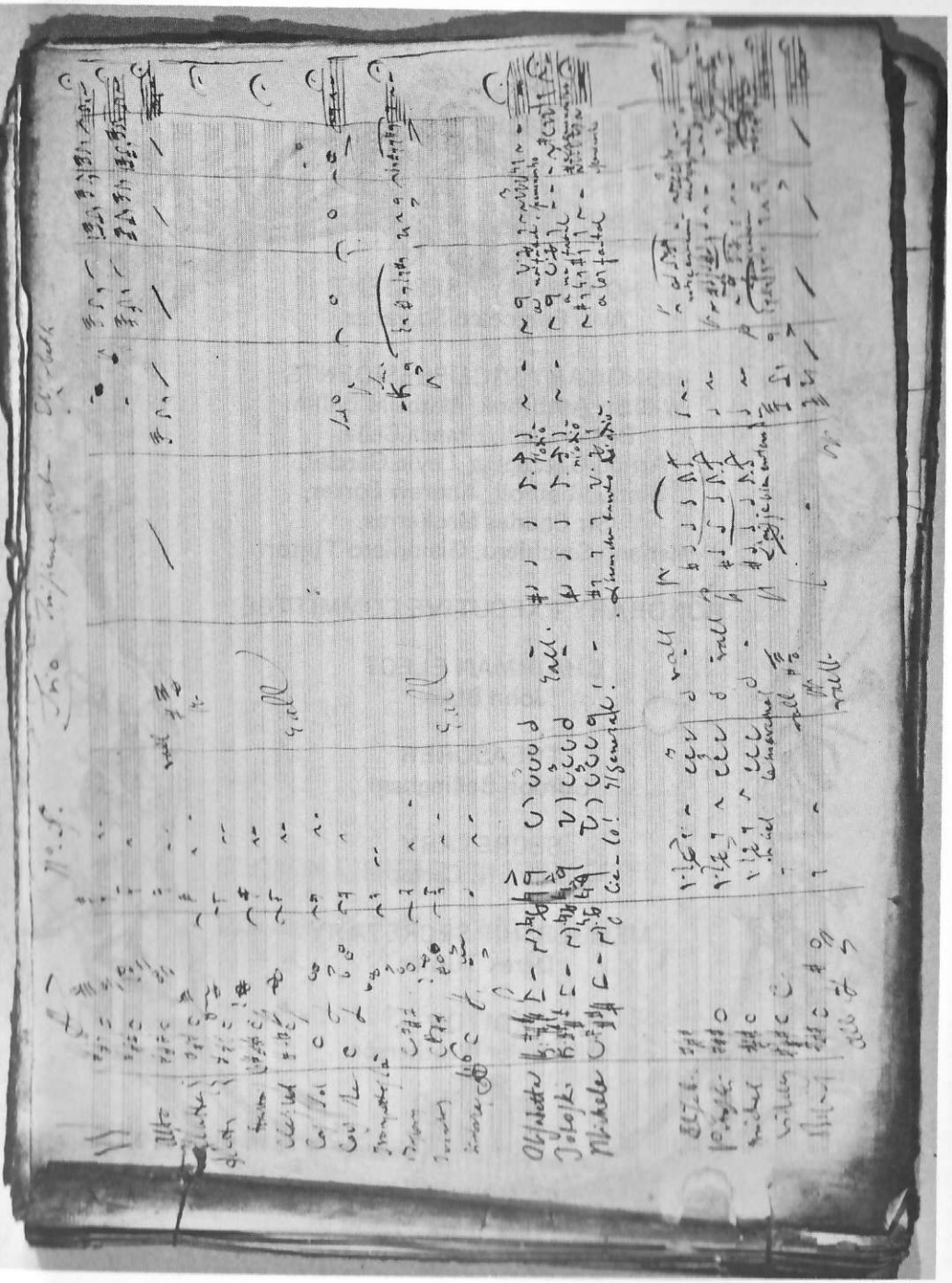


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Opposite: A page from Donizetti's re-discovered Élisabeth/Elisabetta.
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EDITORIAL

