DONIZETTI IN REVIVAL 1978 — 1980

Gaetano Donizetti, once a distant figure, is now clearly in focus in the opera houses of the world. Reduced in the early years of this century to a duo of comic operas almost each succeeding year since the breakthrough of the nineteen-fifties has seen a new work added to the list of rediscoveries. Act I of his revival has now been played. Many new actors have found starring roles, many indeed are now on the point of bowing out covered in glory; inspiring conductors who learned their skills the hard way - on a diet of verismo; superb prime donne - how much the revival owes to the virtuosity of this much maligned group of ladies can never be overstated; musicologists rifling through dusty archives, publishers risking their all in the hazards of reprinting, bookworms, studiosi of all sorts have added their less glamorous talents to those of the legions of singers whose taxing gorgheggi have led them into the stratosphere once inhabited by Pasta, Malibran, Rubini and Lablache.

Act II is now in full swing. To the opulent works of Donizetti's maturity we now can associate those of his youth, the brief farse which enlivened only a small corner of the repertoire of the day, the early melodrammi - once dismissed as Rossinian but not quite that. By 1980 we have heard some of his cantatas, many of his songs, even the opera/oratorio IL DILUVIO UNIVERSALE seems about to come on stream. Certainly 1978 - 1980 has kept up the pace. Not every two years can produce a recital of his Chamber Music; issue a recording of his MISSA DA REQUIEM, identify his GRAND SYMPHONY, append a serene account of his music for four hands; stage a DUCA D'ALBA in the sets of 1882 but with the fervour of the original; conjure up a GABRIELLA DI VERGY from the shadows.

Projects to fill the gaps are under way all over the world. Together with the works of the Bergamasc maestro we see a renewed longing to examine the neglected scores of his contemporaries. Rossini's opere serie - once forgotten - can now be played on car stereo, Mercadante has a vogue, Pacini - his passionate adherents, the Ricci brothers are beginning to be known for the brilliant scores of which the musical world glimpses only the tip of the iceberg. In depth, the musical scholar has a long derided epoch opening up in front of him. Here probably lies Act III.

These composers of the Ottocento, led by Rossini, Donizetti and Bellini are achieving a musical respectability long denied them by the scorn of the past. The teeming operatic world of the early nineteenth century, too stereotyped, too violent, too disconcerting, was simply ignored by later tastemakers bred on mid-european routine. In a world very different from theirs - accustomed to the sort of economic, political and psychological changes that parallels that of Donizetti - we can see his music as expressive of the romantic surge towards physical as well as intellectual stimulation. The theatre of the Ottocento was a world of action, spectators were not passive, not respectful, not cowed by critics, by class considerations, by counterpoint; its music, once thought shallow and vulgar now can be appreciated as a counterpart of the enthusiasms and values of a people in movement.

If this was all the revival would not have long to go. Something more is required to explain this search for lost music, a search which concerns Donizetti as much as it concerns the devotees of polyphony, of the music of the troubadours, of the baroque, the desire for 'original' instruments, for restitution of all kinds. By 1980 we are in the midst of another Act II - that of recorded music. To musical amateurs everywhere the standard symphonic and operatic repertoire is as commonplace as aural wallpaper. By the acid test of overfamiliarity it is the bolder values which survive, direct expression, uncomplex rhythms, the ballad, human passion, music that comes from the heart rather than from the academy. Music above all that complements (not supersedes) the cerebral phases we have gone through since the turn of the century.

Opera itself has never been more popular nor reached so many people, the desire is to hear it in the round, as a complete experience, in its logical sequence. The tastemakers who once wanted to jump from Gluck and Mozart - with one supporting step on Beethoven's FIDELIO, straight to Wagner and (the later) Verdi - cutting out all the music in between, have found themselves spreadeagled. Certain masterpieces of this vast lacuna managed to intrude despite disparagement and distaste: LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR was never forgotten, nor NORMA, nor GUILLAUME TELL. Singers remained loyal to I PURITANI, to LA SONNAMBULA, to the BARBER OF SEVILLE, and loyal too - defying Berlioz, Schumann, Chorley, Grove, and the management of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, to that embarrassing tomboy LA FILLE DU REGIMENT. Choruses went on singing their defiant refrains from NABUCCO and MOSE, cries for freedom from oppression.

