OCTOBER IN WEXFORD (AND NEW YORK)

"Live" vs. "Live in HD"

The goal of our Fall opera-going was the Wexford Festival Opera in Ireland, but on the way we stopped in New York to catch *Anna Bolena* live with Angela Meade singing the title role. I had seen the HD performance "live" a few weeks earlier with Netrebko. I was curious to see (and hear) Meade because I had been so impressed with her in the same role a couple of years ago in Philadelphia in a much smaller venue. Otherwise the cast was the same as on the HD broadcast.

There are of course advantages and disadvantages to "live" opera house performances vs. "live" movie theater broadcasts. The broadcasts are more intimate with many close-ups, and if well acted, can be more involving. On the other hand, all the voices "flatten out" and sound equally powerful and there is never a problem with a voice being overwhelmed by the orchestra. In the opera house, you get the whole sweep of the stage and you can concentrate on what you want to look at, not what the TV director focusses on. And the frisson of seeing the singers succeed (or sometimes fail) is much more real than on a movie screen. That said, it seems to me that the TV direction of the "Live from the Met" broadcasts has gotten better over time, and video direction can help to involve the spectator. On the other hand, seeing and hearing *Anna Bolena* in New York, I was surprised at how big Smeaton's (Tamara Mumford) voice was; she carried easily to the far reaches of the house. Meade was marginally better than Netrebko in the coloratura and fioratura department, but because the Met production cut all of the cabaletta repeats except the final one for Anna, there was not much chance to enjoy the variations that test a singer's ability to decorate in bel canto opera. Meade acted reasonably well, but she lacks Netrebko's charisma and stage presence. Her girth and steatopygian figure would not seem to work well on TV either, although there will be a chance to test that theory in the spring when there will be an HD performance of *Ernani* with Meade. In the end, I think I give the edge to the HD Broadcast (shocking, no doubt, some of my anti-HD friends) when the live alternative is in a house as big as the Met. The broadcast was involving in a way that is very difficult to achieve in a huge house. This is not true in the small opera houses of Europe, even the larger ones, which were the intended venues for bel canto. The Met is just too big for this kind of opera to be fully effective. Which is not to say that Meade's voice did not fill the house. As it seemed to me before, she has a voice of Wagnerian power with true bel canto technique, a very unusual combination. She is an exciting singer and I will enjoy watching her grow.

As for the opera itself, it is an old truth to say that *Anna Bolena* is Donizetti's first great success that took his reputation beyond Italy. Listening to it, one can hear Donizetti mature into a great composer before one's ears, as it were. Most of the opera is dramatic and well wrought (with careful work in the recitatives), but the final scene--all of it--is truly great from the orchestral introduction through Anna's in-and-out of madness scene with "Al dolce guidami, castel natio," through the prayer, based on the same melody as Bishop's "Home Sweet Home," to the final fiery cabaletta, "Coppia iniqua." It is all a masterpiece. The earlier part of the opera has moments of brilliance, but generally (in my opinion) without the great melodic invention that we have come to associate with the Donizetti operas of the 1830's and '40's. But "Al dolce guidami" and "Coppia iniqua" are as good as anything in *Lucia* or *La Favorite*. Working in Giuditta Pasta's villa near Milan to an excellent libretto by Felice Romani, Donizetti grew up.

WEXFORD

Wexford is a pleasant town in the southeast corner of Ireland, where the River Slaney meets the Irish Sea. Sixty years ago, the local opera club, headed by Dr. Tom Walsh, decided to stage an opera--William Balfe's *The Rose of Castille*, a rare opera by perhaps the most famous Irish composer of the nineteenth century. The Festival has persisted ever since, usually performing three relatively unknown operas each year along with short works (one act operas, concerts), vocal recitals in a local church at 1 PM and other kinds of performances. There is even a Fringe Festival à la Edinburgh. One can happily spend a couple of weeks there, most every day filled with music. For most of its history, the Festival performed in the venerable but antiquated Theatre Royal, a Victorian venue. A few years ago, they tore down the Theatre Royal and erected the Wexford Opera House on the same site in the middle of town. The auditorium is a beautiful 765 seat venue framed in dark American walnut from Canada; it has a bright and rich sound. Very few seats do not offer great views of the stage, and the intimacy of performance is akin to the HD movie broadcasts in the U.S. Thank goodness the new house was well underway when poor, beleaguered Ireland fell into the economic doldrums, or it probably would never have been built. Wexford likes to make their evenings dressy like Glyndebourne and Garsington, and almost all the men don tuxes for the occasion, a throwback to the Victorian era when class consciousness was an important part of going to the opera and a tuxedo was the uniform for the upper class. It's not for me. If I want to see penguins, I will go to South America. The men at the opera in working class Wexford seem more dressed up than the women, and that *is* unusual. The Wexford formula has evolved to three main operas--one comic, one 'thinking piece', and a 'singer's opera' (bel canto). They are almost always unusual works. In recent years one of the works has come from the French repertory. This year the operas were Donizetti's *Gianni di Parigi* (Donizetti is Wexford's most frequently performed composer), Ambroise Thomas' *Le Cour de Célimène*, and Roman Statkowski's *Maria* (or *Marya*).

The Princess and the G(ianni).

The Donizetti opera was mostly known only to scholars, who believed for many years that the composer wrote it just after *Anna Bolena,* around 1831, and offered the score to Giovanni Battista Rubini, the greatest tenor of the early nineteenth century, who had just had a smash success in *Bolena*. Donizetti seems to have hoped that Rubini, who was off to Paris, would have the work mounted there, thus bringing the composer to the attention of the Parisian public. But Rubini never sang the work and somehow the score came to the Intendant of La Scala, Bartolomeo Merelli, who mounted the work in 1839 against Donizetti's wishes. It was not particularly successful, and after two more productions in other Italian cities, it sank without a trace until it was revived in Bergamo in 1988 as part of the Donizetti festival in his native city. Again silence, until 2009 when it was revived at the Valle d'Istria Festival; it is this production that Wexford borrowed this year. In working on the score for the Bergamo revival, the Swedish musicologist Anders Wicklund discovered that it had not been written in the aftermath of *Bolena*, but a few years earlier (1828) in Naples and, for reasons unknown, never performed. It makes sense, because *Gianni di Parigi* (*Jean de Paris*) sounds more like the operas of the 1820's than the ones composed after *Anna Bolena*. In fact, to me it sounds like *Elisir d'Amore* waiting to be born. The accompaniments, the structure, the vocal parts are all like

Elisir; the opera is unfailingly melodious like *Elisir*. The gentle good humor is like *Elisir* (Felice Romani wrote both librettos). But it lacks the final refinement that made *Elisir* a hit and a part of the standard repertory since its first performance: those ear-worm melodies that stay with us long after the stage has gone dark. *Gianni* has no "Una furtiva lagrima," no "Quanto e` bella," no "Io son ricco e tu sei bella," no "Prendi, per me sei libero." *L'Elisir d'Amore* is post-*Bolena*, and it is no wonder that the Donizetti of 1839 did not want an unheard opera dating from 1828 brought out. He knew that it would seem out of date and that his style had progressed and that audiences would be disappointed. And they were.

The witty libretto by Romani, the best librettist of the era, is based on a medieval story about the French king Jean le Bon when he was the Dauphin and had an arranged marriage in prospect with Princess Blanca of Navarre. Boieldieu had composed a popular opera to a libretto by San Just in 1812 on the subject and Romani's libretto had actually been written for Morlacchi, whose opera had premiered in 1818. Jean (or Gianni) is traveling from Paris towards Navarre disguised as a rich merchant in order to meet the Princess before he has to commit to marrying her. But the Princess has prior word of the plot and when she arrives at Pedrigo's inn which Gianni has taken over, she plays him like a violin. She is accompanied by her pompous steward, the Gran Seniscalco (Seneschal), a pompous old fart, while the innkeeper Pedrigo is the other buffo bass-baritone. Their interplay allows for a comic duet which is like a draft for the great buffo duet from *Don Pasquale*, "Chieti, chieti" while Gianni's second aria "Il mio destin diipende" (added in 1830 for Rubini?) sounds like a draft for "Una furtiva lagrima." Everyone in the young cast did well, and we may hear from them again when they have more experience. The tall and willowy Zuzana Markova, a young Czech singer was the Princess. It helped that she was indeed pretty, and her high notes were very high indeed, although not always beautiful. Her coloratura was excellent and she decorated judiciously in the cabaletta repeats (which were included here). The tenor was a young Uruguayan (what is it with the Andean countries producing so many light Rossini tenors? The thin air?) named Edgardo Rocha. He too sang well most of the time with a slew of high notes written for Rubini (who had a famous ability to sing in the stratosphere, witness Arturo's role which he created in *I puritani* for instance). The pair of buffo basses sang well, but the Siniscalco could have been fatter (yes, fatter) since Romani makes a lot of jokes about his love for a good meal overcoming his native snobbery and pomposity. Alessandro Luongo looked like he ate salad most of the time. Particularly good was Gianni's page, a pants role sung by mezzo Lucia Cirillo. Her aria, sung as dinner party entertainment for the guests, "Mira, o bella, il trovatore," was the only piece to be excerpted from the score and sung in concerts in Donizetti's day, and today it can heard on You Tube. Cirillo has a deep and distinctive voice, and with luck she will go far. Giacomo Sagripanti, the conductor, had the style just right.

The production from Martina Franca offered us the Art Nouveau exterior of the inn with porch, around which all the action took place. Costumes seemed to place the women in the 1950's and the servants in an earlier era. Certainly no one was situated in the Middle Ages when Jean le Bon actually lived, but Romani does not specify an era. The set worked well, the presentation was traditional, the acting and direction (by Federico Grazzini) were both good, and the chorus sang well and moved fluidly. All in all, an A+ production for an amusing opera which is no masterpiece, but worth mounting every now and again. I was interested to note that the production of *Gianni* was sponsored by the Irish Environmental Protection Agency--their sponsorship

declared proudly above the stage on the supertitle screen and in a full page ad in the program. The Wexford Festival is touted as a "green" opera festival (the world's first?) and maybe *Gianni* is a "green" opera!

Célimène's Cour and Cœur

Ambroise Thomas' *Le Cour de Célimène* of 1855 inhabited another world. This *opéra comique* (ie with spoken dialogue) played for a few performances at its initial outing and then sank without a trace not to be heard again until Opera Rara recorded it in 2007. It is an amusing work with four characters - the Princess (Célimène); her sister the Baroness; the Commander, who aspires to the Princess' hand, but not for love; and the Chevalier, a soldier who also wants to marry the Princess. Only Célimène has a name in addition to a title, and her name is deliberately reminiscent of one of the most famous characters from Molière--the cruel coquette who plays with men's affections in *The Misanthrope*. The reference is deliberate since Thomas' Célimène loves to have men fawning over her, but refuses to reward them. She (and her sister) are widows and her deceased husband was unfaithful many times over, thus Célimène's behavior is intended to punish the whole masculine gender for her late husband's infidelities. The fact that all of the characters are referred to in the opera by their titles (Princess, Baroness, Commander, Chevalier) indicates that we are in the realm of types and not real people. The entertainment is a study in human behavior, not using Molière's play directly, but offering homage to the great comic author by naming the opera's lead character Célimène. The literate librettist, Joseph-Bernard Rosier, would also write a *Midsummer Night's Dream* (*Le Songe d'une nuit d'été*) for Thomas, a work that has nothing to do with Shakespeare's play, but has as characters in the opera Shakespeare, Falstaff and Elizabeth I among others. The title is an homage to the source and an admission that the opera is a type of comedy that Shakespeare wrote, with dreams, an escape to the forest, etc. (It is a veritable *Shakespeare in Love* of the nineteenth century and it is hard to imagine that the movie's plot owes nothing to the opera's libretto.)

