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I should like to say how grateful I am to all writers, particularly those who submitted unsolicited articles, and to express my regret that our slender funds do not permit any payment to be offered to potential contributors. With this in mind I shall be pleased to consider any material for future issues of the Journal.

John Watts.

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CONTENTS

EDITORIAL by John Watts 9

MARIA DI ROHAN by Guglielmo Barblan 15
(translated by Derek Turner)
MARIA DI ROHAN in Performance compiled by John Watts 34

LES MARTYRS REVIVED by John Allitt 37

LES MARTYRS the story with illustrations of the Paris premier 43

LES MARTYRS review in La France Musicale 1840 53
(translated by John Standen)
LES MARTYRS review in Revue et Gazette Musicale de Paris 1840 61
(translated by John Standen)
I MARTIRI review in The Illustrated London News 1852 69

I MARTIRI review in The Times 1852 72

LES MARTYRS the French libretto 75

DONIZETTI 1840 3'French' Operas and their Italian Counterparts 99
by Michael F. Messenger
LA FAVORITE and LA FAVORITA One Opera, Two Librettos 117
by Ralph Leavis
PAUL-BERNARD BARROILHET by Jean-Louis Tamvaco 131
(translated by John Standen)
UNKNOWN DONIZETTI ITEMS in the Neapolitan Journal 'Il Sibilo' 145
by Jeremy Commons
LUCREZIA BORGIA by Joseph Guaricci 161

LUCREZIA BORGIA by John Allitt 179

DON PASQUALE by John Allitt 189

The Authorship of I PICCIOLI VIRTUOSI AMBULANTI 199
by Jeremy Commons
LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR by John Allitt 209

DONIZETTI A sketch of his life and a record of his operas 229
by Richard Northcott (1916)
DONIZETTI An Italian Romantic by Prof. Edward Dent (1955) 249

DONIZETTI An unpublished letter from 1838 271

LE LEZIONE CARITATEVOLI translated by John Allitt 275

MAYR'S LA PASSIONE by John Allitt 294

MAYR'S SAMUELE by John Allitt 314

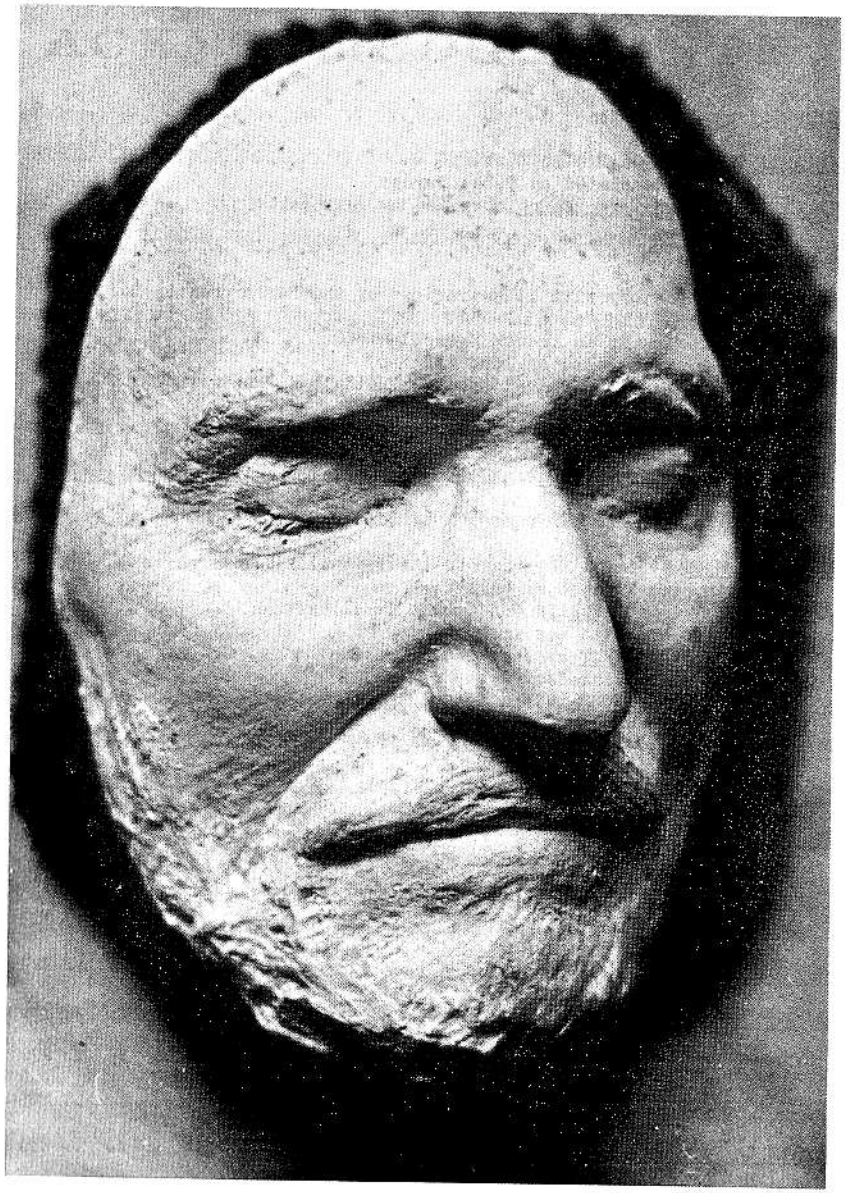
MAYR'S THOUGHTS selected and translated by John Allitt 316

