

M. PAUL BARROILHET.

PAUL-BERNARD BARROILHET

By Jean-Louis Tamvaco

The cemeteries of Paris are full of tombs of once famous but now forgotten men. One of the most remarkable French singers of the nineteenth century was buried in the cemetery in Montmartre and although it has been established that the first idea of abandoning Barroilhet tomb had been discussed in 1935 it is only now 40 years later that the decree for demolition has been pronounced and his final resting place become a scene of senseless destruction.

These details of Barroilhet's career will help to keep alive the memory of and provide a new memorial to such an illustrious artist who dominated the lyric stages of France and Italy in the first half of the last century.

His Italian Career

At Bayonne on 22nd December 1805 this famous singer was born into a relatively well-to-do middle class family. His father was a merchant and it seems clear that he did not oppose the natural calling of the child whose talents for singing were apparent from a very early age. When he was only 19, and blessed with a fine baritone voice, he went to Paris where it seems that he studied singing and where he had several introductions into artistic circles since in 1826 he was received by Eugène Delacroix who painted him in Turkish costume in an admirable picture kept today in the reserve collection of the Louvre.[1] In 1828, on a recommendation from Rossini, he was admitted to David Banderali's class[2] at the Paris Conservatory of Music where he studied singing for two years. Having recognised a real talent, Rossini recommended him to Professor Panizza in Milan who received him into the class which he directed at the Conservatory of that city. Once in Milan, he perfected his art so as to equal the standard of the most famous singers of the time amongst whom were Giuditta Pasta, Filippo Galli and Giovanni-Battista Rubini. He was not long in joining their circle and sang with them on tours which included the largest cities in Italy where he created a large number of roles both in new works and in repertory operas. Thus he appeared in several works by

Mercadante, Donizetti and Bellini, all then very much in vogue. I list a few dates and titles of works in which he particularly distinguished himself during his career in Italy[3]:

1832 : Oroveso in Norma(Bellini), with Giuseppina Ronzi de Begnis(Norma), Gilbert-Louis Duprez(Pollione).

1833 : Belcore in L'elisir d'amore(Donizetti), at the Teatro Sociale, Bergamo.

1833 : Chiara di Rosemberg (Ricci), with Mme. Edwige, at Bergamo.

1836 : Azzo d'Este in Parisina(Donizetti), at the Teatro Valle,Rome.

1836 : Tasso in Torquato Tasso(Donizetti), at the Teatro Valle, Rome.

19 Nov. 1836: Eustachio in L'assedio di Calais(Donizetti), with Almerinda Manzocchi(Isabella), Caterina Barili-Patti[4] (Eleonora), Nicola Tucci(Edmondo), Federico Lablache(Edoardo III), at the San Carlo Naples.

18 June 1836: Belisario in Belisario(Donizetti), with Ronzi de Begnis(Antonina), Giovanni Basadonna(Alamiro),Giulietta Borghese[5] (Irene), first revival at the San Carlo, Naples.

January 1837: Riccardo in I Puritani(Bellini), with Barili-Patti(Elvira), Basadonna(Arturo), Lablache(Giorgio).

29 Oct. 1837: Duke of Nottingham in Roberto Devereux (Donizetti), with Ronzi de Begnis(Elisabetta), Almerinda Granchi(Sara), Basadonna(Roberto). First performance at the San Carlo, Naples.

14 Nov. 1838: Manfredo in Il Giuramento(Mercadante), with Adolphe Nourrit(Viscardo), Adelina Spech(Bianca), Maria Buccini(Elaisa). First performance at the San Carlo, Naples.

26 Nov. 1838: Guido in Elena da Feltre(Mercadante), with Ronzi de Begnis(Elena), Nourrit (Ubalo). First performance at the San Carlo, Naples.

30 Sept. 1838 : Nello in Pia de Tolomei (Donizetti) with Ronzi de Begnis (Pia) and Basadonna (Ghino).

10 March 1840 : Publio in La Vestale (Mercadante) with Spech (Emilia), Buccini (Giulia) Domenico Reina (Decio). First performance at the San Carlo, Naples.

In Naples he formed a brotherly attachment with Adolphe Nourrit who had fled to Italy so that he could avoid hearing of the tenor Gilbert-Louis Duprez who had just replaced him as leading tenor at the Opéra in Paris. This friendship only came to an end when Nourrit committed suicide[6] when, in a moment of despair, he threw himself from a high balcony at the Palazzo Barbaja during the night of 7th to 8th March, 1839.