In *Le Cour de Célimène*, the coquettish Princess contrasts nicely with her serious, sentimental sister, the Baroness. The Chevalier is an impetuous lover type out of *commedia dell'arte* that Molière loved, and often used, often naming him Valère (as in *Tartuffe*). The Commander is the braggart soldier type from *commedia* and ultimately from ancient Roman comedy where his is called the *Miles Gloriosus*. He boasts a lot about his exploits, but he is a poor fighter, and in the opera he fights a duel with the Chevalier over the Princess and comes out the worse for wear in a very funny scene where he complains of all his wounds and Thomas scores the moans and groans from him and from the sympathetic chorus. The chorus consists of 12 men--four old, four middle aged and four young, sung by basses, tenors and mezzos--all falling at the Princess' feet. The Commander, the Chevalier and the chorus constitute the "court" of Célimène, all vying for her heart (*cœur*). The *cour* is worshipful, the *cœur* is hard. In the end the Commander and the Chevalier both give up the Princess, and the Chevalier decides to marry the Baroness, who likes him. The Princess, shocked that she has lost both men, eventually accepts the Commander, who is more interested in the Princess' house and fortune than her heart. The two 'sentimental' characters are united, and so are the two who lack sentiment. The Princess's role is full of coloratura, perhaps one reason for the opera's failure. She has two very involved arias, one at the beginning of Act II and the other at the end. There is a clear derivation from a work like Rossini's *Le Comte Ory* via Herold's works like *Le Pré*

aux clercs. Young and upcoming Irish singer Claudia Boyle (not Susan!) sang the role. She is an attractive young woman who managed her foot high seventeenth century wig as well as her vocal pyrotechnics. Her sister was sung by Nathalie Paulin. Luigi Bocca was a funny, sanguine Chevalier and John Molloy an even funnier, phlegmatic Commander. Carlos Izcaray was the conductor and he kept a light touch throughout.

The production was appropriately non-realistic, with a large gold picture frame on a tilted bias framing the whole stage. It suggested an off-kilter Watteau or Fragonard. In fact the stage itself was heavily raked from right to left. The set indicated that everything was a little out of kilter. A large green topiary hedge with several arched openings framed the back of the stage. In Act II the same set became an interior with mirrored doors for the characters and the chorus to peek out of. Costumes were vaguely seventeenth century with funny wigs. The Princess' wig was powdered (artificial) while the Baroness' wig was brunette (natural). In Act II, the Princess wore white and the Baroness black, clearly differentiating the two as polar opposites.

It was all very amusing and sophisticated in a French way, and the direction by Stephen Barlow distanced the audience from the characters who were not really characters we are supposed to believe in but who represented modes of human behavior; it was a little cartoonish. I thought that the music worked better in action than on the recording. Thomas here is very witty, and quite different from his work in the tragedy *Hamlet* or the sentimental *Mignon*. There are moments of antique sounding music too, appropriate as Thomas and Rosier looked back lovingly at an earlier century. The more we learn about Thomas' work, the more interesting he becomes. I thoroughly enjoyed the production both times I saw it. Stage direction was clever and unobtrusive, and all the actions were appropriate to the tone of the work. Can we have *Le Caid* next? It was Thomas' first big success, and is said to resemble *L'italiana in Algeri*. 2011 was the two hundredth anniversary of his birth. 2011 was also the sixtieth anniversary of the Wexford Festival, and all three main stage operas were enormously successful--a great achievement for one of our most interesting festivals.

Charles Jernigan

OPPOSITE

Yet another wonderful opera emerges from the mists. Prince Józef Poniatowski wrote a handful of operas. Both he and his family were well-known to Donizetti (see Newsletter 113 pp8-10 with its account of a performance of *Linda di Chamounix* in 1843 by the gifted siblings Joseph, Carlo and Elisa Poniatowski in the three principal roles - Józef had the most beautiful tenor voice he had ever heard according to Berlioz). These exceptional Polish exiles, great nephews and niece of the last King of Poland were part of the musical élite of the day, though Weinstock seems to mix him up with the "Count Potoski" of *Otto mesi in due ore* (Prince Józef was eleven years old at the time of this opera) this diplomat and soldier was primarily a composer, a dilettante composer to be sure, but one can only revert to the New York quip *"if this is an amateur why do we need any professionals?"* A 2011 concert performance of *Pierre de Médicis* at Krakow uncovers a stream of perfectly irresistible music and an orchestral talent that is simply astonishing. No skills are missing. A recording will be available. In the meanwhile there a disc of extracts "Poniatowski Rediscovered" nine operatic arias sung by Aleksandra Buczek with Grzegorz Biagas at the piano: SMP 201001

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UN EXILÉ LYRIQUE

Achille de Lauzières

Alexander Weatherson

On the momentous day of 8 February 1457 the young Dieudonné de Lauzières set foot in the Quercynois village of Espédaillac for the first time in his life to receive his *serment de fidélité*. He had inherited his fief from his uncle Raymond de Cardaillac who had died without an heir. He stood – a little unsteadily - where cars are now parked and lavender bushes perch on the edge of the plateau in front of the church with his kinsman Guillaume de Thémines at his elbow for moral support. The donjon behind him and a row of expectant faces before him.

Four centuries on, on the equally momentous day of 19 January 1839 the young Achille de Lauzières, his direct descendant sat - a little unsteadily – for the first time in his life in an official capacity among the rowdy spectators in the teeming Teatro Nuovo of Naples with a cohort of critics behind him and row upon row of expectant faces before him. It was his baptism as a librettist, in this instance for the première of an operatic romp by the current favorite, Vincenzo Fioravanti, for which he had supplied the text. This maestro had made a tremendous reputation with his *Il ritorno di Pulcinella da Padova* on that same stage two years earlier [i] - a perfectly hysterical offering that would prove irresistible in Naples for years and years with its gags, transvestite spoofs and xenophobic fervour. Now, scarcely beyond adolescence, the trembling poet had been given the task of supplying a sequel: *La larva ovvero Gli spaventi di Pulcinella*, three-acts of disreputable comedy to enliven the carnival of 1839. Did it succeed? Well it lasted for six evenings so his ordeal was short – despite the efforts of an expert cast almost identical with the original. Prudently as it turns out the débutant had hidden his blushes behind the pseudonym "Andrea de Leone" so his lyrical *serment de fidélité* could be postponed. But it was a hopeful beginning to an important career as you will see, even if his actual identity would be subject to many guises and disguises in the years to come [ii].

Ancient history? The family of Thémines-Lauzières had risen and fallen the social ladder in the centuries between these two dates. In 1208 the warrior-priest Guillaume de Cardaillac, Bishop of Cahors, had emerged both as a crusader and a huge landowner - as a result his descendants, barons de Saint-Cirq-Lapopie, became *sénéchals de Quercy* - the highest representatives of the king on those rocky heights, the last off them, Jacques de Cardaillac in the early 1500's. Curiously this in no way put a term to religious caprice on the part of various branches of the family, but after the Wars of Religion had come to a messy end

their kith and kin, the Lauzières-Thémines, took over in their place.* Both Pons de Lauzières-Thémines-Cardaillac and his son received the post of *sénéchal de Quercy*, initiating a loyalty that would survive innumerable conflicts and revolutions until eventual exile in Naples:

> *"Après l'assassinat d'Henri III, Thémines prend la tête du parti royaliste, rallié à Henri IV, où se réuinissent hugenots assagis et catholiques loyalists, secondant l'armée royale du maréchal de Matignon, puis infligeant de sérieux revers aux ligueurs menés par Villars...Ses succès allaient en faire pour longtemps l'homme-lige de la Couronne en Quercy."*
>
> [*Histoire du Quercy* ed.Jean Lartigaut (Toulouse 1993), 146]

Under the regency of Marie de Medicis, in fact, Thémines became the *bras armé* of the Queen Regent, his triumph over Condé (who was arrested by Thémines in person) earned him the baton of *maréchal.* He specialised, subsequently, in putting down rebellions of all kinds and persuasions, often involving the kind of bloodletting his musical descendant reserved exclusively for those composers he did not like.

Our fledgling librettist, Achille de Thémines, *marquis* de Lauzières et Thémines (born in Naples in 1818 - died in Paris in 1894) was heir by direct descent of this Pons de Lauzières-Thémines-Cardaillac (1553-1627), created *marquis* de Thémines as well as *maréchal de France* in 1616 under Marie and Louis XIII, a title passing in the next century into the hands of the illustrious d'Estrées [iii] and thus *stirpe* of a noble clan that won most of the honours at court before fleeing France during the Revolution – judiciously transferring its mortal coil from the Bourbon kingdom of France to that of Naples. From Versailles it had indeed been a traumatic step from unquestioned privilege to the flowery realities of the Riviera di Chiaia on the most celebrated bay in the world. But as far as young Achille was concerned, the pen was mightier than the sword so he unsentimentally consigned his ancestors to the past and without hesitation set himself up as poet and critic writing copiously under yet another pseudonym of "Elias de Rauze" an anagram of his surname, and sometimes, with quirky humour, under that of "Mark de Thémines" (*anglo-saxon* take upon Marquis de Thémines). He soon made his mark, in due course contributing with the Gallic vitriol that was his birthright to such Parisian publications as "La Patrie" and "L'Art musical" (Paris 1860 – 1894) the latter, widely popular, and founded by Léon Escudier and Oscar Comettant [iv] as well as to "La Gazette musical" and an extensive swathe of similar French and Parthenopean publications. He was a workaholic, as well as a fearless traveller. He turned himself to every literary challenge from his earliest years and made himself useful to a representative collection of authors and musicians dead and alive throughout a long career. From his desk in Naples would emerge the Italian translation of *Don Carlos* for Verdi for example; of *Dinorah* for Meyerbeer; of *Faust* and *La Reine de Saba* for Gounod, and *Marta* for Flotow; even

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* "Lauzières", according to the Comte de Toulouse, denoted a territory dominated by a large number of lizards [See: Guillaume Lacoste *Histoire Générale de la province de Quercy* (Cahors 1884) Vol II, 257-8] appropriate both to the rocky terrain of the fief of this noble clan as well as to that of a music critic in Paris and Naples.

making a viable Italian version of Shakespeare's Hamlet - "Amleto" published in Treviso in 1875. Conversely he made the French editions of a number of Italian operas. He was a multilinguist counting English, German and Spanish in his repertoire. He succeeded in defying travel restrictions, reviewing Parisian productions for Naples, and Neapolitan productions for Paris, as though independent of any sea or mountain barrier. It is as if he alone could be in both cities at once. Delighted with his Neapolitan credentials he was a perfect boulevardier, somehow invariably managing to rise above the régime changes that plagued his generation.

