The Great Composers. No. XXIV. Hérold

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Source: *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, Vol. 29, No. 539 (Jan. 1, 1888), pp. 15-18

Published by: [Musical Times Publications Ltd.](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3359843>

Accessed: 31-12-2015 23:10 UTC

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were not of the definite character which belongs to tunes written in modern notation, but they were a kind of chant probably delivered in what is colloquially called a "sing-song" tone. The fixed position of a note to the eye gave rise to a fixed method of representing its sound by the voice. The existence of a note with a distinct name, occupying a stated place, did not thereby imply the collateral existence of a fixed pitch. The probability is that each singer chose his own pitch according to his voice, and in writing his melodies he shifted the clef marking the key-note either high or low, according to the compass of the melody.

(To be continued.)

THE GREAT COMPOSERS

BY JOSEPH BENNETT.

NO. XXIV.—HÉROLD.

AMONG French musicians there are few more interesting figures than the composer of "Zampa" and "Le Pré aux Clercs." Alike in his successes and his disappointments, Hérold attracts regard and sympathy, and both as artist and man he deserves a place in our now far-extended series of biographical sketches.

Louis Joseph Ferdinand Hérold was born in Paris (30, Rue des Grands Augustins), on January 28, 1791. His family seems to have been of German origin, and possibly not unconnected with the composer Jean Hérold, who flourished in the Fatherland towards the close of the sixteenth century. Genealogical details upon this and other points are not available, but we know that François Hérold, father of Joseph, was the son of an organist, an Alsatian by birth, and a German by education. At an early age he removed to Hamburg, devoted himself to music, and became a favourite pupil of Emmanuel Bach, then a resident in, and a distinguished ornament of, the Free City. In 1781 François settled down in Paris, where his skill as a teacher soon gave him a good position, and where he remained till his death in 1802, when his son, destined to far greater distinction, was eleven years old. The elder Hérold belonged to a somewhat distinguished circle in the French capital. Amongst his friends were Sebastian Erard, of pianoforte fame, and Louis Adam, father of Adolphe of that ilk. Adam became the godfather of Hérold, who thus had the advantage from birth of connections favourable to his advancement in the art for which, as soon appeared, providence had destined him.

Fétis, who became one of young Hérold's masters, states ("Biographie Universelle des Musiciens") that the boy's father opposed his adoption of music as a profession. "His father did not intend him to follow the same profession as himself, and despite the happy disposition he showed towards music, his education was not so carried on as to develop it." A later biographer, Jouvin, contests this, remarking:—"Mr. Fétis, followed by others, is wrong in saying that the father of our composer did not intend him for a musical career. Far from being crossed, the vocation of the child was encouraged." Probably Jouvin is nearer the truth than Fétis, but we cannot wonder at misstatements on this head, since it seems to be generally understood, with regard to musicians, that their fathers try to turn them into another course. When eleven years old Hérold was sent to a school kept by a Mr. Hix, near the Champs Elysées, and reputed to be one of the best in Paris. By a curious chance, Fétis, then a pupil at the Conservatoire, lodged in the same house, and gave Hix's scholars their lessons in solfeggi. The two were thus

brought together, and Fétis testifies to the extraordinary gifts of his young friend. Hérold had scarcely to labour at music; he divined it instinctively, and soon acquired the reputation of a brilliant pupil, not in art only, but also in classics and rhetoric.

Young Hérold was passing his holidays at Sévres, in a house belonging to the Erards, when news arrived of his father's death. He was an exceedingly sensitive lad, and so delicate that more than a suspicion existed of his having inherited the malady which killed François Joseph. Friends sought, therefore, to conceal from him the loss he had sustained. But a thoughtless word at table made all known, and then the grief of the boy was terrible to see. Jouvin states that his sufferings were far beyond those usually experienced at so tender an age, and adds, "they so struck and impressed themselves upon the memory of the persons present that, more than half-a-century later, a witness of the child's despair could recount the smallest details to the illustrious composer's son." On the decease of the father it became needful to think seriously about what should be done with the child. Some were for placing him in a Government office, where he was assured of protection and advancement by the then Minister of the Interior. But Hérold shrank from such a career. He felt himself called to music, and the impression was shared by others when, in 1802, a composition from his boyish pen excited notice and admiration at a school *fête*. His mother carried the little work to Grétry, who, with his usual kindness, took the trouble to examine it. "This is full of faults," said the master, "but let him go on; you can reckon upon his future." Hearing this the mother went home happy, with all her doubts resolved. It is interesting to know that Madame Hérold lived to see her son famous, and survived him twenty-seven years, dying in 1860 at the age of ninety.

