Adolphe Nourrit, Gilbert Duprez, and the high C: The influences of operatic plots, culture, language, theater design, and growth of orchestral forces on the development of the operatic tenor vocal production

Micheal Lee Smith Jr.
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

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ADOLPHE NOURRIT, GILBERT DUPREZ, AND THE HIGH C: THE INFLUENCES
OF OPERATIC PLOTS, CULTURE, LANGUAGE, THEATER DESIGN, AND
GROWTH OF ORCHESTRAL FORCES ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE
OPERATIC TENOR VOCAL PRODUCTION.

by

Micheal Lee Smith Jr.

Bachelor of Music
California State University, Northridge
2006

Master of Music
San Francisco Conservatory of Music
2008

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Micheal Lee Smith Jr.

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Alfonse Anderson, Committee Chair
Todd Fitzpatrick, Committee Member
Anthony Barone, Committee Member
Nate Bynum, Graduate College Representative

Ronald Smith, Ph. D., Vice President for Research and Graduate Studies and Dean of the Graduate College

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ABSTRACT

Adolphe Nourrit, Gilbert Duprez, and the high C: The influences of operatic plots, culture, language, theater design, and growth of orchestral forces on the development of the operatic tenor vocal production.

by

Micheal Lee Smith Jr.

Dr. Alfonse Anderson, Examination Committee Chair  
Professor of Voice  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

The operatic tenor voice has evolved from a variety of influences. This document identifies four influences involved in the development of the operatic tenor voice and describes their impact on performance practices including the chest voice high C (C₅).

Modern tenors’ performance practices originate in the nineteenth century ascendance of an Italian singing technique. This particular singing technique achieved popularity when Gilbert Duprez sang the role of Arnold in Rossini’s Guillaume Tell with a do di petto (i.e. from-the-chest) production of sound rather than the mix of falsetto and head voice that was traditional at the time. The role of Arnold was written for this type of vocal production and was traditional at the time. It was in this role in which the performance of the aria “Asil héréditaire” that Duprez sang the first do di petto C₅ as was noted by critics.

This feat shocked and impressed the Parisian public (who were predisposed to view Duprez unfavorably), which then thunderously applauded their approval of Duprez’ performance.

In 1837, after a combined ten years in Italy among Italian singers, Duprez performed for the Parisian public, his do di petto high C. The ability and skill to perform
this well grew to be an indicator of consummate vocal ability among tenors.

When Duprez performed the first *do di petto* high C, he created a shift in vocal technique and tenor performance practice. Italy and France were the dominant cultures in opera at this time. The two aforementioned cultures valued different qualities in vocal performance. The French culture of restrained passion highlighted the already singing quality of the language itself. According to Richard Miller, sung French corresponded to the spoken French more than any other European language. This necessary equivalence of spoken and sung French tended to limit its musical expressivity. This limitation had effects on the vocal technique of the tenor, which as a result tended to favor a traditional head voice and falsetto mix that had its origins in the vocal technique and acoustic properties of the castrato. The Italian culture, on the other hand, valued a more fiery and passionate approach to unleashing the power of an operatic performance and the expressive power of the voice. For the Italians, the sound of the voice should come first in importance while the declamation of the language should come second in importance. Miller observed that this was due in large part to the relative simplicity of the Italian language that is centered on pure vowels as compared to the French language, which is centered on a balance of nasal vowels and soft consonants.

The approach this document takes in discussion of these influences on the changes in technique and performance practices of the tenor is one that looks through the lens of the culturally emblematic lives of two of the most famous French tenors of the early nineteenth century: Adolphe Nourrit (1802–39) and Gilbert Duprez (1806–96). Both were involved in this sensational and decisive event: Duprez’ debut at the Paris Opéra as Arnold in Rossini’ *Guillaume Tell*, in which he sang most, if not all of the notes
above A₄ in a full voiced—from the chest—production of sound. This event and
Nourrit’s distaste for and inability to accept any comparison or competition between the
two tenors led him to attempt the same journey to Italy in hopes of acquiring the
technique that gave Duprez his success. Unfortunately, Nourrit’s attempt at acquiring an
Italian technique was mostly unsuccessful. In order to gain facility in the technique
embodied by Duprez he lost the French singing skills that were the keys to his fame and
success. His subsequent failure to acquire an Italian technique of singing left him without
a musical home. This along with chronic illness drove him mad to the point where he
took his life at the age of thirty-seven. However, the question remains, why was Nourrit
unable to find a suitable teacher in France to help him discover the do di petto vocal
technique, which appeared to be such a success for Duprez?

There has been little research done to determine the influences on the change in
vocal technique, performance practice, and audience expectations of what created this
masculine tenor sound. John Potter’s Tenor: History of a Voice speaks in general terms of
the history of the tenor voice. He notes changes and contemporaneous states of tenor
vocal production and differences in timbre, but does not identify the causes for the
changes. There are a small number of doctoral dissertations and documents that tangibly
addresses this evolution in performance practice, but do not identify the reasons and
causes for the change. Therefore, this document proposes answers to the following
questions: was the adoption of Italian vocal technique (that remains the standard today) a
result of the necessities of physical and vocal demands of the tenor roles and repertoire
being composed over time? Was it a result of changes in audience tastes for a natural
tenor sound to embody the heroic roles? Did the interaction of the French and Italian
language and culture play a part in this technical change? Could it simply have resulted from advances in vocal technique and pedagogical expertise that occurred as a result of a more scientific approach to vocal technique in the early nineteenth century? Finally, were there economic concerns that influenced choices in the design of operatic venues resulting in acoustical adversity for the tenor? And consequently, did the diverse acoustic qualities of theaters—notably in France and Italy— affect the tenor vocal production. I propose that it was a combination of all of these factors.
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First of all I would like to thank my committee for their exceptional guidance throughout this process. Each one of them brought unique talents and singular perspective to my degree program and the scholarship involved in this document.

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INTRODUCTION

The collision of important events in nineteenth-century opera singing gave rise to the preeminence of the tenor as a Romantic voice type. During this period different vocal traditions and practices of eighteenth century French and Italian opera were synthesized into practices of a new generation of singers during the early nineteenth century. This synthesis is illustrated by the careers of Adolphe Nourrit (1802–39) and Gilbert Duprez (1806–96). From the early seventeenth century through to the early nineteenth century, cultural and artistic interaction between the French and Italian aesthetics of opera significantly influenced the evolution of the tenor voice. Gilbert Duprez’ do di petto (i.e. from-the-chest production) C₃ in 1837 on the stage of the Paris Opéra was the culmination of this cultural aesthetic interaction. This sensational event led to the ascension of Italian tenor technique and performance practice that continues to be the standard today.¹

French and Italian artists each created opera from their cultural paradigm. French singers, composers, and impresarios chose to create opera that embodied a channeled passion and elegant artifice to emphasize the nuance, prosody, and structure of the French language itself. The Italians chose to create opera that by the firsthand accounts of music critics, writers, and musicians embodied a passionate abandon to feelings and character portrayal that featured virtuosic singing. Nourrit and Duprez respectively embodied these cultures and their performance practices.

Parisian critics and audiences alike praised Nourrit for his passionate acting; some like the influential and outspoken Henry Chorley criticized his voice and performances saying that they, “bordered so closely upon a mannered over-grace and over-sweetness....”

Henry Pleasants explains that though Nourrit was influential, his career and much of the repertoire he sang was transitional because, “he lacked the ‘full voiced upper register that his successors, beginning with Duprez, brought to the roles written for each of them by Meyerbeer (Le prophète and L'Africane) and later works by composers such as Verdi.’” The full-voiced upper register noted by Pleasants represented an emerging Italian style of tenor singing and performance practice that was by no means new to contemporary singing. Until Duprez, however, few tenors had been able to soar past A₄ in what is now considered a do di petto production of sound while maintaining clear declamation of text and evenness of timbre.

Significantly, Duprez was educated in the same school of singing as Nourrit with a foundation in early Italian singing styles that have their direct origin in the singing style of the castrato. Alexandre Choron, Duprez’ teacher and mentor for much of his life, believed that there was no good music for opera after Hasse and Gluck. With Duprez’ training and background, it seems implausible that he would change his technique on a whim or to satisfy curiosity.

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2 Chorley, 62.


4 Traditionally, a tenor would flip into a head voice/falsetto mix at this point of his voice and above. Some singers like Michael Kelly could do this without significant change, but most could not.

Gilbert Duprez significantly changed his technique and singing style while in Italy and the question remains: what were the factors that influenced him to change his technique? This document identifies and describes four concurrent factors that motivated Gilbert Duprez to change his technique and performance practice. These factors are (1) the evolution operatic plots and types of characters represented on stage; (2) the natural affinity of the Italian language’s cadences and the culture’s freedom of passionate expression over the French language’s inherent rigidity of structure and rules for declamation of text and the culture’s preference for nuance and elegance in their expression of passion; (3) the different architecture of theaters in France and Italy, and finally; (4) the increased quantity and complexity of orchestra instrumentation and personnel, and the competition of these with solo voices.

Before Duprez, a lighter production of the tenor voice would have been expected. Prior to the early nineteenth century, most tenor tessitura above A₄ was produced in a mixed, head-voice dominant, or falsetto technique. This lighter sounding vocal production fit the orchestrations used in operatic compositions of the time. Though some singers today occasionally use a lighter vocal mechanism for effect, they can do so as a choice rather than expectation.

Illustrative of the shift in tenor technique, performance practice, and audience expectations are the biographies of Gilbert Duprez and Adolphe Nourrit: two singers representing two divergent singing practices. Examining Nourrit’s life and career will illuminate why he embodied a French technique and performance practice that was no longer tenable for the present and future of operatic compositions. An examination of

Physiological Considerations” (DMA dissertation, University of Kentucky, 2009), 39.
Duprez’ career will illuminate why he embodied the ascendant Italian style of singing technique and performance practice that remain the standard today. Juxtaposition of each man’s career and life experiences illuminates why one style of singing and performance practice was fading away, while the other became the standard for tenors that remains so today.

This document is comprised of five chapters. The first describes the evolution of the tenor voice in the eighteenth century and introduces the career and biographical facts of Nourrit and Duprez’ lives. I will describe Duprez’ sensational debut, give a brief overview of the evolution of the natural tenor voice in relation to the castrato, as well as a description of what it evolved into in the nineteenth century. In the second chapter, I will identify significant and emblematic opera plots and characters involved in the evolution of tenor technique in Italy and France prior to the time of Nourrit and Duprez. There will also be an exploration of significant plots and characters that influenced Duprez and Nourrit specifically. Highlighted in the third chapter, are the influences of the aesthetic friction of Italian and French approaches to singing and operatic performance practice, as embodied by Nourrit and Duprez. Also explained, is how the fundamental strictures of declamation and accentuation of French, constricted French composers and singer, while the Italian language allowed for inherent advantages of freedom and free cadence of word emphasis. The fourth chapter will compare and contrast fundamental differences in Italian theater design and architecture with that of France from a broad historical perspective. Italian design choices produced rigors and acoustical adversity that forced Italian tenors to develop a more acoustically powerful production of sound. Comparatively, French theater design favored the less powerful, but subtle and nuanced
French style of tenor singing that remained closer to the technique of the castrato voice. The fifth chapter explains how the increased densities of timbre and texture of contemporary orchestras challenged the singer and influenced the development of the tenor voice. This chapter will also include examples of French and Italian repertoire in the period 1750–1850 and be divided into four categories: opera orchestrations that supported the tenor voice, opera orchestrations that accompanied the tenor voice, opera orchestrations that competed with the tenor voice, and finally a discussion of the orchestra and the Romantic Tenor voice. This last section and the later examples will have significant relevance to the careers of Nourrit and Duprez. The changing orchestra had a profound impact on the careers of Nourrit and Duprez. All these factors converged in Duprez’ performance of the C5 in the aria “Asile héréitaire” at the Paris Opéra in 1837 using a new vocal technique of Italian origin.

Prior Research

In the early nineteenth century, tenor singing techniques and performance practices changed. Essential to this change is the sensational event that is noted in current research of Gilbert Duprez’ performance of Arnold on the stage of the Paris Opéra in 1837. Absent from the descriptions of this event are the causes of why Duprez’ voice changed to later embody a tenore robusto sound first exemplified by Domenico Donzelli.6 Also absent from the literature is a significant exploration of how Duprez grew to embody and then define the Italian style of singing which remains the standard today, in spite of being trained in the French haute-contre/castrato traditions for most of his life.

John Potter, in his book, *Tenor: History of a Voice*, places the development of the Romantic tenor voice in perspective and touches on some historical considerations in the romantic tenor’s development as well as collecting biographies of famous and influential tenors. He notes the importance of the Duprez debut on the stage of the Paris Opéra, but does not delve into an examination of influential factors that occurred during Duprez’ sensational career debut. Potter provides a clear explanation of the tenor–castrato connection in an article for the Oxford Journal of Early Music, but influences on Duprez’ life are not discussed. James Stark, in his book *Bel Canto* speaks of Duprez and the C5 in 1837 as it relates to the culmination of bel canto style of singing and the final move away from the tenor’s connection to the castrato voice. He also discusses castrato technique as a significant precursor to bel canto style and how Duprez’ achievement was the signature event that ended the hold of the castrato technique on the tenor voice. Richard Miller’s *National Schools of Singing* devotes approximately two and one half pages to Gilbert Duprez and the shift in technique specifically but no ink to the causes for his technical evolution. Henry Pleasants has written two books that deal with the history of the subject. The first is *The Great Singers*, in which he devotes three pages to an examination of Duprez as he relates to other singers and his personal triumphs. However, he does not address the influences that made Duprez leave the singing style and performance practice in which he trained and turn to the Italian style in which he embodies. Following *The Great Singers*, Pleasants explored the life of Adolphe Nourrit in *The Tenor Tragedy* and in it Duprez plays a significant part, but his life and experiences are only mentioned as they relate to Nourrit’s narrative. There are a handful of academic dissertations that explore this sensational event. They are as follows: Jason Vest’s *Adolphe Nourrit,*
Gilbert-Louis Duprez and Transformations of Tenor Technique in the Early Nineteenth Century: Historical and Physiological Considerations; Injoon Yang’s The Castrati and the Aesthetics of Baroque Bel Canto Singing: Influences on the Romantic Tenor. In these documents, Vest explores the history surrounding Duprez’ achievement and delves into the pedagogical considerations of his voice and the probable emotional response of the French public to the C₅. Yang explores the baroque origins of bel canto and the connections to the castrato voice. From this he describes in detail the differences between the castrato voice and the Romantic tenor voice. Both documents as well as previously mentioned scholarship acknowledge that Duprez’ debut was a turning point in tenor performance practice. However, most of these documents deal in a pedagogical analysis with some historical considerations. The purpose of this document is to bridge the gap in the scholarship surrounding the Italian influences involved in Duprez’ abandoning the style of singing in which he was trained and grew to embody.
Chapter 1

Evolution of the Tenor Voice in the Eighteenth Century

The Sensational High C

There were several moments where operatic tenors in France, Italy, or Germany occasionally sang notes above A₄ in a more do di petto fashion; but there was a pivotal point where the expectations changed. In 1837, on the stage of the Paris Opéra, singing the role of Arnold in Rossini’s Guillaume Tell, Gilbert Duprez repeated his performance of 1831 in Lucca, Italy. He performed most, if not all, of the role (which includes two high C-sharps (C♯₅), twenty-eight high Cs (C₅), and many Bs (B₄) and B-flats (B♭₄) in the same octave) in the new full-voice sound. Following this performance in Lucca, Duprez launched a successful career in Italy as a primo tenore under the guidance of the impresario Alessandro Lanari. This brought him to the notice (six years later) of the impresario of the Opéra in Paris (Charles Duponchel). At that time, Adolphe Nourrit was the principal tenor of the Paris Opéra (a position he inherited from his father). Duponchel wished to take advantage of the notoriety of Duprez’ Italian success and desire to return home. As a result, he hired Duprez and proposed to divide the new principal tenor roles in the company between Nourrit and Duprez under the guise of company stability.

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9 Pleasants, The Great Tenor Tragedy, 15.
Nourrit considered Duponchel’s reasoning sound enough to initially agree to the proposition. Ultimately the agreement proved to be an untenable to Nourrit as the contract tilted heavily in favor of Duprez and there were already mechanisms in place at the Opéra to cover for any illness. Nourrit, after initially seeing this turn of events as a competitive challenge to renew his creative energies, fell prey to the fickle winds of the Parisian public’s fascination with Duprez.¹⁰ Nourrit understood that the Parisian public had fallen in love with the new sound that they heard from Duprez—and realized that his successes from now on would be less than they were. Therefore, Nourrit resigned from the opera. He had many reasons that he professed in his own words but the primary one was his desire to take advantage of his current celebrity and repertoire to, “make a grand tour of the provinces, the income of which should not be less than a hundred thousand francs.”¹¹

Before the time of Duprez and his triumph on the stage of the Paris Opéra, the notes A₄ and above were generally sung by tenors using a slightly raised larynx and with a registration that used more head voice than the chest voice. Much technical and pedagogical research has been done on this subject, and though the purpose of this paper is less pedagogical and more historical, an in depth pedagogical discussion would be tangential. As needed for this discussion, the technical and pedagogical ideas referenced in this document will come from Richard Miller’s National Schools of Singing, The

¹⁰ Pleasants, The Great Tenor Tragedy, 16.

¹¹ Ibid., 15
Structure of Singing, or Jason Vest’s examination of the technical and pedagogical aspects of both Nourrit’s voice and Duprez’ voice.¹²

Tenor singing before the mid nineteenth century had somewhat different nationalistic identities and characteristic sounds. There were French tenors, Italian tenors, and German tenors. In the years after Duprez and his definitive moment on the Paris Opéra stage, younger tenors imitated his achievement as audiences came to increasingly expect a similar tenor sound. As a result, by the middle of the nineteenth century there was just one kind of tenor. The one who sang with the Italian vocal technique in the do di petto fashion. Duprez’ feat gradually influenced all male operatic writing by composers. Thus the development of the dramatic bass, the Verdi baritone, the romantic tenors of Verdi and Puccini, the Italian verismo tenor roles, and ultimately the dramatic Wagnerian roles all can be traced to what Duprez accomplished and its thunderous approval by the Parisian public.

The Tenor Voice

In the eighteenth century, the newly ascendant tenor voice was relegated to a lesser status in opera. The tenor voice experienced a stagnant technical and pedagogical period as a result of the increasing importance and use of the genderless and unearthly voice of the castrato. The castrato voice gained in importance over that of the tenor at this time because of what the castrato could give Italian opera: its beautiful, genderless extravagance. Opera was gaining in popularity and became a significant part of the music

being created for public consumption that was not church music. John Potter points out that the castrato voice was,

... so far removed from the present as to seem magical. Gods and Goddesses, semi-mythological shepherds and the like from the intermedi onwards were not expected to behave like normal human beings... Artificial beings need not be gender-specific either, and when courtly establishments began to employ castrati in their chapels it was only a short step for these extraordinary singers to add a new dimension of artifice to the evolving genre of musical drama.\textsuperscript{13}

The extraordinary vocal capabilities of these singers came to be regarded as the best vehicle of expression in opera and chapel music at the time. According to Potter, it is precisely the ascendance and acceptance of the castrati by the public in the eighteenth century, that led them to take over title and leading roles as, “lovers and heroes, while tenors were first shunted sideways into lesser character roles, and then type-cast as kings or generals as opera split into two sub-genres of seria and buffa.”\textsuperscript{14}

At the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century, public tastes and morals changed with regards to the castrato: castration was increasingly seen as morally repugnant. Concurrently, Pope Leo XIII lifted the ban on women performers in Rome and Napoleon banned the practice of castration. Because of the Pope’s decision and the banning of the practice, a woman’s voice began to compete with the similarly timbered voice of the castrato. As an alternative to having two similarly timbered voices (and therefore similarly gender identified voices) playing opposite genders on stage, the natural tenor voice increasingly replaced the castrato voice. Also connected to the growing use of the natural tenor voice was the public’s increasing taste for gender realism


\textsuperscript{14} Potter, \textit{Tenor: History of a Voice}, 18.
in drama. As a result of this shift in public taste, tenors increasingly sang in the natural tenor voice—more in line with the natural male speaking voice—on the operatic stage.

**Influence of Castrati Teachers**

Castrati voice teachers—after retiring from a performance career—were instrumental in the development of the natural tenor voice in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Significantly, they were also the vocal and operatic superstars that delayed the use and development of the natural tenor voice. One of the most notable castrati teachers that laid the foundation for good singing in general and gave us a blueprint for how to train a tenor voice in the nineteenth century was Pier Francesco Tosi with his treatise, *Opinioni de’ cantori antichi, e moderni, o sieno osservazioni sopra il canto figurato* (1723). He was a successful singer, but not a superstar like Senesino. The *Opinioni* was one of the first vocal treatises, and thought to be so authoritative that it was re-published by Johann Friederich Agricola in 1757 with significant additional commentary and interpretation interspersed throughout the text. Agricola’s version has since been translated and published by Julian Baird. In the words of Pleasants,

> If tenors fared better than basses [in bel canto writing] it was because they learned, under the tutelage of the castrati, to use a light head voice and falsetto in such a way that the best of them could approximate the embellishments, cadences, portamenti, roulades, trills and turns established by the castrati as basic devices of good singing. The castrati teacher’s emphasis on the necessary blending of registers, combined with the earlier Italian treatises—regarding the necessity of a stable larynx being the

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15 “Opinions on Singing in the Old and New Style or Observations on the Florid Song.”


vehicle to good singing—created a national style of singing identified with Italy.

Significantly, castrati singers and teachers worked with a male instrument without the hormonal affects of puberty. At the time, it was thought by teachers such as Tosi that such a male could access the larger rib cage of their gender to create an increased subglottal pressure as an advantage for their singing voice. Tosi’s assertion was an observation based on experience rather than science. We know today that it is not the size of the ribcage that determines subglottal pressure: it is muscular antagonism out of balance. Presumably, the castrati could access a more robust male musculature that could do so and Tosi possibly misinterpreted this effect. Castrati also taught a technique of blending registers from the top down while insisting their students make this blend with a stable larynx. “The student will understand that there are two registers: *do di petto* (from the chest) and *da testa* (from the head), and that being able to move seamlessly from one to the other is a central aim of all good singers.”

