

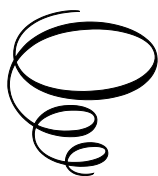
Leading Themes in the Operas of Daniel- François-Esprit Auber

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By

Robert Ignatius Letellier

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1. Frontispiece: Auber seated. Photo by Nadar

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INTRODUCTION

Daniel-François-Esprit Auber (Caen, 29 January 1782–Paris, 12/13 May 1871), the most amiable French composer of the 19th century, came into his compositional abilities late in life. After *Le Maçon* (1825) and *La Muette de Portici* (1828), his life was filled with success. In 1829, he was appointed a member of the Institut; in 1839, Director of Concerts at Court; in 1842, Director of the Conservatoire; in 1852, Musical Director of the Imperial Chapel; and in 1861, Grand Officer of the Légion d'Honneur.

Auber's equable and balanced temperament was reflected in his musical attitudes. While working almost exclusively in musical drama, he avoided any excess of emotion, never taking feelings to the pitch of intensity. He remained within the limits of the discreetly nuanced tones that reflected his own life, his own very particular Parisian elegance. Although criticized for his limitations, he was able to infuse his music with its own very delicate perfumes, be it of the incensed piety of the nuns in *Le Domino noir*, or the freshness of an Easter morning chorus in *Fra Diavolo*. He could conjure up the lives of the townspeople of Naples and the ferocity of Vesuvius in eruption in *La Muette de Portici*, or the impassive splendor of the Venetian state in its glory in *Haydée*. He was also capable of some surprising emotional exploration: the love of the fisherman Masaniello for his wronged, disabled sister Fenella in *La Muette*, the searing doubts of a monarch in love with his trusted friend's wife in *Gustave III*, or a man racked by dark unresolved issues from his past in *Haydée*.

Auber died on 12 May 1871 in advanced old age, and in the pitiful conditions of civil strife, after a long and painful illness which worsened during the Siege of Paris at the time of the Commune. He had refused to leave the city he had always loved despite the dangers and privation. His stylish and restrained art is now of little interest to the world of music, attuned as it is to the meatier substance of verismo, high Wagnerian ideology, and the excoriations of the twentieth century. But he was once a household name, and his pared style, with its fleet rhythms and controlled emotion, was once a byword of taste and the focus of a universal affection.

The ubiquity of Auber's overtures, once as popular as those of Rossini and Suppé, and the influence of his melodies and dance rhythms on piano and instrumental music, and on Romantic comic opera, especially in Germany, was overwhelming. The operas themselves have virtually passed out of the repertoire, but some of their overtures live on vicariously, and sound fresh and charming when given the chance—*The Bronze Horse*, *Masaniello*, *The Crown Diamonds*, *Fra Diavolo*, *The Black Domino*.¹

Some 38 works issued from the collaboration between the composer Daniel-François-Esprit Auber (1786-1871) and the librettist Augustin-Eugène Scribe (1791-1861). Auber was already a composer of some note when he met Scribe, who then became his principal librettist, indeed his exclusive collaborator. Auber's talent was consolidated in 1825 with the hugely popular *opéra-comique* *Le Maçon*, and even more so in 1828 with his revolutionary grand opera *La Muette de Portici*, which gained enduring international esteem and opened for him a prestigious employment at the Court of King Louis-Philippe (as director of Royal concerts). Auber was much admired and honoured, and on the death of Cherubini in 1842, became director of the Paris Conservatoire.

Over a period of 17 years, Auber and Scribe achieved a series of striking successes at the Opéra-Comique (1823-1840) which brought them huge artistic renown. The intimacy of their lifelong collaboration was exceptional. One of Auber's biographers recounts how often it was not the composer who set the librettist's text to music, but Scribe rather who provided words for the musical ideas Auber had already composed and held in reserve in a small notebook. Their correspondence reveals that Auber himself would sometime write words which Scribe would then recast. A letter from Scribe to Auber on 25 August 1843 captures the essence of their personal and artistic relationship.

