Music on the Stage

APOLLON.   LE ROY.

4. Music of the Courts

October 9, 2024

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THIS CLASS BEGINS IN ENGLAND UNDER HENRY VIII and ends in France under Louis XIV. In both countries, musical presentations at court began as tributes to the monarch or allegorical masques highlighting their supposed virtues. In England, there would be a shift towards standalone entertainment, temporarily halted by the Civil War, but resuming at the Restoration in 1660. So it is a paradox to see the music of the French court in the later 17th century return to a refined version of the masques and tributes of the earlier time—but this was due to the personalities of Louis himself and his court composer Jean-Baptiste Lully.

In between these bookends, we visit Italy and the courts of the Medicis in Florence and the Gonzagas in Mantua. Around 1600, court music in both places was similarly concerned with celebrating the rulers and their dynastic marriages. But a new dramatic form was developing that would soon enter the public sphere and explode into the craze for opera. There is a paradox here too. To make operatic narrative and depiction of character possible, composers had to set aside their skills at multi-voice part writing in favor of a simple vocal line shaped by the solo singer over improvised accompaniment: monody. It might seem a step backwards, but it was the key to all that followed. *rb.*

A. The English Court

Henry VIII set up stages all across London to welcome Anne Boleyn to her coronation. Anne's daughter Elizabeth I accepted musical and poetic compliments in the pastoral mode, and reigned over a court where even dancing was theatre. James I, her successor, built a Banqueting House designed to present allegorical masques in ever more extravagant manner.

Video: Anne Boleyn's coronation (from BBC's *The Tudors*)
Video: Anne Boleyn's falcon (Tamsin Lewis)
Playfair: *Coronation Day* (with Hilliard miniature)
Britten: *Gloriana* (1953), entrance of Time (ENO, Colin Graham)
Britten: *Gloriana*, the lavolta (ENO, Colin Graham)
Morley: "Hard by a Crystal Fountain" (The Queen's Six)
Lanier: finale from Ben Johnson's *Masque of Augurs*
Lawes: Pastoral Dialogue

B. The Arts in Harmony

Pastoral was the go-to genre of classically-minded Italians, and all the earliest operas were couched in that vein. As in Britain, though, most court music was written to celebrate political achievements.

Monteverdi: *Orfeo* (1607), "Lasciate i monti"
Peri: "Al fonte, ai prati"
Peri: *Il canto di Arione*
Monteverdi: *Orfeo*, prelude
Monteverdi: *Vespers* (1610), opening (Apollo's Fire, Sorrell)
Monteverdi: *Il ballo delle ingrate*, end (Nikki Treuniet)

C. The Voice of Feeling

The development of opera required the invention of a musical language that could endow a character with emotion. We look at how it works in a song by Caccini and two numbers from the final opera of Monteverdi.

Caccini: "Amarili, mia bella" (Mariana Florès)
Monteverdi: *Poppea*, her entrance (Danielle de Niese)
Monteverdi: *Poppea*, Ottavia's farewell (Rinat Shaham)

D. An Italian in Paris

The street performer Giovanni Battista Lulli comes to Paris as a teen, and is soon dancing partner for the young King. Promoted to court composer, he runs a monopoly in which every official musical composition in the land is designed to flatter the monarch—but he does this with consummate elegance and the smoothest possible integration of the arts of music, dance, verse, and scenic splendor.

Corbiau: *Le Roi Danse* (2000), Louis as the Rising Sun
Lully: *Menuet des trompettes*
Corbiau: *Le Roi Danse*, final scene of *Le bourgeois gentilhomme*
Lully: *Atys*, prologue excerpt (Jean-Marie Villégier, 2000)
Lully: *Atys*, Act III *sommeil*
Lully: *Te Deum*, opening (Le poème harmonique, Dumestre)

Benjamin **Britten** (1913–76, *English composer*), Giulio **Caccini** (1548–1616, *Italian composer*), Nicholas **Hilliard** (1547–1619, E*nglish miniaturist*), Hans **Holbein** (1497–1543, *German painter*), Ben **Jonson** (1572–1637, *English playwright*), Inigo **Jones** (1573–1652, *English architect and designer*), Nicholas **Lanier** (1599–1666, *English composer*), William **Lawes** (1602–45, *English composer*), Jean-Baptiste **Lully** (1632–87, *Italian-born French composer*), **Molière** (Jean-Baptiste Poquelin, 1622–73, *French playwright*), Claudio **Monteverdi** (1567–1643, *Italian composer*), Thomas **Morley** (1557–1602, *English composer),* Jacopo **Peri** (1561–1633, *Italian composer*), Peter Paul **Rubens** (1577–1640, *Flemish painter*)

The course website is **www.brunyate.com/MusicStage**
I will always respond to mail at **rogerbrunyate@gmail.com**