

5 “The Angel of Music Sings Songs in My Head”

The Phantom of the Opera

His face . . . looks like a mild case of albinism, with a few blotches any dermatologist could cure.

Michael Feingold, “The Ghosts of Music Past,” Village Voice

When [the Phantom’s mask is] at long last removed, it reveals something that looks like an unfinished face-lift, not so much repulsive as improbable.

John Peter, “There Is a World Elsewhere,” Sunday Times (London)

What is it about this musical with a hero who has a face like melted cheese, and a 1,000-pound chandelier for second lead, that lures audiences in droves, including people who rarely go to the theater?

Dinitia Smith, “The Chandelier That Earned \$1.5 Billion,” New York Times

As much as critics enjoy describing the Phantom’s deformed face in colorful terms, people do not flock to see Andrew Lloyd Webber’s megamusical *The Phantom of the Opera* for this sight. It could be argued that they go to see the chandelier, falling as it does almost on top of the front rows before veering toward the stage to land, but even this is a passing and entirely predictable thrill. They go, critics agree, to experience more pervasive qualities of the show: romance and lovely melodies. The latter quality had been in Lloyd Webber’s work from the first, but the romantic, human, sometimes erotic story was a new feature. He wanted to write a romance, a story of grand emotions and intriguing char-

acters. This work is a significant turning point in Lloyd Webber's career, marked both by a mature compositional style and a story with adult themes.

For their part, critics generally treated this show more kindly than the two preceding Lloyd Webber shows, *Cats* (the lack of plot in which seemed to disturb many) and *Starlight Express* (about which the critics were more justifiably hostile; unlike *Cats*, it has few redeeming qualities of music or lyrics and even less plot). Pre-opening hype about *Phantom* promised a gripping story with more intrigue and characterization than its predecessors, and lushly romantic music. In general, critics agreed that the musical fulfilled this promise of a richer, more satisfying evening.

Phantom was Lloyd Webber's first serious-tone book musical since *Evita* with Tim Rice; for all three of their collaborations, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, and *Evita*, Rice had supplied the concept and a detailed book as well as the lyrics. While *Cats* and *Starlight Express* had been Lloyd Webber's ideas, the hands of directors, producers, and set designers can clearly be seen not only in the books, but in the shaping of the concepts. This time, Lloyd Webber stuck close to his source material and to his own vision. He found the original Gaston Leroux novel in a used bookstore, having already been pondering it as a subject for a musical, particularly because another musical version was already running. Its creator, Ken Hill, had asked Lloyd Webber's new young wife, singer/dancer Sarah Brightman, to play the lead, but her schedule did not allow for it. The story nevertheless drew Lloyd Webber's attention because it concerned real people in historical, romantic situations—not (as Michael Walsh puts it) the “gods, demigods, cats, and trains” about which he usually wrote.¹ It had been difficult for audiences to relate to many of his heroes, including the morally ambiguous Eva Peron and the string of entertaining but nonhuman, unromantic cats and trains. The press often extended these troublesome qualities in his characters to descriptions of him: they depicted him as aloof, distant, and shy about expressing his affection for people, even his new wife. This show, he hoped, would be his romantic declaration, a heartfelt love triangle story that appealed to him not only for its romance in plot but in its overall musical style; he felt it called for a full symphony orchestra and allowed for some complex compositional devices, especially in ensembles. It also allowed him to cast his beautiful wife with her sweet soprano voice as the ingénue Christine.

Lloyd Webber began work on *Phantom* in the fall of 1984 by reassigning some melodies he had thought to use for another work still years in the future, *Aspects of Love*. He already had some basic ideas about how the book for a *Phantom* musical should be written, even before a lyricist and director came on board. His vision was truer to the Gaston Leroux novel than many movie versions

had been. The original Phantom, like Lloyd Webber's, was deformed at birth and is a composer, architect, ventriloquist, and magician. He lives, of course, in the dark subterranean lairs beneath the Paris Opéra, from which vantage point he plays the organ, tutors a young chorus singer/dancer named Christine Daaé, with whom he is infatuated, and harasses the opera's managers and patrons. Eventually his love for Christine and his need to protect his strange way of life lead him to apply his considerable talents to several clever but brutal murders.

This is the stuff of pulp horror, and Leroux's novel was well received when it appeared in 1911. He was a journalist who often uncovered juicy investigative stories by using disguises and intrigue. This led to detective novels and romantic horror stories, serialized in newspapers. After visiting the Opéra and discovering the underground lake beneath the house, as well as the iron gates blocking off sections of the cavernous dark space, he began to write *The Phantom of the Opera*. The gates were left from when the unfinished Opéra had been used as storage for supplies, and possibly prisoners, during the Franco-Prussian War.² There had been a long delay in building the Opéra, which Leroux reasoned would give his fictional Erik the Phantom plenty of time to design and take up residence in his secret underground home. The story did well in serial form in France, England, and the United States, but was quickly forgotten as a novel until the movie version in 1924 starring Lon Chaney; Leroux died in 1927, having enjoyed an enormous rebirth in his novel's popularity in the wake of the film.³

Leroux tells the story in somewhat journalistic fashion, complete with realistic documents and testimony from key players. Lloyd Webber frames his story differently; the musical opens with an aged Raoul, Vicomte de Chagny, reflecting back on the strange events concerning the Opera Ghost, and the rest of the show is one large flashback (although told not from Raoul's or any one character's perspective; the later time period is never revisited). Lloyd Webber and his creative team eliminated some tangential characters and combined others, changes common to the musicalization of any source, but the show also contains lines taken word for word from the novel.

In Lloyd Webber's version, and to a slightly lesser degree in the novel, *Phantom* is basically a beauty and the beast story, a genre which (as one journalist pointed out) can end in two ways: either the girl kisses the beast and gets a prince, or the beast sacrifices himself so that the girl may have a normal love.⁴ In this version we get both the kiss (but no prince) and the sacrifice, which lends a greater sense of romance than other versions of the story. Indeed, Lloyd Webber envisioned the story as primarily romantic, with the elements of horror lending an eerie atmosphere to the main love story. Focusing on the horror, particularly that of the Phantom's face, would be difficult for the audience to see; hence in

the musical the unveiling of his disfigurement takes place in public so that the reaction of the other actors could fill in what the audience could not scrutinize. But his face, cheese-like or otherwise, was never the point. This Phantom was alluring, far more seductive than menacing to Christine, more of a “possible romantic alternative” than in the novel.⁵ When she kisses him, we can see that she cares for him, but he realizes it comes from compassion, not love, and he sends her away with Raoul, her love interest and champion. (See appendix H for a full plot summary.)

Lloyd Webber began assembling his team with producer Cameron Mackintosh, and they first looked for a librettist. Tim Rice was already committed to his own new project, *Chess*. The legendary Alan Jay Lerner agreed to do it, but then fell ill after writing only a few lines. Lloyd Webber and Mackintosh then brought on board Richard Stilgoe, who had contributed a few lyrics to *Cats* and then served as the librettist for *Starlight Express*. He wrote the lyrics for the single “The Phantom of the Opera” (sung by Sarah Brightman and Steve Harley), released with great success in the spring of 1985, more than a year before the London opening. Stilgoe’s talents, however, were best suited to molding the plot, not to writing the poetic, romantic lyrics the story required, so Mackintosh brought in Charles Hart, a twenty-four-year-old writer whose earlier work Mackintosh had seen in a competition. Although that work did not win and was never performed, Hart nevertheless impressed Mackintosh, and eventually Lloyd Webber as well. Hart wrote most of the libretto in about three months.⁶ The love duet “All I Ask of You” was also successfully released as a single, recorded by Brightman and Cliff Richard, before the show had even had a run-through.

The run-through came at the Sydmonton Festival, the testing-ground concert series Lloyd Webber held every summer on his country estate. In July 1985, a rough act 1 was performed there to the delight of many—and to the shock of director Trevor Nunn. He had already written lyrics for the melodies he heard that day, but he thought they were to have been for *Aspects of Love*. Now Nunn, having directed *Cats* and *Starlight Express* and expecting to work on *Aspects*, hoped to roll with these changes and direct *Phantom*. But despite the fact that Nunn had lent Lloyd Webber the cast of the upcoming *Les Misérables* for the run-through at Sydmonton, including Colm Wilkinson as the Phantom, Lloyd Webber apparently had no intention of giving him the project. Instead Lloyd Webber chose perhaps the only director with a more solid reputation in musical theater (at least in America) than Nunn: Harold Prince. (Nunn would recover from the rejection and eventually direct *Aspects of Love* as well as *Sunset Boulevard*.)

At the time, however, Prince’s reputation was perhaps not as glowing as it had once been; he had not had a hit in eight years, since Lloyd Webber’s *Evita*,

which was one of his few projects to that point not written by Stephen Sondheim or another American composer. As a London journalist pointed out at the time of Prince's work on *Phantom*, Prince previously "had always been identified with the opposition, Sondheim and Bernstein and a range of other American musicals. New York was the home of the musical. Eight years on, it feels very different. The balance of power in musical theatre has tilted across the Atlantic. Prince needs Lloyd Webber, not the other way about."⁷ *The Phantom of the Opera*, therefore, came to be seen as Prince's comeback vehicle.

Prince's work had an enormous impact on the development of the show as well as on its ensuing success. The director jumped at the chance to direct a romantic musical, since he felt it was something the theater needed—something along the lines of *South Pacific*, which happened to be Lloyd Webber's favorite classic.⁸ For inspiration Prince visited the Paris Opéra, discovering for himself the impressive lagoon several stories below the basement, the roof decorated with gilded statues, and the endless maze of nooks throughout the building in which, it was said, several scorned lovers had hanged themselves during the nineteenth century. The house boasts several thousand doors and six miles of underground passages, and is seventeen stories high, although it seats a relatively small 2,156.⁹ Leroux describes much of this in his novel, but Prince, along with set designer Maria Björnson and lighting designer Andrew Bridge, still found the visit invaluable. The chandelier, the lobby staircase, the house itself, all became key elements of the musical.

It is easy to see why the house proved so inspirational. Construction had been underway for thirteen years, including several delays, when the Opéra was finally completed in 1875. Architect Charles Garnier unintentionally hit water beneath the site, but used it to his advantage: he created a permanent lake and used it to operate hydraulic stage machinery. After the house had been in operation for several years, accidents occurred that became the stuff of fiction. One of eight counterweights to the chandelier was severed by a fire in the fly space and fell into the audience, killing a woman. The performance that night, 20 May 1896, was Collasse's *Thétis and Pelée*, and the weight fell at the end of the first act. Leroux changed the weight to the chandelier itself and the opera to *Faust*; Lloyd Webber kept the chandelier but changed the opera to the fictional Mozart-like *Il muto*. There are other tales and mysterious secrets involving the Opéra. A man, rejected by a ballet girl, killed himself and willed his skeleton to the props department so that he might stay near his beloved. There is a room with a locked door but no doorknob that was decreed to remain shut until 2007.¹⁰

Such eerie but romantic tales, and the sensual atmosphere of the place, helped lead Prince to his most important revelation about what the show needed:

sex. It is an erotic tale, not just a romantic one, about a man longing for a lover, for someone to touch him for the first time in his life. Around this time, Prince saw a documentary about disabled people attempting to live their lives, including their sexual lives, normally and happily. The notion of the Phantom's search for sexual fulfillment helped not only to shape the show and the performances, but the sets as well; rich fabric drapes the stage, candles and shadows abound, the lighting is often quite dim and glowing, and the arch of the stage itself is framed by gilded statues of people who, as Prince pointed out, "if you look carefully, you realize are in various stages of ecstasy."¹¹ The research of Prince, set designer Björnson, and lighting designer Bridge in Paris became context over which they built a sensuous look of their own imaginations.

