

Audio Encyclopedia

Perhaps more than any other European country, France has evolved a set of operatic traditions and a style of performance with strong national characteristics. In part, this is the result of a policy of state support of the arts, allowing for the existence of permanent repertoire opera companies. The troupe of the Opera, for example, can trace an astonishing continuity from its creation in 1667 right through the present - which makes it, after the Dresden Staatskapelle, Europe's second oldest music group.

Another factor contributing to this strong stylistic profile is the fact that the National Conservatory of Music, founded in 1793, has traditionally recruited its teachers from among the performers in the two opera companies in Paris. In this way, singers and instrumentalists at any time had in all likelihood studied with their predecessors on the stage and in the pit.

Coaches, too, helped to pass on the tradition: Viseur, for example, after being head coach ('chef de chant') at the Opera-Comique for three decades, moved on to the Conservatory as a teacher of repertoire. In this manner he coached both the first cast of *Péleas et Melisande* in 1902 and the principals of the famous recording of 1941, Irene Joachim and Jacques Jansen. Later on, Joachim and Jansen also became professors at the Conservatoire and helped form the next generation of French singers.

This style and these traditions all but disappeared in the early nineteen seventies when France joined the international opera circuit. But until then they still were very much in force, as it can be seen from these French Radio broadcasts. It must be noted that foreign opera was always performed in translation, very much in the style of French opera.

Contrary to what was usual in the rest of Europe and in the United States, French Radio at the time never broadcast from the Opera or the Opera-Comique. Rather, they preferred to produce their own studio performances. Until 1955 or thereabouts, the operas were usually performed in an abridged version, with a voice-over narrative linking the several scenes.

Opera in France

Performances from the French Radio

Berlioz	LA DAMNATION DE FAUST - September 24, 1959
Bizet	CARMEN ^{excerpts} - November 9, 1942
Fauré	PÉNÉLOPE - May 24, 1956
Gluck	ORPHÉE - March 16, 1960
Gounod	MIREILLE ^{abridged} - July 9, 1948
Lalo	LE ROI D'YS ^{abridged} - 1943
Massenet	THAÏS ^{abridged} - June 13, 1944
Massenet	HÉRODIADE - February 1, 1963
Massenet	LA NAVARRAISE - November 29, 1963
Meyerbeer	LES HUGUENOTS - January 12, 1976
Mozart	IDOMÉNÉE - ca. 1960
Offenbach	LES CONTES D'HOFFMANN ^a - 1943
Reyer	SIGURD - 1974
Saint-Saëns	SAMSON ET DALILA (act 2) - February 28, 1957
Thomas	MIGNON ^{excerpts} - April 30, 1947
Verdi	AÏDA ^{abridged} - August 13, 1948
Verdi	LA TRAVIATA ^{abridged} - October 25, 1948
Verdi	OTELLO ^{abridged} - December 18, 1948
Verdi	DON CARLOS - 1967

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