

**Original citation:**

Astbury, Katherine (2011) *Music in Pixérécourt's early melodramas*. In: Hibberd, Sarah, (ed.) *Melodramatic voices : understanding music drama*. Ashgate interdisciplinary studies in opera . Farnham : Ashgate, pp. 15-26. ISBN 9781409400820

**Permanent WRAP url:**

<http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/42598>

**Copyright and reuse:**

The Warwick Research Archive Portal (WRAP) makes this work of researchers of the University of Warwick available open access under the following conditions. Copyright © and all moral rights to the version of the paper presented here belong to the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. To the extent reasonable and practicable the material made available in WRAP has been checked for eligibility before being made available.

Copies of full items can be used for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge. Provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way.

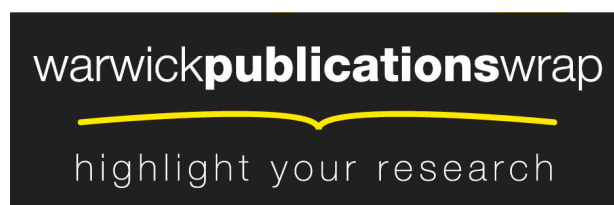
**Publisher's statement:**

© Ashgate publishing

**A note on versions:**

The version presented in WRAP is the published version or, version of record, and may be cited as it appears here.

For more information, please contact the WRAP Team at: [publications@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:publications@warwick.ac.uk)



<http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/>

## Chapter 1

# Music in Pixérécourt's Early Melodramas

Katherine Astbury

René-Charles Guilbert de Pixérécourt (1773–1844) is generally recognized as both the inventor of popular boulevard melodrama and its most successful exponent. Music is an integral part of his plays, yet its role has only briefly been considered – and mainly in his works of the 1810s, 20 and 30s. Such studies nevertheless point to the potential riches of a systematic study of the music of melodrama in France in the early nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> This chapter offers a starting point for a broader study by reflecting on the earliest of Pixérécourt's melodramas, and their relationship with existing musical theatre traditions. It will focus on the use of music in two works and consider the degree to which the playwright and the theatrical press of the period explicitly recognized music as an essential element in their success.

Pixérécourt started writing for the theatre during the French Revolution, and the play now recognized as the first melodrama, *Victor, ou L'Enfant de la forêt* (1798), was his first real dramatic success. During the next 30 years or so he would write more than 120 plays, including 94 melodramas, with audience figures totalling 30,000 over the course of his career.<sup>2</sup> The interrelated political and literary contexts from which Pixérécourt's melodramas emerged are important for our understanding of the characteristics and the development of the genre – not least its emotional charge, which music helped to articulate. The second half of the 1790s was marked by a counter-Revolutionary backlash following the conclusion of the radical phase of the Revolution, the Terror, with Robespierre's execution in July 1794. In 1796, a strong executive known as the Directory was installed to maintain order, but it only succeeded in keeping control of the country by systematically rigging votes in the annual elections, and in the end, in 1799, two members of the Directory asked

---

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Nicole Wild, 'La Musique dans les mélodrames des théâtres parisiens', in Peter Bloom (ed.), *Music in Paris in the Eighteen-Thirties* (Stuyvesant, NY, 1987), pp. 589–609; Emilio Sala, 'Mélodrame: Définitions et métamorphoses d'un genre quasi-opératique', *Revue de musicologie*, 84/2 (1998): pp. 235–46; Sarah Hibberd and Nanette Nielsen, 'Music in Melodrama: "The burden of ineffable expression"?' *Nineteenth Century Theatre and Film*, 29/2 (2002): pp. 30–39. See also O.G. Brockett, 'The Function of Dance in the Melodramas of Guilbert de Pixérécourt', *Modern Philology*, 56/3 (1959): pp. 154–61.

<sup>2</sup> Performance totals are included in a *tableau chronologique* at the beginning of *Théâtre choisi de Pixérécourt* (4 vols, Paris, 1841–43).

Napoleon to instigate a *coup d'état* and form a consulate. Napoleon subsequently took control and declared himself emperor in 1804.

