Donizetti's Lucia:
flute or armonica in the mad scene?

Ian Thomson

Lucia di Lammermoor (hereafter *Lucia*), written by Salvadore Cammarano and composed by Gaetano Donizetti, opened at the Teatro San Carlo, Napoli, on Tuesday 26 September 1835. Act 3 Scene 2 of this *bel canto* opera features a so-called "mad scene" (*la scena della pazzia*) in which Lucia, the soprano heroine, hallucinates wildly and dies. It is one of the best known mad scenes from a period when such scenes had become popular—Donizetti had previously inserted them in *Anna Bolena* (1830) and *Torquato Tasso* (1833)—and arguably one of the most discussed scenes in all opera.[1] Yet *Lucia's* mad scene has prompted a long-running and inconclusive debate, because late in the day and without recorded explanation Donizetti amended his orchestration, replacing a glass armonica (*armonica a bicchieri*) accompaniment with a flute accompaniment. Donizetti's intentions remain unclear and which instrument—armonica or flute—should be played has become an important unresolved question in musicology. Seldom have so many words been written about so few minutes of music.

Directors face a dilemma. Should they reintroduce the armonica on the grounds that Donizetti initially wanted it or should the flute become normalised because Donizetti introduced it for the opening night? While some commentators consider it inappropriate to reinstate an instrument which Donizetti replaced, it is generally accepted that "performers today should feel free to choose between the two alternatives".[2] Both approaches are now adopted, although many directors choose the flute simply because armonica players are scarce. But which instrument is actually most appropriate?

This article reflects further on the subject, examining issues which have not been addressed to date.[3]

The context

Cammarano's libretto derives from—in many respects it differs considerably from—Scott's novel *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1819).[4] The novel contains a short scene in which Lucia, who loves Edgar, is tricked into marrying Bucklaw, who she does not want and then stabs, but does not kill him, at which point she hallucinates. In Cammarano's libretto, this episode becomes the focus of a tragic love story in which Lucia, who loves Edgardo, is tricked into marrying Arturo and kills him. She becomes distraught and in a dishevelled state, hallucinating about being married to Edgardo, sings *il dolce suono*.

The armonica

[1] The operatic history is well presented by Naomi Matsumoto, *The Operatic Mad Scene: it's origins and early development up to c.1700*, PhD Thesis, Goldsmiths College, London, 2004. It has been suggested that Lucia's mad scene is the "locus classicus" (Stephen Willie, *Mad Scene*, Oxford Music Online).

[2] Mary Ann Smart, *The Silencing of Lucia*, Cambridge Opera Journal 4, 1992, No 2, 119-141, 129n; Philip Gossett *Divas and Scholars: Performing Italian Opera* (Chicago and London: Chicago UP), 2006, 435.

[3] Please note that this article is restricted to the instrumentation of the scene. Frequently discussed related subjects—the popularity of the contemporary mad scene, flute music, cadenzas, high notes, the relative merits of different types of soprano voice, and appropriate keys—are not examined.

[4] Walter Scott, *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1819). Cammarano would have relied on the 'volgarizzato' translation *La promessa sposa di Lammermoor* by Gaetano Barbieri, Napoli, 1826. Cammarano indicated in his libretto that he had changed the story.

The glass armonica which Donizetti introduced to accompany Lucia in his original score is a mechanical version of musical glasses invented by Benjamin Franklin in 1761. The instrument became popular in subsequent decades and Donizetti appears to have liked it, having introduced it previously in *Il Castello di Kenilworth* (1829). He knew the qualities and limitations of the instrument. Why did he think it appropriate for *Lucia*?

The instrument produces a curious sound, best described as ethereal, eerie, and otherworldly and (in a modern science fiction sense) arguably celestial. This arises—Donizetti would not have understood the physics—because the range of the instrument is approximately 1–4 KHz, which authorities claim is a point where the human brain has difficulty locating the sound in space.[5] This unusual attribute received a mixed reception: Marianne Kirchgessner, a notable late-eighteenth century performer on the armonica, said it could entice "glad, gentle, and elevated feelings"; many others thought it promoted depression, melancholia and even insanity.[6] From this latter point of view the instrument served perfectly to emphasize Lucia's madness and wild juxtaposition of the temporal and spiritual.[7] As the armonica appears to have been a particularly suitable instrument for the scene, why did Donizetti discard it?

The issues

While one commentator suggests the armonica was replaced "for some unaccountable reason",[8] a number of more substantial explanations have been, and can be, proposed. One is that Donizetti suddenly became bored with the armonica, the instrument having been popular during the late-eighteenth century but increasingly unfashionable by the early decades of the nineteenth.[9] Also, the instrument has such limited pitch and amplitude that it is largely ineffective in a large auditorium. Doubts about its capability may have been raised in rehearsals when the instrument was cast alongside the powerful coloratura voice of Fanny Tacchinardi Persiani.[10]

Another explanation concerns the circumstances of Domenico Pezzi, the contracted armonica player. He had been hired some months before to play an armonica in Tommaso Traetta's *Amore e Psiche* (1773), which opened on 30 May, and clearly had Donizetti's confidence or he would not have been involved in *Lucia*.[11] Commentators have noted, however, that Pezzi became persona non grata, having been involved in a contractual/financial dispute in which he sued the theatre management. It has been suggested that Donizetti was told to avoid working with

[5] Details may be found in *Glass Harmonica*, Wikipedia.

[6] Ibid; The Kirchgessener quotation is from Corey Mead, *Angelic Music* (New York: Simon & Schuster), 2016, 113. See also Stanley Finger, Review of Zeitler, *The Glass Armonica*, Journal of the History of Neurosciences, Volume 23, Number 3, July-September 2014, 333-34.

[7] It has already been suggested that the armonica "unites ghost-death-madness"
Charles Jernigan, *Donizetti's Ghosts*, Donizetti Society, 23 November 2013. Also that:
> The quivering, supernatural sound of this instrument would have been perfect ... for communicating the sense of madness

Annalisa Bini and Jeremy Commons, Lucia di Lammermoor, *L'Arte Armonica*, Le prima rappresentazione delle opere di Donizetti nella stampa coeva, Accademia di Santa Cecilia (Milano: Skirra) c.1997, 513-21.

[8] John Stewart Allitt, *Donizetti* (Shaftesbury, Dorset; Rockport, Mass: Element), 1991, 165-76, quotation is at 175.

[9] Finger, 334.

[10] *Glass Harmonica*, Wikipedia; William Ashbrook, *Donizetti* (London: Collins), 417; Bini and Commons 520-21.

[11] David Valdés, *"Armonica a bicchieri" in Donizetti's operas*, davidvaldespercussion.blogspot.com.

Pezzi.[12] The essential feature of this argument is that a change of instrument became necessary because no other glass harmonica performers were at that point available. On the face of it, the explanation is sound, although given the high cost of staging an opera it is curious that the theatre (admittedly in a dire financial position) should have put its investment in *Lucia* at risk in such a way at the last minute. Donizetti must have been asked by the theatre if the armonica could be replaced. If Donizetti's sole reason for removing it was entirely contractual, then any other instrument would have been a compromise. Had this been the case, it would be perfectly reasonable to reinstate the armonica in modern performances.

But was the armonica rejected for entirely contractual reasons? The remainder of this article addresses the possibility that other factors—whether musical or to do with the libretto—may have influenced its replacement.

That the libretto text is a significant factor in this matter is signalled in the first line by the words *Il dolce suono*. At this point Lucia is apparently referring to Edgardo's voice. Given the armonica's presence in the original, this is a direct allusion to Franklin who in 1762 wrote to a friend saying that "[the armonica's] tones are incomparably sweet".[13] Cammarano and Donizetti are likely to have known Franklin's view even if they had not been aware of the letter. The first line thus creates a comfortable conformance which suggests the words *il dolce suono* were carefully chosen. The role of Cammarano has to date been ignored, the assumption being that instrumentation would have been a matter entirely for Donizetti.

The essential themes which Cammarano imported from Scott's story into *Lucia* are love, deceit and fate (his text in *il dolce suono* emphasizes the fateful implication of deceit). And Cammarano would have recognized that while Donizetti's choice of an armonica with its mysterious, ethereal sound associated with mental instability was perfectly in accord with Lucia's hallucinatory thoughts, it fell very much short in relating to those essential themes. No significant lasting precedents associating the armonica with these subjects were established over the 50 years or so when the armonica was popular (nor indeed were any created by the earlier musical glasses). Being a close friend, Cammarano is likely to have raised the matter with Donizetti.[14]

The opera was complete on 6 July 1835 with production anticipated on Thursday 20 August, but delays to the approval of the libretto (which took until 12 September), management difficulties, and the annual closure of the theatre during part of September, meant that the first night was delayed over five weeks, until Saturday 26 September.[15] There was an extensive period for rehearsals during which it would have been possible and proper for Cammarano to have raised the relationship between instrumentation and libretto, and to have questioned whether another instrument might be more appropriate than the armonica. In any such circumstances, Donizetti's rescoring to reject the armonica does not necessarily mean that the decision was taken quickly and at the last minute. The change could have appeared sudden when it was not.