BOOK REVIEWS by John Allitt 318

LIST OF MEMBERS 330

SOCIETY CONSTITUTION 332

SOCIETY PUBLICATIONS 334



Donizetti's Death Mask.

EDITORIAL

The Donizetti ' riesumazione' continues apace and following the English National Opera's production of Maria Stuarda eloquently conducted by one of our Vice-Presidents, Charles Mackerras with Janet Baker in the title role giving a performance of almost Callas-like intensity and with a total commitment, which one felt sure would have received Donizetti's full approval, we had Torquato Tasso at the 1974 Camden Festival. This first staging anywhere since 1881 by Opera Rara was a notable event, but the production was dogged by misfortune when the soprano fell ill and was replaced by Janet Price at a few hours notice. Miss Price sang her part for the first time from the score in a way that was little short of being miraculous, but when the opera was revived at the 1975 Festival with a different singer it rather failed to make the effect one felt was its proper due.

La favorita staged in a sumptuous new production at La Scala, Milan, in February 1974 received such a noisy reception from the audience that had I not been there I should have found difficult to have believed possible. This was with a cast containing Cossotto, Pavarotti and Cappuccilli!

I also attended the Venice revival of Maria di Rohan in March 1974 and found this to be one of Donizetti's most concise and interesting scores. By 1843 when it was written for Vienna, Donizetti had refined his technique and cultivated a style which must have pointed the way to the maturing Verdi. With Renata Scotto giving an impassioned reading of the title role it is very difficult to understand why the opera has received no more than 22 performances since the first modern revival in 1955.

New York saw the revival in March 1974 of Parisina with Caballé revealing her mastery in portraying one of Donizetti's tragic heroines. The conductor Eve Queler commendably restored the work to accord with composer's autograph at Bergamo.

During 1974 Covent Garden gave more performances of their admirable new production of Don Pasquale, Scottish National Opera mounted a new Lucia di Lammermoor which despite the traditional cuts was well received, and the

Welsh National Opera newly produced L'elisir d'amore in an attractive staging.

February 1975 saw La favorita performed in New York under Eve Queler's direction with Shirley Verrett and Alfredo Kraus. By all accounts the latter's singing of role of Fernando was the most enjoyable aspect of the performance, as it was when I heard him sing two months later in the new production of Linda di Chamounix at Genoa. Surely Kraus must be the greatest living exponent of Donizetti's tenor roles.

Perhaps one of the most interesting of recent revivals was that of Les martyrs in London last February by Pro-Opera in association with the Donizetti Society. It may have been an almost foolhardy undertaking to have attempted to perform such a grand opera on such slender resources but the event was justified in revealing the intense feelings Donizetti had expressed for his characters involved in the most moving situations of Christian martyrdom. Pro-Opera, under its indefatigable conductor Leslie Head are to be congratulated on their endeavours and it is very gratifying to know that the next performances of the opera are scheduled to take place during the forthcoming Congress at Bergamo, using the material prepared by the Society.

Future Donizetti revivals include new productions of L'elisir d'amore(1832), at Covent Garden and Gemma di Vergy(1834), at the San Carlo, Naples. Opera Rara have announced a performance of Rosmonda d'Inghilterra (1834), for later this year and in 1976 Ugo, conte di Parigi(1832), and the Cantata, Cristoforo Colombo of 1845, which was written for Barroilhet. The Royal Opera at Ghent are also considering a production of Le duc d'Albe(1839-unfinished).

