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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

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The Graduate School

ROMANTIC UNDERTONES IN REVOLUTIONARY FRANCE:
THE CASE FOR TARARE AS SPARK FOR
THE REVOLUTION

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Arts

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College of Performing and Visual Arts
School of Music
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ABSTRACT

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Music is almost never cited among the causes of the French Revolution. Other arts are occasionally mentioned, such as painting and poetry, as are more obvious disciplines including philosophy and literature, which could directly disseminate the ideals of the Enlightenment. Despite this, music is only referenced insofar as how it was impacted by the Revolution, rather than how it may have played a part in the development of revolutionary sentiment.

The purpose of this dissertation is to make a case for music as a cultural cause for the French Revolution by analyzing a relatively unknown opera, *Tarare*, by composer Antonio Salieri and librettist Pierre Beaumarchais. *Tarare* is rife with politically subversive material, and was premiered at the Paris Opera just two years before the Bastille was stormed, effectively beginning the Revolutionary period.

French Opera is first established as an ideal and equitable conduit of Enlightenment thought and political messaging. Various political elements of French music are then discussed, concluding that *Tarare* exhibits many of these elements. French music, historically ignored or forgotten, is discussed as an often exclusionary art, reconciling the relative importance of works such as *Tarare* with their lack of modern appreciation. The plot of and salient musical examples from *Tarare* are then analyzed in terms of their unprecedented political impact. Finally, the contemporary success of *Tarare* is connected to Beaumarchais's intent as a librettist, which is clarified by discussion of his career as a political agitator and revolutionary sympathizer.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Cultural Causes of the French Revolution

... a revolution that indeed preceded the political revolution of 1789.¹

—Nicholas Tarling

Though visual art, philosophy, and literature have seen some increase in attention from historians, in the many books and articles that discuss the causes of the Revolution, music has been consistently left out. One central goal of this study is to challenge the omission of music as a cause for the French Revolution by focusing on the impact of the opera *Tarare* by Antonio Salieri, with its libretto by the satirist and social critic (among many other activities) Pierre Beaumarchais. The impact of opera—or of music in general—on the years leading up to the Revolution may be better understood in the context of musical politicization in general, the political and cultural roles Beaumarchais sought to play, and the reception of *Tarare* itself. All of these will be anchored by an analysis of the key musical, political, and creative aspects of *Tarare* and how they support the notion that music needs better representation in the body of research surrounding the French Revolution.

Tarare is not included in the standard canon of classical music; indeed, very little Classical-era French music is, but in its time the opera had a substantial influence and is well

¹ Tarling suggests a connection between *Tarare* and the French Revolution. Nicholas Tarling, *Orientalism and the Operatic World* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 59.

deserving of study, and perhaps even resurrection. Not only *Tarare*, but an ever-growing body of operatic works is beginning to be rediscovered, many of which struck political chords in similar, if less damningly overt ways, as *Tarare* did. These works were actually far-reaching as the *Académie Royale de Musique*, better known as the Paris Opera, was an important cultural and social force in Paris, attracting the nobility, *bourgeoisie*, and lower classes alike.² Amazingly, despite its genesis as Louis XIV's bid to essentially control music in Paris, the Paris Opera not only survived the Revolution but was a protected institution throughout the darkest days of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Therefore, it is a curiosity that opera (and music in general) is essentially absent from the scholarship pertaining to the causes of the French Revolution.

Modern reception of the French Revolution is broadly impacted by an ever-evolving body of scholarship. The Classic argument suggested, in Marxist fashion, that the Revolution was a socio-economic event,³ that a growing *bourgeoisie* that developed into a powerful, united middle class inevitably shifted the balance of power away from the aristocracy, converting—with a violent paroxysm—France's economic system from feudalism to capitalism.⁴ Against this, revisionist historians argued that the Revolution was a political event. Decline in the political landscape forced the hand of change, including (ironically) decline in the *bourgeois* class,⁵ in economic health,⁶ and in the effectiveness of the government in general.⁷ More

² Caroline Wood and Graham Sadler, *French Baroque Opera: A Reader* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2000), 27.

³ This was the prevailing argument among prominent scholars in the early part of the twentieth century.

⁴ William Doyle, *Origins of the French Revolution* [1980], 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 7.

⁵ Doyle, 12.

⁶ Doyle, 43.

⁷ Doyle, 64-65.

recently, French Revolutionary scholar François Furet made a career out of further undermining the Marxist argument and evolving the revisionist historiography.⁸

Because of varying theories on the overarching causes of the French Revolution, the details form a web of countless arguments and rebuttals, and even now the dust has not entirely settled. Still, certain aspects of French culture are considered to be part of the narrative, researched and discussed as they relate to revolutionary sentiment. The shift in zeitgeist and power dynamic brought about by the works of Enlightenment *philosophes* provides apt illustration: ideas such as equality of man, liberty from tyranny, and a brotherhood of humanity are familiar today, but at the time these ideas were radical, an affront to the French absolutist monarchy. Naturally, the extent to which the Enlightenment can be blamed in the face of the major political, economic, and social upheavals that occurred is under debate,⁹ but its effect on the psyche of the populace cannot be denied.

By 1750 in France literacy rates were, at least by contemporary measures, abysmal: estimates for northern France suggest that half of the men and a third of the women could read.¹⁰ Were the situation of the general French population at all similar, that would mean that very few of the low- and middle-class French were capable of reading the works of the *philosophes*. Being unable to digest these works and the political pamphlets that were inspired by them, how then were the bulk of the French underclass moved to act? Concurrent with the Enlightenment, Absolutism had reached its peak under Louis XIV. Clearly, there was immense change in a relatively short period of time in France: a people previously held in check by the government

⁸ For more information, see:

François Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, trans. Elborg Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

⁹ James B. Collins, *The Ancien Régime and the French Revolution*, ed. David Tatom (Toronto: Nelson Thomson Learning, 2002), 31.

¹⁰ Collins, 31.

were, within a few decades, moved to acts of violence, upheaval, and unprecedented political and social change. Though these anti-establishment philosophies served to prepare the coming political upheaval, it is unlikely that a largely illiterate population read them.

It would take art inspired by the ideas of *philosophes* such as Montesquieu and Rousseau to incite passion in the French, not just the writings themselves. Surely, the political and social issues that plagued France deserve equal consideration, but a societal paroxysm such as the French Revolution has a multi-faceted and complex tangle of causes. Despite this, Revolutionary scholarship has generally left art out of the discussion.¹¹ A master's thesis from 2008 sheds light on this body of omissions by making an argument for the power of propaganda in eighteenth-century French visual art, and how that artistic genre demonstrates an alliance between tradesmen artists and political figures.¹² This trailblazing work by a graduate student is relatively rare in the literature, her assertion coming as a result of the lack of legitimate research into cultural causes for the Revolution.

Contrast this further with the treatment of music in Revolutionary history. Music in France throughout the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries is implicated in the upheaval of the French Revolution. However, this music is only discussed as something that was affected by the Revolution rather than vice versa.¹³ Opera is nearly untouched, with only *Le Nozze di Figaro* entering the narrative, and then solely because of its source material and its prominence in the standard operatic repertoire.

¹¹ Scholars such as University of Michigan musicology professor Jane Fulcher are tackling the subject of French music and politics, but few are focusing their efforts on the Revolutionary era. For reference, see her book *The Nation's Image: French Grand Opera as Politics and Politicized Art* (Cambridge University Press, 1987).

¹² Megan Blair, "Art as Propaganda in Revolutionary America and France: A Comparative Analysis" (M.M. Thesis, Western Kentucky University, 2008).

¹³ Collins, 219.

Music as a cause is omitted for a few reasons. Among non-musical scholars, there is a reluctance to discuss music due to an inability to speak precisely, using musical terminology—in other words, to “speak the language.” This severely limits the scope of scholarship that might discuss music in any capacity. Among musical scholars, French composers from the Classical era have mostly fallen out of the narrative, owing to the growth of musicology within a primarily German frame of reference in the nineteenth century; the works are just not often performed. Finally, there is the issue of opera: many composers in France around the late-eighteenth century were not French, and that seems to have had an impact on their cultural significance.¹⁴ So while important names in progressive and republican ideals were writing and living in France during the Enlightenment,¹⁵ composers such as Grétry and Salieri, now barely remembered, were writing opera in Classical-era France from a similar political perspective, and large numbers of people were enjoying them.

French *philosophes* had a profound effect on art. Enlightenment ideas led to the creation of new kinds of works and, despite not being revolutionaries themselves, the *philosophes* certainly inspired the actions of those who were.¹⁶ Dramatic and visual works of art began to mirror the burgeoning ideas of equality and liberty espoused by the philosophical teachings of the Enlightenment. This became a tenet of art thanks to a theory by the philosopher John Locke. Locke posited that a person’s mind begins as a blank slate, and can be changed by what is absorbed by the senses.¹⁷ This stands in opposition to previous beliefs, such as Descartes’

¹⁴ Namely: Gluck, Cherubini, Puccini, and Spontini. There were also plenty of French composers writing opera, and despite the relative popularity of French composers in eighteenth-century France, it is the foreign ones who endure in the repertoire.

¹⁵ Collins, 31-36.

¹⁶ Jean-Christian Petitfils, *Louis XVI* (Paris: Perrin, 2005), 99-105.

¹⁷ John Locke, “An Essay Concerning Human Understanding” [1690], ed. Kenneth P. Winkler (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1996), 21.

assertion that the mind contains preset notions and is inflexible. A belief that the mind will not by default defer to certain constraints ultimately meant that art could be purposefully used to influence people.

Certain genres of art, such as painting, are especially apt for this purpose. The propaganda paintings of Jacques Louis David, for example, acted as both art and journalism, elevating such episodes as the Tennis Court Oath and the death of prominent Revolutionary Jean-Paul Marat to iconic status. Less obvious—but more conspicuous—examples include the wide array of pornographic materials that frequently targeted important royal figures such as Marie Antoinette, but just as often victimized small fry such as nuns, aristocrats, and priests. These works were all effective because they could be consumed by all people; literacy is not required to view paintings or pornography.

Meanwhile, the Paris Opera itself was a meeting place for different social classes and their values and ideas. Individuals from various backgrounds attended the Opera to socialize and be entertained. As a class melting pot, the very institution of opera was beginning to raise questions concerning the disparity of wealth and power in society. Even before *Tarare* hit the stage, the audience at large, traditionally beholden to the nobility and royalty, was becoming less concerned with how the upper classes received a premiere before expressing their own opinions.¹⁸ At *Tarare*'s premiere, the audience went as far as to lead a call for librettist and composer at the show's conclusion. This radical break from traditional protocol was, as Nicholas Tarling put it, "... a revolution that indeed preceded the political revolution of 1789."¹⁹

However, the Paris Opera was state-supported and thus under the watchful eye of government censors. All proposed libretti had to be inspected by "men of letters" before a

¹⁸ Tarling, 59.

¹⁹ Tarling, 59.

composer could be chosen by the librettist or assigned by the opera itself. The music had to undergo similar inspections before it was allowed to be mounted as a production.²⁰ Up until the mid-1770s, these libretti consisted primarily of *tragédies lyriques* settings of mythological stories,²¹ and even the subsequent Reform operas were mostly based on mythology, which hardly made for politically incendiary art. In fact, Calzabigi had a lot to say about his political intentions, or lack thereof. The Italian reformist and Gluck collaborator wrote in a letter to the eventual director of theaters in Vienna, “All is nature here, all is passion: there are no sententious reflections, no philosophy or politics, no similes and none of those descriptions or amplifications which are only an avoidance of difficulties and are to be found in all librettos.”²²

Gluck appeared to be similarly conservative with political expression, though there was at least one instance of the composer using political leverage for personal gain. The remounting of *Iphigénie en Aulide* in 1775 after the coronation of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette (Gluck’s royal student) featured a subtle reimagining of the final chorus number to glorify the new queen: “Sing, sing our queen’s praises, And may her marriage bonds make us forever happy.”²³ This was not so much a rewrite as it was a repurposing of the meaning of the text: “We are united under the queen, no matter your opinion of my music.” Gluck’s outright endorsement of the new queen through music is an instance of musical politicization.

Such examples of politicized music, though fascinating, are also indicative of a relatively “safe” choice. Music to glorify the monarchy or to satisfy a noble was commonplace, so much so that the “politicization” of it was less a composer’s choice than a necessity in order to

²⁰ Wood and Sadler, 12.

²¹ Victoria Johnson, *Backstage at the Revolution: How the Royal Paris Opera Survived the End of the Old Regime* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 152.

²² Piero Weiss, *Opera: A History in Documents* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 117.

²³ Weiss, 127.

maintain one's patronage. Chapter 2 will offer a few key examples of political music that challenged the status quo and how that challenge helped to influence Beaumarchais' politics in *Tarare*.

