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The Journal of John Waldie Theatre Commentaries, 1799-1830

Title

The Journal of John Waldie Theatre Commentaries, 1799-1830: no. 33 [Journal 46] May 24-July 9, 1820

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1t12v7wg>

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Publication Date

2008-06-18

[Box 4]

no.33 [Journal 46]

May 24-July 9, 1820.

Travels in France, Spain, Germany, 1818-1820 (vol.5).

Travels in France, Spain, Italy, and Germany

in the years 1818, 1819, and 1820.

Vol. 5th

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[24. May. 1820]

Venice

... Christie and I went after dinner to the Arena or Teatro di Giorno, which I well remember ... but the company now is very inferior to what we saw then. We saw part of a comedy called Agnese, the same as Paer's opera of L' Agnese, of which the scene seemed to be in Mrs. Opie's England, and a tender hearted old man affecting to be cross and violent seemed one of the last characters -- but we did not stop long. I went home before 7 -- and walked to St. Mark's, where were the usual crowd of people, and thence to the Teatro San Luca. ... The opera was for the benefit of La Passerini, the prima donna. It was La Prova d'un opera seria in 2 acts -- the 2^d act is the best -- which I heard some nights since. Her grand air was most enchanting; her power, execution, and clearness are like a piano, but she has not been gifted by nature

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with much of a soul to animate her silver sounds. It is very provoking -- but this often happens, as in the cases of Miss Stephens and Mrs. Salmon.* She sung in the first act very finely a grand air composed by Portogallo for Catalani, which, however, I did not know -- it was lovely music, and gave great scope to her powers. Between the acts we had the overture to Tancred, and the grand air by her, drest in character, which she sung finely, tho' Rossini's music requires so much feeling it did not suit her. On the whole, I was most astonished and delighted with her powers, but had much rather heard Bassi, or Colbran, or Monbelli. Passerini would make a capital concert singer.

[25. May. 1820]

... I dressed and went to Count Cicognava's and paid my visit of adieu to him and Madame C. ... I found the Kings there, as I expected, and accompanied them to the Opera at St. Benedetto, where was produced this evening for the first time the beautiful opera of La Clotilde by Coccia, which I saw so finely done at Barcelona by Galli and La Sala, &c., but here it was very indifferently done. The chorus was pretty good, but La Cavelli is not equal, having a dull weak bad-toned voice, to such a part as La Clotilde. Botticelli

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was good in Sivaldo -- the tenor and buffo both poor indeed -- and altogether (the orchestra is very inferior to the other theatre) it was very poor.

... Here ends my stay of 8 days at Venice. If I had not been in haste, I would have gone with Laderia to Trieste and then to Pola -- and returned to Venice and seen the opening of the Theatre at Padua at the Festa of St. Antonio and the fair, which is then held there, but I must bid adieu to Italia, bella Italia, for a long time and perhaps forever!

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[26. May. 1820]

Castel Franco

... Christie, Plenderleath, and I, with our baggage in the gondola, were rowed across the Lagunes by 4 men and got to Mestra soon after 9 -- and at 10 set out in the carriage from thence. ... From Treviso to Castel Franco the road is flat but gradually rising and the country is well cultivated. ... Castel Franco is a strong, small place with moat, towers, and turretted walls. The moat is full of beautiful trees and aquatic green plants and a flagged walk round it, the towers & walls covered with

ivy -- a broad carriage road goes outside the flagged walk and houses all round form a sort of square, with the old town inside the walls, and a street leading to Treviso out side of all. We saw the theatre, at which we found there was to be an opera this evening, there being a strolling set of singers here.

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... [the] theatre... is small, but of an elegant design, having a gallery and columns each side with windows and stage and boxes at one end, and 2 boxes each side the proscenium, between it and the open gallery or portico, thus forming a sort of octagon -- the effect is very pretty. We returned to our Inn and after a very good dinner went to the theatre soon after 9, stopping some time by the way to look at the most incessant vivid forked and curved lightning, often in festoons and circles, I ever saw. The orchestra of the opera is formed of a club of academice filarmonica of the town, which consisted of 15 and played very well. They seem a rich intelligent set of people, having built at their own expence the church and theatre, an hospital and a college for education. I had much talk with one of the orchestra -- they use the theatre for music and other meetings in the day time, as it is, owing to its construction, quite light. The opera was not ill performed -- the bass and elegant man of fine action, tho' weak voice, and much feeling -- the tenor a fine voice, strong and powerful, and good manners and action, very superior indeed to either of the tenors at Venice. The first piece was Teresa e Cladio in one act, music of Farinelli -- the second was L'Inutile Precauzione. We had a separate prima donna in each, but both were bad. There were a good female song and a capital duet of "Donne, Donne, belle Donne" in the 2^d piece, sung by the tenor and buffo.

