

Sonorising *La Forteresse du Danube*: Functions of music in Parisian and provincial melodrama of the early 19th century

Abstract

The combination of spectacle and elaborate scenery, orchestra and obligatory dance number made early nineteenth-century French melodrama expensive to produce and, consequently, the genre is strongly associated with the Parisian boulevard theatres. Provincial performances required creative solutions, not least because the music composed for – and central to – the Paris performances remained in manuscript form and was not, therefore, distributed automatically to regional theatres, whereas the play text was printed and widely available. This means that different scores existed for the same play, opening up the possibility that provincial audiences were presented with a different concept of melodrama to Parisians. Using as a case study *La Forteresse du Danube* (1805) by self-proclaimed leading exponent of the genre, Guilbert de Pixérécourt, this article will explore how comparing scores through performance-led research can further our understanding of the changes needed to make a Paris hit performable in the provinces.

Key words

Melodrama; Pixérécourt; music; First Empire; Restoration

The combination of spectacle and elaborate scenery, orchestra and obligatory dance number made early nineteenth-century French melodrama expensive to produce and, consequently, the genre is strongly associated with the Parisian boulevard theatres¹. Provincial performances required creative solutions, not least because the music composed for – and central to – the Paris performances remained in manuscript form and was not, therefore, distributed automatically to regional theatres, whereas the play text was printed and widely available. This means that different scores existed for the same play, opening up the possibility that provincial audiences were presented with a different concept of melodrama to Parisians. Using as a case study *La Forteresse du Danube* (1805) by self-proclaimed leading exponent of the genre, Guilbert de Pixérécourt, this article will explore how comparing scores can further our understanding of the changes needed to make a Paris hit performable in the provinces.

¹ Cyril Triolaire's statistical analysis shows that melodrama represented only a small percentage of plays performed in provincial theatres during the First Empire. See C. TRIOLAIRE *Programmation et diffusion du mélodrame sur les scènes de province (1800-1815)* in T. JULIAN and V. DE SANTIS (éd), *Fièvre et vie du théâtre sous la Révolution française et l'Empire*, Paris, Garnier, 2019.

La Forteresse du Danube was unusual for its time as it required little in the way of complicated scenery or stage effects. This undoubtedly helped it to reach 323 performances in the provinces, more than it had in Paris (281 performances)². The plot hinges on the moral dilemma faced by the young lieutenant Olivier. He has to betray either his adopted father Evrard or his friend, Valbrown, the commander of the garrison where Evrard has been imprisoned with his family servant Alix as a result of machinations against him at court. In fact, it is Evrard's daughter, Célestine, disguised as a travelling entertainer, who helps him escape from prison but Olivier is court-marshalled, only to be pardoned when Evrard is reinstated to his position at court. The melodrama is remarkable in having four distinct, extant scores (from the Paris premiere, Lille, Avignon, and Montpellier)³, allowing us to explore provincial variations in the function of music.

Our study is grounded in both textual analysis and practice. In 2014, Astbury co-organised a performance workshop directed by Gilli Bush-Bailey exploring the relationship between text and music in the first act of Pixerécourt's play and in its English translation, *The Fortress* (1807), by Theodore Edward Hook, with music by Hook's father James.⁴ The workshop built on Gilli Bush-Bailey and Jacky Bratton's Jane Scott project of 2002 while adding a transnational perspective⁵. In 2016, Astbury published a critical edition of the play in the *Oeuvres complètes de Pixerécourt*, though the Paris score was excluded under editorial norms for being labelled as a *reprise*⁶. This score, and the three provincial scores, were the basis for a follow-on workshop in 2017 with a cast drawn from Past Pleasures Heritage Theatre. Finally, the Lille score was used for a performance of *La Forteresse* at the Georgian Theatre Royal in Richmond, North Yorkshire in August 2017, with music arranged by Tisdall, who led the orchestra from the violin.

Music and melodrama

² In the absence of a calendar of performances, the figures comes from G. de PIXERÉCOURT, *Tableau chronologique*, t. I, *Théâtre choisi*, Paris, Tresse, 1841-1843.