As a result of tutelage by the castrati, and the unique interaction of male voices affected differently by gender identifying hormones, Potter notes a significant connection between tenors and castrati and the development of the former’s technique. He observes that it made perfect sense that the best young voices were taught by those perceived to be the best singers. It was these *musici,* as Potter calls them, who taught Mozart the most about voice and who were connected to some of the most influential tenor voices of their

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day such as Pio Fabri (1697–1760), Michael Kelly (1762–1826), Anton Raff (1714–97), Charles Incledon (1763–1826), and John Braham (1774–1856).  

Adolphe Nourrit

Adolphe Nourrit was born into a musical and rather well to do family. His father was first tenor at the Paris Opéra and also a successful diamond merchant. He originally wanted Adolphe to stay away from the performing arts to spare him the rigors such a career would impose, but music eventually won out. On a visit home from school, young Adolphe was practicing some music from *Iphigénie en Tauride* (1779) and the elder Manuel Garcia, who happened to be visiting, heard him sing. After much conversation, Garcia begged the elder Nourrit to allow Adolphe to study with him. From that time, Adolphe enjoyed connections to the music world in Paris that any singer from any era would envy. As first tenor of the Paris Opéra, his father was able to secure his son’s debut with the company in a small role in *Iphigénie en Tauride*. The physical resemblance between father and son was so great that an opera was written to play upon this fact. Following Nourrit’s engagement, Rossini himself wrote a part for Adolphe’s gifts in *Le Siège de Corinthe*. Consequently, the younger Nourrit began his thirteen-
year reign (1824–37) at the Paris Opéra.²⁶ Because of his son’s triumphs, Nourrit’s father chose to retire and the position of first tenor was granted to Adolphe.²⁷ For more than thirteen years, Adolphe was the preeminent tenor in Paris, beloved by the public and personally coached by Rossini. His career took on collaborative artistic efforts that involved consultations on role improvements and libretto writing for both ballet and opera. He was an acknowledged authority on stagecraft and the trajectory of his career pointed to continued triumph in the traditional arena of the Paris Opéra.²⁸ Unfortunately, all of these blessings in his career only served to insulate him from the changes occurring in vocal production and opera in Italy and other parts of Paris where a different, more vibrant aesthetic was valued. When Duprez was engaged by Charles Duponchel as co-tenor, Nourrit was unprepared for both the contract concessions required by Duponchel and by the sensation caused by Duprez’ stunning debut in Guillaume Tell (a role written for and premiered by Nourrit).²⁹ The unique situation seemed to go well at first and make sense for the company. In Potter’s words,

> The prospect was thought to be an inspired commercial decision, and Nourrit at first generously accepted the situation, even handling over some of his own roles to Duprez. Nourrit’s disturbed mental state was beginning to cloud his thinking, however, and his actions after this point are refracted through his psychological problems. He realized he could not accept the presence of Duprez (for whom he had considerable admiration rather than mere envy) and decided that since Duprez had perfected his craft in Italy, then he himself should go to Italy and try his luck there.³⁰

²⁶ Pleasants, The Great Tenor Tragedy, 152.

²⁷ Rogers, Some Famous Singers of the 19th Century, 63.

²⁸ Ibid., 65.

²⁹ Ibid., 70.

Nourrit’s life experience had not prepared him for a competitive struggle for his place on the stage, and this was a contributing factor in his decision to attempt to reinvent his voice and the resulting tragedy that later befell him.\(^{31}\)

The Parisian public enjoyed great access to many forms of opera in the many theaters in Paris such as the Opéra-Comique, Théâtre-Italien. Because of the eclectic nature of Paris’ theater scene, it is not impossible to suppose that Duprez’ sensation was enhanced by a craving for something new and unusual. Nourrit, however beloved, was a known quantity and not without criticism in regards to his voice: mainly the nasality of it. That nasality was symptomatic of his singing technique: the voix blanche. According to Vest, “The cause of nasality in his voice partly arose from Nourrit’s vocal technique, which included singing in voix blanche or voce aperta, otherwise called open singing... As the pitch rises, the larynx rises. As the larynx rises, the soft palate, or velum, lowers thus creating a nasal sound.”\(^{32}\) As a result, one of the only ways Nourrit could have produced beauty in his tone rather than brilliance was to sing in a half voice for which he was also occasionally criticized. According to Hector Berlioz at the premier of Les

\(^{31}\) In Henry Chorley’s *Musical Manners in France and German* he relates a story from Hector Berlioz: “It was the evening of his farewell performance,” says M. Berlioz. “Having shut myself up with him in his room during an interlude, with the object once more endeavouring to combat his resolution, I showed him that all artists were compelled, in the course of their career, to undergo those vicissitudes which he was bent on escaping at any price. I unfolded to him the endless catalogue of difficulties and troubles which every one among us is called on, at one time or other, to encounter... Nourrit wept a good deal: presently recovering his voice, and interrupting me, ‘Enough, my dear friend,’ he said: ‘all that you say is perfectly true, generally speaking, but cannot be applied in my case. I was not born for such an existence: entering at an early age on the stage, while my father still occupied on the first situations at the theater, I found, thanks to a combination of circumstances, including his kind solicitude, every door open to me—every path made smooth—every difficulty removed.” Henry F. Chorley, *Music and Manners in France and Germany*, Vol. 1 (New York: Da Capo Press, 1984), 73.

\(^{32}\) Vest, 26–27.
Huguenots, “The high notes of Nourrit’s head voice have very much a feminine sound.”

Berlioz’ and other criticism puts to question Evan Walker’s assertion that Nourrit was already singing in the voix sombrée and not in the voix blanche that many disliked at the time when Duponchel engaged Duprez. Walker insists that dynamic markings under Nourrit’s part and orchestral textural competition along with the spacious opera houses in which Nourrit sang indicate that he was not singing in a falsetto or head voice production of sound. Not only is Walker’s assertion refuted by Berlioz, but critics such as Henry Chorley and François-Joseph Fétis, also categorized Nourrit’s voice as falsetto in nature. Vest also points out that the stunned reception of the Parisian public to Duprez’ C5 indicates that Nourrit had not offered this type of sound before this moment on stage.

While it may be true that Nourrit sang with more couvert than other French singers (due in large part to working with Rossini and Garcia) the fact remains that both musical critics such as Edoard Monnais and Berlioz noticed a significant distinction between the two voices. In short, Nourrit’s sound, however beloved in the past was not what the Parisian public wanted for its future. In fact, in Nourrit’s words,

I have come to understand that my future at the Opéra will no longer be like my past, and I have drawn the following conclusions. It would be unwise to count on singing for more than another four years. Despite the raise Duponchel is offering me... I have always thought of retiring early.

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35 Vest, 27.
enough to make a grand tour of the provinces, the income from which should not be less than a hundred thousand francs...Now, will I be able to make that grand tour four years from now? Today all my repertoire is new. The operas with which I now earn money will be old and tired, and between now and then I shall be doing only half the new works given in the Opéra...My regular repertoire will be passé, and it could be that between now and then I shall have no new successes... All that without taking into account that I shall certainly have lost some of my moral fiber, if only because I will have ceased to be the first and only one, and you know how the public is drawn to the new.\textsuperscript{36}

\begin{center}
Gilbert-Louis Duprez
\end{center}

Duprez was born to a poor family. His father was a perfumer by trade and as Rogers discusses, it would have been very difficult for him to become educated if he had not come to the attention of Alexandre Choron (a distinguished music pedagogue of the time). Rogers notes that Choron discovered in Duprez a real musical talent, which he undertook to develop.\textsuperscript{37} Potter goes further saying that, “Duprez had been a precocious child, able to \textit{solfège} anything at sight by the age of nine, and appearing at the Comédie-Française while still a treble. He spent ten years of his childhood and teenage years studying singing and composition at the school of Alexandre Choron, who could be so moved by the young boy’s voice, that he was prone to spontaneous weeping.”\textsuperscript{38}

After a short sojourn to Italy in 1825, he returned to France and took a contract at the age of eighteen in the Théâtre-Royal de l’Odéon. This theater began operating under royal warrant to produce music dramas in French that could be translations of foreign

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{36} Pleasants, \textit{The Great Tenor Tragedy}, 15–16.
\textsuperscript{37} Rogers, \textit{Some Famous Singers of the 19th Century}, 68.
\textsuperscript{38} Potter, \textit{Tenor: History of a Voice}, 51.
\end{flushright}
works, opera comique, pasticcio, and other occasional works. The Odéon recruited Duprez in November 1825 on his return to Paris and he was contracted there for approximately three years. His debut at the Odéon was in the role of Almaviva in Le barbier de Séville, which was followed closely in the press. The debut was critically marked by his good vocal ability and also his weakness as an actor. Everist quotes a reviewer and comments that, “As an actor, M. Duprez is not very able: from his extraordinary gestures, from the undulating movements of head, it is clear that he has returned from Italy.” Everist continues on to say that, “The press were entirely agreed on his good voice, agility, and sound technique. His voice was sweet and flûté and reminded one reviewer of the voice of the castrato Giovanni Battista Velluti...” Further, one reviewer remarked that he [Duprez] could not be heard beyond the prompter’s box at the foot of the stage. Commentary and critical reviews such as this detail a pleasant if less than powerful voice that was interesting but not sensational: completely at odds with his reception in Paris twelve years later.

While at the Odéon, Duprez’ repertoire consisted of the lighter Rossini roles as well as some French translations of foreign works and a variety of other roles. He was in

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39 Pasticci are a form of borrowing and reworking music from the same composer or different composers that creates a new work. Often this borrowing is unauthorized. Music often remains unchanged, if threaded together with disparate original creations, characters would change and an imposed original storyline was created.


41 Everist, 82.

the shadow of the primo tenore of the theater Lecomte43 who was much sought after by other Parisian theaters for guest appearances. Duprez was not the first tenor of the company, so as Lecomte was performing at other theaters or was ill, Duprez would take over much of Lecomte’s repertoire. Table 1 illustrates a partial list of Duprez’ repertoire while at the Odéon in 1826 and 1827.

Table 1. Partial repertoire list for Gilbert Duprez at the Odéon Theater for the years 1826 and 1827.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Composer/Librettist</th>
<th>Repertoire Category</th>
<th>Original Title; Composer/Librettist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Le Barbier de Séville</em></td>
<td>Almaviva</td>
<td>Castil-Blaze/Cesare Sterbini</td>
<td>Translation</td>
<td><em>Il barbier di Siviglia</em>; Rossini/Sterbini</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ivanhoé</em></td>
<td>Ivanhoé</td>
<td>Rossini and Antonio Franco Gaetano Saverio Pacini</td>
<td>Pasticcio</td>
<td>Rossini and Antonio Francenso Gaetano Saverio Pacini</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Robin des bois</em></td>
<td>Tony (Max)</td>
<td>Castil-Blaze/Castil-Blaze and Thomas Sauvage</td>
<td>Translation</td>
<td><em>Der Freischütz</em>; Carl Maria von Weber/Friederich Kind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Le neveu de Monseigneur</em></td>
<td>Paoli</td>
<td>Luc Guénée/Jean-François-Alfred Bayard, Augusta Kernoc, Vicomtesse de Chamilly, and Sauvage</td>
<td>Pasticcio</td>
<td>Rossini and Pacini</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Les bohémians</em></td>
<td>–</td>
<td>Crémont/Sauvage</td>
<td>Pasticcio</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>La Testament</em></td>
<td>Malvitz</td>
<td>Lemierre de Corvey/Comtes de Saur and de Saint Geniez</td>
<td>Pasticcio</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Adolphe et Clara</em></td>
<td>Adolphe</td>
<td>Dalayrac/Marsollier des Vivetières</td>
<td>Ancien répertoire</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source*: Repertoire, performance dates and all other information taken from Everist, p 83 and Appendix 1.

As table one indicates, Duprez’ career and repertoire in Paris was not extremely noteworthy. He was singing music in French at the time and much of it in an older style and some of it written by Rossini for a lighter type of tenor voice. A significant departure

43 Lecomte’s first name is not listed in Everist, Grove, Kobbe’s or any source currently available to the author.
from most of his repertoire was the French translation of Weber’s Der Freischütz: Robin de bois. Castil-Blaze was not authorized by Weber to make any translation or use of his works and by all accounts, Castil-Blaze mangled the libretto.\textsuperscript{44} Freischütz is among the first German Romantic operas with an orchestration thick with brass, woodwinds and percussion.\textsuperscript{45} The tenor role in Freischütz requires an acoustically strong voice to be heard through the orchestration, which means that this role must have challenged Duprez’ vocal production to a great extent. The orchestration for operas at the Odéon was not generally minimized for performances.\textsuperscript{46} Accordingly, singing Tony (Max) would have been a challenge for a voice described as fluté and accustomed to the lighter orchestration in Rossini’s Le barbier de Séville. After the company of the Odéon began to fail in 1827–28, he and his wife were released from their contracts. They then joined the Opéra-

\textsuperscript{44} “In his final months in Dresden Weber’s irritation over the mostly unauthorized dissemination of his work abroad led him to try to exert more control over his intellectual property. The actions of the Parisian arranger Castil-Blaze caused special concern. Although he could do nothing about Castil-Blaze’s adaptation of Der Freischütz as Robin des bois at the Théâtre de l’Odéon (7 December 1824), Weber wrote in October 1825 to reproach him for the unauthorized publication of the full score of his version. And on learning that Castil-Blaze planned to produce a new work based in part on the music of Euryanthe, Weber wrote again in January 1826, this time threatening to make his protest public, which he did after Castil-Blaze proceeded anyway to incorporate pieces from Euryanthe in the pasticcio La forêt de Sénart (14 January 1826).” Philipp Spitta, et al, "Weber," in Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/40313pg9 (accessed November 14, 2011).


\textsuperscript{46} “During the period 1824–28, the orchestra at the Odéon quadrupled in size and began to rival those of the major lyric theaters in the capital.” Everist, 95.
Comique for a short time, which ultimately proved unsuccessful. Later, he and his wife left for Italy in 1829 in search of success.

Between their arrival in Italy in 1829 and Duprez’ engagement by the influential impresario Alessandro Lanari (1787–1852) in 1830, there is scant information available. Vest speaks of a successful Italian premier of Rossini’s *Le Comte Ory* in 1830 that featured both Duprez and his wife, Alexandrine Duperron. The premier occurred at the Teatro San Benedetto in Venice in and its success brought the young tenor to the attention of Lanari. Rosselli relates an anecdote from Duprez’ 1880 autobiography, *Souvenirs d’un chanteur*, which describes Lanari’s engagement of the twenty four year old tenor in 1830:

A story of Duprez’ rings true even though it had probably improved with time. When he saw Lanari about signing a long-term contract – he was then twenty-four – Lanari was in his bath, to which he was often confined by severe piles. Duprez tried to push up the price. “‘Alas! You want to make me die, I can see! A poor impresario who is in such pain! To torment him like that! Look!...’ and, will-nilly, I saw!’ [Rosselli observes that] Hardly knowing whether to laugh or to commiserate, Duprez signed.”

Lanari engaged Duprez and placed him in Lucca, Italy in 1831 where he was asked to prepare the role of Arnold in Rossini’s *Guglielmo Tell*. Arnold was originally to be performed by the contralto Benedetta Pisaroni (transposed for her voice) but she fell ill so Duprez was called upon to sing the role for her. He knew, according to Pleasants, that his voice would not be able to contain the shape of the role and the extremely dramatic scenes. In his performance, however, he produced most, if not all, of the role in a new

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47 Vest, 48.

full-voice sound he claimed to have discovered himself as he relates in his *Souvenirs*:

“It required the concentration of every resource of will power and physical strength. ‘So be it,’ I said to myself, ‘it may be the end of me, but somehow I’ll do it.’ And so I found even the high C (C₅) which was later to bring me so much success in Paris.”

His performance in Lucca was one of the highlights of his early career in Italy and brought him to the notice of Gaetano Donizetti with whom he began a long collaboration that continued after Duprez returned to Paris to sing for the Opéra.

Duprez’ debut with the Paris Opéra was not a guaranteed success for either him or the impresario Duponchel. Berlioz notes, “The great majority of listeners were, however, armed in advance against him with cruel prejudices; we were able to easily convince ourselves in listening to the conversations that passed around us in the greenroom and the boxes. The debutant, so they said, is a cold singer, without soul, without any knowledge of dramatic art, and what is more, excessively ugly.” A less than flattering preconception in the Parisian critical magazines set the stage for a great triumph for Duprez. Against this predisposition, with his new sound in a role originated by their beloved Nourrit, Duprez shocked and won over both the critics and the public. According to one critic, Duprez had, “A perfectly pure, balanced, and sonorous voice, extraordinary declamation…he sings simply and powerfully, according to his means…In the third act he restored an aria cut long ago: ‘Asile héréditaire,’ and it is there that his true victory

49 Bloch, 11–12.

50 Pleasants, *The Great Singers*, 166.

began. This aria is his property, his conquest.” Duprez’ triumph can reasonably be explained only by the audience’s readiness and need for the new and for the spectacular of the unexpected. Nourrit was beloved and familiar; Duprez was new and doubted. In this situation, Duprez answered that audience need in his performance of Arnold that night and set the bar for every tenor to come after him.

**Italian Influences on Duprez’ Technique**

In his autobiography, Duprez insisted that beyond some initial lessons with a ‘padroni’ in Milan, he did not study with anyone and that he alone was responsible for developing his own technique and adopting the *voix sombrée* to his needs and for his fame. Some scholars assert that Duprez most probably chose to study with Domenico Donzelli upon his return to Italy in 1831, though others dispute this view. Donzelli was the first tenor to successfully negotiate the chest voice A₄ natural and gained much fame in Paris in the Theatre-Italienne. As early as 1826, Parisian music critics noted that Domenico Donzelli’s voice began to darken and the higher ranges of some of the Rossini roles seemed unsuitable for his voice. Composer Vincenzo Bellini refused to grant Donzelli the tenor role in *Il Pirata* (1827) because his voice had grown unsuitable for it.

At the least, most scholars agree that Duprez modeled his voice after the example of the powerful Donzelli who exemplified the *voix sombrée*. In either case, the fact remains

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54 Vest, 50
that Duprez and Donzelli were well acquainted and during the course of their association, Duprez’ voice continued to change, darken, and grow in acoustic power.

Duprez’ management by Lanari and association with Donzelli brought him to the attention of Donizetti and Bellini – the latter happily casting him in Il Pirata in 1831 before his voice began to seriously change from its Rossinian beginnings.56 Duprez’ collaboration with Donizetti figures prominently in the transformation of Duprez’ voice and thereby the transformation of tenor technique and performance practice and will be explored in depth later in this document.


Chapter 2

Influence of the Evolution of Operatic Plots and Characters

Influence and Integration of Buffa and Seria Styles

In the middle of the eighteenth century, baroque opera and its plots based on myths, legends, and poetry gave way to the naturalistic representations of characters and drama in the combined styles of opera seria and opera buffa. Gluck and his librettist Ranieri Calzabigi began telling and composing simpler operas that valued communication of the drama of a story over an emphasis on fantasy and vocal excess. Many of Gluck’s reform operas dealt with myths and legends, but they did so in a much more clear and classical way that made the characters on stage seem more accessible and natural seeming to the audience. There was a noble simplicity, to use Johann Joachim Winckleman’s term, in Guck’s opera seria that was also evident in his buffa stories. Gluck’s buffa operas showed characters in real life situations (even if comic in nature) that had more than a grain of reality to their story. Le cadi dupe (1761) exemplifies both the hilarity of the buffa subject matter and that modicum of believability in the story by telling how an older judge who wishes to divorce his wife to marry a younger woman is duped into only releasing his claim on the young woman to the one young man whom she loved anyway. Buffa opera gave way to the more complex dramma giocoso of the Italians in the mid eighteenth century. Giocosi demonstrated how a buffa opera could still be socially relevant with the addition of more serious characters and a portrayal of a wider range of natural emotions and believable characters. This was especially evident in compositions such as La buona figliuola (1760) by Niccolò Piccini. The effect of this
evolution of dramatic content in the last half of the eighteenth century on the
development of the tenor voice was significant. Stories told in this timeframe
increasingly required a gender specific voice to represent the more naturally represented
characters. We see confirmation of this in the parts assigned by composer Giovanni
Paisiello (1740–1816) for his male operatic roles: “Paisiello led the way in abandoning
the artificial high voices of the opera seria in favour of the natural tenor voice for parti
serie.” In turn, the natural characters portrayed by natural tenor voices were
increasingly surrounded by increasingly plausible, real-life situations (even if to
somewhat heightened effect). Piasiello was very influential in beginning the integration
of buffa and seria styles of characters and their musical activities. His treatment of what
was called the solo aria, “reached a peak of expansiveness, refinement and
expressiveness: if one were to seek for comparisons in the more familiar operatic
repertory it would be to Idomeneo rather than le Nozze di Figaro that one would turn.
Most of the characters in a Paisiello opera who are not broadly comic are kin to Don
Ottavio or Fiordiligì.”

Mozart accomplished the integration all of these traditions in the last ten years
before his death in 1791 with some of his best-known operas. He also paved the way for
the integration of societal commentary on class distinctions, which then opened the door
to the later inclusion of political themes and characters in operatic plots. In total, Mozart
wrote five opera seria and seven opera buffa. His opera seria features fallible kings like
Idomeneo and unlikely human compassion in Clemenza di Tito. His opera buffa

57 David Kimbell, Italian Opera, National Traditions of Opera, edited by John
58 Ibid., 347.
illuminates the unthinkable interaction of classes in *Così fan tutte*, unpalatable fallibility of nobility in *Nozze di Figaro*, and elements of both in *Don Giovanni*. The artistry with which he told his stories—that increasingly included sensitive themes and commentary—blunted potential monarchical censorship and increased the impact of his innovations and their effects. From this vantage point given by Mozart, it is possible to understand the repertoire that was influential in the life of Nourrit and especially transformational in the voice of Duprez.

