LUCREZIA BORGIA

By JOSEPH GUARICCI

On the 10th October, 1833, Donizetti signed a contract with Duke Carlo Visconti di Modrone, director of Teatro alla Scala, to provide two operas of which the first would be required for the Carnival Season of 1833-34. A Romani libretto based on Victor Hugo's play, Lucrèce Borgia (staged in Paris on the preceding 2nd February), was to be handed to Donizetti by the 25th October. As so often happened, there were delays in this, mainly through the absurd views of the censors who were appalled at the idea of presenting the Borgia family on stage.

Donizetti did not receive the text until the latter part of November, and by that time, he was forced to rush the opera, completing it in approximately twenty-five days. It received its premiere on December 26th, 1833, the traditional date to open the La Scala Carnival Season.

I feel that Lucrezia Borgia is one of Donizetti's greatest achievements, if not his greatest, in the field of opera. I don't think anyone ever composed an opera to musically foreshadow Verdi's style quite in the strong way Donizetti did with his Lucrezia and La favorita (I would place Anna Bolena as a very close third on this list). Although Lucia di Lammermoor is undoubtedly effective in performance and richer in melodic inspiration, it does not contain the structure and various qualities of the three operas just mentioned which can be said to greatly foreshadow Verdi's style, especially the early operas (Ernani) and everything up to and including Rigoletto. In general, there is brassier orchestration and far less embellishment than in other works by Donizetti, giving way to a stronger sense of dramatic unity and romanticism. This can be seen best if we examine various reasons concerning the opera's success as well as certain aspects of the score.

Romani again provided Donizetti with an excellent libretto. Indeed, his work as a librettist was not surpassed by anyone until Arrigo Boito provided Verdi with a revision of Simon Boccanegra and texts for Otello and Falstaff. In a letter, Donizetti requested Romani to provide strong dramatic scenes which would arouse 'emotions to make one shudder' - scenes which would be

unusual for opera of that day. To understand what Donizetti meant, we must realize the history.

Hugo's play was based on historical facts. Lucrezia Borgia was born in 1480 being the illegitimate daughter (by a mistress) of Cardinal Rodrigo Borgia who later became Pope Alexander VI. At the age of twenty-one having already had one illegitimate child, she married her fourth husband, Alfonso d'Este who was soon to become the Duke of Ferrara. Even by today's permissive standards, that would give some people something to talk about, but one can imagine the gossip in her own lifetime. Her reputation was undoubtedly hindered by the malicious tongues of the political enemies of her father (the Pope) and her brother. Furthermore, it is thought that Alfonso murdered Ercole Strozzi, as the latter was thought to be deeply in love with Lucrezia. If we combine this with the fact that Italians (especially at that time) are superstitious to the point of fanaticism,it can clearlybe seen how Lucrezia's reputation was grossly marred by slander. Even as late as Donizetti's time, to mention the name of Lucrezia Borgia was to inspire the most dreaded fear into many Italians. She was accused of being a murderess, having a penchant for poison, and guilty of incest. From this point of view, one could say that Lucrezia Borgia in its own time greatly foreshadowed the verismo movement in opera, still many years to come. This is a point which is so often lost on present day audiences, for the chances are they have never heard of Lucrezia Borgia, and if they have, they certainly haven't the fear of her which Donizetti's audiences had. It has only been fairly recently that historians have found sufficient evidence to prove Lucrezia a 'charming intelligent and pretty blonde, with higher moral standards than her father, the Pope's. She died at the age of 39 of bearing a seventh child.' [1]

The plot of the opera is an unusual one and has strayed a long way from any accurate presentation of the real historical Lucrezia; but this was Victor Hugo's conception of drama, the source from which Romani derived his libretto. Lucrezia is portrayed as the villainess - rather like a Lady Macbeth type character. She has a strong penchant for poisoning anyone she takes a disliking to, but when this is inconvenient, will find other ways of murdering her victims. It is one of the few operas without any real romantic situation - Lucrezia

is married to Alfonso (her fourth husband); neither really cares about the other.

