

A TRIBUTE TO M. ELIZABETH C. BARTLET (1948-2005)

Jean-Philippe Rameau, Platée: ballet bouffon en un prologue et trois actes, ed. M. Elizabeth C. Bartlet, Opera omnia, ser. IV, vol. 10. Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2005. XCVIII, 435pp. ISMN: M-006-52787-8 (hardcover)

Richard Semmens

Volume 26, numéro 1, 2005

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1013249ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1013249ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Canadian University Music Society / Société de musique des universités canadiennes

ISSN

1911-0146 (imprimé)

1918-512X (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Semmens, R. (2005). Compte rendu de [A TRIBUTE TO M. ELIZABETH C. BARTLET (1948-2005) / *Jean-Philippe Rameau, Platée: ballet bouffon en un prologue et trois actes*, ed. M. Elizabeth C. Bartlet, Opera omnia, ser. IV, vol. 10. Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2005. XCVIII, 435pp. ISMN: M-006-52787-8 (hardcover)]. *Intersections*, 26(1), 154–160. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1013249ar>

A number of the sources in Jacob's collection are reproduced elsewhere. In particular, a collection of manuscripts addressing the famous *Gedanke*, or musical idea, is replicated in part in Carpenter and Neff's edition of the well known "Gedanke manuscript" (1995). In Carpenter and Neff, however, some manuscript passages have been omitted. They are restored by Jacob, who resolves some questions of manuscript dating as well. Despite the presence of a few such replications, by far the greatest part of the book makes available writings hitherto unknown and certainly never reproduced.

The book is a publication of Jacob's *Habilitationsschrift*, undertaken under the auspices of the Philosophische Fakultät of the Friedrich-Alexander-Universität, Erlangen, Germany. Jacob is taking up the position of professor at Universität Potsdam in the fall of 2006. His recent work includes an edition of correspondence between Adorno and the music pedagogue Erich Doflein, published by Olms as well.

REFERENCES

- Schoenberg, Arnold. 1911. *Harmonielehre*. Vienna: Universal.
 Schoenberg, Arnold. 1995. *The Musical Idea and the Logic, Technique, and Art of Its Presentation*, eds. P. Carpenter and S. Neff. New York: Columbia University Press.

MURRAY DINEEN

A TRIBUTE TO M. ELIZABETH C. BARTLET (1948–2005)

Jean-Philippe Rameau, Platée: ballet bouffon en un prologue et trois actes, ed. M. Elizabeth C. Bartlet, Opera omnia, ser. IV, vol. 10. Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2005. XCVIII, 435pp. ISMN: M-006-52787-8 (hardcover).

Although lighter works for the stage (ballets, opéra-ballets, pastorales-héroïques, etc.) far outnumber Jean-Philippe Rameau's serious ones (the tragédies), a truly comic muse was a comparatively infrequent visitor with the composer. In *Platée* (1745, rev. 1749, and subsequently), however, Rameau indulged the muse with unprecedented (and never again matched) enthusiasm. *Platée* is, quite simply, an unrelentingly slapstick and farcical piece of theatre, quite out of step with the composer's typical stage works. It was in its day termed a *ballet bouffon*, a unique category in Rameau's dramatic oeuvre. Its comical substance embraces humorous effects in both orchestra and chorus, through colourful pictorial means in its instrumental treatment, and frequent, clearly deliberate upsets to normal accentuation and scansion in its handling of voices. In Act I, scene iv, for example, *Platée* becomes increasingly despondent at being shunned by Cithéron (a King of Greece), and she cries out to him, "Dis donc, Pourquoi? Quoi? Quoi?" ("Say, then, why? What? What?"). She is joined by a quartet of Naiades,

who sing nothing but the word “Quoi?” over and over, in a playfully syncopated setting. More subtle devices are at work, as well, such as Rameau seemingly poking fun at his own harmonic art. At the conclusion of Act II (scene v), the allegorical character, La Folie (Folly), who has appropriated Apollo’s lyre to animate the entire scene, declares: “Par un coup de génie! Secondez-moi, je sens que je puis parvenir au chef-d’œuvre de l’harmonie.” (“With a stroke of genius! Enjoin me, I feel as though I can achieve a masterpiece of harmony.”)