CHAPTER II

PRECEDENTS FOR THE POLITICIZATION OF MUSIC AND OPERA

Revolutionary Music in France: *La Marseillaise* and Other Songs

Music perfected or corrupted nations according to whether governments proposed liberty or debasement. Under the rule of tyrants it enervated and made the people slaves. Under moral authority, it permeated the soul and strengthened the love of virtue and patriotism.²⁴

—Jean Baptiste Leclerc

The establishment of the Paris Conservatory in 1796 indicates that the revolutionary government recognized the importance of music as a political tool. Much like the establishment of the Paris Opera became a powerful source of propaganda for the Bourbon monarchy, the Paris Conservatory would provide an opportunity to train and encourage young revolutionary artists. That this institution was proposed and overseen by Bernard Sarrette, a musician with an established record of Revolutionary service already, further proves that there was institutional awareness of music as a political force.

Before taking the post of director at the Conservatory, Sarrette had gathered musicians to play for the cause of the Revolution. These same musicians aided, among other endeavors, the storming of the Bastille, and eventually formed the core of what would become the musical

²⁴ Michael E. McClellan, Lecture Transcript, “The Revolution on Stage: Opera and Politics in France, 1789-1800” (Canberra, Australia: National Library of Australia, 2004).

branch of the French National Guard.²⁵ That made the Paris Conservatory a sort of musical weapon, as one of its key functions was to train musicians for Sarrette's National Guard bands.²⁶ So the director and the government had a keen understanding of the power of music to facilitate change.

However, these musical changes could not happen immediately. Change was taking place rapidly in France, but to build a generation of musicians free from the patronage infrastructure of court and church would take time. As previously mentioned, the politicization of music was difficult for many composers until the events of the nineteenth century helped to break those tethers. Therefore, political music in France was rather nascent until the developments of the Revolution began to unfold. However, as early as 1790 music was becoming directly and intentionally associated with the Revolution. One of the most well known of these early revolutionary songs was the *Ça ira* [It will succeed].²⁷ Like many Revolutionary songs and hymns, it was set to a beloved melody. This convention allowed for even the uneducated to sing the song with little prompting. However, as Benjamin Franklin liked to observe, what made this song particularly special was its title.²⁸

The song's revolutionary connotations were magnified by the occasion of its birth. On the eve of the *Fête de la Fédération* in 1790,²⁹ it became clear that festival construction efforts were undermanned for a particular neighborhood in Paris. The constituents of this area came out in droves to assist in the work, and the *Ça ira* became their work song. Though peppered with

²⁵ Constant Pierre, *Bernard Sarrette et les origines du Conservatoire national de musique et de déclamation* (Paris: Delalain frères, 1895), 13.

²⁶ Nigel Simeone, *Paris – A Musical Gazetteer* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 214.

²⁷ Charles Hughes, "Music of the French Revolution" in *Science & Society* 4, no. 2 (1940), 193-210.

²⁸ Hughes, "Music of the French Revolution," 196. This being in regards to the American Revolution.

²⁹ A holiday in celebration of the French Revolution, specifically in remembrance of the storming of the Bastille. It is now known as Bastille Day.

dangerous and subversive lyrics that challenged the nobility, the people joyously sang their song as they prepared for the upcoming festival.³⁰ Such public displays of song as performed by common men and women would become a commonplace event in the wake of further Revolutionary activity, though *Ça ira* was certainly the earliest account of this phenomenon.

This concept of accessibility would prove to be very important in French Revolutionary music. The Revolution was a movement of, by, and for the common people. Because of this social upheaval in the fabric of French society, the newfound power of the people drove the politicization of music in interesting ways, and the availability of music to all people was an important part of this. Previously, people of all socio-economic statuses had come to the opera, but they were not able to participate. Now, people had control over the music around them.

Another famous example of this synthesis of music and politics is the French national anthem, *La Marseillaise*. The anthem was written shortly after the French declared war on Austria in 1792. It was a hasty commission in response to the Austrians' retaliation by invading France, an effort to prevent the spread of revolutionary sentiment. Their repulsion from Strasbourg by the national army may well have been thanks to the rallying cry of the song, originally entitled "*Chant de guerre pour l'Armée du Rhin*,"³¹ which was devised as a means of consolidating France's disparate forces.

The song endured, though, and made its way to Paris on the tongues of *fédérés*, or volunteers, from Marseille. Thanks to their influence, the song caught on in the capital, and soon came to be known as the marching song for the National Guard of Marseille.³² Just a few years

³⁰ Hughes, "Music of the French Revolution," 196.

³¹ Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1976), 439. [Song of war for the army of the Rhine]

³² Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen*, 439.

later, in 1795, it was officially adopted by the Convention as France's first anthem, marking another step in the country's new direction as a (short-lived) republic.³³

Notably, over the next century the song's status as the national anthem was contentious. It was at first revoked under Napoleon I, who attempted to dissociate his empire from the chaotic government that preceded it. First he, and then later Napoleon III, replaced it with "unofficial" anthems that more closely aligned with the ideas of empire; they were songs that glorified those emperors for their power and conquest. Later, after the brief resumption of the monarchy, *La Marseillaise* was outright banned for its obvious connection with a very unfortunate time for French royalty and nobility. Finally, in the 1870s, the anthem experienced a gradual resurrection until it was ultimately reinstated as France's national anthem.

The political implications of this song are numerous. From a revolutionary rallying cry, to a marching song for the Guard, to an anthem for the entire country, *La Marseillaise* is fully linked to politics. However, it also demonstrates a predisposition for music to have a political impact not just in its time and country but elsewhere and for years to come. To elaborate, one can look at the impact that *La Marseillaise* has had outside of France from its inception until recent times. There have been many adaptations, quotations, and samplings of the melody, but a few of them are particularly notable.

Perhaps most immediately relevant is Beethoven's quotation of the anthem in his orchestral piece *Wellington's Victory*. The irony, of course, is that a French anthem was quoted to celebrate a victory over the French. The poetic justice is that the victory was over Napoleon's forces; Beethoven surely intended the jab as Napoleon had rejected that same anthem when he came to power.

³³ Michael Mould, *The Routledge Dictionary of Cultural References in Modern French* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2011), 147.

Another fitting setting of the anthem was by Jacques Offenbach, himself a foreigner in Paris who built his fame by writing French operetta. In his *opéra bouffe*, *Orphée aux Enfers*, he quotes *La Marseillaise* in the “*Choeur de la Révolte*” from act 1, scene 2. *Orphée aux Enfers* is a satire that targets, among other things, political scandals surrounding the Second French Empire. Productions have since served a similar purpose. One notable staging in the 1980s by the English National Opera features the character Public Opinion—one who makes no friends with the audience—portrayed as former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.³⁴

A slightly different usage of *La Marseillaise* is in the score of the film *Casablanca*. The composer for the film, Max Steiner, quotes portions of the song throughout his score, but of particular note is a scene wherein the song is actually sung by the characters themselves. In an attempt to drown out Nazis singing “*Die Wacht am Rhein*,” the French anthem is sung to shout down the Nazis, which results in Rick’s Café Americain being shut down. It cannot be emphasized enough how influential this scene was, showing the power of music to overpower one’s political enemies. *La Marseillaise* was likely chosen because of the French café, but it also fits the subject matter well: as a means of repelling an invading force.

The subsequent propagandistic uses of the song drew on an earlier pattern, though. Back in eighteenth-century France, *La Marseillaise* had eventually found its way to the stage of the Paris Opera, where it and other *chansons* were played by the orchestra as a means of currying public favor, a function that the Opera came to embody during the Reign of Terror.³⁵ Naturally, this too resulted in violence as competing Royalists called for their own *chansons* to be played.

³⁴ Operetta Research Center, “*Orphée aux Enfers* at Ilford Festival: An Enjoyable Romp,” <http://operetta-research-center.org/orphee-aux-enfers-iford-festival-enjoyable-romp/> (2015), accessed 18 January 2018.

³⁵ Jane Fulcher, *The Nation’s Image: French Grand Opera as Politics and Politicized Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 7.

The Paris Opera had evolved from a place of allegorical king worship to a forum for political and public opinion, but how did it get there and what were the implications?

Examples of Politicized French Opera

Leclerc's essay unambiguously described music, specifically music for the theatre, as an agent of political power and blurred easy distinctions between music and the political sphere.³⁶

—Michael McClellan

Because the Paris Opera under the monarchy was fully controlled by the state, it was understandably difficult to get dissident operas produced. Lully's works were routinely revived at the Paris Opera until 1779 (an oddity in the treatment of music in Europe through the eighteenth century, as little interest was traditionally placed upon "old" music)³⁷ and Rameau's works were similarly staged and re-staged at the Opera as well, despite the controversy of opinion between the warring Lullistes and Ramistes. Most of the rest of the operas produced were shorter runs by composers such as Campra, Charpentier, Collasse, Desmarest, Destouches, Marais, and Mouret, who all mostly emulated Lully's successful format for the *tragédie lyrique*.³⁸ Indeed, Lully's influence over the Paris Opera continued well past his death and that of his patron, Louis XIV, and would encourage stagnation in the Paris Opera for some time.

Meanwhile, the surging popularity of the *Théâtre de l'Opéra-Comique*, or simply *Opéra Comique*, in the mid-eighteenth century allowed for a wider array of works to be presented to French audiences. In fact, the *Opéra Comique* gave birth to some of the more politically

³⁶ McClellan, "The Revolution."

³⁷ James H. Johnson, *Listening in Paris: A Cultural History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), 151.

³⁸ Johnson, *Listening*, 152.

interesting operas for the time. An early example was Monsigny's 3-act comic opera, *Le roi et le fermier* (The King and the Farmer). The simple plot involves an incognito king that helps a farmer recover his daughter's dowry, which has been wrongfully taken by the corrupt local lord. This opera was allowed to criticize the privilege of the upper classes by also paying some level of homage to royalty; a "compromise" that likely smoothed its passage through the censors. Opera had a long way to go before it could portray regicide and elections, but this subtle jab at the aristocracy was a departure from the blatant king worship of Lully and the apolitical mythological grandiosity of Rameau.

Part of the different political circumstances surrounding the productions of the *Opéra Comique* had to do with its genesis. Rather than being a product of the royal propaganda machine, the *Opéra Comique* came about from folkish and "lowbrow" theatrical traditions from both Italy and France. In fact, the roots of the *Opéra Comique* can be traced both to *commedia dell'arte* and French *vaudeville*,³⁹ with the merger of two prominent theatres from annual fairs in France as the primary instigation. The Fair Theatres of St. Germain and St. Laurent were both popular for their satirical stage productions and for centuries they offered entertainment to fair patrons. However, after a series of political sabotages instigated by the Paris Opera—among other allied groups—the theatres joined forces to combat them.

The state-run groups intended to monopolize the theatrical productions in France and wanted to prevent the damaging propaganda and satire of the fair productions from influencing the public's opinion of the monarchy. Part of the sabotage was the ousting of all Italian actors from the theatres, who were popular among fair goers. This prompted the remaining French

³⁹ M. Elizabeth C. Bartlet and Richard Langham Smith, "Opéra comique," Grove Music Online, accessed 24 Jan. 2019.

performers to simply include Italian theatrical practice into their own performances.⁴⁰ This influence, along with their eventual alliance with the *Comédie-Italienne* meant that the influence of *opera buffa*, *commedia dell'arte*, and other comedic Italianate aspects became a hallmark of the *Opéra Comique*. The fact that so many disparate theatrical traditions had merged into one meant that the variety of productions, styles, and subject matter was much more robust than that of the Paris Opera, a distinctively French and closely monitored state institution.

Here is the first marker to indicate that French opera has a precedent of political currency, as the *vaudeville* stage had often been utilized to satirize other theatres and criticize the government. The satirical aspect of the *vaudeville* certainly remained as the conglomerate of the fair theatres used their combined forces to challenge the other state houses for primacy in Paris. In an effort to fight back against the oppression of the more established theatres, the *Opéra Comique* used their newfound strength to develop opera that was satirical, insightful, and altogether different from the settled productions in Paris. This was met with great success among French opera goers.

One of the most famous composers to write opera for the *Opéra Comique* was André Ernest Modeste Grétry. He is one of the few native French composers from this era that retains some level of recognition. His famous opera, *Richard Coeur-de-lion* (1784), was an early example of so-called rescue opera (rescue opera is a catch-all term still routinely used to categorize a variety of operas that feature the trope of a *deus ex machina*, but that are otherwise disparate enough to warrant sub-classification. The politicization attached to most operas that fall under the rescue opera banner and the continued usage of the term is sufficient reason to

⁴⁰ Jeffrey S. Ravel, *The Contested Parterre: Public Theater and French Political Culture, 1680–1791* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 107.

maintain its usage here. For more information, see David Charlton's article).⁴¹ It did not include all of the elements that came to be associated with the genre, but the general narrative was consistent with later rescue opera plots. Indeed, *Richard* would provide a framework for the genre, encouraging other composers to add to the repertoire with its international success.⁴²

Though not overtly political in its inception, *Richard Coeur-de-lion* became embroiled in French politics later in the eighteenth century. A famous *romance* from the opera, "O Richard, O mon Roi, l'univers t'abandonne," unexpectedly became associated with royalists during the early years of the French Revolution. The *romance* is sung by Blondel, Richard's squire who is searching for the captured king. The themes of a wronged king and a loyal servant were sympathetic for French royalists. In fact, a banquet at Versailles became the precursor for one of the major populist uprisings in 1789, just a few years after the Bastille was stormed. At the banquet, royalists attempted to ingratiate themselves to the king by singing the *romance*. Enraged commoners retaliated by singing *Le Marsellaise*, itself a song that found its way inadvertently into the political scene.⁴³ The image of opposing factions during the Revolution singing songs to essentially battle one another is a powerful one, and provides a sound argument for one of the many ways that politicized music could be used by groups to energize their bases.