His French Career

Around mid - 1840 Barroilhet left Italy to return to Paris where his reputation had preceded him so that he received an immediate engagement at the Opéra where he held the position of first 'basse chantante' (baritone) for the following 10 years. He had to tackle the great French roles and he had quite some difficulty in ridding himself of a strong southern accent. He contributed to the great success of Donizetti's La favorite in creating the role of Alphonse.[7]

The following list includes roles which Barroilhet created at the Opéra as well as his roles in repertory works :

2 Dec 1840 : (debut at Opéra) Alphonse in La favorite (Donizetti)[8] with Rosine Stoltz (Léonor), Duprez (Fernand) Levasseur (Balthazar).

22 Dec 1841 : Lusignan in La reine de Chypre (Halévy) with Stoltz (Caterina), Duprez (Gérard) Jean-Etienne Massol (Mocenigo).

15 March 1843 : Charles VI in Charles VI (Halévy)[9] with Stoltz (Odette), Julie Dorus-Gras (Isabeau), Duprez (Le Dauphin), Levasseur (Raymond), Guilliaume Poultier (Gontran).

13 Nov 1843 : Camoëns in Dom Sébastien de Portugal (Donizetti) with Stoltz (Zaïda), Duprez (Sébastien), Massol (Abayaldos), Levasseur (Juan), Brémond (Ben-Selim).

29 March 1844 : Mirobolante in Le lazzarone[10](Halévy),

with Stoltz (Beppo), Dorus-Gras (Baptista), Levasseur (Josué).

2 Sept 1844 : Iago in Otello (Rossini) (French version) with Stoltz (Desdémone), Sophie Méquillet (Emilie), Duprez (Otello), Levasseur (Brabantio), Brémond (Le Doge).

7 Oct 1844 : Richard in Richard en Palestine (Adam) with Dorus-Gras (Bérengère), Méquillet (Edith), Levasseur (Ismaël), Marié (Kenneth).

6 Dec 1844 : Murray in Marie Stuart (Niedermeyer), with Stoltz (Marie), Marie Nau (Douglas), Méquillet (Anne), Levasseur (Ruthwen), Italo Gardoni (Bothwell), Louis-Henry Obin (Seyton).

17 Dec 1845 : The king in L'Étoile de Séville (Balfe) with Stoltz (Estrelle) Nau (Zaida), Brémond (Don Bustos), Gardoni (Don Sanche).

20 Feb 1846 : Ashton in Lucie de Lammermoor (French version) with Nau (Lucie), Duprez (Edgar), Brémond (Raymond).

29 June 1846 : Franz in L'Âme en peine (Flotow) with Nau (Paola), Gardoni (Léopold), Brémond (Le Sénéchal).

30 Dec 1846 : Robert in Robert Bruce (Rossini arranged Niedermeyer) with Stoltz (Marie), Nau (Nelly) Anconi (Douglas), Bettini (Arthur), Paulin (Edouard).

16 June 1846 : Fargy in L'apparition (Benoist) with Mlle. Masson (Clara), Mme Courtot (Beatrix), Alizard (Nugnes), Poultier (Roger).

Among the roles that he sang at revivals at the Opéra, was that of Sévère in Les martyrs (Donizetti), and that of Guillaume in Guillaume Tell (Rossini).

Retirement

From 1847 Barroilhet must have felt a certain weariness after the unceasing work to which he had devoted himself for so many years and he began to consider a well - earned retirement. The last years at the opera were not spent in peace since Rosine Stoltz wielded her influence as much over the mind of Léon Pillet,

director of the Opéra, as over the whole Opéra company. This exceptionally talented artist had an unbearable temperament - tyrannical, jealous and authoritarian and she made herself hateful in the eyes of her colleagues. She caused the departure of Julie Dorus-Gras[11] who had had to submit to many trials and humiliations. She caused difficulties for Duprez as much as for Barroilhet. Barriolhet could not bear her and one wonders how they succeeded in obtaining such triumphs together in performance. The card scene between Charles VI and Odette remains one of their unequalled successes.

But what had vexed Barroilhet most of all was that the easily lead Léon Pillet had begun to haggle over salaries, and in 1848 he finally left the Opéra company.[12] Before going into retirement he made a triumphal tour of Spain from 1850 to 1851 including the Théâtre Real in Madrid where he made his debut as Alphonse in La favorite in company with Marietta Alboni and Italo Gardoni on 19 November 1850.[13] He finally retired from the stage in 1851 and only returned at rare intervals for concerts or musical evenings, notably those held by Rossini.