OUTSTANDING MUSIC

1980-1984

The re-emergence of Gaetano Donizetti - if marginally less distinctly of late due to financial restraint - continues apace, and throughout the world: the impoverishment of the repertoire of the great opera houses, a depressing feature of this current decade, having done little or nothing to inhibit the tempo of a rediscovery that depends - not on these arbiters of middlebrow music-making - but on the address of scholars, the flair of musical directors, the curiosity of singers, and on the sheer recklessness of small companies who lack neither the courage nor the integrity to look upon opera as a living art. Of the works that were written between ANNA BOLENA and LES MARTYRS, few gaps now remain. These last four years have seen the re-appearance of FAUSTA, LA ROMANZIERA, and FRANCESCA DI FOIX, thus making the non-appearance so far of such operas as L'ASSEDIO DI CALAIS and GIANNI DI PARIGI the more puzzling and the more regrettable. The first of these was something of an unknown quantity for the Bergamasc maestro, it was an opera that lay outside the tradition within which his operatic instincts had been formed, for the first time he had glimpsed a theatrical horizon beyond his native shores and with this score he took a cautious step towards it. Those operas that made him a truly international figure began with L'ASSEDIO DI CALAIS: it was the opening of the siege of Paris where he was concerned.

Thus invoking GIANNI DI PARIGI, intended for performance at the Théâtre-Italien. It comes in a category hard to define, few of Donizetti's comedies were ever out-and-out romps, usually a squeezed out tear (a far from 'furtiva lagrima') managed to intrude one way or another. This meant problems, and not only for the composer. Even as early as 1831 audiences went to the opera house either to laugh or to cry - romantic posturing made laughter a tempting proposition on stages adorned by portly tenors dressed-up as brigands, exiles, aesthetes, gypsies, lovelorn pirates and the like - once you began to question the gravity of the plight of 'La straniera' or 'Il corsaro' for instance you were lost and the 'melodramma tragico' was all too likely to end in guffaws, hilarity, and whistling. Donizetti, however, was one of the last composers able to tread this tightrope with impunity, his IL FURIOSO and TORQUATO TASSO were - paradoxically - the last gasp of the French tradition of the 'comédie-larmoyante'

so that GIANNI DI PARIGI (though indeed an "opera comica") too was a tribute to France and too showed the way the wind was shortly to blow.

There remains one other important score from this period, SANCIA DI CASTIGLIA. This opera - a primadonna opera 'par excellence' - a year or two ago announced for revival at the San Carlo of Naples (where it originated) seems more likely to make its major reappearance in London once the requisite powerful forces have been rallied. Both music and plot are innovatory, the donna's 'coup-de-théâtre' which brings down the curtain was one of the most effective ever (would that some of Covent Garden's heroines could follow her example).

Of the operas before ANNA BOLENA there are riches galore, among them many serious and half-serious scores urgently await examination. This long list includes LA ZINGARA, the opera which proclaimed the emergence in 1822 of a major talent in the musically resistant capital of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies; it includes the extraordinary IL DILUVIO UNIVERSALE, once programmed for revival at the magnificent La Fenice of Venice but which seems to have dried up unaccountably; it also includes IMELDA DE'LAMBERTAZZI - but here there is good news. Switzerland, with its distinguished caucus of 'studiosi' seems certain to host this revival in the very near future. IMELDA is a superb score even if it is an opera mildly compromised by a plot which resembles Romeo and Juliet without the punch; this work will be a revelation. In this group of lacunae there is the hilarious LA REGINA DI GOLCONDA, offering an optimum role for those of the legion of hungry mezzos looking for star billing, it is a switch-back score, colourful and cynically frivolous - so much so that it stands neatly astride two traditions. Of the remainder, there are other neglected 'opere serie' soon to be considered, a convoluted ELVIDA (which needs a Caballé in her prime), and IL PARIA, despairing, outré, and vehement all at the same time - it may well prove to be one of those revivals that undermines the too-glib statements which even now circulate amongst savants (some of whom should know better): IL PARIA is a donizettian score (like L'ESULE DI ROMA), and neither rossinian nor bellinian in anything more than the conventions common to all three.

Of his latest and greatest years only one fully completed score remains to be explored.* This is ADELIA, that wallflower of an opera with a plot which began in 1817 with the ADELE DI LUSIGNANO of Carafa/Romani, continued with LA FIGLIA DELL'ARCIERE of Coccia/Andreotti in 1834, and then, refurbished by Girolamo Maria Marini, became a vehicle for Donizetti in 1841. It was scarcely a success even with Strepponi in the title role, but now who can say? With MARIA STUARDA, MARIA DE RUDENZ, CATERINA CORNARO and PIA and other similar 'failures' ringing in our ears, who can predict what kind of effect she would have? ADELIA's music is engaging and unwearied.

