

Part I : The question of time-beating in the 18th century

Predecessors of time-beating practices

One of the main feature of modern conducting is the physical gesture. A conductor beats time through-out the performance. Did time-beating exist in the eighteenth century? In fact, visual signs are the most ancient method of musical leadership, with origins dating back to 1500 B.C³. The musician directing the performance in Ancient Egypt used a system of visual signs that indicated the curve of a melody by means of gestures of his hands and arms, a primitive form of cheironomy. Cheironomy is defined as : « the doctrine of hand signs: a form

of conducting whereby the leading musician indicates melodic curves and ornaments by means of a system of spatial signs »⁴.



Fig.2. Example of cheironomy as practice in ancient Egypt.

In addition to the ancient Egyptians, the art of cheironomy was developed in various other

³ Sachs, Curt. *The Rise of Music in the Ancient World*. W. W. Norton. New York, 1943. p.78

⁴ Oxford music Online. 'Cheironomy'. 21/01/2017, 16:47

cultures, including Hebrew and Byzantine traditions as well as Western chant. Some of these musical traditions still exist today in practice, and are using the same ancient cheironomy technique. It is important to clarify that this system was and is used in non-written vocal music or in a tradition where the notation is concerned only with pitches, such as plainchant which is sung with free rhythm. With the development of musical notation, especially the mensural system⁵, rhythm started to be notated in a precise and organized way. As George Houle points out, : “the mensural system related all notes to a down-and-up gesture of moderate speed, called the *tactus* (meaning 'beat')”⁶. We could say that the main ancestor of conducting, the use of a steady *tactus*, was born around the year 1260, when Franco of Cologne⁷ established a notation system in which the rhythm of a note has a meaning in itself, independently of notes that surround it⁸. We cannot underestimate this evolution in music notation, especially with regard to the history of musical leadership. From that point, keeping the *tactus* became the main concern of musical directors.

Sixteenth and seventeenth time-beating in theory and in practice

There exists an abundance of pictorial evidence for time beating practices, dating back to the thirteenth century. However, most suffer from a lack of precision, making analysis

⁵ “Mensural music : It is polyphonic music in which every note has a strictly determined value, distinct from the free rhythm of gregorian chant.” Oxford music Online. 21/01/2017, 16:47

⁶ Houle, G., *Meter in music, 1600-1800: Performance, perception, and notation*. Indiana University Press,. 1987. p.1

⁷ “(fl mid- to late 13th century). German theorist and composer. His *Ars cantus mensurabilis* contained the first major statement of an idea that has been fundamental to Western notation ever since: that different durations should be expressed by different note shapes, and not merely by different contexts.”, 'Franco of Cologne', Oxford music Online. 26/01/2017, 16:47

⁸ Oxford music Online. 'Franconian notation'. 01/02/2017, 15:58

of them difficult. In the best examples, one only acknowledges the participation of a time-beater. But nothing more... Consequently, questions arise as to what was he doing? How was he doing it? Why was he doing it? Luckily, various writings from musical theorists shed light on historical time-beating in practice and therefore are more reliable than pictorial evidence. The first musical treatises to broach issues of time-beating issues date back to sixteenth century. From that point onwards, we find a profusion of treatises that witnesses a tireless

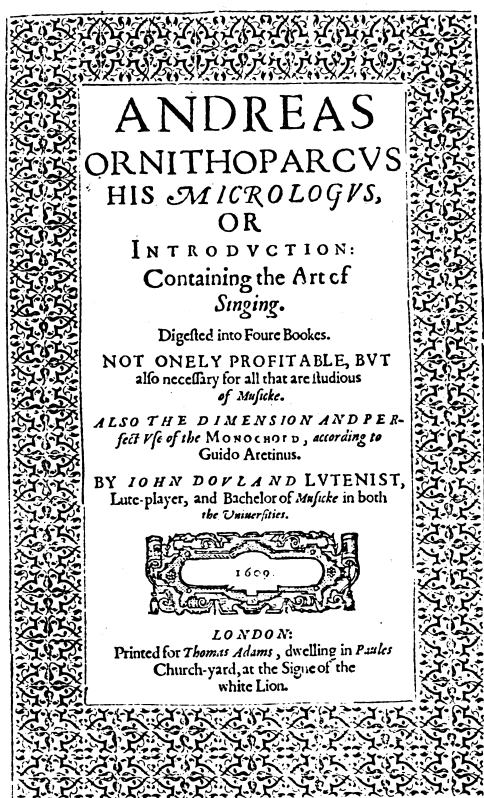


Fig.3.

