Lully’s *Isis*: The Success of the Spectacle

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Jean-Baptiste Lully was known as an innovator of French music. His music became a model for generations of composers several decades after his death. His success as a composer began in the French courts of King Louis XIV with the ballet de cour and comédie-ballet. After a period of publicly criticizing Italian opera and the French composers who attempted it, he acquired a monopoly on composing all-sung dramas. This monopoly, along with the King’s favor, ensured his success in the creation of a new genre: the tragédie en musique. While this new genre was generally pleasing to the courts, Lully and his librettist, Philippe Quinault, often received harsh criticism from a group of writers who also found fame on the French stage in spoken drama: the tragedists.

The tragédie was a very popular form of entertainment in seventeenth-century and was respected for its dramatic delivery. Because this spoken genre shared a similar title with Lully’s tragédie en musique, critics expected them to be similar in performance as well. The tragédie valued universality, rationality, and morality enforced by strict rules and formal structures. The creators of the tragédie en musique were more concerned with producing a grand spectacle by uniting music, dance, and drama. In order to do this, Aristotle’s unities of place, time, and action were often forgotten. Characters acted in irrational, immoral, or supernatural ways, all of which were condemned by the writers of the tragédie. The tragédie was written solely in rhymed alexandrine couplets; the tragédie en musique had no set rhyme scheme, and the length of lines varied from two to twelve syllables per line. The theme of a tragédie was often about love, and how the choice to love led the characters to a tragic fate. In a tragédie en musique, love often coexisted with glory and the plot ended happily.\footnote{Buford Norman, “Ancients and Moderns, Tragedy and Opera: The Quarrel over Alceste,” in \textit{French Musical Thought, 1600-1800}, edited by Georgia Cowart (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1989), 177-8.} Lully and Quinault designed this new drama to
focus more on the spectacle and how to move the audience’s affections, rather than the classic rules of the *tragédie*.

Since Lully did not have a French operatic composer to model his work after, each one of his *tragédies en musique* was unique. He worked closely with Quinault to produce a plot enhanced by music that would please the King, the court, and critics. Despite this hard work, Quinault received the most criticism for his texts, particularly in *Alceste*. While the team struggled to retain popularity, their biggest changes came in their fourth *tragédie en musique*, *Atys*. *Atys* was an attempt to produce a *tragédie* based on the model of famed writers such as Racine. To do this, Lully attempted to make the spectacle unimportant by reducing the number of *divertissements*, eliminating comic scenes, providing a tragic end, and using the story to send a message from the king about the dangers of choosing love over duty. King Louis loved the production so much that it became known as “The King’s Opera.” After this success, audiences expected Lully to continue down the same path. One year later, he premiered his next work, *Isis*, in 1677, which exhibited a drastic change in direction that was met with shock and disappointment from the court. All of the elements that were eliminated or reduced to make *Atys* a success in the courts were present and exaggerated in *Isis*.

Several additional factors caused the premiere of *Isis* to end unsuccessfully. Rumors circulated about the King’s affairs and how they were reflected in the plot, the theme was not of love, glory, or duty, none of Aristotle’s unisons were observed, there were complicated subplots, and it was such a grand spectacle that the audience was left with a feeling of guilt from overindulgence. The negative reaction from the premiere echoed throughout the rest of the

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seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as *Isis* saw the fewest number of revivals and is still rarely performed as a whole.\(^5\)

Based on the drastic shift between his fourth and fifth operas, scholars define *Isis* as an experiment in the role of the spectacle.\(^6\) Following the premiere, this experiment was considered a failure. However, in order to measure the true success of the project, the intended result must be established. What did Lully hope to accomplish with this change in direction that was his most extravagant drama? Scholars believe that Lully simply wanted to achieve the same goal as any drama: to entertain the audience by touching a variety of emotions and to instruct them in a moral lesson.\(^7\) The goal of this paper is to analyze Lully’s use of musical elements in his recitative-dialogue scenes, airs, and *divertissements* throughout *Isis* to demonstrate how he synced music, drama, and text to heighten the spectacle and achieve success in his experimental endeavors.

*Isis* is the story of how the nymph Io was transformed into the goddess Isis as a result of Juno’s jealousy of Jupiter’s unfaithfulness. Quinault adapted the story from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, which was a common source for *tragédie* plots, as well as Italian opera. The plot itself is extravagant, allowing for more than ten descents of gods; hunting and mythological scenes; sets in palaces, gardens, forests, and Hell; and characters including nymphs, gods, demons, sailors, shepherds, and satyrs.\(^8\) Because of these numerous scene changes and extravagant subplots, Quinault received more negative attention from critics than Lully did. Critics often attacked his characters; despite the variety and number of characters, there were not

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\(^5\) Norman, “Quinault’s Libretto for *Isis*,” 57.

\(^6\) Norman, “Quinault’s Libretto for *Isis*,” 61-2.