All this atmosphere required expensive and complex set and lighting design, something for which many critics had developed a distaste; spectacle, they felt, had been taking precedence over everything from plot to actors. Musical theater seemed dominated by laser beams and ramps for roller skates. Lloyd Webber and Prince were careful to keep *Phantom* from being overwhelmed by its spectacular elements, a criticism with which Lloyd Webber was all too familiar and with which Prince tended to agree. "I was tired of what spectacle had become," said Prince. "If this was spectacle, it was another kind, a romantic show with a sense of theatrical occasion and a Victorian feel to it."¹² Although Lloyd Webber would cheerfully work again with Trevor Nunn, he shied away at the moment from Nunn's impressive but sometimes superficial use of overwhelming sets and effects. Prince grounded his designs more in the drama and meant them to help create the dark and sexual mood of the show. Critics generally found the show as high-tech as any, but with a definite purpose; in fact, the show would probably not work without the rich visual atmosphere.

There are many impressive and beautiful visual moments in the show. Hundreds of candles rise from the water to surround the boat in the Phantom's lair. The Phantom vanishes into thin air and projects his voice around the theater. He leads Christine to his lair on a descending ramp that represents miles of underground passages. Raoul, pursuing the Phantom late in the show, jumps off one of the ramps and disappears into the water below. But none of these illusions is impossible to explain; they involve, in fact, basic tricks of staging such as lighting and trap doors, done with particular skill. More impressive and central to the show's overall impact are the ways in which Prince and his designers fill the stage with ever-changing spaces and movement. As Foster Hirsch points out, Prince "sculpts theatrical space and time, from scene to scene transforming the height and depth of the playing area as he divides and rearranges space, creates

frames within frames as drapes descend from the flies, reverses perspective, and fuses episodes with fades, dissolves, montage effects, or abrupt cuts.”¹³ Prince also eliminated what little dialogue the show had in its early drafts, explaining that “the size of the way the story is told does not require dialogue.”¹⁴ Like other megamusicals, *Phantom* had a grand, epic feel as well as seamless, constantly underscored action that made dialogue seem out of place most of the time.

Lloyd Webber, Prince, and their team made several brilliant casting decisions that in true Lloyd Webber fashion helped in promoting the show. Casting Christine was never an issue; Lloyd Webber had composed the role for his new wife, Sarah Brightman. For the Phantom, the team made the surprising choice of Michael Crawford. Largely known for his comic roles on television and stage in England, Crawford had done his share of musicals, including *Barnum*, but was not considered a serious musical theater performer. Yet he had extensive formal vocal training, and his powerful acting would prove one of the highlights of the show. The role of Raoul went to American actor Steve Barton, whom the show’s choreographer, Gillian Lynne, had recommended.

Lloyd Webber and his production team had hoped to open *Phantom* at the Palace Theatre in London, which, along with several other West End venues, Lloyd Webber now owned. But he had already promised the Palace to Cameron Mackintosh’s *Les Misérables* when it moved out of the Barbican Theatre and into the West End. Lloyd Webber kept his deal with *Les Misérables* (and earned profits as the owner), and chose instead Her Majesty’s Theatre for *Phantom*. As Lloyd Webber biographer Michael Coveney puts it, this resulted in the “triple whammy” of *Cats*, *Phantom*, and *Les Misérables* all in the West End together, as they would remain into the twenty-first century; they were “the three most successful musicals in history and the cultural indicator of the Thatcher boom years.”¹⁵

Opening Nights and Sarah II

Opening night, 9 October 1986 at Her Majesty’s Theatre, was greeted with an enthusiastic audience reception and generally good reviews. The cast album, released in January 1987, went platinum in a very impressive ten days. Advance sales boomed. The show won the Larry at that season’s Laurence Olivier Awards, and another Larry went to star Michael Crawford, whose performance as the Phantom critics on both sides of the Atlantic generally hailed as brilliant. Sarah Brightman, nominated for her own Larry, lost.

Perhaps it would have helped coming events had she won. One of the key factors that made *Phantom* a megamusical was its pre-opening buzz, generated not just by marketing or the success of Lloyd Webber's previous shows, but by gossip, scandal, and casting problems. Brightman's presence in the role of Christine created an international scandal when Lloyd Webber and Mackintosh began planning the move to Broadway. The American Council of the Actors' Equity Association barred Brightman from playing her role in New York because it would contradict their policy of allowing only proven international stars to move with a production from a foreign country to New York. If the actor in a lead role was not internationally renowned, Actor's Equity could ban the performer and insist on an American (whether famous or not) in the role, so that an American could have the first crack at a potentially star-making or career-boosting turn. Michael Crawford, famous enough in both countries for a number of years, had no problem getting similar permission. Steve Barton was an American and so there was no issue. But Brightman, basically unknown in the United States as anything other than Lloyd Webber's wife, was not considered by Actors' Equity to be a big enough star to take such a plum role away from an American performer.

It was by no means the first time that Brightman had caused a scandal, at least in England. Known as "Sarah II" to the media there, she was Lloyd Webber's second wife; he had rather suddenly left his first wife, Sarah Hugill—dubbed "Sarah I"—for Brightman. Brightman and Lloyd Webber became regular tabloid subjects, their activities reported the way those of pop music and movie stars are in the United States. She was already working her way up the ladder in the theater at the time, but it was *Phantom* that launched her as a musical star. Casting her in the lead role was a bold move.

Lloyd Webber and Prince were furious with Actors' Equity for blocking Brightman's performance in New York; Lloyd Webber reportedly threatened to cancel the production. The conflict made the front page of the *New York Times* in June 1987, by which time Actors' Equity had already denied Brightman twice. Actors' Equity continued to argue that such a star-making role should go to an American, while Lloyd Webber and Prince argued that the role had been written for Brightman specifically and that she had performed it with great success in London. Prince even attempted to prove his point by holding auditions with dozens of women and then reasserting that Brightman was the best of the lot. Eventually Actors' Equity, knowing what a boon the show would be for the industry, gave in, but with stipulations. Brightman could play New York for six months, and the producers would have to give a leading role in a new London production to an American sometime in the next three years.¹⁶

Just as the conflict was nearing resolution, an influential and familiar voice entered the picture: Frank Rich, chief theater critic for the *New York Times*. He had already reviewed the London production which, true to form regarding Lloyd Webber, he found generally unfavorable, although he praised Prince. Neither he nor anyone else would review the New York opening for another seven months. But having seen in London both Brightman and her replacement, who played the role for two of the eight shows a week, he weighed in on the difference between the two women: "There wasn't any." The show continued to sell out in London without Brightman, and the real stars, Rich asserted, were Crawford and the sets. "So why has everyone been in such a tizzy about a casting question that will have no effect on the artistic or economic health of a production? I would list the following factors (not necessarily in order of importance): Ego, marital devotion, xenophobia, labor-management negotiating tactics."¹⁷ It came down to power, Rich argued. The producers assumed their leading lady was everyone's star, and American Actors' Equity did not want to be manipulated or bullied. He felt it was also about international rivalry: the Americans resented the recent dominance of British musicals on home turf, and the British pushed to make their control more complete. The case of Sarah Brightman became a miniature version of the larger co-dependent rivalry between New York and London that had arisen in the 1980s. Rich correctly predicted that the show would indeed open, and open with Brightman, because everyone would lose too much money if it did not open at all, or if the now-famous Brightman did not come with it. In the end, the whole scandal fell into the no-publicity-is-bad-publicity category, with the exception of some pre-formed biases against Brightman's performance.

Previews in New York began on 9 January 1988, with opening night on 26 January at the Shubert-owned Majestic Theater. The show had already taken in about \$16 million in pre-sales, breaking the record of *Les Misérables* by a good four million dollars, thanks to a massive publicity campaign engineered by Mackintosh. *Phantom* landed on the covers of *Time* and *New York* and gained a great deal of television time. The show broke first-day ticket sales records, and by opening night not a seat was available for almost a year; at present writing, the house sells out regularly and tickets are virtually never offered at a discount. Since its opening, it has run in sixty cities in fourteen countries, earning about two billion dollars.¹⁸ It won seven Tony Awards, including Best Musical, Best Actor in a Musical (Crawford), and Best Director (Prince, his record-breaking sixteenth Tony). Sarah Brightman did not receive a nomination.¹⁹

The Score: Help Me Make the Music of the Night; or, What Do We Mean by Opera, Anyway?

OPERATIC FEATURES, OPERA SCENES

Andrew Lloyd Webber expressed ambivalence about the use of the word “opera” in regard to both *The Phantom of the Opera* and to new musical theater generally. Nevertheless, the word hovered around pre-opening discussions of *Phantom* and remained prominent in reviews. Several characteristics make *Phantom* seem operatic, both to those who know opera and to those who do not. The score, like all of Lloyd Webber’s up to this point, features very little dialogue; a few short conversations transpire over underscoring, but almost everything is sung. As discussed regarding *Jesus Christ Superstar*, the lack of spoken dialogue does not make a show an opera, but it generally makes the show feel more like an opera than a musical comedy to most critics and audiences. The cast also features several operatic voices. Scenes and songs often run together, becoming large complexes of numbers with unclear beginnings and ends, a technique that served Puccini well. Motifs and recurring musical themes, ranging from the catchy and transparent to the complex and dissonant, tie together numbers, sections, and whole scenes, and most of the fragments undergo significant changes in context, form, or meaning. Such devices bring Wagner to mind. Several ensemble numbers grow from one player to two, then three, until eventually seven characters express seven different texts simultaneously, very much like ensembles in Verdi’s or Mozart’s operas.

But perhaps most important, two factors caused the word “opera” to hover around *Phantom*. First, the pre-opening hype and the ensuing reviews all commented on an apparent leap in sophistication that Lloyd Webber had made. The media hailed the show as his most mature, well-crafted work to date, and not just because it told a human love story rather than a children’s tale like *Starlight Express*. Critics, even those not particularly well trained in music, understood that the score was more musically rich than Lloyd Webber’s others, with its motifs, polyphonic ensembles, and large scene structures. Critics and scholars made a link, therefore, between “sophisticated” and “opera.” The use of operatic elements in the score may have simply been coincidental to the maturing of Lloyd Webber’s style, but the two notions were irrevocably linked. One critic noted the “shift toward classical seriousness” that this show, along with Lloyd Webber’s *Variations* and *Requiem*, demonstrated.²⁰

Critics debated whether *Phantom* could be considered a new opera, and whether musical theater generally was a modern take on the operatic tradition.

