

In his review of Saint-Saëns's 1883 opera *Henry VIII*, Henry Fouquier joked that while Saint-Saëns was a leading figure amongst France's younger composers, in France a "young" composer meant only that his beard had not yet entirely turned white.¹ Indeed, Saint-Saëns straddled an odd boundary in 1883—he *was* a leading member of the *jeune école*, but on the other hand he had already logged a thirty-year performing career and was elected to a seat at the Institut in 1881.² Simultaneously "young" and "establishment," Saint-Saëns faced immense pressure to offer both regeneration and stability in his first work at the Académie Nationale de Musique. Edmond Hippeau framed this expectation in quasi-messianic language, writing in his analysis of *Henry VIII* that the "regeneration of contemporary opera is coming through a predestined musician, through a work of art that we are waiting for. Is Camille Saint-Saëns this man, and is *Henry VIII* this work?"³

Of course this focus on regeneration illustrates that *Henry VIII's* premiere was subject to *more* than the typical curiosity, interest, and solemnity of an operatic premiere. *Henry VIII* premiered in March 1883, just one month after Wagner's death, and was thus one of the first works to offer potential directions for opera *après Wagner*. As Hippeau noted, this was a *moment psychologique* for the French national school. What, finally, would be Wagner's legacy? What was the identity of the French national school, and what relationships *should* it have with German and Italian musics? Everything was ensnared in these questions; few decisions seemed neutral. [Slide 2] As an example, *Henry VIII's* printed score included no index for detached pieces; this was read by many as a clue that Saint-Saëns was rejecting number opera. Yet critics hastened to note that *Henry VIII* nonetheless contained clear ariosos, duos, quartets, and other *pieces*. The reviews split down predictable fault lines on the relative merits of Saint-Saëns's

blend of leitmotifs and traditional formal structure in *Henry VIII*; some found interest and progress in this method, while others attacked the procedure as lacking unity or progressive qualities.⁴

The overwhelming pressure of contending with Wagnerian *drame lyrique* in French *fin-de-siècle* music is not a new subject for musicologists; Stephen Huebner's fine study addresses this subject at length, as do works by Manuela Schwartz and other scholars. Rather than rehashing this exact ground, today I would like to look at this question through a slightly reframed optique. Saint-Saëns, for the aforementioned reasons, offers a particularly interesting entrée into studying French operas of this period. [Slide 3] I have chosen *Henry VIII* and *Ascanio* as works that were both written *for* the Académie National de Musique and *premiered* on its stage—in the 1880s and 1890s, the Opéra represented an ambiguous space of both prestige and stagnation. These two operas have significant differences:

- 1) they premiered under very different administrative regimes at the Opéra
- 2) Saint-Saëns oversaw the rehearsal process of *Henry VIII* with a minute attention to detail, whereas he was famously missing-in-action during the rehearsals and premiere of *Ascanio*
- 3) *Henry VIII* was largely a success, whereas *Ascanio* met with lukewarm reception

Yet they share important qualities not just in their genre and institution, but also in a shared 16th century setting and repeated tropes in their critical reception.

In analyzing the reception of *Henry VIII* and *Ascanio* through a close reading about forty reviews for each opera, I have focused **not** specifically on the question of Wagner, but on the interconnected question of how *Henry VIII* and *Ascanio* relate to musics of the past. Through a certain lens, *this* might be the fundamental question for French musicians during this period—given the presence of Wagnerian *drame lyrique*, what is “our” tradition? How do we construct it? What do we value? What do we hide? [Slide 4] At a moment of crisis, how might we look to the

greatness of the past to feed the greatness of the future? As Katharine Ellis has noted, Ernest Renan's famous address of 1882—just one year before the premiere of *Henry VIII*—pondered these very questions of constructing the past and selectively forgetting parts of history in order to agree upon collective interpretations of others.

Within the two operas *Henry VIII* and *Ascanio*, I will discuss a number of ways in which the reception of these two works relate to history and musics of the past. [Slide 5] First, the historical subject matter of the libretti was itself a politicized choice during this period. Second, how did Parisian reviews of these operas tend to discuss Saint-Saëns and his style within a musical lineage—what was his role in French opera? Third, as Saint-Saëns composed these two operas set in the 16th century, how did critics and audiences read his references to musics of the past?