interest in time-beating. In the sixteenth century, the most notorious works dealing with the *tactus* and its practice are Agricola's *Musica figuralis Deudsch* in 1532, *Libro llamado de taner fantasia* by Fray Tomas de Sancta Maria in 1565, Lafranco's *Scintille de musica* in 1533 and the *Micrologus* of Andreas Ornithoparchus (translated to English in 1609 by Dowland). One can deduct from these sources that time-beating in the sixteenth century was “a successive motion in singing, directing the equalitie of the measure : or it is a certain motion, made by the hand of the chiefe singer, according to

the nature of the marks, which directs a Song according to measure”⁹ and only involved vertical movements organized in two ways, using an even “down and up” motion for duple

⁹ Ornithoparchus, Andreas. *Micrologus*. (English translation by John Dowland, original from 1519). London, 1609. p. 46

time and an uneven “down down up” for triple time.

If 16th century theorists used the *tactus* in connection with the notational theories, 17th century treatises tend to consider it an independent topic, even the subject for an entire book, for example, the works *Battuta della musica* in 1611 by Pisa and Valentini's *Trattato della battuta musicale* in 1643. In fact, continuing to deal with the issue of time-beating and its practice, seventeenth century theorists further refined and dissected the *tactus*, asking questions about 'how should one perform the hand motions' in regards to the style of a composition. As musical language developed and transformed in the seventeenth century, specifically with regards to the arise of the *seconda prattica*¹⁰, the art of beating the *tactus* also had to evolve equally, allowing for a more flexible *tactus*¹¹.

Nowadays, we often imagine, principally because of iconographical sources, that time-beaters from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were only beating time (surely because sound can't be seen...). But in fact, the time-beater was often much busier during a performance. As Ornithoparchus makes clear, the time-beater was, indeed, the “Chiefe Singer”, being involved in the sound production of the performance. Nevertheless, this brings us to an essential aspect of eighteenth century musical life, the position of the Kapellmeister; the prestigious musician ensuring time-beating in most musical contexts. His responsibilities extended beyond just beating time, to include composition, preparation of the performance

¹⁰ In the preface of his fifth Madrigal book, Monteverdi explains that his compositional technic use for these pieces establish a new style, a *seconda prattica*, in opposition to the *prima prattica*, a compositional practice having Palestrina as a model allowing a very restricted usage of dissonances.

¹¹ For a more extensive analyze of the issue of time-beating in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, in theory and in practice, see two comprehensive books : George Houle's *Meter in Music 1600-1800* and Roger Mathew Grant's *Beating Time and measuring Music in the Early Modern Era*.

(including rehearsals), administrative tasks, vocal accompanying and training, as well as copying and teaching. Even though the Kapellmeister was often required to beat time during rehearsals and performances, it was far from his main responsibility. In the eighteenth century, Johann Mattheson wrote an extensive book on the art of being a great Kapellmeister, which will be discussed further on.

In short, time-beating was born out of a musical notation system (mensural system) transcribing the music into time-space, through rhythm and organized systematically around the *tactus*, or the measuring reference. The *tactus*, besides its practical implication, was used to illustrate theoretically the functionality of the system. However, through the centuries, theorists and performers developed various methods of beating time for purposes of helping musicians and singers to stay unified rhythmically, essentially to breathe with the *tactus*.

18th century time-beating



Fig.4.

Naturally, the 18th century inherited time beating practices from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, particularly those that have been discussed previously. As we shall see, the increasing interest in instrumental music and the growth of a new style of composition, opera, will completely

revolutionize leadership practices. Nevertheless, time-beating was

consistently used during the 18th century, especially in church music performances. This is clearly stated by Koch in his *Lexicon* (1802), whereby he describes how the Kapellmeister beats time only in Church music, but remains seated in an opera, playing continuo on the harpsichord¹². This affirmation is confirmed by the systematic usage of a distinctive terminology regarding leadership by the Mozart's family in their correspondence. They consistently use the expressions *Tactieren* or *Tact Schlagen*, in reference to time-beating - in the context of several mass and oratorios performances, however *dirigieren* referring to operatic and concert contexts¹³. This proves without a doubt that an eighteenth century musician had to deal with different leadership practice, time-beating being one of them.