Lloyd Webber made his view clear: "What do we mean by opera, anyway? And where does that put *Phantom*? Obviously there is a world of difference between *Phantom* and something like *Sugar Babies*. But there is no difference today between opera and serious musical theater."²¹ If *Sugar Babies* represented nonserious musical theater, by which Lloyd Webber implies a more traditionally structured stop-and-sing musical comedy, then his new definition of opera/serious musical theater helps his effort to win critical respect. This category of opera-like "serious musical theater" would include not only *Phantom* and perhaps his *Jesus Christ Superstar* and *Evita*, but also *Les Misérables* and many sung-through, serious-minded megamusicals yet to come. Lloyd Webber agreed *Phantom* was basically an opera, but he preferred to have it stand as a Broadway show, as that had always been his field, and he chose the devils he knew (theater critics) over those he did not (opera critics).²²

Theater critics, even those who did not fully embrace *Phantom*, agreed the score was Lloyd Webber's most sophisticated and "serious" to date, embracing Lloyd Webber's link between sung-through musicals and (according to Lloyd Webber) the parallel sophistication of opera. Biographer Michael Walsh declares that the score "represents such a leap beyond anything he had done to that point that it can only be explained as one of those periodic quantum leaps that every real artist makes in his art."²³ Mark Steyn argues that *Phantom* is Lloyd Webber's best score because the material suited his musical style so well: "Greatest score? Yes, because this story and these characters were perfectly matched to his broad, sweeping, soaring melodies. *Aspects* needed someone more cynical, *Sunset* someone more psychological; but *Phantom* was made for him: Lloyd Webber made the show sing, full-throated and open-vowelled."²⁴

Steyn has a point, in that Lloyd Webber had always been drawn to romantic nineteenth-century opera, especially Puccini, as in his deliberate Puccini parody in "Growltiger's Last Stand" from *Cats*. The nineteenth-century Parisian setting of *Phantom* allowed Lloyd Webber to give full vent to his taste for romantic melody, true love, and lush orchestration. Critics began to talk not of pastiche, but of a new Lloyd Webber style, one that was his own, built up from elements of other styles in a sophisticated, integrated way. A critic for *Opera News* explained,

Lloyd Webber's emotional, well-orchestrated score is his most satisfying to date, and his richest. He has absorbed the eclectic nineteenth-century opera idiom and built upon it a personal one that is at once fresh and appropriate to the period setting, supporting the drama on a stream of melodic inspiration that Broadway and the opera would have thirsted for. . . . Lloyd Webber unabashedly

follows his lyrical impulse and develops his thematic material with artistic integrity and craftsmanship along traditional lines of serious composition.²⁵

Walsh calls *Phantom* "the gauntlet that Lloyd Webber has thrown down to challenge his critics to take him seriously,"²⁶ and for the most part, they did.

The second and more obvious reason that the idea of opera seems important in *Phantom* is that the musical takes place in the Paris Opéra in 1861, so the show is steeped in the atmosphere of French Romantic opera. The story concerns an opera singer/dancer, surrounded by other performers, the house's managers, and the opera house itself. Their world is the world of opera. Also, the score provides the audience with three performances by the opera company, so we actually see them at work, presenting a scene from a fairly contemporaneous grand opera, another from an Italian eighteenth-century *opera buffa*, and a third from a new opera written by the Phantom.

So Lloyd Webber wrote pastiches. He dove into that most risky of territories, and wrote scenes as close to the style of operatic tradition as he could. The theater critics, generally not as versed in opera as Lloyd Webber, rarely understood whom he parodied, and usually dismissed these scenes as frivolous, but they actually work quite well as operatic pastiches. When critics did bring up the word "pastiche," it was often in conjunction with a melody from the score that reminded them of another Broadway showtune; the opening of "The Music of the Night," for example, seemed to many remarkably like the opening of "Come to Me, Bend to Me" from *Brigadoon*.²⁷

When the setting first shifts from the opening scene at the auction to the opera house in its glory days of 1861, the first thing we see is a scene from the grand opera *Hannibal* by a fictional French composer, Chalumeau. Carlotta, the diva of the company playing the Queen of Carthage, sings a flowery cadenza while holding a severed and bleeding head—a gift from her lover, Hannibal. He is returning to Carthage to free it from the conquering Romans, and the head suggests he has been victorious thus far. Carlotta's coloratura is overblown and shrill, characteristics that hold true for her vocal style throughout the show, whether she is performing in an opera or not.

French grand opera is reflected here in the elaborate sets and large ensemble, complete with ballet dancing slave girls, among them Meg and Christine. The backdrop features a desert landscape with palm trees and two enormous sphinx-like statues of animal-gods. When the character of Piangi enters playing the role of Hannibal, he rides a huge mechanical elephant. Lloyd Webber compresses a number of musical elements into this one scene, items that would each, in an actual grand opera, make up entire numbers. Piangi sings a recitative, then

the slave girls launch into a ballet, and everyone offers choral comments. Piangi and Carlotta share a florid moment of duet, and the whole thing drives to a triumphant finish in honor of Hannibal with a final stage picture. But this is just a rehearsal, so when the scene finishes, everyone falls out of character and the elephant, which we can now see is being operated by two stagehands sitting inside it, is rolled offstage. As Walsh points out, Lloyd Webber surely found satisfaction in writing like Meyerbeer: "The charge of being a pastiche artist had dogged Lloyd Webber for so long that it must have amused him to embrace it wholeheartedly in a work that, paradoxically, turned out to be his most original score. The *Hannibal* scene is mock-Meyerbeer (an inside joke since Meyerbeer is practically synonymous with second-rate, overblown opera)." ²⁸

The new managers of the opera house, Messieurs Firmin and André, ask La Carlotta to sing an aria from act 3 of *Hannibal*, and she begins "Think of Me." Musically, the song seems out of step with what we have heard of this opera so far, with its gentle melody and tasteful decorative touches. It is definitely more parlor chanson than operatic aria. ²⁹ But it serves mostly as a plot point, to allow Carlotta to be replaced by Christine (for whose voice the song is, conveniently, much better suited, especially when transposed down a major third for her) and thereafter to allow Christine to move from rehearsal to successful performance.

The second opera parody comes at the end of *Phantom's* first act. *Il muto*, by the supposedly well known (but fictional) Italian composer Albrizzio, is an *opera buffa* in the style of Mozart or Salieri. In terms of plot, it bears a strong resemblance to Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*, with which some *Phantom* audience members would be familiar, but the plot devices were common enough in other *buffa* works of the time as well. Several scholars argue that Salieri is Lloyd Webber's more likely target, for two reasons: his modern-day reputation as a second-rate Mozart makes him a more likely subject for parody, and—in something of a reversal of the previous point—Salieri was popular at the Paris Opéra in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. ³⁰

Despite the Phantom's explicit demand that Christine play the lead, the opera's managers cast Carlotta as the Countess, and Christine, as the mute of the opera's title, plays a trouser role, the Countess's young pageboy Serafimo (similar to Mozart's Cherubino in *The Marriage of Figaro*). The scene we see also features a lady friend of the Countess, two foppish male companions—a hairdresser and a jeweler—and the jeweler's assistant, played by Meg. The Countess sports an aristocratic lace-covered ensemble with an enormous skirt, and her two male friends preen in powdered wigs and shiny knee breeches. Christine wears a maid's dress over her pageboy costume, as she is currently in disguise to fool the Countess's husband, Don Attilio, played by the Italian star tenor Piangi.

To the accompaniment of a stately, dotted-rhythm orchestral introduction, the rising curtain reveals a fancy salon with a bed at the back. After a brief vamp introduction, the group snickers about the escapades in which they engage under the unsuspecting nose of the Count. Upon his entrance, the Count and the Countess exchange some recitative, both *secco* and accompanied, during which the Count announces he must depart on a trip. The Countess plans to use the opportunity to have an affair with young Serafimo, but the Count, not as foolish as everyone suspects, has actually set up a test of loyalty; he plans to hide and observe his wife's antics. (This testing of loyalty resembles another Mozart *opera buffa*, *Così fan tutte*.) After a flourish of "addio, addio" in decorated recitative, the Count exits, and Carlotta sings a brief recitative before launching into her aria, "Poor Fool, He Makes Me Laugh" (see ex. 5.1). The musical style certainly recalls classical norms, with typical shifts of harmony in the recitative, accompanied by a harpsichord and occasional string comments, and the aria's generally square phrase pattern. The introductory orchestral vamp, still popular through Verdi's day, leads to a bouncy *buffa* melody. Carlotta's coloratura is reminiscent of the vocal acrobatics of, for example, the evil Queen of the Night in Mozart's German *singspiel*, *The Magic Flute*, but in this much lighter context the virtuosic nature of the passage reflects both Carlotta and her role. As in *Hannibal*, Lloyd Webber compresses musical events, bringing the chorus into what otherwise might have been a full-length aria.

But the ensemble barely has time to settle in when the annoyed Phantom interrupts them. His disembodied voice reminds the performers, as well as the managers and Raoul, that Raoul is occupying his private box in the audience—and that Carlotta is playing Christine's role. Carlotta regains her composure and begins the aria again, but she becomes the locus of the Phantom's threats when she makes a loud croaking sound in the middle of a line. When the croaking continues, Carlotta's performance falls apart, as do the other performances and eventually the set—which reveals the dead body of the stagehand Buquet. We get no more of *Il muto*; when Christine takes over for the Countess after "All I Ask of You," she sports the huge embroidered dress but is already taking her bows and then avoiding the plunging chandelier.

Carlotta and Piangi, as befits both their performance skills and their caricatured personalities, have big operatic voices throughout *Phantom*, not just in their operatic performances. Carlotta especially puts this to good use in group scenes, when she wishes to be heard (usually complaining) over the others. Christine, both because she is the ingénue and because Lloyd Webber wrote the role for Sarah Brightman, has a lighter, lyric soprano voice. Raoul is a strapping

Don Attilio (Piangi) (Recit.)

My love, I am called to Eng-land on af-fairs of state and must

bsn.

harpischord
+strings

Detailed description: This musical score is for a recitative piece by Don Attilio (Piangi). It features a vocal line in bass clef and a piano accompaniment in treble and bass clefs. The key signature has one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 4/4. The vocal line begins with a rest, followed by the lyrics "My love, I am called to Eng-land on af-fairs of state and must". The piano accompaniment includes a harpischord and strings. The score ends with a fermata over the final notes.

(spoken aside) Though I'd
happily take the maid with me.

leave you with your new maid. I sus-pect my young bride is un-true to me. I shall not leave but shall

harpischord only

Detailed description: This musical score is for a spoken aside piece. It features a vocal line in bass clef and a piano accompaniment in treble and bass clefs. The key signature has one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 4/4. The vocal line begins with the lyrics "(spoken aside) Though I'd happily take the maid with me." followed by "leave you with your new maid. I sus-pect my young bride is un-true to me. I shall not leave but shall". The piano accompaniment includes a harpischord only. The score ends with a fermata over the final notes.

Countess (Carlotta) Both

hide o-ver there to ob-serve her. Ad-di-o. Ad-di-o. Ad-di-o.

[He [...] hides and watches the action.]

Detailed description: This musical score is for a piece by Countess (Carlotta) and Both. It features a vocal line in bass clef and a piano accompaniment in treble and bass clefs. The key signature has one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 4/4. The vocal line begins with the lyrics "hide o-ver there to ob-serve her. Ad-di-o. Ad-di-o. Ad-di-o." followed by a fermata. The piano accompaniment includes a harpischord only. The score ends with a fermata over the final notes.

Example 5.1. "Poor Fool, He Makes Me Laugh" from *Il muto*

Countess

Se - ra - fi - mo, a - way with this pre-tense. You can-not speak, but kiss me in my hus - band's

+strings
mp

[She rips off Serafimo's skirt to reveal his manly breeches.] *p*

This system shows the vocal line for the Countess and the piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in a treble clef with a key signature of one flat and a 4/4 time signature. The piano accompaniment is in a grand staff with a key signature of one flat and a 4/4 time signature. The lyrics are: "Se - ra - fi - mo, a - way with this pre-tense. You can-not speak, but kiss me in my hus - band's". The piano part includes a dynamic marking of *mp* and a stage direction: "[She rips off Serafimo's skirt to reveal his manly breeches.]" with a dynamic marking of *p*.

ab - sence. Poor fool, he makes me laugh, ha ha ha ha ha

A tempo (moderato)

mf strings

vcl. +bsn.

