Enrico di Borgogna

This Bel-canto-opera is a treasure found by music historian Anders Wiklund. The discovery of this opera is like finding an early work by Picasso, and it provides a window into Donizetti's artistic process during that period. The first performance of the heroic opera Enrico di Borgona by Donizetti took place at Teatro San Luca, Venice 1818. The opera was a great success; however, the score disappeared for unknown reasons. In 2012, Enrico returns to the stage at Vadstena Castle in an opera about a young man who has lost his rightful place on the throne. As in 1818, he is sung by a woman and the opera poses the same vocal challenges that it did nearly 200 years ago. Enrico di Borgogna will play in The wedding hall at Vadstena Castle. July 20- August 7.

Composer: Gaetano Donizetti (1818)
Libretto: Bartolomeo Merelli
Conductor: Olof Boman
Director and choreographer: Clara Svärd
Stage design: Clive Leaver
Costume design: Anna Kjellsdotter
Lighting designer: Jimmy Ström
Makeup design: Katrin Wahlberg
Rehearsers: Dmitry Tyapkin, Magnus Svensson
Rehearser choir: Anna-Carin Strand
Translation: Giuseooina Penta, Nils Spangenberg.

Ensemble:
Enrico - Kinga Dobay (mezzo soprano).
Pietro - Markus Pettersson (tenor).
Elisa - Rebecca Rasmussen (soprano).
Guido - Thomas Volle (tenor).
Brunone - Ludvig Lindström (bass-baritone).
Gilberto - Christian Oldenburg (baritone).
Nicola - Peter Nyqvist (tenor).
Geltrude - Christina Nilsson (soprano).

Choir:
Tenor: Elias Fredriksson, Peter Nyqvist, Alexander Vesterberg. Baritone: Jacob Ingvarsson, Erik Lissel, Hannes Öberg. Bass: Nils Gustén, Martin Hedström, Mikael Horned.

Orchestra: Violin I: Leader, instructor Gabriel Bania, Julia Dagerfelt, Ida Meidell Blylod, Elin Nilsson, Stina Jansson. Violin II: Section leader Catalina Langborn, Laura Amelia Rubio, Kristin Tuomisto, Maria Wernberg. Viola: Johannes Söderberg, Märta Jonzon, Oskar Andersson. Cello: Adina Sabin, Stina Pettersson. Double bass: Michael Carlqvist, Sarah Nygren. Flute: Thomas Schützer. Oboe: Kerstin Frödin (instructor), Kyoko Nakazawa. Clarinet: Antonio Galindo Agúndez, Kayo Nishida. Bassoon: Ivan Jurkovic, Emelie Hasselgren. Horn: Jonatan Olofzon, Emma Wahlström. Trumpet: Jonas Larsson, Niklas Åslund. Timpani: Magnus Olsson. Harpsichord: Olof Boman.

The performance lasts for nearly 3 hours including one intermission of 30 minutes during which refreshments will be available. All the seats are numbered. For the comfort and enjoyment of the performers and the audience, and for reasons of copyright, photography and sound recording in the auditorium are not permitted. Mobile phones must be switched off during the performance.

Synopsis

BACKGROUND
King Alberto of Borgogna and his family are murdered in cold blood at the hands of assassins hired by his jealous brother Ulrico who then ascends to the throne himself. Alberto's youngest son, Enrico, is secretly rescued by the King's knight, Chevalier di Bonsteten. He manages to flee with his wife and Enrico to a remote corner of the kingdom. Shortly thereafter, his wife dies and the Chevalier takes on the identity of a learned hermit by the name of Pietro, who to all appearances lives a simple life close to nature with his son. Even Enrico believes that Pietro is his father. Enrico grows up and begins working as a shepherd in the picturesque countryside. Pietro gives Enrico a sound education as he grows up.

Enrico and Elisa, the daughter of the local duke, fall in love with each other, but Elisa's father sends her to court to get her away from this liaison with the young shepherd. At court, Ulrico's son Guido has just come to power, and he too falls in love with Elisa. On her father's deathbed, Elisa has sworn to marry Guido. Since the murder of the royal family, a resistance movement has been working in secret to one day bring back the rightful heir to the throne. Rumour has it that he is still alive. Pietro's oldest friend Brunone, who holds a high position in Guido's government, leads the resistance movement.

ACT 1

Morning – at the foot of the Alps
The shepherds and their leader Nicola gather together and sing about the dawning day. Pietro is overwhelmed with grief for the loss of his wife. The shepherds attempt to comfort him. Nicola is convinced that there is more to Pietro's melancholy than the death of his wife, but Pietro sends him away and lies down to sleep. Enrico comes in to talk to his father, Pietro. Enrico is unhappy. He misses Elisa and begs the wind to carry to her messages of how much he longs for her. When his father awakes, he finds Enrico frustrated. His son wants to take on bigger challenges than the life of a simple shepherd. Pietro urges him to be patient.

A stranger arrives and addresses Pietro by his rightful name, as Chevalier di Bonsteten. Pietro recognises his old friend Brunone, who tells him that the King's murderer Ulrico is dead, and that it is now time to set to work. Pietro and Brunone tell Enrico the truth about his noble birth, and when he finds out the circumstances surrounding his real father's death, Enrico wants revenge. Pietro gives Enrico the old King's rapier.

Day – the court in Arles
The court jester Gilberto claims that telling the truth and genuine qualifications are overrated. Guido asks Gilberto to tell him what the people really think of him. Gilberto resorts to flattery but Guido is not satisfied before he is told that there are some who complain...

Elisa enters, accompanied by Guido's guards, who urge her to be joyous at the prospect of her coming nuptials. But Elisa is unhappy. Her hopes of seeing Enrico again are growing fainter and fainter. When she is left alone with her lady in waiting Geltrude, Elisa confides in her. Guido forces Elisa to exchange her mourning clothes for a wedding dress and begs her to give in to his great love. She answers that while he may be able to force her to marry him, her heart will never be his.

