

REVIEW ARTICLE

The Sounds and Sights of Parisian Spectacle

Roxane Martin, *Une soirée sur le boulevard du crime: le mélo à la loupe*. Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2023. 243pp. ISBN 978240614365-9 (hard cover); 97824061436666 (paperback)

Jacek Blaszkiewicz, *Fanfare for a City: Music and the Urban Imagination in Haussmann's Paris*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2024. xi + 250pp. ISBN 9780520393479 (hard cover); 9780520393486 (ebook)

Tommaso Sabbatini, *Music, the Market, and the Marvellous: Parisian Féerie, 1864–1900*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024. xi + 251 pp. ISBN 9780197267738 (hard cover); 9780198930921 (UPDF); 9780198930938 (ebook); 9780198930945 (online)

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If Paris was known as the capital of the nineteenth century, recent trends in musicology have encouraged some to turn their eyes away from this position in search of new scholarly frameworks. Many researchers have, on the one hand, moved away from capital-city studies and placed renewed emphasis on excavating the diverse regional cultural environments to fully account for a national musical landscape, in France and beyond.¹ On the other hand, opera scholars in particular have championed a transnational approach to mapping performers' careers, the circulation of repertoire, and the development of singing and staging practices.² Neither approach entirely forsakes the capital, in fact, especially in the case of France. Rather, the highly centralized nature of nineteenth-century French cultural infrastructure has ensured that one of the tantalizing results of shifting the scholarly lens to different geographies is the revelation of new aspects of the significance of the capital's musical practices when placed in relationship with others, and the parallel interrogation of the scope and source of Paris's status and influence when inserted within a

¹Cyril Triolaire, *Tréteaux dans le Massif: Circulations et mobilités professionnelles théâtrales en province des Lumières à la Belle Époque* (Université Blaise Pascal Clermont-Ferrand, 2022); Katharine Ellis, *French Musical Life: Local Dynamics in the Century to World War II* (Oxford University Press, 2021); Vlado Kotnik, *Small Places, Operatic Issues: Opera and its Peripheral Worlds* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019). Ellis's and Triolaire's recent book-length studies build on earlier interventions to a Parisian-focused history of the country's musical culture undertaken on a smaller scale and focusing on specific provincial cities, for example Clair Rowden, 'Decentralisation and Regeneration at the Théâtre des Arts, Rouen, 1889–1891', *Revue de Musicologie*, 94.1 (2008), pp. 139–80; *L'opéra de Rennes: naissance et vie d'une scène lyrique*, ed. by Marie-Claire Mussat (Éditions du Laveur, 1998); Marc Précicaud *Le théâtre lyrique à Limoges, 1800–1914* (Presses Universitaires de Limoges, 2001).

²*Cultural Representations of the Region in Transnational Contexts c. 1840–1940*, ed. by Giulia Bruna, Marguerite Corporaal, Chris Cusack, Sophie van Os, and Anneloek Scholten (University of Radboud Press, forthcoming 2025); *Italian Opera in Global and Transnational Perspective: Reimagining Italianità in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Axel Körner and Paulo Kühn (Cambridge University Press, 2021); Charlotte Bentley, *New Orleans and the Creation of Transatlantic Opera, 1819–1859* (University of Chicago Press, 2022); *Carmen Abroad: Bizet's Opera on the Global Stage*, ed. by Richard Langham Smith and Clair Rowden (Cambridge University Press, 2020); *Grand Opera outside Paris: Opera on the Move in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, ed. by Jens Hesselager (Routledge, 2018).

broader network.³ In other words, recent directions in French music history, in allowing for a more critical assessment of the place and function of the capital from new perspectives, still ignite rather than dim the lure of the musical context of Paris *sui generis*. Indeed, the monographs reviewed in this article highlight that this is for good reason. These three nineteenth-century studies unveil a multiplicity of the capital's musical practices, sites, and figures that, just like new geographies, remain unfamiliar to musicologists despite the ubiquity of the capital in scholars' eyes, and cast new light on Parisian musical history.

The three publications surveyed here each make a distinctive mark on the study of nineteenth-century Parisian musical culture, collectively covering the entirety of a century. Roxane Martin shines the spotlight on Restoration *mélodrame* in the single year of 1823 through her *Une soirée sur le boulevard du crime* (*A Night on the Boulevard of Crime*). The second part of the title, *le boulevard du crime*, refers to the French nickname for the street Le Boulevard du Temple, coined by journalists around 1822 to emphasize the proliferation of onstage portrayals of criminal acts and characters in several *mélodrame* theatres based in this location. Looking at the time around the mid-century, Jacek Blaszkiewicz's *Fanfare for a City: Music and the Urban Imagination in Haussmann's Paris* interrogates the relationship between music and the Second Empire's city environment during this period's immense change in urban planning known as Haussmannization. Finally, Tommaso Sabbatini's *Music, the Market, and the Marvellous: Parisian Féerie, 1864–1900* begins in the same period but explores thirty-six years of *féerie*, the French fairy play that married musical entertainment with sophisticated technological spectacle. All three authors zoom in to close readings of musical scores, play texts and dramaturgy, and press criticism on the one hand, and out to historical context, on the other, in order to profile musical environments that are largely far removed from the city's most well-known (read: elite) institutions, canonical works, and familiar composers.

