Mayr expresses some thoughts on Italian Opera and in particular on Rossini's comic operas

Operatic music was once divided into two distinct genre, buffo and serious. Paisiello appears to have been the first to introduce a mixed style, for example his Nina is a most perfect model. Cimarosa treated this genre also with great success, however always blending something of the comic vein which nature gave him as the principal character of his talent. Il matrimonio segreto is a happy blend of the most elegant semi-seria with the funniest of buffo. During the intermediary school between these two great masters and the age of Rossini, semi-seria gained the upper hand whilst the buffo style waned. The operas of Mayr and Paer introduced into Italian music germanic use of harmony and orchestration, modifying the appearance and preparing a revolution. The taste of exuberance and mad joy which are characteristics of Italy, are also eminently characteristics of comic music in the past. They have brought into being some of the most attractive, gracious and refined (musical) forms.

Rossini, profiting from the development music had made with the juxtaposition of harmony, introduced the force of rhythm and the accent of modulation to a higher level than his predecessors. Even if one finds some pieces of the first order in the opere serie of the past, one has to admit they do not always hold your attention from beginning to end. Otello, Tancredi and Semiramide have pushed out of memory Gli Orazzi e Curiazi.+ However, true buffo is not Rossini's genre. His joy is more epigrammatic (i.e. one tracked and sarcastic). It does not intoxicate. Indeed, one finds spirit in it, a certain mockery*, the personality of the author - but not absurdity, not that undefinable quality unexplainable with a word alone .... for want of a word .... the buffo. Perhaps there is something of this quality in L'italiana in Algeri. When Rossini wants to create comedy he falls back onto the power of rhythm, encumbering it with a waltz. As a man of the spirit he is calculating and when one has not even the time to reflect (owing to the pace of the rhythm), one has not even a chance to be bored.

+Opera by Cimarosa first given in Venice, 1796.

(*Here the translator reads the script as gognenante, a word possibly coined from gogna - pillory. Mettere alla gogna means to hold up to execration. If the translation renders what Mayr meant, one may think of the remorseless humiliation of Basilio. Donizetti's fools are humiliated - yes - but they retain their dignity. Furthermore their humiliation is their initiation into life. In this sense, Donizetti is closer to classical comedy than Rossini. Ridendo castigat mores. This seems to be what Mayr meant in his criticism of Rossini's comic works. Like Wagner, he appreciated the composer's serious works more than the comic operas. Regarding the intoxication of comedy, one may think of Dulcamara or the lifting of 'Sofronia's' veil in Don Pasquale as examples.)

More of Mayr's Thoughts.

*The Chinese held the opinion that the knowledge of music was intimately linked to the art of government and that those who understood the science of sounds would also be capable of governing. From this we may conclude, if any of our composers were in the position to rule, there would very soon be born a situation of total chaos.

*Whilst the austere philosopher seeks truth in a deep well, the favoured sex loves to meet it on a bed of roses.

*With a song the mother greets her new born child, with a hymn the old man descends into the dark depths of the grave.

*To become passionately involved with an art is virtually to have reached half way along life's high road.

*Nature has given the feminine sex three qualities: imagination, sensibility and taste. Are these not the most necessary qualities for music?

*Les grâces n'ont point d'âge.

*Souvent trop d'abondance appauvrit la matière.

*Cleanliness is virtue's supplement.

*Les règles sont filles de l'art, mais l'art est fils de la nature.

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The individuality of the characters, so barbarously neglected by the servile imitators of Rossini's lyricism, is painted with rare energy and religiously observed in many of Donizetti's works. Mazzini.