

## From *Daphné* to *Frédégonde*: all roads do not lead to Rome...

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I wish M. d'Ollone a good and safe journey and success in his life as an artist; in the magical beauty of these autumn days, he must be delighted to find himself on the threshold of a new adventure.

(Alfred Bruneau, *Le Figaro*, November 1897)

Max d'Ollone (b. June 1875) must have felt relief when he left Paris for the Villa Medici in the winter of 1897-1898, having at last, at his fourth attempt, won the coveted Prix de Rome – the key academic award for French musicians. Lacking self-confidence, resigned to having received only a second prize in 1895, he had even considered giving up. It had taken all the powers of persuasion his teacher Jules Massenet could muster to get him to try again in 1897. Through no fault of his own, the young candidate had been caught up in a controversy that had affected the objectivity of the assessment of his music and its merits had not been fairly taken into account. In order to understand what happened in the Prix de Rome competitions of 1894-1897, and explain why Max d'Ollone received or did not receive a prize, we need to piece together the events of those years and take a fresh and impartial look at his cantatas, for indeed *Clarisse Harlowe*, *Mélusine* and *Frédégonde* are much more masterly achievements than was generally admitted at the time.

When he entered the Paris Conservatoire, Max d'Ollone was apparently a shy boy, though not the docile pupil one might imagine: he had firm objectives, was genuinely enthusiastic and showed a discernment and

perspicacity that were remarkable in one so young who was only just beginning his training. In a hitherto unpublished notebook begun shortly before his death, Max d'Ollone looked back with lucidity over those early years and remarked on the prime importance to him of intuition:

In all things intuition in me took precedence over knowledge. Reasoning is only capable of convincing me if it coincides with what I sense. That was the case with religion, morality, politics and *art*. Only feeling decided whether or not I adhered to what I was taught. I thus epitomised the *born heretic*, prompted by an inner force that made me disregard external forces.



#### 1894: *DAPHNÉ*

With all due respect to Max d'Ollone, *Daphné*, his first cantata written for the Prix de Rome in 1894, is all in all quite conventional – which is hardly surprising, considering that he had only joined Jules Massenet's composition class at the Paris Conservatoire a couple of months earlier. His teacher had spotted his remarkable potential immediately and had entered him very early for the competition (organised by the Institut de France, the learned society that groups the various French *académies*) so that he could get used to the *mise en loge* (the long period of isolation imposed on candidates during the tests). It is unlikely that Massenet expected his student to win first time, and it was already a fine achievement for him to be selected after the first round (the composition of a fugue and a choral piece with orchestral accompaniment) to go through to the second and final one, involving the composition of a cantata to a set libretto. That year the first prize and the scholarship to study in Rome went to Henri Rabaud, who later wrote many letters to his younger friend from the Villa Medici. A particularly interesting one, in which he gives Max d'Ollone advice on how to stand a good chance of winning the Prix

de Rome, was written on 3 September 1894, shortly after his own success in the competition:

Believe me, if you want to win the prize, you must gain the approval of the adjudicators by *doing what the Institut expects*, at least in the form the music takes; don't clutter your recitatives with unnecessary elements. Treat them as *pure recitatives*, without any leitmotifs running beneath them. But make sure, for example, that the declamation is right, and that it is colourful. And, you'll see, maybe it's more difficult to compose a short, well-proportioned recitative, in the 'official' style if you like, but *well declaimed*, than to have the voice follow a more or less attractive melodic line, while there are themes vying with the orchestra so that no one can hear anything at all, neither the themes, nor the words! I'm telling you all this because I believe it will take you at least *half-way to the Prix de Rome*: a cantata in which the scenes are clearly distinct, in which importance is attached both to the *spoken word* and to the *singing*, the former in *well-declamed* recitative with the orchestra coming in hardly at all, the latter with melodies that are very simple, very clear, and just a little musical. Well, it isn't all that difficult to compose a cantata such as that, you must admit, and it wins the prize outright. Look at Bloch's cantata last year, and mine this year. There's nothing really salient, there are no outstanding innovations, and musically there's next to nothing of note. But in each case our cantatas were the shortest in the competition, because they were the only ones that treated the recitatives *in the old manner*, Gluck fashion. And that saves time on the orchestral part! But I must admit that I polished up those wretched recitatives enormously, 'pompier' and 'old-fashioned' though they were; I spent more time on them than I did on all the rest, even though the rest is more musical. You see, it isn't always easy to find *the right emphasis*, the *important word* in each sentence that needs to be highlighted, and to do that in the most apposite manner.