Evening – at the square
The wedding party gathers in the square. Enrico and Pietro arrive, unaware of the impending wedding. Elisa faints. Pietro and Brunone attempt to stop Enrico, who is dreadfully jealous, from revealing his true identity. A violent storm draws in and Guido is forced to postpone the wedding.
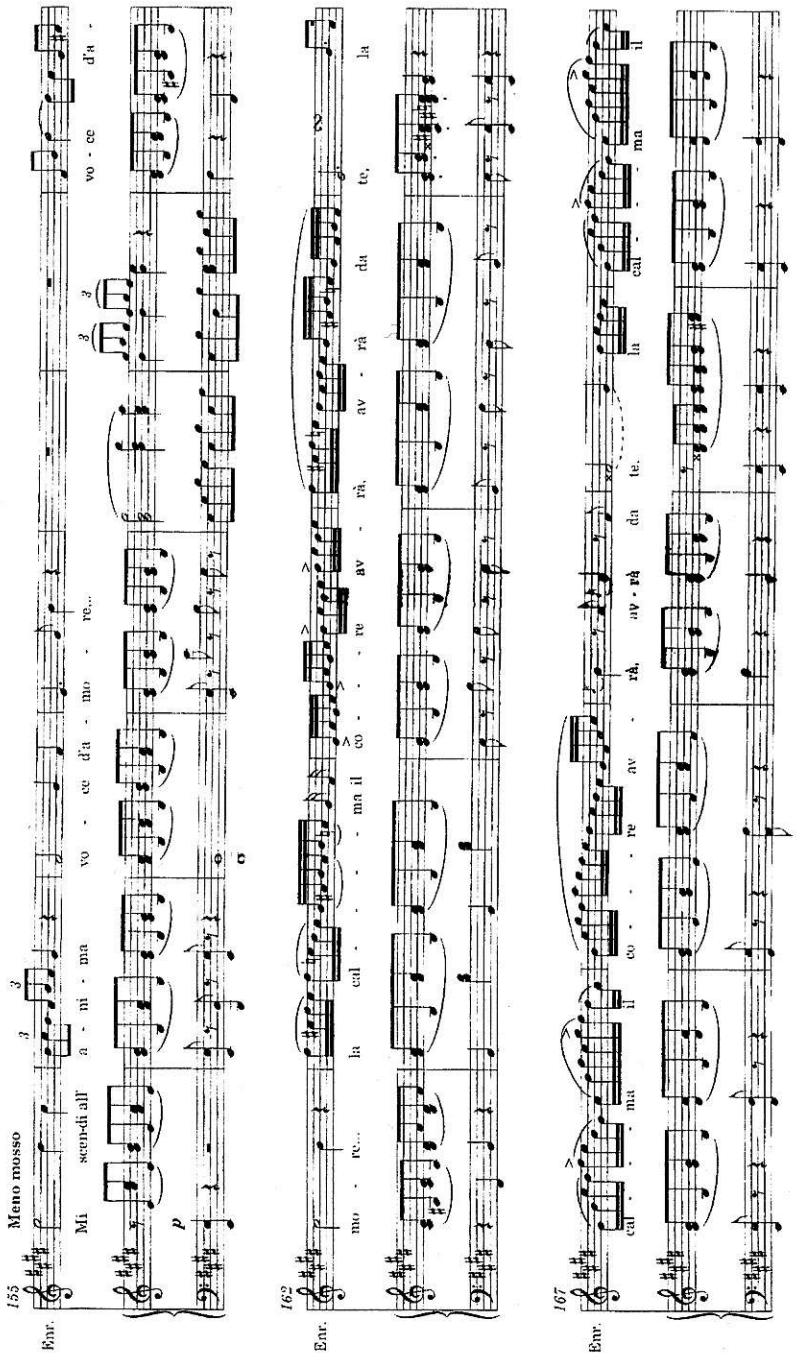
ACT 2

Night – at the palace
Brunone and Pietro tell the resistance movement's men about the return of Enrico. Enrico himself is not there. He has stolen away into the palace to confront his unfaithful Elisa one more time and then to die. On the way, Enrico meets the court jester Gilberto, who manages to conceal him from Guido in the nick of time. Gilberto promises to show Enrico to Elisa's room.

Elisa enters. Guido threatens to kill her if she does not keep to her promise to marry him. But the threat is useless, since she would rather die than live as Guido's wife. Guido gives Gilberto orders to make ready for the wedding and sweeps out of the room. Gilberto ushers Enrico into Elisa's room, warning him that women are just made to cause trouble.

Enrico and Elisa meet. At first, he rejects her assurances that she has been forced into marriage with Guido. But when he learns of her promise to her father, he understands everything and the two are reunited. Guido rushes into the room. Brunone, Pietro and Nicola, who have also broken into the palace, enter at the same time. The truth about Enrico's noble birth is revealed to Guido and Elisa. Guido orders the confused guards to arrest the intruders, but the guards lay down their weapons and the men of the resistance win the day.

Dawn – at the palace
Guido is terror-struck. The people storm in and want Enrico to take revenge on Guido, but instead Enrico greets his people with a call for peace.



as it was in the beginning…

Enrico di Borgogna

and [almost] at the end…

Le Duc d'Albe

Alexander Weatherson

Prayer has been answered. I hope biblical reference may be forgiven in respect of a work silent for almost two centuries. We have long had Donizetti's *last* opera, it has been an interminable wait to hear his first. No amount of frustration, fuelled by the absence of an autograph score, can preempt the satisfaction of finally hearing *Enrico di Borgogna* and the real début of a composer who was so soon to be a cornerstone of the repertory.

