JACQUES OFFENBACH : HIS CENTENARY

By MARTIAL TENEO

ON June the 20th, 1819, at Cologne, in the Glockengasse (now only a memory), was born Jacques Offenbach, whose renown, forty years later, was to overspread the world.

To rehabilitate such an artist, still held in contempt at the present day by our musical "scientists," to restore him to his rightful place on the occasion of the centennial of his birth, is a task worthy of an unbiassed historian. I undertake this task wholly in the interest of justice and truth;—not merely to demonstrate that art, taken in the generic sense, gives admission to each and every formula, but also to demolish certain wretched fables and to throw light on many hitherto obscure phases in the life of an extraordinarily prolific creator.

Though it is almost axiomatic that every man bears, throughout his lifetime, the impress of his early education, Offenbach was an exception to the rule. The youngest of a numerous family, son of a member of the Jewish priesthood, reared in a doctrinal atmosphere, there was apparently little likelihood of his becoming the representative of pagan joyance in an era of luxury and in a land of which he was not a native. His father, a devotee of music, a good singer and a player on the violin, was fond of executing quartets with his friends in an easygoing amateurish fashion, by way of pastime. A grave simplicity, part and parcel of his priestly functions, characterized his every action. Logically, although with no special aim in view, he gave his children early instruction on the violin. At the age of seven, Jacques wielded the bow with considerable facility; but, as the violoncello better suited his natural taste, he made rapid progress on that instrument, and having, thanks to the self-sacrificing generosity of his parents, become the pupil of Alexander, he speedily outstripped his master and found himself lionized at numerous concerts both as a virtuoso and as a composer of ventures whose originality consisted chiefly in daring passages and burlesque imitations.

A strange presentiment soon moved him to abandon the peaceful family circle, to leave his native town and take his way to Paris. Bearing a letter of introduction to the poet Méry, he arrived there, barely fourteen years of age, accompanied by his

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Jacques Offenbach

elder brother Jules. This was in 1833, during the full tide of Romanticism. The two boys entered the Conservatoire, where, in defiance of the ordinance which forbade admission to foreigners, Cherubini, the director, placed Jacques in the class of M. Vaslin. Shortly after this, he came into possession of a desk for violoncello at the Opéra-Comique, with a monthly salary of 83 francs.

Here we must pause to remark that either by reason of remote atavism or through an extraordinary facility for assimilation, Jacques very quickly discovered a mental idiosyncrasy *à la française*. Amiable, gay, inclined to negligence withal, this transplanted German played a thousand tricks in his capacity as an executant. Scamping a phrase, catching up a measure on the fly, mutilating a finale, imitating the bass in the lower octave, neglecting his part to write down some musical thought—all this rendered him the object of such frequent fines that the monthly payday was a time to be dreaded.

At the rehearsals of *l'Éclair* he made the acquaintance of Fromenthal Halévy, who took an interest in his attempts at composition and gave him advice. For three years he held his place at his desk, devoting his days to composition and giving soirées from time to time in various salons. All at once, in 1838, he leaves the Opéra-Comique and forsakes his breadwinner, the violoncello. Suffering from hunger and cold, but with courageous obstinacy, he heaps waltzes on concertos, romances on fantasias, following the impulses of a riotous inspiration; furnishing dance-tunes for the Concerts Julien, and songs for Achard, the comic singer of the Société des Frileux—the same Achard who, in the year following, was to assist at Offenbach's theatrical début in the Palais-Royal by interpreting airs of his in *Pascal et Chambord*.

On May 2, 1841, we find him at a matinée in the home of M. de la Corblère, performing the minuet and finale of a Beethoven sonata with Rubinstein, then twelve years old, at the piano. After this he "sang with grace" (according to the reporter for the *Revue et Gazette*), on the violoncello, his *Cor des Alpes* and also a grand fantasia on Russian themes.

In fact, however, his career as a composer was so beset with difficulties that the youthful Jacques, quitting his writing-desk, undertook a concert-tour through his native country, and thereafter in England.

Returning to Paris after an absence of several years, he soon married Mlle. Herminie de Alcain, a pretty Spanish maiden, whose widowed mother had become the wife of the Carlist general Mitchell.

Scarcely settled in the Passage Saulnier, the young couple bethink them of the necessities of life. Jacques is tempted more than ever by the theatre. After having obtained a hearing for several of his compositions in concerts (those of Herz, in particular, in which a *Grande scène espagnole* inspired by his wife was performed), he sets to music certain of La Fontaine's fables—*La Cigale et la Fourmi*, *Le Renard et le Corbeau*, *Le Savetier et le Financier*, etc.—and composes six pieces for violoncello and piano in collaboration with Flotow.

Years went by. Seizing every seemingly favorable opportunity, and with a view to attracting the attention of the director of the Opéra-Comique, he brought out little stage-pieces hastily thrown together, such as *l'Alcove*.

The February Revolution of 1848 broke out. Offenbach withdrew to Germany and remained there a year, composing various works, re-reading Mozart, and also (probably) cultivating the violoncello, his favorite instrument.

Coming back to Paris, Jacques had no better success than before in getting a hearing at the theatres. An opéra bouffe produced at the Théâtre-Lyrique lived but a few weeks. Perrin, at the Opéra-Comique, turned a deaf ear to the composer; the political unrest had closed the salons. One day, while in lonely meditation on the hardships of the times, at a table in the Café Cardinal, Offenbach saw Arsène Houssaye approaching him with outstretched hand. Recently chosen director of the Théâtre-Français, owing to the favor of the triumphant Rachel, Houssaye proposed, among many other reforms, to provide his theatre with an orchestra worthy of the House of Molière. He knew the artistic temperament of Jacques, and without further ceremony asked him to become his *chef d'orchestre*. The young musician accepted the offer; the 6000 francs which this post insured him meant, for him, independence and the possibility of awaiting events propitious for the realization of his dream.