The press had criticised the prescribed libretto almost every year since the competition began, and 1894 was no exception. The critic for *Le Matin*

could not resist indulging in the sort of ironic gibes that Berlioz, for example, had cruelly driven home fifty years earlier:

The libretto chosen by the jury was entitled *Daphné* and its author was M. Charles Raffalli. The title of the set subject is self-evident, which spares me the trouble of elaborating on it. I could also spare myself the trouble of giving an account of the elucubrations to which it gave rise, but I owe it to those who are interested in the future of our winners of the Prix de Rome to declare that the compositions were on whole of a somewhat lower standard than in previous years. [...] As for Messieurs d'Ollone and [Charles] Levadé, they showed laudable intentions, which I hope will be rewarded before long.

Surprisingly the critic for *Le Gaulois* was of the opinion that 'the competition was generally of a higher standard than in previous years'! He went on to list the musicians who formed the jury: Ernest Reyer, Jules Massenet, Camille Saint-Saëns, Ambroise Thomas, Émile Paladilhe and Théodore Dubois, assisted by Charles-Marie Widor and Louis-Albert Bourgault-Ducoudray. And unlike his colleagues, he gave a brief description of each of the cantatas (which he appears to have listened to carefully, if not objectively, with libretto in hand). Of d'Ollone's composition, he noted:

Performers: Messieurs Thomas and Delpouget and M<sup>lle</sup> Bonnefoy, of the Opéra Comique. Work of a beginner; lacking in clarity. Quite pleasant modulations, following on without any logic. However 'On ne peut rêver plus beau jour' and the end of the duo are perhaps worth mentioning. Trio accompaniment too jerky, 'Nuages [, qui, la nuit, flotez dessus mes eaux]'. Bad.

While the art of modulation appears to have been one of the very young composer's strong points, the orchestration is not pinpointed as being outstanding or even memorable – which is possibly why Max d'Ollone's friend André Gédalge wrote to him in August 1894 underlining the importance of concentrating on the quartet, the heart of the orchestra,

providing the harmony, while the other instruments serve only to add extra colour: ‘You cannot overestimate the importance of the quartet in the orchestra: *it provides all the harmony*, the rest adds only noise.’



### 1895: CLARISSE HARLOWE

Thus, armed with the good advice of his friends and boosted by the constant encouragement of Jules Massenet, and no doubt perfectly aware that his attempt in 1894 had only been a trial run, Max d'Ollone competed again the following year. Again he passed the preliminary test with flying colours. The previous year, for the chorus, he had set *L'Été*, part of a poem by Victor Hugo; this time he composed a piece entitled *Hymne*, to lines taken from Racine. The following week, for the second round, the set text for the cantata bore the title *Clarisse Harlowe*. The libretto (by Édouard Noël) was inspired by Samuel Richardson's epistolary novel, published in 1748, *Clarissa: Or the History of a Young Lady*, which lent itself perfectly to such adaptation. The fact that the subject was taken from a novel is worth noting: it shows that mythology (as in the previous year's *Daphné*) was not the only option. Others before d'Ollone had tackled such texts: Théodore Dubois, for example, in 1861, when the set piece, *Atala*, had been based on the novel by Chateaubriand. The jury in 1895 – Ambroise Thomas, Camille Saint-Saëns, Ernest Reyer, Jules Massenet, Émile Paladilhe, Théodore Dubois, Victorin Joncières, Gaston Salvayre and Charles Lefebvre – took a long time to come to a decision; according to *Le Figaro* ‘the audition lasted from 12:30 to 4 PM’.

