

Alphonse Meurger

Musician, Composer, Publisher

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THE MUSICIAN

As said before, young Alphonse Meurger probably got his first music lessons from his father and mother. Later, he seems to have studied with Garat; at least, this is what – the mostly well-informed – Léon Nutly tells us.¹⁹ There is more than one musician with the name Garat. Best known is the singer and composer Pierre-Jean Garat (1764–1823) (Ill. 4).²⁰ He was a celebrated singer living in Paris, but following the Revolution of 1789 he moved to Rouen, where he could have met Meurger senior. For some time he then lived in exile in England, returning to Paris in 1795, where he was in 1816 appointed at the *Conservatoire* as “professeur de chant”. According to Fétis, he was an exceptionally gifted teacher, a wonder of nature.²¹ If Alphonse Meurger studied with him, it must have been in Paris. Garat wrote some fifty romances, and he was regarded as one of the best singers of this repertoire. It is reported that his voice “was not so much remarkable for its volume as for its range and suppleness”: he was no tenor, nor a bass or alto or baritone, but all of this together. He was able to “change without effort from the most pathetic expression to the most light one, and from the simplest to the most elaborate and embellished style”.²²



Ill. 4. Pierre-Jean Garat (Wikipedia commons).

However, it is also possible that Meurger studied with Garat’s younger brother Joseph-Dominique Fabry-Garat (1774–after 1830), also a singer and composer (Ill. 5). Fabry-Garat first started a career in the army, but at the age of twenty-five he returned to his native Bordeaux and from there went to Paris, where he took up music and studied with Henry-Philippe Gérard and his brother Garat. In 1817 he contributed to the *Almanach lyrique des Dames*, as did Alphonse Meurger’s brother Urbain.²³ Moreover, in the same year in an advertisement for *Le troubadour ambulante*, a music journal in which the Meurger brothers worked together with the Paris publisher Antonio Pacini, the names of Fabry-Garat and Romagnesi are mentioned, next to Pacini and both Meurgers, as contributors of compositions.²⁴ As a musician Fabry-Garat was semi-professional, earning his bread with music teaching and, in the period 1808–1814, also as a financial officer in the Département de Belgique – Belgium was at the time incorporated in the French empire.²⁵ He then must have lived in Brussels, and it was perhaps there that Alphonse Meurger took his lessons

19 Nutly, ‘Biographies’, pp. 114, 150 (33, 69). On Nutly, see below.

20 https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierre-Jean_Garat; M–n–s, ‘Garat, Pierre-Jean’, in: M. Michaud, *Biographie universelle ancienne et moderne*, nouvelle édition, vol. 15 (Paris, 1856), pp. 545–547.

21 F.J. Fétis, *Biographie universelle des musiciens*, 8 vols (revised ed. Bruxelles, 1866–1868), III, p. 461: “Un professeur comme Garat est une espèce de miracle, un effort de la nature”.

22 M–n–s, ‘Garat’, p. 546: “Sa voix était moins remarquable par le volume que par l’étendue et la souplesse; on ne pouvait la classer sans aucune des catégories ordinaires. Ce n’était ni un ténor, ni une basse, ni une haute-contre, ni un baryton: c’était un concordant, c’est-à-dire un résumé de toutes les voix, un composé de tous registres. [...] De l’expression la plus pathétique il passait sans effort à l’expression la plus légère, du style le plus simple à la broderie et à la roulade”.

23 *Almanach Lyrique des dames* (Paris: Janet et Cotelte, [1817]): *L’Echarpe de Bayard* par [Urbaine] Meurger, pp. 33–34; *Le Bearnois Vainqueur* par Fabry-Garat, pp. 61–62; *Le Gentil Troubadour* par Fabry-Garat, pp. 63–64.

24 See below, pp. 24–25 and Appendix B.

25 https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Dominique_Fabry-Garat.