This system continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line has the lyrics: "ab - sence. Poor fool, he makes me laugh, ha ha ha ha ha". The piano part includes a tempo marking "A tempo (moderato)" and a dynamic marking of *mf* for the strings. The piano part also includes the markings "vcl." and "+bsn.".

Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha. Time I tried to get a bet-ter bet - ter half.

+ob.

This system continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line has the lyrics: "Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha. Time I tried to get a bet-ter bet - ter half." The piano part includes a dynamic marking of *mf* for the strings and the marking "+ob.".

Example 5.1. (continued)

Broadway tenor, not operatic but not pop-style either, and the Phantom himself mostly sings in the tenor range, often so high that falsetto is required. The rest of the voices resemble Raoul's in style: theater voices, big and flexible, with occasional tips toward the operatic and a complete absence of pop elements. This was a change for Lloyd Webber, whose musicals until now had been almost entirely populated by pop voices (or a mixture of pop and theater voices), but such was Sarah Brightman's influence on him. Also, the cleaner, straightforward

theater voices with their light operatic flavor sounded more appropriate in the context of the story than rock-influenced singing would have. Perhaps most important, Lloyd Webber's use of "serious" voices served as one of many signals that he meant *Phantom* to be taken as his most mature and sophisticated score.

CONTINUAL AND RECURRING MUSIC

Sophistication, or at least intricacy, is indeed evident in a number of the score's features, perhaps most obvious in the fact that the music is nearly continuous throughout. Many numbers feature only vague beginnings or ends and run without pause into the next number, with the result that much of the score cannot be divided into set pieces at all. A continuous string of material moves the story from event to event. Even the true set numbers rarely allow for applause afterward, either because transitional, recitative-like music or underscoring begins immediately, or because the music gives no clear cue to the audience. *Phantom* does contain occasional, brief spoken dialogue, but almost always accompanies it with orchestral underscoring that then leads into more singing. The staging greatly reinforces this musical continuity, often accomplishing set changes in the middle of numbers; at only one point in the entire show, before the first "Notes," is there a slight pause in the score as well as a significant set change. When the music does provide full closure to a number and the audience gets the rare opportunity to interrupt the mood with applause, the set does not change; rather, the actors simply pause, then continue. Such moments occur, for example, after "The Music of the Night," "All I Ask of You," and "Wishing You Were Somehow Here Again." A similar continuity of action carries *Les Misérables* along; in fact, its creators, Schönberg and Boublil, having been influenced by Lloyd Webber's early sung-through scores, wrote a more smoothly continuous score than anything Lloyd Webber had done until *Phantom*—which followed *Les Misérables* by a year. No evidence suggests that Lloyd Webber was influenced by the structure of *Les Misérables*; he claimed not to like the show much, and he had composed parts of *Phantom* long before his exposure to the other work. Nevertheless, the structural devices the shows share are striking, and it is possible that Lloyd Webber felt the influence of *Les Mis* in some way.

Phantom's opening group of numbers, glued together by various transitional materials, carries the audience along most energetically of any section of the score. The first scene at the auction, which contains bits of singing, underscoring, and dialogue, moves into the orchestral overture quite suddenly, with a burst of light from the chandelier. The overture stops abruptly, incomplete, and Carlotta steps in immediately, with the end of her cadenza from *Hannibal*. The audience sometimes applauds the grand finish to Hannibal's entrance scene, but the actors

have already broken character and the new managers begin their dialogue over orchestral underscoring. This leads into "Think of Me," during which days pass, Raoul is introduced, and the set changes from rehearsal to performance, then to a reverse view of that performance from backstage. The applause the actual audience gives Christine merges with the applause of the invisible, upstage attendants of the Paris Opéra, and Madame Giry continues the backstage scene. The Phantom's disembodied voice sings its praise for Christine's performance as she enters her dressing room, which leads immediately to "Angel of Music." This fizzles off into dialogue and underscoring, which then builds again into Christine and Raoul's singing about their fond memories of childhood stories about Little Lotte. A few lines of dialogue and some thematic transformations in the orchestra lead back into "Angel of Music," which connects without pause to "The Phantom of the Opera" thanks to a bass line that bridges the two. During the course of this number, the Phantom lures Christine through her dressing room mirror into his underground world; it takes them most of the song to descend a series of ramps through the mist and shadows. Toward the end they arrive in his lair via boat, and the Phantom encourages Christine to sing with all her might. She ends "The Phantom of the Opera" on a desperate, strangely spellbound high E, now that she is caught in his trap and will do his bidding. Before her note can fully die away, the Phantom launches into an introductory section of material that sets up "The Music of the Night."

At the soft but definitive close of this number, the audience has its first chance to applaud the show itself, rather than a show within the show. The Phantom and Christine (with the help of the lighting designer) use these few moments to show that night has passed, and Christine awakens to underscoring and lighting that suggest it is now the next morning. A series of small sections of music lead to "Stranger Than You Dreamt It," which, at long last, ends with both a clear cadence and a set change. This entire sequence of numbers carries the audience along through set changes and plot development, all smoothly conveyed through the virtually seamless combination of set pieces and linking material. In fact, this whole dramatic arc covers about half the entire first act.

In most cases, Lloyd Webber glues the more number-like material together with various kinds of recurring musical ideas. As we have seen, Lloyd Webber is well known (and often berated) for revisiting a melody several times in a show. In *Jesus Christ Superstar*, entire songs return with new words. In *Cats*, Lloyd Webber developed a technique that involved a combination of recurring songs (such as "Memory") and more flexible, changeable motifs (such as the Jellicle theme). In *The Phantom of the Opera*, the balance tips significantly toward the use of developing motif material and away from full melodic reprises. Often the

recurring material is dissonant, highly altered, buried under layers of other material, or otherwise easily overlooked; very few critics or historians have commented on any but the most obvious of themes. Yet these less catchy recurring motifs carry large portions of the show and work in intricate ways. Below, we look at three kinds of recurring musical material: a few traditional reprises, several short and catchy motifs, and a number of longer, less fixed motivic ideas.

Lloyd Webber does revisit whole melodies on a few occasions, but never in the teasing way of "Memory" in *Cats* or the somewhat unjustified way of "Strange Thing, Mystifying" and "Peter's Denial" in *Jesus Christ Superstar*. Here, full reprises of melodies occur in quite traditional musical theater settings: the Phantom, for example, reprises Christine and Raoul's love song, "All I Ask of You," when he begs Christine to love him after his unmasking. The love duet also returns at the very end of the show, as Raoul and Christine float out of the Phantom's lair to begin their life together. Similarly, the Phantom revisits "Angel of Music," the song by which he flattered and seduced Christine into his world, when he attempts to win her back in the graveyard scene. Here the melody eventually blurs into the trio among the Phantom, Raoul, and Christine. Conversely, "Angel of Music" emerges from their second trio, in the Phantom's lair just before Christine kisses him. Christine begins the tune while the trio is at its point of maximum chaos, and its shape only becomes clear when the others drop out. The tune then carries her from the trio into the climactic orchestral music of their kiss. In this reversal of roles, in which Christine shows her affection for the Phantom instead of the other way around, the use of their quasi-love song makes sense. Similar instances of recurring recognizable melodies from set numbers include "The Phantom of the Opera" and "Masquerade" (see appendix I for a listing of these and all other types of recurring musical material).

Full melodic reprises, however, are few in number compared to the recurrence of two other sorts of musical material. In the first sort, Lloyd Webber provides the audience with perhaps the most recognizable and understood kind of recurring music: a short, catchy theme or motif with obvious ties to plot or character, not dissimilar to Wagner's use of motifs. The most striking motif is the Phantom's trademark chromatic scale, harmonized and usually played on the organ. It signals that he has done or is doing something violent or frightening; in fact, the motif is so obvious and uncomplicated that one must assume Lloyd Webber meant it as a kind of melodrama or horror movie reference. It is easy to imagine this motif accompanying the silent film version of this story, and it seems in keeping with the period setting of the show. In the first instance of this motif meant to suggest horror, the auctioneer in the opening scene reminds us of the strange tale of the Phantom, and the chandelier suddenly bursts into

light; the organ scale accompanies the moment. Similarly, as the Phantom lures Christine through her dressing room mirror, the chromatic-scale chords introduce (and appear periodically throughout) “The Phantom of the Opera” (see ex. 5.2).

Several times, when characters fail to do the Phantom’s bidding, his menacing motif interrupts the endings of their ensemble numbers, as he scolds them for their disobedience and vows retribution. “Prima Donna” ends with the ensemble in agreement about how to proceed, namely with the casting of Carlotta rather than Christine in the lead role of *Il muto*, but their final chord is overrun by the Phantom’s chromatic scale, running up and down without rests, and the Phantom’s voice: “So, it is to be war between us. If these demands are not met, a disaster beyond your imagination will occur!” The group reasserts its final cadence, but the Phantom and his motif have effectively shattered their good mood. The Phantom and his chromatic scale similarly step on the ending of “Masquerade,” interrupting the party and presenting a new set of demands. The motif also appears when the Phantom’s violence takes control of the action, such as when a falling set reveals the body of Buquet, or when the chandelier shakes and falls to the stage. The motif therefore becomes firmly associated with the Phantom’s violence and anger, but also with the more melodramatic horror-story moments of the show, so that when it appears once again as Christine reveals

The musical score is divided into two systems. The first system, labeled "Tutti", features a piano accompaniment with a chromatic bass line in the left hand and block chords in the right hand. A synthesizer part labeled "[synth.2: 'Phantom bass']" is indicated below the piano part. The second system, labeled "Christine", shows her vocal line with lyrics: "In sleep he sang to me. In dreams he came." The piano accompaniment includes "rock perc. fills" and a horn section marked "hns." and "bsn." with a dynamic marking of "+vcl.".

Example 5.2. “The Phantom of the Opera”

the Phantom's face to the world, it helps to trigger gasps of shock and fear. As noted, the unveiling is public because the audience cannot see the hideous face in close-up, so they take their cue from the actors. The presence of the motif that represents the evil, frightening side of the Phantom surely aids this moment greatly—it has become a musical signal for horror.

A similarly melodramatic short phrase, also tied to the horrors of the Phantom, seems to have been invented by the twittering, superstition-prone, ballet girls. They, and eventually the whole chorus, intone "He's here, the Phantom of the opera," when they feel the Phantom's presence and experience chills of apprehension (see ex. 5.3). It returns, sung by an eerie offstage chorus, during "The Phantom of the Opera," and again at moments when characters sense the Phantom's presence, such as when his disgruntled voice interrupts *Il muto*. Sharing a pounding bass line similar to that which carries the overture and "The Phantom of the Opera," this phrase from the orchestra accompanies the Phantom's disembodied voice as he booms, "Did I not instruct that Box Five was to be kept empty?" Meg then sings the phrase in her breathless young voice, in one of many places in which she, the leader of the frightened ballet girls, represents their fear. These two Phantom-related motifs are the only ones that work in such an obvious, button-pushing sort of way; clearly Lloyd Webber meant them to sound melodramatic, like an old monster movie, as well as appropriate to the more gullible, superstitious, and nervous characters in the show.