Indeed, all three accounts highlight the important influence of the city environment in shaping nineteenth-century musical practices and reception. Such an approach is in keeping with the established musicological turn towards examination of the interaction between urban experience and cultural activity.⁴ Sabbatini's and Martin's books firmly situate their studies within the broader urban socio-political context of Parisian life, highlighting the influence of the commercial market and themes of cosmopolitanism on *féerie* production in Sabbatini's case, and reading *mélodrame* criticism as a politicized reaction, on the part of Parisian critics, to central government policies in Martin's. Blaszkiewicz engages with the urban experience more specifically at street level, moving the focus away from institutional musical spaces and towards the street itself, the open space of the exhibition, and the *café-concert* open to the boulevard. These case studies naturally reveal the influence of the city's shifting urban and social characteristics on musical practice during a time of intense physical change in the urban landscape, as well as the way in which musical events and figures themselves shaped writers', walkers', and onlookers' experience of the city in turn. Consequently, Blaszkiewicz's approach grounds his book's intervention in urban history as well as musicology.

The more specific focus on urban topography also appears as a running thread throughout all three monographs. On a lesser scale than Blaszkiewicz, but befitting their subject matter, both Sabbatini and Martin use sections of their opening chapters to respectively situate the production of *féerie* and *mélodrame* in shifting urban landscapes, including impressively rendered diagrams of the layout of theatrical neighbourhoods from each author. For Sabbatini, the shifting urban space is the same Haussmannian renewal studied by Blaszkiewicz, which, the author underlines, impacted the urban placement, gentrification, and audience demographic of *féerie*'s popular theatres. Martin's book tracks the emergence of the more localized socio-theatrical urban identity, the 'boulevard du crime' in which

³Sophie Horrocks, 'Performing for the Provinces: Travelling Theatre Troupes and the French Political Imaginary, 1824–64' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Durham University, 2024), pp. 185–237.

⁴Gerhard Anselm, *The Urbanization of Opera: Music Theater in Paris in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. by Mary Whittall (University of Chicago Press, 1998); Alessandra Palida, *Urban Spectacle in Republican Milan* (Cambridge University Press, 2023); *Operatic Geographies: The Place of Opera and the Opera House*, ed. by Susanne Aspden (Chicago University Press, 2019).

mélodrame activity led to a re-conception of urban space circa 1822. Together, then, the three monographs promote a musicological sensitivity towards the city in a new way, highlighting how urban topography applied across the nineteenth century can affect music-making. At the same time, and as glimpsed by Martin's research, mentioned above, on the emergence of the urban concept of the 'boulevard du crime' out of *mélodrame* activity, these books reveal the parallel process of theatrical culture which shaped people's understanding and experience of the city. Moving through the three studies from the level of least to most engagement with urban experience, I will now consider Sabbatini's, Martin's, and Blaszkiewicz's monographs in turn.

Fantastic *Féerie*

Sabbatini's book offers a study of a Parisian stage genre that has not previously been the subject of an English-language nor a musicological study. One of the book's great strengths, therefore, is to establish for the first time the key figures, institutions, repertoire, and aesthetic parameters of the *féerie* industry between 1864 and 1900 in a comprehensive manner. With an emphasis on the commercial and entrepreneurial nature of performance culture that underpins his discussion of *féerie*, Sabbatini pieces together the mechanics of the genre's production and the responsibilities of its key agents (composers, writers, machinists, theatre managers), moving between different theatres, from the Théâtre du Châtelet to the Porte Saint-Martin, and between different creators of *féerie* music, from the conductor Auguste Pilati to composers Hervé and Jacques Offenbach, and writers from Jules Verne to the less familiar, in scholarly terms, Cogniard brothers. He also weaves together a chronology of the genre's large-scale artistic developments and establishes a rich corpus of *féerie* repertoire that is likely new to most readers. What these elements add up to is a rich portrait of the genre over thirty-six years. Sabbatini initially defines *féerie* as light plays conceived with onstage tricks and transformations, with vocal numbers that use arrangements of known airs rather than original music, and plots set in a fairytale universe. *Féerie* were played to mass audiences in large commercial theatres and often appealed to the lower classes due to their spectacular displays and the theatres' low ticket prices. A more layered definition of the development of the genre's form and expressive means is, however, slowly unpacked across the four chapters.