But Donizetti was not just a composer for the stage. These last four years have seen the tip of the iceberg of his submerged repertoire of church music, up to now noted and dismissed in the

same breath by those same authorities who once dismissed his operas. The musty shelves of cathedral archives, the vast libraries of neglected music, carefully preserved but almost innocent of the hands of musicologists, bear witness to the immensely prolific ecclesiastical riches of the Ottocento - to our good fortune awaiting performance (much of it awaiting a first hearing). Not just Donizetti and Bellini, but their companion sufferers on the operatic round in that gruelling century wrote reams of church music, some of it as juvenilia; some of it as a necessary corollary to theatrical fame and extruded impatiently between contracts for this or that opera house; some of it in retirement when the shackles of impresarios had been thankfully relinquished. In this way there are unsuspected treasures of music awaiting 'discovery' - oratorios, masses, votive offerings of various kinds, memorial music for friends and enemies, splendid choral compositions, music often thrilling, often disconcertingly secular (to puritan ears), music seldom sterile or untouched by enlightenment. There are oratorios by Mercadante, Pacini and Raimondi, masses and motets by Coccia (he spent the last thirty years of his life devoted to church music), moving scores by - for example - those masters of comedy elsewhere, Luigi and Federico Ricci. Bellini's church music has at least had something of an airing; Donizetti's Requiem Mass in his honour has at last reached beyond a 'specialist' public and taken its place beside Rossini's Stabat Mater and Verdi's tremendous offering. But so much remains. The prejudices which have condemned this (unheard of course) music to a doctrinaire lumber-room have preserved almost a whole tradition for us, intact, unspoiled by the kind of 'arranging' that has mutilated Pergolesi in the past and that even now afflicts some of the church music of Mozart's day. In due course much of this music will be listened to with that kind of studied rapture that now applies only to the aesthetically respectable Baroque (on 'original instruments' of course). It will perhaps be our privilege to hear it in its original freshness.

As usual the record companies are in advance of current taste, and here the international nature of the revival is clear enough. Recent years have seen the recording of Donizetti's "Messa di Gloria" (SCHWANN AMS 3520) (Germany); his "Miserere" of 1820 (HUNGAROTON SLPX 12147) (Hungary); his "Miserere" (revised) of 1842 (VOCE 15) (United States); the "Requiem for Bellini" (DECCA SDD 566) (Britain) and (CIME 25101) (Italy); and a brand-new recording from Bergamo includes a delightful "Qui tollis" and "Salve Regina" (plus two short works by Mayr) (SIPARIO CS25). Certainly the very tip of the iceberg but no less a portent for all that.

As for Donizetti's Chamber Music, this has its own forms of dismissal. These range from polite hyperbole: 'salon music'; 'early experimentation'; to faint praise: 'lively'; 'fluent'; 'operatic' (!) The nineteen string quartets being almost never heard anywhere, the songs only touching the hem of the Wigmore Hall on occasions when one's hair is to be let down. Happily, once more, recordings come to our aid - not too ungenerously either in recent years. 1979 saw a disc of "concertini" -

including examples for flute, for oboe, for oboe d'amore, for clarinet, and the Double Concerto in D minor for violin and 'cello (some of these more than dubiously enhanced by orchestration but, tant pis, a brave gesture) (SCHWANN VMS 2082); then there has been an admirable series of discs - 3 volumes of "Inediti per pianoforte", sinfonie, valzer, variazioni, etc. (RCA RL31577/9), and a box-set of all the music for "pianoforte a quattro mani" - the whole edited and mostly played by the scholarly Pietro Spada (RCA RL31441/3) (Italy); there too has been a first volume (Quartets I to VI) of a projected complete recording of the string quartets played by the Quartetto Amati (DISCHI RICORDI ARCL 327002) (Italy); Heinz Holliger, a distinguished virtuoso, has been a noted advocate of oboe works by Donizetti, Haydn, and Rossini (PHONO 9500564) (Netherlands); while on that same Bergamo recording mentioned above there is a welcome performance of his "Canto XXXIII della divina Commedia" for bass and piano, as well as a "sinfonia in sol minore", two items both of which may be considered special kinds of musical pioneering. The New Zealand Opera Society has produced an excellent disc of rarely performed arie.