Max d'Ollone's cantata *Clarisse Harlowe* begins with a prelude that makes use of the harp and includes solos for the violin and the cello – features showing a propensity for sensuous, ethereal textures, which were to recur in all of his subsequent cantatas. The exploration of the same orchestral colours continues in the tenor aria, ‘*Enfant dont le divin sourire*’. The most successful moment in the work is possibly Clarissa's

first cantilena, 'Mes jours passés dans la prière', which is taken up again soon afterwards in the vehement love duet. The obsessive repetition of a motif, very elaborate in its harmonic and instrumental combinations, creates a most effective suspension in the drama. Though more conventional, the *Andantino*, 'Rappelle-toi les jours passés', with its vocal spontaneity, provides a moment of respite from the emotional tension. The *Agitato*, 'Ah! Malgré moi', recalls the duo from Gounod's *Faust*, and while the rhetoric of Colonel Morden's 'Ô pauvre enfant qu'un fol amour entraîne' calls to mind Meyerbeer, the same character's arioso, 'Crois-moi Clarisse', shows a much more modern and quite splendid finesse and simplicity in its orchestration, like a sweet recollection of Albert's aria ('Elle m'aime, elle pense à moi') in Massenet's *Werther*. The brief 'concertato' in asides leads to the death of Clarissa, whose plaintive accents are perfectly supported by orchestration that is once again delicate and transparent.

The work Max d'Ollone submitted to the jury was remarkable, but he received only the second prize, and some considered even that was more than he deserved: Georges Pelca of *Le Gaulois*, for example:

M. d'Ollone has made considerable progress since last year. He may not have deserved second prize, but he certainly deserved a commendation. [...] In this cantata there is warmth and liveliness; the tenor aria is good, as is that of the soprano. The duo is a bit hackneyed, but nevertheless effective, the trio a bit loud, a bit unnatural. The work on the whole is competent.

Max d'Ollone must have been satisfied, at least to some extent, with the result. Indeed, a second prize was not to be sneezed at, generally paving the way as it did for the first prize the following year. Nevertheless those close to the young composer considered *Clarisse Harlowe* a very fine work and protested that it should have won first prize. Albert Lavignac, professor of harmony at the Paris Conservatoire, was among the most resentful; on 30 June, the day after the competition, he wrote to Max d'Ollone:

I am very upset. I know that you, with your modest, unassuming character, must already feel almost satisfied with the second prize in the Prix de Rome (which, I admit, is not within everyone's reach). [...] Yesterday will remain one of my worst memories. Have a rest now, relax, you must need it, and remember that this famous prize awarded by the Institut – and *which you will obtain* – is not indispensable; one of your adjudicators yesterday (who, I know, will give me his sincere opinion) – Saint-Saëns – never succeeded in winning it and that hasn't held him back.

And Max d'Ollone's fellow student, Florent Schmitt, sent him a short and friendly letter, ending cheerfully with the words: 'But let me say, a bit selfishly, that I'm so glad you're going to remain my classmate for a while!'



#### 1896: MÉLUSINE

Both Florent Schmitt and Max d'Ollone competed for the Prix de Rome in 1896. The poem for the first-round chorus, *Pendant la tempête*, was written by Théophile Gautier. Max d'Ollone chose to use male voices only for his setting, a work in three parts, with the middle section a solo for the tenor voice. Debussy and many others before him had taken that option – thanks to the Orphéon male-voice choral movement, such choirs were common at that time in France. Again Max d'Ollone qualified for the second round. This time the cantata was entitled *Mélusine*, to a libretto by Fernand Beissier, based on a medieval legend that was taken as the subject for many pieces written by the Romantics, Mendelssohn (*Das Märchen von der schönen Melusine*, 1833) and Halévy (*La Magicienne*, 1858) amongst them. Little could Max d'Ollone have imagined then what a hue and cry there was to be later, when the cantatas were performed on the piano at the end of June...

