

AMERICAN BALLET THEATRE

890 Broadway
New York, New York 10003
(212) 477-3030

ADOLPHE ADAM

French composer Adolphe Adam was born in Paris on July 24, 1803 and died there on May 3, 1856. He was the son of a musician who did his best to dissuade him from following the same career; but he was eventually allowed to enroll at the Paris Conservatoire, where he studied under Boieldieu. After helping Boieldieu to orchestrate the overture to his opera *La Dame Blanche* in 1825, he came to the notice of the Opera-Comique and had his first one-act opera *Pierre et Catherine* produced there in 1829. His brother-in-law, Francois Laporte, was musical director at Covent Garden and through him a couple of Adam's works were staged there in 1832. Up to then he had written in the conventional *opera-comique* style, but in *La Chalet* (1834) he wrote what is considered to be the first true French operetta, light and frivolous with music nearer to the popular vaudeville idiom. The opera which established his reputation and has been most frequently performed is *Le Postillon de Longjumeau* (1836): the aria *Mes amis, écoutez l'histoire* has remained a tenor favorite.

In 1844 he was elected a Member of the Institut, in 1849 professor of composition at the Conservatoire. He died suddenly seven years later.

His reputation during his lifetime was not limited to his own country. He wrote ballets for London, Berlin and St. Petersburg, which capitals he also visited personally. The ballets which brought him some of his greatest successes were *Faust* (London, 1833); *La Fille du Danube* (Paris, 1836, for Taglioni); *La Jolie Fille de Gand*, (Paris, 1842) and especially *Giselle* (Paris Opera, June 28, 1841).

(more)

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Adam attempted four kinds of dramatic composition: (1) grand opera, in which he utterly failed; (2) ballet, in which he produced some charming melodies; (3) comic opera, the one and only real domain of his talent; (4) incidental music for nearly thirty plays, which is ephemeral. He also wrote church music, pianoforte pieces and songs, including *Cantique de Noel* (1847), known in English as *O Holy Night*.

Richard en Palestine is considered his most successful grand opera; *Giselle*, his most successful ballet; and *Le Postillon de Longjumeau*, his most successful comic opera.

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Sources: *The New Oxford Companion of Music*, Oxford University Press, 1983, Oxford, England

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