

Élisabeth Reconsidered

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I can still remember opening the Sunday edition of the *New York Times* on May 6, 1984, and being surprised to see a picture of Donizetti on the front page as I sleepily ate my breakfast. The headline of the article by Will Crutchfield, "Unknown Opera by Donizetti Found in a London Basement," almost made me spill my cornflakes. Crutchfield,[1] while searching for material for a book on nineteenth century opera, had found a manuscript bundle in a dusty basement storage room of Covent Garden which contained the first and third acts of a hitherto unknown opera called *Elisabetta.* The authenticity of the manuscripts, mostly in Donizetti's hand, was verified by the Verdian scholar Julian Budden, by John Carter, and by Alexander Weatherson, who at that time were respectively: a Vice-President, the Secretary, and the Editor of the Donizetti Society.

Four years later the eminent conductor/musicologist Richard Bonynge was rummaging through the same trove of old scores in search of forgotten ballet music for a projected recording, and he found the missing second act. It duly confirmed that *Elisabetta,* an Italian language work, ultimately derived from the composer's *Otto mesi in due ore,* which had premiered at Naples' Teatro Nuovo in 1827. Before long, Mr. Crutchfield became aware that *Elisabetta* was in fact a reworking of a French language opera deriving from *Otto mesi* entitled *Élisabeth, ou La fille de l'exilé.* Paris's Bibliothèque National, in fact, housed diverse autograph manuscripts relating to this French version.

Years passed, and Covent Garden contemplated a world premiere of its mysterious work by Donizetti. After all, it is not often that an opera house has the chance to offer an unknown work by one of opera's most famous composers, and a mature work at that, and Crutchfield and Roger Parker prepared a performing edition. When the premiere came, however, Covent Garden was closed for renovations, and *Elisabetta* received a single concert performance on December 16, 1997, at the Royal Festival Hall, a performance most notable (if the critics can be believed) for the unexpected London debut of Juan Diego Florez, who stepped in at the last minute for Giuseppe Sabbatini. The performance was supposed to celebrate the two hundredth anniversary of the composer's birth, but as a single concert performance, it was an inadequate gesture.

Meanwhile, Will Crutchfield began to perform bel canto opera in concert version each summer north of New York City at the Caramoor Festival. Alexander Weatherson had opined that it would probably be possible to reconstruct the French *Élisabeth;* Crutchfield took on the task, and on July 17 and 19, 2003, this opera was finally performed, semi-staged, almost twenty years after that fateful discovery in the dark underbelly of Covent Garden Opera House.

[1] [1]Will Crutchfield, "Unknown Opera by Donizetti Found in a London Basement," *New York Times,* May 6, 1984. Accessed on line, May 6, 2021.

The London performance of *Elisabetta* was recorded and broadcast on BBC Radio 3, and can be accessed today on a CD available from the House of Opera (*www.operapassion.com*: CD 5527 or CD 89681) for a very nominal sum. The live premiere of *Élisabeth* at Caramoor is available for free on You Tube and it provides the basis for further comments later in this article.[2]

One more recording of note in this complex of operas, revisions and remakes is the Actes Sud CD of *Gli Esiliati in Siberia,* which documents a performance, again in concert form, at the Festival de Radio France of Montpellier-Roussillon in 2001. This is substantially the 1832 Rome revision of *Otto mesi,* and is as close as we currently have to the original 1827 score. Some of the Rome revisions made their way into *Élisabeth* and *Elisabetta,* including the *sinfonia.*

It is not my intention here to rehearse in detail the steps on the way to *Élisabeth* or the detective story which led to its discovery, as that has been amply covered in scholarly work by Annalisa Bini, Crutchfield, Weatherson and others. Rather it is to ask why this wonderful work of Donizetti's maturity seems to have slipped once again into obscurity; it has been almost twenty years since Will Crutchfield introduced it to the world in 2003, and it has never been fully staged, not ever. No professional recording is available and it has not been heard again in concert or semi-staged form.

A summary of work which others have done, however, might be helpful in reminding readers about these operas. *Otto mesi in due ore* is based on a real incident which occurred in 1804, just 23 years before the opera's premiere. An eighteen-year-old woman named Praskovya Lopoulova journeyed across Russia, mostly on foot, to St.Petersburg from Zaimka in Siberia where her father lived in enforced exile. Just two years later a French author, Sophie Cottin, who had fallen on hard times in the wake of the French Revolution and her husband's death, produced a fictionalized account of Lopulova's daring trip which became a best seller and was translated into several languages. Dramatized versions followed, especially the play *La fille de l'exilé ou Huit mois en deux heures* (1819) by Guilbert de Pixérécourt. The subtitle would become the basis for the title of Domenico Gilardoni's 1827 libretto for Donizetti's opera (with other intermediary stage works as outlined by Weatherson)[3]

The Corago site from the University of Bologna[4] lists fifteen revivals of *Otto mesi in due ore* in Italian cities between 1829 and 1871[5], when it returned to Naples, at the Teatro Nazionale. Sometimes it went by the *Otto mesi* title, but more often it was called *Gli esiliati in Siberia;* sometimes it was called a *melodramma romantico*, but more often it was

[2] Donizetti *Élisabeth,* World Premiere. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tqlsWpb6Clg. Accessed May-June, 2021.

[3] Alexander Weatherson. Gli esiliati in Siberia, *Exile and Gaetano Donizetti.* http://alexander.weatherson.info/DocPDF/Esiliati.pdf. Accessed June 1, 2021

[4] http://corago.unibo.it/opera/0000099130. Accessed June 1, 2021

[5] Bini notes 17 revivals other than the Naples productions

a *melodramma storico spettacoloso,* an unusual genre, but one which seems quite apposite for the story. Donizetti revised the score time and again for these productions and for another one proposed for Torino which never took place. There were changes in plot, particularly in Act 3, new characters (or the removal of characters), new arias (or the removal of arias), new orchestration and significant changes of voice range—Elisabetta went from soprano to contralto or mezzo-soprano, and Michele went from a buffo bass/baritone singing in Neapolitan dialect to a role with a less comic tint and singing in Italian. For *Élisabeth* he became a tenor and the role took on an almost heroic cast. *Élisabeth,* in fact, is a completely recomposed opera to a new libretto in a new language. *Otto mesi* had originally been a work with spoken dialogue, which was perfect for Donizetti since he intended it for the Opéra-Comique where spoken dialogue was the rule. When the production fell through for unknown reasons, he revised it again, put it back into Italian (he himself apparently translating the French libretto into Italian), replaced the spoken dialogue with sung recitatives, restored much of the *Otto mesi* music cut in the French version and sent it off to London as *Elisabetta,* where, once again, it was not staged for unknown reasons.

To make matters even more confusing, one Uranio Fontana, a supposed pupil of Donizetti, took the *Élisabeth* libretto and composed his own music for about half of it, using *Otto mesi* music for the rest and claiming that he had simply 'put in order' Donizetti's music; this work was presented at the Théâtre Lyrique in 1853, five years after Donizetti's death. Fontana's libretto was published in 1854, and it provides a guide to the libretto by de Leuven and Brunswick (pen names for Adolphe von Ribbing and Léon Lévy) which Donizetti used and which turned *Otto mesi* into *Élisabeth.* Although the published libretto of the Fontana work occasionally differs in significant ways from the text as heard in the Crutchfield reconstruction, it is for the most part the libretto used by Donizetti.

The title of the original work—in English *Eight Months in Two Hours*—is unusual in itself and is the key to the type of drama Pixérécourt (and Gilardoni after him) had fashioned—the somewhat picaresque tale of an extraordinary journey of eight months' duration told in a stage work which takes approximately two hours to play. (In today's world the equivalent would be a fictionalized account on Netflix, or the BBC, of an historic incident which might take six or eight hour-long episodes to dramatize). Pixérécourt's three act structure condenses the journey into 1) Introduction of the main characters and departure from Siberia; 2) the journey with melodramatic events condensed into one act of about 45 minutes; 3) the arrival in Moscow (instead of St.Petersburg), pardon by the Tsar (or his representative), reunion of the heroine's family and happy ending.

Gilardoni was not the best versifier who wrote for Donizetti, nor was he the best dramatic craftsman, but he certainly had a wide taste in subjects and ten of his twenty-one libretti were for Donizetti. The subject is unusual. Very few if any Italian operas of the period are based on recent history, and although Mme. Cottin concocted a "chaste" (Crutchfield) love affair for her heroine, Gilardoni ignores it. *Otto mesi's* Elisabetta is a heroine without a romantic interest—and she remained so through all of Donizetti's iterations of the story—which is itself almost unheard of in nineteenth century opera.