Mozart has a special significance in the development of the tenor voice. He continued along the path set by composers like Paisiello and used the natural tenor voice in roles that took advantage of its sound and the acoustical intensity of that voice’s passaggio. Roles like Ferrando in *Così fan tutte* seduce with the sound of the voice in the passaggio and above; Idomeneo commands with the bravura of his coloratura passages that constantly enter the intense acoustic area of the passaggio and then return to the natural speaking male speaking area of the voice. Don Ottavio proclaims a steadfast and faithful decision in the held F natural just below the passaggio in his aria “Il mio Tesoro”; and finally, Tamino cries for help at the beginning of the opera in punctuated phrases in his passaggio, and declares his undying love in the tessitura of his passaggio in the aria “Dies Bildnis”. Mozart repeatedly took advantage of the acoustic palate in the passaggio of the natural tenor voice in his synthesis of dramatic and musical passages. Because of Mozart’s pivot to increased use of the natural tenor voice—especially the juxtaposition of the tenor role of Idomeneo as the king with the secondary male role of his son Idamantes (by the castrato)—he laid the groundwork for the purging of tenor technique descended
from the castrato voice. Without this pivot, the primacy of the castrato high male voice and its descendant technique would not have been challenged.

After Mozart’s death, opera in the early nineteenth century is best categorized according to nationality rather than style.\(^{59}\) His fusing of the concepts of opera seria and buffa and the integrations of the characters in each redefined opera. Concurrent to Mozart’s redefinition of opera is the stirring of cultural nationalism that began in the late eighteenth century. The concept of nationalism later grew into a pillar of the nineteenth century Romantic Movement that emphasized language and culture as the definition of nationality rather than arbitrary monarchical boundaries at the turn of the nineteenth century.

**Repertoire at the Turn of the Century**

According to the chronology listed in the Oxford Illustrated History of Opera, (assembled by Mary Smart) from the time of Mozart’s death in 1791 to Rossini’s first debut, there are eleven composers and twelve compositions of note.\(^{60}\) The lack of notable and lasting repertoire during this twenty-two year span underscores the significance of Mozart’s impact on opera, and why Gioacchino Rossini later dominated Italian opera at the turn of the century, and how he came to dominate and change French opera with the last three of his operas.\(^{61}\) Rossini’s early operas dealt with engaging buffa subjects as in

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l’Italiana in Algeri (1813) and Il barbiere di Siviglia (1816) for which he is best known. These early operas featured characters that did not stray very far from Mozart’s buffa characters, but were used in much more modern situations and plots. Much of the rest of Rossini’s career is marked by operas that are predominately dramatic or serious in nature. His serious operas and dramas included religious, political, and societal themes and between 1820 with his opera Maometto and his final opera, Guillaume Tell (1829), six of his last nine operas were based on serious subjects with political, historical, or dramatic texts.

Despite the fact that the subject matter for his libretti shifted towards more serious, dramatic, and heroic subjects, his compositional style evolved only a little and remained at odds with the rising influence of the Romantic Movement. It looked backward rather than forward:

The rhythmic idiosyncrasies of Italian Romantic opera were just one aspect of a melodic style, which, in the broadest terms, was becoming more declamatory. Rossini’s melodies, at their most expansive, had depended for their execution upon skills inherited from the great castrati of the late eighteenth century: ease of delivery, the brilliantly pointed articulation of coloratura, phenomenal breath-control, the creative application of embellishment. It was a style that did not lend itself well to the dramatic ambitions of Romanticism.


63 Kimbell, 438.
Significantly, French opera (especially at the Paris Opéra) at the turn of the nineteenth century quite often looked backwards towards Gluck for its repertoire.

According to Pleasants:

The opera at that time—here I am drawing upon Quicherat, but not exclusively—in contrast to the livelier, more adventurous, more popular Opéra-Comique and to the vocal splendors and Italian repertoire of the Théâtre-Italien languished in the hands and minds of a traditionalist establishment still wedded to the concept of serious opera as tragédie-lyrique, with French declamation valued above Italianate lyricism, a holdover from the famous contention between the Gluckists and the Piccinnists of half a century earlier (1771–81).64

Evidence of this traditional mindset and backward looking choices of company repertoire is illustrated in the opera in which Nourrit made his debut at the Paris Opéra in 1821—with an opera written nearly fifty years earlier: Gluck’s Iphigénie en Tauride.

Additionally, five out of Nourrit’s first seven roles were written at least thirty years before he performed them. Combined, the traditionalism of the Paris Opéra and Rossini’s preference for, and writing for, the older, florid style of singing created an opportunity for the sweeping changes that would take place upon Duprez’ return to Paris.

Nourrit and Duprez—from the beginning of their respective careers—performed different repertoire (involving extremely different dramatic content) that featured significantly different vocal demands (see table 3 and table 4). As a result, each singer portrayed different stories on stage and developed his voice for a different area of expertise. Nourrit’s early career at the Paris Opéra focused on performance of repertoire composed before the turn of the nineteenth century that told stories portraying characters of myth, legend, and poetry that incorporated the ‘light amorous tenor’ of early opera.

Repertoire such as this looked backward to before Mozart’s integration of buffa and seria

64 Pleasants, Tenor Tragedy, 4–5.
styles, plots, and characters. Consequently, Nourrit’s style of singing and vocal production remained far more connected to the *haute-contre* style of singing that paralleled the vocal production of the castrato and which Rossini preferred. At the same time (1824–30), Duprez was singing at the Odéon Theater whose repertoire included many foreign works of different styles (see table 1). His exposure to roles and music written by Rossini, Weber, and others (all sung in French) would have challenged his vocal technique to a greater extent than happened with Nourrit at the beginning of his career (see appendix A) while singing *ancien* repertoire.

Beginning in 1830 for Duprez and 1828 for Nourrit, their respective repertoires changed (see table 2 and table 3). Duprez had travelled to Italy by this time and began to sing roles originally written for or performed by Nourrit with one significant difference: he sang them in Italian rather than French. After several successes in the early 1830s in Italy with this repertoire, Duprez came to the notice of Gaetano Donizetti and began an association with the composer that transformed Duprez’ career. Donizetti was writing operas with libretti that drew inspiration from English literature and subjects that portrayed natural characters with violent emotions, which in turn challenged and then took advantage of the darkening voice of Duprez. At the same time, Nourrit was performing roles in works by Rossini, Halévy, Auber, and others that were specifically tailored for his voice and its particular strengths. Even Rossini wrote different vocal demands for different singers that highlighted the best of their voice and thus, according

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65 “These days the art of singing is on the barricades; the old florid style is replaced by a nervous style, the solemn style by that kind of shouting we used to describe as being in the French manner; and finally the tender, sentimental style by the rabidly passionate! As you see, my dear Florimo, today it is simply a question of lung-power; the kind of singing one feels in the soul, and sheer splendor of voice have been banned. (F. Lippman, 1969a ‘Rossinis Gedanken über die Musik,’ in *Mf*, 22. Pg 290).” Kimbell, 447.
to Pleasants, “Never burdened him [Nourrit] with the virtuoso requirements he had
imposed upon David, Nozari, Rubini and Donzelli.” In fact, by many critical accounts,
Nourrit was heavily involved in the musical and dramatic elements of several of the roles
written for him.

**Repertoire That Influenced Nourrit**

1828 marked a significant development in Nourrit’s career at the Paris Opéra. He
created the role of Masaniello in Auber’s *La Muette de Portici* (1828) to resounding
success. Sarah Hibberd explains that, *Muette* was the first opera in the French Grand
Opera tradition and tells a historical story, loosely based on the recent past: “*Muette de
Portici*, has been remembered since it’s première in 1828 for its revolutionary sentiments:
the depiction of a violent but unsuccessful revolt in seventeenth-century Naples, resonant
with the events of 1789.” The opera tells the story of what was commonly referred to as

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67 “His advice and collaboration was sought by composers; he wrote the words of
Eléazar’s aria ‘Rachel, quand du Seigneur’ and insisted that Meyerbeer rework the love-
duet climax of Act 4 of *Les Huguenots* until it met with his approval. He also wrote four
ballet scenarios including *La Sylphide* (1832), whose combination of magic and Scottian
realism was inspired by *Robert le diable*. In addition, he was concerned more broadly
with the social aspects of singing, particularly with the missionary role of the performer.
In the early 1830s he was involved with the ideas of the Saint-Simonians, and after his
retirement dreamed of founding a grand *opéra populaire* which would introduce opera to
the masses (see Locke).” Evan Walker and Sarah Hibberd, "Adolphe Nourrit," in *Grove
subscriber/article/grove/music/20137 (accessed February 26, 2010).

68 Sarah Hibberd, “Grand Operas for Paris,” in *Grand Opera*, edited by David
Charlton, 149–167 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 149.
the Masaniello legend that was well known throughout Europe with the man and his cause striking a resonant chord with oppressed people yearning to fight back. \(^{69}\)

Auber and his librettists, Eugene Scribe and Germaine Delavigne, assigned the part of the dynamic revolutionary to the tenor voice and Auber granted the premier of the role to Nourrit. The libretto and role involve a connection of the rulers and the ruled. Because of their creation of Masaniello’s seduced and raped mute sister, they also intertwined the personal and the political. \(^{70}\) This fusion of elements by Scribe encapsulated the changing dramatic nature of operatic plots on the stage of the Paris Opéra and the Romantic Movement as a whole in the early nineteenth century. Auber personified in his music the reality and urgency that Scribe achieved in the libretto, as Wagner noted in his ‘Reminiscences of Auber’:

> Each of the five acts presented a dramatic picture of the most extraordinary animation, where arias and duets in the wonted operatic sense were scarcely to be detected any more, and certainly, with the exception of a singer prima-donna aria in the first act, did not strike on at all as such; in each instance it was the ensemble of the whole act that riveted attention and carried one away....Auber made his music reproduce each contrast, every blend, in contours and colours of so drastic, so vivid a distinctiveness as we cannot recall seeing before. \(^{71}\)

Masaniello was significant for Nourrit because it marked the transition of what was to be the last half of his career into the first incarnation of what Pleasants calls a ‘dramatic’ tenor (see table 3). Caveat to this appellation is that Nourrit did not alter his

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\(^{69}\) Masaniello was a fisherman’s son according to the legend, who orchestrated underground preparations for a riot in protest of excessive taxes that turned into a rout of the Spanish rulers of the city. He was later arrested and killed. These historical events upon which the opera is based occurred in Naples in 1647.


\(^{71}\) Ibid., 144–45.
voice to become what we think of today as a ‘dramatic’ voice. Rather, he used the talents and abilities of his voice as it was—to the best of his ability—to create and portray ‘dramatic’ roles on the stage.\footnote{Pleasants, \textit{The Great Tenor Tragedy}, 2.} Nourrit portrayed characters immersed in subjects and situations that had more historical significance, cultural relevance, and political resonance than was seen before on stage. He successfully achieved this through his unparalleled stagecraft and acting ability: he did \textit{not} do so vocally. While singing these ‘dramatic’ roles, he was using the voice he developed early in his career and which seemed increasingly unsuited to the roles placed before him. Ultimately, this incongruity of voice quality to dramatic content would set the stage for Duprez’ sensational achievement.

According to Kimbell,

\begin{quote}
What was seen as a more truthful style of acting, the increasingly sensational and violent tone of the dramas themselves, the use of heavier orchestral textures—all these things combined with the plainer lyrical style of the period to encourage a louder and more impassioned style of singing. The extension of the chest-range of the tenor voice from about G upwards to the notorious ‘ut-de-poitrine’ of Gilbert Duprez, a development of the 1830s, was the most sensational symptom of this trend.\footnote{Kimbell, 446.}
\end{quote}
Table 2. French repertoire sung by Adolphe Nourrit, 1826–36.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opera (Date Composed)</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>Fach</th>
<th>Subject Matter</th>
<th>Fach Range</th>
<th>Year Nourrit Performed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>La Muette de Portici</em> (1828)</td>
<td>Masniello*</td>
<td>Auber</td>
<td>Full Lyric</td>
<td>Historical Drama</td>
<td>C3–C#5</td>
<td>1828</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Guillaume Tell</em> (1829)</td>
<td>Arnold</td>
<td>Rossini</td>
<td>Full Lyric</td>
<td>Political/Dramatic</td>
<td>C3–C#5</td>
<td>1829</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Robert le diable</em> (1831)</td>
<td>Robert *</td>
<td>Meyerbeer</td>
<td>Dramatic</td>
<td>Drama</td>
<td>C3–C5</td>
<td>1831</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ali-Baba</em> (1833)</td>
<td>Nadir</td>
<td>Cherubini</td>
<td>Lyric</td>
<td>Tragédie Lyrique</td>
<td>C3–C5</td>
<td>1833</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Don Juan</em> (1787)</td>
<td>Don Juan</td>
<td>Mozart</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>Lyric Drama *</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>1835</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>La Juive</em> (1835)</td>
<td>Eléazar *</td>
<td>Halévy</td>
<td>Spinto</td>
<td>Historical Drama</td>
<td>C3–C5</td>
<td>1835</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Les Huguenots</em> (1836)</td>
<td>Raoul de Nangis *</td>
<td>Meyerbeer</td>
<td>Full Lyric</td>
<td>Historical Drama</td>
<td>C3–C#5</td>
<td>1836</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Repertoire and performance dates are from Appendix B. Fach information is from Richard Boldry’s *Guide to Operatic Arias and Roles.* *Subject matter is categorized differently than the Boldry: information from Spire Pitou’s *The Paris Opera: Roccoco and Romantic* under Don Juan.* **Presumably the role was transposed for Nourrit’s tenor voice, but records are not available or do not survive for verification.

**Repertoire That Influenced Duprez**

The sensation of Duprez’ achievement on the stage of the Paris Opéra is one that had its origins in his time in Italy and in the dramatic content of several roles written for Nourrit. Duprez performed these roles in Italian and the alchemical combination of the Italian language, his vocal training, and the dramatic qualities of these roles created the voice that stole the heart of the Parisian public in 1837. In addition to the influence of his
performances in Italian, is his collaboration with the composer Gaetano Donizetti. Table 3 lists significant repertoire for Duprez while in Italy and highlights the prolific nature of his collaboration with Donizetti that began with Ugo in *Parisina*.

Ashbrook observes that:

> The singer who seems to have had an essential impact on Donizetti’s evolving sense of the romantic tenor was Duprez... The first role that Donizetti tailored to his measure was that of Ugo, the doomed lover of Parisina, who is forced to marry the jealous Azzo d’Este (the situation being somewhat analogous to that in Browning’s *My Last Duchess*). The tessitura of Ugo’s music, which contains an alternate passage with an E [E₅] above the tenor’s high C, is relentless.⁷⁴

The libretto is by Felice Romani and is based on a story by Lord Byron. English literature at this time was a significant source of dramatic material for Romantic opera and the role of Ugo is one that involves hidden origins, mistaken identity, and unjust murder at the hands of a father. The plot of the opera also turns on intense human emotions of jealousy and pride. The tragic and hopeless nature of the Ugo and Parisina’s love for each other—that was originally thwarted by Azzo when he forced Parisina to marry him rather than Ugo—inhabits the entire plot. Azzo’s simmering rage of jealousy and the love triangle in the plot bring to mind Puccini’s *Tosca*. Ashbrook explains that, “*Parisina* has a powerful and tragic plot, derived from Byron’s poem of the same name, but the exposition is somewhat awkward. The plot contains strong elements of Romanticism and two of the characters, Parisina and Azzo, are vividly realized. In many expressive details *Parisina* foreshadows *Lucia*.⁷⁵ Each singer on stage needed to embody their roles authentically in order for the audience to believe that Azzo could kill his own son from a previous

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⁷⁵ Ashbrook, *Donizetti and His Operas*, 78.
marriage for falling in love with his wife. Perceived authenticity of emotions for these portrayals increasingly mattered for the performance of Donizetti’s operas according to Kimbell:

> These developments were simply one sign of the fact that during the late 1820s and 1830s, as composers pursued more original and idiosyncratic dramatic versions, the traditional musical skills of opera singers ceased to be all-sufficient. Beauty of tone and virtuosity of execution yielded pride of place to expressiveness and dramatic perception.\(^{76}\)

Duprez began to excel in these types of portrayals given to him by Donizetti and because of these opportunities he was able to blend the increasing dramatic aspects of his voice with a growing facility on stage. Smart, in her essay *Roles, Reputations, Shadows: Singers at the Opéra, 1828–1849*, spoke of the direction that the libretti in opera were headed. In her essay she noted a dramatic verisimilitude that increasingly defined operatic stories and roles and that was definitely involved in Duprez’ repertoire. She observes that archetypes of masculinity were being re-examined as they pertained to the tenor voice and that roles written for Duprez tended towards the masculine love interest rather than the masculine hero and political revolutionary. The musical manifestation of which came in the use of a higher centered tessitura of notes rather than use of the extremely high range that was now possible.\(^{77}\)

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\(^{76}\) Kimbell, 446.

Table 3. Italian repertoire sung by Gilber-Louis Duprez, 1830–35.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opera (Date Composed)</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>Fach</th>
<th>Subject Matter</th>
<th>Fach Range</th>
<th>Year Duprez Performed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Il conte Ory</em> (1828)</td>
<td>Ory</td>
<td>Rossini</td>
<td>Light Lyric</td>
<td>Romantic farce</td>
<td>C3–Eb5</td>
<td>1830</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Il Pirata</em> (1827)</td>
<td>Gaultiero</td>
<td>Bellini</td>
<td>Spinto</td>
<td>Romantic Tragedy</td>
<td>C3–C5</td>
<td>1831</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Guglielmo Tell</em> (1829)</td>
<td>Arnold</td>
<td>Rossini</td>
<td>Full Lyric</td>
<td>Political/Dramatic</td>
<td>C3–C#5</td>
<td>1831</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Anna Bolena</em> (1830)</td>
<td>Percy</td>
<td>Donizetti</td>
<td>Full Lyric</td>
<td>Historical Drama</td>
<td>C3–C#5</td>
<td>1831</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Parasina</em> (1833)</td>
<td>Ugo</td>
<td>Donizetti</td>
<td>Dramatic</td>
<td>Drama/Tragedy</td>
<td>C3–C5</td>
<td>1833</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Rosmonda d’Inghilterra</em> (1834)</td>
<td>Henry II</td>
<td>Donizetti</td>
<td>Lyric</td>
<td>Historical Drama</td>
<td>C3–C5</td>
<td>1834</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Lucia di Lammermoor</em> (1835)</td>
<td>Edgardo</td>
<td>Donizetti</td>
<td>Full Lyric</td>
<td>Romantic Tragedy</td>
<td>C3–C#5</td>
<td>1835</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Repertoire and performance dates cited from bibliographic sources by Henry Pleasants in *The Great Singers* and *The Tenor Tragedy*, John Rosselli in *The Opera Industry from Cimarosa to Verdi*, Rodolfo Celletti in *A History of Bel Canto*. Fach designations and corresponding ranges are from Richard Boldry’s *Guide to Arias and Roles*. 
CHAPTER 3

Influence of Culture And Language

Cultural Biases towards a Style of Singing

Why was Nourrit convinced that he needed to go to Italy to acquire the skills and vocal production epitomized by Duprez? His decision separated him from his family, friends, and the life and culture with which he was familiar. Why could he not find a master teacher in France to help him make this technical transition he desired? For that matter, what was Nourrit really lacking other than this ‘squawk’ as Rossini put it and what really was Duprez—arguably a talented singer—able to discover in Italy that led to the change in his voice? Duprez’ voice was described as fluté and compared to a castrato in his French debut in 1824. After his time in Italy, he was hailed as a true tenore di forza. At its heart, this decision by Nourrit to chase down Duprez’ path to vocal transformation underscores the cultural affinities and biases of the French and Italian culture and language that impacted Nourrit’s and Duprez’ voices and resulting careers.

In the early 1600s there is documented evidence of differences in musical writing, especially in regards to singing styles. In his book A History of Bel Canto, Rodolfo Celletti quotes a French artist, Cellist André Maugars, speaking of the Italian style of singing. “In truth it must be confessed that they are incomparable and inimitable in this type of stage music, not only in respect of the singing, but in the expression given to the words and the posture and gestures of the characters they represent in an easy, natural manner.”78 Additionally, James Stark quotes the French musician and theorist Marin

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Mersenne, from his treatise *Harmonie universelle*, from the chapter on singing with regard to a cultural preference for a *style* of singing:

As to the Italians, in their recitatives they observe many things of which ours are deprived, because they represent as much as they can the passions and affectations of the soul and spirit, as, for example, anger, furor, disdain, rage, the frailties of the hear, and many other passions, with a violence so strange that one would almost say that they are touched by the same emotions they are representing in the song; whereas our French are content to tickle the ear, and have a perpetual sweetness in their songs, which deprives them of energy.\(^79\)

Differences of each language from the other played a significant determining factor in the development of the operatic singing voice over time.\(^80\) Consequently the marked cultural divisions in style and performance practice of French and Italian opera could have their genesis in these differences. Potter remarks that, “the French had little time for virtuosity that was unrelated to the text, and a distinctively French sound developed based on the exigencies of the French language.”\(^81\) He goes on to assert that any ornamentation a singer would add to a vocal line in the late seventeenth century must be elegant and preserve, “the stresses and quantities of the French language.”\(^82\) Potter delves further into the differences in French and Italian singing by noting that “[Bénigne

\(^79\) Stark, 206.

\(^80\) “Two assumptions result from even a cursory glance into the role of language with regard to the four national schools of singing [French, German, Italian, and English]. First, although perhaps difficult to document, linguistic idiosyncrasies partially dictate and color aural perceptions which mod aesthetic principles out of which national concepts of ideal vocal sound emerge. Secondly, certain languages are better adapted than others to the art of singing because of the kinds of acoustical activity they engender within the vocal tract. Both of these factors, national tonal aesthetics and the mechanistic functions of language, conjoin to produce qualities of vocal sound which vary from school to school.” Richard Miller, “The Role of Language in National Pedagogies,” in *National Schools of Singing* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1997), 172.