If modern gestural language of conducting communicates musicality (phrasing, accent, rubato, etc.), in the eighteenth century and prior this certainly was not the case. As Brossard explains in his *Dictionnaire de musique*, : “Time-beating is this movement of the hand that lower and raise, helping to show the duration of the tones and that we call bar”¹⁴. In fact, Mattheson stresses that the main function of the director of a piece is to keep the beat steady for the musicians during a performance.¹⁵ As we shall see further, time-beating wasn't the exclusive way to maintain a steady tempo, but was used only when necessary in very special occasions. In fact, time-beating was something used in opera context - often in festive productions at the great European courts-, as a matter of necessity. For instance, Quantz shares

¹² Koch, Heinrich Christoph. *Musikalisches Lexicon*. Frankfurt, 1802. p. 1471

¹³ Zaslaw, Neal. *Mozart's Symphonies. Context, Performance Practice and Reception*. Clarendon press. Oxford. 1989. p.508

¹⁴ Brossard. *Dictionnaire de musique*. 1703. 'Battuta' « [la battuta est] ce mouvement de la main en baissant et en levant qui sert à marquer la durée des sons et que nous appelons mesure »

¹⁵ Mattheson, J. *Der Volkommene Kapellmeister*, translation by Ernest Harris, Johann Mattheson's *Der Volkommene Kapellmeister*. Dissertation, George Peabody College for Teachers, 1969. p. 1441

in his autobiography an anecdote relating to an outdoor performance of Fux's opera *Costanza e Fortezza* in 1723, which gathered over 300 musicians and singers in celebration of the coronation of Charles VI, Austrian emperor of Bohemia : “Because of the many performers,



Fig.5. Fux's opera *Costanza e Fortezza* in 1723, Prague

the Imperial Kapellmeister Caldara had to beat time”¹⁶. The choice of the verb 'had' is crucial here. It means that in normal condition, with a reasonable amount of performers and in a conventional acoustic, a Kapellmeister wouldn't have felt the necessity to beat

time. Thus, this practice was only employed for exceptional circumstances and occasions. Moreover, even in church contexts, some theorists and performers felt it was more useful to be part of the ensemble and participate in the sound production. This feeling is echoed in Mattheson's *Vollkommene Kapellmeister* (1739) : “Things always work out better when I both play and sing along than when I merely stand there and beat time”¹⁷. Indeed, we shall further that eighteenth century leaders in general preferred to play an instrument, while leading. The situation in Italy is nearly identical, as time-beating was used only for church music requiring large choruses¹⁸.

¹⁶ Nettl, Paul. *Forgotten Musicians*. Philosophical Library. 1951. p.294

¹⁷ Mattheson, J. *Der Vollkommene Kapellmeister*, translation by Ernest Harris, Johann Mattheson's *Der Vollkommene Kapellmeister*. Dissertation, George Peabody College for Teachers, 1969. p. 1441

¹⁸ Corrette, Michel. *Méthode théorique et pratique pour apprendre en peu de tems le Violoncelle*. Paris, 1741 p.46

Time-beating practices in France – a problem

If issues of time-beating was clear in German-speaking areas and Italy, the situation in France was far more problematic. First of all, little is known about seventeenth century time-beating practices in France, with scholars relying only on a few iconographic sources. Moreover, the confusion is also due to a myth that was perpetuated: the Lully's case. The legend started when Jean-Laurent Le Cerf de la Viéville reported an incident involving Lully's time-beating practice during a performance : “Lully had neglected nothing concerning the music composition and the preparation of the execution and to bring more his fervor, he beat time. In the fire of the action, he gave himself a blow on his feet with the cane he used to beat time”¹⁹. Even if it is surely the most dramatic episode of time-beating and the most memorable, it overstates Lully's usage of time-beating, since he used different kinds of leadership practices, as we shall see in the next chapter. Nevertheless, it initiated a tradition of absolute authority that has been furiously contested throughout the 18th century. As a matter of fact, Lully probably founded time-beating practices in Paris around the 1760s. From the end of the 17th century, the *batteur de mesure*, became a stable position at the Paris Opera. If the Kapellmeister in German-speaking areas and Italy was in charge of the musical preparation and sometimes to beat time for special opera performances, these responsibilities in France were shared between the *maitre de musique* and the *batteur de musique*. We shall further see that there was some shared responsibilities in musical performance outside France also, between the Kapellmeister and the concertmaster. In fact, the *batteur de mesure*'s