Another popular opera that innervated the revolutionary base was Luigi Cherubini's rescue opera *Lodoïska* (1791). Set in Poland, this *comédie héroïque*, a genre found almost exclusively at the *Opéra Comique*, utilized many of the same themes as the rescue opera. In this case, as is consistent with many other examples, the opera takes place in a foreign land and

⁴¹ David Charlton, "Rescue opera," Grove Music Online, accessed March 15th, 2021, <https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.unco.idm.oclc.org/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000023227>.

⁴² R.J. Arnold, *Grétry's Operas and the French Public: From the Old Regime to the Restoration* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2016), 144.

⁴³ *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s.v. "Grétry, André Ernest Modeste."

involves the rescue of someone who has been wrongfully imprisoned. This time, it is the beautiful Lodoïska who is in distress, and her lover Floreski must combat the corrupt Dourlinski to win her back. This might well sound familiar, as the format of the plot is essentially rehased in every iteration of the rescue opera genre. What makes this and other examples of the genre so powerful is the natural conclusion: the defeat of a noble antagonist at the hands of justice. Pair this with a love story and an honorable hero, and the parallels to the Revolutionaries are abundantly clear.

Like many operas of this style and from this era, it has been essentially lost to the modern performance canon. However, it is important to understand the popularity that *Lodoïska*, *Richard, Coeur-de-Lion* and similar productions had in the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, especially in France. *Lodoïska* had a run of over 200 performances, which made it the longest running French opera of the 1790s.⁴⁴ As mentioned previously, music from *Richard, Coeur-de-Lion* permeated French culture and was appropriated for political and cultural usage. These are merely examples of a larger pattern that I will discuss further in Chapter 4.

French politics had been involved in operas with Eastern settings before, such as in Charles-Simon Favart's opera *Soliman second*. The plot revolves around a young French woman who, while in the captivity of Soliman's harem, suggests that the sultan should be more like the king of France. Similarly, in Grétry's opera *Zémire et Azor*, which was based on the story of *Beauty and the Beast*, a noble from an exotic land appears as a beastly and horrible man. After the influence of Western sensibility, he magically transforms into a just and kind ruler. In these cases, the political intentions are quite different from that of *Tarare*, but they still provide a

⁴⁴ Bruce Scott, "Fanning Revolutionary Fires: Cherubini's 'Lodoïska,'" <https://www.npr.org/2011/01/14/132903213/fanning-revolutionary-fires-cherubinis-lodoiska>. (2011), accessed 28 January 2019.

framework for the development of politics in French opera. This is especially important because of the “oriental” influence on *Tarare*; Beaumarchais was not developing these ideas in a vacuum.

Indeed, even outside of France “Turkish” operas were popular staples in the eighteenth century. Mozart’s *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* of 1782 was set in Turkey and featured a plot not entirely unlike *Tarare*’s. Other notable productions include Handel’s operas *Giustino*, set in Constantinople, and *Tamerlano*, which features a defeated Ottoman emperor. The usage of “exotic” settings and characters allowed a certain amount of added freedom to the plots, especially as they related to the nobility and monarchy. Beaumarchais had experimented with the concept in his Figaro trilogy, which took place in the relatively exotic Spain, and likewise infused those works with a political energy that would have met with hostility had its setting been more familiar for European audiences.

It is also important to look into the nineteenth century to see how opera continued to be a political tool. Much like the Revolutionary government utilized the Paris Conservatory to train a generation of independently minded musicians, the Paris Opera under the Bourbon Restoration depended on the Opera to restore faith in certain aspects of the *ancien régime*. This included a return of mythological operas from the eighteenth century as well as newer works that served to harken back in an attempt to glorify the past. However, this also imposed a certain exclusivity that was particularly frustrating for progressives.⁴⁵

The examples that I have provided are all clearly political. Whether by the nature of their genre, the intent of the composer, or the subject matter itself, these staged works were designed or appropriated to make a statement about the way things were in France. However, it is important to step back and consider the political climate in pre-Revolutionary Paris. People were

⁴⁵ Fulcher, *The Nation’s Image*, 14.

starving because the price of bread was too high to afford while the rising national debt was a source of public outrage. The fact that such violent repercussions followed the ineffective regime of Louis XVI proves that France was a country full of disillusioned and angry people. In fact, the demeanor of the people insinuates that any staged works may have had political repercussions. According to R.J. Arnold's assessment of arguments made by Susan Maslan, "...even an overtly apolitical work..." would surely have had unintended resonances for its Revolution-era audiences.⁴⁶

This is true for two reasons. First, it was in Paris that audiences began to truly listen at the theatre. There is plenty of anecdotal and referential information to support the notion that eighteenth-century audiences were a talkative group. The stories of people playing cards in between arias during Handel's productions are a common example of the sorts of things that were occurring in the seats during opera. But Parisian opera goers inadvertently led a movement toward audience silence, and this silence indicates that audiences were really listening during productions. Therefore, patrons of the Paris Opera, the *Opéra Comique*, and the other theatres in Paris were interpreting the whole performance of a staged work.

Audience interpretation is the second reason, for interpretation is the process by which meaning is extracted. If we assume, as is asserted by philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer, that meaning comes about from the confluence of sound and prejudice,⁴⁷ then this implies much about the sorts of things that eighteenth-century audiences would have gleaned from opera. The prejudices that permeated non-privileged members of French society were visceral and directed at the elite members of society. Similar phenomena occurred years later during Italy's political

⁴⁶ Arnold, *Grétry*, 145.

⁴⁷ Johnson, *Listening*, 2. For more information, see the referenced work by Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1988), 238-253.

turmoil and the *Risorgimento*. Verdi's operas were politically interpreted even when no such opinions were intended.⁴⁸ Is it therefore a stretch to imagine that frustrated French audiences might find validation for their growing revolutionary sentiment through opera?

The natural conclusion, then, is that the politicization of art has as much to do with the artist as it does with the audience. An artist can imbue a work with political intent and create or draw attention to circumstances that lend further political meaning to it. Similarly, when art is consumed by a populace their interpretation will be influenced by what the artist has done as well as the circumstances surrounding both the work and the general political or cultural situation at that time. In eighteenth-century France, upheaval was inevitable. For works such as *Tarare*, the political implications were not only captivating but were also amplified by the temperament of those watching and listening.

⁴⁸ Though, to be fair, intent can change with political winds and individual growth.

CHAPTER III

EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY FRENCH OPERA:
RECONCILING OBSCURITY**What Happened to French Classical Music?**

With the disappearance of the French rescue opera from the performing repertory, much of the distinctive political spirit of this age has been lost.⁴⁹

—John Bokina

One major reason for the disappearance of French Classical composers from the repertory was the political upheaval of the French Revolution. Left with instability for decades and nowhere to move but forward, French opera composers could only adapt to the changing cultural and political landscape of France or attempt to ingratiate their works to wider European audiences. Even so, reliably popular composers such as Grétry struggled to maintain works in the repertory,⁵⁰ while foreign composers continued to find success appropriating otherwise French stylistic trends. Rescue opera became the property of the Germans with the success of Beethoven's *Fidelio*. Later, Meyerbeer epitomized French Grand Opera.

Other reasonably successful native French composers had trouble maintaining their influence beyond their deaths. Nicolas Dalayrac was a noted composer and librettist of *opéra-comique* from the late-eighteenth century until his death in 1809. At least as prolific as his

⁴⁹ John Bokina, *Opera and Politics: From Monteverdi to Henze* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 69.

⁵⁰ Winton Dean, "French Opera" in *The Age of Beethoven: 1790-1830*, ed. Gerald Abraham (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 34.

contemporary Grétry, though, Dalayrac is now forgotten. This is due in large part to his tendency for setting relatively lackluster music to otherwise brilliantly written librettos.⁵¹ A gifted dramatist, his penchant for keeping up with trends in the operatic world would nonetheless result in the gradual disappearance of this music in the face of the overwhelming popularity of Italian and German operas.⁵²

Another example is composer Étienne Méhul, who according to musicologist M. Elizabeth C. Bartlet was “the most important opera composer in France during the Revolution.”⁵³ Considered by noted music critic David Cairns to be the first Romantic composer,⁵⁴ he not only forecast stylistic developments of Romantic opera but managed to befriend Napoleon and later maintain the good graces of subsequent Bourbon rule.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, his knack for keeping up with musical and political changes was not enough to prevent his decline from the performance repertory.

These composers represent only a sampling of the successful, adaptable French Classical composers who now live on only as historical footnotes in the wake of their foreign contemporaries. However, historic attrition of native French composers only accounts for part of the dissipation of eighteenth-century French opera. Other concerns, such as the meandering stylistic development of French composers in the nineteenth century, were only problematic in the face of the relatively inclusive and developmental musical traditions of Germany and Italy. Clearly, French music was not unimportant or unpopular despite its gradual loss of prominence

⁵¹ Dean, “French Opera,” 34.

⁵² Dean, “French Opera,” 34.

⁵³ M. Elizabeth C. Bartlet, introduction to *Stratonice*, by Étienne Méhul (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, c1997), vii.

⁵⁴ David Cairns, *Berlioz: The Making of an Artist 1803-1832* (New York: Penguin, 2017), 200.

⁵⁵ Dean, “French Opera,” 36.

in the performance canon. On the contrary, French music often experienced ample popularity, just not necessarily outside of France.

The Uniqueness of French Music

But all our pieces for violin, harpsichord, viols and so on, seem to want to express some sentiment. Thus, not having created signs or characters to communicate our distinctive musical ideas we try to remedy this by marking the beginning of our pieces with words such as “tenderly” (tendrement), “brightly” (vivement), etc. as close as we can to what we would like to be heard.⁵⁶

—François Couperin

The two composers most widely associated with French Classical opera are foreigners: Gluck and Cherubini.⁵⁷ This is not an anomaly in French music, as many of the great composers of French music throughout the eighteenth century and at least until the mid-nineteenth century were not French: Lully, Piccinni, Spontini, Rossini, and Meyerbeer, to name a few. There are exceptions such as Grétry, who composed the aforementioned *Richard, Coeur-di-lion*, but even his fame is limited now mostly to France and cannot compare with the more wide-reaching success of his foreign contemporaries.

Cherubini’s operas took existing French style and tropes and built upon them in a way that seemed to please French audiences as well as those of greater Europe. For instance, his opera *Lodoïska* essentially launched the genre of French rescue opera into public consciousness with its successful 1791 premiere and subsequent 200 performance run at the Paris Opera.⁵⁸ Better known is *Medée*, of which Brahms said “This *Medée* is what we musicians among

⁵⁶ David Tunley, *François Couperin and ‘The Perfection of Music’* (Abingdon, UK: Taylor and Francis, 2016), n.p.

⁵⁷ Hugo Leichtentritt, *Music, History, and Ideas* (Redditch, Worcestershire, UK: Read Books, 2013), n.p.

⁵⁸ Scott, “Fanning Revolutionary Fires.”

ourselves recognize as the highest in dramatic music.”⁵⁹ It is worth noting that *Fidelio* taking on the genre of rescue opera was due, in part, to Cherubini’s influence on Beethoven’s work.⁶⁰

Meanwhile, Gluck repurposed his style for a French audience, and in many cases simply transferred existing Reform Opera from Vienna.⁶¹ As to why Gluck’s music found success in Paris, Jacques-Henri Meister in his *Correspondence littéraire* posits that it was Gluck’s ability to “sacrifice all the resources and all the beauties of his art to theatrical effect, which was bound to please immensely a nation that will perhaps never understand melody but has the most exquisite taste for all things having to do with dramatic propriety.... And that is how we love music in France.”⁶²

Meister’s opinion of French musical taste raises an interesting point about the notion of French attitude regarding melody and its subservience to drama. Compared to the German pursuit of a superior or universal music⁶³ and the Italian focus on *bel canto*, French music often exhibits unique and occasionally exclusionary qualities. These qualities, not only related to melody, have succeeded in both incubating new developments as well as subverting wider appeal for French music.

Consider, for instance, the prevalence of dance in French opera. As will be discussed, *Tarare*’s third act followed in the footsteps of so many dramas that came before with a sort of *divertissement* featuring the requisite ballet. This overtly French detail can be traced to Louis

⁵⁹ Leichtentritt, *Music, History, and Ideas*, n.p.

⁶⁰ Dean, “French Opera,” 39.

⁶¹ Weiss, *Opera*, 128.

⁶² Weiss, 128.

⁶³ Michael H. Kater, “Culture, Society, and Politics in the Cosmos of ‘Hans Pfitzner the German,’” in *Music and German National Identity*, ed. Celia Applegate and Pamela M. Potter (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 178.

