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978-1-108-00464-0 - Gluck and the Opera: A Study in Musical History

Ernest Newman

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### Gluck and the Opera

Early in his long career, the self-taught English music critic Ernest Newman (1868–1959) wrote this influential account of Gluck's life and musical achievements in relation to the intellectual life of the eighteenth century. First published in 1895, *Gluck and the Opera* traces the composer's ideas and his efforts to move opera forward after a period of stagnation. Musicians, thinkers and satirists had been writing for generations about the need to reform the opera, but it was Gluck who brought about far-reaching changes that paved the way for Mozart, Weber and Wagner. His most notable innovation was the fusing of the Italian and French operatic traditions. The first part of the book is a chronological account of Gluck's eventful career, which took him all over Europe but was centred on Paris and Vienna. The second part deals with Gluck in his broader cultural and intellectual context, and lists his works.

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# GLUCK AND THE OPERA

A STUDY IN MUSICAL HISTORY

BY

ERNEST NEWMAN

LONDON: BERTRAM DOBELL

77 CHARING CROSS ROAD

1895

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## GLUCK

*Oft treibt es mich an hellen Wintertagen,  
An deinem ehrnen Bild vorbeizugehen,  
Dir in das strenge Angesicht zu sehen,  
Und jedesmal mit innigem Behagen.  
Wüsst' einer nichts von dir, doch müsst' er sagen:  
Das war ein Geist von frischem, scharfem Wehen,  
Dem konnten keine Nebel widerstehen,  
Und Wolken wusst' er in die Flucht zu jagen.*

*Ja, Wahrheit gabst du wieder deiner Kunst,  
Verschmähtest leerer Töne süssen Tand,  
Auf die Gefahr, der Menge zu missfallen.  
Lessing der Oper; die durch Gottergunst  
Bald auch in Mozart ihren Goethe fand:  
Der Grösste nicht, doch ehrenwert vor allen.*

DAVID FRIEDRICH STRAUSS.

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## P R E F A C E

So far as I am aware, there is no English biography of Gluck. The article by M. Gustave Chouquet in Grove's "Dictionary of Music and Musicians" is grossly inadequate, and little more can be said of the late Dr. Hueffer's article in the "Encyclopædia Britannica" (9th ed.) For English readers, by far the best account of the musician and his work is that in Naumann's "History of Music," translated by Mr. Ferdinand Praeger.

Apart from the usual articles in the French and German Dictionaries and Histories, and the treatment of Gluck in books and articles dealing with the history of the opera, there are several foreign studies of the life and works of the master. Anton Schmid's "C. W. Ritter von Gluck, dessen Leben und Wirken" (Leipzig, 1854), is a very detailed biography, containing almost everything that is known of the life of Gluck. By far the best of all books on the subject, however, is the celebrated "Gluck und die Oper" of Adolph Bernhard Marx (2 vols., Berlin, 1863, afterwards published in one volume as "Gluck's Leben und Schaffen"), which,

besides narrating the life of the composer, and supplying details that have been overlooked by Schmid, gives a minute analysis of almost all his works. It is marred, however, by undue hero-worship, and is scarcely critical enough to be considered final. A. Reissmann's "Christoph Willibald von Gluck, sein Leben und seine Werke" (Berlin and Leipzig, 1882), is an admirable and well-balanced work of history and criticism, thoroughly sound in every respect, as far as it goes. A good piece of patient research is that of the French antiquarian, M. Gustave Desnoiresterres, "Gluck et Piccinni, 1774–1800; La Musique Française au 18<sup>me</sup> siècle" (2nd ed. Paris, 1875), a work which has served as basis for Barbedette's "Gluck, sa Vie, son Système, et ses Œuvres" (Paris, 1882). Heinrich Welti's "Gluck," in Reclam's "Musiker-Biographien," is small but good.

A goodly number of works exist for a history of the opera up to and including the time of Gluck, such as the "Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de la révolution opérée dans la musique par M. le chevalier Gluck" (Paris, 1781), and Arteaga's "Le rivoluzioni del teatro musicale italiano dalla sua origine fine al presente" (2nd ed. Venice, 1785, 3 vols.), of which a translated and abridged form was published in London in 1802. Marcello's "Il Teatro alla moda" is of course indispensable, though, as a satire, it has to be read with caution; it is easily accessible in the French version of

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M. Ernest David (Paris, Fischbacher, 1890). One of the most suggestive writers of the epoch was Algarotti, whose various essays on the arts were translated into German under the title of “Versuche über die Architectur, Mahlerey, und musicalische Opera” (Cassel, 1769).\* Noverre’s “Lettres sur la danse et sur les ballets” (Lyons, 1760), and Planelli’s “Dell’ Opera in musica” (Naples, 1772) are also useful.