¹⁹ Le Cerf de la Viéville, J.-L. *Comparaison de la musique italienne et de la musique française*. Brussels. 1706. p.190 “Lulli n'avoit rien négligé à la composition de la Musique, & et aux préparatifs l'exécution ; & pour mieux marquer son zèle, il y battoit la mesure. Dans la chaleur de l'action, il se donna sur le bout du pié un coup de la canne dont il la battoit”

responsibilities were of course to “not only beat time during the performances and also during the rehearsals, but to take care of all the members of the orchestra, make sure they arrive on time and to prevent musicians to quit their location and their instrument earlier during the opera performance”.²⁰

The lack of information concerning the situation in France may be attributed also to the fact that a lot of evidence was destroyed during the French Revolution (1789-1799), especially in royal institution such as the Paris Opera or the Concert Spirituel, the latter taking place in a room of the castle of the Tuileries. Despite the absence of information, there remain two sources important in unlocking the mystery of the leadership issue at the Concert Spirituel. Firstly, the *Almanach des concerts* stated in 1760 in its *état des personnes qui composent ce spectacle* (situation of the people that took part of this show) Mr. Aubert as the *premier violon* and *batteur de mesure*²¹. One can deduct from this information that the leader might have varied his leadership practices, depending on the musical context, if it was a rehearsal or a performance. But, this is only a speculation. Secondly, the *Mercure de France* reported in 1762 an experimentation “whereby the orchestra was led by two violinists, one at the head of the firsts, one at the head of the seconds, and there was no *batteur* at all for the instrumental music”²². The next year, the position of the *batteur de mesure* reappeared due to multiple complains. Nevertheless, the *batteur de mesure* disappeared altogether in 1774 in favor of the

²⁰ Noinville, Jacques-Bernard Durey de. *Histoire du théâtre de l'opéra en France*.... Paris, 1753, p.136

²¹ *Almanach des spectacles* (1760). p.3

²² Spitzer, John and Zaslaw, Neal, *The birth of the orchestra. History of an institution, 1650-1815*, Oxford University Press, (Oxford, 2004) p.388

violin leadership²³.

It should not be forgotten that France was the setting for a dispute between the defender of the French opera and the champions of the Italian opera which reached its apogee in *la querelle des bouffons* (Buffons' Quarrel). Indeed, an Italian troupe under the direction of Eustachio Bambini²⁴ (known as the *Bouffons*) presented in 1752 at the Opéra, Pergolesi's *La serva padrona*. It had been performed in Paris in 1746, but didn't attract attention back then; it's the fact that it was performed at the *Académie Royale* that caused such a scandal. Criticism was decimated through pamphlets written by leading philosophical figures of the time, including Jean-Jacques Rousseau²⁵, one of the main supporters of the Italian style. In his *Lettre sur la musique française* (Letter concerning French music) published in 1753, the pinnacle of the *Querelle*, Rousseau tries to demonstrate the superiority of the Italian music style, by criticizing the sophisticated harmonies of Jean-Philippe Rameau (Rameau being the reference to the defender of the French operatic style) and stating that the French language cannot support musical works of quality. In fact, we find throughout the pamphlets musical, political and religious analogies. In this context, it is difficult to assess the objectivity of the judgments. Indeed, the highly political significance of the situation is substantial. On one side, there is the defenders of the French identity who believe their nation dominates Europe both politically and culturally, and on the other side we find the supporters of the Italian style, an international trend that has triumphed in a majority of European courts, because it was indeed more in the

²³ Spitzer, John and Zaslaw, Neal, *The birth of the orchestra. History of an institution, 1650-1815*, Oxford University Press, (Oxford, 2004) p.388

²⁴ “(b Pesaro, 1697; d Pesaro, 1770). Italian impresario. After serving as *maestro di cappella* at Cortona and Pesaro, he spent some time in Moravia, where his operas *Partenope* (1733) and *La pravità castigata* (1734) were performed.” Oxford music Online. 'Bambini, Eustachio'. 01/02/2017, 15:34.

