

Rossini: *Petite Messe solennelle*. (Works of Gioachino Rossini, Vol. 3), Edited by: Patricia B. Brauner and Philip Gossett. Barenreiter (BA 10501), 2009. 2 vols. (Score plus Critical Commentary; published with the collaboration of the Center for Italian Opera Studies, The University of Chicago)

You would think that the editorial history of the last great work by Europe's most popular composer would be relatively straightforward, but that's certainly not the case with Rossini's *Petite Messe solennelle*. The mundane facts surrounding its composition and initial performances are well known. Rossini wrote the *Messe* in and around 1863, dedicating it to his friends the Count and Countess Pillet-Will. The first performance took place in their grand new home at 12, rue Moncey on Monday, March 14, 1864 at 10:00pm. Attendance was by invitation only. It was, by all accounts, a major musical event, one which only whetted the appetite for future public performances of the work in both its original form, scored for two pianos and "Harmonicorde-Debain" (more on this below), and Rossini's enlarged version for full orchestra.

In their detailed preface to the score, which is as engagingly written as it is scholarly, editors Patricia Brauner and Philip Gossett capture the atmosphere of the premiere particularly well, citing the critic of *Le pays*:

"Rossini [who was not present] would have enjoyed a rare spectacle that some attentive persons noticed: a Mass, a religious piece, performed at 10:00 at night in front of an audience of women dressed to the nines, to inaugurate the mansion of a Protestant patrician, before the Papal nuncio, who spoke with goodly courtesy to the Ambassador from Turkey, while a Jewish artist [Jules Cohen] directed the orchestra."

There was only one further performance of the *Messe* during Rossini's lifetime, given on April 24, 1865 in circumstances virtually identical to those of the premiere. Subsequently, Rossini revised the work prior to preparing his enlarged orchestration, and until quite recently these two scores, the revised version for two pianos and harmonium, and the full orchestral edition, were believed to be the only existing manuscript sources. In the event, this has turned out not to be the case—but we mustn't get ahead of ourselves.

It goes without saying that such an important work by a major, indeed legendary, figure such as Rossini could not go long without a public

performance, whatever his wishes during his lifetime. Accordingly, very shortly after his death in 1868, Rossini's wife Olympe Pélissier sold the *Messe's* public performance rights to impresario Maurice Strakosch, who wasted no time in arranging the premiere of the orchestral version on February 24, 1869. This performance took place at the Théâtre Italien in Paris, a thoroughly secular venue necessitated by the fact that the Pope, despite numerous entreaties on Rossini's behalf in and around 1866, refused to permit the participation of female singers in the performance of sacred music in a Catholic church.

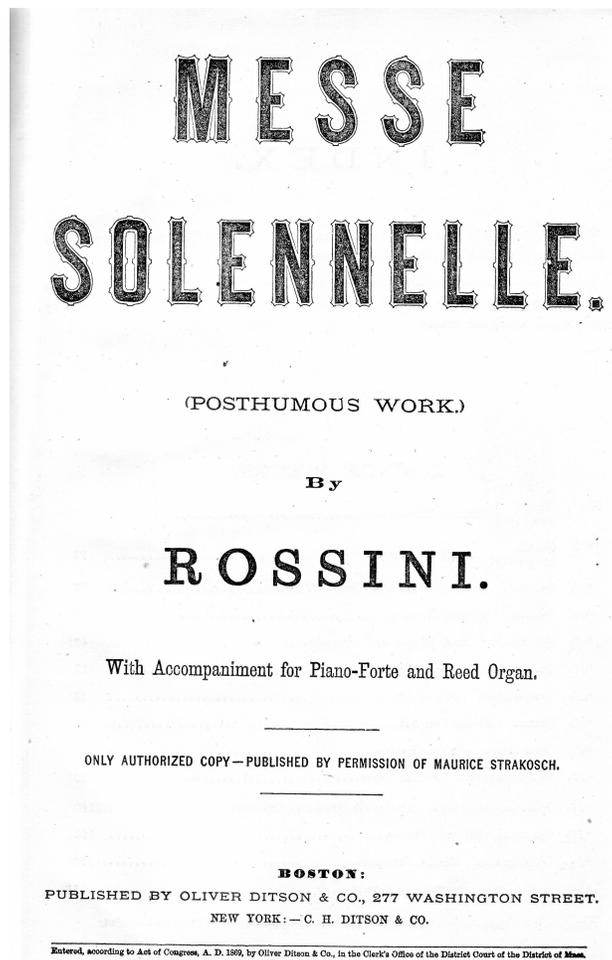
It was about this time that the Paris firm of Brandus & Dufour published the full score, as well as a vocal score arranged for one piano and harmonium. Chappell in London, Oliver Ditson in Boston, and Ricordi in Milan issued similarly redacted versions at about the same time. I reproduce the title page of the Ditson edition below, where it is advertised as the "only authorized copy—published by permission of Maurice Strakosch." The situation in performing the original version of the *Messe* was further complicated in the 1870s when Ricordi published an edition for one piano and harmonium based, not on Rossini's manuscript (now housed in Pesaro), but on an editorial reduction of the full orchestral score. The Ricordi version was reprinted 26 times between 1888 and 1970, and served as the basis for the still current Kalmus edition (Kalmus also publishes the full orchestral score).

