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RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Genre in Flux: *Grand opéra* Through the Lens of French Touring Companies, 1830–1860

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Abstract

In March 1830, travelling troupe director Henri Delorme staged the local premiere of Daniel Auber's *grand opéra La muette de Portici* in the northern French town of Valenciennes. The production marks a turning point in the circulation of operatic repertoire across France, kickstarting a thriving but as yet unacknowledged phenomenon of touring *grand opéra* that persisted into the 1860s and beyond. In this article, I reconstruct the artistic and working practices of this phenomenon, and demonstrate how the arrival of the genre in the northern touring circuit allowed local individuals, such as the director, theatre-goers and local critics, to voice their expectations – in musical, dramatic and staging terms – of the appropriate artistic parameters for the emerging genre when seen from a provincial perspective. I suggest that *grand opéra*'s adjusted scale, status and performance practices on tour had the potential to reconfigure the genre's meaning for nineteenth-century French audiences and theatrical performers as local agents negotiated shifting sets of centre–periphery dynamics, at once seeking operatic imitation of the capital and rejecting it in favour of locally defined practices and values.

Keywords: opera; France; mobility; adaptation; nineteenth century

On 13 March 1830, an anonymous theatre-goer from the northern French town of Valenciennes took issue with the upcoming local premiere of Daniel Auber's *La muette de Portici* (1828).[1] In a censorious letter printed in the town paper *L'écho de la frontière*, a self-titled 'amateur de spectacle' disparaged the work of director Henri Delorme in his first year managing the itinerant theatre troupe that performed in Valenciennes. The letter-writer accused Delorme of neglecting Valenciennes in favour of other towns in his touring itinerary across the departments of Nord and Pas-de-Calais.[2] More pressing, however, was an artist matter: the amateur feared that Delorme would present 'his *Muette* reduced to the size of his troupe'.[3] This stinging charge suggests that the potential spectator was more concerned about how touring troupes would stage large-scale opera in his locality than with the arrival of a new piece and genre.

The letter does not state how the amateur had formed his expectations of the implied ideal non-'reduced' (or 'complete') form of *La muette.* Given the centralisation of the nineteenth-century French theatrical world, it is likely that he implied the operatic practices of the capital,

[1] Libretto written by Germain Delavigne and Eugène Scribe.
[2] *L'écho de la frontière*, 13 March 1830; similar concerns were raised in *Le journal de Valenciennes*, 16 March 1830.
[3] 'sa *Muette* raccourcie à la taille de sa troupe': *L'écho*, 13 March 1830.

whether experienced first-hand, understood through press criticism or extrapolated via the pages of the *Muette* score, libretto or staging manual.[4] The new forms of large-scale musical, dramatic and visual spectacle created for *La muette* at the Paris Opéra could be expected to provoke excitement outside of the capital for two reasons. First, the 'synchronicity' of musical, dramatic and visual expression in Auber's piece (to use Karin Pendle and Stephen Wilkins's term) defined the aesthetic parameters for the development of the Opéra's dominant stage genre throughout the mid-nineteenth century: *grand opéra.*[5] Second, the arrival of such a piece in Valenciennes held additional significance because of the traditional relationship between the capital and the provinces: regional journalists commonly positioned Paris as the purveyor of operatic and wider theatrical novelty. The amateur's letter, however, highlights a local view of *La muette*'s transfer between the capital and a small-scale theatre that focused on the opera's material conditions, rather than the novelty of receiving new repertoire. The worry about receiving a 'reduced' performance indicates that the theatre-goer was anticipating disappointing cuts or other changes to the opera's music, drama or staging. In doing so, the northern theatre-goer's letter reveals a set of striking aesthetic and material preoccupations about the relationship between France's centre and its peripheries.

In this article, I explore the staging practices of *grand opéra* performance in the northern touring circuit of the French provinces during the thirty years after the genre's emergence, with a focus on productions in Valenciennes, a historic lace-making centre very close to the Belgian border with almost 19,000 inhabitants.[6] I argue that the ways in which the musical, dramatic and visual components of *grand opéra* were embraced in touring environments adds important nuance to current scholarly understanding of the genre. Recent exploration of the European and North American circulation of *grand opéra* has expanded the traditional conception of the genre as defined by the reception and performance conditions of its home institution, the Paris Opéra.[7] There has been little investigation, though, of how *grand opéra* functioned nationally on a French scale. Foundational to this question are Sabine Teulon Lardic and Mélanie Guérimand's short case studies and Katharine Ellis's longer investigation of *grand opéra* production by residential companies in large regional cities such as Lyon, Montpellier and Bordeaux. These municipally funded theatre troupes had the largest artistic resources and personnel in the provinces. Accordingly, Ellis, in particular, characterises much of the production of *grand opéra* in these towns as demanding the same scale of musical and visual effects as in Paris, the fervent replication of the Opéra's artistic conditions demonstrating the act of aping cultural capital.[8] From this provincial viewpoint, *grand opéra* appears as a centralised and monumentalised form within France.

The much greater contrast between the artistic environment of the Paris Opéra and an itinerant company, however, has the potential to reveal *grand opéra* working in varying ways across France. For instance, it was the difference in scale between the Opéra and Delorme's itinerant company that provoked the fears of the Valenciennes 'amateur de spectacle', arguably justifiably so. The Opéra employed almost eighty chorus members, more than

[4] Hervé Lacombe, 'Introduction', in *Histoire de l'opéra français: Du Consulat aux débuts de la III^e^ République*, ed. Hervé Lacombe (Paris, 2021), 14–15; Romuald Féret, *Théâtre et pouvoir au XIX^e^ siècle: L'exemple de la Seine-et-Oise et de la Seine-et-Marne* (Paris, 2009).

[5] James Parakilas, 'The Chorus', in *The Cambridge Companion to Grand Opera*, ed. David Charlton (Cambridge, 2003), 84; Karin Pendle and Stephen Wilkins, 'Paradise Found: The Salle Le Peletier and French Grand Opera', in *Opera in Context: Essays on Historical Staging*, ed. Mark A. Radice (Portland, 1998), 171–207.

[6] Abel Hugo, *La France pittoresque* (Paris, 1838), II: 285–6.

[7] Jane Fulcher, *The Nation's Image: French Grand Opera as Politics and Politicized Art* (Cambridge, 1987); Sarah Hibberd, *French Grand Opera and the Historical Imagination* (Cambridge, 2009); Jens Hesselager, ed., *Grand Opera Outside Paris: Opera on the Move in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (London, 2018).

[8] Katharine Ellis, 'Broke: Tales from the French Opera Industry', in *Financing Music in Europe*, ed. Étienne Jardin (Turnhout, 2022), 109–28.

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eighty musicians, plus supernumeraries and child performers.[9] A team of sixty *machinistes* also worked to showcase the lavish historical decors and stage effects for which *grand opéra* became known, including the eruption of Vesuvius in *La muette*.[10] By contrast, Delorme's troupe consisted of only seventeen singers and one dancer, alongside a librarian/prompter, *chef d'orchestre* and director.[11] They would perform accompanied by only around twenty orchestral musicians, largely students and amateurs recruited *ad hoc* from each town on the troupe's itinerary. Additionally, Delorme's company toured without its own decors, relying on stock backdrops supplied by each municipality.[12] It is likely the difference between Parisian and touring conditions that lies at the heart of Ellis's assessment that the scale of *grand opéra* prohibited performances by French travelling troupes.[13] Delorme's staging of *La muette*, though, demonstrates that resources were no impediment for operatic ambition. Indeed, as I will argue here, the as yet undiscovered phenomenon of touring *grand opéra* emerged as vital force across France shortly after 1830, with many directors following Delorme's example.

Throughout, I claim that the touring environment reveals the important role which provincial operatic practice played in debating and determining the aesthetic values and artistic function of French *grand opéra* on a national scale during the nineteenth century. This occurred across two distinct phases which structure the two halves of my article. I first establish the theatrical context within which Delorme's company operated, before reconstructing the musical and scenic conditions of the 1830 Valenciennes premiere of *La muette*. This context reveals that 1830 represents a host of turning points for French operatic practice beyond the emergence of early *grand opéra*: the first circulation of the Opéra's repertoire to the touring network; the transformation of several musical and visual elements of *La muette* in productions away from the centre; and the parallel change in certain itinerant troupe practices brought about by performances of Auber's opera. I then chart broader artistic trends in the establishment of *grand opéra* as a touring genre between the mid 1830s and early 1860s, particularly in northern France. I consider how prestige associated with different musical and visual elements was used by the provincial press to discuss the theatrical relationship between France's centre and its peripheries. The later period reveals a move away from adaptations in individual contexts and a growing emphasis on the pan-provincial imitation of established models for the visual spectacle of *grand opéra*, in particular.

Provincial *grand opéra*

The diverse infrastructural, artistic and social conditions of the touring troupe system significantly informed the way in which *grand opéra* was received in northern France. Delorme's group was known as the 1st *troupe d'arrondissement*, one of eighteen travelling companies forming part of the itinerant tier of the French government's complex theatrical infrastructure governing the provinces during the first half of the nineteenth century.[14] In the provincial theatrical hierarchy established largely in Napoleonic legislation from 1806–7 but reformed in 1815 and 1824, touring companies occupied a lower position than their sedentary counterparts, sometimes referred to as the 'third' order of French theatres and, in

[9] Karin Pendle, *Eugène Scribe and French Opera of the Nineteenth Century* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1979), 50.

[10] Pendle, *Eugène Scribe and French Opera*, 50.

[11] Archives nationales de France, F/21/1234, troupe list (Delorme), 3 June 1829.

[12] Sophie Horrocks, 'Performing for the Provinces: Touring Theatre Troupes and the French Political Imaginary, 1824–64' (PhD thesis, Durham University, 2024), 16, 25–6.

[13] Katharine Ellis, *French Musical Life: Local Dynamics in the Century to World War II* (New York, 2022), 214.

[14] *Ordonnance*, 8 December 1824, printed in *Le moniteur universel*, 22 December 1824.