It has been criticized that Lucrezia is supposed to be a murderess, but yet her music is very beautiful, and therefore she is not given a fully developed characterization. Personally, I don't completely agree with this idea. Donizetti was not the type of composer to create a completely sinister character. Even Verdi didn't fully succeed with his Lady Macbeth. Really, both composers were too deeply rooted in the traditions of Italian lyric melody to produce characters of such nature. Nor, at this time, would either of them have possessed the type of harmonic vocabulary and chromaticism which would really set-off the atmosphere. However, this does not mean that Lucrezia is a weak and feeble figure; Romani gives only one very warm human trait to Lucrezia's character - and that is her sincere love and tenderness for her son Gennaro. It is upon this one quality that Donizetti creates the life of his heroine, and in this respect, he presents a well-drawn characterization. We do, however, have some traces of her unyielding cruelty. In the Prologue, we witness a woman torn between the love of her son and the malevolence of her reputation. In Act I, Lucrezia can be coy and then bitter, but succeeds to make everything suit herself. In Act II, we have that sinister chorus of off-stage voices which precedes Lucrezia's final entrance; it is here where Donizetti rounds-off her characterization, finally showing us her malicious nature.

Throughout the whole history of music, very few composers have known how to really write for the voice. If we were to make a list of these composers, it would be surprising how many great composers (including Beethoven) would have to be left out. Donizetti knew not only how to write for the voice, but how to adapt his skill and technique (like Mozart) to compose music which would be perfectly suited to each and every singer's capabilities.

When Donizetti came to compose Lucrezia Borgia, he was faced with the problem of how to write for Henriette Meric-Lalande. He had written Elvida for her in 1826 at a time when, still at the early part of her career, she possessed a considerably agile voice. However, time was not on her side, and by 1833 (only at the age of 35), her voice had lost its agility and was deemed useless. Nevertheless, she was still prima donna and was

scheduled to open the La Scala season singing the title part of Lucrezia in the premiere. Because of the state of her voice, Donizetti was able to abandon the old traditions of ornate vocalism and explore a more direct means of expression. This was to work very much toward his advantage, for he produced a score which was rich in expression and unhampered by embellishments which he was often obliged to write for a particular singer. But we will later see how this soprano was to provide further problems for Donizetti.

At the time of the premiere of Lucrezia Borgia, Verdi (age 20) was in Milan. He undoubtedly saw the opera and knew it very well. When Verdi came to write Ernani (9th March, 1843), another opera based on a Hugo tragedy, it is curious and interesting, but not really surprising that the end result should be modelled somewhat obviously on Donizetti's earlier Lucrezia. In Verdi, The Man and His Music, Carlo Gatti wrote that 'with Ernani, Verdi blazed no new trail in Italian opera. Instead, he followed in the foot-steps of Donizetti, who in 1833 had set to music another drama of Hugo's, Lucrezia Borgia, and thus opened the way to that realism of which the Italians had never had a more perfect example. Verdi sowed in the furrow plowed by Hugo'.[2]

In his book, The Operas of Verdi, Julian Budden quoted Lucrezia Borgia as being 'the nearest opera to Rigoletto in form and dramatic content'.[3]

PROLOGUE

Donizetti begins the opera with a Maestoso prelude which is rather typical of his style. The roll of the timpani is followed by a melody scored for French horns in D minor. It is the small figuration within this melody which Donizetti uses at length to maintain a tense, gloomy atmosphere throughout this prelude. Its shape remains the same while its intervals and pitch are altered, and is constantly transferred to various instruments of the orchestra. Midway through the prelude, Donizetti brings in another short motif, transferred between woodwind and brass against a tremolando string accompaniment. How strongly it suggests an impending fate and tragedy, especially at the point of the German-sixth chord. Eventually, the tempo changes to Allegro and a long dominant pedal is held under a dramatic transition passage finally bringing us to a Vivace section

in the contrasting key of D major and a chorus. Lively though it is, Donizetti does not let us forget that the final pages will end in tragedy, displaying a true sense of theatre on his part.

