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The Donizetti Society: Editor Alexander Weatherson

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THE MAESTRO

The triumphs and tragedy of Gaetano Donizetti

A play with music, by Duncan Hopper with Mike Wells

Magichour productions are going to stage a series of performances of a new play about the life and times of Donizetti in the 2022 Brighton Festival. There are plans for further performances in the summer.

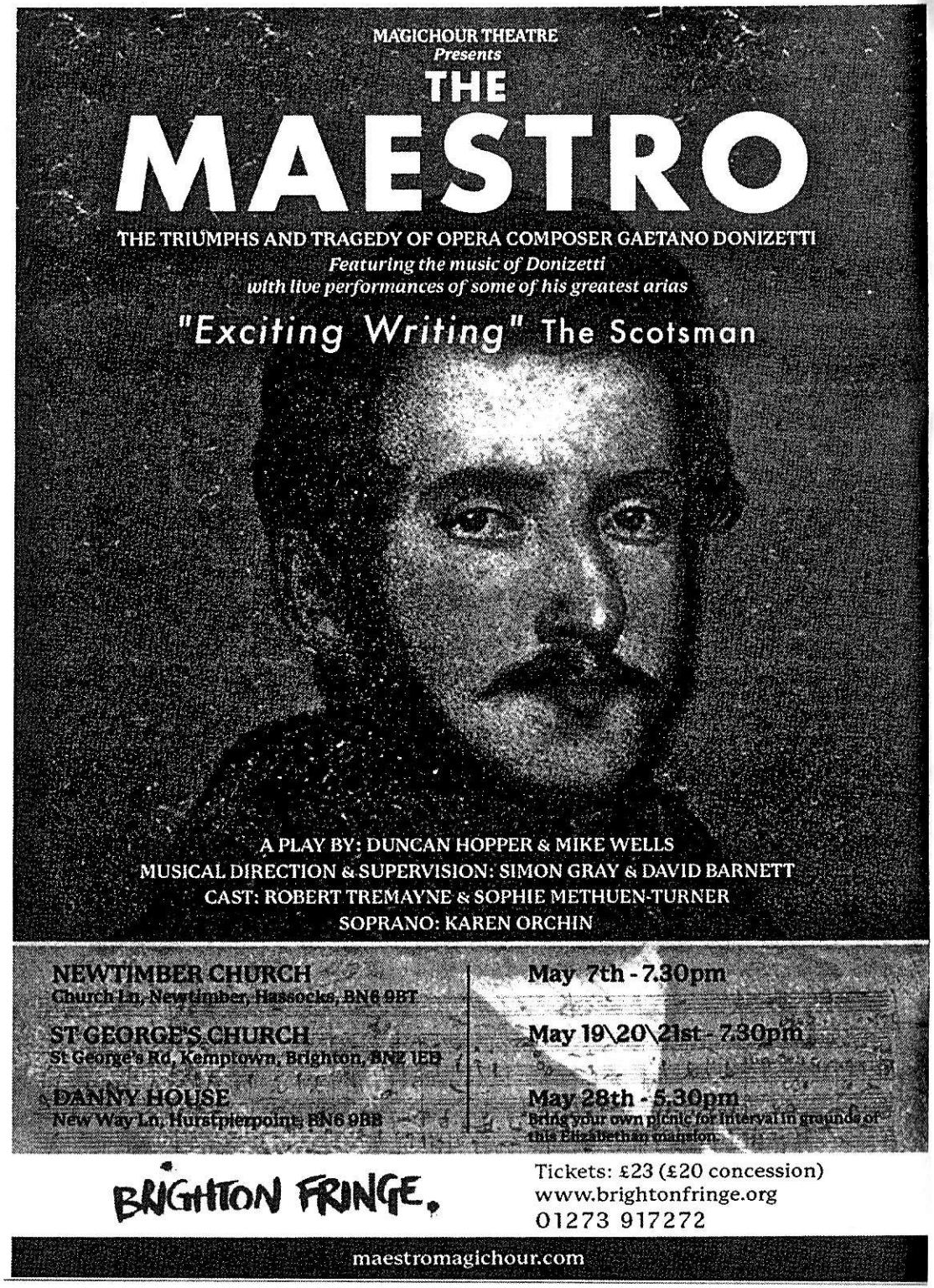
The play includes live performances of arias by Donizetti which link to key elements in his life, performed by Sussex-based soprano Karen Orchin under the musical direction of Simon Gray who has wide experience of conducting opera, including performances of Puccini's *Turandot* with the late Pauline Tinsley. Donizetti is played by professional actor Robert Tremayne.

The play looks back from Donizetti's tragic final year to his youth in Bergamo and his marriage to Virginia. The triumphs are celebrated and his comic genius demonstrated but the play charts the challenges and hardships which are reflected in his music. A series of scenes reveals key elements of his life and times and explores some of the tensions in his life as well as some of his happiest and most productive years.

Experts and connoisseurs may enjoy the dramatisation of elements with which they are familiar but for many Donizetti and this period of Italian opera are a closed book. The play aims to reveal a fascinating life story and the way that his life and times interacted with his music.

How did this play come about?

Its two authors, who have worked closely together in the past arrived at the idea of dramatizing elements of Donizetti's lie from different directions during lockdown. Duncan Hopper is a playwright who has specialised in dramas focusing on real lives, exploring their dramatic possibilities. His play Helen's Shadow features the excavator of Troy, Schliemann, so obsessed with his project that his wife and Helen become merged in his mind and the mythical past and the Victorian present merge. His one woman play An Evening with Lady Montague explores the life and letters of Lady Wortley Montague, the eighteenth century traveller and *belle-lettriste* and uses music of the period to considerable emotional effect. On a very different subject, a musical treatment of the life of Marilyn Monroe offers the tantalising theory that this iconic figure did not take her own life but was spirited away by a certain powerful America political family and lived to a ripe old age. In the play she looks back from a nursing home at her earlier life, vividly recreated by a small cast. This musical drama was performed by a cast including Tom Conti in London, but awaits a full staging.



Duncan has links with Bergamo and Donizetti was a natural subject for another historical and musical study. His wife was born in Borgo Canale, the street when Donizetti was born and Rosarita and Duncan were married in the church of Santa Grata Inter Vites for which Donizetti wrote music – a church whose famous frightening skeletons is referred to in the play.

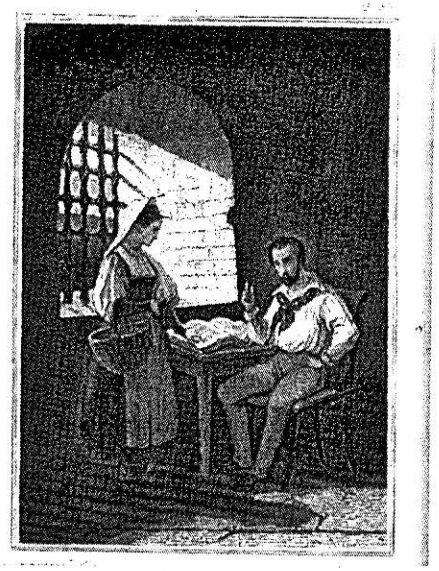


The macabre skeleton painting in Santa Grata. Did this influence the operatic treatment of the military in Donizetti's operas. Should we see Belcore in a new light after seeing this painting?

Growing up Rosarita was familiar with not only the famous melodies of Donizetti but also of the church music of Mayr, a seminal musical figure largely unknown in Britain.

Duncan's collaborator Mike Wells came from a rather different direction. An opera lover since seeing a memorable production of Tosca at Covent Garden when he was sixteen, Mike was intrigued by the Bergamo connection. He directed The Elixir of Love for an opera company in Berkshire in 1976 which was, for him, one of the most memorable productions in a directing career which has included over 200 plays, operas and musicals. Setting himself the rewarding task of listening to all Verdi's operas in chronological order during lockdown, he was drawn more and more to the earlier works. This led him to the listen to more and more opera of the first part of the *ottocento* and to reread the biographies of Donizetti he had bought in the 1970s. Since his early encounters with Nemorino, Adina, Dulcamara and Belcore, he wrote textbooks on *Risorgimento* Italy and has been able to put some of his favourite operatic works in context.

One theme of interest was the danger of linking music with a vision for a new Italy. The fate of composer and activist Silvio Pellico is referred to in the play. Was Donizetti aware of the dangers given the imprisonment of his fellow student at Bologna?



Silvio Pellico in prison. Is this why there is so little overt nationalist sentiment in Donizetti's oeuvre?

Another element of interest, given the pandemic's restriction was the enforced quarantine of Donizetti at Genoa. Opera, history and drama were coming together.

Conversations in lockdown between Mike and Duncan about Bergamo, Donizetti, new works for Magichour to produce, a possible biography of the composer were the genesis for 'the Maestro'.

This is quite unknown territory for us. Mike vividly remembers an art and architecture tour of Sicily with a group who had no ideas why he was so interested to visit the tomb of Bellini in Catania or his frustration that the casa Bellini was shut for restoration. No-one had even heard of the great man. Most of our musical friends had never seen a *'bel canto'* opera. Those with an interest in opera

could not go far beyond *Lucia di Lammermoor* and in conversation saw Rossini, Bellini. Donizetti and early Verdi simply as interested in vocal display. The contemporary fame of these figures came as a surprise and the quantity and more important quality of their output seemed very little known.

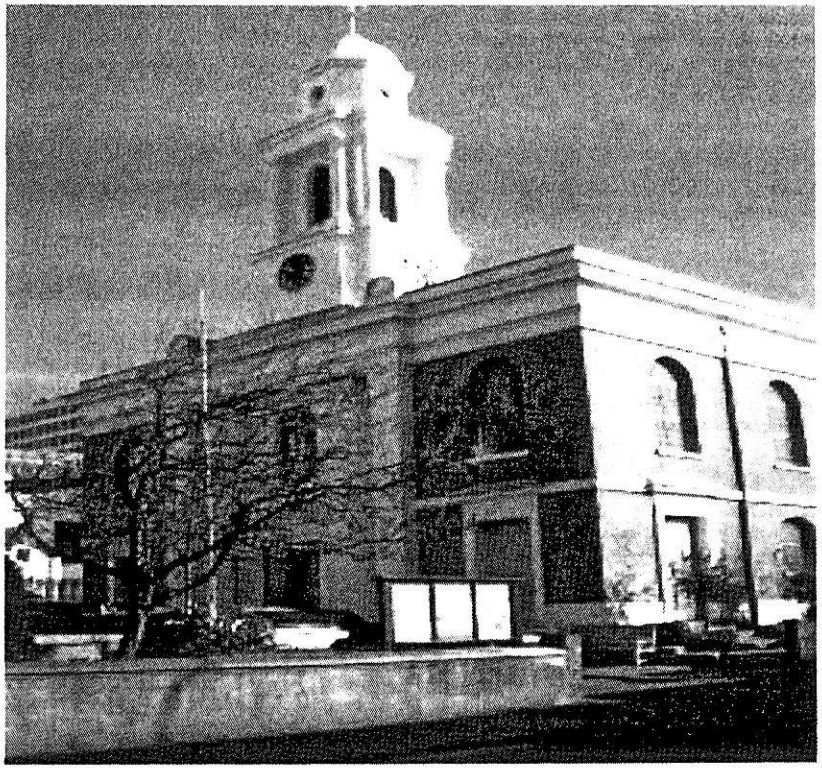
We hope that in our modest way we can help to show how interesting the career and works of Donizetti are to a wider theatre going public. Our professional actors, never having listened to much of music of this period or genre, have been moved and fascinated by the music we have chosen – not all of it familiar. The authors are still pursuing their knowledge of the Maestro's works.