\(^7\) Norman, “Quinault’s Libretto for *Isis*,” 65-6.

two characters who were truly in love. As part of the plot, numerous characters confess their love to other characters; however, their love is often a ruse, or based on other factors such as duty. With the absence of true love in the libretto, one would assume Quinault might turn to a theme of glory. However, the only character who might portray this glory would be Io. Io does finally achieve glory as the goddess Isis in Act five, but it was not as a result of her own actions. Io was an innocent victim of the gods. Instead of glory, Lully and Quinault cleverly unite the production with the theme of liberty and freedom. The word “liberte” (liberty) occurs many times throughout the opera, and at least eighteen times in act three alone. The chorus in act three becomes an integral part in uniting this theme. The chorus of nymphs repeat “liberte” throughout the act in the same repetitive rhythm: a combination of eighth and sixteenth notes. Throughout the other acts, the word occurs occasionally in rhythmic variation, but still using eighth and sixteenth notes.

Quinault was experienced in writing tragédies en musique for Lully, as they had already written four, but Isis took on a clever new structure. The five acts create an arch form (ABCBA) which is centered around the third (C). In the first act, Jupiter descends to Earth to pursue Io (A); in the second act Juno learns of Jupiter’s infidelity and sends nymphs to capture Io (B). Act three is the epicenter of the drama, but does not advance the plot. Actors replace the gods as they stage an opera-within-an-opera. Mercury attempts to put Io’s captor to sleep by telling the story of Pan and Syrinx (C). The fourth act returns to the story where we see Io’s suffering at the hands of Juno (B), and in the fifth act, Jupiter and Juno resolve their differences and Jupiter descends to Earth to free Io and turn her into a goddess (A). Each act has a varying number of scenes, divertissements, and dances to reflect the drama. Although Quinault was criticized and even

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9 Norman, “Quinault’s Libretto for Isis,” 66.
10 Norman, “Quinault’s Libretto for Isis,” 61-64.
banned from writing in the court following the premiere, his libretto and dramatic structure were integral in creating an effective marriage between music and drama that was capable of moving the audience’s affections.

One of the struggles Lully faced in creating the music to a successful *tragédie en musique* was effectively setting poetry to music in the style of tragic declamation. The delivery of the text was very important to the *tragédie* and Lully studied famous actors and actresses such as Mlle Champmeslé, since the practice of declamation was only learned aurally and visually, and there are no textbooks from this era.\(^\text{11}\) The music needed to be notated and sung in a way that imitated the expressive and dramatic recitation of the *tragédie*. Italian composers had effectively set their language to recitative using speech-like rhythms with repeated pitches. Before achieving the monopoly on French opera, Lully declared that the French language was not suited for this style. The French struggled to develop a musical form of poetry until the *rücktitatif* was codified. The *rücktitatif* is the French recitative marked by changing meters. Borrowing from the Italian form, a basso continuo accompanied the singer with a slow harmonic rhythm and a more active bass. The melody was generally syllabic, only using melismas or excessive ornaments to heighten moments of dramatic text or portray deities. The frequent change in meter was not only to accommodate the French language and the non-metrical structure of poetry, but to indicate to the singer a proper form of delivery. The text dictated the flow of the music, and Lully would subtly change rhythmic duration and meter to provide the singer with an idea of how to speed up or take time in their delivery to accurately convey the drama through the recitative.\(^\text{12}\) Carl Duggan claims that *Isis* provides more dramatic inflections than any of Lully’s other operas, and the


singers were expected to sing at a very rapid pace to accurately convey this heightened drama.  

Eighteenth-century writer, Jean Baptiste Dubos, discussed the practice of declamation in recitative and the effect on the audience in this quote:

> We are convinced that the ancient actors were as much moved, tho’ under the constraint of conformin to a noted declamation, as ours are in declaiming after their own fancy. They were touched themselves, and consequently drew tears from spectators. Besides, what great difference did not the ancients make between their actors? This objection against the custom of composing and noting the declamation, might have appeared of some weight, before the invention of operas; but the success of this spectacle, in which the actor, as we have already observed, is obliged to follow the note and measure, renders the objection frivolous.  

Lully uses two main types of recitative: recitative-monologue, and recitative-dialogue. Recitative-monologue is the only type of recitative set with full orchestra. There is often imitation between the voice and strings, which is used to frame the scene. Recitative-monologues are important to the structure of the act as well. They occur at the beginning of the act and serve to introduce a character, show a change in the story, or to provide psychological insight to the character. Lully only sets three scenes in recitative-monologue in *Isis*, since the drama is almost never stagnant and characters are often introduced accompanied by one or more other characters.