²⁵ (1712-1778) One of the most important writer and philosopher of the 18th century. Born in Geneva.

Zeitgeist.

It is frankly from the defenders of the French style that we find the most belligerent, aggressive and defensive statements, considering their word being an integral part of a political agenda. Indeed, wanting to discredit the Italian style, we can read in the *Lettre sur le mécanisme de l'opéra italien* (Letter concerning the mechanism of Italian opera) : “There is no time-beating in the opera in Italy, that is true; but the concertmaster helps out there in a way that is sometimes as disagreeable; he beats time with the foot, he struggles like a madman and supports the orchestra with strokes of the bow that are so pronounced that one can hear them at the far end of the theatre. He who plays the harpsichord in a full accompaniment sometimes hits it so rudely in order to mark the measure that he’d better wear gloves in buffalo leather in order not to break his fingers”²⁶. Furthermore, since the end of the 17th century, time-beating in France started to inspire metaphors of absolute power, the *batteur de mesure* being “a reflection of the absolute power of the Sun King” and “reinforcing the ideology of absolutism”²⁷. Talking about the “the natural inhabitants of the country of the opera”²⁸, Charles Dufresny²⁹ explains that these musicians “depends on the sovereign of the orchestra, a prince whose power is so absolute that by raising and lowering his scepter, the roll of paper that he

²⁶ Anonyme (Calzabigi?). *Lettre sur le mécanisme de l'opéra italien*. Naples. 1756. pp.61-63 English translation by Peter Van Heyghen “On ne bat pas la mesure à l’Opéra en Italie, cela est vrai; mais le premier Violon y supplée d’une manière quelquefois aussi désagréable; il la bat avec le pied, il se démène comme un possédé & soutient l’Orchestre par des coups d’Archet si frappés, qu’on les distingue du fond de la Salle. Celui qui tient le Clavecin dans un fort accompagnement, le touche quelquefois si rudement pour imprimer la mesure, qu’il seroit bien de se gantier de buffle pour ne pas s’estropier les doigts”

²⁷ Spitzer, John and Zaslaw, Neal, *The birth of the orchestra. History of an institution, 1650-1815*, Oxford University Press, (Oxford, 2004) p.512

²⁸ Dufresny, Charles. *Amusmens sérieux et comiques* (Amsterdam, 1699), p.32 “habitants naturels du pays de l’Opéra”

²⁹ (1657-1724) French writer specialized in comedy, written many for the Comédie-Italienne and the Comédie-Française. His *Amusements sérieux et comiques* (1699) inspired the *Lettres persanes* of Montesquieu.

holds in his hand, he regulates every movement of this fickle populace”³⁰.

The leadership practices have also been used as an argument by many defenders of the Italian style, who criticized and made fun of the time-beaters, even so far as nicknaming them ‘the woodchopper’. Baron von Grimm who coined the term, complained about the noise that the baton was making when hitting against a music stand or the edge of the stage. Rousseau explains in his *Dictionnaire de musique* that the *baton de mesure* at the Opéra is in fact “A good big stick made of hard wood, with which the Master hit with force to be heard from far”³¹. Even if there is some truth in that description, one can acknowledge the pejorative meaning. As David Charlton suggests in his article on French time-beating practice, scholars



Fig.6. A performance of Rameau's *La Princesse de Navarre*, Versailles, 1745

tend to overstate the presence of noisy and disturbing time-beating at the *Opéra*³² by avoiding tense discussion of social context.