The plots of many melodramas were drawn from the successful novels of the day. The genre in vogue in 1797–98 was the Gothic novel – English writers like Ann Radcliffe were hugely successful in France, but French writers such as Ducray-Duminil, who wrote the novel from which *Victor* was adapted, also found fame.<sup>3</sup> While characteristics of the Gothic abounded in French literature and theatre – castles, convents, ruins, underground passages, dastardly villains, forests, and a general mixture of fear, excitement and suspense – the French tended to take the mode a little less seriously than their English counterparts, employing a more tongue-in-cheek treatment. Matthew Lewis's novel *The Monk*, for instance, was turned into a *comédie* and became a box office hit.<sup>4</sup> And a critic for the *Esprit des journaux* as early as 1792 mocked the vogue for grim locations 'prisons, prisons and yet more prisons'.<sup>5</sup>

Given what people had lived through, it was widely recognized that highly dramatic works were required in order to have an effect on readers and theatre audiences. This is evident from prefaces and newspaper reviews of the period, as exemplified by the Marquis de Sade's assessment of the situation:

To those acquainted with all the evil that the wicked can bring down on the heads of the good, novels became as difficult to write as they were tedious to read. There was hardly a soul alive who did not experience more adversity in four or five years than the most famous novelist in all literature could have invented in a hundred.<sup>6</sup>

This impression was confirmed retrospectively by Charles Nodier, who wrote the critical introduction to the collected works of Pixérécourt in the early 1840s: 'For these solemn spectators, who could still smell gunpowder and blood, emotions

<sup>3</sup> Radcliffe's *The Romance of the Forest* was translated as early as 1794 as *La Forêt, ou L'Abbaye de Saint-Clair*, but she – and Matthew Lewis – did not become widely known in translation until 1797; see Daniel Hall, *French and German Gothic Fiction in the Late Eighteenth Century* (Bern, 2005), p. 66. Ducray-Duminil's *Victor* was also published in 1797; see Hall, pp. 132–9 and Jean Gillet, 'Ducray-Duminil, le gothique et la Révolution', *Europe*, 659 (March 1984): pp. 63–71.

<sup>4</sup> M.-C. Cammaille-Saint-Aubin, *Le Moine, comédie en cinq actes* (Paris, An VI [1798]). For performance figures see Emmet Kennedy et al., *Theatre, Opera, and Audiences in Revolutionary Paris: Analysis and Repertory* (Westport, CT, 1996). Cammaille also apparently reworked the play as a 'mélo-drame en trois actes à spectacle, terminé par "L'Enfer de Milton"' for the Gaité in the same year; it was published in 1803 by the theatre.

<sup>5</sup> *Esprit des journaux* (May 1792): p. 204. All translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

<sup>6</sup> Marquis de Sade, *Les Crimes de l'amour*, ed. Michel Delon (Paris, 1987), p. 42. Translation from *The Crimes of Love*, trans. David Coward (Oxford, 2005), pp. 13–14.

were required akin to those that the return to order had weaned them off'.<sup>7</sup> A more modern critical approach has been to understand melodrama as 're-enacting the trauma' of the Revolution.<sup>8</sup>

*Victor* was in fact labelled a 'drame en prose et à grand spectacle' [prose drama with grand spectacle] in its earliest editions, though it was first conceived as an *opéra comique*, and the text bears a number of hallmarks of this original form. We have Pixérécourt's own account of the genesis of *Victor* from 1831: he describes the play as 'the first-born of modern melodrama', and explains how he had originally written it as an *opéra comique* (a genre with spoken dialogue rather than recitative linking its arias and other sung numbers) for the Théâtre Favart, with a score by Solié, only for the company of actors to overrule the theatre's management and insist on rehearsing another play on the same topic.<sup>9</sup> In a fit of pique, Pixérécourt took the play to the Ambigu-Comique, 'where it was performed, cutting out only the songs'.<sup>10</sup> He goes on to confirm and reaffirm this sense of what he understood the new genre to be: 'melodrama is nothing other than a *drame lyrique* in which the music is produced by the orchestra rather than being sung'.<sup>11</sup> Some modern critics have suggested that, despite the etymological roots of the term, melodrama was used as a label as early as 1800 for plays without music of a certain tone, atmosphere and construction.<sup>12</sup> But it is clear that to early nineteenth-century critics, music was central to their concept of the genre. A definition from 1810 supports Pixérécourt's view: 'melodrama ... is rooted in the lyrical, as the characters talk and act only to the sound of musical instruments'.<sup>13</sup>

It seems that composers found his texts easy to produce music for – Meyerbeer and Méhul both comment on the fact that his plays are 'all marvellously cut for music' – and this testifies to the genre's essential musico-dramatic hybridity.<sup>14</sup> However, as Barry Daniels has shown, until recently modern critics have tended

<sup>7</sup> Charles Nodier, 'Introduction', *Théâtre choisi de Pixérécourt*, vol. 1, p. vii. Subsequent references to reviews and melodramas are from this edition of Pixérécourt's plays unless otherwise stated.

<sup>8</sup> See for instance J. Paul Marcoux, *Guilbert de Pixérécourt: French Melodrama in the Early Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1992), p. 7.