[4. June. 1820]

Munich

I went to the theatre and got a good place in the pit firme, it being locked till taken possession of. The new theatre, in which are German comedies and tragedies and operas, is thought very handsome -- the boxes are without apparent support, and there is an ugly projecting gallery in front of the first circle of boxes -- the royal box, and those of the attendants each side of it, is handsome but heavy -- and the proscenium is too high -- the drop scene of a mock red curtain is frightful -- the scenery most dismal, dark, and ill painted -- a row of dark lanterns round the second tier of boxes outside, and a poor centre chandelier -- the painting of the boxes very heavy, on the whole as devoid of taste as any thing I ever saw. In the old theatre,

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which is smaller (this is very large) there is once or twice a week an Italian opera. The music in the orchestra was good, but too noisy with horns. The house was very full, more women than men, very dull and quiet. The play was Gustavus Vasa by Kotzebue, and took from 6 till 1/2 past 9 -- 5 dull acts, full of patriotism, wanting dramatic point, and void of variety. It is much the same as the tragedy by Brooke, in which some 15 years since I saw the young Roscius astonish our audience in Newcastle. Gustavus was little, but graceful and clever -- I thought nothing of the others -- but could see it was cold dull acting, tho' much more natural and sensible than in Spain -- yet bad enough -- but I was astonished at the wretchedness of the scene-painting and bad lighting of the stage.

[5. June. 1820]

... we went to the Italian opera at the old theatre, which as well as the new one is close by the Palace. It is a most dismal old

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house, overloaded with faded gilding and carving and in a true heavy German style. ... The orchestra [was] a little too loud for my taste, but played admirably together. The opera was *La Cenerentola*. I was very sorry Madame Festa did not act, as I have heard she is a fine singer -- but the music of *La Cenerentola* is so delightful one cannot hear it too often -- the finale of the 1st act and the whole of the 2^d, especially the *sestello* and finale, are exquisite. Signora Sciasetti is very pretty and pleasing and like Miss O'Neil, and would sing well if her voice was not so weak and of so poor a tone -- but she will never be good. The buffo was very bad -- and the sisters also -- the tenor and bass only were better than at Venice. I was in hopes Rubini, the tenor, was the delightful tenor of Naples -- but it was another, not amiss tho' weak and not animated, of the same name. The basso, Sautinb, who played *Dandini*, was most laughable and comical -- full of life and action, and a face of the greatest variety -- I was really delighted with him -- his duet with *Magnifico* was admirably done indeed -- it is a pity he has not more voice. The opera was tolerably acted and admirably played by the orchestra, but the singers altogether are as weak a set as I have met with.

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[6. June. 1820]

... I went to the German Theatre soon after 6, and saw the French comic opera of *Une Folie* (in English, *Love Laughs at Locksmiths*). The man who played the footman was a good singer and tolerable actor and the young Lady not amiss. The rest very

bad -- as dull as possible -- tho' they sing better than one could expect -- the orchestra is very good -- and the music by Méhul pretty.

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[9. June. 1820]

... went to the Italian Opera at the Old Theatre. ... The opera was Emma di Rosburgo, music by Meyerbeer -- but not near so good as his opéra of Semiramide at Bologna -- in fact very dull and tedious. Sautino in an old Baron was quite out of his element. Vecchi in Norcesto the usurper was good -- a much better tenor than the one in La Cenerentola we had on Monday. Signora Moralt, who must be a German she is so dull, had a number of tedious airs in the disguised Prince of Lanerk (for the scene is in Scotland) and she was truly tiresome -- as was Signora Rossi in the old Baron's daughter. The only thing good was La Festa, who is a celebrated singer -- but much passée. She is like Madame Tambroni in person -- a fine voice in sostenuto like Banti; but no singer of passages or difficulties -- her recit. is very fine -- her duet with Vecchi in the 2^d act was capital -- awakened one as from a torpor -- the same was sung by Bassi and Bonoldi in Semiramide riconosciuta -- but altogether no perfectly humdrum a piece I never heard -- and it is not fair to judge of La Festa from only hearing her in it.