For the next five years he played fragments from his own works in the entr'actes; he directed Gounod's *Ulysse*, wrote airs for Mürger's *Bonhomme Jadis*, Dumas' *Romulus*, Plouvier's *Le Songe d'une nuit d'été*; in *Valéria* Rachel sang his music divinely; and entr'actes followed to the pretty compilation from the *Decameron*.

Nevertheless, in spite of the *Chanson de Fortunio* (written in a few minutes in the presence of Musset), in spite of the *Rose fanée*, in spite of the delightful Barcarolle frequently sung by Mme. Cinti-Damoreau, in spite of the favorable reception accorded his

Pepito, a pretty little Spanish farce played on the stage of the Variétés in October, 1853, Offenbach remained, at the Comédie, the chef d'orchestre to whom the doors of the Opéra-Comique would not uncloze. Indeed, this theatre belied its name, giving access only to miniature grand operas. Genuinely gay, sprightly music, continuing the traditions of Monsigny, Grétry, Auber, and Adam, was heard there with increasing infrequency.

Oh! to become his own master, to revolt on the one hand against routine and, on the other, to give free scope to all the fantasies that were singing in his brain!—Alas! the young musician pursued his vision, hopeless of attainment; his daily duties embittered him, and his nascent notoriety in no wise satisfied his ambition.

It is necessary to linger over certain particular details of exceptional importance, although neglected by all the biographers. For they are the key to the characteristic style of Offenbach, and to the path which he followed regardless of loftier aims.

In 1847 there lived in Paris a certain Florimond Ronger, a lyric actor at the Théâtre Montmartre without fixed salary. His post as organist at the church of St. Eustache brought in 800 francs annually, and that at the Chapel of Bicêtre 12.50 francs monthly besides board and lodging for his wife and himself. This singular personage, living next door to lunatics and taking delight in applying the cognomen of "crazy composer" to himself, assumed the pseudonym of Hervé as a musician. His brain teeming with fancies, energetic, headstrong, never doubting the ultimate success of his musical career, this lyric bohemian had already lavished his eccentric fancy on a quantity of extravagant songs, when he wrote—for a benefit of his comrade Désiré, a future headliner of Offenbach's theatre—a comic interlude entitled *Don Quichotte et Sancho Pança*, in which Florimond, tall and thin, played the Don, and Désiré, short and stout, took the part of Sancho. This skit made a sensation. Adolphe Adam, after hearing it, complimented the author and engaged him as a tenor buffo for the Opéra National in the Boulevard du Temple, of which he was the director, and where, in March, 1848, he revived *Don Quichotte* with the author and Kelm.

The Operetta was born! Hence, it is incorrect to say of Offenbach that he was the father of this form. Actually he was only its continuator. But another circumstance renders this fact still more apparent. Hervé, having taken over the management of the Folies-Concertantes in 1853, proceeded to turn to account various worklets in his peculiar style, producing

successively *Le Compositeur toqué*, *Un Drame en 1779*, *La Perle de l'Alsace*, *La belle Espagnole*, *Le Duo impossible*, *Agamemnon* (a parody of the antique), *Le Jugement de Paris*, and *Achille à Scyros* (other mythological farces requiring only two personages). At once director, composer, author, actor, prompter, stage-manager, machinist, scene-painter, he wrought with feverish activity, giving free rein to his carnivalistic buffoonery.

Offenbach often took time to attend the production of Hervé's "nonsensicalities," and would return from the Folies in a nervous, restless, even jealous frame of mind. This creature of impulse, whose brain was in continual ebullition and whose nerves lay bare to the touch, this marvellous assimilator, this born satirist, this genial warper and wrester, was penetrated by the feeling that the frequently trivial extravagances of Hervé might, if tempered, become the starting-point of a new style. And so it came that he felt himself seized by an intense longing, first, to imitate, then to equal, and finally to excel—in talent, in imaginativeness, and above all in delicacy—the real creator of the French operetta.

Great turns of destiny are frequently dependent on very small matters. Without the example set by Hervé, Offenbach might perhaps never have become the musician who penned *Orphée aux Enfers*, *La belle Hélène*, and so many other triumphant works. An important point of which no one has hitherto taken sufficient note, is that Offenbach, stung to the quick by the success of a capricious and disorderly innovator, one day resolved to prosecute a renewal of his earlier efforts in Hervé's own theatre.

Early in 1855 he paid a visit to his future rival. After expressing the enthusiasm which Hervé's burlesque creations had aroused in him, he begged him to accept and put on the stage a one-act operetta composed in imitation of his own. Our whimsical Florimond received this new confrère with fraternal alacrity, and soon was playing the leading role in *Oy, aye, aye!*, of which Jules Moineaux, the father of our Courteline, had written the libretto.

Some months later the little theatre abandoned by the physicist Lacaze, in the Champs-Élysées, was offered for rental. Offenbach was one among some two dozen competitors, and, thanks to the protection of powerful friends, was awarded the privilege of producing pieces in one act for two or three players. While this restriction was by no means entirely satisfactory in view of his aims, he raised no objection whatever, reserving a solution of the difficulty for a future time. The main thing was that he, himself, would now have a theatre of his own. Thenceforward

he could measure himself against Hervé, whose career was to be so strangely parallel to Offenbach's.

Having christened his theatre the Bouffes-Parisiens, and recruited a troupe uniting vocal and histrionic elements, Offenbach on July the 3d burst in upon Moineaux:—"Day after to-morrow I must have a piece from you to open my theatre!" he exclaimed. The author of *La Question d'Orient*, a political lampoon which had just set all Paris laughing, proposed a three-act piece, *Les Musiciens ambulants*.—"Three acts!" cried the despairful Jacques, "that's impossible on account of my contract!"—Moineaux asked for twenty-four hours, and next day brought in *Les deux Aveugles*, a condensation of *Les Musiciens ambulants*.