The account begins in 1864, which marks not the advent of the *féerie* genre, the prior history of which Sabbatini briefly sketches in the first chapter, but a departure point in its form after the deregulation of theatres across France. This deregulation largely dismantled fifty-eight years of state oversight of theatrical activity, including privileges given to companies to exclusively produce specific genres, in effect protecting the 'grand' institutions performing elite musical forms such as *comédie*, *opéra-comique*, and *grand opéra* from commercial competition. Post-1864 (i.e. post-deregulation), these previously guarded companies — the Opéra, Comédie-Française, Opéra-Comique, and Théâtre de l'Odéon — did continue to receive government subsidies to create these genres, but theatre directors elsewhere were now free to produce whichever genre they chose and any entrepreneur was free to set up theatres across the nation. The number of Parisian companies, in particular, boomed in response to this initiative during the second half of the century.⁵ It is this new landscape of Parisian artistic and commercial freedom that enabled the practices of late nineteenth-century *féerie* that Sabbatini highlights throughout his book, including, as will be discussed shortly, an evolution of the genre's previous musical logic and the expansion of theatres producing *féerie*. Moreover, the renewed Parisian theatrical environment provided the source of what Sabbatini discusses as the influential 'féerization' of the capital's wider stages and genres that emerges as a key theme of the monograph.

Using the components of *féerie* to trouble the parameters by which scholars have traditionally understood stage culture, the book's Chapter 1, 'Overture: *Féerie* and Theatre with Music', which serves as the introduction, lays out the artistic and social context of *féerie* and Sabbatini's methodology to

⁵ *Les Annales du théâtre et de la musique*, 18 (1892) and 20 (1894) <<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k61689p/f4.item>> [accessed 24 March 2025].

approach repertoire, performances, and historical agents. The defining and tantalizing features of *féerie* sit uneasily within traditional musicological paradigms, making it clear why the genre has fallen off the scholarly radar. The genre's blurring of a clear or hierarchical relationship between music, dialogue, and stage illusion, for example, does not match traditional categorization of sung and spoken theatre (and its performers) in opposing silos (pp. 16–20). Nor does *féerie*'s collaborative authorship and the importance placed on continual artistic revision of core repertoire fit with scholarly research into individuals' creative power and responsibility, or the definition of a concept of a stage 'work' that differs from its interpretation (pp. 10–11 and 24). As a corrective, Sabbatini conceives of *féerie* as 'the total artwork of the present' (p. 36). By coining this phrase, Sabbatini positions *féerie* as offering an alternative mode for audiences to consume spectacle produced by extravagant theatrical technologies and stage effects, one that contrasts with contemporary Wagnerian and Meyerbeerian spectacle by pointing explicitly to its theatrical labour rather than towards autonomy or transcendence (pp. 35–37).

While the technological spectacle that wowed audiences remained an integral part of *féerie* throughout the period of Sabbatini's study, the type of music offered to spectators changed progressively during this period. Chapter 2 ('Composerly *Féerie* and the Operettisation of *Féerie*') concentrates on musical developments of *féerie* post-1864, namely the inclusion of original music rather than new words fitted to old music, resulting in a subgenre Sabbatini terms 'composerly *féerie*'. The author uses rich case studies to introduce two of this kind of *féerie* within his recovered corpus: *La Biche au bois* (1845, Cogniard brothers, with music by Pilati), the revival of which in 1865 included new music by Hervé; and *Le Roi Carotte* (1872, Victorien Sardou, with an original score by Offenbach), a piece which Sabbatini disentangles from its usual place within the history of *opéra-comique* by claiming it as a *féerie*. Original music opened new possibilities for *féerie*, including what Sabbatini calls the 'operettization' and consequential gentrification of the genre through the music of composers steeped in the operetta idiom, such as Hervé and Offenbach. New compositions also led to shifts in thinking about the practices of conserving parts of *féerie*'s traditionally ephemeral stage practices. A printed score of *féerie* music was created for the first time for *Le Roi Carotte*, for example, conferring on this piece a new set of musical values of repeatability between and beyond professional theatres and, in doing so, a sense of permanence now attributed to the genre's musical component. Importantly, though, Sabbatini does not frame the achievement of original music as an end goal within *féerie*. Rather, as seen by the disappearance of Hervé's music in a revival only two years later, original music worked into pieces such as *La Biche au bois* should be seen as a new tool through which creators continued to serve the genre's ongoing and ultimate aesthetic: that of showcasing theatrical novelty.

Just as he claims *Le Roi Carotte* for *féerie* in Chapter 2, Sabbatini uses a redefinition of the play *Le tour du monde en 80 jours* (1874, Verne and Adolphe d'Ennery, music by the Porte Saint-Martin theatre's conductor Jean-Jacques Debillemont), drawn from Verne's popular novel, to introduce the traits of the second subgenre in Chapter 3. The third chapter, 'Scientific *Féerie* and the *Féerisation* of Parisian Theatre', focuses on the parallel evolution of what Sabbatini dubs scientific *féerie*, contemporary with its 'composerly' cousin. As exemplified by Phileas Fogg's madcap adventures across the world in a hot-air balloon, the dramaturgy of scientific *féerie* moved away from the supernatural towards themes of technology and travel. Sabbatini explains this shift as reflecting broader sociopolitical currents, including the 'triumph of an entrepreneurial ideal' (p. 116) and the political expansion of the Empire's military and colonizing campaigns. Moreover, he reveals *féerie*'s unique ability to produce and normalize the depiction of extreme events such as space travel (represented in Offenbach's *Le voyage dans la lune*, 1875) through musical language that at times placed dramatic effect over lyrical expression — for example Offenbach's chorus on the shivering sound 'br' to evoke the cold climate of the moon — as well as through extravagant *clous*, these being attention-grabbing moments showing a transformation or technological spectacle, created by complex stage effects involving sophisticated machinery.