Gilardoni called his libretto for *Otto mesi* a "melodramma romantico," and even that is unusual nomenclature. We might think of it as a *semiserio* piece, such as Rossini and many others had produced before 1827, but it is not typical of the genre. Like operas in the *semiseria* genre, it is a serious work with a happy ending and there is a comic "buffo" character (Michele, a baritone), who sang in the Neapolitan dialect, a tradition for such roles in the Parthenopean

city. But unlike most *opere* or *melodramme semiseri*, the story does not revolve around an unjustly accused young woman in a peasant setting, like, for example, *La gazza ladra, La sonnambula,* or Donizetti's own *Linda di Chamounix.* Elisabetta is not unjustly accused (although her father is), she is not rescued by a man (instead, she rescues one) and she is not a peasant (her family is aristocratic). Nor is she the pert, saucy heroine of opera buffa, like Isabella or Norina. She certainly isn't the weak, damaged and/or deranged heroine of Romantic drama, like Lucia or Bellini's Elvira. No, she is determined and brave and quite hardy, taking on a long journey across a frozen landscape, dominating a band of marauding Tartars and surviving a flood. And she is successful in the end. No wonder Donizetti was attracted to her throughout his career. No wonder he made the opera more serious as time went on, ditching the buffo elements, enhancing Elisabetta/Élisabeth's stature and centring the opera more and more on her, changing the title from one which describes the scope of the work to her name or to a description of her as *La fille de l'exilé.* In all of Donizetti's immense corpus, I don't think that there is another heroine quite like her, although in a more comic mode she might have shared some kinship to Marie of *La fille du régiment,* also a daring, independent young woman in an opera written at the same time as *Élisabeth. Deux filles* under the skin, maybe, but Marie, of course, has a love interest and that romantic element grounds the opera's plot.

Which brings us to *Élisabeth* itself. After Will Crutchfield had painstakingly assembled the score from elements used for the Italian *Elisabetta,* together with elements in the Paris archives not used in the London *Elisabetta*, two speculative additions inserted at the beginning of Act Two, and the Rondeau Finale, apparently composed for London but only sketched for *Élisabeth*, he offered the reassembled score for performance at Caramoor. He also transformed the spoken French dialogue into accompanied recitative, basing it on the recitative which Donizetti had composed for *Elisabetta.*

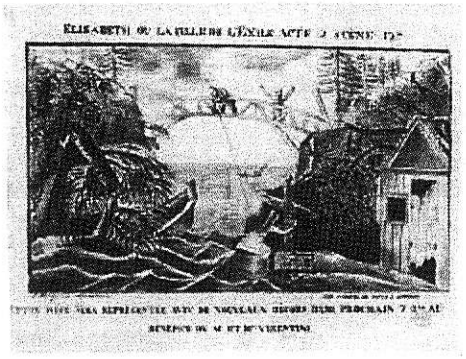
In Appendix 1 of his Program Notes for the Caramoor production, Crutchfield clarifies the relationship of pieces in the French score and various iterations of *Otto mesi,* while Appendix 2 details the correspondence of the 17 French numbers and the equivalent numbers in the London *Elisabetta.* The pirate (?) recording available on You Tube allows us to hear the result and judge the opera's worth. There follows below a list of the musical numbers, based on Crutchfield's *Notes* and the French libretto published in 1854 in conjunction with Uranio Fontana's opera. The comments are mine unless otherwise noted.

Élisabeth, ou La fille de l'exilé

Sinfonia. Otto mesi in due ore originally had a prelude; Donizetti added a full *sinfonia* of about 7 minutes' length to the score for the Rome production in 1832 and revised that for Paris. It opens with an undulating melody in a slower tempo, perhaps suggesting Élisabeth's long, weary trek; there follows an agitated allegro which crescendos, cinematically suggesting the dangers encountered in Act 2, and this theme morphs into a tune associated with the Tartar chorus in that act. This turns into an agitated bridge passage before a recapitulation from the second theme onwards, and concludes with a masterful and exciting finale. The *sinfonia* is mature Donizetti, from 1832—the year of *L'elisir d'amore*—and revised around 1840. Donizetti wrote that it is "scholastic and academic" if not played by full orchestra, but it is not an apprentice piece. I find it exciting and descriptive music, almost programmatic in giving us a concise summary of the eight month journey in the two hours to come.

Act 1

The first act takes place in Zaimka in Siberia. A room in a poor cabin built of wood. There is a staircase leading to other rooms and tables and chairs. A high window with a table in front of it is several feet above the floor.



1. Introduction. The Introduction is in four parts: two choruses and two *cavatines* (entrance arias) for Count Potoski and his daughter *Élisabeth.*

a) Choeur: "Dans la froide Sibérie". This splendid chorus, which expresses the plight of the exiles in frigid Siberia, was reworked by Donizetti from the chorus "Vedeste? Vedremo" which opens the final scene of *Maria Stuarda* (1835). In its original form it sets the stage for Maria's prayer and execution; in the revision for Paris, the music works very well to express the exiles' sorrow and longing for their homeland. (It is not unlike the musically similar chorus "Patria oppressa" from the 1847 version of Verdi's *Macbeth.*) The downward opening notes move into a sweeping, arch-Donizetti melody, the development of which is even better than it was in *Maria Stuarda.*

b) Choeur des Chasseurs: "Dans l'aride plaine". A group of hunters returns from foraging for game with no luck; in the meantime they have become separated from Élisabeth. This chorus signals a worried change of mood. Musically, it is the Act 1 chorus "Qual vien sull'Etra spandere" from *Otto mesi* with little change, but there it announced a gathering for Elisabetta's birthday, and here it explains that Élisabeth has gone hunting with the villagers, but has separated from them; the hunters assure her father, the exiled Comte Potoski, his wife the Comtesse and Marie, Élisabeth's nurse and the mother of Michel (soon to arrive) that she will be found. Potoski starts to follow them as they leave to search, but pauses to sing:

c) Cavatine: "Que ton âme se rassure." This brief piece is the first of the "melting" tenor arias which Crutchfield mentioned in his 1984 *NY Times* article about the London discovery. It is newly composed for Paris and includes some striking high notes. The sense of it is 'into every life some rain must fall', but if my daughter has been ravished, taken by force, I would have to kill myself. The banality of the verse is overcome by the suavity of the melody.

d) Cavatine: "Calmez vos alarmes." Not to worry because Élisabeth arrives from the hunt at this point, a shotgun in her hands. Her aria is in three parts; the opening section is based

on similar music for her entrance aria "Nel vostro sen, fra voi ritorno" in *Otto mesi,* but the other two parts are new for Paris. The *Air* begins, like the *Otto mesi* aria, with a short introduction: 'Don't worry, I'm with you now', but then transitions to a more interesting, more lyrical section, "Pardonne, ma bonne mère," addressed to Marie, her nurse, who lives with the Potoskis. This moderato section is followed by a catchy cabaletta, "Je sens dans mon âme" with chorus, of real virtuosity and some unusual orchestral flourishes. The form is Italian, but the music of these sections often sounds distinctly more 'French'.

[Spoken dialogue (or sung recitative in the recording) follows and fills in the background. Potoski has been exiled to Siberia by the Grand Marshall of the Court through the machinations of his aide, Colonel Ivan, both enemies of Count Potoski. Élisabeth asks why not write and ask the Tsar for pardon. Potoski explains that letters would be intercepted. Potoski sends the others off and is left alone to sing another solo.]

2. *Romance: "Faut-il, helas! Sans espérance".* This piece, newly composed for Paris, consists of two couplets with identical refrains—a sad, rather laconic, but attractive song in the French style, just as Élisabeth's previous aria was very much in the Italian style of cantilena/cabaletta. Donizetti is marrying the showy Italian style to the more subtle French style before our ears. This Romance, a major Donizetti aria, deftly paints the Count's character as he laments his fate as an exile.

[Dialogue follows in which the Count and Élisabeth discuss a route from Zaimka in Siberia to Moscow; we learn that it is 900 land leagues (or about 2700 miles/4345 km) and is an arduous trip over rivers without bridges and mountains without inns. This section of the printed libretto is omitted, however, from the sung recitative in the performance, which begins with Marie, nurse of Élisabeth wondering about her son. She watches for him every day from the window. A cortege has been seen in the village, and she hopes they will bring good news, or at least some news of Michel, who has been gone a long time. A sharp knock on the door and a voice calling out reveal that it is Michel himself!]

3. *Cavatine: "Toi, qui pris soin de mon enfance."* Michel, a second high tenor (!), has his entrance aria, expressing his love for his mother and declaring that thoughts of her protected him from difficulties encountered in his job as a traveling courier for the government. From the moment that song replaces dialogue when Michel bangs on the door of the Potoski cabin ("Allons donc!…dépêchez…ouvrez vite!"), there is a brief, lively duet with Marie, drawn from the similar passage in *Otto mesi* and leading to the *Cavatine* proper. The *Otto mesi* cavatina ("Profitando dal talento") is much jollier, approaching buffo patter even in the revised 1832 Rome version and is centred on Michele himself and how he became a courier. The *Cavatine* in *Élisabeth* is more sentimental, more serious, centred on his love for his mother.

The two main sections of the *cavatine* proper are newly composed for Paris. The first of these ("Toi, qui pris soin") is based on brief phrases with simple accompaniment which soon morph into an attractive waltz-like tune, "Si je pouvais revoir ma mère" —'If I could see my mother again and press her to my heart, I would have no worries on earth, for happiness is being with my mother'. An agitated bridge section describing how thoughts of Marie helped overcome dangers confronted returns us to the calming waltz melody, "En revoyant ma bonne mère." Like the Count's entrance aria, this one has imposing high notes, but also unexpected turns of melody and development. It is interesting that the love interest in this opera regards a daughter for her father and a son for his mother—and the two men are both tenors! The expected

expedient of showing a developing love between Élisabeth and Michel doesn't happen: Michel already has a girlfriend named Nizza, who runs an inn near Moscow and who appears in the last act.