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the eyes of Parisian writers, often associated with performers lacking in talent.[15] Yet these companies had important theatrical responsibilities, being mandated by the Ministry of the Interior to tour twice a season for at least fifteen performances to a list of designated small towns within their region (the *arrondissement*). For Delorme, this circuit encompassed Dunkerque (in English, Dunkirk), Cambrai, Arras and Saint-Omer alongside Valenciennes around 1830.[16] Flexibility lay at the heart of *troupe d'arrondissement* practice before 1830 and after, as performers adjusted to the different sizes of each town stage, the variability of stock decors, and differing numbers of orchestral musicians.[17] Companies were also legislatively mandated to perform across sung and spoken genres. *Arrondissement* troupe members were expected to move nimbly between *opéra-comique*, *vaudeville*, *drame*, *comédie* and *mélodrame*, often within one night, and Delorme's introduction of *grand opéra* into their repertoire added an additional dimension to the required skillset. Each performer was contracted for one or two *emplois*, a casting and contractual category referring to voice type, physique and onstage mannerisms, plus characters' social hierarchy and age.[18] *Emplois* indicated the expected roles that singers took on in at least one genre (i.e. the *ingénue*, the father figure), but performers still needed to hone pluriform skills to fit into other roles across contrasting sung and spoken, 'low' and 'high' art genres within multi-piece programmes.[19] While the chopping and changing between genres was accentuated in a small touring company of under twenty singers such as Delorme's, plural performance skills were the norm within provincial troupes at large. Such conditions were a far cry from those of theatres of the capital. In Paris, government legislation also originating from Napoleon's 1806–7 laws ensured that the profile, repertoire and performers' skillsets of institutions such as the Opéra, Opéra-Comique, Comédie-Française were kept largely separate in order to protect the distinctiveness of stage traditions.[20]

The difference between the singing requirements of touring companies and those of the Paris Opéra is evidenced by the fact that, prior to 1830, Delorme's troupe had not performed the operas created at this institution. His singers were familiar with the alternating spoken and sung numbers of *opéra-comique*, but not the larger, recitative form created at the Opéra even prior to *grand opéra* (as exemplified in pieces such as Gaspare Spontini and Étienne de Jouy's *La vestale*). The situation was mirrored across the provinces as touring companies almost unanimously avoided the repertoire of the Opéra.[21] Many municipal companies did as well, despite their larger forces often reaching around thirty chorus members plus principal singers and nearing fifty permanent orchestral musicians.[22] Only the largest

[15] Archives nationales, F/21/1234, letter from Delorme to the Minister, 16 September 1830. *L'écho*, 14 August 1834, Horrocks, 'Performing for the Provinces', 134–6.

[16] Archives nationales, F/21/1234, itinerary (Delorme), 20 May 1829. Christiane Jeanselme, 'Quelques aspects de la vie théâtrale de l'arrondissement d'Aix-en-Provence dans la première moitié du xix^{e} siècle', in *La musique dans le midi de la France*, ed. François Lesure (Paris, 1997), II: 73, 76.

[17] Archives nationales, F/21/1235, list of *salles* (Nord), 24 May 1841; Féret, *Théâtre et pouvoir*, 145; Archives municipales de Valenciennes, 1/K/20, letter from the Mayor of Cambrai to the Mayor of Valenciennes, 18 March 1850; J/8/44, letter from the Mayor to the Sub-Prefect of Valenciennes, 25 October 1840.

[18] Olivier Bara, 'Emplois et tessitures', in Lacombe, *Histoire de l'opéra français*, 124–34.

[19] Cyril Triolaire, *Le théâtre en province pendant le Consulat et l'Empire* (Clermont-Ferrand, 2012), 261–2; Horrocks, 'Performing for the Provinces', 148–58.

[20] Mark Everist, 'The Music of Power: Parisian Opera and the Politics of Genre, 1806–1864', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 67 (2014), 685–734.

[21] I have only found records of one performance of Spontini's *La vestale* by the 23rd *troupe ambulante* in Troyes, led by director Gautrot: *Le journal politique du département de l'Aube*, 18 May 1823. Other directors did include *La vestale* or Christoph Willibald Gluck's operas in their repertoire lists, yet these titles were seemingly never performed, likely because performers' skills and resources did not match their ambitions: for example Archives nationales, F/21/1234, repertoire list (Dupré-Nyon), 1825–6.

[22] Marie-Claire Mussat, 'Diffusion et réception de l'opéra comique dans les provinces françaises: L'exemple du grand Ouest', in *Die Opéra comique und ihr Einfluss auf das europäische Musiktheater im 19. Jahrhundert*, ed. Herbert

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and most prestigious Grand Théâtres in the important urban centres of Marseille and Lyon appear to have regularly staged pieces such as *La vestale* prior to 1830, presumably because they were the best equipped vocally, and also scenically, to match the Opéra's scale.[23] Delorme's decision to stage France's largest-scale operatic form for the first time in Valenciennes in 1830, though, highlights the sea change that *La muette* represented for operatic culture on a national scale. The director's embrace of *La muette* suggests that the opera's new effects prompted a shift in his perception of the Opéra repertoire's significance for their own theatrical environments and its accessibility to much smaller companies.

The performance practices and audience experiences of *grand opéra* were also informed by the way in which the touring circuit established particular relationships between localities. Performances in theatres such as Valenciennes were understood by administrators, the press and spectators to take place within a shared itinerant circuit in which the director had to juggle towns' differing population sizes, tastes, municipal support and the state of their theatrical resources. As I have argued elsewhere, this connectivity created an imagined *arrondissement* community whereby actions and events occurring in one node of the touring network informed how the press elsewhere advocated for audiences to behave, imagined the economic and political role of local theatre and appraised troupe performers.[24] Such collaborative and competitive dynamics are evident in the reception of *La muette*, starting with the amateur's accusation that Delorme neglected Valenciennes in his regional itinerary. His comment likely implied a comparison with the longer seasons that the troupe offered in nearby Dunkerque, the largest town in their *arrondissement*, which was often the first to receive new repertoire and which hosted the group's very first performances of *La muette* in January 1830.[25]

The tensions inherent within the radical change in programming undertaken by Delorme in March 1830 led the director to make a public statement in advance of performances in which he addressed the importance of materiality and intra-provincial relationships in defining his *Muette.* Delorme penned a letter in response to the amateur's accusation that was published in the same journal a week later. The director defended the time and effort he spent in Valenciennes versus other *arrondissement* towns and, in a postscript, specifically addressed the issue of operatic scale. He played on the theatre-goer's term 'reduced' to reassure readers that his *Muette* would be performed

> next Sunday, not *reduced* to the size of my troupe, but in the way that [the piece] is played across the provinces, and in my theatre *without omitting anything.* People who know the piece will be convinced of this.[26]

Delorme promised spectators just what the amateur feared could *not* be produced in Valenciennes: a faithful staging presenting *La muette* in a recognisable, noteworthy form. Such a claim might well be expected of any impresario attempting to reassure potential

Schneider and Nicole Wild (Hildesheim, 1997), 283–98; Patrick Taïëb and Sabine Teulon Lardic, 'The Evolution of French Opera Repertoires in Provincial Theatres: Three Epochs, 1770–1900', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Operatic Canon*, ed. Cormac Newark and William Weber (Oxford, 2020), 159–203; Teulon Lardic, 'Les Huguenots et Les Dragons de Villars à Montpellier', in Lacombe, *Histoire de l'opéra français*, 750–2.

[23] *Le sémaphore de Marseille*, 15 July 1829; *Le journal du commerce de la ville de Lyon et du département du Rhône*, 22 March 1829.

[24] Sophie Horrocks David, 'Performing Provincial Hierarchies: French Travelling Theatre Troupes and the Creation of Regional Communities, 1824–1864', in *Socio-Political Topicality in the Repertoire of Nineteenth-Century Provincial Theatres*, ed. Annette Kapler, Giulia Brunello and Raphaël Bortolotti (Würzburg, forthcoming 2025).

[25] *Le journal de Dunkerque*, 20 March 1830.

[26] 'P.S: *La muette de Portici* sera offerte au public dimanche prochain, non *raccourcie* à la *taille* de ma troupe, mais comme elle est jouée partout en province, et chez moi sans *rien passer.* Les personnes qui connaissent l'ouvrage pourront s'en convaincre': *L'écho*, 20 March 1830, Delorme's italics.

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ticket buyers. Yet the director's statement crucially reveals how he conceived of the wider theatrical influences that would determine the shape of the inferred recognisable staging. This was determined by performance practices shared across the provinces and brought to Valenciennes, rather than drawn from Paris.

Delorme's letter is significant in two ways. First, by using the category of provinces, rather than the specific touring circuit, Delorme made a claim for his lowly 'third' level company to be considered on equal terms with larger and better equipped municipal theatres. Second, and most crucially, the director's letter challenges the centralising values that scholars traditionally associate with the French theatrical system and with *grand opéra*, in particular. As mentioned in my introduction, the genre's form, values and meaning in France have thus far largely been tied to the context of its home institution. Pendle and Wilkins argue that the changing stage practices and business model of the Opéra from the late 1820s onwards allowed *grand opéra* to showcase a new synchronicity and layering of visual technologies, music and drama to express operatic narrative and characters.[27] Anselm Gerhard, Sarah Hibberd and Jane Fulcher have also emphasised the cultural and socio-political environments of urban Paris as essential to *grand opéra*'s creation and reception.[28] Where Hibberd positions *grand opéra* as a space of ideological, historical and political contest in which ideas of the nation's past, present and future were represented and debated, Fulcher has characterised the genre, as seen at the Opéra, as working to legitimise the power of the restored monarchies and, in so doing, portraying 'the nation's image'.[29] Not only has the Opéra's symbolism and context been extrapolated to be nationally representative, but this status has also been granted to its specific artistic effects. H. Robert Cohen and, more recently, Léa Oberti argue that the printed *mise-en-scène* manuals produced to record *grand opéra* staging reveals practices that were fundamentally codified, not only in terms of reproduction across the nineteenth-century at the Opéra itself but also in the expectation of imitative stagings across France.[30] Together, these authors define *grand opéra* as a genre symbolising the social and political modernity of the nation, with spectacular and technological artistic means that were so monumentalised as to necessitate imitation of the Parisian spectacle throughout France.

Delorme's description of his *La muette* in *L'écho*, though, offers a new way to appraise *grand opéra*'s significance and material conditions, beyond a top-down trajectory of influence emanating from the capital. Rather than looking to Paris, the director established 'the way that [the piece] is played across the provinces' as the model for his *Muette*.[31] While Delorme references the provinces, in general, his model must have specifically alluded to the work of contemporary residential theatre companies, since records indicate that Delorme's 1st *troupe d'arrondissement* was almost certainly the first itinerant troupe to stage Auber's opera. In profiling horizontal directions of theatrical influence between provincial locales as significant for the circulation of *grand opéra*, the director, above all, defined a mode of provincial *grand opéra* that, he implied, existed separately to practices at the Opéra.

[27] Pendle and Wilkins, 'Paradise Found'; Robert Cannon, '*Grand Opéra* and the Visual Language of Opera', in *Opera*, Cambridge Introductions to Music (Cambridge, 2012), 170.