\(^82\) Ibid.
Bacilly (1625–90) is [was] aware of the comparisons that were often made between French and Italian singing, and the importance of language to those distinctions: ‘the Italian language permits more freedom than the French, whose strictness (which is perhaps excessive) tends to hold composers in check and often prevents them from doing everything that their genius would inspire’.\(^8^3\) The strictness to which Bacilly refers is the need to maintain the textual subtleties of the French language while incorporating Italian dramatic declamation. Richard Miller explains:

> The quality and character of the singing tone in the French School is more directly determined by the sounds encountered in the spoken language than in any of the other major schools under consideration...it must be kept in mind than Italian speech is far less involved in subtleties of phonetic variation than is the speech of the French person. Carefully distinguished vowel gradations, nasals, and the important role of inflection and stress—all must find fulfillment in sung French...[the] French [language]...makes greater demands that vocalized sound be closely bound to speech than is the case in any other European school of singing.\(^8^4\)

Nourrit and Duprez’ ways of producing sound—and their respective artistic approaches—reflected the country in which they were immersed. Nourrit studied voice and achieved success in France while Duprez began his studies in France and after no major success, went twice to Italy where his career blossomed. Neither performer considered the other inferior; both respected the other greatly even if each criticized the style of singing the other represented.\(^8^5\) In terms of their artistry, they were both very

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\(^8^4\) Miller, “The Role of Language in National Pedagogies,” in *National Schools of Singing* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1997), 176.

dramatic performers on stage. Nourrit’s dramatic portrayals came from the subtlety of his voice and his studied, traditional movements on stage. Rogers observes,

[Nourrit’s] voice may not have been so full or rich or flexible as the best Italian tenors, but his training under Garcia had given him sure control of its possibilities. His style was energetic without being vociferous; elegant and full of color, rather than impassioned. His enunciation was exemplary. He was rather short in stature, with a tendency to rotundity, but he moved with dignity and grace, and was an adept in the art of costume and make-up. His features were strong and expressive; in particular, his large blue eyes. As an actor he was effective in both comedy and tragedy. Take him for all in all, he was the embodiment of everything that the French thought and still think most desirable in a lyric actor.86

Conversely, Duprez’ dramatic portrayals came from his more virile sound and the raw emotion of his movements. There were however, critics who, as Corti noted, described Duprez’ acting as, “exaggerated.”87 Documented in many respects is a cultural component to this clash of the style and aesthetics of these two artists that cannot be ignored. What the French would call exaggerated the Italians called passionate. Duprez encountered this very prejudicial friction after his first short trip to Italy. Upon his return to France and in his debut at the Odéon theater in Le Barbier de Séville, a critic at Le Frondeur noted that as an actor, Duprez used extraordinary and undulating gestures and movements of the head that made it clear he had just returned from Italy.88

Nourrit and Duprez were singers renowned for their abilities, but the Parisian public, once exposed to Duprez, preferred his more virile and masculine89 sound of over

88 Everist, 82.
89 Bloch, 11–12.
the more nuanced and bright sound produced by Nourrit. The remaining question is: why did they do so? To this point, Nourrit had been hailed for his portrayals on stage and Duprez initially derided for his debut that seemed too ‘Italian’. In his dissertation on this topic, Jason Vest remarked that the reason for the Parisian public’s conversion could lie in the visceral impact of the sound Duprez produced and the resulting engenderment of a significant and different kind of emotion in the listener. He surveyed listeners’ relative emotional responses to sound clips of tenors singing an aria in original fashion and then those same clips, randomized, and edited with an audio program to artificially increase the singers’ formant. In this way he was able to measure an emotional response to that singer’s formant. Vest found that the participants noted an increased emotional response to the edited clips and posits that:

The Paris Opéra debut of Gilbert-Louis Duprez in the 1837 Guillaume Tell allows us to isolate when the physiological changes responsible for the singer’s formant were first used throughout the range of the singing voice to legendary effect. The response of the audience and critics that night seems to imply that the electric emotion they felt as the tenor ascended to his famous high C originated from Duprez’ laryngeal tube, producing a singer’s formant that elicited an overwhelmingly positive emotion from the audience.90

This emotional response noted by the participants in Vest’s survey may help explain the change in the Parisian public’s biases against the Italian style of singing displayed by Duprez. Prior to this point, Paris preferred the singing style of Nourrit and in fact they were predisposed to disparage anything Duprez did onstage. Public change did not happen overnight and there certainly was room for several years for Nourrit’s older style of singing, but because of Duprez, Nourrit and the style of singing and culture he represented were no longer at the vanguard of taste: they were the past.

90 Vest, 105.
Following Duprez’ premier, Nourrit quit the Opéra in a documented fit of pique, and decided to attempt to recreate Duprez’ success and style of vocal production in his own life by going to Italy to learn what Duprez learned. Important to any examination of the factors involved in Duprez’ technical success, is the answer to why Nourrit felt he had to follow the path of Duprez to further his own career and gain new fame and fortune. In the end, Nourrit was unsuccessful. After attempting to retrain his voice in a different technique of sound production, he lost all of what he previously was able to do. In his own words:

You and Adele, when you heard me here, were surprised at the changed that had taken place in my singing, the surprised not unmissed with a bit of regret. You both observed that in gaining certain qualities (or at least in developing them), I had lost others equally essential. Despite the satisfaction that I displayed I fully shared your regret, and hoped always that with time I could recover those fine nuances that were the essence of my talent, and the variety of inflection I had had to abandon in order to conform to the exigencies of Italian singing as one hears it today, and as it is effective in Italy.

Furthermore, he was never able to sing in the same way as Duprez, and gave up the voix sombrée as his wife details in a letter to her brother dated the 20th of October 1838.

Nourrit’s dismay in being unable to sing satisfactorily in any genre drove him mad and, after a disastrous recital, he committed suicide by throwing himself off a hotel balcony.

92 Pleasants, The Great Tenor Tragedy, 73.
93 “Nothing new except that Adolphe has appeared to be in good health for four days, and that his voice is improving. He has given up the voix sombrée, which he had tried to develop, and is now trying to go back to where he was when he arrived in Naples.” Pleasants, The Great Tenor Tragedy, 80.
French Style of Singing Embodied by Nourrit

Nourrit had many talents: he was a poet, artistic collaborator, art critic, and a passionate actor on stage. What he could not express with his voice, he accomplished with his acting on stage and because of this he was beloved in his position as first tenor at the Paris Opéra. He was a devotee of François Joseph Talma⁹⁴ (a celebrated classical dramaturge in Paris) and exemplified that devotion through his dedication to the craft of acting with gesture, movement, and subtlety.⁹⁵ Pleasants articulates that, “Although Nourrit studied singing with Garcia [the elder], it used to be said of him that he ‘had been instructed by García, but inspired by Talma.’”⁹⁶ Pleasants explains that, “Talma’s example led Nourrit far beyond the average actor’s—or average singer’s—range of intellectual curiosity and interest.”⁹⁷ In describing Nourrit’s contributions to his craft Rogers says, “He was an imaginative, all-around man of the theater, and his advice was

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⁹⁴ “About eighteen months ago the maréchal duc de Duras, First Gentleman of the Bedchamber, persuaded by the Comédiens, and particularly by Mme Vestris, who still has him under her thumb, caused the King to found an Actor Training Academy for the Théâtre-Francaise, whose professors are MM Molé, Dugazon and Fleury... the first recognized student of this academy made his debut the other day. [T]he sieur Talma: he has achieved success in both tragedy and comedy: his natural gifts are accompanied by an agreeable appearance, a powerful and expressive voice, and a clear, pure diction. He both feels ad reproduces the harmony of a verse text: his movements natural. Above all, he always shows excellent taste and is without affectation: he does not copy other actors, but performs according to his own feelings and resources. He does credit to the Avademy and leads on to think very favourably of an establishment that can produce such good results. ((Bachaumont), Mémoires secrets, vol. xxxvi, pp. 210–11 (2 December 1787)).” Cited in William D. Howarth, ed. et al., French Theater in the Neo-classical Era, 1550–1789 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 577–8.

⁹⁵ Pleasants, The Great Tenor Tragedy, 153.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.
sought and often accepted by both Halévy and Meyerbeer.”98 He was in his own words an “acting singer” and according, to Rogers he was, “possessor of that rare gift, that of Impersonation.”99

During his career on the stage at the Paris Opéra, he became responsible for integrating the disparate French and Italian aesthetics of opera. Vocally, Nourrit embodied the French singing aesthetic in which he acted, sang, and declaimed the text. Under the tutelage of first the elder Garcia and then in collaboration with Rossini, Nourrit grew to embody the best of an increasing synthesis of Italian lyricism and French vocal technique and language declamation. Nourrit accomplished this in the premiers of Rossini’s French operas in which he starred: Le Siège de Corinthe, Moïse, Le Comte Ory, and Guillaume Tell. These triumphs, accomplished through portrayals of an Italian composer’s work in French, are why he was awarded the first tenor position of the Paris Opéra. Rogers observes that, “In 1828 Nourrit created the chief part in Aubert’s La Muette de Portici. His beautiful singing and expressive acting in all three works won him universal praise and the post of leading tenor at the Opéra. (His father had retired in 1826). At the same time, he was appointed a professor of lyric declamation at the Conservatoire, an unprecedented honor for so young a man.”100 The significance of his appointment to professorship cannot be over-emphasized. The honor of being appointed a professor of lyric declamation at the Conservatoire meant that he was regarded as an artist that not only demonstrated the style and art to a high degree, but that he embodied

100 Ibid., 12.
the culture from whence the style came. He could be counted upon, in this very traditional institution, to guard and teach the style and art of French declamation.

Nourrit enjoyed a significance to the French people for his embodiment of the nascent Romantic ideals and political beliefs that coincided with the turmoil of the day. During the crisis of the revolution, he chose to be more than just a singer:

Nourrit was essentially a young man of the time, no less a romantic and revolutionary than a lyric actor. In the street fighting he stood, like a modern Tyrtaeus, on the barricades, cheering on and inciting his comrades with his beautiful voice. This recklessness may well have been the cause of vocal troubles from which he was never again wholly exempt, and it is certain that his record as an active revolutionary was an obstacle to his success in reactionary Naples eight years later.  

When he traveled to Italy, however, his reception in Naples, as he began to re-invent himself, was mixed because of what he offered on stage—stagecraft that represented what France valued and not what was expected in Italy. He did have some success, and the public applauded his efforts, but Italy was the place where Duprez and other singers had mastered a style of singing completely different than what Nourrit had practiced from his youth into his adulthood. In short, he was competing with the expectations of a public used to the voix sombrée  while trying to fundamentally change his technique to


[102 A technique of voice production. It was made famous by the singing of Gilbert Duprez during the 1830s. He is said to have carried the chest register up to c". Duprez (1845) called this technique voix sombrée or voix couverte (covered voice). ‘Covering’ involves the darkening of the vowels, for example, from ‘ah’ to ‘uh’, resulting in a physiological change in mechanism first described by the physicians H. Diday and J.E. Pétrequin in their ‘Mémoire sur une nouvelle espèce de voix chantée’ (Gazette médicale de Paris, viii, 1840, pp. 305, 455) as a lowering of the larynx. Covered tone is used as an expedient to admit more of the head tone into the area of the break between the head and chest voice, allowing these to be better united. When used in the highest register, as by Duprez, the technique produces a sound of great volume and intensity but can be vocally damaging. The voix sombrée became highly controversial as a voice type and was vigorously attacked by Etienne Jean Baptiste (called Stéphan de la Madelaine) in his
accommodate this type of vocal production. In his own words: “I hoped always that with time I could recover those fine nuances that were the essence of my talent, and the variety of inflection I had had to abandon in order to conform to the exigencies of Italian singing.” And after his debut he wrote: “To tell the truth, with the Italian inflection that I have cultivated, I have only one color at my disposal, and I find myself falling into precisely those errors for which we reproach the Italians.”

What Nourrit set out to do—reinventing every aspect of his singing voice—was a daunting task for any musician to undertake, let alone for one posthumously diagnosed as suffering from the chronic disease of colitis and severe depression. It is not possible to know specifically what factors played the largest part in his tragic end. What we do know from his own words is that he was distraught at losing his musical identity, his health, and his perceived place in the world. Any one of these factors could prove significant: all three at the same time could be overwhelming. Therefore, it is not surprising that he threw himself off the balcony of the hotel in Naples where he was staying. Adolphe Nourrit, star of Paris Opéra, actor, citizen and artist in the grand sense, died just five days after his 37th birthday with his wife in the adjoining room on March 7th, 1839.

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Oeuvres complètes sur le chant (Paris, 1875, pp.128ff). Duprez himself is reported to have tired easily because of his use of the voix sombrée, and had a short career. Manuel Garcia (1847) does not discuss voix sombrée as a voice type; rather, he distinguishes between timbre clair and timbre sombrée as distinct vocal qualities in both head and chest voice and discusses these in terms of offering “the student a throng of resources which permit him appropriately to vary the expression of the voice”. He equated the use of timbre sombrée in the chest voice with voix mixte. Owen Jander and Ellen T. Harris, from "Voix sombrée," in Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/29633 (accessed May 4, 2010).

103 Pleasants, The Great Tenor Tragedy, 155.

104 Ibid., 135–38.
Roles Written for Nourrit

Nourrit had many roles written for him that took advantage of his dramatic talents and the specific qualities of his voice. Beyond that, Nourrit was selected by Rossini to create the lead roles in his first French works: *Le Siège de Corinthe* in 1826 and *Moïse* in 1827. Significantly, he created the lead role in Aubert’s politically charged *La Muette de Portici*. He performed these roles before he was made the principal tenor in the Paris Opéra. Once appointed, Nourrit began to work with Fromental Halévy and Giaccomo Meyerbeer. Subsequently, Halévy wrote the role of Eleazar in *La juive* for him and Meyerbeer wrote Robert in *Robert le diable*, and Raoul in *Les Huguenots*. Nourrit also had the distinction of creating the last tenor role written by Rossini: Arnold in *Guillaume Tell*. This is the role that contains the aria “Asile hérédictaire,” that lies at the crux of change in tenor singing and performance practice that was ushered in by Duprez and where the narratives of Nourrit and Duprez intersect. The interpretation and execution of the aria “Asile hérédictaire,” became the defining factor in which one man’s career was eclipsed and another’s ascended.

A significant departure from the roles written for Nourrit by these contemporary composers, are the roles in the Paris Opéra’s repertoire he was required to sing and that make up the predominant part of his career in Paris. Until he began working with Rossini, Auber, Meyerbeer, and Halévy in 1826, his repertoire consisted of *tragédie-lyrique* in the style of C.W.Gluck and Gaspare Spontini from as early as fifty years in the past. Nourrit embodied, to the best of his vocal ability, the best of his French training and the

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106 A complete list of roles written for, premiered by, or performed by Nourrit and Duprez can be found in Appendix A.
best of Rossini’s older, florid style while Duprez—because of his time in Italy and in collaboration with Donizetti—embodied something new. Nourrit was heavily influenced by Rossini, but in the words of Kimbell, “Though he can hardly be regarded as a true Romantic himself, no other composer did half as much as Rossini to provide Italian Romantic opera with a form and style of its own.”

**Italian Style of Singing Embodied by Duprez**

Nourrit’s path in opera was predestined for him complete with a 'letter of introduction' in the form of his father’s position of first tenor at the Opéra: Duprez’s was not. Gilbert Duprez was just four years younger than Adolphe Nourrit. Those four years and a different life and career path are what set him apart and possibly created a more tenacious artist than Nourrit could ever be.

At the beginning of his career, Duprez had trouble being noticed. The Parisian public received Duprez well enough for his performances at the Odéon—and some critics anticipated the continued evolution of this new talent—yet fame and success were still elusive. Following three years of a mediocre career in Paris and the disbanding of the opera troupe at the Odéon Theater, Duprez left with his wife for Italy the second time in search of success. In Italy Duprez was immersed in the performance practice of some of the best tenors of the day including Giovanni David (1790–1864), Andrea Nozzari (1775–1832), Giovanni Battista Rubini (1794–1854), and most especially Domenico Donzelli (1790–1873). Additionally, Duprez’ immersion into the Italian language, spoken and sung, was a critical factor in the evolution of his voice from the earlier comparison to

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107 Kimbell, 465.
108 Everist, 83.
the castrato Velluti. Richard Miller, in his *National Schools of Singing*, focuses his scholarship on the advantages of the Italian language itself for singing:

> In even the most superficial of linguistic considerations, the Italian language emerges with certain vocal honors. From the vantage point of functional directness, Italian surpasses English, French, and German...Italian is an easier language for singing than any other because it contains fewer possible vowel formations and because it presents a more favorable condition with regard to consonants, requiring fewer radical acoustical adjustments of the vocal tract than does either speech or song in most other European languages. Of course, the frequency of such adjustments is relatively unimportant in speech, but is significant in song.\(^{109}\)

The simplification of Duprez’s vocal effort—allowed by the Italian language in which he began to sing and channeled through his acknowledged singing ability—may have been the catalyst for his vocal evolution. Additionally, it is speculated that Duprez emulated his Italian mentor Donzelli\(^{110}\) who exemplified the lowered laryngeal technique\(^{111}\) that produced the *voix sombrée*, which resulted in increased fame and success for both of them. While Duprez probably benefited from a simplified vocal effort, much of the credit for the forthcoming musical style he represented comes from the influence of Italian song on Italian opera: “... simpler and plainer melodies became a hallmark of Italian opera in the late 1820s and 1830s. The profuse word-repetition of an earlier age were abandoned, at least until the closing sections of a song; and the *fioratura*-laden lyricism of Rossini was succeeded by a style that was predominantly syllabic, thus highlighting rhythmic-metric correspondences...”\(^{112}\)

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\(^{109}\) Miller, *National Schools of Singing*, 172.


\(^{111}\) Ibid., 79.

\(^{112}\) Kimbell, 438.
All of these Italian influences combined to, according to Diday and Petrequin, make Duprez’ a “new species of voice,”

The art of music has recently been enriched by a new species of voice, the discovery of which introduces a new element into the problem of phonation, and which seems to demand a fundamental revolution in the execution and teaching of singing.\textsuperscript{113}

Duprez was a tenore di forze\textsuperscript{114} masquerading as a tenore di grazia\textsuperscript{115} who only discovered and embraced this fact after releasing himself from the French aesthetic that Nourrit so ably embodied. Before his return to Paris, Duprez’ successes with the Italian public were nothing short of uninterrupted. According to Corti:

In the service of the impresario Alessandro Lanari, he enjoyed an almost uninterrupted run of successes in leading romantic roles, beginning with Arnold in the Italian première of Guillaume Tell (1831, Lucca), where he was the first tenor to sing the top high C as a chest note. Duprez scored a triumph as Percy in Donizetti’s Anna Bolena in Florence in 1831 (repeating his success at his first appearance in Rome in 1834), before going on to create further Donizetti roles there – Ugo in Parisina (1833) and Henry II in Rosmonda d’Inghilterra (1834). The highlight of his stay in Italy was perhaps his creation of Edgardo in Lucia di Lammermoor (1835, Naples); apparently he advised his close friend Donizetti on the structure and


\textsuperscript{114} Term used for tenors of the early and mid 19th century who were sturdier than the lyric tenor, but less powerful than the tenore robusto; it applies to singers of the more heroic Donizetti roles or the roles in French grand opéra; Adolphe Nourrit and Gilbert Duprez are the best-known exponents of this voice-type. "Tenore di forza," in Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/53358 (accessed April 21, 2010).

\textsuperscript{115} Term used for the lighter type of Italian lyric tenor voice, appropriate to the comic operas of Rossini and Donizetti and such Verdi roles as Alfredo (La traviata) or the Duke (Rigoletto); the voice also serves in the French repertory and in Mozart roles (e.g. Ottavio, Don Giovanni) and earlier music. "Tenore di grazia," in Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/53359 (accessed April 21, 2010).

As mentioned previously, Duprez’ Italian successes brought him to the notice of the Paris Opéra impresario Charles Duponchel. The narrative thread of this discussion at this point returns to Duprez’ reception in Paris with the role of Arnold in Guillaume Tell. With this role, Duprez combined the French penchant for precise stage declamation with the more vigorous nature of his Italianate voice. According to Rogers after the premier:

... the part of Arnold had been written to fit Nourrit’s high falsetto and, consequently, was not thoroughly suited to Duprez’s more robust organ. But, all the same, there was a spontaneity and a fire in his interpretation that worked in his favor, so that even the most loyal admirers of Nourrit had to admit the debut a promising one.\footnote{Rogers, Some Famous Singers of the 19th Century, 70.}

Following his Paris Opéra debut and his full voice high C\textsubscript{5} in Arnold’s aria, Rossini compared the tenor’s voice to, “the squawk of a capon with its throat cut.”\footnote{Sandro Corti, “Gilbert Duprez,” in Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/08364 (accessed Jan 27, 2010).} Even so, Duprez’ gradual acceptance by the French public was assured and somewhat obscured his technical achievement. As Bloch points out,

It is unquestionable that Duprez was an extraordinary singer. His debut in 1837 was indeed a triumph. However, many at the time seem not to have noticed his innovative use of registers or the newness of his technique generally.\footnote{Bloch, 2.}
Rogers writes, “As time went on and Duprez was heard in other operas, the Parisians came to the conclusion that he was a worthy successor to their former favorite. His acceptance and ascendance was so complete that the notable music critic Henry Chorley “...considered Duprez the most satisfactory of all contemporary tenors, not excepting Rubini.”

Duprez retired after ten years at the Paris Opéra after significant decline in his vocal abilities from his use of the voix sombrée and from the over-use of his voice in Italy. As a result of delays in production, libretto revisions, and casting the other parts, Meyerbeer (who had written the role of Jean in Le prophète for him) had to choose another to premiere it for Duprez was unable to sing it.

