengthy stories told by people he encounters in the city. It appears that Durell took great artistic licence with these stories, and many of them may well have been entirely fictional. As with Jobey's stories, then, the interplay of the real-life and the fictional is central to Durell's literary strategy. Furthermore, in some of these apparent digressions, the speakers recount memories of their past (from places other than New Orleans) at such great length that the titular city seems to disappear into the background altogether: this is a travel account in which the geographical subject is not always the principal focus.²⁵

Scholars have frequently noted that travel writing operates in liminal spaces, spaces of transculturation,²⁶ or spaces 'in-between' to borrow Homi Bhabha's term.²⁷ A kind of liminality is an inescapable part of cultural encounter, produced in the ambiguity and uncertainty of the moments in which different cultures meet. The liminality inherent in the

for example, Raymond Lebègue, 'Le Problème du voyage de Chateaubriand en Amérique', *Journal des Savants* 1/1 (1965): 456–65.

²⁴ Jan Borm has argued against seeing travel writing as a genre in itself, instead suggesting that it is a 'collective term for a variety of texts both predominantly fictional and non-fictional whose main theme is travel' (13). Nonetheless, she concedes that 'travel memoir', 'travel story', and 'travelogue' are all valid terms when talking about particular kinds of travel accounts. Jan Borm, 'Defining Travel: On the Travel Book, Travel Writing and Terminology', in *Perspectives on Travel Writing*, ed. Glenn Hooper and Tim Youngs (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 13–26.

²⁵ Indeed, this seems to have been one of the points of criticism levelled against the book from some quarters. In one of the few existing traces of the reception of Durell's text, the author of a review in *The United States Review and Democratic Magazine* complained as follows: 'It is not easy to discover what he has aimed at in his book; if he meant to verify his title by giving an account of New Orleans as he found it, he has failed woefully: nobody will believe that he found any such New Orleans. And if he only aimed at making a framework for his stories, he has made a still greater failure.' *The United States Review and Democratic Magazine*, Volume 16 (New York, 1845), 432.

²⁶ The term 'transculturation', meaning the merging and converging of cultures, was coined by Fernando Ortiz in his *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, trans. Harriet de Onís (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1947), but it has since been taken up by many other scholars, such as Pratt in *Imperial Eyes*.

²⁷ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

subject matter of Jobey and Durell's texts, moreover, is further reflected on a literary level. While Tim Youngs has claimed that travel writing at large is essentially 'hybrid' and that 'to try to identify boundaries between various forms would be impossible', it is the permeability of stylistic boundaries that gives these texts their impact.²⁸ Indeed, the slippage between the factual and the fictional, the location focussed and the character focussed, the real and the literary, becomes crucial to understanding opera's role as more than a piquant background detail.

Furthermore, such 'in-betweenness' is, I suggest, particularly productive when it comes to projecting an image of the city of New Orleans. Indeed, the city would likely have occupied a similarly liminal image in the minds of readers on both sides of the Atlantic in the nineteenth century. New Orleans was an unusual city in the nineteenth century in that, in a period in which global imperial expansion was rapidly gaining momentum, it was a *former* colony. By the mid-1830s, when Jobey and Durell visited the city, it had been over seventy years since New Orleans had been actively governed by France (as the period of cessation to Spain lasted forty years), and Louisiana had been a state since 1812. Different in customs from both mainland France and the northern states of America, but with ties to both, New Orleans must have seemed to nineteenth-century visitors to occupy a space 'in between' the two. As a port town—and it was the United States' most southerly port at the time Jobey and Durell visited—it was a threshold, crossed by thousands of immigrants arriving in the country. While Jobey and Durell's texts, then, are unusual within travel writing about New Orleans, the liminality that pervades them shows them to be highly revealing examples of the ways in which an image of New Orleans was constructed and reconstructed for readerships on both sides of the Atlantic. And it is in this context—of the 'in between'—that I suggest we can begin to understand opera's significance within these works.

Operatic encounters in the wilderness

Jobey's *Le Lac Cathahoula* (1861) opens with a mysterious nocturnal gathering: it is an August night in the late 1830s, and a group of travellers waits on the main square of the small town of St Martinville, just over 100 miles to the northwest of New Orleans. They

²⁸ Tim Youngs, *Travellers in Africa: British Travelogues 1815–1900* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1994), 8. This process of slippage between styles and registers is a far more prominent and defining feature of Jobey and Durell's travel writing than it is of any of the other accounts about New Orleans that I have found.

are about to embark on a trip to Catahoula Lake,²⁹ some eleven miles away through thick forest, for a few days of hunting, fishing, and exploring the wilderness. The story follows their progress, documenting encounters with bears, wild bulls and alligators in the densely wooded landscape. Their safe passage through this unfamiliar terrain is ensured by their knowledgeable guide (a freed slave named Jean-Louis), his servant (an old French sailor named Lucien), a local landowner, and his slave, Harris, all of whom accompany them. But these travellers are neither intrepid explorers nor run-of-the-mill tourists: they are instead performers from the Théâtre d'Orléans, who have ventured into the depths of rural Louisiana on a summer tour.

The tale has a first-person narrator, whom we might assume to be Jobey himself: certainly, the characters in the story—Paul Cœuriot, Félix Miolan, Joseph Vallière, Mm. Welsh, Bailly, Heymann, Dunaud and Mmes Dunaud and Person—were real people, contracted to the theatre at the same time as Jobey, and the narrator lists ‘yours truly’ (‘votre serviteur’) among the characters.³⁰ The action of this story almost certainly had a basis in reality, as, alongside the theatre’s ambitious northern tours in the summers of 1828–32, 1843 and 1845, in many other years the performers would arrange smaller, informal tours of the towns of rural Louisiana, in an effort to make a little extra money during the closure of the theatre back in New Orleans.

Opera makes its appearance in *Le Lac Cathahoula* during a series of unexpected musical performances at the story’s conclusion. The performers and their companions are finishing a meal at the lakeside, when Harris, the slave, begins to improvise a song in Louisiana Creole. In the course of some eighteen verses, he develops a story of a ball for slaves in New Orleans which is curtailed by their white masters: a narrative that is mirrored when Harris’s master cuts off the performers’ applause, warning them against encouraging slaves too much. Seeing the praise afforded to the slave, the aging French sailor, Lucien, offers to sing, and horrifies his audience with a bawdy, chauvinist sailors’ song. When they have recovered from this assault on their ears, silence falls among the company, and Jobey describes the plentiful, unfamiliar sounds of the natural world around them. Eventually, one of the company dares to ‘mix his voice with this grand symphony of nature’, and

²⁹ ‘Catahoula’ is the modern spelling; the story consistently uses ‘Cathahoula’.

³⁰ While *Le Lac Cathahoula* and Durell’s *New Orleans as I Found It* both have the first-person narrator more common to the personal travelogue style, *L’Amour d’un nègre* has a more novelistic third-person narrator.

Vallièrre, the theatre's oboist, serenades them with the 'air du sommeil' from Auber's *La Muette de Portici*.³¹

Finally, as the sun sinks behind the tree tops, the troupe comes together to sing the prayer from the third act of the same opera:

And the vaults of the virgin forest resounded, for the first and likely for the last time, with this beautiful prayer from *La Muette*, of which the singing, so simple, so broad, begins with a pianissimo, resembling a breath of a breeze, and finishes with an energetic fermata, the echo of which returned to us like distant thunder.³²

As the sounds die away, the singers turn to see Harris, Lucien, and Jean-Louis on their knees in the sand at the lake's edge, moved to prayer by the performance. The episode takes on a special poignancy, as it turns out to have been an unwitting swansong for some of them: in a brief final paragraph, we learn that the following day the group set off back to St Martinville, where three of them, Vallièrre included, died from yellow fever.

This extended scene by the lakeside, then, takes the form of a series of sonic encounters in the wilderness, not only between different groups of people, but between man, music, and nature. It seems at first that opera's role is quite a familiar one: a colonising force in a non-European environment. Indeed, opera was frequently implicated within processes of colonisation, and the building of an opera house in a colonised locale was a means of displaying imperial might.³³ In the case of *Le Lac Cathahoula*, however, it is the *performance* of opera that plays the colonising role. Indeed, Harris's song and the sounds of the natural world initially appear to lead up to the climactic performances of opera, and opera itself is presented as an art that, if not directly civilising, has far more emotional power than any of the other sounds heard. Its impact on the story's three non-operatic

³¹ 'Un seul d'entre nous osa d'abord mêler sa voix à cette grande symphonie de la nature.' Jobey, *Le Lac Cathahoula*, 269.

³² 'Et les voûtes de la forêt vierge retentirent, pour la première et sans doute pour la dernière fois, de cette belle prière de la *Muette*, dont le chant si simple, si large, commence par un pianissimo, ressemblant au souffle de la brise, et se terminant par un énergique point d'orgue, que l'écho nous renvoya comme un tonnerre lointain.' Jobey, *Le Lac Cathahoula*, 272.

³³ See, for example, Rogério Budasz, 'Music, Authority, and Civilisation in Rio de Janeiro, 1763–1790', in *Music and Urban Society in Colonial Latin America*, ed. Geoffrey Baker and Tess Knighton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 162–4. For another instance of an exploration of opera's relationship with empire, see Esmeralda Monique Antonia Rocha, 'Imperial Opera: The Nexus Between Opera and Imperialism in Victorian Calcutta and Melbourne, 1833–1901' (PhD diss., University of Western Australia, 2012).

‘Others’ (the freed slave, the slave, and the lower class white man who fall to their knees during the performance), is, needless to say in this context, especially profound.³⁴

As Roy Bridges, among many other authors, has suggested, ‘travel writing became increasingly identified with the interests and preoccupations of those in European societies who wished to bring the non-European world into a position where it could be influenced, exploited or, in some cases, directly controlled’.³⁵ At first, it seems as if Jobey, a European performer, is using opera to assert similar ideas. Certainly, there are further hints of other kinds of musical colonial encounter inscribed in the story by way of the European performers’ responses to Harris and Lucien’s respective offerings. Harris’s performance and his fluency in improvising—he sings ‘without pause or hesitation’—impress the gathered European performers deeply. They praise the slave’s quick poetic mind, while the spontaneity of his song’s conception positions it not so much akin to art song (or, indeed, opera) as part of an unfamiliar folk tradition. Lucien and his song, on the other hand, simply disturb the assembled troupe; his ribaldry and position as a lower-class Frenchman in servitude to a freed slave make him of little interest to the gathered Europeans.

It appears then, that Harris, the singing slave who improvises so naturally, takes on the role of ‘bon nègre’: a kind of black, enslaved counterpart to the familiar figuring of the native American ‘noble savage’ in this forest backdrop.³⁶ In spite of Jobey’s essentialist comments throughout the story about Harris ‘and others of his race’, he was clearly acutely uncomfortable that slavery remained an institution in the United States well after its abolition in Europe;³⁷ he idealises Harris’s effortless talent as a way of drawing a stark contrast with his curtailed personal freedom.³⁸ His skill as a quasi-troubadour figure (the

³⁴ On musical encounters with the non-European Other, see Ruth E. Rosenberg, *Music, Travel, and Imperial Encounter in 19th-Century France: Musical Apprehensions* (New York: Routledge, 2015). Vanessa Agnew also explores musical encounters with other cultures (and the limits of music’s potential within those encounters) in the eighteenth century in her *Enlightenment Orpheus: The Power of Music in Other Worlds* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

³⁵ Roy Bridges, ‘Exploration and travel outside Europe (1720–1914)’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, ed. Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 53.

³⁶ Jennifer Yee uses the term ‘bon nègre’ to signify the figure of the cultivated black (often enslaved) male, in her discussions of Victor Hugo’s *Bug-Jargal* (1826); see *Exotic Subversions*, 46. When it comes to the United States, however, the colonial question is less clear cut in this respect: after all, although New Orleans had been a colony, the mass killing of the native Americans whose land was colonised meant that there was less of a sense of a colonised indigenous people in the manner of a colonial project such as that in Brazil. Instead, it seems that the slave here comes to stand in for the absent indigenous people.

³⁷ For more on Europeans travellers’ views of slavery in the United States, see Chapter 8, ‘The issue of Slavery’ in Thomas K. Murphy, *A Land without Castles: The Changing Image of America in Europe, 1780–1830* (New York: Lexington Books, 2001), 185–214.

³⁸ Slavery was finally abolished in the French colonies in 1848, but persisted in America until the end of the Civil War. For more on French literary works supporting abolition, see Tanya Lee Margaret Campbell, ‘Representations of Slavery in French Writing: from Revolution to Abolition’ (PhD diss., Queen’s University

performance reminds Jobey of the French verse improviser Eugène de Pradel)³⁹ shows an impressive degree of sophistication, but, at the same time, Harris remains intriguing in his Otherness:⁴⁰ this moment of musical and poetic outpouring from a slave in the wilderness seems to nod to but also refigure earlier tropes of colonial encounter, such as Chateaubriand's reminiscences of seeing Native Americans dancing to a version of Madeleine Friquet or de Tocqueville's surprise meeting with a Native American who could sing French airs.⁴¹ The rural setting is integral to Jobey's encounter, as it is only when the strict social codes of the city (of which Harris sings) are stripped away that his performance becomes possible.