[28] Anselm Gerhard, *The Urbanization of Opera: Music Theater in Paris in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Mary Whittall (Chicago, 1998); Hibberd, *French Grand Opera*; Fulcher, *The Nation's Image.*

[29] Hibberd, *French Grand Opera*, 19; Fulcher, *The Nation's Image*, 2.

[30] H. Robert Cohen, *The Original Staging Manuals for Twelve Parisian Operatic Premières* (Stuyvesant, NY, 1998), xxiii; Cormac Newark, 'Staging Grand Opéra: History and the Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Paris' (PhD diss., Oxford University, 1999), 25; Léa Oberti, 'Livrets de mise-en-scène', in Lacombe, *Histoire de l'opéra français*, 737, 740.

[31] *L'écho*, 20 March 1830.

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La muette in Valenciennes

What artistic markers made up Delorme's concept of provincial *grand opéra* in 1830? The reconstruction of the specific artistic conditions of his northern performances of *La muette*, or any by an itinerant troupe, is admittedly a tricky business. It is known that Delorme premiered Auber's opera in Valenciennes on 21 March 1830 and repeated the piece on 25 March and 4 April to public acclaim.[32] Yet in the absence of traditional musicological evidence such as performance materials (scores, libretti, stage plans), I rely on a range of fragmented primary sources relating to theatrical administration alongside newspaper reviews to piece together the probable musical and dramatic features of these performances. Accordingly, at points in the following section, I linger on the process of archival sleuthing involved in reconstructing these artistic elements, with the aim of presenting a model for the wider study of the ephemeral – to modern eyes – conditions of touring opera.

It is clear that performances of *La muette* involved flexibility and change in musical and scenic terms. As might be expected, the small size of the Valenciennes company and its lack of a dedicated chorus or ballet troupe led to several musical cuts. This can be deduced from administrative sources detailing the running of the Valenciennes theatre. The length of the opera was listed as three hours in Louis-Jacques Solomé's staging manual, a document to which I will return later. In Valenciennes, though, Auber's *Muette* was not staged alone but shown alongside two or three other pieces of around an hour each night.[33] These double or triple bills also involved several scene-change intervals within and between pieces lasting up to half an hour each, plus a performance by the town's amateur orchestra, the Société Philharmonique.[34] If *La muette* had been performed in full, the combined elements in a typical Valenciennes programme from the theatre's opening at 6pm would have easily lasted longer than the judicially mandated theatrical curfew of 11pm.[35] As there is no police record of a director's fine for these performances, however, it is implied that Delorme shortened the opera – an understandable decision given his limited workforce.[36]

The cuts made to *La muette* were likely informed by touring troupes' practices. One key difference between the workforce of itinerant companies such as Delorme's and their sedentary provincial and Parisian counterparts was the lack of a dedicated chorus. Reviews of performances in Valenciennes in 1831 and 1834, though, reveal that troupe singers were used to performing principal roles and chorus parts in the same *grand opéras* once the genre was established in Delorme's repertoire.[37] Such versatility implies that at least some chorus numbers were also included in the *Muette* premiere. Still, some of Auber's thirteen choruses – and the three dance numbers – were almost certainly the first in line for the cuts made by Delorme in order to eliminate scenes in which the small size of his troupe might be noticeable. While Delorme's exact cuts are untraceable, it is important to note that excisions made for practical purposes would have nonetheless reshaped audiences' experiences of the

[32] *Le journal de Valenciennes*, 20 March 1830; *L'écho*, 6 January, 30 January, 20 March 1830; *Le courrier du Nord*, 3 April 1830, 6 April 1830.

[33] Solomé, *Indications générales*, contents page.

[34] Archives municipales de Valenciennes, J/8/24, letter from the Mayor to the Sub-Prefect of Valenciennes, 21 February 1821; J/8/46, report from the Mayor of Valenciennes, 15 January 1842. Archives municipales de Valenciennes, J/8/56, 'Arrêté', 4 June 1842; J/8/51, 'Salle de spectacle', An XI.

[35] Archives municipales de Valenciennes, J/8/51, 'Salle de spectacle' regulation, 1813; J/8/56, 'Arrêté', 4 June 1842. Timings were similar across the provinces: Archives nationales, F/21/1250, theatre regulation (Morlaix), 23 November 1839.

[36] Fines were regularly awarded: Archives municipales de Valenciennes, J/8/47, letter from the Mayor of Valenciennes to director Colson, 15 September 1843.

[37] Reviews mentioned performances of choruses in *La muette* in 1831, and reveal that in the premiere of *Robert* in 1834 soprano Mme Vizentini both sang the principal role of Alice and reappeared as the Mother Superior in the famous dance of the ghostly nuns: *Le courrier du Nord*, 4 October 1831, 14 August 1834.

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opera, owing to the importance of chorus scenes in transmitting political meaning within *La muette*, as in later *grand opéras.* As James Parakilas shows, many of the socio-political resonances of *grand opéra* play out in chorus scenes featuring opposing groups, and the presence of large choruses also manifested the important dramatic contrast between the intimate relationship of protagonists and the inexorable forces of power and fate, represented by the crowd.[38] In the case of *La muette*, the chorus numbers in each act chart the changing allegiance of the Neapolitans from deferential Spanish subjects to mobilised revolutionaries and back again at the death of their leader Masaniello.[39] Practical changes in Valenciennes thus had the potential to significantly reshape how audiences understood the essential dramatic and political components of *grand opéra* and, as I mention later, did so on at least one occasion.

By contrast, expansion, rather than reduction, appears to have governed the orchestral side of Delorme's production. It is clear from press reports that he recruited a more comprehensive set of instrumental forces than was usual in Valenciennes and in touring practice more broadly. As remembered by writer Champfleury (Jules Fleury-Husson), it was the norm for touring opera productions to feature orchestras made up of musicians with a range of talent and assorted instruments, sometimes resulting in a 'battalion' of flutes standing in for various missing instruments, played by absent-minded clerks and students distracted by the action onstage.[40] *La muette*, though, represented a turning point for orchestral accompaniment in Valenciennes. Writing in advance of performances, journalist Benoît Henry referred to Delorme's orchestra as 'reinforced and completed', describing the larger recruitment of amateur performers than was usual for troupe productions.[41] Reviewing their work after the premiere, Henry confirmed that the expanded forces resulted in a new level of care given to orchestral accompaniment. He wrote that spectators previously subjected to the 'monotonous theatre orchestra' reportedly heard a transformation to 'animated and sustained music', which he believed had also improved singers' performances.[42] The importance of this change is emphasised in Henry's voicing of the wider public's thanks to the musicians of the Société Philharmonique for embracing Auber's music with 'zeal'. Such comments further emphasise both the novelty of hearing more complete orchestral sonorities within touring opera and the effort required to develop this new auditory experience.[43]

La muette also likely offered Delorme's singers new vocal challenges. As already mentioned, the touring company was not only significantly smaller in size than the Opéra's workforce but inexperienced in the large-scale five-act operatic forms and recitatives particular to this institution's repertoire within and prior to *grand opéra.*[44] No score survives to record Delorme's musical choices, yet his letter to *L'écho* claimed that his singers would perform *La muette* 'without omitting anything' in the manner of other provincial theatres. This phrase could refer to music, drama or spectacle. If the former, press records from Lyon and Marseille (possibly the only two companies outside Paris that staged Auber's piece before Delorme) indicate that these regional troupes did so with recitative.[45] Delorme's

[38] James Parakilas, 'Political Representation and the Chorus in Nineteenth-Century Opera', *19th-Century Music* 16 (1992), 181–202.

[39] Parakilas, 'The Chorus', 84.

[40] Champfleury, *Souvenirs et portraits de jeunesse: Autobiographie et mémoires* (Paris, 1872), 51—6, 63—70.

[41] 'renforcé et porté au complet': *Le journal*, 20 March 1830.

[42] 'l'orchestre ordinaire et monotone du spectacle … une musique animée et nourrie': *Le journal*, 27 March 1830.

[43] *Le journal*, 25 March 1830.

[44] Annelies Andries, 'Modernizing Spectacle: The Opéra in Napoleon's Paris (1799–1815)' (PhD diss., Yale University, 2018).

[45] *Le journal du commerce de la ville de Lyon*, 27 June 1827, 31 January 1830; *Le sémaphore*, 18 July 1829.

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troupe, it would follow, aped this practice. The brief Valenciennes reviews do not go into enough detail to verify that recitative singing was without a doubt present in 1830. Yet alongside Delorme's letter appeared a newspaper column, potentially also written by the director, advertising that 'arrangements have been made so that the musical elements will not leave anything to be desired', perhaps affirming that, alongside the reinforced orchestra, such arrangements also referred to the troupe's taking on of a new style of singing they had not yet encountered.[46] Certainly, a widespread embrace of recitative by various touring companies emerged in the years immediately after 1830, for pieces such as Giacomo Rossini's *Guillaume Tell* (1829) and Giacomo Meyerbeer's *Robert le diable* (1831).[47] With Delorme at the forefront of French touring *grand opéra* production it seems incredibly likely that recitatives were heard in Valenciennes for *La muette.* At any rate, the director's push to reassure the public about his 'not-reduced' *Muette*, coupled with the press's highlighting of 'new attention' given to musical elements, displays that directors and journalists both recognised that there were important credentials associated with the promise of singing and playing the music of *grand opéra* in its original form.

The use of recitative in *grand opéra* in Valenciennes is worth stressing since the transformation of Delorme's troupe's vocal practice contrasted with the way in which the provincial singing of *La muette* was envisaged by a voice from the centre: Opéra *régisseur* Louis-Jacques Solomé. In his 1828 staging manual addressed to provincial directors and made to facilitate the dissemination of *La muette* across France, Solomé recorded and communicated the Opéra's *mise en scène* to an external public for the first time.[48] The *Indications générales et observations pour la mise en scène de La muette de Portici* (1828) built on his publication of similar *Indications* for *Les trois quartiers* at the Comédie-Française a year prior, and, with these two manuals, Solomé catalysed the creation of hundreds of guides to replicating staging across different genres that were published throughout the century.[49]

The historical function of staging manuals for *grand opéra*, specifically, has prompted significant musicological debate since the rediscovery of these sources. Cohen and others have argued that the codification of *grand opéra*'s stage movements, decors and accessories in these manuals testify to the genre's staging within France as 'an art of preservation rather than creation [...] not intended to be altered' between the late 1820s and 1880s.[50] Arnold Jacobshagen, though, has challenged these claims of fixed operatic practice in Paris by showing that staging practices at the Opéra were, in fact, constantly in flux during this period, departing from the recorded instructions printed within booklets.[51] Jacobshagen credibly repositions staging manuals as commercial operatic objects, often not even created by the original *régisseurs* working on the opera, whose significance within the nineteenth-century theatrical industry must be explored as separate to institutional influence. Building on Jacobshagen's arguments, then, Solomé's *Indications* for *La muette* is ripe for reassessment as a manual that communicates one theatrical professional's assessment of how to record –and, crucially, change – the opera's Parisian practice for wider France, rather than an effort to codify the Opéra's practices. In doing so, the manual offers meaningful comparisons with Delorme's parameters for *grand opéra*, including the singing of recitative, that illustrate significant differences in how the genre's components were seen nationally in its nascent years.