The flute

[12] Gossett, 434. Court papers in Naples indicate there was conflict between Pezzi and the theatre.
[13] Letter to Giovanni Battista Beccaria, 1762, quoted Mead, 58.
[14] Despite reports of disagreements, Cammarano was described as "Donizetti's devoted friend", John Black, *The Italian Romantic Libretto: A study of Salvatore Cammarano*, Edinburgh UP, 1984, 27-30, 50.
[15] Details are from John Black, *Donizetti's Operas in Naples 1822-1848*, The Donizetti Society, 1982, Number 35, 34; Herbert Weinstock, Donizetti (London: Methuen), 1963, 109.

The armonica was replaced for one or more of several reasons. Why did Donizetti choose to introduce a flute? One perfectly reasonable explanation for doing so is that the armonica in *Amore e Psiche* had been replaced with a flute and Donizetti may have realized that the instrument could be introduced to good effect in *Lucia*.[16] However, there is an assumption that the flute was an inevitable, almost automatic, choice. This assumption can be questioned. Admittedly, Donizetti's options were few. Arguably only a flute (with a range up to about 2 Khz), or a violin (with a range, like the armonica, up to 4 Khz), offered appropriate articulation and timbre to accompany a coloratura soprano.[17] So why was the flute chosen?

The music which Donizetti scored for the scene has been highly praised. It is introduced by a short flute solo which heralds the instrument's upcoming significance. Its role has been described in various ways. One commentator suggests the flute is "haunting", another that in following Lucia's voice, when she hallucinates about death and ghosts, it is a "ghostly doppelgänger".[18] It has also been claimed that the flute is an "important foil" and that it acts as if in contest with the voice.[19] A twofold significance: has even been put forward, on the one hand phallic and Dionysian, on the other representing the heart.[20] The flute is also said to represent "Lucia's growing madness, a symbol of her mind taking flight from reality as she imagines life with her love Edgardo".[21] Even if the flute has such effects, there has been scant comment about *why* it was chosen and no explanations to date have considered the relationship between the flute and the libretto. Cammarano and Donizetti would have realized that introducing a flute had implications far beyond the musical composition. This arises from the nature of the flute and the mythologies associated with it.The first half of the nineteenth century was a period during which late-eighteenth
century flutes continued to be played extensively while manufacturers introduced many innovations in new models.[22] A miscellany of instruments was available and if Donizetti had a particular one in mind its details are no longer available. Generically, it was made of wood (boxwood, rosewood, or ebony) with up to 8 keys, a conical bore and was articulate in the hands of a good performer. It would have produced a soft, mellow and acoustically pure sound. Clearly, introducing such an instrument was not without implications. Being the most popular instrument of the day, its sound was well known, which meant audiences would not have experienced the element of surprise which an armonica created. And the flute had never been associated with mental disintegration, which limited its role in the aria. Those commentators and directors who wish to focus on Lucia's hallucination and derangement have

[16] Ibid, 434.
[17] The figures are from Mead, 58.
[18] Gary Schmidgall, *Literature as Opera* (New York: Oxford UP), 1977. 137-47, comment is at 140. Naomi Matsumoto, *Ghost Writing: an explanation of presence in Lucia Di Lammermoor*, Research Online, 2016, 13.
[19] Roger Parker, Lucia di Lammermoor's mad tragedy in Donizetti's mad life, *The Guardian*, 28 January 2010; Alexander Weatherson, Puntature for Pauline Viardot, *Il Teatro di Donizetti, Atti del convegno delle celebrazioni del bicentenario* 'La vocalità e i cantanti', Bergamo 25-27 settembre 1997, (Bergamo 2001). Vol. 1, 197-213, 202. Another previous commentator has said that "the flute accompanying in thirds and sixths suggests the uncanny presence of a hallucinated voice, perhaps taking the place of Edgardo", Smart, 129n.
[20] On grounds that the "flute cut from its reed source in the cosmic waters produces sweet music which longs to return to its source", Allitt, 175.
[21] Trevor Gillis, *Mad Scenes*, operassense.com.
[22] Philip Bate, *The Flute* (London: Ernest Benn; New York: W W Norton) 1975, 2nd edition, 103, 211.

concluded, absolutely rightly from their viewpoint, that the flute is a poor substitute for the armonica.[23] What then were the benefits of introducing a flute?

An articulate flute would certainly have created a better semblance of dialogue with Fanny Tacchinardi Persiani's coloratura abilities than could the armonica. It is also the case that the incipit *il dolce suono* is ambiguous, sweetness of sound being associated not only by Franklin with the armonica but for millennia with the sound of a flute. Moreover, the flute has a long-standing association with mythologies linked to deceit, fate and love—the issues which dominate Cammarano's text.

The relevant flute mythologies

Lucia is extremely confused. She thinks she hears Edgardo's voice and thinks of the heavenly unity of their souls. She sees ghosts. Wishful thinking, death and lamentation go hand in hand with the sound of the voice and flute. This was not a novel role for the instrument and there are several levels to a long-standing mythology linking the instrument—both its construction and its use—to death.

The idea that communication with the other world can be achieved by means of a flute derives from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (c.2), a text which had informed writers and artists over millennia and of which both Cammarono and Donizetti would have been aware. Ovid described how Pan developed the first flute having chased a nymph named Syrinx who, wishing to escape his clutches, prayed to be transformed. Being in the water margins she was transfigured into reeds which in the breeze produced "a low and complaining sound ... sweet tones (*dulcidine*)".[24] Pan cut the reeds into different lengths and joined them, making a set of proportionate pipes, each open at one end, which has since been called a syrinx in memory of the nymph.[25] The sound of a flute has continued to be described as a sweet sound

Pan made the instrument from Syrinx's transformed body. Realizing that he could now only communicate with her as a spirit, he exclaimed: "This union, at least, shall I have with thee". He was expressing the fact that while her transformation made physical union impossible, his creation of "sweet sound" through the instrument would enable spiritual union. This is precisely the situation wished for by Lucia. Donizetti's flute is the mythological means by which Lucia communicates between the temporal and spiritual.

Given the essential theme of deceit—the deaths of Arturo, Lucia and ultimately Edgardo all result from Enrico having deceived Lucia—it was entirely appropriate for Donizetti to introduce a flute because the instrument has for millennia been associated with deceitfulness leading to death.

This association arose in ancient times when hunters in agrarian economies used simple pipes to attract animals, notably birds, which suffered adverse fate. Both Cammarono and Donizetti would have been aware of Papageno the bird-catcher with

[23] A return to the armonica after hearing the flute is said to be "refreshing ... giving [the scene] "a wonderful new colour", Roger Parker, *The Guardian*, 28 January 2010.

[24] Ovid. *Metamorphoses*, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP; London: William Heinemann) Vol 1 (of 2 Vols.), 1971, VI, 51–3.

[25] The syrinx operates on the flute principle, whereby a tone is produced when air is directed onto the edge of a pipe resonator (an external edge in the syrinx and transverse flute, an internal edge in the recorder and whistle). This differs from the operation of instruments which produce tone by means of a vibrating reed (the ancient aulos, oboe, clarinet and saxophone). Ovid's emphasis on sound being made by a reed pipe resulted in reed instruments, which are not flutes, confusingly being considered flutes in much art, literature and archaeology (the Greek aulos is the prime example).

his syrinx in Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* (1791), who is the most famous theatrical example of this role. The literary history of this subject appears to derive from the Roman administrator Cato, who in *Disticha* (ca. BC 200), warned about the sweet sound of a flute:[26]

Fowlers pipe sweetly to delude their prey

And the Florentine scholar Brunetto Latini similarly referred to "el dolce suono" (the sweet sound) of the flute, for a similar purpose, in *Il Tesoro* (1254).[27]

the sweet sound of the flute which tricks the bird is a metaphor for the care which the wise must take ....

The sweet sound of the flute is a harbinger of trouble. This is the case when the flute introduces *il dolce suono* in *Lucia*. *Il dolce suono* signals that Lucia has been tricked (by Enrico). The deceitful flute leads Lucia to her death. The words align perfectly with Cato and Latini.

By the sixteenth century aphorisms of this kind had become emblematic.[28] In *La Morosophie* (1553), a book of emblems prepared by the medieval writer Guillaume de la Perrière (1499-1585), Fortuna, the Roman goddess of unpredictable fate, is depicted playing a pipe (shown as a transverse flute, see Figure 1): she personifies luck, good and bad, and influences the twists and turns of human existence:[29]



Fig. 1 Perrière's image of Fortuna
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Perrière supported his image with two short poems, both of which refer to the flute's

[26] Cato. *The Distichs of Cato*. Minor Latin Poets. Book 1. Trans. J Wight Duff. Loeb Classical Library (London: William Heinemann) 1968, no. 27.

[27] Brunetto Latini. *Il Tesoro*, 1254, Vineggia, Settimo, Cap 11. 143.

[28] Ian Thomson. *The Fatal Flute: the sweet sound of Deceit and Death*. Journal of the British Flute Society 35.2 (July 2016), 44-46.