The commendable attention given to the multiple manufacturers of *féerie* in Chapter 4, 'The People of *Féerie*', retrospectively illuminates various aspects of *féerie*'s aesthetic developments covered in Chapters 2 and 3 through figures that are often sidelined from theatrical studies. Sections unveiling the work of machinists and theatre managers, for example, stress both the intensity of theatrical labour required to

produce the genre and the importance of collaborative authorship that placed stagecraft ahead of text, with plots — and later music — worked around *clous* aiming to grab the audience's attention. The responsibilities of conductors and the work of child actors and female supernumeraries also offer tantalizing insights into the rhythms and responsibilities of *féerie* production, including the potential size of its orchestras and the voyeuristic display it offered of the female body. Furthermore, Sabbatini's analysis in this chapter of *féerie*'s consumers emphasizes that the genre was a family show targeted at children (in age and at heart), with certain didactic elements such as the *défilées* of scientific *féerie* supplementing the core spectatorship mode of pure wonder excited through spectacle.

A key takeaway from Sabbatini's book is his argument for the influence of *féerie* well beyond its dedicated stages, in two ways. First, *féerie* was at once the title of a dramatic category produced at institutions such as the theatres of the Porte Saint-Martin, the Gaité, and the Châtelet, and a mode of theatrical creation and performance that was co-opted into other repertoires and institutions. This is emphasized in Sabbatini's re-reading in his Chapters 2 and 3, as described above, of pieces known to scholars in other categories as actually belonging to *féerie* due to the use of the genre's characteristics: as mentioned already, this includes *Le Roi Carotte*, more well known as an *opéra-comique*, *Le Tour du monde*, largely discussed as a spoken play, and the vaudeville *Coco*, which Sabbatini also claims as a *féerie* in Chapter 3. Second, Sabbatini suggests that *féerie* performance was so distinctive that even when its form was not adopted into other genres or institutions, its practices were thematized and its contents copied. Indeed, Sabbatini uses the lens of *féerie* to provide new insights into other canonical repertoire that is not redefined as *féerie* but is seen to borrow or reference its characteristics, from Grieg's musical language for 'Anitra's Dance' in *Peer Gynt* to Carmen's seduction scene. The influence of *féerie* as a repertoire, a genre-crossing mode, and a means of meta-theatrical reference within the Parisian theatrical landscape emphasizes the stakes upheld by this publication, which should have musicologists and theatre scholars reaching again for their favourite scores for signs of 'féerization'. Sabbatini not only brings to light a hitherto unknown slice of the Parisian performance industry with distinctive practices, but highlights this industry's ability to illuminate new aspects of potentially the totality of Parisian theatre culture through other genres' interaction with *féerie*.

Revisiting *Mélodrame* Politics

Rewinding forty years and zooming in on a much tighter chronological scope, Roxane Martin's book offers a microhistory of *mélodrame* viewed through the lens of five pieces performed on 29 April 1823. The author aims to move away from the highly literary analyses that have dominated recent discussions of the genre. The resulting investigation of the five-piece corpus is both richly detailed and artistically comprehensive, offering an important broadening of the history of great works traditionally deployed in *mélodrame* studies. Not only does Martin explore hitherto neglected aspects of *mélodrame* performance, dedicating chapters to the work of actors, use of decors, and the role of music and dance, but sociopolitical context is placed front and centre within her more literary close readings of the characters and plots of the corpus. Martin states from the opening pages that she views the content and meaning of melodramatic expression on this night primarily through the lens of recent political events: Louis XVIII's expedition to restore absolutism in Spain, an act of monarchical authority that served as a catalyst for ongoing tensions between liberal and ultraroyalist social ideals traded in Parisian newspapers.

The introduction sets out the significance of April 1823 for the study of *mélodrame*, a moment in which Parisian critics discussed a perceived transition between an old and a new, or renewed, *mélodrame* style ('vieux *mélodrame*' and '*mélodrame* renouvelé'). Martin grasps hold of the rhetoric of aesthetic renewal made plain in journalists' critiques, but emphasizes that part of her aim in this book is to challenge whether this narrative was truly visible in *mélodrame* production, rather than simply aligned with political factions. Accordingly, she seeks to establish which artistic elements this renewal specifically referred to and whether discourses of transformation bear up to 'the concrete reality of the melodrama

landscape' (p. 8),⁶ that is, the programmes of the five Parisian theatres, the work of its actors, the music, and the choreographic activity of *mélodrame*.