[46] 'les dispositions sont prises pour que la partie musicale ne laisse rien à désirer': *Le journal*, 20 March 1830.

[47] *Le drapeau tricolore*, 9 July 1833; *Le patriote*, 10 May 1834; *Le journal du Cher*, 7 August 1841; *Le Lorientais*, 14 November 1844.

[48] Louis-Jacques Solomé, *Indications générales et observations pour la mise en scène de La muette de Portici* (Paris, 1828).

[49] Léa Oberti, 'Livrets de mise-en-scène', 737–40; Horrocks, 'Performing for the Provinces', 192–8.

[50] Cohen, *The Original Staging Manuals*, xxiii; Cormac Newark, 'Staging Grand Opéra', 25.

[51] Arnold Jacobshagen, 'Analyzing Mise-en-Scène: Halévy's *La juive* at the Salle Le Peletier', in *Music, Theater, and Cultural Transfer*, ed. Annegret Fauser and Mark Everist (Chicago, 2009), 176–94.

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Solomé's *Indications* was based on the *régisseur*'s first-hand knowledge of managing the stage direction of *La muette* at the Opéra, but also drew from his vast experience working in provincial theatrical administration, including time in the 3rd and 1st *arrondissements*, the latter region in which Delorme premiered *La muette.*[52] The sixty-page *Indications* contained descriptions of the decors, costumes and stage movements for the principals and chorus, and repeatedly specifically addressed provincial directors.[53] The potential for adaptation was placed at the heart of the document, communicated to directors in annotated comments featured alongside the main text, as well as in appendices. Alongside various instructions about how to scale down stage effects and change costumes, chorus allocations, decors and accessories, Solomé offered instructions for musical adaptation. Controversially, given the capital's strict differentiation of theatrical institutions by musical genre, Solomé suggested that regional companies could perform *La muette* in the form of an *opéra-comique*:

> In certain provincial theatres, the directors can play *La muette de Portici* in the manner of the lyrical dramas that are performed at the Théâtre Feydeau, by taking away the ballets and by speaking the recitatives, as well as anything that is not designated as an air or an ensemble piece.[54]

Continuing this switch of genres, Solomé also offered casting instructions listing the *opéra-comique emplois* for the principal male roles after the *grand opéra* ones.[55] Through both sets of instructions, Solomé put forward a printed model for *La muette* that suggested the piece be performed by drawing on musical practices from two separate French operatic traditions. In doing so, he placed genre hybridity, rather than the Opéra's vocal and formal specialism, at the centre of *La muette*'s provincial identity.

Just like Delorme, Solomé considered *grand opéra* to operate by different rules in a provincial context. The *régisseur*'s suggestion of genre hybridity offers a way to recover the likely aural experience of the Valenciennes performance in 1830. Delorme's troupe chose to perform *La muette* in its original recitative form, showcasing different interpretations to Solomé of the specific adaptations needed to catalyse the piece's circulation. The voices of the northern company taking on roles such as Masaniello and Elvire, though, were still contracted and trained for *opéra-comique.* Embedded within Delorme's claim of a 'non-reduced' *Muette*, the aural experience in Valenciennes would therefore also have showcased the meeting of *opéra-comique* voice and *grand opéra* form. Indeed, although singers' and audiences' experiences of this meeting of vocal traditions was not commented upon by critics in Valenciennes in 1830, a friction between both operatic genres did come to define the press's discussion of *grand opéra* performance in the years following, as I will argue in the second half of this article.

Provincial customs for troupe casting were another determining factor in the 1830 production. Singer Mme Alphonse Jules Lejeai performed the mute dancing role of Fenella in Valenciennes even though Delorme's troupe did include one dancer, Louise, employed as

[52] *Le miroir des spectacles*, 24 March 1825, 14 May 1825; *Almanach des spectacles pour 1826* (Paris, 1826), 362, 358. Solomé switched contracts with Dupré-Nyon in late 1826, before becoming *régisseur* at the Comédie-Francaise: *Almanach des spectacles pour 1827* (Paris, 1827), 69.

[53] Solomé, *Indications*, 3, 15, 47, 59–60

[54] Solomé, *Indications*, 47, 'Dans certains théâtres de province, MM. les Directeurs peuvent jouer *La muette de Portici*, comme les drames lyriques que l'on joue au théâtre Feydeau, en supprimant les ballets et en parlant le récit, ainsi tout ce qui n'est pas désigné comme air ou morceau d'ensemble.'

[55] Solomé, *Indications*, 3.

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coryphée (a low-ranking ballet *corps* position).[56] Delorme likely overlooked Louise's dancing role and specified responsibility within the troupe in order to prioritise upholding troupe hierarchy over catering to specific skillsets. This hierarchy affected both singers and audiences. Mme Jules Lejeai was contracted as the troupe's *dugazon*, an *emplois* for a light *opéra-comique* voice in second soprano/young lover roles.[57] She shared the status of the highest-ranking female singer in the troupe with Scholastique Leméteyer, the *première chanteuse à roulade*, a coloratura, leading-lady *emplois.*[58] As well as receiving the highest female salaries, both women could expect to be cast in leading roles according to genre: Leméteyer would claim *opéra-comique* leads and secondary ones in vaudeville, and Jules Lejeai *vice versa.* Provincial spectators and critics expected such rote casting, at times berating directors who asked singers to step outside their official role types.[59] Consequently, Delorme faced the problem of having to correlate the women's existing *emplois* into *grand opéra* repertoire for the first time in *La muette* and for a piece with only one female star singing role, Elvire. By having Leméteyer play Elvire, casting convention thus maintained that Jules Lejeai was given the only other principal female role, above the troupe's designated dancer. In this instance, Delorme mirrored Solomé's instructions in his manual for provincial directors to cast a singer as Fenella, yet it is important to note that they reached the same conclusion for different reasons.[60] Delorme chose to cast singer Jules Lejeai in the role not because his troupe was lacking in trained dancers, as was Solomé's impetus for suggesting an adaptation, but to fit around pre-existing touring troupe hierarchies.

Spectators' experiences of Auber's opera in Valenciennes were informed by an additional troupe convention: mixed-genre programmes. *La muette* was performed alongside the vaudevilles *La famille normande* (Mélesville and Nicolas Brazier, 1822) and *Le gastronome sans argent* (Eugène Scribe and Nicolas Brazier, 1821) on 25 March, and produced on 4 April in an Auber double bill with his *opéra-comique La fiancée* (1829).[61] Susan Valladares has argued in the context of contemporary British multi-genre programmes that the form, themes and characters of each piece inevitably informed spectators' understandings of others in the programme.[62] The juxtaposition of the pieces listed above in Valenciennes, too, would have lent a particular shape to the presentation of *La muette*, compared to its solo production during its premiering run at the Opéra.[63] Without any extant testimonies from sources it is only possible to speculate whether the pairing of *La muette* with *La famille normande*, a vaudeville about the return home of a peasant-soldier, portrayed as a typical 'Norman caricature', might have given rise to comparative thoughts about military control or regional backwardness in the context of *La muette*'s plot centred on a Neopolitan revolutionary figure.[64] Alternatively, the night featuring two Auber operas may have inspired spectators to marvel at the composer's prowess across operatic genres, potentially bridging spectators' experiences of the auditory gap between *grand opéra* and *opéra-comique* through a showcase of Auber's multi-

[56] *Almanach des spectacles pour 1830* (Paris, 1830), 309; *Le courrier*, 10 April 30; *L'écho*, 27 March 1830; Archives nationales, F/21/1234, troupe list (Delorme), 3 June 1829. Mme Lejeai's name was also spelled Lejey and Lejay in other documents and in newspaper columns.

[57] Triolaire, *Le théâtre en province*, 15.

[58] Archives nationales, F/21/1234, troupe list (Delorme), 3 June 1829. Delorme's list shows that Mme Leméteyer was also known as Mme Charles (the surname of her husband it seems), and it is this name that the press used to referred to her in reviews.

[59] Gilbert Duprez, *Souvenirs d'un chanteur* (Paris, 1880), 197–8.

[60] Solomé, *Indications*, 3.

[61] *L'écho*, 24 March 1830; *Le courrier*, 3 April 1830, 6 April 1830; *L'écho*, 7 April 1830.

[62] Susan Valladares, *Staging the Peninsular War: English Theatres 1807–1815* (London, 2015), 195.

[63] *Le journal des débats politiques et littéraires*, 29 February, 7 March 1828.

[64] *Le journal de Paris*, 10 April 1822.

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institutional output. What is more certain, however, is that provincial directors rotated the pairings of pieces on different nights. New pairings thus allowed a piece such as *La muette* to be open to constantly changing interpretations as audiences related its dramatic and musical content to other pieces. In Valenciennes, these pairings ranged from a *drame* recounting an assassination attempt on Napoléon, to a vaudeville satirising romanticism, and *La muette* was also staged on a *début* evening where spectators were primed to focus on assessing the suitability of new troupe members to determine their future in the company.[65] Such varying pairings may well have invited reflections on *grand opéra*'s meanings that were more flexible and wide-ranging than the socio-political readings of the repertoire staged individually in Paris.