Perhaps the most complex and abundant kind of musical manipulation takes the form of more melodically disjunct, less recognizable musical material that returns, serves as transition, and mutates. Less memorable than the tunes of the set numbers, and less obvious than the catchy short motifs discussed above, these materials are less easily detected by the audience and the critics. Yet they make up a vast amount of the music at work here, and Lloyd Webber transforms them in complicated ways. The most prominent of these changeable motifs is one that I have labeled the "story motif," due to its usual association with

Example 5.3. The phrase "He's here, the Phantom of the Opera"

various kinds of narration or exposition. It often functions as a kind of recitative, not only because it furthers the plot at times, but because it sometimes has a free meter or loose tempo, allowing the lyrics to be sung in natural speech rhythms.

The story motif makes its first appearance in the first sung notes of the show, as an aged Raoul contemplates the music box said to have come from the Phantom's lair (and which has just played a tinny version of "Masquerade"):

A collector's piece indeed.
Every detail exactly as she said
She often spoke of you, my friend
Your velvet lining, and your figurine of lead
Will you still play, when all the rest of us are dead?

From this we learn that Christine told Raoul of the figurine she saw in the Phantom's lair, and apparently that Christine has died. Next, the theme functions as exposition for Buquet, who sings it while explaining that the fallen piece of scenery which has just interrupted the *Hannibal* rehearsal is not his fault, but the opera ghost's. This inspires Meg to intone "He's there, the Phantom of the opera." Buquet sings the motif in strict time over an eerie vamp. It next appears as underscoring, in trumpet, harp, violins, and violas, as Christine dazedly reads a letter from Raoul in her dressing room while still confused by the Phantom's role in her first triumphant performance.

The next appearance of the story motif is framed by several other short recurring themes, in an excellent example of Lloyd Webber's segue technique. "The Music of the Night" has concluded, and morning comes to the Phantom's lair. The Phantom plays passages on his organ from what will become *Don Juan Triumphant*, and when he stops suddenly, the music box resting by Christine spontaneously begins to play "Masquerade," which will not be heard in full until the top of the second act. When this fizzles out, an ostinato similar to that which accompanied Buquet begins in the strings, and Christine, beginning to come to her senses after her dream-like evening with the Phantom, begins to piece things together using the story motif.

I remember there was mist,
Swirling mist upon a vast, glassy lake.
There were candles all around
And on the lake there was a boat
And in the boat there was a man.

This cues a solo violin, symbolic of Christine's violinist father, playing "Angel of Music." Christine picks up the melody as she approaches the mysterious Phan-

tom: "Who was that shape in the shadows? / Whose is the face in the mask?" She sneaks up behind him and unmask him, and he rounds on her with a hollered "Damn you!" His subsequent lines present a melody that will be altered slightly to become the first theme of "Notes" in the next scene. This moment, then, features portions of "Masquerade," "Angel of Music," and "Notes," as well as a full statement of the story motif.

But several of these seemingly disjunct passages stem from the same source. Both the Phantom's "Damn you!" and the first theme of "Notes" are based on the same musical idea, derived from the story motif. The story motif outlines the interval of a perfect fifth, and briefly visits another perfect fifth, a whole step below it. Christine's vocal line (in the "I remember there was mist" section) outlines the E-B fifth and visits D-A. The Phantom's enraged reaction to his surprise unmasking more closely resembles the theme in "Notes" than the story motif, but it also serves to carry the idea of descending fifths from one home to the next. His short outburst ends with two sets of fifths a whole step apart as he yells, "Damn you! Curse you!" This simplified take on the fifths has a life of its own in the form of another motif, to which we turn in a moment.

The story motif, being the most common and changeable of linked material in the show, appears not only in its own recognizable form but in the melodies of set numbers such as "Notes" and in significantly altered forms as well. It also appears in what can be thought of as its full form, with a second consequent section added to the first (see ex. 5.4). The Phantom most often sings this form, especially when he instructs his managers and actors in his disembodied, echoing voice. The first such instance occurs during the first "Notes" number, in which the agitated André, Firmin, Raoul, Carlotta, Piangi, Madame Gir, and Meg have all assembled to sort out the enigmatic letters the Phantom has sent them. The crucial one has gone to Madame Gir, the Phantom's most loyal servant, and as she reads it, the ostinato begins and the Phantom's voice takes over for her as all gaze around in wonder. The Phantom here outlines the fifth E-B and subsides to the fifth D-A, just as Christine's version had done. The presence of the story motif in this context not only reflects the other occasions in which it is used to narrate or underscore the reading of letters, it also grows out of the first melody of the very song which it interrupts, "Notes," with its similarly paired fifths (see ex. 5.5).

The story motif appears, in sizes from tiny to full, throughout the musical. For example, the second part of the motif, with its series of steps down, appears in *Don Juan Triumphant* as well as late in the show as Christine angrily arrives in the Phantom's lair for the final time. The first phrase of the motif once appears by itself as a frantic snippet of advice: when Madame Gir sends Raoul down

Phantom

Chris-tine Da-ae has re - turned to you and I am an-xious her ca-reer should pro - gress. In the new pro -

Kbd. *pp*

mp

duc-tion of "Il Mu-to" you will there-fore cast Car-lot-ta as the page-boy and put Miss Da-ae in the role of Coun -

Harp *8va*

Horn

tess. The role which Miss Da - ae plays calls for charm and ap - peal. The

Kbd (vibes)

Clar.

Picc.

Tpt.

role of the page-boy is si - lent which makes my cast - ing, in a word, i - deal.

Vlns.

Example 5.4. Story motif in Phantom's letter in "Notes"

Andre

Firmin

Dam - na - ble, will they all walk out? This is dam - na ble. An - dre, please don't shout, it's pub -

Clar., piano, vlns.

Andre (groans)

Firmin (calmly)

lie - i - ty and the take is vast, free pub - li - ci - ty. But we have no cast. But...

Example 5.5. Opening of "Notes"

below to hunt the Phantom, and later when Meg leads the crowd there, they remind each other, "Your hand at the level of your eyes."

The fifths on which the story motif rests reflect those used in "Notes" and in the Phantom's angry "Damn you!" to Christine. This latter instance itself varies what could be considered a separate motif, an outgrowth of the fifths of the story motif. This version, simply a descending fifth followed by another one a whole step lower, usually sets the text, "Christine, Christine." When characters plead with Christine, attempt to get her attention, or try to comfort her, this motif often helps them do it. Sometimes, the motif gains a third fifth, yet another whole or half step lower, when the Phantom echoes the first speaker in an attempt to remind her of his presence. Raoul experiences this when he tries to soothe Christine after *Il muto* has disintegrated into chaos and they have fled to the roof (see ex. 5.6).

Thus, Lloyd Webber creates a set of related ideas: the story motif with its two halves, the opening melody of "Notes," the motif that accompanies "Christine, Christine," and others. Lloyd Webber uses this highly versatile set of musical

Example 5.6. Echo of “Christine”

thoughts often, but their presence could easily go unnoticed on a first listening, as their subtle, recitative-like, and functional nature makes them fundamental to the show’s structure but not prominent to the listener.

Lloyd Webber provides a second set of related motifs, somewhat less complicated than the story group, and usually undergoing less mutation. This musical gesture involves a bit of recitative on one note, and/or a passage of distinct, tonally ambiguous melody, both accompanied by bold chords. Since it makes its first appearance while Christine and Raoul, recently reunited after years apart, recall stories of a character called Little Lotte that they enjoyed as children, I call this the “Little Lotte motif” (see ex. 5.7).

When the Phantom claims this music as his own, he launches immediately into its second part, using it as the introduction to “The Music of the Night.”

I have brought you to the seat of sweet music’s throne,
 To this kingdom where all must pay homage to music, music.
 You have come here for one purpose and one alone.
 Since the moment I first heard you sing,
 I have needed you with me to serve me, to sing for my music, my music.

After several other appearances, this music truly becomes the Phantom’s, because it appears in his opera *Don Juan Triumphant* (see ex. 5.8). In fact, the Phantom’s opera contains six motifs, most of which exist also in the music outside the Phantom’s score. The most significant of these is the Little Lotte music, which with a slight shift of shape becomes a central theme of the Phantom’s work. This material has already moved from the dressing room scene between Christine and Raoul to the Phantom’s lair, where he used it as the introduction to “The Music of the Night.” He uses it similarly in his opera, to introduce the one set number of *Don Juan Triumphant*, “The Point of No Return.” The lyrics even borrow a few phrases from this previous context in “The Music of the Night.” But the music also appears earlier in the Phantom’s opera, before he makes his appearance.

Raoul

Christine (spoken): You remember that too?

Lit - tle Lot - te let her mind wan - der. Lit - tle Lot - te thought, "Am I fon - der of

sustained *p*

str.'s & kbd 2

+Christine

Christine only

Raoul (spoken): Those picnics in the attic

Raoul

dolls or of gob - lins, of shoes, or of rid - dles, of frocks or of choco - lates?"

tpt. harp + solo vln.

synth. 1

Raoul: As we read to each other dark stories of the north

Christine

"No, what I love best," Lot - te said, "is

kbd. 2 str.

mf

Example 5.7. "Little Lotte" music

The image shows two systems of musical notation. The first system features a vocal line in treble clef with lyrics: "when I'm a - sleep in my bed, and the an - gel of mu - sic sings". Below it is a piano accompaniment in bass clef with a complex, dissonant harmonic structure. A dynamic marking of *(8^{ma})* is placed above the piano part. The second system is labeled "+Raoul" and shows a vocal line with lyrics: "songs in my head, the an - gel of mu - sic sings songs in my head." The piano accompaniment continues with similar dissonant chords and textures.

Example 5.7. (continued)

Don Juan Triumphant opens with a loud, tonally uncentered choral explanation of the plot in violent and lewd terms: young Aminta, sexually inexperienced and curious, will soon arrive and have to “pay the bill” for her bold behavior by becoming Don Juan’s latest conquest. When “tables, plans, and maids are laid,” Don Juan will have his triumph. The first section of this music is derived from the story motif, now harmonized with angry dissonances. The chorus then moves on to two other motifs associated with the Phantom’s opera, the first of which involves dissonant block chords, and the second of which has a shape that steps down, then up, within the outline of a perfect fourth. Finally, the chorus climaxes on the *Don Juan* version of the Little Lotte music (see ex. 5.8).

While much of the *Don Juan* music appears elsewhere in the show, the Phantom’s opera relies much more heavily on harsh-sounding harmonies and unpredictable melodies and rhythms than does the rest of Lloyd Webber’s score. Lloyd Webber explains the appeal of the opportunity to compose the Phantom’s opera, for musical as well as story-driven reasons: “I decided that if we adapted

[Theme A]

S
A
T
B

Here the sire may serve the dam, here the mas - ter takes his

Here the sire may serve the dam, here the mas - ter takes his

Here the sire may serve the dam, here the mas - ter takes his

Here the sire may serve the dam, here the mas - ter takes his

vlns., vlas.
ob.
vcl.
flt.
clar.

meat. Here the sac - ri - fi - cial lamb ut - ters one des -

meat. Here the sac - ri - fi - cial lamb ut - ters one des -

meat. Here the sac - ri - fi - cial lamb ut - ters one des -

meat. Here the sac - ri - fi - cial lamb ut - ters one des -

hns.
+tpts. +kbd.1

Example 5.8. Chorus in *Don Juan Triumphant*

Carlotta

pair - ing bleat. Poor young mai - den for the

pair - ing bleat. Poor young mai - den for the

pair - ing bleat. Poor young mai - den for the

pair - ing bleat. Poor young mai - den for the

thrill on your tongue of sto - len sweets, you will

thrill on your tongue of sto - len sweets, you will

thrill on your tongue of sto - len sweets, you will

thrill on your tongue of sto - len sweets, you will

Gua-----

kbd.1

Example 5.8. (continued)

13

have to pay the bill tan - - - gled in the

have to pay the bill tan - - - gled in the

have to pay the bill tan - - - gled in the

have to pay the bill tan - - - gled in the

bsn., vcl.