Despite the forebodings of the authors' advisers, this musical travesty assured the success of the opening night, and made the name of Offenbach a leading attraction of Paris, to such a degree that in March, 1859, during the session of the Peace Congress, Napoleon III regaled his guests in the salons of the Tuileries with this little play, whose overwhelming vogue was to continue through more than four hundred representations.

Concurrent with and serving as a foil to *Les deux Aveugles*, other pieces were now and again produced by the fortunate director; such as *Le Rêve d'une nuit d'été*, *Le Violoneux* (a little masterpiece of temperament and art, replete with pointed phrases and "heart-interest," in which Mlle. Schneider, then a rising star, won applause), furthermore, *Mme. Papillon*, *Périnette*, and certain pantomimes which were decidedly silly compared with the vivacious operetta.

Besides Auber and Adam, who were assiduous visitors of the "Bouffes"—this miniature theatre "made with a ladder," as one caricaturist termed it—all personages of note thronged to the Champs-Élysées; count de Castellane was fond of recalling the fact that he had divined Jacques' future when, in his soirées, he presented him beside Nadaud and Augustine Brohan.

However, when winter came, the Champs-Élysées had to be abandoned for a shelter in the City itself. Favored by an unexpected opportunity, Offenbach and his friends were not obliged to prolong their search. Comte was willing to make over the Salle Choiseul, and Jacques installed himself there on Dec. 29; as an opening piece he gave *Ba-Ta-Clan*, with Ludovic Halévy, then attached to the Palais-Bourbon as secretary-editor.

By its madcap dash and its charming grace Offenbach's music was now, from day to day, winning an increasingly enviable position for its author. But while he was thus pouring out an

uninterrupted stream of new works, Jacques acquired Adam's *Les Pantins de Violette*, thereby thwarting the Opéra-Comique; and six months later he opened a competition "intended for the benefit of the author of the best comedy-opera (opéra comique) properly so-called."

The theatre of the Bouffes-Parisiens—he wrote in a veritable plea in defense of the operetta—will attempt to resuscitate the traditional and genuine style. Its very name renders this a duty. Hitherto it has endeavored to keep the faith. But it does not believe that its efforts should be limited to this. Wholly without pretensions, and remaining within the bounds of its modest sphere, it considers itself capable of doing great service to art and artists. It has met with success in the remodeled sketches of the earlier opéra-comique, in farces like the stage-pieces of Cimarosa and the first Italian masters; it aims, not merely to persevere in this path, but to dig deep into the inexhaustible vein of ancient French merriment. It has no other ambition than to give short pieces, and, if we reflect for a moment, this is no mean ambition. In an opera that is over in barely three-quarters of an hour, that deploys only four personages on the stage, and that employs an orchestra of thirty musicians at most, there must be ideas and melody payable on sight. Remember, too, that with so slender an orchestra—with which, none the less, Mozart and Cimarosa contented themselves—it is very difficult to hide those faults of inexperience which are smothered by an orchestra of eighty musicians.

Far be it from us to dream of stemming the tide of art, of belittling science. For us, a return to the past is not the last word of progress; but, while admitting that the genre as exploited by the license of the Bouffes-Parisiens is only the first round on the ladder of the genre, it is necessary that this first round should exist if one would go up higher.

Offenbach's generous offer attracted seventy-eight competitors, among whom six were designated for a definitive trial, this consisted in setting to music a libretto by Battu and Halévy entitled *Le Docteur Miracle*. By the vote of a jury composed of Auber, Halévy, Ambroise Thomas, Scribe, Saint-Georges, Mélesville, Leborne, Victor Massé, Gounod, Gevaert and Bazin, the prize was equally divided between Georges Bizet and Charles Lecocq, both scores being produced thereafter at the Bouffes. The eclectic Jacques also presented pieces by Delibes, Poise, Duprato, Rossini, even Mozart. In summertime he returned to the Champs-Élysées; the winters were passed in the Salle Choiseul. And, as he occupied himself with the minutest details of the mounting, with the pettiest administrative matters, one may well ask how he found time to write the eight new pieces which he gave in 1857, several of which were sent out "on the road," first to England, then to Lyons, some of these being *Le Mariage aux Lanternes*, of

youthfulness eternal, and *La Demoiselle en Loterie*, played all over the world.

The year 1858 was to mark an epoch in Offenbach's career and in the musical life of Paris. Now, freed from all constraint, having permission to overpass the limits hitherto set for his talents, Jacques proceeded to create the real opéra-bouffe, to sway a vast audience with his uncurbed imagination, and to attract, together with thousands of admirers, a yelping pack of detractors, among whom, I grieve to state, Berlioz and Janin made themselves conspicuous by their unfairness.

With *Mesdames de la Halle* Offenbach inaugurated a new style requiring lavishness in the mounting, followed by that extraordinary *Orphée aux Enfers* which was the delight of the whole world, despite violent detraction. We must add, that its première was received with reserve. Poking fun at the gods and heroes of the *Iliad* was, in the eyes of many, to be guilty of excessive irreverence.

