

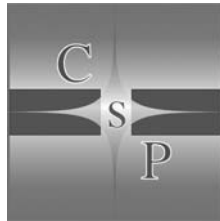
Giacomo Meyerbeer



Giacomo Meyerbeer  
A Guide to Research

By

Robert Ignatius Letellier  
and Marco Clemente Pellegrini



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# INTRODUCTION

This Guide to Research represents another step in the exploration and recovery of the heritage of Giacomo Meyerbeer. Since the turn of the century, the edition of his private papers and the English version of his diaries have opened the details of his life to the world. The publication of the facsimiles of his four most famous operas and some of the early works provides the scholar with access to rare manuscripts. Several symposia devoted to the composer have also seen substantial records of scholarly endeavour collated and published. The most important aspect of this recovery is the rediscovery of his music. The early years of the century have seen several productions of the famous four French *grands opéras*, but most excitingly have seen great progress in the revival of the Italian operas, with four out of the six of these of these formerly forgotten works now presented to the world.

## **1. Archives and General Studies of Life and Works**

This Guide has resulted from years of research on the papers and music of Meyerbeer. Its structure speaks for itself. The first part presents the private papers connected to the composer and his principal librettist, Eugène Scribe, both archival and printed, with working papers and correspondence, as found in Berlin, Paris and some of the famous libraries of the world. The body of Part 2 draws together all the known resources on Meyerbeer's life and historical reputation, from full scale biographies and entries in reference books, through critical discussions, to website resources, to records of symposia. The variety of material over nearly two centuries reflects the immense fame once enjoyed by the composer, the vicissitudes of his fortunes in the early twentieth century, the critical opprobrium he was subjected to, and his re-emergence as a major if still controversial figure in the late twentieth century.

## **2. Origins and Family**

The third part provides material about his background with its unique mixture of Jewish and Prussian elements, the powerful role of the city of Berlin in his life and work, and the individual members of his distinguished family, especially his mother Amalia Beer, and his two brothers Wilhelm and Michael,

each of whom became famous in his own right.

### **3. The Works**

The fourth part concerns the bibliographic material for Meyerbeer's music, looking at his operas grouped as German, Italian and French, each individual entry providing a record of the scores available, both modern and historical, the various arrangements made from the operas during the heyday of their popularity, reviews of modern performances, discography, and bibliography of studies and publications pertinent to the wider cultural and historical contexts of the works. Meyerbeer's Lieder, religious, occasional and incidental works are also listed.

### **4. Contemporaries and the Theatre**

The next two sections provide an extended record of any bibliographical material pertinent to the contemporaries of Meyerbeer. In the fifth section are select bibliographies of composers, authors, artists, performers, politicians, anyone who played some part in the composer's life, or was of significance in his wider contemporary circumstances. This continued in the sixth part where the cultural and aesthetic elements of the composer's milieu or life in the theatre during seventy years of the nineteenth century are listed. This is followed in the seventh part by a bibliography of the social and historical background, where the incidental issues of Judaism in nineteenth-century Europe are considered, as well as the wider political, historical and geographical circumstances of Meyerbeer's life, his relentless travelling, and closely recorded experiences in Germany, France, Italy, Belgium, England, and Austria. The eighth section provides a thematic key to the extensive material of Parts 6 and 7, with lists of general and specific themes and subjects and the name of the pertinent authors providing the cross-reference. These three sections should be helpful in the construction of any general cultural milieu for Meyerbeer and the theatre and world of his times.

### **5. The Published Lists (authors, chronologies and themes)**

Part 9 presents an extended tripartite series of lists of the published scores, arrangements and special studies of Meyerbeer over the period 1820 to 2005. The lists are hardly exhaustive, but are based on the holdings of the British Library, which in the extent of its catalogue, provides a unique perspective on the essential elements of the age and its most characteristic expressions.

Arranged alphabetically, chronologically and thematically, the lists provide an interrelated network of references that collect, collate and group works by or on Meyerbeer from different angles. At a glance the researcher can find the principal musicians who have worked on Meyerbeer, the volume of pertinent publications in any one year, or the recurrence of title and thematic types in the works generated by or from him. The alphabetical list is revealing of many minor musicians active in the nineteenth century especially. The chronology is a graph not only of Meyerbeer's personal fortunes over the years, but also of the cultural phenomenon of types and genres current before the advent of recording and huge changes in popular taste, when, outside the opera house, the parlour piano, the dance hall or the promenade concert were the only ways for people to hear and enjoy the popular music of the age. The thematic grouping reveals the prevalence of fantasias, favourite airs, grand airs/marches/potpourris, reminiscences, selections, transcriptions and variations in the culture of the time. The 1850s to 1870s were the highpoint of Meyerbeer's popularity, while the years following on the First World War mark the lowpoint of his reputation.

## 6. Productions and Discographies

The last two sections provide the modern equivalent of this record of Meyerbeer and his compositions, showing in Part 11 the list of performances of his operas since the Second World War. It is a surprising and revealing record, since, with few exceptions, some of his works have been performed in some part of the world nearly every year. There has been a growing number of revivals following from the legendary La Scala performance of *Les Huguenots* in 1962, with increasing numbers in last two decades. Part 12, listing the recordings of the operas, both commercial and private, for the same period, provides an important point of reference and cultural topicality, and brings the record up to date.

