Donizetti and his contemporaries in Naples 1822 - 1848
A study in relative popularity

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In the absence of published comprehensive *cronache* for the opera-houses of Naples at the time of the development of the Italian romantic opera - which can be dated, more or less, as 1820-1845 -it is difficult to assess how popular the various composers were, or how their fortunes ebbed and flowed. To fill this gap, I have assembled a chronology of performances for the years 1822-1848 which I have already drawn upon for a detailed, statistical study of the performances of Donizetti's operas. (1)

I have used the same unpublished records for the present study. They can be briefly summarized as follows:- over this period of 27 years, the performances at the 5 or 6 theatres giving opera were obtained from the daily announcement in the *Giornale del Regno delle due Sicilie*, but until 1832 and from 1839 on, this information was given only for the 5 or so days a week on which it was published. Between 1832 and 1839, the announcements in the *Giornale* also carried retrospective details of performances on days on which no issue had been published. Therefore the early and late years of the period had to be augmented by reference to other sources: for the early years, the manuscript records of performances kept in the Superintendency of Theatres and Spectacles, and still available for inspection in the *Archivio di Stato*, Naples. (2) For the years after 1839, from the *Programma Giornaliera*. (3) By combining these various sources it was possible to draw up a complete record of performances. One or two possible sources of error in using these records are discussed in the Donizetti publication, but do not affect the validity of the survey now presented.

There were 5 theatres regularly used for opera in Naples at this time. Details of these can be found in the Donizetti study, or in my study of the librettist Salvadore Cammarano. (4) In brief, there were two Royal Theatres, the S. Carlo (the same theatre that exists today) and the smaller Fondo, rarely both giving opera on the same night but with a common management and roster of performers. Next in importance came the Nuovo, the principal home of the Neapolitan dialect opera. It can be seen as a half-way house between the Royal Theatres and the small houses, the Fenice and the Partenope, with everchanging managements and policies, and with periods of works in the vernacular tradition alternating with shorter periods when their

repertoires aped those of the Royal Theatres. For this study it is convenient to group the Nuovo with the smaller houses in view of the strength of the dialect tradition there.

One problem always arising in studies of the Neapolitan opera is the prevalence of "partial" performances, that is single acts - or two acts of a 3-act opera - either with other single acts or to "pad-out" an evening when the other opera or ballet was considered to be too short. These incomplete performances cannot be overlooked in a statistical study.

For the present purposes, I decided to follow the fortunes of 8 composers through the years 1822-1848. Some of these selected themselves - Donizetti, Rossini, Bellini, Mercadante and Pacini. For comparison, three composers have been included who worked primarily in the vernacular tradition: Raimondi, Luigi Ricci, Vincenzo Fioravanti.

The following table gives the total number of performances for each of the 8 composers over the 27 years covered:-

Composer	Number of performances		Number of Operas
	Complete	Incomplete	
Donizetti	2686	574	51
Rossini	1878	265	25
Bellini	1122	206	8
Fioravanti	1057	85	24
Raimondi	838	47	31
Ricci	705	63	15
Mercadante	665	145	24
Pacini	650	101	27

It is at first surprising that the lesser-known composers Fioravanti and Raimondi lead by such a comfortable margin over Ricci, Mercadante and Pacini.Equally that the operas of Donizetti should receive more than twice as many performances as those of his rival Bellini. One important conclusion from this table is that leaving out the incomplete performances makes no significant difference to the ordering of the composers involved, and the rest of the analysis presented in this study will be based only on complete performances.

In order to demonstrate changes in popularity over the 27 years of the study,the number of performances for each composer's operas is shown in a histogram, in figures 1 - 8, for each year from 1822, on the left, to 1848 on the right. The height of the column represents the number of performances, as indicated on the upright scale on the left of the diagram. Thus a tall column indicates a large number of performances. It will be seen that most columns consist of a lower, black section, and an upper, white section. This subdivision of the total differentiates the number of performances at the Royal Theatres (in black) and those at the other, smaller theatres (in white). The two sections are additive, so that the top of the column gives the toal of all performances for the year.

Let us examine the 8 composers in turn, in alphabetical order.

Bellini He was not a prolific composer, but 8 of his 10 operas were given in Naples in these years. From 1826 to 1833 there were under 50 performances a year, but the total increased rapidly to over 200 in 1834 with the arrival of *La sonnambula*, destined to become his most popular work in Naples. After 1840, this opera declined in frequency of performance, but both *Norma* and *I puritani* remained popular as the mood of the tragic romantic opera took hold. The overall picture is of a steady fall in performances from a peak in the mid-1830's until in 1848 there were only three (of *I Capuleti*, which had retained a place in the repertoire almost continually from 1831, when it was first given in Naples, the year after the *prima* in Venice).