[Dialogue. Extended dialogue (most of it necessarily cut in the sung recitative) tells us several important things: 1) how Michel became a government courier, most of which is taken from Michele's Cavatina in *Otto mesi*; 2) that Michel has fallen in love with Nizza, an innkeeper from Moscow, whom he has promised to marry if he has his mother's permission; 3) that none of the Count's friends has dared approach the powerful Grand Marshal to plead that the Count's exile be lifted, but that Colonel Ivan, "your enemy," a one-time henchman to the Grand Marshall, has fallen into disgrace himself and no one knows what has become of him. Soon Michel is left alone with Élisabeth. She discovers that he will have to depart on the Governor's orders at almost any moment and she asks to let her come with him…]

4. *Duet: "Est-il vrai, mademoiselle."* In this very fine duet, Élisabeth tells the astonished Michel that she wants him to guide her to Moscow when he leaves. Michel tries to dissuade her, but when she declares that otherwise she will go alone, he gives in. They both ask God to guide her. The first and last parts of the duet come from *Otto mesi*, but with considerable revision. The central section ("En vain l'espoir vous anime") is new for Paris. In the *Otto mesi* version the baritone Michele sings mostly patter against Elisabetta's legato cantilena, but in the French version, the tenor Michel carries the melodic line as much as she does. The duet ends with a *stretta*, "Dieu, sois mon/son guide" and a coda as they bid each other farewell until tomorrow, although the sense of the words in the *stretta* differ from those in *Otto mesi*.

[Everyone prepares for bed. The Count returns with a letter for Michel. Before retiring, Élisabeth asks her father for his blessing.]

5. *Benediction: "O toi, Providence."* This very attractive canonical piece is sung by Count Potoski, the Countess, Marie and Élisabeth. It was added by Donizetti for a 1831 revival of *Otto mesi* in Milan and adjusted for Paris.

[A quick section of dialogue shows that Michel has received his orders to depart immediately, and Élisabeth is ready. Marie is shocked by the news that she intends to accompany Michel to Moscow, and this leads to the…]

6. *Finale: "Du silence! Du mystère."* The finale is both brief and unusual. It restores the original Act 1 finale for *Otto mesi*, revised for Paris, which ended quietly and without the usual big *concertato*. There is a quick exchange of sung dialogue, masterfully handled by Donizetti: Michel tries to hurry them up, Marie tries to restrain them. A pause in the hurried music allows Élisabeth contrastingly and movingly to declare the reason for her journey—to end her father's unhappiness ("Toi, mon seul amour sur terre"). They discover the door is locked! Undeterred, with Michel's help Élisabeth climbs onto a table and jumps out of the window; Michel follows, and the act ends. The 1832 version of *Otto mesi* added the expected *concertato* by having the Count and his wife rush in to find his daughter gone. An entire backup chorus comes in with them and they all express their dismay to music which will soon end up as the basis for the Act 1 Finale of *Elisir*. Dramatically—and musically—the abbreviated finale is more effective, catchy as the familiar proto-*Elisir* tune might be.

The second act takes place on the banks of the River Kama, a wild and mountainous place. On the left is a poor cabin and farther back is a tumulus built of stone surmounted by a (wooden) cross. The river crosses the stage in the background, and beyond that are snow-capped mountains.



7. Prelude and Scene

The beginning of Act 2 presented the one serious gap in the manuscripts for Crutchfield as he was attempting to reassemble *Élisabeth*. On the banks of this river a little more than half way on our heroine's journey, Colonel Ivan, who was instrumental in Potoski's downfall, is living in exile himself. In all iterations of *Otto mesi* the act opens with a short prelude, recitative and aria with cabaletta for Ivan in which he laments his past misdeeds and mourns the death of his own daughter, Lisinka whose grave with the cross in the tumulus behind. For the London *Elisabetta* Donizetti simply reused the *Otto mesi* material, but nothing equivalent has been discovered for the French version. As Crutchfield points out, we don't know whether Donizetti composed something new, cut Ivan's aria, or simply intended to use the *Ottō mesi* material set to a French text. The 1854 French text offers extended dialogue for two soldiers and a pair of *couplets* for Ivan which lament his downfall and his daughter's death, but they are in a meter which could not be used with the *Otto mesi* music.

Crutchfield's solution was to use two separate pieces of uncertain origin to fill the lacuna, although both are certainly by Donizetti.

a. Prelude. First, he used a brief, melancholy prelude found in the Paris archives, written for "an unpublished opera" to begin the act.

b. Recitative from *Otto mesi.*

c. Cavatine: "Sans, toi, ma fille, la vie sans retour." For Ivan's "missing" aria, he used an insert aria (without cabaletta) supplied to Paul Barroilhet, who sang the part of Nottingham in *Robert(o) Devereux* at Lyon in 1841. Professor Weatherson had discovered this piece printed as an Appendix in a vocal score in Brussels and suggested to Crutchfield that the aria, "Je t'aime encore," might have originally been Ivan's aria and had been extracted from

Élisabeth to enhance Barroilhet's part in Lyon. It is certainly an attractive aria, which sounds a lot more like "French" Donizetti circa 1840 than "Italian" Donizetti circa 1827.

d. Recitative and Cabaletta from Otto mesi. For these sections, Crutchfield used the music from *Otto mesi* and translated the Italian text in *Elisabetta* into French. Ivan laments his crimes and his lost daughter in the recitative; in the cabaletta ("Dovunque m'aggiro" in Italian; "Pourtant ou je regarde" in French[6]); Ivan can't escape the crime he has done to Potoski. The cabaletta is attractive, but four-square and the music does nothing to illustrate the guilt and regret in the words.

[Extensive dialogue at the beginning of Act 2 in the French libretto tells us that Ivan has been exiled to Siberia too. His daughter has accompanied him but she made it only as far as this (to the banks of the Kama River) and here she died, Ivan has been allowed to stay here and attend to the tomb of his departed daughter]

Élisabeth and Michel have become separated while crossing the snowy Urals; she fears he is dead and stumbles into Ivan's little clearing, not knowing who he is. The sung recitatives in the Crutchfield assembled score follow the Italian recitatives in *Elisabetta* but are now frenchified: Élisabeth comes into view, painfully descending a path and sits down on the far side of the river. Ivan sees her and goes across to ferry her to his side in his boat.

A brief recitative leads to…

8. *Duet: "Si peut-il, fatal moment!."* This is a three-movement duet taken from *Otto mesi*, but revised for Paris wherein Ivan realizes who Élisabeth is and reveals to her that he is the one who has caused her father's exile; in the opening section Ivan is tormented by the pain he has caused and Élisabeth is at first puzzled why he is so upset; in the stunningly beautiful second, moderato, section ("Je veux de toi-même") she absolves him of his crime but noise of a march interrupts their reverie, and Ivan, knowing that it is a Tartar band, fears for her.

In the stretta ("O fille si tendre") he urges her to hide in his humble hut.

9. *Tartar Chorus: "Pour nous, heureux destin!"* The Tartar soldiers come down the mountain with their leader Alterkan and call on Ivan to ferry them. They sing a lusty drinking song which comes from *Otto mesi* without change.

But the Tartars have spotted Élisabeth and demand that Ivan turn her over to them, he refuses and they threaten and are about to kill him when she comes out of the hut and displays a crucifix glowing on her breast - the gift of her mother - frightened they are instantly cowed which leads to a trio…[7]

10. *Trio: "Ma rage cesse."* From *Otto mesi* with revisions; Alterkan and the Tartars. Ivan and Élisabeth all comment on the Tartars' change of heart in a well-wrought ensemble which ends with an exciting stretta in which they see hope for the future.

[In a brief recitative Ivan offers to write a letter for the Tsar absolving Count Potoski of the accusations he had levelled against him. Élisabeth is thankful, but…]

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[6] I have had to rely on my ears for the French text here; it may be inaccurate

[7] The 1854 libretto is much more extensive and includes the appearance of Michel, who has not perished.

11. Inundation-Finale: "Ah! Que je vois?" In the brief, but exciting second act finale, the sky darkens, there is thunder and lightning and a storm breaks. The river floods, the stage fills with water, and Ivan is drowned while Élisabeth clings to the wooden cross on the tomb of Ivan's daughter. The rushing waters lift the cross together with the clinging Élisabeth and carry her away on a flood tide into the wings as the curtain falls.

This finale is taken unchanged from *Otto mesi* and is the "spectacular" part of the opera which so impressed the 1827 audiences in Naples. It would have required some very fine stagecraft to bring off successfully, but Naples was famous for its advanced stagecraft in the early nineteenth century. Modern commentators have sometimes found the ending overly melodramatic and risible. Perhaps they are not familiar with the comic book Hollywood blockbusters which stun audiences today with similar unlikely dramatics. At the very least, it makes for a "Perils of Pauline" cliff hanger about 100 years before the silent film era.

Act 3

There were many versions of the third act in the various iterations of *Otto mesi in due ore*. Donizetti was not satisfied with Gilardoni's conclusion and asked Jacopo Ferretti to rewrite the act. Some versions (*Elisabetta* for instance) take place in a "magnificent hall in the Kremlin"; some divide the act into two scenes. *Élisabeth* takes place in an inn (how appropriate for an opéra-comique!) on the outskirts of Moscow, which is where Michel's girlfriend Nizza is in charge.

12. *Chorus: "Sachons tous saisir."* In comparison to the previous act, most of the music for this act was newly composed for Paris, including this opening drinking chorus.