Recitative-dialogue is the term given to Lully’s scenes that include two or more characters. The scene often moves smoothly between declamatory and more melodic forms of recitative and end with a duo or trio. Lyrical sections are created through occasional repetition of the text as the music evolves seamlessly from the previous declamatory section. Recitative-

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13 Duggan, 111.
15 Lully’s full orchestra typically contained four strings and continuo. Additional instruments, such as flutes, oboes, and trumpets were only used during dramatic airs or divertissements.
dialogue scenes are a vehicle for love scenes, arguments, and comic episodes, which keep the listener fully engaged in the story and the spectacle.\textsuperscript{17}

Although \textit{Isis} was an attempt to move away from the stifling rules of French \textit{tragédie}, some textual elements were common in both genres and continued to be portrayed at specific moments throughout the text in recitative form. The most important subtlety to note is the use of alexandrines. While \textit{tragédies} used alexandrines throughout their text, \textit{tragédies en musique} used them sparingly within \textit{vers libres}\textsuperscript{18} in to convey a theme. Lully always set alexandrines, and in many cases, half of an alexandrine, to a meter in four with the same repeated rhythm: two eighth notes followed by a quarter note.\textsuperscript{19} Example 1 illustrates the alexandrine rhythm in a recitative-dialogue scene in act two. In this scene, Lully uses the alexandrine rhythm to bring out the irony of the text. Mercury was sent to distract Iris, Juno’s servant, who was sent to abduct Io. He immediately swears his love to her in hopes of distracting her from her mission. As the scene progresses, the false love transforms into a hint of true love as Iris accepts Mercury’s love and the characters pledge themselves to each other. However, a few measures later, they both retract their statements of love and resolve to stay true to their duty and serve their masters. The first line of text is an alexandrine set to the typical rhythmic pattern. Additional selected alexandrines, or partial alexandrines (lines with six syllables), are emphasized throughout the scene with the same rhythm. These occur in m. 8 (Mercury, six syllables), m.16 (Iris, twelve syllables), m.15 (Mercury, six syllables), and mm. 16-17 (Iris, thirteen syllables with feminine ending\textsuperscript{20}). They occur on phrases such as “que je veux vous choisir” (I wanted to choose you), “Votre coeur et le

\textsuperscript{17} Newman, 91.
\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Verse libres} is the term for varied line lengths. Quinault’s line lengths varied anywhere from two to twelve syllables.
\textsuperscript{19} Rosow, “French Baroque Recitative,” 469.
\textsuperscript{20} In tragic declamation, feminine endings often were often not pronounced unless they were placed on a strong beat. Rosow, “French Baroque Recitative,” 470.
mien” (unite your heart with mine), and “Jupiter et Junon nous occupent sans cesse” (Jupiter and Juno occupy us constantly). These phrases, coupled with the monotonous repeated rhythm, enhance the irony of the situation – the characters sing about the conflict of choosing love or duty, when their pledged love is based on false pretenses.

This same scene is a typical example of Lully’s use of recitative-dialogue to heighten drama, portray different characters in the music, and advance the plot. Lully’s recitative is much more melodic than contemporary Italians’, and is comparable to Monteverdi’s recitative style; Lully constantly slips from recitative to airs and includes melodic arioso sections. Also similar to Monteverdi, the recitatives are used as a vehicle for the advancement of the plot through dramatic text and musical characterizations.21 In example 1, Lully also uses the recitative-dialogue form to portray the characters’ artificial argument of love and duty. The scene begins with a dialogue between Mercury and Iris in recitative, but Mercury’s vocal line is noticeably more melodic. Compared to Iris’s response, Mercury has fewer repeated pitches, longer rhythmic durations, and is more metric. This would indicate to the singers that Iris should sing at a more rapid pace, imitating declamation, and Mercury should sing in an arioso style. As the scene advances, the melodic and declamatory style of the music closely reflects the characters’ feelings towards each other. When they become more united in their conversation, their music becomes more similar in rhythm and range. By m. 18, both vocal lines remain between the pitches F sharp and E flat, and their rhythms consist of only eighth notes and quarter notes.

Typical of Lully in a recitative-dialogue scene, he inserts short airs throughout the scene. The first two airs occur in succession, first by Mercury and then by Iris, as they discuss their faithfulness to each other. The two airs end with a short duet which repeats the phrase “Promettez-moi de constantes amours; Je vous promets de vous aimer toujours” (Promise me

21 Duggan, 107.
constant loves; I promise to love you forever), securing their fidelity and love for each other. The airs themselves are unique to the work. Iris’s air is the only simple binary air in all five acts. Mercury’s air is in rounded binary form, repeating first line of text, “Un ecoer fidele” (A faithful heart), as the last line of text. At the end of these airs, the listener is left with the hope that these characters find happiness in choosing love over duty.