16

(Sopranos)

wind - ing sheets. Serve the meal and serve the maid,

wind - ing sheets. Serve the meal and serve the maid,

wind - ing sheets. Serve the meal and serve the maid,

wind - ing sheets. Serve the meal and serve the maid,

[Theme E]

tpsts., trb.
hn. 1

vcl.
c.b.

Example 5.8. (continued)

serve the mas - ter so that when tab - les, plans, and maids are

serve the mas - ter so that when tab - les, plans, and maids are

serve the mas - ter so that when tab - les, plans, and maids are

serve the mas - ter so that when tab - les, plans, and maids are

tpt., hns.

harp gliss.

trb.

vel.

c.b.

23

laid, Don Juan tri - umphs once a - gain.

laid, Don Juan tri - umphs once a - gain.

laid, Don Juan tri - umphs once a - gain.

laid, Don Juan tri - umphs once a - gain.

laid, Don Juan tri - umphs once a - gain.

+timp.

Example 5.8. (continued)

the plot to include a performance of an opera specifically composed for Christine by the Phantom, we could not only introduce a far more modern musical ingredient into the score, but could contrive a situation where the Phantom was not only unmasked in front of many characters, but on the stage of his opera house, in his own opera, in what was supposed to be his night of triumph.”³¹ The Phantom’s opera is mentioned in Leroux’s original story, but never performed. In Lloyd Webber’s telling, the characters generally dislike the score they are commanded to sing; in rehearsal, Piangi cannot sing a whole-tone scale, and Carlotta complains loudly that no one in the audience will know or care if they get the notes right.³²

During the actual performance, with the chorus’s foreboding exposition out of the way, Don Juan, played by Piangi, enters. He summons his latest lover, played by Meg, who coquettishly takes his payment, kisses him, and flits off. Don Juan then reviews his plan for Aminta (played by Christine) with his servant, Passarino: they have lured Aminta there on the pretense that she will meet the servant for a tryst, but the Don, in his servant’s clothes and with his face hidden, will do the seducing. The master and servant swap clothes in the tradition of Don Juan stories, although the servant, unlike Mozart’s Leporello, seems just as ill-intentioned as his master here. The music that accompanies their discussion presents two more *Don Juan* motifs, both of which have already made appearances in earlier contexts. The first motif runs up, then down, steps made from two whole tone collections, usually covering the span of a ninth or more (see ex. 5.9); the second circles around itself, hovering inside a fourth (see ex. 5.10). Both find their way into several orchestra underscorings and short sung phrases, and the second will appear again, for example, in the Phantom’s final lair scene (“Hounded out by everyone! Met with hatred everywhere!”).

Don Juan (Piangi)

Pass - a - ri - no faith - ful friend, once a - gain re - cite the plan.

mf

[Theme B]
clars.

timp.

harpichord

Example 5.9. Phrase from *Don Juan Triumphant*

[Theme C]
Don Juan (Piangi)

mp Fur - tive - ly we'll scoff and quaff, tak - ing what in truth is mine.

flute, kbd. 2 (bells) vlns. harp+vlns. hn.

mp

piano, cello, bass

Example 5.10. Phrase from *Don Juan Triumphant*

Next, Christine, as Aminta, enters, and Piangi as Don Juan exits to prepare for his conquest. Later the audience will realize that at this juncture the Phantom kills Piangi backstage and takes over for him, donning the cloak that hides his face. Christine enters singing a lilting phrase she will use once more (in her real life) in the final scene, and the substituted Don Juan then launches into the Little Lotte music that introduces “The Point of No Return.” This number is a tango-like seduction of Aminta that the Phantom clearly means to use to sway Christine, but during its course she realizes his identity. Gradually the guards Raoul has hired realize it too, and the Phantom, giving up all pretense of acting, moves from his own composition into a heartfelt reprise of “All I Ask of You.” Before his final word, Christine removes his mask, the law moves in, Piangi’s body is discovered, and the Phantom vanishes with Christine.

It is quite telling that the Phantom’s idea of seduction, as revealed in his opera’s libretto, involves violence, male domination, and bold sexual imagery. This brings to mind Hal Prince’s revelation about the psyche of the Phantom, and his inclusion of sexual imagery alongside romantic notions in the story and the sets. The Phantom seduces Christine quite gently in “The Music of the Night,” but apparently this step is simply the first of many; there, she becomes used to his presence, his mask (which he has her stroke), and his strange home. By the time we arrive at *Don Juan Triumphant*, the Phantom is ready for a real sexual relationship, and he hopes Christine will be as well; by now he has a mannequin in a wedding gown which resembles her, and he has clearly begun to envision a true romantic and sexual encounter. But his longing takes on an angry, desperate, and somewhat explosive tone in his opera, which discusses conquering

women, unleashing their repressed sexual urges, and teaching them about physical pleasures in a callous, dominating way. *Don Juan Triumphant's* harsh, jagged music reflects this and seems to serve as an outlet for this darker aspect of the Phantom's psyche. This side of the Phantom, disguised as Don Juan, fizzles quickly when he is confronted with the real thing: when Christine kisses him passionately in the final scene, she defeats him. He understands that although she is quite capable of physical love, she should be with Raoul, and he lets her go. The Phantom's sexuality—linked with the angry music of his opera—feels frightening and dangerous despite its brief airing.

THE STRUCTURE OF AN OPERA-LIKE ENSEMBLE, "NOTES/PRIMA DONNA"

The Don Juan plot is not Lloyd Webber's only borrowing from Mozart's operatic world. Besides the more general operatic features already mentioned above, several numbers in *The Phantom of the Opera* are reminiscent of Mozart in their structure. Lloyd Webber wrote many more ensembles, ranging from trios to septets, in this show than in any previous one, and several of them function in a distinctly Mozartean manner, in that they build up one voice at a time as characters enter. Then, in a structure that refers to Verdi as much as Mozart, the characters sing distinct lines simultaneously, with different melodies and lyrics, while the basic mood and message of each line remain clear. Sections of action alternate with sections of reflection. The act 3 quartet from Verdi's *Rigoletto*, for example, works similarly, as does the act 2 finale of Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* and the act 2 sextet in *Don Giovanni* (to name a few of Mozart's many ensembles in which he adds layers of character, information, and melody as the scene progresses). The most sprawling and impressive example of this cumulative and polyphonic ensemble style in *Phantom* is the first "Notes," which becomes "Prima Donna."

"Notes" begins with the Opéra's co-manager, Firmin, reading about Christine's successful debut and subsequent disappearance in the papers, and reflecting on the profitability of scandal. His partner André enters, and they share the notes written to them by the Opera Ghost. Just as their verse ends, Raoul barges in demanding to know Christine's location and brandishing his own threatening note from the Ghost. His entrance is marked by a descending fifth, reminiscent of the "Christine, Christine" echoes (which, as we have seen, is logical since both the first melody of "Notes" and the echoes of Christine's name relate to the story motif). Next Carlotta, returned from having temporarily quit in fury and humiliation, returns with Piangi in tow, rattling a note threatening her not to perform lest a "great misfortune" ensue. Finally Madame Giry enters with her daughter Meg, and the mood shifts to a quieter and more menacing one. Ma-

dame Girys note is quoted in example 5.4, the Phantom's disembodied voice doing most of the reading. In the eerie silence after he finishes, Meg murmurs the "Christine, Christine" motif, echoed by a furious Carlotta.

This initiates a new section of the ensemble; now that everyone has had their individual say, they all comment on the tense situation simultaneously. Carlotta shrieks "O traditori! O mentitori!" André and Firmin attempt to pacify her: "Please signora, we beseech you." Madame Giry reminds everyone, "The angel sees, the angel knows." Raoul wonders to himself, "Why did Christine fly from my arms?" Meg occasionally joins him in support, wondering where Christine went. This *tutti* passage covers only twelve measures, climaxing in a unison "What new surprises lie in store?" but it lays the groundwork for the longer ensemble passage to follow.

"Prima Donna" proper begins next; André and Firmin charm, flatter, and woo Carlotta: "Can you deny us the triumph in store? / Sing, prima donna, once more." Carlotta then picks up the thread, singing of her glories, and soon all seven voices join in. André and Firmin note wryly that all this high drama reminds them of opera, while Meg, Madame Giry, and Raoul ponder the nature of this angel or ghost. The melody changes hands, as does a faster-moving line with an almost patter feel to its lyrics, and anyone not singing one of these two items sings his or her own material. All of the voices unite ("Sing, prima donna, once more") and then the Phantom, as usual, steps on their climactic finish, vowing disastrous consequences should Carlotta indeed sing. The number is both funny and chaotic, and although the lyrics are largely lost, the import of each character's message is clear. One of the most effective and complex ensembles in the show, "Prima Donna" manages to further the plot and unite most of the main characters in a structure reminiscent of earlier operatic ensembles.³³

SET NUMBERS THAT DEFINE MOMENTS OF DRAMA

In *Cats*, Lloyd Webber assigned each solo cat a musical genre; to a certain extent, he assigned styles to characters in *Jesus Christ Superstar* as well. *Phantom* has a much more consistent musical style to it; set numbers usually sound less different in style and tone than in Lloyd Webber's earlier works. In fact—in another interesting similarity to *Les Misérables*—*Phantom* uses most of its set numbers as fodder for manipulation and recurrence, rather than as character-defining signature tunes.

"The Music of the Night" ranks as Lloyd Webber's biggest hit from *Phantom*, although its success pales in comparison to "Memory" from *Cats* or "Don't Cry for Me, Argentina" from *Evita*. It never quite became the pop standard that those

songs did, but it does continue to enjoy a healthy life as a concert piece, for Michael Crawford (whose performance of the number in the show appears to be largely responsible for its ensuing success), Sarah Brightman, and a host of other Broadway talents. The Phantom uses the song to cast a hazy spell over Christine, imploring her to trust him, touch him, and allow the power of his music to enter her mind. He reinforces the magical atmosphere of the moment with a gentle final phrase, rounded out by five soft chords that have a shimmering, seductive quality (see ex. 5.11).

The same five chords will close the show, as the Phantom sings a brief reprise of the number before vanishing. The chords also introduce “All I Ask of You,” functioning there as a shift from a tense, fast-paced mood to one of calm happiness. The two songs share a stronger connection as well: their final sung phrases are virtually the same. This resemblance is not particularly noticeable until the last moments of the show, in which the departing Raoul and Christine sing the first three lines of the chorus of “All I Ask of You,” and the Phantom sings the fourth and fifth lines, but uses lyrics that refer to the “Music of the Night” version instead of the “All I Ask of You” version of the phrase.

Raoul and Christine: Say you'll share with me one love, one lifetime
 Say the word and I will follow you.
 Share each day with me, each night, each morning
Phantom: You alone can make my song take flight
 It's over now, the music of the night.