[Slide 6] Beginning with the use of historical subjects for opera libretti, Saint-Saëns took a firm position in the late 1870s that historical subject matter was as good (perhaps better) than mythological subject matter. He planned a series of operas drawn from French history, beginning the work with *Étienne Marcel*, first performed in 1879 in Lyon. *Henry VIII* and *Ascanio* offered further essays in historical opera, but many Parisian critics were unconvinced by Saint-Saëns's position. Hippeau found Saint-Saëns's defense of history uninteresting, while other critics were clearly in Wagner's camp. In Victor Wilder's *Ascanio* review, for example, he wrote that "Wagner believes myth is the clear headwater where a composer can draw his inspiration, whereas Saint-Saëns prefers to drink from the muddy waters of history." *Ascanio* drew additional criticism due to its origins as a "pseudo-historical" play from a mid-century boulevard theater in the 1830s. Moreover, if a composer was going to feature a historical subject on the vast stage of

the Opéra, why choose one with so little scope for large choral masses?⁵ Despite Saint-Saëns's advocacy, historical subjects seemed stuck within both Wagner's rejection AND the legacy of Meyerbeer.

Before looking at specific pieces within *Henry VIII* and *Ascanio* that critics heard as related to musics of the past, I'd like to make a few general comments on how Saint-Saëns's compositional style was framed by critics of these operas. [Slide 7] First, comments on the general musical style of Saint-Saëns recall the oft-repeated clarity, sobriety, lightness. In *Le Constituionnel*, Jacques Hermann described Saint-Saëns's artistic temperament as “an almost austere sincerity, an almost geometric precision, an implacable will to do what he wants and a sort of instinctive repulsion for hackneyed procedures.”⁶ One characteristic quite specific to Saint-Saëns is the emphasis on erudition and “science.” [Slide 8] Second, I've compiled a rough chart of the specific musicians Saint-Saëns was often compared to in these reviews.⁷ As you can see, much of the constructed lineage for *Henry VIII*—this long-awaited work—overtly attempted to place Saint-Saëns in the lineage of great dramatic composers who wrote in a supposedly “classique” style (namely Mozart and Gluck). Auguste Vitu's comment is typical, describing Saint-Saëns's style as “la pure tradition classique..Mozart is his God.” Critics performed these motions less enthusiastically for *Ascanio* seven years later—no longer did they bother placing Saint-Saëns or this opera as the next in a great lineage. Rather, most of their attention focused on specific pieces which reminded them of other melodies; there are a number of references to Meyerbeer and Wagner's *Die Meistersinger*.

As a brief side note and one specific detail on Saint-Saëns's style, praise for the *orchestration* of both *Henry VIII* and *Ascanio* was one of the FEW areas of universal agreement.

Critics united in calling Saint-Saëns a master *symphoniste* (a few critics couldn't help themselves from puns which likened Saint-Saëns as an orchestral sculptor to Benvenuto Cellini the sculptor). But even this praise raised dilemmas.⁸ Before the premiere of *Henry VIII*, Léon Kerst noted he had doubts this master of the concert hall and the orchestra was really a man of the theater.⁹ Some critics opined that the ballets and other detachable pieces might have been written with an eye towards eventual performance on the Sunday orchestral concerts rather than the opera stage¹⁰—*La Lanterne's* reviewer noted *Ascanio's* ballet could be played on its own under the title “La Nympe de Fontainebleau.” If *Henry VIII* or *Ascanio* represented a future path for French opera, what did it mean that the some of the most marvelous pieces renounced the voice entirely? On the other side of the coin, Saint-Saëns's orchestral emphasis potentially suggested yet another colonization of French music by German opera. Wagner's innovations in operatic orchestration were an obvious influence on Saint-Saëns; he himself noted Wagner's influence on the orchestration of *Henry VIII*, namely that he had expanded the Opéra's woodwind section to three flutes, three oboes, and three clarinets.¹¹

More cogent to our focus is the critical response to Saint-Saëns's use of particularly learned approach to composition in general and counterpoint in particular. [Slide 9] Although less a contrapuntal device than a metrical ploy, several critics complained about the constantly shifting meters in Catherine of Aragon's heartfelt farewell to Spain in Act IV of *Henry VIII*, noting that it was “clever” but distracting. Counterpoint in particular offered a complicated link with earlier musics. As Katherine Ellis notes in her study of early music revivals in 19th century France, French listeners had a mixed reaction to Bach, torn between praising him or regurgitating age-old criticisms à la Rousseau about counterpoint as the triumph of calculation over inspiration