In 1806, having finished his education under Hix, Hérold entered the Conservatoire, where his godfather, Louis Adam, taught him the piano, Catel being his master in harmony, and Kreutzer for the violin. The lad made rapid progress, which, as regards the pianoforte, can be tested by the distinctions gained. In 1808 he was an *accessit*; in 1809 he took second prize, carrying off the first in 1810 by the performance of a Sonata composed by himself. This, Mr. Jouvin tells us, was sufficiently a rare occurrence to be noticed in the public journals. One writer, curiously enough, complained of Hérold as showing bad taste in testifying possession of a double talent where the Conservatoire expected evidence only of one. This person must have been the very incarnation of red tape. In 1811 the lad became a pupil of Méhul for composition, and entered upon a close friendship with that famous musician, who at once saw the talent he possessed. Hérold, we are told, loved his master as one loves a father, and Fétis declares: "The lessons of that great composer, and still more perhaps his piquant and enlightened conversation, exercised the happiest influence upon the development of his faculties. His progress was that of a man born to be an artist."

One year after placing himself under Méhul, Hérold competed for the Grand Prix de Rome. Nobody, except, perhaps, his dear master, expected that he would get it; all eyes being fixed upon one Cazot, who had carried off the second prize in 1811. Cazot himself looked upon the matter as settled beforehand. He was certain to be the lucky youth, and proceeded to discount his success with much vainglory. Alas, for Cazot! His was the pride that goeth before a fall. One day while the competition was in full progress, Hérold came out of his *loge*. "Have you given up?" was the cry. "No, no," exclaimed the

lad, "but I have finished." He had completed his cantata, "Mdlle. de la Vallière," and that work extinguished Cazot, while making its composer a burning and a shining light among the musical youth of France.

Hérold set out for Rome in due course, studying there for a year and afterwards going on to Naples, where he taught the piano to the daughters of Murat, and found himself in the congenial society of men like Paisiello, Zingarelli, and Mayer. Hérold was still at Naples in 1815, when he produced his first stage work, "La Gioventù d'Enrico Quinto" ("The Youth of Henry V."), founded upon a drama by Alexander Duval, who, in turn, took his materials from Shakespeare. The production of an Italian opera in Naples by a French composer was considered a remarkable event, evidence of which may be found in Hérold's own account of the performance, which we here translate from his journal:—

"At last behold me on the point of appearing before the public. I am astonished to find that appetite does not fail me to-day, especially as for three days I have been able neither to eat nor sleep. I dine very well, since fate so decrees. That function discharged, I dress myself in black (sign of mourning), and am at the theatre two hours before anybody else. What an idea, when darkness comes on and the lamps are lighted, to say 'I shall never again see the sun without being thoroughly content or equally ashamed!' The public arrive, the actors cough and hem, the violins are tuned; I tremble in all my limbs. The signal is given, the overture begins; the thing is done. January 5, 1815. You cannot imagine what a state I am in."

"The overture is greatly applauded, though they are not much accustomed to listen to overtures in Italy. The curtain rises, I fear that an actor will make a false step, that a scene will fall, that an attendant will forget to have a torch ready, and so on. O what moments! The introduction is also much applauded. Then comes *Henry's* air; it is received with three rounds, and I being at the piano am obliged to salute the public. I declare that made amends for much trouble. What other art brings such lively delights!"