The first chapter, 'Feu le vieux mélo' (Old Melodrama Is Dead), plays out Martin's triangulation between reception, politics, and performance conditions in order to explore the relationship between press discourse and the output of the five Parisian theatres staging *mélodrame* on 29 April 1823. Martin first identifies the dramatic features through which music journalists constructed binaries between 'old' and 'new' *mélodrame* repertoire — overly dramatic action (old) versus more realistic situations (new) and the depiction of the need for repentance (old) versus characters' remorse (new) — before overlaying these aesthetic binaries with ultraroyalist (old regime) versus liberal (progressive) social values. She then assesses whether such rhetoric can be supported by theatres' programming, studying the differences in the output of the Cirque-Olympique, Gaité, Ambigu-Comique, Porte Saint-Martin, and Panorama-Dramatique. These case studies of institutions whose managers and performers are rarely mentioned in the annals of music history reveal a diversity of *mélodrame* programming that muddies the aesthetic-political factions overlaid by contemporary reception. In turn, this diversity serves to nuance the concept of a collective theatrical and institutional identity on the recently baptized 'boulevard du crime'.

Chapter 2, 'La loi, le crime et la morale' (Law, Crime and Morality), turns to literary criticism to interrogate the centrality of crime in the repertoire of *mélodrame* theatres. Martin analyses the representation of criminal behaviour in *Le Remords*, *Les Deux forçats*, *Valérien*, *La Fille de l'exilé*, and *Bertam*, setting this against the backdrop of changing legal frameworks to address and control criminal activity in French society between 1790 and 1824. Her readings of the onstage depiction of suicide (a criminal act at the time) and characters such as the virtuous brigand, honest men with a criminal past, and the (im)possibility of social rehabilitation of certain criminals across the five titles underlines, as in Chapter 1, the diversity of *mélodrame*'s criminal imaginary. As Martin points out, newer titles crucially shifted the genre's dramatic function after the Revolution: censors previously valued the continued depiction of just legal punishment for individuals to emphasize the genre's moralizing function, yet Martin demonstrates a transition in the characterization of agitators within recently produced *mélodrames* that highlighted unscrupulous behaviour as a symptom of social ills rather than personal vice. Martin illustrates for readers how *mélodrame* at the historical junction of 1823 muddied previous theatrical depictions of the association of class with virtuous behaviour, at times even using the stage to question the power of the contemporary legal system.

Moving from the page to the stage, the third chapter, 'Le décor et l'acteur' (Scenography and Actors), charts developments in actors' use of physicality and costume (provided personally by each actor) alongside scenography as a result of the plot and character shifts described in Chapter 2. Martin's study of the performance practices that gave life to stock *mélodrame* characters, such as the sentimental heroine, naive youth, and traitor, is impressive in its scope. She traces the flexibility of star performers such as Marie Dorval and Frédéric Lemaître in different roles as an indicator of 'natural' characterization that was championed by critics as defining 'new' *mélodrame*. In considering actors' training and the nature of their work creating and performing the genre, though, Martin does not focus solely on celebrities. Instead, much like recent accounts of opera singers' work in Paris and New Orleans,⁷ she also charts the careers of non-celebrity performers whose names are forgotten today but who represent the most significant tranche of the theatrical industry (in Paris, the provinces, and francophone theatres abroad) in terms of numbers.⁸ This comprehensive approach is valuable as it is through comparison between the work of 'ordinary' performers and the expectations placed upon them by critics and theatre managers that scholars can best assess aspects of celebrity formation, that is, whether stars attain their status

⁶'Confronter les discours critiques à la réalité concrète du paysage mélodramatique'.

⁷Bentley, *New Orleans and the Creation of Transatlantic Opera*; Kimberly White, *Female Singers on the French Stage, 1830–1848* (Cambridge University Press, 2018).

⁸*Almanach des spectacles pour 1824* (Barba, 1824) <<https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=zEJgAAAACAAJ>> [accessed 24 March 2025].

because they are representative of the best of an established theatrical tradition, or are brought to the top of the theatrical pyramid through their unique differences.

Martin's final chapter is the most methodologically innovative, drawing largely on unstudied archival manuscript sources to piece together the audible and corporeal elements of *mélodrame* performance. Chapter 5, 'La musique et la danse' (Music and Dance), hangs around the hypothesis that composers' move away from overly spectacular music in 'new melodrama' reacted to plot shifts emphasizing interior life over external spectacle. The effect, Martin suggests, of a turning back from using music to aurally depict onstage events such as avalanches and to imitate actors' gestures resulted in a shift in musical function in *mélodrame*, creating 'music that we don't hear' (p. 164) due to its emotive rather than active depiction.⁹ Yet more far-reaching than Martin's musical analysis, which could benefit from cross-referencing with criticism to gauge the effect these pieces produced on their audience, is her illumination of the process of musical creation and circulation for *mélodrame*. In this chapter, she provides crucial and previously undiscovered information about the genre's musical production and the role of conductors and mechanics in preserving music for circulation and revival. Similarly, the methods that Martin uses to reconstruct *mélodrame*'s dances, left unknown by the lack of surviving choreographic material, are exemplary. She ably mines biographic details of the dance masters and performers as well as closely reading the potential gestural and bodily implications of dance music to fill this lacuna. Consequently, she offers tantalizing new information about the different types of dance forms within *mélodrame* (character dances, *défilé*, village festivals) and the function of flamboyant choreography as a symbol of 'virtue triumphant' (p. 201) in Pixérécourt's *Le Fille de l'exilé*.