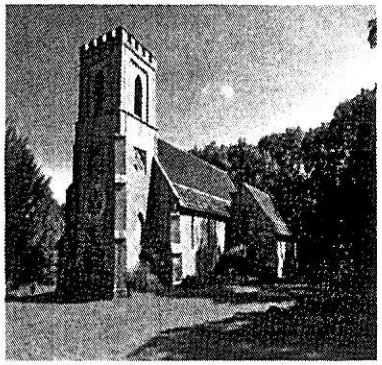
Our venues

The initial venues are not the usual theatrical ones. The beautiful church of St George's in Kemptown is one of Brighton's architectural gems and close to some of the finest Georgian buildings in Britain. The church in Newtimber is in the fine scenery of the Sussex Downs, with easy access from the main London to Brighton road. Danny House is a most beautiful Elizabethan mansion and it music room where we will be performing is like a stage set in itself. A picnic in the grounds would add to the pleasure of a visit. And after that we hope to stage *The Maestro* in some other places of historical interest and take advantage of the beauties that Sussex has to offer.



Our venues Danny House, St George's Kemptown and Newtimber Church.





LA CONVENIENZA DELLE *INCONVENIENZE*

Fulvio Stefano Lo Presti

Da spettatore, aggiungo alle mie quattro in catalogo (Dordrecht, Taranto, Lucca e Treviso) queste quinte *Convenienze ed inconvenienze teatrali* del Teatro Municipale di Piacenza (19 e 21 novembre 2021). Come già a Lucca, ho preferito concedermene il bis. L'esuberante ed estroversa partitura donizettiana è il regalo che Donizetti si offre per il 30° compleanno il 21 novembre 1827 al Teatro Nuovo di Napoli (al compleanno, per la precisione, mancano otto giorni, e nel suo già imponente canone è al titolo 21°).

Al battesimo molto favorevole della nuova opera, in un atto, seguirono numerose repliche e tutta una serie di riprese con quasi altrettante varianti, a cui si presta la drammaturgia aperta di quest'opera particolare, della quale infatti si può dire che esistono quasi altrettante versioni quanti sono i manoscritti che la tramandano. Si aggiungano le varie edizioni allestite ovunque in epoca moderna. Nel 1831 Donizetti o chi per lui la trasformò in due atti per il teatro milanese della Canobbiana (*dépendance* della Scala) Ne seguì una versione napoletana.

Tuttavia le quasi certezze sulla genesi della prima e seconda versione si accompagnano col tempo a punti interrogativi. La paternità del libretto, attribuito perentoriamente al Bergamasco (da Zavadini e altri), spetterebbe invece, in base a documenti attendibili, al librettista Domenico Gilardoni, collaboratore abituale di Donizetti. Ma Donizetti interveniva solitamente nella stesura dei libretti, come deve essere avvenuto anche in questo caso.

La scena lirica attuale non è ormai teatro di capricci e prepotenze di cantanti, che subiscono invece, rassegnati o meno, quelli dei registi coadiuvati dagli scenografi. Bisogna dare atto al regista Renato Bonajuto e al drammaturgo Alberto Mattioli di avere realizzato con una certa discrezione uno spettacolo fantasioso ed effervescente, prendendosi talune libertà difendibili, per esempio l'inserimento nel secondo atto del sontuoso balletto della *Favorite* (Parigi 1840), affidato alla leggerezza e all'eleganza dell'Ensemble Capital Ballet: affiatato sestetto giovanissimo – tre ragazzi e tre ragazze – a cui nel resto dell'opera sono toccati inoltre compiti di figuranti.

L'azione è ambientata, alla nostra epoca, non più a Lodi bensì a Castellarquato (PC), con agganci a Milano ed alla stessa Piacenza. Il sovrintendente oltre a sembrare il perfetto sosia dell'attuale *boss* artistico della Scala, lo ricordava ai più distratti con l'inconfondibile accento francese.

Le prove del peregrino e *old fashioned* melodramma *Romolo ed Ersilia* procedono tra alti e bassi, più questi che quelli, e tra esilaranti intoppi, equivoci ed imprevisti che i variopinti e scalcinati personaggi vivacizzano. Il nutrito *cast* ha in larga misura corrisposto con versatile prontezza alle esigenze e "inconvenienze" dello spettacolo. La combinazione delle due peripezie principali - l'invasione della mamma furibonda della seconda donna, Mamma Agata (basso buffo che ha

cambiato sesso) e la simultanea defezione del musico e del tenore tedesco - fa da perno alla vicenda, con Mamma Agata, che dopo scambi da lavandaia con il soprano Corilla, si candida a rimpiazzare il musico, mentre Procolo, "principe" consorte di Corilla di cui è esagitato fan, si offre di cantare al posto del tedesco. Alla fine la notizia del taglio della sovvenzione delle autorità locali con conseguente cancellazione dello spettacolo induce la troupe in bella solidarietà a scapparsene nottetempo insalutati ospiti, tanto più che hanno ricevuto una parte del compenso. A questo punto il sovrintendente, rovinato e abbandonato, tenta il suicidio ma la pistola fa ripetutamente cilecca!

Chi ha giustamente la parte del leone è l'effervescente (anche troppo) Mamma Agata del basso-baritono Marco Filippo Romano, che ne sfaccetta agilmente la presenza in scena, fino alla goffa Afrodite nascente in una gigantesca conchiglia, modulandone con maestria l'espressività e la lingua. Il suo contraltare è Corilla, l'esuberante primadonna incarnata dal soprano Giuliana Gianfaldoni, che, tra vanagloriosi acuti e svarioni vocali, è una convincente cantatrice dozzinale quanto piena di sé. Il musico si giova della pastosa morbidezza del mezzo soprano Silvia Beltrami e il tenore tedesco, Guglielmo, si avvantaggia della limpida agilità del tenore Matteo Desole. Ci sono ancora quattro baritoni: adeguato Dario Giorgelè quale sovrintendente e passabile il Maestro di Cappella Biscroma Strappaviscere di Andrea Vincenzo Bonsignore, poco incisivi invece, nonostante la gestualità sopra le righe, Procolo, marito di Corilla, dell'invadente Nicolò Donini e il regista Prospero Salsapariglia, droghiere di mestiere, di Stefano Marchisio, quest'ultimo quale regista *gay* (non ce n'è penuria a dire il vero, ma si sbracciano tutti in quel modo?). Il soprano Paola Leoci era una graziosa non intrusiva Luigia, la seconda donna figlia di Mamma Agata, mentre all'elegante e misurato basso Juliusz Loranzi è toccato lo striminzito ruolo dell'ispettore del teatro (ha almeno preso la rivincita cantando Timur tra le due recite in una non disdicevole *Turandot* pucciniana al Teatro Sociale di Castiglione dello Stiviere (MN)).

L'allestimento, che andrà poi al Teatro Coccia di Novara ed al Chiabrera di Savona, era nelle competenti mani di Giovanni Di Stefano, che ha diretto l'Orchestra Filarmonica Italiana, mentre il Coro era quella della Casa affidato all'impeccabile Corrado Casati.

È più che doveroso menzionare infine le scene di Danilo Coppola, i costumi di Artemio Cabassi, le coreografie di Riccardo Buscarini e le luci di Michele Cremona.

Alla seconda rappresentazione - una domenicale pomeridiana - è apparsa in scena all'improvviso Iva Zanicchi, veterana della musica leggera, in un *aside* gustoso quasi in punta di piedi, calorosamente salutato dal pubblico e che a Donizetti non sarebbe dispiaciuto. La cantante reggiana aveva però lasciato nel guardaroba del teatro con la pelliccia i suoi formidabili ottant'anni.

Teatro abbastanza affollato di giovani e meno giovani complessivamente divertiti e appagati, che non si precipitavano all'uscita.

A Piacenza c'è chi ricorda ancora un soprano piemontese di non oscura fama ma ormai al tramonto, che alle prove dei *Puritani* venne protestata dal direttore, al

quale, con pretese e capricci non dissimili da quelli della prima donna delle *Convenienze*, si oppose battagliando inutilmente, mentre all'esterno del teatro la di lei anziana genitrice faceva uno strepito altrettanto infruttuoso. Il teatro è da sempre specchio della vita reale.





Bergamo 2021

Alan Jackson

As last year, this account is based on my viewing of Donizetti TV, which streamed the three operas performed at the 2021 Bergamo Festival. The programme comprised *L'elisir d'amore*, *La fille du régiment* and Mayr's *Medea in Corinto*. When this was announced I, no doubt like many Donizetti enthusiasts, felt a pang of disappointment that on offer were two of Donizetti's most performed operas. And here in London, we have lovely productions of both that have been revived frequently over the last few years with excellent casts. What had happened to the idea of performing all his works on the two-hundredth anniversary of their premieres? Well, in this case there is an explanation: no Donizetti works were premiered in 1821, *Zoraide di Granata*, though largely written in 1821 was first seen early in 1822. But there was a far more pressing explanation: the Covid pandemic. As the programme book says: *"In his city, after so much pain, it is time for hope and celebration. This is why the 2021 Festival, the one in the name of rebirth - with our beautiful theatres, the renovated Donizetti and the Sociale, at full capacity at last – will celebrate Gaetano with two of his most successful comedies."* I am certainly not going to argue with that. And with many of us still shy about international travel, maybe there was economic pressure to put on works that would fill the theatres with more local audiences. Again, I am not going to argue.

As a gesture to scholars and fans who want to hear every note Donizetti wrote, the performance of *La fille du régiment* was based on a new critical editions and that of *L'elisir d'amore* contained some "new" music. I have indicated some of the "new" details below.

The Mayr *Medea in Corinto* was the first performance in modern times of the version written for Bergamo in 1821, and so the bicentenary idea was after all adhered-to in some measure.

<u>La fille du régiment</u>

The setting is Cuba and not the Tyrol: the Glorious 21st Regiment of Napoleon's army has become a band of Castro followers, "barbudos", (except that the men of the Coro dell'Accademia – Teatro alla Scala are very young with hardly a beard in sight!), and seem to be artists rather than fighters; the Tyrolean Marquise de Berkenfield a pro-American noble lady. The setting for Act I owes much to the Cuban painter Raúl Martinez while the world of the Marquise is made from black and white adaptations of the Stars and Stripes. The frequent mention of France in the sung text is because the name of the regiment is "La France". Hm!

The characters and their relationships are clear enough, very similar to the Covent Garden production. Marie is a waif-like tomboy. At Covent Garden she peels potatoes and irons the soldiers' underwear; here she cleans their paint brushes. As in every production of *La fille* that I have seen, once the opening chorus and couplets for the Marquise are done, what little sense of danger there has been is largely forgotten in favour of the heartfelt romantic comedy that follows.

The cast is pretty good and was much appreciated by the audience. Here I must include a warning. I have watched and heard these operas via my laptop by subscribing to www.donizetti.org/tv which live streamed the opening nights and kept them available for subsequent viewing and listening. Not hi-fi by any means, further compounding any falsifying of the sound picture by the use of microphones. What I heard will not have been the same as what the audience heard in terms of timbre, harmonics, vocal impact, balance between soloists and orchestra etc.