[29] Guillaume de la Perrière, *La Morosophie*, Lyon, 1553, No. 41. Such emblem books—which contained a set of images with an allegorical and symbolic content, usually presented within classical, moral or religious themes, and accompanied by a short poem—were prepared by writers, artists and alchemists from the early 16th century and became extremely popular.

sweet sound. One reads:

At caveas, ne te tam mendax fistula prodat:
Dulcis & in lachrymas incidat ille sonus.

But beware! Let not the lying flute betray you,
And that sweet sound fall into tears.

In this warning, Perrière was aligning himself with intellectuals and religious leaders who condemned Fatalism as conducive to despair, or as he said, tears. A wise person should recognize when they are being deceived by others and adjust their behaviour accordingly. Lucia did not, she could not, recognize the deception. As a result she suffers, and tears flow.

According to Perrière, the result of hearing the deceitful flute is death, the ultimate twist of Fate. Perrière alludes to this relationship between deceit and death in another verse, in French, when he refers to Fortuna's "deadly poison" as the flute becomes sweeter:

Lors que son chant plus doucement resone,
Garde toy bien de son mortel poyson.

When her melody sounds softer/sweeter,
Beware of her deadly poison.

In other words, beware the sweet sound or untoward events may occur. The flute is thus a harbinger of death. In the opera it is pointedly Lucia's death.

The flute's association with death was evident in other ways. The ancient Greeks used the aulos, which is commonly called a flute, at funerals.[30] In *The Dinner of the Seven Wise men* (ca. 100), Plutarch wrote that ancient flutes were constructed from bones (and archaeologists have discovered these bone flutes throughout Europe).[31] A flute appeared on some Etruscan tomb sculpture.[32] Much later, Lully scored a flute in *Isis* (1677) to relate the lamentations of Pan on the death of the nymph Syrinx.[33] And most importantly, Gluck created a direct association between the instrument and the underworld in his orchestration of *The Dance of the Blessed Spirits*, a musical accompaniment to Orpheus as he enters the underworld in Act II of *Orphée et Eurydice* (1774). The sound of the wooden flute with a conical bore, recognized as being harmonically pure (although the physics were not understood until the twentieth century), lent credibility to a heavenly role for the flute in the opera. This is perfectly in keeping with Scott's comment that Lucia is "an angel descended to earth", the underworld context suggested by her ghostly apparitions" and the ghost of a murdered girl earlier in the story. Donizetti emphasized the connection by arranging for the introductory flute solo to *il dolce suono* to be a repeat of the melody

[30] Loraux, Nicole, *The Mourning Voice: an essay on Greek Tragedy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP), 2002.
[31] The subject reappeared in Fritz Lang's film *Metropolis* (1927) and Harbou's novelization of the film: Freder experiences a dream of premonition in which Death appears "playing the song which nobody plays after him, on his flute which was a human bone". There are numerous similar examples.
[32] Raymond Meylan, *The Flute* (B T Batsford: London) 1988, 37. And the idea is reflected in Shakespeare's description of the "pipes and whistles" in a man's sound" as he approaches death (*As You Like It* (1599).
[33] A subject to which Debussy again referred in *Syrinx*, a lament for solo flute written as incidental music when Pan dies in Mourey's *Psyché* (1913).

for *Regnava nel silenzio* (from Act 1, Scene 2), the earlier aria in which the ghost of the murdered girl is seen.

Lucia experiences considerable, albeit understated, sexual desire. And again the flute is relevant to her condition because the instrument has over time acquired a phallocentric mythology. This mythology is closely related to that which links the flute to deceit, there being but small steps between deceit and seduction.

Plato recognized the beguiling features of a woodwind instrument when he recorded that the sweet and soft tones of the flute beguile and melt the spirit (he was probably referring to an aulos).[34] Often the ability to beguile creates harmony: animals for example are attracted to the flute (an early image shows the biblical King David calming animals and creating harmony in Orphic fashion with a flute).[35] The second century Sicilian author Longus described at length the beguiling effect of the flute (a syrinx) on animals. And in the aforementioned case of agrarian economies in which hunters used pipes, the flute beguiled birds. In folklore the Pied Piper enchanted both rats and children. There are some notable musical precedents for this reaction in women. For example, in Handel's cantata *Nell dolce dell'oblio* (The Sweetness of Forgetfulness, also entitled Nocturnal Thoughts of Filli, 1710–15), the melodic lines of the voice and flute are similar and imitative, as is the case in Lucia's aria. Filli is thinking of love/desire and she is disturbed by fantasies of her beloved, as is Lucia. Later in the nineteenth century the flute's effect on women appeared in du Maurier's novel *Trilby* (1894), in which Trilby is manipulated by Svengali's flute, and Ravel's/Klingsor's *La flûte enchantée* in the song cycle *Shéhérazade* (1903), in which a girl is drawn to her flute-playing lover at night. A similar situation occurred again in D H Lawrence's novel *Aaron's Rod* (1922). In the world of art, too, the flute's association with the phallus appeared frequently in paintings with amorous content.[36]

Finally, the pairing the flute and soprano voice was extremely apt, both having been associated with the nightingale on the basis of similar timbre. For example, prior to *Lucia* Beethoven introduced a flute to represent a nightingale in the second movement of 'Symphony No. 6' (1807–8). Similarly, the soprano voice shares the same timbre as a flute; Persiani was a lyric coloratura soprano, some of whom became

[34] Plato considered the vibrating reed aulos beguiling: "when someone gives music an opportunity to charm his soul with the flute and pour those sweet, soft, and plaintive tunes … through his ear…if he keeps at it unrelentingly and is beguiled by the music, after a time his spirit is melted and dissolved until it vanishes, and the very sinews of his soul are cut out", Plato *The Republic III*, Loeb Classical Library (London: William Heinemann; New York: G P Putnam's Son's) Vol. 1 (of 2 Vols.), 1930, 411a-b, 291.
[35] see Theodore of Caesarea's image, ca. 11, British Museum f.189v).
[36] "there can be no doubt about its connotation", Emanuel Winternitz, *Musical Instruments and their Symbolism in Western Art* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP), 1979, 48, 52. The reed/syrinx represents unrestrained passions in Poussin's *The Triumph of Pan* (1636) and Handel's *Acis and Galatea* (1731). During Renaissance Neoplatonism end-blown flutes were depicted played by a woman, an orally erotic image explicit in Giorgione's *Concert Champêtre* (ca. 1500) and Titian's *Venus and Cupid with a Lute Player* (ca. 1520?). In Titian's *Nymph and Shepherd* (1560) the flute played by a male conveys lust. Flutes and sexual pleasures are associated in Pieter Pourbus' *An Allegory of True Love* (ca. 1547). Sexual significance extended on occasion to instrument names (the small *fleute Eunuque* being an example). The flute's phallocentricity became sufficiently strong in northern Europe that women were directed away from wind instruments. Genteel Conduct Books, for example Essex's *The Young Ladies Conduct* (1722), suggested end-blown wind instruments are "unbecoming to the Fair Sex" and look "indecent in a Woman"s mouth". As transverse flutes became more popular than end-blown, they too acquired the association (in Boucher's *Shepherd piping to a Shepherdess* (ca. 1745) the flute, a male symbol, points directly into the girl's small ring of flowers, her feminine symbol).

known as "nightingales".[37] Singers have been called nightingales for centuries. An example which Donizetti could have followed is Giacomelli's *Quell'usignolo che innamorato* (1734), in which a coloratura soprano and a flute both emulate a nightingale.

The nightingale parallel is also relevant to the fact that Lucia sings alone in the evening, the bird usually being heard in the dark. In Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry* (1840) the nightingale "sits in darkness" and people are "entranced by the melody of [this] musician". Evocation of the nightingale serves to reinforce the idea of the dark underworld setting, as in Gluck' opera. Moreover, Milton's description of the nightingale as a bird for lovers in *Ode to the Nightingale* (1819) reinforces the sexual undercurrent.[38]

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There are many ways in which Cammarano could have opened this aria and it is inconceivable that he was not aware of the relevance of a flute to his libretto at the time he was writing it. Given Cammarano's literary background there is a strong case for suggesting that he wrote *il dolce suono* with a flute in mind and that Donizetti wanted the armonica instead. Fortunately for Donizetti, the words *il dolce suono* permitted flexibility by alluding to both Franklin's description of the armonica sound and long-standing descriptions of a flute sound. However there can be no doubt that Lucia's hallucination is better accompanied by an armonica. The implication is that Donizetti wanted to emphasise the hallucinatory context, even though doing so constrained the dramatic interpretation of the scene by not relating to the main libretto themes. The decision to employ a flute was not just a musical issue. The flute necessarily went hand in hand with a de-emphasis on the hallucinatory aspect of the aria and an increased emphasis on love, deceit and death. This was an inevitable but definitely intended change in (or more likely return to) the scene's purpose. Given that the libretto was written before Donizetti's music, these themes should be respected.

The flute's long-standing association with death, fate and sexual attraction—themes which come to a focus in Lucia's aria—and the pure tonal qualities which result from its construction, make the instrument remarkably appropriate to the scene, far more than the armonica. It has sometimes been suggested that Italian composers did not as a rule pay significant attention to instrumentation, but on this occasion Donizetti excelled. *Il dolce suono* contributes to a rich operatic tradition of meaningful flute orchestration.