³ Paris manuscript, labelled 'reprise' BnF Musique Mat. TH (99); Lille manuscript score M5010; Montpellier, Bibliothèque municipale, manuscript Série R 2/8 [60], Bibliothèque municipale Avignon, manuscript M415.

⁴ For the findings, see K. ASTBURY, K. HAMBRIDGE & J. HICKS, *The Melodramatic Moment: Researching Early French and English Melodrama through Performance*, online documentary (2017) at: <https://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/modernlanguages/research/french/currentprojects/napoleonictheatre/performingmelodrama/>

⁵ *Nineteenth-Century Theatre and Film*, 29/2 Winter 2002.

⁶ K. ASTBURY, *La Forteresse du Danube* in R. MARTIN (dir), Pixerécourt *Mélodrames III (1804-1808)*, Paris, Garnier, 2016, pp. 263-411.

Growing interest in practice-based research – and so efforts to sonorise melodrama – are helping to nuance music's function in melodrama and its interaction with two other key components: text and gesture⁷. Emilio Sala's seminal theoretical work highlights the role of music in animating and giving voice to the body⁸. Sarah Hibberd has defined four functions of music in melodrama: development or signalling of character through marking entries; a physical presence in the text (such as a song); action (fight, march or pantomime); exteriorisation of emotion⁹. To this we might add informing the acting by the way a cue evolves. Practice-based research has shown us that cues are often multifunctional: an exit cue, for instance, can also serve to exteriorise the emotion of a character left on stage and add layer to the dramatic context.

Practice-based research also challenges early contemporary accounts of music's function in melodrama, most notably the satirical *Traité du mélodrame* (1817), which modern scholars too often take at face value. It sees melodramatic music as formulaic:

Ses [la musique] accords se font entendre au commencement de chaque scène ; ils annoncent les personnages qui doivent paraître. Si tout l'orchestre, agissant à la fois, produit des sons sourds et lugubres, c'est que le tyran approche, et tout l'auditoire frémît ; Si l'harmonie est douce et moelleuse, l'amante infortunée ne tardera pas à se montrer, et tous les coeurs s'attendrissent ; Mais la cadence devient-elle vive et folâtre, le niais n'est pas loin ... et tout le monde se regarde. En un mot, la musique est à chaque scène ce que les avenues sont aux châteaux¹⁰.

A simplicity of musical language was necessary, however to communicate effectively the moral message of the work but, above all, music unified the visual, the emotional and the auditory and contained markers to signal an evolution of gestures and emotions to both actor and audience.

In his advice to budding melodrama composers, the Paris-based composer and teacher Anton Reicha hierarchised two types of melodrama: 1) a one-act piece such as Rousseau's *Pygmalion*, where «la musique dialogue avec le monologue de l'acteur» and «le compositeur exprime par des bouts de musique ce qui se passe sur la scène, ou dans l'âme de l'acteur» and

⁷ See, for instance, K. HAMBRIDGE and J. HICKS (dir), *The “Melodramatic Moment”: Music and Theatrical Culture, 1790–1820*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 2018. It lies beyond the scope of this article to explore acting techniques and the relation between Paris and the provinces in terms of performance because no archival evidence has thus far been found that would allow us to understand set design, staging, casting or the use of gestures and declamation.

⁸ E. SALA, *L'opera senza canto: Il mélo romantico e l'invenzione della colonna sonora*, Venice, Marsilio, 1995.

⁹ S. HIBBERD and N. NIELSEN, *Music in Melodrama: “The Burden of Ineffable Expression”?* in «Nineteenth-Century Theatre and Film», 29.2, 2002, pp. 30-39.

¹⁰ A !, A !, et A ! [A. HUGO, A. MALITOURNE, J.-J. ADER], *Traité du mélodrame*, Paris, Delaunay, 1817, pp. 54-55.

2) long pieces à *grand spectacle*, with dances, marches and pantomime¹¹. Here, for him, the music has no artistic function or value: «le compositeur est le maître de choisir dans les partitions connues ce dont il a besoin, quand il n'a pas le loisir ou le talent de l'inventer lui-même». This tension, between the musical expression of the soul and unabashed entertainment – musical creativity and recycling – will play out in our practice-based comparison of Parisian and non-Parisian scores.