Furthermore, eighteenth century time-beating practices in France would deserve a more

³⁰ Spitzer, John and Zaslaw, Neal, *The birth of the orchestra. History of an institution, 1650-1815*, Oxford University Press, (Oxford, 2004) p.512. Dufresny, Charles. *Amusmens sérieux et comiques* (Amsterdam, 1699), p.32 “relèvent tous du souverain de l'Orqueste, Prince si absolu, qu'en haussant & baissant un Sceptre en forme de roulau qu'il tient à sa main, il regle tous les mouvemens de ce peuple capricieux”

³¹ Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Dictionnaire de musique*. Facsimile de l'édition de 1768. Actes Sud (2007) Baton de mesure : “un bon gros Bâton de bois bien dur, dont le Maître frappe avec force pour être entendu de loin”

³² Charlton, David. ‘A maître d'orchestre...Conducts,’: *New and Old Evidence on French Practice*. *Early Music*, Vol. 21, No.3, French Baroque II (Aug., 1993), pp. 343-345

comprehensive study, since the context at the *Opéra* was far more complex, involving in its *tragédie lyrique* ballets and choruses that were not present in Italian opera back then. Was the time-beater helping the musicians, the singers, the choirs, the dancers? To what extend? In fact, iconographic evidence shows that the time-beater was often near the stage with his back to the orchestra, maybe to act also as a prompter.

Evermore, Italian musicians of the 18th century seems to have not understood the French practice of beating time at the Opera. Ange Goudar³³, a French adventurer that travelled many years in Italy, recounts in his book *Brigandage de la musique italienne* that “the Italians look at the Paris Opera like a company of blind person ; they say it is because they need a cane to behave”³⁴.

Criticisms of Time-beating

Beside this particular political context, time-beating has also been criticized a great deal throughout Europe, notably for its negative influence on the music and musicians themselves, especially in regards to noisy time-beating. For instance, Martin Heinrich Fuhrmann³⁵, a German music theorist, criticizes bad musicians who “have gotten into the habit of rapping the beat violently with their feet which defiles the entire performance”³⁶. It is by far

³³ Goudar, Ange (b Montpellier, 1708 ; d 1791) French adventurer and writer.

³⁴ Goudar, Ange. *Le Brigandage de la musique italienne*, 1777. p. 120

³⁵ 'Martin Heinrich Fuhrman' “(b Templin, Uckermark, bap. 29 Dec 1669; d Berlin, bur. 25 June 1745). German organist, Kantor and writer” Oxford music online. Accessed on Saturday, March 4th, 2017.

³⁶ Fuhrmann, Martin Heinrich. *Musikalischer Trichter*. (Leipzig, 1706) translation from : Camesi, David. *Eighteenth-Century Conducting Practices*. Journal of Research in Music Education. Vol. 18 no. 4 (Winter, 1970) p. 366

not the only source to describe time-beating performed by musicians, in a chamber music context. As a matter of fact, some theorists found it sometimes useful in practice. For example Michel Corrette³⁷ in his cello method encourages the cellist, “being a good musicians, to play loud and to beat time during one or two bars by keeping steadily the movement that was taking at the beginning of the piece, that brings the *dessus* in the tempo, and prevent him to go even faster”³⁸. One clearly sees that it might have been used for catastrophic musical contexts. However, Fuhrmann stipulates that “some [directors] themselves are prone to act thus disreputably in that they stamp the beat incessantly with their feet; Or with a paper held in the hand, they whip at the pulpit or board in front of them at every downstroke so madly that it resounds with a smack and so that the congregation gathered in the church can hear every beat that is struck; but which is an ugly *soloecismus directorius* for one should never at any time hear the rhythm of the music being beaten except, *nota bene*, the first beat and all others (if it can be helped) should merely be seen being beaten”³⁹. One can conclude that Fuhrmann sanctioned audible time-beating but was merely in favor of an unobtrusive time-beating practice in church.

Besides the inconveniences caused by the audible time-beating, this technique in itself (as a visual art) was often seen as inefficient or even an enemy to the music. Johann Mattheson⁴⁰,

³⁷ 'Corrette, Michel' “(b Rouen, 1709 ; d Paris, 1795) Fr. composer and organist. Org. at Jesuit College, Paris, 1750 – 9. Known to have visited Eng. Comps. incl. ballets, conc. for hpd., fl., hurdy-gurdy, and org., sonatas for bn., vc., and vn., much church mus., secular songs, and works for org. solo. Renowned as teacher and author of several methods for org., hpd., fl., vc., hp., and v. Hpd. method entitled *Les amusemens du Parnasse*”. Oxford music online. Accessed on Saturday, March 4th, 2017.