[37] James Barrie connected the nightingale and pipe in *The Little White Bird* (1920), as did D H Lawrence in *Aaron's Rod* (1922), his novel about a flute player (when Aaron plays with the Marchesa, a soprano, he catches the "timbre of her voice").

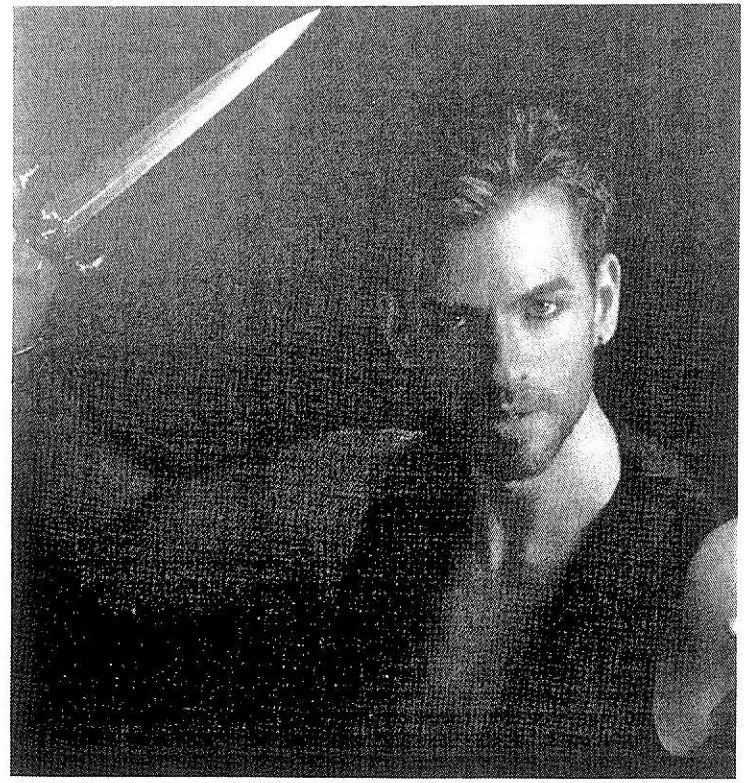
[38] "[The Nightingale] with fresh hopes the Lover's heart doth fill", John Milton, Ode to the Nightingale (1819), *Poetical Works* (London: Ward Lock & Co.), 1878, 345.

Vittorio Prato sings arias for Antonio Tamburini

Alan Jackson

The German record company Illiria has issued a CD of a concert given by Vittorio Prato at the 2017 Rossini in Wildbad Festival. It is entitled "Vittorio Prato – Il Bravo, Belcanto arias for Antonio Tamburini". The programme is delightfully un-hackneyed and the performances contain coloratura baritone singing of a standard almost unknown today.

It begins and ends with two show stoppers: Riccardo's aria from the beginning of Bellini's *I puritani*, and Corrado's aria from Act III of Mercadante's *I briganti*, (Wildbad revived it in 2012 with Prato and it appeared on two Naxos CDs in 2014). In between are arias from Donizetti's *Gianni di Calais*, Balducci's *Riccardo l'intrepido*, Coccia's *Edoardo in Iscozia*, Donizetti's *Don Pasquale* (Malatesta's cantabile from the start of the opera and with the Bellini only the second item that could be described as well-known), Generali's *Chiara di Rosembergh*, Marliani's *Il bravo* and Balfe's *Falstaff*. Rarities indeed! (Balducci doesn't even get a mention in the Opera *Grove*, though he, Coccia and Generali do feature in Opera Rara's "A Hundred Years of Italian Opera" box sets.



Before discussing individual arias, a word about the presentation. The CD is accompanied by a booklet with an essay in Italian by musicologist Giancarlo Landini with an English translation by Michael Aspinall. This gives a chronological overview of Tamburini's career and describes each of the items recorded in terms of what they tell us about Tamburini's voice, range and capabilities. There is less about the dramatic context of each aria. But full marks to Prato and the Wildbad Festival for giving us introductory recitatives, cabaletta repeats which Prato varies appropriately, and wonder of wonders, supporting singers and chorus where they are called for. Full aria texts and translations are given. I should point out that the booklet uses some of the smallest print for both articles and texts that I have ever seen in a CD booklet and there is a smattering of typos (in the English versions at least). There is also one oddity in that the aria texts also contain the stage directions, but in exactly the same type as the aria words. Welcome though these are, it does make for some strange reading! Landini's essay is excellent and makes me hope that maybe he and Aspinall could write and translate a full biography of Tamburini. In recent years we have had biographies in English of Pasta, Rubini and Lablache; there also exist biographies of Malibran, Grisi and Mario. Which leaves an obvious gap.

The listing given above is in the order the arias appear on the CD and that makes for a satisfying programme. But it is also interesting to listen to these arias in chronological order of composition, following their discussion in Landini's essay. The earliest is "Nel periglioso istante" from Pietro Generali's opera of 1820 *Chiara di Rosembergh*. Tamburini was born in 1800, so we are at the start of his career. Generali (born in 1773) on the other hand was towards the end of his opera-composing career and this attractive aria sounds pre-Rossini with no fioritura save an arpeggio descent to a low G in its opening recitative. Its final section is an embryonic two-verse cabaletta.

Rossini does come to mind in the next aria "Si: vittoria!" from Giuseppe Balducci's *Riccardo l'intrepido* premiered in 1824 and containing much Rossinian coloratura. The music could almost come from *La Cenerentola* (perhaps an aria for Dandini) yet the words suggest a serious or heroic opera. Balducci, four years Rossini's junior, must have had Rossini's ability to make the same music fit differing genres. The recitative contains the fastest flourishes on the disc, delivered superbly by Prato.

Donizetti's *Gianni di Calais* was first performed in Naples in 1828 with Rubini in the title role. But the hit number seems to have come from the baritone role of Rustano whose barcarolle "Una barchetta in mar solcando va" was sung by Tamburini. It is an entrancing number charmingly sung by Prato – the spoken interjections and the transitions from minor to major are pointed beautifully – that warns old people of the dangers of sea travel. Apparently one can forget how to swim in old age! The opera held the stage for a few years and this barcarolle was published separately by Lucca in Milan with the inscription "Cantata dal Sr Frezzolini Al Teatro Carcano il Carnevale 1831". This was Giuseppe Frezzolini, father of the famous soprano Erminia Frezzolini. Tamburini received his credit in Henri Herz's "Agitato et Rondo pour le piano sur la Barcarole chantée par Tamburini dans l'opéra Gianni di Calais ....".

With Carlo Coccia's *Edoardo in Iscozia* of 1831 we enter the Romantic era and the standard double aria form. Despite some reminiscences of Rossini we are in the world of Donizetti and Bellini, though the aria "Non speranza di grandezza" doesn't quite sound like either. On the evidence of this aria Coccia had an individual voice. Particularly lovely are the orchestral echoes (in fact double echoes) in the first andante (the cabaletta is also marked andante), perhaps learned from Rossini's Willow Song in *Otello*. Edoardo, in disguise, is making an escape by boat, though why and who from isn't clear. Assuming that Iscozia is Scotland I also sense an atmospheric connection with Rossini's *La donna del lago*. Prato lightly ornaments the return of the tune in the cantabile and the second verse of the cabaletta though cadenzas apart, the fioritura is restrained. He interpolates a high A*b* at the end, regrettably to my mind, though others may disagree.

1834 saw the premiere in Paris of Marco Aurelio Marliani's first opera *Il bravo*. An Italian born in 1805, he lived in Paris from 1830 to 1847 where he also taught singing to Giulia Grisi and received composition lessons from Rossini. Prato sings the role of a Venetian, Giacomo Grandenigo, whose only solo is this bracing *brindisi* (Grisi and Rubini, Tamburini's colleagues in the premiere were each given two). It is a little more elaborate than the "two strophes" mentioned in the notes. The key shifts from B*b* major to G minor for the start of the second verse and there is also a choral introduction and a coda for soloist and chorus. The lead-in to the second part of each verse is marked with a pause mark and a trill. Prato slows but very briefly and doesn't attempt the trills. I suppose that to do so might risk spoiling the irresistible forward momentum of the song, but perhaps this is a grace not available to him. I think I am correct that none of the items on this CD calls for a trill, so maybe Tamburini didn't have one. But with or without a trill we have an attractive contrast to the more formal arias surrounding it.