The political theme that Martin introduces so specifically at the beginning of the book appears to wane in these last two chapters, and it is this feature that I found the hardest to grasp within the study. Perhaps it is a question of putting the cart before the horse: only in the book's conclusion does Martin provide newspaper quotations that explicitly link *mélodrame* with politics, in similes conceptualizing the military campaigns in Spain and Portugal as aping *mélodrame* action. Otherwise, the political overtones of aesthetic discourse are inferred by the factions of the newspaper within which they are published. Granted, French theatre always had the potential to be political, yet the question remains as to whether it is enough to map discourse that speaks of aesthetic change directly onto contemporary political factions without some intermediary. To this end, readers who wish to better understand the political connotations of *mélodrame* may take Chapter 2 and even aspects of the conclusion as a more detailed introduction to the political overtones of the genre.

The Streets Are Alive with the Sound of Music

Moving from the *salle de spectacle* onto the Parisian street, Jacek Blaszkiewicz's book investigates the interconnections between urban planning and musical practice during the Second Empire. The effects of Haussmannization upon the specifically theatrical landscape of Paris are for musicologists perhaps one of the more familiar elements of the history of urban planning, cited by Sabbatini, for one, as mentioned above.¹⁰ In a complementary but contrasting manner, Blaszkiewicz's monograph is much broader in scope, examining different musical spaces that he describes as the city's 'fanfare': that is, 'the musics of the city rather than in the highly curated edifices located *in it*' (p. 8). This results in a series of case studies of musical practice and repertoire, and their shaping by various forces, in a series of different enclaves such as the exhibition hall, *café-concert*, and street corners. Blaszkiewicz's central argument throughout the book is that 'urban politics both shaped, and were shaped by, musical discourses and practices in the city' (p. 186). This publication is thus placed at the intersection between sound studies, urban history, and

⁹Identifier la musique mélodramatique comme une musique que l'on n'entend pas'.

¹⁰Juliette Aubrun, 'Le théâtre dans les travaux d'Haussmann: histoire d'une reconstruction d'un dessein culturel', in *Les Spectacles sous le Second Empire*, ed. by Jean-Claude Yon (Armand Colin, 2010), pp. 72–83; Mark Everist and Annegret Fauser, 'Introduction', in Everist and Fauser, *Music, Theater, and Cultural Transfer: Paris, 1830–1914* (University of Chicago Press, 2009), p. 4.

musicology thanks to the author's detailed analyses of several different axes through which the interface between the city and its music was played out and controlled: through urban policy, administrators' aesthetic influences, programming for city festivities, literary discourse and press criticism, the curation of interior musical spaces, and in specific musical works.

Dealing with the man at the centre of it all, Blaszkiewicz's first chapter, 'Baron Haussmann's Musical Imagination', charts how Haussmann's musical sensitivity shaped his urban politics. Demonstrating how the disciplines of music and administration were interwoven early in Haussmann's life, Blaszkiewicz argues, positions this prefect's urban work as that of a 'demolition-artist', pursuing an infrastructural campaign that Blaszkiewicz sees as rooted in musical aesthetics shared with both Berlioz (his erstwhile classmate at the Conservatoire) and Wagner. The inclusion of this chapter, quite different in scope from the following ones which all centre around a musical event, is significant. The time taken by Blaszkiewicz to uncover, through rigorous evidence, how Haussmann's personal convictions shaped his public actions offers a model for other scholars studying the many musical practices mediated by French administrators who often appear faceless in musical historiography. Granted, other central ministers, regional prefects, and town mayors may not have left the same archival trail as Haussmann, yet attending to their personal philosophies and cultural positions, where discoverable, has the potential to greatly enrich the study of practices of cultural mediation and state oversight of musical activity across France.

Blaszkiewicz demonstrates why there is much to be learned from a history of failures in his Chapter 2, 'Fanfare City: The Expositions universelles'. He dives into the soundscape of ceremonial events that were commonly associated with the Second Empire, reading the 1855 and 1867 universal expositions musically. Blaszkiewicz suggests that urban planners aimed to transform 'visual ceremonial aesthetics' into sonic experience through the musical programming for the closing award ceremonies. The ensuing case study of the fiasco of a disrupted performance of Berlioz's *L'Impériale*, the cancelling of a commission by Saint-Saëns, and the last-minute triumph of Rossini's *Hymne à Napoléon III* highlights the way in which a particular urban space and event demanded, in the eyes of the programming committee, a different set of musical aesthetics than what many composers were willing to offer. In other words, the crafting of 'imperial fanfare' (p. 75) exposes the difficulties of achieving sensory control and of shaping the narrative of a particular civic ritual, despite the ubiquity of music within such ceremonies.

