Introduction: Music in the present tense

For me. I am discouraged by the absolute lack of dates. Imagination wears itself out chasing dates instead of imagining things.

Stendhal, *Souvenirs d'égotisme*[1]

The pleasure that we take from the representation of the present comes not only from the beauty in which it can be clothed, but also from its essential quality of presentness.

Baudelaire, 'Le Peintre de la vie moderne'[2]

In the early afternoon of 13 November 1827, Pierre-Paul Royer-Collard stood up to speak in the Salle des Séances at the Institut de France, home of the Académie française. A man of few published works, he had been elected to the Académie the previous April largely on the strength of his oratorical gifts as a member of the Chamber of Deputies, leader of the studiedly moderate liberal Doctrinaires.[3] Now, at his official reception, expectations ran as high as for a new work at the Opéra: tickets had been sought a month in advance, the doors of the Institut besieged since early in the day, and the raked galleries of the hall, beneath the building's grand central cupola, filled long before the opening of the meeting by what one report termed a 'shining assembly'.[4]

[1] '*For me*. Je suis découragé par le manque absolu de dates. L'imagination se perd à courir après les dates au lieu de se figurer les objets'; Stendhal [Henri Beyle], *Souvenirs d'égotisme* [1832, first published 1861]; English trans. Andrew Brown: *Memoirs of an Egotist* (London: Hesperus Classics, 2003), 60.

[2] 'Le plaisir que nous retirons de la représentation du présent tient non seulement à la beauté dont il peut être revêtu, mais aussi à sa qualité essentielle du présent'; Charles Baudelaire, 'Le Peintre de la vie moderne' [1863], in *Curiosités esthétiques, L'Art romantique et autres oeuvres critiques de Baudelaire*, ed. H. Lemaître (Paris: Garnier, 1962), 454.

[3] On the position of the Doctrinaires in the Restoration see Aurelian Craiutu, *Liberalism under Siege: The Political Thought of the French Doctrinaires* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2003).

[4] C. L. Lesur, *Annuaire historique universel pour 1827* (Paris: A. Thoisnier-Desplaces, 1828), 'Chronique', 278.

Royer-Collard began his address by pointing out his lack of literary credentials for his new post, but soon smoothly began to intertwine the realms of art and politics. The march towards justice and liberty in society, he suggested, was propelled by the use of eloquent, reasoned language, which at best functioned as a type of literature. Literature, meanwhile, followed developments in government and religion, alterations of habits and mental attitudes, and so was itself the expression of society. And finally, all literature expressed the feeling of liberty. 'Such is the advantage of the times in which we live', he concluded, 'where by the goodwill of a monarch whose memory will be revered by posterity, liberty has at last passed from minds into laws.'[5]

The speech serves as a telling introduction to the French Restoration, whose foundational tensions are encapsulated here in the use of the word liberty – one of the cardinal virtues of the French Revolution – in relation to an ageing king (rarely revered by posterity) most famous for his desire to re-create the illiberal values of the pre-revolutionary *ancien régime*. The monarch in question was Charles X, younger brother of both Louis XVI (beheaded by the revolutionaries in 1793) and Louis XVIII, who had come to power with the fall of Napoleon, first in 1814 and then – after Napoleon's return to France from Elba and final defeat at Waterloo – again in 1815. Charles acceded to the throne on his brother's death in 1824 and would remain as king until the next revolution of July 1830, when he (and with him the entire Bourbon line) would be replaced by the 'bourgeois king' Louise-Philippe, and the Restoration would slip away to become part of the same past that its rulers had always desired.

It is within this environment that Royer-Collard's assertion that 'literature is the expression of society' gains its full resonance. The phrase was printed in italics in reports of his speech, in recognition of the fact that he was quoting the words of another Academician, the

[5] 'Tel est l'avantage des temps où nous vivons, que, par le bien fait d'un monarque dont la postérité révérera la mémoire, la liberté a enfin passé des esprits dans les lois'; quoted in Lesur, *Annuaire historique*, 'Chronique', 279.

religious philosopher the vicomte de Bonald. But the decade that separated de Bonald's original statement from Royer-Collard's reiteration encompassed its transformation from a maxim bordering on truism into a powerful incantation for cultural renewal, as would become clear soon enough in Victor Hugo's elaboration of the idea in the prefatory manifesto to his unperformable play *Cromwell*, printed within weeks of the meeting at the Institut.[6] What sort of society, after all, might the arts express in the wake of Revolution, Empire and now Restoration? The ordered theocracy desired by de Bonald, the equally imaginary liberal monarchy outlined by Royer-Collard? Or, as Hugo would indicate, something altogether more fractured, which inescapably bore the marks of the cataclysmic upheavals of recent decades?