³⁸ Corrette, Michel. *Méthode théorique et pratique pour apprendre en peu de tems le Violoncelle* (Paris, 1741) p.46

³⁹ Camesi, David. *Eighteenth-Century Conducting Practices*. Journal of Research in Music Education. Vol. 18 no. 4 (Winter, 1970) p. 366

⁴⁰ 'Mattheson, Johann' “(b Hamburg, 28 Sept 1681; d Hamburg, 17 April 1764). German composer, critic, music journalist, lexicographer and theorist”. Oxford music online. Accessed on Saturday, March 4th, 2017.

one of the greatest music theorist of the 18th century, relates in his comprehensive *Vollkommene Kapellmeister* that he finds it less effective when he only beats time, but more efficient when he both plays and sings alone⁴¹. It is difficult to establish if he had in mind an opera or a church performance/ rehearsal context, as German Kapellmeister were involved in both musical contexts. However, he surely suggests that a director who might have beat time could experiment with playing along with the musicians, since his experience demonstrated that it was more efficient. Time-beating was also seen as an insult for professional musician and harmful for the good execution of the music. In fact, Grétry⁴² thought that the stick that conducts the musicians is “humiliating them”⁴³. In his *Mémoires*, he makes fun of time-beater : “He does the starting sign, he hits majestically, but the rebellious musicians have conspired, and nobody starts. He stays surprised, and he acknowledges the fact that his beating-time stick, without the rescue of the performers, his an instrument of very little effect”⁴⁴. Jokes aside, Grétry believed that time-beating was harmful to the performance of an opera since “each musician is obliged to have an eye on the singing actor ; it is the only way he can accompany well ; it is impossible when one hits him every beat ; because he cannot and

⁴¹ Mattheson, J. *Der Vollkommene Kapellmeister*; translation by Ernest Harris, Johann Mattheson's Der Vollkommene Kapellmeister. Dissertation, George Peabody College for Teachers, 1969. p.1442

⁴² ‘(b Liège, 8 Feb 1741; d Montmorency, Seine-et-Oise, 24 Sept 1813). Liégeois, later French, composer of Walloon descent. He made decisive contributions to the scope and style of the 18th-century *opéra comique*, and to technical aspects such as musical ‘local colour’ and the design of overtures. His *opéras comiques* and recitative comedies for the Paris Opéra enjoyed unparalleled success in the 20 years up to the French Revolution. Many of his works were staged abroad, and a number were revived in the early 19th century in Paris: several survived through the middle decades, albeit with updated orchestration.’ ‘Grétry, André-Ernest-Modeste’ Oxford music online. Accessed on Saturday, March 12th, 2017

⁴³ Grétry, André Ernest Modeste. *Mémoires, ou essai sur la musique* (Paris, 1789) p.50

⁴⁴ Ibidem. p.49 “il fait le signe pour commencer, il frappe majestueusement; mais les musiciens rebelles se sont donné le mot, et personne ne commence. Il reste tout étonné, et il voit que son bâton de mesure, sans le secours des exécutans, est un instrument de fort peu d'effet”

shouldn't follow two persons at the same time”⁴⁵. By not being able to follow the singer, the composer from Liège observed that the musicians forced to follow the stick of the time-beater were becoming “cold and indifferent”⁴⁶. However, Grétry acknowledges the necessity of time-beating at the Opera in certain context, in larges choruses for instance : “One shouldn't believe that a group of singers as far could hear the orchestra, whatever numerous it is : each singer sings in the ears of his neighbor, and I surprised myself sometimes singing against the bar conducting falsely the choir around me. The chorus master could move forward and look at the stick ; would you say, it is what he does ; although if it is a chorus that is danced and sung ; if a crowd of dancers occupy the scene, the stick is then no longer visible. Thus the time-beater hits against his stand, which is very unpleasant to hear ; because it reminds you immediately that you are at the Comedy. I often thought at methods to remedy to this inconvenient ; I think that we could, if we would placed some organ pipes behind the scene, or even under the theater.” [...]”⁴⁷ Grétry considered audible time-beating unavoidable in the some contexts of the Opera, but always unfortunate when it had to occur.