Blaszkiewicz's third chapter, 'Urban Planning Lessons from the Café Concert', focuses on the popular singing phenomenon of the *café-concert*, with one of its most famous institutions, the Eldorado, built in the 10th arrondissement in 1858, serving as the main case study. With the performance genre of the *café-concert* framed primarily as an urban industry and social event and the musical detail of the repertoire left largely for the next chapter, the result is a nuanced approach that deftly avoids a conflation of the *café-concert* experience with its celebrity singers or most repeatable repertoire. In moving away from these musicological imperatives that have governed the small amount of scholarship so far on this phenomenon, Blaszkiewicz arguably recalibrates the site's hierarchy of tastes and experiences (social, thirst-quenching, musical) more closely to those of nineteenth-century visitors.¹¹ Moreover, the informal social realm of *café-concert* performance, he argues, resisted the 'compartmentalization' of geopolitical and theatrical worlds under Haussmannization that have been discussed in the book so far, in its centring of 'sociospatial transgression' (p. 94) that contrasted with Haussmann's monumental aesthetics that were carving up the city beyond the café's doors.

¹¹Previous work on the *café-concert* includes Nathalie Coutelet, 'La chanson mimée au café-concert de la Belle Époque', *Horizons/Théâtre* [en ligne], 16–17 (2023) <<http://journals.openedition.org/ht/4276>> [accessed 13 February 2025]; Elisabeth Pillet, 'Du café-conc' au music-hall: les souvenirs de Mayol et de Maurice Chevalier', *Belphegor* [en ligne], 11.1 (2013) <<http://journals.openedition.org/belphegor/273>> [accessed 13 February 2025]; Hannah Scott, *Singing the English: Britain in the French Musical Lowbrow, 1870–1904* (Routledge, 2022); Olivier Bara, 'Le café-concert dans la grande presse, ou la crise du feuilleton dramatique' in *Presse, chanson et culture orale au XIXe siècle*, ed. by Elisabeth Pillet and Marie-Eve Thérénty (Nouveau monde éditions, 2012), pp. 101–19 <<https://hal.science/hal-00910179v1>> [accessed 25 March 2025].

Centring, in Chapters 4 and 5 ('Street Music: Between Regulation and Liberation' and 'Street Cries: Constructing the Old City'), on musical figures found on the streets themselves, Blaszkiewicz's study of street singers and hawkers reveals the effects of urban policy and policing on people who literally sounded out their living on the boulevards and street corners. The author's suggestion that musicologists pay more attention to 'policing as a historiographical category' underlines an approach that is central to the scholarly excursions beyond the French capital that I mentioned earlier, since the work of town, departmental, and ministerial administrators and agents, who acted as gatekeepers to musical experience, are central to understanding cultural activity across France. These two chapters serve to emphasize how music, sound, and noise, categories that Blaszkiewicz defines separately and thoughtfully, worked not only to mythologize the figures that were being physically displaced through Haussmannization, but also to conjure narratives of the old and the new city. It is here that Blaszkiewicz's argument that musical practices also configure the city truly comes into its own through the author's close reading of several songs from Jean-Georges Kastner's symphony for orchestra and chorus *Les Voix de Paris*, which incorporated notated versions of street cries that were in the middle of being lost through police reforms. These final chapters bring home what Blaszkiewicz successfully demonstrates throughout the book: that there is a complex and interrelated history of urbanism and music in Second Empire Paris. Blaszkiewicz's methodology for defining this relationship, through attention to diverse aspects of cultural practice — from investigating administrators' motives and the effects of state policing to the close reading of musical works and analysis of performance spaces' social and musical roles — has the potential to stimulate future work on other settings. The late nineteenth century saw urban renewal across France, not to mention its colonies, and it might be productive to investigate whether music and urban experience needed to triangulate with Paris's scale and its administrators in order to feed off each other.

New Histories of Parisian Musical Life

The breadth and scope of these three publications highlight little-known genres and performance spaces, reconstruct complex means of musical production, administration, and reception, and reveal largely unfamiliar repertoire and cultural agents of the nineteenth-century French capital. There is much to learn, too, from the way the three authors deploy archival sources within their books. In particular, Martin's and Sabbatini's analyses of primary sources to reveal the production process, use, and shape of theatrical music on the popular stage constitute a monumental recovery of music that was a result of practices that were more collaborative, flexible, and ephemeral than contemporary elite genres. The work of gaining such insights should not be underestimated, as these musical sources often elude institutional repositories, are conserved incomplete, are spread across various archives, and are not always catalogued. They also often call for additional labour to facilitate interpretative readings of their musical components, such as tracing provenance, dates, and ownership when items are not archived as part of institutional collections, or transcribing individual parts to a full score to understand the full sonority of a piece. Martin addresses some of the challenges of working with these materials in her fourth chapter, dedicated to music (and dance) in *mélodrame*. Her impressive problematization of the difficulties of working with fragmentary sources and the impossibility at times of definitively identifying some of the historical details associated with *mélodrame* music in the archives will, I hope, serve to embolden others in their approaches to similarly elusive materials. Specifically, Martin demonstrates how one might bring meaning to archival silence and potential uncertainty by emphasizing the historical musical practices that created these conditions — from the national circulation of orchestral parts with directors, leading to their being scattered between archives, to the *régisseur's* responsibility to collect them after each performance, engendering wear, change, and potential loss.

