

PREFACE

IN the entire history of the lyric stage there is hardly a parallel to the fabulous success enjoyed by Meyerbeer and his associates at the Paris Opéra beginning in 1831. Carrying all before them, they created a type of lyric drama which not only won a local triumph but left its mark wherever opera was played. There was opposition, but it proved fruitless. Former favorites were shunted aside and even Wagner, himself, was unable to halt the conquest.

At least from an historical point of view, therefore, French grand opera of the 1830's cannot be disregarded or dismissed with a phrase. Its one-time glory is now woefully faded, but its place in nineteenth-century annals is important. In the commercial world it is outstanding for its shrewd analysis of the theatrical market; as an art form it is notable for its attempt to give a new, large-scale design to opera; and as a social document it provides numerous clues to an understanding of the era in France following the Revolution of 1830. Considering all these things, it would appear, then, that there is room for a more comprehensive study of this style of musical theater than has heretofore been available.

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