At last, and not without difficulty, my dear Friend, I believe I have attended to our business better than I had at first indicated, because I have succeeded in securing the new role for Roger. This will give me a lot of work, but none for you, considering that it is solely in my area of work that the problem is difficult to resolve, and so I have not made any changes affecting a note of the music; only in the finale of Act I which you have not yet composed. When I wrote the role for Chollet, there was no chance of doing it any other way, which disappointed me. Because Chollet, who is still good in exaggerated character roles, becomes detestable as soon as he must act with reality, verve and above all involvement. Involvement is not possible with him, but now with Roger I will have vivacity, involvement and a feeling for comedy. Moreover, I have positioned the little aria for

Mlle Lavoye according to the rhythmic pattern you provided, and perhaps I will add in for Roger a small smuggler's song which will not detract from his air in Act 2. Now only our lover remains, whom we have always reserved for a secondary role. Let us see if this young Giraud you introduced to me, and who you think augurs well, will be able to sing and fill this role. This will be a real gain, because with Giraud, Roger and Mlle Lavoye we will immediately have a young and new profile for our work which is rare for the Opéra-Comique, and is almost of itself a pledge of success. For the rest, fingers crossed, Crosnier [the director of the Opéra-Comique] has promised me that Mlle Lavoye will not play in any other new piece before ours. I am working away because I am not losing interest in it, and so am making the most of the situation.

Yours, E. Scribe²

There is another important element that contributed to their great success. Auber and Scribe knew precisely for what singers they were writing, and the composer worked in close collaboration with the artists who were going to create his scores. This assured the effectiveness of both composer and that of his interpreters since they devised the vocal parts together in a fashion which brought to the fore the qualities of the different voices.

AUBER:
GALLERY OF CONTEMPORARIES
BY EUGÈNE DE MIRECOURT³

If we classify our personages in order of merit, and if we follow the hierarchy of honour, for a longtime now the patriarchy of French music would feature in our gallery.

But it often happens that the harvest of notes is far from being ripe on the right, so to the left it resembles a shower of sheaves.

Further—let's say it—we do not pretend to possess infused knowledge to treat at first sight all the materials.

Before judging a man, it is necessary sufficiently to study the speciality in which he distinguishes himself. It is good to guard against false judgments or against malicious or foolish appreciation.

Silliness is uttered when one speaks against the faith of another.

It is essential to examine in itself the all the aspects of the talent one wishes to depict. This task achieved, if one cannot be certain of the absolute truth, then at least not to fall into the rut where criticism flounders in wishing to resolve *ex abrupto* the most delicate artistic questions. Exercising common sense is always the sensible way.

Auber, our illustrious composer, was born in Caen on 29 January 1784, during a journey which his mother made to this town.

He was called Daniel-François-Esprit, and if one is able to believe that the realm of faires still existed, then one of them wanted to be his godmother, in order to add a prophetic name at his birth.

His grandfather, of Norman origin, left his native home at a very young age and went to seek his fortune in Paris. In 1775 he became the painter-decorator of the Carriages of Louis XVI, with permission to live at the Petites-Ecuries, the royal building housing the equipage of the Court. The Petites-Ecuries gave its name to a street which no longer exists. One finds

it today in the Cité d'Orléans,

Soon the carriage-painter had amassed an income of 30,000 livres. But the Revolution brutally deprived him of this, just as it did to others. The father of Daniel-François-Esprit, seeing the tempest of 1793 disperse his heritage, began an engraving business in the Rue Lazare, and established the basis of a new fortune. He and his wife, Françoise Adelaïde Esprit, *née* Vincent, had three sons and a daughter.

Jean-Baptiste-Daniel Auber was a well-educated man, a great amateur of lovely things and a good musician. The cream of artists met at his house, and his salon was the venue of perpetual concerts. So, one sees without doubt the inculcation of the love of music in his son.

Auber's childhood was tormented. The Septembrists persecuted his family. At this time, anyone who had had relations with the Court excited persecution. The proprietor of the engraving shop hid to escape from the men who argued with the hatchet and governed with their feet in blood.