and dry learnedness.¹² In 1888, Camille Bellaigue wrote of Bach that “of all the great musicians, the greatest perhaps, that is to say he without whom music itself would not exist, the founder, the patriarch, the father, the Abraham, the Noah, the Adam of music, Johann Sebastian Bach is the most tedious. Handel comes only afterwards...” In *Henry VIII*, many critics appreciated the contrapuntal intensity. Jacques Hermann wrote of the counterpoint as bright, virile, sober, with a severe line and even an admirable local color.” BUT Saint-Saëns was also damned with some of the same criticisms for his counterpoint: the coldness, the severity, the intellect or technique over passion. Hippeau wrote that Handel, Bach, then Beethoven were Saint-Saëns’s first masters, but BECAUSE of his nature of developing everything, the composer has a tendency towards the overly short phrase and the overdeveloped. [Slide 10] In the later work *Ascanio*, critics worried about the density of the web of motifs and again, the overly intellectualized compositional technique. Saint-Saëns famously wrote to Gallet bragging about his use of an inverted motif in *Ascanio*, a letter that was later printed for all to see in *Le Figaro*.¹³ Several critics quoted the letter in their reviews, torn between admiration about Saint-Saëns’s cleverness and the feeling that all this was lost on the public.¹⁴

Turning now to specific pieces within each of these operas¹⁵ which referenced musics of the past—or at least critics made claims they did—Saint-Saëns set himself a difficult task with *Henry VIII* and *Ascanio*. Beloved sources of music—particularly French sources—from the 1500s were few and far between, unlike the music of later periods such as Rameau, Lully’s dances, or the vocal polyphony of Lassus, Palestrina, and Allegri. The only potential option for Saint-Saëns were the *chansons populaires* by Clement Janequin—through Janequin, 16th century music DID represent a pre-decadent period, a kind of “earthiness, esprit, verve, and

colorful style.”¹⁶ It was not clear, however, how exactly Saint-Saëns might transplant such sounds to the operatic stage, particularly within the demands of 1880s and 1890s operatic style.

[Slide 11] Turning first to *Henry VIII*, this 16th century story offered some greater freedoms for Saint-Saëns, given its English setting. Several critics commented that there was no tradition to how England was represented onstage at the Opéra, opening up space for various approaches. Saint-Saëns researched historical musics for *Henry VIII*, allegedly borrowing period liturgical pieces and copying the mob chorus in Act III from a manuscript at the British Royal Library.¹⁷ Tellingly, Saint-Saëns seems to view his own role as a quasi-archaeological one, writing to Durand of this melody “it had almost disappeared beneath fioritura and conventional ornamentation from which I extracted it like a small statue that one might find covered with sprouting fungus.”¹⁸ Tiersot praised Saint-Saëns’s exactitude for “couleur extérieure” by not relegating his quotations to the ballet, but including borrowings throughout the drama from “pieces for clavecin and virginal, and *airs de danse* by William Byrd, Bull, Tallis, Orlando Gibbons, and others.”¹⁹ Chart shows about 16 numbers noted as archaic. **Play prelude (35 sec)**

In the Act II ballet, [in yellow on the chart] an obvious place for insertion of period dances or *couleur locale*, Saint-Saëns oddly wrote a series of “Scottish” pieces with little or no connection to period sources. Nonetheless, most critics liked the ballet, although a few criticized the final gigue, preferring the menuets found in other portions of *Henry VIII*. (We also see some nationalist snark regarding the “dryness” of English music and the unattractive thumping sounds English people make when they dance). While much of the praise for Henry VIII’s archaic pieces is generically brief and positive, interesting critical fissures emerge. Tiersot lauded Saint-Saëns for borrowing from “authentic and truly serious sources,” and not resorting to *pastiche*.

[Slide 12] Conversely, Auguste Vitu praised Lassalle's aria "Qui donc commande" which seemed 'without trying too hard for a researched archaism,' to nonetheless exude the style of Lully or one of his predecessors. [Play this, 34 sec] So while the past was obviously important and open for artistic pillaging, there were obviously "wrong ways" to include historical sounds—one wonders exactly how much space there was between a tacky ahistorical *pastiche* and "trying too hard to sound archaic."

[Slide 13] Perhaps the most interesting comment comes from Jacques Hermann, who noted that with all *Henry VIII's* unresolved cadences and other musical markers of the period, it "is enough to bring out the 16th century to the listener and to render the tableaux presented before their eyes as living scenes. It is the gift of genius—or at least first rate talent—to transport the viewer, without preparation or cunning to the time and place where the action is going to happen." While Hermann undoubtedly approved of Saint-Saëns's opera, this emphasis on visuality likewise traps French opera in a dual problem: a) the emerging discourse of the "work" trumping visual and spectacular elements and b) the problem of dance being gendered as decorative and feminine.