The Society has been fortunate in locating a manuscript full score in a copyist's hand of Gabriella di Vergy(1826). The great importance of this discovery is that the M.S. had been corrected by Donizetti's hand and can therefore be considered to be fully authentic. The opera was never performed in Donizetti's lifetime and it was only in 1869 that a'rifacimento' was staged at the San Carlo. The original score is in 3 acts and is a far more substantial work than the 1869'edition'. As Ashbrook tells us, 'The libretto by Tottola is based on a gruesome play by du Belloy. Donizetti composed the opera although he had no contract for it, or, apparently, any plans for producing it. He wrote it, as he says,

as 'a diversion', or as an exercise. The gory plot, dealing with a heroine who dies when her husband hands her a casket containing the freshly-excised heart of Raoul, afforded Donizetti the opportunity to treat situations stronger and more violent than those in the librettos offered him by impresarios. In those days there was a marked preference for plots which ended happily; the tidal wave of romantic melodrama was not to break for another decade on Italian stages. Thus, with Gabriella Donizetti seems to have been addressing himself deliberately and privately to the problem of enlarging his range as a composer of operas'.

Of Gabriella Prof. Barblan has written, 'In his fable of love and death one identifies the fundamental themes of the Donizettian opera, which are pure love as victimized by rivalry and perfidy; feminine virtue misunderstood and brutalized by accusation of treachery (Gabriella facing Raoul will become Lucia facing Edgardo and, in Poliuto Paolino facing Severo); the inexorability of misfortune; the contrast between conjural duty and the impulse of love'. This is clearly an important opera and its first performance in the form originally intended by the composer is an eagerly awaited event. So far the first act has been completed.

A future concert in London will have some of Donizetti's religious music including the Ave Maria(for soprano, contralto and orchestra), dating from 1844 and the Miserere(for three male voices, string orchestra) of 1842. This concert will also feature a Te Deum by Mayr and a Mozart Mass in C major transcribed by Mayr: this is an unknown work by the young Mozart and will reveive its first performance in modern times.

The 1974 Wexford Festival saw the production of Mayr's Medea in Corinto but reports that cuts had been made following the dress rehearsal and the not very enthusiastic reviews of the work, the staging and the singing are unlikely to help the cause of further revivals of this or indeed other operas by Mayr. The Society were associated with the the first modern performance of Mayr's Oratorio La Passione, and if some of us in the audience found the music lacking in inspiration and strangely at odds with the subject of the work, John Allitt in his essay points out that with deeper study the apparent simplicity of Mayr's religious style need not be confused with naïvete.

The full score of Mayr's Oratorio Samuele has been re-discovered and an introduction to it is included in the Journal. A performing edition is being made together with one of Mayr's G Minor Requiem. This work is written on a large scale in the manner of Donizetti's Bellini Requiem and Verdi's Manzoni Requiem.

The Society has sponsored our Chairman's book 'Donizetti and the tradition of romantic love' and few of the limited edition printed are still available. This is an important book in the understanding of the composer and incidentally is so far as I can discover only the second book on Donizetti to be written by an Englishman. The first by Richard Northcott was written in 1916 and is reproduced in this issue of the Journal. It begins with the statement (erroneous one must say) that Donizetti came from Scottish ancestors!

Egret House in association with the Donizetti Society have issued reprints of piano vocal scores long unavailable and so far the following have appeared:- Maria Stuarda, Lucrezia Borgia, Caterina Cornaro, Les martyrs, Roberto Devereux and Messa da Requiem. The Society is also considering sponsoring the printing of miniature vocal scores (the same size as the Journal), and the following operas are under consideration:- La regina di Golconda, Maria di Rohan, Poliuto, Belisario and La favorite.

A further publishing venture is the establishment of the Mayr·Donizetti·Press. This has already issued for the very first time several works by Donizetti and Mayr. A full list is included in the Journal.

This issue of the Donizetti Society Journal has a distinct 'French' flavour and with the revival of Les martyrs it is to be hoped that all Donizetti's operas written to French librettos will be given in their original versions. This includes a Lucie de Lammermoor which differs materially from the Italian version.

At the time of writing the projected Congress in Donizetti's birthplace, Bergamo, is still some months away and it is to be fervently hoped that the present economic climate will do nothing to prevent it from taking place. The very initial suggestion came from the Society and this enlarged issue of the Journal is one of our tangible contributions towards its success.

J.W.
June 1975.

