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Lully Studies (review)

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## NOTES

1. From *Nagasaki*, words by Mort Dixon, music by Harry Warren, copyright 1928 by Remick Music Corp., New York.

2. Van Rij's statement that "there is no reason to believe that the initial consulate scene was the original act 2 of Illica's draft" puts him at odds with other writers. See William Ashbrook, *The Operas of Puccini*, 2d ed. (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 100; Arthur Groos, "Lieutenant F. B. Pinkerton: Problems in the Genesis and

Performance of *Madama Butterfly*," in *The Puccini Companion*, ed. William Weaver and Simonetta Puccini (New York: W. W. Norton, 1994), p. 186.

3. A third brother, Thomas Blake Glover, was Tomisaburo's adoptive father. This Scottish merchant, who became a prominent Nagasaki businessman, sometimes helped Japanese young men to travel to England. Tomisaburo himself visited both Britain and America.

*Lully Studies*

John Hajdu Heyer, editor

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000  
311 pages, \$64.95

The appearance of this sequel to the same publisher's *Jean-Baptiste Lully and the Music of the French Baroque* (which I reviewed in the summer 1990 issue of this journal) bespeaks a healthy continuance of scholarly interest in the life and work of the famous seventeenth-century court composer. At the same time, sporadic efforts to revive this or that *tragédie en musique* notwithstanding, the music of this big daddy of French Baroque opera still seems incredibly resistant to widespread public appreciation.

A case in point: By an odd coincidence, a week before I was assigned to review this book, I attended a concert performance in Rochester, New York, of—wonder of wonders—Lully's *Thésée*, billed as the North American premiere (I believe it) and performed on period instruments by the Eastman Collegium Musicum under Paul O'Dette (who, soon thereafter, led the first American staged production of the work for the Boston Early Music Society). A surprisingly large crowd turned out for Eastman's underpromoted event, but by intermission time (following the prologue and first two acts, played nonstop) a substantial number of audience members who left their seats ostensibly to "stretch their legs" never returned to hear the rest of the opera, and many of those who did stay had difficulty suppressing yawns. Indeed, it would seem that Lully's musical setting of Quinault's elegant alexandrine verse has yet to become the general public's cup of tea instead of the handful of connoisseurs' demitasse of chamomile.

This new collection of scholarly essays is introduced by no less than that venerable authority of French Baroque music, James Anthony (the dedicatee of the

earlier Festschrift), who offers a knowing perspective on the past and current state of Lully research. Anthony's optimism that "Lully's fortune's may improve as we enter the twenty-first century" is based on encouraging progress toward publication of the *Oeuvres complètes*, a number of recent staged and concert performances of the operas, and the growing discography of same. Anthony does well to mention William Christie and his ensemble Les Arts Florissants, who over the past two decades have led the way in bringing the music of Lully back to life.

The opening essay from Jérôme de la Gorce fills in some of the many gaps in our knowledge of Lully's early years, and conjectures that it may have been the composer's own reluctance to admit his humble origins that made him "the first victim of his own weaknesses in Italy as well as in France, thereby tarnishing the image that he left to posterity" (p. 11). Patricia Ranum reexamines the well-known circumstances of Lully's famous operatic *privilège* and shows how his enforcement of it was not as strict as it is usually made out to be; it was, in fact, affected by political rivalries among powerful members of the aristocratic houses of Guise and Orléans and "the creative individuals who were linked to these households and who sometimes had to fight for survival" (p. 30). Lully's own artistic survival, it is implied, depended on his knowing when and with whom to *faire l'oreille sourde* (i.e., turn a deaf ear).

What it was like to attend a performance at the Paris Opéra during Lully's heyday is the focus of the fascinating article by Barbara Coeyman, drawing on period illustrations and floor plans (some of which are reproduced in the book) as well as on a unique report by a visitor to the theater published anonymously in the March 1678 issue of the *Mercurie Galant*. Before taking the reader on this firsthand "walking tour," Coeyman gives a historical overview of the court theater's previous three stages of development: the initial Palais Cardinal under Richelieu; the Torelli remodeling under Mazarin; and the home of the acting troupe of Molière (she errs when she states that "Molière died in this theatre . . ." [p. 221]; in point of fact, he died at home an hour after being carried from the theater, where he had collapsed on stage during performance).<sup>1</sup> Even after the 1673 remodeling and opening of the Palais Royal as a public theater, all the evidence indicates a smallish, cramped performing venue with "no distinctive features signaling its identity as a civic setting for the arts" (p. 227) throughout the rest of the life of the structure, until its destruction by fire in 1763. That Lully's operas (and Rameau's) could have succeeded for so long in such an architecturally imperfect environment seems quite remarkable, leading Coeyman to wonder if Lully (after having produced many court ballets amid various transient settings, both indoor and outdoor) "may have initially considered the Palais Royal as yet one more temporary theatre, which he intended to use for a few years until a better site presented itself" (p. 218). On the other hand, Coeyman conjectures that "a hall of [such] relatively small proportions should have distributed the delicate nuances of French Baroque musical style well" (p. 229). All in all, the degree to which all these factors affected the development of

French opera (or lack thereof) during the eighteenth century would seem to offer a rich area for future research.

Other entries likely to appeal to readers of *The Opera Quarterly* include Buford Norman's analysis of Quinault's unusual libretto for *Isis* and Herbert Schneider's assessment of Lully's influence on Gluck's operatic reform policies ("Lully's conception of setting the dramatic element on at least an equal footing with the musical [caused Gluck to open up perspectives] that helped to determine the course of opera in the nineteenth century" [p. 264]). French literature fans will no doubt find Manuel Couvreur's study "Jules Ecorcheville's Genealogical Study of the Lully Family and Its Influence on Marcel Proust" of particular interest.

The musicologically inclined will appreciate the more specialized studies, peppered with musical examples and statistical tables, on the phrase structures of Lully's dance music (Rebecca Harris-Warrick), the articulation of Lully's dialogue scenes (Lois Rosow), pastoral conventions in the Molière-Lully *comédies-ballets* (John S. Powell), and the somewhat mysterious origin of Sébastien de Brossard's late-seventeenth-century arrangement of *Alceste* for the Strasbourg Académie de Musique (Catherine Cessac). Carl B. Schmidt's bibliographical survey of the Amsterdam editions of Lully's music includes a substantial thirty-eight-page appendix listing and describing all known prints.

In spite of much informative material in this volume and its predecessor, Anthony rightly reminds us in his foreword that "there remains much more to be done to shed light on the Lully canon" (p. xiv). Whether any of Lully's operas are someday accepted into the standard world repertory has yet to be seen, though perhaps the successful completion of the *oeuvres complètes* edition will inspire a new generation of musicians and singers to explore this still largely unknown territory.

E. Thomas Glasow

#### NOTE

1. The actor La Grange recorded in his *Registre*: "This very day after the Comedy, around 10 o'clock in the evening, Monsieur de Molière died in his house on the Rue de Richelieu." See facsimile page in Madeleine Jurgens and Elizabeth Maxfield-Miller, *Cent ans de recherches sur Molière* (Paris: S.E.V.P.E.N., 1963), p. 191.