Bellini's operas were extremely popular in the small theatres; 60% of all performances of his operas were in them, 40% in the Royal Theatres. All 8 of his works were given in both groups; not only did *La sonnambula* keep its hold on the small theatres, but there were popular revivals of *Norma*, *I puritani* and even *Beatrice di Tenda* in them, too. In fact, the number of performances at the Royal Theatres remained small throughout, falling steadily through the 1840's. It is rather surprising that Naples' favorite son should not have been more frequently performed at the Royal Theatres, and this helps to explain Florimo's (5) incessant campaigning on behalf of his friend and his equally incessant denigration of Bellini's rivals.

Donizetti Donizetti was by far the most frequently performed composer, and most of his operas were seen on the stage during these years, 51 in all. In the earlier years it was mostly the comic operas which predominated, but as the 1830's wore on, the great tragic works ushered in by *Anna Bolena* (which was first given in Naples in 1832) gradually took over. The period reached its peak in the late 1830's with *Lucia di Lammermoor* (1835) and *Roberto Devereux* (1837), though the evergreen, light-hearted favorites, *L'ajo nell'imbarazzo*, *L'elisir d'amore* and *Il furioso* were never displaced. The popularity of his operas in the 1840's, after he had left Naples, was sustained by two highly successful works, *La figlia del reggimento* (from Paris) and *Linda di Chamounix* (from Vienna). The proportion of his performances given in the Royal Theatres, 40% or so,

was the same as for Bellini. His lighter works were particularly suited to the small theatres, and it is not surprising to find that many of his operas were given there. The evidence is that his popularity was consistent, with a strong base in each group of theatres.

If Donizetti never had occasion to complain about lack of performances of his work, he certainly complained often enough of the pirated versions current, scores orchestrated by unknown hands from vocal scores filched from other theatres, but his principal difficulty in establishing his deeply personal tragic style lay with the censors and the regime in which he had to work, and this does not show up in the statistics.

Vincenzo Fioravanti Here was a composer in an entirely different tradition, the buffa Neapolitan dialect opera. His natural home was the Teatro Nuovo, where 20 of his operas received their first performance, most of the rest appearing first at the little Fenice theatre. The most surprising feature of the histogram of his performances is that there were any performances at the Royal Theatres at all - but there were rare occasions on which the company from one of the small theatres was engaged to play there, and this would explain the 8 performances listed - one of *Amore e disinganno*, two of *I due disperati per non andare in carcere;* two of *Pulcinella e la fortuna* and three of *Il supposto sposo.* The titles of these works alone tell nearly all that needs to be known about the style of his output. By far his most popular work was *Il ritorno di Pulcinella dagli studi di Padova* and this, with *I due disperati,* ran continuously. Others of his works came and went within a few years. Most of his operas were restricted to Naples but some - particularly *Il ritorno di Pulcinella* - were popular in other cities, with the Neapolitan dialect mostly replaced.

Mercadante There were few performances of Mercadante's operas in the years before 1840, though by that time he had written 45 works, and most of the performances noted were of his "semi-seria" *Elisa e Claudio.* His "reform" period, coinciding more or less with his return to Naples in 1840 and the Directorship of the Conservatorio, brought a sudden quickening of interest in his tragic operas - *Il bravo, Gabriella di Vergy, Il giuramento* and *La vestale.* The success of his "reform" period operas was uneven - there were only two performances of *Le due illustri rivali* and 9 of the Neapolitan *Elena da Feltre* - and interest in them soon flagged. The success of *Leonora,* a Teatro Nuovo opera, in the years after 1845 produced a late peak in performances, but his work had little lasting claim on the Neapolitan audiences. His comparative lack of success comes as something of a surprise in view of the position he occupied in Naples and the high reputation which posterity has accorded him.

Pacini Of the 8 composers examined, Pacini was the least frequently performed, in part because he was less regularly given at the small theatres than were the others (only 30% of his performances took place in that group). His popularity

in the 1820's was overshadowed by Rossini, though he had a number of frequently-performed operas to his name. Gradually other composers came to the fore and his fortunes went into decline. A period of moderate success in the early 1830's, ascribable to runs of *L'ultimo giorno di Pompei, Gli arabi nelle Gallie* and *Il contestabile di Chester,* was followed by 5 years of relative silence (33 performances in all over these years, and these mostly in the smaller theatres) which he referred to himself in his Memoirs (6) as the time when a whole generation went by without his name being heard at the S. Carlo. His fortunes revived with the appearance of *Saffo* in 1840, but fell back to a low point in 1844, only picking up again with the Neapolitan production of *Bondelmonte* and a revival of *Luisetta o la cantatrice del molo* at the Nuovo, in 1846.