## 7. Acknowledgements

This Guide is the result of collaboration between Robert Letellier and Marco Pellegrini. It has grown out of the work involved in the translating, editing and annotating of Meyerbeer's diaries (1999-2004), all of which has been supplemented, expanded and updated. The rich store of Italian reference is the particular contribution of Marco, who has demonstrated the enduring interest in Meyerbeer in that country over nearly two centuries. Indeed the series of new productions and performances in the 1960-70s—*Gli Ugonotti*, Milan 1962, *Robert il Diavolo*, Florence 1968, *Le Prophète*, Turin 1970, *L'Africana*,

Florence 1971—each mark decisive moments in the Meyerbeer revival, a phenomenon continued in the 2000s by the work of Sergio Segalini in Martina Franca (*Robert le Diable* 2000, *Les Huguenots* 2002, *Semiramide* 2006). The lists of performances, their reviews and annals of the recorded testament are also Marco's special contribution to this book. Grateful acknowledgement in this regard is made to the work of Alexander Negrea in Berlin, Hugo Delava in Antwerp and especially Ken Reis in Sydney.

## 8. Iconography

Another aspect of Marco's contribution is the iconography used in this study. All fifteen of the pictures were chosen from his personal collection, and represent an interesting survey of the popular response to Meyerbeer in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Seven of them are taken from Liebig and other collector's cards (like Chocolat Guérin-Boutron and Edition de la Chocolaterie d'Aiguebelle) that were such a prominent feature of popular culture into the 20<sup>th</sup> century: Meyerbeer as child prodigy, the Gambling Scene, the Scene at the Cross, Bertram and the Evocation of the Nuns from *Robert le Diable*, the Nuptial Benediction from *Les Huguenots*, the Prison Scene from *Le Prophète*, the Shipwreck from *L'Africaine*. There are also two formal prints (a lithographic apotheosis of Meyerbeer, surrounded by characters from his operas, and a painting of the Coronation Scene from *Le Prophète*), and two modern portrait collages (Meyerbeer as freemason, and Meyerbeer surrounded by scores of his compositions).

A special element in this collection are the original drawings down by Stefano Pellegrini, which reflect the reactions of a young contemporary artist to the emotional and spiritual charge of Meyerbeer's operas. Stefano has provided his own vision of the Scene at the Cross and the Evocation from *Robert le Diable*: here the underlying eschatological implications of the drama are distilled with a Van Goghian sensibility. Most recently, his view of the Cathedral Scene in *Le Prophète* has captured the architectural monumentality that echoes the spiritual issues explored in this great piece of operatic drama. His portrait of the composer is in the tradition of the caricaturists. Let Marco speak for his son:

As for Stefano's paintings, he painted Meyerbeer's portrait in December 2003 and the two *Robert le Diable* scenes in summer 2004. He has also just done the coronation scene of *Le Prophète* (the architecture of the church is the interior of Milano cathedral—and he made the sketch of more than twenty soldiers, Anabaptists, men of the people. On the left in the foreground there is the statue of king David with his harp: of course he looks like Jean. If you look at it

carefully, you can see Meyerbeer (dressed in black) seeing the scene from the second balcony of the cathedral.

Robert Ignatius Letellier,  
Cambridge, 5 September 2006

## SECTION ONE

### SOURCES AND DOCUMENTATION

(Entries are alphabetical, and chronological within each entry)

#### Correspondence and Diaries

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  - Vol. 4 (1846-1849). Ed. Heinz and Gudrun BECKER (1985).
  - Vol. 5. (1849-1852).Ed. Sabine HENZE-DÖHRING (with Hans MOELLER) (1998).
  - Vol. 6. (1853-1855). Ed. Sabine Henze-DÖHRING (with Hans MOELLER) (2002).
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- JERUSALEM: THE JEWISH NATIONAL AND UNIVERSITY LIBRARY [ARC.4 1651] 15 autograph letters.
- LONDON: THE BRITISH LIBRARY. 21 manuscripts and 1293 printed items.
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- Carton 122: Meyerbeer's Pass for the Opéra.
- Carton 115, 137: *Il Crociato*.
- Carton 182: Accidents, *Robert le Diable*.
- Carton 183: Works staged from 1831 to 1849.

- Carton 187: Administration 1830-1845.
- Carton 202: *Les Huguenots*.
- Carton 207: *Le Prophète*.
- Carton 221: Contracts with librettists and composers 1837-1869.
- Carton 289: The organ for *Robert le Diable*.
- Carton 347: Commissions.
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- Dossier d'artiste
  - Pièce 1: Documents relatifs à ses funérailles.
  - Pièce 2: Notice biographique presse.
  - Pièce 3: Copies de lettres.
  - Pièce 4: Meyerbeer vu à son journal.
  - Pièce 5: Journal de Meyerbeer [1813].
- Articles consacré aux manuscrits de Meyerbeer achetés par la Bibliothèque de l'Opéra.
- [Much uncatalogued information is contained in the various *Dossiers d'oeuvres* and *Dossiers d'artistes*, especially those for *Robert le Diable*, *Les Huguenots* and *Le Prophète*, as well as for *Meyerbeer*.]
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- STOCKHOLM: THE NYDAHL COLLECTION. 8 music autographs [MMS 46, 48-49, 942-45] with 68 autograph letters [2614-54; 5617-43].
- WASHINGTON DC: THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS. 829 printed items.

## The Scribe Archive

- PARIS: BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE, Département des Manuscrits [F-Pnn.a.f.]:
- 22480-22560: Plans and manuscripts of both published and unpublished works.
  - 22501-22508: MS material of works performed at the Opéra.
  - 22544-22522: Letters to Scribe (alphabetical by sender).
  - 22553: Letters from Scribe.
  - 22561-22583: 23 vols of mixed notes and sketches.
  - 22561-22570: 10 *vademecum* notebooks.
  - 22584: 46 small note books, including diaries.
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## SECTION TWO

### GENERAL STUDIES: LIFE AND WORKS

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