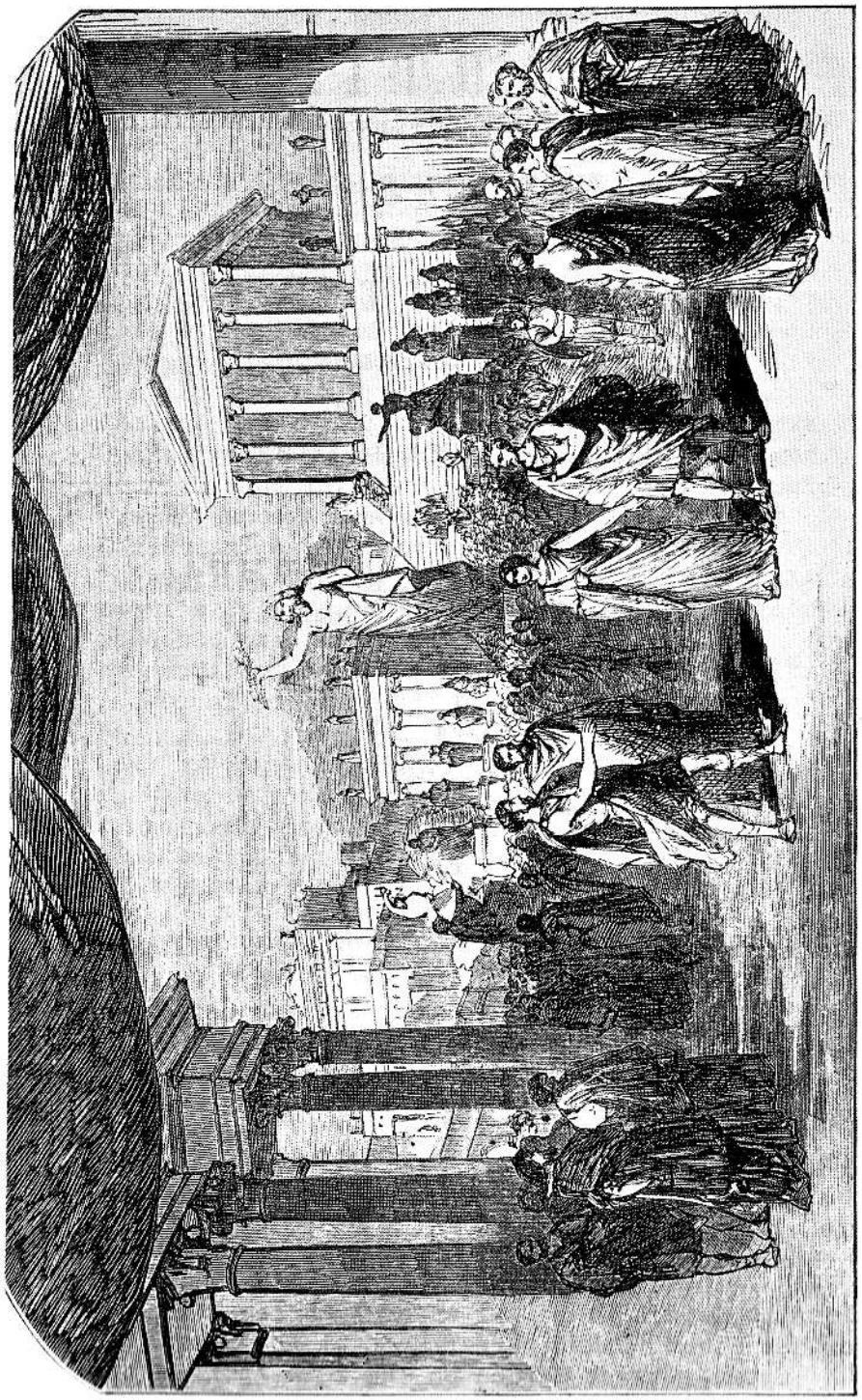


I martiri - The central square at Melitene, (Royal Italian Opera, Covent Garden).



The Illustrated London News
24 April 1852

ROYAL ITALIAN OPERA

'I martiri,' Lyric Tragedy, in Four Acts; The Music by Donizetti, The Libretto by Scribe, and the Italian Adaptation by Maggioni.