At that time people were ignorant, as so many are still ignorant, of the dominant reason for such an undertaking. Now it is worth our while to notice it. Years before, Offenbach had confided to his friend Crémieux that, while still *chef d'orchestre* at the Comédie-Française, he had sworn to be avenged for the intolerable ennui he so often experienced while viewing the parade of the personages of antiquity, the gods of Olympus, and the heroes of mythical times. His teeming imagination, his resolute modernism, could not bend themselves to the rules of a rigid classicism. His ardent temperament had suffered with veritable indigestion from mythology served in regular and soporific doses. He broke out in revolt against the plasticity of so many denatured phenomena. All these old arrears of hatred he proposed to pour out in jovial irony some day when, as he maliciously remarked, he should find an "accomplice" worthy to second his vengeance. Crémieux was this accomplice while awaiting the time that Ludovic Halévy and Henri Meilhac should come to his assistance and make his vengeance complete. The violent attacks of Janin in the "*Journal des Débats*" decided the success of *Orphée*. The tempest of maledictions aroused curiosity. Everybody wanted to hear the accursed work, and the Bouffes was soon crowded to capacity. The laughers took the side of the actors, especially when Crémieux revealed, in Figaro, that the tirade let loose by Léonce at his entry upon Olympus had been "lifted" from a feuilleton by Janin—Janinus Maro, Janinus Flaccus, Janinus Naso, as he was dubbed by the librettist. And our good Jacques, harassed by his criticisms, wrote him thus haughtily:

You say my music is an abominable concoction, music in a short petticoat or without a petticoat, music *à la chie-en-lit*? [Shocking Janin!] You think you are still among school-boys! Carnival music! bal-masqué music! music in rags and tatters! For all that, it never begged one line of you!

In rejoinder to the unjust attacks of which Offenbach was the object, the authors and composers whose works were given at the Bouffes, had the idea of offering a banquet to their director and friend. The members of the committee, J. Duflot, E. de Najac, C. du Locle, J. Duprato, H. Caspers, and L. Delibes, solicited support. It poured in from every side, sympathetically and eagerly. This manifestation was not of a nature to impose silence on irreconcilable enemies, but it impelled the musician to persist in his course. And so, in 1859, he ventured to bring out a pendant to *Orphée*, in the form of a travesty on the tragic adventures of Geneviève de Brabant. The semi-success obtained (Nov. 19) discouraged him all the less in that he now finally saw his dearest hopes realized by the receipt of his certificate of full naturalization. For on the 14th of January, 1860, in the "Bulletin of the Laws of the Empire," under No. 9513, there appeared an Imperial Decree (countersigned by the Guardian of the Seals, the Minister of Justice) setting forth that the "sieur Offenbach (Jacques), composer of music, born June 20, 1819, in Cologne (Prussia), resident in Paris, is admitted to enjoy the rights of a French citizen, in conformity with Article 2 of the law of Dec. 3, 1849."

Moreover, one month earlier, as if in reply to those ill-wishers who made pretense of proving that Wagner had influenced Offenbach, and that the latter was a foreign musician with pernicious tendencies, the "Press" of Vienna had devoted a long article to the author of *Orphée*, and acknowledged that he wrote French music. To this the "Figaro" added:

Since the Germans themselves recognize Offenbach as a Frenchman, it is quite natural that we in Paris should consider him out and out French, although born in Cologne.

In celebration, after his own fashion, of his newly acquired status as Frenchman, Jacques produced, on March 27 (1860), *Daphnis et Chloé*, a delightful score whose freshness rivals its tender feeling. However, the popular composer, at once prodigal and charitable, was not growing wealthy. A performance for his benefit was announced in the Théâtre Italien. The Emperor signified his intention of attending it, but required that *Orphée* should be placed on the program, desiring to hear for himself the work from which his military bands so frequently borrowed

fragments during the Italian campaign, besides the quadrille that enlivened the lovely *soirs dansants* at the Tuileries.

Not long after this ever-memorable evening, as if to crown five years of successes, the two foremost lyric stages of Paris issued invitations to the embarrassing Offenbach. That was the last straw! It was called flying in the face of commonsense; the word "indecenty" was spoken, there was a general outburst of rage among the envious, the malcontents, the emulators of the hyperbolic Janin, the paradoxical Roqueplan, the coarse Scudo. On Nov. 26 the ballet *Le Papillon* (scenario by Saint-Georges and Mlle. Taglioni) won a sweeping success on the stage of the Académie Impériale de Musique [the Opéra]. The enemies of Jacques vented stormy protests, like the negro Cochinat, who exclaimed:

It would be difficult to imagine anything more colorless—to speak frankly, anything more futile and more hollow. It is the final limit of an art outworn.

This attitude of the gnashers of teeth appeared the more ridiculous in the light of the complete success of the work, which had forced adversaries like Fiorentino to do justice to the score. In fine, the chorus of praises drowned the racket of invective. "The music of Offenbach," wrote Paul de Saint-Victor in the *Presse*, "is lively, clever, easy to follow and pleasant to listen to. It has melody and rhythm, the spurs of the dance." Eugène Chapus declared that the theme of the *Valse des Rayons* was a veritable treasure-trove of genius; in Offenbach he recognized a musical Messiah whose cult might succeed the cult of Auber and Halévy. Chadeuil, of *Le Siècle*, believed that many pages of the score would not have been disowned by Adam. The *Revue et Gazette* felicitated the composer on having given proof of a remarkable talent in the handling of that formidable and complex instrument, the orchestra. "Most assuredly," so adds the chronicler, "the *Valse des Rayons*, of so alluring and coquettish a mien, will have an immense popular success." This was a true prophecy, for at the present time, despoiled by highwaymen, it is still to be heard on the stage of every music-hall under the appellation of *Valse chaloupée*.—Finally, the best proof that can be adduced for the success of the *Papillon*—in whose cast the leading lady was that poor little Emma Livry who was fated to be burned alive at a rehearsal of *La Muette de Portici*—is, that the ballet was given forty-one times in succession, a rare occurrence in the annals of the Opéra.