[Slide 14] *Ascanio* shared *Henry VIII's* mid-16th century setting, but presented additional problems given the French locale. In *Ascanio*, Saint-Saëns would have to directly confront the question not only of *pastiche*, but also find a way of representing 16th century French musical styles in a manner that made a strong case for French musical superiority. Within *Ascanio*, critics referred to seven pieces or segments within the score as archaïque or overtly influenced by musics of the past. [Slide 15] The King's madrigal was lauded by all for its lovely archaïque color, with several critics likening it to Ronsard in particular.²⁰ [Slide 16] Colombe's unaccompanied ballad in the second tableau was likewise a hit, with additional gendered

references to the charm, grace, and agreeable naïveté of this number. Interestingly, Scozzzone's Act II Italian aria was much more divisive for the critics. Saint-Saëns claimed this melody was written "après" a 16th century melody, and Malherbe even suggested that the tonality seemed archaïque, suggesting the 7th tone of plainchant. Yet multiple critics found it "vulgar," too contorted, too full of fioritura, too fantastic. **[Play: 30 seconds]**

[Slide 17] The 12 pieces of the ballet complex employed the most concentrated allusions to music of the past.²¹ In a article in *Le Menestrel*, Julien Tiersot analyzed the provenance of each of Saint-Saëns's ballet movements. He concluded that the ballet "is doubly interesting, comprising an artistic and historic element as well as an archaeological one." Louis Fourcaud did not agree, however, writing that "this neverending mix of ancient and new forms leads, above all else, to monotony."

Certainly these pieces employed the particular talents of Saint-Saëns as well as attracting certain audience constituencies—Henri Moreno noted that the archaic manner of one of Ascanio's airs would not fail to please the "amateurs d'antiquité" in the crowd. Yet a tension emerged between the visual components of the production—many critics mentioned how François I's costume had been copied from paintings by Titian—and the representation of historical sounds. *Le Matin's* reviewer notes that "Well, all this science leaves us cold and seems to singularly impede the artists who are tasked with it. We see François I in his costume, but his soul—where is it? These old paintings walk before us, but they are frozen paintings. We have the representation of art, not of life. I fear that archaeology is the antipode of dramatic art and particularly of lyric art." In addition to recapping some of the problems of the focus on *visual* reconstructions, this reviewer ponders whether all of this research and *pastiche* contribute

anything at all to dramatic sensibility? For other critics, the issue of homogeneity reemerged. Stoullig seemed puzzled, writing of *Ascanio*: “But where is the personality of this work, which floats between archaic pastiche and imitation of Gounod, between the leitmotifs of Wagner and a kind of Italianism.” Albert Soubies offered a harsher critique, noting that masters of the *drame lyrique* haven’t gone in for this “slightly puerile” need for local color: “because if it’s to be logical, it should be maintained throughout the work and a terrible boredom will quickly overtake the auditorium. The *drame lyrique* composers have written music of their own time, and frankly I think they were right to do so. With an artist such as Saint-Saëns the drawbacks of this method are hardly noticeable, but it wouldn’t do for him to be imitated by many.”

By and large, specifically “archaic” pieces within *Henry VIII* and *Ascanio* were successful with critics and the public, as reflected in reviews, requests for encores, and even performances outside the Opéra by the major Parisian concert societies. Yet as part of the larger operas, these pieces seemed to strain the boundaries of what Parisian critics and the public demanded from new French opera in the 1880s and 1890s. Could looking to music history really advance operatic progress AND please audiences? Reading the reviews closely reveals a tension between interests in historical reconstruction and allusion on one hand, and dislike of heterogeneity, pastiche, and styles which seemed TOO researched and intellectual on the other. This double bind was particularly problematic for Saint-Saëns. As we’ve heard multiple papers at this colloquium, accounts of both Saint-Saëns’s playing and composing repeatedly invoke sparseness, economy of means, perhaps coldness. If historicism and learnedness both attracted and repelled, Saint-Saëns’s aesthetic seemed unusually bound up in such debates. In his review of *Ascanio*, Henri Moreno noted that it was often said of Saint-Saëns that music is made with the brain and

not with the heart. Ultimately, these historical operas dazzled audiences with their technique and their references to the past, but such sections seemed to pale in comparison with the response to pieces such as the full-throated final quartet from *Henry VIII*. If historicism offered a potential path out of the Wagnerian morass, it was a path with significant challenges, particularly for Saint-Saëns.