The rural setting also plays an integral part in our understanding of the role opera plays in the story. Paul Smethurst has pointed out that in the late eighteenth century and first half of the nineteenth, the way in which people conceived of nature was radically reorientated: human dependency on nature was seen as diminishing (and science started to replace nature as the object of wonder), and the 'natural world itself was becoming increasingly dependent on human agency'.⁴² Travel writing, of course, came to reflect changing attitudes towards the natural world and it reveals ways in which authors newly constructed an image of nature. As Smethurst argues, for all its heterogeneity, travel writing broadly 'disseminates an ideology of global vision and power in searching for order and structure in the natural world', just as it has been seen to do in human societies.⁴³

Initially, Jobey's whole operatic episode in the wilderness seems set up to emphasise difference: between the improvised, 'natural' characteristics of Harris's song and the sophisticated, prescribed operatic excerpt, between human music and the sounds of the natural world, and, of course, between opera's accustomed urban location and the rural wilderness. But on closer inspection, the narrative becomes less clear cut, as these

Belfast, 2009). See also, *Translating Slavery: Gender and Race in French Women's Writing, 1783–1823*, ed. Doris Y. Kadish and Françoise Massardier-Kenney (Kent, OH and London: Kent State University Press, 1994).

³⁹ For more on the little-known Pradel, see [Anon.], *Eugène de Pradel dans cette ville* (Châlons, 1837).

⁴⁰ He is in this sense a version of what Jennifer Yee calls the 'elite Other', but his elite status lies in his cultural prowess rather than in noble birth: *Exotic Subversions*, 8.

⁴¹ Ruth E. Rosenberg examines both of these encounters more fully in *Music, Travel, and Imperial Encounter in 19th-Century France*, 81–3 and 94–6 respectively. It is particularly interesting to note that in both of these encounters, there is not just a cultural meeting with an Other, but also an encounter with the legacy of an earlier European 'mission civilisatrice'. The comparison with Pradel evokes a similar situation in Jobey's novel.

⁴² Paul Smethurst, *Travel Writing and the Natural World, 1768–1840* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 2.

⁴³ Smethurst, *Travel Writing and the Natural World*, 5.

differences themselves seemingly enable operatic performance to reach a state of perfection. When Vallière plays Auber, for example, Jobey remarks:

Vallière had chosen his moment well to make the majority of us, who heard him every day at the theatre, feel emotions that had been unknown to us until that moment.—It is not in concert halls, theatres, in the light of chandeliers, nor in front of ladies done up in lace and diamonds that we must hear the oboe; it is at the calm and red hour of twilight, beside a lake, in the shadow of the woods, amidst the peaceful retreats of nature.⁴⁴

When music and nature meet, music gains its full emotional power, and, in true Romantic style, the sublimity of the landscape reflects the sublimity of the art performed, thus intensifying the experience of listening. The experience reaches its zenith when the troupe comes together to perform, with the ‘natural’ sound of the human voices in harmony surpassing even the impact of Vallière’s solitary oboe upon the three kneeling figures. In this communal musical performance in the wilderness, we might even read opera as being momentarily refigured as a kind of folk music.

Even the opera troupe’s ‘natural’ harmony with the landscape, of course, could be read in terms of operatic power relations, with Europeans positioning opera against the magnificent environmental backdrop in order to bring the non-Europeans to their knees. But the natural world is more than simply a backdrop here, or something that can be tamed at will by humankind: instead, it is a character in its own right, an active participant in the story, which adds its varied voices—from the ‘rustling of the foliage’, the ‘plaintive note of the mockingbird’ and the ‘softened voice of the Ocelot’, to the ‘sonorous cries of the caimans, tormented with amorous ardour’—to the exchange.⁴⁵

The natural world makes its presence felt here in a way that complicates opera’s relationship with its already unusual surroundings. It is not opera that has the final say in this encounter, but nature. When the troupe sings together, the physical features of the

⁴⁴ ‘Vallière avait bien choisi son heure pour faire éprouver à la plupart d’entre nous, qui l’entendions pourtant tous les jours au théâtre, des émotions qui nous étaient inconnues jusqu’alors.—Ce n’est pas dans les salles de concert, dans les théâtres, à la lumière des lustres, ni devant des femmes parées de dentelles et des diamants qu’il faut entendre le hautbois; c’est à l’heure calme et rouge du crépuscule, au bord d’un lac, à l’ombre des bois, au milieu des retraites paisibles de la nature.’ Jobey, *La Lac Cathahoula*, 270–1.

⁴⁵ ‘Nous écoutions le frémissement du feuillage ... la note plaintive du moqueur ... la voix adoucie du chat-tigre ...; les plaintes sonores des caïmans, tourmentées d’ardeurs amoureuses’, Jobey, *La Lac Cathahoula*, 269.

landscape resonate in response to them: the ‘virgin forest resounded’ to their voices. In Jobey’s description, this response is unique to operatic performance, and there is no suggestion of such interaction in the case of Harris’s or Lucien’s songs. Furthermore, the sounds of opera are not only echoed back, but are adapted by the landscape, taking on qualities of the natural world as they resemble first the breath of a breeze and then distant thunder. The landscape, then, has the last word, as it returns the final notes of the troupe’s performance in more sublime form. Opera, a product of the urban environment, can stun other human beings into silence, but cannot silence the natural world.

In *Le Lac Cathahoula*, Jobey complicates the narrative of operatic colonialism by refiguring the geographical setting—from the inside (of the opera house) to the outside, from the urban to the rural—and, therefore, the balance of power between the cultural product and its surroundings. The tale is not so much of opera’s power to tame or to civilise in ostensibly exotic environments, but rather about how opera has been absorbed and altered by those environments: its echoes return to the European performers with an air that is slightly disquieting, like the distant thunder simulated in Jobey’s description. Rather than proclaiming French cultural domination in a quasi-imperial manner, *Le Lac Cathahoula* seems to speak of letting French culture go, to be assimilated into an environment that makes it its own.

In this way, the episode reveals much about French (and, indeed, more broadly European) perspectives on the United States up to the mid-nineteenth century, perspectives that are conflicting in many respects. On the one hand, it fits with ubiquitous European narratives from the period that positioned the United States as a land without culture, while hinting at the role the Théâtre d’Orléans troupe played in remedying that lack (especially through its large-scale summer tours of the North East). The operatic performance in *Le Lac Cathahoula* could then be seen as a wry comment on the troupe’s role as missionaries in the cultural wilderness.

But at the same time, the wilderness is not portrayed as something that must be tamed, but something that actually enhances opera’s impact, acting as a sounding board for the troupe’s performance: in this way, the scene presents a European fantasy of the Americas, of the kind that had been epitomised in the work of Chateaubriand.⁴⁶ In its focus on the natural world, *Le Lac Cathahoula* presents a dream of European travellers’ interactions with an untamed landscape that is fascinating, sublime, and, as the operatic

⁴⁶ Ban Wang, ‘Inscribed Wilderness in Chateaubriand’s “Atala”’, *Romance Notes* 33/3 (1993): 279–87.

performance goes to show, responsive to their influence all at the same time.⁴⁷ The American wilderness seems placed to fulfil the desire for ‘authentic’ experience that was common to so much travel writing, even if, in a period of rapid urbanisation for the United States (and, indeed, when the nation was on the brink of Civil War as it was when Jobey’s story was finally published in Paris), it was already a utopian dream. But if the United States remained a screen onto which Europeans could project their fantasies, the role of opera in this story at least hints at an awareness on Jobey’s part that this previously ‘blank canvas’ had the potential to shape Europeans’ perceptions of their own culture.⁴⁸

Inside and outside the theatre: opera and the exotic in Charles Jobey’s *L’Amour d’un nègre*

I now turn to another of Jobey’s works, *L’Amour d’un nègre* (published in Paris in 1860s) in order to investigate how it, like *Le Lac Cathahoula*, could challenge European perceptions of their own culture, but this time through its portrayal of opera’s role in the urban environment. *L’Amour d’un nègre* follows a young Parisian named Charles Roger, who goes to New Orleans in 1834 to settle his late father’s estate; the novel tells the story of a disastrous love affair, which results in Roger’s transformation from an eligible bachelor and wealthy heir to a hunted and broken man. As Jobey sketches out Roger’s new surroundings, the theatre emerges as a recurring if initially apparently minor figure, and, later, at the very heart of the novel, there is a lengthy scene set in the Théâtre d’Orléans.⁴⁹ It is here, during a performance of Auber’s one-act *opéra-comique*, *Le Concert à la cour*, that Roger’s fortunes take a sudden and dramatic turn for the worse.

Roger has gone to the theatre at the instigation of his capricious new fiancée, Camillia. She wants him to report back on the evening’s events: Mademoiselle Dupuis, a young soprano, and Madame Saint-Clair, the established prima donna, have been vying for position for weeks, and earning passionate partisans within the Théâtre d’Orléans audience; that night is expected to be the moment of reckoning. At the theatre, Roger finds that the assembled throng is loudly discussing the matter, and disagreements are already breaking

⁴⁷ John W. Lowe, ‘Not-so-still waters: Travellers to Florida and the Tropical Sublime’, in *The Oxford Handbook of the Literature of the U.S. South*, ed. Fred Hobson and Barbara Ladd (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 180–95.

⁴⁸ Axel Körner has discussed the ways in which European views of the United States as a ‘blank canvas’ persisted from its initial colonisation until into the nineteenth century. See Körner, *America in Italy: The United States in the Political Thought and Imagination of the Risorgimento, 1763–1865* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), 1–7.

⁴⁹ The scene can be found in Jobey, *L’Amour d’un nègre*, 146–61.

out. Not long after the start of the performance, Dupuis is drowned out by a barrage of whistles from her opponents, while a man clambers onto a bench in the parterre, shouting ‘Mademoiselle Dupuis! The role of Adèle is not yours, and we will not let you play it!’.⁵⁰ The ensuing melee is nothing if not operatic:

At these words a tempest bursts forth, everyone is on their feet, in the orchestra, the parterre, in the boxes; they exchange insults, threats. The actress, cause of all this noise, takes the opportunity to faint on the stage. The disorder is at its height, personal provocations are exchanged; blows, bellows, fists rain down on all sides. A dagger is drawn, and in an instant twenty, fifty, one hundred, two hundred daggers, knives, dart-sticks, pistols, shine in the room.⁵¹

The rioting mob spills out into the street, where two people are killed, many injured, and dozens more arrange duels to settle personal scores. As Roger and his companions go to leave their box, they are confronted by a young man named Simpson, Roger’s bitter rival for Camillia’s love. In the midst of the chaos, Simpson challenges Roger to a duel with pistols. When they meet the following day, Roger kills Simpson and is forced to flee New Orleans, destined to wander the United States in the hope of one day being reunited with his beloved Camillia.

What are we to make of such an overly dramatic scene, and of opera’s role within it? At first, it might seem as if, in his avowed quest for authentic detail, Jobey were drawing upon a memory of a real event: ‘diva wars’, as we saw in Chapter 2, were commonplace in New Orleans as they were the world over, when supporters of one slighted leading lady would vie with those of her rival; the divas in question here—Mme St-Clair and Mlle

⁵⁰ ‘«—Mademoiselle Dupuis! le rôle d’Adèle ne vous appartient pas, nous ne vous le laisserons pas jouer.»’ Jobey, *L’Amour d’un nègre*, 151. It is, of course, highly appropriate that this particular opera should serve as the backdrop for the climax of the diva war: Auber’s *Le Concert à la Cour* tells the story of a young soprano’s struggles to find favour at court in Stuttgart, as a jealous superintendent of the Prince’s music tries to thwart her efforts.

⁵¹ ‘A ces mots, la tempête éclate de plus belle, tout le monde est debout, à l’orchestre, au parterre, dans les loges; on s’injurie, on se menace. L’actrice, cause de tout ce bruit, prend le parti de se trouver mal sur la scène. Le désordre est à son comble, les provocations personnelles s’échangent, les bourrades, les soufflets, les coups de poings pleuvent de tous côtés. Un poignard est tiré, et, à l’instant même, vingt, cinquante, cent, deux cents poignards, couteaux, cannes à dard, pistolets, brillent dans la salle.’ Jobey, *L’Amour d’un nègre*, 151.

Dupuis—were real life contemporaries of Jobey’s at the Théâtre d’Orléans.⁵² There is little, however, to support the notion that any theatrical quarrels escalated beyond scuffles in the parterre.

Contextualising Jobey’s scene within long-standing literary traditions, on the other hand, opens up a very different set of interpretative possibilities. The *soirée à l’Opéra* was an oft-employed device in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Parisian novels, to the extent that Cormac Newark has observed that the novels of Balzac’s *La Comédie humaine* ‘at times seem mainly populated by characters who like nothing better than discussing productions at the Opéra and its back-stage ins and outs’.⁵³ Newspapers and magazines in New Orleans, too, were full of short stories and serialised works of fiction about opera-going, as can be seen particularly clearly in the case of *La Revue louisianaise* in the 1840s. Jobey’s evening at the opera in *L’Amour d’un nègre*, then, had an established literary precedent and a well-developed generic context on both sides of the Atlantic.

