The other Pasquale

Spring-board years, years of attrition maybe (whatever else can we call them?) may well be the best description of those of *L'esule di Roma, Gabriella di Vergy, Alahor in Granata* and *Il paria*, not to forget his Liverpuddlian revision; *Otto mesi in due ore;* and those buffo landmarks *Borgomastro, Convenienze teatrale* and *Olivo e Pasquale*. Years of expansion, of elation and disappointment Thanks to Ashbrook we know the background. But do we know the score? There are so many qualifications in retrospect due to the surprising resilience of these wide ranging experiments. His *Olivo e Pasquale* (1827), at their very heart, is a special case in point. How did Donizetti himself view such pre-*Anna* works, especially this one whose comic outline in so many ways prefaces that later exhilarating comedy which more-or-less puts a term to opera buffa in Italy?

To begin with: the libretto: its domestic setting is perfectly conventional; Lisbon may be a trifle unexpected but the *drammatis personnae* is as-to-be-expected - daughter in love with the wrong young man - heavy father - sympathetic uncle - unwelcome suitor-become ally and happy ending. Nothing new here. Sografi's commedia of the same name (1794) had received considerable musical attention and even with Ferretti's imaginative embellishment by adding a scene from another of Sografi's plays "*per renderne più teatrale lo sviluppo*", inserting the feigned suicide of the penultimate moments, struck no new chord

As we know the opera gave rise to a species of musical chairs: the tenor Camillo began life as a contralto, when, later, he succeeded in recovering his trousers his rival Le Bross took to skirts; in 1830 both were tenors, as later too was the obsequious basso buffo Columella! This ambivalent vocality may or may not have amused Donizetti but ensures that no comprehensive edition of the opera is possible. *Olivo e Pasquale,* however, represents a significant advance in the composer's vocabulary; as Alberto Zedda observed so acutely [interview France Musique 4 September 2001] "Donizetti found his *own* voice within the style of Rossini" - a splendid perception even if it is a factor special to this opera buffa and not necessarily the case with the companion scores listed above. A Rossinian echo in any event was probably inevitable with such a familiar imbroglio (*Il cambiale di matrimonio/Eduardo e Cristina*) in it he took the *Cenerentola*-like confrontations of two buffi one step further, launching a new prototype - no longer endorsing the asinine derision of Rossini's wonderful opera but casting a moist eye over of the anguish and pathos of superannuated humanity which would eventually triumph in Verdi's *Falstaff*.

Much revived, much amended (by whom?), to aver that all the subsequent versions of *Olivo e Pasquale* are a muddle is a painful misunderstatement. Each and every revival offers a headache to scholarship. Its history is one of continuous adjustment. A very long and discursive comedy in 1827, it shed whole sections like autumn leaves over the years. Irrespective of the stream of impressive music which was its birthright the convolutions of the plot insisted upon continuous simplification in the face of audiences whose powers of concentration were even less in evidence than today. The first version of the opera was simply not viable for the obvious reason that the amours of the ardent couple at its heart could never be

consumated (as Ashbrook so amusingly remarked). And then the casting of subsequent revivals is completely bizarre. It was put about that Emilia Bonini singing the soubrette-like role of Isabella at the prima failed to convince as she was a heroine of opera seria, but what do you think about the mezzo Fanny Goldberg (the first *Caterina Cornaro*) singing Isabella at Padua in 1839? And what about the suave Paul Barroilhet singing Olivo in Verona in 1832? (his Pasquale, better chosen, was Carlo Poggiali). In my view the revival to open the primavera season at the Canobbiana in Milan in 1844 is amongst the most intriguing of all, full of tantalising changes to the music. Could Donizetti have been responsible? It seems wildly improbable. The cast was extraordinary with three tenors - not the *can belto* epigone we know but the ambivalent trio listed above, the Olivo was Giuseppe Catalani and the Pasquale Vincenzo Galli, while Isabella was sung by Virginia Viola. Most of them sang very strange music. Miss Viola took the biscuit with a new cavatina, untraced so far, but maybe an *aria da baule,* and brought down the curtain with the aria finale from *Betly* (the opera began on 21 May when the Maestro was safely out of hearing in Vienna). The casual way whole sections were swept aside is mesmerising, no one would contemplate anything like it nowadays (not even English National Opera)