[Michel enters and greets Nizza, who asks him when the wedding is to be. He is distracted and tells her about the journey and Élisabeth's quest to seek pardon for her father from the Tsar. She says he is in luck because the Tsar is in town for his wedding and will pass this way, but this serious dialogue does not deflect her thoughts of marriage, so he launches into a…]

13. *Rondeau: "Je suis courrier."* Michel's remarkable and jaunty aria, new for Paris, is a standout in the score. In the Caramoor performance, Crutchfield even included a middle section which Donizetti had apparently cut himself. Michel explains to Nizza that marriage takes a good bit of courage for a traveling man—a courier—to enter into since he will be gone for long periods when a would-be admirer might insinuate himself into the wife's affections. The basic melody, which opens the aria and holds it together is just delightful, and Donizetti wouldn't give up on it when the production of *La fille de l'exilé* fell through. At some point he transferred the music to Pepé's aria "Je suis joyeux comme un pinçon" ("Allegro io son" in the more familiar Italian version) in his *opéra-comique Rita*, which, like *Élisabeth,* was unstaged in his lifetime. The amusing, lengthy middle section of the *rondeau* imitates the words a would-be lover might mouth ("O ma belle…") to mocking, lugubrious music, and to tragic flourishes in the orchestra Michel imagines that the blandishments will work. All in all, it is a very sophisticated and appealing piece.

[Nizza leaves and Count Potoski arrives. Worried about his daughter, he has dared a death sentence should he be caught to follow her to Moscow, disguised as a merchant. He meets Michel and asks for news of his daughter. Michel tells him he has every reason to hope and leaves to try and find her. Potoski is left alone.]

14. *Aria: "Mon enfant, mon seul espoir."* Potosi has a major aria here, first composed by Donizetti for a Turin performance of *Otto mesi* in 1834, a performance which never took place. Crutchfield says it was revised and expanded for Paris. In a hurried allegro he laments his misfortune and is in ignorance about his daughter's fate. A cabaletta movement concludes the aria which restates his determination. Like Michel's *rondeau*, this aria is studded with high notes, but it is very much in a more serious vein. It is top drawer Donizetti.

[Élisabeth bursts in]

15. *Duet: "Sur mon coeur que je te presse."* This splendid 'recognition' duet opens with a breathless section in which father and daughter express their delight at being reunited. Élisabeth tells him about Ivan's written confession and her hopes for a happier future. The duet ends with an exciting "cabaletta," "Ah! Dans ma patrie." Father and daughter hope that he will be able to live free in his own country.

[Nizza offers to help and speaks of a mysterious "officer" whom she believes to be a high official in disguise. She convinces Élisabeth to allow Ivan's document to be given to the "officer" who will get it to the Tsar. Élisabeth, the Count and Michel ask who the "officer" is and Nizza alarms them: "*The Grand Marshall*, she says, *I'm sure of it!*" They react in horror.]

16. *Trio: "O ciel! Le maréchal! Ai-je bien entendu?"* After the initial shock registers that Élisabeth has given the confession to someone they know to be their enemy, a slow, well wrought section describes her despair and the Count's fatalism ("Le destin m'opprime"). But Michel has an idea: he will give them his courier's pass and that will allow them to escape their enemies. This hushed section ("De la prudence et de mystère") Is interrupted by the sound of a military march, but the soldiers pass on, and "De la prudence" is repeated. Although nicely written, this is one of those ensembles when everyone stands around singing about the need to hurry up and go ("Allons, allons, il faut partir"), but they don't, and when the soldiers have gone, they repeat it all—without leaving. [When *Élisabeth* did not come to fruition, Donizetti transferred the "De la prudence" part of the trio to the penultimate scene of *Dom Sébastien* (1843)—where critics of the day complained that it smacked too much of *opéra-comique*, which it did!] When everyone has repeated "il faut partir" a hundred times, they start to leave and discover that the way is blocked by soldiers: they begin to be frightened, Potoski vows to go to his death, and the trio ends with a stirring *stretta* led by the two tenors Potoski and Michel, joined by Élisabeth for the repeat. It is a wonderful patriotic tune and a rousing finish to this multi-part trio.

The Grand Marshal emerges and orders their arrest - but no one other than the Tsar himself now comes forward - the soldiers blocking the exits are his escort. He it was disguised as Nizza's mysterious officer. He pardons Potoski and punishes the guilty Marshal by giving Potoski his rank and place. The Chorus hails the Tsar ("Vivat, vivat"), and Élisabeth is given the final word.

17. *Rondeau-finale: ("Renais à la vie").* According to Crutchfield, Donizetti did not set the finale for the French score (although he left a sketch). However, he did write the final *rondo* for the Italian *Elisabetta.* Textually, it is similar to so many examples of happy *rondo-finales* from Italian operas from Cenerentola's "Non più mesta" to Amina's "ah! Non giunge." Musically, it is a rollicking waltz-song showpiece, set to end the show with fireworks. Since it did not exist in the French score, Crutchfield translated the Italian text, although I am at a lost to follow the words in performance…

Critical Reception

When *Élisabeth ou la fille de l'exilé* finally made its long delayed debut on July 17, 2003, the critics in the audience were lukewarm. The *New York Times*' Anthony Tommasini was generally positive and kind to the singers, but he complained about the "melodramatic recitative, which become rather ponderous and slowed down the action." He ends his review with a back-handed compliment, arguing that it is not exactly a new discovery, but is "…certainly worth a hearing. At least once." Marion Lignana Rosenberg, writing in *Opera News*, said that the opera was "…not top drawer Donizetti, perhaps, but a rewarding, intriguing work nonetheless."

Criticism of the London premiere of *Elisabetta* in 1997 was also mixed. Everyone loved Florez; not everyone loved the prima donna, Andrea Rost. Although most of the critics found the opera amusing in parts, some, such as Michael Tanner in *The Spectator,* found it "*Donizetti…at his mediocre second best*"[8]

Based on reaction audible on the You Tube recording, however, the Caramoor audience was *extremely* enthusiastic. There was vociferous applause throughout. Both tenors (John Osborne as Michel, Yegische Manchurian as Count Potoski) were wildly applauded after their bravura numbers. Likewise, Daniel Mobbs as Ivan. Irini Tsirakidis sang the leading role. According to the *Opera News* review she was indisposed, and indeed she tired noticeably by the end of the evening so that her *rondo-finale* was a distinct disappointment. Today she is a voice teacher in Athens, and she does not mention the opera in the list of impressive accomplishments on her web site. Will Crutchfield's conducting of the St. Luke's Orchestra was found wanting by some of the critics, but praised by others.

I myself was unable to attend the performances in 2003, so I do not know the cause of the laughter which erupted in the audience during moments when the libretto does not seem to be comic. It could be due to the way the action was acted and semi-staged or due to super-title translation, or in Act 2 because the audience found the melodrama to be too unbelievable. In the staging, Michel seems to have maintained some of the comic nature he had in *Otto mesi,* which he gradually lost as the opera was revised again and again.

Conclusion

So what can we conclude about this still mostly unknown work of Donizetti's maturity? *Élisabeth* is one of several operas which Donizetti worked on late in his career which were either left unfinished or unperformed in his lifetime: *Le duc d'Albe, L'ange de Nisida, Rita, Ne m'oubliez pas* and *Élisabeth.* In some ways *Élisabeth* is the most interesting: first, it has an unusual libretto based on recent history, which obviously appealed to the composer who kept retouching and rewriting it over ten years. (Anyone wishing to study the evolution of Donizetti's compositional style could do worse than study the various iterations of this story from the 1827 *Otto Mesi in due ore* to the 1841 *Elisabetta.*) The audiences from the first, quite successful, performances of *Otto mesi* loved the spectacle in Act 2, and it is difficult to see why contemporary audiences would not find it thrilling too, if well staged. But perhaps we lack the stagecraft they had in Naples in 1827?

The unusual story is 'staffed' by a very unusual group of singers: a mezzo-soprano heroine and two equally important tenors, both of whom reach for stratospheric high notes. We don't know who Donizetti had in mind for their roles, but we do think that he wanted the eighteen year old Pauline Garcia (Maria Malibran's sister who would become famous under her married name, Pauline Viardot) for the title role. The lower male voice, Ivan, is limited to Act 2, but he has a substantial part there.

Le duc d'Albe is a worthy work, but it is very much unfinished, and all attempts to give it in its French guise a satisfactory last act have been disappointing. The recent restoration of *L'ange de Nisida* is interesting, but we already know most of the score from *La favorite,* which is a superior opera. *Ne m'oubliez pas* remains fragmentary. *Rita,* of course, has had an active life for a long time, and, recently, in its original French. But *Élisabeth ou la fille de l'exilé* remains mostly unknown even though it can be performed substantially complete, with all music by Donizetti. *Rita, Le duc d'Albe, L'ange de Nisida* and even *Ne m'oubliez pas* have enjoyed commercial recordings. But not *Élisabeth…*

Le duc d'Albe has also had many stagings, starting in 1882 and now *L'ange de Nisida* has had two outings, one a full staging. Neither *Élisabeth nor Elisabetta* has been fully staged—not ever. Even *Otto mesi in due ore* awaits a modern stage production (one of the few Donizetti operas not to have one). The original 1827 *Otto mesi* has not been heard in a modern performance at all.