But Jobey’s scene does more than simply capitalise on a literary vogue. As Newark has argued, opera became part of the frame of reference for French novels of the period because opera-going formed a regular part of the social experience of their bourgeois and aristocratic readership: the opera house came to function as a microcosm of society at large.⁵⁴ That society, of course, was almost exclusively Parisian, with occasional provincial detours, such as the evening at the opera house in Rouen that becomes the catalyst for Emma Bovary’s second bout of adultery in Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* (1854). Jobey’s microcosm of society, however, is explicitly not Parisian, nor from the French provinces, nor even from Europe. Instead, his *soirée à l’Opéra* attempts to provide the French reader with a distillation of a society some 5,000 miles away.

Sure enough, through most of the book, Jobey paints an image of New Orleans as exotic, and as intriguingly (sometimes dangerously) unfamiliar. Roger’s bumbling Parisian uncle, Monsieur Potard, accompanies him for the first part of the novel, and it is through his eyes that Jobey introduces his reader to the unfamiliar world of New Orleans. A man of creature comforts, Potard is unable to cope with the climate, or the behaviour of his black landlady, and he is horrified when confronted with the local cuisine. In the few chapters

⁵² As I discussed in Chapter 2, one particularly notable conflict took place between New Orleans’s most-loved prima donna, Julia Calvé, and her rival Mme Bamberger in March 1841. See *Daily Picayune*, 30 March 1841.

⁵³ Cormac Newark, *Opera in the Novel from Balzac to Proust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 3.

⁵⁴ Newark, *Opera in the Novel*, 3.

before his return to France, he serves as a comic foil to his infinitely more open-minded and likeable young nephew, as Jobey draws on long-standing tradition to satirise the small-mindedness of the European traveller abroad.⁵⁵ Although Roger, by contrast, embraces the unfamiliarity of New Orleans, he still finds himself marvelling at the exotic. Indeed, when it came to New Orleans, articles in Parisian journals of the period, for example, focussed on everything from the dangerous wildlife to the appearance of local women to unfamiliar burial customs, developing the sense of peril found as early as L'Abbé Prévost's *Manon Lescaut* (1731).⁵⁶

But Jobey's use of the theatre within the novel complicates the picture. Indeed, in contrast with the more straightforwardly foreign outside world, Jobey presents the experience of opera-going to his Parisian readers, at least initially, as entirely recognisable: Roger is listening to an *opéra-comique* by Auber, the performers' egos are as inflated and fragile as those of any Parisian prima donna, and they have the same power to inspire partisan support. Even the audience reminds Roger of what he has left behind in France. Arriving at the theatre early, he observes the rapidly filling auditorium: the Louisiana belles (and, of course, men of social status) in the first tier, the second tier occupied with free people of colour, and the third tier, filled with slaves.⁵⁷ The parterre (though not mentioned by Roger) would have been filled with less affluent white men; it is here, of course, that the unrest breaks out.

Although the social make up differed strongly from Parisian custom, as Roger watches the slaves, in 'white dresses, yellow or red tignons' and eating their pecans, figs and oranges, all he can think of is how like the 'titis of the [Parisian] boulevards' they are, up there in New Orleans's equivalent of the *paradis*.⁵⁸ While such a description might be

⁵⁵ The tradition's roots can be traced all the way back to Lucian's *Vera Historia* of the second century, or, more conservatively, Thomas More's *Utopia* from 1516.

⁵⁶ See, for example, Auguste Robert, 'Souvenirs atlantiques: Nouvelle Orléans', *La France littéraire*, 1832, 79–82 and L. Xavier Eyma, 'Les Femmes du Nouveau-Monde, IV', *La Sylphide*, July 1848, 59. The vogue for periodicals containing articles about travel and foreign lands was by no means exclusively a French one in the nineteenth century. Axel Körner comments on the space devoted to such articles in Italian periodicals in his *America in Italy*, 16.

⁵⁷ On race in New Orleans's theatres, see Juliane Braun, 'On the Verge of Fame: The Free People of Color and the French Theatre in Antebellum New Orleans', in *Liminale Anthropologien: Zwischenzeiten, Schwellenphänomene, Zwischenräume in Literatur und Philosophie*, ed. Jochen Achilles, Roland Borgards, and Brigitte Burrichter (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2012), 166.

⁵⁸ Jobey, *L'Amour d'un nègre*, 150. It is interesting to note Jobey's wording here: the 'titi parisien' was associated specifically with Parisian boulevard theatres and their perceived lack of artistic and moral refinement, but here they are watching an *opéra-comique* in a theatre that also produced grand opera. It is not clear, however, whether Jobey's link here was meant to cast aspersions on the quality of productions at the Théâtre d'Orléans, or whether the comparison between lower-class French people and slaves was part of a wider agenda concerning the representation of race in the novel.

read as a quasi-satirical comment on the colourful social composition of Parisian theatre audiences, Roger is in no way cynical. Indeed, the initial experience of opera-going in New Orleans turns out to be oddly familiar, even uncannily Parisian. For one brief moment before the performance begins and chaos breaks out, the distance between New Orleans and Paris is reduced to almost nothing, as Roger sits in the theatre and thinks of home.

In these terms, it is tempting to read Jobey's Théâtre d'Orléans as offering a utopian bastion of French culture, uniting New Orleans's disparate social factions—black and white, francophone and anglophone—in their shared desire for opera, even as they occupy distinct areas of the theatre. Indeed, the theatre is characterised as a place of relative equality; Roger is there because Camillia's slave told her it would be a night of great importance. All sections of society are equally keen to patronise the theatre. The parterre and orchestra areas are so full that the audience overflows into the corridors, and the first tier is filled three deep; meanwhile the second tier is completely full with 'only half of those who presented themselves at the box office', while in the third tier, the slaves are 'packed in like sardines'.⁵⁹ Not only are all strata of society present in the theatre, but they are actively participating in the debates, and loud conversations about the forthcoming performance 'take place in all parts of the auditorium'.⁶⁰ The theatre is therefore characterised as a space of relative privilege, where everyone from Creole elites to slaves can have an opinion on the performers in the troupe.

In other respects, too, the theatre is not only a place of civilisation, but a familiar point of orientation for the European abroad. It seems to function within the novel as a kind of North Star, the guiding light by which Jobey helps the visiting Roger and his Parisian readers alike to navigate in the city. On several occasions, for example, meetings between characters take place in a restaurant that is described as being 'opposite the French theatre', with this location providing a counterbalance to the unfamiliar food Roger and his uncle find the restaurant serves.⁶¹ The geographical prominence of the theatre at the heart of the French Quarter gives it a significance for the European visitor as much as for the locals.

But if in some respects the Théâtre d'Orléans appears to be a reassuring symbol of unity and civilisation in an otherwise exotic locale, Roger is soon confronted with the fact

⁵⁹ 'Les secondes loges, réservées aux gens de couleur, n'avaient pu donner place qu'à la moitié de ceux qui s'étaient présentés au contrôle. ... Les troisièmes, enfin, contenaient toute une population de nègres et de négresses ... le tout tassé comme des harengs', Jobey, *L'Amour d'un nègre*, 149–50.

⁶⁰ '... Les conversations se firent à haute voix sur tous les points de la salle', Jobey, *L'Amour d'un nègre*, 150.

⁶¹ Jobey, *L'Amour d'un nègre*, 42.

that image and reality diverge, and opera is simultaneously a catalyst for social disintegration. The scene at the opera elaborates on and intensifies many aspects of New Orleans's unfamiliar and divided urban politics, sketched out in the earlier part of the novel. In particular, it is concerned with mounting tensions between French and English speakers in the city during this period: the scene sees the culmination of the love rivalry between Roger (a Frenchman) and Simpson (whose name reveals him to be Anglo-American), leading ultimately to the duel and Simpson's death. The theatre was a particularly fitting setting for Jobey to have chosen for this moment of confrontation between the Frenchman and the Anglo-American, given the Théâtre d'Orléans's highly charged symbolic position within New Orleans, which I explored in Chapter 3.

But, even if the events at the opera in Jobey's novel go some way towards undermining its image of cosmopolitan civilisation, and the multitude of knives, daggers and dart sticks appear to verge on savagery, in many ways the riot precipitated by the performance might have struck Parisian readers as familiar. On the one hand, the episode is simply a typical piece of novelistic drama, but on the other it hints at well-known stories of incidents both on and off the operatic stage. Descriptions of the scene's theatrical violence would surely have brought to mind the on-stage revolutions of *grand opéra*, while the audience fracas might have recalled the fabled riot at a performance of Auber's *La Muette de Portici* in Brussels in 1830.⁶² After all, it is another Auber opera that is being performed in *L'Amour d'un nègre*. Whether in Europe or New Orleans, then, opera's civilised image is shadowed by the potential for violence.

Jobey, therefore, uses the scene at the opera to facilitate a very particular kind of literary tourism for his readers. In his hands a familiar novelistic device, operatic performance, becomes the means through which an 'exotic' society at large is translated and reduced into a recognisable form. But, as in *Le Lac Cathahoula*, the result is not a straightforward domestication of the exotic. Instead, while the world outside the theatre remains largely Other, the opera becomes a way of presenting Parisian readers, like the Parisian protagonist Roger, with an uncanny experience, as they are forced to recognise themselves in that Other.

⁶² I do not mean to draw a causative link between the opera and the Belgian Revolution of 1830 (much scholarship has demonstrated the complexities and coincidences involved in the relationship between grand opera and politics), but the imaginative potential of the incident remains important here. See Sonia Slatin, 'Opera and Revolution: *La Muette de Portici* and the Belgian Revolution of 1830 Revisited', *Journal of Musicological Research* 3 (1979): 45–62.

In Jobey's novels, operatic performance and its physical locations become mutually influencing, as opera shapes its surroundings and in turn finds itself shaped by the environments in which it is performed, in both literal and more broadly metaphorical ways. Both texts, in a way, are examples of what Syrine Hout calls 'the cultural dialogue' in travel writing, where the voice of the Other is not simply bypassed as the European writer soliloquises, but is actively engaged (if ventriloquised) in the formation of the text.⁶³ These texts have, to borrow Jennifer Yee's formulation, the 'potential to disturb a culture's monologue with itself, to remind it that it is not absolute'.⁶⁴ In his stories (as in his career), the opera house becomes a site for the simultaneous affirmation of Eurocentric ideas of cultural consumption and, at the same time, the undermining of those ideas. Opera becomes a means through which aspects of the European self are both centred and decentred, repeatedly destabilised in more or less unfamiliar settings, to the point where, in *Le Lac Cathahoula*, the opera house itself, with its veneer of civilisation, disappears altogether. Ultimately, Jobey's stories show that international operatic production, like travel writing, can expose the European subject to alternative and sometimes troubling perceptions of even the most apparently incontrovertible features of their 'civilised' cultural identity.

Opera and the Travel Experience: Edward Durell's *New Orleans as I Found It*

If scenes featuring opera were Jobey's invitation to his Parisian readers to reflect back upon their own society, while at the same time providing them with a kind of exotic titillation, opera facilitates a different kind of travel experience in Durell's *New Orleans as I Found It*. Over the course of 125 pages, each comprised of two closely typed columns, Durell recalls his earliest impressions of everything from the local geography (urban and rural) to politics and administration: the city, he says, is a 'world in miniature', and he sets out to explore as much of it as he can.⁶⁵ The fifteenth chapter of the book, the close of Durell's second day in New Orleans, recalls an evening at the Théâtre d'Orléans. Durell does not

⁶³ Syrine Hout, 'Viewing Europe From the Outside: Cultural Encounters and European Culture Critiques in the Eighteenth-Century Pseudo-Oriental Travelogue and the Nineteenth-Century "Voyage en Orient"', (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1994). It is interesting to note in this light that *Le Lac Cathahoula*'s Parisian publication in 1861 was not the first time it had appeared in print. Some five years earlier, in November and December 1856, it featured as a serialised story in the short-lived arts journal, *La Loge de l'opéra*, in New Orleans. The New Orleans version is almost word for word the same as the Parisian one, except for its title, which was *Souvenirs de la Louisiane*, suggesting a more local Otherness, designed for the sophisticated opera-goers of New Orleans themselves. I have not been able to find any hint of the reception of either the New Orleans or Parisian versions of the story.

⁶⁴ Yee, *Exotic Subversions*, 7.

⁶⁵ Didimus, *New Orleans as I Found It*, 5.

go alone but, instead, he accompanies the doctor and the lawyer, the two most frequently invoked of the book's dramatis personae. While neither the doctor or the lawyer are Creole ('of that portion of the population of New Orleans whose distinctive character has coloured that of all the rest' as Durell puts it), the doctor professes himself to be a lover of the opera, and keeps a box at the theatre. Sunday night, he says, is the most fashionable night to be in attendance at the opera.⁶⁶

As a visitor from the north with its Puritan legacies, Durell professes to his reader his amazement and discomfort at going to the theatre on the Sabbath.⁶⁷ He cannot resist noting that the theatres in the American Sector of the city are patronised mainly by foreign visitors on a Sunday evening: the Anglo-Americans, he says, although they have adapted to Creole customs in certain respects, 'retain many of the scruples of an early [northern] education', and do not generally frequent their own theatre on a Sunday night.⁶⁸ Nonetheless, he decides that accompanying the doctor and the lawyer to the theatre is part of the experience of this 'most remarkable city in our country', so he puts his conscience aside and goes along.⁶⁹

The experience of theatre-going described by Durell initially bears many of the tropes common to almost all travel literature about New Orleans in this period. He provides, as with so many other authors, a brief description of the theatre and the patrons gathered there:

We now entered the theatre; it is in Orleans street—a small building, without any pretensions to beauty or regularity of style in architecture; but, as New Orleans is the only city in the United States where French plays and the French Opera are performed, we cannot ask why its patrons have done no more. The hour was early, yet we found pit and boxes already

⁶⁶ Didimus, *New Orleans as I Found It*, 52.