In order to sustain suspense in the plot, immediately following their declaration of love and fidelity, the characters exhibit a sudden change in direction, just as Lully did with his production of Isis. Mercury and Isis are suddenly overcome with feelings of distrust. It might be expected for the characters to return to separate musical characterizations, similar to the beginning of the scene, but they both agree in their distrust and end the scene in a duet similar to a Venetian love duet. Example 2 is this final duet of the recitative-dialogue scene. Note the text repetition, staggered entrances, and use of a major mode; these are the characteristics that imply a Venetian love duet. Lully may have used this Venetian convention as a model to again enhance the irony of the scene and to illustrate the characters’ resolve. In Venetian love duets, the characters pledge their undying true love, but this duet does the opposite. Note the translation of the French text in example 2A. Lully only repeats the entire text twice, but within that repetition, he repeats the word “reprends” (take back) over ten times in the music between both voices. Overall, the harmony of the duet is very consonant, which implies love and happiness. However, the first time the word “reprends” occurs in m. 121, Lully inserts an F natural into a G-major (tonic) chord, creating a major-minor seventh chord dissonance. He continues to use similar dissonances on the repetitions of the word. In mm. 133 and 134, dominant seventh chords

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are again used on the repetition, but on different pitch classes. In mm. 139 and 145, he intensifies the dissonance with a diminished triad, signifying the finality of their decisions.

With the absence of the three-fold repetition and the parallel thirds that are common to the Venetian love duet, Lully emphasizes the use of independent lines for each character. Mercury enters in the third measure of the duet, and the text is not in sync with Iris’s. By the end of m. 118, the text is synced, but the melodies are not. Each character has an independent vocal melody with slightly different rhythms. However, on the repetition of the quatrain in m. 126, Mercury and Iris switch parts. The pitches are different, but the rhythm and melodic contour are identical to their partner’s lines in the first half of the duet. This again intensifies the irony in that each character is as independent as their lines, but they are united in the fact that they should not continue to love each other. These adaptations of Italian conventions coupled by ironic situations illustrate Lully’s mastery of the recitative to drastically convey the text through music.

Scholars tend to emphasize the importance of Lully’s recitative, and leave little mention of his airs. Reasons for their biases are due to the fact that airs are often found interspersed in the middle of recitative-dialogue scenes, are very short compared to contemporary Italian arias, and often do little to advance the plot.\(^2^3\) While it is true that Lully’s airs were shorter than contemporary Italian composers’ arias, they are not less frequent. Table 1 shows that in act one alone, there are nine airs indicated in the score between the seven scenes.\(^2^4\) Generally, his airs and arioso-like writing occur as a form of expression for the characters, not to advance the plot. Lully believed in melodic, singable vocal lines to enhance the expression of the text. Vocal melodies did not have a wide range, and were largely syllabic with a conservative harmony.\(^2^5\)

\(^2^3\) Duggan, 117-19.
\(^2^4\) Table 1 is found in the Appendix. Data is based on the piano-vocal score. New York: Broude Brothers Limited, 1971.
\(^2^5\) Duggan, 102.
Most of his airs were in a binary form, but he used double continuo airs at specific moments in the drama, both practices stemming from Italian opera. James Anthony categorizes Lully’s binary airs into three types: Simple, rounded, and extended. Out of the twenty-eight airs that Anthony categorizes as binary in *Isis*, nine are simple binary, one is rounded binary, and eighteen are extended binary. Simple binary is the traditional Italian form of two contrasting sections which may or may not be repeated. The binary air in *Isis* is found in the recitative-dialogue scene previously discussed. Iris’s air, *Un coeur fidè* serves to convince Mercury that she loves him and will be faithful as it repeats two couplets with different music.

Rounded binary airs are used sparingly throughout the work and feature a return of opening material at the end. Mercury’s air in the same recitative-dialogue scene (Act II, scene 4) is an example of a rounded binary air. The repeated text is emphasized by a repeated melody and slight rhythmic and harmonic variation. Extended binary airs are used excessively throughout the work. Lully modeled this binary style after his father-in-law and teacher, Michel Lambert. The music is usually set to a quatrain of text with the last two lines repeated, occasionally varying the music on the repetition. Hierax’s air in Act I, Scene 3 is an example of an extended binary air. Evident in example 3, Lully uses repetition of the text “Je sentirais moins mon tourment / Si je trouvais à qui m’en pendre” (I would feel my torment less / If I found whom I might blame) to mark the B section. The music is not repeated, only varied. The first two measures of the repeated text (mm. 89-90) are transposed up a minor third from the original in mm. 84-85. The vocal melody in the second half of the B section is used to heighten the drama by extending to the highest note in the air both times. The highest note, D occurs right before the resolution of each phrase. The resolution chord in m. 12 on the word “prendre” (blame) is A-major, which is the

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27 Anthony, 127.
dominant of D-minor. This half cadence provides a reason for the repetition of the phrase. The last three measures of the repeated phrase, mm. 15-17 serve to provide tonal closure in the key of d-minor. The dominant chord now occurs on the phrase “qui m’en” (whom I), allowing the return of the tonic, D-minor chord to provide closure on the final word of the air.