On Dec. 24, at the Opéra-Comique, the score of *Barkouf* was overwhelmed in the failure of a puerile libretto. This was greeted

with an explosion of ferocious joy from the vituperators. They asserted that the master's prestige was ruined past repair—thereby showing their scant appreciation of the inexhaustible resources of so fertile a talent. With that fine self-reliance which signalized his character, Jacques constructed within a week the charming piece, *La Chanson de Fortunio*, winning therewith on Jan. 5, 1861, one of the most brilliant triumphs of his career. Public enthusiasm reached its highest pitch, and Meyerbeer went about repeating to all who cared to hear: "I only wish I might have written that ravishing score."

This discomfiture caused the hostile camp to redouble its outrages. Whereupon, Xavier Aubryet entered the lists in defense of Offenbach, and castigated Berlioz (who treated him too loftily), Scudo, Haquet, Commettant, and all the rest. He asserted unreservedly that the *Chanson de Fortunio* was a little masterpiece worthy of a niche between *Les Noces de Jeannette* and *Le Chien du Jardinier*.

Seized by a veritable mania for production, and spurred by his desire to confound the fools and backbiters, Jacques brought out in swift succession *Le Pont des Soupirs* (an indescribable bit of buffoonery), *Monsieur Choufleuri restera chez lui* (a droll fantasy by the Duc de Morny), *Apothicaire et Perruquier* (an amusing pastiche of eighteenth-century music), and, finally, *Le Roman comique*. On the pinnacle of fame—and the verge of bankruptcy! So the Bouffes passed into the hands of Varney, but retained its established purveyor. Offenbach's Muse lost no time. In *Monsieur et Madame Denis* she is bewitching, and presents us with a Chaconne of instant popularity; in *Les Bavards* she is delicate and keen-witted; in *Lischen et Fritzchen* she proves herself a skillful improvisatrice; finally, in *Les Georgiennes*, she makes bold to surround herself with a scenic exuberance unusual in her case. Ah! this dainty, lightsome Muse, short of skirt, ironical and capricious, who carols a delicate romance after shouting out the *Marseillaise des Femmes* or the *Évohé*, as she is forced to obey the fantastic, arbitrary, ever-vigilant genius of an unrestful master. This master leads her from Paris to Ems, from Ems to Baden, from Baden to Vienna or Berlin, and, when he promises her to rest awhile at Étretat, he is deceiving himself, for, surrounded by his family and friends, he is always possessed by the demon of work.

The time has now arrived when the great humorists Meilhac and Halévy are to reserve their most uniquely fanciful creations for their friend Jacques. These two authors possessed imagination

united with a racy, nervous style, and—the public liked this—they infused rhyme and reason into their parodies. In these the tone rings true, and their satires in action cannot possibly be confounded with the stale buffooneries of their imitators.

In 1864, a week before Christmas, the Théâtre des Variétés brought out *La belle Hélène* with Hortense Schneider (whose name was thenceforward inseparably linked with that of Offenbach), with Dupuis (an inimitable Paris), with Grenier, Coudert, and Kopp. Lily-white, blond and smiling as a Rubens, when she delivered *a piena voce* the famous phrase “Il nous faut de l’amour!” the queen of French operetta aroused frenzied applause.

The chorus of the classic enemies of gayety again spat invectives at the librettists, the musician, the interpreters. Ridiculing Homer! Laying impious hands on ancient Greece! Dragging Helen and Paris into dionysiac buffooneries!

This time Offenbach made light of these vituperations. He was borne aloft on a whirlwind of popularity; for full twenty years he had struggled before tasting the sweets of victory, and now successes impelled him on and on along his course as National Amuser.

Some months later, after having presented *La belle Hélène* to the applause of Vienna and Berlin, and having won a sprig of laurel at Ems with his *Coscoletto*, he composed *Les Bergers*. “In the first act,” he wrote, “we are all antiquity; . . . in the second I breathed the very air of Watteau; in the third act I strove to simulate the music of Courbet . . .” But his audience at the Bouffes did not understand him. The libretto was doubtless a trifle complicated for its comprehension and its every-day humor; the music, by turns dramatic, tender, and gay, presented contrasts which disfigured their musical idol in the eyes of his worshippers. But what of that! Scarcely two months had passed, when Jacques once more confounded his foes with *Barbe-Bleue*, at the Variétés (Feb. 5, 1866).

The new temple dedicated to Offenbach had no empty seats; not a stranger but wished to hear Boulotte (Mlle. Schneider) and Barbe-Bleue (M. Dupuis). The more violent the attacks of the high priests, the greater were the triumphs. In the newspapers, on the boulevards, in the retirement of the ateliers and in all the salons, Offenbach is held in honor. The most visionary schemes are proposed for his acceptance; his exits and entrances are spied upon; his last word and deed is passed through the sieve of Parisian newsmongery; he is the god of music, the god of Paris, the idol of

the Empress, and, consequently, the *bête noir* of all antagonists of the imperial régime.

The combined fancy of Meilhac and Halévy had concocted a burlesque intended for the troupe of the Palais-Royal, newly converted to "Offenbachism"; and on Oct. 31 *La Vie Parisienne*, interpreted by Mmes. Zulma Bouffar, Honornie, Thierret and Montalaud, and MM. Hyacinthe, Brasseur, Gil Pères and Lassouche aroused thunderous applause. However, the success of this madcap score was to be surpassed by far, six months thereafter, by that of *La Grande Duchesse de Gérolstein*, an extravagant caricature whose unexampled vogue will never be surpassed, and which still stirs the bile of the aristarchs.

This year of 1867, rendered so brilliant by the Universal Exposition, was regarded by some as the noisome symbol of the Régime of December the Second. Certain gloomy moralists took as their theme the public festivals, the balls, the theatres. They reminded us of Sadowa and the Mexican campaign;—and sometime they will declare that Offenbach's music contributed to the defeat of 1870!