Death

A man of taste and a great lover of paintings, he devoted his leisure-time to the collection of pictures by masters among which some were signed by his friend Delacroix. It was from him that the great painter obtained the small picture attributed to Watteau, Les Apothicaires, afterwards bequeathed to Schwiter. An ingenious speculator, Barroilhet did not hesitate to re-sell canvasses, sometimes at great profit.

He became teacher of singing at the Paris Conservatory of Music where he taught until he died on 17 April 1871.

Barroilhet possessed a very fine baritone voice with a two-octave range, more like a tenor than a bass. He was outstanding in flexibility, and the wide compass of his voice and his intelligent interpretations showed the music of the composers whom he served to the best advantage. In spite of this Paris critics reproached him a little for his addiction to unusual ornaments that he added to his roles.

At Montmartre Cemetery

Very little is known with any certainty about Barroilhet's private life but it can be imagined that, although having acquired a comfortable existence and having had the pleasure of seeing himself succeed in several of his ambitions, he found his last years saddened first by the death of his wife, Marie-Gaëtana (née Casanova)[14] by whom he had a daughter, Laurencia[15] (who became the wife of M. Tarelli from Milan, Italy), and then by the rigours caused by the disaster of 1870 and the Commune. One can imagine that the privations he had to endure during the months of the siege of Paris which preceded his death, both contributed to it and accelerated it. Several of his famous contemporaries, amongst whom one can cite Auber, Carafa and his long-standing colleague, the bass Levasseur, vanished from the scene at the same time and died in the same sad condition as he did.[16]

Barroilhet was buried at Montmartre Cemetery in the same tomb as his wife and until the Spring of 1973 one could still admire his noble features from the bust mounted on a pedestal on which was sculpted a lyre as well as a page of the score of La favorite, and beneath could be read the following words:

HERE RESTS PAUL-BERNARD BARROILHET
OPERA SINGER
DIED 17 APRIL 1871
REQUIESCAT IN PACE[17]

But can one understand the evil turn of mind that made the Paris cemeteries administration condemn this tomb for demolition? In May 1973 visitors to the cemetery found before their very eyes the distressing sight of an open tomb, emptied of its dead and filled with debris of empty coffins and moreover the tombstone was marked with a red cross, the sinister sign of imminent demolition.[18]

Thus one of the glories of the Opéra has been completely forgotten and his tomb abandoned until today when our interest is lead towards it. The name of Barroilhet stands beside the most famous names that the Opéra in the 19th century bequeathed to us. Among the singers who attained perfection in their art one can name for comparison Lablache, Tamburini, Rubini, Cinti-Damoreau, Sontag, Lind and Alboni for whom all the

critics invariably wrote eulogies whilst of other famous singers they noted their weaknesses, failings and period of decline, but Barroilhet retired from the stage in full possession of his powers, wishing in this way to leave the public, which had applauded him so much, the memory of an artist conscious of his own work and faithful to a tradition that he served with his gifts and his devotion to his art.

NOTES

1. Picture exhibited provisionally in Delacroix's studio, Place de Furstenberg until 15 Oct. 1973.
2. Famous singing teacher and previously a buffo tenor. His other famous pupils included Pasta, Méric-Lalande and Rubini. His tomb can still be seen in the Montmartre Cemetery.
3. This list is not complete for it is difficult today to trace his career step by step. I give titles of works which can so far be listed.
4. Mother of the famous singers Adelina Patti, Carlotta Patti and Amalia Patti.
5. Her real name was Juliette Bourgeois, (the 1st Marie in La fille du régiment).
6. He was then only 37 years old.
7. He is known to have sung this role on a large number of occasions since the hundredth performance of La favorite took place in 1848. The 408th performance took place on 4 Oct. 1872 when the baritone, Jean-Baptiste Faure, took the part.
8. At the reopening of the Opéra on 2 Sept. 1850 Barroilhet reappeared in La favorite when his colleagues were Marietta Alboni (Leonor), Gustave Roger (Fernand), Nicholas-Prosper Levasseur (Balthazar).
9. On 23 Sept. 1850 his colleagues included Marietta Alboni (Odette) who did not succeed in effacing memories of Rosine Stoltz who had provided such an unforgettable characterisation. Alboni had only a fair success and quickly relinquished the role.
10. At first the main role was to be sung by a tenor and Italo Gardoni was chosen. But Rosine Stoltz who had obtained a great success in trouser-roles, persuaded Halévy to transform the part for herself.
11. Julie Dorus-Gras, a singer of exceptional ability had triumphed in many roles : first Alice and then Isabelle in Robert le diable, Marguerite de

Valois in Les Huguenots, Eudoxie in La Juive, Ginevra in Guido et Ginèvra(Halévy), Teresa in Benvenuto Cellini and Pauline in Les martyrs.