The following year, 1835, saw Tamburini create the part of Riccardo in Bellini's *I puritani*. His aria "Ah! per sempre io ti perdei" is the first solo in the opera. How good it is to hear the aria sung by a baritone comfortable with its coloratura. The word "perdei" is set to a little downward scale, normally smudged over, but here it is articulated cleanly, and the considerable challenges that follow in both the aria and cabaletta are all met successfully. Landini's note invites us to listen to Mattia Battistini's 1911 recordings of the cantabile and cabaletta "to sample the old-fashioned style". Prato more than survives the comparison. Indeed the differences are ones of phrasing rather than accomplishment. Battistini uses much more portamento than Prato. Just compare the opening phrases. Prato manages the upward fourth on "sempre" cleanly, yet still legato, whereas Battistini lifts his voice through the interval in an almost ungainly fashion and then takes a breath before "io ti perdei". Commentators have remarked that while Battistini has a reputation for being a paragon of bel-canto, he frequently emphasises certain notes almost violently, to the point of going sharp. He is impassioned and individual, and the voice itself is a wonder, but Prato's evenness and elegance are much closer to a conventional idea of bel-canto. If Battistini is "the old-fashioned style" then I question that Prato is following it. I suspect Landini was thinking more of Battistini's virtuoso singing of the coda to the cabaletta, which Prato matches note for articulated note. The other difference between Battistini and Prato is that the former allows himself much more rhythmic freedom, for example an unmarked rallentando and diminuendo at the conclusion of the cantabile's first period. This was a feature of many singers of the period – think of the tenors Fernando De Lucia and Alessandro Bonci – yet modern singers seem reluctant to attempt anything so bold. Reprehensible or magical? Who holds sway, the conductor or the singer? I like to think that in this Battistini was carrying on a tradition that dates from Tamburini's age. Of other recordings of this piece, Mario Ancona, a contemporary of Battistini, sings the cantabile beautifully smoothly on a 1907 disc, but is a trifle dull in comparison, and Sherrill Milnes in a complete Decca recording is big-voiced and velvety but way out of his depth in the semiquavers of the coda. Prato's version gains from including the beautiful introductory recitative and a more than adequate Bruno, Patrick Kabongo Mubenga. It surely becomes the gold standard for this piece.

Even more of a display piece - it ended the concert with a bang - is Corrado's "Ah no, vivi" from Act III of Mercadante's *I briganti*". It was premiered in 1836 in Paris at the Théâtre Italien and featured all four members of the *I puritani* quartet. This time Tamburini got two solos, despite the presence of Grisi, Rubini and Lablache in the cast – the one from Act I is equally florid and demanding. The opera is a tale of sibling rivalry

and a patricide that in fact doesn't happen. Near the end Corrado, driven nearly mad with guilt, comes close to murdering the woman who loved his brother but he goes off to fight his brother. The words with the Prato CD suggest it is his brother he wants to kill though the synopsis in the complete opera set says he is seeking his own death in battle; in the end he kills himself with his brother's sword. Whatever, it is melodramatic stuff. But the cantabile is beautiful and the cabaletta spectacular with the final flourish rising to a top G. As Tamburini's range is given as up to an F, could this be a clue to how Mercadante expected it to be phrased, without a pause on the high note such as Prato gives us, and as is almost always heard from singers in this sort of vocal line. Sometimes a singer's range is given with a rider saying that an extra unsustained note is available in a melisma, and I wonder if this could have been true for Tamburini. In this performance Prato gives us both verses unlike on the Naxos CDs; the second is nicely varied.

According to the introduction to the aria text, and corroborated by Grove, Balfe's *Falstaff* was first performed at Her Majesty's Theatre, London, on 19th July 1838, though Landini's essay gives a different date in the following year. Tamburini sang Ford, again alongside Grisi, Rubini and Lablache with contralto Emma Albertazzi also in the cast. Ford's aria is the equivalent of that in Verdi's *Falstaff*, a jealous tirade against his wife despite the best efforts of his servants to explain her game to expose Falstaff. Balfe starts with the ejection of the Old Lady of Brentford (actually the fat knight in disguise) an episode in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* omitted by Boito and Verdi. It is an attractive aria in the usual structure with a florid cabaletta whose repeat is varied by Prato. Again I could do without the top A*b* at the end, especially as it is briefly held over changing tonic-dominant harmony.

The latest work to be excerpted is Donizetti's *Don Pasquale* from which we hear Malatesta's "Bella siccome un angelo". There is no cabaletta for Prato, as in the opera the cabaletta is given to Pasquale himself. *Caterina Cornaro*, whose composition overlapped that of *Don Pasquale*, also has a double aria structure shared between two characters. Landini singles out the little upward semiquaver run in the second stanza on the word "v'innamora" Strangely, this is perhaps the least convincing coloratura from Prato on the whole disc. But then you can't re-take in a live performance. My "golden age" comparison is with Giuseppe De Luca, a record dating from 1907. He too fails to articulate that run clearly, but he does insert a five-second long diminuendo on the high F that I find magical. Landini also mentions the florid cadenza ranging from low A*b* to high F that Donizetti writes out. Very disappointingly De Luca substitutes his own syllabic alternative that is not at all florid. Prato commences Donizetti's suggestion but doesn't in fact reach down as far as the low A*b* – he makes a C its lowest pitch before running back up the scale. Like everyone else he ignores Donizetti's final bar so as to end on a high D*b* rather than the one in the middle of the stave. This short aria has a number of fermata or pause marks, two in the first verse and five in the second, though two of these are in the final bar that both De Luca and Prato alter. They both choose the same one for the insertion of a tiny ornament, but I wonder if the others are also invitations for the singer to embellish. Strangely, what we think of as the cadenza doesn't have a fermata. Maybe Donizetti wanted it sung in strict tempo as written leaving an improvised flourish (or two) for the final bar. Who knows? (I have used a 1980 Ricordi full score for reference here.)

So all in all, this is a superb recital. All the "new" items make me want to hear the operas from which they come. Prato's voice is beautiful and contained with no obtrusive vibrato. Legato lines are smooth with little portamento and he is appoggiatura literate. Above all, the florid singing is unmatched. There is alert support from the Camerata Bach Choir, Poznań and the accompaniments from the Orchestra "Virtuosi Brunenses" under José Miguel Pérez-Sierra are beautifully buoyant. There is applause after each item, but I

detected no audience noises otherwise. I had difficulty finding a supplier and ended ordering it direct from www.illiria.de
Expensive, but worth it.

Henry Chorley wrote about Tamburini in his *Thirty Years' Musical Recollections* (1862): 'He was a singularly handsome man; his voice was rich, sweet, extensive and equal – ranging from F to f', two perfect octaves – and in every part of it entirely under control. His execution has never been exceeded … No one since himself has so thoroughly combined grandeur, accent, florid embellishment and solidity'. Vittorio Prato's voice is a little higher, a true baritone rather than a bass-baritone, but so much of Chorley's assessment also applies to him. Tamburini has a worthy successor and I can't give greater approval than that.





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THE ITINERANT MELOMANE

AMUSING *ALI BABÀ*



Enterprising Opera Southwest in Albuquerque, New Mexico, has revived Giovanni Bottesini's 1871 comic opera *Ali Babà* in an edition which may very well qualify as the world premiere of the work in the form originally conceived by Bottesini and his librettist Emilio Taddei. Many American opera companies, plagued by aging and declining audiences, have tried to expand the repertory from the ten or twelve most frequently played works to stimulate interest, mostly by commissioning new works from contemporary composers. Very few (as compared to their European counterparts) have tried to explore the enormous heritage of forgotten works from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and earlier. Opera Southwest under its daring director Anthony Barrese is the exception. The little company in the off-the-beaten-operatic-track town of Albuquerque, NM, has made a habit of programming rare works alongside standard repertory, including several rarely done Rossini operas and two works which Barrese, acting as musicologist, *maestro concertatore* (performing-edition preparer), conductor and music director has single-handedly brought back to life: Franco Faccio's fascinating *Amleto* and now Bottesini's comic *Ali Babà.*

Bottesini (1821-89) is best known today as a famous virtuoso on the double bass and the composer of several pieces for that instrument. In his day he was marketed as "*the Paganini of the double bass*," and indeed he styled himself after the famous violinist. Bottesini was a peripatetic musician too, traveling and playing concerts all over Europe and in Cuba and North American cities, including Boston and New York. While in Havana, he wrote his first opera, the one act *Colon in Cuba* (*Cristoforo Colombo*) to a Spanish libretto. He would compose operas for Italy, France (including one in French), Spain and England. It was in 1871 while Bottesini was presenting a season of operas at the

Lyceum Theater in London that his *Ali Babà* was first performed. That was also the year he was chosen to conduct the world premiere of *Aida* in Cairo. In all, Bottesini wrote 12 operas, two never performed. As far as I know, prior to the Opera Southwest offering, the only one which had enjoyed a performance in modern times is *Ero e Leandro*, to a libretto by Arrigo Boito, which was revived in Bottesini's native Crema in Lombardy in 2011 (a CD and DVD exist).

"Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves" is one of the "orphan" tales added to the *Thousand and One Nights* collection by French Orientalist Antoine Galland in the early eighteenth century. Galland, who translated the original Syrian manuscript, introducing the *Thousand and One Nights* to a European audience, supposedly heard additional tales from a Maronite Christian, including the stories of Ali Baba and Aladdin. *Ali Babà* the opera differs considerably from the original tale by grafting a typical comic opera plot - youthful lovers who thwart the girl's rich father's plan to marry her off to someone she doesn't want - to the story of fabulous treasure hidden in a cave protected with the magic words "*open sesame.*"

The opera was composed quickly to a libretto which Taddei based directly on *Ali-Baba ou Les quarante voleurs*, the libretto which Eugène Scribe and Mélesville (pen name of Anne-Honoré-Joseph Duveyrier) wrote for Luigi Cherubini, which premiered and flopped in Paris in 1833. Some of the French text is translated directly into Italian for the Bottesini work, however Taddei abbreviated Cherubini/Scribe and Mélesville's 4 hour long work into a more manageable 2 1/2 hours. Also, Cherubini's Grand Romantic Opera (rather like Weber's *Euryanthe* or contemporary works by Auber) became a comic opera in Taddei's hands. Taddei also reordered some of the plot. Cherubini's lengthy work opens with a Prologue in which Nadir happens upon the thieves and learns the magic words. Taddei tucks that central plot element into the second scene of the first act and gives Ali Babà, the rich merchant, prominence in the first scene—and a nice buffo aria ("O spettacolo che incanta") which establishes his character as a greedy merchant who is essentially comic.