¹ ?, *Le XIX Siècle*, 13 March 1883. La curiosité du public était d'autant plus éveillée que Henry VIII était le début, à Paris et sur la scène de l'Opéra, d'un « jeune » c'est-à-dire d'un musicien qui n'a pas encore tout à fait la barbe blanche. Malgré cette « jeunesse » à l'usage des compositeurs, M. Saint-Saëns a déjà beaucoup produit. On a joué de lui des symphonies, des oratorios, des suites d'orchestre et, à Lyon, un grand opéra, Etienne Marcel....

² Henry VIII, as many know (have commented, Steven Huebner has said) took place at a fraught moment for the French operatic school. Wagner had died little less than a month before Henry VIII's premiere. Hippeau commented that this was a "moment psychologique" for the French national school.

Premieres of new works at the Opéra were always less frequent than critics, dilettanti, and the national administration desired, and as such, new works did take on a certain "solennité" when they appeared. Vitu wrote of Henry VIII that "une grande curiosité et un grand intérêt" was associated with this great event. Like always, proving one's mettle at the Opéra was the ultimate test of a French composer's status. Yet the stakes for Saint-Saëns seemed even higher. He straddled an odd boundary as an establishment composer—his career before the French public already spanned more than thirty years, and his reputation had been institutionalized through his 1881 election to a siège at the Institut—AND a leading light of the "jeune école." Or, as Hippeau put it, "un des compositeurs les plus estimés de la jeune école." As Hippeau points out, S-S was already a man before he began writing for the stage—already a mature talent with strong views. Despite the fact that Etienne Marcel had not played in Paris, and *Le Timbre d'argent* had played only at the defunct Théâtre Lyrique, a number of Parisian critics knew the works and mentioned them by name in their reviews of Henry VIII. Overall, Saint-Saëns was quite well-known to Parisian audiences; the *Monsieur de l'Orchestre* of *Le Figaro* noted that he did not need to introduce Saint-Saëns to the Parisian public, as most people had seen him play piano at least once (Lisztian idea of soul in his fingers).

Hippeau and others made much of the fact that they hoped for, wanted, expected, a masterpiece from Saint-Saëns's debut at the Opéra (though Hippeau demurred that Saint-Saëns was probably not trying to write one). As Hippeau put it, "isn't this what we have been looking for for twenty years?" or, what Hippeau calls "l'œuvre d'art attendue." Or, as Hippeau put it in more messianic language later on, "Je crois toujours que la régénération de l'opéra contemporain est prochaine qu'il y a un musicien prédestiné, une œuvre d'art attendue. Camille Saint-Saëns est-il cet homme; Henry VIII est-il cette œuvre?" Charles Tardieu noted that if S-S had been given the stage of the Opéra earlier, we might have had today the masterpiece we will have tomorrow. (Hippeau added: Le nom de Camille Saint-Saëns est donc un espoir pour la jeune école, et ceux qui font reposer sur l'auteur à Henry VIII leur confiance dans le triomphe de l'école française sont les plus nombreux et les plus autorisés à la fois).

³ Hippeau, "Je crois toujours que la régénération de l'opéra contemporain est prochaine qu'il y a un musicien prédestiné, une œuvre d'art attendue. Camille Saint-Saëns est-il cet homme; Henry VIII est-il cette œuvre?"

⁴ Hippeau pondered whether this style indicated a particularly French quality of eclecticism, whereas more intransigent Wagnerians accused Saint-Saëns of making concessions to public taste.

⁵ Henry Fouquier in *Le XIX Siècle* noted that the inconvenient thing about this libretto is a certain monotony of situations and the absence of certain historical events which allow the choral and historical masses which belong to the Opéra.

Unsigned review of *Le Matin* is very critical of setting Dumas at the opera, and also not enough to fill the stage (need masses, not a few singers discussing politics).