12. Although Barroilhet left the regular company at the Opéra in 1848 he returned for occasional appearances,(see above).
13. Other interesting performances in which Barroilhet took part in Madrid were :
20 December 1851, Don Carlos in Ernani(Verdi), with Frezzolini as Elvira.
31 May 1851, Enrico in Lucia di Lammermoor, with Frezzolini(Lucia) and Emmanuel Carrion(Edgar).
14. Very probably he married Marie-Gaëtana in Italy between 1835 and 1839. She died on 19 November 1865 at her appartment, 68, rue Blanche, Paris.
15. Laurencia Barroilhet, who married Tarelli,died at the age of 52 in 1893. She was cremated on 11 July 1893 and her ashes buried in the tomb at Montmartre Cemetery near her father and mother where they remained until 19 September 1930 when they were exhumed and taken to Milan.
16. A grant of land in perpetuity had been acquired by Paul Barroilhet on 20 November 1865 in the cemetery(Number 1301, sited on the pathway named La Croix, 28th division, row 5, number 36) to raise there all time a special monument to Mme. Barroilhet.
17. Epitaph discovered by the author of this article on 31 August 1973 ; at this date the tomb was open and the boards of the disinterred coffin could be seen. The bottom of the pedestal bore the inscription and the bas-relief still existed.
18. Barroilhet's bust was recovered by the devoted Michel Odin, historian of the Opéra and erected in its library where it can now be seen.
For further details refer to the article published by René Sirvin in Aurore on 23 July 1973.

* * * * *

This article was first published in issue Number 17 of 'Connaissance de Paris et de la France'(1973). It has been translated by John Standen and somewhat re-edited by John Watts. Since preparing the article Monsieur Tamvaco has written some further notes on Barroilhet and these (including extracts) are given on the following pages. Quotations are indicated thus ".

From 'Adolphe Nourrit' by L. Quicherat

"Léon Pillet director of the Académie Royale de Musique had rendered a great service to the establishment by engaging in 1840 a distinguished artist, Barroilhet whose talent had been consecrated in Naples. The baritone had been first engaged to sing at the Théâtre de la Renaissance (Salle Ventadour) in an opera by Donizetti L'ange de Nisida but before the opera was completed by the composer the theatre was declared bankrupt and had to close down."

The score was quickly modified into a grand opera entitled La favorite and it entered into the Opéra repertoire with Barroilhet in the cast.

Barroilhet's style of singing was superb. His manner was grand and the sound of his voice was floried and effortless. He had fantastic agility and was able to improvise all sorts of ornaments on the spur of the moment. Some of his detractors reproached him for his personal interpolations, which they found to be out dated and too much in the tradition of the old Italian school when at that time the repertoire was changing rapidly.

Barroilhet's vocal range can be checked in the French score of La favorite. 'Jardins de l'Alcazar' is one of the best examples to show his capabilities.

However we have been unable to find any reviews on Barroilhet's performances - he seems to have been throughout his career in equal form and was never known to have stepped on stage if not in perfect vocal shape. Such great singers as Pasta, Malibran,Sontag, Lablache and Donzelli to name but a few, have all at least once been the target of the critics. This never occurred with Barroilhet and nor, to our present knowledge, to Rubini, Cinti- Damorau and Dorus-Gras.

To return to Barroilhet's style; it was more connected to the prevailing Italian tradition of the beginning of the 19th Century. He was one among those who maintained in Paris these traditions until the middle of the century. (The artists at the three main theatres, Opéra, Théâtre-Italien and Opéra-Comique, in spite of their contrasting repertoires, were all first class singers until 1850).

Thus the highest standards of singing were then to be found in Paris, both Italian and French singers,

whilst in Italy singing techniques had degraded to such an extent since 1830-33 that the Italian singers from Paris got a shock when they returned to their native country and found that screams and high C's were all that the public wanted to hear.