Marie was sung very well by Sara Blanch who has the flexibility and range for the part. She was affecting in the slow arias without effacing memories of my last Covent Garden Marie, Sabine Devieilhe. She has the ability to sing while performing taxing stage movements including being carried offstage by her regiment. The only thing I didn't like was the decision to sing the music lesson scene deliberately flat and with ill-defined semi-quavers. The joke quickly palls, becoming unpleasant to hear, though it must be quite a feat to sing consistently out of tune for such a long time. (The legendary diva Giuditta Pasta was criticised for singing out of tune, especially late in her career, but I can't believe it sounded anything like this.)

The Marquise was sung by the rich-voiced mezzo Adriana Bignagni Lesca. She played the part with a little too much "comic" hyper-activity for my taste but conveyed the Marquise's very real dilemma movingly at the end. At the start of Act II she interpolated (I presume it isn't in the new critical edition) the song "El arreglito" by Sebastián Yradier, the habanera on which Bizet based Carmen's very famous example.

Paolo Bordogna sang and played an excellent Sulpice – nothing exaggerated. Cristina Bugatty spoke and acted the Duchesse de Krakentorp in the usual over-the-top manner, though it is difficult to conceive it otherwise. Small roles were well-taken.

Which leaves the Tonio of John Osborn. He doesn't have a voice with the sunshine of Pavarotti or the ping of Florez. On this occasion he sounded a little lack-lustre, in comparison with memories of his Benvenuto Cellini (heard live in Amsterdam a few years ago) and Arnold (in London). This may have been for technical reasons, see above, but it did sound just a little flat, though I stress, not in comparison with the orchestra. However, having heard that Bergamo's *L'elisir d'amore* was being performed at a period pitch of A = 430 Hz I checked my virtual piano and found that it did sound a little below

standard modern pitch of A = 440 HZ. But here is the bizarre thing. Checking Tonio's Act II aria, usually in A major, but raised here, according to the new edition, by a semitone to B*b* major, it sounded perfectly in tune. Checking a few other places revealed that other pieces in Act I were also about a quarter-tone flat, while Act II was unaffected. Electronic reasons? A rogue oboe player for the tuning up? I'm mystified.

Feel free to accept the audience's judgment over mine. They adored him, and they will have heard more top Cs in a single aria than ever before! Just before the second statement of "Pour mon âme" Osborn inserted two quaver top Cs. Not only that, but in the second statement the Cs on "âme" were embellished with upper mordents (C-D-C). And Osborn is the first tenor in my experience to preserve the sense of the words through the final, long-held interpolated top C. Others have always made it "mi-li-tai.....-re", though the sense is "militaire et mari". Osborne sings the usual top note, then two more briefer ones on "et ma" before descending to F with "ri". Bravo! The audience showed their appreciation at length and so eventually the whole final section was repeated, if without the mordent embellishments. I make that 28 top Cs in total, with two top Ds thrown in for good measure.

Tonio's second aria "Pour me rapprocher de Marie" sees the most obvious departures from the standard text. Firstly, it is a semi-tone higher than usual. Then there is a short middle section for Marie, the Marquise, Sulpice and Tonio between the two verses and the other three voices join in the 4 bars marked animando. After the usual close there is a new coda which includes top Ds and top Cs before a cadenza that leaps to a top E*b* and a final cadence for all four voices. It is all very lovely, or it would be if it could be sung in a honeyed mezza voce. This aria needs to melt our hearts through the beauty of the singing as well as the Marquise's through Tonio's affirmation of love for Marie. Osborn did so in part – a lovely diminuendo on the top Bb and descent that ends the first verse – but those extra bars really need a tenor prepared to float the top notes using more head voice than Osborn displayed. It was all much too strenuous and the top E*b* was somewhat of a scream. It would have been more moving to have just the usual two verses and the lower key.

Following my modern Schirmer vocal score I detected some other deviations, but nothing significant, though Blanch declined one or two cadenza opportunities; those like me who were brought up on Joan Sutherland may miss them. There may have been adjustments to orchestration that I didn't notice. The excellent conductor was Michele Spotti, the orchestra that of Donizetti Opera – fine once past an overture with some scrappy string passages. The director was Luis Ernesto Doñas, sets were by Angelo Sala, costumes by Maykel Martinez and choreography by Laura Domingo.

<u>L'elisir d'amore</u>

Before the performance started, ticket holders were welcomed back into the theatre by what turned out to be a Dulcamara look-alike. I think this was actually the first opera performance of the Festival, and so the first one with a full audience in the refurbished and renovated Teatro Donizetti. The audience had been furnished with flags containing the words of the opening chorus of Act II. They were duly rehearsed and when that point in the opera was reached joined in – audibly if not lustily. Flags were waved energetically, and a good time seemed to be had by all.

The setting for the opera was a square with the facade of the Teatro Donizetti as a backdrop. Otherwise sets and props were pretty minimal. There was nothing to suggest the farming community of the original and costumes didn't look much like 1830s. 1950s? I'm not sure. No matter, Donizetti's evergreen opera with its near-perfect blend of comedy and sentiment almost always transcends any particular choice of time and setting.

The performance was very enjoyable. All the singers were good, with one exception who was to my mind distinctly better than good. The cast was Caterina Sala (Adina), Javier Camarena (Nemorino), Florian Sempey (Belcore), Roberto Frontali (Dulcamara) and Anaïs Mejíar (Giannetta) with Riccardo Frizza conducting Gli Originali and the Chorus of Donizetti Opera. The production team consisted of Frederic Wake-Walker (Director), Frederica Parolini (Sets), Daniela Cernigliero (Costumes) and Fiammetta Baldiserri (Lighting). I have heard sweeter-toned Adinas and Giannettas, and I can imagine Belcore's fioriture thrown off with a bit more swagger. Both Sempey and Frontali pattered effectively in their duets with the soprano and tenor. All were more than equal to their roles, both vocally and dramatically.

The exception was the Nemorino of Javier Camarena who gave the most beautifully subdued and understated account of "Una furtiva lagrima" that I have ever heard. This Nemorino may have seen a furtive tear well up in Adina's eye, but he wasn't going to tempt fate by shouting about it. There is a vocal hurdle to be overcome in the second phrase of each verse – the two rising grace notes on "suoi" and "cor". A number of tenors broaden them out into a triplet, which just sounds clumsy. Others keep them as a rapid grace but fail to articulate them – I have never understood how Pavarotti's version on the complete CD set under Richard Bonynge was allowed to pass. Camarena got them just right. There was a lovely diminuendo at the close of the first verse (which to be fair, most tenors manage well) and another at the very end on "d'amor", remarkable as it started already very softly. This is one moment when others think it necessary to proclaim that they are real tenors with a crescendo splurge that usually precludes an effective final diminuendo. (While in Pavarotti-bashing mode, I recall a London concert in which his pianist didn't play the final four bar codetta – but then we mustn't make the divo wait for his applause. Camarena received a full minute of ovation without coming out of character.) Just occasionally I did wonder whether he played, or was

asked to play, Nemorino as too much of the village idiot; he may not have an education but there needs to be no stupidity if a relationship with Adina is to be plausible.

The orchestra Gli Originali plays on original instruments and at a pitch that is slightly lower than is usual today. The performance was complete without any of the usual cuts. (I repeat this and some of the following from an online review in Bachtrack; when I clicked on the download button to get the Festival's programme note for *Elisir* I got the programme note for *Medea.*) This may explain a slightly less brilliant edge to the sound. The note also says that the performance is based on the critical edition of Alberto Zedda from 1979. This includes music that Donizetti wrote for the 1839 Paris premiere at the Théâtre-Italien, so instead of the usual aria for Adina "Prendi; per me sei libero" Ms Sala sang a replacement aria written for Fanny Persiani. It is a lovely piece and I was glad to hear it. The cabaletta sounds familiar, though I can't place it. In general mood and rhythmic, if not melodic outline of the opening, it is very reminiscent of the cabaletta that Donizetti wrote for the happy ending of *Pia de'Tolomei* in 1838 when *Pia* was revived for Naples. This you can hear as an appendix to the Opera Rara recording of *Pia*, the final track on CD number 3. Of course, it may be a completely new piece but if not and you can identify it, answers on a postcard please.

My enthusiasm for *L'elisir d'amore* dates from 1959 when I was taken to the Adelphi Theatre in London to hear it done by an ad hoc Italian company alternating it with *La Boheme* and with Ferruccio Tagliavini, the only well-known singer, as Nemorino. The Adina for the first night was the mistress of the impresario and was definitely sub-standard. The audience made its displeasure very audible, to the extent that Tagliavini, who must have sung the role hundreds of times by then, was unnerved and skidded into the wrong verse of "Una furtiva lagrima" at the modulation to the major key! The wretched soprano was replaced for the rest of the week by the Mimi who I hope was thanked for taking on a double workload. I wasn't at that first night (alas?) but heard a performance later that week. Very soon after I bought the Decca LP recording with Hilde Gueden and Giuseppe di Stefano. When I got round to following it with a score I found out that it was greatly cut, with lots of repeats and a whole section of the Act II quartet missing. The cut that I regretted most was the cabaletta repeat of Adina's aria, mainly because I thought that Gueden sang it very well and I wanted to hear it again with embellishments in verse two. And to this day I have never heard both verses. I would have expected the Sutherland CD set to include them, but she replaces the whole cabaletta with that waltz song that may be by Maria Malibran or it may be by Malibran's husband Charles de Beriot. I think it is out of place, though it would have made an interesting appendix.

Now here is the conundrum. Part of me wants both verses of Donizetti's cabaletta; another part of me thinks that the drama would be better served by

none at all, just a short happiness duet for Adina and Nemorino. Their drama has ended with the tempo di mezzo in which Adina finally admits that she loves Nemorino; a full-scale cabaletta here really is out of place. But I suppose that the original prima donna Sabine Heinefetter demanded a double aria somewhere and this was the only possible place. Interestingly, *Elisir* is short of conventional double arias. Nemorino doesn't get one at all and Dulcamara's buffo entrance, though multi-sectional, doesn't follow the cantabile–cabaletta model. Belcore gets closest, but the repeat of his cabaletta is hi-jacked by Adina.

As mentioned, Bergamo used music written for Persiani in 1839 for Adina's aria. Other variants are possible. In Newsletter 103 (February 2008) I wrote about two arias appended to a score published by Bernard Latte, one for Persiani and one for Tamburini, both of whom were in that Paris premiere together with Ivanov and Lablache. Adina's is yet another version of "Prendi, per me sei libero", different from both the Milan original and the Paris version sung at Bergamo – this time the cabaletta is identifiable as coming from *Ugo, Conte di Parigi*, though with new words. The aria for Tamburini is an expansion of the cabaletta to the duet for Belcore and Nemorino and is real virtuoso piece, which I would love to hear sometime – Vittorio Prato where are you? Ashbrook also mentions a duet for Persiani and Tamburini written for Paris and a later cavatina for Tamburini (the aria just mentioned?). Also in Newsletter 103, our Chairman describes an alternative version of "Una furtiva lagrima" transposed down by a minor third "with astonishing variants in the reprise". Both verses have some lovely delicate ornaments, but in addition the first two lines of the second are completely re-written – astonishing indeed. Luckily this version can be heard, sung by Roberto Alagna on a complete recording conducted by Evelino Pido and the aria has been reissued by Decca on a compilation 2-CD set entitled "The Greatest Opera Show On Earth". All of which makes me wonder if Bergamo missed a trick in not re-creating the whole of that 1839 Paris performance or at least in not using more of these alternatives. However, what we were given was accomplished and enjoyable.