For an accurate estimate of Gluck and the music of his time the general intellectual life of the eighteenth century has to be studied, especially in the works of those who wrote on music, such as Diderot, Rousseau, Grimm, Marmontel, Suard, La Harpe, Goldsmith, Harris, Du Bos, and others. Some of these men knew little of music in a practical sense, but they knew at least as much as Sonnenfels, whose “Briefe über die Wiener-schaubühne” are always quoted approvingly. For a general survey of the music of the time by a competent musician, Burney’s various works are of course indispensable; while the general musical life of the eighteenth century is well illustrated in Vernon Lee’s “Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy.”

Berlioz’ “A travers chants” contains some interesting articles on *Orfeo* and *Alceste*, and articles on Gluck are scattered about the *Revue des deux Mondes*, the *Revue Contemporaine*, and the *Revue Germanique*.

\* English translations of his Essay on the Opera were published in 1767 and 1768.

Schuré's "Le drame musical" treats cursorily of Gluck and the opera, but the book is too *à priori* in its method to be of much value. Ludwig Nohl's "Gluck and Wagner, ueber die Entwicklung des Musikdramas" (Munich, 1870) is Wagnerian in feeling, while an anti-Wagnerian counterpoise is to be had in C. H. Bitter's "Die Reform der Oper durch Gluck, und R. Wagner's Kunstwerk der Zukunft" (Brunswick, 1884). This gives a good account of the opera previous to Gluck, with copious musical examples.

A few words remain to be added as to the general method and purport of the present volume. So far as the biographical portion of it is concerned, I have, of course, been entirely dependent upon the recognised authorities, whose united labours have covered the whole field exhaustively. In the critical portions I have attempted to sum up the measure of Gluck's achievement in relation to the intellectual life of his day. As the book is meant rather as a tentative contribution to culture-history from a side hitherto painfully neglected, than as a mere narration of a thrice-told tale, I have thought it well to dispense with the history, in detail, of the technical side of the opera. This can be had in many excellent works, and it were superfluous to devote another volume to the task. I have rather endeavoured to view the subject philosophically, and to bring the opera of the eighteenth century in general, and Gluck's work in particular, into line



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with the whole intellectual tendencies of the time. Thus in the sketches in Part II. of the rise and development of the opera in Italy, France, and Germany, I have dealt only with such historical phases of it as fall within the province of culture-history. This seemed to me the more important and the more pressing work in view of the present condition of musical culture in England; while those who wish to supplement the account of the intellectual development of music in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by an account of the formal development of the expressive side of music and of musical structure, will find this without difficulty in any of the numerous histories of the art.

. . . . .

My grateful acknowledgments are due to my friend Mr. F. H. Woollett for his constant assistance and advice.

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## CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF GLUCK'S WORKS

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <p>? De profundis.</p> <p>1741 Artaserse.</p> <p>1742 Demofonte.<br/>Demetrio (Cleonice).<br/>Ipermnestra.</p> <p>1743 Siface.<br/>Artamene.</p> <p>1744 Fedra.</p> <p>1745 Alessandro nell' Indie<br/>(Il Re Poro).</p> <p>1746 La caduta de' Giganti.<br/>Piramo e Tisbe.</p> <p>1747 Le nozze d' Ercole e<br/>d'Ebe.</p> <p>1748 La Semiramide ricon-<br/>osciuta.</p> <p>1749 Tetide.<br/>Telemacco.</p> <p>1751 La Clemenza di Tito</p> <p>1754 Le Cinesi.<br/>L'orfano della China.<br/>Il trionfo di Camillo.<br/>Antigono.</p> | <p>1755 La Danza.<br/>L'innocenza giustifi-<br/>cata.<br/>Les amours cham-<br/>pêtres.</p> <p>1756 Il Re Pastore.<br/>Le Chinois poli en<br/>France.<br/>Le déguisement pas-<br/>toral.</p> <p>1758 L'île de Merlin.<br/>La fausse esclave</p> <p>1759 Cythère assiégée.<br/>? L'arbre enchanté.</p> <p>1760 Tetide.<br/>L'ivrogne corrigé.</p> <p>1761 Don Juan.<br/>Le cadì dupé.<br/>? Le diable à quatre.</p> <p>1761 Il trionfo de Clelia.</p> <p>1762 On ne s'avise jamais<br/>de tout.<br/>Orfeo.</p> |
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1764 La rencontre impré- vue.	Aristeo.
1765 Il parnasso confuso. La corona.	? Klopstock's Oden und Lieder.
1767 Alceste.	? Hermannsschlacht.
1769 Paride ed Elena. Prologo delle Feste d'Apollo.	1774 Iphigénie en Aulide.
	1777 Armide.
	1779 Iphigénie en Tauride. Echo et Narcisse.

\* \* In the case of some of the early operas, of which it is impossible to learn the real year of the first performance, the above dates are merely approximative.

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