It is now quite proper for even the most fastidious authority to report on the primo Ottocento in a spirit other than that of amusement. The days when it was only possible to broadcast a performance of EMILIA DI LIVERPOOL complete with comments on the northern climate, the unlikely nature of the contadini and the proximity of Lime Street Station, have now quite gone. A new seriousness has invaded the opera lovers of the world, sheer pleasure is not enough, people want to be informed, to read about opera, pursue rarities, study libretti - more people arrive prepared for a performance than ever before.

All of this amounts to success, and a success which does not stop at the achievements of the great Bergamasc but which starts there. The satisfactory accomplishment of the Donizetti revival leads to Acts III, IV and V of an even greater revival, that of an informed public such as the maestro himself saw, heard, and composed for, with such brilliant results.

1978 had an exceptional preliminary in the quartet of Donizetti operas appearing at Nice, Barcelona, Naples and London the month before; December 1977 saw a mini-festival, a restaging of four of his mature operas with a constellation of the leading Donizettian interpreters in the title roles.

Nice	PARISINA D'ESTE with Montserrat Caballé, Vincente Sardinero, D Gonzales
Barcelona L	LINDA DI CHAMOUNIX with Maddalena Bonifaccio, Alfredo Mariotti
Naples SC	POLIUTO with Renato Bruson, Adriana Maliponte, Giorgio Casellato-Lamberti
London CG	MARIA STUARDA with Joan Sutherland, Huguette Tourangeau, S Burrows

The last of these being in the production originally prepared for the remarkable performances at the English National Opera in 1973 with Janet Baker as an unforgettable Stuarda.

After this operatic full-house (in every possible meaning of the term) it was left to the valiant and charming Royal Opera of Ghent to start the season with an opera that would have no less than five productions at various cities during the two-year period.

Ghent 5 2 1978	ANNA BOLENA with Ottilla Mère, Maryse Patris, Christian Portanier, Pierre Lanni

This was one of the modest presentations of Ottocento opera that were such a feature of musical life in the lovely Flemish city at that time.

The Donizetti Society itself promoted the following major event, a concert performance at London's Queen Elisabeth Hall of PIA DE'TOLOMEI in an exceptionally complete edition of a work that would receive critical astonishment that 'there was not a weak number in the score'.

London QEH 26 2 1978	PIA DE'TOLOMEI with Lois McDonall, Anthony Roden, Della Jones, John Tomlinson & Jonathan Summers. Cond. Head.

The Ghibellini coro at the start of Act II had been restored from the MS at Naples and the part of Rodrigo - as in the original - was sung by a musico, in this case by Della Jones who had been singing in many of the more adventurous operatic exhumations of the past few years.

A general feature of 1978 was a resurgence of performances of LA FAVORITA. Once indeed a favourite throughout the world but for so many years fallen on hard times. Now receiving a surprising number of revivals it returned to the repertoire as enterprising mezzos began to look around for roles that would endorse their right to a place at the top of the cast list; sadly however it was almost invariably sung in the Italian translation, a distortion of the original - however effective and however much the text had been sanctioned by the maestro himself.

New York M 21 2 1978	LA FAVORITA with Shirley Verrett, Luciano Pavarotti, Sherrill Milnes, Bonaldo Giaiotti

This trans-atlantic production proved to be the first intimation of a new commercial recording which would project the opera to a wider audience than ever its success in the nineteenth century had done; a Decca recording of LA FAVORITA with Fiorenza Cossotto in the title role and Luciano Pavarotti once more as her reclusive husband started a burst of real interest in a work once regarded as being nothing more than an epic of the 'breast-clutch-and-lurch variety'. It was not then surprising that scarcely a month later came a European response to the New York initiative:

Nice 14 4 1978	LA FAVORITA with Viorica Cortez, Umberto Grilli, Vincente Sardinero. Cond. Almeida.

a sound and enjoyable presentation.