Medea in Corinto

Mayr's opera, with a libretto by a very young Felice Romani, was first performed in November 1813 at the San Carlo, Naples and subsequent revivals saw various changes to the score. My rather basic knowledge of the opera comes from the Opera Rara recording which does a certain amount of picking and mixing and also includes appendices of some pieces written for 1823 performances in Milan and/or Paris. Bergamo's production is of an 1821 revision written for Bergamo's Teatro Sociale and so this year's festival

honoured Donizetti's teacher by performing it there on the 200th anniversary of that revival.[1]

Would that Director Francesco Micheli (who is also Artist Director of the Donizetti Festival) had also honoured Mayr's opera. It pains me to report that this was another production (like last year's *Marino Faliero*) that did all it could to confuse and distract its viewers, whether by the presence of extras in strange costumes or principals appearing in scenes in which they didn't belong. Judging by the chorus director's curtain call, the chorus sang from boxes in the auditorium – certainly they didn't appear on stage. The programme note available to those streaming the opera contained a statement of his intent to "show how contemporary and 'ours' this apparently distant story is". As though a drama about infidelity, betrayal and revenge can only make sense if enacted in modern dress. During the overture there was a dumb show portraying the back stories of the principals, though it only really made sense if you already knew who was who. Thereafter it seemed to me that Micheli was rewriting the plot. Creusa was certainly affected by the poisoned dress, but did she die? Medea's two children seemed to be teenagers, and thus older than those pictured with Giuditta Pasta in prints of her celebrated portrayal in the 1820s, and I sensed a suggestion of an incestuous relationship. At the end, Giasone was old and infirm though the others hadn't aged. Medea took the still alive children by the hand and slowly walked offstage past the other characters, while tempestuous sounds from the orchestra spoke of the completely different events that Romani and Mayr had in mind.

The programme synopsis summarised Romani and Mayr's opera, not Micheli's re-writing (though perhaps vanity project would be an apt description). For acting style we had a lot of crawling around and there was much dressing and undressing so we saw a lot of the principals' underwear. The modern naturalistic sets comprised two bedrooms, a living area, an office and a kitchen which descended from and ascended to the flies or floated to and from the wings. Continually, and confusingly, a character would sing their aria while others also inhabited their space. For example, Creusa sang her aria sitting on the bed in which Medea and Giasone were sleeping. If the intention was to make clear by the positions of Medea and Giasone that their relationship had cooled, I would reply that we already knew that. Costumes were modern everyday wear except for Creonte who wore a chasuble-type robe that would have suited a cleric, not a king. My apologies if directorial subtleties passed me by, but I just wished that Micheli had concentrated on telling the story. In short, it was Greek Myth reduced to tacky kitchen-sink drama, even if the kitchen, equipped with cooker, cupboards and fridge freezer, seemed to lack a sink.

[1] As this version is not mentioned in the booklet accompanying the Opera Rara recording I assume it wasn't known to its author, Jeremy Commons, at its time of writing (c. 1993).

The title role was sung by Carmela Remigio, a Bergamo stalwart; she was impassioned and fluent as required, the voice remaining true throughout its range. I would be happy to see her again in a different production. Juan Francesco Gatell as Giasone and Marta Torbidoni as Creusa were a little over-parted, he sounding rather tired and she somewhat squally. As Egeo Michele Angelini successfully took his opportunities for florid singing. Smaller parts were taken by Roberto Lorenzi (Creonte), and none too mellifluously by Caterina Di Tonno (Ismene) and Marcello Nardis (Tideo). The Orchestra and Chorus of Donizetti Opera performed well under Jonathan Brandini, the wind players relishing their frequent solos. The production team included Edoardo Sanchi (sets) Giada Masi (costumes) and Alessandro Andreoli (lighting).

Bergamo used the critical edition by Paolo Rossini. I am not sufficiently familiar with the opera to comment on how the musical text differed from, say, that used by Opera Rara. Following the Opera Rara libretto gave me the impression that recitatives are sometimes condensed in this 1821 version and I did notice that Medea's final aria was a florid one with violin obbligato, not the plainer one with cor anglais. The programme note mentions that there are alterations to the roles of Creusa and Egeo. It also mentions that Donizetti may have participated in its composition "as he was unemployed and maybe in the compositional workshop at the time".

The Donizetti TV Extras

As last year, in addition to the three streamed operas, there were a lot of extras – interviews with artists, talks about the operas including extended features lasting about three hours. Some had English subtitles, but not all. (I described them more fully in my report in Newsletter 142.) New this year were reflections by three musicians on the conductor and composer Gianandrea Gavazzeni marking the 25th anniversary of his death and discussing his importance in the rediscovery of Donizetti. Gavazzeni was of course the conductor of and a driving force in the revival of *Anna Bolena* at La Scala Milan in 1957. Also new this year were items about a two-week course for young singers in stagecraft as well as vocal development, overseen by bass Alex Esposito. I think this led to the opening public concert of the festival but as far as I could see this wasn't available for streaming.

Much of what was produced for the 2020 Festival was still available for viewing. This included operas given between 2016 and 2020. The only one I watched was the 2019 *Lucrezia Borgia,* which allows one to hear the cabaletta to Lucrezia's aria in the Prologue as well as that (one verse only) to her aria finale. The A- Z vignettes I mentioned in Newsletter 142 were still there and there were short clips of this year's artists talking briefly to the bust of Donizetti. Most said how grateful they were to him for all the wonderful music he had given them. Only Alex Esposito dared to complain that while both

sopranos and the tenor in *Anna Bolena* were given two arias each, the bass role of Henry VIII had none!



Concerto in omaggio a Giovanni Pacini a Catania

Fabio Pappalardo

Serata tutta dedicata a Giovanni Pacini quella realizzata a Catania all'interno della XIII edizione del Festival Belliniano organizzato dal regista e scenografo Enrico Castiglione. Martedì 2 novembre 2021 presso la Chiesa della Badia di S. Agata il concerto in omaggio a Giovanni Pacini ha visto l'esibizione del soprano turco Gonca Dogan e del tenore siciliano Filippo Micale in vari brani tratti dalle opere *Saffo, Niobe, La regina di Cipro, L'ultimo giorno di Pompei* e *L'Ebrea*, accompagnati al pianoforte da Ruben Micieli.

Ricordiamo che di quest'ultimo melodramma, del quale sono stati eseguiti due brani, si trattava di una prima esecuzione assoluta in tempi moderni, dato che dopo il debutto dell'*Ebrea*, avvenuto a Miano il 27 febbraio del 1844 con un cast dell'epoca stellare che schierava Antonietta Montenegro (Rachele), Marietta Alboni (Berenice), Nicolai Ivanoff (Manlio) e Ignazio Marino (Eleazaro), venne realizzata una seconda e ultima rappresentazione tre anni dopo, cioè il 17 novembre 1847, al teatro Principal di Barcellona. Da allora l'opera cadde ingiustamente nell'oblio più assoluto, tant'è che a tutt'oggi di essa non esiste alcun video né alcuna registrazione. Pertanto merito precipuo del concerto è stato quello di avere proposto anche due splendidi brani dell'opera: "Ah come penso e lo sospiro" per soprano e "In quel dì clemente il cielo" per tenore.

La serata ha visto anche l'esecuzione di 4 brani tratti da *Saffo*: Atto I, scena IV e V finale "Quando il mio caldo genio… Ah! Dalla gioia oppresso (Soprano, Tenore); Atto II, Finale "Ai mortali, o crudo ai numi" (Soprano); Atto III, scena III "Fra queste orrende tenebre… Ah! Giusta pena io colsi… mai più divisi, o cara, non saremo" (Tenore); Atto III, scena V "Teco all'are pronube… L'ama ognor qual io l'amai" (Soprano) e dalla *Regina di Cipro*: Atto II, scema I "O tenera madre! Dal cielo rimira (Soprano).

Il bravo e agguerrito maestro Ruben Micieli ha invece eseguito i brani strumentali: "Fantasie brillante sur les motifs de l'opèra *Norma* musique de Bellini" op. 65 di J. Leybach; "Grande Fantasia sur la *Niobe*" di F. Liszt; "Grande Marcia" da *L'ultimo giorno di Pompei*, riduzione per pianoforte di G. Galluzzo.

Il concerto è stato introdotto dal musicologo Giovanni Pasqualino, il quale ha fornito all'uditorio notizie esaurienti sia sulla vita che sulla produzione musicale paciniana, sottolineando in particolare che l'opera *l'Ebrea* dovrebbe godere di speciale attenzione proprio nella città di Catania, nella quale ebbero i natali sia il compositore Giovanni Pacini che il librettista Giacomo Sacchero. Dovrebbe essere sufficiente tale motivazione campanilistica a spingere la maggiore istituzione musicale etnea (Il teatro Bellini di Catania) a risuscitare, rivalutare e riproporre tale

magnifico melodramma che come abbiamo potuto notare dai due brani eseguiti, promette un elevato spessore artistico e un profondo pathos lirico.

Impeccabile e partecipata è stata l'interpretazione fornita dai cantanti e dal pianista, con un encore del soprano Gonca Dogan, che ha chiuso il concerto con "Casta Diva" dalla *Norma* di Vincenzo Bellini.



Maria Padilla

Buxton Festival Opera staging 2003

Spagna, ultimo atto: la *Maria Padilla* di Donizetti

PierAngelo Pelucchi

L'attrazione da parte di Donizetti nei confronti della storia iberica è testimoniato da ben 9 titoli che, in modo diretto o indiretto, collocati in terra di Spagna. In ordine cronologico abbiamo *Zoraida di Granata* (Roma, 1822); *Alahor in Granata* (Palermo, 1826); *Elvida* (Napoli, 1826); *L'elisir d'amore* (Milano, 1832); *Sancia di Castiglia* (Napoli, 1832); *Il furioso all'isola di San Domingo* (Roma, 1833). Nei sei anni seguenti la produzione donizettiana fu estremamente intensa, con ben 17 opere nuove e svariati rifacimenti, ma fu solo nel 1839 che il tema iberico rientrò prepotentemente fra le opere del musicista bergamasco. La tormentata ed incompiuta *L'ange de Nisida* (1839) fu uno sfortunato esordio prima di giungere al grande successo de *La favorite* (Parigi, 1840). L'ultimo melodramma spagnolo di Donizetti fu la *Maria Padilla* (Milano, 1841), altrettanto tormentata tanto per la difficoltà della realizzazione della partitura, quanto per l'epilogo della vicenda in essa narrata.

Evidentemente il Maestro era assai soddisfatto dell'argomento per la nuova opera, tratto dall'omonima tragedia francese di Jacques Ancelot (1838), a sua volta preceduta dal *Vaudville* andato in scena a Parigi nel 1837 con musica di Alexandre Pierre Joseph Doche.