⁶⁷ Perhaps Durell took a little artistic licence in stating that Sunday night was the most fashionable opera night in order to make his point about the Sabbath: it appears that Sunday was usually the night for spoken drama in New Orleans rather than opera, although many other accounts report that Sunday was a fashionable night.

⁶⁸ It is interesting to note here that Durell considers the Anglo-Americans of New Orleans to have adapted to Creole customs, in light of the stories discussed in Chapter 3 surrounding the production and reception of *grand opéra* in the city, which seem to imply that the process operated exclusively in reverse: that the Creoles adopted to Anglo-American customs rather than vice-versa. Didimus, *New Orleans as I Found It*, 52.

⁶⁹ Didimus, *New Orleans as I Found It*, 52.

filled with the elite and beauty of the French quarter, interspersed, here and there, with a representative from the American.⁷⁰

Durell was not alone at being unimpressed with the decor of the theatre (many other American visitors were similarly uninspired), but he chooses not to dwell on its imperfections and instead emphasises the theatre's special status within the United States. His brief note on the audience composition is more surprising: unlike Jobey and many other travellers in this period (particularly European ones), Durell presents an entirely white audience. It seems that he never looked above the first tier to see the black patrons who so fascinated Jobey. Instead of indicating the particularity of the local conditions and the racial (as well as linguistic) diversity of the audience, Durell seems interested only in presenting the theatre as a place of gathering for the city's elites (be they Creole or Anglo-American).

Given Durell's northern background and education—he hailed from New Hampshire where legislation towards the (very) gradual abolition of slavery had been introduced in 1783—this avoidance of the subject of slavery is surprising. Indeed, the whole book barely makes mention of the topic, in comparison with many European accounts of the American South from the time that focussed at length (and, in the case of such works as James Silk Buckingham's *The Slave States of America*, exclusively) on the conditions of slavery.⁷¹ The reasons for Durell's avoidance of the topic are surely complex, but perhaps have something to do with the way in which they would spoil his otherwise exclusively positive portrayal of the city's Anglo-American residents: not only does he praise them as a strong 'moral influence' in the city, but he is immensely proud of their 'great discoveries in science' and their commercial skills.⁷²

Nonetheless, there are also perhaps specific literary reasons for Durell's presentation of the theatre as occupied only by white, and predominantly Creole, elites. While Jobey saw the Théâtre d'Orléans as a microcosm of society at large, Durell's interpretation is very different. In the opening paragraphs of his book, he described the city of New Orleans as a 'world in miniature', but his presentation of the Théâtre d'Orléans deliberately contains only a small part of that world: the Germans, the Jews, the Spaniards, the Irish, the sailors, and the Native Americans, among others, all of whom populate

⁷⁰ Didimus, *New Orleans as I Found It*, 52.

⁷¹ James Silk Buckingham, *The Slave States of America* (London, 1842). For more on European travellers' views of slavery in America, see Murphy, *A Land without Castles*, 185–214.

⁷² Didimus, *New Orleans as I Found It*, 21.

Durell's sketch of the city as world, are not to be found in his description of the theatre at all, and instead are featured separately in other chapters. Durell's presentation of the theatre audience might be reductive, then, but his presentation of New Orleans society as a whole in the book is far more complex and nuanced than Jobey's, even if he is unashamedly biased towards Anglo-American achievements. In this formulation, the Théâtre d'Orléans functions not as a microcosm of the world, but as one piece of an ever-expanding mosaic of city life. Nonetheless, Durell preserved the idea that the world might be understood through the theatre, as, on the very first page of his account, he goes on to talk of his 'world in miniature' as 'the theatre that I am about to describe'.⁷³

So where does this theatricalisation of the city leave the actual experience of theatre-going and opera-going? After all, it could be seen as stripping the theatre of its privileged position as social microcosm. Durell's visit to the opera, it turns out, initially appears to have very little to do with opera itself: he explains that his companion, the lawyer, was not a lover of music and 'could not distinguish one note from another', and freely admits that he himself was 'more attracted to the novelty of the show than to the music of the opera'.⁷⁴ They occupy themselves by watching the other members of the audience, and Durell does not even tell us the name of the opera they attend, let alone describe anything of the performance.

But the evening at the opera plays an important role within Durell's travel account. He has the following to say about his experience:

I felt transported to a European city—the language sung was foreign to my ear, and the features and dress of those about me equally foreign to my eye ... The mustached lips of the men, the richness of their toilet—which had neither the plainness nor that nice keeping in colours which mark the American or English gentleman—the dark hair, dark eyes, and somewhat dark complexion of the women, with the exquisite taste and set of the French millinery, carried me to Paris; everything was Parisian

⁷³ Didimus, *New Orleans as I Found It*, 5.

⁷⁴ Didimus, *New Orleans as I Found It*, 52 and 53.

about me, and I was, in spirit, three thousand miles distant from American soil.⁷⁵

It is not the music that he, as a northern visitor to the city, finds important, but the atmosphere: being surrounded by the city's elites in all their exotic finery transports Durell in his mind to Paris. There is a point of contact here, then, between the scene at the opera in Jobey's *L'Amour d'un nègre* and Durell's own account. The connection between the two cities was, after all, an obvious enough one for Durell to make, as an American attending the French opera for the first time.

The nature of the experience that leads to the drawing of such a connection, however, is perceived very differently by the two writers with their very different backgrounds. It was the performance itself (the behaviour of the performers and audience) that made the connection for Jobey's protagonist, Roger, setting in motion a complex process of recognising oneself in the exotic, but for Durell the initial points of connection with Paris are language and dress, rather than anything specifically related to the performance. What is more, for Jobey, the experience seems to be a shared one, belonging to both New Orleans and Paris, as distinctively local features colour the protagonist's reminiscences of Paris; for Durell, on the other hand, the experience seems to be exclusively Parisian. In his figuration, the distance between the two cities is not reduced, but instead he feels himself directly transported away from New Orleans and American soil.

Indeed, opera-going in *New Orleans as I Found It* facilitates a travel experience of its own, during which the reader is transported to Paris by way of New Orleans, without ever leaving their seat. Such a role is very much in keeping with other episodes in Durell's account: throughout the book, Durell's own observations are interspersed with travel stories narrated by people whom he meets during his time in the city, and these stories involve places far from New Orleans. The doctor, for example, introduces the reader to nineteenth-century Hamburg through the (highly anti-semitic) tale of a Jewish patient he treats;⁷⁶ an elderly sailor Durell meets on the Levee recounts a tale of being robbed on the road to Natchez, Mississippi;⁷⁷ the lawyer tells the story of a boy named Oceanus who voyages

⁷⁵ Didimus, *New Orleans as I Found It*, 53. Durell underestimates the distance between New Orleans and Paris here by nearly 1,800 miles.

⁷⁶ Didimus, *New Orleans as I Found It*, 45–51.

⁷⁷ Didimus, *New Orleans as I Found It*, 9–14.

upon the seas, to give three examples.⁷⁸ Each of these stories, and Durell's own story of his evening at the opera, position New Orleans not simply as a 'world in miniature', but rather as the gateway to the world: through Durell's experiences in the city, the reader is able to travel farther afield than they could ever have anticipated.

Music and interiorised travel

In this light the scene at the theatre might initially appear to be simply a device on Durell's part to create one more exciting trip on the imaginary world tour in which he invites his readers to partake, with opera itself serving as nothing more than a convenient backdrop. Nonetheless, it becomes clear that opera has a particular significance for Durell. As he looks around the theatre, he sees that 'the whole audience seemed composed of amateurs, so profound was its attention, and so much enjoyment was depicted upon the faces of all'.⁷⁹ The doctor is one of these amateurs, and while Durell tells us nothing at all of the performance itself, he describes the doctor's response to it in precise detail:

He never missed the leader's first note, and sat, during the whole performance, with his eyes closed, and his head reclining upon the cushioned rail, wrapped in elysium. The pantomime of an opera was nothing to him.⁸⁰

This could not be further from the description of the audience or its listening practices in *L'Amour d'un nègre*. The evocation of silent listening is more reminiscent of the important changes in operatic reception in the city that were explored in Chapter 3 than the noisy engagement of Jobey's audience. Although Durell himself claims that he is unable to comment on the experience of listening in this manner, the doctor speaks eloquently about it:

He said 'that the gestures and grimaces of the actors interfered with and lessened the effect of the music; that it was impossible to gratify, to their

⁷⁸ Didimus, *New Orleans as I Found It*, 69–125.

⁷⁹ Didimus, *New Orleans as I Found It*, 52.

⁸⁰ Didimus, *New Orleans as I Found It*, 52.

utmost capacity for pleasure, any two of the senses at one and the same time; that the words of an opera, however admirable as a poetical composition, added nothing to its effect, and were of use only as being the model upon which sounds are constructed.’ He made the poet subservient to the composer, and esteemed his verse merely as the setting which held together and exhibited to the best advantage the diamonds of his collaborator.⁸¹

The doctor’s words, then, are no longer about the theatrical experience at all, but rather an elevated discourse of music as the highest of all the arts. As the doctor claims that the only way to listen is with one’s eyes closed, opera is actively stripped of its dramatic power: the performers who had been so central in Jobey’s account of the significance of opera in New Orleans are moved to the very fringes of this experience (and, it seems, would be removed from it altogether, were it not for the fact that someone must be producing the sounds with which the doctor is so enraptured), and the visual spectacle for which the Théâtre d’Orléans was so well known is dismissed as ‘interfering’ with and ‘lessening’ the impact of the music.

This arresting excerpt is in actual fact only the beginning of a more extended discourse about music in Durell’s book, as, at the end of the performance, Durell encounters a man whom he has been observing throughout the evening and accepts an invitation to his house in the French Quarter.⁸² Once there, Durell mentions the opera, prompting a lengthy and enthusiastic reply from his host:

‘The opera’, said the strange gentleman, ‘combining, as it does, two arts proceeding from the loftiest qualities of the mind, is at once the most artificial and most perfect of man’s intellectual creations. Music, like poetry, is incapable of being defined. The difficulty consists partly in the barrenness of language, its inability to give expression to many of our highest thoughts and feelings, and partly in ourselves. One who is devoid of musical taste would hardly understand what it is were it most clearly

⁸¹ Didimus, *New Orleans as I Found It*, 52.

⁸² This particular passage accounts for ten densely typed pages in the book (each page contains two columns). Although this might not seem much, it is the longest chapter of the book, save for the multi-part tale of Oceanus, the boy who travels the world, that concludes the book, and to which all the other stories lead.

defined, and he who is blessed with the Divine gift needs no other definition. Language is not subtle enough nor flexible enough to comprehend it; nor does the resemblance end here. Poetry is one and the same to all, as the sun is one and the same to all; seen with a clear or more obscure vision. It is confined to no class of objects, and dwells equally with life, decay, and death; music walks hand in hand at her side.⁸³

Even by the standards of nineteenth-century writing, this little monologue is striking in the way it comes across as pre-prepared rather than spontaneous: the strange gentleman pours forth a well-formed disquisition at a moment's notice on the subject of music's position within the arts and on the nature of musicality. The passage would not have been out of place in a philosophical treatise on the arts, so influenced does it seem to have been by German Romanticism. Certainly, as we saw in Chapter 3, with the introduction of grand opera to New Orleans in the 1830s a newly elevated style of critical discourse emerged—perhaps surprisingly early, given that a similar style was only just beginning to crystallise in Europe at the same time—arguing for the primacy of music in the operatic experience, but these disquisitions go much further than that, not using contemporary philosophy to comment on opera, but using opera as a way into talking about the arts as a whole.

Tempting as it is to pause longer over the intricacies of these passages, the pressing question for my purposes here is what such statements might be doing in a travelogue and, moreover, this particular travelogue, which has up to this point shown few artistic inclinations. Indeed, as recently as in the previous chapter, Durell was recounting a trivial story of a Jewish coffin salesman, and a large registral shift has happened in order to bring us to these philosophical reflections. It is the only place in the book where the arts are discussed at length, even if the epigrams with which Durell begins each chapter suggest certain pretensions to philosophical grandeur, taken as they are from the likes of Schiller and Sophocles.⁸⁴ Durell's sudden emphasis on such modern cultural discourse and musical listening practices might simply have been a way of suggesting the uncommon sophistication he perceived among the elite theatre-going 'amateurs' of New Orleans, further sketching out the nuances of the society he observed.

⁸³ Didimus, *New Orleans as I Found It*, 54.

⁸⁴ See, for example, Didimus, *New Orleans as I Found It*, 38.