Ten years later, Heinrich Heine would offer one more possibility. In 1837, he published a letter to a German friend musing on the connections between music, society and political regimes in France. The operas of Giacomo Meyerbeer, Heine suggested, were perfectly suited to the inclusive aspirations of Louis-Philippe's constitutional monarchy, as they represented 'the suffering and joys of all humanity'. The ideal music for the preceding period, on the other hand, had been that of Gioachino Rossini: 'The Restoration was the moment of triumph for Rossini, when even the stars in the sky, at that time at leisure and scarcely concerned with people's destinies, listened to him with delight.'[7]

Heine's fantasy of the 'Italian Orpheus', enchanting celestial and earthly realms alike with his melodies, is both memorable and characteristically double-edged; through his residence in Paris from 1824 to 1829, Rossini becomes implicated in the idleness of the heavens at the time, his music providing a suitably distracting soundtrack for the anachronistic and selfish Bourbon monarchy. Under no other regime,

[6] The play was published in December; Hugo dated his preface October 1827.

[7] Heinrich Heine, 'Über die französische Bühne' (1837); reprinted in Heine, *Historisch-kritische Gesamtausgabe der Werke*, vol. 12/1, ed. Jean-René Derré and Christiane Giesen (Hamburg: Hoffmann and Campe, 1984), 273–83.

Heine suggested, would Rossini have had such success, since only at a time of inactivity would his melodies have been heard with so much pleasure. Rossini, in other words, also produced art that was the expression of Restoration society, but whereas Royer-Collard's speech or Hugo's Preface had argued for a compelling interaction between the two spheres, for Heine the match between Rossini's melodies and the lethargy of the Restoration served only to lull people into forgetting the problems of the world. It would take the revolution of 1830 to change things, and the new social order would be accompanied by the grand choruses of Meyerbeer.

The contours of Heine's account have remained in place ever since. First, in the idea that the Restoration represents a kind of historical gap between Revolution and Empire on the one hand and the rest of the century on the other; in the wry characterisation of Sheryl Kroen, 'an embarrassing interlude in the progression toward modernity'.[8] Second, in the belief that Rossini's overwhelming popularity in the 1820s, impossible for later historians to disregard, is easiest to account for in reference to the shallow tastes of the time, and therefore unworthy of serious critical scrutiny. As Adorno dismissively remarked: 'music will be the more true and substantial the further it is removed from the official zeitgeist; the one of Beethoven's epoch was represented by Rossini rather than by him.'[9] Finally, there is Heine's conception of Rossini as nothing but a seductive melodist, tickling the ear with his charming music. With such an aural image in mind, reinforced by the catchy snippets that represent Rossini's main legacy in the musical world today (the *galop* from the Overture to *Guillaume Tell* as mobile phone ringtone), it becomes easy to distance the composer from the passionate engagement of Hugo or Royer-Collard, and from the highly politicised debates over the nature of French romanticism that wove their way through both of their

[8] Sheryl Kroen, *Politics and Theater: The Crisis of Legitimacy in Restoration France, 1815–1830* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 15.

[9] Theodor W. Adorno, *Beethoven: The Philosophy of Music*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 46.

pronouncements. Either the narrative of musical romanticism in the 1820s is denigrated as 'one of the platitudes of history' (Carl Dahlhaus), or else the link between Rossini and the French romantics is acknowledged but explained away: 'we may be somewhat surprised that some of the better authors of the 1820s and 1830s considered Rossini to be one of them,' Jean Mongrédien has suggested, before going on to propose that this situation occurred only because these writers 'were not, for the most part, musical connoisseurs'.[10]