The last type of air I will discuss is the double-continuo air. The air is named after the bass line, which occurs in the continuo and is doubled in the voice. Similar airs occurred in Monteverdi’s music, along with his contemporaries, but there seemed to be no correlation between their use and particular dramatic situations or scenes. Lully’s double-continuo airs always occurred in situations that were ironic and dramatically emotional for a rejected (or soon to be rejected) lover, and became a standard convention in the following generations of composers.\textsuperscript{28} In order to determine the effectiveness of this air, we must understand some of the French and Italian operatic conventions. First of all, Lully did not use the same voice type for the same character from work-to-work as the Italians did. Italian composers became comfortable with the Faustini model of heroes sung by tenors, and unrequited lovers or old men sung by basses.\textsuperscript{29} The French loved and valued the bass voice more than the Italians, and Lully would often write the heroic part for a bass voice. However, this was not standard and some heroic roles were also sung by tenors. This variety in voice-typing caused a sense of unpredictability in the plot. The audience could not expect the bass character to be destined to a tragic ending or the tenor to win the favor of the female character. This being said, the audience expected at least one character’s plights to end in despair.\textsuperscript{30}

Along with his choice of voice types, he also chose plots with a variety of love schemes. Cuthbert Girdlestone analyzed all of Lully’s tragédie en musique plots and determined the

\textsuperscript{28} Howard, 150.
\textsuperscript{29} Rosand, 322-4.
\textsuperscript{30} Howard, 142-3.
stories he chose were all based on different “love chains.” Girdlestone also categorized Lully’s plots into at least six different love chains where at least one, if not two or more, characters experienced rejection. The chain featured in *Isis* is represented by the following scheme: A (Hierax) loves B (Io) who loves and is loved in vain by C (Jupiter) who is loved by D (Juno). This does not take in account the numerous divertissements that introduce additional characters in love, or the fact that most of the love in the story of *Isis* is untrue love. With this chain, it is clear that Hierax is most susceptible to rejection. Since the part of Hierax is written for a bass, and he experiences what he perceives to be rejection, he is a prime example of a character for the double-continuo air. In fact, Lully utilizes the form of the double-continuo air, sung by Hierax, twice within the same act.

Lully used these double-continuo airs to heighten the drama through irony. These airs always occurred at the moment the character is deceived or betrayed, sometimes without the character’s knowledge. In Act I, Scene 3, Hierax and Io have been arguing about the state of their relationship. Hierax believes Io does not love him anymore because she wants to delay their wedding. Io declares her love for him, but Hierax does not believe her claims and almost calls an end to the relationship. While the irony is not immediately evident in this early scene, the audience would have anticipated the upcoming scenes based on the mythological story. The audience would be alerted by Hierax’s double-continuo air to the irony of perceived rejection coupled with Io’s impending suffering.

The music itself also conveys a sense of irony. The texture of the air is typical of a double-continuo air: continuo, a bass voice doubling the continuo bass line, and two violins. The air contains three phrases that are longer than most other airs: phrase one has seven measures, and phrases two and three have five measures each. Example 3 illustrates the musical ironies in

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this scene. While the voice employs chromaticism and large leaps, another Monteverdian technique to convey distress, the violins make consonant melodic exchanges in cheerful short phrases above the voice. The violins signal a happy ending for the distressed lover, which the audience knows he will not get. The continuo repeatedly emphasizes tonic and dominant chords, specifically in mm. 77, 83-84, 87-90, and 92-94, to represent the lover’s stagnant emotional state. These different types of airs show Lully’s versatility as a composer and mark the importance of airs throughout the work.

Several examples have already been given to illustrate Lully’s importance as an innovator of dramatic conventions. His true mastery of the spectacle occurs in a device of the tragédie en musique pioneered by Lully: the divertissement. A divertissement is a scene in which the spectacle is exaggerated through the use of dance, machinery, chorus, ensembles, and more. These scenes often have nothing to do with the plot and focus on pure entertainment. The structure of the scene is dependent on the situation and the type of scene it is depicting, which could include a celebration, battle, funeral, or in Isis, the telling of a completely different story.32 Divertissements are always placed at the end of the final act, and are interspersed throughout the rest of the drama, often at the end of the previous acts as well. Table 2 depicts the number of divertissements in each of his tragédies en musique. Isis contains thirty-four scenes, and twenty-one of them are considered divertissements, two-thirds of the entire work. There are only two other of his tragédies en musique that contain that much emphasis on divertissements: Proserpine and Persée. The works surrounding Isis have a considerably lower percentage of divertissements. This confirms that Isis was an experiment on how much spectacle and elaborate elements Lully could work into the production while still pleasing the king and audience. After a negative reaction to this work, he reduced the number of divertissements and included more

tragedie-like elements in *Psyche* and *Bellérophon*. However, after regaining favor by reducing *divertissements* in those two works, he returned to the use of extravagance in *Proserpine* and *Persée*. This leads to the conclusion that the audience may not have been ready for the amount of *divertissements* used in *Isis*, but Lully felt successful enough to try his experiment again years later.