In the opera, Nadir and Delia are the lovers and Ali Babà is Delia's rich father, a merchant who is trying to hide the "Moka" (coffee) that he has imported without paying customs duties. The unwanted suitor for Delia is Aboul Hassan, the customs officer who demands marriage to Delia as the price for not reporting Ali Babà's contraband and sending him to prison. Ali Babà is perfectly willing to marry Delia to Aboul Hassan and banish Nadir until Nadir happens on the thieves' cave while wandering in the forest and, spying on the brigands, learns the magic words. Nadir enters the cave, sees the fabulous treasure and takes some for himself. Returning with his new found wealth, Nadir convinces Ali that he should marry Delia, but Ali ferrets out the source of his wealth along with the secret words.

The thieves now capture Delia and take her to the cave, not knowing who she is. Greedy Ali goes himself to the cave and uses the magic words to enter, but,

once inside, he forgets the formula and cannot get out. When the thieves return, they find him. Delia, held captive in the cave, convinces the thieves to ransom her and her father with Ali's great wealth as a lure. The bandit chief, Orsocane goes to Ali's palace to collect the ransom while quietly ordering the thieves to hide amongst the barrels of Moka, waiting to plunder the palace at a signal from their leader. Ali's faithful slave Morgiana discovers the hidden thieves and alerts Nadir, who leaves for help. The opera ends when Aboul Hassan arrives with soldiers, destroys the Moka, and arrests the thieves. Ali Babà laments his lost coffee while Nadir and Delia tell him that he still has them.

The London critics in 1871 liked Bottesini's score, but did not like the libretto, perhaps because it deviated too much from the well known tale (which, to tell the truth, is pretty gruesome and includes a character who is drawn and quartered and eventually sewn back together by a blindfolded tailor). According to reviews, the original London performances offered the work in English translation and omitted the through-composed recitatives almost entirely, so Opera Southwest's revival, in Italian and with the recitatives intact, may have been the first performance of the work ever as it was envisioned by Bottesini and Taddei. In spite of doubts about the libretto, the opera was more successful than the Scribe/Mélesville/Cherubini version and played for around a decade in London. There were a few subsequent productions in Spain and perhaps Italy before the score was adopted for a puppet theater troupe, which continued to perform it in a reduced version with piano until the 1930's. And so it rested until the Albuquerque revival of October, 2019, brought it back in its full glory.

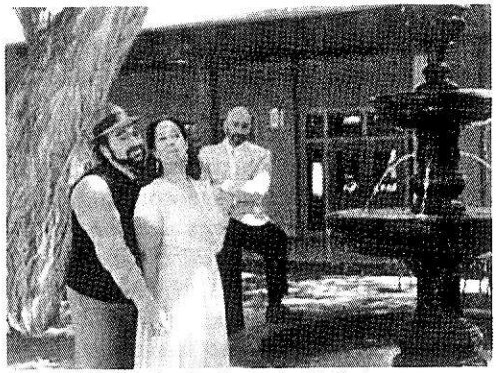
The faults of Taddei's libretto may be attributed to the Scribe/Mélesville libretto, and include fairly standardized characters and an overly abrupt ending. Interestingly, it does not stereotype "orientals" or make comic fools of them in the manner of Mustafà in Rossini's *L'Italiana in Algeri.* Ali Babà may be greedy, but he is not an idiot, and Delia and Nadir are as sympathetic as any comic opera lovers. Ali and Aboul Hassan may descend from the buffo basses of Donizetti and Rossini, but they are pretty far removed from *commedia* character types like Don Magnifico and Don Bartolo. Also, Opera Southwest's production is careful to avoid racial stereotypes.

The music of *Ali Babà* is mellifluous and fluent, with well formed melodies, some easily memorable. The vocal forms hark back to the operas of the 1840s and '50s, with typical arias, some with cabalettas, and a big concertato finale at the end of Act II which reminds us of many operas by Donizetti and Verdi. In other words, the musical formulae are part and parcel of the period and usually don't show the developments seen in middle and late period Verdi where the drama is wedded so closely to the musical expression. There are a variety of rhythms, with one aria in Spanish style reminiscent of Eboli's Veil Song from *Don Carlo or* Hélène's Act V Sicilienne from *Les Vêpres siciliennes.* Another is accompanied by a mandolin, but the dominating rhythm

seemed to me to be the waltz. At least two of the big ensembles are in waltz rhythms, including the final big ensemble, which is Ali Babà's drinking song, sung as Morgiana and Ali get the thieves drunk ("Se un bicchier di squisto Shirà"). Inevitably, some of these popular comic scenes are reminiscent of operetta since by 1870 most comic opera had migrated to the operetta genre. Offenbach reached his apex of popularity in England in the 1870s and operetta composer Charles Lecocq would produce his own *Ali-Baba* in 1887.

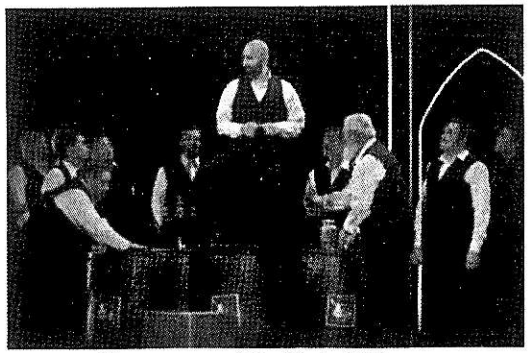
Bottesini weds this popular, operetta-ish style to a more operatic, 'serious' style in some of the arias and duets, often with interesting touches in the orchestra. Nadir has melting arias in Acts I and IV ("Lungo da te, mia Delia" and "Da te lontano—da te diviso") and Delia has a nice Romance with harp in Act I ("Non è il poter, nè l'oro") and a very dramatic and well wrought piece ("Me sventurata, muoio di spavento") in Act III when she is held prisoner in the cave. Orsocane, the bandit chieftain, on the other hand, has a delightful and more operetta-like aria with chorus hailing the joys of the bandit life, "Per monti e boschi ognora," in the same act. These are indeed jolly brigands, more suited to Offenbach or Gilbert and Sullivan than to the bloodthirsty thieves who are burnt to death in the original tale along with Ali's coffee (but are only arrested in the finale to the Bottesini opera).

Opera Southwest's production directed by Foad Faridzadeh with Scenic Design by Richard Hogle and costumes by Carmella Lynn Lauer, updated the story to 1940s Isfahan in Persia (now Iran). The "sets" were media projections of Persian buildings and courtyards framed by a colorful neon "sculpture" in the form of moorish arches set part way upstage. The thieves' cave used projections of the large cave entrance or interior with an "interactive" boulder which rolled back on the command "Sesamo, schiudi il sentier" ("Open sesame"). The projections of the forest with the cave featured a huge moon and starry skies. I thought it was all very effective. Costumes were mostly black suits and white shirts with hats for the brigands and forties' dress for everyone else, except, curiously, for four female chorus members who for some reason wore colorful peasant costumes which contrasted oddly with the otherwise sober mid-twentieth century attire. Mr. Faridzadeh's direction was clear and effective too, making the audience laugh appropriately in the comic moments and moving the sometimes confusing story along fairly clearly. For me, however, the action muddied in the last scene when the thieves are drinking and Aboul Hassan arrives with the troops. At least some of the confusion comes from the libretto, which ends too abruptly, without a summary chorus or happy-ending trio for Nadir, Delia and Ali. (Cherubini's opera ends with a brief chorus of rejoicing.)



Nadir, Delia and Ali Baba

Egyptian bass-baritone Ashraf Sewailam was perfect as the title character, as a singer and an actor: he owned the stage whenever he was present. Tenor Christopher Bozeka sang Nadir with grace and charm and a pleasant, sweet voice, capable of reaching imposing high notes. Monica Yunus' Delia was also strong, especially in her Act III aria, which elicited much applause. I also liked very much bass-baritone Darren Stokes as chief thief Oroscane. Tall and handsome, he swaggered about the stage and sang lustily. I was sorry that Laurel Semerdjian, our Morgiana (Ali's slave) did not have a bigger role because she has a luscious mezzo and was an audience favourite. Tall, thin Kevin Thompson had the thankless role of Aboul Hassan, the unwanted suitor, and Matthew Soibelman, Jonathan Walker-VanKuren and Kameron Ghanavati all performed well in minor roles. There was a big chorus (56 strong) which moved well on stage and mostly sang the unfamiliar music with verve. The fifty-person orchestra also performed well under Maestro Barrese, and the music moved along nicely with no problems that I could identify given my unfamiliarity with the score.