Duprez taught at the Paris Conservatoire for approximately eight years and sang in London (Lucia di Lammermoor 1844–45), toured in Germany (1850) and in 1853 founded his Ecole Spéciale de Chant. He had some success as a vocal teacher and his

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120 Rogers, Some Famous Singers of the 19th Century, 70.
121 Chorley, cited in Ibid., 70.
122 “Presumably through forcing his voice, and also because of the great number of performances he gave during his years in Italy where he had to sing as many as six times a week, a decline set in early; Berlioz greatly admired him in the vigorous music of Benvenuto Cellini in 1838, though noting (Mémoires) that his voice had coarsened somewhat.” Sandro Corti, “Gilbert Duprez,” in Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/08364 (accessed Jan 27, 2010).
most notable student, Miolan-Carvalho, did a great deal to bring to light the beauty of the operas of Charles Gounod. In the end, Duprez revolutionized what it meant to be a tenor on the operatic stage, but did not leave a significant direct pedagogical legacy other than by example and later imitation. He wrote two treatises on vocal technique that were regarded kindly which subsequently did not stand the test of time.

Roles written for Duprez

Duprez premiered many of the most famous and enduring tenor vocal roles in French and Italian repertoire. By doing so, he created a new standard of tenor performance practice. His Italian success began with taking on two roles written for Nourrit and Rubini respectively in the older florid style of singing: the role of Il Conto in the Italian premier of Rossini’s Le comte Ory in 1830 at the Teatro San Benedetto theater in Venice and the role of Gualtiero in Bellini’s Il pirata in 1831 at the Teatro Regio in Turin. Shortly thereafter his management by Lanari and collaboration with Donizetti resulted in a performance of Percy (originally premiered by Rubini) in Anna Bolena in 1831 at the Teatro della Pergola in Florence. Duprez also premiered several more of Donizetti’s lead tenors; all at the Teatro della Pergola in Florence: Ugo in Parisina in 1833, Henry II in Rosmonda d’Inghilterra in 1834. The exception to his Donizetti collaborations at the Pergola is the creation of Edgardo in Lucia di Lammermoor in 1835 at the Teatro San Carlo in Naples.

At the Paris Opéra in the Salle le Peletier Duprez created Guido in Guido e Ginevra for Halévy in 1838, and Le Dauphin in Charles VI in 1843. Duprez’ other notable premiers of lead tenor roles included Berlioz’s Benvenuto Cellini as Cellini in 1838, Auber’s Le lac des fées as Albert in 1839, Donizetti’s Les martyrs as Polyeucte in
1840 (incidentally the role was sought after and originally promised to Nourrit), *La favorite* as Fernando in 1840, *Dom Sébastien* as Dom Sébastien in 1843, and finally the French premier of Verdi’s *Jérusalem (I Lombardi)* in 1847. Corti notes in addition to all of the roles written for him, he “established himself as Nourrit’s successor in the lead tenor roles of Robert le diable, Les Huguenots, La Juive and La muette de Portici.”

Although Duprez did not leave an influential pedagogical legacy in manuscript that stood the test of time, his example and career ensured his place in vocal history.

### Working Conditions and Expectations for Singers in France and Italy

Working conditions for singers in Italy and France were very different from each other in the early nineteenth century. These differences had a direct impact on how a singer performed on stage and on the length or lack thereof of their career. In Italy singers were subject to the whims of impresarios whose primary aim was financial success and not the health and welfare of the singer. In France, where Nourrit spent the bulk of his career, expectations for a singer of his caliber were conducive to optimum health and performance readiness. The biographies of Nourrit and Duprez also converge in their separate navigation of the business of being an opera singer.

The differences in these two sets of working conditions and of doing business in opera stem from the way opera was treated in each country in the seventeenth century. In Italy, opera became a commercial venture in 1637 with the leasing of the Teatro San

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126 A list of roles created and performed by Duprez at the Paris Opéra can be found in Appendix A that demonstrate the breadth of his career.
Cassiano to impresarios to make a profit. In France, opera and the arts in general were under the control of the Monarchy and were therefore subsidized to a much larger extent than Italy at the time. Consequently, French subsidy of the arts and opera created an environment more supportive of artists while in Italy the impresarios were able to set performance and rehearsal expectations without regard for the well being of the singers or their voices.

Nourrit was unprepared for his time in Italy. In his first weeks in Naples, Nourrit writes in a letter dated 23 January 1839 to his sister, Mme Aucoc:

A singer's life in Italy is so different from a singer's life in our country. The work, the conventions, the directors, even the public, all are so little like what I knew in France for sixteen years that I have trouble adapting myself to this way of doing things. The work of memorization, above all, bothers me. Accustomed as I was to learning one or two roles a year, to taking rehearsals in my stride, to resting when I was tired, to sparing myself when I was hoarse or had a cold, I am stunned by that is required of me here (and in all Italian theaters; the San Carlo is the most accommodating in that respect): to rehearse every day, to get a new role in my head every month, never to know one day what I am to sing the next. Hardly to be certain in the morning what one will be called upon to do in the evening, and not to be excused for anything short of a fever!127

Nourrit goes on to say, in a later letter dated 5 February 1839 to an old colleague (Louis Quicherrat – his future biographer), after his successful debut in Il giuramento (14 November 1838),

What was I lacking? A good role, a good work! What was lacking above all else was knowing what I had to do. But with Italian impresarios, one lives from day to day... Thus after I had devoted three or four days to La sonnambula, it had to be set aside to cast me in the role of Raoul in Gabriel di Vergy... I had to adapt it and no sooner had I begun to study it than the impresario had a change of mind... It is now Norma that must be learned... Spech is to sing it with me... but not at all, She doesn't wish to do it anymore!128

128 Ibid., 102.
Day to day instability such as this made performing very difficult for the singer in Italy in contrast to how organized and structured business was at the Paris Opéra. Duprez also bore the scars of his time in Italy as Berlioz noted. The caveat to Berlioz’ observation of Duprez’ Italian experience is his close association with the impresario Alessandro Lanari. Lanari was unique among impresarios of the day in that he identified promising singers and tried to develop their talents rather than merely exploiting them by giving them the security of their next meal:

In 1823 he took over, from an impresario who had just died, both a costume workshop in Florence and the task of running the main theater there, la pergola. The workshop became one of the two main influences that shaped Lanari’s career: the other was the practice he developed during the 1820s of giving promising singers long-term contracts and then trying to place them at a profit.

Significant aggravation to Nourrit’s experience in Italy was court and church sponsored censorship. Donizetti had collaborated with Nourrit on a work called Polliuto (in French, Polyeucte), a story of a Christian martyr. Polliuto was to be a tailored debut vehicle for Nourrit’s voice, abilities and temperament. Unfortunately, after many go-rounds with the court and church censors in Italy, the story was ultimately rejected. Consequently wasting a great deal of work by both the maestro Donizetti and Nourrit, and closing off an avenue of potential breakthrough success for Nourrit. Duprez would

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131 Rosselli, *The Opera Industry*, 34.

later create the role in France (tailored for his voice this time) on the stage of the Paris Opéra. Juxtaposition of these outcomes underscores the different approach to libretto content in opera in France and Italy: what is banned in Italy because of themes is allowed and celebrated in France.  

Influence of the Italian and French Impresari

Charles Duponchel, the impresario of the Paris Opéra, was instrumental in the offending of Nourrit’s artistic dignity by engaging Duprez while Nourrit held the position of first tenor. Duponchel was insistent with Nourrit that the concerns that impelled him to engage two tenors in such a manner had more to do with the fact that having only one tenor put the company in danger of having to shutter its doors if Nourrit fell ill for a month or more. Further, he said that Duprez insisted on the conditions that offended Nourrit or he (Duprez) would not sign with the Paris Opéra. Duponchel effectively pitted the two singers against each other in this way, which in effect absolved him of the responsibility to treat with Nourrit ethically. In the words of Francis Rogers in an article for The Musical Quarterly on Adolphe Nourrit:

We cannot, after a hundred years, sort out the rights and wrongs in this curious case. It certainly does not seem unreasonable that Duponchel should have wished to have more than one first tenor on call, and Nourrit accepted this, but Duponchel showed a sad lack of gratitude and appreciation of Nourrit’s great services to the opera when he tried to force on him the other degrading concessions.  

133 Pleasants, The Great Tenor Tragedy, 70–71. According to Nourrit, this censoring of a Christian theme is not something that would have happened in Paris, as is evidenced by a letter dated the 12th of August 1838 in which Nourrit tells Quicherrat that there was talk of mounting a production of Polyeucte in Paris and that they would not be troubled by any censorship.

Duponchel’s underhanded actions were very influential in Nourrit’s decision to resign his contract and, as Francis Rogers goes on to say, “... Some tactful concession on Duponchel’s part would in all probability have persuaded Nourrit to make the experiment [the sharing of the first tenor position in the Paris Opéra].”

Counterpoint to Nourrit’s experience with Duponchel, Duprez had much success with the Italian impresario Lanari. Especially significant was Lanari’s influence over his singers including Duprez: Lanari not only represented his singers for a profit, but also helped choose repertoire that suited, challenged and developed their talents. In fact, Lanari was the vehicle through which Duprez’ greatest Italian triumphs occurred. It is a strong possibility, however, that the way in which the Italian impresario ran an opera company contributed to the all-too-soon faltering of a voice as happened with Duprez and [Giuditta] Pasta. Although Duponchel made mistakes in dealing with Nourrit, there was a more congenial understanding of what a singer should be required to do and be in Paris in order to sustain a long career and a healthy voice. A congenial understanding was not the case in Italy. Five performances per week of a role was not an uncommon expectation while six was not unheard of. Duprez experienced this himself while

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136 “He also helped to launch some of the finest singers of the day, in particular the French tenor, Duprez whose discovery under Lanari’s guidance in Italy of the ‘chest high C’ changed the development of the tenor voice.” Rosselli, The Opera Industry, 35.

137 Rogers, Some Famous Singers of the 19th Century, 71.

138 “It is now unheard of for opera singers to sing leading parts four or give times a week, but in Italy it was the norm until the late nineteenth century—and six times a week was not unknown. Most opera companies gave four or five performances a week; unless there was a ‘double company’ (meaning two lots of soloists) all the leading singers would have to appear at each performance. Double companies were rare outside of La Scala and
performing Edgardo in *Lucia*. Nineteenth century impresarios were the essential link to
the functioning of opera as a business. Nourrit’ and Duprez’ different treatment at the
hands of their impresarios had a lasting impact on the development of their voices and
their career paths. An impresario’s method of doing business varied from region to region
and sometimes city to city, but one anecdotal impression returns again and again: their
primary motive was a profitable production that ensured their contract for the next
production. Consequently, ethics and fair treatment were the exception, not the norm and
these decisions ruined voices and people.

Ramifications of Duprez’ high C…

This was the point of no return for tenors, a change in the very nature of
the voice and a defining characteristic of the best (and worst) tenor singing
ever since.\(^{139}\)

Duprez’ Italian notoriety, engagement by Duponchel at the Paris Opéra, and his
sensational success gave the Parisian public the experience of a new kind of tenor voice
in a role that they knew so well as premiered by Nourrit. Gradual acceptance of Duprez’
sound and subsequent performances led to a universal acceptance of his method of
singing for tenors. Rossini himself called this high C (C\(^5\)) the “squawk of a dying capon,”
but in Potter’s words, “Rossini was known for his wit, and it is possible that he was fully
aware of the irony in this remark, which was perhaps intended as a reference to the now
inevitable extinction of the old castrati-influenced singing.”\(^{140}\) Nourrit’s superior
dramatic stagecraft and excellent declamation created dramatic repertoire that set the


\(^{140}\) Ibid., 51.
stage for Duprez’ vocal triumph. For, without the public’s familiarity and emotional connection to Nourrit’s roles, one wonders if the emotional affect of the *do di petto* high C would have been more than a novelty and not the death knell for an older and more familiar style of singing.

With Nourrit’s earlier ascendance in Paris, Rossinian reforms of French opera and a gradual acceptance of a more Italian method of singing (as represented first by Garcia and then his student, Nourrit) took hold in Paris. At the same time as Nourrit’s ascendancy, Duprez left France and went to Italy to follow a path laid out by Donzelli and Rubini before him; there he found his own voice and eventually fundamentally changed the Italian style to something far different than what Rubini represented.

In the end, the Italian culture of passionate excesses and language of fluid expression influenced, over time, the permanent adoption of Italian singing styles as embodied by Duprez for the tenor over the French culture and style as embodied by Nourrit. Italian culture and language naturally encouraged the development of a free, acoustically powerful, and emotionally engaging *do di petto* production of sound as exemplified by Duprez on the stage of the Paris Opéra that night and the audience’s stunned approval. Nourrit and Duprez represented their respective teaching legacies and the cultures from which they came. Their struggles, successes, and defeats changed the operatic art form permanently.
Chapter 4
Influence of Architectural Designs

In France and Italy there were many different architectural design choices for theater and opera. These venues were a significant factor in the technical shift of the tenor voice over time. Early performance venues were designed to accommodate multiple types of ensemble and solo performances. Consequently, these early theaters were not designed to highlight the visual components of opera. They were designed as concert halls with a capacity of between 300 and 500 audience members. In the words of John Borwick,

Since its origins at the end of the 16th century opera has undergone considerable evolutionary changes, not least in terms of production complexity and of the numbers of singers, orchestral players, and often dancers employed. There has been a parallel development in the theatres or ‘opera houses’ where performances take place. Operas were originally composed and presented as a sumptuous accompaniment to some special event, such as the weddings or birthdays of dukes, princes, and the like. Their venue was therefore a stately ballroom or terrace, and audiences were restricted to the nobility and others of high rank.\(^{141}\)

An exception, as Borwick notes is the, “Teatro delle Quattro Fontane in the papal palace in Rome (1632), which held 3000 spectators.”\(^{142}\)

From Shoebox Shaped Venue to Opera Theater

In 1700 there were approximately ten purpose-built theaters for opera in Venice and as Borwick notes, “opera houses were springing up in France, Germany, and ultimately throughout Europe as opera became commercial entertainment for wider


\(^{142}\) Ibid.
audiences.”  

By the middle of the eighteenth century regular theaters were being converted into opera houses, as was the case with Covent Garden in London. Fire destroyed many of these first opera houses and was a constant danger even during the time of Nourrit and Duprez. There is one famous example of an early Baroque opera house in Dröttingholm, Sweden that remains in the same historical configuration and condition today, and still houses a regular performance season.

Figure 1. Image of the Interior of the Dröttingholm Court Theater. Image courtesy of the Bengt-Wanselius/Drottningholms Slottsteater. Source: Eva Lundgren, Dröttingholms Slottsteater. Further information: www.dtm.se.

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144 Ibid.

145 Ibid.
Figure 2. Architectural drawing of the Dröttingholm Court Theater. *Source:* Image from *Buildings for Music* by Michael Forsyth, p 75.

Figure 1 is a picture of the Dröttingholm Court Theatre in Sweden. Figure 2 shows the architectural drawing of that same theater. The architectural drawing highlights the rectangular nature of the venue, which is very similar to the one at Esterháza in which Haydn’s music and especially operas were performance until it was destroyed by fire.¹⁴⁶ The configuration of this kind of theater is relatively small, narrow, and low ceilinged. These architectural features serve to focus the voice and the sound of an orchestra or ensemble so they can be heard in the back of the hall. The difficulty associated with this rectangular construction model is that it has many seats on the long side of the theater that provided difficult, neck straining views of the stage. The design also limits the amount of people in the audience, which for a court function does not much matter,

however, it does matter when a more commercial model is applied to the theater and the art form it accommodates.

Commercial and economic concerns drove the changes in the architecture of opera houses and theater venues more than any other concern. According to Borwick:

During the 19th century, operas became increasingly grand, with elaborate scenery used to create exotic locations, and with huge vocal and instrumental ensembles. Many of the world's best-known opera houses were built in the second half of the 19th century; they were designed not only to house lavish spectacle but also to symbolize national or civic magnificence, the Palais Garnier in Paris being a striking example.¹⁴⁷

As a result, the great opera houses and venues of the nineteenth century owe their basic form and function to early Italian architects and their design choices for seventeenth and eighteenth century venues.

In the late eighteenth century, composers were using larger orchestras as new instruments were invented and older instruments perfected. Concurrently, opera was becoming a more commercial venture with less state subsidy. Therefore, unobstructed views were needed for the paying audiences that could also enhance the clarity of the auditory experience. As a result, theaters designers chose shapes to improve the view of the stage for as many patrons as possible and deadened the reverberation of the hall to create auditory clarity. Also, of great importance, was the ability to move the orchestra out of the way of the drama occurring on stage. As a result, theater designers began to chose configurations that were more audience friendly and that brought them as close to the stage as possible as Borwick notes:

One feature was the establishment of an orchestral platform or ‘pit’, set at a lower level in front of a raised stage and, in some recent examples, with adjustable height to suit different operas… Another feature distinguishing the design of opera houses from that of concert halls… is the use of a horseshoe plan with tiered balconies and boxes over most of the wall surfaces (six tiers in La Scala), bringing audiences closer to the stage. Thus the relatively long reverberation times associated with multiple strong reflections from the flat walls in a typical tall shoebox or fan-shaped concert hall with few side balconies are replaced by a deader acoustic as sound waves undergo extra scattering and absorption.\textsuperscript{148}

There was a shift from the shoebox shape of a theater to larger and more visually oriented and audience friendly designs. The new “U” shape and the horseshoe shape of the Italians were significant and affected theater designs throughout Europe.

Changes in venue architecture were begun by the Italians in the mid seventeenth century and taken to extremes in the eighteenth century. These venues required more powerfully resonant voices to penetrate both the dense acoustics of the new theater shapes and sizes and to penetrate the concurrently larger orchestrations presented in operatic compositions developing at this time. The voice most affected by these economically driven design choices was the tenor voice. Prior to the mid eighteenth century, composers would make textural allowances for a weaker tenor voice: effectively creating musical and acoustical space in which they could be heard. The space thus given by the composer mitigated the weakness of the tenor voice so that it could fill up even the larger venues of the early and middle eighteenth century. At the end of the eighteenth century, the tenor voice began to sing more prominent roles of a romantic and heroic nature. The nature of these new role assignments necessitated that composers grant this

acoustical and textural space less and less. Consequently, the tenor was required to develop a more powerful voice to fill that same large venue.

Venue size and the resulting acoustic challenges (or lack thereof in certain venue designs) in Italy and France in the nineteenth century directly impacted the tenor voice. Tenors were increasingly competing with a thicker orchestral texture in an acoustically dead venue. The careers of Nourrit and Duprez were significant to this time because their careers and voices straddled either side of the transition of the tenor from player of secondary characters to the political and then the romantic hero. Because of Duprez’ experience in Italian theaters, he discovered how to navigate the unhelpful acoustic venues and the concurrently increasing orchestral competition with the solo voice. Nourrit, with the lighter vocal texture developed in the more accommodating French theaters, was unprepared and underpowered for new trends in opera in Paris after Duprez’ triumph.149

Acoustic Properties of Architectural Features

Internal theater design has a significant affect on the behavior of directional sound (the kind experienced in an opera house) coming from the stage to the audience. The shoebox or rectangular theater with hard, flat surfaces discussed in figure 2 was very reflective of sound waves. Another term for reflective is ‘live’, while a room shape that has materials that absorb sound or has irregular surfaces that disperse sound waves is

149 Speaking of Nourrit’s premier in Le siège de Corinthe, at the Salle le Peletier seating 1900, “As Néoclès, Adolphe Nourrit scored another victory with Mlle Cinti and Dévis père opposite him... But when the applause had died away, young Nourrit knew that his voice was not trained for this new style of singing. Yet there did not seem to be any immediate need to alter either his voice or his delivery because he was moving from one triumph to another...” Spire Pitou, The Paris Opéra: An Encyclopedia of Operas, Ballets, Composers, and Performers (Growth and Grandeur, 1815–1914, M–Z), vol. 3, pt 2 (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 947.
called ‘dead’.\textsuperscript{150} In general, a balance of these two qualities is necessary for a venue (operatic or other) to be acoustically pleasing to the audience. A space that is too reflective of sounds creates a cacophonous mush and intelligibility of directional sound is lost. Conversely, a space that is too dispersive of sound results in a dead acoustic and the vibrancy to the directional sound is then lost.

In regards to theater design (relative to sound reflection or dispersion in the audience) the most important determining factor is the shape of the reflecting surface on the sides and top of the venue: convex or concave. A convex surface reflects sound waves clearly while a concave surface focuses sound back upon its directional axis and creates echoes and dead spots.\textsuperscript{151} If directional sound travels, as noted by Borwick, through a regular shape there is little dispersion or deadening of the source sound. Equally, if the directional sound encounters a concave surface and absorbent rather than reflective materials, or irregular surfaces as it travels then the source sound wave weakens.\textsuperscript{152} Consequently, the flat and regular sides of the shoebox and “U” shaped theaters act as regular reflective surfaces whereas the horseshoe shape seen in influential Italian theaters of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries resembles a concave surface (sides and ceiling) that dissipates the source sound. Because of this design adversity, Italian theaters challenged singers to create a powerful acoustic production. The acoustically adverse


\textsuperscript{152} Beranek, 22.
challenge to the singers on the Italian stage affected the weak tenor voice the most because it had not yet grown to match the acoustical power of other kinds of voices on stage.

**Architectural Features of Italian Theaters**

Italian cities adopted a “U” and then the horseshoe shape in architectural designs (and thus a deader acoustic) for opera houses well before these designs were adopted in France. Earlier implementation of a duller acoustic, and all of the innovations noted by Borwick put more difficulties in front of Italian singers, earlier, than many of their international counterparts. Italian opera houses from the time of the Teatro San Cassiano on were commercial in nature and needed to conform to a more pleasing experience for the important and moneyed box holders. The San Cassiano’s “U” shaped configuration was essential in Italy as noted by Beth and Jonathan Glixon in their book, *Inventing the Business of Opera*.