In this book I also take Heine's basic premise as a starting point: Rossini's music was deeply bound up with the Restoration, and in complex ways was indeed an expression of its society. This was not simply a matter of pretty melodies, however, nor indicative of a lack of connoisseurship; instead, his popularity derived in large part from the perception of his music as an audible symbol of romantic modernity at a time when the nature of this modernity was strongly contested. But for such an argument (like most arguments about the relationship between music and society) to move beyond the platitudinous, it is necessary to recapture the types of historical detail that can offer hints of how the idea of 'Rossini' – as man, musical experience, compositional voice and symbolic presence – functioned within the second half of the 1820s, the period that saw the transformation of Rossini's style and the consequent 'revolution' of French opera, marking the beginning of the *grand opéra* tradition.[11]

In outline, the details of Rossini's Parisian career in the 1820s are simple enough.[12] After several years of preliminary negotiations, he had arrived in the French capital in November 1823 en route to

[10] Dahlhaus's assessment appears in *Nineteenth-Century Music*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), 54; Mongrédien's is from *French Music from the Enlightenment to Romanticism, 1789–1830*, trans. Sylvain Frémaux (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1996), 136–7.

[11] For a detailed discussion of the use of the term 'revolution' in relation to Rossini's style and to the arrival of his works at the Opéra, see Ch. 4.

[12] This sketch is fleshed out in later chapters, but further details can also be found in the documents collected in the indispensable *GRLD*, and are summarised and elaborated in Jean-Marie Bruson, *Rossini à Paris: Musée Carnavalet, 27 octobre–31 décembre 1992*, exhibition catalogue (Paris: Société des amis de Carnavalet, 1992);

London; he returned later in 1824 having signed a year's contract with the French government to write one French and one Italian opera for the magnificent salary of 40,000 francs. In November, once the supportive vicomte Sosthène de La Rochefoucauld had taken up the position of Director of Fine Arts, Rossini signed a new, more open-ended contract that put him in charge of the Théâtre Italien – the single theatre allowed to stage Italian opera in the capital – for a salary of 20,000 francs and that offered to pay further sums for new works as required (5,000 francs for a single act, 10,000 for several).[13] Subsequently, he produced the single-act *Il viaggio a Reims*, premiered on 19 June 1825, for the coronation of Charles X (his last opera in Italian), and rearranged two large-scale earlier works, *Maometto II* and *Mosè in Egitto*, for the Académie royale de musique (the Opéra) as *Le Siège de Corinthe* (9 October 1826) and *Moïse* (26 March 1827). Next, he combined parts of *Il viaggio* with new music for the two-act comedy *Le Comte Ory*, also given at the Opéra (20 August 1828), and a year later (3 August 1829) his final opera, *Guillaume Tell* – his only entirely original opera in French – received its premiere there. Alongside these partially or completely new works, he also oversaw productions of other operas that were new to the Théâtre Italien, both by himself (*Semiramide* (8 December 1825) and *Zelmira* (14 March 1826)) and others (Meyerbeer's *Il crociato in Egitto* (22 September 1825)). Meanwhile, the music that had made his name before his arrival carried on being played at the theatre – *L'italiana in Algeri*, *L'inganno felice*, *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, *Il turco in Italia*, *Otello*, *La gazza ladra*,

and in two chapters in Mauro Bucarelli, ed., *Rossini 1792–1992: Mostra storica-documentaria* (Perugia: Electa, 1992): Janet Johnson, 'Rossini e le sue opere al Théâtre Italien a Parigi', 221–44, and M. Elizabeth C. Bartlet, 'Rossini e l'Académie Royale de Musique a Parigi', 245–66.

[13] Later contracts changed his conditions further; in October 1826, after the premiere of *Le Siège de Corinthe*, he swapped his position at the Théâtre Italien for the more symbolic posts of Composer to the King and Inspector General of Singing, and renegotiated a final new contract in May 1829, shortly before *Guillaume Tell*. For full copies of all these contracts, see Bruson, *Rossini à Paris*, 56–62, relevant entries in *GRLD* and Bernd-Rüdiger Kern, 'Meister der Verhandlungstaktik: Gioachino Rossinis Vertrage mit der Krone Frankreichs', *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 153 (1992), 13–18.