Regrettably, his idea of using organ tubes behind the scene was never employed during his lifetime at the Paris Opera. However, it was used elsewhere to facilitate performance involving a great amount of performers, for instance the performances in commemoration of Handel that

⁴⁵ Grétry, André Ernest Modeste. *Mémoires, ou essai sur la musique* (Paris, 1789) p.49 “chaque musicien est obligé d'avoir l'oeil sur l'acteur chantant; c'est la seule manière de bien accompagner : il en est dispensé quand on lui frappe chaque mesure; car il ne peut et ne doit pas suivre deux personnes à -la- fois”

⁴⁶ Ibidem. p.50

⁴⁷ Ibidem. pp.50-51 “Il ne faut pas croire qu'un groupe de chanteurs ainsi éloigné puisse entendre l'orchestre, quelque nombreux qu'il soit : chacun chante à l'oreille de son voisin, et je me suis quelquefois surpris chantant contre mesure et conduisant à faux le chœur qui m'environnoit. Le maître des chœurs peut s'avancer et jeter un coup d'œil sur le bâton, direz-vous; c'est ce qu'il fait : mais si c'est un chœur dansé et chanté ; si une foule de danseurs occupent l'avant-scène, le bâton n'est plus visible. Le batteur de mesure frappe alors sur son pupitre, ce qui est très désagréable à entendre ; car il vous rappelle sur-le-champ que vous êtes à la comédie. J'ai souvent songé aux moyens de remédier à cet inconvenient ; je crois qu'on le pourroit, en plaçant quelques gros tuyaux d'orgues derrière la scène, ou sous le théâtre même [...]

took place in Westminster-Abbey in 1784. Charles Burney⁴⁸, one of the most eminent musicologist of the eighteenth century, heard these performances and offered an comprehensive descriptions of these events, published under the name of *An Account of the Musical Performances in Westminster-Abbey, and the Pantheon, May 26th, 27th, 29th, and June the 3th, 5th, 1784, in commemoration of Handel*. Besides the written description, a seating-plan is included, indicating the location of the various musicians and choir members. The director



Fig. 7. Diagram of Orchestra seating-plan for Handel commemoration at Westminster Abbey, London, May-June 1784

Mr. Bates, who is listed as the organ player and the harpsichord player, is called the “conductor” on the diagram. In fact, even if hundreds of performers were involved, Burney explains that the performances didn't necessitate “ the assistance of a *Corymbus* to beat the

⁴⁸ ‘(b Shrewsbury, 7 April 1726; d Chelsea, London, 12 April 1814). English musician, composer and music historian. A fashionable and popular teacher of music, he was a composer and performer of modest talents whose greatest success and legacy are his writings on music.’ ‘Burney, Charles’ Oxford music online. Accessed on Saturday, March 12th, 2017

time, either with a roll of paper, or a noisy baton, or truncheon”⁴⁹. In fact, the solution was that the harpsichord keys played by the conductor Bates were connected to the pipes of an organ at the back of the stage and could be heard by the orchestra and choir members. Some sub-directors helped the conductor, but mainly for administrative tasks, like “conducting the company to their seats”, “arranging the performers” and “conveying signals to the several parts of that wide-extended orchestra”⁵⁰, but not to beat time during the whole musical performance.

In summary, 18th century time-beating practices continue to be consistently used in church performances all over Europe, but was not the case for opera or purely instrumental music. If we don't consider the French context, opera and instrumental music was mostly led by a player of the ensemble, either the Kapellmeister who presided at the keyboard or the concertmaster playing the violin. Indeed, the French context is quite different : time-beating was standard in most opera and instrumental performances despite the barrage of criticisms. However, most theorists and performers of the eighteenth century were against time-beating, accepting this practice only under the absolute necessity, when musical performances would not have been possible without it. We shall see in the next chapter how most of 18th century leaders preferred to lead their musical performances.

⁴⁹ Charles Burney, *An Account of the Musical Performances in Westminster-Abbey, and the Pantheon, May 26th, 27th, 29th, and June the 3d, and 5th, 1784, in commemoration of Händel*. T. Payne and Son. London , 1785 p.112.

⁵⁰ Ibidem. pp.11-12