Private boxes offered those who could obtain them not only a guaranteed seat, one physically separate from and above the general crowd, but also a different sort of social evening than that afforded to those who sat in the parterre. The entertainment on stage was only one of several reasons for attending the opera: part of the theatrical experience centered on seeing and being seen by other members of the audience, activities facilitated by the shape and structure of theaters and boxes. Indeed, one might view each box as a sort of miniature stage on a small scale (after placing the distinguished occupants on view to at least part of the audience). Despite this visibility, however, guests could still be entertained, and conversations conducted with a degree of privacy.\(^{153}\)

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Economic concerns and audience comfort were very influential factors in the design of seventeenth century Italian opera houses. As a result these two factors, the half circle shape of the ancient theaters from the Romans and Greek changed to a “U” shape, which then evolved into a horseshoe shape. In figure 3 we see this “U” shape in the image of the Teatro SS. Giovanni e Paolo. In figure 4 we see the horseshoe shape that became the standard design in Italian venue architecture during the nineteenth century in the image of the planned Teatro Tordinona in Rome (which was very similar to the famous Teatro Argentina in Rome (1732)). Both of these architectural renderings show a design angle to the boxes in the multiple tiers that lets patrons focus on the stage without
craning their neck uncomfortably and a solid partition between each box. Each of these boxes would also be fitted with thick curtains that could be drawn for privacy.

In the first theater (figure 3) we see an elongated half circle in a “U” shape that funneled and contained sound from the stage efficiently. This was due to the area in the middle of the theater that does not widen and disperse the sound but reflects it instead as noted by Beranek. Conversely, the second theater design has a horseshoe shape that features a concave structure on the sides and a ceiling that diffuses sound from the stage as the sound waves travel from the narrow lip of the stage to the middle of the theater. The acoustic of the latter design is more challenging for the singer than the flat sides of the SS Giovanni e Paolo. Design choices that favored the concave shape and resulting deader acoustic were driven by the economics of the industry and especially impacted the acoustically weak tenor voice of the time.
Figure 4. Architectural rendering of the proposed Teatro Tordinona in Rome (1670).
Source: Image from Buildings for Music by Michael Forsyth, p 79.

Italian theater designers further complicate and deaden the venue acoustic with the inclusion of multiple tiers of private boxes. Private boxes were a status symbol for the clientele and a revenue stream for the theater and impresario as the Glixon’s assert. Additionally, they had a serious deadening multiplicative affect on the listening experience in the private box and therefore in the theater as Forsyth explains:

Despite the near-legendary reputation that La Scala and similar opera houses have acquired (which doubtless helps people tolerate practical shortcomings), the acoustic and visual conditions for listeners in boxes, except those at the front of each box, are actually poor. This is because the opening in the box is usually sufficiently small (about 40 percent of the wall area occupied by the box) for it to behave acoustically as a ‘coupled room,’ effectively separate from the main volume of the auditorium. This, together with the sound-absorptive material in the box, causes a remarkable decrease in loudness...\textsuperscript{154}

\textsuperscript{154} Forsyth, Buildings for Music, 100.
The ethos at the heart of the design for most Italian opera houses was convenient for the patrons, lucrative for the theater and impresario, but required more vocal power of the singers on stage. This demand placed on the singer a greater need to access a different vocal production to fill the larger venues (affecting the weaker and as yet underdeveloped tenor voice the most).

The next two figures illustrate an audience perspective of the Italian opera theater. In Figure 5 we see the interior of the Teatro la Fenice prior to the fire that burned it to the ground in 1836. La Fenice was originally constructed in 1732 and featured many boxes in five levels. It also had a great deal of standing room and the limited seating in that area was on benches. The sides of the theater are concave as is the tope of the theater. Both design features are dispersive of sound; resulting in a deader acoustic than if they were flat or convex. This results in less reverberation and reflection of the directional sound of the voice and orchestra in the theater. Consequently, the singer producing a directional sound from the stage must overcome that acoustical adversity.
Figure 5. The interior of the Teatro la Fenice (1792) as shown before it burned down in 1836. Source: Image from The Opera Industry from Cimarosa to Verdi, by John Rosselli, p 38.

Figure 6 shows the reconstructed theater in 1837. In this picture we see the extensive seating in the floor section as differently configured than before the fire in 1836. The different floor configuration seats more people, which in turn decreases the reflective properties of the floor. In perspective, we also can see a widening to the horseshoe shape of the theater in the reconstruction. This change deadened the acoustic slightly more but allowed for a more enjoyable experience in the private boxes. The change to seating as opposed to standing room in the main floor also changed the experience of the operagoers who could not afford boxes.
Figure 6. The interior of the Teatro la Fenice after its reconstruction in 1836. *Source:* Image from *The Opera Industry from Cimarosa to Verdi*, by John Rosselli, p 38.

Figure 7 and 8 show the two largest and most influential Italian opera houses of the late eighteenth and nineteenth century that remain so to this day: the Teatro San Carlo in Naples and the Teatro alla Scala in Milan. The San Carlo happens to be the largest in size and was constructed in 1737 under the auspices of King Charles III, the son of Phillip the V of Spain. The theater’s age, size, and the eighteen notable operatic premiers over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by composers such as Rossini, Donizetti, Bellini, Mercadante, and Verdi make it the standard by which many composers would choose voices and create characters. The San Carlo’s very large volume and difficult acoustic was where Duprez performed Henry the II in *Rosemonda d’Inghilterra* in 1834, and Edgardo in *Lucia di Lammermoor* in 1835: both by Donizetti.
The second most influential opera theater in Italy, shown in figure 8, is only slightly smaller in seating capacity than the San Carlo. The Teatro alla Scala, built under the auspices of Maria Theresa, sat 2800 audience members. La Scala featured an auditorium size unheard of to this point in history with a staggering 260 boxes that were spread among six tiers. While it is true that La Scala seated 700 fewer people than the San Carlo, La Scala, was larger in volume. Additionally the greater amount of private boxes and their “coupled room”\textsuperscript{155} acoustical effect rendered La Scala acoustically less efficient than the San Carlo.

The influence of the San Carlo and La Scala was felt far beyond its geographical location. The prestige of both theaters attracted the best musicians, the most notable operatic premiers (see appendix A), and displayed a standard of performance practice in new virtuoso singing beloved by some and derided by others. According to Kimbell who quotes Spohr, “Unhappily the new San Carlo was less sympathetic acoustically than the earlier theater had been; vast in size, it also helped make fashionable the building of larger auditoriums. Given the very special prestige the San Carlo enjoyed, it played no small part in encouraging that new style of singing in which ‘either one hears the singers shout, or one doesn’t hear them at all’ (Spohr 1860–61, II: 13).”\textsuperscript{156}

\textsuperscript{155} Forsyth, 100.

\textsuperscript{156} Kimbell, 425.
Figure 7. Engraving of the Teatro San Carlo (1737). Source: *The Great Tenor Tragedy*, by Henry Pleasants, plate number 14 after p 82.
Architectural Features of French Theaters

Early French theater venues were designed to house the spectacle of a ballet or the focused performance of a play: not the acoustically cacophonous opera with its multiple singers and layers of instrumental accompaniment. Consequently, the size and design of the theaters in which opera performances were held at the end of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth century were not completely suited to house opera companies. French theaters favored large stage machinery, spectacular visual effects, and a large and deep stage that could hold the many participants of ballet and choruses. This design necessitated a sizable separation of the audience from the stage and therefore a design of smaller capacity for theaters to compensate and allow singers to still be heard. The exception to this smaller size theater was the disastrously gargantuan Salle des
Machines – Palais des Tuileries (1660) that originally accommodated approximately 6000 to 8000 spectators.\textsuperscript{157} Because of the poor acoustics it was rarely used for significant performances of opera and when it was the temporary home of the Opéra in 1763, was reduced to a capacity of 1270.\textsuperscript{158}

Evolution of opera house architecture in France from the mid-seventeenth century to the late eighteenth century can be described as cyclical. French theaters began fairly small, grew in size to the monumental proportions of the Salle des Machines – Palais des Tuileries, and then back to a more manageable size and shape of a theater that benefited both the performers and the audience. Their shape also changed with their capacity from the rectangular shoebox to the truncated “U” shape and then to a modified ellipse that resembled a curved-in half-circle. Important to this period of architectural evolution, and circling back to a more moderate size of theater is the construction of late eighteenth century theaters. The Versailles Theater (completed in 1770) as shown in figure 9 reflected the designs favored during its construction.


\textsuperscript{158} Ibid.
The Versailles and French theater design in general reflected less of a need for privacy than Italian theater design in the late eighteenth century. Consequently, the French favored open balconies, fewer tiers, and on occasion what amounted to segmented galleries.\textsuperscript{159} These ideals led to an adoption of smaller, more acoustically favorable theater designs. The theater at Versailles (1768–70) reflects these values. It was constructed for the marriage of the Dauphin and Marie Antoinette in 1770. The shape of

\textsuperscript{159} “French society required less privacy and intimacy than did the Italians, and this is reflected in the earlier provision of galleries in place of boxes,” Forsyth, 104.
the Versailles is a truncated ellipse that narrows from stage to back of the hall. As a result, the theater is acoustically focusing rather than dispersive. The openness featured in the Versailles Theater became a part of French theater design in the nineteenth century. Following the revolutions, a societal and political significance was imprinted upon this open aesthetic. According to Forsyth:

The changes that took place in French theater design around this time [the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century] became an important facet of so-called enlightened thinking. The high-minded idealism of the freethinkers in prerevolutionary France was advocating, along with other wide-ranging reforms in society, public education in all matter of culture and learning. For the architect this resulted in fresh interest in all cultural buildings such as art galleries, libraries, and museums. Musically, it involved providing for opera going on a large scale, with theaters designed so that all could see and hear equally well. In pursuit of these social aims, attempts were made by theater architects to abandon the segregated system of boxes and galleries in favor of the classical amphitheater form.160

**The Paris Opéra**

The theater that first housed the Paris Opéra, from 1673 to 1763, was the Salle du Palais-Royal that seated approximately 1270 people with only two tiers of actual of balconies and lower ceilings. Figure 10 illustrates how this early theater accommodated most of its audience in the floor *parterre* in standing room only. The internal structure of the theater was acoustically friendly to the singer because it was not overly tall and cavernous and offered wooden reflective surfaces and a rectangular shape that did not disperse the directional sound coming from the stage. The size and design of French theaters at the end of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth century was appropriate to house the spectacle of a ballet or the focused performance of a play: not the acoustically cacophonous opera with its multiple singers and layers of instrumental

160 Forsyth, 108.
accompaniment. The Palais-Royal Theater was also very similar to the earlier ‘shoebox’
theater described by Borwick. It was an acoustically friendly hall for performers and
singers from the stage but did not favor the visual components of opera. From the
illustration, it appears that the stage thrusts out a bit from the proscenium. Those in the
segmented galleries and in the tiers, however, must still twist themselves to see the action
on stage the farther back in the theater they are sitting.

Figure 10. Photograph of a Painting by Saint-Aubin of a performance of Lully's *Armide*
Arts, Boston.

Influential opera theaters for the Paris Opéra include two that are not shown in
this document. They are the Théâtre de la Porte-St-Martin (1781) with a capacity of 2000,
home of the Opéra from 1781 to 1794 and the Théâtre National de la rue de la Loi (AKA
rue de la Richelieu) (1793) with a capacity of 1650–2200 and home of the Opéra from
1794 to 1820. Records of the design of these two theaters are unavailable beyond the raw data shown here but some reasonable conjectures can be made based on their construction dates, capacities, and their architect’s other endeavors.

Both of these theaters were constructed in the late eighteenth century and as Forsyth has asserted, theaters at this time reflected openness in choice of balconies over boxes and a desire for acoustic clarity as a result of the shape of the theater. The Théâtre de la Porte-St-Martin, built hastily under royal direction by architect Nicolas Lenoir (1726–1810), was only meant to be a temporary home for the opera. It’s construction and internal configuration is unavailable. Victor Louis (1731–1800) was the architect of the Théâtre National de la rues de la Loi. He was also the architect for the Grand Théâtre (1777–80) at Bordeaux. According to Forsyth the Bordeaux, “has both a balcony and two tiers of open, balustraded boxes that are more like a segmented gallery. This open arrangement, combined with a relatively small size—the maximum distance from the front of the stage to the furthest box is 64 feet (19.5 meters)—helps to make theater acoustically outstanding.”¹⁶¹ We can surmise that these kinds of aesthetic choices evident in the theater at Bordeaux may have been carried over to the later theater.

In figure 11 and twelve we see a radically different design from the Opéra’s beginnings in the Palais-Royal. As well as the near doubling in capacity from the Palais to the Peletier, the general shape changed. The architectural drawing of the newer theater’s general footprint in figure 12, illustrates the significant difference in Italian and French theaters existent in the early nineteenth century that we see in the designs of La Scala and San Carlo in figures 7 and 8. The truncated half circle design of François Forsyth, 104.
Debret (1777–1850) employed here in the Peletier has significant advantages for the singer on stage and the audience in the theater. The Peletier was larger than many French theaters but still maintained as little distance as possible from the lip of stage to the back of theater because of its shape as shown in the architectural drawing of figure 12. Figure 11 shows that the pit for the orchestra was narrow and spread around the stage to minimize the distance between the performers and the audience and the back of the theater was a truncated half circle that minimized the distance between the stage and the back of the theater. The stage, because of the design, curved out into the audience area. The balconies impinged on the internal volume of the theater, which ensured they did not create acoustically “coupled” rooms that negatively affected the listening experience or deadened the acoustic unnecessarily. The Peletier was fundamentally different in design from that of the prominent theaters of the Italians. This Parisian theater was shorter in height by at least two balconies, was much more shallow from front to back and had a more forgiving curve to the back of the theater such that the audience was closer to the stage. Combined, these features supported the singer, delighted the audience with auditory clarity, and provided significantly unobstructed views of the stage.

Notably, the forgiving acoustic design of the Peletier is where Nourrit performed his entire career and in which Duprez, with a voice used to the gargantuan San Carlo and La Scala theaters, shattered audience expectations and raised the bar for operatic tenors with his do di petto C5 in “Asil héréditaire.”

Comparative Adversity of Italian and French Opera Theater Architecture

Between 1673 and 1763 at the Paris Opéra a tenor would have sung in the Salle du Palais-Royal Theater, which seated approximately 1270 people, had at most three tiers of spectators, and was much more rectangular in shape. Tenors in the major theaters in Italy, from the early 1600s to 1737, sang in theaters with a capacity of between 800 and 1500 seats in a shape that ranged from a semi circle to a horseshoe and featured three or more levels of box seating. After 1737 in Italy, tenors sang in a theater that was more than double the size of the Opéra’s Palais-Royal: the Teatro San Carlo in Naples that sat 3500 and featured six tiers of acoustic deadening boxes. The San Carlo was not the only theater in Italy, but it was the most famous theater for Italian premiers until La Scala was built in 1778. Even theaters such as the Teatro della Pergola where Donizetti worked closely with Duprez sat 1500 with four tiers of boxes. Significantly impactful was La Scala, which sat 2800 and boasted six tiers of boxes (more boxes and a larger internal volume than the San Carlo). La Fenice (built and rebuilt in 1792 and 1823 respectively) sat 2200 and featured five tiers of boxes and the distinctly elongated horseshoe shape of the theater. All of these Italian theaters incorporated the sound deadening concave shape on the sides and ceiling.

From 1784 the Paris Opéra changed physical homes quite often (if one includes the temporary locations due to destruction by fire of the major venues), as did the seating capacities and theater configurations. There was not a general standard for opera house construction in Paris, as Voltaire complained. An objective method of comparing the

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"I shall never cease to be astonished or to complain at the lack of concern taken in France for making the theaters worthy of the excellent works that are staged in them and
characteristics of theaters is to compare their relative seating capacities as the seating capacity has a correlation to the internal volume and overall size of a theater. With this measurement we can gauge the relative acoustical adversity experienced by tenors in these theaters. In Paris from 1784 to 1789, a tenor sang in a 2000 seat opera house (Théâtre de la Porte-St-Martin), from 1794 to 1820 the same tenor sang in a 1650 seat house (Théâtre National de la rue de la Loi), and from 1820 to 1821 he sang in an 1100 seat hall (Salle Favart). During the months of May and June of 1821, the Opéra lived at the Salle Louvois, which sat 1450 people. And finally, from August of 1821 to approximately 1870, a tenor at the Paris Opéra would have performed in the Salle Le Peletier that could seat 1900 people and featured a truncated oval shape and four balconies. For further reference, a detailed table in Appendix B illustrates the multiple theater venues, venue and theater company names (which changed depending on who was in power), which the Opéra and other troupes cycled during the revolutions. The Paris Opéra was not the only theater troupe and venue of influence in Paris. The Théâtre-Italienn, the Opéra-comique, Théâtre de l’Odéon, were popular amongst the Parisian public and in many respects, it is in these theaters where the true creative energy of operatic performances were happening in Paris. Nonetheless, the Paris Opéra was the most influential institution for singers in Paris and by extension the theater in which they performed. In Appendix B there is also a collection of the vital statistics of the influential Italian and French opera houses. The Italian theater information comes primarily from Inventing the Business of Opera, from the Glixons’ Inventing the Business, Rosselli’s


Italian tenors generally sang in larger, more acoustically challenging theaters than French tenors in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This challenge in Italian theaters encouraged Italian tenors to connect to a more acoustically powerful production of sound. Concurrently, French tenors sang in smaller size opera houses that were more accommodating of the singer. Some French theaters were still acoustically challenging for reasons relating to acoustic noise and poor design, rather than the gargantuan acoustic void that was the San Carlo or La Scala. French tenors at the Paris Opéra also enjoyed a well-behaved audience while tenors in Italy had to contend with audiences that could stop a production insisting on numerous encores as easily as interfere or stop a production with hissing and shouted disapproval.163

Before his move to Italy, Nourrit was singing with the voix blanche that was less acoustically powerful in the acoustically friendly Salle Le Peletier. At the same time, Duprez was perfecting his technique with the impressive sounding and acoustically

163 [Speaking of the comportment of Italian audiences] But that is not to say that audiences had lost their critical faculties. On the contrary, they were demanding and opinionated; but on the whole—to judge from the composers they acclaimed and the operas they singled out for particular approbation—shrewd too, with a very keen sense of quality within the conventions they knew and understood. No doubt they were sometimes factional, obstreperous or unjust: ‘All the anger, the contumely, the calumnies which today erupt in political conflict, gathered at that time [before 1848] around the heads of poets and artists to deadly affect’ (Ghislanzoni 1958)... And there was another side to the picture painted by Ghislanzoni; for when they heard beautiful music beautifully sung, their feelings erupted no less powerfully.” Kimbell, 428.
powerful voix sombrée in the challenging La Pergola in Florence that sat 1500 and the cavernous Teatro San Carlo in Naples that sat 3500 people in six tiers of acoustically deadening boxes. Sometimes singing Edgardo five times per week in the latter theater. Pleasants and other critics speculate that because of the rigors of singing in Italy, Duprez developed an instrument and a delivery that must have seemed super-human to the shocked the Parisian public. We must remember, as Monnais commented, Duprez’ voice bore no resemblance to anyone, least of all his rival Nourrit. Duprez accomplished what Nourrit was not able to do because of his training and experiences.

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164 “It is now unheard of for opera singers to sing leading parts four or give times a week, but in Italy it was the norm until the late nineteenth century—and six times a week was not unknown. Most opera companies gave four or five performances a week; unless there was a ‘double company’ (meaning two lots of soloists) all the leading singers would have to appear at each performance. Double companies were rare outside of La Scala and the San Carlo, and could not always be afforded even there...The tenor Duprez sang in Lucia five times a week, at one point six times.” Rosselli, The Opera Industry, 127.
Chapter 5

Influence of the Growth of Orchestral Forces

Threading through all of the previous discussion of factors of influence on the development of the tenor voice is the concurrent growth of orchestral forces in opera compositions. This growth of orchestral forces in opera encompassed the size, density, darkening timbre of the opera orchestra, and competing textural use by the composer. According to Hamm, the opera orchestra did not solidify in its composition until the middle of the eighteenth century and continued to change throughout the nineteenth century. Orchestral instrumentation would have varied greatly from small town to small town and also from large city opera house to large city opera house and would have varied regionally based on the tastes of the public. There was also a significant difference in composition and quality of orchestras in France and Italy along with some small deviations\textsuperscript{165} in standard pitch. Hamm observes that, “One [orchestra] in Paris might have twenty strings and woodwinds and brasses by twos; an Italian orchestra in a small town might have only strings—and only eight or ten of these—and harpsichord; the Hamburg orchestra might be weak in strings but have five flutes, 4 oboes, 5 bassoons, 4 horns and trumpets, and a drum.”\textsuperscript{166} French opera orchestras had a reputation for excellence at the turn of the century due in large part to the crown subsidy that supported regular


\textsuperscript{166} Charles Hamm, "The Orchestra and its Use," in \textit{Opera} (Boston: Allan and Bacon, Inc., 1966), 140.
employment of musicians and an abundance of respectable manufacturers for their instruments. Italian orchestras on the other hand did not enjoy this kind of reputation. In fact, they were notorious for poor musicianship on sub-par instruments (compared to those played by French musicians) even if their playing was passionate. Notable exceptions to the situation in Italy are the orchestras of the more prestigious opera houses of the San Carlo and La Scala: as a direct result of Alessandro Lanari’s insistence.167

The most effective way to judge the growth of orchestral changes and their impact on the development of the tenor voice is to examine representative opera scores to demonstrate these evolutionary changes. Repertoire examples will be drawn from the years 1750–1850 and divided according to their relative support of or competition with the solo voice. The scope of this discussion of influence will not include an exhaustive survey of all operatic repertoire in all times. The chosen repertoire is meant to both illustrate the concurrent impact of developing orchestral complexity in Nourrit and Duprez’ careers and to be somewhat representative of the repertoire to which they were exposed. Upon examination of these examples, a historical pattern of growth will emerge up to and including what they were performing at the time of their meeting, in the eighteenth century.168

167 “Roman orchestras, it would be fair to say, were notorious, until the impresario Lanari began to lick them into some sort of shape in the mid-1830s...But the only orchestras to meet with almost unanimous admiration of musicians were those of La Scala and the San Carlo.” David Kimbell, Italian Opera, National Traditions of Opera, edited by John Warrack (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 422–433.