<sup>9</sup> Pixérécourt, 'Le Mélodrame', *Paris, ou Le Livre des cent-et-un* (15 vols, Paris, 1831–34), vol. 6 (1832), pp. 319–25, here p. 325.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p. 332. The term *drame lyrique* designated (at the end of the eighteenth century) an opera, or more usually an *opéra comique* – though generally with a tone more serious than the latter, and strongly moralizing. See M. Elizabeth C. Bartlet, 'Drame lyrique', in [www.grovemusiconline.com](http://www.grovemusiconline.com).

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Marc Régaldo, 'Mélodrame et la Révolution française', *Europe*, 703–704 (November–December 1987): pp. 6–17, here p. 13.

<sup>13</sup> *Annales dramatiques ou dictionnaire général des théâtres*, vol. 6 (1810), quoted in Julia Przyboś, *L'Entreprise mélodramatique* (Paris, 1987), p. 19.

<sup>14</sup> Meyerbeer, in Pixérécourt, *Théâtre choisi*, vol. 2, p. 583.

to refer to music only in passing when examining French melodrama<sup>15</sup> – even if some have recognized that Pixérécourt's dramas were 'a theatre made for performance much more than for reading'.<sup>16</sup> One of the reasons for this is that, until recently, critics of French melodrama have almost exclusively been literary specialists focusing on the texts. Where reference is made to the music, most of the comments are in fact just a reworking of Paul Ginisty's assessment from 1910.<sup>17</sup> In his monograph on French melodrama, Ginisty devoted just four pages out of 224 to music. He concluded that music was used primarily to mark entrances and exits, with particular instruments linked to certain character types (a flute for the unhappy heroine, for instance), and to underline climactic moments of drama and emotion. Despite the brevity of this passage, it is in fact one of the most detailed analyses we have of the use of music in French melodrama by a literary specialist. Subsequent critics have done little to further our understanding of the use of music in melodrama. Eise Carel van Bellen summarizes Ginisty's conclusions in a single sentence in her thesis,<sup>18</sup> Julia Przyboś does at least acknowledge her source when drawing on him in her work, and even adds a page on songs, but concludes that the music was utilitarian and 'probably unoriginal' – the 'probably' giving away the fact that she was relying on the texts of the plays rather than the scores.<sup>19</sup> Even French musicologists have tended to dismiss melodrama – Jean Mongrédien's study of music from the Enlightenment to Romanticism makes no mention of melodrama or of boulevard theatres, and confines its coverage of music drama to the more respectable genre of opera.<sup>20</sup> Peter Brooks, in his seminal work *The Melodramatic Imagination* (1976) – the 1995 edition of which stimulated the new wave of interest in the genre and its aesthetic influence across the disciplines of literary, theatre and film studies and musicology – barely acknowledges the role of music in his survey of the genre in early nineteenth-century France.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless – partly in response to Brooks's neglect – Nicole Wild, Emilio Sala, and Sarah

<sup>15</sup> Barry Daniels, 'Mélodrame: La Musique', *Revue d'histoire du théâtre*, 3/2 (1981–82): pp. 167–75.

<sup>16</sup> André Virely, *René-Charles Guilbert de Pixérécourt (1773–1844)* (Paris, 1909), p. 17.

<sup>17</sup> Paul Ginisty, *Le Mélodrame* (Paris, 1910, repr. 1982).

<sup>18</sup> Eise Carel van Bellen, *Les Origines du mélodrame* (Utrecht, 1927), p. 178.

<sup>19</sup> Przyboś, *L'Entreprise mélodramatique*, p. 148.

<sup>20</sup> Jean Mongrédien, *La Musique en France: Des Lumières au Romantisme* (Paris, 1986).

<sup>21</sup> Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven, CT, 1976, repr. 1995). This despite his recognition that 'music is inherent to [melodrama's] representations', a very brief survey of music's various roles – and the assertion that 'melodrama finds one possible logical outcome in grand opera ... where melody and harmony, as much as the words, are charged with conveying meaning', pp. 48, 49. Brooks develops this latter idea in 'Body and Voice in Melodrama and Opera', in Mary Ann Smart (ed.), *Siren Songs: Representations of Gender and Sexuality in Opera* (Princeton, NJ, 2000), pp. 118–34.

Hibberd and Nanette Nielsen have provided us with a more nuanced understanding of 1820s French melodrama by revealing music's important narrative function in addition to its more obvious role enhancing dramatic effect.<sup>22</sup> In this article I shall take their reflections on later melodramas and apply them to the earliest Pixérécourt plays to see if it is possible to trace an evolution in the musical contribution to the genre during the first decade of the century, when the genre was still in its infancy.