Tancredi, *Cenerentola*, *Mosè in Egitto*, *Ricciardo e Zoraide* and *La donna del lago* – and versions of his works also appeared in French at the Théâtre-Royal de l'Odéon on the left bank.[14] Such a list still gives only a very partial glimpse of the composer's influence; by January 1828, the most steadfastly anti-Rossinian journal was moaning, not without reason, that 'Monsieur Rossini or his imitators reign everywhere, at the Feydeau [i.e. the Opéra-Comique], at the Opéra, at the Odéon, at the Bouffes [Théâtre Italien], at the Vaudeville, at the melodrama. In sum, it is not possible to enter a theatre without being immediately pursued by [his] refrains . . . It's just lucky that the Comédie française . . . has not yet replaced the obligatory Haydn symphony with the overture to *La gazza ladra* or the march from *Le Siège de Corinthe*.'[15]

The following chapters take place within this setting; yet any traditional biographical account of Rossini's life and works at the time – even one alert to all the political agendas, vested interests and grinding axes of Restoration journalism – can only depict rather than hope to explain the effects of such musical ubiquity. Accounts of the spread of 'Rossini fever' in the 1820s across Europe and beyond, meanwhile, typically make few distinctions between the composer's

[14] The works are listed in the order of their first appearances at the Théâtre Italien. A few other works by Rossini were also produced in the years before his arrival in Paris: *Torvaldo e Dorliska* came off after just two performances in 1820, *La pietra del paragone* after three in 1821, and *Elisabetta* after four in 1822. The production of *La donna del lago*, which opened in September 1824, was partially overseen by Rossini. For full performance statistics see Janet Johnson, 'The Théâtre Italien and Opera and Theatrical life in Restoration Paris, 1818–1827', Ph.D. diss. (University of Chicago, 1988), 593–637. The particular versions of each work performed, complete with cuts, substitutions and additions are outlined in Philip Gossett, 'The Operas of Rossini: Problems of Textual Criticism in Nineteenth-Century Opera', Ph.D. diss. (Princeton University, 1970), and the introductions to individual volumes of the Rossini complete edition (Pesaro: Fondazione Rossini). Stendhal's reviews in the *Journal de Paris* of works at the Théâtre Italien performed between 1824 and 1827 have been reprinted in *Notes d'un dilettante*, in *L'Âme et la musique*, ed. Suzel Esquier (Paris: Stock, 1999); on the arrangements of Rossini at the Odéon see Mark Everist, *Music Drama at the Paris Odéon, 1824–1828* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002).

[15] *Le Courrier des théâtres*, 13 January 1828.

popularity in one place rather than another, and treat the nature of the popular response, as if in homage to Heine, as an uncomplicated reaction to his melodic gifts, fuelled by the whims of fashion. Yet the meanings of his works altered profoundly from one location to the next, interacting with existing musical environments and with a variety of social and cultural needs.[16]

In Paris, these needs changed even over the course of Rossini's short time there as an active operatic composer, and did so in conjunction with the transfiguration of the city itself into its familiar incarnation as 'capital of the nineteenth century', whose birth historians have tended to situate just beyond the Revolution of 1830.[17] To

[16] Aside from the works listed above in n. 12, analyses of Rossini's reception in Paris in the 1820s include Paolo Fabbri, 'Rossini in Paris vor Rossinis Ankunft: Einige Bemerkungen zur Debatte über Rossinis Musik von 1821–1823', in *Rossini in Paris*, ed. Bernd-Rüdiger Kern and Reto Müller (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2002), 201–51; Janet Johnson, 'The Musical Environment in France', in Peter Bloom, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Berlioz* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 20–38; and Fiamma Nicolodi, 'Rossini a Parigi e la critica musicale', in Daniele Spini, ed., *Studi e fantasie. Saggi, versi, musica e testimonianze in onore di Leonardo Pinzauti* (Florence: Passigli, 1996), 193–219. Denise Gallo provides a useful overview of literature on Rossini's reception in other European locations, in *Gioachino Rossini: A Guide to Research* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 103–37. Of particular interest for the contrasts that arise with the situation in Paris are Mark Everist's work on French Rossini performances outside the capital: 'Lindoro in Lyon: Rossini's *Le Barbier de Séville*', *Acta musicologica* 64 (1992), 50–85; reprinted in *Giacomo Meyerbeer and Music Drama in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 19–64; and Emanuele Senici's exploration of Rossini's reception in Italy: ' "Essentially Theatrical": Reality and Representation in Rossini's Italian Operas', given at the Annual Meeting of the American Musicological Society, Washington DC, October 2005.