Melodrama in manuscript

Despite Reicha's dismissive account of melodrama, he acknowledged that even generic forms such as dances and airs would need to be adapted for the timing on stage, in consultation with the poet, machinist, actors and the director. Here lies a reason for the low survival rate of melodrama scores: they remained in manuscript form because the music was only finalised during the rehearsal process¹². The score was thus tied to the theatre for which it was written. Often the same manuscript would be used for subsequent revivals, with crossings out or new pages stuck in. This is in direct contrast to the situation in Britain where melodrama contained set pieces (especially songs) which were printed for distribution, often as piano reductions.

French provincial theatres functioned differently from Paris in that the same venue offered performances of the full range of genres. After Napoleon's theatre reforms of 1806-07, all provincial repertoire was expected to derive directly and exclusively from the Paris theatres. This requirement held only for melodrama play texts and not their score. This meant that provincial theatres wishing to stage melodrama had to be creative. We know that some music sellers in Paris offered to copy scores for provincial theatres but often the local *chef d'orchestre* would use existing music that could be made to fit the play being performed, or would compose music for his theatre to fit the space, musicians' capabilities and his budget. The 1805 Barba edition of *La Forteresse du Danube* in the University of Warwick's Marandet collection came from the library of the Jesuit college in Avignon and has handwritten annotations marking where there was music in the Paris production (each musical intervention is numbered in ink)¹³. This suggests that visitors to Paris wanted a reminder of where the music occurred and that this then informed provincial performance. Pixerécourt wrote extensive *didascalias* to help

¹¹ A. REICHA, *Art du compositeur dramatique*, Paris, Farrenc, 1833, p. 106-07.

¹² At this time the orchestra was often led from the violin, and there were only individual orchestral parts, which have to be transcribed using notational software to create a score.

¹³ <https://cdm21047.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/empire/id/7705>

provincial actors achieve the desired array of emotions at key moments in the text (the stage directions are much longer than in the manuscript source text) but he only very rarely inserts indications of when music should occur into the printed edition (again in contrast to the British tradition where an indication is often printed in the play text). The annotated copy in the Warwick collection shows that its owner wanted to mark the musical cues and thereby compensate for their absence in the printed text.

There is no calendar of theatrical performances for Paris or the provinces for the Napoleonic period. Survival rates for the regional periodical press are poor, with large gaps in print runs. This means that it is hard to ascertain when *La Forteresse du Danube* was performed in any of the provincial locations where music has survived. While the Paris premiere dates from 1805, the provincial scores almost certainly date from later when Parisian melodrama had itself evolved as a genre and this makes direct comparison between the scores difficult. Nevertheless, the survival of four distinct scores for the same play gives us as a unique opportunity to explore the extent to which melodrama in the provinces in early nineteenth-century France was distinct from the Parisian phenomenon as a direct result of different music being used in each theatre.

The musical sources

The Paris score is recorded as being for a *reprise* in 1810 but it shows lines for cues that were in the original manuscript play text which did not make it into the printed edition. It is, therefore, almost certainly the music for the premiere at the Théâtre de la Porte Saint Martin, repurposed for the *reprise*. The composer was Francesco Bianchi (1752-1810), an Italian opera composer who arrived in Paris in 1804 to compose opéra-comique. *La Forteresse* was his first melodrama score.

The Lille score is signed E. Marty who was the *chef d'orchestre* of the Théâtre de Lille from September 1808 until 1810 and again from April 1814 until at least 1816¹⁴. He composed the music for a staged celebration in Lille of Louis XVIII's return in May 1814 and for the Lille performance of Pixerécourt's *Charles le Téméraire* in 1816¹⁵. The *Forteresse* score may date from the early Restoration but it is also possible that the score dates from Marty's first period

¹⁴ See Archives du département du Nord, 1T298/1, *Tableau de la troupe*. We are grateful to C. Triolaire for providing this information from material gathered for <https://therpsicore.msh.uca.fr/>.

¹⁵ *Journal du département du Nord*, 209, Dimanche 30 juillet 1815.

in charge of the orchestra. The play is listed as being part of the repertoire of the Théâtre de Lille between 1813 and 1816, but not before¹⁶.