Was it an adieu to his student years? There is a distinct suspicion that he has put into Merelli's feeble libretto all the duets, trios and ensembles he had composed in the previous months and years. In *Enrico di Borgogna* there is none of the soaring arch we know so well of an entire opera conceived from start to finish and offered to us in a continuous vocal line on a sheaf of blank pages, when a sense of the whole is there from the start. There is no sense of organic growth in this score only a frieze of delectable items set to a Rossinian road map. And then (and thanks to Merelli) there is an unequal balance between these disparate vocal items – a hint that the weightier items have simply slid-down together to form a group as a result of a dramatically tilting plane - and not as a preconceived operatic exposition: Enrico, Elisa and Guido, the principals, make an unequal series of entries; the first two have all the best cards from the start, indeed poor Guido scarcely has a chance in this plot, you end-up on the side of the enemy overwhelmed as he is by vocal volleys. A disbalance not at all fair operatically-speaking in this delectable Swedish venue especially when the villainous Guido was sung as well as he was at Vadstena by a splendidly dark Thomas Volle. And then the buffo of this opera, Gilberto, too is an interesting case much like the buffo in Meyerbeer's *Margherita d'Anjou* so soon to appear, not exactly *funny* as playing upon the inanities of important personages. Sung here by Christian Oldenburg he was a key figure, almost omnipresent, and most expertly presented, sung and conceived.

(opposite: a vivid glimpse of the future)

First staged at the Teatro San Luca in Venice in 1818 this opera was not just the début of a twenty-one year old maestro but a plum commission. The theatre had been rebuilt and revamped and – thanks to Mayr – his pupil had been given the quite exceptional honour of raising the brand new curtain before a prestigious audience. The Teatro San Luca was a family enterprise of the noble Vendramin dynasty in Venice, dating back to 1622, and a theatre that still exists though scarcely recognisable: first being called the Teatro San Salvatore; then the Teatro San Luca; later the Teatro Apollo and now called the Teatro Goldoni. Shortly before the advent of *Enrico di Borgogna* the San Luca had fallen into decay. Indeed, just in time for Donizetti it had been completely refurbished by the architects Giuseppe Borsato and Bernardino Bisson, supplied with much more seating, a brand new decor (especially on the superb curve of the boxes) and a much wider stage.

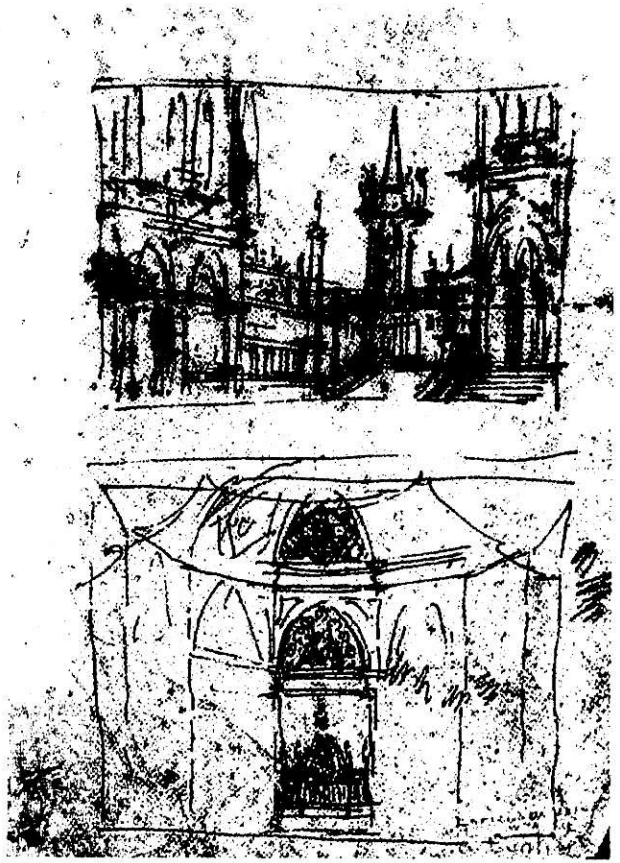
The publicity even went as far as to boast that *"In a word the S.Luca now takes its place in the first rank of theatres in Venice putting itself into direct rivalry with La Fenice".* And it was true, that when La Fenice burned down in 1836 it was the San Luca, then called the Teatro Apollo, that took over (opening with another Donizetti opera, *Pia de'Tolomei*).

It was thus a real plus to the ego of the young maestro that for the actual inauguration of this revamped theatre on 14 November 1818 that the Sicilian impresario Paolo Zancla chose the completely unknown Gaetano Donizetti and his *Enrico di Borgogna*, his most ambitious composition so far. No one can doubt that Mayr - for long years a fixture and favourite in Venice - was behind this choice, as well as behind the choice of librettist, Bartolomeo Merelli, a fellow Bergamasc and ex-student of sorts. Not only this but in the wake of *Enrico* the young maestro was commissioned to put on another of his operas, the one act farse *Una follia* also with a text by Merelli. It was a momentous double-début in the watery city.

The reviews for *Enrico* were warm and encouraging despite all sorts of hitches [you can find them in the utterly invaluable Bini/.Commons chronology of press reports [1]] the real musicological snag as far as we are concerned being that Paolo Zancla walked-off with the autograph score and no one has set eyes on it since. This Vadstena edition was based on the copyist full score and parts surviving in the Royal palace

---

[1] Annalisa Bini/Jeremy Commons *Le prime rappresentazini delle opere di Donizetti nella stampa coeva* Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia (Milano 1997) 44-55



Bertoja: two set designs for ***Enrico di Borgogna***
Teatro San Luca, Venice 14 November 1818

library at Copenhagen (that in the Bibliothèque Nationale of Paris – its only rival – is slightly incomplete).