I have to smile to myself when I consider that a work such as this was the object of the last large-scale research project that M. Elizabeth C. Bartlet (1948–2005) steered to completion before her untimely death on September 11, 2005. The many comic layers in *Platée* certainly would not have gone unnoticed nor unappreciated by Beth, and her warm sense of humour, I am certain, was stimulated many times in her work (over several years) with this material. Yet Rameau’s ballet was much more than a piece of humorous fluff. By 1754, caught up as it was in the tempests of the *querelle des bouffons*, *Platée* came to be regarded by some as the composer’s true masterpiece,¹ a work that could be held up as a worthy French counterpart to Pergolesi’s *La Serva padrona*. There was, in other words, real substance here to engage Beth’s artistic sensibilities and mental agility, as well. This, too, makes me smile.

As could have been guessed by any of us who had the privilege of knowing Beth’s scholarship, of witnessing her utter mastery over the archives and libraries of Paris, or of admiring the meticulous attention to detail that always characterized her musicological work, this edition of *Platée* is splendid. It is just the second installment in the new Rameau edition, the *Opera omnia Rameau* (OOR), since it made the transition from its Paris based publisher, Gérard Billaudot, to Bärenreiter in 2003; the only other edition to be issued under the new publishing arrangement has been *Anacréon* (OOR IV.25, ed. Williams 2004).² For its editions of Rameau’s stage works (series IV), the OOR has adopted a number of editorial policies that some might consider idiosyncratic. For example, the layout of pages disposes instruments and voices in ways that are at odds with modern score preparation practices: placing voice parts above instrumental ones is a case in point. Another is locating two parts that are doubling each other (oboes and violins, for example) on a single line in the score. And still another is the use of terms such as *fort* (*f*), *doux* (*p*), and *à demi* (*mf*) for dynamic markings (although such words conveyed more subtle information to performers of the time). These are practices consistent with those found in most French sources of the eighteenth century, but they may seem somewhat arcane for those encountering them for the first time.

In addition to such peculiarities in score layout, however, the OOR editions all share other quite commendable characteristics. They are sumptuously spacious in presentation, and handsome in design. Each volume of the stage works presents a sizable Introduction (in both French and English), placing the opera

¹ See, for example, *Mercure de France* (1754, 180–181). The passage is translated and discussed in the Introduction to this edition, pp. lxiv–lxv.

² For a thoughtful review of this edition see Rosow (2005, 714–716).

or ballet in its historical setting, considering its reception, identifying known eighteenth-century revivals (partial or complete), offering details about casting, and reconstructing, so far as is possible, changes and revisions made in a work's eighteenth-century performance history. There follows a critical edition of the libretto, and that of the score. Each volume concludes with the critical apparatus for both music and libretto that accounts for variant readings not otherwise apparent or explained in the editions themselves. The materials of each volume overall operate as a kind of interactive package: the score makes sense, in many passages, only with recourse to the introductory information, or the critical apparatus, or both. And for good reason. Rameau tinkered almost compulsively with his compositions. During rehearsals, or a production run, or in revivals, he regularly made changes, cuts, or additions. The sources—especially for works that remained in repertory for some time—frequently show several layers, spanning several years. So the OOR editions of the composer's ballets and operas usually not only cannot present a single version (actual or idealized) of a "work," they make no attempt to do so. Rather, they invite the reader or the performer to explore options that are embedded in the edition proper, or presented in *Compléments* (numbers, or sizable portions of them, that had been excised wholesale at some point), and the critical apparatus.

The principal musical sources for *Platée* are not numerous, but they are complex. They arise from (and cast very interesting light on) the single "court" performance at Versailles in 1745, and the ballet's subsequent move to the Opéra in 1749, where it remained in repertory (in whole or in part) until 1773, after the composer's death. Witness to the 1745 performance is a remarkably complete set of performing parts, including those for the *parties* (the *hautes-contre de violon* and the *tailles de violons* both played on violas). Surviving parts for these instruments are exceedingly rare, as Bartlet points out (p. lxxix). These performing parts were re-used, with numerous revisions, additions, substitutions, and deletions in the opera house in 1749 and afterwards. Also from 1749 is a "pre-publication" print of the score, with manuscript annotations, some of them autograph (p. 330). This source transmits some of the revisions made to the ballet in subsequent years, and served as both a rehearsal and a performance score (p. 331). Finally there is the engraved score issued by Boivin in conjunction with the ballet's initial Paris run. Bartlet shows (pp. 331–340) that this print must have been assembled in stages (it captures just a selection of the 1749 revisions), and therefore "does not represent the opera as performed in any of its versions, as has been assumed heretofore" (p. 331).

