

# Gioachino Rossini's *Moïse*

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It was to the Théâtre Italien that Gioachino Rossini first turned his attention when he began his official activities in Paris in 1824, mounting productions of his major Italian works, some of which were unknown in France. Few doubted, however, that among his goals was to compose operas in French for the primary theater of the capital, the Académie Royale de Musique, commonly known as the Théâtre de l'Opéra. He prepared his way carefully, becoming comfortable with the French language, courting government favor (his opera *Il viaggio a Reims* was written for the coronation of Charles X, in 1825) and developing a new generation of French singers proficient with Italian vocal style.

Rossini's earliest efforts at the Opéra reflect a deliberate plan. Instead of beginning immediately with a new opera in French, he adapted two of his finest Italian serious operas, works whose emphasis on theatrical spectacle made them particularly congenial to the traditions of French dramaturgy. Both operas, in fact, had been written for the Teatro San Carlo of Naples, where Rossini had functioned as music director between 1815 and 1822. Of all Italian cities, Naples was the one most influenced by French culture, a legacy of the reign of Murat during the Napoleonic era, and the operas of Gluck and Spontini were frequently seen there. It was no surprise, then, that Rossini should choose to revise two Neapolitan operas as his calling cards at the Opéra.

*Le Siège de Corinthe*, a French adaptation of *Maometto II* (Naples, Teatro San Carlo, December 3, 1820), had its premiere at the Opéra on October 9, 1826; *Moïse*, a French adaptation of *Mosè in Egitto* (Naples, Teatro San Carlo, March 5, 1818), followed on March 26, 1827. In each case the libretto was prepared jointly by an Italian poet, Luigi Balocchi, who worked closely with Rossini between 1825 and 1829,<sup>1</sup> and a French poet (Alexandre Soumet for *Le Siège de Corinthe* and Étienne de Jouy for *Moïse*). Their job was to help Rossini transform works conceived for the Italian stage into French operas, to translate into French those compositions that were to be reused in whole or in part, and to prepare new text for the added sections and numbers.

Together with his librettists, Rossini decided which compositions to preserve essentially intact, which to omit altogether, and which to present with revisions (of

varying magnitude). He also composed directly the new music introduced into these operas, whose transformation to the French stage required a considerable expansion in their length, the addition of ballet movements absent in the original, and the further development of the role of the chorus. Finally, all the recitative, completely recast in French, needed to be newly prepared.

Rossini did not create a completely new autograph manuscript of *Moïse*, nor did he cannibalize the autograph of the Italian *Mosè in Egitto*, which he left intact.<sup>2</sup> Instead, the complete manuscript of *Moïse*, used by Eugène Troupenas (Rossini's publisher) to prepare the printed full score he issued in 1827, consisted of several different kinds of sources. Because Troupenas later disassembled this manuscript and apparently gave away sections to a number of associates, it is impossible to reconstruct the entire process, but some principles are relatively clear. For entirely new musical numbers, Rossini wrote out new autograph scores.<sup>3</sup> For numbers borrowed intact from *Mosè in Egitto*, but with the vocal lines now set to a French text, Rossini apparently wrote out new manuscripts of the vocal lines alone.<sup>4</sup> For a number partly identical with the original Italian but involving some revisions, Rossini had a copyist prepare a manuscript of the piece and entered his corrections directly in the source.<sup>5</sup>

Rossini apparently wrote all the recitatives anew, and the autograph manuscripts of a number of these recitatives are still known to exist.<sup>6</sup> The Library of Congress manuscript from the Moldenhauer Archives is such a source. It presents the recitative "Dopo il Ballo" from the second act, which follows the entire Divertissement (three *Airs de Danse*) and precedes the second-act Finale. Most of the Finale is newly written for *Moïse*, but no autograph manuscript is known to survive.<sup>7</sup> The Moldenhauer autograph consists of two folios, but is not complete: of the forty-three measures in the recitative "Dopo il Ballo," the manuscript includes measures 1-18 (on folios 1r and 1v) and 36-43 (on folio 2r); the layout of these pages suggests that an intervening single folio, notated on both sides, is missing. There is an autograph sketch on folio 2v, which will be discussed below.

In the absence of a complete set of autograph manuscripts for the newly written sections of *Moïse*, the Moldenhauer autograph (along with the other surviving autograph sources) is an important indication of the editorial practices of Troupenas. It helps us gauge the extent to which Troupenas's edition reliably reflects the *missing* originals. In fact, Troupenas's editorial policy seems to have been to remain as close as possible to Rossini's autograph manuscript.<sup>8</sup> For the most part, there are no significant divergencies between folio 1r of the autograph, here reproduced, and the Troupenas edition for which it was the direct source.<sup>9</sup> Even in seemingly insignificant details Troupenas follows the autograph: thus, following Rossini, Troupenas employs a half rest for the strings on the last two beats of the third measure, but two quarter rests in

2<sup>a</sup> Version 22 (24) Spirit Bible 76. *opus. M. 2. 1840-1841*  
*All: Maestoso*  
 Violini  
 Viola  
 Basses, Contrabasses  
 Piano, Chorus, Organ  
 Accordion

*maie*  
*no*  
 Te re - clame tu dei pro - mise. Charaem n'ingal d'abli-  
 e parquellament h'e il g'uard'ingui - ton le h'ond'act de mo - ve