His list of operatic libretti is fascinating and polyglot. If he never supplied the most momentous composers of all with his operatic verse it is probably because he was never willing to submit to the literary abasement that would entail:

1. *La larva ossia Gli spaventi di Pulcinella* (Vincenzo Fioravanti)
   T.Nuovo, Naples 19.1.1839 (poets given as Andrea de Leone and Raffaele d'Ambra)
2. *Riccardo Moor* (Francesco Gallo) [v]
   T. Nuovo, Naples 9.11.1843 (as Achille de Lauzières)
3. *Clarissa Visconti* (Giuseppe Winter)
   T.Re, Milan, 19.6.1844 (as Achille de Lauzières)
4. *Il gemello* (conte Nicola Gabrielli)
   Teatro del Fondo, Naples 21.5.1845 (as Achille de Lauzières)
5. *Mortedo* (Vincenzo Capecelatro) [vi]
   T.San Carlo, Naples 3.9.1845 (as Achille de Lauzières)
6. *Chi cenera?* (Vincenzo Fioravanti)
   T.Argentina, Rome carn.1845 (as Andrea de Leone and Marco d'Arienzo)
7. *Mazeppa* (Fabio Campana)
   T.Comunale, Bologna 6.11.1850 (as Achille de Lauzieres (sic))
8. *Ulrico e Lidia* (Salvatore Palumbo)
   T.del Fondo, Naples 16.7.1851 (as Achille de Lauzières)
9. *Zaffira o La riconciliazione* (Giovanni Pacini)
   T.Nuovo, Naples, 14.11.1851 (as A de L)
10. *L'avventuriero* ((Teodulo Mabellini and Luigi Gordigiano)
    T.Rossini, Livorno 4.1851 (as Achille de Lauzières)
11. *Il cid* (Giovanni Pacini) [vii]
    T. La Scala, Milan 12.3.1853 (as Achille de Lauzières)
12. *Adriana Lecouvreur o La duchessa di Bouillon* (Edoardo Vera)
    T.Argentina, Rome 26.11.1856 (as Achille de Lauzières)
    [A variety of sources list an opera "*I portughesi al Brasile* by Pacini" as performed in Rio de Janeiro in 1856 with a text by Achille de Lauzières, but it is non-existent, the confusion is with Pacini's cantata *L'alleanza* which celebrates the Portuguese in Brazil and was written for the birthday of Dom Pedro II, Emperor of Brazil in 1851]
13. *Arabella* (Carlo Emanuele Barbieri)
    T. D'Argennes, Turin 20.5.1857 (as Achille de Lauzières)
14. *Estella di San Germano* (Gaetano Braga)
    Kârntnertortheater, Vienna 29.5.1857 (as "Lanzières" (sic))
15. *Il ritratto* (Gaetano Braga)
    T. del principe di Siracusa, Naples 6.3.1858 (as A. de Lauzières)
16. *Almina* (Fabio Campana) [viii]
    Her Majesty's Theatre, London 26.4.1860 (as Achille de Lauzières)

IL PESCATORE

Text by Achille de Lauzières after Schiller
Dedicated to Principe Belgioioso

Era l'ora che i cieli lente lente
Mandan l'ombre sfumate,
E ch'ogni istante, tacito, fuggente,
Sul fronte della sera, ingenuo e puro
Spande un velo più scuro.
Sovra un limpido lago un battelliero
Col suo battel leggero
Tracciava un solco che vedea svanir
Siccome il sovvenir – dei dì che furo.
È giovane e leggiadro il pescatore
E deliba l'incanto
D'un lieto di ne' sogni di speranza.
E canta e tutto tace, ché il suo canto
È il canto dell'amore.
Oh! vent'anni giungeste, né un core
Del mio core la voce ha sentita,
Né la rosa sul seno appassita
Una vergine a sera mi diè.
La mia barca abbandona la riva
Senza un caro sussurro, un addio.
Senza un guardo, una voce che a Dio
Implorasse un sospiro per me.
Ahimé! ma tace, ascolta;
Al canto suo dall'onde
Una voce risponde.
La speranza sul labbro gli ridea
E la voce d'amor così dicea:
A me giunse il tuo lamento,
Mi ferì quel caro accento.
Son la dea di questo lago,
Il mio viso è puro e vago;
Giovinetto pescator,
Per te palpito d'amor.
Non morrà la mia bellezza,
Non morrà tua giovinezza;
Sotto un trono di corallo,
Sotto un cielo di cristallo,
Vieni, vieni pescator
Vieni al bacio dell'amor.
Tacque e s'udia sul lago e sulla sponda
Un mesto mormorio che affievoliva
Urtando d'onda in onda.

"Un hiver à Paris, Donizetti per Camera"
Girard 4235 1838-39

17 *Il figliuol prodigo* (Paolo Serrao)
T.San Carlo, Naples 23.4.1868 (as Achille de Lauzières)
18 *Piccolino* (Clémence de Grandval) [ix]
Th.Italien, Paris 5.1.1869 (as Achille de Lauzières)
19 *Rosellana* (Friedrich von Flotow) [x]
T.V. Emanuele, Turin 18. 11.1876 (as Achille de Lauzières-Thémines)
Also a revised vsn (original text by Jules-Henri Vernoy de St. Georges) of Flotow's *L'esclave de Camoëns* (1843) [xi] as
Alma l'incantatrice
Th.Italien, Paris 9. 4. 1878 (with a new Italian text by Achille de Lauzières)
20 *Wallenstein* (Gustave-Raphaël Ruiz) [xii]
T.Com. Bologna 4.12.1877 (as Achille de Lauzières and Enrico Panzacchi)
21 *Cleopatra* (Felipe Pedrell)
T.Principe, Barcelona 1878 rev.1885 (as Lauzières de Thémines)
22 *Inèse e Bianca* (Marcial del Adalid y Gurréa) [xiii]
Barcelona (unperformed 1881) (as Lauzières de Thémines)
23 *Aben Hamet* (Théodore Dubois) [xiv]
Th.Italien,Paris16.12.1884 (as de Lauzières-Thémines and Léonce Détroyat)
24 *Tasso a Ferrara* (Felipe Pedrell)
T.del Liceo, Barcelona 1885 (as Lauzières de Thémines)
25 *Alonso Garcia il rinnegato* (Tommaso Giribaldi)
T.del Liceo, Barcelona 6.6.1885 (as Lauzières)
26 *Renaud* (Gilbert des Roches [*baronne* Legoux])
Th.Boulogne-sur-Mer 8.9.1888 (as Achille de Thémines-Lauzières)

This list tells us a lot of things: in Naples he was not a member of Mercadante's coterie, he kept aloof. His affiliation with Giovanni Pacini (even though disguised by the skeletal "*A de L*") alone reveals his refusal to align himself with the rancorous caucus of enemies of this latter, and indeed he did not feature among any of those who eagerly took sides of any kind [xv] a vestigial *désinvolture* still influenced his actions – now-and-then at least.

His emergence on the musical scene crossed tragically with the departure of Donizetti from Naples, but this did not prevent the famous maestro from setting a poem or two by the barely emergent Achille de Lauzières in the period just before and just after his exit for France in October 1838. This juvenile *erudit* must indeed have made an impression.
These songs include:

1 *Il pescatore* "Era l'ora che i cieli lente, mandan l'ombre sfumate" (based on Schiller)
2 *La ninna nanna* "Dormi fanciullo mio" (both the above published in 'Un hiver à Paris' of 1838-9)
3 *Il sospiro* "Malvina la bella sull'arpa sciogliea" ("parole di Andrea de Leone") pub. 1843

Though *Il pescatore* and *La ninna nanna* compete for attention it is his *Il sospiro* (despite its date of publication possibly the first Donizetti setting of a text by Achille de Lauzières) that attracts the most emotion with its triple time, rippling scales and poignant climax. But significantly, *Il pescatore* too is a litany of farewell and departure. All three evoke the Neapolitan genius mixing precocious maturity on the

part of the poet with a frank and undisguised nostalgia on that of the maestro. The empathy and dismay shared by a companion in exile is very marked in these songs. The "*hiver*" in question was that of 1838, when Donizetti regretted Naples most. Was it the Bergamasc maestro who recommended the untested Achille as poet for the T.Nuovo in the fading months of 1838? It is a reasonable guess.

The Bergamasc was not alone in turning his attention to him, Rossini subsequently set one known text by de Lauzières: *La vedova andalusa* "Fiero ocean rispondimi" [published in Paris by Léon Escudier as *La Veuve andalouse*] [xvi]and Pacini's interminable vocal output contains a whole series of fleeting songs with his texts, most all of them quasi- unidentifiable today. It is in fact Giovanni Pacini who earned his longest period of fidelity, there was clearly some sort of rapport between the precocious savant and the cynical manipulator of audience responses, they were alike both in terms of restless prodigality, and perhaps in outlook too. For a year or two there was almost a collaboration, [xvii] between 1851 and 1855 emerged two important joint operas, *Zaffira* and *Il cid*, together with a cantata and a major *rifacimento*, all with texts by de Lauzières. This last is probably the most fascinating: Pacini had carefully selected this insider/outsider to mastermind the huge changes he proposed to make to his beloved *Gli arabi nelle Gallie* to survive a momentous plunge into the Parisian maelstrom; on 30 January 1855 there appeared at the Théâtre Impérial-Italien in Paris an entirely new version of this opera, a third of it recomposed, entirely re-orchestrated, and with some seven new pieces by Achille de Lauzières. Now a *dramma lirico in quattro parti* starring Angiolina Bosio as Ezilda and Adelaide Borghi-Mamo as Leodato and given a momentous staging at the express request of Napoléon III, it was a success, it was applauded, but fickle Parisian audiences soon turned their attention elsewhere, for four gilded days only did he get the international recognition he craved.

The earlier cantata too had been equally imperial, this was *L'alleanza*, a cantata for the birthday of Dom Pedro II, Emperor of Brazil with its libretto by the *marchese Achille de Lansieres* (sic) and given its first performance on 1 September 1851 at Petropolis (Rio). Pacini had known the Empress Teresa Cristina of Brazil as a child in Naples and the cantata was commissioned at her request.

Imperial Brazil? Imperial Paris? Did he have a longing for empire? It seems very likely. Although in 1855 he took part in publishing a lavish '*Descrizione della città di Napoli e delle sue vicinanze: divisa in XXX giornate*' together with Gaetano Nobile and his former collaborator Raffaele D'Ambra, affiliation with his birthplace was declining, the French capital and the lure of exotic travel began to beckon irresistibly. Nothing happened very quickly but some five years later Achille de Lauzières abandoned Naples for good. The Risorgimento and the collapse of the Bourbon kingdom of the Two Sicilies was a point of no return. No fidelity remained now. He could go home… But once there the restlessness of a confirmed expatriate survived intact - the Hispanic past of his native city remained a constant it would seem and there were repeated excursions to Spain. The Iberian peninsula had always been on the agenda, there were incessant reminders – from *Il cid* to the Andalusian fervour of his song for Rossini, even a Bourbon kingdom in disarray – as Spain had been for decades – was irresistibly tempting, for part of several years in succession he took up regular residence in Barcelona as a quartet of opera texts written later in life bear witness. But at no time was there any question of actual exile and the critical flood continued unabated from wherever he was living.