During these last four years the music of Donizetti's minor contemporaries has had scarcely any kind of airing at all - neither on disc nor anywhere else. This is where financial restraint hits hardest. Giovanni Pacini has made a modest showing; of his ninety operas there has been a SAFFO in concert in New York, and, rather more appropriately, another SAFFO in his native town of Catania where it was noticed (at last) that this composer has a musical identity of his own. A garish but musically delectable staging of Pacini's MARIA, REGINA D'INGHILTERRA at the Camden Festival in London in the spring of 1983 under the aegis of the formidable Opera Rara was a revelation for many of those who were able to listen freely (and people came from all over the world to do so). In this context Opera Rara's projected recording of "One hundred years of Italian Opera" is the only hope for a balanced survey of Donizetti's day. One volume (three records) has been issued to cover the decade 1800-1810 (OPERA RARA ORH101) (Britain); a single disc of Mayr is shortly to follow; the decades 1810-1820, 1820-1830, and 1830-1840 should change the conception of the 'primo Ottocento' for every listener - especially if the high standard of performance already established (and the high standard of documentation by Jeremy Commons) is maintained. From time to time the Ricci brothers get an occasional performance of one or another of their comic operas (usually confined to CRISPINO E LA COMARE, but PIEDIGROTTA is promised again), Mercadante has a fervently loyal Altamura to support him; Guiseppe Persiani actually managed a revival of his INES DE CASTRO in the theatre named after him at Recanati on 28th June 1980. But these are drops in an ocean (I do not pretent to have listed all the drops).

Writing about music has done distinctly better than listening to music. The years 1980-1984 have seen an extensive documentation of Donizetti and his works. Pride of place must go to William Ashbrook whose "Donizetti and his Operas" (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1982) is sure to remain the standard textbook

for the foreseeable future. This is not just an updating of his earlier volume (1965) but a new study, written with a scrupulousness and an attention to detail that is breathtaking. The biography manages the miracle of appearing fresh and sharp profiled, each opera is given the weight that the author considers it deserves (but here, inevitably, there might be some carping). The sage commentary, the exhaustive notes, the selected but cogent musical analyses come as near to saying the last word on Donizetti as anybody ever will I suspect. From Switzerland comes Robert Steiner-Isenmann's "Gaetano Donizetti - Sein Leben und seine Opern"(Hallwag Verlag, Bern und Stuttgart 1982). This is a well-organised German language study in depth of the composer and all his works (not just the operas) written authoritatively but with tact and discretion enough to give confidence to the reader who has only just begun to listen to this music. A book not only compiled with a passionate concern for the period, with a real care for music and texts, but with an affectionate ear for the nuance of his composing which makes the book both truthful and sympathetic. From the maestro's hometown of Bergamo there are two optimum offerings. The first of these is "Gaetano Donizetti: Vita e Opere di un Musicista Romantico" by the doyen of his day Guglielmo Barblan, and completed after his death by his student Bruno Zanolini (Societa di Assicurazioni Liguria, Bergamo 1983). A magnificently produced publication with the reflections of a lifetime on the composer and his place in Italian music. Donizetti's music seen from the inside, from within his tradition, completed loyally and meticulously by Zanolini; the whole undertaking - for the outsider 'donizettiani'- so valuable and so revelatory. The second Bergamasc offering being the long awaited "Atti del 1° Convegno Internazionale di Studi Donizettiani" (Azienda Autonoma di Turismo, Bergamo 1983), two volumes of the papers delivered at that important 1975 Congress when Bergamo assembled the largest collection of authorities ever to speak on his work. Superbly printed and proofed, a goldmine of facts and figures, judgements and postulations, papers which have retained their relevance and originality despite the pace of the Donizetti Renaissance in the succeeding eight years.

Brand new is a "Gaetano Donizetti" (Nuove Edizioni, Milano 1983) (Several authors. 'Direttore della ricerca': Giampiero Tintori). This is a glossy-covered aptly conceived and well documented volume of learned essays, presenting the life and times of the maestro as from under a freshly polished lens. Much of the writing is distinguished, many of the facts are new. Quite the largest portion of the book being given over to Luigi Inzaghi's "Catalogo Generale delle Opere", a bibliographical tour-de-force detailing the distribution of the printed music and manuscripts of the composer - comprehensive for Italy, with a token coverage for elsewhere. This will be a major document for all researchers, Maestro Inzaghi's ability to encompass only a modicum of scholarly hiccups - the admiration of everyone in such a hugely daunting undertaking.