XIV, who sought to use the arts as a means of imposing self-glorifying ceremonies upon the courts while implying the superiority of French politics and culture over those of its neighbors.⁶⁴

Further, the tendency for French vocal music to rely upon the cadence of the language was much different and more difficult for non-native singers than the Italian operatic vocabulary. Though both Italian and French operatic traditions began as a means of resurrecting the ancient Greek ideals through their art, France was decades behind Italy in this endeavor.⁶⁵ For this reason, Italian style was familiar to French audiences and seemed always at odds with the French style, especially as the Italians diverged further from declamation with showy arias and coloratura vocal writing. The text-first approach to French declamation would endure well into the nineteenth century, though this all but required singers to be experts in the language and could be challenging for audiences incapable of appreciating the nuances of the French language.⁶⁶

Louis XIV's mark can also be found in the less showy French singing style, as music intended to glorify the singer would undoubtedly spoil the king's own glory. However, despite the relaxation of absolutist dictates over the course of the eighteenth century, dance and other distinctly French elements continued to be used in opera. This is partially due to the enduring productions of works by Lully and Rameau, which heavily influenced French composers. That influence would also continue because *philosophes*, composers, and men of letters would continue the narrative of comparing French music and Italian music and instigate such phenomena as the *Querelle des Bouffons*.

⁶⁴ George J. Buelow, *A History of Baroque Music* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 152.

⁶⁵ Buelow, 152-154.

⁶⁶ Dean, "French Opera," 37.

As Salieri was not French, the relevance to *Tarare* requires some explanation. For one, thanks to Beaumarchais's influence, *Tarare* would prove to be uniquely French in both style and delivery. Though more details are covered in Chapter 4, it is important to note here that *Tarare*'s musical treatment stands in contrast to the works of Salieri's fellow foreign composers, and therefore lumps the opera with other decidedly "French" works from native French composers. As will be mentioned, one of the most glaring examples of this was Beaumarchais's insistence that the text supersede the melody, which resulted in a primarily arioso style of singing.

Beaumarchais, for all of his radically political writing, seemed intent upon reaching back to French musical traditions for *Tarare*. Perhaps this was a calculated move, cloaking the opera in the safety of tradition and offsetting the politically uncomfortable plot with culturally comfortable music. Unfortunately, this only served to further alienate modern, non-French audiences from *Tarare*.

The Canon and *Tarare*

By default, it has fallen to an Austro-German work, Beethoven's *Fidelio*, the only opera from the first decade of the nineteenth century to remain in the performing repertory, to represent in opera the republican spirit of the French Revolution.⁶⁷

—John Bokina

With Salieri in Mozart's shadow and Beaumarchais linked primarily to the *Figaro* trilogy, what chance did *Tarare* have to maintain any level of prominence in the operatic repertoire? French music from this era was selectively maintained in the canon, with names like

⁶⁷ Bokina, *Opera and Politics*, 69. Though Bokina references early nineteenth-century opera, his point about *Fidelio* being the sole representative of Revolutionary spirit in standard canonical opera brings certain issues with our operatic repertory to the forefront.

Cherubini and Gluck universally touted as the authoritative sounds of Classical French opera. Despite Beaumarchais's enduring fame, *Tarare* seemed doomed to international obscurity.

This is only exacerbated by the operatic canon, which is among the most entrenched repertoires in classical music.⁶⁸ Using the Metropolitan Opera as a benchmark for productions, it should come as no surprise that *Tarare* and many other important works are rarely seen on the contemporary stage. The four most-staged works at the Met—*La Boheme*, *Aida*, *Carmen*, and *La Traviata*—return year after year, in some seasons making up a quarter of the total performances between them.⁶⁹

Worldwide, the data is equally telling. According to Operabase, which maintains a database of metrics related to major operatic productions, of the ten most performed operas, only *Carmen* is in French. As well, only Mozart represents pre-nineteenth century opera, while most of the same productions from the Met's typical lineup make up the rest.⁷⁰ Representation matters, especially on the major stages of the world, and operas like *Tarare* are largely ignored in this regard.

Even contemporaneously, *Tarare* met challenges. While *Tarare*'s success was limited mostly to France, the rest of Europe was much more receptive to its later Italian *opera buffa* reimagining: *Axur, Re d'Ormus*.⁷¹ Conceived by Salieri and longtime Mozart collaborator Lorenzo da Ponte, *Axur* featured necessary plot and music tweaks to avoid alienating the greater

⁶⁸ Brian Wise, "The Same Four Operas are Performed Over and Over," FiveThirtyEight, accessed June 29, 2020, <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/the-same-four-operas-are-performed-over-and-over/>.

⁶⁹ Brian Wise, "Why the Same Few Operas Seem to Be Staged Over and Over," BrianWise.net, accessed June 29, 2020, <https://brianwise.net/most-popular-operas-metropolitan-opera/>.

⁷⁰ "Statistics," Operabase, <http://operabase.com/statistics/en> accessed 15 March 2021.

⁷¹ John A. Rice, *Antonio Salieri and Viennese Opera* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 418.

European audience. As well, those subtle adjustments allowed it to clear censors much more smoothly than its French progenitor would have.⁷²

Today, *Axur, Re d'Ormus* is more forgotten than *Tarare*. Even so, the potential for *Tarare*'s wider appeal was impacted by *Axur*'s success. The upheaval of music in France during those difficult years placed the nails in the proverbial coffin of much French music from the late-eighteenth century and even the early nineteenth century; *Tarare* was likewise unable to escape this fate.

Despite this, *Tarare* has seen some productions in recent years. As recently as 2018, the *Theater an der Wien* mounted a production with Cristophe Rousset at the podium. Rousset's revival went so far as to culminate in an audio recording in 2019, the first of its kind. It is fortunate that period ensembles, such as Rousset's *Les Talens Lyriques*, have contributed to a renewed interest in music that has otherwise been overlooked. The fact that Salieri's operas—specifically *Tarare*—have been among those revisited by proponents of the movement is certainly indicative of the perceived importance of his work from a musicological and performance practice standpoint. Even so, such productions are rare and reach a limited audience.

It is clear that many obstacles yet prevent *Tarare* from achieving any widespread fame. In the meantime, knowledge of such compositions will help to assuage the damage done by years of neglect. *Tarare* is only one example of politically charged, well-written, artistically proficient works from France in the eighteenth century, though it may serve to be the most important link between French music and the onset of the revolution. Having explored other examples of politicized French music and reconciled the relative obscurity of *Tarare*, the next chapter will

⁷² I discuss *Axur* in more depth in chapter 4.

examine the opera itself and provide conclusive evidence for the role the opera played in helping to foment support for the French Revolution.

CHAPTER IV

TARARE AS MEASURE OF OPERA'S
IMPACT ON THE REVOLUTION

Beaumarchais and Salieri

[Beaumarchais and Salieri] helped lay the ideological and emotional foundation for the revolution that broke out two years later.⁷³

—John A. Rice

To eighteenth-century audiences, *Tarare* must have been quite a shock even though it shared many of the standard conventions for French opera at that time, which would have been familiar to many who attended its premiere.⁷⁴ This familiarity came partially from the creators themselves. Beaumarchais was a famous playwright and Salieri had developed a reputation in Paris after his success with *Les Danaïdes* and subsequent flop with *Les Horaces*. This partnership, though unprecedented, was not nearly as strange as it appeared to be. Beaumarchais had noticed the successes that such foreigners as Gluck and Piccinni had enjoyed in Paris, and he needed a composer who understood French operatic style but was not so established that he

⁷³ Rice, *Antonio Salieri*, 400.

⁷⁴ Rice, 391.

The story was lifted almost unchanged from a book called *The Tales of the Genii, or the Delightful Lessons of Horam, the Son of Asmar* by Englishman James Ridley. Ridley was in turn influenced by *The Arabian Nights*, which had been published in French not long before. Therefore, the story was likely well-known by many who came to see the opera. The specific story from the book, “Sadak and Kalasrade,” is nearly indistinguishable from Beaumarchais’ libretto except for his renaming of all of the characters. Such tales, inspired by *The Arabian Nights*, influenced many of the libretti being used in French rescue opera at the time.

might impose ideas counter to his own. His intention was shared by many other composers in Paris: the reform of French opera.⁷⁵

Salieri was still in his mid-30s, had not yet reached the pinnacle of his fame and, like Mozart would set only completely new libretti.⁷⁶ *Tarare* met this requirement, and in fact it was at the behest of his mentor, Gluck (perhaps the most famous opera reformer), that Salieri composed French opera in the first place. The commission for the opera *Les Danaïdes* had initially been Gluck's, but the aging composer was nearing retirement and offered the contract to Salieri instead. In fact, advertisements for the production proclaimed the opera to be "by Gluck and Salieri," though after a run of successful performances Gluck admitted that Salieri was the sole composer. In this way, Gluck ensured that Salieri would not take the fall if the opera were to fail, but could open a new door in Paris if it won over French audiences.⁷⁷

What unfolded was a close partnership between composer and librettist. The older, more experienced Beaumarchais subtly and deftly exerted his influence on every detail of the production—and although Salieri began writing the opera while at his post in Joseph II's court in Vienna, at Beaumarchais's behest he came to Paris to complete the work in closer collaboration.⁷⁸ It was during this time that the playwright was most able to influence the score, though by all accounts the developing relationship between them was congenial and friendly.⁷⁹ Salieri, having learned from his recent failure with *Les Horaces*—the French were a fickle audience—readily took the other's suggestions, and what resulted was a theatrical piece that

⁷⁵ Rice, 386.

⁷⁶ Rice, 113.

⁷⁷ William Foster Apthorp, *The Opera Past and Present: An Historical Sketch* (New York: Charles Scriber's Sons, 1901), 68.

⁷⁸ Georges Lemaitre, *Beaumarchais* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949), 296.

⁷⁹ Volkmar Braunbehrens, *Maligned Master: The Real Story of Antonio Salieri*, trans. Eveline L. Kanes (New York: Fromm International Publishing, 1992), 131.

exemplified dramatic French style. Most scenes were comprised of French *récitatif* (similar to the declamatory singing popularized by Lully) broken up by short arioso passages. The dialogue-like sections were offset by ensemble numbers, choruses, a modified ballet, and a number of airs that still managed to avoid substantial Italian influence.⁸⁰

Whether it was Salieri's geniality, his acumen, or his desire to work again in Paris is up for debate, but in him Beaumarchais found a worthy counterpart in his experiment to reform opera.⁸¹ About his partner, Beaumarchais wrote:

But what belongs to me even less is the beautiful music by my friend Salieri. This great composer, who brings honor to the school of Gluck, having the style of that great master, had received from Nature a delicate sensibility, a true spirit, a most exceptional talent for dramatic music, and a wealth of ideas that is almost unique. He had the virtue to renounce, in order to please me, a crowd of musical ideas with which his opera sparkled, only because they lengthened scenes and slowed the action; but the manly, energetic color of the work, its rapid, intrepid tone, will compensate him well for so many sacrifices.

This man of genius, so misunderstood and scorned for his beautiful opera *Les Horaces*, has responded in advance in *Tarare* to the objection that will be made that my poem is not very lyrical. Lyricism was not the object that we sought, but only to make dramatic music. My friend, I said to him, to soften ideas, to make phrases effeminate so as to make them more musical, is the true source of the abuses that have spoiled opera for us. Let us dare to elevate music to the level of a poem that is vigorous and strongly plotted; we will render to it all of its nobility; we will attain perhaps those great effects vaunted so much in the ancient spectacles of the Greeks. These are the ambitious labors that we undertook years ago. I say sincerely that I would never have consented, for any price, to leave my study to work with an ordinary man on a project that has become, thanks to M. Salieri, my evenings' recreation and often a delightful pleasure.

Our discussions, I believe, would have made a very good theory of operatic poetry, for M. Salieri was born a poet, and I am something of a musician. One will perhaps never succeed without the cooperation of all these things.⁸²

⁸⁰ Braunbehrens, 145-147. A notable exception is the clear da capo in Calpigi's aria in Act III.

⁸¹ Harlow Giles Unger, *Improbable Patriot: The Secret History of Monsieur de Beaumarchais, the French Playwright Who Saved the American Revolution* (Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 2011), 172-173.

⁸² Rice, 390.

Beaumarchais no doubt meant what he said, for he was quick with criticism and opinionated. Paired with Salieri's agreeability, this glowing assessment provided insurance that he would have almost complete creative control over the production.⁸³

Later, of course, Salieri grew to become a commanding presence in the musical world. He rose to the distinguished post of *Kapellmeister* in Vienna and was the director of the Italian opera there. He was highly sought after as a teacher into his later years (numbering the young Franz Schubert among his students) and was a titan of operatic composition until his music fell out of favor in the mid-nineteenth century. Is it cynical to insist that Beaumarchais influenced Salieri's composing with his dramatic sense? Personal accounts of the Italian-born composer all point to his charming, warm personality and friendly disposition. His first biographer, Ignaz Franz von Mosel, suggested that Salieri's ". . . kindness, jolly humor, and cheerful wit (which was never offensive) made him most pleasant company in society."⁸⁴ The Irish tenor Michael Kelly agreed, saying that Salieri ". . . would make a joke of anything, for he was a very pleasant man, and much esteemed in Vienna."⁸⁵ Add to this Salieri's conspicuous silence in regard to other composers and music of the time, and one can deduce that Salieri was both a kind man and adept at keeping his mouth shut when it might benefit him.

