

Reyer, Ernest (1823-1909) : Summary of his Writings

Composer and music critic, Louis-Etienne-Ernest Rey alias Reyer (Marseille, 1^{er} december 1823 - Le Levandou/Var, 15 january 1909) published over 750 articles in various publications over the second half of the nineteenth century. He studied music from the age of six at the Music School of Marseille, directed by Thomas-Gaspard-Fortuné Barsotti; then, around 1848, he completed his musical education with his aunt, Louise Farrenc, composer and piano teacher at the Paris Conservatory. In Paris, he met Joseph Méry, born like him in Marseille, who introduced him to Théophile Gautier and his literary and somewhat bohemian circle of friends. A very strong friendship developed between Reyer and Gautier. It is surmised that around that time he adopted and changed his name from Rey to Reyer.

Between 1850 and 1852 he collaborated anonymously with the articles signed by Théophile Gautier. From November 1851 to April 1852, Reyer published 17 very short articles under his own name, reporting on performances at the Théâtre-Italien of Paris in the *Messenger des théâtres et des arts*; then, thanks to Gautier, he was hired as music critic of the *Athenaeum français* and at the *Revue de Paris*. He published in the former 59 articles between July 1852 and June 1856 and in the latter 24 articles between May 1852 and November 1854. From February 1855 to February 1858, Reyer published 23 articles in the *Revue française* and from April 1857 to November 1859 another 54 in the *Courrier de Paris*, followed by 11 in the *Gazette du Nord* from January to June 1860. He stopped writing articles between July 1860 and October 1864, because he was very busy composing and overseeing the productions of his operas-comiques *La Statue* (1861) and *Erostrate* (1862). Thereafter was sent on a mission in Germany from April 1863 to 1864, about which he reported in 19 articles published in the *Moniteur universel* between November 1864 and January 1865. In April 1864, Reyer was appointed Librarian of the Opera, and, thanks to the recommendation of Charles Gounod, became the music critic of the *Journal des Débats* in December 1866. He remained in this position until his retirement in 1899, publishing during his 33-year tenure over 500 articles. In addition, Reyer occasionally wrote articles for other publications such as *La France musicale*, *L'Indépendance belge*, *La Revue et Gazette musicale*, *L'Artiste*, and *La Presse*.

In 1875, Reyer published a book through Charpentier & Cie, entitled [*Notes de musique \(Notes of Music\)*](#), which presented a selection of his articles of music criticism. In preparing articles for this publication he edited all his articles published in the *Moniteur universel* and reissued them under the title *Souvenirs d'Allemagne*. He selected an additional 15 articles and excerpts from another 13 and eliminated from all articles any mention of his judgement on the performances by the artists.

Another compilation of articles by Reyer was published posthumously by Emile Henriot through Calmann-Lévy in 1909 under the title [*Quarante ans de musique \(Forty Years of Music\)*](#). It presented 15 articles and excerpts of another 14. Together these two books cover less than 10% of Reyer's output. The complete reissue of the music criticisms of Ernest Reyer, fully annotated, is being published on-line on the web-site ernestreyer.com.

Reyer also wrote articles in books: *Lettre en guise de préface (Letter in lieu of preface)* for the book of Henri Maréchal: *Paris, souvenirs d'un musicien, 185.-1870*, (*Paris, souvenirs of a musician, 185. -1870*), Paris, Hachette, 1907.; and *La Critique musicale: Castil-Blaze, H. Berlioz (Music Criticism: Castil-Blaze, H. Berlioz)* in *Le Livre du centenaire du « Journal des Débats » (The Book of the Centenary of the "Journal des Débats")*, Paris, Librairie Plon, 1889. His acceptance speech at the Académie des Beaux-Arts in memory of his predecessor, Félicien David, was published in the *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* on November 25, 1877. His speeches on the occasion of the unveiling of statues of Berlioz in Paris (1886), at the Côte Saint-André (1890) and in Grenoble (1903) were subsequently published respectively in the *Journal des Débats* on October 17, 1886, in the *Journal des Débats* on September 29, 1890 and in the *Guide musical* on August 23 and 30, 1903. The last was republished in *Le Monde musical* on August 30, 1903.

In his articles Reyer reviews primarily the creations of lyrical works in the three main government-subsidized theaters of Paris in his time: The Opera, the Opera-Comique and the Théâtre-Lyrique. Occasionally he will also cover some creations of works at the Théâtre des Bouffes-Parisiens, the Fantaisies-Parisiennes or the Théâtre de la Gaîté. He also reviews the concerts of the Société des concerts du Conservatoire, as well as those of Jules Padeloup (Société des Concerts Populaires) and Charles Lamoureux (Société des Concerts Lamoureux), the main chamber music concerts and recitals by travelling artists, the choral societies concerts (Orphéons) and their national competitions and sacred music concerts in the churches. Besides his reviewing works and their interpreters, Reyer discusses other aspects of musical life: the absence of a large concert hall for orchestral concerts in Paris, the difficulty for travelling artists to organize a concert to showcase their talent, music at world expositions, aspects of musical instrument manufacturing such as the advantages and drawbacks of the introduction of valves in brass instruments. Sometimes Reyer shares with his readers his impressions of his walks through the mountains or of his travels by train to attend a competition of choral societies as a jury member.

His style is alert and he uses irony with great subtlety. Many of his contemporaries thought his writing style worthy to make him eligible for election to the French Academy. His judgements were always based on a careful analysis of the score and of the libretto, without any prejudice. He was thus able to recognize the talent of composers as diverse as Wagner, Berlioz, Gounod, Bizet, Offenbach and Massenet. He was one of the first in the French press to praise Wagner (*Courrier de Paris* on September 30, 1857) and Gounod (*Athenaeum français* on July 17, 1852). On the other hand, Reyer was very critical of the habit of the theater directors of his time to make cuts in the scores of the composers and fought against those that made arrangements/adaptations of scores such as Castil-Blaze did with the works of

Weber. In conclusion we may quote the funeral eulogy of Gabriel Fauré in the *Figaro* on January 16, 1909: "One could point to some of his essays as models of criticism. He joined a precise and lively literary form and an incisive and biting spirit with a very varied culture, making reading his writings very engaging."

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