Lastly, and far from least, (but coming modestly at the end in view of the familiarity of its sponsors) John Black's "Donizetti's

Operas in Naples 1822-1848" (The Donizetti Society, London 1982). A slim volume containing those kinds of facts and figures which are the foundation of all further study, correcting misdating, correcting misconceptions within the superficially innocent-looking statistics provided. This, we believe, to be the kind of publication which will find a place on the desk of every scholar, the result of the unique capacity of one such to verify the well-nigh unverifiable.

1983 saw some signal donizettian gatherings, notably at Stony Brook (United States) on April 22nd - 23rd, when a performance of MARIA PADILLA was preceded by papers from William Ashbrook, Roger Parker, David Lawton and Gabriela Roepke (two of which are printed in this Journal) on the literary, historical, and romantic environment of the times which saw its birth; also by a concert of Chamber Music and songs and attended by an enthusiastic audience. The autumn saw Bergamo 'en fête' with a mini-convegno of considerable musicological import (September 28th - 29th), with distinguished contributions from rossinian and verdian specialists as well as from a handful of well-known donizettiani - happy to meet colleagues in a site of such fascination; also to hear a revival of ANNA BOLENA in the Teatro Donizetti (as well as a recital of songs including "Nuits d'Été à Pausilippe" in the evocative Teatro Rubini).

1984 has operas to look forward to: L'AJO NELL'IMBARAZZO at the Teatro Regio, Turin (with the astonishing Luciana Serra - who must be one of the few Maries in LA FILLE DU RÉGIMENT to strike up her own tattoo); LUCREZIA BORGIA at Bologna; MARIA DE RUDENZ at Rotterdam; DOM SÉBASTIEN (in French) under the baton of Eve Queler at New York. Even IL DILUVIO UNIVERSALE has been mentioned for performance by the enterprising RAI. Then 1985 offers LES MARTYRS in the grandeur of the Paris Opéra which gave it birth (not of course in the same building, that Opéra was pulled down in 1873), and indeed SANCIA DI CASTIGLIA and IMELDA DE'LAMBERTAZZI and others.

As for the Donizetti Society, projects and achievements are in balance. Sunday 15th March 1981 saw a good revival of Bellini's BIANCA E FERNANDO in the version of its 'genovese rifacimento' of 1828. This concert proposed an excellent new prima donna in Sandra Hahn, and gasped at the exceptional singing of Bruce Brewer whose 'quite unequalled and unflagging stylistic and technical richesse' - to quote The Times, sprinkled with top D's and F's, gave up a 'glimpse of the operatic ambience of a time in which Bellini could write "...opera, through singing, must make one weep, shudder, die"' (!) This enterprise, though laudable, was later overshadowed by a revival of its contemporary, L'ESULE DI ROMA, on Sunday 18th July 1982. The score was assembled by the Society from innumerable sources (involving one of those interminable worldwide searches that Opera Rara know so well in pursuit of the music of the tenor's Dungeon Scene: having finally alighted on which of the handful or so versions to perform, there then remained the problem of rooting-out the unknown possessor of its full score; maybe Maestro Inzaghi's listing will be able to help with this sort of thing in future) but based

mainly on a manuscript in the proud possession of the Royal College of Music in London. The performance material and vocal score were prepared by the New Zealand conductor Graeme Young, the vocal score being subsequently published by the Society. In this Bruce Brewer was joined by his American compatriot John-Paul Bogart, the central trio of this opera's casting being completed by Katia Ricciarelli whose singing - solos, duets, and whose interpretation in the famous trio-finale - was a revelation. Although dividing her time memorably with Covent Garden, her performance, 'per la causa', brought a work - simply a name from the history books - into the twentieth century with such an èclat that it will never return to the shadows from which it was wrested so valiantly.

In this context, I end with a tribute to the prime donne around whose impeturbable achievements so much Italian opera has been conceived. In the four years from 1980 to 1984, two such stand out - Raina Kabaivanska (Fausta) and Katia Ricciarelli (Argelia), artists whose irresistably affecting singing has brought two of Gaetano Donizetti's long dead heroines to life in front of a generation of adherents, enthralled by those skills, those emotions, those intuitions that the Ottocento is able to offer the Novecento.

Alexander Weatherson

* The recent discovery of the autograph of his ÉLISABETH/ELISABETTA in the cellars of Covent Garden Opera House adds one more opera to this list. This will be explored with great joy.