Il soggetto quà è *Maria Padilla, favorita di Pietro il Crudele di Castiglia.* [...] Il libro, come è fatto, è bellissimo. Una ragazza è sedotta da un re, il quale le giura sposarla; ma bisogna che viva per molto tempo come sua ***maîtresse***, e passi per tale in faccia a tutti, mentre essa sola sa di essere legittima sposa. Pel dolore, suo padre divien pazzo. Ella strappa dal capo a Bianca di Francia la corona, nel mentre Pietro si rende infedele, e grida: questa corona è mia... eppoi s'uccide... Vedi che son situazioni![1]

Scorrendo il vastissimo epistolario del musicista è quasi sconcertante la sincerità con la quale Donizetti riferisce anche dei propri insuccessi, certo palesando delusione -a volte la propria irritazione- ma sempre con pragmatismo e senza addolcire l'amarezza. In occasione delle prime rappresentazioni della *Padilla* Donizetti finalmente si concede una dettagliata, soddisfacente descrizione del pieno e meritato successo.

Dramma istorico della seconda rappresentazione di *Maria* Padilla all'I.R.teatro della Scala. Milano, 28 Xbre 1841.
Maestro sulla scena. / Cavatina *Ines* – Fuori maestro una volta. Cavatina *Maria* – Fuori maestro una volta. Sortita di *D. Pedro* – Applausi; fuori maestro una volta. / Duetto *D. Pedro* e *Maria* – Molti applausi. Artisti fuori, maestro no.
Atto II°
Coro – Applausi. / Cavatina *Ruis* – Fuori Donzelli. / Duetto *Maria* e *Ines* – Fuori maestro due volte. / Duetto *Ruis* e *D. Pedro* – Applausi molti. Stretta finale – Pochi applausi.
Atto III°
Terzettino due donne e secondo tenore – Applaudito. / Duetto *Ruiz* e *Maria* – Chiamato il maestro dopo l'adagio, e tutti, dopo. / Coro – Niente. /Romanza Ronconi ossia *D. Pedro* – Fuori maestro una volta. /Pezzo finale – Fuori maestro all'*adagio*. Fuori tutti dopo. Maestro due volte solo e due volte cogli artisti.[2]

Per verità la sera della prima rappresentazione, nonostante un buon numero di brani applauditi, il risultato complessivo non fu particolarmente lusinghiero e la maggior parte delle recensioni criticarono tutto: libretto, musica e cantanti. Già dalla seconda sera però le cose cambiarono totalmente ed anche i giornali che si erano espressi in modo assai severo ritrattarono

1 Lettera a Antonio Vasselli, Milano, 10 ottobre 1841.
2 Lettera di Donizetti ad Antonio Vasselli, Roma, plausibilmente 29 dicembre 1841.

la propria posizione, dichiarando che *Maria Padilla* era da annoverare fra i migliori lavori del compositore bergamasco.

La vicenda prevedeva che la protagonista si suicidasse pugnalandosi, ripercorrendo puntualmente la trama della tragedia di Ancelot. Come di consueto Donizetti diede un considerevole apporto di alla strutturazione e redazione del libretto, tanto da poter essere considerato a giusto titolo coautore del libretto assieme a Gaetano Rossi.

Il 2 novembre 1841 il musicista scriveva al collega ed amico d'infanzia Antonio Dolci, annunciando «Quanto all'opera di Milano è finita (non istromentata però)». La parte vocale costituisce la parte più creativo-concettuale di un melodramma, nel caso della *Padilla* un lavoro imponente. Eppure tale impegno creativo non è paragonabile a quello -più tecnico- della strumentazione, soprattutto in considerazione dell'enorme organico orchestrale che il Maestro desiderava utilizzare. Si trattava di un lavoro colossale, aggravato ulteriormente dalla "spada di Damocle" della onnipresente censura e dalla incombenza del 26 dicembre, improrogabile data prevista per la "prima" alla Scala. Incredibilmente il Maestro completerà la strumentazione in poco più di trenta giorni, tanto che l'8 dicembre potrà cominciare le prove in teatro.

I timori che sempre accompagnavano compositori e librettisti in occasione di un'opera nuova si palesarono (come di consueto) a ridosso della messa in scena. Solo pochissimi giorni prima della rappresentazione Donizetti dà notizie sul cambiamento del finale: «Caro Toto, Sissignore! *Padilla* morirà coll'afflusso di sangue, al momento; non canterà, nossignore....! E se andrà male, almeno sarò il primo che l'avrò tentato!»[3]

Da tali parole sembrerebbe che la modifica fosse stata proprio una iniziativa del compositore, ma è chiaro che il suicidio di Maria costituiva un irrinunciabile *coup de théâtre* per la conclusione dell'opera. La censura però era di opinione diversa. Nella scena che precede il finale ultimo Don Pedro riconosce pubblicamente il proprio giuramento nei confronti di Maria, che in pochi istanti diviene pertanto la legittima Regina di Castiglia... e una regina "non può" essere uccisa in scena, né tanto meno suicidarsi. Il cambio di finale -che non ci è dato sapere se escogitato dall'autore o imposto dalle autorità- poteva avere due vie percorribili: con la protagonista che moriva in modo incruento oppure con un epilogo lieto. E Donizetti le percorrerà entrambe.

Ancora oggi, 180 anni dopo la prima messa in scena di *Maria Padilla*, il finale del terzo atto evidenzia però aspetti mai del tutto chiariti. Sappiamo che nel finale delle 24 rappresentazioni scaligere Maria moriva sopraffatta dalla gioia dopo essere stata riconosciuta legittima consorte del Re, come attestato da una attenta recensione teatrale:

> Donizetti, i cui spartiti sono in questo momento il sostegno dei principali teatri d'Europa, e il cui ingegno fervido e creatore ha dato alle nostre scene musicali tante acclamate composizioni, ha scelto per soggetto del suo novello lavoro quella *Maria Padiglia* che visse moglie di Pietro di Castiglia surnomato *il Crudele*, che [...] si uccise secondo il dramma francese di Ancelot, e muore adesso di gioia per la scoperta sua innocenza, secondo il pensiero, non so del maestro Donizetti oppure del suo poeta signor Rossi.[4]

Già dalla fine del gennaio 1842 il musicista comunica a Michele Accursi che la *Padilla* sarebbe stata a Trieste la successiva Quaresima (1° marzo 1842) specificando che «Vi ho fatto cabaletta in fine perché non è tragica». È singolare che Donizetti non abbia voluto sfidare ulteriormente la censura tentando di ripristinare la versione originale di Ancelot, ma dalla seconda serie di rappresentazioni in poi (di particolare rilievo è quella napoletana al Teatro S.Carlo del 28 luglio 1842) Donizetti accoglie definitivamente l'idea della sostituzione dell'epilogo "tragico-lieto" con il finale totalmente lieto. C'è quindi da chiedersi per quale motivo nelle poche partiture manoscritte pervenuteci (compreso l'autografo di proprietà di Casa

3 Lettera a Antonio Vasselli, Milano, 24-25 dicembre 1841.
4 *Corriere delle Dame*, Milano, a XLI, n. 72, 30 dicembre 1841.

Ricordi) non c'è traccia né del finale tragico originale, né di quello con la morte "di gioia". Persino i libretti forniscono notizie contraddittorie, giacché diverse pubblicazioni riportano ancora il testo del finale scaligero.

La musicologia che ha trattato il tema della *Padilla* negli ultimi decenni ha solo scalfito i tanti interrogativi legati a questa straordinaria partitura e spesso ha dato più spazio alle incongruenze librettistiche e dei contenuti del dramma, piuttosto che dedicarsi ad una profonda analisi della musica, delle incredibili soluzioni vocali e strumentali e delle singolarità che Donizetti seppe porre in quest'opera. Ad esempio potremmo evidenziare la Cavatina di Ines, che si presenta come una grande Aria da protagonista (con struttura tradizionale e Cabaletta doppia), mentre il primo importante intervento solistico di Maria è assai più contenuto. Evidentemente Donizetti aveva accuratamente pensato all'economia vocale dei protagonisti, che avrebbero dovuto sopportare uno sforzo esecutivo improbo. Il compositore è attentissimo ad assegnare una parte vocale che rispetti le estensioni, le caratteristiche vocali e la resistenza di ciascun membro del cast. Al giovane ed aitante Ronconi è data una parte con una tessitura particolarmente acuta per un baritono; per il cinquantaduenne tenore Donzelli l'estensione è accuratamente limitata alle sue possibilità, mentre esalta la parte espressiva che gli era propria grazie alla grande esperienza teatrale. Alla giovane Abbadia -Inés- nelle parti solistiche è attribuita una parte con la medesima estensione e tessitura della prima donna, anche se nei duetti, terzetti e nei concertati si mantenerrà subordinata alla parte di Maria.

Se gli episodi solistici evidenziano la consueta, inarrivabile cantabilità donizettiana, è nei Duetti che le voci sono sublimate fra espressività, tecnica e concettualità compositive uniche. Anche il tema su cui ruota il dramma va a delineare i colori musicali voluti da Donizetti e, di conseguenza, le caratteristiche espressive messe in atto. Per quanto a prima vista sembrerebbe che gli argomenti dell'opera siano l'amore fra Maria e Don Pedro ed il potere, in realtà il centro gravitazionale della vicenda è l'onore: un elemento fondamentale nella tradizione spagnola e che nella società italiana, alla metà del sec. XIX, già cominciava ad essere percepita come un'idea in via di estinzione. L'onore dunque. Quello a cui Maria rinuncia per poter vivere accanto a Don Pedro, nonostante ciò la trasformi nella concubina del Re. L'onore del nome dei Padilla, che Ruiz vuole riconquistare insultando il Re e gettando il guanto di sfida sul suo volto. L'onore del monarca, che risponde all'offesa con un insulto ancor più grave, facendo bastonare il vecchio Ruiz: una punizione allora destinata solo ai traditori e agli schiavi. E ancora: Ruiz, che non sopportando l'ulteriore disonore della fustigazione, non può che rifugiarsi nella pazzia. Questo getta nella disperazione Maria, che sa di essere -più di Don Pedro- la responsabile di tale sciagura. Per ultimo: l'onore riconquistato di Maria, benché ciò determinerà un chiaro insulto nei confronti della povera Bianca di Francia ed un onta per i cavalieri francesi... ancora l'onore!

Una breve analisi strutturale può fornirci alcuni interessanti spunti di riflessione su quali fossero gli elementi che Donizetti teneva in primo piano durante la composizione di quest'opera. Potremmo prendere in esame il Coro di apertura del II atto "Nella reggia dell'amore" in cui Donizetti ricorre al ritmo di Bolero per accentuare le tinte di un travolgente color locale. Ma uno dei brani più significativi e toccanti di quest'opera è il Duetto Maria-Ruiz nel III atto. La prima sezione "Padre, o rio dolore..." è una vera e propria Aria drammatica di Maria posta avanti al Duetto. A questa sezione segue la Canzone popolare "Della sera la brezza leggera" che Ruiz cantava alle sue bambine e che ora è Maria a ripetere al padre impazzito.[5] Il Larghetto successivo in cui esordisce Ruiz ("Ah! Se ti restan lagrime") evidenzia una melodia struggente ed è singolare che la seconda frase di questa sezione ripercorra la struttura armonica e persino alcuni passi della preghiera "Una lagrima" (Romanza per voce e pianoforte di cui Donizetti era autore anche del testo) scritta dopo la morte della sua amatissima Virginia. Sempre nel Larghetto

5 È chiara la similarità con quanto accadrà fra Pierotto e Linda nell'opera immediatamente successiva alla *Padilla*: la *Linda di Chamounix* (Vienna, Kärtnerthortheater, 19 maggio 1842).

la linea melodica ripresa da Maria "Amare son le lagrime" è continuamente interrotta da pause, a sottolineare i singulti del pianto.[6]

Che dire poi delle finezze (evidenti per chi ascolta semplicemente la musica, ma esaltate nella visione della partitura) sul finale di questo stesso Larghetto? I due protagonisti interagiscono in modo totalmente differente, poiché Maria sta parlando al padre con tutta la sincerità del cuore, mentre Ruiz, perso nella sua follia, non la ascolta e parla solo con se stesso. Tuttavia la melodia di del tenore è sempre in evidenza rispetto a quella di Maria, a sottolineare la sua sofferenza di quest'ultima. Nell'ultima frase (Maria: "m'uccidi padre mio, ma non mi maledir" - Ruiz: "più amarla non degg'io se l'ho da maledir") le voci giungono addirittura ad incrociarsi ad indicare quanto Maria si senta soverchiata dalla vergogna.