Durell's apparent desire to create an imagined travel experience for his reader, however, perhaps offers another interpretation of the presence of these unexpected artistic and philosophical interludes. As the evening unfolds, the strange gentlemen speaks at even greater length about opera, moving on to discuss ideas of the beautiful and the sublime in music, the 'sister arts' of music and poetry, and the positions of all the arts including sculpture, painting and dance, exploring their relationship to language and philosophy.⁸⁵ The gentleman's wife performs for them, exemplifying his ideas as they roll forth. First she sings a Scottish song, then gives an impassioned rendition of the *Marseillaise* on the organ, followed by a dance, accompanied by a slave sitting cross-legged upon the floor playing the lute.⁸⁶ With features described as 'approaching the Grecian nearer than any other model', the strange gentleman's wife seems to be a personification of the muses: with all the classical overtones, the sensuality of the dance, and the strangeness of the situation in which Durell finds himself, the scene is as exotic as any description of a foreign locale.⁸⁷

In a way, then, the scene, with all its extended philosophical discussions of the arts, affords a kind of travel experience of its own, an internal one, that begins with the doctor's serene and attentive listening at the opera and ending with the burning passions of the woman's final performance, which leaves both the strange gentleman and Durell feeling that 'every nerve trembled with emotion'.⁸⁸ The emphasis on listening (and, in the doctor's case, *closing one's eyes* and listening) in this passage is highly significant for our understanding of this text as travel writing: travel writing has been seen as an intensely visual style—it is the gaze, the 'imperial eye' in which scholars have been most interested—but here we have a moment where Durell, the travelling subject, is eventually forced to listen, not within the opera house, but when the strange gentleman begins to talk about opera and the arts, and his wife begins to perform. While Durell, unlike the doctor, does not actually close his eyes, once at the strange gentleman's house, the primacy of the visual is temporarily challenged as Durell seeks to capture the sounds he hears around him.⁸⁹ The very foundations of the travel experience are altered in this scene.

⁸⁵ Didimus, *New Orleans as I Found It*, 54–6.

⁸⁶ Here we have another portrayal of musicality in a slave. In contrast to Jobey's portrayal, however, in Durell's account, the slave's performance serves only to support the creativity of the white woman that takes place in the foreground.

⁸⁷ Didimus, *New Orleans as I Found It*, 54.

⁸⁸ Didimus, *New Orleans as I Found It*, 60.

⁸⁹ Pratt's *Imperial Eyes* is, of course, the most obvious source to mention for a discussion of travel writing's focus on the visual, but there are many other examples. See, for instance, Marguerite Helmers and Tilar Mazzeo, 'Unraveling the Traveling Self', in *The Traveling and Writing Self*, ed. Marguerite Helmers and Tilar Mazzeo (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), 9–11.

The opera, although it is seemingly forgotten by the end of the chapter, serves here as a catalyst: while Durell found himself fascinated but not much moved emotionally by his experience at the opera house, once the strange gentleman and his wife begin to explain and illustrate the arts to him, he finds himself on an inner journey that leaves him feeling breathless. If New Orleans is the gateway to the world in Durell's formulation, the theatre becomes the gateway to a unique personal experience. This inner journey, of course, has an imagined physical counterpart: from Paris, Durell finds himself transported to Scotland, back to Paris, to Greece, to eastern lands, all in the course of an evening. But at the end of it Durell finds his head spinning, unsure that he has actually been anywhere at all, but deeply moved all the same. It is not so much the places visited that matter as the experience of travelling.

Unlike Jobey's precise presentation of particular strands of the city's socio-political environment and of opera's unique role within it, it is the breadth and variety of New Orleans that concerns Durell. For him, a northerner from a small town, New Orleans was most astonishing in its diversity. The local particulars that Durell would gradually get to know so well during his time in the city appear in *New Orleans as I Found It* to be less important than the possibilities for travel, both literal and imaginary, afforded by the city. And the opera plays its role within that: having pointed out early on in the chapter that New Orleans's operatic life was unusual within the United States, he goes on to show the new worlds that have been opened up to him by experiences in and encounters at the opera house. Opera is not granted a special status in itself (in fact, it is valued only for its music), but it holds a special place in this narrative by virtue of the fact that it sets in motion such an intense inner journey: its significance is located in its ability to facilitate emotional travel and development and philosophical growth, rather than in the specificities of its local entanglements.

In Durell's account, then, opera becomes a facilitator of mobility (albeit an imagined mobility) both for Durell as the protagonist and for his readers. Once again, we can read this as complicating the underlying imperial agendas that many scholars have argued to be inherent in travel writing. Here, opera serves not as a tool through which a mobile observing subject controls a static 'rest of the world', but as something that enables movement. In Durell's account, New Orleans is not merely a place to be surveyed and 'collected': indeed, it cannot be, as it is characterised as changing constantly and at a great pace. Indeed, Durell opens his book with a preface suggesting exactly that:

When I again appear before you, you must not expect to find in the New Orleans of ‘to-day’ an exact counterpart of ‘the New Orleans of 1836’. A few years tell much in its story; and herein consists the difficulty of my subject. The city's rapid growth in population, in business, and in wealth—causes which will continue to operate for centuries to come—the frequent change of actors upon its scenes ... render it impossible to draw a portrait which will be equally recognised from every point of time.⁹⁰

Durell, as the observer, is all too aware that his subject is evolving at a pace he cannot equal in his writing. Opera’s role as a facilitator of movement in both a literal (i.e. the production of opera in New Orleans leading to the movement of people and materials across the Atlantic) and an imaginative sense, then, is vital when it comes to understanding the nineteenth-century New Orleans that Durell sought to capture: it is only through a mobile lens that we are able to gain a sense of the constantly evolving city.

Conclusion: Travel through the operatic lens

As Jennifer Yee has suggested, it is often at the margins, the peripheries, that we can begin ‘to find traces of other stances and echoes of discourses that are not given centre stage’.⁹¹ There are not many texts more marginal than those considered in this chapter: as examples of travel writing, they already sit at the fringes of the nineteenth-century canon; their little-known authors and the fact that none of them seem to have run to more than one edition make them more peripheral still. And we do begin to see within these texts, as Yee suggests, hints of subversion, or at least different possibilities for reading dominant narratives both of opera and travel writing itself. Indeed, we find good examples in all three of what James Duncan and Derek Gregory call the ‘ambivalence’ of travel writing, whereby the self-reflexivity of the genre gives a ‘sense of its own authorities and assumptions being called into question’.⁹²

A focus on opera in these works can help add further layers to our understanding both of opera’s relationships with imperialism outside of Europe and also travel writing’s

⁹⁰ Didimus, ‘Dedication’, *New Orleans as I Found It*, [no page number].

⁹¹ Yee, *Exotic Subversions*, 18.

⁹² Duncan and Gregory, ‘Introduction’, *Writes of Passage*, 5.

relationships with ideas of imperialism. If imperialist readings of travel writing have typically looked for strategies of control on the part of the observing subject over the people and places observed, it seems as if the evocation of opera in the travel accounts considered here becomes a means of expressing the subject's perception of a certain lack of control in their travel experience: the European performers at the Théâtre d'Orléans in *L'Amour d'un nègre* may serve as the catalyst for the riot, but they have no control over the breakdown of order that ensues. Meanwhile, Durell finds himself transported in spite of his professed lack of interest in opera as he sits first in the Théâtre d'Orléans and later in the strange gentleman's house. A study of nineteenth-century travel writing through the lens of opera, then, perhaps offers the possibility of shaking some of our more familiar interpretations of such writing and its ideologies.

But what of New Orleans? While I have offered suggestions for what a focus on opera might contribute to a study of travel writing more broadly, it is undoubtedly the city of New Orleans that lies at the heart of these texts. Indeed, Jobey and Durell's travel accounts afford us an opportunity to reflect upon many of the themes that have emerged throughout this dissertation, revealing to us as they do the strategies visitors to New Orleans used to shape its image for readers elsewhere. Opera emerges from these texts as a fundamental part of the city's identity for visitors as much as it was for locals. The idea of connection, of participation in a wider nineteenth-century world, that has been so central to this thesis reveals itself clearly throughout these accounts. Jobey, as a musician, of course, is an example of the role performers played in creating and sustaining the Théâtre d'Orléans that I discussed in Chapter 2. But he played a further role in creating the theatre and its image through his self-conscious focus on opera and the retelling of performances for a predominantly transatlantic readership.

Meanwhile, for Durell, the idea of opera itself became a means of connecting New Orleans with the rest of the world not just geographically, but across time: the invocation of the Classical muses weaves the city and its love of opera into a lineage that extends across centuries. At the heart of the city, the Théâtre d'Orléans served as an impetus for creativity for these authors, revealing that the creative influence of this institution extended beyond the musical spheres explored in Chapter 4 to literary ones. Opera's dual identity as something existing in the real world (as performance and within institutional structures) and also in imagined (perhaps even idealised) form, not to mention the slippage between the two, becomes key to understanding the city of New Orleans in this period.

New Orleans is characterised in these accounts as somewhere that is at once European and exotic, simultaneously the gateway to the rest of the world and preoccupied with local tensions. It is opera that helps to initiate a reflexive process of looking outwards and inwards—from the wilderness of Louisiana to the interior of the theatre; from the physical representation of opera on stage to its imaginative potential; from the external social contexts to the internal emotional journey that opera can create—that allows the reader to understand something of a city so full of contradictions, apparently of the Self and yet somehow Other all at the same time.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation began with a brief glimpse of the ways in which opera became entangled with some of New Orleans's most pressing socio-political issues, but I hope ultimately to have shown how the significance of opera for the people of New Orleans extended far beyond the city itself. I set out to recast New Orleans not as a unique case to be studied in isolation from its larger national and international contexts, but as a city forged by and actively forging multiple human, material and economic connections. As the preceding chapters reveal, operatic performance and reception in New Orleans were inseparable: the movement of people and the movement of materials of all sorts (from scores and costumes on the one hand, to newspapers, periodicals and criticism on the other) shaped both. Contemporary comments, such as a remark from 1844 that *Robert le diable* was applauded from 'Madrid to St Petersburg, London to Mexico, Berlin to New Orleans', with its echoes of the opening lines of Stendhal's *Vie de Rossini*, seem to invite an exploration of the city as part of a global operatic world.¹ Such comments, along with Jürgen Osterhammel's claim that 'opera underwent globalisation early on', are tantalising provocations in many respects for an opera scholar.²

Taking on this challenge, Chapters 1 and 2 aimed to reconstruct some of the international relationships involved in producing and receiving opera in New Orleans, showing something of the complex interrelations between human agency and the transmission of materials. They suggest that there was a multitude of paths—direct and indirect—that people and materials took to New Orleans, but that certain patterns were discernible among them. In this way, I sought to complicate New Orleans's status as an operatic 'periphery' and, likewise, Paris's position as an operatic centre, by positioning them both in wider French and transatlantic contexts.

While I gestured above to ideas of 'global opera' in a broader sense, this link between New Orleans and Paris has remained perhaps the principal connection in this research: it emerged time and time again through primary sources relating to the opera in New Orleans during the period from 1819 to 1859, and to downplay the importance of this relationship in favour of a wider range of global links would have been untrue to those

¹ Léon Curmer, 'Giacomo Meyerbeer', *Les Beaux-Arts: Illustration des Arts et de la Littérature*, Volume 2 (Paris, 1844), 352.

² Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Patrick Camiller (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 5. First published as *Die Verwandlung der Welt* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2009).

sources. Even so, I hope to have demonstrated that the relationship between the two cities was more nuanced and less hegemonic than has previously been considered, and that the French capital was by no means the sole connection of importance to nineteenth-century New Orleans.

Osterhammel has referred to Paris as the ‘radial point’ of the nineteenth-century operatic world, implying not only that it was a centre with direct connections to any number of unrelated peripheral locations, but that the direction of influence was from Paris to those locations.³ I hope that my explorations in this thesis have questioned this characterisation. Paris did not have monolithic significance for New Orleans, and instead its influence can be understood in several distinct, albeit co-existing forms. Literally, of course, the city of Paris did provide many of the materials and much of the musical education upon which the Théâtre d’Orléans drew, but the constant mobility of the performers who made the transatlantic crossing reveals that it would be a mistake to assume that practical influences on the production of opera in New Orleans came from a single place.

I hope to have shown that the contact between the places previously assumed to be peripheral and Paris was not always straightforward: they were all also shaped by contact among themselves, particularly when it came to singers’ movements and the materials and ideas they inevitably brought with them. This contact was sometimes mediated by the physical and economic influence of Paris, but not always. Furthermore, the later chapters of this dissertation reveal that the ‘idea’ of Paris was equally if not even more influential on the development of New Orleans’s operatic culture than anything it offered in practical terms: the city’s reputation for operatic excellence, innovation and social/cultural refinement circulated alongside but slightly separately from the materials that enabled the production of opera there.

At the same time, while I have been largely concerned with transatlantic movements, all of my chapters have shown in various ways that New Orleans was by no means disconnected from the rest of the United States, even if its operatic life did not always follow typical narratives of operatic development there. In certain senses, we must not confuse the theatre’s ‘local’ identity with a broader ‘American’ one: that is to say, that while the Théâtre d’Orléans’s racial conditions, for example, made it distinctly non-European, they did not make it typically American either. Nonetheless, the development of an Anglo-American cultural and economic ‘mainstream’ shaped the ways in which the

³ Osterhammel, *Transformation of the World*, 5.

theatre functioned and the ways in which a diverse range of people—theatre managers, francophone critics, and visitors to the city alike—understood the Théâtre d’Orléans and its position in society. So too, as I hinted at in Chapter 4, did a growing drive towards an American national identity shape the kinds of works ‘local’ composers began to write. It is not my intention here to position New Orleans as one thing or the other—as American or European—as a number of authors have done, but rather to show the ways in which it could be both at the same time: how diverse population groups accessed networks of production and discourse that were simultaneously local, national and international, not to mention cosmopolitan.