It was more tranquil under the Directory, and he resumed his business, recalled his friends dispersed by the revolutionary tempest, and tries to repair the damage caused to his son's education. From a very tender age the child showed a decided musical taste.

There was no shortage of teachers. He took lessons principally from Ladurner,⁴ and soon became proficient on the violin, and not counting the violoncello and the piano, which he mastered in the same way.

At the age of 11 years, the future author of the *Muette* had already composed charming romances sung by the *nymphes décolletées* of the Directory, in between two waltzes published by Reveillère-Lepeaux and Barras. One of these romances entitled *Bonjour* enjoyed an extraordinary vogue.

Of a timid character already pushed to the limit, and something which never changed throughout his life, Daniel-François-Esprit, far from being carried away by this first success, appeared discouraged. Such diffidence even towards himself was incomprehensible.

He did not venture to launch an artistic career, but rather helped his father with the business. But he had hardly begun to savour the delights of preserving books when he was overtaken by a strong desire to leave the shop.

Not yet daring to show his distaste, he maintained that he needed to acquire a better grasp of business. He left for London in the company of a young banker for whom the journey was as much about cross-channel fashion as about the methods of banking.

He burnt all the letters of recommendation which he received on departure for the merchants of the city, never visited an emporium, but rather responded to his flattering reception in the English salons which opened to his musical talents. Charming ladies hummed his romances, and performed his Quartet for harp, violin, violoncello and piano. These took place during the peace signed between Great Britain and the First Consul. Auber was 28, in excellent shape and tender-hearted. He recovered in the fair sex an audacity which he lacked in pursuing glory, something to which the daughters of Albion were not insensitive. But the rupture of the Peace of Amiens frightened away his loves.⁵

The young man returned to Paris after 16 months by the Thames, very much less prepared for commerce than before his departure.

“Good heavens!” observed his father. “You certainly bring us back a good-looking merchant! Leave us in peace with regard to your commercial vocation, and make music then as an amateur if you don’t want to do it professionally! Auber gave in willingly to this argument.

All the quartets which he composed in England were played at the Conservatoire at the end of 1804, and won for him unanimous applause.

A celebrated violoncelist called Lamare⁶ encouraged all of Paris to attend his concerts. Lamarre himself did not have a single musical idea of his own. As a composer he showed an untenable mediocrity and his method of execution was not able to redeem the absence of melody which afflicted his work. Admiring Auber’s prodigious facility, he proposed that Auber should write him concertos for the violoncello. The young man accepted.

It was unusual to see him working for the renown of another with more enthusiasm than he worked for his own interests. The concertos provoked a furore and Lamarre claimed them with pride. Alas, there are Alexandre Dumases everywhere, even in music.⁷ Now the artists recognized among themselves that it was difficult to gasp this change. The name of the young virtuoso was discovered and it was proclaimed from the rooftops.⁸

Another celebrated performer Mazas requested a violin concerto from Auber. "You will sign it," he said, "and I will perform it myself at the Conservatoire Prize-Giving." He kept his word.⁹

The piece was declared to be superb.¹⁰ The author was praised to the sky. All the musicians of the capital praised his precocious talent. The purveyor of engravings observed: "Alas! If you do not work for the theatre, I will disown you!"

Fear once more seized the soul of the young man. He hesitated and sought to escape the parental demand by a thousand excuses. But eventually a compromise was reached.

It was agreed that without further delay that Auber would compose the music for an old opera *Julie* for a society of amateurs who performed at the Doyen home in the rue Francs-Bourgeois at Marais. In less than a week he composed the score and distributed it to the performers.¹¹

While rehearsing the work, he noticed in the orchestra a chubby violinist who chanced to let go of his bow in ecstatic contemplation of the actress playing the role of Julie.

Auber approached him. "Sir," he said to the violinist, "may I please ask you to follow the music. You have not performed anything in time," he added timidly.

"It is possible, sir, it is possible... but look, I beg you, at this young woman... Have you ever seen a purer figure?... Hey?... Do you not share my opinion?... And what do you think of outline of her arms?"

"If I may..." said Auber.