As for the Avignon and Montpellier scores, they contain no indications as to composer or date. The Avignon score shares music with a manuscript for the Nodier-Piccini melodrama *Le Vampire* (1820) in Avignon and we suspect the Montpellier score also recycles existing music.

Taking the four scores side by side, the sets of parts show the relative size of the respective orchestras and reflect the size of the theatres. The Paris symphonic orchestra of stringed instruments, woodwind, brass and timpani offer a more varied (and louder) range of sounds than the regional theatre orchestras. While Lille and Avignon could muster a similar-sized orchestra to that of Paris, bar the trombone and timpani, Montpellier reflects a more typical regional set-up of strings with available woodwind and brass, in this case two French horns, and the occasional flute melody.

Music cues

It was customary to indicate on the score the line from the play text that preceded the musical cue. It is not, however, always clear at what point the orchestra was to come in. This is something we explored in our 2017 Warwick workshop, where, in the absence of dates for the creation of the scores or their use, we rehearsed the last four scenes of the first act of *La Forteresse*, in descending order of total bars of music (Paris, 90; Lille, 66; Avignon, 32; Montpellier, 31) and decreasing number of musical cues (Paris: 8; Lille, 4; Avignon, 4; Montpellier, 3)¹⁷. The table of cues (in English and French) and orchestration can be found in the Appendix. Only twice do all four scores coalesce – Philippe «Vous, suivez-moi...», when the soldiers go to recapture Evrard, and at the end of the act when Olivier vows «Je saurai les forcer à me rendre justice». These are the two moments of most tension and greatest drama in the act and the use of music at these points acts as a signpost to the audience.

Paris

¹⁶ Archives du département du Nord, 1T298/3.

¹⁷ The second Lille cue is played under speech and so spans three of the separate Parisian cues, making the Lille total effectively 6.

The eight cues present in the Paris score cover three of Hibberd's four functions of music in melodrama: characterisation through arrival/exit music, action (including the off-stage action of Evrard being stopped from escaping through the chapel window) and exteriorisation of emotion (Olivier's dilemma; Evrard's sense of betrayal).

The first cue «Je pars/Adieu Olivier», is in two contrasting parts and clearly acted both as the exit music for Valbrown and the scene change to deal with Olivier's conflicting emotions. It starts quietly, with a bustling melody in C major (a neutral key) in the first violin and staccato accompaniment – classic exit music. It moves seamlessly into the second part, which switches into C minor. The darker soundworld and overall descending motive, alternating between high instruments and low instruments gives an unsettled feel. The actor, who is instructed by the play text to remain stationary, thus could explore facial and arm gestures within this short passage of music.

The next two cues «Aux armes!» and «Vous, suivez-moi...» are entry and exit music for the soldiers and thematically linked in the score. The first cue, which only appears in the Parisian score, is a unison orchestral fanfare, with a military motif and jaunty melody for the first violin. The second cue continues the energetic melody. These were straightforward for the actors to negotiate because they provide a structure to movement on and off stage.

The fourth cue, Olivier's «Suis-je assez malheureux!...» is unusual because the orchestra are included in the stage direction «*Silence pendant lequel l'orchestre exprime sourdement ce qui se passe en dehors. Olivier prête l'oreille.*» Off stage, the soldiers recapture Evrard: onstage the audience sees Olivier's reaction to what he is hearing. The music provides clear marker points, starting very quietly with a fluttering motif in the violins and an insistent beat from the lower strings. There is then a short interjection of alternating quiet and loud chords which we interpreted as an off-stage tussle, before the strings meander around a motif that rises in pitch and remains unfinished. The music informed the acting by providing a framework for and structuring the action, though it took time to coordinate off and on-stage action with the music. Interestingly, the actors with musical or dance experience took the lead in supporting colleagues with a more theatre-based training. Only the Paris and Lille scores include music at this point, perhaps Avignon and Montpellier were time-poor and could not rehearse this more complex moment, or the actors did not possess the necessary musical training.

Another entrance – Evrard, Alix and the soldiers – is heralded by the fifth cue, which is a short and loud orchestral flourish. Again, this is not marked in the regional scores, calling

into question the oft-repeated assertion that music marks entrances and exits in melodrama, either because it is less common in the provinces or because the scores were composed later and reveal the evolution towards a new relationship between text and music.