There is no doubt too that, even in Paris, the allure of Naples stayed fresh in his mind, his review of Federico Ricci's *Une Folie à Rome* in "La Patrie", after its triumphant Parisian appearance in 1869, is a case in point:

> Frédéric Ricci a gardé la tradition du *bouffe* italien dans tous ce qu'il a de plus vif et de plus élégant; cette verve toujours dintinguée, cet entrain de belle tenue, qui ne va jamais plus loin ni surtout plus bas que la gaieté, qui se grise de sa folie, mais qui n'en paraît jamais ivre, qui s'amuse de toutes les allures, se plait à toutes les danses, depuis la *polka*, jusqu'à la *forlane*, depuis la *valse*, jusqu'à la *tarentelle*, mais qui s'arrête juste au *cancan*.
>
> C'est de la musique de gentilhomme qui, en pirouettant à ravir dans tous les sentiers, ne met pas une seule tache de crotte à son talon rouge.
>
> DE THÉMINES

But everything was about to change. Napoléon III was soon to disappear and *post*-Imperial French tastes did not meet with his approval. As with many legitimists who had found the Emperor to be eminently worthy of his endorsement he viewed those of his compatriots who flourished outside the pale of imperial favour with contempt, their musical tastes were discarded with the current derogatory term of "*musique de l'avenir*". The upstart Bizet of course fell foul of his own glossy portrait of a country he adored, with *Carmen* - and *his* Spain seen through the eyes of a vulgar Parisian tourist - he felt that the entire peninsula was being defiled: Achille's indignantly "Victorian" slaughter of *Carmen* in 1875 is truly memorable:

> *Une fois qu'on s'est engagé dans l'égout social, on est forcé de descendre […] Carmen, c'est la « fille », dans la plus révoltante acception du mot […] une bohémienne ! une sauvage ! moitié égyptienne ou gitane, moitié andalouse, se chargeant d'endormir sous ses caresses vénales la vigilance des douaniers…* [xviii]

> The stage [in general] is given over more and more to women of dubious morals. It is from this class that people like to recruit the heroines of our dramas, our comedies, and now even our comic operas. But once they have sunk to the sewers of society they have to do so again and again; it is from down there that they have to choose their models... They think they always have to "improve" on what has gone before. Marion Delorme, Manon Lescaut, Marguerite Gautier step along this sorry path, are now past and gone ... Carmen is the daughter [**of these**] in the most revolting sense of the word ... the veritable prostitute of the gutter and the street-corner. [xix]

[but maybe Queen Victoria herself, who expressly commanded a private performance of *Carmen* at Windsor Castle, would not have been so amused]

His last years were full both of success and appreciation. Occasional critical bile was to be expected and a certain réclame sustained him worldwide thanks to his translations. His contacts with the prickly Giuseppe Verdi were warm and protracted (despite the snide comment he had made about Marguerite Gautier). They had first met in Bologna in 1867 at the time of the translation of *Don Carlos* into Italian [xx] and contact was renewed (at a distance) when he supplied the text for a song by Auber 'L'esultanza' which formed part of the album of songs, masterminded by Verdi (1869), to add to the finances of his stroke-ridden colleague Francesco Maria Piave. In fact they remained in touch to the final years of his life. [xxi]

The incessant reviewing continued to the very last, he supplied letters from

Paris almost every week to the Ricordi "Gazzetta musicale di Milano", caustic, witty and learned commentaries from 1866 to 1893 always signed "A.A." (for "Aldino Aldini" yet another pseudonym) [xxii]

Although it is true that *"no one erects a statue to a critic"* an exception might be made for a librettist, poet and translator. This epigone of the defrocked was an important cog in the international operatic machine of his day. And not simply a mechanical ingredient but destined to oil the wheels of a difficult and challenging juggernaut without whom the transference of skills could never have been so smooth or so universal. As an activist and entrepreneur he was in demand till the pen fell from his hands. Anyone who could link Vincenzo Fioravanti, Gioacchino Rossini, Gaetano Donizetti, Giovanni Pacini, Giacomo Meyerbeer, Giuseppe Verdi and Charles Gounod with so many others large and small at a creative level should never be overlooked.

De Lauzières died suddenly in the same year that Debussy's 'L'après midi d'un faune' was first to be heard. Could it have been from shock? That there was a personal confrontation between the Pulcinella of his début and Debussy - as wide a gulf as conceivable between proletarian farce and elitist frisson – must have urged him to throw down his pen. Here was a challenge beyond the reach of any critical norm. Had his world changed for good? Achille de Lauzières must long have reflected. But this musical exile knew very well that his Pulcinella would bounce back again, disreputable, dismissive, caustic and sceptical, an eternally recurrent critical exemplar that would always win hands down.

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[i] Revamped in various guises, for example as *Il ritorno di Columella da Padova* or *Il ritorno di Genneriella dagli studi di Padova ossia Il pazzo per amore,* it kept the ribald backstreet theatres of Naples in stitches interminably, with its leading role a basso buffo of very indeterminate status and sex and with its North/South divide, this delicious comedy was revived every year until 1848. In 1838 it was given no less than 61 times (variously at the Nuovo, S.Ferdinando and Fenice theatres), and in 1839 – the year of Achille's sequel - 68 times (at the Nuovo, S.Ferdinando, Fenice and Partenope theatres). Its distinctly more expert librettist was Andrea Passaro

[ii] He divided the challenge of supplying the verses for this frightening operatic début with Raffaele D'Ambra who was scarcely more experienced

[iii] Louis-Armand d'Estrées de Lauzières-Thémines (1682-1723) 4th *duc* d'Estrées, *marquis* de Coeuvres, Thémines et Cardaillac, Pair de France, *vicomte* de Soissons, *baron* de Gourdon-Labouriane, Gouveneur d'Ile de France, Laon, Noyon et Domme, married to Diane-Adelaide de Mazarin-Mancini, had no children and the marquisate reverted to Lauzières cousins

[iv] *"In addition to the editors' contributions, one of the journal's most prolific is Achille de Lauzières de Thémines. His over four-hundred contributions treat numerous subjects (e.g., the influence of Italian music in Egypt, the role of the orchestra in opera, the administration of lyric theaters, Lully and the recitative, nationalism in the works of Verdi and Wagner, and the letters of Joseph Haydn)"* according to Wikipedia.

[v] The plot is based upon Schiller's "Die Räuber" anticipating Verdi

[vi] The *marchese* Capecelatro was widely feared as a *jetattore* (ie believed to have the "evil eye") so the poor attendance at his opera even in the utterly resplendent Real Teatro di S. Carlo (*Mortedo* survived for two-and-a-half performances only – did the audience run out half-way-through?) was understandable. They would have been too scared to buy tickets in any case, something nasty might happen to them! The opera's title will not have helped

[vii] After Corneille

[viii] The title-role was sung by Maria Piccolomini who attracted sufficient press attention for the opera to be included in French dictionaries that normally chose to consider operas written for London to be of no import whatsoever

[ix] After Sardou. Marie-Félicie-Clémence de Reiset, *vicomtesse* de Grandval wrote a handful of operas between 1859 and 1892, no dilettante she composed a substantial list of instrumental and vocal works

[x] Friedrich von Flotow (1812-1883)

[xi] Both music and plot being a saccharine challenge to *Dom Sébastien roi de Portugal* of Scribe and Donizetti of that same year of 1843

[xii] After the trilogy by Schiller

[xiii] Marcial del Adalid y Gurréa died on 16 October 1881, his death seems to have been responsible for the abandon of this opera for Barcelona

[xiv] After Chateaubriand's "Le dernier des Abencérages" it had the most astonishing cast including Victor Maurel, Edouard de Reszké and Emma Calvé

[xv] As a sign of his neutrality, at least one song text was written with/for Francesco Florimo, an inveterate apologist for Mercadante. This was a 'Tarantella' of 1845

[xvi] There would be many contacts with Rossini in later life. It is in a memoir by Achille de Lauzières that a substantial description of the aging Rossini is to be found: *"Memorie di un giornalista"* [in] 'Capitan Fracassa' (Rome, September issue 1885)

[xvii] Pacini even managed to spell his name correctly – a sure sign of utter devotion
Cfr *Le mie memorie artistiche* (Firenze 1865) 117

[xviii] "La Patrie" 1875

[xix] English translation of the same review as quoted from the internet. This rude judgment did not prevent de Lauzières from supplying a *versione ritmica italiana* of the text of Henry Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy for *Carmen* at the request of the publisher Sonzogno!

[xx] The prima of the Italian version of this opera took place on Sunday 27 October 1867 at the Teatro Comunale of Bologna, Achille clearly felt exceptionally honoured by the event as quite untypically in Italy his name was printed in full for the occasion as Achille de Lauzières-Thémines in tandem with that of his co-poet Angelo Zanardini. Antonio Ghislanzoni further adapted this translation in 1884.

[xxi] An autograph letter from Verdi to Achille de Lauzières sent from St Agata and dated 5 October 1891 regarding the composer's *Falstaff* was sold at Christies in 1992. The catalogue claims, with a certain amount of fantasy, that the translator was *"a friend of Verdi"* and that he was keen, conjecturally, *"to find out what was going to be next after Otello"*

[xxii] It was far from being the last of his literary disguises, he wrote also under the bizarre name of *"Ralph"* in "Le Courrier franco-italien" (but he might have shared this pseudonym with others it would seem)

Retracing Mercadante's Iberian Adventures:

A Conversation with Paolo Cascio

A few years ago, if one wanted to place bets on which Mercadante operas were likely to be revived, it is doubtful that *I Due Figaro* would have made anybody's 'short list.' One of the legion of forgotten 19th century operas reduced to mere titles on an uninformative list, it received only a single production during the ottocento and then was discarded seemingly forever.



Enter Paolo Cascio, a doctoral student at Universidad Complutense Madrid. Probably the first scholar to focus intently on the shadowy "Iberian Period" of Mercadante's career, Cascio has found himself thrust into the media spotlight in a way few musicologists do, thanks to his work on the first modern performing edition of this very opera.

One doesn't have to dig far beneath the surface to reveal *I Due Figaro*'s potential for popular appeal. It fits neatly into a triad with *Nozze* and *Barbiere*, its story a sequel to both. Mercadante was Neapolitan by adoption if not by birth, a factor which made the opera tantalizing to Riccardo Muti, whose interest in Neapolitan music is well-known. Most crucially, Mercadante lavished great care on this score – the end product, as has almost been unanimously agreed in the press – is nothing shy of a masterwork. Muti's production debuted in Salzburg, traveled

to Ravenna this summer, and now makes its way to Madrid and on to the Teatro Colón. And the tiny, adventuresome Amore Opera in New York scored a major coup with the North American premiere in October – part of a "Fall Figaro-Fest" in which they presented it alongside *Barbiere* and *Nozze*![1] There is every possibility that *I Due Figaro* will accomplish what even *Il Giuramento* so far could not: return the composer to the mainstream.

This December, I was fortunate enough to meet with Cascio in New York in an Upper East Side diner. He was in the United States as part of his Ph.D. program, for a three-month period of study with Philip Gossett (and to visit American relatives). It was a delightful experience; Cascio is a true *amatore* of the ottocento, and his friendliness and enthusiasm made him a pleasure to chat with.

His love affair with opera began when he was only fifteen. Born in Torino, he spent much of his childhood in Catania. Cascio had already known something about opera, having been exposed to a documentary TV program about it, and had some knowledge of classical music (he was lucky enough to have an excellent music teacher at school, who exposed him to the great composers). Bach and Brahms were favorites. But everything changed when he stopped at a small shop and stumbled onto a cassette tape of *Tosca*. Intrigued, he bought it and upon hearing the music immediately became obsessed with opera, frequently spending the school lunch money his mother would give him on more recordings. He and a friend tried to get tickets to the Teatro Regio, but found them difficult to purchase. As a school project, Cascio wrote an essay about how hard it was to purchase opera tickets at the famed house. It won the contest and was published in the local paper. The Regio rewarded him and a friend with free tickets. The first thing they saw was a *Mitradate*. Cascio found the Mozart opera unbearably dull, but didn't give up, attending a *Carmen* and a *Tosca* and falling even more deeply in love with the art form.

How did Cascio decide to focus on Mercadante generally, and specifically on his Spanish period? He already knew and loved Verdi, Bellini, Rossini, and Donizetti. He had heard of Mercadante and for a time looked for his music on CD without success. Then he found a copy of and *Il Giuramento* (the Domingo/Baltsa recording) and was immediately captivated. With persistence he obtained others, though *Orazi e Curiazi* would have to wait a while; Opera Rara's prices put their recordings out of reach for him and most of his fellow students for some time (they jokingly referred to it as "Opera Cara").