The final three chapters of this thesis seek to complicate further the material culture/human agency equation I set up earlier by adding layers of aesthetic discourse of various kinds. These in turn relied upon both material culture and human agency for their dissemination. In various respects, Chapters 3 to 5 have sought to insert New Orleans into investigations of the emergence in the mid-nineteenth century of international print culture, broadly conceived, looking at how it shaped and was shaped by opera. Chapter 4, for example, with its exploration of early examples of opera adaptations for salon performance in New Orleans, raised questions of where opera’s identity can be said to lie. At a time when opera was internationally still more often considered to be a theatrical form than a musical one, such opera-inspired publications occupied an uncertain position part way between paratextual material and a complete move away from opera (indeed, if opera was not understood as a ‘text’, even a metaphorical one, what would have constituted a ‘paratext’?). What this dissertation underlines, then, is the sense that opera’s physical translocation and its passage into print culture are more than simply forms of dissemination, but actually serve to transform and even construct the operatic product itself in various ways.

This thesis, then, has sought to expand the ways in which we can think about operatic translocation, beyond the basics of which works were performed, when, and where. Instead, I hope to have revealed how the complexities of the interrelationship between discourse, practicality, creative practice, and individuals’ circumstances shaped international operatic culture. In so doing, I have tried not simply to highlight ‘unique’ or ‘epoch-making’ historical moments, moments where ‘everything changed’, but rather to normalise many of the features of New Orleans’s operatic life that have previously been seen as exceptional, by placing them in their wider contexts. That is not, of course, to say that there was nothing special about the Théâtre d’Orléans and its activities, but rather that

its special position was formed by overlapping (and constantly changing) layers of more or less unusual circumstances that are best seen over time, rather than separated into discrete, ‘earth-shattering’ moments. The flowering of the Théâtre d’Orléans, as explored in this thesis, was the result of the coming together of a diverse range of conditions—geographical, social, political and cultural—in particular ways, for a period of time. Examining these processes through the work of a particular institution provides one way of holding them in focus. Of course, there were developments in the ways in which operatic culture was presented and understood in this period, as has emerged time and time again in this dissertation, but the institutional framework provides a stable perspective on the changing surrounding landscape.

In terms of future work, New Orleans’s expanding periodical culture in the 1840s and 1850s, driven in large part by the work of Louis Placide Canonge, would benefit from further attention. Music and opera played vital roles within it in ways that I did not have space to explore here.⁴ A comparison of how this local print culture (and that of the United States more generally) developed alongside the more-studied equivalents in cities such as London and Paris would be particularly useful, both for local and transnational studies. Furthermore, such vital aspects of local print culture as the identity of some of the early critics and the readership of the new publications still require further research, if they have not been made permanently inaccessible by the somewhat ephemeral nature of so much of the print culture of the time.

Moving beyond the fragility of so many printed documents, there are further challenges in studying nineteenth-century print culture in the present day, to which I alluded in the introduction to this thesis. While the digitisation of newspapers, periodicals and sheet music has, of course, improved access to materials for scholars from more geographically distant locations, it has in certain respects destroyed fundamental aspects of the very print culture we seek to study, as contributors to both the ‘Search’ and ‘Quirk Historicism’ special editions of *Representations* (from 2014 and 2015 respectively) have

⁴ Juliane Braun discussed various aspects of Canonge’s work as a playwright, but there has as yet been very little work on his role within New Orleans’s emerging press culture, leading Braun to highlight Canonge as a figure for further research. Juliane Braun, ‘Petit Paris en Amérique? French Theatrical Culture in Nineteenth-Century Louisiana’ (PhD diss., Julius-Maximilians-Universität Würzburg, 2013).

shown.⁵ That is to say, while we are able to search documents digitally, thanks to Optical Character Recognition, we can quickly lose sight of some of the factors that were most integral to their original form: we are often presented with simply the ‘chunk’ of text relevant to our search and little to nothing of the original layout. Not only do we lose the possibility for serendipitous discoveries of important information as we look through a document, but, as Emanuele Senici has suggested, the positioning of an article within that document may well have contributed significantly to the original meaning of that article.⁶ When assessing sheet music and libretti, too, the materials themselves—the thickness and folding of the paper, for example—can be similarly important to our understanding of the items. The question of how to write anything verging on material history when screens separate us from the very materiality of the things about which we write is a pressing one, and one which invites consideration in the future.

There is still much to be explored both in terms of trans-/international opera studies and in terms of the complex cultural milieu of nineteenth-century New Orleans, but, specifically, there are a few areas that stand out as demanding further research. The connections that New Orleans’s early operatic life (and, indeed, the Théâtre d’Orléans itself) had with refugees from Saint-Domingue merits further attention. Jean Fouchard’s two books on opera in Saint-Domingue reveal much about the island’s thriving operatic scene, but little about its relationship with New Orleans.⁷ The role of Cuba as a stopping point for many of the Saint-Domingue refugees on their way to New Orleans (as indeed it was for John Davis) has not yet been explored in cultural terms.⁸ Research into the communities established on Cuba by francophone refugees in the early years of the nineteenth century, then, might serve as an important insight into the complexities of New Orleans’s initial operatic development, by providing a more nuanced circum-Caribbean context.

Also on the subject of operatic movement, there is still work to be done on the tours of the Théâtre d’Orléans. An investigation of the ways in which they impacted the shape

⁵ The ‘Search’ special issue was *Representations* 127 (2014), while the ‘Quirk Historicism’ one was *Representations* 132 (2015).

⁶ Emanuele Senici, ‘Delirious Hopes: Napoleonic Milan and the Rise of Modern Italian Operatic Criticism’, *Cambridge Opera Journal* 27 (2015): 97–127.

⁷ Jean Fouchard, *Artistes et répertoire des scènes de Saint-Domingue* (Port-au-Prince, Haiti: H. Deschamps, 1988) and *Le Théâtre à Saint-Domingue* (Port-au-Prince, Haiti: H. Deschamps, 1988).

⁸ Gabriel Debien, however, has outlined the importance of the island for immigration to New Orleans. See Debien, ‘The Saint-Domingue Refugees in Cuba, 1793–1815’, trans. David Cheramie, in *The Road to Louisiana: The Saint-Domingue Refugees, 1792–1809*, ed. Carl A. Brasseaux and Glenn R. Conrad (Lafayette, LA: The Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1992), 31–112.

of North American operatic development would further contribute to a reintegration of New Orleans into histories of music in nineteenth-century America, and so would an exploration of how they related to the more established touring circuits taken by English and Italian troupes, which have been laid out by Katherine Preston in her *Opera on the Road*.⁹ In one sense, the Théâtre d'Orléans tours were highly unusual among operatic tours of the period. As Preston has so clearly demonstrated, touring opera troupes in the first half of the nineteenth century were predominantly composed of small groups of star singers, who gathered around themselves supporting performers; it was only after the mid-century that a shift towards 'combination' troupes, in which an entire company travelled together, emerged. The Théâtre d'Orléans's summer tours from the late 1820s on, however, always made use of the full company and many of the regular orchestral players, as well as, it seems, their sets and costumes.¹⁰

The logistics of these early tours by the Théâtre d'Orléans troupe must have been quite different from those that took place later in the century,¹¹ and there has been little work besides Preston's on touring opera in the United States in the earlier period. In an era before the United States had a developed railway network, the means by which a large troupe like that of the Théâtre d'Orléans was able to travel would have been very different, and so too must have been the processes of advertising and creating an audience. All of these are important future lines of enquiry for a study of early touring opera in the United States. Furthermore, questions of how these tours shaped cultural exchange in the host cities as well as of operatic performance's relationship with religion and morality remain to be explored on a larger scale, and would allow for an opera-centred perspective on ways in which the Catholic culture of francophone New Orleans influenced and was influenced by the historically puritan North.

⁹ As I have noted at various points in this thesis, important early groundwork on the troupe's northern tours was laid by Mary Grace Swift in 'The Northern Tours of the Théâtre d'Orléans, 1843 and 1845', *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 26/2 (1985): 155–93 and by Sylvie Chevalley in 'Le Théâtre d'Orléans en Tournée dans les Villes du Nord 1827–1833', *Comptes Rendues de L'Athénée Louisianais* (Mars, 1955): 27–71. Neither, however, were concerned with cultural movement so much as with the factual details of when and where the troupe performed. More recently, Jennifer C. H. J. Wilson has conducted an in-depth study of the troupe's reception in New York in her PhD thesis, 'The Impact of French Opera in Nineteenth-Century New York: The New Orleans French Opera Company from 1827–1845' (PhD diss., City University New York, 2015).

¹⁰ Wilson quotes from a number of reviews from the New York press which appear to suggest that the company brought its own sets during the tours of the 1840s. See Wilson, 'The Impact of French Opera in Nineteenth-Century New York', 214–7.

¹¹ See Kristen Turner, 'Opera in English: Class and Culture in America, 1878–1910' (PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2015), 95–164.

These ‘official’ northern tours of the Théâtre d’Orléans were not the only touring activities undertaken by the theatre, however, and members of the Théâtre d’Orléans company undertook smaller ventures of their own in the summer months of the years in which there were no official tours, as Jobey’s *Le Lac Cathahoula* illustrates. These smaller-scale tours introduced opera to towns in rural Louisiana, including St Martinville and Donaldsonville.¹² Here, then, lies a rare opportunity to examine the meeting of metropolitan and rural culture in antebellum America through touring opera. Indeed, opera’s sphere of influence in this period was wider than has previously been explored, and touring opera can offer us a way in to unravelling the impact of imported European culture on rural communities away from the cosmopolitan aspirations of the United States’s large urban centres.¹³

Back in New Orleans itself, there is much about the rich fabric of musical and operatic life still to be explored. There has been little work on the history of the French Opera House after 1859, for example, and nor has there been much research on the history of opera in the other institutions in the city, such as the Grand Opera House (1871–1906), or on the interplay of distinct professional and amateur theatrical/musical performances in these locations later in the century.¹⁴ These changes in the city’s operatic culture could be fruitfully investigated in light of arguments made by Lawrence Levine and others about the development of a cultural hierarchy in America from the middle of the nineteenth century.¹⁵ Levine discussed this phenomenon both in terms of the changing status of Shakespeare’s plays, from a democratic sphere to one of elite high culture, and also in terms of a similar process in the production and reception of Italian opera (from the early days of the García family’s tours to New York, to the Astor Place Riot of 1849).

While a number of other scholars have ultimately agreed with Levine that a cultural hierarchy emerged in America in the second half of the nineteenth century—and I have alluded to this on a number of occasions in this thesis—they often disagree vehemently

¹² Braun also recommends that the theatrical life of rural Louisiana should be a subject for future study, but the operatic activities of the Théâtre d’Orléans performers adds another layer to this beyond spoken drama. See Braun, ‘Petit Paris en Amérique?’, 226.

¹³ Ann Satterthwaite’s *Local Glories: Opera Houses on Main Streets, Where Art and Community Meet* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), reveals the extent to which rural or non-metropolitan communities had embraced the idea of opera as having cultural significance (even if they were not frequently exposed to full-scale operatic productions) through the ubiquitous emergence of opera houses in small places.

¹⁴ A single thesis about the history of the Grand Opera House exists. See Shirley Madeline Harrison, ‘The Grand Opera House (Third Varieties Theatre) of New Orleans, Louisiana, 1871 to 1906: a History and Analysis’ (PhD diss., Louisiana State University, 1965).

¹⁵ Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of a Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1988).

over both the reasons for such a development and its effects. While, in Levine's analysis, wealthy social elites used such 'highbrow' culture as a way of reinforcing social inequalities, for Joseph Mussulman, the process was driven by a distinct set of cultural elites. That is to say, by people who were not necessarily wealthy (indeed, Mussulman claims that moneyed elites were interested only in 'conspicuous consumption'), but who saw high culture as the preserve of the highly moral composer or artist.¹⁶

An exploration of New Orleans's relationship with the emergence of elite and popular culture in the later years of the nineteenth century could serve to nuance further the city's position in American cultural development. Given the way in which Mussulman in particular has highlighted the role of German aesthetic ideals in this process, an investigation of the role that the city's growing German population and its music-making played in such a process would be valuable.¹⁷ There has already been scholarly interest in the history of German immigrants in Louisiana, as well as in their music-making there, but an investigation of how they shaped wider ideas about music and theatre in New Orleans would help us to understand the ways in which separate national musical traditions interacted with each other in the city.¹⁸

Having cautioned against the allure of 'completism' in the introduction to this thesis, it seems appropriate to mention here that there is also still work to be done on the Théâtre d'Orléans's role within the city of New Orleans: I very much hope that this dissertation does not have the final word on the subject. The surviving opera scores by Curto and Prévost offer the possibility of investigating how local composers wrote for particular individuals within the theatre troupe (*Le Lépreux* was written specifically for named singers), and thus of shedding light on the vocal qualities of the performers. Meanwhile, the dedications of compositions, touched on briefly in Chapter 4, offer the possibility of investigating further the wider social networks in the city in which the Théâtre d'Orléans played a part. There is also still much scope, as I have already mentioned, to investigate questions of race in relation to the theatre: in particular, given black citizens'

¹⁶ Joseph A. Mussulman, *Music in the Cultured Generation: A Social History of Music in America, 1870–1900* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1971).

