DR. GABRIEL ANDRAL: A FOOTNOTE

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On the fatal eleventh of August 1845. (and not on his nameday as is sometimes reported) Donizetti was seen by three French doctors. all at the apex of their profession. At whose behest has never been made quite clear. Drs. Ricord. Mitvié and Andral held a joint consultation at the Hotel Manchester by the bedside of the eminent patient. all three as much stars in their own world as the great maestro himself. Only one of them seems to have made an impression. This was Dr Gabriel Andral whom Donizetti described as "very handsome" and whose thumping of his chest gave rise of one of the last jokes we have from the stricken composer.[1]

We know little about the preordained composition of this group,[2] but Dr Andral, clearly enough. had been included in the ominous triad for diagnostic reasons. Now in his prime (he was the same age as Donizetti). born in Paris in 1797 twenty-three days before the maestro, he was a pupil of the great Laënnec who had invented the stethoscope and whose assistant he had become. he became a member of the *Académie de Médecine* before the age of thirty as well as a Professor at the Faculty of Medecine



Gabriel Andral as a child, a portait in the family house at Espédaillac

where he took the Chair of Pathology and *Thérapeutique générale*. He was elected a member of the *Académie des Sciences* in 1843 and soon emerged as a teacher and savant of the first order. His book "*Clinique Médicale*" (1823-34) was a manual that ran into many editions and for many years a fashionable *Hôpital Andral* flourished near the Place des Vosges. Even today a Salle Andral still exists at the Hôpital Cochin, but a marble bust of the famous doctor placed in the grand hall of the Faculté de Médecine in Paris does not resemble him greatly it seems.

Above all, he came from an extraordinary family, never were so many doctors assembled on the same tree: father, grandfather, uncles and great-uncles; first, second, third and fourth cousins, all were doctors, general practitioners or specialists, sometimes in humble country practice, sometimes in service to the great – even in that of at least two of the kings of France.[3] The fact that his father Guillaume had been at school with Joachim Murat and followed him to Naples when *he* became king gave him what only can be described as an *aperçu* on his eminent patient in 1845.

Like Murat, the Andral family came from the Lot in south-west France, this may not have been the most propitious springboard for an international career but its infertile rocky plateau seems not to have inhibited any of its members from travelling to take up prestigious positions elsewhere. Gabriel's father was born at Espédaillac[4] on the Causse de Gramat, where the family house remains inhabited by distant descendants, a village not far from Labastide-Fortanière, now rechristened Labastide-Murat, where Murat's father was innkeeper. Guillaume Andral was called to Naples in 1809 in the role of *médecin-chef de la Garde royale*, thus he witnessed not only the rise (and fall) of his schoolfriend but also the arrival of Rossini whose legitimist views he began (if only co-incidentally perhaps) increasingly to share. He managed to avoid the *Cent Jours*, pleading deafness he succeeded in returning to Paris in 1815 where he took up – in due course – at first an adroit appointment under Louis XVIII and then became medical consultant to Charles X (who was also Rossini's patron). Under Louis-Philippe he abandoned this role, and was replaced in his duties by his son Dr Gabriel, which distinguished appointment the latter still held at the time of his interview with Donizetti.

Of the childhood of Gabriel Andral not much is known, only a charming portrait of a young boy in the romantic Italianate style of Gérard or David survives at Espédaillac. That he spent several years in Naples is certain and it is tempting to believe that something of the musical life in that city rubbed-off on the young man (who was nearly eighteen years-of-age at the time of his father's return). Inevitably, the youngster must have witnessed more than a distant echo of the operatic regeneration that took place there in those years, especially as his father was on intimate terms with Queen Caroline Murat whose musical tastes were renowned.[5] How lucky to have been able to witness the first intimations of operatic romanticism in the operas of Mayr and others.