Meantime, the sovereigns of all nations were making Paris their rendezvous. One after the other came William I, escorted by Bismarck; Franz Joseph, Tsar Alexander II, Sultan Abdul-Aziz, the king of Greece, the king of Belgium, the brother of the emperor of Japan, the viceroy of Egypt, the king of Portugal, the king of Sweden, the queen of Württemberg. The Exposition opened April the 1st on the Champ de Mars; and the 12th, after some tilts with the censor, the Théâtre des Variétés launched *La Grande Duchesse*. Next day the Song of the Sabre, the "declaration" of Mlle. Schneider, the rondeau of Fritz, the Legend of the Glass, flew from mouth to mouth. In its sobriety, the report of the chronicler Jérôme strikes the true note. He writes:

No one knows how great resourcefulness in the way of melody, of imagination, of variety, is called for by this highly specialized style, in which so few masters have excelled. Methods, formulas, the science of harmony, do not suffice here. One must pay, as the saying goes, cash down; there must be an inexhaustible fund of vivacity, originality, *esprit*, without resort to the outlandish and bizarre; one must be merry without effort, comical without triviality. All this Offenbach can do, and one is astonished, on hearing his new opera, at the potentialities of the seven notes of the scale in the way of charm and wit, of enchantment and laughter.

Jacques, the anointed monarch of Opéra Bouffe, saw with permissible pride this procession of the great ones of earth

before his work, together with his faithful public. Princes, warriors and diplomats came as eagerly as the nobility, the bourgeoisie, and all the rest. Napoleon III, the Tsar (to whom the Empress offered a seat), the Prince of Wales, the Duke of Edinburgh, Herr von Bismarck, Grand-duke Constantine, the kings of Bavaria, Portugal and Sweden, supported by the ladies of the court and the sovereign herself, came to applaud Schneider and Dupuis, whose popularity passed all bounds, and who were now known as la Grande Duchesse and Fritz on the street as well as in the theatre.

On Nov. 23 *Robinson Crusoe*, at the Opéra-Comique, made up for the failure of *Barkouf*. "Adam is dead! Long live Offenbach!" people said while going out after the première.

Not long afterwards word came from New York that the 150th representation of *La Grande Duchesse* had been celebrated. And in London the St. James Theatre was also preparing to produce this masterpiece of drollery, as well as the *La belle Hélène*.

While the Bouffes were scoring two further successes with *Le Fife enchanté* and that extravaganza in motley, *l'Ile de Tulipatan*, Jacques put *La Périhole* in rehearsal at the Variétés. Brought out Oct. 6, 1868, this work scored a complete success. "It is a drumfire of melodies," said "Le Figaro." And "Le Gaulois" added: "The Muse of the maestro is clad in a robe of changeable silk; the robe remains the same, but the reflection is never the same."

In 1869 there was a delightful rôle for Capoul in *Vert-Vert* at the Opéra-Comique; its success was so genuine, so unanimous, that in the hostile camp hardly any one ventured to brandish a thunderbolt; at the Bouffes, Schneider carried all before her in *La Diva*, a veritable musical autobiography, unhappily destined to fade early, like all plays based on current events; at Baden, *La Princesse de Trébizonde* was acclaimed by a select audience, and later at Paris for the débuts of Mme. Chaumont, who declaimed the music marvellously, if she didn't sing it. Finally, three days thereafter, *Les Brigands* came out at the Variétés with Dupuis, Zulma Bouffar, Baron and Cooper.

By way of a rest from such continual activity Jacques visited Vienna and Darmstadt, proceeded to Nice via Paris, returned to Vienna, came back to Paris, where he gave a monster supper to his faithful interpreters, and then shut himself up at St. Germain to finish *Fantasio*. But he had overrated his powers of endurance. His physicians ordered him to stop work for three months. While in his villa at Étretat he was surprised by the war. In

a letter to a friend on Aug. 9, 1870, he expressed the distress he felt at the turn of events. The storm burst. He departed, threatened and mocked by those who, more than ever, liked to regard him as a German hired by the Empire, a corrupter of the public taste, a dangerous individual. Harsh and cruel, month followed month. The siege of Paris came, and famine with it. Some few representations were given for the wounded; in February, 1871, *La Princesse de Trébizonde* reappeared at the Bouffes. The vilest invectives were hurled at the absent author. He himself wrote his collaborators, Nutter and Tréfeu from Milan, March 6, a really fine letter, in which he said:

I know the story of *Trébizonde*; I am sorry for those poor little confederates who hope, because I have great success, to injure me by saying that I am a German, when they know very well that I am French to the marrow of my bones! They will be punished for their perfidies; I hope to return soon, and I also hope, my dear friends, that we shall begin work again, and—although I, alas! was born in Cologne—that you will deign to entrust me once more with a poem.

Madame Offenbach, with the children, had taken refuge in St. Sébastien. In the letters of this model spouse we have another proof that Offenbach was affected by the horrors of war like a true Frenchman. His health was seriously impaired, and his morale had suffered a terrible shock; but the artist was not vanquished. As soon as the theatres were reopened in 1871, *Les Bavards* reappeared on the posters. The resuscitated town welcomed its favorite musician. On Jan. 15, 1872, *Le Roi Carotte* (book by Sardou), a grand spectacular fairy opera, transported the audience at the Gaîté, exactly thirty-two days after the victorious première of *Boule-de-Neige* (a revised version of *Barkouf*). Everywhere something or other by Offenbach was revived; so anybody can see that if the operetta killed the Empire, as certain persons had recently affirmed, it did not die, too.

Betrayed by a mediocre libretto, Offenbach witnessed the fall of *Fantasio*; however, he set out for Vienna, where several of his works were now in higher favor than ever, among them being *Le Corsaire noire*, of which he wrote both the book and the music.