Durante il suo ultimo periodo di attività a Parigi Donizetti elaborò la versione francese dell'opera, della quale curò la traduzione assieme a Hyppolite Lucas, ripristinando la Romanza iniziale di Maria nel primo atto, aggiungendo la Romanza di Don Pedro ed ampliando diverse sezioni, soprattutto nelle cabalette. Donizetti non assistette alla prima in francese dell'opera, che fu rappresentata a Versailles nel 1845 ed ancora nel 1850 e 1854 rispettivamente a Nantes e a Marsiglia. Il grande interesse per quest'opera è testimoniato da una seconda edizione dello spartito integrale canto-pianoforte che la casa editrice Schonenberger pubblicò (nel 1844) per la versione francese, dopo avere già stampato quello nella versione italiana.

Donizetti ottenne il suo primo grande successo operistico con un vicenda ambientata in Andalusia: *Zoraida di Granata*. Ventidue anni più tardi, la versione francese di un'altra opera spagnola -la *Maria Padilla*- il musicista avrebbe concluso definitivamente il suo ciclo creativo, per affrontare il tormento della malattia e dell'isolamento nell'ospedale di Ivry.



6 Durante la sua formazione musicale presso le *Lezioni Caritatevoli* di Giovanni Simone Mayr il giovane Donizetti aveva letteralmente assorbito la tecnica musicale drammatica del suo maestro. Uno degli esempi che probabilmente restò indelebile nella mente donizettiana fu l'*Adelasia e Aleramo* di Mayr. la prima opera pubblicata in canto-piano nel 1807 dalla neonata Casa Ricordi e che aveva ottenuto un esito straordinario alla Scala il 26 dicembre 1806, esattamente trentacinque anni prima della *Padilla*. Proprio nel duetto fra Adelasia e Ottone (Soprano e Tenore) Mayr aveva utilizzato questo stesso effetto di pianto e singulti con tratti compositivi straordinariamente simili.

***Robert le diable*, Bordeaux Auditorium, jeudi 23 septembre 2021**

Robert, Duc de Normandie : JOHN OSBORN
Alice, sa sœur de lait : AMINA EDRIS
Isabelle, Princesse de Sicile : ERIN MORLEY
Bertram, père de Robert : NICOLAS COURJAL
Raimbaut, un troubadour : NICO DARMANIN
Alberti : JOËL ALLISON
Quatre Chevaliers : OLIVIER BEKRETAOUI, LUC SEIGNETTE, JEAN-PHILIPPE FOURCADE, SOMON SOLAS
Coryphées : MARJOLAINE HORREAUX, LENA ORYE
le Maître de cérémonie : PACO GRACIA
un Héraut d'armes : PACO GARCIA
un Prêtre : JOËL ALLISON
Trois Joueurs : JEAN-PHILIPPE FOURCADE, SIMON SOLAS, LUC SEIGNETTE

Orchestre et Chœurs de l'Opéra National de Bordeaux Aquitaine
Chef de chœur : SALVATORE CAPUTO
Direction musicale : MARC MINKOWSKI

À la fin du mois de septembre, l'Opéra de Bordeaux a proposé le premier opéra français de Meyerbeer, *Robert le diable*, créé le 21 novembre 1831 à l'Académie Royale de Musique à Paris. Initialement prévu dans une mise en scène d'Olivier Py, celui-ci est finalement proposé en version concertante à l'Auditorium, lors de trois soirées, les 20, 23 et 25 septembre. Comment ne pas se réjouir d'une telle initiative, tant l'ouvrage est absolument splendide de bout en bout ? Comme le musicien éponyme du conte balzacien, *Gambara*, « Je tressaille encore [...] aux quatre mesures de timbales qui m'ont atteint dans les entrailles et qui ouvrent cette courte, cette brusque introduction où le solo de trombone, les flûtes, le hautbois et la clarinette jettent dans l'âme une couleur fantastique. Cet andante en ut mineur fait pressentir le thème de l'invocation des âmes dans l'abbaye, et vous agrandit la scène par l'annonce d'une lutte toute spirituelle. » Sur une dizaine de pages, le malheureux musicien décrit avec enthousiasme ce *Robert le diable* qui l'a littéralement envoûté et il est « encore sous le charme de cet admirable chant des enfers », car « la science est grande dans l'opéra de Meyerbeer ». Il faut dire que Marc Minkowski parvient à insuffler à cette œuvre tout ce que le compositeur a cherché à y mettre. Son amour pour le compositeur est perceptible à chaque instant, et lors des saluts, à la fin du spectacle, le maestro sert sur sa poitrine la partition et nous rappelle ainsi qu'il a, dès mars 2000 à Berlin avec une édition critique de *Robert le diable* et en juin 2011 avec une édition assez complète des *Huguenots* ou bien en février-mars 2020 avec *les Huguenots* encore, redonné à ce compositeur toutes ses lettres de noblesse et la place qui lui revient dans l'univers de l'opéra.

Donné souvent dans des versions plus ou moins tronquées et des mises en scène plus ou moins inspirées, l'opéra est donné à Bordeaux dans la version la plus complète que je connaisse, avec près de quatre heures de musique[1] : seules quelques mesures du premier acte ont ainsi été

[1] Voici les productions modernes de *Robert le diable* :
Isabelle – Alice – Robert – Raimbaut – Bertram / Direction musicale – lieu et dates / enregistrement discographique existant
– Renata Scotto – Stefania Malagù – Giorgio Merighi – Gianfranco Manganotti – Boris Christoff / Nino Sanzogno, Firenze Teatro Comunale, 07, 09, 12/05/1968 [version italienne] / **CD MYTO 992-206 (07/05/1968)** [L'enregistrement a été distribué par d'autres labels, comme ARKADIA, OPERA D'ORO, MRF]

supprimées ; mais peut-être seront-elles rétablies lors de l'enregistrement officiel, qui deviendra sans nul doute la référence pour cet ouvrage. Lors de cette deuxième représentation, et dans une salle à moitié vide, j'ai donc pu savourer cette partition fabuleuse, en regrettant que le sur-titrage vienne parfois détourner l'attention par des commentaires prétendument spirituels mais quelque peu agaçants. Le début de la soirée a donné une étrange impression brumeuse et cacophonique, manifestement en raison de la disposition des chœurs dans tout le balcon d'arrière-scène, situé derrière l'orchestre. Par chance, l'oreille s'accoutume assez vite et cette mauvaise impression première disparaît alors, car les chœurs, très présents dans l'ouvrage et bien préparés par Salvatore Caputo et Jean-Marc Fontane, montrent de réelles qualités. L'instrumentation très raffinée et originale est parfaitement restituée par l'Orchestre National Bordeaux Aquitaine, dirigé magistralement par le maestro Minkowski. On peut ainsi apprécier certains instruments – ophicléide, bassons, etc. – ou bien encore les deux harpes pendant l'air d'Isabelle au quatrième acte.

Par sa longueur et ses difficultés, *Robert le diable* exige un plateau d'exception, et celui-ci est ici réuni et généreusement applaudi. La diction, chez chacun des chanteurs, est excellente, même si la distribution est très internationale. Isabelle est brillamment incarnée par le soprano américain Erin Morley, très élégamment habillée. Les aigus, les vocalises, l'ampleur de la voix, le phrasé, l'investissement sont à saluer dans chacune de ses interventions, seule ou accompagnée. Erin Morley est ainsi une très belle Princesse de Sicile, si malmenée par Robert. Le soprano égyptien Amina Edris n'a rien à lui envier dans le rôle d'Alice, la sœur de lait de Robert. La chaleur de sa voix ample, son agilité, sa grande tessiture donnent une épaisseur dramatique à ce personnage, si important dans l'histoire, puisque Alice veille sans cesse sur Robert.
Du côté masculin, la basse française, Nicolas Courjal, impressionne dans le rôle terrible de Bertram, démon et père de Robert. Ses interventions sont saisissantes, et le troisième acte qui lui est presque entièrement consacré lui donne l'occasion de montrer la noirceur d'une voix profonde et ténébreuse à souhait. Déjà remarquable à Bruxelles où, deux ans plus tôt, il chantait ce rôle pour la première fois, Nicolas Courjal a gagné encore en qualité : il est sans nul doute un très beau Bertram, dans la lignée d'un Samuel Ramey, magistral à Paris, en 1985, et on ne peut que se réjouir que parallèlement

– June Anderson – Michèle Lagrange (24, 27, 29/06) / Lucia Scappaticci (02, 16, 20/07) – Alain Vanzo (24, 27, 29/06, 02/07) / Rockwell Blake (05, 08, 11, 16/07) – Walter Donati – Samuel Ramey / Thomas Fulton, Paris Palais Garnier 24, 27, 29 juin & 02, 05, 08, 11, 13, 16, 20 juillet 1985 / **CD LEGATO 229-3 (29/06/1985)** [L'enregistrement de cette soirée radiodiffusée a aussi été proposé par les labels LR, GALA, ADONIS, OPERA PASSION, OPERA ADDICTION] – [La soirée du 08 juillet a été diffusée à la télévision] – Marilyn Mims – Frances Ginsberg – Chris Merritt – Anthony LaCura – Samuel Ramey / Eve Queler, New York Carnegie Hall 21/02/1988
– Maria Tkaldlcikova – Galia Ibragimova – Valerij Popov – Tomáš Černý – Ulf Paulsen / Vincent Monteil, Práhá Státní Opera 11, 13, 18/12/1999 / **CD Státní Opera Práhá SO 0006-2611 (11/12/1999)**
– Nelly Miricioiù – Marina Mescheriakova – Jianyi Zhang – Stephan Rügamer – Kwangchoul Youn / Marc Minkowski, Berlin Staatsoper unter den Linden 11, 14, 19, 26, 30/03 & 02/04/2000 / **CD HOUSE OF OPERA 689 (14/03/2000) – CD MFC 005 (19/03/2000)**
– Patrizia Ciofi – Annalisa Raspagliosi – Warren Mok – Alessandro Codeluppi – Giorgio Surian /Renato Palumbo, Martina Franca Cortile del Palazzo Ducale 06 & 08/08/2000 / **CD DYNAMIC 368/1-3 (08/2000)**
– Nelly Miricioiù – Brigitte Helm – Jianyi Zhang – Stephan Rügamer – Kwangchul Youn / Marc Minkowski, Berlin Staatsoper unter den Linden 08, 11, 16, 25/03/2001 / **CD MIKE RICHTER AUDIO ENCYCLOPEDIA 006 (11/03/2001)**
– Diana Vassileva / Irina Jekova (21/01) – Lioubov Metodieva / Olga Mihaïlova-Dineva (21/01) – Gueorgi Soultanov / Philippe Do (21/01) – Daniel Ostretsov / Nikolaï Pavlov (21/01) – Martin Tsonev / Svetozar Rangelov (21/01) / Didier Talpain, Sofia Opera National 20, 21, 22/01, 02/02/2012
– Patrizia Ciofi – Carmen Giannattasio – Bryan Hymel – Martial Defontaine – Alastair Miles / Daniel Oren, Salerno Teatro Verdi 23/05/2012 / **CD BRILLIANT CLASSICS 94604**
– Patrizia Ciofi – Marina Poplavskaya – Bryan Hymel – Jean-François Borras – John Relyea / Daniel Oren, London Royal Opera House 06, 09, 12, 15, 18, 21/12/2012 / **DVD OPUS ARTE 1106 (15/12/2012)**
– Lisette Oropesa – Yolanda Auyanet – Dmitry Korchak – Julien Dran – Nicolas Courjal / Evelino Pidò, Bruxelles Palais des Beaux-Arts 02 & 05/04/2019.

