Bergamo

musical notices from Città e Provincie



The most important event since the last Newsletter was, of course, the *Convegno Internazionale di Studio "L'Opera teatrale di Gaetano Donizetti"* in mid-September. The facilities and arrangements provided by the Commune di Bergamo were admirable - the proceedings sometimes protracted and one participant confessed that, with the greatest will in the world, he found the content of some of the lectures rather taxing. The writer's sympathies were with him as they were with another who voiced the view that too little notice was given to the socio-politico circumstances of Donizetti's time and their effects on his work. So weighty were the matters for consideration in the programme (illuminated (!) by esoteric mathematics) they would have benefited from such a leaven, as one began to wonder if any music had come from Donizetti's pen as a spontaneous expression of innocent genius. The performance of Mayr's *Passion according to Matthew and Mark* (see below) realised by Dr PierAngelo Pelucchi provoked a considerable exchange of correspondence around the time of the *Convegno*. Conflicting views were expressed on similarly weighty matters and one was grateful to the correspondent who reminded us *"quando gli elefanti si scontrano, ci vanno di mezzo le formiche"*, and would not Mayr have closed an eye (even an ear?) *"per accontentare la sensibilità delle formichine"*? It is to be hoped that in their learned discussions *gli elefanti* will not forget *le formichine*, so many of whom simply enjoy the music.

The summer and autumn musical scene is largely determined by the initiatives of local authorities and tourist offices. Concerts and recitals of every conceivable nature can be accomodated; one noted a guitar trio, a saxophone quartet, a quintet of flute and four horns, a brass octet, *"elevazioni"* of orgen music, sometimes with vocalists, operatic highlights as well as the customary music making by more common instrumental groupings. These *"iniziative"*, including a *"scena aperta"*, *"Andar per musica"*, *"Concert d'organo"*, *"Concerto sotto le stelle"*, offering as they do opportunities to hear rare and unusual music are indication of a praiseworthy disposition to congregate and share in a "performance". Little wonder questions were raised when, at Clusone, only three people turned up for a talk on Rossini's *"silenzio operistico"* of his later life which preceeded a concert of his music by a tenor, violinist and pianist. Many offered explanations, including the Mayor, but it was concluded that with so many cultural events to be enjoyed, some would inevitably suffer because *"Clusone is not Paris, indeed it is not even Bergamo"*!

Another initiative *"Estate vivi la tua città"* promotes most of the band concerts heard during the summer when those who have not fled the city can enjoy the bands on the Sentierone on Sunday mornings and elsewhere. There were 30 concerts by different bands this last year, among them one noted the *Banda Gaetano Donizetti* and the band from Almeno whose original regulations of 1857 provided that any member stopping off on his way to a concert *"a bevere nelle osterie"* would be fined 50 centesini! What price such a deviation today? The *Associazione bergamasca bande musicale* takes a lot of credit for many of the arrangements for these concerts and for a highly successful course for bandmasters. Anniversaries this year included the 140th of the band from Zogno, birthplace of Belotti and of Pietro Ruggeri da Stabello in 1797, the latter poet and author of *"Oh de la Müla"*, a comic intermezzo for baritone and bass set to music by Forini, a pupil

at Mayr's school. Much of the action is the playing of *"la morra"* by the two characters (highly reminiscent of the same game played in Donizetti's *Rita*). Composed in 1843, this duet remained popular intil the early 1900's and as its manuscript, with orchestration, is extant, perhaps we can hope for a revival.

Until the season at the Teatro Donizetti opened on 24 September, opera lovers had to content themselves with the occasional concert performance, highlights and excerpts, for which they are, in the main, indebted to the *Associazione Amici della Lirica "Giulietta Simionato" di Filago* (who remembered the 10th anniversary of the death of Mario del Monaco with a concert by 4 tenors); the *Circolo Simone Mayr* (with highlights from *L'elisir d'amore* opening their 1992/93 season); and the *Club G.B.Rubini*. In due course, no doubt, to them will be added the new *Gruppo lirico Mayr-Donizetti* (the promotors of which include a number of officials from the *Circolo Mayr*), which has a self-confessed role of offering young artists an opportunity to sing in public. The Teatro Donizetti (which is equipped with an electrical device detering the pigeons from giving opera-goers an additional welcome) has now a new ridotto which housed an interesting exhibition during and after the *Convegno*, and had a calendar which comprised *La traviata*, *Il turco in Italia*, *Il matrimonio segreto* with, to open the season, *Madama Butterfly*. The drama of this last piece began before the first performance: Maria Chiara withdrew from the title role because of a bad throat, then the tenor suffered a sudden "lowering" of his voice and was replaced, and with 3 days to go they had no baby for Cio-Cio San. A newspaper item on 21 September invited those of small stature, between the ages of 3 and 5, to an audition at 10am that very morning. In the event no agonising choice was necessary as only one aspiring bambino applied!

In admitting that *"we live in a time of demographic crisis"* (!) it was suggested that things would have been very different if they had been looking for someone to appear in a new Ninja Turtles Film. Not suprisingly, possibly, the first night was less than wholly successful, the house less than full for a less than felicitious performance and production.

It was to be regretted that there was no Donizetti opera in the season - indeed no *Donizetti Festival* for reasons previously recounted. Maestro Aldo Ceccato referred to this omission in an interview; he found the absence of a work by *"one of the great composers of the nineteenth century... incomprehensible"* and said he was confused and bitter about the *"evoluzione ed il destino del Festival dedicato a Donizetti"*. Let us hope the future provides good reasons for less concern.

The numerous Japanese singers noted at Bergamo in recent times is in part due to a series of cultural exchanges dating from 1988. In 1992 it focussed on a collaboration between the Conservatorio *"G.Verdi"* of Milan and the University of Osaka, one result of which was two performances of *Il Signor Bruschino* (on the same day) at the Teatro Donizetti, with young Japanese and Italian artists.

The Bergamasque Roberto Benaglio died on 7 July 1992, a famous chorus master who held posts with the Dallas Civic Opera, Teatro Regio of Turin, the San Carlo, La Scala, the Teatro del'Opera of Rome and several choral bodies. Born in 1806, he studied at the Istituto Musicale *"Donizetti"* but left unqualified. He made his début at the Teatro Donizetti in 1931.

The reconstructed (*"con paziente e accurato lavoro"*) *Passione secondo Matteo e Marco* of Mayr was heard in the cathedral on 25 August. PierAngelo Pelucchi's reconstruction was followed by a lengthy exchange on its merits and defects. Pieralberto Cattaneo said it contained nothing vaguely resembling the characteristics of any Mayr composition and to claim otherwise brought us to the pretty pass when someone would announce the prima of a Donizetti opera which would consist of the first act of *Maria Stuarda*, the second of *Don Pasquale*, and the third of *Lucia*! A month later the distinguished Director of the S.Maria Maggiore Choir School attempted to put *"una pietra sepolcrale"* on the difficult issues that had *"turned into a soap opera"*. He called for all that had gone before to be but the prelude to the rediscovery of Mayr in 1995, the 150th anniversary of his death.

There have, incidentally, already been discussions on the arrangements for the anniversary between appropriate bodies in Bergamo and visiting representatives from Mayr's Bavarian birthplace.

Space does not permit details of all the orchestral concerts, choral activities and numerous recitals, except to refer briefly to one on 2 October when the young organist di Fino gave a programme of music entirely by Bergamasc composers including Padre Davide, and Donizetti who was represented by two Offertorios.

Brian Thornton