In a masterly close inspection of the performing parts, and the many layers of performing history they transmit, Bartlet managed to identify several scribal hands, among them Jean Rollet, Brice Lallemand, Durand, and Marveraux. A painstaking study of the paper used (the watermarks and rastra), and archival research into the performers identified on many of the parts, made a secure dating for the various layers of performance possible. The layers could then be fitted to the known Parisian productions: the initial run of 1749; a revival of 1750; a revival of 1754 (in which the ballet became entrenched in the *querelle des bouffons*); revivals of the Prologue only from 1759–61; and a final revival of

the Prologue only in 1773. Bartlet elected to base the main edition on the Paris version of 1749. But through the *Compléments*, the *Annexes*, and the critical apparatus it is also possible to reconstruct the premiere of 1745 at Versailles, or any of the Parisian revivals from this edition. I am aware of only two recordings of the “complete” ballet, both of them rather interesting period performances (1990, Radio France/Erato-Disques 2292-45028-2; 1988, CBS Records M2K 44982) and both based largely in Boivin’s printed score (1749). Listeners following along with this new edition will notice many instances where the recorded performances and the actual version of 1749 diverge.

While the edition and its critical apparatus are masterful, the Introduction is no less impressive. The account of *Platée*’s performance history is nicely detailed. Bartlet pays particular attention (pp. lviii–lx) to La Folie’s *Grande Scène* (II, 5) to which I made brief reference near the opening of this review. This scene serves as the comic climax to an act that has placed slapstick stage action in the foreground. In scene iii, for example, Jupiter has first announced himself to *Platée*, appearing initially in the form of a donkey and accompanied by a braying orchestra, and next in the form of an owl, with a mock serenade from all the other birds. The act overall, and La Folie’s antic final scene in particular, were a locus of frequent revision for Rameau, and for Marie Fel, his favourite singer at the Opéra and the individual who performed the role of La Folie from the premiere in 1745 through the revival of 1754. Rameau’s revisions to the scene, mapped out with great precision by Bartlet in Table 2 (pp. lix–lx), demonstrate how concerned the composer was with giving maximum impact to the comic effects.

Dance was central to *Platée*, and Bartlet draws our attention to this on several occasions in the Introduction, noting for example that the original Versailles performance “required 38 dancers (plus probably the performer of Iris), 17 women and 21 men including four women and eight men as featured soloists” (p. l). In the more streamlined version of the ballet mounted at the Opéra in 1749 37 dancers, nevertheless, were still required, “(19 men and 18 women) with eight men and three women assuming solo roles” (p. lvii). Dances for the Versailles performance were choreographed by the royal dancing master, Mr Laval, while those made for the Paris production, Bartlet presumes (almost certainly correctly) were by Jean-Barthélemy Lany, the *maître de ballet* of the time at the Opéra. As Bartlet points out (p. l), none of the choreographies has survived. In fact theatrical choreographies for any of Rameau’s stage works have yet to come to light. Anyone contemplating a production of *Platée* (and with a resource such as this edition now at our disposal the possibilities in this regard are much improved) must confront this lacuna, especially if a period style production is envisioned. Although we have no certain knowledge of the conduct of specific dances in *Platée*, there is a wealth of information on choreographed stage movement embedded in the surviving scores and librettos. Bartlet plots these with great care in this edition, and reports on variants to these staging directions in the critical report. A stage direction in the printed sources of Act III, scene 4 (p. 218 in this edition) has La Folie leading Momus, who appears a bit embarrassed, to the edge of the stage. Additional precision is provided in the

earliest surviving performing part for La Folie. At this point a direction notes that there is a moment of silence as La Folie leads Momus to the edge of the stage, and then she embarrasses him in a mute scene during the ritournelle [of the subsequent Ariette]. (p. 397, note to b.553) So there is much precious information here for those who might attempt a period reconstruction of the ballet.

