Dramatic Expression in Rameau's *Tragédie en Musique*

Cynthia Verba's book explores the story of music's role in the French Enlightenment, focusing on dramatic expression in the musical tragedies of the composer-theorist Jean-Philippe Rameau. She reveals how his music achieves its highly moving effects through an interplay between rational design, especially tonal design, and the portrayal of feeling, resulting in a more nuanced portrayal of gender and gender distinctions, which become an integral part of the story. Offering a new approach to understanding Rameau's role in the Enlightenment, Verba illuminates important aspects of the theory–practice relationship and shows how his music embraced Enlightenment values. At the heart of the study are three scene types that occur in all of Rameau's tragedies: confession of forbidden love, intense conflict, and conflict resolution. In tracing changes in Rameau's treatment of these, Verba finds that, while he maintained an allegiance to the traditional French operatic model, he constantly adapted it to accommodate his more enlightened views on musical expression.

CYNTHIA VERBA is Director of Fellowships for the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences at Harvard University. She has published articles and reviews in *Cambridge Opera Journal*, *Journal of the American Musicological Association*, *The Journal of Musicology*, and *Journal of Modern History*. While her earlier book, *Music and the French Enlightenment: Reconstruction of a Dialogue, 1750–1765*, closely examines the arguments in Rameau-centered debates, her current research has shifted focus to Rameau's musical practice, particularly his concept of musical expression and how it manifests itself in his tragedies.

***The Broken Mirror c.* 1762/63, by Jean-Baptiste Greuze. The Wallace Collection, London, United Kingdom**

The lovely woman in the Greuze painting has much in common with the heroines in Rameau's tragedies: A pleasurable experience has been disrupted by a disturbing, even portentous, incident. She is shown responding to her shattered image, broken into pieces, as her mirror presumably fell from her hands. And yet, in the Greuze portrayal of her emotions, she still retains her beauty, precisely because she responds with dignity and restraint, reflected as an overall quality in the painting itself (no radical distortion of her features, no wild uncontrolled gestures). And so it is with Rameau's portrayal of the plight of the heroines in his tragedies: women who respond with deep feeling, but also with dignity and restraint, reflected in the overall quality of the musical setting.

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Between Tradition and Enlightenment

CYNTHIA VERBA

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Acknowledgements

In compiling a list of people who have supported this project over the years, I quickly found that I had to weave together the different parts of my career: Compartmentalization, while necessary for some degree of order in one's life, is only an elusive dream. It is the same "me" who is engaged as a music scholar, while also having a full day-time job as Director of Fellowships and advisor to Harvard graduate students in the arts and sciences on issues of professional development. As proof of the strong thread of continuity from one role to the other, my list of acknowledgements on this Rameau book weaves back and forth, with barely a break in the transition.

I would begin with my first serious scholarly exposure to Rameau, which took place in the 1960s, in a graduate seminar at the University of Chicago, taught by Philip Gossett, fearless leader, undaunted by Rameau's atrocious prose, having recently completed his exemplary translation of Rameau's *Traité*. Gossett, along with the rest of the remarkable faculty in the music department, gave us the gift of setting the highest standards of scholarship, inspiring students by their own example. For this very same reason, my next expression of gratitude goes to the many Harvard graduate students with whom I have worked over the last some thirty years; they too have absorbed a strong sense of professionalism through their graduate training, and, individually and collectively, they have taught me so much about the process of becoming a scholar that I could never have learned in any other way. And while I am on the subject of my working environment, I would like to express gratitude to my colleagues in the graduate school administration, past and present, who have shown such commitment to supporting the enterprise of training new scholars, sparing no effort to help students, especially as they navigate through some very difficult currents.

Just a short walk from the Graduate Fellowships Office brings me to Harvard's music department and library, where the unparalleled collection is matched only by the level of helpfulness of its staff. Given the richness of resources and faculty, it is small wonder that I have found music students, both graduate and undergraduate, who have worked so ably in helping to prepare the music examples for this book: graduate composition student Ashley Fure and recent composition graduate Adam Roberts, and Zachary

Sheets, a music concentrator with a minor in French, who joined the project during his sophomore year.

Within the more specialized world of Rameau scholarship and music theory, special thanks go to Charles Dill, whose advice magically combines close attention to detail while keeping his eye on the big picture. Gratitude also goes to Alex Rehding for his helpful suggestions on the theory chapter in this book, and to Graham Sadler, who read with such care and generosity several portions of the manuscript, especially those dealing with *Zoroastre*. Going back much further in time, I am also indebted to the generous assistance of the staff at the Bibliothèque Nationale, where I did daily research on my dissertation during the early 1970s, when I lived in Paris for two years during my spouse's sabbatical, absorbing French culture with every breath that I took.