March 1978 produced two revivals of considerable rarity.

Paris TA 13 3 1978	Cantata TERESA E GIANFALDONI with Joyce Castle, Bruce Brewer

Donizetti's cantatas are perhaps the most neglected area of his repertoire and this lyrical work, dating from early in his career, may well be in the van of many such

unconventional recitals. In London one week later was a second rarity:

London BBC March 1978 — Scena IL CANTO D'UGOLINO with Ian Caddy and Jenifer Partridge

Donizetti's dramatic pièce d'occasion to a text by Dante, a work anathematised by Rossini who then proceeded to write very much the same sort of thing himself. It proved to be a virtuoso drawing-room piece of historic power, a chamber opera perhaps of diminutive length 'per voce e pianoforte' and covering a herculean range of emotional and vocal moods.

This tour-de-force was echoed in a recording issued the same month by CIME of Italy. A grateful sequence of cantilena and covering just as many moods as 'Ugolino', sung by Renato Bruson the most remarkable Donizettian baritone of his day. The recital included extracts from CATERINA CORNARO, GEMMA DI VERGY, ROBERTO DEVEREUX and MARINO FALIERO. Many of the items were selected for Mr Bruson by the Donizetti Society.

Playing a very considerable part in the Donizetti Revival, enterprising music publishers began to reprint vocal scores of unobtainable opera in 1978, following in the wake of the Donizetti Society itself. Most notable amongst these has been Edizione OTOS of Firenze who have not only produced scholarly editions of works long out of print like DON SEBASTIANO and IL FURIOSO ALL'ISOLA DI SAN DOMINGO but added the even more remarkable feat of printing the first complete editions of scores such as I PAZZI PER PROGETTO and IL GIOVEDI GRASSO - often enough in connection with the summer revivals at the Barga Festival whose delightful Teatro dei Differenti has been the site of so much adventurous opera. This is a link in the Donizetti revival which will be strengthened in future years; the Barga Festival is to revive OLIVO E PASQUALE in 1980.

May 1978 saw the second production of the year of ANNA BOLENA in a most romantic performance at Switzerland, a country with a full complement of Donizettian scholars.

Lausanne 29 5 1978 — ANNA BOLENA with Emma Renzi, Bianca Maria Casoni, Edith Gruber, Rockwell Blake. Cond. Quadri.

This was succeeded by a staging of the Bergamasc maestro's initial French grand-opéra

Venice LF 13 6 1978 — LES MARTYRS with Leyla Gencer, Renato Bruson, Ottavio Garaventa. Cond. Gelmetti

Italy is certainly more accustomed to hearing POLIUTO - in one of its many versions - than in this expanded version made for a prestigious production in the French capital. At Venice it too achieved a prestigious production and had the special benefit of an authoritative performance by Leyla Gencer, one of the most distinguished interpreters of forgotten works, together with Bruson in one of his most rewarding roles.

Abbey Opera in London presented in July 1978 a concert performance of LUCREZIA BORGIA. This was held in the somewhat bizarre London church - now a concert hall - once known as 'Queen Anne's footstool' because of its curious baroque outline. St John's, Smith Square was the scene of a well sung LUCREZIA which had the notable addition of an aria-to begin the second act-composed by Donizetti for Mario in Paris.

London SS 2 7 1978 — LUCREZIA BORGIA with Helen Lawrence, Graham Clark, William Elvin, Angela Hickey. Cond. Shelley.