Table 2: Lully’s use of *divertissements* in his *tragedies en musique*.³³

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The focal point of the opera occurs in act three with the succession of six *divertissements*. In this act, Lully and Quinault created the masterpiece that scholars have titled an opera-within-an-opera. In this succession of scenes, Lully and Quinault successfully recall the Greek tradition by emphasizing the power of music, adapting Venetian conventions, providing a complete diversion from the plot with actors who parallel the main characters, and using numerous choral pieces set as separate characters responding to the drama. These elements were intended to greatly expand the spectacle’s effect on the audience and reach several different emotions. The act contains eight scenes: two recitative-dialogue scenes and six *divertissements*, in succession.

At the start of the act, Io was just captured and placed under the guard of the hundred-eyed Argus, who is Heirax’s brother. As Heirax and Argus discuss Io’s imprisonment, Mercury appears, dressed as a shepherd, and begins portraying the story of Pan and Syrinx to distract Argus’s one hundred eyes. The characters are transformed into actors in scene three, which seamlessly transforms into an opera-within-an-opera, sung in five divertissements. This act alone would have been enough to achieve Lully’s goal of the theatrical production - to please, touch, and instruct their audiences.

Traditional of Lully, each scene varies in length and medium depending on the situation. Act III, scene 6 not only forms the focal point of the act, but the focal point of the entire opera. It is the longest of all the divertissements and effectively uses all forms of media as shown in Table 3: recitatives, airs, duets, a trio, chorus, a double chorus, a lament, a sleep scene, a double continuo air, and added instrumentation.

Table 3: Structure of Act II, Scene 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of Piece</th>
<th>Type of Piece</th>
<th>Characters</th>
<th>Other information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Marche”</td>
<td>Dance</td>
<td>Satyrs and shepherds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Quel bien devez-vous attendre?”</td>
<td>Duet</td>
<td>Two shepherds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd Air</td>
<td>Dance (Minuet)</td>
<td>Satyrs and Shepherds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Je vous aime, nympe charmante”</td>
<td>Recitative-dialogue</td>
<td>Pan and Syrinx</td>
<td>Includes an air by each character</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Aimons sans cesse, N’aimons jamais”</td>
<td>Double chorus</td>
<td>Chorus of nymphs; chorus of silvains, satyrs and shepherds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Faut il qu’en vain discours un si beau jour se passe?”</td>
<td>Recitative-chorus</td>
<td>Syrinx; chorus of nymphs; chorus of silvains, satyrs and shepherds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symphonie</td>
<td>Instrumental</td>
<td>Backstage chorus</td>
<td>Becomes the ritornello for the following chorus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Courons à la chasse”</td>
<td>Chorus</td>
<td>Backstage chorus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

34 Argus was a giant monster with one hundred eyes, according to Greek Mythology.
### Narrative of Scene Six

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recitative-Dialogue</th>
<th>Recitative-Monologue</th>
<th>Lament</th>
<th>Lament</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Syrinx; Pan; chorus of nymphs; chorus of silvains, satyres and shepherds</td>
<td>Mercury</td>
<td>Pan</td>
<td>Pan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recitative-diologue</td>
<td>Air (double continuo)</td>
<td>accompanied by flutes</td>
<td>accompanied by flutes; sleep scene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syrinx; Pan; chorus of nymphs; chorus of silvains, satyres and shepherds</td>
<td>Trio</td>
<td>Pan and two shepherds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recitative-diologue</td>
<td>Recitative-monologue</td>
<td>Mercury</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Greeks often incorporated a theme of the power of music and dance in their dramas; Lully did the same in this theme and added the power of opera to his themes. Quinault emphasizes these themes in the plot by using this internal opera as a way to distract the guard and rescue the heroine. While Mercury’s rescue was eventually thwarted by Heirax, he was successful in putting Argus to sleep, which was said to be impossible, due to his one hundred eyes. Lully also portrays these themes in several ways. First, he constantly varied the orchestration (recitative, airs, duets, trios, chorus, and instrumentation). Each part in this scene emphasizes a different operatic medium and brings a new spectacle to enjoy, emphasizing the power of opera. Another way Lully emphasizes the power of music is through the use of flutes. In scene six, flutes are added as a symbol of the reed flute Pan created after Syrinx turned into reeds\(^{35}\), but more importantly to recall Greek tradition. Flutes were used to take the audience back to the origins of music and operas they were among the first musical instruments, and often used by the Greeks to move the affections. In Italy, flutes were used exclusively for the pastoral genre, which was a predecessor to Italian opera, and pastoral scenes in the early all-sung dramatic works. Further heightening the effect of the flutes, Lully places them at the climax of

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\(^{35}\) In Greek mythology, the death of Syrinx is the birth of the flute.
this important internal opera. The goal of this instrumental addition was to transport the audience into Greek times and to simply enjoy the production.