When he decided to become a musicologist, Cascio honed in on Mercadante's years in Spain and Portugal not only because so little was known about it; he considers this a fundamental period in Mercadante's development. Mercadante spent time in Lisbon and Cadiz and two seasons in Madrid before returning to Italy to compose such successful works as *Zaira* and *Normanni a Parigi*, which earned him a reputation as worthy competitor to Donizetti, Bellini, and Pacini. Clearly significant artistic development had taken place while Mercadante was there; and direct examination of the operas he wrote while in Iberia

[1] See this author's review of the Amore production at http://www.musicalcriticism.com/opera/amore-duefigaro-1111.shtml. Some of my misconceptions about the opera's history were put right in the present interview.

reinforced for Cascio that it was an artisically fertile period that was worthy of more intense study.

Having been more than once vanquished in my own attempts to decipher Pacini's autographs, I wondered whether Mercadante's presented any special or unique challenges for a would-be editor. Cascio's face brightened – actually, just the opposite has been true in his experience: Mercadante was very organized and neat, and his autograph scores are generally a pleasure to work from.

"He was a wonderful scholar," Cascio says. "A Donizetti score for instance is typically rather messy. He wrote with great speed. He had to change a lot of things. Bellini usually was also a very fast writer. Donizetti wrote sketches during composition – but often it would be on the same paper as the performing score. Mercadante was very deliberate, and as a result his scores are much easier to read. He would write a sketch, a *partitura*, but the pristine condition of the scores indicates there was probably a continuity draft. *La chiarezza é magnifica*," Cascio beams. *I Due Figaro*, he says, was written out neatly, including *recitative secchi* which were composed by Mercadante himself.

I was interested in hearing more detail about *I Due Figaro*'s history. Recent media coverage surrounding the Muti and Amore Opera productions indicate that the 1826 production was halted by censors while it was well into rehearsals in 1826. Cascio sets the record straight. The problem, it seems, was less political and more personal.

The company was actually ready to perform when the production was halted. Cascio found correspondence and press coverage attesting that the fly in the ointment was a vendictive primadonna, Letizia Cortesi (cast as Susanna). In a letter to the director of the Teatro Principe, Cortesi expressed her wish to sing *Cenerentola* for her benefit performance. The director replied that *Cenerentola* was already chosen for another singer's benefit. As an alternative, Cortesi suggested *I Due Figaro*; she predicted it would be a great success. But as it turned out, Mercadante had already chosen it for his own benefit performance! Though she was angered by this, Cortesi became positively enraged when she saw the size and scope of the role of Cherubino, written for her rival Isabella Fabbrica.[2] Cortesi persuaded her lover Ignacio Martinez de Villela (the Presidente del Consejo de Castilla) to have the opera banned – the whole affair is spelled out in detail in *La Revista Española* (28 January 1835). A fascinating story worthy of today's tabloids!

Mercadante's *Figaro* had its belated debut at the Teatro Principe on January 26, 1835. The production was unsuccessful: no mezzo-soprano who was equipped for Cherubino's role could be found. Thus the role was rewritten for soprano, which apparently threw off the whole balance of the piece. Also, the plot and the distribution of voices was viewed as out of step with the latest developments (*Diario de Avisos de Madrid*). The die was cast, and *I Due Figaro* was heard no more. The 1835 premiere cast, then, was:

[2] The 1826 cast was to have been:

Isabella Fabbrica (Cherubino); Letizia Cortesi (Susanna); Maria Navarro (Inez); Josefa Spontoni (Contessa); G.B. Montresor (Conte); Luigi Maggiorotti (Figaro).

Emma Albertazzi	Cherubino
Almerinda Manzocchi	Susanna
Antonia Campos	Inez
Leonor Campos	Contessa
Giovanni Battista Genero[3]	Conte
Felice Bottelli	Figaro

Cascio's current musicological project is just as exciting: a performing edition of Mercadante's *Francesca da Rimini*. Lists of the composer's works always include this tantalizing title, sometimes *in modo dubitavo* or with a note "probably unperformed". Like *I Due Figaro*, it deals with a subject already familiar to modern opera buffs from a more famous work; and the prospect of the *world premiere* of an opera written by a major composer more than 180 years ago is enough to make one's mouth water. Details on why this opera never actualized on stage are scarce in the more common reference works. What befell the unfortunate *Francesca*?

Though Cascio is still piecing together the story, he offered some illuminating and intriguing details. Apparently it was again yet another case of a prima donna's misbehavior that ran the opera off the rails. Once again, censorship had nothing to do with it.

Written by Romani for the San Carlo for a composer called Carlini, the libretto was a text Mercadante knew already. He decided to set it for Madrid, and the opera was composed and completed by the end of December in 1830. In a letter to Florimo dated 30 November 1830 an irate Mercadante enumerated the transgressions of Adelaide Tosi, who was to have played the unlucky heroine. She had completely ruined Bellini's *Pirata* with bad singing, yet demanded a huge salary. Her tantrums, poor performances, and exorbitant fees put the *impresa* of the Madrid theater in great financial difficulties. Indeed, within the first few months of the year 1831, the Italian opera company had to be dissolved.

In a cruel echo of the situation Mercadante faced with *I Due Figaro*, the production was already in a late stage when the wheels came off the cart; orchestral parts had already begun to be extracted when the entire season had to be called off.

It seems logical to conjecture that Mercadante recycled *Francesca*'s music in later operas: surely a whole opera would not have been allowed to go to waste by any bel canto composer worth his salt! When I bring this up, Cascio surprises me and further sweetens the prospect of hearing this long-lost tragedy. So far he has found *none* of *Francesca da Rimini*'s music resurfacing in other Mercadante operas!

The reason for this became clear when he read correspondence indicating that when Mercadante returned to Italy, he tried for a number of years to convince various impresarios to stage the opera. Not wishing to spoil the opera for a potential future production, he left his *Francesca 'intatta e pura'*. None other than Merelli apparently was interested, but Mercadante insisted that he retain ownership rights to the score, and the deal fell apart when a compromise could not be reached.

[3] Genero had been, it should be noted, the first Nemorino in *L'Elisir d'Amore*!

Other attempts to produce the opera also ran aground, and eventually *Francesca* was abandoned altogether.

And so, what of the music? Cascio's face lights up as he tells me excitedly of the surprises he found when he began examing in the score. "He makes a lot of aesthetic choices you find later in the reform operas. In the middle of 1830 Mercadante starts to use a lot of solo instruments. Francesca's cavatina is scored for solo harp and soprano."



Excerpt from Francesca's Cavatina.

"For the first time Mercadante in this opera utilized solo *cor anglais*. Also he felt free to change Romani's libretto, adding many expressive and stage directions not present in the original."

Negotiations are currently under way to produce the opera, and we can all look forward to hearing the world premiere of this 'new old work'. Cascio already envisions future endeavors – one of which is quite ambitious. He hopes to spearhead a larger project involving many more hands – the creations of critical editions of all Mercadante's operas.[4] Among other composers, he is fascinated by Francesco Morlacchi, whose works he feels have been unjustly neglected; Cascio considers him a forerunner of Wagner! Morlacchi spent time as the Royal Kapellmeister director of the Dresden Opera; he composed a *Barbiere di Siviglia* which had the misfortune to debut in the same year as Rossini's, and a *Tebaldo ed Isolina* that particularly appeals to Cascio as a future project.

Unfortunately, at this point in our conversation, our waitress politely asked us to leave the crowded diner. We had, after all, been occupying our table for two hours, though it seemed to fly by in fifteen minutes. Cascio's is definitely a name we will be likely to hear much more of the in near future, and the music he is restoring to life will be a precious gift to lovers of bel canto everywhere. Mercadante has certainly found a worthy champion!

Dan Foley

[4] He also "tweets" that he is working on and edition of Mercadante's *La Rappresaglia*.

'IO SON CONTE, DUCA SONO... '
RISPLENDE MERITATAMENTE IL BLASONE DI ERNANI
(Sassari, Teatro Verdi, 9 dicembre 2011)

Ernani, quinto titolo e tappa fondamentale del catalogo verdiano, è oggi abbastanza infrequente nei cartelloni delle stagioni liriche. Valeva dunque la pena di inseguire fino a Sassari l'ormai raro melodramma, che il Teatro Verdi ha avuto l'encomiabile audacia di allestire a conclusione di una stagione in cui si sono avvicendati con esito lusinghiero *Norma*, due atti unici di Nino Rota e *L'elisir d'amore* (il mio *Ernani* precedente, che risaliva alla stagione 1972 del Teatro Massimo Bellini di Catania, oltre alla direzione di Gianandrea Gavazzeni, si era giovato di interpreti quali: Carlo Bergonzi, Leyla Gencer, Piero Cappuccilli e Ruggero Raimondi).

Lanciato prepotentemente alla ribalta dall'imponente e corale *Nabucco* (Milano 1842), seguito dal polittico straripante dei *Lombardi alla prima Crociata* (Milano 1843), Verdi sceglie per l'esordio veneziano del marzo 1844 - accogliendo con entusiasmo il suggerimento del Presidente del Teatro La Fenice Alvise Mocenigo - *Hernani ou L'honneur castillan* di Victor Hugo, che con il suo romanticismo scarmigliato, pur paludato in esuberanti alessandrini a rima baciata, aveva seminato lo sconvolgimento - la *bataille d'Hernani* - nel teatro parigino del 1830. Si tratta di un soggetto che sviluppa in un quadro grandioso un dramma di personaggi. Occorre aggiungere che nel melodramma ottocentesco nostrano, attraverso cui si espresse più compiutamente il romanticismo italiano, il "risorgimentale" *Ernani* acquista un valore oserei dire emblematico. Verdi stesso, quando a un decennio di distanza concepisce *Il trovatore*, sembra rivisitare con nostalgia, dando loro nuova vita e diverso spessore, le passioni esasperate e travolgenti di una Spagna "favoleggiata" che continuerà a frequentare. Il semiesordiente librettista Francesco Maria Piave, sulla scorta dell'esperienza di Mocenigo e dell'intuito infallibile di Verdi, realizza una "riduzione meravigliosa ma brutale" (come direbbe Luca Ronconi) della vasta fonte hugoliana, trovando l'ispirazione di versi espressivi ed incisivi - il fascino della suggestiva 'rugiada al cespite d'un appassito fiore' o delle sibilline 'cimbe natanti sopra il mar degli anni' (le cimbe sono piccole navi) la vince decisamente sulle astruserie a venire di Boito & C. - versi che sembrano dare le ali alle idee musicali del compositore: le melodie si sviluppano quasi naturalmente da una fantasia che non conosce limiti ma le fa scaturire appropriate al momento giusto, individuando efficacemente i vari profili e dando a ciascuno di essi nel canto la propria fisionomia drammaturgica. Lo scorrere dell'invenzione musicale prevale tuttavia sullo scavo dei personaggi, mentre l'azione mirabilmente "insensata" del melodramma incalza senza soste vivida e persuasiva.

Se non sempre il vino migliore sta nelle botti piccole, da queste se ne spilla non di rado di così prelibato da sfidare il confronto con quello delle botti grandi. La provincia dell'opera abbraccia vastità siberiane e non equivale certo a sminuire un teatro di più che rispettabile tradizione quale il Verdi di Sassari includerlo in tale provincia, poiché gli fanno compagnia i teatri di Catania, Lucca, Bilbao, Bordeaux, Nancy, Liegi, Lussemburgo, Rotterdam, Leeds, Norimberga, per citarne alcuni a me noti.