"The quintet which followed had obtained the greatest success at rehearsal. The artists of the orchestra foretold that it would go straight to the mark. 'Alle stelle, alle stelle, maestro!' Not at all. The piece was received quite coldly. I have spoken of it to Italians, who tell me that it is not musical enough. I dispute their opinion and explain to those who will listen. The tavern-keeper's air followed and that of *Bettina*—little success; however, at the second performance, the first-named having been 'cut,' it did very well. I even had the pleasure of hearing the theme sung by the audience as they retired. The Lesson duet was much applauded, but certain passages for the second woman, which she sang badly, gave me cruel apprehensions. The *Finale* came, and was well received, although the little chorus at the end went badly."

"The second act began. The second tenor's air passed, as well as the little duet, without exciting opposition. Then came the *prima donna's* air, which was applauded in lively fashion. Then came something else and gave me great pleasure. It was the Court. Oh! how I breathed again! Applause was prohibited—so much the worse; but so was hissing—so much the better. The sextet would, I fancy, have been applauded, but the last *Finale* made everybody smile, and I quite believe that, the Court absent, there would have been loud laughter. With all respect to the Neapolitans, I think them in the wrong. Here is the situation: *Henry*, ashamed of all that had just taken place, says to his com-

panion, 'My friends, retire without noise; let nobody speak of what has happened. Silence! Silence!' In consequence I composed a very short, soft piece. Everyone was astonished, and they said, 'It cannot finish like that!' Then the curtain fell. The next morning I wrote a noisy *Finale*, and the public was satisfied, but not myself. I recognise my faults better than anybody, and I promise you to profit by the advice I have received, but never will I admit that my *Finale* was bad. Let common-sense judge it."

Remarking upon the last paragraph, M. Jouvin indulges a taste for sarcasm. After pointing out that common-sense is no more on the judgment-seat now than in 1815, he proceeds: "A composer eager for applause, still writes and always will write his 'Combattons' and 'Marchons' for choristers who stand quite still in rows, and *Finales* accompanied by the full strength of the orchestra upon 'Silence' and 'Let us withdraw in quiet.' The spectator who does not get a headache at the hearing of an operatic *Finale* never spares, on quitting his seat, the musician who has spared his ears. He returns home well in health but discontented and saying, 'Pooh! very small music.'" We must make another quotation from Hérold's own remarks upon his first opera, because they show the admirable spirit of the young man, and how free he was from the blindness of self-conceit: "The great fault I have committed," he wrote to a friend, "consists in having attempted too much. But I have one great consolation—all the famous masters who have heard my opera give me much encouragement. Mayer, since that time, has had the exceeding goodness to take me into his friendship, and to speak well of me on all hands. Paisiello also found good in the work, but said that it 'smacked too much of the school,' and he is quite right. I shall profit by this first attempt in order to do something remarkable by-and-by." There remains to add, as regards Hérold's Neapolitan opera, that it had several representations, and achieved extraordinary success at a time when Italians professed, and perhaps felt, the greatest contempt for French musicians.

Several letters have been published as written by Hérold to his mother just before and after the performance of the opera, but they are largely taken up with the circumstances detailed above. One or two extracts may, however, throw some light upon the young composer's character. On January 5, 1815, he wrote: "My dear Mother; I am very late in writing to you, but I have good excuses; I desired to wish you a happy New Year in a manner somewhat distinguished, and I send you two things as gifts—the success of my opera and thirteen hundred francs which you will receive at Goupy's. Of this sum, I beg you to take a thousand francs for yourself, and give three hundred to my uncle, wishing him, on my part, *bonne année*." What this thoughtful act indicates we all know and appreciate. In another letter we get Hérold's evidence regarding some of the musicians around him: "I have fallen into one error here—that of neglecting M. Paisiello. But I shall repair it, and my excuse is that my music is altogether in the taste of Mozart. Paisiello would have found it bad, or, at least, he would have thought so. Moreover, the first composer of Italy—Mayer—has shown himself altogether in favour of my style, and I could not consult, at the same time, two persons so opposed in taste. But I can say that I study much the music of Paisiello and find it delicious. As for M. Zingarelli, he is the avowed enemy of all that is not catholic, apostolic, and Roman. The 'Creation,' 'Don Juan,' 'Iphigénie en Tauride,' 'La Vestale,' &c., are monstrous in his eyes. Why? Because

he has not written them. So much the worse for little *Pio*, if M. Zingarelli alone has charge of his musical education." These are interesting glimpses of the men who sixty years ago made Naples famous as a musical city.