"Bah! If I may yourself!... Before being a musician, I am a painter, and when an antique Venus comes into view, what the devil, I admire her!"

This chubby violinist was none other than Ingres.¹² It is in this singular manner that these two celebrated artists made each other's acquaintance. They remained great friends from this time, that is for 52 years, since the opera *Julie* was presented in the Doyen household in 1805. Auber was also closely linked to Paul Delaroche.¹³

Auber wrote the music for two violins, two violas, a violoncello and a double bass—six musician in the orchestra, resulting in a most delicate effect. Certain pieces would not have been disowned by the greatest master.

“And so, what do you think of my son?” asked the father of the young man of Cherubini, one of the closest friends of the hosts.¹⁴

“I think he has talent,” responded the author of *Lodoïska*, “but one can see that he has not undertaken significant musical studies.”

“What do you mean! What are you thinking of? I put him under the direction of our foremost artists!”

Cherubini took him by the shoulder.

“My dear old father Auber,” he said, “consider one thing: artists do not sell their secrets, they present them,”

“Just like my son!”

“Your son, up to the present, should forget all his little successes!”

“Would you agree to direct him in his new studies?”

“Yes, but he must return quite simply to his ABC. The terms are rigorous!”

“Very well! It is agreed!” added the purveyor of engravings.

The young man agreed to the arrangement which his father made on his behalf. Cherubini, this illustrious composer, who knew how to combine with such ease Italian form with French taste, imparted to him all his musical science, and traced the brilliant route that his pupil would soon follow—from triumph to triumph.

Every year Auber would spend five or six months of the high season at the home of the Comte de Caraman, later the Prince de Chimay. This grand lord had married the celebrated Madame Tallien, and was excluded from the Court of Napoleon.¹⁵

The couple lived in Belgium and attracted as many as possible to their home to brighten up their ancestral manor. This was a charming house, a delicious Eldorado, a temple where artists loved to find refuge away from the tumult of arms and the cannon of Caesar.¹⁶

It provided a permanent literary circle. One read poems, acted in comedies. The Prince was a great sketcher and a great champion of French music.

For the chapel of the château, Auber composed a remarkable Mass from which he later drew the magnificent prayer in *La Muette de Portici*.

The small theatre at Chimay, envious of the chapel, also wanted to have a work from the young master. They asked Nepomucene Lemercier, a guest of the Prince, to write a libretto [*Couvin, ou Jean de Chimay*].¹⁷ Auber wrote the score so loudly demanded by the crowd of noble amateurs. This time he wrote the music for a full orchestra. Virtually all of the music for this opera was carried over into other compositions. The whole château was enchanted by it, and the success lasted from one end to another of September 1812.¹⁸

One was ignorant of the fact that the Russians had burned Moscow, that the Grand Armée was in retreat and marching to disaster at the Battle of Bersinz [Berezina] (26-29 November).¹⁹

Auber, encouraged again by his family and by Cherubini, who at last judged him capable of boldly taking flight, tried to conquer his terrors of tackling a real theatre and serious public.

But whether fear bridled his genius, or whether the subject was antipathetic to his inspiration, he failed in his first attempt at the Salle Feydeau. *Le Séjour militaire* given in 1813, was only a mediocre success.²⁰ To speak bluntly, it was a flop.

For a long time, the young man was not able to obtain a libretto. For five years he had plagued Planard who always promised much but delivered nothing.²¹

To compound misfortune, the composer's father, taken by the unfortunate idea of financial speculation, lost in a stroke the resources he had so painstakingly acquired in business.

Auber, chasing after any kind of work to survive, gave piano lessons. Cherubini, nevertheless, confident in the pupil he had formed, urged Planard for a second book but the result was equally unfavourable. *Le Testament et les Billets doux*, the second small opera from the authors of *Le Séjour militaire*, hardly fared better at the Feydeau than their first effort had.²² It was really a bit of a disaster, Auber's music and the condemnation of a poor libretto became synonymous.

"Let's try a third attempt!" said Cherubini to Planard. "We will be uninjured this time, I promise you! But don't hold back, produce a good

poem. If it fails...very well, I will blame the score!"