While early nineteenth-century definitions of melodrama written by practitioners such as Pixérécourt reinforce the centrality of music, theatre critics of the time are often silent on the matter when reviewing performances. They almost always include comments about the score and singers when discussing operas (though, as literary men, they rarely offer detailed insights), but when reviewing Pixérécourt's melodramas, although they often name the composer, they rarely acknowledge the music. One of the reasons for this may be that it was often provided by the 'chef d'orchestre' [leader of the orchestra] of the theatre where the play was to be performed rather than by a recognized composer. In fact, it has been claimed that despite numerous offers from established and well-regarded composers, Pixérécourt was often too impatient to wait the length of time it would take a 'proper' composer to come up with a score,<sup>23</sup> which suggests that there is an unresolved tension at the heart of melodrama between music as an integral part of the performance, and the need to put on plays quickly in order to capitalize on the vogue for 'dramas à grand spectacle' where music was just one of many elements contributing to the overall effect.

Not all critics remained silent about music, though. The *Journal d'indications* praises Gérardin-Lacour's score for *La Femme à deux maris*, performed in September 1802, his first setting of a play specifically labelled a 'mélo-drame' – and the earliest of Pixérécourt's melodramas with an extant score. The critic Babié comments: 'a number of his musical items gave real pleasure, and they are well adapted to the situations'.<sup>24</sup> Two years later, another of Gérardin-Lacour's scores received similar approval in the same journal and from the same critic, this time for the melodrama *Les Maures d'Espagne*: 'M. Gérardin-Lacour's music has been crafted agreeably and offers simple and melodious tunes'.<sup>25</sup> Babié suggests that, if he continues in this vein, he might even make it as a composer of *opéra comique*, thereby revealing the compositional hierarchy that the limited space accorded to melodrama music in the reviews has already suggested. The views of most critics

<sup>22</sup> See note 1 above. See also the work of David Mayer on later nineteenth-century English melodrama, including 'The Music of Melodrama', in David Bradby, Louis James and Bernard Sharratt (eds), *Performance and Politics in Popular Drama* (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 49–64.

<sup>23</sup> Méhul for instance offered to produce the score for *La Citerne* in a letter dated 20 December 1808 but said it would take a year. Pixérécourt declined the offer because he wanted the play to appear more quickly than that; *Théâtre choisi*, vol. 2, p. 281.

<sup>24</sup> Pixérécourt, *Théâtre choisi*, vol. 1, p. 252.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 14.

do not seem to extend beyond the degree to which the music is ‘well adapted to the subject’.<sup>26</sup> The score’s simplicity is regularly mentioned as a positive rather than a negative trait. Ducray-Duminil, for example, praises Bianchi’s music for *La Forteresse du Danube*, ‘the crafting of which is always simple and varied and belongs to the best school’.<sup>27</sup> Above all, the scores for melodramas are praised for being pleasant, melodic, charming and capable of giving the audience great pleasure. By 1809, however, critics have almost entirely stopped commenting on the music, which suggests that its effects are by then taken for granted, and that successful melodrama music was not supposed to draw attention to itself – a situation that continued through to the 1820s.

French notions of musico-theatrical hierarchy are apparent in the way in which melodrama is received in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Music is mentioned only in passing because such works are not operas. Nevertheless, Pixérécourt produced librettos for several *dramas lyriques* and *opéras comiques* during these years, and the generic ambiguity of his first melodramas continued to be recognized.<sup>28</sup> In 1806, the melodrama *Les Mines de Pologne* was adapted by Joseph Sonnleithner as an opera for Cherubini, under the title *Faniska*.<sup>29</sup> More than 30 years later, Eloïse Voïart, writing the préface for *Les Maures d’Espagne* in the 1841 edition of Pixérécourt’s volume of *Théâtre choisi*, confirmed the still acknowledged generic fluidity of the text, saying that this melodrama would make ‘a delicious canvas for a grand opera’ – though here making reference to a type of opera with recitative rather than spoken dialogue.<sup>30</sup> Conversely, Pixérécourt’s *drame lyrique La Forêt de Sicile* (Feydeau, 1798) had exemplified his facility for spoken drama with musical accompaniment for the opera house.<sup>31</sup>

While Pixérécourt was involved in the creation of *opéras comiques* and *dramas lyriques*, he also drew on the French pantomime tradition, which by the end of the eighteenth century was rapidly becoming ‘à grand spectacle’. Hapdé and Gebauer’s *L’Enfant du mystère* (Cité-Variétés, 1800), for example, is advertised as ‘à grand spectacle, marches, combats, évolutions militaires’

<sup>26</sup> For *La Forteresse du Danube*, see Ducray-Duminil in the *Petites affiches* (5 January 1805), quoted in Pixérécourt, *Théâtre choisi*, vol. 2, p. 86; for *Robinson Crusoe*, see Babié in the *Journal d’indications* (4 October 1805), quoted in vol. 2, p. 182.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 86.