At this juncture the maestro made up his mind to obtain the directorship at the Gaîté, whose vast stage would permit him to mount grand spectacles—to dazzle and delight at the same time. While maturing his plans he produced *Les Braconniers* at the Variétés on Jan. 29, 1873; he launched the vivacious Théo on her career in *Pomme d'Api*, at the Renaissance theatre, and composed

for her *La jolie Parfumeuse*, in which, on Nov. 29, the new diva shone in full lustre. Once director of the theatre he had coveted, he prepared a revival of *Orphée aux Enfers* with amplifications and a stupendous mounting. The following 7th of February crowds fought at the doors of the Gaîté; on May 18 the hundredth representation was celebrated; while *La Périhole*, enriched by a new act, renewed the ovations to Schneider and Dupuis at the Variétés.

Following in swift succession came *Bagatelle* at the Bouffes, with Judic and Mme. Grivot; *Whittington and His Cat* at the Alhambra in London; *Madame l'Archiduc*, whose principal airs were encored and which had over one hundred and fifty consecutive representations. And then, in one and the same month (November, 1875), three creations: *La Boulangère a des Écus*, *Le Voyage à la Lune*, and *La Créole*.

In spite of all this, Offenbach was obliged to give up the directorship of the Gaîté. Lavishness in living and giving led to his ruin, for all his decisive successes. He now regretted far less the passing of his fortune into the hands of his creditors, than the evanishment of his dream—the fairy opera-drama. For months he had been constructing with Sardou and Nutter a *Don Quichotte* adapted from the production at the Gymnase; it was his intention that it should surpass in splendor anything theretofore seen on the stage! To this end, he had entrusted to Fromont the question of decorations; Sardou had proposed windmills with revolving vanes, a rainbow, moonlight effects, and a sunrise, a storm with flying clouds, pigs in goldfoil, a mechanical bull for the circus, a splendid wayside altar with a group of women ranked stepwise among the flowers, an interior in the palace of Barataria, a conflagration of this same Oriental palace, a combat of demons, nightmare visions, a ballet of personages with two faces, and finally a sumptuous Wedding of Gamache as an apotheosis. But matters had gone wrong; two such violent temperaments as Offenbach and Sardou, despite the gentle impassibility of Nutter, were bound to conflict, the dramaturgist showing himself exigent, and the composer neglecting his score because of disagreements; so that when the theatre passed into the hands of Vicentini, Sardou requested Nutter to take back the manuscript of *Don Quichotte*. The affair had no sequel.

The following year, impelled by conscientious scruples, Jacques saw only one way to earn enough money to idemnify all his creditors, namely, a tour in America. At New York he received a spectacular welcome. The tricolored banner was flown

in his honor; above the balcony of his hotel an enormous transparency bore, in large letters: "Welcome, Offenbach"; an orchestra gave him a serenade; the populace acclaimed him; he was invited to the clubs. He gave concerts at Gilmore's Garden, and in Philadelphia; he conducted several of his works in different cities; and on the 8th of July the *Canada* took him back to France. He brought with him one hundred thousand francs in net profits, and his "Notes d'un Musicien en Voyage."

Scarcely had he reëstablished himself among his friends, when he produced in rapid sequence *Pierrette et Jacquot*, *La Boîte au Lait*, *Le Docteur Ox*, *Le Foire Saint-Laurent*, and *Maître Peronilla*. During the Exposition of 1878, the master produced nothing. The year preceding, however, he had requested his faithful collaborators Meilhac and Halévy to devise a piece promising a new and striking success. Moreover, the Gaîté, under Weinschenk's directorship, revived *Orphée aux Enfers* with lavish decorations, besides reserving a surprise for the public—Hervé in the rôle of Jupiter! Yes, in sober truth, this "moving cause" of the *genre* Offenbach, Hervé, who, side by side with *La Grande Duchesse*, and *Périchole*, and *Barbe-Bleue*, and *La Princesse de Trébizonde*, had brought out *l'Oeil crevé*, *Chilpéric*, *Le Petit Faust*, and *Les Turcs*—Hervé, who had penetrated so profoundly into the popular heart with his chansons as interpreted by Thérèse—Hervé, of all men, is now harnessed to the triumphal chariot of his rival!

Jacques is once more in favor; his *Madame Favart*; a genuine comedy-opera, has a brilliant success at the Renaissance; the Bouffes are playing *La Marocaine*; and *La Fille du Tambour-Major*, the one hundredth score of the fertile musician, wins a glorious triumph.

As in the brightest days of his great vogue, Offenbach fills the columns of the daily press. His *Belle Lurette* is announced at the Renaissance; there is a rumor of a *Cabaret des Lilas* for Théo at the Variétés; *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* are eagerly awaited at the Opéra-Comique. But in the night of October 4-5, 1880, Offenbach passed away, at the age of 61. Death came after an attack of rheumatism of the heart. For ten years he had been the victim of intolerable pains, yet his intrepid and unwearied spirit refused to succumb to suffering and adversity. He sought refuge in work, never ceasing to manifest an admirable stoicism, forcing himself to live, to struggle, and to conquer, without a respite.

The hour had now struck to pay the brilliant tribute due the great artist who had just departed. On October the 8th Jouvin declared:

The manner of writing *bouffe* music, and which one must call the Offenbach style, has been the object of very lively polemical discussions in the press. While criticizing this style, frequently in very bitter fashion, only one aspect has been considered—the frolicsome and audacious tone which bordered on caricature and inclined toward parody. Such criticism makes Offenbach's music exclusively responsible for the peculiarly extravagant turn of the plays of his collaborators. Parody being the scenic element, necessarily became the soul, the flame and the smile of the score. Offenbach was far too sagacious to commit the absurdity of draping his *chanson musicale* like a Muse, making it strike an attitude in the midst of the extravagances of the libretto.