First of all, the press disagreed over the merits of the candidates. *Le Gaulois* came out openly in favour of Max d'Ollone, praising the qualities

of a score written by a composer who had ‘made tremendous progress in the past two years. The introduction is melodious, the duo is very appropriate, the trio less successful (a bit shrill), but on the whole an excellent score.’ According to *Le Progrès artistique*, however,

There are of course some fine passages in M. Max d’Ollone’s cantata [...]. But the work suffered from his cold, mannered style and his unclear developments. The ensembles are noisy but not sonorous; the difficulty of the intonations hinders the fluency of the vocal phrase. And yet we had high hopes for M. Max d’Ollone’s cantata: we were simply under a misapprehension. [...] The main criticism we would make of all the competitors is that they overdid the accompaniment and covered each note with overloaded harmonies.

*Le Gaulois* pointed out that, though ‘incoherent, inexperienced and clumsy’, Florent Schmitt’s score was ‘very interesting, denoting true musicianship. M. Schmitt’s *Mélusine* is very modern, very earnest, and composed spontaneously, rather than being put together to please the members of the Institut.’ An acknowledgement of the fact that ‘music of the future’ had the right to flourish, while admitting that the cantata test in the Prix de Rome was perhaps not the ideal place for a show of extravagance. As for Max d’Ollone he made almost excessive use in his cantata of evanescent harmonic textures to evoke the enchantments of *Mélusine*, with the harp once again used to create a feeling of unreality. Divided strings in the very high register create a halo of sound in the prelude and colour harmonies that follow the same principle and are largely unstable in their tonal functions. Not surprisingly, we notice similarities between the tenor aria, ‘O toi qui me versas au cœur pareille ivresse’, and some parts of Massenet’s (almost contemporary) *Cendrillon*. Note too the fine dramatic progression in Scene 3, with the entrance of the Spectre, and especially the predominance of recurring motifs (a feature of Massenet’s works), which are employed much more regularly in *Mélusine* than they were in *Clarisse Harlowe*.



However, the real scandal was not related to the biased judgement of certain members of the press – it came from elsewhere. Indeed, spring 1896 had seen the beginning of a controversy in the capital when Massenet, having been offered the directorship of the Paris Conservatoire, refused, and the Ministry – the Ministère des Beaux-Arts – deliberately turned instead to a man of moderate temperament, the organist and composer Théodore Dubois. When the latter took over from the late Ambroise Thomas, who had held the position for a very long time, he was obliged to assert his authority. He had a reputation for being rather uncharismatic, especially compared to Massenet, whose behaviour was sometimes deliberately inflammatory. However, many of Dubois's colleagues at the Académie des Beaux-Arts, feeling snubbed by Massenet's refusal of the post, were annoyed with the latter and made it their duty to praise Dubois to the skies, as if to justify his recent appointment and give it greater lustre. Massenet had to be 'sent packing', and poor Dubois, who was not particularly aggressive by nature, found himself being used as a weapon by the former's opponents. Thus the Prix de Rome competition that year became a battleground, the scene of violent disagreements, Dubois and Massenet each having two students taking part: Jules Mouquet and Richard Ivry for Dubois, Max d'Ollone and Fernand Halphen for Massenet. The jury of musicians voted *in camera* and came out in favour of Max d'Ollone. But then, to his dismay – particularly since Massenet had hinted to him the day before that he was the favourite – the Académie des Beaux-Arts, in full force, overruled the jury's decision! So Max d'Ollone's hopes were raised one day, and then dashed the next – when he discovered that he had won no prize at all! For, having been awarded the second prize in 1895, the only prize for which he was eligible in 1896 was the first prize, and since that was denied him, he received nothing.