So far, my piecing together of Delorme's *La muette* has revealed that parts of the opera's defining musical features in Paris were done away with in Valenciennes for practical reasons, but also to fit distinctive itinerant troupe practices which the director chose to retain. At the same time, the standard touring practices of Delorme's company were also transformed, musically, to make way for *grand opéra,* in the expansion of orchestral size and learning of the new singing style of recitative. The mixture of established provincial customs and new influences in the evolution of provincial *grand opéra* is also evident in terms of the visual staging of *La muette.* Prior to 1830, travelling troupes' staging practices relied upon re-using stock backdrops, depicting the same generic settings of, say, a farm or interior *salon*, used for different titles and genres.[66] The resulting lack of specific interplay between the narrative of each opera and its depicted setting contrasted significantly with the bespoke scenery used to highlight the musical and dramatic effect of *La muette* and later repertoire at the Opéra.[67] For his production, though, Delorme made a substantial effort to offer his spectators a new level of what he described as 'great care' lavished on the scenery, costumes and accessories, as described in the *Journal de Valenciennes.* Such care included:

> In the third act, a scene portraying a busy market on one of the squares of Naples; in the fourth act, Masaniello's triumphal entry on his parade horse, and in the fifth act, the eruption of Vesuvius that ends the piece.[68]

The advertisement emphasised the shift in representation from troupes' use of approximate operatic settings to the recreating of specific scenes, underlining newly bespoke decors as a prestige element within local operatic practice.

Beyond their evident prestige, the material conditions of Delorme's scenic elements are, again, difficult to piece together with the lack of surviving information. The fact that he later advertised a new Vesuvius backdrop for reprisals of *La muette* in Valenciennes in October 1830, suggests that Delorme did not purchase a new backdrop for at least this scene in the March premiere.[69] Instead, it is likely that, to create his advertised spectacle, the director relied solely on Bengal fire, a slow-burning firework commonly used for explosive effects on European stages from the mid-eighteenth century onwards, including by Solomé for Vesuvius's eruption at the Opéra.[70] We know that Delorme had already used that technology in Valenciennes

[65] *Le courrier*, 17 February 1831, 14 September 1833; *L'écho*, 11 April 1839.

[66] Archives municipales de Valenciennes, J/8/22, report for new decors, 18 April 1817.

[67] Pendle and Wilkins, 'Paradise Found'.

[68] 'montée avec le plus grand soin par l'administration; mise en scène représentant un marché animé sur l'une des places de Naples; au 4e acte, entrée triomphale de Masaniello, dans la ville sur son cheval de parade, et au 5e acte, éruption de Vésuve qui termine la pièce': *Le journal de Valenciennes*, 20 March 1830.

[69] *Le courrier*, 9 October 1830.

[70] *Le Figaro*, 2 March 1828. Solomé, *Indications*, 47. John A Rice, 'Operatic Pyrotechnics in the Eighteenth Century', in *Theatrical Heritage: Challenges and Opportunities*, ed. Bruno Forment and Christel Stalpaert (Leuven, 2015), 23–40.

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in 1829, almost a year prior, to stage a dance in the vaudeville *L'ours et le pacha* (1820, Scribe and Joseph Xavier) while working as *régisseur* under his predecessor Dellemence.[71] Delorme's presumed re-use of Bengal fire, rather than a bespoke decor for *La muette*, would have added further simplifications to Solomé's imagined scaling down of the finale staged at the Opéra.[72] Indeed, it is likely that the local reduction of the staging manual's account of an already scaled-back set of provincial visuals was reflected across the various settings showcased in the opera. The Valenciennes readers of the *Journal* were not, for example, promised a view of the Act I chapel scene as staged at the Opéra, nor the Act II beach panorama, implying that audiences were left to construct their impressions of these scenes from stock resources. Delorme's simplification naturally follows the reduction of scale between the Opéra and a touring troupe, yet it is the way in which his choices relate to Solomé's instructions for adaptation that are most revealing about the way in which these two theatrical entrepreneurs envisaged the circulation of the genre's aesthetics. Solomé did outline how to cobble together various materials to create the first two acts from existing scenery, yet Delorme chose not to implement these simplified instructions.[73] The limited bespoke decors seen in Valenciennes highlight the practical limitations faced by the touring company and the adaptative choices needing to be made to move away not only from the Opéra but from the published adaptative model even when Solomé offered clear guidance for altering aspects of *grand opéra* practice for the provinces. In this way, the production in Valenciennes emphasises that there was greater disparity between the visual technologies of the Opéra and those of small theatres than Solomé anticipated.

The conditions of the Valenciennes *Muette* that I have so far recovered offer several important insights into the form and meaning of operatic practice beyond Paris and the emergence of *grand opéra* in the year of change that was 1830. The musical cuts made to Auber's piece are typical of the 'event'-orientated nature of traditional European operatic practice, where artists, composers and managers frequently changed the music of operatic repertoire during performances and revivals, much-documented before and during the first half of the nineteenth century.[74] Befitting the newness of the musical and scenic elements of *La muette*, *grand opéra* unsurprisingly needed to adapt to provincial artistic conditions in order to travel beyond Paris, with Delorme embracing operatic change without sharing the fears of doing so that the Valenciennes amateur felt so strongly.

Yet the expanded orchestral accompaniment and likely new recitative singing that Delorme arranged for *La muette* suggest that the director also moved away from this more flexible attitude, aiming to instead match the musical dimension of his production more closely to the techniques and forces of an established model, in this case the residential theatres that he referenced in his letter. Similarly, Delorme's advertisement of some precise decors for Acts III, IV and V recreated in Valenciennes underlines the existence of a similar model for visual spectacle that the director aimed to uphold where possible. Delorme's desire to imitate other theatrical environments and, crucially, make his readers aware of his choice to do so, reveals that the director valued operatic fixity, both musically and in terms of staging, as a parallel integral part of touring *grand opéra* – so much so that he embraced the transformation of existing touring practices to do so. Despite all its adaptations, the

[71] *L'écho*, 11 April 1829. The vaudeville was advertised as *L'ours blanc et l'ours noir* in Valenciennes, the new title coming from Scene XV in which the two main characters dress up as a black bear and a white bear.

[72] Solomé, *Indications*, 59, describing how to reduce from the Opéra two Vesuvius decors (smoking and exploding) to one, plus additional red lighting, smoke and fire.

[73] Solomé, *Indications*, 57; Idem, 57–8.

[74] Lacombe, *The Keys to French Opera in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Edward Schneider (Berkeley, 2001), 24–30; Susan Rutherford, '"La cantante delle passioni": Giuditta Pasta and the Idea of Operatic Performance', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 19/2 (2007), 107–38.

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Valenciennes *Muette* thus additionally offers a glimpse of a developing view of operatic practice around the mid-century. Francesca Vella describes an emerging understanding of opera 'as permanent works amenable to reproduction', a phenomenon conditioned by several means including the codifiable performance of operatic stars, reconceptualisation of compositional authority and the circulation of operatic visual materials and instructions including Solomé's manuals.[75] Delorme's actions, I argue, similarly reveal that provincial grand opéra promoted a way of regarding certain elements of opera as fixed in specific conditions and needing replicating, rather than transforming, through touring.

How representative was Delorme's *La muette* of early provincial forms of *grand opéra*? Evidence from contemporary performances across France suggests that the balance between operatic continuity and change found in Valenciennes was also central to the wider circulation of the genre across the nation in its first ten years. The Montpellier company's premiere of *Les Huguenots* in Montpellier, for example, was characterised by musical cuts made to combat singers' fatigue and inexperience in larger operatic form, but some changes of staging were implemented for artistic as well as practical reasons, much like Delorme's casting choices and fitting of *La muette* into a mixed-genre programme.[76] In Lyon, the premiere of *La muette* by the resident company in 1829 featured a mix of significant musical and dramatic adaptations to Auber's piece and local efforts to reproduce the original staging described in Solomé's manual, as in Valenciennes.[77] Both premieres, then, hint at a fault line established between the national transfer of musical and visual aspects of *grand opéra.* While musical elements were more often subject to changes to fit the genre to provincial capabilities, decor and staging were more consistently considered to be more fixed elements, most likely partly thanks to the availability of models for staging such as Solomé's *Indications.* Crucially, however, provincial *grand opéra c.*1830 reveals that ways of conceptualising opera, as adaptative or reproducible, existed alongside each other without overpowering one another. Touring performances of Auber's piece, like productions elsewhere, were defined by significant efforts made to imitate models of operatic practice outside of Valenciennes, but productions were, ultimately, only made possible through important adaptations to the *grand opéra*'s originating musical and visual features. The emergence of provincial *grand opéra* was thus clearly defined across France by coexisting parallel conceptions of fixed and adaptative operatic practice, with different local companies striking their own balance between both approaches.

Grand opéra as the touring norm

In the years after 1830, provincial *grand opéra* evolved into a fully fledged phenomenon alongside the establishment of a repertoire of *grand opéra* titles at the Paris Opéra. Directors across France embraced this repertoire wholeheartedly over the subsequent quarter century.[78] In the north, Delorme and his successors staged nine out of the twenty *grand opéras* created at the Opéra between October 1839 and October 1862 (the period for which complete records of the 1st *troupe d'arrondissement* exist), as shown in Table 1.[79] The awakening of

[75] Francesca Vella, *Networking Operatic Italy* (Chicago, 2021), 28–9; Rutherford, 'La cantante delle passioni'.

[76] Teulon Lardic, 'Les Huguenots', 750–2.

[77] Mélanie Guérimand, 'La muette à Lyon', in Lacombe, *Histoire de l'opéra français*, 749–50.

[78] *Almanach des spectacles pour 1837* (Paris, 1837), 86; *Le journal des théâtres*, 13 October 1847. Archives nationales, F/21/1250–1, F/21/1258–9, F/12/1277–8.

[79] This data is compiled from the available *recettes* listings in the Archives nationales, departmental and municipal archives. Within the areas I have researched, the 1st *arrondissement* troupe appears to have been exceptional in the rate of its *grand opéra* productions, as fewer performances and a smaller range of titles were

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Table 1. Performances of *grand opéras* by the 1st *troupe d'arrondissement*, 1830–62

Opera	First performance	Last performance	Number of performances (Oct 1839–Oct 1862)
La muette de Portici (1828)	1830	1859	32
Robert le diable (1831)	1834	1859	25
La juive (1835)	1836	1859	24
Guillaume Tell (1829)	1841	1857	20
La favorite (1840)	1841	1860	66
La reine de Chypre (1841)	1846	1849	17
Charles VI (1843)	1845	1848	15
Jérusalem (1847)	1853	1853	6
Le trouvère (1857)	1860	1860	8

nationwide acceptance of *grand opéra* performance from the mid-1830s onwards implies an important reappraisal of the means needed to perform the Opéra's repertoire beyond Paris. Various companies the size of Delorme's and smaller evidently no longer felt constrained by scale or prior professional experience. In the process, the genre of *grand opéra* gained a new national significance.