In the case of his partnership with Beaumarchais, Salieri likely opted to go along with his librettist for both personal and political reasons. Perhaps he saw the genius of what Beaumarchais set out to accomplish and wished not spoil it. The French public could be fickle, and Salieri had already encountered failure with his previous opera *Les Horaces*. Besides, Salieri would get a chance to make his own mark on the work later, when he produced an Italian

⁸³ Braunbehrens, *Maligned Master*, 135.

⁸⁴ Rice, 28.

⁸⁵ Michael Kelly, *Reminiscences* (London: Henry Colburn, 1826), 101.

modification of *Tarare* called *Axur, re d'Ormus* for the Viennese court with the help of librettist Lorenzo da Ponte.⁸⁶

The result of Beaumarchais and Salieri's partnership was an opera that was heavily politicized, scandalous, prone to censorship, and wildly popular. Beaumarchais foresaw the potential for trouble with such a politically scandalous opera, and knew that he could win the hearts of opera-goers by retaining a variety of beloved formulas and tropes that were proving successful in contemporary Paris. He would cloak his political message in a seemingly innocuous production that would bring in as many listeners as possible.

The Parisian environment was not wholly inhospitable to musical progress. Composers enjoyed relative freedom at the *Opéra Comique*, in which "theatrical and musical experiment flourished fairly freely," as Alexander Ringer put it.⁸⁷ Perhaps for this reason, Beaumarchais chose to include certain aspects common for the *Opéra Comique* into *Tarare*, while maintaining certain conventions of the Paris Opera.⁸⁸ By including so much variety into the production, the likelihood was increased that *Tarare* could slip its political agenda past the censors.

However, by the time *Tarare* was submitted for review in 1786, censorship was far less threatening—since the height of absolutism under Louis XIV, France had seen a marked decline in government efficiency with each successive heir to the throne.⁸⁹ Gone were the days of Lully's political dominance in centralized opera productions, and though the Paris Opera suffered some level of stagnation (productions by Lully and Rameau were remounted every season), more daring subject material was also appearing each year. The *Guerre de Bouffons*

⁸⁶ For additional information on this Italian version of *Tarare*, see the short subchapter at the end of this chapter.

⁸⁷ Alexander Ringer, *The Early Romantic Era Between Revolutions: 1789 and 1848* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1990), 50.

⁸⁸ Consider Chapter 2 of this work, and the differences between the Paris Opera and the *Opéra Comique*. Further mention of what made *Tarare* indicative of the norms of both institutions will be made later in this chapter.

⁸⁹ Doyle, *Origins*, 53-54.

and the lesser rivalry between Gluckists and Piccinists demonstrated that French tastes extended well beyond the narrowly national. Passion and fickleness among the operagoing public only fueled Parisian interest in new and innovative dramatic music, even if that “innovation” was a reimagining and amalgamation of existing concepts.

To feed this growing interest in operatic novelty, Beaumarchais chose to use a new and popular trope from the *Opéra Comique*,⁹⁰ the rescue opera. Originally a French creation, the most famous examples include German works such as Mozart’s *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* and Beethoven’s *Fidelio*. They were most certainly inspired by early examples of the genre in France such as Pierre-Alexandre Monsigny’s *Le roi et le fermier* and *Le déserteur* in the 1760s, and later by more popular works such as *Richard Coeur-de-Lion* by Grétry, which premiered in the 1780s. The genre further developed to include the emerging French fascination with exotic, Eastern cultures, especially after the success of Cherubini’s *Lodoïska*, which was set in . . . Poland.⁹¹

The rescue opera genre was desirable aesthetically and politically. The unstable political climate in France fostered a public that welcomed a change from the same tired plotlines celebrating gods and heroes; the larger-than-life protagonists from most *tragédies lyriques* were merely symbols of the royalty, which felt like a mockery in the degenerating political climate and growing dissatisfaction with the nobility and monarchy. Rescue opera, though, focused on the plight of individuals against a tyrannical government. The triumph of realistic heroes, rather than mythological ones, was a new direction for opera: real people were capable of great deeds.

Beaumarchais needed a commoner as his protagonist, so the rescue opera was a natural choice. Moreover, the development of setting such operas in foreign locations would well suit

⁹⁰ Bokina, *Opera and Politics*, 66.

⁹¹ For further information on these works, including plot, relevance, and political implications, see Chapter 2.

Beaumarchais' plans to politicize *Tarare*. In order to evade the overworked censors, he used a strategy similar to the earlier one of setting his *Figaro* trilogy in Spain. Despite its close geographic proximity, culturally Spain was sufficiently far removed from France that *Figaro*'s biting criticism of privilege in the nobility could escape government scrutiny. This cloak of exoticism had succeeded once, and would again serve to get his production staged.

In *Tarare*, Beaumarchais chose to employ an eastern location, as was favored by later rescue operas. He set the story in the kingdom of Hormuz, an actual empire that encompassed what are now parts of Saudi Arabia and Iran. The idea was both to capitalize on French fascination with "oriental" cultures, while also creating a diversion to criticize the corruption of religion and government, a smoke-and-mirrors tactic that would help to get the work past the censors. Eastern cultures, though viewed relatively favorably and with more curiosity than animosity, were still perceived by the French to be "savage" and backwards. They did not share the historically informed anxieties held by the Viennese concerning Turkish invaders, and their geographic distance from the middle east meant that they had little actual experience with these cultures, at least since the Crusades. Because of this, *Tarare* could portray ineffective leadership with the ravings of a barbarous Turkish king, and religious meddling by presenting a religion that had little connection to European Christianity.

In some of the more famous rescue operas, exotic, brutal villains would abscond with European women whose European lovers would come to their rescue; such stories would illustrate the power of love and the virtue of Western nobility over perceived Eastern savagery. In *Tarare*, the villain, hero, and damsel-in-distress are all from the East, creating a very different set of circumstances. Indeed, this type of characterization did have precedent, such as in Grétry's oriental opera *Zémire et Azor* (1771), which included almost exclusively characters of

Eastern descent. In *Tarare*, Beaumarchais was trying to use their non-western backgrounds as a means of furthering the idea of basic equality among all people. He did not want the audience to view the European characters as better or more noble than the oriental ones, which would spoil the perfect virtue of Tarare and his lover Astasie. Interestingly, the only characters of European origin, the Italian eunuch Calpigi and his long-suffering wife Spinette (their curious marriage was the product of an arrangement by their oblivious Turkish captors), function primarily as comic relief (though they are major supporting characters and appear frequently throughout the opera).

Despite interpolating elements from the *opéra comique*, Beaumarchais structured *Tarare* more or less like the long-form operas popularized by Lully and Rameau known as *tragédies-lyriques*, which had originated more than a century previous. In this genre there are five acts—sometimes preceded by an allegorical prologue—with a ballet serving as the third act. In the earlier works of Lully that developed the prologue concept, the allegory—which remained throughout the composer’s life—was designed to glorify the king. An example: in Lully’s masterpiece *Armide* the prologue begins with an orchestral *ouverture* that suggests the entrance of someone important—the king, as it functions to emphasize the importance of his arrival.⁹²

The *ouverture* opens with drums, followed by an orchestral march in the French overture style, complete with stately dotted rhythms and pompous melodic contours. This is contrasted with a quicker, *marcato* B section, often contrapuntal, that communicates a sense of royal vivacity and energy. The music returns again to the dotted rhythms of the A section, as though

⁹² Mary D. Sheriff, *Enchanted Islands: Picturing the Allure of Conquest in Eighteenth-Century France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 141.

According to Sheriff, even the staging of the prologue scene following the overture was a dedication to the king. It serves to glorify both Renaud and the king for the virtues of Glory and Wisdom, and in the king’s case the conversation between these personified virtues references specific acts that the king had done.

to remind the listener that above all else, the royalty is graceful, majestic, and stately. This formulaic approach lived on into compositions of the latter eighteenth century, but generally lost the practical application of being entrance music for a royal personage.

Once the players enter, the allegory comes into focus. In the case of Lully's *Armide*, the players in the prologue are Glory and Wisdom, virtues that might describe—truthfully or not—a monarch. For the duration of the short prologue, they and a choir of singers declaim the praises of an unnamed hero. The two virtues fawn over him and his exemplifications of their namesake virtues, and the chorus also gives voice to the adoration of the magnificent individual. It is reasonable to assume that the hero being described is Reynaud, the crusader who falls under *Armide's* spell in the story. However, by cleverly avoiding an identification of this mythical hero until the final few lines of the scene, the audience and royal consort might believe that all of this praise and adoration is for the glorious, wise king. Even after the hero is named, the true purpose of the prologue has been fulfilled: the king has been glorified.

At the time of Louis XIV, opera and music in general were tied much more strongly to the crown and the court, and Lully was wise not only to remain in the king's good graces, but also to use his position as a means of exerting the king's power. However, this sort of mythological propaganda through art was not limited to music. Paintings of the Sun King were produced constantly in an effort to propagate Louis XIV's presence throughout the kingdom. In many cases, these portraits depicted the monarch as a God-King, using mythological imagery to impart a divine aura upon Louis.⁹³

In *Tarare*, Beaumarchais' prologue was also designed as political propaganda. However, rather than praising a monarch, it was conceived to impart a pro-Republican "grand

⁹³ Emmet Kennedy, *A Cultural History of the French Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 154.

philosophical idea” that would permeate the plot of the opera. The divine God-King was replaced by deities that represent human nature, reason, fate, and equality. By superficially following the convention, he could subvert it politically: a blatant use of art to illumine and glorify the monarchy became a glorification of the common man. The very beginning of the opera would therefore challenge the establishment by evoking Enlightenment ideas and political insurgency. Furthermore, it would do so by appropriating and inverting an operatic construct that was intended to do the opposite.

Not all the politicization of *Tarare* was veiled in allegory. In fact, the libretto is sometimes very straightforward in its political stance. Without the option of actual spoken dialogue (something limited to works produced at the *Opéra-Comique*), Beaumarchais instead went to great pains to ensure that the text could be understood at all times. In fact, he went as far as to decide that, even if there were no music present, the opera could still be declaimed like a play.⁹⁴ By following the lead of such musical visionaries as Rousseau, who used his *intermède*, *Le Devin du Village*, to illustrate opera’s ability to move an audience,⁹⁵ Beaumarchais took the French declamatory style to the extreme in order to achieve a new type of storytelling in opera.⁹⁶ In his attempt to send a very clear philosophical message, he crafted the delivery of *Tarare*’s story in a way that would be innovative but also familiar to French audiences.

But Beaumarchais was not breaking new ground in having music serve text. Like many aspects of the production, he was merely borrowing recent ideas that had been employed by composers and accepted by French audiences. The dedication of Gluck’s opera *Alceste* is one of

⁹⁴ Michael Fend, “Romantic Empowerment at the Paris Opera in the 1770s and 1780s,” *Music and Letters* 94/2 (May 2013), 27.

⁹⁵ Weiss, *Opera*, 103.

⁹⁶ Alexander Wheelock Thayer, *Salieri, Rival of Mozart*, edit. Theodore Albrecht (Kansas City, MO: The Lowell Press, 1989), 103-104.

the most famous documents concerning Viennese reform opera. In it, Gluck's librettist Calzabigi addresses melismatic writing in music by suggesting that "I thought I would restrict the music to its true function, serving the poetry...."⁹⁷ In a previous letter, written in 1767 to Count Wenzel Anton von Kaunitz, the director of theatres in Vienna, Calzabigi also insisted that his plots "are simply not romanticized," furthering his assertion that the music should serve the text.⁹⁸ Clarity, therefore, was of the utmost importance to these early reformers. Beaumarchais agreed, but also set forth a political agenda not present in the operas of his predecessors.

Tarare could capitalize on the ongoing arguments concerning the comparison of French and Italian opera, striking a declamatory French stance, but Beaumarchais' spiritual predecessors were other men of letters who dabbled in music: Rousseau and Frédéric-Melchior Grimm (1723–1807). These older statesmen argued passionately against French style, essentially attacking the French establishment.⁹⁹ After all, the arts were an institution of the government.

Beaumarchais, in contrast, found his voice by slyly inserting political views in *Tarare* itself. He avoided much of the distracting outrage that Rousseau and company incited by actually embracing many aspects of French style and by paying tribute to the French language. While Rousseau insisted that the French language was incapable of being adequately set to music,¹⁰⁰ Beaumarchais guided Salieri in proving just the opposite. By avoiding too much extraneous musical content, and by focusing on the accurate delivery of the French language, *Tarare* actually gave the impression of being very pro-French. Composer and librettist thus

⁹⁷ Weiss, 119.

⁹⁸ Weiss, 117,118.

⁹⁹ Weiss, 107.