⁶ Hermann, *Le Constitutionnel*, En examinant, en effet, le tempérament de l'artiste, en prenant, pour ainsi dire, le signalement musical de l'homme—à l'heure où nous sommes de sa carrière—deux traits fortement accentués nous frappent dans cette original physionomie, deux qualités précisément nécessaires à l'historien: la netteté et la clarté, la simplicité et la brièveté. Dans les détails, dans ce qu'on pourrait appeler l'attitude, la manière d'être de ses œuvres, M. Saint-Saëns découvre une science profonde et une variété de procédés qui va jusqu'à l'habileté la plus affinée, mais ne descend jamais jusqu'à la ruse. Une sincérité presque austère, une précision presque géométrique, une volonté implacable de faire que ce qu'il voit, enfin une sorte de répulsion instinctive pour tout ce qu'en art on a appelé des ficelles. Tel nous apparaît l'auteur d'Henry VIII.

⁷ the line represents general comments, while the bottom portion shows that specific pieces were seen as recalling specific works by other composers

⁸ Louis Gallet noted that Saint-Saëns is drawn by a double current, on one hand to be a symphoniste on the other to be a compositeur dramatique.

⁹ On doutait beaucoup, je dois le dire. On tenait le futur auteur d'Henry VIII pour un remarquable symphoniste, on l'avait maintes fois acclamé dans les concerts classiques du dimanche, on savait que sa réputation de meneur d'orchestre lui avait ouvert les portes de l'Institut. Mais, était-ce un homme de théâtre? Pourrait-il assouplir suffisamment sa profonde science harmonique pour laisser aux chanteurs le rôle important qu'ils doivent jouer dans tout opéra écrit en vue d'un auditoire français? Saurait-il, selon la pittoresque expression de Gluck, laisser la statue sur la scène et reléguer le piédestal dans l'orchestre? Aujourd'hui, la preuve est établie, triomphale dans certaines parties d'Henry VIII, douteuse dans certaines autres, mais, — balance faite, — concluante en somme. L'homme qui a écrit tout le quatrième acte d'Henry VIII, le duo d'amour entre Henry et Anne, le finale du premier acte et la scène du synode, possède l'instinct scénique fortement développé. Il n'a plus qu'à vouloir pour devenir l'égal de nos compositeurs dramatiques les plus célèbres.

¹⁰ And this did indeed happen—Colonne played works from both Henry VIII and Ascanio for decades, and these morceaux détachées were played in places as far afield as Brazil in the 1890s and 1900s.

¹¹ Oui, sans doute, le compositeur d'Henry VIII emploie comme Wagner les trois clarinettes, les trois bassons, les trois hautbois à l'unisson; The reviewer in *La soirée théâtrale* notes as well —Avez-vous remarqué mon orchestre ? demande-t-il à ceux qui le complimentent. En effet, Saint-Saëns, a emprunté Wagner un de ses procédés. Au lieu de deux flûtes, deux hautbois et deux clarinettes qui ont jusqu'à présent suffi à tous les ouvrages de l'Opéra, le compositeur d'Henry VIII a tenu à avoir trois flûtes, trois hautbois et trois clarinettes, réservant les cuivres pour les effets de sonorité plus accentués.

¹² Ellis, p. 60. As Katherine Ellis notes, a pushback against counterpoint as “antiexpressive, scholastic, and (pejoratively) virtuosic” dates back to Rousseau’s *Lettre sur la musique française* (1753).

¹³ Saint-Saëns to his collaborator, 17 November 1887, and published in *Le Figaro*, 13 March 1890. “ça commence, dit-il en parlant de la première scène de son opéra, par la peinture d’une activité dévorante qui se calme à l’entrée du héros. Il parle sur un ton demi-léger. Quand il arrive au dessin du Pagolo, l’orchestre joue à l’envers le motif du travail pour montrer que Pagolo a travaillé en dépit du bon sens. C’est drôle comme tout.”

¹⁴ Tiersot defended him on this front, noting that all the students of the Conservatoire would have known how to do this. Also cites Bach, Alfred Bruneau’s *Kerim*, and even that Wagner might have done this in the *Nibelungen* or *Mastersingers*.

¹⁵ Albert Soubies comments that Saint-Saëns has voluntarily ensconced himself in the music of the old masters, namely Palestrina up to Rameau. No one can orchestrate so well or “dress” (if that’s appropriate) music composed in an old way in the modern clothes of today. Saint-Saëns was known for doing this, in the *passe-pied* of Henry VIII as well as the *pavane* from *Proserpine*. a few weird descriptions of the king and Duchess as having motets in the style of *maîtres des chapelles*.

¹⁶ Ellis, p. 158.