Raimondi Unlike the other composers, Raimondi wrote buffa works for the smaller theatres and serious ones for the Royal Theatres. The picture is one of outstanding success, three popular works and twenty or so "also-rans", but he was primarily a small theatre composer, as shown by the high proportion (80%) of his performances in them. His one famous opera, *Il ventaglio,* was given every year after its introduction in 1831 and accounted for over half his performances, being heard at one time or another in each of the theatres.His other popular works were all "small-theatre" works - *La verdummara,Il viglietto del lotto* and *La vita di un giuocatore* - which were well spaced out over the years. From time to time he wrote serious works for the Royal Theatres, but even the most popular of these, *Isabella degl'Abernanti,* only ran for 12 performances. In sum, a steady run of performances based on one outstanding work backed up by a few firm favorites.

Luigi Ricci Here we have another example of the "vernacular" composer, 90% of whose performances were at the small theatres, where he obviously had a steady and devoted following. *Aladino* played throughout the whole period, while *Il diavolo condannato nel mondo a prender moglie,* initially extremely popular after its prima in 1827, was not often played after 1839. Both were given about 140 times; so was *Chiara di Rosembergh,* the work which was to bring him European-wide success in the 1830's and 1840's. The only other opera of any statistical importance during these years in Naples was *Il nuovo Figaro.* His attractive and, one might add, cheeky Neapolitan style, to say nothing of his gift for parody, clearly kept him regularly in the public eye.

Rossini The last composer in alphabetical order was of course the first chronologically.Rossini's period as Director of Music at the Royal Theatres ended in 1822, and he moved to Paris, where he was to write his last operas. The pattern of his performances in Naples reflects this, with a solid representation in all the Theatres at the outset, then falling away almost to nothing in the Royal Theatres by 1835 while retaining a regular following at the small theatres. Most of the latter performances were of *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (which accounted for 30% of all his performances), *La cenerentola* and *La gazza ladra,*

both of which retained their popularity till about 1845. The two serious works to keep a place in the repertoire were *Otello* and *Semiramide*, both of them predominately Royal Theatre operas. The popularity of these serious operas, which were already beginning to sound old-fashioned, fell away as the new tragic style took hold of popular imagination in the mid 1830's, and those works of his which survived were those in a lighter vein. At the end of the period under review, both 1847 and 1848 went by without a single work of his being heard at the Royal Theatres, and only the indestructible *Il barbiere* elsewhere.

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Conclusion

This survey of the frequency of performances of 8 leading composers in Naples over a 21 year period produced some unexpected results, the most obvious being the domination of Donizetti. He was followed by a group of three; two of these, Rossini and Bellini, had imposing reputations and one, Vincenzo Fioravanti, though played elsewhere, was essentially a local phenomenon. The next two, Raimondi and Luigi Ricci, were again composers primarily of local significance, though Ricci has not been forgotten, as occasional performances of *Crispino e la comare* or *Piedigrotta* confirm. It was perhaps surprising that the final pair have remained much better known: both Mercadante and Pacini achieved formidable international reputations in the 19th century and have never entirely dropped out of sight. Their poor showing in this study clearly had much to do with their comparative lack of the common touch, as their work was not taken up at the small theatres to the same extent as some of their contemporaries.

Looking at all the histograms together, one is struck by the way different composers predominate at different times. From 1822-1833 Rossini's operas were so popular, especially in the Royal Theatres, that even Bellini found it difficult to displace him; but in the early to mid 1830's Bellini's star was in the ascendant. Then came two peaks in Donizetti's popularity with a trough about the time he left Naples for Paris. This trough left room for a rapid rise in the number of performances of Mercadante's operas; this rise was followed by an equally rapid fall as Donizetti's operas re-established their hold on the repertoire. The same years saw a return of Pacini's work to the stage, but it has to be said that there seems to have been an element of the haphazard in the reception and consequent popularity of this composer's output. In the smaller theatres the same type of pattern can be seen: early interest in Raimondi and Ricci, followed by a domination by Fioravanti, with a significant contribution by Bellini in the mid 1830's and by Donizetti in the mid 1840's.