This is basically where matters stood until modern Rossini scholarship got underway. Recent editions by Angelo Coan (1980, Edizioni musicali OTOS) and Nancy P. Fleming (1992, Oxford University Press) were the first to make available the complete piece for two pianos and harmonium as preserved in Rossini's Pesaro manuscript. Work on these scores uncovered some very interesting facts. In particular, Fleming noticed that the early published editions for one piano and harmonium (including the Ditson print just mentioned), include cuts, which she suggested resulted from editorial intervention. This assumption turns out to be incorrect. As Brauner and Gossett explain:

"Until 1994...the Pesaro autograph manuscript and the posthumous editions for one piano, harmonium, and voices were the only known sources. Yet logic tells us that there must once have existed a rich array of contemporary sources: performing parts used the soloists, chorus, and instrumentalists in 1864 and 1865; a master copy employed by the conductor Jules Cohen (unless he conducted from Rossini's autograph,

which seems most unlikely); and copies that served for the Brandus & Dufour edition of 1869 (which was *not* merely a reduction of the orchestral score).

It is in this context that the survival of a manuscript of the *Petite Messe solennelle* in a copyist's hand must be understood. Presented to the work's dedicatee, Countess Louise Pillet-Will, it is still owned by the family. We do not know when Rossini made his gift. It is likely that the title page would have borne an autograph dedication and perhaps a date, but it is precisely that title page, together with the first seven bars of the Kyrie (written on the verso of the title page), that are missing today. Otherwise the manuscript is complete."



The rather cheesy title page of the Ditson Edition of Rossini's *Petite Messe solennelle*

This Pillet-Will presentation score, Brauner and Gossett go on to argue persuasively, likely preserves the work as it was originally performed. The differences between the two versions are not huge, but they are still

significant. They consist for the most part of Rossini's later addition of more elaborate instrumental preludes and postludes to the various movements, the insertion of the soprano solo "O Salutaris hostia" after the 1865 performance, and some adjustments to the vocal parts. However, as the editors of the present edition point out, "they have a cumulative effect: the readings of PW [the Pillet-Will score] give the vocal lines a simpler frame, one even more appropriate for its original setting as a salon work than the version preserved in the Pesaro autograph."

However, it's extremely important to note that in preparing an edition that makes both versions, the Pillet-Will manuscript and Rossini's Pesaro autograph, available to prospective performers, Brauner and Gossett take the thoroughly intelligent and mature position that neither must be regarded as "definitive" in the sense of only one reading being right and the other wrong. Rather, they offer all of the material that artists will need to make their own decisions, while offering perfectly reasonable and practical suggestions on how this material might best be used. This is so different, and so refreshing, as compared to what we find in some recent purportedly critical editions—I am thinking particularly of the publication of Mahler's Sixth Symphony, in which the editors obsess over answering the impossible question of which version of the inner movements reflects the composer's "ultimate" intentions, coming across in the process as more concerned with trashing their predecessors than in fairly evaluating the musical facts.

The textual situation with respect to Rossini's late works is particularly complicated. As Brauner and Gossett note, Rossini's operatic manuscripts are usually relatively clean, presenting few second thoughts and compositional variants. The *Péchés de vieillesse*, however, his "sins of old age," are quite different. Evidently Rossini enjoyed sinning. Working for no one but himself, and composing under no particular pressure of time, he was free to tinker, revise, polish, and otherwise rewrite as often and as much as he liked. The *Petite messe* was no different in this respect even though it enjoyed only two performances in Rossini's lifetime, and notwithstanding all of the posthumous editorial intervention it suffered after his death.

Aside from the addition of "O Salutaris hostia," itself an adaptation for soprano of the earlier "O Salutaris, de Campagne" for contralto and piano (included as an appendix in the present score), one of the most fascinating

discoveries in connection with the *Petite Messe*¹ is the fact that the music of the “Christe eleison” was actually borrowed, possibly as an affectionate personal tribute, from the “Et incarnatus” of another *Messe solennelle* composed in 1849 by Rossini’s friend Louis Niedermayer (d. 1861). The original movement is also thoughtfully included in the present score for purposes of comparison, and perhaps it will serve to spark some interest in the still grossly neglected (and oft-maligned) sacred music of 19th century France.