The scene opens in Venice. It is night, and a festival is in progress. Gennaro and his friends are gathered. When Gubetta mentions the name of Lucrezia Borgia, the mood abruptly changes to one of fear. Together they sing, 'Be silent.. Who can know of her sins and not hate her?' Obviously, the thought within them is Lucrezia's penchant for poison - but none of them dare say it. It is curious to note that at this point, Donizetti gives us a trill-like figure on B to A sharp. In the final scene of the opera, when the same characters unwittingly drink the poison, Donizetti gives us a similar trill (using the same notes, but in a different key) which I would say was definitely intended to suggest the fatal poison. Both trills could be made to sound very similar providing the conductor chose to interpret them in this way. However, whether the composer thought of the first figure as a little motif to musically depict the poison and thereby foreshadow his characters' fate remains very tenuous; there is a possibility that this could simply be a coincidence, unless one of Donizetti's letters should be discovered dealing with the point.

In the aria 'Nella fatal di Rimini', Orsini relates the story of why he hates the Borgias. The real musical importance of this aria (including its use of chorus) is that it demonstrates Donizetti's skill in combining the lyrical and declamatory elements into a purely Italian musical idiom. This declamatory nature of singing, which Donizetti was probably the first to develop, is so prominent in works such as Verdi's Il trovatore (especially in the prologue with its use of chorus, and Azucena's music in ActII).

The music returns to its previous waltz-like tune of the festivities. Eventually, all leave, save Gennaro who has fallen asleep. The mood changes again to a sombre Larghetto. A gondola draws up and the Duchess Lucrezia Borgia, masked, advances toward the sleeping Gennaro. She is hesitant, and the orchestra conveys this with an equally hesitant figure, which is repeated various times and transferred to various instruments (see musical example 1). It was just at this moment that Henriette Meric-Lalande had her first complaint

about the opera. She objected to having to wear a mask for her first entrance, fearing she would not be recognised. This complaint was as trivial as it was annoying for Donizetti, but the singer was content only after she was permitted to acknowledge the applause before wearing the mask.

As Lucrezia glances at the sleeping Gennaro her melodies are very soft, lyrical and full of restrained affection. Note that it is the woodwinds in thirds which make this passage sound so typically Italian. Her secret agent, Gubetta, enters, and to him, Lucrezia expresses a regret for her past deeds. When he inquires about the sleeping youth, she warns and dismisses him. Left alone once again, the orchestra conveys Lucrezia's innermost emotions. We have that little hesitating figure back again (see mus. ex. 1); and how beautiful an expression of Lucrezia's heart-felt anguish is given by the ensuing violin phrase, echoed in such a compassionate manner by the 'cellos.

Lucrezia sings the aria 'Com'è bello!' a beautiful expression of emotions. It is interrupted momentarily by a sinister passage sung by Alfonso and Rustighello; both in the distance and spying upon Lucrezia, they misinterpret her actions and believe Gennaro to be her lover. A cabaletta, 'Si voli', was added to this aria for the 1840 La Scala revival, sung by Erminia Frezzolini; beautiful as it is, I am in favour of omitting this cabaletta as it relies on convention (which was not Donizetti's original idea) and does tend to impair the structure and dramatic impact of this scene.

As she is about to depart, Gennaro awakens, and to Lucrezia's joy, begs her to stay, confessing his love for her. She is most moved when Gennaro explains that there is only one person he loves more, his mother whom he has never seen. Donizetti's music abounds with the conflicting emotions of this scene, expressions of joy and love, and yet both for different unknown reasons. Gennaro explains to her that he was brought up by a humble fisherman in Naples in the aria 'Di pescatori ignobile'. What is most important about this aria is that it is a perfect example of what Ashbrook calls Donizetti's 'popolaresco' style.