¹⁷ German aesthetic ideals heavily influenced the American Transcendentalist movement, which in turn shaped the criticism of one of Mussulman's most-discussed writers: John Sullivan Dwight (of *Dwight's Journal of Music*).

¹⁸ See, for example, Ellen C. Merrill, *Germans of Louisiana* (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing, 2005) and Andrea Mehrländer, *The Germans of Charleston, Richmond and New Orleans During the Civil War Period, 1850–1870: A Study and Research Compendium* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011). For more on their musical cultures, see Ann Ostendorf, *Sounds American: National Identity and the Music Cultures of the Lower Mississippi River Valley, 1800–1860* (Athens, GA and London: University of Georgia Press, 2011).

apparently enthusiastic patronage of the Théâtre d'Orléans, explorations of opera's significance for them, though doubtless hard to uncover, would help give a voice to social groups that were increasingly marginalised as the mid-century approached.

Beyond the Théâtre d'Orléans

It seems fitting to end this thesis with the demise of the Théâtre d'Orléans, as an illustration of changing conditions—both theatrical and socio-political—and the ways in which they shaped New Orleans's operatic future. In September 1848, the Orleans Theatre Company was forced to sell the building of the Théâtre d'Orléans to the Union Bank of Louisiana, as the result of a loss in a financial court case. Over the next few years, the theatre building changed hands a number of times, passing along a string of private owners, and in March 1859, it was sold to Henry Parlange. While previous owners had successfully negotiated leases with the theatre company, a dispute soon arose between Parlange and Charles Boudousquié, the then manager of the Théâtre d'Orléans.¹⁹ Boudousquié announced his intention to renew his lease of the theatre, but it seems that Parlange offered him unreasonable terms, and no agreement could be reached. Boudousquié instead channelled his efforts into setting up and incorporating a French Opera House Association, with the intention of building a dedicated opera house in the city to replace the Théâtre d'Orléans as home to the French opera company (Figure 6.1).

On 4 March 1859, the stock company of the French Opera House was registered. It had \$100,000, held in 200 shares of \$500 each, and Boudousquié made a substantial personal investment in the project.²⁰ The following month, construction of the new theatre, which was to seat 1,800 people, began on a site at the corner of Bourbon and Toulouse Streets.²¹ When it opened on 1 December 1859, the new opera house was greeted with widespread excitement, if the critic for the *Daily Picayune* was anything to go by:

¹⁹ Details of the Chain of Title are recorded in the Historic New Orleans Collection's Vieux Carré Survey, accessible online at http://www.hnoc.org/vcs/property_info.php?lot=18627-01 (accessed 24 June 2017). See also John Smith Kendall, *History of New Orleans* (Chicago and New York: Lewis Publishing Co., 1922), 730.

²⁰ For more on the history of the French Opera House, see Lyle Saxon, *Fabulous New Orleans* (New York and London: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1939), 280–3.

²¹ It was, therefore, substantially larger and more comfortable than the Théâtre d'Orléans, which only had three tiers, rather than four. All of this is according to Thierry Beauvert, *Opera Houses of the World* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998), 198. The information provided by Beauvert conflicts with that given by Harry Brunswick Loeb, who suggests the house had an even larger capacity, seating 2,078 people. See Harry Brunswick Loeb, 'The Opera in New Orleans', *Publications of the Louisiana Historical Society* 9 (1916): 34.

The coup d'oeil [*sic*] presented by the auditorium, when viewed from the centre of the parquette, was superb indeed. The house is constructed so as to afford a full view of the audience from almost every point, and its gracefully curved tiers of boxes, rising one above the other, each gradually receding from the line of the other and then filled, in a great degree, with ladies in grand toilette, presented a spectacle that was richly worth viewing. The private boxes on each side of the proscenium, are elegantly draped with crimson damask and all are occupied by families for the season. The whole house is painted white and the decorations of the front of the boxes are in gold; the first circle, with rich festoons, and those above it with panel work. A magnificent mirror in a gold frame on the wall on each side of the proscenium adds greatly to the picturesque effect of the auditorium. The entrances to the house are numerous, spacious and commodious, and the concert-room, ladies' retiring-room, etc., are constructed upon a scale of great elegance and convenience.²²

A grand opera, Rossini's *Guillaume Tell*, was chosen as the inaugural work, to be preceded by a 'selection of national airs', among which was the particular favourite, 'Yankee Doodle'.²³ From the very opening, then, Boudousquié positioned the French Opera House not as a marker of francophone separatism, but as a place where growing American nationalist interests could also be played out. Boudousquié took with him the troupe from the Théâtre d'Orléans, leaving that theatre to limp on until it was claimed by fire in December 1866.²⁴

The move to the new French Opera House brought significant, albeit initially subtle changes to the system of operatic production and reception I have outlined in the rest of this thesis. First and foremost, Boudousquié soon began to explore the possibility of moving beyond the company model that the Davises had established with such success at the

²² *The Daily Picayune*, 2 December 1859, as reprinted in *The Daily Picayune*, 24 October 1909 in a special issue concerning the fiftieth anniversary of the French Opera House.

²³ *The Daily Picayune*, 2 December 1859, as reprinted in *The Daily Picayune*, 24 October 1909. These 'national airs' may well have been a spontaneous addition to the festivities, as they were not detailed in the advertisements of the programme for the opening night as printed in *L'Abeille* on 30 November 1859 and 1 December 1859.

²⁴ Karyl Lynn Zietz states that the Théâtre d'Orléans was consumed by fire on 7 December 1866 in her *Opera Companies and Houses of the United States: A Comprehensive, Illustrated Reference* (Jefferson, NC and London: McFarland, 1995), 115. For more on the history of the French Opera House, see Joseph Gabriel de Baroncelli, *Le Théâtre-français à la Nouvelle Orleans: essai historique* (New Orleans: Imprimerie G. Muller, 1906), 75–83.

Théâtre d'Orléans. The Théâtre d'Orléans had been different from the majority of theatre troupes in the nineteenth-century United States, in the sense that it had always relied on a stable company, which was recruited for the whole season, rather than on visiting stars.²⁵ While the mid-century might well have been a time of transition for touring troupes, as they moved from being star centred to 'combination' troupes in which an entire company travelled together, in certain respects, the early years of the French Opera House reveal indications of a reversal of the Théâtre d'Orléans's long-established practices, furnishing examples of star-centred performance.



Figure 6.1 – The new French Opera House (as sketched in the early twentieth century). LARC, Albert Voss Collection, Manuscripts Collection 856, Series 5, Box 16

Indeed, in December 1860, Boudousquié engaged the seventeen-year-old Adelina Patti for three months of performances at the French Opera House. The tour had been negotiated by Patti's brother-in-law, the theatrical impresario Maurice Strakosch, as a means of preparing for and filling the time before her London debut, which had been arranged for the spring of 1861. Of course, New Orleans had played host to visiting vocal stars long before 1860: Jenny Lind and Henriette Sontag, among others, had all visited, but they had typically only sung in concerts or between the acts of operas, not in the Théâtre

²⁵ Preston even points this out in *Opera on the Road*, 32.

d'Orléans's productions.²⁶ As Jack Belsom has shown, this is what the local press initially assumed would happen during Patti's visit.²⁷ Alongside concert engagements, however, Boudousquié contracted Patti to make six appearances in works at the French Opera House over a three-week period. She made her debut in the title role of Donizetti's *Lucie de Lammermoor* on 19 December 1860 to rapturous critical acclaim. Such were the waves that Patti made that Boudousquié and Strakosch quickly added new dates to her engagement: she performed in works at the French Opera House on twenty-seven occasions over the next three months, before giving a final gala performance on 22 March 1861 and departing soon after for Havana and then London. She appeared in a range of repertoire, from *Lucie* to Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots* and *Le Pardon de Ploërmel*, via *Le Barbier de Séville*, *Le Trouvère*, *Rigoletto*, and *Martha*.

Patti's guest appearances, much loved as they were by the people of New Orleans, not only signalled the first real departure from the tight, company-orientated ethos developed at the Théâtre d'Orléans, by introducing a guest star into their already well-known productions, but they also brought about a more fundamental rupture in the French operatic tradition in the city, by departing from the French language.²⁸ That is to say, as Belsom has pointed out, that Patti herself sang her roles in Italian (with the exception of the part of Valentine in *Les Huguenots*, which the local press suggested she sang in French in order to pay homage to her local friends and their devotion to this particular Meyerbeer opera). Meanwhile, the rest of the cast sang in French, as was their usual practice and as had, of course, been the tradition at the Théâtre d'Orléans.²⁹ In order to complement Patti's Italian performances, on occasion members of the French Opera House company were persuaded to relearn particular roles (or parts thereof) in Italian. It appears, for example, that the tenor Mathieu sang the role of Manrico (to Patti's Leonora) in *Le Trouvère* mainly

²⁶ The only exception to this seems to have been Laure Cinti-Damoreau, who made guest appearances in several opera performances at the Théâtre d'Orléans during her concert tour of 1844. The roles she performed in New Orleans were ones she had sung at the works' Paris premiers: La Comtesse Adèle in Rossini's *Le Comte Ory*, and Henriette and Angèle in Auber's *L'Ambassadrice* and *Le Domino noir* respectively. These performances were billed as 'représentations extraordinaires', and they appear to have been entirely exceptional in the history of the Théâtre d'Orléans; they are distinct from the performances later given by Patti at the French Opera House, in the sense that Cinti-Damoreau was not simply engaged for her star vocal qualities, but for her close links with the operas' creation in Paris.

²⁷ Jack Belsom, 'En Route to Stardom: Adelina Patti at the French Opera House, New Orleans, 1860–1861', *Opera Quarterly* 10/3 (1994): 116. Patti's stay in New Orleans has also been explored by John S. Kendall in 'Patti in New Orleans', *Southwest Review* 16/4 (1931): 460–8.

²⁸ What is more, *Il trovatore* and various other works had already been performed in the 1860–1 season before Patti's arrival and would, therefore, still have been fresh in audience's minds, thus making the impact of introducing a visiting star even greater.

²⁹ Belsom, 'En Route to Stardom', 123.

in Italian on 2 January 1861 and the usual baritone, Melchisedec, was replaced in the role of the Count di Luna by Patti's half-brother Ettore Barilli.

With the engagement of Patti, then, Boudousquié diverged from some of the most established traditions of New Orleans's operatic scene for the first time. We might choose to read Patti's visit not as a regression to an earlier model of theatrical activity in the United States, but as foreshadowing a particularly modern kind of operatic production, familiar today, in which star singers circulate globally, performing with support from 'in-house' choruses and sets, etc. While the Théâtre d'Orléans had always been proud to present works and acts of works in as complete a form as possible, Patti, as only a star (or in this case an emerging star) could do, freely interpolated her own favourite arias, and indeed some of the audience's favourite songs (such as 'Home, Sweet Home') into her performances.³⁰ But whether Patti's engagements at the French Opera House looked to a global operatic future or back to an operatic past driven by singers' whims, her appearances there reveal that shifts away from the Théâtre d'Orléans's practices happened quickly after the opening of the new house.

Although the first two seasons at the French Opera House were enormously successful and Boudousquié doubtless had grand ambitions for future years, the outbreak of the American Civil War in April 1861 saw the closure of the theatre.³¹ At the end of the war in 1865, Boudousquié was not re-employed, and he died the following year. Furthermore, the loss of the entire French opera troupe heading for New Orleans in the shipwreck of the 'Evening Star' in October 1866 cast a long shadow over the reopening of the house.³² From that point on, the opera house was managed by a series of different impresarios (often changing from one season to the next). Sometimes it had its own resident troupe, while at other times it played host to visiting touring troupes for just a few months a year. Indeed, the New Orleans premiere of *Carmen* in 1879, one of the most discussed French operas globally, both at the time and since, was given not by a French troupe at all, but by Strakosch's visiting Italian Opera Company, since the city did not have a resident troupe at the French Opera House for the 1879–80 season.³³ In some respects, then, the

³⁰ Belsom, 'En Route to Stardom', 122.

³¹ Saxon, *Fabulous New Orleans*, 282.

³² Saxon, *Fabulous New Orleans*, 282. Baroncelli also discusses the closure of the Opera House during the Civil War and the shipwreck of the Evening Star. See Baroncelli, *Le Théâtre-français à la Nouvelle Orleans*, 81–7.

³³ See advert in *The Daily Picayune*, 15 November 1879. Reviews of the premiere appeared in *L'Abeille* on 19 and 21 December 1879, and in *The Daily Picayune* on 19 December 1879.

second half of the nineteenth century saw New Orleans begin to integrate more with nationwide systems of operatic performance.

Close to midnight on 3 December 1919, smoke was spotted curling its way from the roof of the French Opera House. By the next morning, the once-impressive Greek-revival building was nothing but a burned-out shell, despite the best efforts of the local fire brigade. The destruction of the French Opera House was mourned as the end of an era in New Orleans: ‘Gone! All Gone! The curtain has fallen for the last time on *Les Huguenots* ... The heart of the old French Quarter has stopped beating’, reported *The Daily Picayune*, as the public struggled to process the loss.³⁴ Of course, it was the end of an era: the French Opera House not only left a very literal empty space in the centre of the French Quarter, but on a symbolic level, the fire led to the loss of a potent symbol of the city’s cultural heritage.