The overture begins pizzicato, continues with a Rossinian flourish, looks briefly towards *La gazza ladra* and indulges in several crescendi but moves on to other things. This suave Copenhagen overture differs a little from the version in Paris and copies existing elsewhere. If the pupil was eager to pay homage to his master, he was also unable to resist the multiform blandishments of his master's immediate contender for operatic supremacy in Italy. This is more or less the recipe of the entire *Enrico di Borgogn*a. Despite the Mayrian opening pastorale and the Rossini-clone of a "rondo" ultimo, Donizetti breaks the mould of both masters in-between and whenever he can. A wholly surprising foretaste of *Anna Bolena* appears in the cabaletta of Enrico's aria di sortita, it is one of those evocative moments – far from rare with Donizetti – when one is reminded that he sprang on the stage with a fully rounded musical personality even though there was a lifetime of evolution ahead. After an agitated recitative, the delicious larghetto 'Care aurette' sung with great delicacy by Kinga Dobay revealed its credentials as the piece from the opera to make a big impact, published and republished as it was in several editions in the next years, but for modern ears the allegro 'Ma tornerà!...la rivedrò' makes everyone sit up, just a phrase, a mere hint (but what a hint!) of what is to come in his lustrous career and a flash of insight into an unknowable future. Otherwise big moments are few in this opera it must be admitted, but a series of well-shaped ensembles, beautifully orchestrated, sustain the unfolding of a plot with no surprises.

This is a youthful exordium, bold, hidden depths abound, a young man's fancy sung and staged here by young people under a youthful baton. A cut or two (in the cori and in the cavatina for Elisa for example) and some odd pronunciation (cruelly exposed in the secco recitatives) now and then did nothing to reduce the significance of carefully judged cadenzas and ornaments and a vocalism that was both promising and already polished.

The Vadstena staging had the inestimable advantage of an orchestra of the day with an intimate envelope of sound and instrumentation perfectly adapted to the salon-like acoustic of the Wedding Hall of the Renaissance Castle. If it almost encouraged a wayward solo now and then (at the prima) it was an orchestral authenticity more than enhanced by the impeccable direction of Olof Boman. A minute precision ensured that every nuance was detailed from beginning to end. The young composer's subtleties and intuitions glowing anew after so many years of silence. Mayr made an appearance mostly in

this orchestration, Rossini dominated a predictable series of parallel statements, triplets, quartine and cookbook climaxes, but not really to excess. With a Guido *un peu* Duca d'Ordone, an Elisa *un peu* Dorliska, an Enrico *un peu* Isabella (!) and a *finale primo* of huge complexity – with everyone in disarray and coming-in from all sides - the impact of the great *pesarese* was never in doubt - and how could it have been otherwise in 1818?

But a very precocious intelligence dominates throughout. The highlights? Musical sophistication: the cavatina for Gilberto and the succeeding duetto with Guido; the stretta of the Elisa/Guido duetto; the stretta of the *finale primo* (with a wind machine as in *Il furioso*); both Pietro and Brunone have rather predictable music ; a key dramatic recitative heralds Elisa's Act II aria which is very elaborately formulated (and was sung admirably by Rebecca Rasmussen) but was rather cut; Gilberto's aria lays the first seeds of a generation of buffo sorties presently to emerge from the pen of the young maestro; the duetto Elisa/Enrico launches with huge reclame and has a cooing centre-section *larghetto* and a vivid stretta; if the following sextet emerges academically a bit like a student essay it dissolves fluently enough before reassembling; Guido's angry aria achieves almost Beethovian intensity in its earlier sections but ends conventionally; the final coro and rondo (cabaletta) for Enrico are suitably climactic (with lots of percussion) and the ultimate utterances of the mezzo-soprano hero here are as adroit as any exemplar by the great *pesarese,* brilliantly and generously sung by Kinga Dobay they bring the momentous (momentous for us that is) drama to an especially irresistible close. A great career begins here.

*

As for *Le Duc d'Albe*, you have to say first: *Come off it!* You can no more finish an opera by Donizetti than complete a painting by Rembrandt. Why try, especially when more expert minds have already offered a perfectly acceptable compromise? [2]

After a first hearing of the version presented at Antwerp and Ghent what is clear is that in its holograph form Donizetti's command of

---

[2] ie the version staged iof 1882 as *Il duca d'Alba* which was supervised by Amilcare Ponchielli, Cesare Dominiceti and Antonio Bazzini under an editorial banner brandished by Matteo Salvi. Gossip of the day attributed the celebrated tenor aria 'Angelo casto e bel' to Dominiceti.

the setting of French voices was in its very first manifestation. All too often the French language is lost in an Italian orchestration. French consonants are all but invisible under a full battery of Italian sound and French vowels disappear into the air, only later (with *La Favorite* of 1840) did he find the right balance. *Le Duc d'Albe* and *Élisabeth* - both begun in 1839, are only half-way to Paris! This fascinating incomplete tragedy over which so much theatrical ink and anguish have been expended, begun but never quite put aside, with its fine Scribe and Duveyrier text, was a proving ground for the great maestro - not only dramatically but also acoustically.

The completion offered by Giorgio Batistelli is accompanied by a sympathetic argument supplied by the composer, but inevitably, inevitably, the *sound world* he proposes is not just alien – it is distracting if not to say destructive to the carefully planned sequence of vocal items leading to the climax as devised by and for Donizetti. Not just an anti-climax or non sequitur but a dead-end. A withering-away of tension. The bitter-sweet sorrow of the defeated and cruel anti-hero, the father of a dead son he loved, at once a winner and a desperate loser, goes into a never-never land of arcane chords. The listener, ears bent to the articulate ground plan of the formulae of Italian opera - primo tempo, cantabile and stretta of all the preceding music - operatic certainties not to be discarded at the drop of a hat - is deprived of any sense of direction and cast into an aural wilderness.