> 'This style is related to that of the Neapolitan songs that became internationally popular around the middle of the nineteenth century, largely through the efforts of Donizetti's friend

> Guglielmo Cottrau, who published several collections of them. Donizetti's popolaresco style has distinctive characteristics. The melodies are practically free of ornament except for an occasional accacciatura. The phrases of the melody are symmetrical and frequently progress sequentially. The melodic rhythms are very regular. In the melodic there is a great preponderance of conjunct intervals.'[4]

Gennaro also explains in this aria that he received a letter from his mother: 'Victim of some powerful evil, she feared for herself and for me; she beseeched me never to speak, nor to ask her name.'[5] Lucrezia is overcome with emotion and can scarcely restrain herself in the following duet. Various structural traits and accompanimental devices of this duet slightly foreshadow the 'Parigi, O cara., Gran Dio, Morir si giovine' duet from La traviata: this would tend to suggest that Donizetti was the ground upon which Verdi (through his unconscious instinct) was so richly cultivating.

As people approach, Lucrezia tries to leave; when Gennaro requests her name, she hastily replies, 'One who loves you; and whose life is to love you.' But before she can leave, she is recognised by Gennaro's friends who bitterly address Lucrezia, one by one, in an Andante ensemble:

Orsini : 'Milady, I am Maffio Orsini. You killed my brother as he slept.'

Vitellozzo : 'I am Vitelli, whose uncle you had killed after having taken his castle.' (etc.)

There is a magnificently dramatic transition passage leading back to the original melody of the ensemble (the second time with different words). Throughout, Gennaro's friends are bitter in their recollections and insults. Lucrezia begs for pity and mercy while beseeching Gennaro not to listen to them; her melodies are full of anguish and despair. Gennaro is torn between the two opposing sides. Eventually at the end of the ensemble, Gennaro's friends sing in unison 'È la Borgia' ('It is the Borgia woman!'). Shocked and dismayed Gennaro leaves with his friends. Later Verdi wrote similar ensembles employing the same kind of writing in operas such as La battaglia di Legnano and Il corsaro.[6]

ACT I

With Rustighello, Alfonso plans Gennaro's death, not realizing that his 'rival' is in actual fact Lucrezia's son, whose identity is kept secret by Lucrezia alone, for fear that her reputation would do him harm. Voices are briefly heard in the distance from Gennaro's house singing 'Viva, Evviva' in a joyful manner. This provides not only a strong dramatic contrast, but also something that was still a novelty in opera, which Verdi later used with great effect.

Don Alfonso sings a plea for revenge in his aria, 'Vieni! la mia vendetta'. Rustighello provides the usual intrusion (transition passage) which results in the cabaletta, 'Qualunque sia l'evento'. This is one place in the score where Donizetti relies purely on a convention of form. Yet, it still has a special musical importance. Daniels : 'Bursting the bonds of stylistic elegance, Donizetti here invests several numbers with a rhythmic energy presaging early Verdi. This blood-and-thunder cabaletta sung by Lucrezia's jealous, determined-to-prevail husband, Alfonso, is typical.'[7] And indeed, Daniels is most correct when he later claims that this would not be out of place in Nabucco. While it is perhaps most easily suited to Nabucco, it is so much a part of Verdi's style (especially with its predominantly brass introduction), that it could easily be inserted into any number of Verdi operas (providing the dramatic situation warranted it).

Alfonso and Rustighello leave; Gennaro and his friends enter. A long dramatic dialogue follows, which I am reluctant to call recitative because it is not formally designed as such. I think it is clear evidence of Donizetti searching for a more dramatic means of expression. Like so much of his music, one cannot pin-point any specific detail of the score which can demonstrate this; it can only be realized through the general overall effect of the passage as a whole. Perhaps this is why Donizetti's importance as a composer is so often overlooked.

Gennaro expresses his wish to help his mother, but his friends are more concerned with the party to be held that same evening at the Negroni Palace. Seeing Gubetta, his suspicions are once again aroused. He expresses his hatred for Lucrezia Borgia, and to insult her, removes the first letter of the name 'BORGIA' on the crest outside

her palace, thus leaving the Italian word 'ORGIA' ('Orgy'). When Orsini realizes they are being watched, they seperate. Rustighello and Astolfo enter and observe each other momentarily. Rustighello: 'Qui che fai ?' 'What are you waiting for ?' Astolfo: 'For you to leave - that's what I'm waiting for. And you ?' Rustighello: 'For you to leave - that's what I'm waiting for'. (etc.) Rustighello: 'Where are you taking him ?' Astolfo : 'To the Duchess. And you ?' Rustighello: 'To the Duke'. Astolfo: 'Oh, the way is not the same'. Rustighello: 'Nor does it lead to the same end'. Astolfo: 'One to a party -' Rustighello: 'The other to death'.