¹⁰⁰ Weiss, 107. The fact that he wrote French opera notwithstanding, Rousseau had plenty to say about the superiority of the Italian language for song. For more information, read his *Lettre sur la musique française*.

found a way to be both pro-French and anti-monarchist, an approach that would see plenty of growth in the revolutionary years to come.

Plot and Analysis

*Mortel, qui que tu sois, Prince, Brame ou soldat, Homme! Ta grandeur sur la terre n'appartient point à ton état; elle est toute à ton caractère.*¹⁰¹

At first glance, the plot of *Tarare* looks like one of many dozens of the same genre. It shares much with the popular “abduction opera” as set in exotic Asia: rescue of a kidnapped woman, the exotic harem scene, a cruel but ridiculous dictator, and finally a reunion. But Beaumarchais used the abduction format as a kind of camouflage, rather than as a means to its own formal and comedic end. Claiming to have chosen Turkey as a setting because of its dramatic possibilities and perceived “violent social conflict,” Beaumarchais actually chose the location because he wanted to represent a declining society. He needed a veil of exoticism to comment on the inadequacy of an outdated system and its bureaucracy, and to show the shortcomings of a government in which religious leaders could exert control.¹⁰² These are dangerous ideas to associate with one’s government, and Beaumarchais had already learned the consequences of upsetting people in power; he honored those past experiences by writing *Tarare* to make his grandest political ideas known.

The prologue to *Tarare*, a fantastical and allegorical scene wherein the Geniuses of Fire and Nature¹⁰³ are deciding the fates of the main characters before they are born, intones what

¹⁰¹ The opera *Tarare*’s “grand philosophical idea”: “Mortal, whoever you are, prince, brahmin, soldier, MAN! Your greatness on earth is not based on your state; it is entirely of your character.”

¹⁰² Thomas Betzwieser, “Exoticism and Politics: Beaumarchais’ and Salieri’s *Le Couronnement de Tarare* (1790),” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 6/2 (July 1994), 91.

¹⁰³ The French word *génie* translates as “genius,” and all translations of the opera refer to the character as such. One may note the similarity to the Anglicized version of the Arabic word Jinn, which is also genie. However, the

Michael Fend called the “grand philosophical idea” that drives the opera: all men are born equal, and it is because of society that they become unequal.¹⁰⁴ This is Rousseau’s exact philosophy, and thus highlights a connection between the progressive nature of *Tarare* and the Enlightenment philosophies of the French *philosophes*.

The setting is on another plane of existence, where the main characters exist as spirits or “shades.” As the opera opens, the chaotic, rumbling, and melismatic overture suggests an ethereal storm. Soft C major chords, indicating the purity and simplicity of primordial origins are almost immediately interrupted by the strings playing sweeping melismatic patterns that evoke the wind. These wind motifs in the strings seem to transform the peaceful, sustained chords below them, which begin playing tremolo patterns. (See example 1) The tremolos and melismas move chromatically away from C major, eventually landing on the dominant G major. This arrival is short-lived, however, as more chromatic movement features lowered seconds, which provide a stereotypical “exotic” sonority, until finally the key changes to C minor. (See example 2)

comparison is circular, as the word *genie* in English came about as a borrowing of the French term *génie*, which is how the spirits were called in an eighteenth-century translation from a French edition of *Thousand and One Nights*.

¹⁰⁴ Fend, “Romantic Empowerment,” 28.

Allegro La Nuit

Flûtes

Hautbois

Bassons

Cors en mi \flat

Trompettes en ut

Trombones

Timbales

Violons

Altos

Basses

Allegro

Ex. 1
Antonio Salieri, *Tarare*, Prologue, Overture.

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Pantomime les Vents

The musical score is arranged in two systems. The first system includes the woodwind section (Flute, Horns, Bassoon, Cor, Trumpet, Trombone, Timpani) and the string section (Violins, Alto, Bass). The second system includes the Violins, Alto, and Bass. The score is for measures 22-29. The woodwinds and strings play a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, while the piano plays a more complex melodic line. Dynamics range from piano (p) to fortissimo (ff).

Ex. 2
Salieri, *Tarare*, Prologue, Overture.

This new key affords opportunities for ever more interesting forays from the tonic and eventually results in a sustained relocation to the relative major of E-flat. Even the new key of

E-flat is unsettled, however, as stray accidentals and odd harmonies flit in and out of the musical structure. This departure from the calm of C major into the stormy chaos of related keys seems to prefigure Haydn's treatment of the Chaos that preceded God's work in *Creation*, written ten years later. Indeed, Salieri employs plenty of rumbling harmonies and striking accidentals to portray this arcane and elemental chaos.¹⁰⁵ However, unlike Haydn, Salieri does not resolve his much stormier chaos with the light of God, all jubilant major chords and choirs of angels. In fact, the entrance of the two deities, the Geniuses in this case, provides little resolution to the music. The intonation of Nature's opening line instead only adds to the maelstrom; only gradually will the storm subside as the choir of the winds bends to the will of Nature.

After a brief conversation between the Genius of Nature and her companion the Genius of Fire, the mysterious deities summon and interact with some of the characters, divulging who they will become in life. Eventually, they come across the shades of Tarare and Atar and conclude that one of them shall be a king and the other a soldier. Up to this point, the orchestration has been vibrant and brimming with a variety of figures, with silence beneath sections of stricter *récitatif* marked by occasional chords to maintain the harmonic scaffolding. Only under particularly notable lines of text has Salieri composed a preceding fanfare motive and then set the strings to accompany the *récitatif* with sustained chords. For instance, this setting is used as Fire notes the import of their decision. First, he questions the shades of Tarare and Atar, asking "One of you is king, who wants it?"¹⁰⁶ (See example 3) When both balk at the thought, Nature suggests that in life their preferences would shift. Fire, again over sustained strings,

¹⁰⁵ A major difference, of course, is that Salieri's chromaticism is not only used to evoke the chaos of a storm, but also to indicate the exotic setting.

¹⁰⁶ Antonio Salieri, *Tarare* (New York: Broude Brothers Limited, 1971), 39. This line of text is also preceded by a short dotted rhythm fanfare, similar to Nature's line concerning equality.

wisely notes, “I move my eye between them, seeking a well-suited king... but I fear my own judgment! Nature, a moment’s error can result in a century of misery.”¹⁰⁷

The image shows a musical score for the Prologue, Scene 3 of Salieri's opera *Tarare*. The score is in French and features vocal parts for Vn. (Violon), Alt. (Alto), and B. (Bass). The tempo is marked "Andante Maestoso". The lyrics are: "LE GÉNIE dat. Permettez ; ce grand choix les touchera peut-être. J'en doute. LA NATURE L'OMBRE DE TARARE Roi ? Je ne m'y L'OMBRE D'ARAR Ensemble et sans couleur Un de vous deux est roi : lequel veut l'être ? Roi ? Je ne m'y".

Ex. 3

Salieri, *Tarare*, Prologue, Scene 3, “J’en doute un de vous deux est Roi.”

After some hesitation, the Genius of Fire ultimately picks Atar to be the future king. Tarare, meanwhile, is destined to become a soldier. This “fate scene” appears to suggest that our roles are, indeed, predestined and that the gods themselves decree who shall rule and who shall bow down. As will become clear, this implication only makes the final scene of the opera even more powerful.

Furthermore, it is a line by the Genius of Nature that indicates the true intentions of the fate scene: “Children, embrace each other. Equal by nature, yet far from it in society.” In

¹⁰⁷ Antonio Salieri, *Tarare* (Paris: Éditions Nicolas Sceaux, 2019), accessed March 20, 2021, https://ks.imslp.info/files/imglnks/usimg/6/63/IMSLP559449-PMLP5350-Salieri_Tarare.pdf, 41.

example 4 Nature's proclamation begins with the familiar fanfare, this time featuring double-dotted rhythms over a tremolo pattern. This indicates the importance of the upcoming line, perhaps both to the shades and to the Parisian audience. Further down, when Nature begins the line concerning equality, there is an indication in the orchestra to reduce the dynamic to piano. To be sure, these markings are strategically placed throughout the entire score, but noticing particularly where they are placed gives insight into the moments that are of the most dramatic importance.

A key aspect here is that the importance of the prologue relies upon the expectations of the audience. As mentioned previously, allegorical prologues were conventional in French opera and were traditionally written to herald and glorify the entrance of the king. Lully perfected this in his *tragédies lyriques*, and viewers had come to expect this sort of royal propaganda to precede his productions.¹⁰⁸ In *Tarare*, however, the opera's namesake is revealed to be a common soldier. This is a strange amalgamation of a *tragédie lyrique* and something one might see at the *Opéra Comique*. He borrows the form and layout of the former, but rather than mythological heroes and setting he adopts the story of a common man, something generally associated with *opéra comique* (albeit with the mythological overlay). Beaumarchais was turning the expectation of the audience on its head by taking idioms from many genres and drastically changing their functions. Moreover, he was taking politicized aspects of the opera and repurposing them.

¹⁰⁸ Unlike much music in Europe at this time, Lully's operas endured in Paris long after his death. Therefore, the specifics of his works were still fresh in the minds of Parisian audiences.

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103

0-13 La Nature : Enfants, embrassez-vous, égaux par la nature

Allegro

Hautbois

Trompettes en Ut

Bassons

Violons

Altos

LA NATURE

Basses

Enfants, embras-sez - vous :

6

Htb.

Tr.

Bn.

Vn.

Alt.

NAT.

B.

é-gaux par la na-tu - re,

Ex. 4

Salieri, *Tarare*, Prologue, Scene 3, "Enfants embrassez-vous."

At the conclusion of the prologue, the fantasy realm disperses as a new overture plays and the clouds part to reveal a magnificent, exotic room in Atar's palace. Salieri alluded to a Turkish setting with the addition of cymbal and bass drum to this second overture, instruments widely considered to be of Turkish style, intensified by the unexpected addition to the D major overture of the raised fourth scale degree, G \sharp . As if the tritone were not enough, he created some truly clashing sonorities by harmonizing it as the root of a diminished seventh chord, thus grating the F \flat of the chord against the F \sharp of the melodic line.¹⁰⁹ (See example 5)

1-1 Ouverture

Allegro Presto

Flûtes

Hautbois et Clarinettes

Bassons

Cors et Trompettes in D

Timballes in D

Tambour et Cymballes in D

Violons

Altos

Basses

Ex. 5
Salieri, *Tarare*, Act I, Overture, opening measures.

¹⁰⁹ Rice, *Antonio Salieri*, 393.

In Atar's conversation with Calpigi, much is revealed about his character. In the score at Atar's entrance is marked the words *entrant violemment*, and his opening line *Laisse-moi*, Calpigi is indeed violent, as melodic leaps were conventional indicators of rage. His leaping, rising lines contrast with Calpigi's mollifying responses, more stepwise and often disarmingly descending. (See example 6) Atar's villainous characterization is important, as the audience must sympathize fully with Tarare and feel very little empathy for the king of Ormuz.

The image displays a musical score for a scene from Salieri's *Tarare*. The score is divided into two systems. The first system features vocal lines for ATAR and CALPIGI, and instrumental parts for Violons (Violins), Altos, and Basses. ATAR's entrance is marked "ATAR en entrant violemment". The lyrics for ATAR are "parlé Laisse-moi, Cal-pi - gi ! La fu-reur vous é - ga-re. Mon maître ! ô roi d'Or-". The second system features vocal lines for ATAR and CALPIGI, and instrumental parts for Vn. (Violin), Alt, and B. (Bass). The lyrics for ATAR are "mus ! grâce, grâce à Ta - ra-re ! Ta-ra-re ! en-cor Ta-".

Ex. 6
Salieri, *Tarare*, Act I, Scene 1, "Laisse-moi, Calpigi!"

It becomes apparent that Atar's rage is directed against none other than Tarare. Calpigi, an enslaved Italian castrato who is now a jester of sorts, pleads with Atar to cease his incessant

outbursts. As Atar complains to Calpigi, he bemoans promoting Tarare for his bravery and chides Calpigi for recounting the story wherein Tarare saved the eunuch's life. He curses Tarare for being beloved by the same people that despise Atar himself, and suggests that Tarare's worst transgression is his monogamous relationship with Astasie (for in a kingdom where men are free to ravish women as they please, how could Tarare find contentment with just one?).

In fact, as Atar details his plan to apprehend Tarare and ravish his wife, Astasie, the style of singing switches from *récitatif* to arioso. Atar mockingly assumes a more melodic approach and a key is established. (See example 7) This pivot in singing style and moment of excitement for Atar acts as a further indictment of his character.

The image displays two systems of a musical score. The first system, starting at measure 71, features a Bass (B.) vocal line with lyrics: "duit. Il ra-vi-ra sur-tout son As-ta-si-e, il ra-vi-". The second system, starting at measure 75, continues the Bass vocal line with lyrics: "ra sur-tout son As-ta-si-e, ce mi-ra-cle, dit-on, des beau-tés de l'A-". The instrumental parts include Violin (Vn.) and Alto (Alt.) staves, with dynamics like *f* and *p* indicated.

Ex. 7

Salieri, *Tarare*, Act I, Scene 1, “Il ravira surtout son Astasie...”