The musical shape of *grand opéra* stagings after *La muette* in Valenciennes and beyond remained largely the same after 1830, prioritising flexibility and adaptation to fit the genre into the previously mentioned confines and conventions of travelling troupe singing and programming. Reviews from the north, Brittany and Alsace demonstrate that large- and small-scale musical changes, including the cutting of whole acts and the transposition of numbers or changes to vocal lines, were routinely made by itinerant troupes between the 1830s and 1860s.[80] Such cuts were now overwhelmingly accepted by the press as part and parcel of *grand opéra*'s provincial existence, without the anxious overtones of commentary such as that of the Valenciennes subscriber in 1830.[81] Although normalised, adaptative practices would certainly have affected spectators' understanding of the musical, dramatic and visual meanings of specific pieces, although not always in the ways perhaps expected by scholars. The repeated presentation between 1833 and 1859 of only *La muette*'s first four acts in Valenciennes to better fit the opera into a mixed programme, for instance, may well have led to spectators' understanding of the opera as glorifying Masaniello's usurping of the King of Spain taking place at the end of Act IV, ignoring the dramatic shift of power back to the monarchy portrayed in Act V.[82] Surprisingly, the political implications of the four-act version were neither raised by censors nor discussed by journalists, perhaps implying that *La muette*'s revolutionary charge, as discussed in Paris, did not make the same impact in northern France even if the opera's dramatic conclusion was presented in a significantly different way.[83]

presented by the 6th, 9th and 16th troupes. The table reveals notable absences for *Les Huguenots* (1836) and *Le prophète* (1849), which I discuss below.

[80] *La gazette des théâtres*, 29 November 1832; *Le journal de Lorient*, 10 January 1847; *Le mémorial*, 11 November 1863.

[81] Médiathèque de l'abbaye Saint-Vaast, Collection Cayat-Chartier volumes 1–9.

[82] *Le courrier*, 27 July 1833, 20 May 1837; *L'écho*, 24 March 1855; *L'écho*, 12 September 1863.

[83] *Le courrier*, 30 July 1833. Hibberd, *French Grand Opera*, 17–55.

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The fate of *Les Huguenots* in this region further emphasises that *grand opéra*'s political content was appraised differently across France. As seen in Table 1, Meyerbeer's opera was noticeably lacking in performances in the 1st *arrondissement*, despite appearing on the repertoire lists of Delorme's successors Guillaume and Prosper Bertéché's 1838–9 and 1850–1 seasons.[84] Northern France was a region with traditional Huguenot sympathies.[85] While Meyerbeer's opera was not specifically censored by the Prefect of the Nord department, who had the local power to do so, Bertéché father and son frequently received reminders from this administrator and the Mayor of Valenciennes that the repertoire they performed must not be 'capable of wounding social or political standards'.[86] It thus follows that, although the Bertéchés came close to considering the piece twice, they likely chose not to stage *Les Huguenots* because its depiction of the brutality of religious war was considered by them a topic still too sensitive for a pro-Huguenot region. Indeed, a ministerial report from 1850 concerning the limited circulation of Meyerbeer's opera across the country suggests that the northern situation had parallels across France, with several administrators and directors keeping Meyerbeer's opera off their stages in places 'where religious quarrels have left morbid memories'.[87] The easy embrace of an overtly republican four-act version of *La muette* in Valenciennes and the clear rejection of Huguenot persecution depicted in Meyerbeer's opera reveal the potential for sensibilities to political and religious operatic themes both locally dampened or heightened in comparison to those in the capital. However defined the genre's political overtones were at the Opéra, these were far from nationally uniform.

In the visual realm, directors increasingly prioritised stage technologies that imitated *grand opéra*'s Parisian conditions more closely after 1830. Although there remained an element of adaptation, Delorme and his counterparts left behind stock resources to a greater extent after *La muette* and invested in a much larger range of bespoke scenery and, newly, costumes, to present *grand opéra.* The Parisian connections traced by these new materials were proudly advertised to spectators in town newspapers, for example for Delorme's 1834 Valenciennes premiere of *Robert*, featuring two new decors depicting a graveyard and Parma cathedral.[88] As advertised in *L'écho*, these were constructed by Achille Varnout, the *machiniste* of the Théâtre de la Porte Saint-Martin, and painted by Devoir and Pourchet, artists working at the Opéra, Folies-Dramatiques and Porte Saint-Martin.[89] Set pieces also gathered complexity: the fact that Varnout travelled to install and service the decors indicates that Delorme not only ordered a backcloth but a complex structure, likely the trap door for Bertram the devil's descent into hell.[90] Audiences' warm embrace of these new stage technologies is implied by Auguste Lemaire writing in *Le mémorial de Saint-Omer*, a neighbouring town to Valenciennes, to which the 1st *arrondissement* also toured. Reacting to an 1835 production of *Robert*, Lemaire underlined that bespoke decors offered performances in which the visual elements were, for the first time in his town, 'analogous to the subject' of

[84] Archives nationales, F/21/1235, repertoire list, 20 May 1838; F/21/1237 17 November 1850.

[85] Mack P. Holt, *The French Wars of Religion, 1562—1629* (Cambridge, 2005), 81.

[86] 'les ouvrages qui me paraissaient susceptibles de blesser les convenances sociales, ou politiques': Archives nationales, F/21/1235, letter from the Mayor of Valenciennes to Bertéché, 28 September 1835.

[87] 'L'opéra des Huguenots joué presque partout n'a jamais été autorisé dans les pays où les querelles religieuses ont laissé de funestes souvenirs, et ne pourraient être remises en question sans un certain danger': Archives nationales, F/21/1169, letter from the Minister to prefects, 29 October 1850.

[88] *L'écho*, 14 August 1834, 12 July 1834.

[89] *La gazette des théâtres*, 5 June 1834, 5 August 1834. Germaine Bapst, *Essai sur l'histoire du théâtre* (Paris, 1893), 621; Herbert Schneider, 'Scribe and Auber: Constructing Grand Opera', in *The Cambridge Companion to Grand Opéra*, ed. David Charlton (Cambridge, 2003), 185, fn441.

[90] *Le courrier*, 7 August 1834.

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the opera.[91] As Lemaire highlights, novel technologies allowed for the increasingly specific depiction of operatic narratives through musical, dramatic and now visual means in a touring environment unused to these means of representation. Provincial audiences' embrace of the correlation between the subject of an opera and its represented setting led to a boom in touring directors' commissioning of specialised decors in the subsequent twenty years. Directors Bertéché father and son commissioned new decors for northern premieres of *La juive*, Halévy's *La reine de Chypre* and *Charles VI* and Verdi's *Jérusalem*, as well as for pieces in other genres, and several other directors also rented *magasins de costumes* from Paris-based theatrical agencies.[92] These investments highlighted the growing importance of delivering an experience of *grand opéra* on tour that matched audience expectations drawn from an established model, rather than from individual interpretation.

A rare illustration of Bertéché's troupe performing in Valenciennes in 1848 offers a glimpse of how exactly the staging, decor and costumes of this period might have looked and related to Parisian models. The print does not depict a *grand opéra*, but represents a performance of Halévy's *opéra-comique Haydée*, staged in Valenciennes on 12 October 1848 with a bespoke backdrop.[93] Accordingly, the print can be seen as representative of the wider touring trend for imitating Parisian visual technologies across sung and spoken stage genres, particularly as the Act II scene depicted in the Valenciennes print (Figure 1) can be directly compared to a Parisian illustration of the same scene at the Opéra-Comique (Figure 2).

The print of Bertéché's troupe was published in the Valenciennes paper *L'impartial du Nord*, evidently based on the Parisian press sketch. As the former was published three days after the troupe performance it is likely that the Valenciennes artist had time to draw from his experience of the local production, rather than simply copying the Parisian one with imagined changes.[94] Both prints are incredibly similar in terms of backdrop, scenery, costumes and placement of performers onstage. These features suggest that spectators would have experienced a high level of continuity in staging between the capital and a provincial town, facilitated by the contemporary boom in the production of staging manuals.[95] There are, however, some crucial differences that reflect the impact of smaller troupe resources. For one, we may note the striking disparity in theatrical scale between the twelve performers of Bertéché's troupe and the crowds shown in the Parisian illustration, with the size of the onlooking crowd shifting the dramatic context of the scene. There are also differences in the ships' details and the cityscape, even if both portray Venice: the nearby churches in the Valenciennes backdrop give an impression of the ship sailing through the city centre, while the much smaller buildings depicted on the horizon in the Opéra-Comique illustration represents the vessel much further away from civilisation. Overall, these sketches do suggest a level of national standardisation within opera's decors and mise-en-scène by the mid-nineteenth century, while also emphasising that provincial

[91] *Le mémorial*, 27 September 1835, 'analogue au sujet'.

[92] *L'écho*, 20 September 1826; *Le courrier*, 20 September 1836; Médiathèque de l'abbaye Saint-Vaast, Collection Cayat-Chartiers, poster 17 February 1846. Archives nationales, F/21/1236, ticket sales (Bertéché), 30 October 1845. Médiathèque de l'abbaye Saint-Vaast, Collection Cayat-Chartiers, poster 27 January 1853; Archives nationales, F/21/1238, ticket sales (Lefevre) undated, July–August 1854; Ticket sales (Tonel-Dubuisson), 26 October 1855.

[93] New backdrops were not bought exclusively for *grand opéra* after 1830: Archives départementales du Nord, JX/506, *L'impartial du Nord*, 9 March 1840 (*La fille de l'exilé*); Médiathèque de l'abbaye Saint-Vaast, Collection Cayat-Chartier, poster 26 February 1838 (*Les enfants des genies*); Archives nationales, F/21/1236, ticket sales, Prosper Bertéché 21 August 1848 (*Le comte de Montecristo*).

[94] Archives départementales du Nord, JX/506, *L'impartial du Nord*, 15 October 1848, painted by local artists, Meurice father and son (sometimes written as Maurice).

[95] Sylviane Robardey-Eppstein, 'Les mises en scène sur papier-journal: Espace interactionnel et publicité réciproque entre presse et monde théâtral (1828—1865)', *Médias 19 Presse et scène au XIX^e siècle* (online), 2019.