This whole passage beginning with 'Qui che fai?' is most important. To begin with, Romani and Donizetti introduce an element of comic relief to their gloomy tale, yet they perfectly characterize the situation. Here, Donizetti gives the orchestra melody (see musical example 2). The dialogue is merely placed above it in a conversational manner. How many times Verdi employed this type of composition, most notably in Il corsaro ('Vieni Gulnara') and Rigoletto (Signor .. va non ho niente). Concerning the latter opera, Budden wrote: '..A new idea takes shape in the orchestra: a sinuous melody played by muted' cello and double bass with a pulsating accompaniment of clarinets, bassoons, four violas, bass drum, another solo 'cello, and the rest of the 'cellos and basses all pizzicato. (See musical example 3).

This serves to introduce the hired assassin Sparafucile, and forms the background to this duet with Rigoletto ... This extraordinary duet in which the voices never join and the entire melodic interest rests with the orchestra has an ancestor in the duettino 'Qui che fai' from Donizetti's Lucrezia Borgia. Both pieces derive from the comic opera procedure of two buffo basses parlanti against an orchestral melody. Appropriately enough, each depicts a situation in which there is an element of grotesque humour .. in one, two spies are trying to checkmate one another; in the second, a hired assassin is setting forth his terms with the self-conscious rectitude of an honest tradesman'.[8]

Budden has perfectly realized the connection here, and nothing more need be said, Eventually, Rustighello calls in his brigands who force Astolfo to leave in the chorus 'Non far motto'. This too can find its later echos in Verdi. There is that chorus in I masnadieri ('I cittadini correano alla festa') and even better example in Rigoletto

when the Duke's men enter to abduct Gilda. They all bear a special resemblance in their malicious sense of humour. As Astolfo leaves, Rustighello and his brigands approach Gennaro's house to take his prisoner back to the Ducal Palace.

Scene II takes place within the Ducal Palace. Alfonso and Rustighello make further plans for Gennaro's death, who has been taken prisoner and held in their palace. A servant announces the Duchess, and as she enters, Donizetti perfectly characterizes her conflicting emotions in a brief orchestral passage, scored for strings. He does this very concisely with a four-bar phrase marked Allegro agitato. The first two bars (forte) are very aggressive and ominous: Lucrezia is most outraged at the insult to her name ('ORGIA'). She has come to demand revenge of Alfonso, later singing, 'Whoever he may be, I want him killed, and in my sight; I ask your sacred oath, as Duke..' The second two bars (piano) are an expression of Lucrezia's anguish: she is still haunted by that evening in Venice when she was insulted, Gennaro thus realizing her identity but not his own relationship to her. Donizetti then repeats these four bars, but as further contrast and to match the growing intensity of the protagonist's emotions, he has increased the degree of dissonance; hence, his minor chord becomes diminished, and his diminished chord becomes a diminished-seventh.

Alfonso orders the prisoner to be brought in. At the sight of Gennaro, Lucrezia's mood completely changes; whereas she had previously demanded revenge not knowing who the offender was, she is now taken by fear of what might happen. Realizing she has been trapped like an insect in a web, she asks to speak to Alfonso alone.

The duet 'Soli noi siamo' follows. Lucrezia is cautious and hesitant, so Donizetti returns with that same little figure previously stated in the prologue (see musical example 1). It is repeated various times and is extended and developed between another figure (see musical example 4). The end result is that the melodic interest in the orchestra holds together the dialogue; therefore the orchestral design is of greater importance than the vocal part. This is important for Donizetti was the first to create duets of this nature which Verdi later developed with such refinement of taste. The action is constantly being progressed through contrast on each side, or one person's words trying to counteract

the other's.