The following year, in 1820, *La Bergère châtelaine*, *opéra-comique* in three acts, enjoyed huge success at the Feydeau, with innumerable performances.²³ Cherubini proved prophetic. The weakness of the preceding two libretti was for many the reason for the failure of the earlier two operas.

A complete genius of initiation and verve, Auber could not be held back by the frozen shackles of dead poetry. He had to be inspired by the verse and adapt the verse himself to his melodic ideas.

To begin with he was not able to constrain the authors of the words and bend them to his musical yoke; but he later knew how to take his revenge.

Scribe knew something about this. Many of the loveliest pieces by Auber were composed before the words. He gave his collaborator the required *monstre* [rhythmic pattern or scansion], that is the model for the text without content or any further sense, observing: "I would like a verse of this type with sonorous syllables." And Scribe would meet the requirement.

La Bergère châtelaine is a work which abounds in refined melodies and happy motifs, with an ideal orchestration. With a single stroke Auber's fame was at the summit.

"My friend," he said one day to Adolphe Adam, "may I please ask for your first two compositions."²⁴

"Good heavens, what do you want with them?"

"That is my secret."

"But they are awful."

"One more reason."

"I do not understand you. Either you are losing your senses, my friend, or you are teasing me!"

"So, you want to know what I will do with them? Very well, I want to show them to my pupils when they become discouraged. This will give them courage, do you understand me now?"

Auber's father died three months after the premiere of *La Bergère châtelaine*, thanking heaven in his last hour for having given his son success in exchange for the fortune he no longer possessed.

One could say that the loss of this family fortune was a happy accident for Auber. With his chronic shyness and constant fears, it is probable that he could have rested on the laurels of his first triumph. The necessity of work constrained him to persevere in his glorious task.

Emma, ou La Promesse imprudente, given in 1821, enjoyed a vogue of similar length and merit to that of *La Bergère châtelaine*.²⁵ Until then one had reproached the composers of *opéras-comiques* with a certain stylistic vulgarity which seemed to be a strained consequence of the genre itself; Auber proved that elegant innovation could be introduced without excluding either originality or grace.

Among authors already distinguished by their powerful exploitation of the theatre, was a vaudevillist whose fame would soon spread all over Europe. This was Eugène Scribe.²⁶ He very soon understood that signing an alliance with Auber would enable them forever to enslave success to their purposes.

Auber received an amiable letter in which he was asked if he would allow a song from *La Bergère* to be borrowed for use at the Gymnase. Auber replied in the affirmative. Scribe paid a visit to thank him, there was an affinity, and the alliance was established. What admirable operas do we not owe to the association of these two men!

Between them existed some sympathy that one can only be called providential. Endowed, the one and the other, with talents varied, flexible and popular, they extended a mutual support to each other. One could liken the situation to two trees, dissimilar in nature, which after having mingled their branches, seemed to have formed a single tree, presenting varied and favoursome fruit to the traveller.

In the same year that they became acquainted, 1825, two operas saw the light of day, and the playbills twice linked the names of Auber and Scribe. These were *Leicester* and *La Neige*. They received a success that the annals of the lyrique theatre of the time recorded with pride. *La Neige* especially made enormous receipts. However, the piece was almost compromised on this occasion.

Musicians always have favourite pieces that they seek to place wherever, often despite common sense. We do not say this of Auber whose tact and right judgment are recognized. But on this occasion gave way to an ultramontane fantasy that almost proved fatal to his work.

La Neige was being rehearsed.²⁷

“You do not seem satisfied with your denouement?” said Auber to Scribe.

“I confess,” murmured Scribe, “for the last 24 hours I have struggled to find a more ingenious peripetia... But nothing, I cannot find anything.”

“Do not trouble yourself! I will see to it.”

“How then?”

“A magnificent piece!”

“For the finale?”

“Yes, I will place it after the denouement, as they do in Italy!”

“Hmm!” muttered Scribe, shaking his head.

“Do not worry. If the peripetia is hissed, one will applaud this piece, I swear!”

But the opposite happened.