Four illustrious names are associated with the opera of 'The Martyrs' produced with such signal success on Tuesday night, at Covent Garden, in the presence of Her Majesty and Prince Albert, Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg, and a large assemblage of fashionable, literary, and artistic celebrities, amongst whom must be specified as the 'lion' of the evening - the 'observed of all observers' - Mdlle. Johanna Wagner, who was in a private box with her father. The four names are Pierre Corneille, Adolphe Nourrit, Scribe, and Donizetti. It was Corneille who wrote 'Polyeucte, Martyr,' in 1640: it was Nourrit, the celebrated French tenor, who suggested the tragedy to Donizetti as the subject for an opera, at the San Carlo, in Naples, in 1839; but on the eve of representation the authorities prohibited the performance of 'Polyeucte' as profane; and poor Nourrit, the night after the prohibition, having been hissed whilst he was singing, returned to his domicile, and committed suicide by throwing himself out of the window. Curiously enough Donizetti, who had written Lucia for Duprez, the rival tenor who drove Nourrit from Paris in despair, afterwards adapted 'Polyeucte' for the Grand Opéra in Paris, with the aid of Scribe, for Duprez; and on the 10th April, 1840, 'Les martyrs' was brought out at the Académie Royale de Musique, Mdme. Dorus-Gras being Pauline: M. Massol, Sévère, the Roman Proconsul: M. Derivis, Félix, the Governor of Armenia; M. Serda, Calisthènes, the priest of Jupiter; and M. Wartel, Néarque, the friends of Polyeucte. Although the opera was rapturously received, it did not remain in the repertoire, the connoisseurs only arriving to hear the third act, and quitting the theatre before the fourth act, to the annoyance of Duprez. The judgment of the Parisian amateurs was, however, quite accurate. The first, second, and fourth acts contain little that will fix the attention of musicians, but the third act has

some sublime situations, both dramatic and musical. Schlegel's analysis of Corneille's tragedy is so admirable, that we willingly transfer it here as a key to the libretto. In 'Polyeucte,' Christian sentiments are not unworthily expressed; yet we find in it more superstitious reverence than fervent enthusiasm for religion; the wonders of grace are rather affirmed than embraced by a mysterious illumination. Both the tone and the situations in the first act incline greatly as Voltaire observes, to 'comedy.' A woman who, in obedience to her father, has married against her inclinations, and who declares, both to her lover (who returns when too late) and to her husband, that 'she still retains her first love, but that she will keep within the bounds of virtue;' a vulgar and selfish father, who is sorry that he has not chosen for his son-in-law the first suitor, now become the favourite of the Emperor - all this promises no very high tragical determinations. Scribe has rigidly adhered to the tragedy, putting in action the events which are only described by Corneille. In the first act there is the conversion of Polyutus (Tamberlik) by Nearcus (Stigelli); in the second there is the arrival of Severus (Ronconi). with his discovery that his early love, Paulina (Madame Julienne), is united to Polyutus; in the third act there is the condemnation of Nearcus, the avowal of Polyutus that he is also a Christian, and his condemnation by his father-in-law, Felix; and in the last act Paulina accepts the faith of her husband, and the martyrdom of the Christians takes place, despite of the noble efforts of Severus to save them from the wrath of the High Priest of Jupiter (Polonini).

The great defect in the music of Donizetti for the 'martiri' is, that he has not grappled with, and embodied, the antagonistic passions of the Christians and Heathens. The opera is, throughout, of one colour, and lacks contrast. In the choruses to Proserpine and to Jupiter the mode of treatment scarcely differs from that adopted to depict the holy rites of Christianity. The Italian composer has sought to imitate Meyerbeer, but has failed to attain the individuality of character so wonderfully observed in the 'Huguenots,' of which the 'martiri' is but a faint copy. Mr. Costa has made some wholesale but very necessary cuts in the score, and