¹⁷ Specific pieces: Jacques Hermann notes overture is pure Handel. Vitu makes several comparisons in *Le Figaro*: Compares Henry’s act I air to “le parfum d’une mélodie de Lully ou de quelqu’un de ses successeurs.” Then he goes on to talk about the Noble dame chœur as sounding like Rameau, “De même le chœur de femmes en si bémol « Noble dame », pour vous plaire » se rapproche, par son allure à la fois aisée et régulière, d’un des plus jolis chœurs de Rameau. Ne serait-ce pas, d’aventure, une canzonetta que la lamento touchant de la reine au dernier tableau « Je ne te reverrai jamais, ô douce terre où je suis née! » aussi plaintive que la romance du Saule? Enfin il faut bien en convenir, l’allegro en la majeur d’Anne de Boleyn, au second acte « Je vais donc enfin le connaître! » n’est autre chose qu’un « rondo », horresco referens! oui, un rondo avec reprise et coda, comme il s’en trouve dans tous les opéras de Mozart, et même dans l’Adolphe et Clara de Dalayrac.”

¹⁸ Letter to Durand, 27 Feb. 1888, Saint-Saëns Durand correspondence, Bibliothèque Gustav Mahler.

¹⁹ De musique moderne (?) et de modulations indécises, il n'en fallait pas pour faire surgir devant l'esprit de l'auditeur le seizième siècle et rendre vivants les tableaux présentés aux yeux. interesting that he brings the antique style of music to make the spectacle itself visible. very interesting.

C'est le don du génie, tout au moins d'un talent de premier ordre, de transporter le spectateur, sans préparation ni ruse, au temps et au lieu où va se passer l'action, où les passions vont lutter, où la nature de chacun va se dévoiler. Ce que de dis ici de l'ouverture peut de sire de l'opéra entier. ...le tour madrigalesque et tout français du dialogue de Don Gomez de Faria avec le duc de Norfolk, seigneur de la cour d'Angleterre.

Hermann continued by calling the Henry arioso in Act I as "Le type d'Henry VIII est peint de main de maître et philosophiquement conçu; dès son entrée en scène, il convoite déjà la belle Anne de Boleyn; son amour est excité savamment par la coquetterie et les résistances de la fille d'honneur, et il dit à son confident sa faiblesse et son tourment "Qui donc commande quand il aime?"; ce cantabile juste, de goût, d'expression, et il s'en dégage un délicieux d'archaïsme."

He continues by discussing the Act II music as: Un chœur madrigal est chanté par les filles d'honneur à l'enchanteresse; on dirait un babillage de cour, signé Lambert ou Lulli. C'est un hors-d'œuvre, mais il est délicieux...

The menuet at the opening of Act IV, danced by Anne's ladies in waiting, also attracted praise from Hermann, who wrote, "Au milieu de cette scène de cour, prétexte pour le musicien à un menuet dans le plus pur style du temps, qui est un véritable bijou."

Anne's entrance music is a menuet: "andante grazioso, quasi minuetto", p. 71.

Beginning of Act II prelude, one of the motifs recalls a phrase of the minuet which accompanied Anne to court.

Act III, third fragment of Anne's entrance menuet, p. 72, third line and p. 244 measure 4 and following.

Anne's entrance menuet one more time in Act IV when she comes to visit the queen.

historical research:

Apparently Lacoste went to England to research ballet and decors and costumes.

It was reported in Le Figaro in June 1882 that "Vous savez que M. Eugène Lacoste a été envoyé à Londres en mission artistique, pour étudier à Londres en mission artistique, pour étudier et collectionner les costumes de l'Henri VIII qui sera joué à l'Opéra. M. Saint-Saëns, auteur de la partition, a, de son côté, fouillé les bibliothèques musicales anglicanes, afin de s'inspirer notamment de quelques beaux chants liturgiques."

Interesting note that Henry VIII is the first opera set in England at the Opéra?