Nor do *Élisabeth* or *Elisabetta* appear on standard lists of Donizetti operas, not even on the Donizetti Society web site. This cannot be because they are revisions of previous work since many other Donizetti works which are revisions are there, e.g. *Poliuto* and *Les martyrs* or even *Lucie and Lucia de/di Lammermoor.*

One might ask: 'is *Élisabeth* a new opera'? I would say it definitely is, even though the story is based on an earlier work. Of the seventeen musical numbers, only two are imported unchanged from *Otto mesi,* and most were either completely new for Paris or substantial portions of them were newly composed. It is in a new language with a new ending. It certainly deserves to be on the "list" of Donizetti operas—perhaps with *Élisabeth* as a new work and *Elisabetta* as an Italian revision of the French work.

Will Crutchfield's work in restoring the score should be seen as the monumentally important undertaking it was for those of us who love bel canto and Donizetti in particular. His solutions for the "gap" in Act 2 seem most logical to me. I would only recommend that, if performed today, it would be with the spoken dialogue (maybe with judicious cuts) which Donizetti intended and not with orchestrated, sung recitatives, which take longer to perform and offer less plot information. I think international audiences are more used to hearing *opéra-comiques* with spoken dialogue today than they were twenty years ago. And I would like to see it called by the title which Donizetti himself wanted: *La fille de l'exilé.*

What a joy it would be do see this opera again, staged, perhaps by the *Opéra-Comique* itself (180 years late is better than never), perhaps sponsored by the good people at the Palazzetto Bru Zane. And what a delight it would be to have a recording in good sound! Perhaps then the Exile and his daughter could finally return home.

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Betly – A little known gem

Alan Jackson

My recommendation for a Donizetti opera that deserves re-visiting in a recording from the last century is *Betly*. The opera exists in two versions: as a one-act work with spoken dialogue premiered in Naples at the Teatro Nuovo in August 1836 and an expansion to two acts with recitatives premiered in the same city at the Teatro del Fondo in September 1837. My recording is of the original one act opera. On the Bongiovanni label, it is a live performance from January 1990 at the Teatro Rossini, Lugo – a two-CD set that also contains *Le convenienze teatrali* (the 1827 work, not the two-act revision of 1831 entitled *Le convenienze ed inconvenienze teatrali*). Both are claimed to be the first performances of these one-act versions (presumably in modern times, though this is not stated). When I saw *Betly* at Bergamo's Teatro Sociale in 2014, that too was claimed as the first modern performance of this one-acter with dialogue!

My memory of that Bergamo performance is rather vague now. I remember the baritone as being rather good, the soprano as not coping as well with the extended oscillation between high G and A at the end of her *aria finale* as Susanna Rigacci on the recording, and the opera itself being just as charming as I had hoped. On checking my programme, I discovered that the baritone was Vittorio Prato, so no surprise there. Replaying the recording revealed Rigacci as slightly less sweet-toned than I remembered but lively and generally technically assured. And the opera itself does have much charm and melodic richness. Only the entrance arias for tenor and baritone from this Bergamo revival seem to be available on YouTube, sung by Enrico Iviglia and Vittorio Prato respectively.

The libretto is basically a translation of the one Scribe wrote for Adam's *Le chalet*. So we have a Swiss setting, a rather timid tenor (Daniele) who loves the independent soprano (Betly), a baritone (Max) who is the soldier brother of the soprano returned unrecognised after 15 years away and who befriends the tenor, orders his men to pillage Betly's chalet for drink and thus provokes Daniele into more assertive behaviour which wins over Betly. Cue happy ending and florid *aria finale*. There are obvious reminders of *L'elisir d'amore*, and *Betly* forms a bridge between that opera of 1832 and *La fille du régiment* of 1840.

Each of the principals has their entrance aria. Daniele believes Betly will be his, but this is the result of a trick played on him by the chorus who have forged a suitable letter. His aria starts with some Rossinian flourishes and in truth Maurizio Comencini sounds not quite warmed up with these, but he despatches his cabaletta well and succeeding numbers are attractively sung. Betly's *entrata*

"In questa semplice modesto esilo" is the best known piece in the opera, no doubt due to its yodelling refrain, and it has been recorded by Sutherland and from the previous generation, Margerita Carosio. Rigacci is accomplished, if not perfect. The aria has a couple of held high notes under which Donizetti momentarily slips into remote keys, C and G major in a context of E major, typical of the care that Donizetti has taken with his score. Max's aria is to my mind an echo of Count Rodolpho's entrance in *La sonnambula*. Both characters are returning home after a long absence and are moved by their return, and though the time signatures are different, they share the key A*b* major, the same broken chord accompaniment and the same rising interval of a fourth in their opening phrases. I own that there are probably loads of other arias which share these same features – they are after all part of 1830s *lingua franca* – but I still argue that the comparison holds good. The Bellini has been considered one of the most beautiful bass arias ever written. Listen to "Ti vedo, ti bacio" and wonder if it is really much inferior. Roberto Scaltriti sings it beautifully.

The performance is conducted by Bruno Rigacci (father of Susanna – and also of pianist Pietro Rigacci). Many decades ago I had a small very lo-fi medium wave transistor radio that I managed to tune in to what must have been the RAI equivalent of the UK's Radio 3. A name that repeatedly cropped up was that of Bruno Rigacci. An on-line discography shows that he was responsible for the live performances of quite a number of lesser-known Donizetti operas. He was born 100 years ago this year and died two years ago at the age of 97. His conducting here is admirable, all the tempi sound natural and the orchestral and choral discipline is fine. My only quibble is that none of the three singers varies the second verses of their cabalettas. In 1990 it would have been more unusual than today for the men to do so, but I would have expected his prima donna to embellish the second verse of her showpiece finale. (The YouTube clip of Vittorio Prato mentioned earlier reveals that he did effectively introduce some modest variants into his cabaletta repeat.) Gratifyingly, there are no interpolated extra-high notes to spoil any of the arias' final moments. Indeed, Ms Rigacci's final C is the one in the middle of the treble clef and perfectly natural it sounds. The use of appoggiaturas is to my mind inconsistent. The recording quality is perfectly adequate.

The British Library has the one-act original in a modern critical edition but with the Covid restrictions that are in place at this time of writing I haven't been able to consult it. The only score of *Betly* that I have been able to view is a Kalmus reprint of what looks to me like a nineteenth century vocal score of the two-act version published by the Paris firm of Launer. It includes an overture that William Ashbrook mentions in his discussion of the one-act version, though it is not included in our recording which begins with a *ranz des vaches* (a nice touch of local colour) that introduces and underpins the opening chorus. Curiously, the score has an addendum of Betly's *aria finale* transposed down a tone from B*b* major to A*b* major. In fact Ms Rigacci sings it in C major, thus taking her up to a

high D in each verse. She also sings her opening aria up a semitone from the B*b* major of this Launer score, as does Sutherland in her studio recording. Maybe these keys reflect the score of the one-act version.

Donizetti mentions Launer in a famous letter written in Paris at time of the premiere of *La fille du régiment* in 1840. He was responding to a rant by Berlioz that accused Donizetti of incorporating into *La fille du régiment* music that had already been heard "at least in great part ... imitated or translated from *Le chalet* of M. Adam".[1] Donizetti's dignified reply acknowledges that the libretto of *Betly* is that of *Le chalet* but stresses that the music for *La fille du régiment* is all totally new.

> "*The author of the feuilleton is not afraid to claim that my score has already been heard in Italy, at least in great part, and that it is a little opera imitated or translated from Le chalet by M. Adam. If M. Berlioz, who rightly places conscience among the prime duties of an artist, had taken the trouble to open the score of my Betly, which has been engraved and published in Paris by M. Launer, and of which the poem is indeed a translation of Le chalet, he would have assured himself that the two operas he cites do not have any pieces in common. Let it be permitted me in fairness to affirm that the pieces which comprise La fille du régiment were all composed expressly for the Opéra-Comique and that not one of them has figured in any of my previous scores whatever.*"[2]

Now I know that one phrase doesn't make a piece but listening to the opening of "Mi sprona la gloria", the cabaletta of the duet for Daniele and Max towards the end of *Betly*, I hear a strong pre-echo of Marie's "Salut à la France"! And while on the subject of fragments that sound familiar, the chorus "A noi... sia birra, rhum o rack, Kirschenwasser o cognac" (when the soldiers go off to raid Betly's cellar) has its echo in the music for the guests at Olympia's demonstration in Offenbach's *Les contes d'Hoffmann*.

Ashbrook prefers the one-act version to the two-act one, considering it "better paced, not stretching the slender but beguiling material to its limits", a verdict I am happy to accept. The additions he mentions are an expansion of the confrontation duet with chorus between Betly and the as yet unrecognised Max which becomes the finale of the first act, and a trio in the second act. I can't find a recording of the expanded two-act version of *Betly* and in fact the Bongiovanni recording seems to be the only one to have been made of any version. However, a search on YouTube has come up with a couple of curiosities. The first is one by Opera BB Zagreb performed with small forces in what looks like the courtyard of a large house. It is in Italian but with dialogue in what I assume is Serbo-Croat. The soprano has some quite good moments, the tenor and baritone are weaker.

[1] These quotes are from the translation in William Ashbrook's "Donizetti and his Operas".

[2] According to my copy of Zavadini's collection of Donizetti's letters, the original has the phrase "déja entendue en Italien" so it is the language not the country that Donizetti cites. Both Ashbrook's books on Donizetti give "Italy" rather than "Italian". The force of Donizetti's argument is of course unchanged.