Dr Gabriel Andral was a radical innovator, of him it was said in 1849:



Dr. Gabriel Andral in 1845

"Ce que Louis XVIII avait fait en politique, ce que Casimir Delavigne tentait dans l'art dramatique, M. Meyerbeer en musique, M. Cousin en philosophie, M. Andral le fit pour le dogmatisme médical".[6] Donizetti might have found this conjunction of at least two familiar names reassuring. And then Dr. Andral had an admirable bedside manner it seems: "grave sans être froide, chaleureuse sans être déclamatoire, sobre sans sécheresse".[7] No wonder Donizetti could find the courage to be amusing.

Three fascinating questions concern this interview with the doomed composer. Was the royal doctor sent to his bedside on the express instructions of King Louis-Philippe? It was the *citizen-King* who gave the Bergamasc his Légion d'honneur and Queen Marie-Amélie – a princess of Naples – had been the dedicatee of some of his music. Both would have been immensely concerned for the reputation of the celebrated artist. Secondly, did Donizetti and Dr. Andral converse in Italian? If so, it would have explained his warm (and pathetically joking) response to the "handsome dog" as related in his letter to Dolci. But thirdly there is a sinister side to this consultation. Dr Andral was celebrated for his autopsies, for his *Culture de la mort* through which he was to achieve lasting fame. He arrived both too late to save Donizetti and too early to find out why precisely such a genius was so ill. Is this the real explanation why the French stubbornly refused to allow the dying man to return to Bergamo? Did Dr Andral try to prevent such an important patient leaving the country before he could excercise his supreme skills? A word in the ear of the sovereign might have been enough.

Donizetti slipped out of his grasp. Had Dr Gabriel Andral got his wish Italy might have been spared those proud but heartbreaking months at the *palazzo* Basoni Scotti in the *città alta* of Bergamo that we visit today with such emotion, but Dr Andral – rather than those credulous doctors who carried out their furtive post-mortem on the remains of the great composer, one of whom carried away part of his skull like a trophy – might have been able to discover, once and for all, the precise nature of the disease which put such an unacceptable term to the life of one of the most admired musicians of all time.

There is one more irony, a gentle one this time. In Espédaillac the portrait of Gabriel Andral still looks down in the family house. The vast tomb of the Andrals abuts the back wall of the *Commandérie* d'Espédaillac – the former residence of the noble Commander of the Order of St. John – though Dr Gabriel Andral himself is not in it, he died in 1876 and is buried with his wife's family at Châteauvieux in the Loir et Cher.[8] It is in this 12th Century building, however, now a country house, that the *Président* of the Donizetti Society has been spending his summer holidays for the past fifteen years. The "*ombra paterna*" of the great maestro stretches further and more enquiringly than ever we could have imagined.

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1. "Quel cane d'Andral (faccia di bellissimo uomo) [...] Batte a gran forza sulle coste dritte, e dissi io: voi non fate male alcuno: ed egli rideva" Letter to Antonio Dolci of 21 August 1845. GUIDO ZAVADINI *Donizetti: Vita, Musiche, Epistolario* (Bergamo 1948), No. 648, p. 822.
2. Dr Philippe Ricord was a specialist in venerial diseases *cf* WILLIAM ASHBROOK, *Donizetti and his Operas* (London 1982), p. 192. Dr Jean Mitvié presided over a private mental home.
3. For a recent note on one of Gabriel Andral's cousins see: CHRISTIANE CONSTANT-LE STUM, *Un Quercynois à La Cour de Louis-Philippe*, (in) *Bulletin de la Société des Etudes du Lot [Tome CXIX]* (Cahors 1998), pp. 149-153.
4. The name Espédaillac, oddly enough, appears to be a medieval corruption of "ospitalet" (*cf* the italian *ospedaletto*) reflecting the existence there of a crusader hospital run by the Commanders of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem.
5. One of her protégés was Nicola Vaccai.
6. Dr Michea, *L'Observation* (Paris 1849-51).
7. *Le Progrès Médical: Deux documents sur la jeunesse de Gabriel Andral* (Paris 1935), p. 201.
8. Dr Gabriel Andral married the daughter of Pierre-Paul Royer Collard, philosopher, academician, and friend of Louis-Philippe, Président of the Chambre des Députés. He had one son Paul, who was married to a Mlle. Delius who died in 1925. But this is another musical footnote.