“All I Ask of You” is a warm, comforting love duet, and its traditional musical comedy quality (Michael Walsh points out its Richard Rodgers feel) comes

Phantom

You a-lone can make my song take flight. Help me make the mu-sic of the night.

piano + harp

str's.

mp

pp

8^{ub}

Example 5.11. The end of “The Music of the Night”

as a relief after the visual and musical chaos of *Il muto*.³⁴ A quite traditional Entr'acte features both "All I Ask of You" and "The Music of the Night," and opens with "Angel of Music."

In its home early in the second act, "Angel of Music" wonderfully conveys the sense of excitement, uncertainty, and magic in the air that Christine, who has not yet seen her new vocal coach, experiences. Harp, light strings, clarinet, and flute make Christine's explanation of the Angel of Music sound not only angelic, but child-like, for it was her father who told her the stories of him. Rather giddily, she explains:

Here in this room, he calls me softly, somewhere inside, hiding.
Somehow I know he's always with me. He, the unseen genius.

After Meg departs, Christine shares her Little Lotte moment with Raoul, and "Angel of Music" resumes with the Phantom's voice filling Christine's dressing room. Christine, ecstatic about coming to know this mysterious figure, calls to him in reverent, obedient terms:

Angel of Music, guide and guardian, grant to me your glory.
Angel of Music, hide no longer. Come to me, strange angel.

The light texture gives way to the throbbing bass, which moves the score directly into "The Phantom of the Opera," the show's only pop song. It comes as no surprise that this song was chosen for music video treatment, not only because of its steady rock beat, but also because the action takes on a cinematic, montage feel with a recorded, processed sound. Throughout the first two-thirds of the song, the Phantom leads Christine down a winding set of shadowy ramps and paths set far back from the audience, while the audience hears their voices blasted over the sound system, intimately close to their microphones.³⁵ The orchestra becomes dominated, just this once, by a synthesized drum track and electric keyboards that really sound electronic, rather than synthesizing acoustic instruments. Soon, the two arrive in the Phantom's lair and the sound reverts to its more normal acoustic space (still heavily miked, but obviously emanating from the bodies onstage). The number, despite being the only rock tune in the show, grows organically and realistically out of the tense throbbing of "Angel of Music," and carries the murky stage images effectively. Once Christine and the Phantom arrive in his lair, he bids her to sing, and she launches into a high coloratura based on the motif "He's here, the Phantom of the opera." As the Phantom draws her out ("Sing, my angel!"), Christine climbs higher and higher, the song stepping up in key twice and ending abruptly on Christine's high E.

"Masquerade," the only true chorus number (as opposed to ensembles sung by principal players) in the show, is notable for its orchestration. Taking place at a masquerade ball to celebrate the new operatic season and the newly replaced chandelier, as well as the absence of the opera ghost of late, the number relies heavily on percussion. The masked chorus features all the principal players, but also a number of colorfully dressed *commedia dell'arte*-like players, in stylized costumes reminiscent of the circus. Four of these figures play percussion instruments onstage; these include a genie-like man with a tambourine, a court jester with hand bells, and cymbals played by a girl in a monkey costume not unlike the figure on the Phantom's music box. The scoring of the song features these percussion instruments and a host of others in the orchestra pit, including an insistent bass drum, as well as a synthesized barrel organ, frequent pizzicato strings, and a general absence of a bass line and low instruments. At one point the orchestra imitates a music box, and the choral texture becomes light and clipped (see ex. 5.12). While the principal characters rejoice in the recent peace, the chorus refers to sinister, concealing masks and the truths they can hide. The distinctive orchestration and the strange, freakish costumes combine to make "Masquerade" a strong conveyor of this tensely charged moment of respite before another Phantom-inspired storm.

The Phantom of the Opera, like *Cats*, creates a world of its own, yet it relies less on its sets to achieve this theatrical escapism; the multifaceted, lush score does a great deal of the transporting that an audience experiences. The seamlessness of the transitions, the unity of the sound, and the consistency of the rich romantic atmosphere make *The Phantom of the Opera* Lloyd Webber's most satisfying score to study not only for its musical qualities, but its emotional ones too. The characters, despite their melodramatic situations, have discussions, fall in love, and express fear and grief. Lloyd Webber provides them with a unified, interesting, complicated, seductive score with which to carry out this drama.

Reviews: "This Is Subtle. This Is Bold. This Is Theater."

The pre-opening buzz in both London and New York was massive for *The Phantom of the Opera*. *Cats* had proven Andrew Lloyd Webber as a reliable, crowd-pleasing commodity, but it had also solidified his position as many critics' least favorite composer. *Starlight Express*, with even more spectacle and even less plot than *Cats*, only served to prove to critics that they had been right. As noted, *Phantom* was meant to be Lloyd Webber's adult statement, his mature musical both in compositional style and in content. For the most part, his plan succeeded.

S
Mas - quer - ade seeth - ing sha - dows breath - ing lies

A
Mas - quer - ade seeth - ing sha - dows breath - ing lies

T
Mas - quer - ade seeth - ing sha - dows breath - ing lies

B
Mas - quer - ade seeth - ing sha - dows breath - ing lies

8va
kbd. 2

pizz. strings

Mas - quer - ade, you can fool an - y friend who ev - er knew you.

Mas - quer - ade, you can fool an - y friend who ev - er knew you.

Mas - quer - ade, you can fool an - y friend who ev - er knew you.

Mas - quer - ade, you can fool an - y friend who ev - er knew you.

brass
f

Example 5.12. "Masquerade"

Reviews for *Phantom* were generally positive in London and fairly good in New York. Critics agreed that the show was lovely to look at, the spectacle in this case serving an enjoyably romantic story rather than simply impressing the eye. Praise for director Hal Prince, designer Maria Björnson, and actor Michael Crawford was consistent. But Lloyd Webber's music received from some critics the usual share of snide and dismissive remarks. At this crucial point in his career, when he hoped to move from pop music into something more critically admired, when he hoped to have himself evaluated as a composer rather than a songwriter, the critics only partially helped him get there. While some admired his melodies, techniques, structures, and orchestration, others found his style (as they had before) overly melody-centered and simple. *Phantom* certainly paved the way stylistically for his next steps, *Aspects of Love* and *Sunset Boulevard*, but it did not entirely redeem his critical reputation, nor has any other show since done so.

Lloyd Webber has rarely championed his work as the complex, deep sort that critics might like. Speaking about *Phantom* long after the critics had had their say, he noted, "I started from the premise of wanting to write something that was a high romance. It doesn't stand up to huge intellectual scrutiny. . . . At the end of the day, it's overwhelmingly high romance."³⁶ Still, it mattered deeply to Lloyd Webber what the critics said, and their takes on *Phantom*, while not hurting the show economically, could surely have helped its reputation.

Frank Rich of the *New York Times*, the one source to which people might turn before deciding whether to see the show, told his readers to see it. He managed to do this while actually disliking the show rather strongly. Interestingly, he seems to have enjoyed his evening despite himself and his general objections to Lloyd Webber's music. His review opened on a seemingly positive note: "It may be possible to have a terrible time at 'The Phantom of the Opera,' but you'll have to work at it. Only a terminal prig would let the avalanche of pre-opening publicity poison his enjoyment of this show, which usually wants nothing more than to shower the audience with fantasy and fun, and which often succeeds, at any price."³⁷ The "at any price" pointed to Rich's basic problem with Lloyd Webber: he writes catchy pop tunes highlighted so brightly that the show comes to a halt to showcase them. The tunes are too pop-like and could be sung by anyone, since the lyrics are generic and the melodies do not reflect the characters' personalities or states of mind. The show did not, despite its hype, make Lloyd Webber the next Richard Rodgers; it was simply a "characteristic Lloyd Webber project—long on pop professionalism and melody, impoverished of artistic personality and passion" that the admirable work of Prince, Björnson, and Crawford elevated to enjoyable and respectable heights. Prince and Björnson's visual creations, and Mackintosh's panache with marketing, overcame Lloyd Webber's

faults: it was "as much a victory of dynamic stagecraft over musical kitsch as it is a triumph of merchandising über alles." Prince and Björnson's dark images were so heartfelt, Rich maintains, that their passion for the theater itself was the real romance here. Even as he praised the look of it—the roof, lake, gondola, drapes, all timed and directed well—he found the premise laughable: "The lake, awash in dry-ice fog and illuminated by dozens of candelabra, is a masterpiece of campy phallic Hollywood iconography—it's Liberace's vision of hell."

The engrossing sets overcame the paltry book, Rich said, which is a simple story of beast meeting and losing beauty, set among "disposable" secondary characters among whom only Carlotta (Judy Kaye) held much interest. This weak story was filled out by plenty of pauses in the action for the catchier songs, forcing the show to "cool its heels while he [Lloyd Webber] hawks his wares." These were nevertheless "lovely tunes, arguably his best yet" and featured wonderful orchestration, but of course they returned too often. Rich made an exception for "Music of the Night," which he found particularly moving as it seemed to "express from its author's gut a desperate longing for acceptance." He was of course referring to Lloyd Webber, who did not write the lyrics but presumably had a strong say as to the general point of the song, which does indeed focus on the Phantom's longing to be accepted by Christine. Rich found the three opera parodies (including the Phantom's own work) "self-indulgently windy" and not particularly funny, aimed as they were at "such less than riotous targets as Meyerbeer."

Crawford received high praise; Rich labeled him "mesmerizing," "moving," and the source of "most of what emotional heat" the show had. Despite the handicap of having his face covered by a mask, his voice and hands were very expressive of his desire for Christine, especially in the powerful "Music of the Night," which, as he bewitches her, becomes "as much a rape as a seduction." He was just as impressive by the end, when without his mask he becomes a "crestfallen, sweaty, cadaverous misfit."

Rich offered no such praise for Brightman, whose performance he had already disliked in London. Although her voice is lush and strong, she cannot act, he asserted. Despite her long history in the role, "she still simulates fear and affection alike by screwing her face into bug-eyed, chipmunk-cheeked poses more appropriate to the Lon Chaney film version." His criticism, echoed by many, was that while her voice was sweet and pleasing, her acting came across as stiff and less heartfelt than the more nuanced Phantom. Rich quickly dismissed Steve Barton as Raoul as "an affable professional escort with unconvincingly bright hair."

In conclusion, Rich conceded a significant point: Lloyd Webber was vastly

influential in the theater and should not be dismissed. *The Phantom of the Opera* became for Rich a window into the workings and appeal of the megamusical:

Yet for now, if not forever [a reference to *Cats*], Mr. Lloyd Webber is a genuine phenomenon—not an invention of the press or ticket scalpers—and ‘Phantom’ is worth seeing not only for its punch as high-gloss entertainment but also as a fascinating key to what the phenomenon is about. Mr. Lloyd Webber’s esthetic has never been more baldly stated than in this show, which favors the decorative trappings of art over the troublesome substance of culture and finds more eroticism in rococo opulence and conspicuous consumption than in love or sex. Mr. Lloyd Webber is a creature, perhaps even a prisoner, of his time; with ‘The Phantom of the Opera,’ he remakes *La Belle Epoque* in the image of our own Gilded Age. If by any chance this musical doesn’t prove Mr. Lloyd Webber’s most popular, it won’t be his fault, but another sign that times are changing and that our boom era, like the opera house’s chandelier, is poised to go bust.