[insert musical example Paris malheureux]

As Evrard is led away, the stage direction calls for him to show Olivier «*tout le mépris qu'il lui inspire*». A key emotional moment in the play, where the father-son pairing of Evrard and Olivier is put into tension with that of Olivier and Valbrown, it is also a key musical moment, with cues also in the Avignon and Lille scores. In the Parisian score, this is divided in three distinct sections. The opening is in a fast tempo, coupled with a unison orchestra in block dynamics (suddenly loud, suddenly soft). The second section is resolutely loud with dramatic violin and flute descending scales and a pounding accompaniment. The third section is even louder, with ascending bass arpeggios and a melodic military theme. We took the first section as Evrard starting to move, the second as the moment Evrard passes Olivier and the third his exit, leaving Olivier's reaction. In response to the strong, unrelenting music, the actor playing Evrard interpreted the contempt as anger. The music could therefore serve to show the significance of Evrard's belief that Olivier has betrayed him.

The seventh and eight cues at the end of the act are linked in the score. The brief four bar exit music for Alix is an upward gesture; Olivier's final line «Je saurai les forcer à me rendre justice» releases the tension of the held chord and the orchestra is unleashed for the dramatic close to the act. In rehearsal, it proved complicated to fit the action of Alix leaving and Olivier's exteriorisation of emotion as noted in the stage directions – raising his eyes to heaven, hiding his face with his hands and, «*sortant tout-à-coup de son accablement*» to announce his resolution – into these four bars. Experimenting with moving Olivier's line also proved unsatisfactory as there was no obvious place for Olivier to speak. There is a significant number of bars – 22 – and the cue has two sections, with the continuation of the despairing seventh-cue melody followed by chains of dissonance and ultimately resolution over a fantastically mobile bass line for the trombone¹⁸. The only possible alternative place for Olivier to declare his resolution was as the music finally resolved harmonically and the orchestra came to a brief halt in the third-to-last bar, before he then made his exit.

¹⁸ The trombone, especially in this period, usually fulfilled a strictly harmonic and accompanying role.

Overall, we found the use of music in the Paris score played a central role in the evolution of both action and emotion. Crucially, we found that the lines between the functions identified by Sala, Hibberd and others were often blurred rather than sharply delineated.

Lille

The Lille score marks similar moments to the Parisian score and the music is similarly used for shaping stage movement, characterisation and emotional processes. This may suggest a certain familiarity with the Parisian conventions. There is a third less music than in the Parisian score, which may have been for practical reasons: the Lille theatre had a smaller stage and so there was less need to “cover” actors moving across it.

Unlike the bipartite Parisian cue of exit and then emotion, the first Lille cue focuses on the latter. Olivier’s conflicting emotions, which come to the fore as Valbrown leaves, are expressed through the yearning G minor melody in the first violin. A sweep up the scale slowly unwinds down a sinuous chromatic scale, before the music undulates, unravels and disappears to a whisper. Its second cue, as Philippe takes the soldiers to find Evrard, has the following instruction in the score «Les petits mots se disent pendant la musique qui se joue très piano.» This cue runs through until Evrard is brought back on stage. There are three clear sections, giving distinct marker points for the actors. Firstly, the violin unison, needling between two notes, is set against a dissonant and disjunct melody in the lower strings. In the second section, the lower strings and violins swap over, with the pitch and volume rising into the third, loud, section. Here, the syncopated accompaniment and punchy chords finish harmonically in mid-air, pushing the dramatic action forward. We found this section required more rehearsal time, as it was challenging to work with one continuous piece of music rather than three separate cues as in the Paris score. The overall sensation, however, was that this felt a more organic realisation of the action.

The third Lille cue marks, like Paris, Evrard’s contempt of Olivier. In contrast to the Parisian loud fury, however, this music seems more subtle. It is a slower tempo – walking pace – and it remains very quiet. The first violin leads off, generating a relentlessly unswerving rhythm that becomes more chromatic and eventually moves into a minor key. The last six bars repeat the same notes over and over, fading to silence. The amount of space provided for the actors to tap into deep emotions, and the resulting pathos evoked by this desolate and inexorable

funeral march, highlighted that melodrama's «visceral impact» is equally as important as the narrative and its metaphors¹⁹.