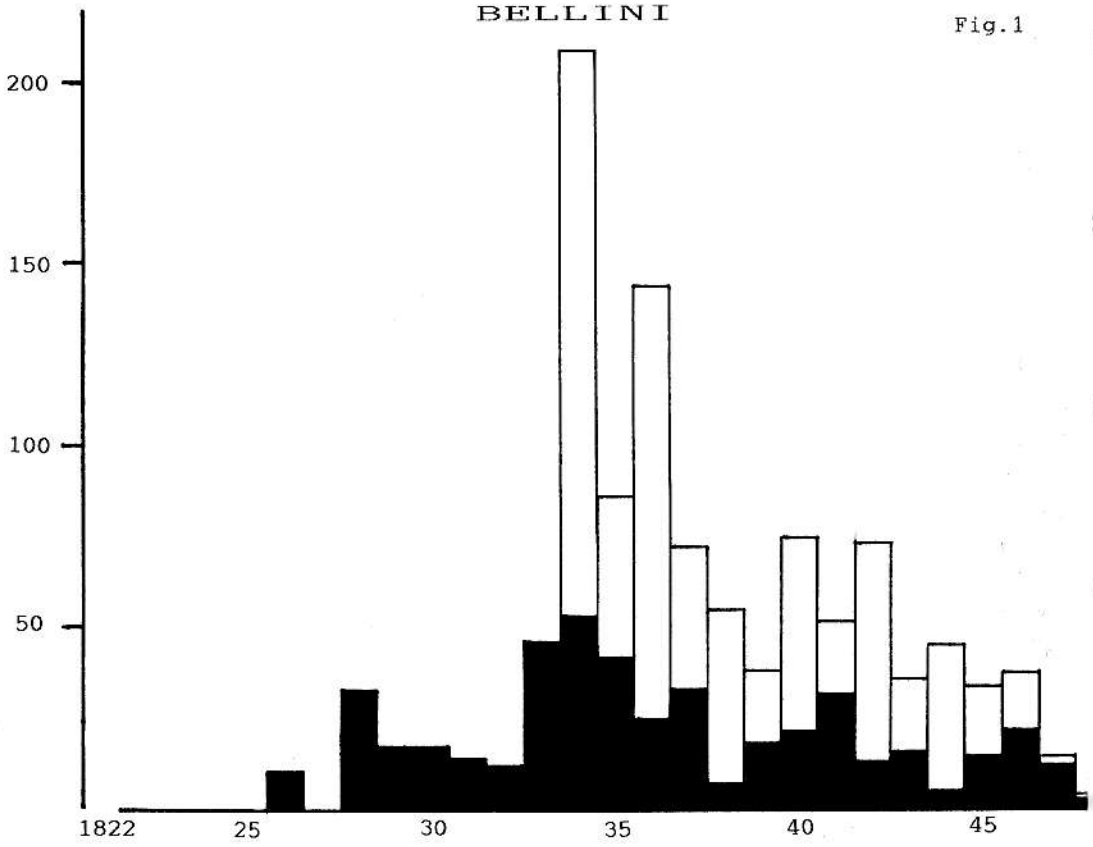
The whole of this analysis would of course be nullified by the identification of other composers where works have been overlooked. An examination of the performance records of the period confirmed, however, that no such composer had been ignored: neither Coccia nor Pavesi at the Royal Theatres, nor Gabrielli, Aspa or Moretti at the smaller theatres reached the level of performances of Mercadante or Pacini, the least performed of the 8 studied. This is not of course to say that individual operas by other composers did not score considerable successes (Petrella's *Il diavolo color di rosa*, written when he was a student of 15, is a case in point), but no other composer sustained a level of performance over the whole period. The one name that comes to mind is of course Verdi, but his time did not come until the last year of this period. There had been a few performances of his operas in the mid 1840's (notably of *I due Foscari*), and these were followed by an explosion of performances in 1848. From then on there was no looking back. This had, no doubt, as much to do with changes in the political as in the musical environment.

As an *envoi*, it should be noted that accurate comparisons depend on performance records for *all* opera-houses, not only the most prestigious. A study of the S. Carlo alone would have given very different, and, as will be appreciated, entirely misleading results.