If it is the nineteenth-century silver-surfers who took hold of the microchip in his comedies (ie Vambett, Olivo, Pasquale, Mamma Agata, Don Annibale Pistacchio and Don Pasquale) longevity is also a major characteristic of the operas in which they feature. Indeed, *Olivo e Pasquale* seems to have held the stage longer than any of its pre-*Anna* peers in the Ottocento, the last nineteeth-century staging was probably that of the Teatro Filarmonico "in piazza del Municipio" [di Napoli] during the Carnevale 1870-71. Its libretto in the Collezione Lo Presti ("*Prestione*") is even more fascinating than that outlined above. The cast is as follows:

Olivo	Luigi Brignole
Pasquale	Aristide Fiorini
Isabella	Laura Sainz
Matilde	Rosalia Trapani
Le Bross	Enrico Serazzi
Colonnella (sic)	Enrico Patierno
Camillo	Francesco Sortini

thus correct-enough where gender is concerned. If, however, the Canobbiana '44

staging had been cut, this of Naples is staggering in its brevity. It is as if the age of Verdi with his repeated insistance upon "less words" had infiltrated even the profuse buffoneria of those operas of his predecessors which had survived. The opera was "*divisa in tre parti*", Act 1 has been split into two parts so that the concerted piece of Act 1 Scene V is promoted into a new finale primo. So now there are *two* intervals with, correspondingly, more opportunity for chat. There is no spoken dialogue "*com'era usuale*" in that city, but Pasquale sang in Neapolitan dialect as a concession to tradition. The major set pieces survive but are deprived of both their setting and any hope of a logical continuity. On the other hand there are certain gains in dramatic impetus, the whole has a kind of economy which wastes no time in coming to the point, Isabella sings a kind of précis of her aria finale. Maybe, one can only speculate, it is the kind of revision Donizetti himself would have proposed had he lived long enough to repolish his earlier scores in the changed world of an Italy united in its long slide to standardisation and a packaged response?

Alexander Weatherson

For further details of this score in revival see Newsletter 64 (January 1995)

Il domino nero

Lauro Rossi's unique comment upon his day and age

No one, simply no one, can deny that the Teatro Pergolesi of Jesi comes up with revivals of real quality, this year with an opera by a composer no one remembers at all, and with a work of extraordinary quality - the provocative, riotous romp we all need urgently, especially now. First staged at almost the mid-century, a companion-in-arms, metaphorically-speaking, of the Ricci brothers' equally cynical *Crispino e la comare* (1850) the Macerata-born Lauro Rossi (1810-1885), wide-ranging, much-travelled, splendidly-gifted, had an early triumph with his *Il domino nero* whose plot and content brandishes an hilarious summation of the musical theatre of his day. Casting a beady eye and ear over his competitors, his irresistible stream of high camp has the remarkable virtue of supplying a score in no way inferior to those of his victims! With happy verve he pounces upon Verdi, Pacini, Rossini, Donizetti and the rest, clothing the most absurd details of his non-plot with their most solemn statements, a parodistic genius that is both gentle and savage at the same time. So much splendid melody, situate somewhere between *opera-seria* and farce, it plunges from royal palace to brothel to convent without any kind of hitch, his dominoed-heroine co-existing merrily in all three. Everything is grist to his mill. Beautifully sung and staged this Operagoers Almanac for 1849 has been recorded by Bongiovanni. It will be reviewed more extensively in Newsletter 85. AW

(opposite: A scene from the Act II duet of *Il domino nero* 'Io son figlia a Belzebù' with the most brilliant Donizettian parody imaginable, the irresistible Chiara Taigi in the title role and Mauro Buda as the unfortunate buffo). Photo Coutrtesy Teatro Pergolesi di Jesi