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[10. June. 1820]

... Christie, Plenderleath, and I went to the Grand
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Salle of the Museum this evening to a concert for the benefit of M. Hummel, a famous pianoforte player and composer. ... The music of the concert was good -- a song in Italian very ill pronounced was well sung by M^{lle} Metacher, the chief singer

of the German Opera -- a song, accompanied by variations of pianoforte, violin, and violincello, and sung by Lohle, the best singer and buffo of the German Opera -- a Concertante for pianoforte, flute, oboe, horn, tenor, violincello, and bass, in which Hummel on the first was most brilliant -- then a flute concerto by M. Bohm was good, and by M. Rauch a concerto on the horn -- and some capital extempore pianoforte playing, in which Hummel introduced numbers of well known airs, finished the evening.

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[16. June. 1820] Strasburg

... we went to the old theatre, where there was a German comedy and opera by the Augsburg Company, who are very bad, and the theatre ugly, dark, and dirty -- there were not many people. The comedy was over before we arrive. The opera was called Der Dorfbarbier, the music by Schenk -- it was light, but pretty and nor commonplace -- the finale of the first act, when 6 or 7 are shaved at once, is very comic and beautiful, also a duet between the barber and the young Lady -- the Lady, Madame Bieser, had a tolerable voice and some execution, but often was out of tune -- a thing I observe the Germans do not attend to -- time with them is all -- the men are all bad singers without voice, but the barber's apprentice was very comic -- the piece was lively enough and the acting tolerable and the music pretty.

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[18. June. 1820] Nancy

... I was highly pleased, interested, and affected by Le Brun's new tragedy of Marie Stuart, taken partly from Schiller, which has had a great success at Paris. It was wonderfully well done here, tho' the tones and language sound

harsh and discordant to Italian ears, but Madame Boniet, who acted Marie, was really pleasing, natural, and affecting, and the Elizabeth was excellent, both in looks and action. The scene between Elizabeth and Leicester, where she consent to see Mary, the scene between the two Queens, & above all the last scene of Mary, where she takes leave of her friends, were really delightful and very well acted. Old Melvil, the friend of Mary & her advocate with Elizabeth, was good. Leicester is a bad part, and his agonies at the death of Mary and not attempting to do any thing to prevent it are ridiculous -- this part and that of Mortimer, her lover, were but indifferently done, but I was much pleased with the two Queens -- in point of acting the women in France are far before the men.

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[22. June. 1820] Paris

... went to the Italian Opera to see *Le Nozze di Figaro* -- the house was full, the orchestra most exquisite. A Madame Favelli made her 2^d debut in the Countess. She is French, and handsome, and has a good voice, but is not always sure of being in tune, but I thought it more owing to want of habit than a bad ear -- she sung some of it very well. Garcia acted well in the Count, but the ensemble pieces suffer much by moving his notes higher, the part being originally bass -- he sung some parts with great effect, and is indeed after Braham the only very fine tenor I know. Porto was stupid in Figaro. Bartalo and Basilio very good. The best was Susan by Madame Ronzi, who has a delightful manner of singing and fine voice. The Page by M^{lle} Negrini, a debutante, was very bad, and indeed Mozart had no justice done him in the performance except by Madame Ronzi.

[23. June. 1820]

... Lord Sinclair, Potts, and I went to the French Opera, which is now at Favart, the other house being closed. We saw *Le Devin du Village*, which is very pretty and which I have before described, &

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then the new ballet pantomime of *Clari, ou la Fête du Mariage*. A Duke of Milan (Albert) persuades a female servant (Bigottini) to leave her father's house, promising her marriage. She only knows him as a Chevalier. At his house, by finery, fêtes, &c., he tries to seduce her -- and there is a grand fête with most exquisite *pas de trois* by Paul, Fanny Bias, and M^{lle} Noblet, also by Albert, Bigottini, & M^{lle} Anatole. The Duke brings players and orders them to act something like her story, making her father forgive her. The play is arranged and a theatre fitted up -- and Bigottini sees it and is so affected she runs to the actor who does the father and kneels and faints. The Duke returns and she in great agony shews him the letter with promise of marriage. Left in her room with her maid, she changes her fine dress for her peasant's dress, and escapes over the balcony, much to the vexation of the Duke and confusion of the servants, &c. She arrives at home much tired. Her mother forgives her, but her father turns her away, till the Duke arrives to seek her and explains that he has not succeeded. Then she is forgiven and the Duke, who repents, marries her and it ends, of course, with much dancing. It is very interesting and was admirably acted and got up. Bigottini's acting, where she suffers at the play, where she shews the Duke his promise of marriage, where she flies the house, and above all where she pleads to her parents is most exquisite.