An extra couple of characters (Betly's cook and cleaner at her chalet?) are invented for the dialogue and the writing and forging of the letter is made explicit in a longish piece of dialogue at the start of the opera.

The second is from an even smaller-scale performance - in Portuguese, with an orchestra of just six players: violin, cello, flute, clarinet, percussion and piano. The credits at the end thank the Teatro Maria de Lourdes Sekeff, Sao Paolo, Brazil, presumably the performance venue, and the Instituto de Artes da Unesp. There are loads of cuts ranging from whole cabaletta repeats to four bars here, two bars there, and even the cantabile from Betly's *aria finale*. Much of the singing is pretty dire. The chorus must have been on speed, especially Max's platoon of five soldiers who never stop marching, dancing and hand-jiving: totally over the top and their singing is gloriously unrefined. The audience makes its enjoyment very audible and there is something infectious about it despite the prevailing amateurishness. And surprisingly, it contains music not included on the Bongiovanni recording. Here the confrontation duet with chorus for Betly and Max has a lovely larghetto section, though not the short vivace *tempo di mezzo* which is also printed in the Launer score. Following "Dolce istante inaspettato", the duet for Betly and Daniele with its annotated yawns for the tenor during the soprano's cadenza, this Brazilian performance includes a two-section trio, presumably the one mentioned by Ashbrook. Again, it is attractive music though I wonder if it is here performed complete. Before we go on to the Daniele/Max duet we have what I can only describe as a rap interlude for the two men, with Betly and two other women performing a backing dance routine. I have no idea what this is about, but it has the audience in stitches and brings down the house.

For those with a desire to hear Donizetti's dialogue in Serbo-Croat the YouTube link is www.youtube.com/watch?v=LnUjOqYVkgU And for Donizetti completists who want to hear every note the master wrote, the Sao Paolo performance is essential listening/viewing - even if only once! The link is www.youtube.com/watch?v=f6OWiZ-wLjo (These two links do not contain the digit zero, just the letter between n and p.)

Listening to these various performances repeatedly has not lessened my affection for *Betly*. The Bongiovanni recording isn't perfect, but it is amply good enough for the charm and musical delights of this little-known opera to emerge. It occupies one CD of this 2-CD set (the other contains *Le convenienze teatrali*) and it seems to be still available from Bongiovanni's own website and at a very reasonable price. The accompanying booklet contains a background essay, the Italian text and English translation.

OLD GOLD

The 1973 live recording of Donizetti's
Il BORGOMASTRO di SAARDAM

Dr. Paul Micio

Let's be honest. Much as we all might revere the Bergamasque master, not every opera that Donizetti wrote is a masterpiece. But this is true of Verdi and every other opera composer as well. This said, there are always interesting and beautiful passages in all his works and some of these early or lesser-known operas are hidden gems whose brilliance comes to light when there is a cast and a conductor who bring the piece to life and make it shine. One such delight is Donizetti's two-act opera buffa, *Il borgomastro di Saardam* (The Mayor of Saardam). Donizetti already had almost twenty operas to his credit – including another charming buffa, *L'ajo nell'imbarazzo* – when he composed *Borgomastro* for Naples in 1827. It was preceded by *Otto mesi in due ore and was followed by Le convenienze ed inconvenienze teatrali. The* libretto was by Domenico Gilardoni who penned many a work for Donizetti including one for another little jewel, the one-act farsa, *I pazzi per progetto*. Gilardoni was also the poet of *Bianca e Gernando* for Bellini[1] as well as other libretti for Pacini, Moretti, Ricci and Coccia. The opera was a success at its première at the Teatro del Fondo where it ran for more than thirty-five performances, although it failed at La Scala and elsewhere and only held the boards until about 1840.

The plot is loosely based on an actual historical event when Peter the Great worked incognito in the Dutch shipyards of Saardam (or Saenredam, now Zaandam) in 1697. In Donizetti's opera, a pair of young lovers faces obstacles to their marriage that are happily overcome with a *lieto fine* ending, thanks to the magnanimity of the Tsar who finally reveals his true identify in the closing scene. On this recording, the role of the inamorata, Marietta, is engagingly sung by Ana Philippo. Donizetti originally wrote the part for the Austro-Hungarian contralto, Carolina Ungher (1803-1877), who introduced other of Donizetti's operas as well. Although she had sung as a mezzo-soprano in Vienna, when she was brought to Italy by Barbaja around 1825, she extended her vocal range into the soprano register. Bellini would write the part of the *seconda donna* in *La Straniera* for her in 1829 and Donizetti would honor her in the same way with his *Parisina d'Este* (1833), the role of Antonina in *Belisario* (1836), and the title role in *Maria de Rudenz* (1838). When Rossini heard her sing during the 1833-1834 season at the Théâtre-Italien in Paris, he is said to have commented: *Elle a l'ardeur du Sud, l'énergie du Nord, une poitrine de bronze, une voix d'argent et un talent d'or* (She has the passion of the South, the vitality of the North, a chest of bronze, a voice of silver and a talent of gold).[2]

The performance reviewed here was issued on more than one label in a two-CD set from the production that took place in the town of its setting in 1973 (used copies can be found on line).[3] There is also a version on You Tube but, unfortunately, the sound jumps and is of very poor quality and so this cannot be recommended. More recently, there was a revival of *Borgomastro*

[1] See review in the November 2020 Newsletter No. 141.
[2] Among other references, cited in William Ashbrook, *Donizetti*, Cassell & London, 1965, p. 94, note 1.
[3] The set used for this review, which includes the Italian libretto, is: Italian Opera Rarities, no. LO 7721-22.

at the Teatro Sociale di Bergamo, in 2017, that can be seen in a full-length video, again on You Tube.[4] Regrettably, the voices are not nearly as good as those from 1973. This is just as well as one doesn't have to contend with the idiotic movie clips jarringly projected onto the back scrim of the stage that are so distracting to the flow of the opera.

One of the things that makes listening to this recording so enjoyable is the fact that there is no weak link in the cast: *all* of the singers are excellent. In the title role, Renato Capecchi shows his lively comedic brilliance as Marietta's father, the mayor of Saardam. The Tsar is sung by Pieter van den Berg who has an extremely secure baritone voice that is particularly suave and is a sound in which it is a pleasure to be enveloped. The young suitor, Flimann, is assumed by Philipp Langridge whose tenor role is, exceptionally for Donizetti, smaller than that of the two baritones. The performance is conducted by Jan Schaap who does not rush the orchestra allowing one to savour the music and listen to the repartee between the characters. Donizetti integrates quite a bit of staccato into the vocal numbers and ensembles and it is interesting to note that later composers, like Federico and Luigi Ricci, would continue to use this same staccato device in such works as their comic opera *Crispino e la comare* of 1850. The similarities are really quite striking. But when Donizetti composed *Borgomastro* in 1827, he himself was still not fully emancipated from Rossini's influence and it is clear that his use of the *recitativo secco* accompanied by cembalo was already beginning to be a somewhat archaic form. Bellini had already abandoned this device in 1825 after his first opera, *Adelson e Salvini*.

What we have here is the diametric opposite of Grand Opera which would soon begin to develop in Paris, Europe's cultural capital. Far from ambitioning grandiosity, Donizetti's aim here is simplicity and most of all charm. This is also true of the modest orchestra for which Donizetti makes no symphonic pretense. His *melodramma giocoso* is a small-scale work of intimate proportions in every respect and we can feel the intimacy as we listen to this live recording captured in a small theatre. What a pleasure to hear the audience's spontaneous reaction to what is being acted out on the other side of the lights to Donizetti's confection of a score! Although we cannot see what comical stage business is afoot during Marietta's final cabaletta, we too get caught up in the audience's guffaws of laughter. Bellini wrote that, through singing, "opera must make you weep, shudder, die". The great opera composers who followed Bellini and Donizetti – principally Verdi, Tchaikovsky, and Puccini – had this great gift of infusing human emotion into their music and their characters, especially where love is concerned. However, none of them could write comic works that are also infused with such pathos as Donizetti was able to do. His art in this genre reached its pinnacle with *L'elisir d'amore*, written only five years later, but such earlier operas as *Il borgomastro di Saardam* are the building blocks upon which he was able to compose such a monumental masterpiece. Listening to some of these earlier works rewards us richly for Donizetti's building blocks are exquisitely hewn and they are etched with his very particular genius.

[4] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x744VzuvyCE&t=4143s

La romanziera e l'uomo nero and its roots

(a mildly retouched reprint of an article appearing in Newsletter 28 of January 1982)
Opera buffa in one act
Prima: 18 June 1831
Teatro del Fondo, Naples (two performances only)
Libretto: Domenico Gilardoni

Alexander Weatherson

La romanziera is an opera buffa with one joke. It is not really surprising that Neapolitan audiences soon stopped laughing. Its heroine is a petulant young woman who, not getting her own way at home, decides to become a Rousseau-esque hermit, a role she promptly abandons within the space of one duetto and two terzetti.