[insert musical example: Lille contempt]

The final Lille cue posed similar staging issues to that of Paris; the music came after Olivier's final line and so left him to exteriorise his emotions to music. This cue, however, had a clear silence of two beats between its two sections and so Olivier's line seemed to make more dramatic sense (for us) here. The first section, marked *agitato* (agitated) and with a breathless melody ending harmonically in mid-air with punchy chords, doubled as Alix's exit music and Olivier's turn from despair to resolution. Although the function of music is broadly aligned in the Paris and Lille scores, the latter seems to prioritise the emotional conflict over the dramatic closure of the act, through its more nuanced use of dynamics and tempi.

Avignon

The Avignon score is more perfunctory, with two-thirds less music than Paris and a third less than Lille. The technical difficulty of the music is also noticeably lower, which would suggest that, like many regional theatre orchestras, there was a mix of professional and amateur musicians and (or) little rehearsal time.

Valbrown's exit is marked by a short four-bar phrase, with the violins creeping up and down an arpeggio; the lower strings remain on the same note. This is simple exit music, with no scope to develop Olivier's conflicting emotions. After the clear signposts of the Parisian and Lille scores, the actors found it hard to connect the second musical cue, when the soldiers go to recapture Evrard, with the dramatic action. Was this to function simply as exit music? We tried it and it seemed a little long for that. The score also did not marry with the play text (end of act 1, scene xvii), which says the orchestra expresses off-stage action. Consisting of a loud opening flourish from the whole orchestra, another flourish repeated higher and ending with a violin melody accompanied by blasts of woodwind and horns, it was possible to fit the text into the timeframe of the cue but the jaunty melody jarred with Olivier's unhappiness.

Thanks to Benoit Louriou's presence at the workshop, we were able to ascertain that a significant amount of the Avignon *Fortresse* score was either reused by or reuses music from

¹⁹ S. HIBBERD, *Introduction*, in S. HIBBERD (dir), *Melodramatic Voices: Understanding Music Drama*, Burlington, Ashgate, 2011, p. 7.

Charles Nodier's melodrama, *Le Vampire*, with score by Alexandre Piccini, first performed at the Théâtre de la Porte Saint-Martin on 13 June 1820²⁰. Recycling was a common, yet regularly denounced practice in regional theatre, the rationale for which would make an interesting subject for deeper investigation²¹. In the Avignon score, the third cue, where Evrard is led off and shows his contempt for Olivier, is either borrowing from or being borrowed for cue 19 (end of Act III, vi) of *Le Vampire*: «Ne t'éloigne pas, je vais te conduire à l'autel». ²² [insert musical example Avignon contempt] Since this is musically the most compositionally complex number in this part of the score, we would suggest the former. It is plausible that for this key moment the Avignon composer turned to more experienced work. It is similar in mood to the corresponding Lille cue, quiet and with a rhythm in the accompaniment that suggests a steady walking motion. While relatively short in length, the actors found that the accompaniment helped them pace the denouement, in addition to the brief change to a louder volume.

The end of the act repeats the music from the second cue. The *chef d'orchestre* perhaps felt that generic “dramatic” music could be used in both instances. There is no effort to tie the two moments thematically. Again, in our workshop we could not effect a convincing interaction of text, music and gesture, with Alix exiting and Olivier left to exteriorise his emotions in silence. Maybe the main dramatic moment in this act was envisioned as that of Evrard revealing his contempt of Olivier. But usually the first act of a melodrama finishes in a minor key, in keeping with the dramatic denouement. The ending felt very different to that of Paris and Lille, highlighting the disadvantage, so the actors felt, of recycled music.

Montpellier

The Montpellier score has a similar amount of music to that of Avignon, and, as will become apparent, probably also borrowed music from elsewhere. The actors found it disconcerting to move from the Paris music to this score where there was scant music: they were now expecting music when none was present²³. There is a notable exception to this: the moment when Olivier

²⁰ Benoit Louriou, is preparing a thesis on the music of Alexandre Piccini, at Université Paul Valéry, Montpellier 3. He believes the *Forteresse* score dates from the period when Sarda was in charge of the theatre (1826-1827).