<sup>28</sup> For more on this ambiguity, see Mark Ledbury, ‘Sedaine and the Question of Genre’, in David Charlton and Mark Ledbury (eds), *Michel-Jean Sedaine (1719–1797): Theatre, Opera and Art* (Aldershot, 2000), pp. 13–38.

<sup>29</sup> First performed at the Theater am Kärntnertor (Hofoper) in Vienna (25 February 1806).

<sup>30</sup> Pixérécourt, *Théâtre choisi*, vol. 2, p. 11.

<sup>31</sup> The overture accompanies stage action, dialogue is employed instead of recitative (as was usual for the genre), and there is no singing in Act II until scene 7. Pixérécourt, *La Forêt de Sicile, drame lyrique en 2 actes et en prose* [libretto] (Paris, An VI [1798]); Antoine-Frédéric Gresnick, *La Forêt de Sicile, opéra en 2 actes* [score] (Paris, n.d. [1798]).

[a grand spectacle with marches, fights, military manœuvres] and with ‘costumes du temps, incendie, explosion, démolitions, etc’ [period costumes, fire, explosion, demolitions, etc.], and clearly suggests a number of parallels with the burgeoning melodrama tradition in which musical and visual elements were arguably more important than speech in conveying the drama and emotion.<sup>32</sup> This popular context for melodrama’s development is an important element in our understanding of the evolution of the genre, but it has also exacerbated the lack of esteem in which the music was – and continues to be – held.

In fact, relatively few scores have survived from Pixérécourt’s melodramas. Because there were only a couple of songs at most in each play, there was little reason to publish the scores as integral works – in contrast to the music for operas. As noted above, the composer was usually the theatre’s ‘chef d’orchestre’ (often simply the principal violinist), which further contributed to the underrating of the music.<sup>33</sup> Although Gresnick’s score for *La Forêt de Sicile* (1798) was published almost immediately after its premiere (and survives at the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris), those of Pixérécourt’s earliest melodramas were not published, and were consequently lost. No score remains for his first six melodramas from 1798 to 1801, and although that of the seventh, *La Femme à deux maris* (September 1802), survives in manuscript form, the next five have been lost. We have two scores from 1805, and from 1808 survival rates improve further. For the purposes of this chapter, I have taken just two works, *La Femme à deux maris*, the earliest melodrama with an extant score (1802), and *La Citerne*, the first four-act melodrama (1809), to see if it is possible to trace an evolution in the codification of melodrama music during this time, and to ascertain whether its role as established by Nicole Wild and others for plays of the 1820s can be understood in the earlier works.<sup>34</sup>

*La Femme à deux maris* was announced as a great success following its premiere at the Ambigu-Comique on 13 September 1802.<sup>35</sup> It provoked unanimous applause and continual tears from the audience according to the *Journal des Indications*.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>32</sup> J.B. Hapdé, *L’Enfant du mystère, ou Les Amans du XV<sup>e</sup> siècle, pantomime en 3 actes* [text] ([Paris, 1800]); François René Gebauer, *Le Troubadour, ou L’Enfant de l’amour / L’Enfant du mystère* [MS score], *F-Pn*: Mat Th. 27. The close relationship between melodrama and pantomime in the development of the visual and musical components of drama has been examined by Emilio Sala. See, for example, ‘Musique et dramatisation dans la “pantomime dialoguée”: Le Cas de *L’Homme au masque de fer* (1790)’, in Jacqueline Waeber (ed.), *Musique et geste en France de Lully à la Révolution: Études sur la musique, le théâtre et la danse* (Bern, 2009), pp. 215–32.

<sup>33</sup> For a list of surviving scores, see Pauline Girardin, *Musiques de scène des théâtres parisiens conservées à la Bibliothèque-musée de l’Opéra 1778–1878* (Paris, 1993).

<sup>34</sup> Gérardin-Lacour, *La Femme à deux maris*, Mat. Th. 17; Alexandre Piccini, *La Citerne*, Mat. Th. 8 (both *F-Pn*). The musical numbers are individually labelled from no. 1 for each act, and indicated in the discussion below.

<sup>35</sup> See the *Courrier des spectacles* (29 fructidor An X [15 September 1802]), p. 2.

<sup>36</sup> Pixérécourt, *Théâtre choisi*, vol. 1, p. 252.