à ses trois représentations, un enregistrement soit effectué par le label Palazzetto Bru Zane, qui permettra d'immortaliser sa splendide prestation. Le troubadour Raimbaut, le fiancé d'Alice, est interprété par Nico Darmanin. Le ténor maltais se sort fort honorablement de ce rôle, plus présent scéniquement qu'il n'y paraît, et sait physiquement occuper le devant de la scène. Le rôle éponyme revient au ténor américain John Osborn. Je dois dire que celui-ci m'a quelque peu laissé sur ma faim. Si tous les chanteurs ont une réelle présence scénique, John Osborn est plongé quasi en permanence dans un iPad, ce qui lui interdit tout naturel, toute émotion, tout investissement. Le manque de préparation ou bien la peur d'un rôle écrasant expliquent certains cafouillages, une émission parfois peu claire. Pourtant le ténor américain réussit la plupart du temps à surmonter les difficultés d'un rôle, contrairement à bien des ténors – songeons à Alain Vanzo à Paris –, y compris dans l'air fréquemment coupé et créé pour le ténor Mario, qui ouvre le deuxième acte, même si Dmitry Korchak s'y montrait supérieur à Bruxelles. Les autres rôles masculins sont chantés tout à fait correctement et complètent bien ce splendide plateau. Cette soirée éblouissante restera sans aucun doute dans les annales, et nous attendons impatiemment l'enregistrement officiel.

William DESNIOU

***Stiffelio*, Strasbourg Opéra National du Rhin, mardi 19 octobre 2021**

Stiffelio, ministro assasveriano : JONATHAN TETELMAN
Lina, sua moglie, figlia di : HRACHUHÍ BASSÉNZ
Stankar, vecchio colonello, conte dell'Impero : DARIO SOLARI
Jorg, altro vecchio ministro : ÖNAY KÖSE
Raffaele, nobile di Leuthold : TRISTAN BLANCHET
Dorotea, cugina di Lina : CLÉMENCE BAÏZ
Federico di Frengell, cugino di Lina : SANGBAE CHOÏ

Orchestre Symphonique de Mulhouse
Chœur de l'Opéra National du Rhin
Chef de chœur : ALESSANDRO ZUPPARDO
Direction musicale : ANDREA SANGUINETI

Pour ainsi dire un mois après *Robert le diable*, l'Opéra National du Rhin – Strasbourg (les 10, 12, 14, 16 et 19 octobre), puis Mulhouse à la Filature (les 07 et 09 novembre) – propose le très rare *Stiffelio* de Verdi. L'œuvre est tirée d'un drame français en cinq actes et six parties, *le Pasteur ou l'Évangile et le foyer* d'Eugène Bourgeois et Émile Souvestre, représenté pour la première fois à Paris, sur le Théâtre de la Porte-Saint-Martin le 10 février 1849. Les huit personnages de la pièce française sont, à peu de choses près, conservés, et Rudolphe devient Stiffelio. Le spectateur pénètre dans l'univers austère d'un pasteur évangélique qui voit son existence bouleversée par la découverte de l'infidélité de sa femme Lina à laquelle il finit néanmoins par pardonner. Verdi et son librettiste Francesco Maria Piave respectent très fidèlement le drame français et son univers qui a malheureusement choqué la censure italienne, contraignant le compositeur à expurger l'histoire et à opérer de radicales modifications. Ne supportant pas cette idée, Verdi a préféré "détruire" le manuscrit original. Il faut attendre 1968[2] et la découverte de deux copies à la Bibliothèque du

[2] L'opéra est en effet recréé à Parma avec Angeles Gulín Domínguez – Gastone Limarilli / Renato Gavarini (03) – Walter Alberti / Vasile Martinoiu (03) – Antonio Zerbini / Peter Maag, Parma Teatro Regio 26, 29/12/1968 & 03. 07/01/1969.
Nous possédons de nombreux enregistrements de *Stiffelio*, souvent *live* et non officiels :
Lina – Stiffelio – Stankar – Jorg / Chef d'orchestre, lieu et dates / Marque discographiques

Conservatoire de Naples pour que le public contemporain, plus d'un siècle après sa création à Trieste, en octobre 1850, puisse redécouvrir une œuvre absolument superbe. Pour autant, *Stiffelio* a du mal à trouver sa place dans les Opéras, même si certains grands théâtres, comme le Royal Opera House de Londres (en 1993, 1995, 2007, 2014, 2018) ou le Metropolitan Opera House de New York (en 1993, 1994, 1998), n'ont jamais hésité à l'inscrire dans leurs programmations. La France, en revanche, se montre plus timorée, et après une unique représentation à Reims[3], une grande scène française a enfin le courage de proposer cet opéra d'une grande intensité.

Le décor, très sobre, représente une maison de bois, tantôt intérieur austère de Stiffelio, tantôt salle de prière d'une église. Cet univers très rigoriste peut rappeler celui des Amish ou des Quakers aux États-Unis. On pense aussi à la peinture américaine de John Sloane ou de Grant Wood. Les costumes des chanteurs, créés par Hannah Clark, restent pareillement dans une tonalité noir et blanc. Les très beaux éclairages de Malcolm Rippeth accentuent le caractère pictural proposé en scène. Tout cela participe à la qualité du spectacle et aide le public à se concentrer sur la musique et le chant. Une ouverture, la plus longue que Verdi ait écrite, met en place le drame auquel nous

– Angeles Gulín Domínguez – Gastone Limarilli – Walter Alberti – Antonio Zerbini / Peter Maag, Parma Teatro Regio 29/12/1968 / **CD NUOVA ERA 2284**
– Angeles Gulín Domínguez – Mario Del Monaco – Giulio Fioravanti – Joshua Hecht / Oliviero De Fabrittis, Napoli Teatro di San Carlo 26/12/1972 / **CD LEGATO 169-2**
– Angeles Gulín Domínguez – Mario Del Monaco – Giulio Fioravanti – Joshua Hecht / Oliviero De Fabrittis, Napoli Teatro di San Carlo 07/01/1973 / **CD GREAT OPERA PERFORMANCES 773**
– Sylvia Sass – José Carreras – Matteo Manuguerra – Wladimiro Ganzarolli / Lamberto Gardelli, Wien Österreichischen Rundfunk 06/1979 / **CD PHILIPS 422 432-2**
– Rosalind Plowright – Antonio Barasorda – Brent Ellis – Giorgio Surian / Eliahu Inbal, Venezia Teatro La Fenice 22/12/1985 / **CD MONDO MUSICA MFOH 10803**
– Catherine Malfitano – José Crarreras – Gregory Yurisich – Gwynne Howell / Edward Downes, London Royal Opera House [02, 06] /02/1993 / **DVD PIONEER PLMCB 00861**
– Sharon Sweet – Plácido Domingo – Vladimir Chernov – Paul Plishka / James Levine, New York Metropolitan Opera House 13/11/1993 / **DVD DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON 00440073 4288**
– Sharon Sweet – Plácido Domingo – Vladimir Chernov – Paul Plishka / James Levine, New York Metropolitan Opera House 05/03/1994 / **CD SERENISSIMA 360.120-121**
– Kallen Esperian – José Carreras – Vladimir Chernov – Mario Luperi / Gianandrea Gavazzeni, Milano Teatro alla Scala 29/03/1995 / **CD HOUSE OF OPERA 1200**
– Verónica Villaroel – Plácido Domingo – Carlos Álvarez – Miguel Ángel Zapater / Arturo Tamayo, Madrid Teatro de la Zarzuela 23/05/1995 / **CD HOUSE OF OPERA 920**
– Catherine Malfitano – José Cura – Anthony Michaels-Moore – Gwynne Howell / Edward Downes, London Royal Opera House 20/06/1995 / **CD HOUSE OF OPERA 547**
– Olga Guryakova – Keith Ikaia-Purdy – Boris Statsenko – Kwangchul Youn / Wolfgang Gönnenwein, Ludwigshafen Theater im Pfalzbau 20/09/1996 / **CD LEGATO CLASSICS 4804**
– Verónica Villaroel – Plácido Domingo – Haijing Fu – Paul Plishka / James Levine, New York Metropolitan Opera House 04/04/1998 / **CD HOUSE OF OPERA 5129**
– Dimitra Theodossiou – Alberto Cupido – Alberto Gazale – Riccardo Zanellato / Pier Giorgio Morandi, Piacenza Teatro Municipale [29, 31] /03/2000 / **DVD PREMIERE OPERA 6187**
– Dimitra Theodossiou – Mario Malagnini – Marco Vratagna – Enzo Capuano / Nicola Luisotti, Trieste Teatro Lirico "Giuseppe Verdi" [13, 16, 19, 21] /12/2000 / **CD DYNAMIC 362/1-2**
– Verónica Villaroel – Luis Lima – William Stone – Daniel Sumegi / Antony Walker, Washington Kennedy Concert Hall 10/06/2003 / **CD PREMIERE OPERA 1329-2**
– Sondra Radvanovsky – José Cura – Roberto Frontali – Alastair Miles. / Mark Elder, London Royal Opera House 08/05/2007 / **CD CELESTIAL AUDIO 671**
– Yu Guanqun – Roberto Arónica – Roberto Frontali – George Anduladze / Andrea Battistoni, Parma Teatro Regio [18, 21] /04/2012 / **DVD UNITEL CLASSICS / C MAJOR 723008**
– Maria Katzarava – Luciano Ganci – Francesco Landolfi – Emanuele Cordaro / Guillermo García Calvo, Parma Teatro Farnese [06, 13, 21] /10/2017 / **DVD NAXOS 2.110590**

[3] Felicia Filip – Zwetan Michailov – Marcel Vanaud – Wojtek Smilek / Maurizio Barbacini, Reims Grand Théâtre 06/03/1994 [Unique représentation que j'ai commentée : cf. *Newsletter* n° 62].

allons assister et révèle déjà le soin que le compositeur a mis dans l'écriture musicale : on appréciera en particulier le solo de la trompette de Xavier Ménard. D'emblée aussi, les chœurs, préparés par Alessandro Zuppardo, montrent de belles nuances et un bel équilibre dans les ensembles : la scène finale est de ce point de vue admirable et impressionnante.