In fact, to judge Offenbach rightly, one must first of all consider that he was a musical humorist who was capable of being something else, had he so desired—witness *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*. This point was missed by Berlioz, embittered in his pride as a belated romanticist. This is what the hypocrites and the high priests of bigotry refused to see. For all that, from whatever angle one may choose to view them, it is impossible to ignore the variety, the *esprit*, the good humor and the longevity of his artistic faculties. It is well to recall that Halévy, Auber and Adam encouraged and supported the first essays of the artist who, although German by race, never employed uncouth raillery, but rather light satire; one should also remember that Rossini dubbed Offenbach the Mozart of the Champs-Élysées. Now, it will surely be admitted that the Swan of Pesaro knew what was what in *bouffe* music. Meyerbeer felt himself so strongly attracted by the surprising fecundity of a fabulous imagination, that he never failed to assist at the *second* representation of the pieces of him whom he likewise called “the great minstrel of the nineteenth century.”

And did not Reyer remark: “M. Offenbach may have his faults, but he possesses one precious quality—he is original and drinks out of his own glass”? Saint-Saëns characterized him as having great fertility, the gift of melody, harmony rising at times to distinction, much *esprit* and inventive talent, and great theatrical skill.

Wagner himself—that giant!—professed the most sincere admiration for the composer of so many works replete with whimsical inventions, rhythmic caprices, prosodic oddities, elegiac phrases, and exquisite melodies.

One day when I was speaking of Offenbach in the presence of Charles Lecocq, the author of *Madame Angot* exclaimed: “He is our master—he belongs to all of us!” I could cite the opinions of twenty, of thirty, of fifty authoritative artists. *Cui bono*? The case is settled in the minds of all eclectics.

Miniature music!—so think the amateurs of musical trigonometry even in our day. Call it so, if you will; but it is the music of a great artist, and assuredly more of a moralist than those who scoffed at him in the name of morality, feigning ignorance of the fact that, before the galop of Orphée, our fathers had danced the cancan to the quadrille from *La Tulipe orageuse*!

What a lot of rubbish, of silly prejudice and pompous nonsense, was exposed and riddled by Offenbach! In his assault on insolent prestige, on usurped grandeur, on grotesque love-making and the gauds of vanity, he assailed a thousand absurdities with his irresistible laughter, and with an audacity which, for the host of humble folk, was sweetly revengeful.

This Master of Arts in musical buffoonery has had successors and heirs, but not one among them all has been able to rival him. Those who tried to assume his style have never equalled him. And yet, technically, his processes were simple. A clever prestidigitator, he had an invariable trick consisting in a uniform rhythm in two-four time halting with intentional insistence on the second beat, with the ninth as a point of support, but suspended in the air. And yet he alone could manipulate this same trick, so easy to catch and copy, so as to obtain certain racy and unexpected effects.

Names would flow readily from my pen, did I care to mention the "serious" composers who have turned to their account this "recipe" of Offenbach's. These composers ought to have manifested some gratitude to the memory of Jacques, because, by caricaturing entire finales of grand operas, he gave a rough shock to the superannuated formulas of the Italian school, and became the demolisher of routines, although as a true servant of progress.

Only see how cleverly he brings about a brusque change of tonality when, in the midst of his fun-making, he surrenders himself to a pathetic impulse. Into the whirl of the extremest burlesque he tosses the loveliest flowers of a soul suddenly grown sentimental. "Beneath his gayety there always gleams a divine spark," as Reynaldo Hahn very truly observed.

The great representative artist of an epoch and an environment, Offenbach, in his true inwardness as a man, was a most sympathetic figure. His friends called him "le grand Jacques"; he was small of stature, thin and slender. Fond of applause, intoxicated by the panegyrics of the press, spurred by acrimonious criticism, supported by an admirable spouse who sustained his self-confidence by continually repeating that he was the strongest and handsomest of all, he went through life possessed by a naïve

vanity and never doubting either his talent or his physical attractions. Indeed, the man who, on departing this life, left behind him *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*, was singularly Hoffmannesque. With his hair worn *à la* weeping willow, his mischievous mien, his crooked nose, the mocking—at times sneering—twist of his mouth, his corkscrew whiskers, his hands distorted by rheumatism, his aspect as of a skeleton lost in flowing apparel, he really had the air of a phantasmagorical creature, suggestive of a nightmare rather than a reality. Persons unacquainted with him, who had had no opportunity to discover, under that sardonic mask, the soul overflowing with tender delicacy, with boundless sympathy, or to surprise, mirrored in a smile, his simple kindness of heart, felt distinctly uncomfortable in the contemplation of his jubilantly Macaberesque physiognomy. The Offenbach of the boulevards, of the restaurants, of the salons, of the external pose, bore no resemblance whatever to the Offenbach of familiar intercourse.

When we saw women avoid him for dread of the *jettatura*, or noticed men touching iron on his appearance, this laughter at everything, and everybody, and himself, withal, manifested poignant distress. The legend constructed around his name by Fiorentino tormented him, although this keensighted man was steeped in a superstition original in its way, for he insisted when giving a dinner at his house that there should be thirteen at table, and preferred to begin a journey on a Friday.

What remains to be said on this centenary, so propitious for the evocation of such a master of merriment? Only this: that to-morrow, following the convulsions of an atrocious war, the people will hail the coming of some new Offenbach who will appear because the people of France crave the most complete relaxation, just as they did after the outrageous barbarities of the Romantic epoch, of the Revolution of 1848, of the Coup d'État, and of the campaign of 1870.

And in closing, I recall the words of Goethe: "Only those win immortality who were the full expression of the mentality of their epoch."

(Translated by Theodore Baker.)