Another influence from Italy came in the form of Venetian conventions. After the death of Syrinx, Pan begins to sing a Lament. Despite the fact that the score is marked “Plainte de Pan” (Pan’s Lament), Lully does several things that characterize this piece as a model of the Venetian lament that was popular in the seventeenth century. The Venetian lament was characterized by a repeating descending tetrachord in the continuo. These tetrachords could be chromatic or modal, but would be immediately recognizable to listeners based on this feature. The vocal line included accented dissonances, vivid imagery, and interrupted or short rhyme schemes. Lully uses several of these elements, along with adaptations to his own style in “Plainte de Pan.”

The first immediately recognizable feature is the descending line. It occurs twice to frame the recitative and air sections: once at the beginning of the lament, and again before the recitative turns into an air. The first occurrence is not the traditional tetrachord - neither minor nor all-chromatic; however, it has two functions. It sets the stage for the tragic lament and provides a tonal transition from the previous key of C-major to the haunting key of C-minor. Many of Lully’s tonal transitions between scenes were connected by a descending pattern, named a chute by eighteenth-century musicians. Example 4 illustrates Lully’s lamenting pentachord – five notes instead of four – in which the first three notes are chromatic, followed by a whole step, and a final chromatic half step. It is interesting that Lully placed a full step in the middle of a chromatic line, without a clear reason for doing so. However, it does create a very strong dissonance when the voice enters in measure three: a C-minor chord (voice and continuo) with an A flat in the bass. Another break from early Venetian convention is the lack of repetition

36 Rosand, 362-4.
of the descending bass line. Instead, he splits it into two sections and places it in the vocal line. The first section, C to B natural, occurs in m. 3 on the word “helas” (alas). The second section, B flat to A flat to G, occurs on the phrase “Ah! Quelle voix nouvelle” (Ah, what a new voice). These opening lines of text, coupled with the descending line illustrate Pan’s comprehension of Syrinx’s death. The opening phrases in the voice are separated by several beats of rest which add to the drama of Pan’s lament. He has lost his lover and the short phrases of music portrays the time it takes him to fully understand what has happened.

The vocal melody is also characteristic of a Venetian lament. It enters on a weak beat (beat three) of the measure and displays very short phrases. The space between the short phrases decreases as the phrase length increases, but the longest phrase only consists of four measures. The range is very narrow, spanning only an octave, and it is syllabic without a clear rhyme scheme. The phrase “Ne cessons point de nous plaindre avec elle” (Let us not cease to moan with her) is repeated with different music the second time, creating a vocal ritornello which creates the vivid image of Pan mourning the loss of his lover among the musical reeds.

The flutes are used in this scene to symbolize Syrinx reincarnated as the reeds blowing and lamenting in the wind. They are an integral part of this scene, as they heighten the tenderness and emotion of the scene. They act as a character and respond to Pan between his lines of text. Each response is in major thirds, echoing the rhythm first posed by the descending chromatic line: eighth note, quarter note, quarter note.

The final statement of the original descending pentachord occurs in m. 30 of the lament. Example 4A shows the second statement of the pentachord, but this time is all-chromatic. This chromaticism at the end of the lament sparks further curiosity about the first statement. It is possible to speculate that Lully combined the idea of the chute with the descending tetrachord of
the lament to create the whole-step-interrupted pentachord at the beginning of this haunting lament. Another possibility is that Lully tried to avoid completely imitating the Italians, since he was born Italian and the French were not impressed with Italian opera, and hoped his version of the lament would not be considered purely Italian. The answer to this puzzling question may remain hidden; however, this beautifully haunting lament embraces the power of music to move the audience’s affections.

The lament is elided to the next air by an ascending chromatic line, followed by a perfect authentic cadence. This transition is again similar to a *chute*, but differs in the use of chromatic intervals, and the fact that the two pieces do not change key. The lament is followed by an air in the same key (C minor) performed by Pan and the shepherd-flutists. Lully keeps the intensity of the drama going by using a double-continuo air symbolizing the ironic emotions of Pan. After lamenting the loss of his love, his lament turns to anguish as he realized Syrinx killed herself to escape his pursuits:

Les yeux qui m’ont charmé ne verront plus le jour.  
Etait-ce ainsi, cruel amour,  
Qu’il fallait te venger d’une beauté rebelle,  
N’aurait-il pas suffi de t’en rendre vainqueur,  
Et de voir dans tes fers son insensible cœur  
Brûler avec le mien d’une arder éternelle,  
Que tout ressentze mes tourments.  