Of the dances themselves Bartlet, quite understandably, offers no speculation. I would like to conclude with my own speculation on what some of the dances might have looked like, at least in some respects. I attempt this not because I think its absence in this edition is a shortcoming, but rather as an example of the new enquiry Bartlet's excellent study is bound to stimulate. As well, the musings that follow have allowed me to take the edition out for a real "test drive." It has not surprised me to discover that it runs like a charm. After the overture, the very first music we encounter in this ballet is a "Branle." It accompanies the appearance of a troupe of Satyres, Ménades, and peasant grape-pickers, their wives and children, who make their entry dancing. But they are interrupted twice (albeit rather briefly) by a Satyre who sings in praise of wine. When he is joined in this praise by a chorus, the instruction reads "On danse." The opening branle is then repeated, as is the chorus, and the whole is concluded with a final occurrence of the branle. A few years ago I pointed out that this was likely the last appearance of a titled branle, but my main concern in that study was to argue that the music of the later branle, and the *cotillon* (a *contredanse* for two or four couples) shared the rhythmic profile and phrase structure of the *gavotte* (see Semmens 1997, 46). Here I want to suggest that the Satyres, Ménades, and grape-pickers likely entered in couples, in a kind of processional line dance not unlike some of the older branles. They stopped their procession when the Satyre started to sing, and resumed it where the direction reads "continuation du Branle." By the time the Satyre sings a second time, the troupe had likely taken up a formation in the center of the performing space. This was a sizeable gathering: the Satyres and Ménades comprised three couples, and the grape-pickers included a lead couple, and two groupings of two, and three couples respectively (p. lvii), for a total of 18 dancers. It seems likely that the dancing to the chorus involved many (or all) of the dancers, while the intervening branle music might have featured a lead couple or two as soloists.

The Prologue concludes with a scene complex that features a "Contredanse en rondeau." The same characters introduced in the opening (as choristers and dancers) are joined now by Thespis, a lead singing role in the Prologue. As in the opening scene, the contredanse here alternates with solo singing (Thespis) and the chorus, and like the first scene, whenever the chorus sings there is the direction "on danse," so I believe the routine of group dancing with the chorus recurs. Quite unusually, though, every time that Thespis sings by himself, we find the notation "on danse si l'on veut" (one dances if it is wished). If there was dancing, it almost certainly was by soloists in these passages. The entire cast dances off stage to the accompaniment of the "contredanse en rondeau" at the conclusion, just as they had danced on stage to the branle at the beginning. But there is more. The music of the concluding "contredanse en rondeau" was issued subsequently under the title "La Platée" in a collection of contredanses per-

formed at the opera balls.³ Although no choreography for this dance is known to have survived, it seems very likely that the group dancing that occurred at the conclusion of the Prologue informed the lost choreography used at opera balls (and elsewhere), and that it must itself have drawn on the routines of the contredanse in the eighteenth-century ballroom. The dancers, therefore, would probably have been arranged in “longways” sets, with couples moving up and down the sets in various recurring figures. Alternatively, in *cotillon*-fashion, the dancers may have been organized in several two- or four-couple “squares,” with the dance featuring various crossing patterns alternating with a refrain figure. (The music of the “contredanse en rondeau” Rameau supplies is a perfect specimen of the typical *cotillon*.)

Finally, I would like to consider the great chaconne of Act III, scene iii. The mock wedding ceremony between Jupiter and Platée that has been organized at this point to trick Junon, and rid her of her jealous suspicions of Jupiter’s infidelity, has been delayed through various contrivances. Platée, who foolishly believes the ceremony will be a real one, is becoming more and more impatient at the delays. A stage direction reads: “Jupiter and Mercure have Platée seated on a side of the stage. A dance in the noblest of styles is performed to increase her impatience even more.” (p. 202) The chaconne that ensues is 231 measures in length, and it was even longer in Rameau’s original conception! (See pp. 407–408, and Annexe 7.) The famous Louis Dupré (1697–1774) was a featured dance soloist in this scene in 1749 (p. lvii), but whether he performed as soloist throughout this ridiculously long dance is unclear. It seems a certainty that he was featured for at least part of it, however, because a virtuosic, “noble” style was among his specialties: he was, in short, the perfect dancer to truly annoy Platée! In the next season (1749–1750), Dupré’s last at the Opéra, he was featured as soloist in a dance related to the chaconne—the *passecaïlle*—for a revival of André Campra’s *Les Fêtes Vénitienes*. Giacomo Casanova (1725–1798) witnessed one of Dupré’s performances in this production, and he included a description in his diary. Although it is tongue-in-cheek, Casanova’s account is worth quoting in part, because it conveys the qualities of which Dupré was capable, and gives an idea of the dance from *Platée* of the previous season.