Adapted from a Ducray-Duminil novel, the plot hinges on Eliza discovering that her villainous first husband, Fritz, had faked his death in order one day to reappear and claim possession of all Eliza has been given by her second husband, Edouard. He is recognized and arrested as a deserter by the uncle of her second husband, who offers him an escape route in order to save his wife's name being connected with a condemned man. Fritz is happy to take the money but determined to kill Edouard nevertheless and arranges for an accomplice to assassinate him. Edouard's concierge, a wily retired corporal, foils the plot and his accomplice kills Fritz by mistake. The score was written by Gérardin-Lacour, who worked with Pixérécourt on six melodramas at the Ambigu-Comique between 1801 and 1804. My comments on the music are based on consultation of the conductor's score.

*La Citerne* proved equally successful when it was first performed at the Gaîté on 14 January 1809. The increase in length of the melodrama format is testimony to the popularity of the genre. For the *Gazette de France*, it was a giant leap to make the transition from three to four acts successfully.<sup>37</sup> The play was appreciated for its dramatic explosion at the end, set to suitably exciting music, but also for its variety, comic moments and overall execution. Don Fernand persuades an imprisoned pirate, Picaros, to impersonate Séraphine's father in order to prevent her from marrying the man she loves, Don Alvar, the son of the governor of Majorca. Unbeknownst to the crooks, Séraphine's long-lost real father Don Raphaël, and her sister Clara, have just been shipwrecked off the island and are able to foil Fernand's plan to marry Séraphine himself for her money – succeeding in part because Picaros repents of his previous lifestyle and helps the two sisters escape from the clutches of his former piratical associates when they fall into their hands trying to escape Don Fernand. The character of Picaros was particularly appreciated by the critics who were full of praise for the representation of a corsair reforming his ways. The score was written by Alexandre Piccini, a prolific composer for a number of boulevard theatres.<sup>38</sup> In the absence of a separate conductor's score, it is the first violin part (which was probably used to direct the performance) that has been examined.

The scores have been compared with the texts of the two plays to examine how music is used and to see whether an evolution can be traced in its function. The earlier of the two plays seems to indicate that the full potential of musical intervention has not yet been realized, although a number of devices that would

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., vol. 2, p. 378 (15 January 1809).

<sup>38</sup> According to Nicole Wild, *Dictionnaire des théâtres parisiens au XIXe siècle* (Paris, 1989), Piccini's music was performed at the Ambigu-Comique (p. 37), the Beaujolais (p. 52), the Cirque-Olympique (p. 85), the Jeunes Artistes (p. 214), the Jeux Gymniques (p. 221), the Panorama-Dramatique (p. 356) and the Variétés (p. 411). He was also a composer attached to the Gaîté (1818–31) (p. 170); an accompanist at the Gymnase-Dramatique (from 1820) (p. 182); accompanist at the Opéra (1803–22) (p. 314) and *chef de chant* and *chef des chœurs* (1822–26) (p. 313); *chef d'orchestre* at the Porte Saint-Martin (p. 367) and composer attached to the theatre (1814–37) (p. 371).

become standard features are already present. The most extensive music in Gérardin-Lacour's score is reserved for moments in the plot which require music, most notably ballet sequences in which the peasants practise their dancing (Act I, scenes 1 and 2), and then welcome Edouard and his uncle with a performance (Act II, scene 7). The latter incorporates a song in honour of Edouard. Music is used to mark entrances and exits, but only those of the two lead females (Eliza, and the actress playing her son Jules) are marked consistently. Just the first appearance of each of the other characters is signalled musically, as a shortcut to understanding their characterization (the major, for example, is introduced with military-style music in Act I, scene 6 (no. 7, p. 264)). There is little music to accompany dialogue – only very occasionally does this happen, and then it serves to contrast what is being said with the situation in which the characters find themselves. For instance, in Act I, scene 8, the audience sees Fritz enter the grounds of the estate, while Eliza expresses her fears that he might find a way of getting in, accompanied by the orchestra (no. 14, p. 270).