È sobria di elementi scenografici, con prevalenza di tendaggi, l'evocazione dei diversi ambienti dell'azione proposta da Alessandro Ciammarughi, che ha ideato anche i sontuosi costumi. Su tale impianto il regista Jun Aguni ha distribuito accortamente i movimenti di masse e solisti, ciascuno dei quali incarnava credibilmente se stesso sulla scena. Il fascinoso gioco delle luci di Nevio Cavina, con quel suggestivo graduale smorzarsi di volta in volta, ha disegnato chiaroscuri caravaggeschi e impresso rilievi rubensiani. Nel quarto atto, che fa precipitare le nozze di Ernani ed Elvira nella catastrofe dell'*unhappy ending*, la terrazza della festa si muta repentinamente nel lugubre e agghiacciante ambiente, disseminato di grandi ceri accesi, dove l'inestinguibile sete di vendetta di Silva scriverà la parola fine.

L'agile direzione di Maurizio Barbacini imprime alla valente orchestra dell'Ente concerti Marialisa de Carolis il giusto slancio e le infonde il bel vigore necessario, traducendo nella vibrazione degli strumenti il respiro inconfondibile della robusta partitura verdiana.

Le sostituzioni dell'ultima ora formano l'imponderabile della vita di teatri piccoli e grandi. Ma i rimpiazzi del tenore e del basso sono risultati assai felici. Quale protagonista, il giovanottone sudcoreano Rudy Park ha infatti messo in evidenza cospicui e pregevoli mezzi vocali con una soddisfacente dizione italiana, riuscendo a temperare all'occorrenza - se ne avvantaggerebbe praticandolo maggiormente - l'impetuoso ruolo del nobile aragonese divenuto bandito. Liete sorprese sono venute dalle prestazioni del resto del cast, compresi i provetti interpreti dei ruoli minori.

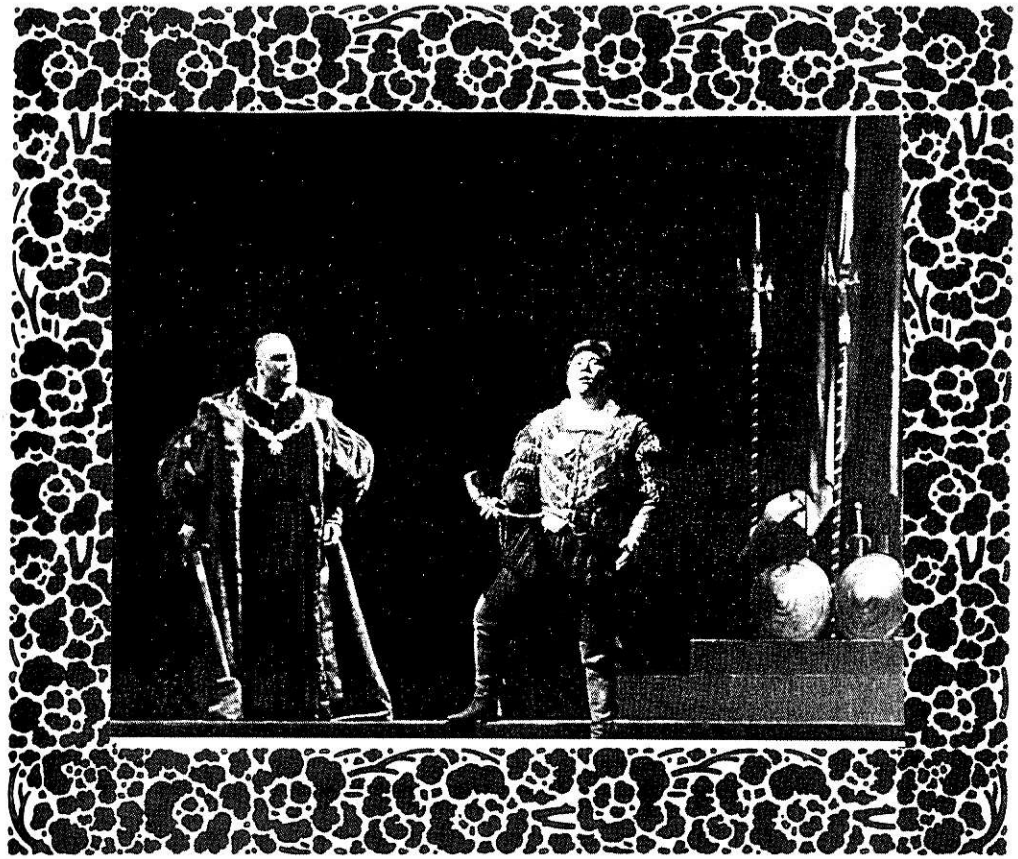
Il soprano statunitense di colore Elisabeth Stevens si è rivelata un'Elvira maliosa, sensuale e appassionata sin dalla lussureggiante aria di sortita con la trascinante cabaletta. Sarà di nuovo Elvira a breve scadenza al Metropolitan di New York. Chi avrebbe riconosciuto in quel dispotico e capriccioso ragazzaccio di Don Carlo - Carlo V divenne imperatore a diciannove anni ma era re di Spagna già dai sedici - impersonato dal baritono Alessandro Luongo l'anziano e stizzoso Siniscalco del donizettiano *Gianni di Parigi* di poche settimane prima al Festival di Wexford? Ma l'acerbo sovrano di Luongo sfoggia un timbro "imperiale" con un canto ora morbido e suadente ora grintoso, che lo destina idealmente ai ruoli del primo Ottocento, e si fa valere nell'apoteosi del personaggio, l'aria e il concertato del terzo atto. *Last but not least* Silva, questa sorta di Commendatore verdiano, cioè il basso Enrico

Giuseppe Iori, che al canuto duca Don Ruy Gomez de Silva - canuto sì, ma non decrepito! - presta il suo strumento di lusso. E non è soltanto l' 'Infelice e tuo credevi' che ci seduce, poiché nel secondo atto, che sottolinea in più ampia misura il personaggio, fiero, generoso, fedele a tutta prova, innamorato perdente, implacabile nella vendetta, fino al tragico terzetto dell'epilogo Iori è un formidabile Grande di Spagna.

Non si può dire che il coro in *Ernani* funga da riempitivo e la valorosa compagine sassarese diretta da Antonio Costa vi si è imposta duttile sin dall'esordio, non deludendo l'aspettativa con l'impeto elettrizzante di 'Si ridesti il leon di Castiglia' nella scena della congiura all'inizio del terzo atto, così come nel dilatare egregiamente l'eloquenza dei due grandiosi concertati (finale 1° e 3°).

Un *Ernani* da ricordare: grazie Sassari!

Fulvio Stefano Lo Presti



Past Present and Proposed No.13
Pip Clayton

Four theatres, The Queen's, The King's, His Majesty's and Her Majesty's in the Haymarket

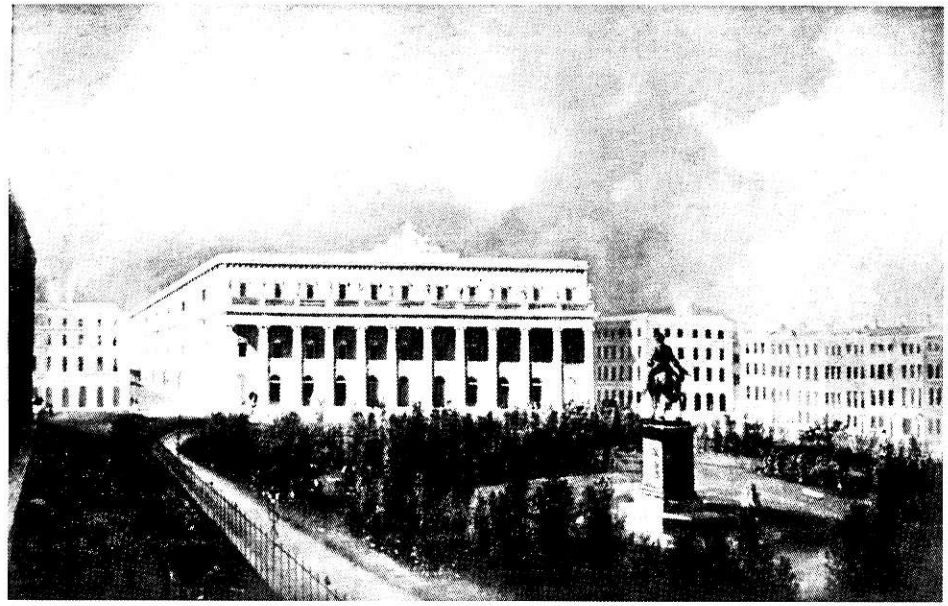
The Second Theatre, a Prologue

With the destruction of the old King's Theatre by fire in 1789, William Taylor, still in prison for debt, approached John Gallini with an offer to go into partnership with him and was refused. Instead Gallini went into partnership with Robert Bray O'Reilly now his legal adviser and these two applied for a license for an opera house to be built in Leicester Square, which the Lord Chamberlain refused. Not to be outdone Taylor next approached Edward Vanbrugh for the lease of the site of the old theatre. To add to the confusion the Duke of Bedford and the Earl of Cholmondeley also planned to build a new opera house but not on the ruins of the old one. Nothing came of this scheme. Gallini and O'Reilly however were granted a license to present operas at the Little Theatre in the Haymarket (this is where the Theatre Royal now stands) and presented their first season in 1789-90. In the meantime Taylor had obtained the lease from Edward Vanbrugh but when he applied for a new license the Lord Chamberlain told him that Gallini and O'Reilly had secured a license for the new theatre in Leicester Square and consequently Taylor was refused.

Gallini and O'Reilly had actually double-crossed each other. O'Reilly purchased the land in Leicester Square to build the new theatre, Gallini refused to help pay for it. O'Reilly appealed to the Lord Chamberlain who granted him the sole right to a license for a theatre on the site. Gallini turned his back on the whole sorry affair and joined forces with Taylor! These two, no better than each other, now conspired with the owners of Drury Lane Theatre and Covent Garden and together they formally objected to another theatre being built. Taylor still in the Debtor's prison and ever the chancer was going ahead with the foundations of the new theatre in the Haymarket, even having the corner-stone laid on 3 April 1790 by John, Earl of Buckinghamshire - even though he had still not had the license to do so from the Lord Chamberlain. On April 14 the case for O'Reilly's license for his new opera house was heard. It was refused. Consequently today, no Opera House stands in Leicester Square. (It is possible that the architect was Sir John Soane whose vision of the opera house would have been the most magnificent in Europe (**See illustration 1**), what I find curious is that this painting looks just like the Grand Théâtre at Bordeaux built in 1775-80 by Victor Louis who O'Reilly had originally approached for a design, also that this painting has been attributed to a certain George Maddox well known to O'Reilly, even more curiously that this design was adapted for the Petrovsky Theatre in Moscow - the first Bolshoi Theatre - built by Prince Pyotor Ourosov and an Englishman named Michael Maddox!) However O'Reilly was given a consolation prize, a license to present Italian Opera for four years at the Pantheon, a place of Assembly, Masquerades and Concerts which had opened in 1772. (This Pantheon stood in what is now Lower Oxford Street on the site now occupied by Marks and Spencer's)

While the King's Theatre in the Haymarket was being rebuilt by Michael Novosielski, the Pantheon was being remodeled by James Wyatt the original architect. O'Reilly and Taylor tried to outsmart one another even to the point of asserting that the other's theatre was not capable of ensuring public safety, surveyors were called in and both houses passed inspection!

