Bergamo

musical notices from Città e Provincie

Amongst the spring and early summer events, the piano and choral festivals mentioned in the previous Newsletter, were prominent but by no means the only offerings. The "Trio chitarristico Donizetti" were active but offered no transcriptions of the Maestro's music; the Società del Quartetto now in its 88th year, heard the Gerosa sisters Elisabetta (violin) and Giuseppina (oboe) play variations on *Aida* (!) at one of their meetings; those other long established bodies, Circolo "Simone Mayr" and Circolo Artistico Bergamasco enjoyed regular concerts, and Easter brought a number of interesting *"elevazione musicale"* in Santa Maria Maggiore with items by Perosi, Pedemonte, Ponchielli and Rossini sung by the Coro dell'Immacolata di Bergamo, a *"group of 60 or so voices formed in 1904 and, since 1956, conducted by Corbetta"*. At the opening of an art exhibition in Sant'Agostino (a covent founded in the late 13th century, supressed in 1797 is now unused but its church, consecrated in 1347, today often houses exhibitions and, in modern parlance, *"promotions"*), one could have heard Giuliani's transcription for guitar of Rossini's overture to *Semiramide*. It was the time of the year for the new season in a number of continuing presentations; the 32nd review of Church Music at Loreto featured choirs from twelve countries in "Messa laurentauna" by Virgilio Mortari; there was music by Byrd, Shütz, Lotti and Scarlatti in the 11th "Arte e Musica Antica", by Bach, Campra, Dowland, Purcell, Scarlatti and Vivaldi in the new season for *"In...canto"*, and the first concert of the 5th "Musica per la Basilica" was dedicated to Guido Gambarini (died 1978 aged 71) and included a *Kyrie*, a *Sanctus*, and a *Magnificat* by his hand. During the 1950's and 60's Gambarini had been a central figure in the musical life of Bergamo where he had spent more than ten years at the Istituto Musicale Gaetano Donizetti studying organ and counterpoint during which time he was substitute organist at Santa Maria Maggiore. He went on to the Royal Conservatory at Milano to finish his studies.

The Finals of courses at the Istituto commenced in mid-may for a month, with concerts open to the public. Students of guitar, strings, oboe and bassoon, clarinet and piano, offered a wide variety of music, and from the vocal classes was noted an aria from *Don Pasquale* and duets from both that opera and from *L'ajo nell'imbarazzo*. The schools of piano, harmony, counterpoint and composition joined forces for the last concert to present new settings of 'O'folce di luna cadente' by d'Annunzio and of 'Lente neve' by Giovanni Pascoli.

The 5th INternational Festival of Choirs at Clusone coincided with the local "Coro Idica", celebrating thirty-five years of existence, to commemorate which a history of the Choir was published. All the choirs participating in the Festival paraded through Bergamo on the 28 May - some residents lodged a protest at the disruption - before which some gave a concert in honour of *la città*. With more than 2,500 participants, feeding and lodging the choristers created many problems. One village. Parre, undertook to provide 60 kilos of *torte*, but one of its inhabitants brought a kilo of cherries because she couldn't make cakes! Choirs from the former Eastern bloc received a particularly warm welcome, all 59 choirs singing in the closing ceremony being joined by 15 folk groups supported by the Banda "Giovanni Legrenzi". The Choir from Brazil, singing in a downpour endeavoured to raise spirits with a rendition of 'O sole mio' before the pullman coaches set off for Riga, Sofia, Moscow, Copenhagen and elsewhere.

Apart from two concert performances (in costume) of *Il barbiere di Siviglia* there were only operatic excerpts and recitals to be heard during