...e l'uomo nero? No racism is involved, the reference was an obscure one that even in 1831 must have eluded most of those seated in the theatre. The opera is in fact a comic precursor of the G&S *Patience* - a parody that may have made sense at the time of writing but one whose barbs require inside knowledge for their understanding: the "Black Man" of the Donizetti/Gilardoni score was *"L'Homme Noir"* both the title (and title-role) of an *énigme en un acte (melée de vaudevilles)* given in Paris at the Théâtre du Vaudeville on 18 November 1820, written by Jean-Henri Dupin (1791-1887) and 'Félix' (a pseudonym of Eugène Scribe). This vaudeville – a wordy and eliptical curtain-raiser, was indeed a parody, an ill-focussed, twin-barrelled pop-gun affair aimed at Lord Byron and a more accessible target – at the "Prince des Romantiques"no less - at Charles-Victor Prévost *vicomte* d'Arlincourt whose *Le Solitaire* would be all the rage very soon in Paris (to their annoyance)[1]

D'Arlincourt has a key place in the belcantist era, not only was his *Le Solitaire* (1821) to be set by Carafa (Lib. Planard. Opéra-Comique, Paris 1822) - a seminal offering soon to be endorsed by Felice Romani for Bellini's *La straniera* (1829) - he specialised in anguished ultra-mysterious outcasts from society, in the ejected and proscribed, in voluntary and involuntary exiles.[2]

L'Homme Noir - the melodramatic mystery-man of the title-role of the vaudeville (for the record he is merely *l'homme en noir* - he wears black clothes) is even set up with behaviour patterns and a vocabulary that cunningly presages the d'Arlincourt play about to appear with its all-knowing ever-present hero: *"il sait tout" 'il connaît tout"* and making in-jokes at d'Arlincourt's expense (the vicomte would not fail them, when it emerged his *Soliraire* would be a *"man in brown"*!)

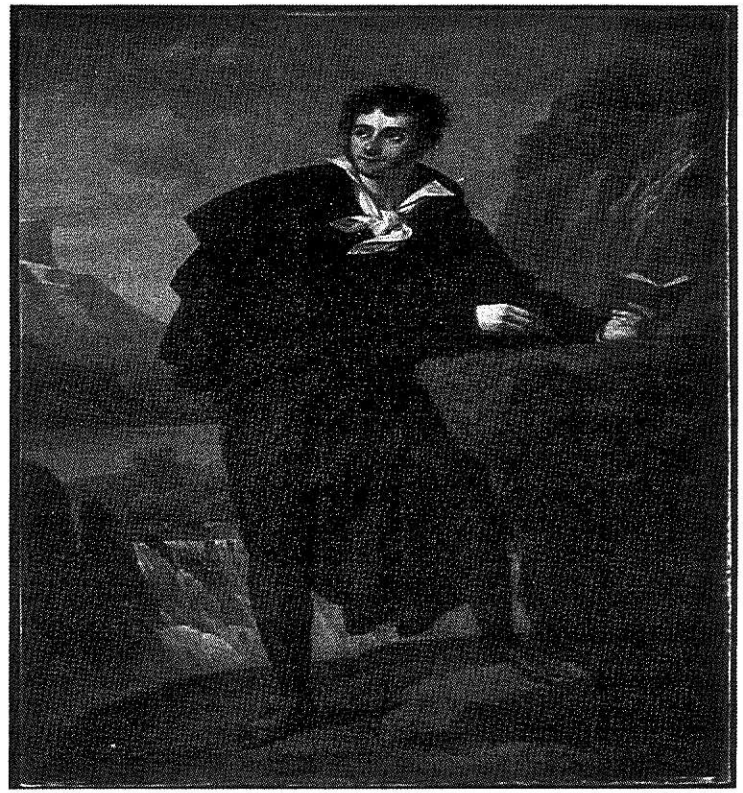
Gilardoni,[3] writing for Donizetti, reflects only a shadow of all this, his story is not slavishly based either on Dupin/ Scribe or for that matter on Byron and/or his Gallic confrère it merely ridicules the genre. The young composer's target was *Romanticism* in general – and on the side using d'Arlincourt as an excuse making a feint at Bellini, not in any malicious spirit but just making fun of operatic conventions as he had so much

[1] Rossini was to be included among the targets surprisingly as the "black man's song" at the end of the vaudeville was set to the music of *La gazza ladra* then deemed a typically romantic confection!

[2] Agobar, the abducted Merovingian hero of Pacini's *Gli arabi nelle Gallie* - would actually be the most fêted example of d'Arlincourt's presence in the opera of the day and one whose image was portrayed worldwide

[3] Gilardoni was the subject of a startling ultimatum on the part of the management. On 17 June a letter was written to Barbaja saying that if the libretto of *Romanziera* was not in print by midday of the 18th – the day of the prima - the performance would be forbidden. Was any libretto ever printed? There seems none in existence. But the performance went ahead just the same. I am indebted to John Black for this fascinating information as well as for the correct date for the prima and a lively discussion on this elusive work

enjoyed in the past with *Il fortunato inganno* (1823) and *Le convenienze ed inconvenienze teatrale* (1827)



Charles-Victor Prévost d'Arlincourt *"Le prince des Romantiques"* a man in black

Frankly, Gilardoni's text could have been almost no help at all, it is at once terse, vapid, and repetetive. The opera starts out well, but nothing in fact ever transpires and the Bergamasc maestro's delicious music is expended on a handful of setpieces, all well-written, all perfectly static, and all of them – in the absence of a viable plot – instantly forgettable.

We are glad, however, that this comedy has not been forgotten. There have been revivals: there was a wonderful one after this paper with a revision by Franco Piva, the music edited by Michalangelo Zurletti and conducted by Piva at the Teatro Sociale di Rovigo – vivid and authentic-sounding with Patrizia Cigna in the title-role and elemental sets and costumes to enliven an enchanting whole.

At its birth in Naples it followed fast on the heels of *Anna Bolena* (1830) but missed its target abjectly - with *Francesca di Foix* (1831) however, it marked a turn in his fortunes: from henceforth it would be his *opere serie* that would make him famous. (Bellini would find little to crow-about in *this* particular failure)

SYNOPSIS

La romanciera e l'uomo nero

Schonenberger, Paris. Vocal score no.2172 149pp

Cast: CHIARINA ms ANTONINA sop TRAPOLINA sop CARLINO ten FEDELE ten CONTE bs FILIDORO bs GIAPPONE bs NICOLA bs TOMMASSO bs

No.1 After a 7 bar opening (in a gay 3/4 time) the Introduzione begins boldly with a text of almost laconic economy that soon becomes well-nigh incomprehesible; a despairing duettino between Carlino and Giappone is interupted rudely by the Conte: '*E fia poter del mondo*' - earning a sardonic response from Carlino: '*Suo servo! ...addio Carlino poltrone*' - followed by the pompous buffo aria of Tommasso '*Il mondo è un vast'oceano'* whose relish for the obvious provokes ribald interjections from the remaining singers and ends in a noisy concertato

No.2 A soothing cavatina (*romanza*) by Antonina with harp accompaniment follows '*Tu di rose inghirlandate'* whose mock-Bellinian cantilena is egged-on by Tommasso and supplied with an unexpected post-script – a begiling and contrary *canzonetta/cabaletta* with tremolando underpinning for Filidoro:'*Non vè maggiore* dolore' [optional it seems, an *oppure* probably, and labelled "No.2 bis"]

No.3 This is succeeded by a tongue-in-cheek *gran'duetto* for a ductile Antonina and a willing Filidoro: '*Ciel! Fia ver, mio Filidoro'* in which the composer skillfully parodies his own (and Gilardoni's) *L'esule di Roma*! After a rebuff from her father the Conte, Antonina threatens exile, to die or enter a cloister with wild claims for romantic refuge: "*Forse un chiostro? È triviale...una fuga occulta*" - where an urge for isolation devolves into parallel musical statements - suductive for the soprano and erotic for Filidoro - the initial section followed by an interlude of indecision (partially in thirds) - then resolved enthusiastically into an allegro of far-from innocent anticipation "*Ne boschi trovere ogni commodità...*"

No.4 Terzetto[Chiarina/Fedele/Tommasso] exposing Tommasso's cyncal views on duplicity with fragmented interjections from the higher voices that gradually come to easy agreement

No.5 Duetto [Chiarina/Filidoro] a slapstick confrontation of fright with allegro moderato exchanges in assumed horror "*Che paura – sul le gambereggo astendo l'uomo nero*" (!)

No.6. Recit e terzetto [Antonina/Nicola/Tommasso] The recitative followed by an andante cunningly incorporating Giovanni Pacini's "*Dopo tante e tante pene*" which aria had been one of Maria Malibran's major triumphs in Naples sung as an unneccessary conclusion to *Tancredi* and rather more appropriately interpolated here – "*la commedia è finita*" (Donizetti had fun with this opera even if the audience did not) underneath which ravishing soprano indulgence Nicola sings a muttered descant gradually developing into a choleric exchange as Tommasso joins in…

No.7 Rondo finale. A brilliant introduction heralds an infectious aria cantabile:

"*Si colpevole son io*" for the chastened Antonina, the Conte responds "*Ne mai più romanticismo?*" "*No mai più*" then Filidoro: "*Lascio l'ombre ed i fantasmigli astri...?* Antonina "*Lascio il salice ed il cipresso, l'urna, il cenere ed il pianto...torno al ballo, torno al canto. Lascio il lugubre castello, il ruscello cristallino, torno all'opera...*"

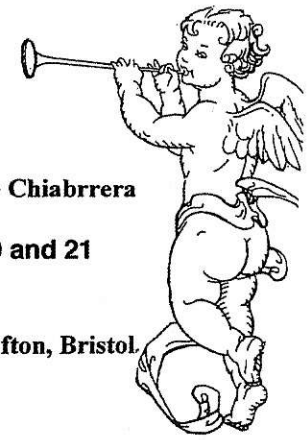
Then in a flood of increasingly vivacious fioriture… "*Romanzieri addio per sempre*" whose wild vocalisations end with a brief concertato to finish (17 bars)

Thus the Bergamasc composer's 1831 review of the current operatic scene came to a conclusion with a fleeting over-the-top spoof making fun of his own work as well as that of his rivals. One replete with in-jokes and quotes from forgotten scores.

