THE JOURNAL OF THE DONIZETTI SOCIETY

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EDITORIAL

By JOHN WATTS

When Franz Liszt was asked by a friend why he had invited to one of his parties only men who were involved in commerce and finance, the composer replied that he liked to meet people who talked about music. So why not invite musicians the friend enquired. 'Musicians?' said Liszt scornfully, 'All they ever talk about is money.' So perhaps it is no co-incidence that the Donizetti Society has been formed by a group of people none of whom are professionally involved in the musical world. However all are passionately interested in Italian music with a particular enthusiasm for the era culminating in the so called 'Ottocento' period.

The attitude towards Donizetti by the main opera organisations in this country is somewhat restricted to say the least and only the most famous operas are intermittently performed. In the 26 years existence of the Opera Company at Covent Garden, three Donizetti operas have been given, Lucia di Lammermoor (1959), La fille du régiment (1966) and Don Pasquale (1973). The first launched Joan Sutherland onto the international scene and has been revived several times, the second also produced for Joan Sutherland was a great success with the public but the sets and costumes were sold to the Metropolitan Opera, New York after only a few performances. The third was staged in 1973 to celebrate the 25 years membership of the company by Sir Geraint Evans.

The records of Sadlers Wells Opera which was formed 42 years ago showed only one Donizetti work, again Don Pasquale with two productions, the first in 1953 and the second in 1967, until the production last December of Maria Stuarda. Glyndebourne Festival Opera have given three Donizetti operas: Don Pasquale (1938/39), L'elisir d'amore (1961/62&67/68) and Anna Bolena (1965&1968). Scottish Opera produced Don Pasquale in 1972 and will add a new Lucia in the autumn. The Welsh National Opera's first Donizetti production will be L'elisir d'amore this spring.

If our established companies have found it difficult to look no further than the few accepted

masterpieces it does not follow that the opera enthusiasts in Great Britain have been deprived of a share in the Donizetti revival. Visitors from abroad, Festivals and small home based groups have performed on stage or in concert form during the past 25 years:-

L'ajo nell'imbarazzo
Belisario
Betley
Il campanello
Caterina Cornaro
Le convenienze
Emilia di Liverpool
Il giovedì grasso
Linda di Chamounix
Lucrezia Borgia
Maria Padilla
Maria Stuarda
Marino Faliero
Poliuto
Rita
Roberto Devereux
Torquato Tasso

The concert performance of Caterina Cornaro closely followed the Naples revival in 1972 and that of Maria Padilla last year was the first in this country and the first anywhere since 1858. The Camden Festival production of Torquato Tasso marks another important stage in the 'riesumazione' of Donizetti's works.

Surely due for revival before long must be the three grand operas written for Paris, Les Martyrs, La favorite and Don Sébastien roi de Portugal, all to french texts. The B.B.C. has already shown with their excellent studio productions of Verdi's french Don Carlos and Les Vêpres Siciliennes how worthwhile original language performances of these operas can be and might not the same be the case with Donizetti?

Is it too much to hope that the new regime at the Paris Opera or the new head of studio opera productions at ORTF will soon turn their attention to these works?

Apart from trying to expand the number of revivals of Donizetti's operatic output, performing some of his important religious music, what else is there to be done? No doubt one of the most essential is the establishment of correct performing editions for even the well known operas. It is not generally realised

that the texts often used are far from being as Donizetti left them and hardly any revival especially in Italy is not in someone else's 'prepared edition,' presumably done mainly for copyright reasons.

However Alberto Zedda has shown with his careful research into Rossini's Il Barbiere di Siviglia, La Cenerentola and La Gazza ladra that the situation in Italy may be changing. We are fortunate in this country to have the good examples already set with Maria Padilla, L'ajo nell'imbarazzo and Torquato Tasso.

Donizetti's teacher Mayr too wrote more than 70 operas but only three have been revived in recent times, La rosa bianca e la rosa rossa (Bergamo 1963), Medea in Corinto (Munich Radio 1963, New York 1969, London 1972) and L'amor coniugale (London 1973).

It is good to learn that the religious works, San Luigi Gonzaga and La Passione are scheduled for performance in 1974, and a large scale Requiem Mass in 1975. Of the operas, Medea in Corinto will be staged at the next Wexford Festival, a performing edition of Fedra has been completed in Germany and others of I misteri eleusini and Ginevra di Scozia are in course of preparation. What are now needed are performances of Mayr's work so that we can appreciate more fully his unique qualities and influence on his star pupil Donizetti.

The contents of the first issue of the Society's Journal endeavours to reflect recent events in the Donizetti and Mayr revival and future issues will continue to do this.

Articles for publication will be welcomed and copies of previously unpublished letters written by Donizetti or to and concerning him and the times in which he lived will be particularly appreciated.

Similarly news and reviews of performances throughout the world should be submitted for inclusion in one of the quarterly newsletters.