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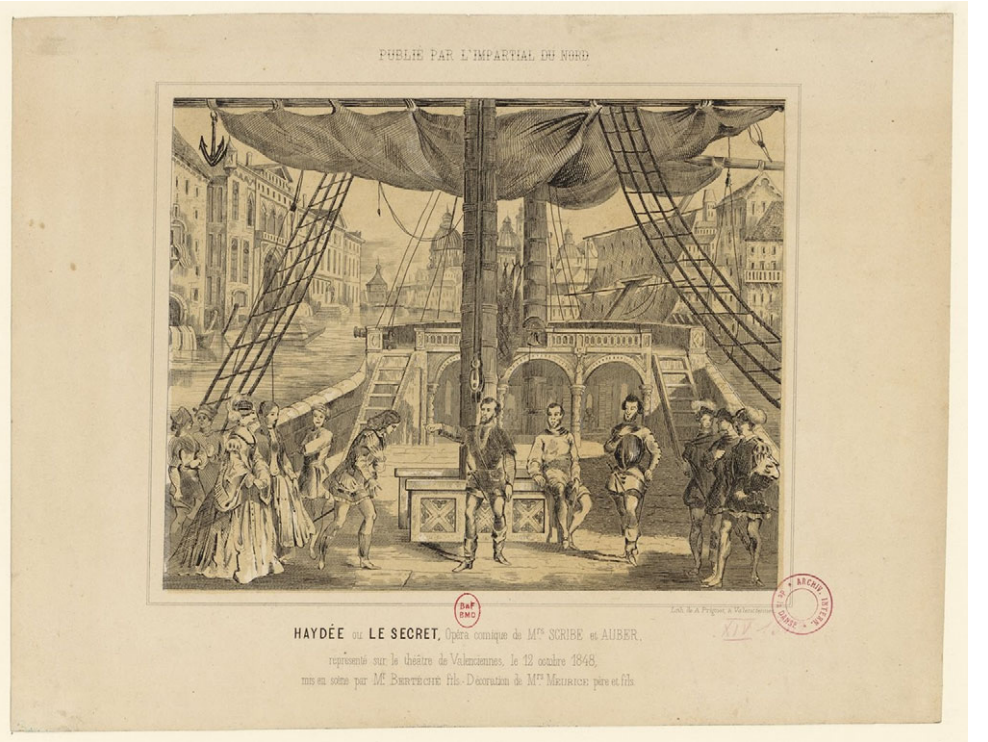

Figure 1. *Haydée ou Le secret, Opéra-comique de MM. Scribe et Auber, représenté sur le théâtre de Valenciennes, le 12 octobre 1848, mise en scène par Mr Bertéché fils. Décoration de MM. Meurice père et fils.* Bibliothèque nationale de France, département Bibliothèque-musée de l'opéra, ESTAMPES SCENES Haydée (2), 1848.

performances continued to make room for local inflection, whether due to practical constraints or artistic choice.

Investments in touring technologies also ensured a new kind of theatrical continuity across itinerant circuits. Directors now travelled with their own decors rather than using municipal collections in each town, meaning items outlived individual entrepreneurs as they were sold to successors or to municipal theatre collections.[96] Rented costumes also freed troupe performers from the usual responsibility of sourcing their garments, in the process ensuring that clothing remained in a director's care across different seasons, while singers tended to move on after one-year contracts.[97] *Grand opéra*'s material conditions were thus increasingly defined by both top-down and horizontal standardisation after 1830. Yet it is important to note that not all touring locations were large enough to sustain directors' standardisation of itinerant technologies. Rather, as testified in an account of Guillaume Bertéché's career by his son Prosper, the fact that directors travelled with their own collections in the 1840s did not entail uniformity in regional production. Prosper states that directors made sure to own a selection of decors 'appropriate for the various theatres of the arrondissement': he either implies the choice in each theatre of whatever appropriate backdrop in the director's resources that was of a correct size; the use of backdrops that could be altered to fit stage sizes (removing or adding visual elements); or, perhaps least

[96] Archives municipales de Dunkerque, 2/R/8, list of decors bought from Bertéché senior, 10 June 1858.
[97] Triolaire, *Le théâtre en province*, 258–62.

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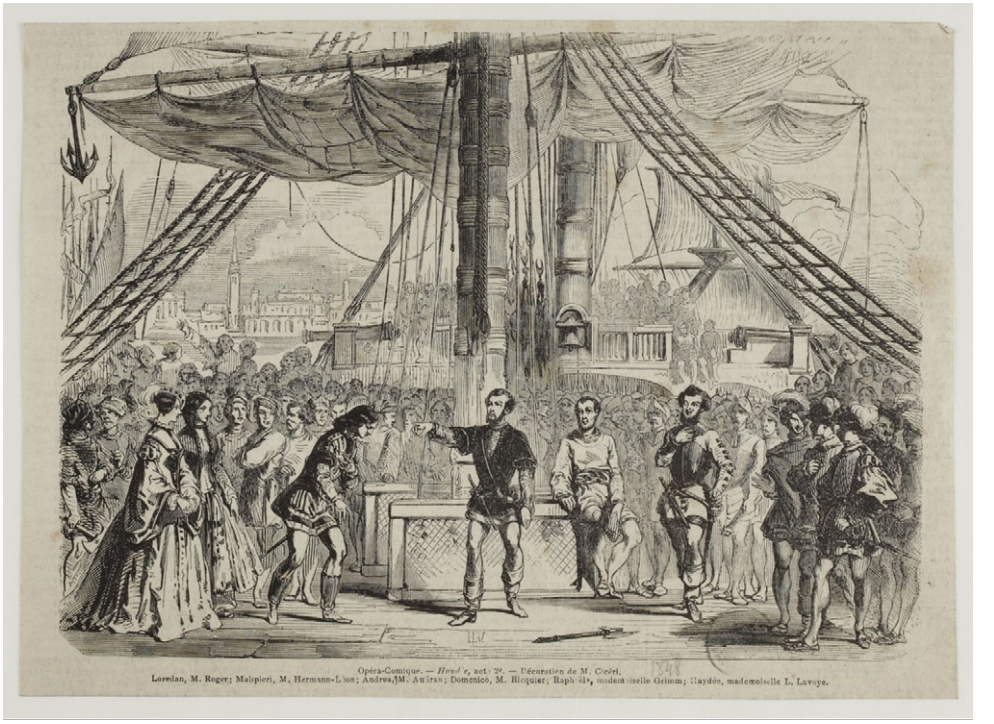

Figure 2. *Haydée ou Le secret, opéra-comique d'Esprit Auber: illustration de presse.* Bibliothèque nationale de France, département Arts du spectacle, 4-ICO THE-2802, 1848.

likely, that the troupe possessed a range of the same backdrops in different sizes, resulting in audiences' experiences of different scales of the scenes depicted.[98] In the first two cases, the newly commissioned decors would still have emphasised the place of adaptative elements, such as detachable panels, within standardising technologies, or showed that such materials were conceived as limited in touring terms, only destined for specific buildings on a director's itinerary.

In larger touring centres such as Valenciennes that could benefit fully from directors' emphasis on visual splendour, though, touring developments after 1830 emphasise the increased prestige associated with imitating the visual technologies of the Paris Opéra in a much more extensive way than was possible for *La muette.* These developments reveal a shifting understanding of the importance of spectacle and of historical and geographical specificity within touring *grand opéra*: these were aesthetic values that could, from the mid-1830s, be considered to define the genre in its national as well as Parisian context. Moreover, there is evidence that directors may have looked to keep up with changes in staging at the Opéra in order to maintain their up-to-date imitation of Parisian practices. As Jacobshagen has observed, developments in the placement of chorus ensembles and switching of scenery were central to performances of *La juive* and, he argues, was likely integral to recurrence of all *grand opéra* titles within the Opéra's mid-century repertory.[99] The new decors advertised in 1837 for *Robert* in Valenciennes only three years after the premiere thus potentially indicate that director Bertéché responded to a similar Parisian development –

[98] Archives nationales, F/21/1237, letter from Prosper Bertéché to the Prefect of the North, circa March 1854.
[99] Jacobshagen, 'Analyzing Mise-en-Scène', 191.

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although it is possible that directors continued to also look to other provincial theatres as models.[100] Audiences, too, were invited to appraise *grand opéra* repertoire differently from the 1840s as touring companies began to stage some pieces such as *La favorite* individually. As the sole performance filling an entire evening, spectators' attention could now focus on the narrative and characters of the Opéra's pieces, no longer drawing inference from a surrounding programme and reinforcing the individual and specialised nature of the genre.

Overall, directors' efforts to replicate models for *grand opéra*'s visual spectacle reveals a growing understanding of the genre as bearing fixed decorative parameters from the mid-1830s. As Vella argues, this trend mirrored the material circumstances of the genre's European circulation.[101] Moreover, the monolithic and monumental values of *grand opéra*'s visual elements was reinforced by the staging manuals produced after *La muette.* These contained far fewer, if any, adaptations for provincial companies, instead focusing on imparting stage action in increasing detail, and providing new tools such as costume sketches to aid directors in replicating operas in increasingly specific ways.[102] In European practice, as well as in codification of *grand opéra* in commercial publications, the importance placed on copying visual elements thus moved away from local variability and increasingly configured its repertoire as replicable operatic works.

Provincial prestige

I finish by considering how developments in the musical and visual elements of *grand opéra* were associated with cultural prestige in the touring environment, a term I have already invoked several times. There were crucial differences to the way that such prestige was articulated on tour compared to larger provincial centres. As mentioned in my introduction, in Ellis's study of *grand opéra* in residential companies she shows how municipally funded theatres' budgets were stretched to breaking point because managers strained to replicate the forces of the Opéra in exacting ways.[103] Ellis argues that *grand opéra* was considered a monumental force: it would not be staged unless the full artistic requirements such as a large chorus or ballet company could be recruited, for fear that the theatre in towns such as Bordeaux and, by extension the town as a whole, be considered inadequate by local audiences and the municipal council. Here, reduced or non-specialised forces such as Delorme's singer–dancer Mme Lejai and his principals doubling as the chorus would not be tolerated in circumstances where civic pride for theatre professionals working in lager provincial centres was directly related to upholding Parisian practices. The negative associations of adapting *grand opéra*'s conditions in the capital underline what Jonathan Hicks describes as the 'cultural cringe' present in *grand opéra*'s global transfer, that is, the frequency of historical commentators assessing certain operatic conditions in locations from New Orleans to London as lacking because of their distance from the Opéra's resources.[104] In these scenarios, the cultural capital associated with *grand opéra* in municipally funded operatic environments was fundamentally tied to aping the large-scale artistic means by which titles were staged in Paris.

The situation in Valenciennes, as representative of the wider touring circuit, is notably different. Knowledge of the gap between local and Parisian versions of *grand opéra* was certainly evident, and some critics did refer to the smaller-scale experience of the genre as lacking: for example, in 1834 journalist Arthur Dinaux wrote longingly about missing effects

[100] *Le courrier*, 18 March, 1837.
[101] Vella, *Networking Operatic Italy*, 28–9.
[102] Horrocks, 'Performing for the Provinces', 29–35.
[103] Ellis, 'Broke', 109–28.
[104] Jonathan Hicks, 'Opera History, the Travel Edition', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 33 (2021), 273–83.