The French public, unadventurous by habit and otherwise guided by taste of extreme delicacy, did not accept this Italian importation, which, it seemed to them Auber was seeking to introduce. The denouement was applauded and the piece hissed. “What then,” cried the pit, has it not finished? Silence orchestra!” The boos came thick and fast. On the next day this harmonic addition was removed, and *La Neige* proceeded without encumbrance.

As for the rest, the composer did not deceive himself about the merit of this final part. Later, this same piece interpolated into *La Fiancée*, at a more appropriate point, received appropriate praise.

From 1823 Auber very rarely accepted libretti not by Scribe, and when he occasionally did so, he almost always experienced a lesser success.

When one learned in Paris of the victory of the Duc d'Angoulême at the walls of Trocadero,²⁸ MM. Empis and Mennechet, two Parisians known for their journalistic power and vigour, thought up a circumstantial piece entitled *Vendôme en Espagne*. Auber provided the music [with Hérold].²⁹

It was a token of honour to be complimented by Louis XVIII, but the denizens of the pit gave the composer no praise at all, since this royalist libretto inspired only a mediocre score. Auber returned to Scribe and consequently to success.

Le Concert à la cour, Léocadie, Le Maçon, Fiorella, Le Timide, ou le Nouveau Séducteur given between 1824 and 1827, all received a good reception.³⁰ Auber was awarded the Red Ribbon and enrolled in the Légion d'Honneur on the same list as Piccinni.³¹

The majority of journalists, whose mission here is to goad celebrated men by their unjust attacks—God does not wish us to fall asleep on the path of laziness, and gives the world everything he can. But the majority of journalists, we maintain, tormented Auber ceaselessly.

“This is not a musician,” they say, “but a purveyor of party music; he has no nerve, lacks breadth, and we condemn him to the Opéra-Comique for ever.”

“They decidedly wish to impose silence,” observed the composer to Scribe. “Do you have a subject that could encompass five acts?”

“No, but we will find one.”

“As soon as possible, I beg you.”

While deliberating in this way, they attended the Feydeau where there was a benefit performance for Madame Desbrosses.³² The latter had requested a camerade Bigottini,³³ a mime of the first order, to pay a role using her skills in a small *opéra-comique* called *Deux Mots dans la forêt*.³⁴

At the end of this piece, Scribe tapped the shoulder of his collaborator. “I have our subject, my dear friend.”

“Really?”

“The opera will lack the first soprano. A role for a dancer, a mimed role, would instead be marvellous. What do you think?”

“It is possible. Do you have a title?”

“An excellent title, drawn from the subject itself: *La Muette*.”

“Bravo,” said Auber. “Let’s begin the work. We must show the reporters that we remain with the Feydeau by choice, but not because of inability.”

This is how *La Muette* came into the world. Scribe and Germain Delavigne wrote the entire book in eight days. As for the score, it was handed to the Opéra in December 1827, and in January 1828 the master’s *chef d’oeuvre* was announced to Europe. The critics were silent. Never did such a universal praise of a composer’s glory resound. Auber ascended the most elevated heights of musical art, revealing unexpectedly a victorious energy, a sublimity of passion that no one had suspected of him.³⁵

“Amour sacré de la patrie”: this melody is of such great magnificence that Rossini himself, on hearing it, said: “I have never written any thing more beautiful!” It roused the theatre as by electric shock. People lent out of the boxes and sat up on the benches. A rain of flowers fell at Nourrit’s feet.³⁶ There was madness: the thunderous applause could be heard on the street.

“For the moment,” said Auber to Scribe, “the journalists will keep quiet, I imagine. We will return to the Opéra-Comique.

La Fiancée was mounted in 1829. It was hissed for six successive performances attended by Scribe, who had had the extraordinary idea of bringing onto the stage a Berline for two horses which his heroine mounted at the denouement.

“You will see,” said Auber, “that they will accuse us of charlatanism. This type of exhibition belongs more to the Cirque or the Ambigu.”

“You are mistaken there!” responded Scribe. This carriage, my dear friend, is a philosophic instruction!”