From under the shadow of Vesuvius, Hérold moved northward, on the whole well satisfied with himself and the measure of fame he had been lucky enough to secure at a first stroke. His destination was Vienna, where he ultimately arrived after many adventures. The year was 1815, the "Corsican tyrant" had broken loose, and Frenchmen were suspected everywhere out of their own country. But Hérold pushed on towards the Austrian capital with the resoluteness of a Napoleon, and at last entered the desired city. Even then his troubles were not over. He was still a Frenchman among enemies and could only obtain peace by persuading old Salieri and, when the Congress opened, Prince Talleyrand, to answer for his being merely a harmless musician.

M. Jouvin, to whom Hérold's diary was confided for the purpose of his biography, has not published it in its entirety, and he seems to think that its unliterary qualities afford a legitimate reason why it should not be printed. But the very evidence which tends to show that Hérold had no notion of making a book is proof of its interest and value. The contents of such a diary, however hastily expressed and badly proportioned, are the writer's own genuine thoughts and feelings hot, so to speak, from his brain and heart. M. Jouvin has, however, given a considerable number of extracts, some of which are worth notice here. In one, for example, we find Hérold's impressions of the Lenten services in Rome—those which Mendelssohn and others have described with so much point and vivacity:—

"At last I go to hear the famous 'Miserere' at the Sistine Chapel—the *Miserere* for which I have expressly travelled sixty leagues. I am not sorry, as it is a magnificent thing. I had been told that it was a marvel, a miracle, something wholly angelic, of a kind which I could not even imagine. All these fine words had made me smile, but the fact is that the 'Misereres' are very fine. That which they performed this evening is the work of an old master named Allegri. It is music entirely harmonic, with a succession of *retards*. There are two quartets, which sing the strophes alternately. After each strophe, a verse of the 'Miserere' is 'psalmodised,' and at the end the eight voices come together with all their force. There is no accompaniment. I noticed that the pitch dropped at least a tone. . . The music derives a particular character from the fact that it has no measure. It moves slowly, without rhythm, and without determinate cadences. The gathering shades of night, the prostrate priests and people, the profound silence, the grandeur of the chapel, and the obscurity of the place, all contributed to produce an extraordinary effect. The chapel is excellent for voices, being extremely sonorous. The crowd was immense. The great number of strangers who had come from all parts to assist at the ceremony and in hope of seeing the Pope—a rare spectacle—made the scene more impressive. We waited, from moment to moment, the arrival of the Holy Father; but it was in vain. Political affairs were troublesome at the time, and no one knew what to think of the delay. He did not come, and on leaving the chapel we ascertained that he had gone away. This news caused great excitement; everybody went home and made the 'Miserere' a *pièce de circonstance*. . . This moment I have received pleasant news—namely, that the 'Gioventù di Enrico' has been played at the San Carlo, and that it made a good effect. So much

the better! I will now go and see whether this information can keep me from sleeping. *Bon soir*."