As far this new ending by is concerned it reminded me of an accouchement described by Krafft-Ebing (*was* it Krafft-Ebing?) where all the neighbours and even the husband stood round the bed and tried to imitate the birth pangs in order to alleviate the pain of the suffering victim. In a cacophony of groans the scene came to its expected dénouement. Of course the spectators gave birth to nothing whatsoever but did not feel left out of the drama

I'm not quite sure that this was what Maestro Batistelli intended, indeed I rather suspect that he liked the story he was setting and wanted it to grab the audience at the final curtain, but only those with avant garde inclinations will have felt they were there for anything but decorative attendance at a non-event.



IL RITORNO DEL CARNEFICE
LE DUC D'ALBE DI DONIZETTI AD ANVERSA E GAND

Fulvio Stefano Lo Presti

Un decennio fa mi occupai, nel *Journal 7 of The Donizetti Society / Donizetti and France* (Bergamo & Londra, 2002), delle vicissitudini della composizione e del mancato completamento del *Duc d'Albe*, la tormentata *"Incompiuta"* donizettiana, su cui a varie riprese si è creduto di aver tratto tutte le conclusioni plausibili per poi tornare al punto di partenza la volta successiva. Per nostra fortuna il saggio *The "hache sanglante" of the Duke of Alba* di Alexander Weatherson, che correda il CD del *Duca d'Alba* (versione italiana integrale 1882) pubblicato da Universal Music France nel 2008, chiarisce il quadro e sgombra gran parte dei dubbi e delle perplessità.

Composto nel 1839 quando Donizetti si era da pochi mesi trasferito a Parigi, *Le Duc d'Albe*, grand opéra in quattro atti su un eccellente libretto di Eugène Scribe, venne messo da parte quando il nuovo direttore dell'Opéra non lo trovò di suo gradimento poiché non era gradito alla sua amante, il mezzo soprano Rosine Stoltz. È pur vero che, senza questo *pollice verso* della tirannica prima donna, non sarebbe nata *La Favorite* (Parigi 1840), ma Donizetti avrebbe potuto riprendere e completare in seguito *Le Duc* e se non lo fece fu essenzialmente perché non si presentò più la possibilità di eseguirlo. Dopo la morte di Donizetti, Scribe trasformò *Le Duc d'Albe* in *Les Vêpres Siciliennes* di Verdi (Parigi 1855) e Verdi fu sin dall'inizio ben consapevole delle origini del libretto. Ma era destino che *Le Duc* non finisse nel dimenticatoio e, un quarto di secolo dopo la scomparsa del Bergamasco, il completamento in versione italiana da parte di un quartetto di musicisti, di cui facevano parte un ex discepolo di Donizetti, Matteo Salvi, e Amilcare Ponchielli (gli altri due erano Antonio Bazzini e Cesare Dominiceti ed ancora oggi è pressoché impossibile accertare chi fece che cosa), fu una "gioiosa" macchina bellica lanciata nella guerra commerciale tra l'editore musicale Lucca e il suo arcipotente rivale Ricordi. L'impresa di Lucca conseguì un lusinghiero successo, ma *Il Duca d'Alba* (Roma 1882) fece una carriera teatrale ottocentesca limitata. L'ibrida versione italiana avrebbe dovuto attendere la metà del Ventesimo secolo per risorgere e guadagnare il favore di un pubblico.

Completato con zelo "donizettiano", *Il Duca d'Alba* rimane irrimediabilmente un... Donizetti a metà! Quello che un autore non ha condotto a compimento, un altro, per quanto abile, non potrà mai farlo al suo posto. Si tenga conto inoltre che l'incompletezza in questione non dipende soltanto da quello che Donizetti non ha scritto, ma altresì

dall'assenza delle modifiche, dei tagli e delle aggiunte a cui Donizetti avrebbe sicuramente sottoposto la parte già composta.

La versione italiana postuma - il più spesso variamente amputata, qualche rara volta completa - ha avuto una discreta circolazione dagli anni Cinquanta ad oggi. Ma fino all'iniziativa della Vlaamse Opera di questa primavera, *Le Duc d'Albe* non era mai stato eseguito nella versione originale francese. L'occasione è sembrata propizia per affidare al compositore Giorgio Battistelli (Albano Laziale 1953) - noto e apprezzato per il suo *Riccardo III* dato ad Anversa nel 2005 - il compito di inserire due brani di sua composizione nel 3° e nel 4° atto. Battistelli, sia detto a suo onore, è intervenuto con discrezione, cercando di evitare un contrasto troppo stridente tra il suo linguaggio atonale e quello di Donizetti. Il finale ultimo, che è il contributo più impegnativo, pur riprendendo alcuni spunti di Donizetti, è farina del suo sacco e si impone musicalmente e drammaturgicamente, lasciando però non troppo convinti i donizettiani di stretta osservanza. Questi ultimi però avrebbero anzitutto da eccepire che la strumentazione, che nell'autografo di Donizetti si arresta a metà dell'opera, sia rimasta quella posteriore della cosiddetta versione Salvi di cui si è detto prima. A parte il ripristino dell'aria del tenore 'Anges des cieux', all'inizio del 4° atto - che divenne poi 'Ange si pur'/'Spirto gentil' quando passò nella *Favorite/Favorita* - al posto di 'Angelo casto e bel' che di Donizetti non è, si è praticamente riascoltata la versione Salvi ma cantata nel francese di Scribe anziché nella versione ritmica italiana di Angelo Zanardini.