Some newspapers were not aware of the reasons behind the controversy or of the political manipulation involving most of the members of the Académie des Beaux-Arts. *Le Monde orphéonique* of 4 July noted only 'the triumph of the new director of the Conservatoire. M. Dubois's professorship will have ended on a fine note!' Writing a few days earlier, on

28 June, *Le Figaro* was a little more observant: 'As we see, fortune has favoured M. Théodore Dubois's students, just as he is about to leave his professorship to become director of the Conservatoire.' Otherwise insightful, *Le Progrès artistique* remarked with a touch of irony (2 July): 'The two students presented by M. Théodore Dubois were awarded prizes, which is not really very surprising, for is it not natural to believe that the man who is worthy of the position of head of our foremost music school must train better students than a mere professor, albeit one by the name of M. Jules Massenet?' *Le Gaulois* published a long article clearly aiming to stir up controversy, but which curiously overlooked the real cause of the problem – the stance in favour of Dubois – focusing instead on the overruling of the musical jury's decision by the non-musical members of the Académie des Beaux-Arts. This article from *Le Gaulois* calls to mind the diatribes of Berlioz in his *Mémoires*:

Are the rules of the Institut to blame? Or are human beings to blame? The fact remains that the Prix de Rome music competition has raised storms that are making even more din than a Wagnerian orchestra. The issue, in brief, is this: the painters, architects and engravers of the Institut have, in a musical matter, decided differently from the musicians. The latter had voted the first prize to go to M. d'Ollone. They were overruled. And their reaction is not like that of Sgnarelle [in the plays of Molière]: they are annoyed and they are protesting! I feel they are right to do so. When a musician assesses a musical work, his opinion should carry more weight than that of a painter, an architect or an engraver. The arts are not as interrelated as M. [Sully-] Prudhomme would have us believe. I know of excellent architects who find little difference aesthetically between Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and Yvette Guilbert's repertoire at the Alcazar. Ingres boasted that he played the violin beautifully, but he was the only one who gave himself that credit. The cobbler should stick to his last, then competitions will be better judged!

Thus, Max d'Ollone left the Palais de l'Institut feeling sad and disheartened. For some time, despite his friends' regular concern and encourage-

ment, he was adamant that he would not compete again. On 9 July, barely ten days after his third attempt, Albert Lavignac of the Conservatoire informed him that he had received a note from Saint-Saëns:

If Max d'Ollone would like my advice, tell him from me that the aim in composing an academic fugue is not to produce lovely music, but, as Gounod so aptly put it, to practise *l'étude du nu en musique* ['figure drawing in music'], in a style that is concise and polished. I feel that this young man is most highly gifted, but tell him that only hard work, *labor improbus*, can bring out the full potential of a natural gift. Tell him to take advantage of not having yet won the prize to spend another year seriously studying fugue and orchestration, and to beware of the adulation he is bound to receive! And beware too of his grace and ease – gifts that cannot be lost, he will always find them again – and try to build up 'muscle' by practising the appropriate gymnastics. As for the prize, it is perhaps fortunate for him that he didn't receive it, for he is very young.



### 1897: FRÉDÉGONDE

In 1897 Max d'Ollone was to win the Prix the Rome at last. But it took all Massenet's powers of persuasion to get his former pupil to try again. *Former pupil?* Indeed. For, following the scandal in spring 1896, Massenet had resigned from his composition class at the Conservatoire. His students had therefore been sent to join other classes, and thus for several months Max d'Ollone studied with Charles Lenepveu, who had won the Prix de Rome in 1865. In a letter dated 6 September 1896, Massenet was clearly concerned about Max d'Ollone's pessimistic outlook: 'You *can't* give up the certain belief that you will be among the winners of the Prix de Rome – I want it for the corporation – you know what I think of you, your present and your future.' But his words were not enough to convince Max d'Ollone, for seven months later he was still in doubt. On 15 April 1897 Massenet wrote:

As for advising you not to enter the competition, that is a serious matter. If your health does not make it strictly out of the question, why deprive yourself of a prize that is a foregone conclusion? Think it over carefully; listen to your common sense, take your health into consideration. As for believing the result will favour someone else... who could that someone else be? Come now, take heart!