Orchestrations that Support the Voice

The first work in our discussion of orchestral influence on the development of the tenor voice comes from a scene from Jean-Jaque Rousseau’s infamous Le Devin du village (1753). Devin was composed during the Querelle des Bouffons. Rousseau hoped to embody what he thought of as the most advantageous aspects of the Italian buffa style of opera. Le Devin featured simple melodic forms, shorter component parts of airs and dances separated by minimal recitatives that were in direct contrast to what was perceived as the complicated artifice of the tragédie-lyrique. Rousseau used a simple orchestration of woodwinds and strings in an accompagnato manner: meaning that the recitatives would be accompanied by all or most instruments in the orchestra. As we can see in figure 13, the orchestra initially plays to establish a tonality and Rousseau reduces the texture as a voice begins to sing and then brings the texture back to where it began after the voice stops. The space that Rousseau gives to the voice aids the singer in declaming text clearly so the tenor playing Colin can emphasize the communicative aspects of his text with the nuance and emphasis so necessary to the French language without fear of competition from the supporting orchestra.\(^\text{169}\)

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Figure 13. The first seventeen measures of the scene VI duet with Colin and Colette, “Je l’apperçois”, from Jean-Jaques Rousseau’s *Le devin du Village* (1753).  

Fourteen years later, we have Christoph Willibald Gluck’s *Alceste* (figure 14) and we begin to see with this example as a significant addition of orchestral forces in support of the tenor voice. The example is from Adméte’s (the King of Thessaly’s) act three,

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scene three air, “Bannis la crainte et les alarmes.” In the work, he reacts to his new-found health and tries to reassure the stricken Alceste who has (unbeknownst to him) sacrificed herself for him. His air is reminiscent of the military march identified with the seria characters of Kings in early eighteenth century seria opera. Gluck chooses to accompany the voice with a full orchestration here rather than reducing it and writes the melodic line with a significant portion of it in the acoustically strong passaggio of the tenor. A tenor performing this role at its debut would have used a *voix-mixte* vocal production in this area of the voice that would have sounded brilliant rather than sonorous. The resulting brilliance would have cut through the orchestration of the mellow sounding clarinets and strings that were accompanying his vocal line. Figure 14 highlights the technical development in the tenor voice in the mid eighteenth century that was, because of its brilliance, capable of cutting through an orchestral texture that was supportive that still doubles the vocal line. In comparison with Rousseau’s *Le Devin du village*, the tenor who sang Admétus would have required a great deal more vocal power than the tenor who sang Colin.
Figure 14. The first eleven measures of the act three, third scene air, “Bannis la crainte et les alarmes”, from Gluck’s *Alceste* (1767).\(^{171}\)

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\(^{171}\) Christoph Willibald Gluck, *Alceste* (musical drama in three acts, Paris Version 1776) 2 vols. (Boca Raton, FL: 1900), 206. This version appears to have been taken from the Bärenreiter *Sämtliche Werke* I/7: *Alceste/Alkestis* (BA 2291).
Orchestrations that Challenge the Voice

Comparatively, the next examples of orchestral evolution and increasing demands on the tenor voice has a direct connection to Nourrit. In 1821 Nourrit was cast as Pylades in *Iphigénie en Tauride* (1779) as one of his first roles in the Paris Opéra. The role of Pylades is noteworthy not only for its connection to the narrative thread of this document but because we see a considerable change in the opera orchestra as it accompanies the voice with increased textural competition between tenor and orchestra.

The excerpt in figure 15 is taken from the final fifteen measures of the orchestral score to Pylade’s aria “Divinité des grandes âmes.” The melodic line, the declamation of the French, and the orchestration show a drama as yet unknown to tenor roles until this point. The orchestration calls for two oboes, two bassoons, two horns and two trumpets in C, timpani, and a large complement of strings in violin, viola, violoncello and basso.

“Divinité” is a dramatic aria from a role that is more central to the plot and dramatic content of the opera. The excerpt shows the tenor leaping into his *passaggio* to a sustained A₄ natural while singing over a very insistent and dramatic orchestra. The orchestral texture here is thick and requires the brilliant voice of the tenor to remain connected to an acoustically more powerful chest voice production in order to be heard. Gluck placed the tenor in direct contention with a powerful orchestra without the typical pulling away of texture to ensure the tenor could be heard. Gluck would not have written the ending of this aria in this way unless the tenor for which he wrote it were able to sing powerfully enough to cut through the chosen orchestration.

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The next example from this level of interaction with the solo voice is from *Così fan tutte* (1790) by Mozart. *Così* has a significant tenor role in the plot that includes an extremely lyrical aria demonstrating the expressive capabilities required by Mozart of the tenor voice and hints at uses to come. In the aria “Un aura amorosa,” Ferrando is attempting to seduce (in disguise) his best friend’s (Guglielmo’s) fiancé as part of a bet placed on them by Don Alfonso that women in general will not be true if their men are away. The aria’s soaring lyrical lines above a sparse orchestration gives hints of the forthcoming bel canto style. The example in figure 16 highlights a lyrical line that leaps to the $A_4$ natural from the $D_4$ and floats strongly and sustains above the full but elegant

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orchestration. “Un aura” is unusual for its time and significant because the tenor must remain in his passaggio for most of his phrases in a sustained fashion rather than quickly moving through it. Simultaneously, he must produce an elegant and graceful tone that seduces rather than commands. These features together in this aria encapsulate what the Italians would call a spianato style of singing coupled with a tessitura where the tenor remained in his passaggio and above repeatedly.¹⁷⁴

Figure 16. The final twenty-seven measures of Ferrando’s aria “Un aura amorosa” from Mozart’s *Cosi fan tutte*. Used by arrangement with Bärenreiter-Verlag Karl Vöterle GmbH & Co. KG.
The orchestration is larger than Gluck’s for Pylades. Mozart calls for flute I & II, oboe I & II, clarinet I & II, and bass clarinet, bassoon I & II, horn I & II, timpani, strings, and a continuo for recitatives that included a harpsichord and celli.\textsuperscript{175} The vocal line is sparsely doubled for the first utterance of a phrase and for the repeat the orchestra competes with the solo voice. There are darker timbered instruments called for here that result in an increased density of sound from the orchestra. Consequently, a significantly more resonant tenor voice is required to satisfactorily perform the role. In support of this contention, Hamm notes that,

Something quite new in the history of opera is happening in such a passage: the singer must be capable of enough volume to be heard in competition with twenty or thirty instruments. He can no longer sing at a dynamic level, which pleases him; he must make enough sound to be heard over the orchestra—and if he is not capable of this, he is not suited for the part. Though the normal function of the orchestra in the operas of Mozart, Gluck, and their contemporaries is to support the singer, to accompany him, it may on occasion compete with him. A new requirement has been added to the skills necessary of the operatic singer\textsuperscript{176}

\textbf{Orchestrations that Compete with the Voice}

\emph{Fernand Cortez} (1809) by Gaspare Spontini (1774–1851) illustrates the compositional and textural shift at the beginning of the nineteenth century with which the tenor—increasingly the lead role in operas—competed to be heard. The subject matter of the opera deals with the conquest of Mexico by Fernando Cortez. The libretto was commissioned by Napoleon in anticipation of his campaign against Spain. The excerpt in figure seventeen and eighteen come from the finale of the second act and represent a traditional march that has its roots in the earlier seria style for Kings and leaders.

\textsuperscript{175} Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, \textit{Cosi fan tutte}, libretto by Lorenzo Da Ponte (Bärenreiter Kassel: London, 1999), 212.

\textsuperscript{176} Hamm, 142.
Spontini’s treatment, however, is quite different than Gluck’s treatment of Admétus’s air. Spontini exponentially increases the orchestral forces in this opera compared to Gluck and especially in this march compared to Admétus’ air. The orchestration includes: violin I & II, viola, violoncello, piccolo, oboe, clarinet in C, two horns in D, trumpet in D, bassoon, timpani, percussion, and a SATB chorus.

I have selected the first two pages of the finale for analysis to show both the increased orchestration in the work as a whole, and the judicious way in which Spontini chooses to accompany the voice for the tenor role of Cortez. On the first page we see an extensive list of instruments and a thick march-like texture of rhythmic patterns. Spontini brings these elements and the declarative line of Cortez in together. Notable at the beginning, however, is the lack of chorus, brass and timpani while Cortez is singing by himself. Twelve measures later, however, Spontini creates the textural consequent to Cortez’ exhortative antecedent and it is here that he brings in the chorus and the brass to significant effect. The text is triumphant with Cortez proclaiming that he will lead all to success and the chorus response is to proclaim that if they follow him, they will succeed. Spontini’s treatment of the tenor role stretches the acoustical power of the tenor voice to cut through a thicker orchestration than Admétus’s. After the first eleven measures, the tenor is supported with a chorus when Spontini wishes the increased dramatic effect of added brass. This example illustrates the early nineteenth century tendency to use the tenor in a more texturally competitive situation, which does not force the voice to compete, as composers would have done in the 1820s and 1830s.
Figure 17. The first page of the final march of act II, “moi Castillans marches troupe invincible” from Gaspare Spontini’s *Fernand Cortez ou La Conquête du Méxique* (1809).

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Figure 18. The second page of the final march of act II, “moi Castillans marches troupe invincible” from Gaspar de Spontini’s *Fernand Cortez ou La Conquête du Méxique* (1809). (see figure 17 for attribution)
At the turn of the nineteenth century (more than fifteen years before Rossini’s time), influential German composer Simon Mayr moved to Italy. His innovations changed the fabric of Italian opera orchestras that in turn influenced France through Rossini upon his move there. Rossini’s subsequent arrival in France accelerated the increasing combination of Italian and French styles of opera that began in the 1810s and 1820s. A significant example of tenor repertoire for this period is Rossini’s *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* (1816). The tenor role, Count Almaviva, is the lead role despite the fact that the opera is not eponymously named. The aria in the next example, “Ecco ridente in cielo,” illustrates significant features of the use of the tenor voice in a lead role at this time. However, choosing excerpts of this aria to show orchestral texture, however, is quite difficult as Rossini moves through several different textures in the orchestra and through many stylistic requirements in the vocal line. He does all of this as both a nod to Giovanni Paisiello’s early masterpiece and to avoid too much comparison.

At the beginning of the aria, the Count is singing very simply with a guitar accompaniment (usually onstage) and light *staccatti* accompaniment from orchestral strings. Rossini’s arrangement allows the voice to soar into the theater without competition from the orchestra. It is not until the allegro of the B section, that a more full orchestration comes into play. There is still a rough alternation between the singer and

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178 “German influence [in the first half of the century] was pronounced in a second development—the use of an enlarged and more imaginatively deployed orchestra. The Bavarian-born Simon Mayr, who settled in Italy and became probably the most influential composer of opera there in the twelve of fifteen years before the début of Rossini, did more than anyone to encourage Italian musicians to open their ears to the dramatic and evocative powers of instrumental timbre.” Kimbell, 442.

the orchestra that allows a lighter and more agile voice to succeed. In the first sections of
the aria, the few times the Count competes with the entire orchestra are when he interjects
short statements such as ‘O istante’ and ‘Felice’. Near the very end of “Ecco ridente” the
entire instrumentation of piccolos, flutes, clarinets, bassoons, horns, guitar, and strings
align homophonically with the voice so that the tenor, finally in and above his passaggio
in the descending line, is showing true vocal power. These last five measures of the aria
in figure 18 illustrate one measure of the lighter orchestral texture and the full use of the
orchestra.

Figure 19. The final six measures of Almaviva's aria “Ecco ridente in cielo” from
Rossini's *Il barbiere di siviglia* (1816).

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180 Gioacchino Rossini, *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, Libretto by Cesare Sterbini,
reproduced from the authoritative edition published by Ricordi from the G. Ricordi, n.d.
The Orchestra and the Romantic Tenor Sound

As the provided examples move towards the mid-century mark, the orchestral competition with the solo voice increases and the nature of the tenor voice significantly changes. Accordingly, the next influential opera we will analyze lies at the crux of this document. The role was written for Nourrit and his vocal abilities and dramatic talents, but nine years later, Duprez eclipsed Nourrit by singing most of the role, including the stunning C₅ at the end of the aria in a do di petto manner. Figures 19 and 20 present two excerpts from the orchestral score.¹⁸¹ The orchestration for the beginning of the aria calls for two flutes, two hautbois (oboes), two Bb clarinets, four horns, two trumpets, two bassoons, two trombones, tympani, violins, violas, celli, and bass. Rossini called for a large orchestra with a much thicker timbre and assembly of forces than we see in the Barberie aria. “Asil héréditaire” deals with Arnold’s visit to the empty home where he grew up and recalls how the Austrians killed his father. Rossini attempted to match the emotional content of the text with a similar orchestral palate of timbre and texture as evidenced by the groups of instruments accompanying the voice. Political strife, emotional pain, and revenge are the subjects of this aria. The timbre palate of the orchestra includes brass, dark timbered woodwinds and a full use of a string section with significant use of bass and cello.

In the first page of the score, figure 20, we see the music leading up to the C₅ of the cadenza. Rossini is increasing the texture of the orchestra, with a doubling of the vocal line in strings and woodwinds, along with introduction of a grounded support in the top system with the celli. The bottom system of figure 20 illustrates the dramatic

¹⁸¹ Giocchino Rossini, Guillaume Tell, Libretto by Etienne de Jouy and Hippolyte Bis (Mainz: B. Schott’s Söhne, 1830), 736–37.
sforzandi and dynamic accents indicated by Rossini that correspond to the anger and drama of the subject of the aria.

Figure 21 in the top system illustrates how Rossini thickens the texture and competition with the voice as he indicates sustained chords in the horns and bassoons while the upper woodwinds and strings pursue leaping and angular figures. Before this opera and this aria, Rossini rarely used this effect and even so never to this degree. A tenor, who forty years earlier sang Ferrando, would have been daunted to see such competitive forces in front of him. In the end of the first system, Rossini begins to clear some of the competing texture to give the singer’s cadenza in the bottom system more dramatic space for proper affect. It is important to remember that “Asil héréditaire” and the role of Arnold from which it comes were written for Nourrit’s voix blanche, which would have required less texture in order to create a dramatic effect in the cadenza. Nourrit’s less acoustically powerful voice would have needed this reduction in texture: Duprez’ voice would not have needed the reduction in competing forces. Guillaume Tell was performed only a few times on the stage of the Paris Opéra after its premier, and in fact the aria, “Asil Héréditaire,” was usually omitted when Nourrit sang the role.\(^\text{182}\) It was only added for Duprez’ premier with the Opéra at his insistence. Regardless, Duprez was able to take advantage of this textural void written by the composer, and with his acoustically robust voice, stunned the audience and claimed both this aria and this role for the ascendant style of Italian singing.

Figure 20. Second to last page of the aria “Asil héréditaire” from the orchestral score to Rossini's *Guillaume Tell* (1829). Source: The 1830 edition by B. Schott’s Söhne. Source: IMSLP, Petrucci Library Project.
Figure 21. Last page of the aria “Asil héréditaire” from the orchestral score to Rossini’s *Guillaume Tell* (1829). Source: The 1830 edition by B. Schott’s Söhne. Source: IMSLP, Petrucci Library Project.
In a different genre, we have the opera *Fra Diavolo* (1830) by Auber, which was premiered at the Opéra-Comique and became one of the most performed operas on the stage with more than 900 performances through 1907.\(^{183}\) Auber was popular in France and *Fra Diavolo*, as well as the Opéra-Comique itself represents a significant continuation of the growth of orchestral performing forces through which tenors in France would have had to compete. Neither Nourrit nor Duprez premiered or as far as we know sang this role. However, it is illustrative of the changes that were happening to French opera that was composed by French composers. Significantly, this example illustrates that the changes of orchestral timbre and texture were not just occurring at the Paris Opéra. A noteworthy change that stands out in this opera is the inclusion of a much larger percussion element to the orchestration. At the top, the score calls for two flutes and piccolos, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, first and second violins, violas, cellos, and basses. The expanded percussion section includes bass drum, timpani, snare drum, triangle, and tambourine. Increased thickness of orchestra, use of multiple percussion instruments, and a larger trombone section compared to what Rossini would use, added to the dramatic possibilities of the orchestra.\(^{184}\) In addition to the pit orchestra, there was also a chamber group of instruments that included two horns, two trumpets, three trombones, and a bell. While a stage group of instruments is nothing new to the operatic genre of this time, including brass is a bit unusual.


The next to last example of orchestral change, role evolution, and dramatic storytelling relevant to this document and the change in tenor vocal technique is one that was written for Duprez by Donizetti after Duprez’ success with Guglielmo Tell in 1831. It is the role of Edgardo in Donizetti’s Lucia di Lammermoor (1835). In this opera Donizetti calls for two flutes, a piccolo, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, triangle, cymbals, bass drum, church bell, and a full complement of strings. Here we find a role that features a real story with characters that are not far removed from their passions. The role of Edgardo is one that is not extensive in terms of time on stage, but it is vocally demanding. By examining the Ricordi piano/vocal score,\footnote{Gaetano Donizetti, Lucia di Lammermoor, Opera completa per canto e pianorte. Libretto by Salvadore Cammarano (Milan: Ricordi, 2006).} we see that the role includes a twenty-two page duet with Lucia that ends act I, a quartet in act II that includes fifteen pages of singing that leads into the thirty-eight pages of the famous sextet that ends act II, a twenty page duet with Enrico that opens the third act and the famous recitative and aria that ends the opera, Fra poco a me ricovero that he sings in front of the tombs of his family. The role of Edgardo requires a passionate delivery, thick with frustrated dreams and too-heavy expectations of future happiness. With this backdrop of story content in mind, Donizetti composed the role of Edgardo for Duprez’ masculine and thrillingly powerful voice. The recitative of the aria at the end of the opera features an optional cadenza that has the singer sustaining a long lyrical phrase while maintaining the A₄ and Bb₄ tessitura. In figure 22 we see that at the apex of the cadenza the orchestra is silent but enters as the line descends to the middle range of the singer’s voice and cuts out to let the singer finish the word ‘morte’ a capella.
Figure 22. The final eleven measures of Edgardo’s recitative “Tombe degli avi miei” from Donizetti’s *Lucia di Lammermoor* (1835). Source: IMSLP, G. Ricordi Orchestral score.

The aria begins with a larghetto and an accompaniment of close harmonies, not in the strings and upper woodwinds, but in the darker timbered instruments like the bassoons and horns with occasional interjections of a heartbeat ostinato in the timpani. Donizetti achieved a synthesis of orchestral forces and voices that brought the orchestra closer to an equal footing with the characters portrayed on stage. He did this through instrumentation and orchestration choices as well as with the tailoring of language and melodic lines for particular singers:

Although the accumulation of these touches [modifications to melodies and recitatives] contributes to the freshness and spontaneity of *Lucia*, the continuing appeal of this score rests on other foundations as well. One is the almost consistently high level of Donizetti’s melodic inspiration—in such passages as ‘Veranna a te’, Lucia’s ‘Soffrival nel pianto’ or Edgardo’s ‘Fra poco a me ricovero’. Another is the Romantic color of the orchestration—the prominence given the horns from the prelude at the
beginning of the work through the final scene, and the participation of the solo woodwinds as ‘characters’.\textsuperscript{186}

This is the achievement of the bel canto orchestration of Donizetti as it relates to the voice and to the creation of the Romantic Tenor sound. Despite the fact that the instrumentation is not close to the scale it would achieve in a Wagnerian orchestra, the timbres that bel canto composers such as Donizetti chose mirrored and enhanced the \textit{do di petto} sounds of the tenor singers for which they were composed. The previous example illustrates this very point: Edgardo’s final recitativo and aria features the optional cadenza at the end of the recitativo. The second example from \textit{Lucia} is shown in figure 23 and features part of the final eleven measures of the aria that demonstrates the thicker timbres over which the singer must be heard.

\footnote{\textsuperscript{186} Ashbrook, \textit{Donizetti and His Operas}, 380.}
Figure 23. The final eleven measures of Edgardo's aria “Fra poco a me ricovero” from Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* (1835). Source: IMSLP, G. Ricordi Orchestral score.

The final opera role and orchestra we will examine is from Berlioz's *Benvenuto Cellini* (1838), that included a role in which Duprez achieved great success albeit with a “coarsening of the voice” noted by Berlioz. In the Kalmus orchestral score Berlioz lists an orchestra with two flutes, two oboes, clarinets, bassoons, four horns, four trumpets,
two coronets, three trombones, a full percussion section including timpani, and a large string section. Evident in this list is the fact that with just the addition of all the brass instruments in Berlioz’s score, this orchestra would overpower by a large magnitude any voice used to performing even Ferrando in Così and quite possibly the tenor who traditionally would have sung Almaviva just twenty-two years earlier.

From the turn of the century to the collision of the careers of Duprez and Nourrit, the state to which the opera orchestra had moved in time included a massive orchestra of great volume and thick timbre in a large, wide, and acoustically unhelpful setting.

According to Hamm,

A study of the development of the operatic orchestra makes it quite clear that singing styles must have changed in the nineteenth century. A singer could no longer sing as he had in the previous century—he simply would not have been heard. Conversely, once singers adjusted their techniques to overcome the competition of the new orchestra, they were no longer equipped to sing in the older style. These evolving pressures and rigors of performing, then, are what must be understood as a critical element in the ascendance of Italian vocal technique and performance practice. Growth of orchestral forces that increasingly competed with the solo voice is a central factor in each of these tenors’ lives and their respective successes and failures. The growth and evolution of the opera orchestra’s size and power as well as a thickening of textural use by the composer and darkening of orchestral timbre had a strong affect on the development of the vocal technique of the tenor.