[24. June. 1820]

... went to the Italian Opera -- got a good place to see Il Turco in Italia, which was admirably performed and the orchestra capital in point of musical execution and beauty. Madame Ronzi is far before Monbelli and is very animated and captivating. Her grand air was admirably sung, and the sestetto of "Questa sgruppa," from La Cenerentola introduced, had a perfect effect. The whole opera is a feast of music, but Pelegrini, tho' a good musician, is not animated enough for the Turco, which was much better done at Rome, but Bordogni in Narcisso, tho' with a weak voice, sung most admirably, especially "Languir per una bella," from Italiana in Algieri. De Vegnis was even more comic than Taci in Geronio -- the masquerade scene was most inimitable. Madame Garcia in Zaida was not bad, and Profeti in the Poeta most comical. Altogether I was highly amused and delighted -- it is indeed a perfection of execution, effect, and composition, and I own a style of music that is to me much finer than Mozart's, tho' I admit there is not so much at once to carry away by ear, yet the continual variety and rich melody & harmony intermixed and astonishing novelty make Rossini (in his happiest inspirations) like Shakespeare

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a never failing source of pleasure.

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[29. June. 1820]

... We drove to Beaujon Jardin, where it was splendidly illuminated and full of people. A balloon shaped like an elephant & larger than one was let off -- there was a good orchestra of music -- a theatre and comedy and a man balancing ladders on his nose -- another theatre with a conjuror, who changed a lady into a child, both living and under a barrel --

a Sybil of the Boulevard, a capital orchestra for dancing, a pavilion temple of lamps opposite the mountains, which were constantly occupied with crowds in the chairs, La Force beating down by a blow an iron lever with a leather cushion to strike upon -- the finale was a grand display of fireworks and it was the most splendid I have seen, excepting of course those of St. Angiolo at Rome.

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[1. July. 1820]

... Christie and I dined together and went to the Odeon, which has been rebuilt and is now the 2^d Theatre Français since I was here. It is a noble theatre of handsome architecture, forming a circle, but a good deal spoiled by the Royal box in the middle with heavy gilt caryatides -- indeed the whole is far too covered with gilding, which is all in bad taste, but the shape of the house & proscenium are very fine. We had good places in the orchestra, but it soon became very full. The play was Cinna, a noble tragedy. Eric Bernard in Auguste was very natural, impressive, simple, and fine in his anger at the betrayal, his hesitation at the sentence, and his ultimate forgiveness of the conspirators. Maxime by Prevost I thought insignificant, but it is a poor part, tho' his deceit to win Aemilie and his confession to the Emperor might been done with more of the appropriate cunning and remorse. Joanny, the rival of Talma (whom I once saw at Toulon), is an admirable actor for feeling passion and the great power of representing every passion with its real tones -- in the tender scenes he is beyond Talma and yet an actor of great force and power, but he wants a little more noblesse of manner, and is plain and old but very affecting. I was astonished and delighted with M^{lle} Percilie, who was a singer at the French

Opera. She has a look, tho' very inferior in the face, to Mrs. Siddons and is a noble figure -- her action is admirable and manner noble -- voice capital and of every possible tone -- sometimes I could have wished a little more feu, but she is only a debutante and this is only her 3^d appearance. She was taken ill in the 4th act, but sending on an apology, got thro' the 5th without much exertion. She is a most

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elegant woman, and if she takes pains will be a very fine actress. It is a noble play, and I was greatly more amused than I expected. We then laughed heartily at the Avocat Patelin (the Village Lawyer of our stage), which was extremely well done, with much nature and comic effect.

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[6. July. 1820]

Calais

... went to the spectacle, of which the first piece, Camille, ou le Souterrain, an opera of good music -- ill sung, was nearly done, but our attraction was Philippe, the capital actor of the Vaudeville, who played Monsieur Champagne and Monsieur Sans Gêne, the last I never saw before. It is admirably droll. He takes possession of a man's house, whom he knew a little at college, in his absence -- and nothing could exceed the easy confidence and undoubting friendship and delight with which he meets the astonished proprietor, who returning at last recollects him for a scamp and soon turns him off, marrying his daughter to the officer she loves, whom he previously disliked -- this he does out of pique to Sans Gêne, who boasted that his good old firend would give her to him. The acting of Philippe is nature itself and so comic, easy, & gay it is quite delightful. His Gascon Footman in M. Champagne is inimitably good, and we could not take (I fear)

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a long leave of the French theatre more pleasantly.

[7. July. 1820]

Dover

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... Yesterday 7 or 8 Italians landed here from Bologne, and the populace, supposing they were witnesses against the Queen, pelted them, broke their carriages, and one person was very much hurt -- disgraceful indeed! -- nobody took any pains to prevent such barbarity & tumult. ... England is in a sad commotion about the Queen's trial and discontented everywhere.