²¹ See K. ASTBURY and D. TISDALL, «Une exploration du mélodrame parisien à travers la représentation d'une pièce des prisonniers de guerre du château de Portchester en 1810: *Roseliska ou amour, haine et vengeance*», in O. BARA (dir) *Musique en Scène*, actes de colloque, in press.

²² *Le Vampire*, mélodrame en 3 actes de MM**, musique de Piccini [sic], Paris, Barba, 1820.

²³ We wonder if their response would have differed had we worked on the scores in reverse order...

has called the guards to stop Evrard's escape (all the scores provide music for this moment). Olivier's sadness is foregrounded in the music whereas in the Paris and Lille scores, the stage directions instruct the orchestra to express softly what is happening off stage while Olivier listens. The eight-bar cue is scored for strings only, with a quiet, slow and lyrical melody in the first violin underpinned by an anxious syncopated rhythm in the second violin. A sighing gesture (loud to soft; dissonance to resolution) is passed from violins to lower strings before two descending arpeggio figures – possible references to footsteps – lead to a final (unresolved) chord. [insert musical example Montpellier Olivier] The contrast in pace and mood of the entrance of Evrard, Philippe and the soldiers was striking in its sombreness. With no music to structure Evrard's contempt of Olivier, however, the encounter felt emotionally empty and rushed.

The ending of Act One is more convincing and straightforward to rehearse than that of Avignon, and similar in style to that of Paris. Alix's exit and Olivier's exteriorisation of emotion seemed to fit within the first cue; the nervous melody in the first violin with buzzing trills finishes abruptly after an insistent three-note motif. In the score is written «on parle», which we interpreted as Olivier's final sentence, and this then launches the final cue. While typical in style in terms of loud, fast music propelling towards the close of the act, the music is unusual in that the pitch is much higher for the violins than even those of the Parisian orchestra. Was this the sign of proficient violinists? Or a later score? Or, given our findings for the Avignon score, perhaps this was not music written for this specific production and was borrowed from elsewhere – the composer picked out a “stock” ending, as it were.

The reduced volume of music in the Montpellier score compared to the Paris score changed the feel of the act for both actors and audience at the workshop. It felt much more like spoken drama with incidental music than melodrama where music and text are a unified whole.

This is just a small sample of one act from one play, although we did also explore the music for comic scenes from act 2 and found that music was adjusted to the strengths of a troupe as well as the size of the stage. In Avignon, for instance, the comic scene music suggests a much less farcical tone, perhaps because the actors were not as strong as the original Paris comic actors for whom the scene was written as a showcase. Despite the narrow scope of the workshop, however, larger questions have been raised. The comparison of the scores reveals the centrality of practical issues such as space and performability. The songs were omitted in

Lille perhaps because the actor playing Célestine could not sing²⁴. In Avignon they cut the dancing perhaps owing to a lack of ballet corps. But the juxtaposition of scores also raises aesthetic questions and evidence of a variety of concepts of the function of melodramatic music. They also reveal the stylistic evolution of the genre towards spoken theatre. Although Pixerécourt's vision of seamless words, gestures and music does not translate to all provincial stages because of the time, skill and resources required to execute it well, the Lille score shows an alternative, more organic and equally viable way of marrying music and action. The cues in the Paris scores tend to be more obtrusive and the musical markers more obvious. Is there a greater need to bring the audience's attention back to the stage in Paris? When shortening the play text for performance at the Georgian Theatre Royal, Richmond, we did find much of the expositional dialogue repetitive... By contrast, Pixerécourt melodrama on smaller provincial stages relies more on the play text and its inherent emotional intensity than on creating total theatre. Ironically, in this respect the provincial theatres are in fact ahead of Paris. By the end of the Empire the use of music was diminishing and there are a growing number of footnotes in plays indicating that the music can be omitted. The golden age of melodrama did not last long.

²⁴ Pixerécourt published a note in the printed play text giving provincial theatres room to adapt, suggesting that if Célestine cannot sing, Madame Thomas should perform instead.