Lucrezia pleads desperately to save Gennaro's life. She then asks in a most innocent manner, 'What makes you, dear Alfonso, so inimical towards Gennaro?' Too much for him, Alfonso bursts out with rage, accusing Lucrezia of loving Gennaro. This passage (the second part of the duet) is full of tense drama. Here, Donizetti injects the sort of rhythmic energy into his accompaniment which Verdi so often used in his 'blood-and-thunder' cabalettas — as they are so often called by most writers. The vocal lines are strongly contrasted :Alfonso's lines are defiant and bitter while Lucrezia recoils in horror as she realizes that she can say nothing to save Gennaro. The type of writing in this duet soon became an essential part in the style of Verdi's writing. Of the notable early examples, one can think of 'Donna chi sei' from Nabucco. It reached an important stage of development in Rigoletto, and attained full maturity in his late operas. The cabaletta, 'Oh! A te bada' was added for the 1840 Paris performances with Grisi and Tamburini.

Alfonso offers Lucrezia a choice of whether she would prefer Gennaro to die by the sword or poison. Having eventually decided upon the latter, Gennaro is brought back to suffer his fate. Alfonso tells Gennaro that his crime is forgiven and offers a drink. In the trio, 'Guai! Se ti sfugge un moto,' Donizetti characterizes all three : Alfonso warns Lucrezia and orders her to pour some wine, indicating that Gennaro's glass is to be poisoned. His melodies are of a subdued malicious (staccato) nature. Gennaro's lines are smooth and lyrical (legato) as he expresses his surprise and thanks for being pardoned. Lucrezia is torn between the two men and therefore has no individual vocal line of her own. She sometimes utters Alfonso's agitated phrase, sometimes Gennaro's sustained phrase.

When Gennaro has taken the poison, Alfonso leaves saying, 'Now Duchess, as you wish --- stay with him, or send him away.' With a sudden idea, Lucrezia produces a vial containing an antidote. In a hurried duet, she explains that 'a single drop will save your life..... drink, and flee, I beg you, for your mother...' Lucrezia shows him the way through a secret door.

ACT II

It is night. Rustighello and his brigands enter and observe Gennaro's house. Realizing he is still alive and in Ferrara, they vow the Duke will have revenge on his rival. Their melody is light-hearted and sneering but is set against a sinister accompaniment of repeated chords in four-time compound revealing once again their malicious nature and enjoyment of spying--a dark business which they take lightly. It might be worth noting that the type of transition passage contained midway through this chorus can find its later echos in Verdi (most notably in the transition linking the ballet march in Act III scene II of Don Carlos), but this is a rather tenuous and unimportant point, despite the fact that both employ similar types of harmonic vocabularly and are orchestrated similarly.

Rustighello and his brigands withdraw as Orsini and Gennaro meet. In a recitative section, 'Sei tu?' Orsini requests Gennaro to come to the Princess Negroni's party to be held that same evening, but Gennaro declines as he must leave for Venice. A duet follows, 'Minacciata è la mia vita,' in which Gennaro explains that his life is in danger. The structure of this duet leans more towards a formal duet than does the rest of the score. The first section is marked Allegro guisto and is intensely dramatic. As with 'Soli noi siamo,' it is held together by orchestral design rather than vocal. The middle (Larghetto) begins with Orsini's'Onde a lei tu mostri grato,' in which he tells Gennaro that Lucrezia only pretended to save his life so that he would be grateful to her. His melody in A flat major, reflecting his carefree and optimistic nature as well as his disbelief of the poison tale, is contrasted by Gennaro's pessimistic melody which enters in the tonic minor key of A flat minor. In the final section of the duet (Allegro), the two are about to depart when Gennaro changes his mind and decides to attend the Negroni party and leave for Venice in the morning with Orsini. They join voices in a rather frivolous duet; perhaps Donizetti deliberately made this section sound frivolous as Gennaro has made a foolish decision against his better judgement --- a decision which will prove fatal to him and his friends. Rustighello and his brigands enter again and sing a sinister gleeful chorus as they realize that Gennaro will walk right into their trap.