Largely thanks Massenet's kind support, Max d'Ollone resumed his objectives in the spring. A well-written fugue and chorus with orchestra (*Sous-bois*, to a text by Philippe Gille) again fully satisfied the jury. The libretto by Charles Morel for the second-round cantata, *Frédégonde*, appears to have been more than usually inspiring. Quite exceptionally, it was for two sopranos, which must have appealed to Max d'Ollone, who was particularly fond of the pathetic situations that were relished at that time by heroines at the Opéra. Unfortunately, however, he was let down by one of the singers, as *Le Matin* reported on 4 July:

M. Cogny and M<sup>lles</sup> Ganne and Guiraudon performed the cantata written by the young laureate, whose win was decisive despite some bad luck. Indeed, the day before yesterday, at the Conservatoire, M. Emile Engel was unable to sing the part of Chilperic as he had promised. Quickly M. Cogny was brought in and he took the part at short notice, but yesterday, at the Institut, he sang any old how. Fortunately, the work is of true value; the trio, in particular, is treated masterfully.

As a result of that incident, the jury members were obliged to infer the quality of the work, rather than rely on what they heard. According to *Le Figaro*, 'the *grand prix* was closely contended and gave rise to heated debate', while *Le Soir* reported:

The jury composed of musicians had awarded two prizes, to MM. d'Ollone and Caussade. But the latter was eliminated by the non-musical members of the Académie des Beaux-Arts and replaced by two candidates they

let through, even though the jury of specialists had considered that they were not good enough to be classified.

For the performance of his cantata Max d'Ollone was at the piano. Determined to bring out the full symphonic potential of his work, he had even notated on a separate stave a part for a 'third hand', which was readily lent by the page-turner, thus broadening the sound spectrum and the keyboard resonances (especially in the prelude and in Fredegunda's aria, marked '*agitée*' in the score, 'Et mon cœur brisé sans retour'). This gave journalists an opportunity to observe the young man and describe his physical appearance, at a time when photographs in the daily press were a rarity. *L'Écho de Paris* (5 July) saw him as 'tall and thin', with a 'child-like' face that was 'delicate and intelligent'; he had a 'fair schoolboy's beard', his nose was a little on the large side, and he had 'the brow of a true musician'; the youthfulness of his face 'contrasted with the stern, profound, rather vague look' of his 'light blue eyes'. *L'Europe artiste* confirmed that he was 'a tall, thin young man, refined and intelligent-looking, with a fine, clear forehead, light blue eyes, a profound, severe, slightly vague look, and with a blond beard framing his face'. Finally, *Le Figaro* presented him – paradoxically, in some respects – as 'small, slender, fair-haired, beardless, with a slight moustache, and the air of a seventeen-year-old. [...] M. Max d'Ollone is a young man who is as distinguished as his aristocratic name. [...] He is naturally good looking without any artifice.'

