L'accademia di musica in Bad Wildbad

16 July, 2003

The third offering at Bad Wildbad this year – as if to atone for the disappointment two years ago when *Werther*, announced as an opera by Mayr, turned out to be by Pucitta – was *L'accademia di musica*. A genuine piece by Mayr, dating from 1799, this is a farsa so little known as not even to figure in the list of his works given in The New Grove Dictionary of Opera.

The convoluted plot is that of a young man (Valerio), aided by the family servants (Vespina and Cecchino), plotting to get his girl (Annetta) despite the opposition of his father (Guglielmo), who has disowned him. The twist is that Guglielmo is susceptible to female charms, and succumbs to those of Annetta, not knowing who she is. Having presented herself to him as a singer, she invites him to a concert at which everyone must participate. Rejecting his offer of marriage, she persuades Guglielmo to permit Valerio to marry a girl that he also likes as well and, after the concert is over, Guglielmo is faced with the fact that Annetta is the girl who fills the bill. The farsa ends when Guglielmo's fury at falling victim to this stratagem turns to horror at being confronted by Marfisa, an old woman he has previously promised to marry. We are left to guess the outcome.

The concert appears to be a rather forced pretext (because it is not strictly integral to the mechanism of the story) merely to give the singers an opportunity for display, choosing their own party pieces. The opera as performed at Bad Wildbad, therefore, had various interpolated arias, including two by Mayr himself, his La Biondina in Gondoletta and an aria from another farsa called *L'avaro,* as well as arias from Generali's *L'Adelina* and Rossini's *L'inganno felice*.

Musically, as well as dramatically, the piece is slight, adding little to our understanding of Mayr gleaned from recorded material. Which is to say that the evening passed agreeably enough, enabling us to admire, for example, felicities of instrumentation here and there, but conscious that all was still very much grounded on the traditions of Cimarosa and Paisiello. All the singers did what they could with their material. Roberto Abbondanza (baritone) was very competent as Guglielmo, while Valerio was pleasingly sung by Florian Mock (tenor), benefitting from more opportunities for vocal display than in his role as Haley in Mosca's *L'Italiana in Algeri*. However, the undoubted star of the evening was Roberta Canzia (soprano), whose hilarious performance in the concert, guying the mannerisms of a prima donna, deservedly brought the house down – the only really amusing moment of the whole evening.

The simple setting (Siegfried Mayer) consisted of a curtain in front of which a few pieces of furniture were placed. The Czech Chamber Soloists from Brno played well for the conductor, Gabriele Bellini, who gave an alert account of the score. I doubt if this evening will have made many clamorous converts to the cause of the Mayr renaissance and, in my opinion, the world will not be a much worse place if *L'accademia* is not revived again in the near future.

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