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such as the moonlight in the *Robert* graveyard scene, presumably experienced in Paris.[105] By and large, however, Valenciennes reviewers and directors could react to the differences in musical and scenic scale between their stage and the Opéra in a more sanguine manner than their municipal counterparts. Without a municipal *cahier de charges* that tied directors into civic expectations for the size and talent of their company and its type of repertoire, touring managers such as Delorme and Bertéché were free to produce *grand opéra* with tiny forces and without ever recruiting specific chorus or dancers.

Some aspects of itinerant *grand opéra* did admittedly struggle more than others to be accepted locally on provincial rather than Parisian terms, most notably singers' voices. Throughout the 1830s and 1840s, journalists continually accentuated the vocal strain that *grand opéra* cost touring troupes. Writing about Valenciennes and Saint-Omer, journalists Dinaux, Ernest Bouton and Lemaire all identified a clash between smaller voices trained for *opéra-comique* and the larger scale of the Opéra's repertoire. This rhetoric was at times used to define Meyerbeer, Auber and Halévy's music by its 'proportions that [our singers] could not attain', but the three critics overwhelmingly emphasised the positive attributes of *grand opéra*'s vocal challenge and the tussle with troupe singers' specialism: they particularly admired performers that took on 'exhausting' roles in which the press identifies musical 'weight' and 'difficulty' compared to *opéra-comique.*[106] Troupe members' limitations were thus reconfigured as heroic vocal efforts in taking on roles such as Robert or Rachel, rather than missing the standards of the Opéra.[107] Another journalist known as J. P. L., writing in *L'écho*, even argued that Valenciennes spectators needed to close their ears to Parisian markers for local *grand opéra* singing. In reviews of performances of *Robert* in September 1834 featuring a guest appearance by Julie Dorus-Gras, a Valenciennes native and star of the Opéra for whom Meyerbeer wrote the role of Alice, J. P. L. described that Dorus-Gras's performance led spectators to reappraise their usual troupe artists that they had previously enjoyed: 'the rest is rubbish for a crowd seduced by a big name'.[108] J. P. L. argued that Dorus-Gras's specialised voice endangered 'the enjoyment of the public' and argued that spectators needed to instead develop localised parameters to appraise singers in order to dispel the temptation to compare them negatively with the Opéra.[109] The journalist's rhetoric showcases the local expectation of compromise evident within *grand opéra* production, not apparently possible in towns such as Bordeaux but essential, he argued, to accepting the genre on its own local terms in Valenciennes.

Achieving compromise also appeared to be important in terms of visual effects. Journalists such as Bouton acknowledged that while the Valenciennes version of, say, *Robert* did not provide theatrical splendour of the same magnitude as the Parisian version, the very presence of the genre in 'a town of the third order, fifty *lieues* from the capital' was cause for rejoicing, once again using the hierarchical third-order term to compare Valenciennes to provincial metropolises and Paris.[110] Indeed, the self-acknowledged low position of Valenciennes within France's theatrical and spatial hierarchy appears to have lowered the stakes for the shape of *grand opéra* locally. This was a positive move, as there was still civic prestige to be had in an adapted version of the genre because audiences were encouraged, by the

[105] *L'écho*, 14 August 1834.

[106] *Le courrier*, 14 August 1834; *L'écho*, 29 September 1835; *Le mémorial*, 27 September 1835; *Le mémorial*, 7 June 1845.

[107] The lack of transferability of these 'proportions' may account for the lack of performances of *Le prophète* in Valenciennes. The role of Berthe was written for Pauline Viardot's specific tessitura and, as acknowledged by Meyerbeer's changes to her melodies in the vocal score, was considered too wide-ranging for other singers.

[108] 'le reste est nul pour la foule qu'un grand nom seul séduit': *L'écho*, 18 September 1834.

[109] 'les jouissances de son public': *L'écho*, 18 September 1834; see also 16 October 1834.

[110] 'Valenciennes ville de 3me ordre, de Valenciennes éloignée de cinquante lieues de la Capitale': *Le courrier*, 14 August 1834.

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press, to embrace performances with obvious reductions: one might say 'liking and lumping' adaptations, rather than rejecting them as theatre figures feared might happen in Bordeaux.

Some touring environments beyond Valenciennes went even further in stretching the artistic definition of *grand opéra*'s prestige when they took on the genre with performance practices even more distant from those of the Opéra. In Lorient in 1845, for example, a performance of *La favorite* by the 6th *troupe d'arrondissement* featured singers specialising in vaudeville, with reviewer Flammèche noting the enhanced difficulty in switching from this declamatory popular sung style to singing *grand opéra*.[111] In the Pyrenees, Joseph Hermant's 16th *troupe d'arrondissement* also leapt from their usual vaudeville fare to *La juive* and *La muette* in the summer of 1844 to perform in Auch alongside soloists from the temporarily dissolved Grand Théâtre, Bordeaux, a scenario that must have pushed both Hermant's non-operatic singers and the soloists used to Bordeaux's exacting imitative standards firmly out of their comfort zones.[112] The Lorient and Auch performances would have made clear to spectators the disparity between the stage traditions of popular theatre, heard in the troupes' voices, and the form of so-called high art that they tackled. The very presence and success of these performances, though, reveals that *grand opéra*'s circulation to certain corners of France depended on and allowed for hybridity between popular and high art genres in a way that was not possible in large towns: as Ellis demonstrates, when Bordeaux and other resident companies ran into difficulties in securing funds to recreate the large-scale forces and effects of *grand opéra*, the genre was removed from municipal stages, rather than being reimagined.[113] The flexibility shown in recreating *grand opéra* in these touring adaptations fundamentally reconfigured where the prestige of the genre lay in mid-nineteenth-century France. In these provinces, prestige rather than 'cringe' was found by critics, directors and spectators in the act of translating *grand opéra*'s musical, dramatic and visual effects into smaller-scale or distinctly provincial practices. In Valenciennes, for example, the effort of singing Alice or the display of a bespoke graveyard decor in *Robert* retained and conveyed the meaning and saliency of Meyerbeer's opera and showcased the audacious efforts made by touring companies to bring the genre to their itinerant circuits, even without relying on the specifically Parisian way of producing these effects such as Dorus-Gras's voice and realistic moonlight.

* * *

I have argued throughout that *grand opéra* examined from the perspective of touring productions offers new insights into the genre's aesthetics, meanings and influence within nineteenth-century France. Befitting *grand opéra*'s status in 1830 as a recently developed and still emerging operatic form, preliminary experiments with *grand opéra* in the provinces reveal that the genre initially circulated beyond the capital in a malleable state where Paris was not the only influence. In Delorme's production of *La muette* in 1830, the director's desire to produce a 'non-reduced' version of opera resulted in musical and visual developments in previous troupe practice. Such expansions took place alongside necessary adaptations made to Auber's opera in order to uphold troupe conventions as well as reduce the piece's scale. Crucially, Delorme saw his production as an example of provincial *grand opéra*, displacing the direct influence of the Opéra and revealing the importance of intra-provincial theatrical relationships. The wider provincial situation suggests that a mix of imitative and adaptative artistic practices characterised *grand opéra*'s initial journeys outside Paris, although the differences in several musical, dramatic and staging elements that I observed between the Valenciennes staging, Solomé's instructions for an imagined provincial performance, and

[111] *L'abeille de Lorient*, 12 October 1845.

[112] Archives nationales, F/21/1278, ticket sales, 4 October 1844.

[113] Ellis, 'Broke', 109–28.

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snapshots of contemporary productions in Lyon, Montpellier and Bordeaux demonstrate that theatrical entrepreneurs and critics in each centre defined the weighting of different approaches to the genre. Provincial *grand opéra*, I argue, was more a spectrum of practices than a codified set of theatrical effects, as a variety of historical agents worked to define the most productive relationship between their locality, other provincial centres and the capital. These environments offer a picture of *grand opéra* as a new genre in flux across the nation, its values being defined in part through its provincial practices.

The situation developed from the later 1830s to the 1860s, during which time touring *grand opéra* can be characterised as exhibiting parallel growth in practices of local adaptation in musical terms and centralised imitation in visual spectacle. Certainly, there is no denying the Parisian influence over stage practices during this period. The emphasis that directors, critics and spectators across France placed on the genre's use of bespoke decors and costumes technologies highlights the importance of visual spectacle in the genre's national circulation, articulating clear efforts by these theatre figures to replicate the Opéra nationally, aided by new publications and resources. These efforts provided a standardised experience that related provincial performances more closely to Parisian models and to most, although not all, other provincial locales. In so doing, directors' investments transformed previous ways of representing operatic narrative in the touring circuit. These investments also highlighted the now significant cultural capital of replicating an ideal and fixed concept of *grand opéra*'s spectacle nationwide.

At the same time, it is important to remember that the way in which pieces from *La muette* to *Robert* were performed, musically, with forces a fraction of the size of the Opéra and with less specialised vocal skills, emphasises that cultural capital, at least in touring environments, still allowed for a transformation of the musical practices of *grand opéra.* Touring productions reveal that expectations concerning visual parameters evidently travelled separately from musical ones, where flexibility and adaptation was widely practised and accepted locally. Moreover, as shown in reflections on the subject from Valenciennes journalists, the Parisian comparison was unproductive for local experience. The vocal identities of Opéra singers such as Dorus-Gras were not seen to define *grand opéra*, locally, because they were not perceived as transferable to the local situation. J. P. L.'s approach to hearing touring *grand opéra* on its own terms acknowledged that Valenciennes was not Paris, however much directors wanted to copy the Opéra. Significantly, this reasoning did not devalue touring troupes' performances or crumble local attempts at *grand opéra*, as happened in Bordeaux. Rather, such comments are indicative of how touring conditions fashioned a broader acceptance that *grand opéra* could (and, practically, must) undertake several reconfigurations, in musical terms and in terms of scale, without losing its cultural capital or artistic relevance.

The accepted place of artistic reconfigurations in touring environments accentuates that the porousness and the specialisation of *grand opéra*, together, defined the genre's identity and place within nineteenth-century French stage culture. The genre was both reimagined as musically open, at times making room for vaudeville voices and, in parallel, it was increasingly monumentalised by aims of achieving the thorough replication of visual spectacle seen at the Opéra. The importance of *grand opéra* for touring directors, spectators and critics was thus found in both of these elements and in the way they interacted, offering the genre a flexibility that was not possible in Paris, or across all provincial environments.

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