the period. A report of the baritone Marzio Giossi's visit to the Circolo "G.B.Rubini" (who always have a busy season at Romano) mentioned that he would shortly be leaving for Japan to sing Turiddu and Canio but not, the report was careful to point out *"on the same evening as is usually the case in Italy"*!! (an earlier report had said he would sing Alfio and Canio!!!). At the "Giovanni Legrenzi" Rooms in Clusone (where the composer was born in 1626) there were excerpts from the *Barber*, *Don Giovanni* and *L'italiana in Algeri*; at Bonate Sotto the tenor Costanzo Palade and his wife Doina (soprano) assisted by others, gave lengthy excerpts from *Simon Boccanegra*, a concert for the long-serving provost of Romano opened with the 1812 Overture and continued with arias and choruses from *Nabucco* and *Mosè*. The "Giulietta Simionato" Association from Filago visited Pontida with a thoroughly Italianate programme of Verdi, Rossini, Bellini, Mascagni and excerpts from *L'elisir*, *Don Pasquale*, *Lucia* and *Figlia del reggimento*; their last concert in May is dedicated to their patron, the great mezzo attended and all were pleased to welcome on this occasion Gianandrea Gavazzeni and Denia his wife with their nephew Paolo contributing piano pieces by Brahms and Chopin.

That rather neglected aspect of Italian music, the operetta, was featured in the third concert of *"In...canto"* with pieces from *Scugnizz* by Costa, *Primarosa* by Pietri, and items by Lombardo, Ranzato and Rulli, performed by Silvia Gavarotti accompanied by Angiolina Sensale. The advent of summer also gives rise to all sorts of concerts of the *"Estate vivi la tua città"*, *"Serate estivi"*, *"Sotto le stelle con..."* variety and bleeding chunks of *La forza* were noted at Vertova; elsewhere there were pieces from the *Stabat Mater* of Rossini and Vivaldi's *Gloria*; a tenor Isidoro Coppola essayed an 'A te o cara' and 'Spirto gentil'; one concert donated the takings to the Casa Verdi for restoration work; the Wind Octet of Milano had transcriptions of arias from, and the Overture to, the *Barber*; two pianists Daniela Uccello and Massimiliano Damerini added their homage to Rossini delighting their audience with the encore *Duetto dei due gatti*! "Musica Aperta" offered Paisiello, Vivaldi and Stravinsky, and at Trescore Balneato they were fortunate to hear one of Perosi's Masses. But a real rarity was included in a concert at Gandino by "Antiche Armonie", a *duo* from a *Magnificat* by Gaffurio. The actual place of his birth, in 1451, is open to question, some have it as Ospitaletto which is between Bergamo and Brescia, but Gaffurio himself seems to suggest he was from *"Lemen"*, that is "Almenno" or the modern Almè some ten miles north of Bergamo. This noted theorist influenced Mayr and for a time was Maestro di Cappella at Santa Maria Maggiore.

The organ and its music attracted particular attention; Luigi Pilon - acknowledging Bergamo's contribution to organ building - provided a biographical sketch of Padre Davide who studeied with Mayr and others of his school, though Davide (Felice Moretti) was not enlisted there as a pupil. Later, he undertook organist duties at Torre Boldone and other places near his birthplace, Zanica. A noted example of bergamasc organs is that at Serassi, recently restored, on which Lorenzo Ghielmi played works by Frescolbaldi, Pasquini and Zipoli to celebrate its restoration. At the "Ateneo", Giosuè Berbenni's talk reviewed four centuries of organ music at Bergamo. Later at the "Ateneo", the address by Pierangelo Pelucchi was *"Mayr, compositore nella Cappella di Santa Maria Maggiore"*.

Also recently restored are the cloisters of Santa Marta (located in the premises of a bank) and in celebration Thomas Briccetti conducted the Orchestra Stabile in Respighi, Haydn, Briccetti (*Cennina Concertino for violin, 'cello, strings and synthesiser*), and notably Donizetti's Concerto in D for violin and 'cello.

Maestro Gavazzeni was much in the news in April and May; there was the announcement of his appointment as Principal Conductor of the Orchestra Sinfonica dell'Emilia Romagna "Arturo Toscanini" but his first meeting with them was delayed due to his indisposition. When he did reach Parma it was announced that the appointment would be for two years. The press noted Gavazzeni's ironic enquiry as to whether or not there was still

