

Gaetano Donizetti *Parisina* tragedia lirica in tre atti, libretto di Felice Romani. Orchestra della Svizzera italiana. Coro della RTSI. Gruppo vocale Cantemus diretto da Diego Fasolis. Lugano, Auditorio RSI. 19 January 1997

With their double bicentenary programme "*Destini paralleli: Donizetti/Schubert 1797-1997*" the concerti pubblici of the Orchestra della Svizzera italiana have currently been doing both maestri proud. There is one extremely specific reward on hearing an opera in this purpose-built auditorium for recording - one can hear (and see) every note of the score, a kind of stereoscopic landscape, visual and vocal, before the spectator. True the artists are locked eye-to-eye with the audience, which must be daunting indeed, but every nuance can be read and registered, every inflection making its own impact. Under this magnifying glass *Parisina* reveals itself it have an orchestral luxuriance that puts it in another league from - for example - the contemporary operas of Bellini; a greater precision; a more intense instrumental sweep of sound; a bolder awareness of contrapuntal colouring that raises this particular gory tale to an unsuspected poetry.

Those who attended *Imelda de' Lambertazzi* here will remember the scene, the diamond-shaped salle with enclosing balconies, the informed *aficionadi* - never very many in number, the soloists up front, the conductor slightly behind them, the vast orchestra whose proportions reflect rather more those of La Scala than those of La Pergola, and with a solid bank of coro at rear stage, alert and attentive to what is going on at the leading edge. The Lugano cast in fact mirrored that at Wexford (see Newsletter 69), only one of the *bassi* changed, but the scope and scale of the performance was immeasurably enhanced. The young conductor Emmanuel Plasson took the score by the scruff of its neck, shaping an emphatically rhythmic reading with great arches of sound, a bit loud, a Donizettian score seen with a Verdian *arrière pensée* perhaps. But then, why not? It was upon this kind of opera that Verdi bit his teeth. As its composer intended, everything was designed to frame the performance of the prima donna, and found a splendid jewel for the prepared setting, Alexandrina Pendatchanska, as compellingly young and beautiful as was the historical tragic duchess, but with a psychological insight into the great role that took the audience by storm. This - no doubt as a legitimate bequest from the Wexford performances - was a perfectly prepared interpretation, the soprano in dramatic voice equal to every vocal hurdle, fine tuned, searing pianissimi contrasted with such vehemence (especially in the scene where she involuntarily reveals her love for Ugo *ex-matrimonially* so to speak) and in the subsequent defiance of his psychopathic father, that this strange but true tale upstaged any amount of Byronic artifice. The Spanish baritone Ramon de Andrès took the role of Azzo with a conviction equal to this uphill occasion, soft-grained but effective and wholly within his role (both he and the prima donna acted-out their terrifying destinies visually even within this concert setting). I found Amedeo Moretti, as Ugo, a trifle scrawny in this company, but the suicidal impetuosity came over and apart from some understandable nervousness at times he pointed the text to good effect. Eldar Aliev, as Ernesto, is a fine young bass (both Ernesto and Azzo seemed somewhat younger than their disputed offspring!), and Daniela Barcellona as Imelda gave towering support. This *Parisina* will be broadcast in June.

Alexander Weatherson

Those who get rather bored with bloodshed might prefer the ending to *Parisina* that was sung at Reggio Emilia on 19 May 1838, when instead of unrelenting gloom Carolina Ungher burst forth into the cabaletta finale of Bellini's *Bianca e Fernando*...

- Ern.* Alfin siam psghi: ai nostri voti arrise
Propizio il Cielo: Azzo è placato, ed Ugo
Ferrara abbandonò: ecco già spenti
Sono i sospetti infidi,
E più che mai serena
Torna la bella pace a' questi lidi.
- Par.* Che ascolto? oh gioia! E il ver tu narri?
- Ern.* Il vero.
- Ogni tristo pensiero
Sgombra omai dal tuo seno:
Esulta, o Principessa, Azzo t'attende.
- Par.* Oh dolce istante! Oh me felice appieno!
Alla gioia ed al piacer
Non resiste il core in sen:
All'idea di tanto ben
Va smarrito il mio pensier.
Se del pianto e de' sospir
Tal mercede il Ciel mi dà,
Fin soave a me si fa
La memoria del soffrir.
- Coro* Riedi al Trono: in sen d'amore
Al contento schiudi il core:
Oggi al mondo il Ciel mostrò
Che virtù perir non può.
- Par.* Alla gioia ed al piacer
Non resiste il core in sen ec.

I wonder if anyone fancies a more logical finale to *Don Pasquale*? The following might make an interesting alternative (what Prof. Piero Mioli would call an "autentica catarsi"?)
Pasquale shoots Norina, Ernesto and Malatesta and sings the cabaletta finale from Bellini's *Zaira*...

Viz:

Don Pasquale Un grido d'orrore
D'intorno rimbomba:
Tremendo sul core
Un peso mi piomba;
Qual sangue innocente
(contempla, con ironia, il cadavere di Norina)
S'innalza fremente,
M'incalza com'onda,
Fuggirlo non so...
O Cielo, fa scempio
D'un mostro, d'un empio!
(riguarda i cadaveri di Malatesta e Ernesto)
Il sangue che gronda
Vendetta grido.
(si abbandona fra le braccia dei servi)

Tutti

O notte funesta
Di sangue e d'orror!