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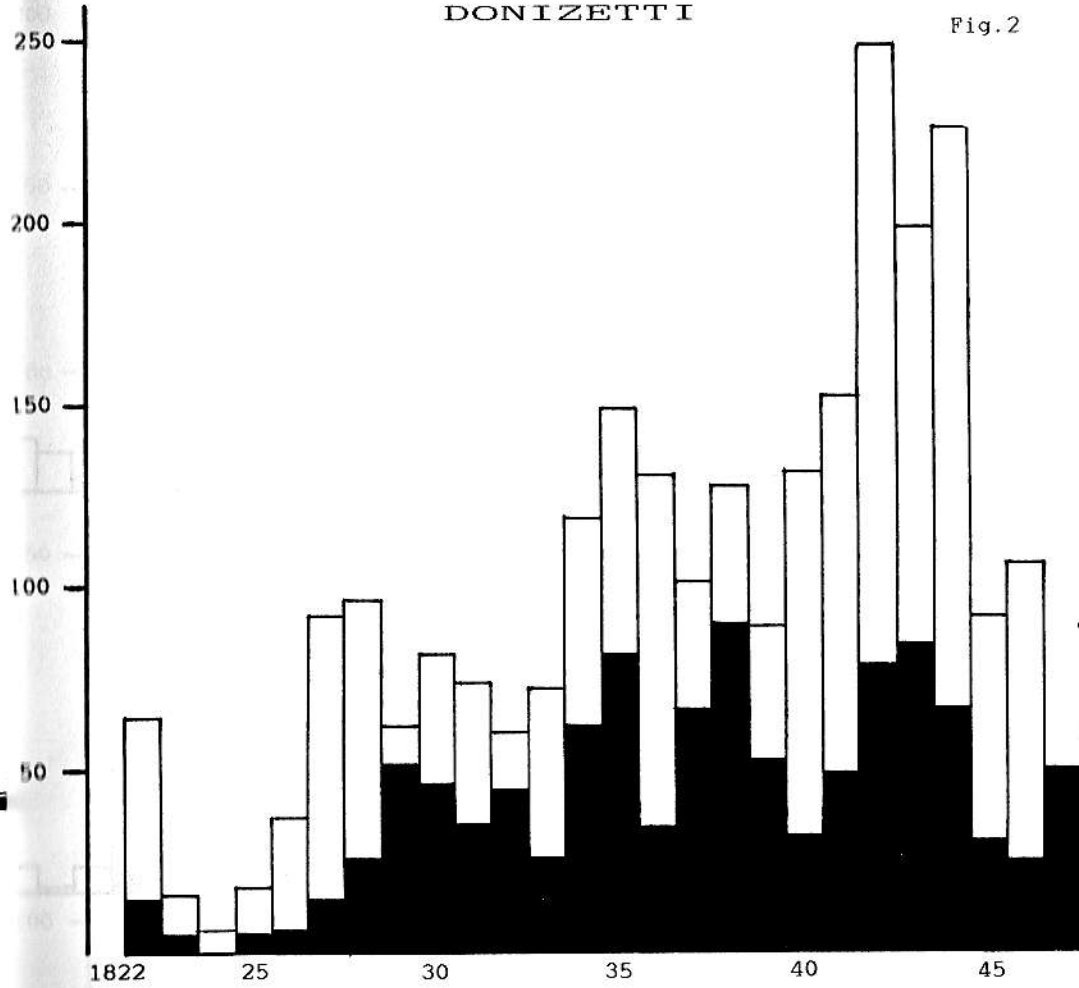
BELLINI