(I had asked in Newsletter 114 who held the balance of power in all the shenanigans of that period? I found the answer in a satirical print entitled "High Committee", which



Oil painting in the London Museum

Unexecuted designs for an OPERA HOUSE IN LEICESTER SQUARE, 1789-90



HIGH COMMITTEE, or, OPERATICAL CONTEST

'High Committee, or Operatical Contest', late 18th to early 19th century

shows the two managers as pugilists: Taylor is supported by the Prince of Wales and the playwright Richard Brinsley Sheridan; O'Reilly has on his side Lady Salisbury and the Lord Chamberlain who is leading King George III by a string through his nose. **See illustration 2**) The Pantheon opened on 9 February 1791 with an opera *Armida* by Antonio Sacchini. As a result O'Reilly played a final dirty trick, he renamed the Pantheon the "King's Theatre" a move which has thrown untold confusion among theatre historians to this day.

Also that year 1791 saw the demolition of the old Drury Lane Theatre leaving the actors headed by John Kemble without a theatre. Taylor rented out the King's Theatre to the Drury Lane manager Richard Brinsley Sheridan and the company opened there with *The Haunted Manor* an English comic opera by Stephen Storace on 22 September 1791. It is interesting to note the quirk of fate in the first and second theatre in the Haymarket. The first King's Theatre had been built as a playhouse for drama but became a house for Italian Opera: the second King's Theatre was intended for Italian Opera but for the first years it was home to legitimate drama. The first King's Theatre was destroyed by fire in 1789, and in 1792 the second King's Theatre was destined to become one of the greatest opera houses in the world. This took effect as on the night of 14 January 1792, when the Pantheon/King's Theatre burnt to the ground. Eventually O'Reilly like others before him lost his money and fled to France

Taylor immediately applied for a license to present Italian Opera which was granted, but with three conditions: first, there would be three trustees, the Prince of Wales, the Duke of Bedford and the Marquis of Salisbury, and that Taylor could continue as impresario only as long as he conducted the management properly; the second condition was that Taylor had to agree to pay the debts contracted by O'Reilly at the Pantheon; the third condition was most peculiar, Taylor had to pay £5,000 to the manager of Covent Garden for the patent of Drury Lane (this had become dormant and was in the possession of a Thomas Harris of Covent Garden), without it the Drury Lane company of actors could not perform at the King's Theatre. Taylor was either a very brave man or a very stupid one, he started this venture buried in debt, he now owed £30,000 of the Pantheon's debt, £12,000 to the original subscribers, an unknown amount to Gallini, and £5,000 to Harris together with an unknown amount of debt from his previous management (for which he was still in prison!!)

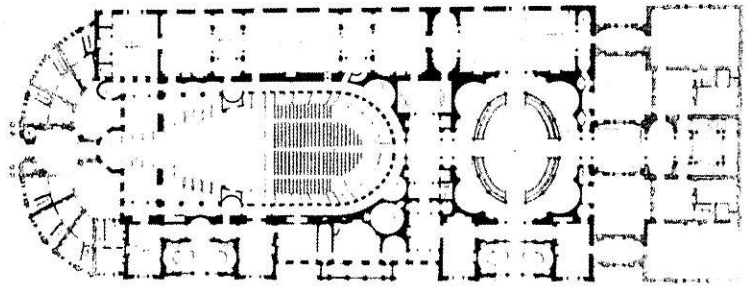
Act 1 The Great Opera House

Before I describe the theatre I would like to clear up a misapprehension which in some quarters has lasted to our present day. The celebrated architect Robert Adam **did not build the second King's Theatre** but he did draw-up plans and an illustration of the front elevation of a theatre which was never built. Possibly these plans were for the Duke of Bedford and Earl Cholmondley's scheme.(**See illustration 3**)

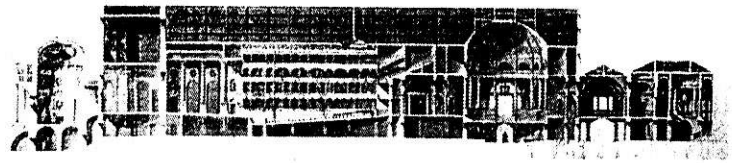
Michael Novosielski was the architect, but who was he? Despite his Polish name he was born in Rome in 1747. When he came to England is not known but by 1772 he was living in London. Between 1781-84 he was a scene painter at the King's Theatre. A portrait of him shows him holding the plans for the new theatre but these plans no longer exist. (**See Back cover**) The new opera house was going to be considerably larger than the old one, its walls now extended to Market Lane to the east and Pall Mall to the south. Some shops had survived the fire and Novosielski planned to demolish these so he could build a concert room in their place, this was not built in 1791 as funds were not there but more importantly at the time the license was restricted. This concert room was finally completed in 1793 (Joseph Haydn in 1794-95 gave a series of concerts of his symphonies in this concert room including the premiere of the *Military symphony*).



Haymarket elevation



b. Plan



c. Longitudinal section

OPERA HOUSE, HAYMARKET Unexecuted designs by Robert Adam

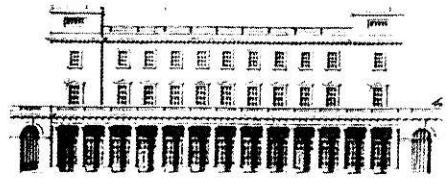
Only the ground floor of the Haymarket facade was faced with stone the rest was of plain brick with three pillars, two windows, an entablature, pediment and balustrade. Before 1800 two men, Thomas Leverton and John Fordyce, proposed to widen Pall Mall at the south end of the site and to extend Charles Street to the north to connect with the Haymarket thus giving the impression that the theatre was isolated on a island, but at that time nothing came of it.

In 1815 the crown lessee of the theatre secured a 97 year lease of the whole site to enable this plan to be completed. He also employed the architects John Nash and George Repton to furnish the facades with some decoration. (I should imagine that for the best part of thirty years the bottom half of the Haymarket resembled a building site. Not only changes were made to the exterior of the opera house but also to the auditorium). Their designs (borrowed from the idea of Leverton and Fordyce) turned a virtually plain brick building into one of finest opera houses in the known world. Between 1816-1818 an elegant arcade of shops named the Royal Opera Arcade became the first shopping arcade in London, this fronted the Market Lane facade (it is still extant today). Roman Doric colonnades by John Nash and his pupil George Repton completely enclosed the property on the other three sides. The entablature was of Bath stone with the brickwork covered in a Roman cement stucco (**See illustration 4**). During the next seventy-six years the interior was constantly being altered and refurbished. There were five tiers of boxes, four entire, and the fifth interrupted by the gallery. Each year a Plan of the Boxes was published and each year it seems as though the total number was different due to variation to the size of the boxes which could be altered to accommodate any number of people. In 1829 figures were published to give the answer: the Pit was 66 feet long and 65 feet wide and held 800 spectators, the boxes 900 and the gallery 800 making the total capacity 2,500. Even so we cannot be absolutely certain of the audience capacity as in the same article it stated that each box had six chairs, there were 150 boxes, thus earlier figures for the sum-total for the boxes vary between a total of 139, 163 or even 202 occupants!

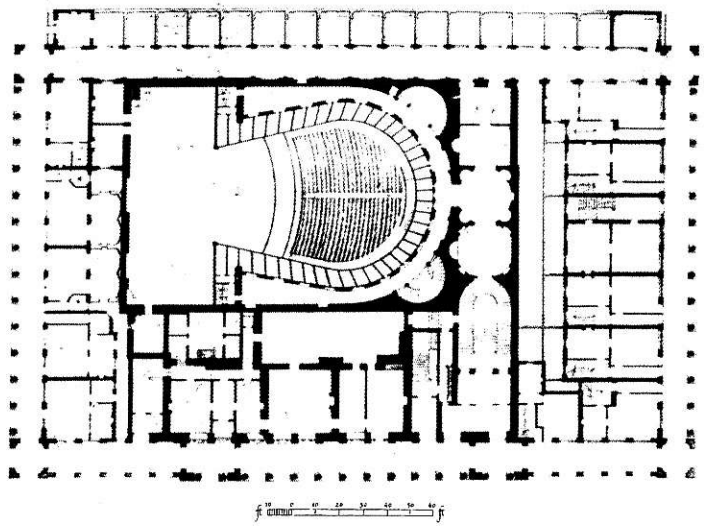
The fronts of the tiers of boxes were painted blue within a gold frame and each tier was distinguished by a decoration centred upon Tritons, Mermaids and Dolphins or wreaths of flowers with Cherubs and Leopards, Lions and Griffins. The top of each tier was hung with a scarlet drapery edged with a gold fringe. There were two boxes at each side behind the proscenium and in front of the drop cutain, some sources say it was three. The width of the stage was 80 feet with the opening of the proscenium arch 37 feet and the depth from the back wall to the orchestra pit was 60 feet. The theatre was lit by candles held by sconces fixed to the front of each tier which meant that the grease and smoke were a constant annoyance to the audience sitting below. It was not until 1818 that the theatre installed a central chandelier lit by gas. (Both Covent Garden and Drury Lane, even though less affluent had done so the year before). The Pit in most theatres did not have seats until about the 1830's but they appeared in the King's Theatre much earlier than that, but when is not known. About 1802 a Lord Galloway noticed to his confusion that a long Bench had been substituted in the place of a row of armchairs. The manager Pierre Laporte re-instated four rows of stalls in 1828, Benjamin Lumley added three rows of stalls seats in 1841 and John Mapleson added three more rows in 1862. Each time it caused a near riot as the audience objected to the increased prices they had to pay for the privilege of sitting instead of standing.

Act 2. The Music and the Artists.

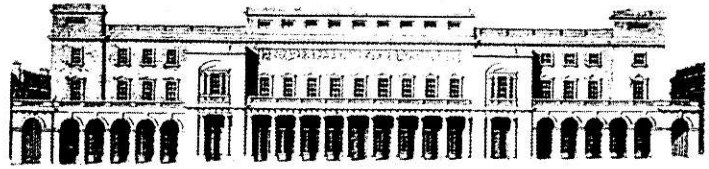
The history of Italian Opera, certainly in London up to the middle of the nineteenth century is frankly the history of the King's Theatre. In 1737 the Licensing Act was passed by Parliament, this gave Drury Lane and Covent Garden a permanent license to present



a. Pall Mall elevation



b. Plan



c. Haymarket elevation

OPERA HOUSE, HAYMARKET. G. S. Repton's designs for the addition of 1816-18 *Demolished*

drama, with the King's Theatre holding the only license to perform *Italian* Opera. Opera composed in other languages, even in English, was translated into Italian. Its monopoly was not challenged until 1846 when the Royal Italian Opera company was formed at Covent Garden.

The King's opened on the 21 February 1791, not with an opera but with an evening of music and dance owing to the Lord Chamberlain's delay in licensing opera performances, but on the 10 March a private performance was given for subscribers of Paisiello's opera *Pirro.* The first public performance was not given until 26 January 1793. This was of course due to the fact that the Drury Lane actors were in situ while their theatre was being rebuilt, though some records state that opera was given in concert form. The first theatre had seen opera's by Ariosti, Bononcini and Handel, names familiar to opera cognoscenti today, but who now today (other than historians and opera fanatics) know of Abos, Fischietti and Latilla whose opera's were also heard at the first King's Theatre? Now, with a brand-new opera house, London saw the beginning of a new era with operas by young composers coming to the forefront of the genre.

As this Society is concerned with Donizetti and the music of his time, I wish to give you some idea of the new works that were coming from young composers and the reaction to them by both critics and public.