La vicenda, ambientata tra Bruxelles e Anversa, si può sbrigativamente così riassumere. Il Duca d'Alba, spietato e inflessibile esecutore della feroce repressione politica e religiosa attuata nei Paesi Bassi (Belgio e Olanda) da Filippo II di Spagna, scopre che Henri, giovane di Bruges che lotta contro gli spagnoli, è suo figlio. Ma Henri gli è doppiamente avverso poiché ama la contessa Hélène d'Egmont, che ha giurato di vendicare il padre fatto decapitare dal duca. Quando il duca, al momento di lasciare il Belgio perché richiamato altrove, si illudeva già di aver domato la rivolta e conquistato l'affetto di Henri, Hélène riesce ad avvicinarglisi con un pretesto per pugnalarlo ferendo invece mortalmente Henri che si è interposto e che prima di spirare implora ed ottiene dal duca l'impunità per l'amata.

La repressione spagnola nei Paesi Bassi non è solo materia per libretti d'opera, poiché è anzitutto storia autentica. Gli spagnoli di Filippo II con ignobili soprusi e massacri di protestanti e insorti perpetrati su vasta scala avrebbero avuto poco da imparare dai nazisti del XX secolo. Il recente film del polacco Lech Majewski *The Mill and the Cross* (2011) ci ha rinfrescato la memoria su quel terribile periodo offrendone immagini di insopportabile violenza ma anche di toccante poesia. Ho assistito al *Duc d'Albe* domenica 13 maggio ad Anversa e giovedì 31 maggio a Gand.

Nel preludio si assiste ripetutamente all'esplosione in frantumi di una grande statua della Madonna col bambino, chiara allusione alle distruzioni sistematiche di immagini e statue di chiese associate alle prime, tumultuose ondate della sollevazione protestante (nulla peraltro di così diverso dall'iconoclastia scatenata nel secolo VIII dall'imperatore bizantino Leone III Isaurico). Ben più raccapricciante, anche per la Madre di Gesù resa complice involontaria degli spagnoli, la visione dei cadaveri nudi e straziati di patrioti giustiziati disseminati sulla scena.

Arroganti e soddisfatti gli spagnoli del Governatore Alba, in attillate divise nere, ingollano la pregiata birra belga e contemplano sprezzanti dall'alto di una passerella i fiamminghi in basso che riconoscono sgomenti tra le vittime congiunti e amici. Divise e abbigliamenti casual sono stati realizzati dalla coppia A. F. Vandevorst (An Vandevorst e Filip Arickx) e così pure il bianco abito da cerimonia del duca (quando non è in nero anche lui) in stravagante contrasto con i piercing e i tatuaggi di cui si adorna generosamente. Sullo sfondo gigantesche sagome trasparenti di soldati armati "scortano" quasi tutto lo spettacolo fino alla conclusione e, con l'aggiunta di pochi altri arredamenti scenici, costituiscono la scenografia di Alfons Flores, costantemente immersa nelle luci cupe e notturne di Fabrice Kebour.

Il venezuelano Carlos Wagner indulge in qualche preziosismo, a quanto pare ineludibile - con quel duca di Medina Coeli bambino venuto a sostituire Alba in partenza o l'uno e l'altro duca portati a turno su una sorta di fercolo come dei santi protettori - ma la sua concezione di un dramma attuale e senza orpelli storici, che riduce all'essenziale i rapporti tra i personaggi accentuandone i rispettivi moventi, si difende egregiamente. Accurato l'impiego di coro e comparse, come nella scena del birrificio di Daniel, dove i congiurati si fingono birrai tra sacchi e cumuli di orzo. Intensa l'immagine conclusiva dei coristi senza testa che "salutano" la partenza di quel duca, privato per sempre del figlio ritrovato, duca che di teste ne ha fatte tagliare un gran numero.

Paolo Carignani ha diretto con vigore e sensibilità la valorosa Orchestra sinfonica della Vlaamse Opera, dando a mio parere il giusto respiro e una vivida intensità alla lettura della partitura, anche quando da Donizetti si è passati a Battistelli. A qualcuno dei critici che ho letto è parso di avvertire un accento e una tinta preverdiani, il che non deve stupire, poiché Donizetti non è solo quello delle *Stuarde* e delle *Lucie* e taluni suoi titoli (Mazzini lo aveva ravvisato) sono chiaramente prerisorgimentali, come quell' *Assedio di Calais* (Napoli 1836) citato a un certo punto nel *Duc d'Albe*.

I "cattivoni", il tenore Gijs van der Linden (Carlos / Balbuena) e il baritono Vladimir Baykov (Sandoval), sono risultati più interessanti scenicamente che vocalmente, mentre il basso Igor Bakan ha reso con efficacia il personaggio non troppo secondario del birraio Daniel. Il terzetto

dei protagonisti si è dimostrato ragguardevole, a cominciare dal soprano svizzero Rachel Harnisch (Hélène d'Egmont), un'eroina vibrante e risoluta, che trova toni più suadenti nell'esprimere l'amore per Henri. Di Henri tuttavia gliene sono toccati due, poiché, dopo le prime recite, al tenore spagnolo Ismael Jordi è subentrato il belga Marc Laho. Quest'ultimo ha espresso più convincentemente la veemenza e la passione di un ruolo decisamente preverdiano, ma Jordi non ha certo sfigurato, confermandosi anzi tra i tenori più interessanti delle ultime leve. Resta il vero e proprio protagonista cioè il duca d'Alba, impersonato dal baritono rumeno George Petean: malgrado lo stravagante *look*, un duca... principesco. Bel timbro scuro, poderoso, espressivo, duttile: da tirannico governatore che incute il terrore con un solo sguardo a padre implorante frustrato nella speranza dell'affetto filiale. Originale l'idea del confronto tra padre e figlio che portano entrambi lo stesso disegno tatuato sull'intero torace anche per dimostrare che tale comunanza non basta a riunirli.