Eugène Hubert of Gil Blas did not care for the ballet or the dance (disliked English/Scottish stuff): Il paraît que, spécialement pour le ballet — auquel nous arrivons — M. Lacoste a fait le voyage de Londres. Je le regrette. J'ai vu à Paris des collections d'estampes anglaises et écossaises, qui lui auraient permis — sans se déranger - de faire aussi exact et plus coquet. Ce n'est, après tout, un mystère pour personne que nos voisins d'outre-Manche n'ont guère de goût....que pour les colonies. Il est évidemment fâcheux pour les auteurs d'un ballet que leur sujet se passe en Angleterre. La gigue, destinée sans doute- à utiliser les plus grands pieds du globe, ne peut faire excuser la fréquence disgracieuse de sa trépidation sur le sol que par un besoin inné de « battre la semelle ». Qu'un matelot sautant du bord sur le plancher des vaches, se livre à cet exercice gymnastique, soit !..." Hubert likes the pas de l'écharpe and thought Soria

specific pieces: Jacques Hermann notes overture is pure Handel. Vitu makes several comparisons in Le Figaro: Compares Henry's act I air to "le parfum d'une mélodie de Lully ou de quelqu'un de ses successeurs." Then he goes on to talk about the Noble dame chœur as sounding like Rameau, "De même le chœur de femmes en si bémol « Noble dame', pour vous plaire » se rapproche, par son allure à la fois aisée et régulière, d'un des plus jolis chœurs de Rameau. Ne serait-ce pas, d'aventure, une canzonetta que la lamento touchant de la reine au dernier tableau « Je ne te reverrai jamais, ô douce terre où je suis née! » aussi plaintive que la romance du Saule? Enfin il faut bien en convenir, l'allegro en la majeur d'Anne de Boleyn, au second acte « Je vais donc enfin le connaître! » n'est autre chose qu'un « rondo », horresco referens! oui, un rondo avec reprise et coda, comme il s'en trouve dans tous les opéras de Mozart, et même dans l'Adolphe et Clara de Dalayrac."

²⁰ King's first entrance: charming flute phrase that underlines this. Called a pavane (harp & flute), a menuet (x2) marotique, discrète et narquoise that brings a completely unique French spirit. Like a Renaissance arabesque. Gives us the color of the times, gracieuse et sobre, chevaleresque and princière.

Ascanio, second tableau: Malherbe only one to call this a madrigal. De par le Roi. Like a chanson in plein air.

King's madrigal "Adieux, beauté, ma mie: joli (x4), archaïque (x4), couleur (x2) chevaleresque, like Ronsard (x2), elegant, sentiment exquis, ton délicieusement surannés, smells of the 16th century, agréable, pastiche.

Duchesse: end of second tableau, whose last word is repeated in echo by the chorus, seems to be akin in spirit to what Tiersot called "Chansons de plein air" in his *Histoire de la chanson populaire en France*

Scozzzone : Tiersot notes that in the second act she sings le madrigal of Palestrina, *Alla riva del Tibro* (profane work of Palestrina). Funny to write for a single voice a masterpiece of polyphony. But then replaces by a mention "d'après une chanson du XVIe siècle. Tiersot doesn't know the source. vulgar, imitating the 16th century but too contorsionnée, trop fantasque, too surcharged with fioritures (although it was encored). Another mentions Italian song of the 16th century. assez vulgaire even if it comes from the 16th century. Malherbe notes that Saint-Saëns scrupulously said that this was composed after a 16th century melody, and while it's discreet, the tonality seems archaïque (7th tone of plainchant, with Bb minor in the gamme of C major?)—but all the developments, modulations and rentrées don't seem archaïque at all

Colombe, "Non cœur s'est envolée" on "Mon cœur est sous la tombe": "ballade ancienne," charming, P.G. calls it more elevated than Scozzzone's song, exquisite ballade archaïque, grâce incomparable, archaïque, couleur charmante, légèrement archaïque, aimable naïveté,

Air de Ascanio which follows Colombe: langorous, which in in the archaïque manner, and will not lack taste for "amateurs d'antiquité." Again with the metaphor of being a jewel that Saint-Saëns has sculpted (like Benvenuto himself). grand simplicity, but agréable parfum archaïque

²¹ Tiersot notes these are not in constant imitation of dances of the XVI century. Some are pastiches, imitation on ancien rythmes, but introducing something new. Sometimes they resemble their ancient models more. opening march à la Handel (Tiersot agrees).

1

2 Tordion (Malherbe)

3 "Diane, Dryades et Naïades" comes from Ballet de la Royné (1582). Return of cadences on relative minor on the second degree, and the absolute absence of any cadence on the dominant

4

5: Apparation de Phœbus-Apollo et des neuf Muses. Entirely from a XVIe theme. An air de basse-danse from *Orchésographie* (1589). Arrangement with accompagnement continuous of tambour or tambourin of the Chanson of Clément Marot, "Jouissance vous donnerai"

6

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11

12 Apothéose: lots of plagal cadences, string dominated, note against note, rhythmic formulas, cadences in the relative minor.