Did the Neapolitans appreciate the jokes? All the quotes? His and Gilardoni's brittle sense of dissmissal? It seems not judging by its swift removal. Probably (as evinced by the non-printing of the libretto) *La romanciera e l'uomo nero* was poorly staged - the singers not rehearsed and – especially as it was a farce intended to have no fixed definition accessible to nightly changes in the tradition of less prestigious stages - it failed to survive long enough to have any such satisfactory evolution. The comedy was over as soon as it began…

At any event it is certain that the Neapolitans disliked laughing at their own operatic faibles, only at *foreigners* (like Donizetti)

DIARY
(Two items only!)



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Donizetti pratica nella scrittura quartettistica un felice ibridismo, una mescolanza di stili e linguaggi, e una costante sperimentazione di situazioni compositive.
« Risparmiare la fantasia » e « condurre un pezzo con poche idee » (sono parole sue) significava per Donizetti soprattutto conferire respiro e durata all'invenzione melodica. Si tratta di una delle indicazioni più esplicite di un'aderenza ai principi basilari di ciò che noi moderni identifichiamo con 'stile classico'.
La silloge proposta in questo primo cofanetto contiene una scelta di sei quartetti appartenenti ad anni diversi. Tutti riflettono le caratteristiche generali comuni, ma ognuno sviluppa peculiarità sue proprie. La varietà delle scelte, dei riferimenti a tradizioni diverse, delle soluzioni e delle combinazioni, dà sinteticamente conto di quanto Donizetti concepisse la scrittura per quartetto come un vero e proprio laboratorio compositivo.
È il primo cofanetto di tre contenenti l'integrale dei 18 quartetti.

IL CALAMO DI EUTERPE

Percorsi tra letteratura e musica, conversando con Giovanni Pasqualino
di Marco Leo

[Giovanni Pasqualino, *Il calamo di Euterpe*, Merone, Manzoni Editore]

Un titolo come *Il calamo di Euterpe*, a chi abbia anche solo un'infarinatura di cultura classica suggerisce che si voglia parlare di musica; meglio: di scrittura musicale; o, forse, di scrittura e di musica. Tutto questo, e ancor più, fa Giovanni Pasqualino nel suo nuovo volume (Manzoni Editore, 2021), dedicato a indagare i rapporti tra la letteratura e la musica che sono stati sviluppati da alcuni significativi protagonisti italiani di queste arti, allorché, insoddisfatti di quella che era a loro più propria, sono andati a cercare un completamento espressivo nell'altra. Perché, come riassume Pasqualino in una frase magistrale che basta a spiegare l'importanza di questa indagine, «la parola si avvale della musica per espandere la propria semanticità; la musica si avvale della parola per fissare la propria emotività». Va da sé che un ruolo considerevole, ma assolutamente non esclusivo, sia riservato al melodramma.
Il libro si articola in venti capitoli (suddivisi in tre parti più due appendici), di lunghezza assai varia (dal bozzetto di poche pagine al saggio diffuso e articolato), ciascuno dei quali affronta una figura di artista, fornendone la necessaria inquadratura biografica e poi affondando l'obiettivo sul modo in cui i rapporti tra parola e musica si siano compiuti nella sua esistenza. L'ultimo capitoletto, nella sezione delle appendici, riguarda particolarmente da vicino i nostri lettori: si intitola infatti *Gaetano Donizetti. Suggestioni letterarie e cinematografiche*. Non è un saggio musicologico, ma una rassegna di citazioni del nostro autore prediletto nella letteratura e nel cinema tra Otto e Novecento. Alcune sono abbastanza note (*Madame Bovary*), altre sono vere chicche che rivelano la profondità delle indagini di Pasqualino e permettono di conoscere l'impressione che la figura di Donizetti lasciò negli uomini di cultura europei per un lungo arco di tempo. Basti pensare all'obliato romanzo *Gli artisti da teatro* di Antonio Ghislanzoni, nel quale si immagina con tratti commoventi che in un salotto parigino sia ospite un Donizetti nel quale si è da poco conclamata la follia.
Giovanni Pasqualino, catanese, laureato in filosofia e diplomato in pianoforte, per una vita è stato docente di musica nelle scuole medie e superiori; ma è altresì abilitato all'insegnamento di letteratura poetica e drammatica per i Conservatori, materia che rispecchia il suo interesse, manifestato fin dalla tesi di laurea, per il rapporto tra parola e musica. Inoltre, è già autore di diversi volumi ed è giornalista, critico militante di musica, ma occasionalmente anche di letteratura, su vari giornali siciliani (*La Sicilia*, *Il messaggero del Sud*), e fondatore di *Bellininews*, magazine online di cui è tuttora direttore. La sua firma è già comparsa sulle pagine della nostra *Newsletter*. Ci siamo visti "in modalità virtuale" con una videochiamata per chiacchierare sulla sua ultima fatica editoriale.

Giovanni, come è nata l'idea di scrivere *Il calamo di Euterpe*?

È nata dalla volontà di analizzare il rapporto tra parola e musica seguendo due percorsi paralleli, che di fatto coincidono con la seconda e la terza parte del mio libro: quello dei musicisti che sono andati a cercare la parola e quello degli scrittori che si sono messi alla ricerca della musica. Ho voluto indagare come le due arti si completino a vicenda attraverso l'esempio di grandi personaggi che furono poeti, critici, studiosi, musicisti. Del resto, le potenzialità del connubio tra parola e musica risultano evidenti anche solo pensando alla *Nona* di Beethoven, che nel movimento conclusivo prevede l'intonazione dell'*Ode alla gioia* di Schiller per fissare in un testo il senso di universalità della musica. La prima parte del mio volume è dedicata alla Sicilia, non per campanilismo ma per affetto nei confronti di alcuni importanti scrittori della mia terra che hanno incontrato la musica. Nelle appendici, invece, trovano spazio due scritti su Bellini e Donizetti: non si tratta di saggi musicologici, bensì di percorsi sulle riletture che questi compositori hanno ricevuto da parte della letteratura e del cinema.

Nel tuo percorso affronti personaggi abbastanza eterogenei. Ce n'è qualcuno che hai in particolare piacere di segnalare?

È vero che sono personaggi eterogenei, ma tutti accomunati dall'urgenza di affiancare letteratura e musica. Mi piace ricordare Giuseppe Vannicola, figura quasi sconosciuta di bohémien che fu primo violino alla Scala e poi morì in povertà dopo essersi dedicato alla letteratura. E mi ha colpito Giorgio Vigolo, che ho definito "il melosofo", perché fece studi, che si possono definire antropologici, nei quali colse aspetti ancestrali del rapporto tra musica e parola.

Ritieni che, tra le due arti, una possa essere considerata superiore all'altra?

La parola ha la caratteristica di poter fissare i concetti, a differenza della musica che può solo alludervi, ma questo non delinea alcuna superiorità, bensì una specificità espressiva diversa delle due arti che devono trovare il giusto connubio.

Sulla quarta di copertina del volume è riportata una citazione: «Il melodramma è senza dubbio una forma esaurita». Il tuo libro ci rivela che la frase fu scritta da D'Annunzio in un articolo pubblicato su *La tribuna* nel 1887. Ti riconosci in questa affermazione?

Quando D'Annunzio la scrisse, era forse in anticipo sui tempi, ma, come tutti i geni, aveva avuto una premonizione. Del resto, le opere di quegli anni già tendevano alla concisione lasciando cadere molti dei tratti del melodramma ottocentesco. Oggi credo che sia vera più che mai, nel senso che il melodramma si è evoluto verso forme completamente diverse. Ciò non toglie che ascoltare i titoli del repertorio ottocentesco abbia un immenso significato emozionale, culturale e storico per lo spettatore odierno.

[Vedi la copertina di questo Newsletter]

ÉTUDES SUR LE THÉÂTRE ET LES ARTS DE LA SCÈNE
SOUS LA DIRECTION DE MARCO CONSOLINI, TIPHAINE KARSENTI ET FLORENCE NAUGRETTE

CLASSIQUES GARNIER

Stella Rollet

Donizetti et la France (1831-1897)
Carrière, créations, réception

Préface de Jean-Claude Yon

La carrière parisienne de Gaetano Donizetti est parsemée d'immenses succès ainsi que de cuisants échecs. Sa prolixité lui vaut les faveurs des théâtres mais le cantonne au rang de compositeur secondaire. Cette étude a pour ambition de lui rendre la place qui est la sienne dans le paysage musical parisien.

Donizetti's Parisian career is dotted with immense successes as well as stinging failures. His prolixity earned him the favour of theaters but confined him to the rank of secondary composer. This study aims to restore his place in the Parisian musical landscape.



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