At this particular time Donizettians were delighted by the large number of revivals that were being proposed on the international scene. If all, or even a portion had reached the stage there would have been a diluvio universale of new music. This last indeed had been put forward for production at Venice (which has certainly a large amount of the required ingredient) but has not yet reached the stage anywhere. A FRANCESCA DI FOIX was proposed for revival in Holland, and may yet take place but no precise date has yet been promised. SANCIA DI CASTIGLIA was mooted for Naples; the rather more accessible opera semiseria TORQUATO TASSO was being

proposed for Genoa and it seems will be played there in the not too distant future. Rather further away L'AJO NELL'IMBARAZZO was scheduled to be performed in Buenos Aires, a city which - in the last century - was an exceptional bastion of Italian opera.

In the event it was London again that made the next move. This was a recital of Chamber Music most of which has since been recorded on the first disc issued by the Donizetti Society, DONIZETTI DA CAMERA. Much of the pleasing music played on this occasion had been composed at the start of Donizetti's career and the recital included wind sonatas, a piano trio, a string quartet and some vocal items.

London PR 22 8 1978 — DONIZETTI DA CAMERA with the Redbridge Young Musicians

Although there is much more of it than popular programmes suggest, Donizetti's Chamber Music is only slowly entering the repertoire - some of the two-movement sonatas and isolated String Quartets are now beginning to be heard if still rather infrequently. It seems probable that much of this music will have an airing in the next few years.

Later in the same month there was a well received LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR at the Théâtre de la Monnaie at Brussels, a resplendent opera for this sumptuous opera house of the Belgian capital. The youthful cast was well chosen for the searingly passionate score.

Brussels LM — LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR with Pizzo, Leo Nucci, Bortoli. Cond. Morelli.

The autumn of 1978 evinced an opera that in many ways can be considered the most remarkable 'revival' of the period, for it was no revival at all, it was a first performance:

Belfast 9 11 1978 — GABRIELLA DI VERGY with La Verne Williams, Maurice Arthur, Christian du Plessis, Roderick Earle. Cond. Francis

The opera, unperformed it was thought, in that Donizetti's 1826 essay had only received a posthumous staging in an edition compromised by music from other scores, had been

left to moulder on the library shelves. A manuscript copy however, lying in the Sterling Library of London University was examined by a group of knowledgeable scholars, identified as a revision by the maestro himself of his 1826 original and brought to performance at Belfast. A Donizetti prima in our own day no less. The musical version by Opera Rara had its critics but the performance revealed a fascinating work, something of a patchwork in that it re-echoed phrases from a whole decade; flashing reminiscences of IL CASTELLO DI KENILWORTH, mixed with those of LUCIA, PIA, and of PARISINA, but the thematic entity was persuasive and theatrically effective. The score of this second version had, no doubt, been hurried together and never tried out on the stage - a reminder from a past so difficult to grasp, of the day to day problems of bringing an opera forward. A blueprint then, without all the shadings and inflections that only the maestro could have qualified in a production of his own. The music was not without qualities, it had several lyrical numbers, an excitable love duet suddenly transformed into an angry trio, and although a compendium of past scores Gabriella's violent cabaletta in Act I - with its terminal whiplash flick of fioritura - presages the many similar cabalette Verdi was to write in the next ten years. All honour to the redoubtable Patric Schmid and Don White for presenting this rarity. Later this year it would be given an impressive recording by Opera Rara (with Milla Andrew as the heroine), a second album in their projected series of operas by Donizetti.

It is appropriate that after this exceptional event the next work to be revived should once more reveal the superlative talents of Montserrat Caballé, almost anything else would have been anti climactic. The great soprano sang in two presentations of the work which has become a legend.

Nice 1 12 1978 — MARIA STUARDA with Montserrat Caballé, Bianca Berini, Serra, Gimenez

Barcelona L 28 12 1978 — MARIA STUARDA with Montserrat Caballé, Berini, Serra, Gimenez. cond. Gatto.

The opera was given two remarkably different interpretations. Not as a result of the differing musical resources of the two theatres but because Caballé - like all the great singers of the period when the opera was written - varied her response to the words and the music according to the logic of the performance itself. Thus investing each phrase with a colouring valid for that evening only, as was envisaged by the composer.