Orsocane and the Forty Thieves

Bottesini composed some dance music for the last act as Ali Babà and his friends try to distract the thieves, but Opera Southwest had no dancers and the principals and chorus members cavorting on stage looked awkward. Fortunately there was no formal, full-length ballet to contend with, as Cherubini had composed for his version.

For me, *Ali Babà* was not of the same order as Barrese's previous revival, Franco Faccio's *Amleto. Amleto* is a first-rate work, a real revelation, and it has enjoyed an afterlife, especially in a terrific production in Bregenz. *Ali Babà* is more of a pleasant diversion for troubled times, albeit one which sent its listeners out humming into the starry New Mexico night.

Once again, Barrese deserves opera lovers' thanks for digging into the treasure trunk of unknown nineteenth century scores and working to bring some of it back from the dead. He has said that once you get beyond the top ten (or maybe twenty) best known operatic titles, it doesn't matter what you stage since a totally unknown work like *Ali Babà* will be no more obscure to most of your audience than, say, Donizetti's *La favorite* or Verdi's *Simon Boccanegra.* So why not try something both old and new? It worked, because the October 25 performance we attended enjoyed a capacity audience and the subsequent matinee on October 27 was completely sold out. Barrese is the real Ali Baba minus the greed, intoning "Open Sesame" and finding operatic treasure in that vast cave of the musical past, full of forgotten gold

Charles Jernigan



Sychrov Castle 29 August 1998
(left to right) Dr Kadlec, Princess Marguerite de Rohan,Victoria loukiaetz, Maestro Elio Boncompagni and his wife

THE ITINERANT MELOMANE

DONIZETTI FESTIVAL Bergamo 2019

Lucrezia Borgia is not one of Donizetti's best-known titles today, but it should be. Coming between *L'elisir d'amore* and *Lucia di Lammermoor*, this 1833 opera, based on a Romantic play by Victor Hugo, broke new ground as both drama and music. Listening to it today, one feels that Donizetti had composed his own *Rigoletto* (an opera also based on a revolutionary Hugo play) some twenty years before Verdi got around to his. Verdi was a young student in Milan when *Lucrezia* debuted at La Scala, and he obviously took Donizetti's work to heart.

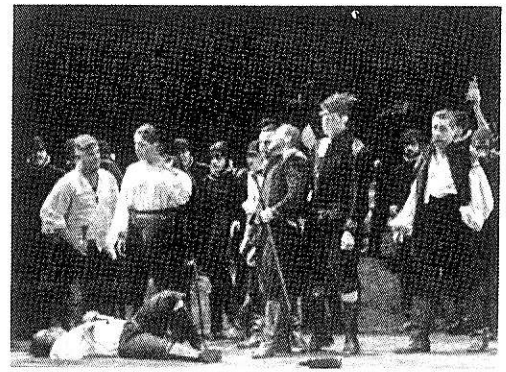
Donizetti kept adjusting the score over a period of almost ten years, trying to make the story comply with the censors of various Italian cities or improving the dramatics or adding new music to please new singers—which brings us to the new critical edition by Roger Parker and Rosie Ward. Parker argues that there were actually ten different versions of the score done with Donizetti's participation or blessing, including the original, which debuted at La Scala on December 26,1833. The version performed in Bergamo this year was essentially the one performed at the Thèâtre Italien in Paris in 1840, when Donizetti had a superb cast of singers. The Paris edition includes an extensive cabaletta that the composer wrote to accompany Lucrezia's beautiful two-verse cavatina, "Com'è bello." Donizetti advised that if the cabaletta were performed, the aria should be cut to one verse, and so it was in Bergamo. This piece, "Si voli il primo a cogliere," is ornate in traditional bel canto fashion, and may have been added to appease the Parisian melomanes who expected a florid showpiece for the soprano—in this case Giulia Grisi. The second major change is a new tenor aria in Act II, written for the great tenor Mario, who sang the role in Paris, "Anch'io provai le tenere." Although this alternate aria has been recorded (by Juan Diego Florez among others), until now it was thought that Donizetti's orchestration was lost, so orchestration had to be improvised. Now the original has turned up in Geneva, and we heard it in Bergamo. It is first rate Donizetti, a gorgeous, harp-accompanied *romanza*. The Gennaro-Orsini duet in the last act, cut by Donizetti himself in earlier editions, was restored here too ("Minacciata è la mia vita") as well as a brief solo for Gennaro ("Madre se ognor lontano") in the finale. The soprano sang the tragic rondo finale "Era desso il mio figlio," but with only one verse as Donizetti had also recommended, changing it from a soprano show piece to a dramatically appropriate ending. It is taut, riveting drama with a most unusual title character—a murderer who ironically has the capacity for maternal love.

The stage director, Andrea Bernard, seems to have seized on that maternal aspect since his production used two symbolic visual elements—a baby's cradle and the female breast, as both nurture and erotic body part. Before the music began, we saw Lucrezia as a young mother nursing her infant by a white cradle. Soon the cradle was broken into pieces and by the end of the opera we were offered a half dozen broken cradles. As for breasts, the image of a nursing mother opened the opera, and during the performance we saw Lucrezia's breasts pawed by her husband and petted by Gennaro, who is erotically attracted to her before he knows she is his mother. In the end, Lucrezia was supposed to stab herself in the breast (in this production, not in the libretto). Unfortunately our Lucrezia, Carmela Remigio, could not get the pouch of stage blood hidden in her dress to break, so she kept daintily poking her breast with a poignard. She

died a bloodless death, but her white dress was covered with blood when she took her bows. Breasts, however, were intact. I found the cradle/breast concept a bit juvenile.

Bernard's stage direction also gave us a Renaissance full of violence, fights, threats, blood and sex: it was very active, the opposite of park and bark opera. The singers (including the chorus) acted well and Bernard managed to distinguish various characters through mannerisms or movements. Besides maternal love, Bernard suggested incest (between Lucrezia and both Pope Alexander, who appeared as a silent character and Gennaro, whose interactions with his mother were definitely on the erotic side) and also homoerotic love (Gennaro-Orsini). Gennaro may be innocent, but in this production he certainly touched all the sexual bases. There was even a pole dancer—apparently the Princess Negroni, who hosts the fatal party in Act II. Who knew that there was pole dancing in the Renaissance?

The stage set, by Alberto Beltrame, was dark and ugly. Bodies protruded from the earth in Act I—Lucrezia's victims, one supposes. A coffered ceiling turned over to become a wall of the Borgia palace, and for some reason it dumped a bucketful of dirt as it turned. The set did nothing for the opera. Costumes, by Elena Beccaro, were more or less Renaissance, with doublets and cod pieces, but they were gray and dull. Only Lucrezia was allowed some color.



Toughs in Ferrara

The singing was always adequate, in some cases outstanding. Particularly good was Xabier Anduaga as Gennaro. His tenor is strong, even and lovely up to the highest notes and he was capable of singing softly and dreamily in his first aria, "Di pescatore ignobile." He could sing forcefully too, and he was superb in the "Mario" aria in Act II. I thought that Remigio's voice was too light for Lucrezia, but she sang it with such musicianship and fine acting that in the end it did not matter. She was a young Lucrezia, hardly older than her son, but given that family, she was probably 12 when he was born. Marko Mimica did not much impress as Don Alfonso, but Varduhi Abrahamyan was very good as Gennaro's friend Maffio Orsini (a pants role). She conquered the famous brindisi, "Il segreto per esser felice," easily and she sent frissons down the spine leading off the Prologue finale as she/he confronts Lucrezia. Donizetti wrote that the "minor" characters were not minor at all and should not be doubled. Here we had Manuel Pierattelli as Jeppo Liveerotto, Alex Martini as Don Apostolo Gazella, Roberto Maietta as Ascanio Petrucci, Daniele Lettieri as Oloferno Vitellozzo, Rocco Cavalluzzi as Gubetta and Edoardo Miletti as Rustighello



Xabier Anduaga

Credit should go to Marta Negrini as Choreographer. There was a lot of movement to manage—fights to stage, stomping to attend to, kicks in the teeth to oversee and sword play to work out. She did a good job. Best of all on the musical side was Riccardo Frizza, who whipped the Orchestra Giovanile Luigi Cherubini into a white fury for the exciting climaxes, but gave ample space to breathe for the long cantilenas. There was a stage band, and the chorus under Corrado Casati was excellent.

All in all, this *Lucrezia Borgia* was musically taut and convincing, and with very good (although perhaps overly violent and cruel) stage direction and acting. The scenery was downright ugly, however. As an opera, *Lucrezia Borgia* rates an A+; it is one of Donizetti's finest. We saw it on November 23.