Rather than accompanying dialogue, music is more generally used by Gérardin-Lacour to enhance the emotional affect of tableaux, such as the concluding scene of Act I (scene 16; no. 19, p. 287), when Eliza collapses into the arms of her chaplain after Fritz has issued his threats, or in Act II, scene 11 (no. 19, p. 311), when we see her on her knees, distraught at her father's intransigence and refusal to forgive her for marrying Fritz. The extensive use of tableaux reminds us of the degree to which early melodrama was indebted to eighteenth-century theatrical aesthetics, with music helping to extend and intensify a static, climactic moment.<sup>39</sup> The tension is also amplified by music during more dramatic, active, passages, although perhaps not as often as one might expect. The scene in which Eliza reads the letter telling her that her first husband is still alive takes place to orchestral accompaniment (Act I, scene 3; no. 3, p. 257), and the pact to assassinate Edouard is sealed to music (Act III, scene 7; no. 6, p. 324). But the passage where Fritz's identity is revealed to the assembled company (Act II, scene 10), and his public threats to reclaim his wife and her possessions, contain no music at all – despite Eliza's heightened emotional state and the potentially perilous position in which she finds herself. In dramatic terms, this is the moment of crisis and the point of Eliza's most intense fear in the play; but rather than mark fear as a strong emotion, the orchestra is silent. Instead, the composer chooses to highlight love and forgiveness elsewhere in the play: twice music is used to underscore an embrace, firstly between mother and son in Act II, scene 5 (no. 4, p. 296) – the first time they have been able to recognize the blood ties between them – and secondly in the final scene, where Eliza's father embraces her and her son in reconciliation (no. 10, p. 336). These two moments are the 'tear-jerking' highlights of the play, but the emphasis on love and forgiveness in both of these scenes may also reflect the political context in which the play was performed. In 1802, the divisions

<sup>39</sup> See, for example, the discussion in Pierre Frantz, *L'Esthétique du tableau dans le théâtre du XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1998).

caused by the Revolution had not fully healed – émigrés were only just being allowed to return to France, for example – and for the sake of social and political stability there was a need for reconciliation and forgiveness, themes which recur time and again in the literary productions of the immediate post-Revolutionary period. The decision to reinforce scenes of love and forgiveness by underscoring them with music perhaps demonstrates how closely attuned the playwright and composer were to public feeling and popular sentiment.

Piccini's score for *La Citerne* reveals that, by 1809, there was a much greater awareness of the variety of ways in which music could be used in a melodrama, and Pixérécourt has also adapted his text to suit. While the ballet music remains the most extensive musical contribution, just as it was for Gérardin-Lacour's score for *La Femme à deux maris*, Piccini also indulges in a long and energetic overture and a lengthy, Gothic-flavoured introduction to Act III. Some of the points in the text where music is openly part of the plot appear rather tenuous, however. In Act IV, scene 7 (no. 4, pp. 122–3), for instance, the pirates come out of their hiding place to marching music, a use of music barely motivated by the plot, even if such a common military topos served more broadly to signal their fighting spirit. The play contains far more pantomime than *La Femme à deux maris*, where there was only one scene – as part of the celebrations welcoming Edouard home, with two simpletons and a monkey performing for comic effect. In *La Citerne* there are numerous examples, and each is accompanied by music. The first four scenes of the play, for example, contain extensive pantomime as we see the locals fishing, the main comic character Don Mesquinos falling out of a boat while trying to fish, and a picnic and dancing interrupted by a storm. Don Fernand has a mute black slave and this leads to several shorter pantomime scenes, especially with Picaros, as the slave tries to pass on instructions. It is clear that in all of the mimed scenes the actions and the music are designed to synchronize. We know from Meyerbeer that in the 1820s the playwright was reluctant to start rehearsals until the score was complete, reinforcing the notion that the music was integral to the whole and indeed shaped the performance on stage.<sup>40</sup> In the score to *La Citerne* we see confirmation of this: in Act II, scene 1, for instance, when Picaros gives a signal by clapping three times, this coincides with three distinct but *piano* notes in the score (no. 1, p. 49). Similarly, the canon fire in Act I, scene 5, is carefully noted in the score to coincide with specific bars of music (no. 4, p. 32). These indications show us that the score is not mere accompaniment, but carefully stage-managed music that reinforces what the audience is seeing or hearing on stage.

There are a number of scenes where mime is interspersed with snatches of dialogue. It is clearly indicated in the score that the music should stop to allow the line to be spoken and then start up again. When there is a line of dialogue over

<sup>40</sup> This is revealed in a letter to Pixérécourt of 3 September 1827, reprinted in *Théâtre choisi*, vol. 2, p. 585.