The final scene of the opera takes place in the Negroni Palace. A banquet is in progress and the Princess Negroni (a friend of the Borgias) is entertaining her guests. Gennaro and his friends are seated around the table, each with a beautifully dressed lady. Gubetta (Lucrezia's secret agent) sits opposite Gennaro. The scene opens with a lively chorus, at the end of which Gubetta remarks (to himself): 'They are already drunk; we must try to get them alone.' Orsini offers to sing a brindisi which he has written, but Gubetta mocks him and provokes him into an argument. When Orsini picks up a knife, the orchestral part becomes very agitated and aggressive to reflect the argument. The Princess Negroni leaves with her ladies. Soon, the fight is suppressed. A cupbearer brings in a bottle of Syracusan wine from which all drink, save Gubetta who tosses his drink over his shoulder —— an action which arouses Gennaro's suspicions. Orsini sings his famous brindisi, 'Il segreto per esser felici,' which is one of the operas most remembered tunes.

But there is a solemn contrast after the first verse of this song. A funeral bell tolls and voices sing: 'The joys of the iniquitous are but a wisp of smoke.' The second verse of the brindisi is also followed by the same contrasting voices. (Verdi used the same idea of a funeral bell and off-stage male voices in the 'Miserere' of Il trovatore, but with much greater dramatic effect.) Slowly, the lamps go out one by one. The orchestra conveys a contrast as well. From its cheerful brindisi accompaniment in C major, it now darkens its colour into a mysterious and sinuous melody in C minor.

When they try to leave they realize all doors are locked. 'Where have we come?' —— they ask. A door opens at the back and Lucrezia enters saying 'To Lucrezia Borgia!' In a most dramatic passage, she says 'Yes I am the Borgia woman. You gave me a sad ball in Venice. I offer you in return a dinner in Ferrara... Five graves will cover you when you are dead, for the poison will soon kill you ' Gennaro (advancing): 'Five graves will not suffice —— you need a sixth.' Greatly shocked, Lucrezia orders the guards to leave, taking Gennaro's friends with them.

Left alone, Gennaro produces the antidote, but when told it is not enough for his friends as well, he decides to die with them.

When he is about to kill Lucrezia, she finally tells him that he too is a Borgia and in an aria, 'M'odi,ah! m'odi, io non t'imploro,' implores him to drink the antidote.

Suddenly, in a most agitated and nervous passage, Gennaro recalls his dying friends, but Lucrezia begs him once again to drink the antidote --- 'For your mother!' This only infuriates Gennaro who demands to know his mother's fate. Desperately, she exclaims, 'She lives, she lives, and speaks to you in my sorrow, in my fright!' Realizing the truth too late, Gennaro dies in his mother's arms.

By the time Donizetti had come to compose Lucrezia Borgia, he had acquired a dislike for the cabaletta. Probably in view of Meric-Lalande's limitations and the agility required for a cabaletta, composer and librettist decided to end the opera not with the usual rondo-finale, but with the death of Gennaro. Donizetti in particular wanted a quiet, sad ending to the opera, and not the rousing and quick-moving cabaletta which he considered out of place; this in itself was a somewhat revolutionary move in Italian opera on the part of Donizetti and Romani. Perhaps they thought that the state of Meric-Lalande's voice would provide just the right excuse to eliminate a convention which they hated, but which the singers demanded for vocal display.

When Meric-Lalande was shown the score of Lucrezia Borgia, she immediately insisted upon having a final cabaletta. This was simply embarrassing as Donizetti had given her a score which was not only beautifully expressive and dramatic, but within her then vocal capabilities. Romani supported Donizetti who openly claimed that it would be inappropriate for a mother to sing a cabaletta in the sight of her dead son, which although it has been used with telling effect to suggest depression, it is more effectively used as an expression of joy. Meric-Lalande remained adamant, and soon came to the point that if a cabaletta was not added, she would not sing. Realizing the further damage she could do to the score, Donizetti reluctantly provided the cabaletta, 'Era desso il figlio mio,' in which he skillfully maintains a mournful atmosphere through using the minor mode.

If the score of this is examined closely, it will seem fairly obvious that Donizetti took a subtle

revenge. Whereas the rest of the score was written very carefully for her voice (with a top range of B flat), the cabaletta requires a brilliant technique (with a top range of C, some slightly uncomfortable leaps, ascending and descending runs involving awkward figurations, consecutive trills, etc.) which Meric-Lalande definitely could not sing effectively.