it will be found expedient to excise still more, particularly the divertissement in the second act. The omission of the overture, in which the novel effect of a chorale sung behind the curtain was introduced, is not at all to be regretted. Donizetti took especial pains with the orchestration, but an overture was beyond his grasp. The most effective piece in the first act was the trio in the finale, in six-eight time, 'Ah ! so tu m'ami,' beautifully sung by Mdme. Julienne, Stigelli, and Tamberlik. In the second act, Mdme. Julienne made a good impression by her singing of the polacca, 'Perché di stolti,' and Ronconi, who has the melodious gem of the opera, a romance, 'Amor de miei prim' anni,' lighted the auditory, but the finale went off heavily. In the third act, attention was awakened by the duo between Mdme. Julienne and Ronconi, 'Approdando a questa riva,' beautifully instrumented. Then came the tender air, in six-eight time, 'Supremo oggetto,' exquisitely sung by Tamberlik, in the cabaletta of which, 'Si, Andrò nel loro tempeo,' he took the house by storm, being the announcement of Polyutus's resolve to overthrow the Pagan idols. In the encore he took the C sharp in alt with thrilling effect. The finale of the third act excited the enthusiasim of the house to the highest pitch. The scene is in the Temple of Jupiter, and begins with a heathen ceremony of the immolation of a victim. Nearcus is condemned, and Polyutus avows that he is of the same creed. A magnificently-voiced sextet, the themes of which will remind the hearer of the 'Lucia,' was next superbly sung by Mdme. Julienne, Tamberlik, Stigelli, Ronconi, Polonini, and Marini, which was rapturously redemanded. After Polyutus had broken the sacred vases, the crescendos in the finale were climax upon climax, the amazingly-powerful voices of Madame Julienne and Tamberlik being heard above the combined choral and orchestral masses with electrifying effect. The curtain fell amidst a storm of cheering, and after the artistes had been recalled the presence of Costa was imperiously exacted. In point of conception and execution, this finale may take place with the finest Royal Italian Opera lyric displays. In the last act, the duet in the prison scene between Madame Julienne and Tamberlik was another triumph for the artistes; but the denouement of the martyrdom did not move the sympathies in the manner intended by Corneille & Scribe.

Madame Julienne is a native of Rouen, and was a pupil of the same master as Poultier, the cooper tenor. She has been the prima donna of the Grand Opéra in Paris, at which theatre her powerful soprano told amazingly in those works requiring more than ordinary physical power. The quality of her organ and her style are essentially French: she possesses immense energy. Madame Julienne, whose married name is Dejean, must not be confounded with Mdlle. Jullien, of Brussels, or with Madame Julian (Van Gelder), known at Her Majesty's Theatre as Madame Giuliani.

With Madame Julienne and Tamberlik, who is now the greatest of dramatic tenors, with Ronconi's fine taste and artistic Judgment in the insignificant part of Severus, and with Marini's majestic voice when it is in tune, 'I martiri' will be a very useful, if not a very prominent work in the repertoire. It was given for the second time on the extra night, on Thursday. The pageantry of the third Christian era, under the Emperor Decius, is most gorgeously depicted; the procession in the 2nd act, with the entrance of Severus, being one of the richest spectacles ever witnessed.

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From 'The Times' for Wednesday the 21st April 1852.

## *ROYAL ITALIAN OPERA.*

**When Nourrit, the celebrated French tenor, was at Naples, Donizetti wrote his serious opera, *Poliuto*, expressly for him. What Rossini did with his *Maometto Secondo* Donizetti subsequently did with *Poliuto*; he enlarged it into the dimensions of a grand opera in four acts, which, like *Le Siege de Corinthe*, was produced in Paris, at the Academie Royale de Musique, under the title of *Les Martyrs*. Of this French edition of *Poliuto* a new Italian version was brought out, last night, at the Royal Italian Opera, with complete success.**

**The *libretto* of *I Martiri* happily stands in need of no description. The *Polyeucte Martyr* of Corneille, or rather the sublime performance of Rachel as the heroine, Pauline, made a powerful sensation at the St. James's Theatre last season, and the plot of the tragedy was recounted and commented upon at the time. It will be remembered that the whole story turns upon the conversion to Christianity of Pauline, daughter of the Pagan governor of Armenia, by Polyeucte, her husband; and that both are consigned, in the end, to the fury of wild beasts, by Sevère, proconsul of the Roman Emperor, Decius, who has been despatched to Melitene to put down the sect of Christians. Such a slender foundation was hardly fitted to support the weight of a grand opera in four acts; and it is not surprising that the first two of Donizetti's *Martyrs*, with the exception of some few pieces, should be dull and spiritless.**