Turning to the more personal realm of friendship and then family, I begin with Janet Levy and Leonard Meyer, both deceased and terribly missed. Janet was the one person who was "allowed" to pressure me when I thought I had good excuses not to persevere with my graduate training at such a "late stage in life." (Just imagine, I was already in my thirties and had two children plus one more on the way when I began graduate school!) No one understood better than Jan that giving up was not an option. And Leonard! No one understood better than he that humor, including some pretty dreadful puns, was perhaps the best prelude to some incredibly insightful observations, usually about music. I only wish I could remember the half of them, told over many years of weekend visits to New York or many summer vacations in Mount Desert, Maine.

Finally, there is the almost impossible task of determining the specific ways that my family's support contributed to this book (with the intent of limiting it to just that dimension). My three daughters – Margy, Ericka and Martina – are now mature women with their own highly individual interests and accomplishments, but all three have stepped into a new kind of relationship with their parents, now asking how we can help and nurture one another, replacing, at some unidentifiable moment, an older and more one-directional childhood model. And yes, it does benefit my work on Rameau, just to know that these three strong women are there to help in any way that they can. I know if I don't mention eleven-year-old grandson David, and seven-year-old grand-daughter Mimi, I will regret it, so I can only say that the joy that they bring must surely contribute in a positive way to anything that I undertake.

Standing apart and in a class by himself in terms of supporting my Rameau work is my spouse, Sidney Verba (we just recently celebrated our

fifty-eighth anniversary). Without any ability to even read music, he has been an indispensable listener and critic, as I formulated my ideas, not only for the current book, but for my earlier work on Rameau and the Enlightenment. As a leading scholar on issues of inequality and democracy, he has perhaps had an advantage in his critical reading of my Rameau work, precisely because he could come to it with a fresh but also rigorous perspective. And by now, he does in fact understand the important hierarchic distinction between the tonic and the dominant; they are by no means equal.

To return to the opening thought of the unexpected continuities between my seemingly different careers, I cannot resist concluding with this question: Is it more than just coincidence that this present book seeks to weave seamlessly back and forth between Rameau as theorist and Rameau as composer of tragic opera?

Translations and terminology

The French libretto texts that appear in the attached appendices to Chapters 3, 5, 6, and 7 are drawn from the musical scores used in this study (as identified in Chapter 1), in the interest of having matching scores and texts. For the English translations in the appendices, I have provided my own, and have pursued a policy of staying as close as possible to the ordering of phrases in the original French, even at the expense of a smoother or more natural flow in the English. The rationale stems from Rameau's concept of musical expression, which is premised on a parallelism between the emotional progressions in the phrases of the text and the harmonic progressions in the musical phrases. Departure from the French phrase ordering would lose the extraordinary nature of this parallelism. The study also retains French spellings for the names of characters, even in the English translations.

In addition to these considerations for translation, there are issues of terminology in regard to the musical examples discussed in the study. The French terminology is followed for the recitative dialogue scenes, using the term "air" not only for those pieces where the term appears in the eighteenth-century score, but also for those pieces where the obviousness of the air is so clear that the French score omits the label, apparently assuming this determination. The study distinguishes between the airs with identifying labels and those with no label by using brackets for the latter. Similarly, the study adheres to the term "ariette," which appears in the French eighteenth-century scores, to designate the elaborate da capo arias that typically grace the more entertaining divertissement scenes, in contrast to the Italian operas of this era, where the da capo aria features prominently in the more serious dramatic scenes. Lastly, the discussions in the study freely use the more common term "aria" for the many dramatic monologue examples in Rameau's tragedies written in da capo aria form. They appear without identifying label in the French scores.

Finally, there is a somewhat different procedural point concerning the study's emphasis on Rameau's harmonic procedures, claiming for them a central role in his approach to musical expression. While there is a consensus that harmony does in fact play a crucial mediating role in his operas, I do

not insist, as Rameau so often did, that all else derives from harmony and is subordinate to it. It would be impossible, in any case, to discuss the issues at stake in the present study if harmony is kept in isolation from the many other factors that enter into the picture. As we shall see, there is an extraordinary level of complexity in Rameau's music, and this study is committed to respecting that complexity.