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188 Hamm, 147.
Orchestral forces for the opera grew increasingly larger in number, thicker in textural use by composers, and darker in timbre with the addition of newer instruments such that the matching of instrumental timbre to vocal timbre became an important consideration for composers. Orchestral competition with the solo voice necessitated a more acoustically powerful tenor voice that by and large was darker in timbre than tenor voices that came before and is what we see contrasted with reviews of Nourrit’s voice and reviews of Duprez’ voice. The ascendance and adoption of this darker and more masculine sound continues today and is the standard by when successful tenors are judged.
Conclusion

In 1837 on the Paris Opéra stage there was a sea-change in vocal technique which deeply affected Nourrit and Duprez’s lives and set the path of the operatic tenor toward an increasing need of a more powerful and sonorous sound. The technical shift and resulting change in timbre was brought on by many influences to a relatively equal degree: (1) the changes in opera plots and characters that increasingly personified Romantic ideas and an increasing accessibility and naturalistic drama in opera; (2) the eighteenth and nineteenth century interaction of French and Italian culture and language, which led to the ascendance—in tenor vocal technique and performance practice—of the Italian style of singing; (3) the influence of Italian opera houses and their architects that ushered in a shift in venue design that affected size, shape, and acoustic profile of opera theaters that increased the demand for the vocal power needed to both rise above the orchestra and fill the dead acoustic of the house; and finally (4) an increasingly numerically powerful, dense, and thick timbered opera orchestra that competed with the solo voice. The combination of all of these influences led to the moment when Gilbert-Louis Duprez stunned and impressed the Parisian public with his voice and performance. Because of this performance and its reception, vocal writing for the tenor and all male operatic singers changed. Composers began to explore the newfound abilities Duprez demonstrated. From this event we can draw an evolutionary line to the verismo genre its gritty reality and powerful roles to the culmination present in the Romantic operas of Verdi and the music dramas of Wagner.
In vocal production, dramatic content, and venue design, there was an extensive expansion and evolving definition of the art form called opera and the role the tenor played in it. It has been speculated that Nourrit, in his intensely dramatic portrayals of character, paved the way in Paris for Duprez’ robust and electrifying sound because it matched in vocal production what Nourrit accomplished through acting. Had Nourrit not fallen apart, one wonders whether such an artist would have regained his place on the stage once he mastered the change in expectations brought on by his rival.
Afterword

Through the course of this research it has become difficult to think of either Adolphe Nourrit or Gilbert Duprez without the other coming to mind instantly. The former was an accomplished and beloved professional who when faced with becoming a second-rate artist, attempted the impossible and failed, while the latter became the created a sensation with his discovery and was the first artist to create the *tenore di forza* we know and expect on the stage today. Without the groundwork laid by the dramatic actor that was Nourrit, for the dramatic singer that was Duprez, the question remains: what would male operatic singing be today?
APPENDIX A

Roles performed by Nourrit and Duprez and Theater of Performance
Along with Theater Size

*Roles with an asterisk indicate a premiere.*

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Original Source: Reprinted from Quicherrat’s *Adolphe Nourrit: Sa vie, son talent, son caractère, sa correspondance.*)

**Adolphe Nourrit at the Paris Opéra – Salle Le Peletier, 1900 seat Theater**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Opera</th>
<th>Composer</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pylade</td>
<td>Iphigénie en Tauride</td>
<td>Gluck</td>
<td>1821</td>
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<tr>
<td>Achille</td>
<td>Iphigénie en Tauride</td>
<td>Gluck</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Démaly</td>
<td>Les Bayaderes</td>
<td>Catel</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>L’Asthénie</td>
<td>Hérold</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Oedipe à Colone</td>
<td>Sacchini</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Renaud</td>
<td>Armide</td>
<td>Gluck</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orphée</td>
<td>Orphée</td>
<td>Gluck</td>
<td>1823</td>
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<tr>
<td>Salem</td>
<td>Les deux Salem</td>
<td>Garcia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Le Tasse</td>
<td>La Mort du Tasse</td>
<td>Garcia</td>
<td>1824</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nouradine</td>
<td>Florestan Vendôme en Espagne</td>
<td>Garcia</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sapho</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Icile</td>
<td>Virginie</td>
<td>Berton</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aladin</td>
<td>Aladin ou la Lampe merveilleuse</td>
<td>Nicolo</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Lyncée</td>
<td>Les Danaïdes</td>
<td>Salieri</td>
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<td>Calpigi</td>
<td>Tarare</td>
<td>Salieri</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>La Caravane du Caire</td>
<td>Grétry</td>
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<td>Fernand Cortez</td>
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<td>La Vestale</td>
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<td>Olympie</td>
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<td>Abel</td>
<td>Kreutzer</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ipsiboé</td>
<td>Kreutzer</td>
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<td>Lubin</td>
<td>Le Rossignol</td>
<td>Lebrun</td>
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<td>Colin</td>
<td>Le Devin de Village</td>
<td>Rousseau</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>La Belle au Bois Dormant</td>
<td>Carafa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Néoclès*</td>
<td>Le Siège de Corinthe</td>
<td>Rossini</td>
<td>1826</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Macbeth  
Aménophis*  
Chélard  
Francois 1er à Chambord  
Adolar  
Euryanthe  
Weber  
Masaniello*  
La Muette de Portici  
Auber  
1828  
Comte*  
Le Comte Ory  
Rossini  
1828  
Arnold*  
Guillaume Tell  
Rossini  
1829  
Le Dieu  
Le Dieu et la Bayadère  
Auber  
1830  
Guillaume*  
Le Philtre  
Auber  
1831  
Robert*  
Robert le diable  
Meyerbeer  
1831  
Le Serment  
Auber  
1832  
Gustave*  
Gustave III  
Auber  
1833  
Ali-Baba  
Cherubini  
1833  
Don Juan  
Don Juan  
Mozart  
1836  
Eléazar *  
La Juive  
Haleyvy  
1835  
Raoul de Nangis*  
Les Huguenots  
Meyerbeer  
1836  
Phoebus*  
Esméralda  
L. Bertin  
1836  
Stradella*  
Stradella  
Niedermeyer  
1837

Adolphe Nourrit at the Teatro San Carlo – 3500 seat theater (Naples)

Viscardo  Il Giuramento  Mercadante  1838  
Reina  Elena da Feltre  Mercadante  1838  
Pollione  Norma  Bellini  1839

Gilbert-Louis Duprez at the Paris Opéra – Salle Le Peletier, 1900 seat Theater

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Opera</th>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>Date</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arnold</td>
<td>Guillaume Tell</td>
<td>Rossini</td>
<td>1837</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guido*</td>
<td>Guido et Ginevera</td>
<td>Halévy</td>
<td>1838</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cellini*</td>
<td>Benvenuto Cellini</td>
<td>Berlioz</td>
<td>1838</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albert*</td>
<td>Le Lac des Fées</td>
<td>Auber</td>
<td>1839</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polyeucte*</td>
<td>Les Martyrs</td>
<td>Donizetti</td>
<td>1840</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fernand*</td>
<td>La Favorite</td>
<td>Donizetti</td>
<td>1840</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gerard*</td>
<td>La Reine de Chypre</td>
<td>Halévy</td>
<td>1841</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dauphin*</td>
<td>Charles VI</td>
<td>Halévy</td>
<td>1843</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sébastien*</td>
<td>Dom Sébastien, roi du Portugal</td>
<td>Donizetti</td>
<td>1843</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Otello</td>
<td>Otello</td>
<td>Rossini</td>
<td>1844</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edgard</td>
<td>Lucie de Lammermoor</td>
<td>Donizetti</td>
<td>1846</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaston*</td>
<td>Jérusalem</td>
<td>Verdi</td>
<td>1847</td>
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</table>
APPENDIX B
Principal Italian and French Theaters, Their Capacities, and Notable Premiers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construction Date</th>
<th>Opera House and Location</th>
<th>Capacity</th>
<th>Notable Opera Premiers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1637</td>
<td>Teatro San Cassiano</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1638</td>
<td>Teatro SS Giovanni, Venice</td>
<td>900</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1640</td>
<td>Teatro San Moisè</td>
<td>900</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1657</td>
<td>Teatro della Pergola, Florence</td>
<td>1500</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 1737              | Teatro San Carlo, Naples  | 3500     | • Domenico Natale Sarro: Achille in Sciro (4 Nov 1737)  
|                   |                          |          | • Simon Mayr: Medea in Corinto (28 Nov 1813)  
|                   |                          |          | • Gioacchino Rossini: Elisabetta, Regina d'Inghilterra (4 Oct 1815)  
|                   |                          |          | • Gioacchino Rossini: Armida (11 Nov 1817)  
|                   |                          |          | • Gioacchino Rossini: Mosè in Egitto (5 Mar 1818)  
|                   |                          |          | • Gioacchino Rossini: La donna del lago (24 Sep 1819)  
|                   |                          |          | • Gioacchino Rossini: Maometto II. (3 Dec 1820)  
|                   |                          |          | • Gaetano Donizetti: Alfredo il Grande (2 July 1823)  
|                   |                          |          | • Vincenzo Bellini: Bianca e Fernando (30 May 1826)  
|                   |                          |          | • Gaetano Donizetti: Il Paria (12 Feb 1829)  
|                   |                          |          | • Gaetano Donizetti: Maria Stuarda (18 Oct 1834)  
|                   |                          |          | • Gaetano Donizetti: Lucia di Lammermoor (26 Sep 1835)  
|                   |                          |          | • Gaetano Donizetti: Roberto Devereux (29 Oct 1837)  
|                   |                          |          | • Saverio Mercadante: La Vestale (10 Mar 1840)  
|                   |                          |          | • Gaetano Donizetti: Caterina Cornaro (12 Jan 1844)  
|                   |                          |          | • Giuseppe Verdi: Alzira (12 Aug 1845)  
|                   |                          |          | • Gaetano Donizetti: Poliuto (30 Nov 1848)  
<p>|                   |                          |          | • Giuseppe Verdi: Luisa Miller (8 Dec 1849)  |
| 1756              | Teatro Communale di Bologna | 1100   |                        |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construction Date</th>
<th>Opera House and Location</th>
<th>Capacity</th>
<th>Notable Opera Premiers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1778              | Teatro alla Scala        | 2300     | • Antonio Salieri: Europa riconosciuta (3 Aug 1778)  
|                   |                          |          | • Domenico Cimarosa: Circe (26 Dec 1782)  
|                   |                          |          | • Ferdinando Paër: Rossana (31 Jan 1795)  
|                   |                          |          | • Gioacchino Rossini: La pietra del Paragone (26 Dec 1812)  
|                   |                          |          | • Gioacchino Rossini: Il turco in Italia (14 Aug 1814)  
|                   |                          |          | • Gioacchino Rossini: La gazza ladra (31 May 1817)  
|                   |                          |          | • Gioacchino Rossini: Bianca e Falliero (26 Dec 1819)  
|                   |                          |          | • Giacomo Meyerbeer: Margarita d'Anjou (14 Nov 1820)  
|                   |                          |          | • Gaetano Donizetti: Chiara e Serafina, ossia I pirati (26 Oct 1822)  
|                   |                          |          | • Vincenzo Bellini: Il pirata (27 Oct 1827)  
|                   |                          |          | • Vincenzo Bellini: La straniera (14 Feb 1829)  
|                   |                          |          | • Vincenzo Bellini: Norma (26 Dec 1831)  
|                   |                          |          | • Gaetano Donizetti: Lucrezia Borgia (26 Dec 1833)  
|                   |                          |          | • Saverio Mercadante: Il giuramento (11 Mar 1837)  
|                   |                          |          | • Giuseppe Verdi: Oberto (17 Nov 1839)  
|                   |                          |          | • Giuseppe Verdi: Un giorno di Regno (5 Sep 1840)  
|                   |                          |          | • Giuseppe Verdi: Nabucco (9 Mar 1842)  
|                   |                          |          | • Giuseppe Verdi: I Lombardi alla prima Crociata (11 Feb 1843)  
|                   |                          |          | • Giuseppe Verdi: Giovanna d'Arco (15 Feb 1845)  |
| 1792              | La Fenice, Venice        | 2200     | • Gioacchino Rossini: Tancredi (6 Feb 1813)  
|                   |                          |          | • Gioacchino Rossini: Semiramide (3 Feb 1823)  
|                   |                          |          | • Giacomo Meyerbeer: Il Crociato in Egitto (1824)  
|                   |                          |          | • Vincenzo Bellini: I Capuleti e i Montecchi (11 Mar 1830)  
|                   |                          |          | • Vincenzo Bellini: Beatrice di Tenda (16 Mar 1833)  
|                   |                          |          | • Gaetano Donizetti: Belisario (4 Feb 1836)  |
| 1837              | La Fenice, Venice        | 2200     | • Maria di Rudenz 30 Jan (1838)  
|                   |                          |          | • Giuseppe Verdi: Ernani (9 Mar 1844)  
<p>|                   |                          |          | • Giuseppe Verdi: Attila (17 Mar 1846)  |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Theater Names</th>
<th>Theater Capacity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Paris Opéra  
AKA –  
- Théâtre des Arts  
- Théâtre de la République des Arts  
- Académie Impériale de Musique  
- Académie Royale de Musique and others | Salle du Palais-Royal  
(1673–1763)  
Théâtre de la Porte-St-Martin  
(until Aug 1794)  
Théâtre National de la rue de la Loi  
(Richelieu)(7 Aug 1794–13 Feb 1820)  
Salle Favart (i)  
(19 April 1820–11 May 1821)  
Salle Louvois (15 May–15 June 1821)  
Salle Le Peletier (16 Aug 1821 onwards) | • 1270  
2000  
1650  
1100  
1450  
1900 |
| Opéra-Comique  
AKA –  
- Comédie-Italienne  
- Théâtre Italien  
- Théâtre Favart, Théâtre National de l’Opéra-Comique  
- Théâtre Impérial de l’Opéra-Comique | Salle Favart (i) (until 20 July 1801)  
Salle Feydeau  
(16 Sept 1801–22 July 1804)  
Salle Favart (i) (23 July 1804–4 July 1805, except 3–23 Oct 1804 at the Salle Olympique)  
Salle Feydeau  
(2 Sept 1805–12 April 1829)  
Salle Ventadour  
(20 April 1829–22 March 1832)  
Salle de la Bourse  
(24 Sept 1832–30 April 1840)  
Salle Favart (ii) (16 May 1840 onwards) | • 1100  
1200  
1100  
2200  
2200  
1106  
1200–1300  
ca. 2000 |
| Théâtre (de la rue) Feydeau  
AKA –  
- Théâtre deMonsieur  
- Opéra-Comique Français and others | Salle des Machines, Palais des Tuileries  
(26 Jan–22 Dec 1789)  
Ancienne Salle des Variétés, Foire St. Germain (10 Jan–31 Dec 1790)  
Salle Feydeau (6 Jan 1791 onwards; merges with Opéra-Comique in 1801) | • ca. 1270  
700  
2200 |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Principal Paris Theatres, 1789–1870</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Théâtre Italien AKA - Opera Buffa - Opera Seria e Buffa - Théâtre Royal Italien et Anglais - Théâtre Impérial Italien; popularly: ‘Bouffons’ - Théâtre des Italiens'</td>
<td>• Salle Olympique (31 May 1801–13 Jan 1802) • Salle Favart (i) (17 Jan 1802–19 May 1804) • Salle Louvois (9 July 1804–4 Aug 1808) • Salle de l’Odéon (ii) (16 June 1808–30 Sept 1815) • Salle Favart (i) (2 Oct 1815–20 April 1818) • Salle Louvois (20 March 1819–8 Nov 1825) • Salle Favart (i) (12 Nov 1825–14 Jan 1838) • Salle Ventadour (30 Jan–31 March 1838) • Salle de l’Odéon (iii) (Oct 1838–31 March 1841) • Salle Ventadour (2 Oct 1841 onwards)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
GLOSSARY

Tenor Octave Range Guide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>C3</th>
<th>B♭3</th>
<th>C4</th>
<th>G4</th>
<th>A4</th>
<th>B♭4</th>
<th>C5</th>
<th>C3</th>
<th>B♭3</th>
<th>C4</th>
<th>G4</th>
<th>A4</th>
<th>B♭4</th>
<th>C5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Note: Treble clef intervals shown appear as they would be read in a music score and sound one octave lower.

Terms

ancien répertoire: Term used to differentiate older works in current repertoire.

bel canto: Beautiful singing or beautiful song; a term covering the remarkable qualities of the great eighteenth and early nineteenth century Italian singers; suggesting performance practice in the lyrical style in which tone is more important than declamatory style; beauty of tone and legato phrasing, with faultless technique, were the primary ingredients.

buffa: Comic styles of opera popular in the mid-eighteenth century; opposite of opera seria; style of opera that features characters from the commedia dell’arte.

chest voice: Ordinarily, voce de petto corresponds to the comfortable speaking range and terminates in the region of the primo passaggio. The tenor, unless he is a high-pitched leggiero, seldom inflects the speaking voice much above D₄. (From Richard Miller)

claque: Members of the audience at (usually) an opera house but also in the concert hall who are engaged by a performer (or impresario)—often at considerable expense—to applaud, call for encores, and generally show enthusiasm (or the reverse). Claques are highly organized, under leadership of a chef de claque, and exert considerable influence. The claque appears to have developed in Paris in the early eighteenth century.
**couvert:** Literally French for covered; refers to the practice of covering that tenors use to darken the tone of their voice and blend registers.

**da testa:** Refers to old Italian pedagogical terminology meaning literally: from-the-head; refers to the modern understanding of the head voice register.

**do di petto:** Refers to old Italian pedagogy meaning literally: from-the-chest; refers to the lowered laryngeal production of the upper range of a voice that blends the head and chest registers.

**dramma giocoso:** Refers to comic drama. Taken from the eighteenth century Italian term for comic operas containing tragic features. Significantly used by Mozart to describe *Don Giovanni* and by Haydn for several of his operas.

**evirati:** Italian verb: masculine plural of the past participle verb *evirato* which comes from the transitive verb *evirare*, which means to emasculate.

**fluté:** Literally means like a flute. Used to imply a flute-like tone in a voice.

**full voice:** Refers to the lowered laryngeal singing position used by modern tenors for their upper range since Gilbert Duprez’s performance in 1837 of *Guillaume tell*. Designates a sound that is ringing with singer’s formant in the upper range and not falsetto or head voice in tone.

**half-voice:** Refers to the mixed voice and raised laryngeal singing used by the *haute-contre* of France. Often connected to descriptions of falsetto or falsettone; implies less acoustical power in the voice.

**haute-contre:** A high tenor voice, neither castrato nor falsetto, with a range of roughly *d–b’*. It was the leading male solo voice in French opera from Lully to Rameau; by about 1820 it had been superseded by the normal tenor voice.

**head voice:** (voce di testa) Above the second pivotal point (*secondo passaggio*) lies the legitimate head voice, a range extending a fourth or fifth in most male voices. Increased cricothyroid action, vocal fold elongation, diminution of vibrating vocal fold mass, and constantly changing contours of vocal fold edges—all are realized in the uppermost regions. (From Richard Miller)

**musici:** Title for Italian musicians; usually confers respect.

**pasticco(i):** A dramatic entertainment with songs, ensembles, dances, and other items assembled from the works of several composers, thus giving the audience a medley of their favorite tunes. Used significantly at the Théâtre de l’Odéon.

**parterre:** French for floor. Usually refers to the floor/bench seating area of a theater rather than balconies or boxes in an opera house.

**parti serie:** Italian for serious parts. Term usually referred to the seria characters in opera such as kings and leaders.
passaggio: Italian term for the point at which two of the three vocal registers (high, middle, or low) meet; an area of acoustical intensity for the voice and more complex coordination of singing musculature.

padroni: of Italian origin that means tutor.

primo tenore: Refers to the first tenor of an opera company. Designates assignment of roles and pay grade for performance contracts.

seria: Serious opera; style of opera prevalent in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Opera seria was the chief operatic genre of this time; generally featured very formal and complex rules of plot and dramatic presentation; elaborate display arias; plots often involved mythological subjects.

spianato: Planed, leveled, smoothed. Comes from the Italian tool to smooth wood and refers to the Italianate sustained legato vocal line especially in the upper range of the voice.

solfège: Term for a method of sight reading or vocal exercise in which names of the notes are used as in fixed Do; secondary use in France to cover all early music education.

tessitura: Italian term meaning texture. Indicates the prevailing mean or average position of a composition’s notes in relation to range of the piece being sung; adjective delineating a high, low, or medium tessitura.

tenore di forze: A high male voice (tenor) that boasts a ringing, sonorous, and powerful sound. Gilbert Duprez and Domenico Donzelli exemplified this kind of singing in the nineteenth century.

tenore di grazia: A high male voice (tenor) that boasts a ringing lighter sound, that is usually has significant flexibility. Giovanni Battista Rubini exemplified this sound in the nineteenth century.

tenore robusto: Similar to tenore di forze but includes a significant baritone kind of sound; generally a voice that is perceived as dramatic and heroic in nature.

timbre: Descriptive word to differentiate tone color; usually described in paired, opposite terms: light/dark; bright/mellow and so forth. Descriptions of timbre can sometimes indicate different musculature coordination for a singer’s voice.

tragédie-lyrique: A term coined by the librettist Philippe Quinault (1635–88) and by Lully—and first used by them for Cadmus et Hermione (1673)—for a genre of opera that would make use of tragic mythological or epic subjects, with great attention to clarity of declamation and naturalness of action. It was nevertheless much criticized, even in its heyday, for the high-flown and exaggerated treatment of its subjects in its reflection of the gloire essential to Louis XIV's court entertainment. It became a stilted convention; anticipating many of the rigid features of opera seria and laying itself open to vigorous parody by the librettist

**voix blanche:** Literally French for white voice. Term used to describe a voice that is perceived to be shrill and without warmth of tone; generally less acoustically powerful than other methods of vocal production.

**voix sombrée:** Literally French for darkened voice. Term used to describe a voice that is perceived to be significantly dark in timbre, warmth; often a more acoustically powerful production of sound identified with dramatic voices.

*Source:* Chest voice and Head voice definitions are from Richard Miller’s The Structure of Singing. All other definitions in this glossary are variously adapted by the author from the Oxford Dictionary of Music, Grove Music Online, and The Oxford Companion to Music.
Bibliography:


VITA

Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Micheal Lee Smith jr.

Degrees:
  Bachelor of Music, 2006
  California State University, Northridge

  Master of Music, 2008
  San Francisco Conservatory of Music


Dissertation Examination Committee:
  Chair: Dr. Alfonse Anderson, D.M.A.
  Committee Member: Dr. Tod Fitzpatrick, D.M.A.
  Committee Member: Dr. Anthony Barone, Ph.D.
  Committee Member: Nate Bynum