Fig.1



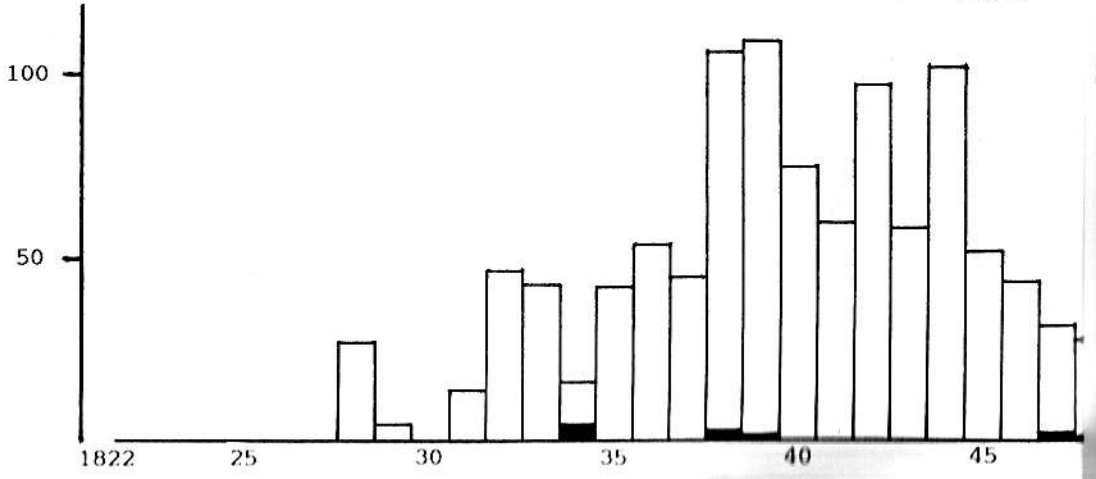
DONIZETTI

Fig.2



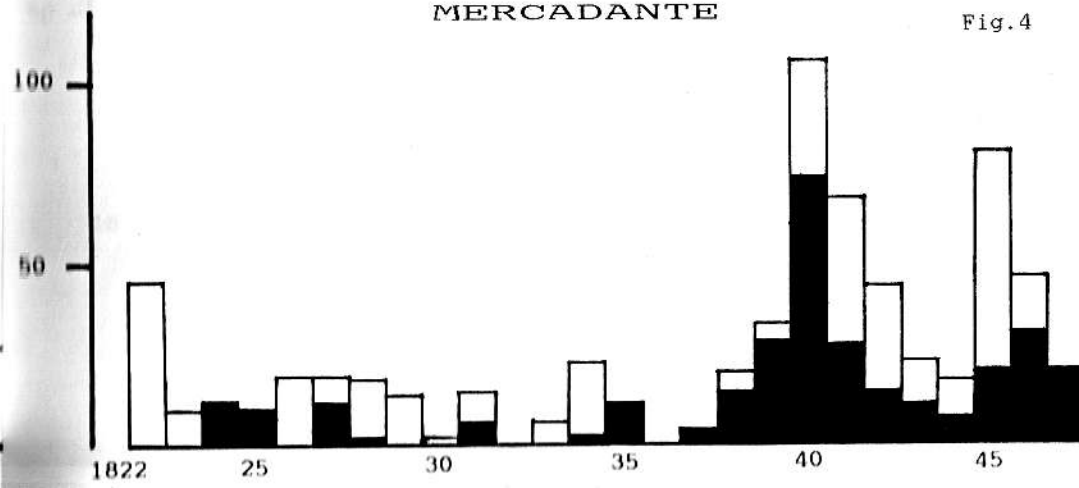
FIORAVANTI

Fig.3



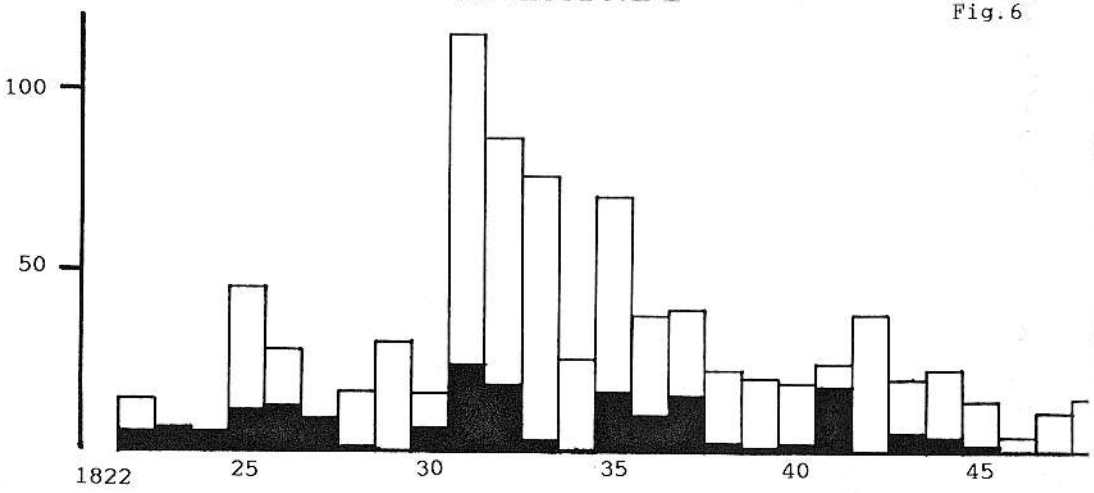
MERCADANTE

Fig.4



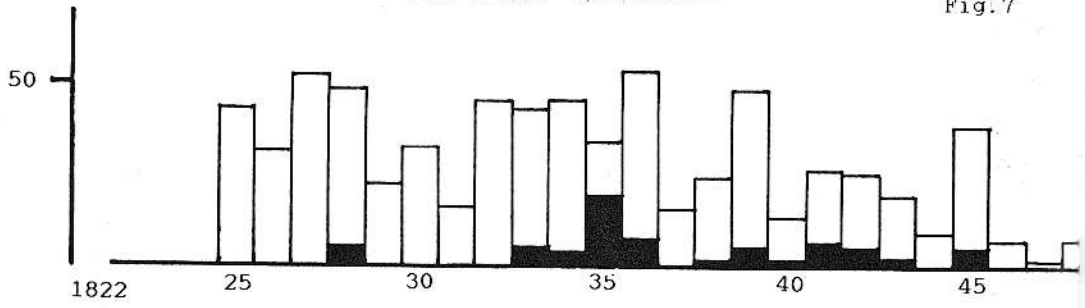
RAIMONDI

Fig.6



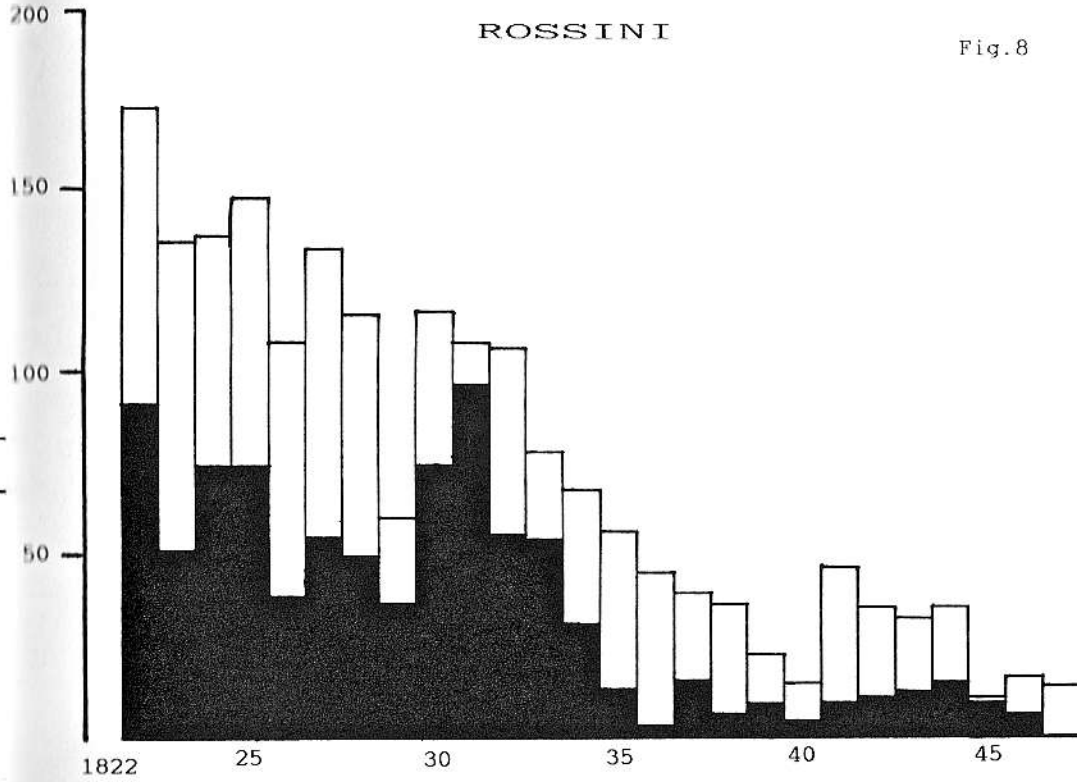
LUIGI RICCI

Fig.7



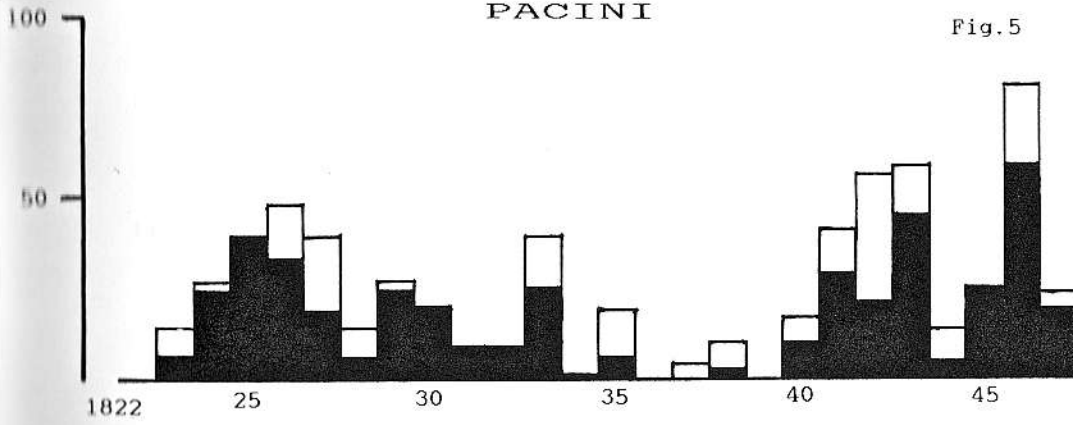
ROSSINI

Fig.8



PACINI

Fig.5



APPENDIX

OPERAS BY THE EIGHT COMPOSERS GIVEN IN NAPLES, 1822-1848

VINCENZO BELLINI

Beatrice di Tenda
Bianca e Gernando
I Capuleti e i Montecchi
Norma
Il pirata
I puritani
La sonnambula
La straniera

GAETANO DONIZETTI

Adelia
L'ajo nell'imbarazzo
Alahor di Granata
Alfredo il Grande
Anna Bolena
L'assedio di Calais
Belisario
Betly
Il Borgomastro di Saardam
Buondelmonte
Il campanello di notte
Caterina Cornaro
Le convenienze ed inconvenieze teatrali
Il diluvio universale
Don Pasquale
L'elisir d'amore
Elisabetta al castello di Kenilworth
Elvida
Emilia di Liverpool
L'esule di Roma
Fausta
La figlia del reggimento
Il fortunato inganno
Francesca di Foix
Il furioso all'isola di S. Domingo

Gemma di Vergy
Gianni di Calais
Gianni di Parigi
Il giovedì grasso
Imelda de'Lambertazzi
La lettera anonima
Linda di Chamounix
Lucia di Lammermoor
Lucrezia Borgia
Maria di Rohan
Maria de Rudenz
Maria Padilla
Marino Faliero
Olivo e Pasquale
Otto mesi in due ore
Il paria
Parisina
I pazzi per progetto
Pia de'Tolomei
Poliuto
La regina di Golconda
Roberto Devereux
La romanziera e l'uomo nero
Sancia di Castiglia
Torquato Tasso (Sordello)
La zingara