They eyes that charmed me will no longer see the day.  
Was it thus, cruel love,  
That you had to avenge yourself of a rebellious beauty?  
Would it not have sufficed to make yourself the victor  
And see in your chains its unfeeling heart  
Burn with mine in eternal ardour?  
May everyone feel my torments.  


Lully sets Quinaults text to an air that changes meter and doubles the melodic vocal part in the continuo. While the piece is clearly an air, the change of meter implies it is a recitative. This seems to be a device to sustain emotion throughout the scene. In the previous lament, Quinault used a repeated line of text with different music. In example 4A, Lully uses the same ascending
semi-chute heard between the pieces in mm. 16-18. Since the voice is doubling the continuo bass line, it is also sung. This creates a strong sense of unity between the lament and air.

We have now seen how Lully used conventions developed by himself, the Italians, French tragedists, and even the Greeks in the creation of his fifth tragedie en musique, Isis. Most nobles of the French courts did not react positively to the premiere and since then Isis is rarely performed. The success of any work can only be measured by what the composer hoped to achieve. If the composer’s intention was to create a work that would continue to be performed for centuries to come, than Isis is judged as a failure. Based on scholarly evidence, Lully’s goal for Isis was to place more emphasis on the spectacle in order to entertain the audience by moving their emotions and instructing them in a moral lesson. By this standard, Isis was a major success for Lully.
Bibliography


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## Appendix: Tables and Musical Examples

### Table 1: Vocal Music Types in Act I

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scene</th>
<th>Character(s)</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Hierax</td>
<td>Cessons, cessons d’aimer une infidele</td>
<td>Recitative-monologue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Pirante, Hierax</td>
<td>C’est trop entrete nir</td>
<td>Recitative-dialogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Hierax</td>
<td>L’inconstante n’a plus l’empressement extreme</td>
<td>Air (double continuo)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Io and Hierax</td>
<td>M’aimez vous?</td>
<td>Recitatie-dialogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Hierax</td>
<td>Je cherche en vain l’heureux amant</td>
<td>Air (double continuo)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Hierax and Io</td>
<td>Non, non, il ne tient qu’a vous</td>
<td>Duet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Micene</td>
<td>Ce prince trop longtemps dans ses chagrins s’obstine</td>
<td>Air</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Io and Micene</td>
<td>Je veux bien te parler enfin sans artifice</td>
<td>recitative-dialogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Io</td>
<td>Lorsqu’on me presse de me rendre</td>
<td>Air</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Mercury</td>
<td>Le Dieu puissant qui lance le tonnerre</td>
<td>Air</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Chorus of Deities</td>
<td>Echos, retentissez</td>
<td>Chorus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Mercury</td>
<td>C’est ainsi que Mercure</td>
<td>Air</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Io</td>
<td>Pourquoi du haut des Cieux</td>
<td>Air</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Mercury</td>
<td>Ce serait en aimant une contrainte etrange</td>
<td>Air</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Chorus of Deities</td>
<td>Que la Terre partage</td>
<td>Chorus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Jupiter</td>
<td>Les armes que jetiens protegent l’innocence</td>
<td>Recitative-monologue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Jupiter</td>
<td>Jupiter vient sur la terre</td>
<td>Air</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Chorus of Deities</td>
<td>Jupiter vient sur la terre</td>
<td>Chorus</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total pieces: 18**  **Total Recitative: 5**  **Total Airs: 9**
Mais, si je vous disais que je veux vous choisir.

Pour attacher mon cœur d'une éternelle chaîne?

Je vous écouterais peut-être avec plaisir.
- sir, Mais je vous croyerais avec peine.

Rejetez vous d'ujourdhui.

Jupiter et Jupiter

- nir votre cœur et le mien.

- non nous occupent sans cesse. Nos soins sont assez.
Gardez pour quel-tre
Gardez pour quel-qu'au-tre
Votre amour trom-peur;
Gardez pour quel-qu'au-tre
Votre amour trom-peur;
Gardez pour quel-qu'au-tre
Votre amour trompeur;
Gardez pour quel-qu'au-tre
Votre amour trompeur;
Gardez pour quel-qu'au-tre
Votre amour trompeur;
Gardez pour quel-qu'au-tre
Votre amour trompeur;
Gardez pour quel-qu'au-tre
Votre amour trompeur;
Gardez pour quel-qu'au-tre
Votre amour trompeur;

Gardez pour quelque autre
Votre amour trompeur;
Je reprends mon coeur,
Reprenez le vôtre.

Keep for someone else
Your deceitful love;
I take back my heart,
Take back your own.39

Example 4: Jean-Baptiste Lully, *Isis*, Act III, scene 6, mm. 1-18
Example 4A: Jean-Baptiste Lully, *Isis*, Act III, scene 6, mm. 49-60.