Suddenly I hear the parterre clapping at the appearance of a tall, well-built masked dancer in a black wig with black curls that reached halfway to his waist, and wearing a robe that was open in front and came down to his heels. Patu [Casanova’s companion that evening] told me in devout and earnest tones that I was seeing the great Dupré. I had heard him talked of, and I am all attention. I see the fine figure advance with rhythmical steps and, reaching the edge of the orchestra pit, slowly raise its arms in a circle, move them gracefully, extend them to the full, draw them in again, move its feet, take small steps, execute some mid-leg *battements*, then a pirouette, and disappear, backwards, into the wings. The whole dance of Dupré’s lasted only thirty seconds. The clapping from the parterre and the boxes

³ *Recueil de Contredanses avec la Basse Chiffree* (n.d.: Paris). There were dozens of similar collections issued in the middle decades of the eighteenth century. For a discussion of Rameau’s place in these collections see Semmens (2004, 150–151).

was universal; I ask Patu what it means, and he answers seriously that the applause was for Dupré's grace and the divine harmony of his movements. He was, he said, sixty years of age [an exaggeration], and he was the same as he had been forty years earlier. (Casanova 1968, 2 [3], 142)

I am convinced that Rameau must have fashioned his lengthy chaconne (and its hysterically funny effect on poor *Platée*) with Dupré in mind (he had also performed in the Versailles premiere).

In every respect this new edition of *Platée* is first rate. It captures so much information that it takes a good deal of time and patience (more, certainly, than the title character would ever put up with or endure) to digest it all. It fashions a score (or scores) and critical apparatus in which I have yet to spot a single slip-up. It is meticulous in its documentation. And yet I sense, as I am sure many others will, a huge reservoir of knowledge backing the edition up, supporting it without specific reference. That, too, is part of Beth Bartlett's legacy.

REFERENCES

- Casanova, Giacomo. 1968. *History of my Life*, trans. by Willard R. Trask, 12 vols. in 6. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World. 2 [3], 142.
- Mercure de France* (March 1754):180–181.
- Rameau, Jean-Philippe. 1990. *Platée*. Ensemble Vocale Française Herr, Les Musiciens du Louvre, Marc Minkowski, director. Radio France/Erato-Disques 2292-45028-2. Compact disc.
- Rameau, Jean-Philippe. 1988. *Platée*. La Grande Écurie et La Chambre du Roy, Jean-Claude Malgoire, director. CBS Records M2K 44982. Compact disc.
- Recueil de Contredanses avec la Basse Chiffrée; et la Table par Lettres Alphabétiques. Qui se dansent au bal de l'Opéra, et de St Cloud*. n.d. Paris.
- Rosow, Lois. 2005. "Rameau's galante orgy." *Early Music* 33:714–716.
- Semmens, Richard. 1997. "Branles, Gavottes and Contredanses in the Later Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries." *Dance Research* 15/2:46.
- Semmens, Richard. 2004. *The bals publics at the Paris Opera in the Eighteenth Century*. New York: Pendragon.
- Williams, Jonathan Huw, ed. 2004. *Jean-Philippe Rameau, Anacréon: ballet héroïque en un acte*. Kassel: Bärenreiter.

RICHARD SEMMENS

Katherine Ellis. 2005. *Interpreting the Musical Past: Early Music in Nineteenth-Century France*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press. Personalia, bibliography, and index. xxii, 295 pp. ISBN 0-19-517682-0 (hardcover).

Few scholars other than Katharine Ellis could have written *Interpreting the Musical Past: Early Music in Nineteenth-Century France*. For this monograph draws extensively on the author's substantial experience with French music criticism, as well as her sophisticated understanding of that nation's political