* * * * *

From 'Les Souvenirs d'un Chanteur' by Gilbert Duprez (Paris 1880)

Barroilhet and Duprez had for long been friends before they made their debuts almost at the same time at the Académie Royale de Musique and they had in fact been singing together since 1829, the first time in Milan. Duprez relates how fond he was of Barroilhet and praises his great talent without reservation. But he stresses also Barroilhet's ugliness and with fairness admits his own too! Some contemporaries compared Duprez's face to that of a Pekinese dog. Duprez mentions the following amusing anecdote in his memoires. "Walking down the boulevard with him, we met Perrot (Jules) our first dancer, who did not shine by better physical features. This time he looked uglier than usual and Barroilhet did not refrain from saying; 'Good Lord, my poor Perrot aren't you ugly!'... 'Bah!' answered Perrot 'You do not look charming Barroilhet yourself'... 'Quiet' said our baritone; 'I do not think myself good looking certainly, but you Perrot and you Gilbert (Duprez) look even worse than me'. We nearly got into quarrelling over the subject when we stopped a kindly looking passer-by. I addressed him: 'Excuse me Monsieur' said I. 'If I am stopping you but would you be our arbitrator in a small argument which stands between my friends and me, and like the late God, Paris, give the apple to the one of us three whom you find the ugliest!' The passer-by stopped, examined us, then 'Ma foi' he says, 'Messieurs, I am too embarrassed to make the choice,' and turned his back on us laughing".

* * * * *

From 'Les Petits emoires de l'Opéra' by Charles de Boigne (Paris 1857)

Charles de Boigne in his very interesting book, confirms Madame Stoltz's contradictory attitude towards Donizetti after he had offered her the immortal role of Léonore in La favorite so well written for the texture of her voice, so musical and filled with melodies which nearly surpassed the success of Robert le diable. He says that it was during a rehearsal of Dom Sébastien Donizetti felt the first symptoms of the terrible disease that later destroyed one of the most wonderful intelligences of our time. During the 5th Act Barroilhet sang his barcarolle 'Pêcheurs de la rive'. The first stanza did not make much effect, but at the second there was a thunder of applause.., Barroilhet was applauded, encored, called back! Madame Stoltz could not tolerate such conceit! The second stanza had to be cut. Donizetti walked out of the rehearsal, furious and in a state of exhaustion; his head whirled and his legs could not support him; if his faithful agent, Accursi had not sustained him and nearly carried him to his carriage he would have collapsed. It would have been so for the first time in his life. Charles de Boigne also adds that it would be ridiculous to accuse Madame Stoltz of having hastened the end of Donizetti for besides her exclusive and dominating character she was a woman of great artistry and merit. The fact that Léon Pillet was so totally infatuated with her did her more harm than she deserved in her professional career at the Académie Royale de Musique.

Besides being a great singer and a distinguished artist Barroilhet was good-natured and ready to enjoy the good things of life. Between the sombre moments of the deaths of his daughter and wife and his own he did not give up searching for more works of art for his collection to which he also added the other live feminine perfections. Indeed during the period of his retirement he had been seen regularly at the Casino Cadet where he had set up a 'carnet' listing the various merits of each of the ladies who entertained the clientele of the establishment.

* * * * *

From 'Les Petits Mystères de l'Opéra by Albéric Second.
(Bruxelles 1844)

Regarding the very despotic and strict concierge of the Opéra, Madame Crosnier, to whom only Rosine Stoltz had the right to say 'tu', Albéric Second observed: "happy privilege of talent!.."Barroilhet who was always ready to indulge in pranks never missed an opportunity to pinch her waist familiarly whilst Monsieur Crosnier was asleep in the back room. "Barroilhet occupies a whole mansion in the Rue de la Rochefoucault at an annual rent of six thousand francs. His house is a museum. Barroilhet who loves the arts sincerely and which he understands like the great artist he is, has brought back from Italy precious canvases with which he has covered the walls of his home with royal abundance. Monsieur Barroilhet is the prince of French baritones, this younger branch which is growing quietly in the shade, and which will end up by replacing the high C's of the elder branch! I forgot to mention (he adds) that these two throats (meaning Duprez and Barroilhet) are paid sixty and fifty thousand francs respectively for the same amount of work. (Eleven months a year at the Opéra)!"

* * * * *

Letter sent by Barroilhet to Charles Maurice concerning the purchase of a bronze group (28th June 1844).

"Here, my dear friend is the small roll of two hundred (francs) of which we spoke yesterday. Kindly remit to the bearer the famous Titans which decorate your office and who will hereon fight in the one of your faithful."

Paul Barroilhet



Rosine Stoltz