The new year brought a routine staging of DON PASQUALE at London's Covent Garden

London CG 12 1 1979 — DON PASQUALE with Evans, Cotrubas, Summers, S Burrows. cond. Chailly

succeeded shortly after by an intense production of ANNA BOLENA at Rouen with Francoise Garner in the title role and making an effective foil to the Amelia d'Egmont she had sung at Ghent in their first staging of IL DUCA D'ALBA in Belgium two years before.

Rouen Th Arts 21 1 1979 — ANNA BOLENA with Francoise Garner, D Petkov, C Anghelakova, G Carturan, A Bevacqua. cond. Ethuin.

The following month brought its logical sequel, LUCREZIA BORGIA - the next great tragic anti-heroine in the Donizetti canon.

Florence 13 2 1979 — LUCREZIA BORGIA with Katia Ricciarelli, Alfredo Kraus, Elena Zilio

Katia Ricciarelli splendidly cast, the opera was conducted by Gabriele Ferro, who with Riccardo Chailly are the two jeunes premiers in this repertoire.

Barcelona revived in its turn LA FAVORITA, thus proving itself once more in the van of such revivals.

Barcelona 20 2 1979 — LA FAVORITA with Bruna Baglione, Umberto Grilli, Antonio Salvadori, G Gusmeroli. cond. Rivoli.

March 1979 cast Katia Ricciarelli once again, making her second excursion into Donizetti major roles with the

second production of ANNA BOLENA this year.

Bologna — ANNA BOLENA with Katia Ricciarelli, Umberto Grilli, Elena Zilio

each of these major roles showing the brilliant talent of this young soprano. Lucerne, often the site of interesting productions, turned to that international success:

Lucerne 14 3 1979 — MARIA STUARDA with Horiana Branisteanu, Silvia Corbacho, Franco Bonanome

and Ghent - to the most established of his opere buffe:

Ghent 25 3 1979 — DON PASQUALE with William Elvin, Eric Garrett

This early part of 1979 saw the publication of a really unexpected item. This was "Dom Sebastien, roi de Portugal" a novel by Rene Swennen, a sensitively conceived romance more faithful to the events that led up to the Paris production of Donizetti's grand-opéra than many of the histories have ever done. The last and declining days of the maestro are depicted with a poignancy and an accuracy that demonstrated much more than a straightforward sympathy with the artist, something much nearer to an empathic commentary on his approach to composition.

The summer of 1979 with its rash of festivals produced three English events, an ANNA BOLENA in an English translation (as ANNE BOLEYN of course) in South London, and in July an equally modest IL CAMPANELLO at Blackheath. Such brave excursions by ardent bands of amateurs stiffened by students are the backbone of any revival however much the vocal demands exceed the vocal resources offered by the casts. The third event however was of a very different calibre. The Buxton Festival was restarted in its peaches-and-cream Frank Matcham opera house, long abandoned to the cinema. This superbly redecorated setting was used to stage a LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR for once finding herself in the right sort of wild surroundings - as the Derbyshire Peak District would have made the real Lucy Ashton feel perfectly at home. The prima offered royalty, fireworks

and a full civic welcome to Donizetti's tragic opera, but in the event the promised prima donna had influenza the day before the curtain was due to rise so that a mini-drama of a different kind emerged when a replacement was flown in at the last moment.

Buxton LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR with Deborah Cook,
30 7 1979 Fausto Tenzi, Kari Nurmela

At the first performance there were necessarily some cuts but on later evenings a complete account of the standard edition of Donizetti's music was given, including the "Wolf's Crag" scene and the Raimondo/Lucia duet which Miss Cook learned in a few hours and sang very affectingly.

1979 saw no less than three stagings of IL FURIOSO ALL' ISOLA DI SAN DOMINGO the first two of which were presented in the United States. A performance in English at New York in February - and a summer revival in Italian at Washington. These continued the excellent series of erudite productions we have come to expect from the high standard of musicology in that country.