In conclusion, it is worth reflecting that while the three authors' objects of study can each be classed as popular forms of music and theatre, their different engagements with the notion of the popular raise

important questions about how scholars conceptualize and use this category. Blaszkiewicz, for example, explicitly writes against the notion of the popular in his introduction, considering this way of defining musical activity and musicians within academia as more of a 'neoliberal project of carving out newness' (p. 8) than a close reading of historical power dynamics. His directive for readers to abandon preconfigured binaries when approaching nineteenth-century musical culture certainly resonates with Martin's and Sabbatini's accounts of the cross-pollination of writers, composers, and spectators continually crossing genre binaries and official or informal musical spaces. Refraining from overlaying categories such as elite/popular onto nineteenth-century cultural activity in this way may well suggest to scholars that such categories are more appropriate to classify today's world of music marketing than used as shorthand for more complex and intersecting historical currents. That said, the very emergence of such terms to categorize musical activity must also be studied historically, and nineteenth-century Paris is ripe for such enquiry. Conceptions of high/low or elite/popular art are arguably more tangible within the highly stratified system of nineteenth-century French theatre that all three authors touch on than in any other. During the period of theatrical privilege (1806–64), ministerial legislation stratified a strict binary between *grand* and *secondaire* institutions, genres, and repertoires, with Martin's and Sabbatini's genres falling into the second category.¹² Moreover, throughout the century both of these types of theatre were conceived as separate to the entertainments known as *spectacles de curiosité*, including the *café-concerts* and some errant street singers, both explored by Blaszkiewicz. The opposition between theatres and *curiosité* performances lay not only in the format of formal versus more informal performances, but in their public utility in ministers' eyes, with only the former offering educative value for the public.¹³ For this reason, while Blaszkiewicz's hesitation to embrace the concept of the popular may be founded on a sound academic principle, Martin's and Sabbatini's use of the term 'popular theatre' appears to me to engage more with the historical reality in which creators and consumers of nineteenth-century French musical life existed. Their studies show that addressing the popular as a label can still allow for some of the probing of academic trends that Blaszkiewicz appears to desire. Martin and Sabbatini both emphasize, for example, how the study of popular music allows a shift in the traditional methodologies applied to elite institutions and repertoire: a move towards corpus studies rather than a focus on 'great works', revealing different dynamics of theatrical production in commercial theatres, such as collaborative authorship, and highlighting the importance of the commercial marketplace, i.e. audiences' tastes, over repertoire creation and institutional longevity.¹⁴

Overall, these books constitute a tripartite broadening of the narratives typically associated with Parisian musical life that will appeal to many scholars. While Martin's book will appeal more to *mélodrame* or Restoration theatre specialists due her detailed corpus study and incredibly focused time period, Blaszkiewicz's and Sabbatini's monographs offer insights that could more easily be integrated into undergraduate teaching, particularly Sabbatini's demonstration of the influence of *féerie* on contemporary operatic pieces and Blaszkiewicz's profiling of the *café-concert* and street musicians. Future research on the musical environments profiled by Sabbatini and Martin will, moreover, be enabled by these authors' richly detailed appendices. The former provides a plethora of primary sources, a chronology of *féeries* composed in Paris between 1864 and 1908, and forty profiles of artists involved in various aspects of *féerie*. The latter includes two appendices of the musical numbers in *Les Deux forçats* and *La Fille de l'exilé*, these simple tables belying the amount of academic labour that will allow others to bring future insights to bear upon *mélodrame* repertoire, whose scores remain largely unpublished.¹⁵ This generous source of additional information in both books will no doubt prove foundational for

¹²Triolaire, *Tréteaux dans le Massif*, p. 97.

¹³Nicole Wild, 'Les spectacles de curiosité du Premier au Second Empire', *Vibrations*, 5 (1988), pp. 14, 19, and 27 n. 13; Paris, Archives Nationales de France, F/21/1168, *Circulaire* from the Minister of the Interior, 1 July 1808.

¹⁴Martin, *Une soirée sur le boulevard du crime*, p. 9; Sabbatini, *Music, the Market, and the Marvellous*, pp. 21–22 and 36–37.

¹⁵Although Martin has been part of a recent effort to produce critical editions of *mélodrame* scores, published by Classiques Garnier.

future work on the genre, its repertoire, and performers. Indeed, one of the greatest strengths of all three monographs is that the amount of new information about Parisian musical life put forward by the authors will stimulate further enquiries and questions from readers. There are very few people, these books invite their readers to reflect, who cannot succumb to the richness and complexities of Paris, no matter how familiar the capital appears.

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