The press gave no real account of the music itself until the following November, when, having won the prize, the cantata was performed at the Institut by a full orchestra, enabling the audience at last to grasp the finer points of its composition. Unfortunately, however, the clarity of that first performance was marred by the acoustics (reverberation in the dome). The prelude introduces the two main themes: the one representing Fredegunda's hatred, the other one, more lyrical, corresponding to Chilperic's love. The former juxtaposes several rhythmic cells that later lend themselves marvellously to fragmentation. And indeed, the two themes return frequently to embellish an orchestral texture that is much

more 'leitmotivic' than in the previous cantatas: a new milestone had been reached in the assimilation of the Wagnerian discourse. This orchestral piece, which Alfred Bruneau of *Le Figaro* described as a 'tragic prelude with expressive, dissonant harmonies', was not to the liking of more conservative journalists, such as Joncières, who wrote in *La Liberté*: 'I admit that the dreadful dissonances at the beginning of the prelude gave me a fright, which was soon dispelled by the passionate phrase, melodiously presented by the first violins.' Alfred Dandelot of *Le Monde musical* was of the same opinion: 'After a prelude tormented by regrettable dissonances comes a pleasant motif played by the violins, introducing very effectively the dialogue between Fredegunda and Chilperic.' Then comes Max d'Ollone's first, very successful melodic innovation, with Fredegunda's arioso 'J'avais fait un beau rêve', over which Chilperic's love theme is gradually superimposed. Dandelot again: 'In this scene, I noted the sharp contrast between the melancholy "J'avais fait un beau rêve" and the passionate outburst, "Oh! je la hais, je la hais ma rivale... Mais donne-moi ton amour que j'implore". I must praise [...] the intelligence with which the imperious character of Fredegunda is depicted in the music.' Rejected at first by Chilperic, Fredegunda – a dramatic soprano – heaps abuse on poor Galswintha, whom we imagine, even before we have seen her, to be a woman of sweet disposition. Joncières felt that Max d'Ollone perhaps took Fredegunda's anger a little too far, allowing Galswintha's fierce rival to 'shout too much [...]'; nor did Chilperic make sparing use of his loud voice'. Yet the composer was merely doing full justice to the passion and violence of the text, while at the same time preparing an effective contrast with Galswintha when she appears. Suddenly rejected by Chilperic, she launches into a splendid arioso – both the ariosos in this work are remarkable – to a fine text ('What makes heroes is magnanimity, the fighting spirit, respect for women, justice and charity. What makes heroes is a noble heart, sweet mercy, great devotion, courage and kindness.'). Showing once more his partiality to the volutes of the harp and the sound of solo strings, the composer enriches the vocal line with delicate countermelodies. Joncières applauded: 'The character

of Galswintha, barely glimpsed, is full of charm and grace.' And for Dandelot the 'touching and poetic' portrayal of Galswintha was made 'even more effective' by the contrast with Fredegunda and her rage. In a 'sonorous trio of the heroic type' (Bruneau) the fragile soprano faces her two adversaries, while the orchestra, sharing the melody between different instruments, sometimes on different octaves, takes up the heroic theme, 'Ce qui fait les héros', over tiered scansion from the woodwinds and the brass in sextuplets. The only option left to Galswintha, having been humiliated, is to leave the palace, which she does with noble resignation: the vocal line culminates on a high B flat *pianissimo* worthy of Puccini. 'The end of the scene, when she bids farewell to the king, is handled with exquisite delicacy. This is the part that struck me as being the most delightfully inspired,' wrote Joncières. For Dandelot, 'the farewell [...] to King Chilperic (like other passages) shows exquisite feeling' and, 'the score ends with a final imprecation, loaded with hatred, from the triumphant Fredegunda' – 'What a triumph for me! What a fine day! What joy To sacrifice to my hatred so great a prize!' This part includes impressive leaps (intervals of an eleventh), so difficult that the composer provided an alternative, 'easy' version for singers with a less extensive vocal range. *Le Gaulois* concluded enthusiastically:

This is surely the most successful work since Charpentier won the competition [in 1887]. M. d'Ollone is not a revolutionary like M. Charpentier, but he is a musician, a fine musician. His composition is melodious, generally pleasing in character; the orchestration is polished and full of attractive details.

At last Max d'Ollone was able to savour his longed-for success, before leaving Paris for the Villa Medici in Rome, where he was to compose other works.