New York IL FURIOSO with Pam Myers, Stephen Dickson,
22 2 1979 Richard Barrett, Donnie Albert

Washington IL FURIOSO with Marianne Christos, Charles
7 8 1979 Long, Rockwell Black, James Tyeska

London, at the end of the year also revived IL FURIOSO in a performance by Pro Opera with the joint collaboration of the Donizetti Society. It was mounted, appropriately enough in view of the tempestuous events on that island, in aid of the British Committee for Hurricane Relief for the Dominican Republic. The musical edition - as was the Washington performance above - was that of Vito Frazzi prepared for the OTOS edition of the score and it included the full final scena for Eleonora.

London QEH IL FURIOSO with Lois McDonall, Terence Sharp,
25 11 1979 Eduardo Velazco, Frank Olegario. cond. Head.

This year brought an exceptional range of recordings. A most welcome first commercial recording of the MISSA DA REQUIEM written in memory of Bellini in the sad weeks

after his death in 1835, a recording by CIME with Luciano Pavarotti, Renato Bruson, Viorica Cortez and Paolo Washington. Donizetti's Chamber works for once had something like a representative covering; there was an impressive disc of his Complete music for piano - four hands, revived, edited and played by Pietro Spada with his pupil Giorgio Cozzolino and published by Italian RCA. This was supplemented by the record published by the Donizetti Society of part of the selection of Chamber pieces played in its earlier concert Donizetti da Camera and including a variety of the two-movement sonatas which have such instant appeal. The operatic offerings were divided between the most familiar and the most unfamiliar; a LUCREZIA BORGIA with Joan Sutherland, Marilyn Horne, Giacomo Aragall, Ingvar Wixell published by Decca, and from Opera Rara (fully living up to its title - no one is likely to forget its Donizettian series) NE M'OUBLIEZ PAS with Margreta Elkins, Alexander Oliver and Christian du Plessis - an account of all the extant fragments of this unfinished worklying in manuscript in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

The rest of this two-year period under review continued with a very wide range of music. Bergamo staged a LE CONVENIENZE ED INCONVENIENZE TEATRALE in October; Paris a LA FILLE DU REGIMENT (in a grotesque production) also in October; Toronto ended the year happily with an ELISIR D'AMORE. To complement these were two outstanding events both concerned with the scholarly aspects of the Revival. In September to commemorate the millennium of the City of Brussels there was a spectacular staging at the Théâtre de la Monnaie of IL DUCA D'ALBA, dazzling in the meticulously painted sets originally made for the 1882 production - its première in the edition prepared by Matteo Salvi.

Brussels LM IL DUCA D'ALBA with Marina Krilovici,
28 9 1979 Silvano Carroli, Ottavio Garaventa
Cond. de Fabbritiis

The production sought to emulate the melodramatic gestures of the time of its first appearance on the stage and this beautiful and convincing performance finally made clear the place of the work beside the other operas of his maturity. Apart from a concert performance of LA FAVORITE, in Brussels too, later in the same year -

for once sung to its French libretto - there was one more striking rediscovery to end the year.

In November Raymond Meylan, the distinguished Swiss flautist and musicologist conducted at Liestal the first performance of his "Grand Symphony", identified and disintered from Donizetti's writings when he was in Paris to compose IL DUCA D'ALBA. This work which relates to the final String Quartet (1836) and which makes the essential bridge between this last of his Chamber works and its partial reappearance in the Overture to LINDA DI CHAMOUNIX, is an example of the kind of creative reconstruction that enlarges our experience beyond any of the hopes we had the right to expect at the beginning of the Donizetti Revival.

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Abbreviations

L	Liceo, Barcelona
SC	San Carlo, Napoli
CG	Covent Garden, London
QEH	Queen Elisabeth Hall, London
M	Metropolitan, New York
TA	Théâtre de l'Athenée, Paris
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
LF	La Fenice, Venezia
SS	St John's, Smith Square, London
PR	Purcell Room, London
LM	Théâtre de la Monnaie, Brussels
C	Comunale, Firenze