Rich seemed to understand that he had lost touch with audience taste, while Lloyd Webber understood it perfectly. Though Rich maintained that his own minority view was the correct one, that current theatrical styles were not admirable, he nevertheless acknowledged not only Lloyd Webber’s talent at audience-pleasing, but his staying power.

Another review opened with an obvious joke:

Andrew Lloyd Webber’s new musical is, he says, “About a man who is hideously ugly who falls hopelessly in love with this girl and is only able to express himself through music.”

Only those of a very cruel frame of mind would suggest the musical was at all autobiographical.³⁸

A few critics took a particularly snide tone. John Simon of *New York* magazine summarized, “The only areas in which *The Phantom of the Opera* is deficient are book, music, and lyrics.” He later added Brightman’s performance to his list.³⁹ Michael Feingold of the *Village Voice* clarified his moral objections: “Yes, yes, I know. The semi-educated middle-class world loves Andrew Lloyd Webber best of all theater composers, and the *Phantom* is already a financial triumph, no matter what any critic may say, with an \$18 million advance sale. . . . Nevertheless, the educated world knows by now that Andrew Lloyd Webber is not a real composer, but a secondhand music peddler, whose pathetic aural imagination was outpaced years ago by his apparently exhaustive memory.”⁴⁰ This last comment, about Lloyd Webber’s memory, refers to what Feingold felt was an inexcusable series of brief quotations from other composers, never integrated into a whole but simply butted up against one another. He offered a few examples, extremely brief and obscure, with only vague pointers as to where in

the show he heard them. He wrote what he has always written on Lloyd Webber's music, in his usual trendy, anti-establishment stance: Lloyd Webber's popularity makes him worthless, and only the "semi-educated middle class" would be fooled by his music, which is clearly not even composed.

Walter Kerr in the *New York Times* focused on the variously satisfying and disappointing ways in which the show realized the book's chills and frights. Kerr was drawn to the story by the falling chandelier, the Phantom as Red Death, the boat, and all the other juicy thrills, and he felt some of these were staged fulfillingly. Oddly, he spent much of his review analyzing the importance and effectiveness of these moments of melodrama, but then goes on to complain that the show is nothing but these moments.⁴¹

William A. Henry III in *Time* attributed the show's effectiveness to powerful theatrical magic, in words almost exactly the same as those Rich had used in describing a similar quality in *Cats*: "The show apparently taps into yearnings for a transporting sensory and mystical experience: in a word, for magic. On that primal level, despite considerable and embarrassing shortcomings, *Phantom* powerfully delivers."⁴² Henry seemed at first not to mind the sketchily drawn characters or the "muddled" story; he found the journey delightful, full of safe scares and lovely sights. Yet he went on to analyze the plot and, in an odd shift, seemed to convince himself that the magic doesn't work after all. The similarity he saw between "The Music of the Night" and "Come to Me, Bend to Me" from *Brigadoon* inspired him to take back his statement that the show "powerfully delivers" its magic; *Brigadoon* had "true magic, fantasy and romance" which Lloyd Webber "has not come close to matching." His change of heart in mid-review seemed to result from his discussion of the psychological makeup of the characters, which itself went off track. He argued that Christine's dilemma lies in choosing between the outward beauty of Raoul and the inner beauty of the Phantom, but the show never suggests that Raoul is not a good person, despite being handsome, and the Phantom's inner beauty must surely be marred by his murderous tendencies. Henry became even more creative when he speculated that Christine chooses between being a rich man's wife and a performer, but again, nothing suggests Raoul would make her stop performing; in fact, he admires her talent repeatedly. Henry did raise an interesting point: that Lloyd Webber and the Phantom seem to be conducting simultaneous reshaping of musical theater in their own times.⁴³

A number of fairly important New York critics showed great enthusiasm for *Phantom*. Howard Kissel of the *Daily News* enjoyed the nineteenth-century sensibility created by Prince and Björnson in the "breathtaking, witty, sensual" staging and design, and he welcomed the rare chance to see a love story.⁴⁴ Though

he found the characters shallow, the plot melodramatic, and the lyrics forgettable, the whole added up to a good time, an evening of harmless fun. Like so many critics before him, he accused Lloyd Webber of writing music that sounded "borrowed" without citing anything specific, yet he enjoyed Lloyd Webber's sound in this show: "He seems to be borrowing from better sources, and he has much greater sophistication about putting it all together." Jack Kroll of *Newsweek* admired the show's overall structure, especially in the moving series of numbers that begins the first act. It was as if everyone on the creative team had worked out a perfect series of events, highlighted by Lloyd Webber's "purely romantic, indeed erotic, group of songs" from "Angel of Music" through "The Music of the Night."⁴⁵ Kroll declared, "These songs, with their reaching, yearning, impassioned melodies, are the most effective Lloyd Webber has ever written."

Clive Barnes of the *New York Post* wrote a glowing, if slightly over-the-top, rave. Using words like "phabulous," "phantastic," and the "biggest-ever, superheated megahit," he declared that it fully lived up to its hype.⁴⁶ This was the way to create a megamusical, he believed; of all the "spectacular theatrical extravaganzas" that Lloyd Webber and other British composers have made their own, this one worked best at creating an accord among "theme, music and staging." Prince's vision of the story, and Björnson's fulfillment of it, had a great impact, especially when telling a beauty and the beast story that no one can resist. Lloyd Webber's music, borrowing for parodic purposes with great skill here, "is smart enough to give pastiche a good name." Here, at last, Lloyd Webber had found a voice of his own, Barnes believed. "His scores . . . have always seemed like imitations of opera and operetta. . . . But with 'Phantom,' Lloyd Webber's style comes into its own, and gives itself carte blanche. . . . This music just couldn't be more appropriate." And the music, in turn, was at its best when expertly serving the drama; Barnes pointed specifically to the moment after Christine kisses the Phantom, and the orchestra, led by the soft snare drum, sneaks back into the silence. "This is subtle," he declared. "This is bold. This is theater."

On balance critics in London were slightly more enthusiastic than those in New York, since Lloyd Webber was a homegrown hero that Brits were proud to champion. Michael Coveney of London's *Financial Times* wrote an all-out rave: *Phantom* "restores sex and romance to the modern musical, with a full quota of pulsating melodramatic tension."⁴⁷ He found the ending of the story "almost unbearably moving" and advised bringing tissues. Lloyd Webber's score, he felt, used older operatic styles, linking motifs, and his own "idiosyncratic sound" in interesting ways.

Michael Billington of London's *Guardian* agreed with many that the spec-

tacle, though abundant, was put "to the service of an exciting story" made all the more gripping by effective music.⁴⁸ The story was corny but in an irresistible and sincere way: "It may be hokum but it is hokum here treated with hand on heart rather than tongue in cheek." Responding to the very same sentiments that Prince and Lloyd Webber had hoped to convey when they began the project, Billington found it "refreshing to find a musical that pins its faith in people, narrative and traditional illusion." Lloyd Webber's "lush, romantic, string-filled" style nicely mixed with the opera scenes and the comic numbers, and *Don Juan Triumphant* sounded effectively like "1860s avant-garde." Billington rounded out his unabashed rave with praise for lyricist Charles Hart, a sentiment shared by few fellow critics, including most of the enthusiastic ones.

Irving Wardle of the London *Times* offered a review with a more negative slant than most of his English peers. Although a few moments from the story were beautifully and frighteningly embodied here, the show overall was not as scary as Wardle wished; he was annoyed by the emphasis on the love story rather than on the unrealized but potentially thrilling frights.⁴⁹

If the London and New York critics did not quite agree on the value of the staging or the score, they did mostly concur when rating the performances. All praised Michael Crawford as the Phantom. "Reasserting his pre-eminence as the outstanding star of our musical theatre," he carried the show and made England proud.⁵⁰ Most of the critics found Sarah Brightman's work adequate, although several echoed Frank Rich's negative assessment of her acting. *Time's* William A. Henry III declared that "as an actress she has learned almost nothing from her years in the role,"⁵¹ and Joel Siegel on WABC said she "couldn't act scared on the IRT at four o'clock in the morning."⁵² Mimi Kramer in the *New Yorker* saw parallels between the way the Phantom threatened and controlled the opera company into giving Christine the lead in his opera and the way Lloyd Webber threatened and cajoled Actors' Equity into giving Brightman the lead in New York.⁵³ Many reviewers, however, amid such well-publicized derision, found Brightman's performance enjoyable; Clive Barnes of the *Post* and Douglas Watt of the *Daily News* in particular admired her.⁵⁴ Steve Barton as Raoul was generally considered to be talented but underused in a role that called for him to do little more than portray a "stick-hero in [a] yellow wig."⁵⁵

Later History

It was a competitive year at the Tony Awards in 1988. Also nominated was Stephen Sondheim's most commercially successful musical, *Into the Woods*, which

had also been critically acclaimed. In the end Sondheim took the Tony for Best Score over Lloyd Webber, but *Phantom* beat *Into the Woods* for Best Musical. *Phantom* also won Tonys for Michael Crawford, Judy Kaye, Hal Prince, Maria Björnson (for both costumes and scenic design), and Andrew Bridge (for lighting). *Into the Woods* also won for its book and for Best Actress, the category in which Sarah Brightman was conspicuously not nominated.

It took a little over a year for *Phantom* to recoup its initial Broadway investment, and the show has turned a profit ever since. At this writing, it continues to run both in London and New York, and like *Cats* and *Les Misérables* before it, the show opened all over the world, starting with Toronto, Tokyo, Vienna, and Stockholm. While the show remains one of the most coveted tickets in any city in which it opens, it also costs a great deal to maintain; nevertheless, Lloyd Webber's Really Useful Group has deftly balanced profits with losses from other productions and *Phantom* appears untouchable.⁵⁶

When the show's run reached ten years in London, Lloyd Webber played "The Music of the Night" onstage while Sarah Brightman—now his ex-wife—sang it in a mini-concert; reminding the British papers why he is such a favorite source of gossip, both the first and third (then current) Mrs. Lloyd Webbers attended. It made for more effective publicity.

By 2004, two new *Phantom* enterprises were in the works, giving the show fresh life. A film version, based on the Broadway staging, premiered amid strong publicity and moderate critical success. And the Venetian Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas announced that a new version of *Phantom* would take up permanent residence in a specially built theater there in 2006. This version of *Phantom* was to be restaged on a new set and directed by Hal Prince, with the score trimmed to ninety minutes by the composer. In carrying the story, the *New York Times* noted that since *Phantom* opened in London in 1986, it had made \$3.2 billion—and continues to tour the United States and several foreign countries.⁵⁷

Despite some negative reviews, *Phantom* remains Lloyd Webber's most enduring mature work. His next hit, *Sunset Boulevard*, received good notices, but *Phantom* is Lloyd Webber's only musical currently running on Broadway in its original production. Like *Les Misérables*, but unlike a number of other musicals, *Phantom* weathered the disastrous drop in ticket sales after the tragedy of 11 September 2001. The show may have annoyed a few Lloyd Webber haters as much as *Cats* had, but *Phantom* won over some skeptics and rightly gained the composer a small amount of the respectability for which he had always hoped. Its influence and success were brought home in January 2006 when it passed Lloyd Webber's other institution, *Cats*, to become the longest-running show in

Broadway history. *Phantom*, perhaps more than any other megamusical with the possible exception of *Les Misérables*, set the bar for future Broadway composers. It is remarkable how many musicals of the 1990s and 2000s have drawn their inspiration from *Phantom's* tone, style, and techniques.