In many respects, however, the move away from the Théâtre d’Orléans sixty years earlier had been an even more significant watershed in the city’s operatic life, albeit a less dramatic one. The employment of Patti, the periodic reliance on touring troupes, and the performance of Italian opera in its original language all reveal the ways in which the layers of practices and conditions that had sustained the city’s French operatic life for the past forty years began to pull away from each other. All of this casts into sharp relief the position occupied by the Théâtre d’Orléans from 1819 to 1859. As I hope to have shown, this was a position that was in many ways highly unusual, but in others was representative of wider theatrical customs and processes. If the local press felt that they were bestowing enormous praise on John Davis when they called him ‘the man who gave Louisiana a French theatre’, a closer inspection reveals that their description hardly did him or his creation justice: the Théâtre d’Orléans was always more than simply a French theatre. The activities taking place on stage might have been the most-obvious and most-recorded elements of its existence, but the theatre’s cultural influence, in both ideological and material terms, was far wider. It is only when we venture to look beyond the city that we can really appreciate the depth to which the theatre was embedded in the life—real and imagined—of nineteenth-century New Orleans.

³⁴ Lyle Saxon, *Times Picayune*, 5 December 1919.

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APPENDIX

Théâtre d'Orléans Contract

ENTRE M. PIERRE DAVIS, D'UNE PART:

ET

M. [BLANK], Artiste

Dramatique et lyrique, libre de tout engagement qui pourrait contrarier le présent, d'autre part;

Il est convenu et réciproquement accepté ce qui suit, savoir:

MOI [BLANK]

M'engage pour jouer dans la troupe de la Nouvelle-Orléans, sur le Théâtre français de cette ville, en tout autre, les emplois dits de [LARGE BLANK SPACE]

Le tout en chef, ou partage du tout, ou de partie, à la volonté de l'administration.

Je m'engage, en outre, à consacrer mes talents au bien de l'entreprise, à apprendre et chanter les chœurs dans tous les opéras et vaudevilles, à paraître dans les pièces à spectacle, pantomimes, mélodrames et ballets, à jouer au moins douze rôles dits de complaisance, dans le courant de mon engagement;

A suivre la troupe, en tout ou partie, partout où il plaira au Directeur de l'envoyer, sans exiger d'autre dédommagement que les frais de transport;

A me fournir tous les costumes nécessaires aux rôles que je jouerai, sans restriction.

Dans toutes les pièces où mon emploi ne me donnera pas un rôle, je m'engage à jouer celui qui me sera distribué, de quelque genre qu'il soit, jeune ou vieux, sérieux ou comique, et lors même qu'il serait répété accessoire.

Dans le cas où, pour le bien d'un ouvrage, le Directeur du Théâtre, ou son régisseur, jugerait à propos que je jouasse un autre rôle que le mien, je m'engage à me déplacer, l'administration se réservant le droit de distribuer les pièces nouvelles à sa volonté, sans que l'artiste puisse faire aucune réclamation.

Je partirai pour joindre mon engagement dans le courant de [BLANK] ou [BLANK] à la volonté du Directeur.

Je ne jouerai sur aucun Théâtre, ne jouerai et ne chanterai à aucun concert payant ou particulier, ni ne me livrerai à aucun travail étranger à mon profession, sans l'autorisation expresse et par écrit du Directeur.

Dans les ouvrages nouveaux, je m'engage à apprendre trente-cinq lignes par jour, indépendamment des études occasionnées par les remises de pièces.

Je me conformerai strictement au règlement dont la teneur suit, et de tout autre qu'il plairait au Directeur de faire pour le meilleur service de l'entreprise.

RÈGLEMENT DU THÉÂTRE D'ORLÉANS

1. Aucun artiste ne pourra s'absenter de la Ville de la Nouvelle-Orléans, sans en prévenir l'administration et désigner l'endroit où l'en pourra le trouver en cas d'accident ou de changement de spectacle.
2. L'artiste qui, à la représentation, se fera attendre à l'heure précise du lever du rideau, paiera une amende de 10 pour 100 sur ses appointements du mois; si cette attente durait plus d'un quart-d'heure, l'amende doublerait pour chaque quart d'heure en sus.
3. L'artiste qui manquera une entrée à la représentation, paiera 10 pour 100 de ses appointements du mois; s'il manque une scène entière, 30 pour 100; s'il manque la représentation, la recette entière, évaluée à la plus forte possible. L'artiste qui arrivera aux répétitions générales d'un ouvrage sans savoir son rôle, sera sujet à une amende de cinq piastres. L'amende sera doublée à la représentation.
4. L'artiste qui, par sa faute, fera retarder la représentation d'une des pièces affichées pour un jour fixe, paiera 36 pour 100 sur ses appointements du mois.
5. L'artiste qui, par sa faute, fera retarder la représentation d'une pièce jouée depuis 4, 5 et 6 mois, et annoncée depuis 48 heures à l'avance, paiera un mois de ses appointements; la raison qu'il faut remettre un rôle n'étant point admissible. Le refus d'un rôle, exigible d'après les clauses de l'engagement, entrainera une amende de deux mois d'appointements, si toutefois l'administration ne juge pas à propos d'exiger de plus forts dédommagements. Chaque artiste devant paraître et chanter les chœurs, celui qui manquera à cette partie du devoir sera pointé comme s'il manquait un rôle. L'artiste qui, en scène, se dispenserait de chanter les chœurs, paiera dix piastres d'amende.
6. Toute pièce qui aura été jouée, ne pourra être refusée sur le répertoire de la semaine; et toutes celles jouées depuis 3 mois seront exigibles du matin au soir, sous peine d'une amende de 20 pour cent des appointements de l'artiste en défaut.
7. Les cas d'indisposition qui feront suspendre le service et changer la représentation affichée, entraîneront l'obligation d'en prévenir de suite la Régie, qui fera constater la maladie (s'il est nécessaire), et de rester surtout chez soi, sans se montrer au spectacle, ni ailleurs, le jour où on aura ainsi changé la représentation, sous peine de l'amende qu'il plaira à l'administration de fixer.
8. Tout artiste qui aura suspendu son service pour cause d'indisposition, et qui néanmoins chantera chez lui ou s'absentera indiscrètement, soit pour des parties de

campagne, de souper, ou pour faire des écoliers en ville, subira une retenue égale au quintuple de ses appointements du nombre de jours qu'il aura passé sans service.

9. Toute indisposition dont la feinte sera prouvée par des médecins, autorisera la rupture de l'engagement, et tous dommages et intérêts qu'il plaira à l'administration de demander.
10. Les répétitions commenceront précisément à l'heure indiquée. L'artiste qui manquera sa réplique paiera 4 escalins; pour un quart d'heure une piastre, et en doublent ainsi de quart-d'heure en quart-d'heure, jusqu'à la concurrence de dix piastres. L'artiste qui quittera la répétition avant qu'elle soit tout à fait terminée, paiera la même amende que s'il l'avait manquée entièrement. Si l'artiste est absent au moment de sa réplique, quoiqu'ayant déjà paru, il sera soumis à l'amende d'une piastre, et ainsi de suite, en doublant de quart-d'heure en quart-d'heure, jusqu'à la concurrence de six piastres. L'acteur qui se fera appeler à sa réplique, paiera, au troisième appel du souffleur, 2 escalins d'amende. L'amende sera la même pour les leçons de rôle et des chœurs, dont personne ne peut se dispenser à moins d'être en état d'étudier seul.
11. Les répétitions générales se feront avec le même soin que les représentations. Dans le moment où l'on répètera, les personnes qui parleront sur la scène, ou s'y tiendront sans y avoir affaire, paieront 4 escalins, et 4 de plus chaque fois que le régisseur les priera de faire silence ou de s'éloigner. En outre, on ne pourra coudre ni faire aucun ouvrage d'aiguille, ou autre, lorsque l'on répètera en scène, sous peine de cinq piastres d'amende.
12. L'artiste qui manquant l'heure de la répétition, refusera de venir au Théâtre lorsqu'on l'enverra chercher, paiera dix piastres d'amende, s'il n'a pas fait part à l'administration, dès le matin, à 8 heures, de l'indisposition qui le force à rester chez lui; les dix piastres ne détruisant pas l'amende de la répétition.
13. L'artiste qui, ayant chez lui une partition ou une brochure, négligera de l'envoyer au Théâtre, au concierge, un heure avant la répétition, paiera dix piastres d'amende. Pour la représentation l'amende sera doublée.
14. Le plus profond silence doit être observé au Théâtre, lorsque le spectacle est commencé. L'artiste qui, dans les coulisses, parlerait assez haut pour être entendu sur la scène, paiera 10 piastres d'amende, et l'amende doublera à chaque injonction faite par le régisseur pour engager au silence. L'artiste qui, lorsqu'il est sur la scène, soit dans les chœurs, soit dans une simple comparutions, causera ou rira dans une scène sérieuse paiera dix piastres d'amende.
15. Chaque artiste peut avoir au Théâtre un ou une domestique, mais ces domestiques ne peuvent rester dans les coulisses pendant la représentation; leur place est dans la loge de leurs maîtres; et ils ne peuvent la quitter, ni se montrer sans exposer leurs maîtres à une amende d'une piastre chaque fois qu'il seront en défaut.
16. Les artistes danseurs sont soumis au même mode de règlement que les autres artistes.

17. Messieurs les musiciens se trouveront à l'orchestre un quart-d'heure avant le lever du rideau, sous peine de deux piastres d'amende, et en doublant pour chaque quart-d'heure que durera leur absence pendant la représentation jusqu'à la concurrence de dix piastres; et pour les répétitions, il sera payé une piastre par celui qui manquera au premier coup d'archet qui sera donné par le chef d'orchestre à l'heure indiquée. Cette amende doublera pour chaque quart-d'heure que durera la répétition, jusqu'à la concurrence de cinq piastres. Le musicien qui quittera la répétition avant qu'elle soit entièrement terminée, paiera la même amende que s'il avait manquée tout entière. En outre, ces Messieurs sont priés de ne point franchir la cloison qui sépare l'orchestre des fauteuils, et aller dans la salle par ce chemin; l'infraction à cet article entraînerait 25 piastres d'amende et, lorsque le coup de cloche annoncera la fin de l'entracte, tout musicien absent paiera une piastre d'amende.
18. Il sera placé dans le foyer du Théâtre un tableau qui annoncera le travail du jour.
19. Toute discussion étrangère au travail du Théâtre est interdite. Celui qui contreviendrait à cet article serait amendé de vingt piastres, et pour un sujet étrangère au Théâtre, de cinquante.
20. Le magasin n'étant établi que pour les choristes et figurants, n'est point à la disposition des artistes qui ne pourront réclamer un costume pour un rôle quelconque, l'administration ne reconnaissant point d'habits de magasin en aucune circonstance, même pour les rôles de complaisance.
21. Dans le cas où la répétition, pour un motif quelconque, ne commencerait pas à l'heure indiquée, les artistes doivent attendre; celui qui quitterait le Théâtre paierait une piastre pour un quart-d'heure, et en doublant ainsi de quart-d'heure en quart-d'heure, jusqu'à la concurrence de dix piastres. La pendule du Théâtre sera le seul régulateur du service.
22. Les artistes ne pourront prétendre à aucun rôle de début, l'administration se réservant le droit de les fixer à sa volonté.
23. Il est expressément convenu entre les soussignés, que le Directeur a le droit d'annuler, de sa seule volonté, l'engagement de tout artiste qui nuirait à l'activité du service et du répertoire, par défaut de conduite, ou qui troublerait l'ordre et la tranquillité par des tracasseries, injures ou provocations envers ses camarades. Il en sera de même pour toute maladie chronique, ou provenant d'inconduite, et sans que le pensionnaire puisse prétendre à aucune indemnité.

Et M. Pierre Davis, s'oblige, les clauses du présent engagement strictement remplies par M. [BLANK] à lui payer la somme de [LARGE BLANK] mois, en piastres (évaluées à Fr. 5 25 chacune), laquelle somme sera répartie en portions égales payées de mois en mois.

Il fera, en temps utile, à M. [BLANK] et à *titre de prêt*, une avance de la somme de [BLANK] qui lui sera retenue en portions égales d [*sic*] [BLANK] jusqu'à concurrence du parfait remboursement.

Il paiera le voyage de M. [BLANK]; savoir: sa personne par voiture publique, et ses effets par voie de roulage ordinaire, de [BLANK] au port du départ, et du port à la ville de jonction. Il en sera de même du voyage de retour, jusqu'au premier port de France.

Le présent engagement sera de [BLANK] mois, à compter du jour du début à la ville de jonction.

Il est convenu entre les soussignés que dans le cas de fermeture du Théâtre par suite d'incendie, ou pour cause de quelque événement majeur, interdiction, calamité publique, ou par ordre du gouvernement ou des autorités locales, les appointements cesseront de courir, pour ne recommencer que du jour de la réouverture.

Le présent engagement, une fois signé, ne pourra être annulé que du consentement des deux parties: celle qui voudra le rompre, paiera à l'autre un délit de la somme de [BLANK] exigible par corps, comme affaire de commerce, par devant les tribunaux, en tout pays et sous toute sorte de juridiction; et, dans ce cas, le premier réclamant s'oblige de le faire timbrer à ses frais.

FAIT DOUBLE ENTRE NOUS, et de bonne foi, pour servir et valoir ce que de raison, et comme passé par devant notaire.