VINCENZO FIORAVANTI

Amore e disinganno
Il cieco del dolo
Colombo alla scoperta delle Indie
La dama e lo zoccolajo
I due caporali
I due disperati per non poter andar in carcere
Il folletto innamorato
La larva
La lotteria di Vienna
Un matrimonio in prigione
Menella la cianciosa
Non tutti i pazzi sono all'ospedale
Il notaro d'Ubeda
Il parucchiere e la crestaja
La portentosa scimmia nel Brasile con Pulcinella
Pulcinella e la fortuna
Pulcinella molinaro
La rassegna al campo
Il ritorno di Pulcinella dagli studi di Padova

Robinson Crosue
Il sarcofago scozzese
Il silfo innamorato
Il supposto sposo
Gli zingari

SAVERIO MERCADANTE

Il bravo
I briganti
Didone abbandonata
Donna Caritea regina di Spagna
Le due illustri rivali
Eduardo ed Angelica
Elena da Feltre
Elisa e Claudio
Emma d'Antiocchia
Francesca Donato
Gabriella di Vergy
Il giuramento
Ipermestra
Leonora
I normanni a Parigi
Gli Orazi e i Curiazi
Il proscritto
Gli Sciti
Il signore del villaggio
La testa di bronzo
Il vascello de Gama
La vestale
Violenza e costanza
Zaira

GIOVANNI PACINI

Adolfo di Warbel (Il duca d'Alba)
Adelaide e Comingio
Alessandro nelle Indie
Amazilia
Gli arabi nelle Gallie
Il barone di Dolsheim
Bondelmonte
Il contestabile di Chester
Il corsaro
Gli elvezi

Il falegname di Livonia
Fernando duca di Valenza
La fidanzata corsa
Furio Camillo
Irene
Ivanhoe
Luisetta o la cantatrice del molo
Margherita regina d'Inghilterra
Merope
Niobe
Le regina di Cipro
Saffo
La schiava in Bagdad
Stella di Napoli
Il talismano
L'ultimo giorno di Pompei
L'uomo del mistero

PIETRO RAIMONDI

A mezzanotte
Argia
Gli artifici per amore
Berenice in Roma
La caccia di Errigo IV
Il cestellino di fiori
Clato
Il disertore
Don Anchise Camparone
La donna colonello
La fidanzata del parrucchiere
Il finto feudatorio
Giuditta
L'infanzia accusatrice
Isabella degl'Abernanti
Il morto in apparenza
Il nemico degli ammogliati
Le nozze di Saniti
L'orfana russa
Palmetella maritata
I parenti ridicoli
Peggio il remedio che il male
Il previdente disgraziato
Raffaele Sanzio
Sapienta paura
Il tramonte del sole
Il ventaglio
La verdummara

Il viglietto del lotto
Vinclinda
La vita di un giuocatore

LUIGI RICCI

Aladino
Un'avventura di Scaramuccia
La cena frastornata
Chiara di Rosembergh
Chi dura vince
Colombo
Il diavolo condannato nel modo a prender moglie
Il disertore per amore
(with Federico Ricci)
I due sergenti
Eran due or son tre
La lucerna d'Epitetto
Il nuovo Figaro
Il sogno avverato
(with Dionigi Pagliani-Gagliardi)
Ulisse in Itaca

GIOACCHINO ROSSINI

Armida
L'assedio di Corinto
Il barbiere di Sivilgia
Bellezza e cuor di ferro
Bianca e Falliero
La cambiale di matrimonio
La cenerentola
Il conte Ory
Demetrio e Polibio
La donna del lago
Elisabetta regina d'Inghilterra
La gazza ladra
La gazzetta
Guglielmo Tell
L'inganno felice
L'italiana in Algeri

Maometto II
Mosè in Egitto
Otello
Ricciardo e Zoraide
Semiramide
Tancredi
Torvaldo e Dorliska
Il turco in Italia
Zelmira

Notes

1. Black, John : *Donizetti's Operas in Naples 1822-1848*, London, The Donizetti Society, 1982.

2. *Archivio di Stato*, Naples. *Sezione teatrale, fascio 3.*

3. The *Programma giornaliera* was issued daily under the authority of the *Sovrintendenza dei Teatri e Spettacoli*, and contained full details of the day's performances.

4. Black, John : *The Italian Romantic Libretto*, Edinburgh, The University Press, 1985. See chapter 1.

5. Francesco Florimo, a student colleague of Bellini's, remained his constant correspondent and champion. He became librarian at the Conservatorio S. Pietro a Majella in Naples, a post he held till his death in 1888.

6. Pacini, Giovanni ; *Le mie memorie artistiche* (2nd Edn), Florence, 1875. See page 81.