“What do you mean?”

“Without any doubt! The companions of the *Fiancée* have poured humiliation upon her. Imagine their discomfort when they see her wealthy, happy, mounting a splendid equipage!”

“Do you really think the public will perceive this intention?”

“I do!”

Scribe was mistaken. But it needed a storm of six days and interminable cries of “Down with the carriage! The horses to the stables!” for him eventually to agree that it was the Berline that was being booed, and it appeared no more.

It went much better with the *La Fiancée*. “In this score,” wrote a critic, “one observes a richness of instrumentation, a brilliant overture, a pretty duet for fife and drum, the song and chorus of the patrol, a Tyrolian air, an original and witty trio, and host of charming passages.”³⁷

At the same time as *La Fiancée*, Gossec, author of the celebrated *Messe des morts*, died. Auber inherited his vacant chair at the Institut.³⁸

The following year Auber’s favoured theatre presented *Fra Diavolo*, *ou l’Auberge de Terracine*, another masterpiece. It would be pointless to list its remarkable pieces. All France knows them.³⁹

Scribe did not altogether share Auber’s generic taste. He preferred the Académie Royale de Musique to the Feydeau. It is said that it was not only the love of poetry which inspired this predilection. The *droits d’auteur* were very much more considerable at the Rue Lepelletier. This is not to dishonour Scribe. The priest lives at the altar, the poet by the inspiration of his muse.

“Ah! The muse of M. Scribe!” cry the malicious tongues. Let them say what they will.

Auber and his collaborator did return to the Grand Opera. From 1830 to 1835 they presented: *Le Dieu et la Baydère*, *Le Philtre*, *Le Serment* and *Gustave*.⁴⁰

It was at the first performance of *Le Philtre* that the unfortunate Dr Véron was given the soubriquet of ‘Fontanarose’, a nickname he has never been able to shake off.⁴¹

Fontanarose is the amusing charlatan who sings these burlesque couplets in the opera:

Approchez tous, venez m’entendre!
Moi, ami de humanité,
À juste prix je viens vous vendre
Et le bonheur et la santé.

Those who would like to judge *Le Philtre* by the articles in the papers will find themselves in serious embarrassment.

“A miserable, shabby school,” wrote *L’Avenir*, the journal of M. de Lamennais, “grafted into the grand system introduced by Rossini. This is mud which one has run to remove foam in which one hopes to bathe an opera, full shameful plaigerisms, airs and phrases that do not merit popularity...” (June 1831).⁴²

It appears that the chief editor of *L’Avenir* did not obtain an *entrée* to the Opéra.

Le National was more accommodating.

“...M. Auber has embellished this light subject with witty and piquant music. Everything acknowledging the requirements of the period in which it is written, the composer does not lose sight of the genre of the work assigned to him. It would have been clumsy to have taken an elevated tone for a trifle when its proportions are not destined to be classed among the great products of art. Let us not be astonished then that M. Auber has limited his pretensions in the music of *Le Philtre*, to find melodies that are natural and graceful, accompanied by an orchestra that is elegant but simple, rather than throwing himself into severer forms of dramatic grand opera” (27 June 1831).

We presume that the great citizen Marrast, more happily than M. Lamennais, had a box reserved for him at the Opéra.⁴³

Le Serment and *Gustave* are not operas of the first order. They reflect a certain fatigue or rather boredom on the part of Auber tested far from the Feydeau.

By blocking his ears and deciding against the pleas of Scribe in favour of the Académie Royale de Musique, Auber declared that pecuniary considerations held no value for him, and that in future he would work according to his taste.

Consequently, the Opéra-Comique mounted *Lestocq* and *Le Cheval de bronze*.⁴⁴

A last engagement, contracted for a long time, obliged the composer to leave the Rue Lepelletier [Le Peletier]: the score of *Actéon*.⁴⁵ This was a real disappointment for him. The work had all the chances of succeeding. It was prepared with care. Madame Damoreau,⁴⁶ Nourrit, Levasseur sang the principal parts. Fanny Elssler, at the end, should have appeared as