After, still reeking of jealousy, Atar is infuriated by a prophecy that declares Tarare to be the “avenger of the empire.” Both weak-willed and little more than a puppet to the religious

leaders of Hormuz, Atar therefore puts great stock in the prophetic words. With both the reluctant Calpigi and the vizier Altamort, Atar arranges to have Astasie abducted so that he can force marriage upon her.

As the story progresses, the audience is introduced to the eponymous character Tarare, who is a ranking soldier, beloved by his men. Tarare embodies all of the virtues traditionally associated with a hero. He is courageous and generous, and he shares a pure and virtuous love with his wife Astasie. Clearly, Tarare is designed to be the perfect foil to the villainous Atar. Despite the partial anagram in their names (which may well have been another nod to the idea of equality¹¹⁰), Atar (nothing at all like Tarare) is violent, angry, imprudent, cowardly, and greedy. The development of his character is specifically designed to show the worst of political corruption. It is worth remembering that the current French King, Louis XVI, was nothing like Atar in temperament; he lacked the commanding presence and energy of his ancestor the Sun King, the political acumen of even Louis XV, and all accounts of his demeanor even at the direst of times suggest stoicism far removed from Atar's ragings. To make such comparisons between a king who commits suicide and the ruler of one's own nation would be a dangerous undertaking in any case; here the dissimilarity helped distance them further.

All the while, the chief eunuch Calpigi is scheming to foil Atar's plans and aid Tarare while his wife Spinette—also an enslaved European—involves herself in the plot as well. With Calpigi's help Tarare disguises himself as a mute slave after infiltrating Atar's harem. Astasie, having rejected Atar's advances, has been sent to the dungeon. Enraged by Astasie's rejection, Atar orders Calpigi to throw Astasie to the mute slave (Tarare), though this happy accident is

¹¹⁰ Beaumarchais likely borrowed this idea from Metastasio's occasional employment of partial anagrams for his character's names. In the Italian version, *Axur, re d'Ormus*, Da Ponte opted to rename Atar to Axur, and gave Tarare the old villain's name of Atar. This may have been some form of appeasement to the Viennese censors.

further complicated when Astasie asks the oblivious Spinette to take her place. The amorous, underappreciated Spinette instantly falls in love with the disguised Tarare, only to unmask him and end the game. Soldiers come to arrest Tarare and Astasie on Atar's orders, determined to carry out their duty despite their respect for Tarare. As Tarare is conducted away for his execution, Atar's majordomo warns Calpigi in an aside that he, too, may be destined for execution.

Calpigi concludes the fourth act with an Italian-style rage aria, one of a handful of numbers inspired by Italian music.¹¹¹ Fed up with the king's unquenchable thirst for death and fearing his own future, Calpigi suggests the fate that will befall Atar at the conclusion of the opera. The aria opens with a short *récitatif* in which Calpigi promises "Atar ... those storms that your hate ignited will consume you!" The use of severe dotted rhythms and tremolos provide an atmosphere of discontent, complementing Calpigi's leaping vocal line. In the aria, Salieri takes advantage of the high tessitura of the French *haute contre* voice part, writing many leaps up to Bb⁴, some of which are sustained. (See Example 8) This stratospheric range evokes the frustration and anger that Calpigi feels for his king. Throughout, offbeat sixteenths, tremolos, and sweeping string flourishes all contribute to the Calpigi's raging soliloquy:

*L'abus du pouvoir suprême finit toujours par l'ébranler
Le méchant qui fait tout trembler est bien prêt de trembler lui même
Cette nuit despote inhumain Tarare excitait la furie
Ta haine menaçait sa vie quand la tienne était dans sa main.*

The abuse of supreme power always ends with destruction,
The villain who makes others tremble will himself tremble likewise,
Tonight, this inhuman tyrant is consumed with rage at Tarare,
Your hate threatens his life, when your own was once in his hand.

¹¹¹ Having been an Italian castrato before his enslavement, it is fitting that Calpigi would sing a da capo rage aria. In the act 3 *divertissement*, he also sings a strophic song that Salieri referred to as a *barcarolle*.

538 TARARE

62

Htb.

Cor.

Bn.

Vn.

Alt.

CAL.

B.

bler lut- mê - - me.

Ex. 8

Salieri, *Tarare*, Act IV, Scene 8, “trembler lui même.”

The fact that the eunuch is one of the few European characters in the show makes the scene more politically charged, and it also provides a unique counterpoint to Tarare’s quiet acceptance of his king’s decree. To have any character, let alone the representative of Europe, decry a king in such a way and essentially assure his demise was one of the more politically dangerous scenes in *Tarare*. Da Ponte felt the same way in his rewriting of the story for *Axur, re d’Ormus* and actually omitted the aria, replacing it with a buffa-style finale.¹¹²

Act five builds momentum and eventually reveals Tarare and Astasie who, ever virtuous, face death emboldened by their love. As Atar gives the final command to sentence them both, there is a commotion from offstage. Calpigi arrives with a rebel army to oust Atar and proclaim Tarare the new emperor, thereby fulfilling the prophecy that Atar so feared. The soldiers, afraid

¹¹² More information on *Axur, Re d’Ormus* can be found in the short subchapter at the end of this chapter.

that Tarare has already been executed, go as far as to make threats against Atar's life, a scene that would foreshadow the many violent altercations between Louis XVI and rebelling French commoners in the years to come. Ever virtuous, Tarare rejects the crowd, admonishing their threats against the king. Even now, he maintains his pledge to serve Atar despite the monarch's corruption and his own impending execution. Unable to grasp the immensity of Tarare's virtue and humility and realizing that he will never be so loved by his people, Atar, in despair, rejects his crown and kills himself, willing the burden upon Tarare.

Tarare refuses the crown. He wishes not to elevate beyond the state that fate granted him, and asks only to humbly grow old with his love, Astasie. Undaunted, the crowds press on, and the former king's majordomo comes forward with the imperial diadem. Moved by the insistence of his people, Tarare finally and reluctantly assumes the mantle of king. Not only has Hormuz's new ruler been elected by popular vote, but he refused the title until finally persuaded by the passionate pleas of his people. Tarare exhibits here some unique characteristics for a king. Not in the history of the French monarchy had a king been chosen by the people, and likewise none had attempted to refuse their post in such a public fashion.

Suddenly, the supernatural Geniuses of Fire and Nature return. This final scene is in C major, hearkening back to the key of the prologue, wherein the Geniuses first imparted life and character to the others. This time, to maintain as much clarity as possible, they engage in a style of singing similar to a reciting tone. In unison, Fire and Nature slowly and methodically sing Beaumarchais's "grand philosophical idea."

After this, the opera ends in a short orchestral flourish and a convincing C major unison. The use of the key of C may indicate the purity and simplicity of the final message, its spiritual decisiveness, or even the seriousness of the return of the deities. What is clear is it is a return to

the opening key of the opera, a return to the peace that preceded the storm and the events that led up to Atar's suicide and Tarare's ascent to the throne. In any case, the unison recitation by Nature and Fire ensures that the audience will comprehend every word of Beaumarchais' final statement on the value of man despite his station in life, his "grand philosophical idea." (See examples 9a and 9b)

ACTE CINQUIÈME, SCÈNE DERNIÈRE.

615

Lent et Majestueux

Fl.

Htb.
Cl.

Cor.
Cors en Ut

Tr.

Bn.

Tmb.

Lent et Majestueux

Vn.

Alt.

LA NATURE
Mor-tel, qui que tu sois, prin - ce, brame ou soldat ; homme ! ta gran-

LE GÉNIE DU FEU
Mor-tel, qui que tu sois, prin - ce, brame ou soldat ; homme ! ta gran-

Lent et Majestueux

B.

Ex. 9a

Salieri, *Tarare*, Act V, Scene 10, "Mortels, qui que tu sois"

616 *TARARE*

25

Fl.

Hrb.
Cl.

Cor.

Tr.

Bn.

Tmb.

Vn.

Alt.

B.

deur sur la terre, n'appartient point à ton é-tat; elle est toute à ton caract

deur sur la terre, n'appartient point à ton é-tat; elle est toute à ton caract

Ex. 9b

Salieri, *Tarare*, Act V, Scene 10, “sur la terre, n’appartient point”

Beaumarchais was trying to reform opera the same way he had revolutionized theatre with the character of Figaro: by introducing characters with whom the public could identify.

Even with its fantastical opening and the oriental setting, *Tarare* is essentially a realist opera. The phantasmagorical served to get it past the censors. Because Beaumarchais avoided the “number opera” method of organization, instead seamlessly moving from scene to scene as in a play, the dramatic format seems more plausible than that of most operas. The characters are not two-dimensional buffa stereotypes, nor are they heroic, mythological reform opera characters: they are familiar personalities experiencing relatable problems—if residing in an exotic land—and those problems are directly connected to the political climate in France, even in all of Europe.

Beaumarchais drew upon his own experience with his works. Much like Figaro met his corrupt “betters” with cleverness, *Tarare* matched his through a virtuous character and unwavering loyalty to his country. Beaumarchais spent his entire life reaching beyond his beginnings as a watchmaker’s son by engaging with those above his station in clever, virtuous, and meaningful ways. He proved his worth by his wit, his inventiveness, his ingenuity, and his belief in country and patriotism. If anyone in France lived by the notion that “the greatness of man lies ... in his character,” it was Beaumarchais.

The success and popularity of *Tarare* is discussed in greater detail in Chapter V, but it will suffice here to say that the opera did quite well, from a commercial perspective. This far-reaching appeal throughout Paris helped to foment so much anger and frustration among the commoners and middle-class artisans into action. Anti-royalist thinkers such as Diderot and Rousseau had laid the philosophical foundation for the message of *Tarare*, but for many unable to read or comprehend such learned writings, these ideas were being presented for the first time. To be told—or in this case shown—that kings are no better (and can even be worse) than the common person lent some merit to the growing dissatisfaction with Louis XVI’s government.

Amazed by the idea of a democratically elected leader, many of the same people who watched *Tarare*, perhaps multiple times, no doubt served on the Third Estate or involved themselves in the many governments that would rise and fall over the coming years. Perhaps most importantly, those who were emboldened by the cries for king Atar's blood surely howled similarly while storming the Bastille just two years later.

On the Subject of *Axur, Re d'Ormus*

... the success of *Tarare* was felt as strongly in Vienna as in Paris.¹¹³

—John A. Rice

There are two good reasons to bring up the later reimagining of this opera. The first is that *Axur, Re d'Ormus* was wildly popular throughout Europe, which was not true of the original.¹¹⁴ The second is to identify some of the political elements that did not remain in Da Ponte's revisions. The librettist had reduced the amount of politically dangerous material when he set Beaumarchais' *Le Mariage de Figaro* as well, and for good reason. Unlike France, Vienna maintained a level of structure and control that more closely resembled France under Louis XIV.

Much can be inferred from Salieri and Da Ponte's reworking of *Tarare* as commissioned by Joseph II. For the most part, changes were made to gain acceptance from Viennese audiences, which were more familiar with the Italian opera buffa style. The two biggest changes were omissions of the most uniquely French elements of *Tarare*, the prologue and the divertissement ballet in act 3. However, the end of *Tarare*—comprising the soldiers' threats to

¹¹³ Rice, *Antonio Salieri*, 385.

¹¹⁴ See Chapter 5 for more information on the reception and success of *Tarare* in Paris.

kill the king, the suicide of Atar, and subsequent the ascension of Tarare to the throne—was also vastly changed. In *Axur*,¹¹⁵ the soldiers make no threats against the king's life, and the king willingly abdicates the throne before stabbing himself. Though a small gesture, the fact that the character of Axur is no longer king before he dies sends a much different statement than the scene in *Tarare*. These elements were politically subversive, and in the more constrained court of Vienna would never have gotten past the censors.

As I mentioned in a previous footnote, Calpigi's act 4 rage aria was also omitted by Da Ponte. In this case, however, the reasoning was both political and structural.¹¹⁶ The notion of a slave berating a king for bad behavior was more than Viennese censors would tolerate, and so to close the scene with a large, buffa-style ensemble was much more fashionable on the Viennese stage.

One of the clumsiest changes to the Vienna version of *Tarare* was the change of its title. By including the name of the king, regardless of his villainous actions, Da Ponte drastically changed the message of the opera. Now, Axur, the king of Hormuz, would achieve some level of sympathy from the audience, a misunderstood monarch upon whom fate thrust a mantle that he simple could not bear. One would as likely mourn the royal Axur's fated death as celebrate the election of a fair and virtuous leader to replace him.

Despite the more far-reaching success of *Axur, re d'Ormus*, the original *Tarare* found popularity only in Paris. The political climate and general popularity of the Paris Opera were both partially responsible for this, but much of the credit can be given to Beaumarchais. In the following chapter, I will discuss his business acumen and ability for marketing, as well as his

¹¹⁵ See footnote 35 for more information on name changes instituted by Da Ponte for his reworking of the libretto.

¹¹⁶ Rice, 417.

personal and political intention for *Tarare*. Additionally, I will discuss the premiere of the opera and how audience reaction created even more anticipation around the production.