Saluons tout de suite le ténor américain Jonathan Tetelman dans le rôle-titre. Les qualificatifs superlatifs manquent pour décrire son travail et son total investissement. D'origine chilienne, ce ténor est une totale révélation : il n'incarne pas Stiffelio, il est Stiffelio. Sa grande taille, son physique quasi christique, sa chevelure et sa barbe noires impressionnent immédiatement. L'engagement du chanteur est total et croît au fil des scènes : il laisse le spectateur sidéré par cette présence et cette voix, ample, chaude, généreuse, magnifique. Le public lui réservera une véritable ovation au rideau final. Parmi les voix masculines, il faut aussi saluer celle du baryton italien Dario Solari, dans le rôle de Stankar, le père de Lina. Le personnage s'inscrit parfaitement dans la lignée des grands barytons verdiens : pensons à Giorgio Germont dans *la Traviata*, à Miller dans *Luisa Miller*, à Giacomo dans *Giovanna d'Arco*, par exemple. Sa grande scena ed aria au début du troisième acte est vraiment splendide. Jorg, le vieux pasteur, est chanté par la basse turque Önay Köse. Celui-ci restitue tout le rigorisme moral de ce personnage et marque durablement le spectateur à chacune de ses interventions, avec sa voix puissante et chaude. Il ne faut pas oublier le second ténor, Tristan Blanchet, qui sait donner vie à Raffaele, l'amant par qui le scandale arrive. Même si ce rôle ingrat est assez effacé dans la partition, le jeune ténor suisse confère une présence non négligeable à ce personnage détestable qui attire sur lui la haine de tous.

Lina, épouse de Stiffelio et fille de Stankar, est interprétée par le soprano arménien Hrachuhí Bassénz qui a déjà interprété ce rôle au Royal Opera House de Londres en décembre 2008. La chanteuse restitue toute la fragilité du personnage, et son grand air au début du deuxième acte ne peut qu'émouvoir le spectateur. Mais c'est sans doute dans le grand duetto avec son époux, au troisième acte, que le soprano se révèle la plus émouvante : on perçoit tout l'amour infaillible de Lina pour Stiffelio même si celle-ci a été entraînée à la faute par Raffaele. Le soprano et le personnage éponyme y sont absolument fabuleux. Même si Federico, interprété par le ténor coréen Sangbae Choï, et Dorotea, interprétée par le soprano français Clémence Baïz, sont très secondaires, tous deux ne déméritent pas.

La direction impeccable d'Andrea Sanguineti contribue à faire de cette soirée un moment inoubliable, et on ne peut que regretter qu'aucune captation sonore ou visuelle n'ait été envisagée pour ce qui constitue une grande première française de cet ouvrage si rare de Verdi et si idéalement porté par un plateau galvanisé sans aucun doute par Jonathan Tetelman.

William DESNIOU

Donizetti - John Harris and his friends enjoyed him live again in Bergamo!

*

On 19th November 2021 the renovated Teatro Donizetti reopened (the work having taken around four years at a cost of around €19m) with a celebratory performance of *L'elisir d'amore*, the Fondazione Opera Festival 2021 production launching its season complete with eager audience participation marked by a singing of "*cantiamo, facciam brindisi a sposi cosi amiabili...* ".

One has to congratulate our Italian friends declining the fuss in the UK with the audience masked - presenting their covid passes to gain entrance - with orchestra and conductor masked and the chorus singing *through* their masks...!!! Similar arrangements operated outside for access to shops, cafes, restaurants. Everyone masked on the excellent public transport system and on the streets. Why should there be a problem ?

Nemorino was sung by the Mexican tenor, Javier Camerena, and anyone who missed him can see him reprise the role at The Met later this year. His singing of "*Una furtiva lagrima*" was greeted with rapturous applause and won the demanded encore. Adina was beautifully sung by Caterina Sala; Florian Sempey was a suitably roguish Belcore and Roberto Frontali enjoyed his Dulcamara role peddling his false dreams (this was 1832... has anything changed?)

The audience was very happy with a performance that lived up to the occasion once more in the presence of their composer after so much streaming and in the beautifully restored Opera House in his name. It has to be said, even so, that there was appreciative discussion of the improvisation two years ago when *L'Ange de Nisida* was performed in the round in the cleared stalls area despite incomplete building works on every side – a fabulous evening remembered with great affection by those privileged to be present and a talking point still...

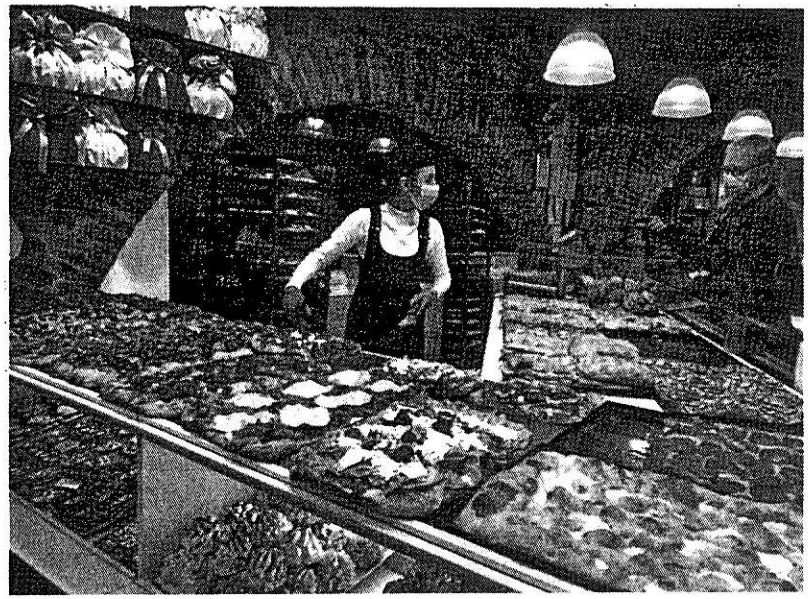
As a recognition of Donizetti's, (and our), debt to Simon Mayr, his leading work - his *Medea in Corinto* - was performed in the lovely Teatro Sociale in Bergamo Alta. One of his many works composed by the teacher and mentor born in Bavaria become music director of Bergamo Cathedral and founder of its choir school. But we speculated what Mayr would have thought of its very *unusual* production....!!!

The third opera offered was *La Fille du régiment*, a spectacular production in collaboration with the National Opera of Cuba, notable for its Marie sung by the Spanish soprano Sara Blanch and with John Osborn as Tonio. Once again the audience loved it, even taking-in some street- theatre outside prior to the performance...

Bergamo was as attractive, enjoyable, and friendly as ever notwithstanding covid precautions, especially with its football team in the European Champions League and on a roll (and we know now that San Pellegrino is an actual place as well as a fine bottled water - it's a nearby Spa)

It was great to be live with Donizetti again

John Harris



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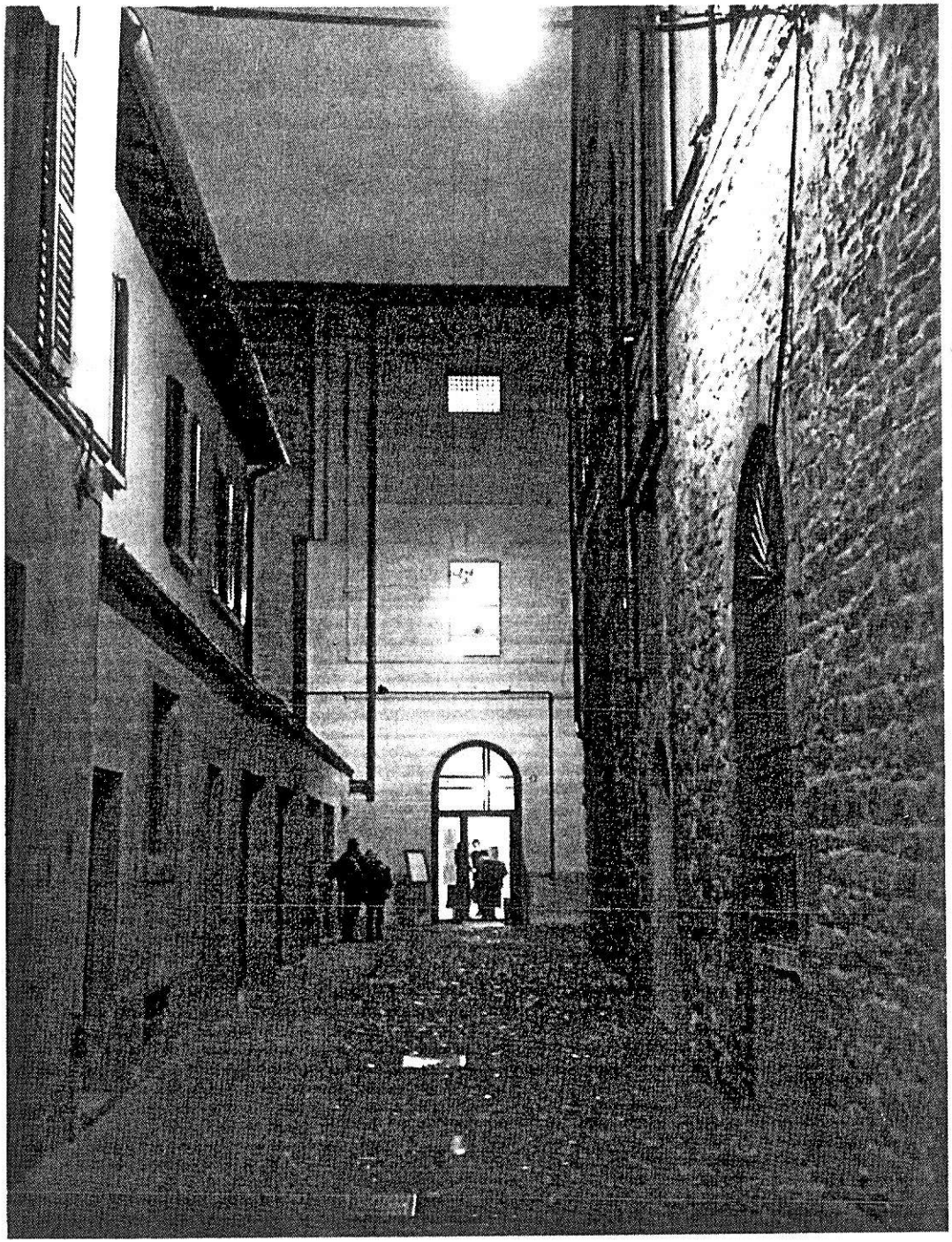
And back cover
Bergamo Nostalgia
courtesy of Mr John Harris



Diary



Trieste, Teatro Verdi
Don Pasquale 1-19 April 2020

Venice, Teatro La Fenice
I lombardi alla prima Crociata (Verdi) 1-19 April
La Fille di régiment 14-22 October

Bologna, Teatro Comunale
Lucrezia Borgia 3-13 May

Amsterdam, Muziektheater
Anna Bolena 10-29 May

London, Barbican,
Britten Sinfonia, Opera Rara
Il proscritto (Mercadante)
(w. Ramòn Vargas Cond. Carlo Rizzi) 28 June (Concert Perf)

Wildbad, Belcanto Opera Festival Rossini
Armida (Rossini) 15/20 July
Ermione (Rossini) 16/23 July
Adina (Rossini) 17/22/24 July
Stabat Mater (Rossini) 21 July
Margarita Gritskova sings Donizetti 22 July
(Lieder by Donizetti; Maria Prinz (piano))

Torino, Teatro Regio
Don Checco (De Giosa) 26-30 July

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Opinions in the Newsletter are those of the author
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