**In the third act, however, the composer rises with his subject, and the *finale*, where Polyeucte, recently converted to Christianity by his friend Nearque, braves the anger of the heathen priests and people, resists the supplications of his wife, Pauline, insults their idols, and resolves to share the glory of martyrdom with Nearque, is one of Donizetti's most powerful compositions. In the fourth act (some scenes in which were omitted last night) there is also a highly effective duet, in E major, between Pauline and Polyeucte, where the religious fervour and eloquence of the husband finally succeed in persuading the wife to the true faith, and they resolve to die together. The general character of the music is very much in the manner of *La Favorite*. It presents few evidences of inspiration, and is deficient in the freshness and vigour of the earlier operas of the composer. These defects, however, are in a great measure atoned for by that command of the mechanical resources of his art which Donizetti at this period possessed in a very eminent degree. The orchestration and the vocal combinations, in all the concerted music, are quite masterly, and go far to hide a comparative absence of ideas and a superlative want of originality. In the matter of straining the voices on high notes, however, Donizetti has, in the *Martyrs*, almost put Meyerbeer, Halévy, and Verdi himself into the shade; and it is not unfair to suppose that he has had a hand, no less than his contemporaries, in destroying the magnificent organ of Duprez, the great French tenor, for whom he composed *Lucia* in Italy, and rewrote, or rather augmented, *Les Martyrs* in Paris.**

**The performance last night, in spite of the severe cold and hoarseness of Signor Marini—who played Felice, the Governor, and for whom an apology was printed and circulated in the theatre—and in spite of the heaviness of the first two acts, was one of the most brilliant and satisfactory we remember at the Royal Italian Opera. The subject of *I Martiri* gives ample scope for scenic display, and of this the management has taken full advantage. The scenery of Messrs. Grieve and Telbin, consisting for the most part of architectural *tableaux*, is of the best; the costumes are appropriate and splendid; and the procession accompanying the triumphal entry of Severo, the proconsul, may vie with any preceding attempt at varied and gorgeous display for which the theatre has been celebrated. The *ballet*, too,—especially the dance of Amazons, and the grand *pas*, executed so admirably by Mademoiselle Robert,—is excellent, notwithstanding the large curtailments in the music, which were perhaps inevitable. In short, no pains have been spared to render the *spectacle* as grand and imposing as possible. The three principal characters of Paulina, Poliuto, and Severo, were cast to Madame Julienne, Signor Tamberlik, and Signor Ronconi. Madame Julienne is well known to those who are familiar with the operatic history of the present times as a lady who has, on more than one occasion, been the chief support of the Grand Opera in Paris. She is an artist of distinguished ability. Her voice, a high *soprano*, partakes of that thinness of quality for which the majority of French female voices are noted. The *timbre* is metallic, and its telling quality remarkable, more particularly in the upper register, where the notes, even as high as C in alt, are wonderfully clear and powerful. Madame Julienne is an executant of more than ordinary skill, her fault being an occasional uncertainty of intonation, which, nevertheless, gradually disappears as she warms into her task. She has great energy, and throws herself, heart and soul into the passion of the scene. Her Paulina is a most able performance, from first to last, her histrionic efforts being remarkable for intelligence and power. In Signor Tamberlik Madame Julienne found such a Poliuto as probably she never met before. This great singer, who, with every new part, rises higher in the estimation of the public, has by last night's performance attained the pinnacle. He was in glorious voice, and on more than one occasion completely electrified the audience. His acting throughout was on a par with his singing. Equally good in its way was the Severo of Signor Ronconi, like all he does, a truthful and well-studied impersonation.**