Violini  
 Viola

the fourth measure. The printed edition reproduces precisely the position of dynamic markings and articulation, rarely extending them to other parts. It even fails to add the tie, missing in Rossini's autograph, that must join the last whole note in the bass on folio 1r and the first whole note on folio 1v.<sup>10</sup>

On the other hand, from the autograph we learn that Rossini's tempo indication at the beginning of this recitative was originally "All<sup>o</sup> Maestoso." An editorial hand changed the "All<sup>o</sup>" above the staff to "And<sup>e</sup>" and added the same indication above the bass staff. Who authorized this change and when? And is it clear that the revised sign should be simply "And<sup>e</sup>" or rather "And<sup>e</sup> Maestoso"? Research into performing materials of *Moïse* at the Bibliothèque de l'Opéra in Paris might help resolve these and many other questions pertaining to the work.

Perhaps the most fascinating element in this manuscript, however, is the sketch Rossini notated on folio 2v. This is one of the few Rossini sketches known to survive. It pertains to the Finale of the second act, directly following the recitative. The relevant passage begins on page 402 of the Troupenas edition, where Osiride and Moïse invoke their respective gods, "Ser[apis]" and "[Jehova]," each addressed as "Dieu de la lumière." The sketch covers eighteen measures, providing a few hints of the orchestral material and an incomplete vocal part. At the start it is identical with the final version (although there are fascinating differences in details of declamation), but the resemblance begins to fade toward the end.

That the sketch starts in the middle of a section suggests that Rossini did not systematically work out the entire Finale in this form. More likely he resorted to sketching when faced with a problematic passage in the course of composing the Finale directly in what would become his full score. The presence of this sketch on the verso of the preceding recitative, furthermore, implies that Rossini had completed the recitative before composing at least this part of the Finale, and perhaps before beginning the Finale at all. Further study of the surviving autograph passages from *Moïse* might well help to resolve these questions.

At the top of folio 1r, the publisher has written "offert à M. Desnoyers / E. Troupenas." This Desnoyers was almost certainly Louis Desnoyers, critic of the Parisian *Le Siècle* and author of a volume entitled *De l'Opéra en 1847, à propos de Robert Bruce* (Paris, 1847), a defense of the production that year at the Opéra of *Robert Bruce*, an

adaptation of Rossini's *La donna del lago*. It may have been on that occasion that a grateful Troupenas, publisher of the full score of *Robert Bruce*, made his gift to Desnoyers. Troupenas's casual disposition of this recitative and the dispersion of other parts of the original score does not augur well for a likelihood that it will ever be possible to reassemble the entire manuscript. Each individual item in Rossini's hand, then, will continue to have special significance for our understanding of the work. Hence the importance of the Moldenhauer manuscript.

<sup>1</sup> Balocchi also wrote the libretto of *Il viaggio a Reims* in 1825 and, in 1829, prepared a singing translation of Rossini's *Guillaume Tell* (Paris, Théâtre de l'Opéra, August 3, 1829), the composer's first completely original opera in French. It was also the last theatrical work to issue from his pen.

<sup>2</sup> It is preserved today in the collection of the Conservatoire at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, Département de la Musique, MSS 1326 and 1327.

<sup>3</sup> Surviving are the autographs of two *Airs de danse* and the new *Air* for Anai in the last act. The autographs of the former are in the collection of the Conservatoire, MSS 2437 and 2438. The autograph of the *Air* for Anai is at present inaccessible, part of a private collection in Basel.

<sup>4</sup> Only one such manuscript is known to exist, autograph vocal parts for the second-act Duo between Aménophis and Pharaon, "Moment fatal! que faire?" The piece is otherwise identical to its model in *Mosè in Egitto*. Rossini's manuscript is in the Memorial Library of Music at Stanford University.

<sup>5</sup> The only surviving source in this form is the Finale of the third act of the opera, "Quel bruit," in part derived from *Mosè in Egitto*. The manuscript is in the Conservatoire collection, MS 2435, ff. 48-65.

<sup>6</sup> Previously known autograph manuscripts for recitatives in *Moïse* are found in the Conservatoire collection in Paris and in the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York.

<sup>7</sup> There is a surviving autograph manuscript of "Strumentini" (instrumental parts that would not fit into Rossini's principal autograph) in the Conservatoire collection, MS 2435, ff. 38-39 and 40, but even this manuscript is fragmentary.

<sup>8</sup> A facsimile of the Troupenas score is published in the series *Early Romantic Opera*, ed. Philip Gossett and Charles Rosen (Garland Publishing, Inc., 1980). See pp. 390-92.

<sup>9</sup> Notice the numbers "1" through "5" on five staves after the third measure on the first system and the numbers "6" through "10" after the fourth measure on the second system: these are marks specifying the organization of the printed page. The first three measures fill one system (the first five staves on p. 390) and the next four measures fill the next system (the sixth through tenth staves on the same page). For purposes of the printed score, Troupenas has

ignored the blank staves in the autograph.

<sup>10</sup> There are occasional mistakes. In the twelfth and eighteenth measures of this recitative, for example, the Troupenas edition mistranscribes Rossini's rhythmically correct notation in the string parts.