music, this is also carefully noted in the score.<sup>41</sup> The music does not underscore the dialogue but rather the dialogue seems to underscore the music – while the music underscores *action*. Very short snatches of music (often only a few bars) are used by Piccini to highlight dramatic moments in the play, as in Act II, scene 10 (a seven-bar passage comprising scalic motifs and tremolos; no. 6, p. 79), when Séraphine erroneously believes she has found her father and embraces him; or in Act III, scene 15 (a two-bar rising scalic motif in semiquavers; no. 12, p. 115), when Clara announces that the blind man seeking alms is in fact her father, the famous Don Raphaël. The main fight scenes do not have much music, something I found surprising, given that all the pantomime scenes are scored – though there would have been extensive sound effects. In Act IV, scene 15, instead of general and continuous fight music, common in melodramas of the 1820s, the composer has chosen to focus on a pirate seizing Séraphine (17 bars of *allegro*  $\frac{3}{4}$  in A minor, no. 9, p. 126) after the fight has been under way for some time, and then on Clara running him through with her sword. A 14-bar *allegro*  $\frac{4}{4}$  passage in D major (no. 10, pp. 126–7) accompanies Clara's attack and the pirate's retaliation: 'forcé de se defender, [il] lâche sa proie et combat Clara' (forced to defend himself, [he] released his prey and fought Clara). Piccini initially included a further 16 bars, comprising rising quavers on the beat countered by plunging semiquaver figures, and culminating with *forte-piano* motifs, but these have been crossed out. After some dialogue, a lengthier  $\frac{4}{4}$  passage in A minor (no. 11, pp. 128–9) italicizes the moment when 'le pirate tombe percé d'un coup mortel' [the pirate falls, pierced by a mortal blow] – the vocabulary of rising and falling scalic passages and tremolos continues the mood of the previous two numbers for some 45 bars.

The use of music here encourages us to reassess more systematically those scenes that have music (they are not always the ones one would expect), their length (often the music seems too long or too short to fit the stage directions), and consider the different sorts of relationships established between dialogue, stage action, character and music. The main fighting which opens the scene features anonymous pirates and the forces of order, and this is unaccompanied; in contrast, Clara is the principal female role (played by the young actress Caroline Soissons<sup>42</sup>) and her actions are provided with music. This suggests that music is being used here to reinforce the audience's attachment to a character (and focus their attention in a chaotic scene) rather than to provide incidental, background accompaniment.

In contrast to the score for *La Femme à deux maris*, music in *La Citerne* is used less frequently to mark entrances after the first appearance of each character –

<sup>41</sup> See Act III, scene 14, for instance (p. 114 of the score), where 'on parle' (talking) is written onto the score.

<sup>42</sup> According to O.G. Brockett, the young Soissons was trained by Pixérécourt for her role in *La Citerne*; as suggested by a review by Dusaulchoy which appeared in the *Journal de Paris* (15 January 1809), she had previously been known only as a pantomime dancer; Brockett, 'Pixérécourt and Unified Production', *Educational Theatre Journal*, 11/3 (1959): pp. 181–7, here p. 183.

although the main female role's appearances are still usually announced in this manner. Instead, the composer's efforts are directed towards marking transitions from one scene to another (which may include an exit) to serve as a reinforcement of what has happened immediately before. Sometimes the music confirms the audience's knowledge that all will work out in the end, as when Clara laughs to the audience, accompanied by a short confident passage in D major, as Picaros takes the pistols from which she has removed the primers (Act II, scene 18; no. 14, p. 90). One exception is the treatment of Picaros: his monologues are each framed by music, perhaps to emphasize the significance of his moral musings as he wrestles with his conscience and turns from villain to reformed character.

It is clear that in these two early melodramas music is being used in a variety of ways to shape the performance and the audience's reactions – and it is also evident that we need to provide more specific contextual detail when describing how music functions. It is not simply that music is being used to mark entrances and exits: in *La Citerne* only certain entrances and exits are marked in order to contribute to the plot or the moral message, or to announce to the audience the arrival of the principal female lead. Similarly, not all moments of dramatic or emotional tension are accompanied by the orchestra, and the choice of scenes that do have music reveals a fairly sophisticated manipulation of audience reactions. At times the music may be considered to be offering a narrating voice.<sup>43</sup> In these early melodramas, music does not accompany dialogue systematically, despite this subsequently being seen as 'the identifying element of melodrama' by many modern critics.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, the comparative examination of the two texts with their scores shows that a number of assumptions about the use of music in early melodrama need to be revised. Above all, this brief survey of the two plays shows that the use of music in Pixérécourt's melodramas evolved over the first decade of the nineteenth century, and that there is a pressing need for a more systematic exploration of the way in which French melodrama as performance rather than text developed from the end of the eighteenth century through to the 1840s.

---

<sup>43</sup> There is a significant body of literature on orchestral 'voice' in opera, in response to Carolyn Abbate's discussion in *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, NJ, 1991); and a range of scholarship that roots the narrative role of music in film in melodrama and opera of the nineteenth century – see, for example, Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (London, 1987).

<sup>44</sup> See Thomas Forrest Kelly, *First Nights at the Opera* (New Haven, CT, 2006), p. 144.