The 19th century started well with four operas by Peter von Winter to libretti by Lorenzo Da Ponte (excerpts of two of which can be heard in the first two box-sets of 100 years of Italian Opera by Opera Rara). In March 1806 a notice in The Times read, *Mrs Billington respectfully informs the Nobility, Gentry and the Public that her benefit night is fixed for Thursday, March 27th, when will be performed a grand serious opera with choruses, entitled La Clemenza di Tito, entirely composed by Mozart- the most celebrated ouvrage of that great composer, and the only one of his operas ever produced in this* country. Mrs Billington took the role of Vitellia but the papers instead of writing a criticism of the opera saw it more as a social event which I suppose it was as the fashionable audience was headed by the Prince Regent and his brothers the Duke of Kent and the Duke of Clarence. This brilliant occasion was followed in quick succession by *Cosi fan tutte* in May 1811 and then in June by *Il flauto magico.* The next year on 18 June a charity performances in aid of the Scottish Hospital saw for the first time *Le nozze di Figaro* with Angelica Catalani as Susanna, perhaps the highest paid singer at that time. This was followed by *Don Giovanni* in 1817.

On 19 June 1806 *Che originali* was produced at the King's by Donizetti's teacher Simon Mayr. Some of his music had been heard in 1804 when a duet 'Parto, ti lascio' and a chorus 'Qual orror' were inserted into the opera *La vergine del sole* by Gaetano Andreozzi. Other operas by Mayr to be heard in London were *Adelasia e Alaramo* in 1815 and *Elisa* (as *Il monte di San Bernado*) in 1820. The great Giuditta Pasta created a sensation with her *Medea in Corinto* in 1826, an opera revived many times subsequently, and she also sang in a (pasticcio version) of Mayr's *La rosa rossa e la rosa bianca* in 1828.

On 7 March 1818 it was announced that a new composer would be introduced that evening to London with a performance of an opera written in rivalry with the famous Paisiello, the performance was cancelled until 10 March when it was announced that Signor Garcia will make his first appearance in this country. Of course the opera was *The Barber of Seville* or is it was then called *Almaviva, o sia l'inutile precauzione* by none other than Gioacchino Rossini. The cast included Manuel Garcia (Almaviva), Giuseppe Naldi (Figaro), and Joséphine Fodor-Mainvielle (Rosina.) The next day The Times said: *"a young composer of extraordinary merit, who enjoys great celebrity in all parts of the Continent."* and his music *"bears marks of haste, and still more of extravagance: but we are persuaded*

that all persons must have been delighted and astonished by the occasional touches of genius, the variety and originality of his style."

From the Observer there was praise for Garcia: *His figure is good, his voice clear and sonorous, his execution most rapid and articulate, his intonation just, his science great and his acting excellent.* There was also praise for Madame Fodor: *The slight fioramentes with which she just touched particular passages were the triumph of delicacy and sentiment: it was the southern breeze that swept through an orange grove, waking the sweetness of its blossoms but forbearing to scatter any of its leaves.*

But four days later the News did its best to dampen the praise by writing that Rossini: *was a composer who is considerably more admired on the Continent (where the ankle of the Prima Donna is more critically examined than the music of her part) than he is ever likely to be in this country.* Just a month later came *Elisabetta, regina d'Inghilterra,* Such was the success of the *Barber of Seville* that for the next six years Rossini's operas dominated the stage, in fact at least two of his operas were heard every year for the first time in London. 1820 saw *Cenerentola* and *Tancredi* which had many revivals in the next forty years. In 1824 of the twelve operas given that season eight of them were by Rossini one of them being his new *Zelmira* with his wife Isabella Colbran in the title role (it failed).

Carlo Coccia had been engaged as well as Rossini but as conductor and the two men where paid the same as the singers, Isabella Colbran, Guiditta Pasta and Giusepina Ronzi De Begnis. But what a cast! Even with the maximum publicity however it was not a success, at one point Angelica Catalani had to be recruited to give it a boost. It's not surprising that the impresario Giovanni Battista Benelli ended the season in debt to the tune of £25,000.

Bellini was not lucky. 17 April 1830 saw the first performance in London of *Il pirata.* The Times was not enthusiastic, *as a musical composition the opera is not destitute of merit, with the exception of the overture, which was very weak and puerile.* The Morning Post was equally damming, *its lively and sucré quality is such that almost imagined it to be the medium of comic rather than of serious action.* A year later *La sonnambula* given as a benefit night for Rubini with Pasta and Gabriele Santi was ignored by The Times while The Morning Post waited until the second performance and said of the music *its prevailing character is sprightliness rather than depth. La straniera* also failed to please in 1832 and in the following year *Norma* also had a poor reception. Again it was a benefit performance this time for Pasta and again The Times ignored it while the Morning Post dismissed it completely with: *We cannot award any high praise to this opera. It is lamentably deficient in original ideas and but for a certain dramatic character discernible in its music would, unusually short as it is, put the patience of the audience to a some-what severe test.* Less than four months after its premiere in Paris *I puritani di Scozia* opened at the King's Theatre on the 21st of May 1835 with the same stellar cast, Giulia Grisi, Giovan-Battista Rubini, Antonio Tamburini and Luigi Lablache. For the first time the press reviews were not so disparaging as for the earlier operas. The Morning Post said that: *Bellini has, it must be admitted, not withstanding added materially to his reputation.* And, *In act two the magnificent duet Suoni la tromba with a beautiful symphony on the horn begins a musical dialogue in which the questions are given with dignity on the one hand, and stern defiance on the other. We never heard more tremendous cheering as each singer gave their words in turn and then together and was compelled to be repeated.* The Morning Chronicle was, I would say, its usual carping self, with: *The airs are pretty, but common, and the choruses are little better than noise,* and - *the brazen instruments and drums, the braying and beating of which hardly ever intermit from beginning to end of the piece.* The Times was more positive: *The whole of the first act, so far as the music is concerned, is a work of very superior merit.* Later in the review, *the whole opera abounds in choruses only some of which were given due the lack of rehearsal time and the performance a good deal*

shortened. If all the choruses be so good as the few that were given, they should not be left out in future. But the last paragraph amused me, it was about the curtain call for Giulia Grisi: *...on whom crowns and garlands were showered from the parts of the house nearest the stage. This practice, which a few contemptible sycophants have introduced within the last four or five years is an exceedingly silly one, and not at all in harmony with our English notions and customs. We wish its authors would testify their admiration by some other mode more suitable to our English manner. A shower of cabbage leaves is surely a very little better compliment than a volley of rotten eggs.*

The first opera by Donizetti to be given in London was *Anna Bolena* at the King's Theatre on the 8 July 1831 with Pasta in the title role, Rubini as Percy and Lablache as Henry VIII. Once again the first night was a benefit performance, this time for Pasta herself and unusually The Times critic was there and offered a review in which he said of Pasta:- *The energy of Medea, the dignity of Semiramide, the tender pathos of Desdemona, the profound afflictions of Mary Stuart, and that fascinating littleness which forms the charm of her mad scene in Nina were all displayed in turns.* Even so then and now in our present time, the composer seems to get a rather grudging review. The Times thought: *There is a great deal of good music in the opera, and the hand of a master is visible throughout, but imperfections are abundant. In some parts Rossinian recollections have strongly prevailed, and in others Bellini's Pirata has supplied the model.*

What was thought to be the most Bellinian aspect was Anna's *Larghetto* in the finale ultimo, but William Ashbrook in his 1984 book on Donizetti points out that this passage is a reworking of an aria from *Enrico di Borgogna* of 1818, some seven years before the première of Bellini's first opera. The Morning Post gave this strange comment: *it was so well performed that it was impossible to judge the music at first hearing.* The critic then went on to say: *There are no airs that particularly strike the attention or impress the memory, yet is this work above mediocrity,* and;- *all writers after Rossini must more or less be followers of his style, and last night we were impressed with the conviction that Donizetti composed his opera with not only the music of Rossini in his mind but also the strains of the universally-known and admired Auber.* Of the singers the following was said: *Of Pasta's performance of the heroine it is impossible to give any adequate idea by description. We never heard her in finer voice than last night. Her acting was no less admirable, and at the conclusion of each act attained to the very perfection of the histrionic art. Rubini as Percy sang delightfully. We have never yet seen him in a part that offered so many opportunities for the display of his delightful and peculiar powers. Lablache completely identified himself with the character of bluff King Hal, and equal credit is due to him for the manner, at once chaste and forcible, in which he gave the music of the part, which led him to acquaint himself with peculiarities of appearance, costume, and the bearing of the man he personated. A Mademoiselle Gay* (as Jane Seymour) *made her debut before a London audience but labouring under the effects of timidity added to an apparent indisposition we can only say that her voice is of pleasing quality and considerable compass, that she has taste as a singer and much judgement as an actress.* The review ended with, *the whole of the dresses were beautiful and perfectly correct, and a similar commendation applies to the scenery.* On the side there was a lively domestic dispute, Sir Henry Bishop complained that his ballad *Home, sweet home* written in 1821 and introduced for Pasta to sing into *Anna Bolena* was plagiarism and he was prepared to sue for piracy and breach of copyright!

The following year two operas by our maestro were produced. Advertised as with new singers, the first was on 4 February and two days later The Morning Post had this to say: *The doors opened without any crowd, and although the house was comfortably filled by an audience of many of its distinguished aristocratic patrons, and a large number of well-known dilettante, yet there was room throughout the evening. The Opera was Esule di*

Roma of Donizetti a work which has acquired for that composer a considerable reputation amongst his fastidious and musically-gifted countrymen. We are much in doubt that it will give him a niche in the ideal temple, according to the judgement of the frequenters of the King's. Of the singers, *Madame Joséphine de Méric as* (Argelia) *we believe had been unheard in this country, and the Manager engaged her upon the sole recommendation of her talents, without that of fame. He was right, for she is an acquisition and will be popular. The tenor Signor* (Berardo Calvari) *Winter as* (Setttimo) *was a decided hit. His part is written rather high frequently touching A, and once we believe B, he had never occasion to resort to the falsetto. Signor* (Luciano) *Mariani* as (Murena) *has a baritone of considerable depth, but of good quality. We are sure, however that he will be heard with much more satisfaction if he will abate his efforts to prove its force.* The review ended with;- *the choruses were extremely well performed, the scenery, equipments and general arrangement are much superior to what we have been accustomed to.* On 31 March the second opera was offered. This was *Olivo e Pasquale* and The Morning Chronicle had this to say on April 2: *The entertainment was an Opera Buffe and like many modern operas, deficient in airs; but it contained several good-concerted pieces, and although not an original it is a lively and agreeable piece, and deserving of the success it has had on the continent.* The Morning Post was agreeable: *We like Donizetti better in this light and pleasant character than in his more elaborate attempts. If there is but little originality, this Opera displays taste, spirit and clever adaptation, and an entire absence of dullness.* The singers were de Méric as Isabella, Mariani as Olivo and Vincenzo Galli as Pasquale.

As was usual, in place of a programne the management sold a booklet that gave the plot plus the libretto in the original Italian and a translation into English. The Times however had a comment to make which I would say is just as relevant today as it was then: *It is impossible not to be struck with the slovenly and disgracefully incorrect manner in which the English translations of the libretti are executed. Can no one be found to do them who knows anything of the Italian and English languages? There is hardly a sentence the text of which has not been grossly perverted. These books are in fact, no translations at all. The English writer affects to give an adaptation of his own in blank verse, and he only succeeds in making it the most absurd and stupid trash that was ever seen in print.* Harsh words but perfectly true.

To be continued.