Quando si ha disposizione il Coro della Vlaamse Opera diretto da Yannis Pouspourikas non si possono nutrire dubbi sulla prestazione e infatti nei numerosi interventi il Coro si è imposto ammirevolmente contribuendo al successo dello spettacolo.

Malgrado l'ampio spazio richiesto dal Concorso internazionale Reine Elisabeth di violino, che si è svolto a Bruxelles nelle ultime settimane, non si può giustificare l'ostinato quanto meschino silenzio da parte del principale quotidiano belga di lingua francese, *Le Soir*, su questa prima mondiale assoluta di *Le Duc d'Albe* allestita dalla Vlaamse Opera, che ha fra l'altro attirato numerosi spettatori e critici stranieri, anche dall'Italia e d'Oltreoceano.

BEL CANTO SALON CANTATAS

"I Virtuosi ambulant have assembled a remarkable collection of the rarest cantatas to perform in the "Haydnsaal" of Esterházy Castle at Eisenstadt in Austria on 13 October 2012. They include a series by Donizetti with *Saffo* – which is a modern première; *Teresa e Gianfaldoni, La dernière nuit d'un novice, Noé* – the modern première of the 1839 version and *Il canto d'Ugolino*; *Francesca da Rimini* by Rossini; and *Saffo* by Paër. Artists include Anna Agathonos, Margarita De Arellano, Timothy Fallon and Randal Turner. James Alexander is Director and the Pianist is Mark Pogolski. The whole has been conceived with his usual flair, skill, and capacity for research by Nicolas Trees.

Mercadante rediscovered
I BRIGANTI in BAD WILDBAD

Saverio Mercadante, for a long time this name meant to me - and most German radio stations - the composer of the Flute Concerto in e minor. This rather limited view of one of the greatest Italian operatic composers of the Ottocento - one who composed almost 60 operas between 1820 and 1860 - has not basically changed, or not at least as far as classical music programmes on the (German) radio are concerned. It is true that this sad phenomenon is closely connected with the small number of recordings of his operas, not before the 1990s and after a hesitant revival in 1970 can we find an increasing number of his operas on the CD market, and these the result of the committed dedication of some of the minor but highly esteemed Opera Festivals such as that of Martina Franca and Wexford. However, opera houses in Europe have not taken the trouble as yet to stage a Mercadante opera in their regular programmes apart from some rare exceptions like that of *Il giuramento* at the innovative Stadttheater at Giessen (2006).

The well-known Belcanto Festival ROSSINI IN WILDBAD started paying continuous attention to Rossini's contemporaries in 2000 and since then has allowed some of their hitherto forgotten operas to share the limelight: *Maometto* (P. von Winter), *L'italiana in Algeri* (Mosca), *L'amor coniugale* (S. Mayr), *Semiramide riconosciuta* (Meyerbeer), *I due Figaro* (Carafa), *Don Chisciotte* (Mercadante), *Adelina* (Generali), *Ser Marcantonio* (Pavesi) and some shorter operas by Pacini and Balducci. A remarkable list of trophies! In 2009, on the occasion of the 250th anniversary of Friedrich Schiller's birth, a further neglected Belcanto gem was presented: Vaccaj's *La sposa di Messina* intended to be the starting-point of a series of operas after plays by the German poet and with Mercadante's *I briganti* (Paris 1836) already announced for the years to come. Three years after this promise, a new critical edition by Florian Bauer based on manuscripts and the research by the musicologist Michael Wittmann (also responsible for unearthing Otto Nicolai's *Il Templario* and *Il proscritto* in Chemnitz) had emerged, and on 14 July 2012 the curtain rose for the first performance of this *melodramma serio* in three acts since the revival in Pisa in 1847.

Rossini was then Director of the Théâtre Italien in Paris and had invited his compatriot Mercadante to write an opera semiseria for the season 1835/36 with the well-known Felice Romani as librettist. As Wittmann in his elucidating article for the Wildbad programme expounds, Romani had not produced a text by the end of 1835 and so Jacopo Crescini, who until then had made a name for himself only as a prose poet, was brought in together with Friedrich Schiller's *Die Räuber*. In his *"Avviso"* of 18 March 1836 Crescini describes his

proceeding, explaining why he thought it necessary to tone down some of the characters: *"Whereas in the German drama these brigands are presented as a gang of dastardly characters who wallow in unrestrained violence, here they are depicted as young men standing up to any unjust oppression. They cherish genuine independence, which does not undermine either the law or some other social or political order, they defy misfortune and overcome all dangers. The dark countenance of the night, the quiet of the woods, a stormy sky, nature's awesome mysteries correspond to their spirit... ".*

On the small stage in the Bad Wildbad "Trinkhalle", which is especially lacking in depth, festival director **Jochen Schönleber**, who was also responsible for the stage set, found adequate solutions for the different scenes and places – small-scale palace rooms, forest and dungeon. He transferred this "Sturm und Drang " drama of the young Schiller to South America in the 1960s, changing the brigands into guerrillas living in the forest and fighting against injustice and social inequalities. Not surprisingly Ermano – Schiller's Karl Moor and the Carlo in the Verdi/Maffei *I masnadieri* – is cast in the same mould as Che Guevara who now-and-then appears in video clips in the background beside another would-be revolutionary Jim Morrison. Sitting in a death cell the younger son of Count Massimiliano in a dreamlike flash-back relives his feelings when he returned home in disguise and shared some happy moments with his beloved Amelia freeing at the same time his incarcerated father, who had been declared dead. At the end of the opera, having failed in his attempts not to let down his father or Amelia while remaining loyal to the men who looked up to him, when his brother Corrado (Franz Moor and Francesco respectively) kills himself in desperation after being vanquished in a fraternal duel he is dragged away by his fellow brigands (but in Schönleber's staging - unlike in the Crescini libretto - he is executed).