[17] Such a transfiguration was, of course, more metaphorical than real; geographically, Paris changed relatively little from the 1820s to the 1830s (although many of the covered arcades that Walter Benjamin famously placed at the centre of his unfinished – and unfinishable – account of the ninteenth-century city opened during the later 1820s: see Johannes Willms, *Paris: Capital of Europe, From the Revolution to the Belle Epoque*, trans. Eveline L. Kanes (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1997), 168–74; and Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1999)). Instead, the city became written about in a different way: compare, to take only one example of many, Etienne de Jouy's hugely popular sketches of late Empire contemporary

engage with Parisian preoccupations in the 1820s, sensitised to the nuances of chronology unfolding, is to feel these well-known post-1830 textures – the textures traced (and created) so memorably by Daumier or Balzac – become more tangible from one year (or month, or week) to the next. Indeed, it is within such a geographically and temporally restricted context that the unusually close connections between Rossini's music and the society in which it was experienced become most potent – shedding light on the beginnings of Parisian music criticism, the history of French romanticism and the dynamics of the Restoration – and also, in their transience, most poignant. Only through detailed explorations of the shifting patterns of Rossinian reception, traced from year to year, can we begin to reconceive the relationship between opera and life outside the opera house at the time, collapsing notions of 'text' and 'context' into a kaleidoscope of moments that together define the creation of a recognisably modern musical culture in Paris.

Within such a closely scrutinised situation, Rossini himself at times moves out of focus, to be replaced by stereotypes, rumours, politics, criticism or just the chatter of daily life. But in organising my narrative in such a fashion, I have sought to outline some of the multiple ways in which he and his music accrued meanings in the hyperactive public sphere of the Restoration. Not all of the ways; there will be little here about the detailed inner workings of theatrical institutions, or the singers who formed such a central part of the experience of Rossinian performance, first at the Théâtre Italien and then from 1826 also at the Opéra; little too about the private music-making that accounted for such a large proportion of many people's experiences of Rossini, now imaginable only from the interminable lists of published arrangements for voice with piano or guitar, or for combinations that seem either more improbable (solo flute), or else more intriguingly targeted

life, *L'Hermite de la Chaussée d'Antin* (1812–14), and the multi-authored, early July Monarchy *Paris, ou le Livre des Cent-et-un* (1831–34). For a magnificently detailed account of Paris during the period in all its facets, see Bertier de Sauvigny, *Nouvelle histoire de Paris: La Restauration, 1815–1830* (Paris: Hachette, 1977).

at an audience increasingly interested in non-vocal music (solo piano, or string quartet).[18] To some, the result might still seem too composer- and work-centred within the collaborative structures of Parisian operatic life and the partially hidden worlds of domestic and semi-private performance; to others, too unconcerned with Rossini's own intentions and actions. Yet to dwell on Rossini as I do here is to recognise his centrality to contemporary musical debates, without insisting on his absolute control of the terms of these debates: both protagonist and proxy.

My attention falls instead on the premieres of each new opera that Rossini composed or rearranged for Paris at the time, as refracted by (and themselves refracting) the events and rhetoric surrounding them. Such rhetoric operates as constitutive as well as descriptive of musical meanings, and in the act of reconstruction I have sought to give almost equal weight to those voices without musical expertise as to knowledgeable critics, and considerably more weight to contemporary opinion over anyone writing after 1830, once the modes of talking about the composer became shaped into their still-recognisable forms. Not that expertise brought with it no influence; criticism, after all, concerns the attempted exercise of power – the power to alter taste, and the power to engineer controversy. But it was not the only means to generate such influence, and at a point when music criticism was just beginning to become a professionalised discipline, Rossini's reception in the 1820s also traces the history of a struggle between rival hierarchies of critical language, in which the lack of specialisation and the free exchange of ideas and vocabulary between discourses allowed imagery from one area to give emphasis or signification for almost anything else.

[18] An impression of the range of contemporary arrangements available of Rossini's works can be gained from two volumes edited by François Lesure: *Cinq catalogues d'éditeurs de musique à Paris, 1824–1834* (Geneva: Minkoff, 1976), and *La Musique à Paris en 1830–1831* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale, 1983). Arrangement for solo flute was the version of Rossini's music favoured by the notably misanthropic Berlin-based *Rossiniste* Arthur Schopenhauer.