One more interesting musical detail concerns the actual instrument used to play the harmonium part at the first performances. The original programs list it as a “Harmonicorde-Debain,” a hybrid between a piano and a reed organ invented by François Debain, the man credited with introducing the term “harmonium.” In his later autograph score, Rossini identifies the required instrument simply as a harmonium. Brandus & Dufour added registrations later, but as there is no evidence that Rossini had any hand in their selection, the editors have elected to omit them from the new Bärenreiter score. Fleming’s Oxford University Press printing, as they note in the preface, retains these registrations, and discusses them in some detail.

Perhaps the greatest utility of this new edition lies in the fact that the two principal sources, the Pillet-Will manuscript and Rossini’s Pesaro autograph, are presented with optimal clarity in order to facilitate comparison. Instead of a mess of appendices and addenda, the scores are presented side by side, in the main text. Where Rossini’s first thoughts represent a simpler, shorter version of his more elaborate later revision, the original is presented as a footnote on the same page of the score, as in the example below from the “Qui tollis” section of the “Gloria.”

In this case, Rossini’s first, quite laconic conclusion, a mere three chords lasting a bar and half, was later expended into a four-bar postlude, those last three chords becoming a hushed adagio. As the editors note, this revision is consistent with Rossini’s evident intention to give the piece a higher degree of rhetorical emphasis, particularly in the instrumental preludes and postludes. It also lends support to the notion that one of the motivating factors in making these revisions may have been their usefulness as preparation for the full orchestration that followed.

¹ Made by American organist Kurt Leuders while researching mid-19th century church music in Paris.

471

Adagio

pppp

Segue Solo

471a

* PW: P.1° =

Segue Solo

"Qui tollis" measure 471 (p. 52)

The increase in rhetorical emphasis is even more evident at the opening of the "Cum Sancto Spiritu" conclusion to the "Gloria." Here the revisions are particularly numerous, and can be summed up as follows:

1. Expansion. In the purely instrumental introduction, Rossini replaces fermatas over rests with full bars of silence. This is one of those indicators that may suggest that he was thinking in orchestral terms, since measured time is obviously more congenial to keeping a large ensemble together than an unmeasured pause (the presence of a conductor notwithstanding).
2. Text Setting. The opening choral entry, for the sopranos, fortissimo, is strikingly different. In the Pillet-Will score, the chorus sings "Cum Sancto Spiritu" in a lyrical phrase lasting two bars, whereas in the revision they have "Cum Sancto Spiritu in gloria Dei Patris," and take four bars. Additionally, the vocal line becomes notably more declamatory and emphatic, being mostly on one note with heavy accents (^) over each.
3. Accompaniment. In the revision, the accompaniment is considerably heavier in the second piano part, while the dynamics have been expanded to include a magisterial fff (which includes the full chorus). Rossini also postpones the entry of the instrumental ensemble to the word "Amen," giving it an emphasis nowhere to be found in the Pillet-Will score.

You can see many of these differences in the example below ("PW" = "Pillet-Will"), as well as how splendidly the present edition aligns the two scores to facilitate comparison:

less as in the revised Pesaro manuscript, but they continue with, and the accompaniment reflects, what we find in Pillet-Will:

Cum Sanc-to Spi-ri-tu in Glo-ri-a De-i Pa-tris, in Glo-ri-a
Thou, with the Ho-ly Ghost, in glo-ry with God the Fa-ther, in glo-ry with

Cum Sanc-to Spi-ri-tu in Glo-ri-a De-i Pa-tris, in Glo-ri-a
Thou, with the Ho-ly Ghost, in glo-ry with God the Fa-ther, in glo-ry with

Cum Sanc-to Spi-ri-tu in Glo-ri-a De-i Pa-tris, in Glo-ri-a
Thou, with the Ho-ly Ghost, in glo-ry with God the Fa-ther, in glo-ry with

De-i Pa-tris,
God, the Fa-ther,

I offer the above extract merely to illustrate just how complex an editorial process has been involved in putting this magnificent new edition together, never mind all of the myriad details addressed in the separate volume of critical commentary. It was very gracious of the Pillet-Will family to make their copy of the score available for the preparation of this new edition. It offers truly fascinating insights both into the working methods of Rossini's last years, and the subsequent history in print of his last great masterpiece. Absent any other contemporary source material coming to light, it is very difficult to imagine anyone arriving at a more scholarly, accurate, and practically useful text than this.

David Hurwitz
July, 2010