The effective passages in the first act were a short solo for Signor Tamberlik, "Sovra il mio cor;" a melodious chorus for female voices, in F (hymn to Proserpine), "O Diva sovrana," and Paulina's prayer, "Oh, madre mia!" in which Madame Julienne was very nervous. In the second act Signor Marini's indisposition was detrimental to himself and to all the music allotted to Felix; and, in spite of a catching *bravura* in F, *à la* palocca, "Perche di stolto giubilo," which, though slightly at variance with the signification of the words, was cleverly sung by Madame Julienne, and much applauded, the performance dragged along somewhat heavily until the appearance of Signor Ronconi, as Severo, the proconsul, in his triumphal car, drawn by three horses, and forming the principal object in a gorgeous procession. The striking manner in which Signor Ronconi delivered the opening recitative, the general pageantry, the *ballet*, and a rather spirited *morceau d'ensemble* in A flat, in which the five principal characters take part and are joined by the chorus, roused the attention of the audience, and brought down the curtain with something like *éclat*. The third act made amends for all, and decided the success of the opera. The opening duet, a long though not ineffective composition, in which Paulina explains her position to Severo, who, though formerly her lover, resigns himself to her loss, was extremely well performed by Madame Julienne and Signor Ronconi, and complimented by a recall. The first real burst of enthusiasm, however, was for the air, "Si, andro nel loro tempio," where Poliuto, burning with Christian zeal, resolves to repair to the temple and defy the heathens. This was given with amazing fire by Signor Tamberlik, who, by his admirable singing and acting, redeemed it from commonplace, and entirely captivated the audience. There was a unanimous encore, and on repetition Signor Tamberlik, in the cadence, gave, with immense power, a C sharp in alt, which, to explain away a technicality, is the highest note ever recorded to have been sung by a tenor of force like Signor Tamberlik, who makes little or no use of the *falsetto*. The *finale*, already alluded to, was executed by all concerned in it with the utmost spirit and decision. The quintet for the principals, "Lo spergiuro," was encored, and an effect of which we remember few parallels was produced by the *coda*, in which the completeness of the *ensemble* was not less remarkable than the powerful singing of Madame Julienne, Signors Tamberlik and Ronconi. At the fall of the curtain the three artists were obliged to reappear, accompanied by Signor Stigelli, whose careful and correct execution of the music allotted to the secondary, but not unimportant part of Nearco, was of great consequence to the general effect. Mr. Costa was then unanimously summoned before the curtain. In the fourth act the great duet between Paulina and Poliuto renewed the enthusiasm of the house. The last movement, "O santa melodia," after the sounds of the celestial harps have melted the obduracy of Paulina and suddenly given birth to the faith which converts her to the true religion, was sung by both artists with extraordinary energy, and the sustained and reiterated high notes in the cadence gave a wonderful brilliancy to the climax. Not content with encoring the movement, the audience compelled Signor Tamberlik and Madame Julienne to come forward once again after the repetition. From this to the fall of the curtain, except a short *morceau d'ensemble*, "Oh santa melodia," a recurrence to the last movement of the duet, which Paulina and Poliuto repeat previous to resigning themselves to martyrdom, there was no point demanding special mention. The climax, like that of the *Juive*, the *Huguenots*, and other grand operas of the French school, is somewhat unsatisfactory; moreover, in the *Martyrs*, it is not remarkably effective. The undramatic incident of the wild beasts which are to devour the miserable Martyrs is hardly made impressive by such awkward effigies of lions and tigers as would seem, judging from the specimens of last night, to constitute items in the "property" department of the Royal Italian Opera. Such an exhibition, had the scenes immediately preceding excited a less marked sensation, might have possibly endangered the success. The curtain fell, however, amidst the greatest applause; the chief performers were again summoned forward, and *I Martiri*, with all its defects and merits (which are tolerably well balanced), is likely to remain one of the stock operas of the theatre.



# LES MARTYRS

OPÉRA EN QUATRE ACTES,

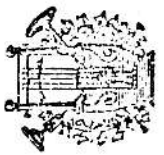
PAROLES TRADUITES PAR M. E. SCRIBE,

*MUSIQUE DE M. DONIZETTI,*

DIVERTISSEMENTS DE M. CORALLI.

Représenté pour la première fois, à Paris, sur le Théâtre de l'Académie Royale de Musique, le 10 avril 1844.

**Prix : 25 centimes.**



**BRUXELLES.**

CHEZ JOSSE SACRÉ, IMPRIMEUR-LIBRAIRE,
RUE DES CARRIÈRES, 26.

—

1845.

PERSONNAGES. ACTEURS.

FÉLIX, gouverneur de l'Arménie au nom de l'empereur Décius.
PAULINE, sa fille.
POLYEUCTE, son gendre.
SÉVÈRE, proconsul envoyé par l'empereur.
CALLYSTHENES, prêtre de Jupiter.
NÉARQUE, chrétien, ami de Polyeucte.
UN CHRÉTIEN.
Jeunes filles, suivantes de Pauline.
Chœur du peuple, habitans et habitantes de Mélitène.
Chœur des Chrétiens.
Chœur des Prêtres de Jupiter.
Soldats des différentes armes composant une légion romaine.
Licteurs.
Sacrificateurs.
Gladiateurs.
Chœur de danseurs et de danseuses, paraissant dans les cérémonies publiques et religieuses.

La scène se passe à Mélitène, capitale de l'Arménie.