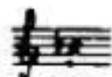


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Bergamo

Musical notices from Città e Provincie



The Director of the Istituto musicale Gaetano Donizetti made a rather gloomy report on its activities; reduced enrolments reflect, he felt, the lessening of interest in music in Italy and the fewer opportunities for a career in music. There is now no shortage of teachers and he feels too much money is directed to events of limited appeal whilst teaching is overlooked. He recalled that Mayr approached M.I.A. to create a school not to finance concerts. There is no doubt a balance somewhere but one cannot help feeling there is something of a "chicken and egg" situation to be addressed.

The interest in *bande*, however (*pace* Francesco Donizetti) seems to go from strength to strength – that of Gandino celebrated its 175th anniversary, Vilminore, 100th and Cene, with its thriving junior section, 90th. During the season – May to October – there were no less than 90 concerts including one by the "Corpo musicale Donizetti" from Calolziocorte and the "Corpo musicale di Grumello" closed the season whilst celebrating their 75th.

Providing monies are forthcoming, there are numerous works envisaged for the Teatro Donizetti, but not operatic – installation of a lift, fire escape, improvements to the sound systems, central heating, better access for the disabled, changes to the air conditioning, and much-needed work to the outside front and east side (that facing Donizetti's statue). Above the facade two statues have long been in a protective "cloak" to save those below from falling debris. The estimated cost for all these projects is currently £6 million but inevitable delays will increase that and so cause further delay...! Some improvements are, however, required by regulations already in force and should be completed for the 1995/6 season.

In the light of the foregoing, it is interesting to recall an event of 23 August 1894 when the chandelier was being lit for the performance, some of the decorative cloth around the metal ceiling support fell on to the gas burners and ignited. It quickly burnt itself out as the gas was switched off and the theatre then lit up by the wall lights. It seems that the incident passed with little notice as it all happened during the playing of the overture – to *La Gioconda* – and most of the audience had yet to take their seats. When the offending chandelier was eventually taken away there must have been general relief at the reduced fire risk and because it had long restricted the view of the stage, particularly so for many in the upper parts of the house.

Music by the Maestro during the summer and autumn included an *Elisir* at San Pellegrino; *Pasquale* at Gazzaniga and a number of tenor arias at one of the many concerts organised for the Rubini bicentenary celebrations when Giacinto Prandelli and Gianni Raimondi were honoured guests.

There was comment that Bergamo needs a second theatre of some substance – those of yesteryear that remain, Nuovo, Rubini and other minor ones are too small or occupied with films etc to be of support to the Teatro Donizetti. One suggestion that, if it came to fruition, would give great joy, was to restore the Teatro Sociale. It has been re-roofed in recent years and part made available for exhibitions but a simple glance confirms the large sums that would be required. For it to echo again to the operas of its youth almost certainly remains a dream.

Plans are at an advanced stage for a TV film on the Ricordi family in which Alessandro Gassman is to play Donizetti, with others as Rossini, Bellini, Verdi and Puccini. (Channel 4 are involved so it may perhaps be their treat for Xmas 1995!)

The musical exchange with Japan mentioned earlier in this Newsletter chose as its 1994 *incontro* to be an "*Incontro con Gaetano Donizetti*". Much of the activity in the way of concerts, opera, exhibitions and the like, happened in Como and Milan, but there was a string concert in Bergamo and a number of religious works were well performed in the very appropriate setting of S.Maria Maggiore. The opera was (*see earlier*) *Olivo e Pasquale* – perhaps rather too enthusiastic at Como but with young virile voices acquitting themselves well, was enjoyed by this contributor at the kind invitation of the Teatro Sociale. The Japanese guests also visited the Museo Donizettiano in the company of their hosts and others. One of whom ventured to ask when we might expect a new catalogue – *not*, it seems, for a very long time, if ever!

An exhibition at the Teatro Donizetti of playbills, photographs, awards and decorations, formed an interesting "Testimone del Tempo" of Maestro Gavazzeni whose book *Scena e retroscena – Una testimonianza* has recently been published, containing biographical details and his thoughts about Donizetti and his music.

...and finally – amid the turmoil of Italian politics, the Lega Nord announced that too much was being spent on producing critical editions of the operas of Donizetti! NO wonder he steered clear of politics...