Indeed, Verdi took a bold step in the composition of Ernani, an opera which I have already mentioned in close reference to Lucrezia Borgia, when he refused Sofia Loewe with a rondo-finale. In the same way as Donizetti, Verdi had composed his score and when the soprano glanced through it, she demanded a final cabaletta. Verdi objected strongly, and eventually got his way. But in all fairness to Donizetti, we should remember that Verdi had the advantage of facing the same situation ten years later. Perhaps this doesn't seem a long enough period to make much difference, but copyright laws had not long been enforced and people were beginning to half-consider them. Also, the rank of the composer was increasingly taking precedence over that of the singers.

Donizetti eliminated this cabaletta for the 1840 Milan revival with Frezzolini, (perhaps this is why he added 'Si voli' to the prologue), substituting a more appropriate ending with the death of Gennaro. This 'Nuovo Finale'was, of course, going back to his original idea of how the opera should end. Ashbrook explains that for the dying Gennaro, Donizetti has written 'a passage that might, out of context, seem almost to have been written by the Verdi of Rigoletto or Il trovatore.' Ashbrook also explains that:

> 'Romanticism made its way gradually in the Italian opera house, at first more by a shifting emphasis on choice of subject and effect rather than by a revolution of form. In Donizetti's case, the emergent romantic emphasis can be seen in the contrast between the two versions of the finale to Lucrezia Borgia...' For the version without the cabaletta, 'Donizetti shifted the emphasis to the dying Gennaro and gave him a brief, eloquent arioso rather than a full-scale aria.' This version 'contains greater romanticism because, instead of the coldly formal pattern of Lucrezia's aria, the focus of interest has moved to the poisoned youth, a victim of his

fate and of his loyalty to his friends..The vocal line of his arioso is a simple, unornamented melody, freighted with his tragic despair. His last phrases are sung to a series of unresolved dominant chords in G minor. The whole impression... is one of greater freedom of form in comparison to'[9] the conventional cabaletta ending.

After considering all the details in the score of Lucrezia Borgia, how must we wait for this opera to re-enter the standard repertoire of our major opera houses? It is opera of great importance and worthy to rank alongside many operas. Its structure relies much less upon conventional form than most other works by Donizetti. This inevitably results in greater continuity and a stronger sense of drama and impact. Even the use of an all-male chorus throughout the opera is noteworthy. It has a story which revolves around a cruel woman's love for her son, Although really by coincidence, this quality foreshadows yet another Verdi trait, and that is the latter composer's constant father-image throughout many of his operas.

In a letter, Donizetti wrote with much sadness; 'Imagine that (Robert) Schumann describes the triumphing Lucrezia as music for a marionette theatre!'[10] However, Hans von Bulow had a better opinion of it in 1891 when he wrote to his daughter:'my favourite opera after Carmen : Donizetti's Lucrezia Borgia (I admit one has to hear it sung by singers, not screaming dolls, and only in Italy).'[11]

Personally, I feel that Schumann is most wrong, I ask the reader to consider the point.

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NOTES

1. The Victor Book of Opera, Edited by Simon, N.Y.
2. As quoted by Henry Pleasants, 'A Turning point in Italian Opera',
   Lucrezia Borgia libretto, R.C.A. Records, 1967.
3. Cassell and Co. Ltd., London, 1973. p.482.
4. Ashbrook, Donizetti, p.379
5. All translations by Dale McAdoo, R.C.A. Records, 1967.
6. Compare with Budden, The Operas of Verdi, p.404n.

7. Daniels, 'The Serious Donizetti', Opera News, (American Magazine), 1st February 1969.
8. Budden, pp.381,492.
9. Ashbrook, pp 408,410.
10. Weinstock, Donizetti, p.145.
11. Ashbrook, p.410, who has derived the information from The Letters of Hans von Bülow (translated by Scott Goddard), p.431.

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MUSIC EXAMPLES

Ex. 1



Ex. 2



Ex. 3



Ex. 4