Hérold left Rome on April 1, 1815, accompanied beyond the walls by his fellow-students of the Villa Medici, and made his way to Florence, whence, after a short stay, he departed for Bologna. There the peaceful musician found himself in the midst of war. Murat had declared for his old chief, Napoleon, at the beginning of the Hundred Days, and his Neapolitans were skirmishing with the Austrians before Bologna and Modena. Hérold immensely admired the courage and *sangfroid* of the crowned cavalryman, and mentions an instance of both: "This morning the king went out to reconnoitre, and some concealed Austrians fired a volley at him. He was only forty paces distant, but they missed him. The king took off his hat to them and rode away at a gallop. Lately, because the soldiers would not work at the intrenchments with balls whistling about their ears, the king sat on the ground before them, and thus shamed them out of their fear." A fortnight in Bologna was quite enough, but in that time he was made a member of the Philharmonic Society, and composed a symphony by way of acknowledgment. The diary shows, too, that he came across Rossini: "I have seen Rossini, a young composer who, at this moment, is making a devil of a reputation in Italy." The entry stops with these few words, but Rossini was destined in after time largely to influence the French master's career.

From Bologna, Hérold went to Milan, where he endured rather than enjoyed life. "If the music is bad," he wrote, "the bread is good," and that was one set-off against the annoyances to which he was subjected both as a musician and as a traveller worried about passports by a suspicious police. The Milan experiences seem to have been the proverbial last straw. At any rate, Hérold's amiability gave way, and he confided to his diary an angry tirade against Italy and the Italians:—

"They boast much about the passion of the Italians for all kind of stage shows. Let us see about this. Is it love of spectacle that makes them receive company and eat and drink in the boxes while the piece is proceeding. Is it enthusiasm for the theatre to have a large *salle* like that of the Seraphin in Paris, and give opera twice a week here, in a city like Bologna? What if I speak of Florence, where one cannot distinguish if the action is in the house or on the stage? I say nothing about Rome; people there are given up to gambling and the *giostre*. But look at the stupidity of men who risk assassination at every mile, and encounter the fatigues of a painful journey in order to say 'I have seen'? What? This beautiful Italy! This Garden of Europe! Yes, this beautiful Italy, where one dies of cold in winter, or is stifled with heat in summer. However, I am going to leave it, this enchanting spot."

In this grumbling frame of mind, Hérold left Milan for Venice, where he heard Rossini's "*L'Italiana in Algeri*," and also the male soprano, Vellutti, whose powers were then on the wane. What he thought of the first is not stated, but his opinion about the second may be gathered from a single sentence: "The trumpets, trombones, and drums prevented me from hearing the orchestra, and the extremely bad roulades of the great booby, Vellutti, prevented me from hearing the singing." That the composer was much interested by Venice goes without saying; he had, however, to stay there much longer than he desired. It was the old passport trouble again. Day after day he applied to the police for the necessary document and day after day they put him off. Their dull routine-mastered minds could not take in the idea that a Frenchman wished to cross the path of the armies

marching against Napoleon without some nefarious purpose. In vain Hérold represented that he was a peaceful musician anxious to reach the Austrian capital for purposes connected with his art. The functionaries knew better, and, as they had no grounds for absolutely refusing the passport, they fell back upon the policy of delay. "Come again to-morrow" was all that Hérold could get out of them. For a time he bore this with patience, because in Venice a man can generally endure the existence of obstacles to his departure. Our young composer entered into the life of the city, so strange, picturesque, and *sui generis*, but after awhile its attractions waned. Hérold's thoughts went on to the City of the Masters, where he knew not what triumphs awaited him, and he fretted sorely against the bars of his beautiful prison. "Let me go" he cried to the police, who would only answer, "We are investigating your case, come again to-morrow." At last he lost all patience, and took a resolution the gravity of which he could hardly have known. The Austrian police in Italy was not a power to be trifled with. It had ways of its own, and they were very hard ways for offenders. However, Hérold, as he could not travel with a passport, determined to do so without one, and on May 16, 1815, stole out of Venice, the legitimate prey of any functionary who might challenge his right.

(To be continued.)

SONGS.