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The third opera at this year's Festival was, by a long shot, the last of Donizetti's works to premiere: ***L'ange de Nisida***, which had its first performance ever as a concert at Covent Garden in June, 2018, and its first staging at the Donizetti Festival this year, on November 16, 2019. Sort of. In Bergamo, this piece, which Donizetti never saw on stage, was presented in the *cantiere,* the construction site, of the Teatro Donizetti, which for the last two years has been undergoing a major renovation, with modernized stage areas, dressing rooms, foyers and bars. Work will be completed in time for the 2020 Festival. In the meanwhile, *L'ange* was staged in the orchestra seating section (the stalls), all seats removed, while the audience sat in boxes or on the stage itself in a *tribuna*—a raised, tiered metal platform with fixed plastic seats. The orchestra was in the pit, but facing the stage, while the conductor faced the playing area so that the singers could see him. It was opera in the round. The unusual circumstances made for an unusual production, and in my estimation, *L'ange de Nisida* still awaits a proper stage production so that we can see it as Donizetti probably imagined it. The staging we saw naturally had some problems with acoustics with difficulties posed by the placement of the singers and voice projection, but it was a fascinating attempt to stage this opera—a work in progress—in a space which is also a work in progress.

This opera has a complicated history. Donizetti wrote *L'ange de Nisida* for the Théâtre de la Renaissance in Paris in 1840, but the theater went bankrupt between the beginning of rehearsals and the projected date of the opening, meaning that it was never staged. For reasons

relating to regulations from the Napoleonic era governing the types of operas which Parisian theaters could perform, no other Paris house—the Opéra, the Opéra Comique or the Thèâtre Italien—could take the work, and Donizetti knew that no Italian house would stage it due to the story, which reflected unfavorably on both the King of Naples, Fernand of Aragon, and the Church. In the end, he dismembered the score, placing almost half of it in *La favorite,* a French grand opera with a similar story which became a triumph at the Opéra, while part of an aria went into *Don Pasquale.* And so it remained for 180 years until musicologist Candida Mantica managed to reconstruct the score from autograph pages in the Biblioteque National in Paris and from a microfilm copy of the autograph of *La favorite* (the autograph itself is currently "lost" too). The reconstruction gives us an opera with about 60% of the music used elsewhere (and therefore familiar to Donizetti fans) and about 40% which is "new."

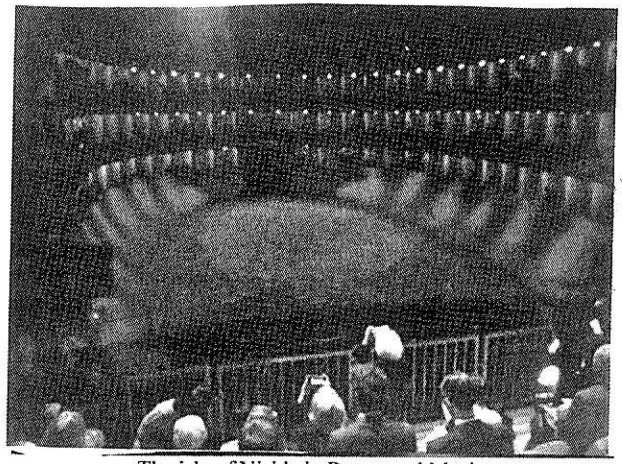
In order to get around the theatrical regulations of the theatres, a work for the Renaissance could not be a grand opera in French (the purview of the Opéra), a work in Italian (the purview of the Thèâtre Italien) or a French work with spoken dialogue (the purview of the Opéra Comique). Thus the librettists Alphonse Royer and Gustave Vaëz devised what was called a *genre* opera: a work in French but in the style of an Italian opera semiseria, with a plot which included a comic character within a serious story. *L'ange*, however, differs from almost all Italian semi-serias, which always have a happy or rescue ending, while *L'ange* ends with the death of the protagonist. To make it even more complicated, Donizetti evidently used extensive portions of an existing Italian opera semi-seria which he had written, but which had never been staged, *Adelaide,* in the score of *L'ange de Nisida.* Thus the librettist had to adapt new words—in French—to existing music composed for an Italian text!

The story, based on eighteenth century texts about the Comte de Comminge, concerns the Countess Sylvia de Linarès (soprano), a young Spanish woman 'adopted' by Don Fernand I d'Aragon, the King of Naples, in the fifteenth century. He has fallen in love with her and keeps her, as his mistress, most of the time on the island of Nisida, in the Bay of Naples. The people call her their angel (*l'ange*) because of her kindness and good works. Leone de Casaldi, a young soldier who has been exiled after a duel, falls in love with her, not realizing that she is the King's mistress. She loves him too, but implores him to forget her. The Church in the person of the Monk, declares that the King must renounce her and send her away, but Don Gaspar, the King's chamberlain, plans a marriage of convenience for her. Leone becomes the chosen husband, but when he learns the truth, he renounces her in front of the Court and breaks his sword in front of the King. In the final scene, Leone, desperate, has become a novice in a monastery where the Monk is the Father Superior, but Sylvia has also come to the monastery disguised as a male novice. She is desperately ill, and when she reveals herself to Leone, he at first disowns her. Soon, however, love conquers his sense of offended honor, and they sing a love duet, hoping for a future together. It is too late. She dies in his arms, and he tells the Monk that he will follow her the following day.

Those who know *La favorite* will immediately see the similarities—a king with a mistress, an innocent lover who does not know her "history," the opposition of the religious authorities, the last act in the monastery with the death of Lèonor, the protagonist of that opera. When Donizetti refashioned *L'ange de Nisida* as *La favorite*, however, he dispensed with the buffo bass Don Gaspar, who would have been unsuitable for a work at the Opéra. One part of the story which moved to the new opera intact was the final scene in the monastery. A much repeated story held that Donizetti wrote the music for that last act of *La favorite* in the white heat of a single night while suffering from a migraine headache. Of course that was baloney; he had written it the previous year for *L'ange de Nisida.*

L'ange de Nisida undoubtedly has a lot of first rate Donizetti music which is otherwise unknown, including Don Gaspar's Act I buffo aria with chorus ("Ma puissance n'est pas mince") with its concluding cabaletta ("Et vous Mesdames") which will become "Un foco insolito" in *Don Pasquale;* Leone's cabaletta-like "Quelle ivresse et quel délire" in Act II when he thinks Sylvia is his; the King's "O mon Ange que j'implore," which is a solo couched in a trio, which concludes Act II; the duet between Don Gaspar and the King in Act III; the Chorus "Déjà dans la chapelle" in Act III, and much else. A small percentage of the music either was never composed or is lost. For the London concert (and the Opera Rara recording) it was newly composed in Donizetti's style by Martin Fitzpatrick, including a Prelude, or in the case of a cabaletta for Sylvia, it was borrowed from an additional piece which Donizetti wrote for *Maria di Rohan.* The Bergamo performances tried to stick as close to Donizetti's score as possible: a few passages of recitative without music were mimed silently, the Fitzpatrick additions were discarded and Sylvia's Act III cabaletta was taken from an early, never heard version of the Lèonor's analogous cabaletta from *La favorite.*

Instead of scenery as such, the production opened with sheets of music covering the oval playing area in the shape of the small island of Nisida. At other times, the chorus, singing in the top tier of boxes, dropped sheets of music from the opera to the playing area (some were caught by audience members sitting in the boxes below). The idea honored the work as a musicological reconstruction rebuilt from the scattered leaves of the score. Otherwise projections (by Angelo Sala) on the playing floor took the place of sets. All of this worked well.



The isle of Nisida in Recovered Music

Costumes by Margherita Baldoni consisted of modern attire for most of the opera, but in the second part (Act III of the original) the chorus came in wearing colorful medieval costumes, followed by the principals in equally spectacular period dress—all made of paper printed with medieval or Renaissance designs, paper which was ripped apart and discarded as the act progressed. The symbolism seemed to suggest that the period did not matter—a woman abused by the men around her is a timeless theme.

Charles Jernigan

DIARY

Genova, Teatro Carlo Felice
***Anna Bolena* 15/16/17/18/19 April 2020**



Liège, Théâtre Royal
***Alzira* (Verdi) 17/19/21/23/25 April**

Palermo, Teatro Massimo
***Roberto Devereux* 29/30 April, 3/5/6/7 May**
***Il pirata* (Bellini) 3/6/7/8/9 June**
(w. Angela Meade, Ludovic Tézier)

New York, Metropolitan Opera
***Maria Stuarda* 19/23/27/30 April, 3/9 May**

Barcelona, Liceu
***Semiramide* (Rossini) 30 April, 3 May**

London, Queen Elizabeth Hall, Chelsea Opera Group
***Roberto Devereux* 27 June 2020 (concert perf)**
(w. Helena Dix Cond. Dane Lam)

Bologna, Teatro Comunale
***Lucrezia Borgia* 16/17/18/20/21/23 June**

Napoli, Teatro San Carlo
***Maometto II* (Rossini) 2/4 October**

Bilbao, Amigos de la Ópera
***Jérusalem* (Verdi) 16/19/22/25 November**

Bad Wildbad, Rossini Opera Festival, Königliches Kurtheater
***L'isola disabitata* (Gercia) 10/17/24 July**
***La scala di seta* 12/16/18/23/25 July**
Trinkhalle
***Elisabetta regina d'Inghilterra* 11/18/25 July**
***Le Philtre* (Auber) 17/24 July**

Martina Franca, Festival della Valle d'Itria, Palazzo Ducale
***La rappresentalia* (Mercadante) 14/26/27 July**

[To be noted: ***il furioso*** at the Barbican in London in July
Le nozze in Villa at Bergamo in November]

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