a Verdi festival, recalling the occasion when Gavazzeni conducted a concert of music by Pizzetti in the middle of a mini festival of Verdi. The poor response of the Parmigiani had apparently led to Gavazzeni commenting that Parma was a place where one could not make music! A few weeks later the great conductor was auditioning violins and violas for the orchestra and his acceptance of th new responsibility suggests that his previous encounter had been forgotten. In June he and the orchestra were at Ravenna for three performances of *Poliuto*. The success it met with, demonstrated, so it is reported, that the substitution of Anna Maria Gonzales for Tiziana Fabbricini as Paolina was little regretted. It was explained that Fabbricini had a certain *"licenziamento"*, which meant that she and Gavazzeni could not work together. Somewhat earlier at La Scala, Gavazzeni - because of an indisposition, not serious but enough to prevent him *"ascending the podium"* - had been replaced by Stefano Ranzani to conduct *Lucia*, the title role of which was to be shared by Denia Mazzola, Mariella Devia and Fabbricini. These last two had made known their dissatisfaction, to put no finer point on it, with Gavazzeni's declared intention that he would be eliminating the now customery "virtuso cadenzas" to return substantially to the original work envisaged by Donizetti. Gavazzeni remarked that such comments by the two sopranos was something he had never previously encountered, even with Callas(!). They declared that in preferring *"variazioni con accompagnamento di flauto"* it was not their intention to oppose the theatre or Gavazzeni and they wished the maestro a quick recovery. That, he seems to have done because when Daniel Oren withdrew, he stepped-in at the last moment to conduct *Lucia* at Venice with Mazzola in the title-role. She was reported as saying that the reception the opera had received showed he husband to have been right in his approach and that they both remained saddened (again, not making too fine a point) at the lack of respect for a conductor of such importance. Gavazzeni intends to direct Massenet's *Esclarmonde* at Palermo in 1993 - a work not previously performed in Italy - with Mazzola, who has also been invited to sing the role at the Festival Massenet at Saint-Etienne and at the Opéra-Comique in Paris.

The numerous "bands" were very active as summer approached though the exceptionally wet weather in June meant many were driven indoors to give the concerts scheduled for the open-air. On a rare fine day, Gianmario Bonino, conductor of the band from San Pellegrino Terme, explained that he had rescheduled Strauss's *"Thunder and Lightning"* polka to the end of the concert on the Sentierone (that delightful promenade opposite the Teatro Donizetti, not to provoke *Giove Pluvio* by playing it half-way through. No opportunity is missed to celebrate a band's anniversary and during the period they ranged from San Paolo d'Argon's 10th Anniversary to the Centenary of Fioranono al Serio and the 140th of the band from Zogno whose original rules provided for a deposit by those who joined, of 24 Austrian *lire*, returnable only if the individual was found to have no musical ability, was unable to succeed because of a physical condition, or had to leave the district. A monthly subscription of 4 *lire* was needed until completion of a member's instruction. The band of Adrara San Martino celebrated its 70th Anniversary whilst that of Ponteranica its 67th, and those of Sorisole and Mariano their 65th, though the latter and the band from Sforzatica were for some time closed down by the Fascist regime to form one body "Corpo musicale aziendale" della Dalmine s.p.a (the large steel business west of Bergamo) a situation quickly redressed at the end of the war. La Banda Cittadina di Gazzaniga - Filarmonica Mousike won the title "Band of the Year - 1992" at the second national competition at Pesaro helped by a superior performance of the Overture to *Semiramide*. The Banda della Guardia Finanza played that same overture and six others by Rossini at the swearing-in ceremony for new cadets in the Teatro Donizetti.

Some indication of the immense activity among the local bands is the timetable of forthcoming concerts when up to eight performances might be heard during a weekend. The band from Sforzatica were on hand to play off the new train service to Bordighera on the Riviera Ponente! The "Primavera" band of Seriate were joined by the bass Silverio Castelli in 'D'immenso

giubilo' from *Lucia* and were obliged to play an encore. The promised course for the band conductor gets underway in September when there will be a *"full immersion"* (in English in the report!) for those wishing to acquire the fundamentals. The number of active bands and the longevity of many of them, suggests there will always be a demand for conductors and perhaps this initiative augers well for ever higher standards.

In respect of the forthcoming Donizetti Congress, the hope is expressed that a review and re-evaluation of the *Donizetti Renaissance* will be made so that one can reflect on ideas for the Bi-Centenary celebrations in five years' time. There is to be no festival in 92, the intention being to "draw breath" and have a *"Donizetti nel suo tempo"* every second year which ought to make 1997 a bumper year...

Brian Thornton

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