CHAPTER V

THE RECEPTION AND SUCCESS OF TARARE

**Beaumarchais as Pamphleteer:
The Marketing of *Tarare***

The name *Tarare* [Nonsense] is a joke, probably ... intended to incite curiosity and increase ticket sales.¹¹⁷

—John A. Rice

Tarare's commercial and popular successes were due in no small part to Beaumarchais's marketing campaign. The playwright spared no expense or endeavor on marketing *Tarare* aggressively and creatively.¹¹⁸ A crucial part of Beaumarchais's plan—and one of the primary reasons it was even possible—was to leverage his existing acclaim. This process was nothing new for him; he always involved himself in the dissemination of pamphlets and articles that varied from political proclamations to advertising ploys. In addition, he built personal influence and fame through his books and plays, which were largely successful because of his innately strategic mind for advertising.¹¹⁹ Even today, of the authors and playwrights living in France during the late-eighteenth century, Beaumarchais is among the most notable and celebrated.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Rice, *Antonio Salieri*, 392.

¹¹⁸ Braunbehrens, *Maligned Master*, 136.

¹¹⁹ Fend, "Romantic Empowerment," 288.

¹²⁰ Unger, *Improbable Patriot*, 79.

Salieri, too, had experienced success in Paris with his first French opera *Les Danaïdes*. As the presumed heir to Gluck, his reputation was built upon the Reform Opera of his predecessor and his position in Joseph II's court as composer and director of the Italian opera. Hence, his name certainly aroused curiosity among Parisian operagoers. Nonetheless, Beaumarchais's tireless marketing work—and the controversial successes of his plays *Le Mariage de Figaro* and *Le Barbier de Seville*—had undoubtedly aroused much of the interest in their collaboration on *Tarare*.

The confluence of these factors also resulted in a certain fascination from the French nobility. Despite—or perhaps because of—the unseemly depiction of the nobility in *Figaro*, even the upper class avidly awaited *Tarare*'s premiere. To sate this curiosity, Beaumarchais permitted a number of high-profile individuals to the final dress rehearsal. Naturally, the circumstances in Act V (Atar's suicide and the pointed insistence that even kings are not above the law) prompted boos from the audience. Nonetheless, the controversy only elevated *Tarare*'s mystique, as Beaumarchais promised revisions.¹²¹ It is unclear if he actually changed a thing, but the added publicity was ultimately positive.

Further controversy embroiled the show before opening night, as the tenor singing the role of Tarare, Étienne Lainez, was also a court singer. A staple at the Opéra, he had premiered many roles and was active for nearly thirty years, but after leaving *Tarare* early in the production due to kidney pain, it was difficult to convince him to come back to rehearsals. He did return, but complained often and tried to quit *Tarare* many times because of his subsequent treatment at court.¹²² As France continued to experience early rumblings of the oncoming Revolution, the lines between reality and fiction became blurred for the king and many courtiers. The

¹²¹ Braunbehrens, 136.

¹²² Fend, 291.

unfortunate association of Lainez, a loyal court performer, with Tarare, a commoner-turned-king, demonstrates how strongly Beaumarchais's rhetoric was felt even before opening night.

The Premiere and its Reception

Les Horaces failed, but the success of *Tarare* was felt as strongly in Vienna as in Paris.¹²³

—John A. Rice

Beaumarchais managed to bring Paris to a near frenzy as the date of the premiere approached.¹²⁴ After building curiosity for the opera for months by hosting open rehearsals for select viewers, producing pamphlets discussing the merits of the show, and leveraging his personal fame, Paris was abuzz with curiosity. In fact, crowds were estimated in the thousands for the opening night of *Tarare*. Soldiers were posted with barriers at the entrance to the theatre in anticipation for the projected numbers, and one journalist recounts that “never before did any of our theaters see such a crowd...”.¹²⁵

Opening night only tells part of a show's story, however. No amount of excited anticipation can promise long-term success for a stage work, and in some cases its inability to live up to high expectations can have the opposite effect. In *Tarare*'s case, the reception of the premiere was a notable start for a work whose success would live up to Beaumarchais's—and Paris's—lofty expectations, resulting in one of the most successful operas in Paris for nearly a decade.¹²⁶

¹²³ Rice, *Antonio Salieri*, 385. *Les Horaces* was Salieri's second French opera, and was received rather less well than his first and third attempts.

¹²⁴ Fend, 289.

¹²⁵ Unger, *Improbable Patriot*, 173.

¹²⁶ Braunbehrens, 148.

Audiences were watching and rewatching *Tarare*. In fact, the show enjoyed a long and successful run, accounting for nearly a quarter of ticket sales at the Paris Opera between its premiere in July of 1787 and February of the following year.¹²⁷ So popular was *Tarare* that Joseph II of Austria commissioned Salieri and the Vienna court librettist Lorenzo Da Ponte to devise an Italian translation, *Axur, re d'Ormus*.¹²⁸ So politically damning was the original text that much of it was changed for the Italian rework, though even this iteration proved to be among Joseph's favorites, and a commercial success across the continent.¹²⁹

As to the question of whether audiences were truly absorbing the story of *Tarare*, one need only look at articles from the time. Though not about *Tarare*, one article in the *Mercure* asserted that audiences at the Paris Opera exuded "An extreme and uninterrupted attentiveness, the strongest emotions visible on every face ... prolonged by enthusiasm one moment and cut short for fear of losing a word or note of music: such were the signs of interest and approval" in reference to an operatic premiere in 1779.¹³⁰ Of course, one need only imagine the events to come in Paris for proof of similar exuberance over *Tarare*'s premiere.

Critics were also writing about the opera. Many of these reviews were dismissive, seeking to avoid the political fallout an endorsement would produce. However, a particularly lengthy article in the *Correspondance littéraire* was fairly neutral in its assessment of *Tarare*. Among other things, it discussed the political implications of *Tarare*, suggesting that Beaumarchais was "speaking truth to power."¹³¹ Another journalist from the same newspaper suggested that the entire country was "distracted" by *Tarare*.¹³² Even later critics and writers

¹²⁷ Fend, 290.

¹²⁸ Thayer, *Salieri*, 111.

¹²⁹ Rice, 417.

¹³⁰ Tarling, *Orientalism*, 59.

¹³¹ Fend, 291.

¹³² François, Furet, *Revolutionary France (1770-1880)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 41.

had a positive view of the opera. According to the noted British music critic Edward Dent, *Tarare* had a pronounced influence on the coming Romantic transition, directly impacting composers such as Weber, Beethoven, and Spontini.¹³³

Beaumarchais: Revolutionary or Opportunist?

Beaumarchais ... was one of the spiritual leaders of the French Revolution...¹³⁴

—Hugo Leichtentritt

Tarare was the creation of an imagination largely free from political, institutional, and generic strictures. Virtually all elements of music theatre had become available for reconfiguration. Beaumarchais's poetic liberty had almost become absolute. He presented a political manifesto disguised as an allegorical opera, because in the *ancien régime* had become an art form capable of evoking a revolutionary utopia for mass audience.¹³⁵

—Michael Fend

Beaumarchais was rather disarming in self-description as a playwright, claiming that his so-called hobby was as innocent as others' "hunting, drinking, or betting" in their spare time.¹³⁶ This tendency towards overt political deflection was likely borne from a strong sense of self-preservation, a side-effect of his common birth. On the other hand, Beaumarchais was involved in politics and intrigue for most of his life, and adroitly managed to keep himself in the Parisian spotlight.¹³⁷ If Beaumarchais truly did not see himself as a political operative, then he was

¹³³ Edward Dent, *The Rise of Romantic Opera*, ed. Winton Dean (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 33-46. Dent's opinion, and those of later historians such as Michael Fend, suggests that Salieri and select contemporaries were composing in a "pre-Romantic" style that helped to usher into or translate between the Classical and Romantic periods. This idea of "shades of grey" between the two musical eras is not a controversial one, but is not always so eloquently argued for.

¹³⁴ Leichtentritt, *Music, History, and Ideas*, n.p.

¹³⁵ Fend, 293.

¹³⁶ Fend, 291.

¹³⁷ Lemaitre, *Beaumarchais*, 48.

deluding himself. In reality, the playwright had learned from every mistake and misdeed, growing in caution and subterfuge as his political aspirations became ever more brazen.

Of Beaumarchais' dramatic writings, *Le Mariage de Figaro* was probably the most successful. Receiving positive reviews throughout the continent despite (or perhaps because of) its apparent anti-aristocratic undertones and politically charged subject matter, Beaumarchais always claimed to be satirizing those who abused their power, not the aristocracy as a whole.¹³⁸ Such diplomatic claims seem disingenuous, but were necessary. Even before *Tarare* he was stymied by censors and was imprisoned for a short while during the fight to have *Figaro* performed.¹³⁹

The play nonetheless enjoyed successful performances throughout Europe, and was all but immortalized in the operatic reimagining by Mozart and Da Ponte. Along with *Tarare*, *Figaro*'s popularity highlighted the growing strength of the lower classes (made all the safer, of course, when the characters are from Spain or "the orient") and the normalizing of the common man triumphing over aristocratic villains. Even so, Beaumarchais's intent does leave questions, as he was a man who benefitted from elevated status while speaking out against the very system that had allowed his social climb.

Musicologist Michael Fend touches on some of the political intrigue of *Tarare*. Though the thesis of the article argues for a new definition of musical Romanticism, he references *Tarare* as the centerpiece for his argument, eloquently making a case for *Tarare*'s political implications in Paris and beyond. As part of his concluding material, he writes:

By means of his dramaturgical conception of *Tarare*, the marketing of his utopia, and the subordination of Salieri's music to the demands of textual comprehension, Beaumarchais staged a revolt against the political status quo in his country. He was the ultimate creator

¹³⁸ Joseph Sungolowsky, *Beaumarchais* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1974), 80-81.

¹³⁹ Sungolowsky, 31.

of an aesthetic reality, which presented the audience with a virtuous, constitutional monarch. In response to existing problems in French government, Beaumarchais took on a more responsible role, namely to imagine a political revolution¹⁴⁰

If Fend's assessment is true, then Beaumarchais's dream of change would inadvertently turn into a nightmare in a relatively short frame of time.

Tarare was certainly ahead of its time, and specific elements of a later style can be ascribed to the opera. As was shown in chapter 4, *Tarare* was intentionally written in a through-composed form, decades before Wagner's operas.¹⁴¹ This came about because of Beaumarchais's insistence that the drama supersede the music, an important facet of his musical revolution as well as his desire to get the text across as clearly as possible.¹⁴² Beaumarchais biographer Joseph Sungolowsky suggests that Gluck passed the commission to his pupil specifically because of this progressive, if not compulsively controlling, idea.¹⁴³ Other accounts play down Gluck's refusal to poor health. Regardless of the reason, the outcome was a good match. Salieri biographer Volkmar Braunbehrens goes as far as referring to Salieri as "the co-author of a *Gesamtkunstwerk*,"¹⁴⁴ a term closely associated with Wagner's operas and indicative of Romanticism.

Looking at Romantic music as more of a celebration of freedom or independence from government, one might say that *Tarare* managed to exude Romantic sentiment earlier than the fully-fledged Romantic music of associates such as Beethoven or Brahms. To say that Romantic music is tied to the empowerment of common people and a move toward equity links it to the

¹⁴⁰ Fend, "Romantic Empowerment," 292.

¹⁴¹ Braunbehrens, *Maligned Master*, 145.

¹⁴² Lemaitre, 296.

¹⁴³ Sungolowsky, 56.

¹⁴⁴ Braunbehrens, 145.

executions of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette,¹⁴⁵ whose deaths were likewise preceded spiritually by Atar's death at the conclusion of *Tarare*. In fact, the violence of Atar's death preceded the violence of the Revolution itself in many regards. Whereas the strengthening of the middle class and the growth of equity among the population was tied to Romanticism, so too was the chaos of the Revolution.

Tarare's appropriation of the popular rescue opera format was nothing revolutionary. However, Beaumarchais used the abduction format as a means of disguising his intentions, rather than as a means to its own formal and comedic end. Claiming to have chosen Turkey as a setting because of its dramatic possibilities and perceived "violent social conflict," it is clear that Beaumarchais actually chose the location because he wanted to represent a declining society. He needed a veil of exoticism to comment on the inadequacy of an outdated system and its bureaucracy, and to show the shortcomings of a government beholden to religious leaders.¹⁴⁶ These are dangerous ideas to associate with one's government, and Beaumarchais had learned the consequences of upsetting people in power; he had learned from past experiences and set out with *Tarare* to make his grandest political ideas known.

In Chapter 2, I pointed out that artistic intent can be overshadowed by the way an audience interprets art. In the case of *Tarare*, there is a coming together of these two forces, intent and interpretation, with a "grand philosophical idea" leaving its mark upon the unstable and politically turbulent atmosphere in France. With the confluence of these two variables, it was inevitable that *Tarare* would have political implications. However, not even Beaumarchais could predict just how deeply those implications would change the landscape of France, and all of Europe, in the decades to come.

¹⁴⁵ Fend, 267.

¹⁴⁶ Betzwieser, "Exoticism and Politics," 91.

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