AT this festive season of the year music forms the strong element in social gatherings. Compositions, good, bad, and indifferent, soothe or excite, lull or torment the listening ear. Each one who sings, or who thinks he can, or who is flattered by his friends into the exercise of vocal power, has his song or two, which he "lets off" on every possible occasion. The influence of the moment palliates many an effort of bad taste or thoughtlessness. The kindly help towards whiling away the long hours of the winter evening which is offered by those who "bring their music with them in a friendly way" ought not to be undervalued. But this question suggests itself—Could not something be done towards awakening in the minds of those who have the power and the will, the desire to make their ministrations in the dissolution of dulness of permanent profit in the months to come, when the evenings are not long, and the love for music finds few opportunities for exercise? Would it not be possible to induce amateurs to select pieces which may have something more than a passing effect? It is true that there is a great temptation to indulge in the last new song, as sung by the "great tenor, Mr. Chestnuts," or the "well known baritone, Mr. Leatherlungs," each of whom has guaranteed his living interest in certain songs, and has given them, as it were, a warranty, a *cachet*, by appending his signature to the title-pages. The choice of these things of course saves much trouble, and helps to cover a multitude of sins in the singer. What is wanted, however, is for the intelligent amateur to exercise his own judgment, and to make his vocal repertory a matter of as much consideration as the choice of his coat, or the important duty of looking after his health in the matter of "what to eat, drink, or avoid."

In the matter of music there is much that may be called "levelling upwards." The tastes of amateurs are the guide of the professional. If the songs constantly issued from the press were not as constantly bought there would be an end to the business. Those who are prominently before the public have proved to a certain extent somewhat uncertain in their trustworthiness

as musical guides. It is time that, in the matter of songs, for instance, a change should be effected. Why should amateur singers continue to sing songs whose words are more or less an insult to their reasoning powers? Why should not the song be selected for other qualities besides its melody and easy accompaniment? Why should the long winter evening be made an excuse for the perpetuation of weak, flabby, worthless, and often mischievous verses allied to music? Our amateurs and domestic musicians have eaten of the tree of knowledge and can judge between the good and the evil for themselves without prompting. Let them bring common-sense to their aid and not follow an indifferent leader like a flock of sheep. The gain to art would be great out of such an effort. It will be impossible to exclude all that is valueless. The history of art proves the futility of any attempt of the sort. Something should be done towards showing posterity that we are not such fools as we look as far as the majority of the songs of the present day is concerned. Encouragement should be offered to all who are striving to get out of the beaten track, so that we may leave something to show that we are not worse, even if we are not better, than our fathers.

The wits of the song writers of a period run in grooves. No sooner has one discovered, or has fallen upon, a sentiment, an expression, or an idea, than all the rest of the poetasters follow with some variation of the theme. Ingenuity stands in the place of invention, and the one thought which had found approval in popular fancy makes a complete circuit under different guises. The Chloes, the Strephons, the Phillises, and the Corydons, and the sham sentimentality and artificial pastorals which they represented, retarded the progress of popular song for more than a century. When Dibdin's vigorous verse fell upon the wearied ear, the rhymesters were roused to an activity which, however, only spent itself in copying the words selected, without attempting to improve upon them, or to extend the lines in the direction already laid down. Dibdin had all the genius necessary to make a national poet for England, but the fact that he was a musician as well, removes him from the parallel with the Scottish Burns on which he should have been placed as an Englishman. His verses and songs did not influence the manner of contemporary poets so much as might have been expected. They were felt to be inimitable. There was nothing unreal in them, and therefore nothing which could be seized and made a mania of. At the beginning of the present century manliness seems to have been replaced by morbid melancholy. The songs were of madness and disappointed love. These subjects were favourable to artificiality, and so they flourished for awhile, leaving traces of their existence in the influences they exercised over subsequent works, and a high-water stain, as it were, on the literature of their time as a record of the height of the flood of folly. Each successive generation has left a foolish line upon its song literature, and the many marks suggest reflections of a somewhat saddened character.

Time was when the song books contained songs, ballads, verses, and fancies which were "not for an age, but for all time." It cannot be denied that there are many effusions which have been admitted to the pages of those same books which show that the current of popularity has sometimes rolled through the borders of the imbecile and the undesirable and carried some of their soil into sweeter and more wholesome lands. But there has been no age, until the present, which has not left a legacy of beautiful or stirring verse, be it small or great, for the admiration and envy of posterity.