The première of *I briganti* on 22 March 1836 was more than just a *successo di stima* but probably did not meet with a better response simply because three weeks earlier Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots* had taken Paris and Europe by storm. And then his great Italian rivals, Donizetti and Bellini, also invited to Paris by Rossini, had set a very high standard with *I puritani* (24 January 1835) and *Marino Faliero* (12 March 1835) respectively thanks to the team of Giulia Grisi, Giovanni Rubini, Antonio Tamburini and Luigi Lablache, the famous "Puritani Quartet", who too were the stars in Mercadante's new work.

The cast of Bad Wildbad was excellent, led by the outstanding **Maxim Mironov** as Ermano, who sang this extremely difficult Rubini part with amazing ease and fascinating dramatic empathy. **Vittorio Prato** , equipped with a beautiful baritone, sang his brother Corrado firmly and fluently in the coloratura passages, and **Bruno Pratico**, a bass buffo renowned worldwide and a favourite of the Wildbad visitors for some years, gave a moving and convincing portrayal of Count Massimiliano. The Bulgarian soprano **Petya Ivanov** as Amelia, desired by both brothers, captivated with her heartfelt acting

and dazzling coloraturas, even if her *acuti* sometimes sounded a bit shrill. Also the supporting roles were more than adequately sung and played by other talented young singers : **Rosa Fiocco** (as Amelia's friend Teresa), the Spanish tenor **Jesús Ayllón** as Rollero (a brigand) and the Bulgarian bass **Atanas Mladenov** as the benevolent hermit Bertrando, who had kept the old Count alive. The members of the **Camerata Bach Chor Posen** were remarkable actors and passionate singers (with the tenors tending to over-sing occasionally). The festival orchestra **Virtuosi Brunenses** – considerably challenged in three opera productions plus concerts – performed excellently including the soloists (clarinet, cello, harp) and was sensitively and brilliantly conducted by **Antonino Fogliani,** since 2011 the musical director of ROSSINI IN WILDBAD .

Probably the most moving number of *I briganti* is the recognition-duet sung after Ermano has rescued his father and the two are joyfully reunited. It is part of the essentially through-composed Act II, which starts with the brigands and their leader singing a drinking song - a really catchy tune by this "generally average melodist" (F. Lippmann) - followed by Ermano's *Preghiera* before the longer *scena e duetto* which leads to the Finale II and the brigands being called to arms. But it is not a so-called "Reform Opera" yet like *Il giuramento* of a year later, in which Mercadante proclaimed the "canto dramatico", demanding from his singers expressive singing that reflected the plot, giving up the display of virtuosity and the familiar cabalettas . In his only Paris opera Mercadante does not go so far. *I briganti* is still a Belcanto opera, which Wittmann appropriately calls a "*work of transition*" for we (fortunately!) hear ample evidence of "canto fiorito", and in his sad farewell to Amelia and his father at the end of Act III Ermano sings a (hugely anticipated) final cabaletta. When less than two years later Mercadante prepared the première of this opera for the Scala di Milano (1837) he himself not only changed part of the libretto – Ermano stabs Amelia and himself to death - but also revised its musical structure towards "canto dramatico" so that this later version, whose last performances in Torino 1838 were conducted by Otto Nicolai , to a larger extent sounds pre-Verdian.

It is probably too optimistic to prophesy that after its enthusiastic reception in Bad Wildbad *I briganti* will find open doors to the offices of opera house managers. However, its rediscovery should certainly not remain a nine-days'-wonder, or only delight scholars and those aficionados of Belcanto who, as Wittmann puts it, feel a "*deep satisfaction in the fact that another blank spot on the map of operatic history has been erased*".

Walter Wiertz
(performance of 18 July 2012)

BELISARIO

Da E. Hanslick *Musikalifches und Litterarifiches*, Allgemeiner Verein
für Deutfche Litteratur, Berlin 1890, pp123-126
Traduzione e note di Antonino Titone. Palermo 16-17 maggio 2012

Il "Belisario" di Donizetti — una nuova ripresa l'11 febbraio 1888? In questo caso, abbiamo letto correttamente anche se non capito del tutto. Quale misterioso potere provocò a quel che pare la riesumazione di questo feldmaresciallo bizantino, da molti anni abbandonato a una serena morte? Egli non stava divertendo nessuno; nei suoi ultimi anni è probabile che nessuno abbia più ascoltato i suoi lamenti. Aveva visto la luce a Venezia nel 1836, ed era stato ripreso lo stesso anno a Vienna, allora la città più italiana delle tedesche contrade. Le due dorature, nelle quali Belisario risplendette, ossia la novità delle sue melodie e la magia delle voci italiane, sono ormai completamente tramontate da mezzo secolo. Lo stile di canto del "Belisario" ci è divenuto improvvisamente estraneo, è stata impressa una direzione completamente diversa ai cantanti più qualificati; loro vi si ritrovano con difficoltà, come gli ascoltatori. Già poche scene ci fanno piombare in questa mielosa alta marea di terze e seste, nell'aria soffocante di queste languide triadi d'accompagnamento. Come Tannhäuser nel Venusberg siamo assetati "di amarezze", di qualche velenosa goccia di contrappunto, di ritmiche punture di spillo e urticose strumentazioni. L'elemento caratteristico non è comunque del tutto assente. Nessun Gibbon, o Ranke o Mommsen è capace di descrivere in modo tanto convincente la profonda decadenza dell'impero romano, come lo fa l'incredibile unisono dei Patres conscripti e la banda militare nell'opera "Belisario". Questo non appartiene tuttavia a quanto di meglio ha prodotto il fertile e splendido talento di Donizetti. Dalla sua amabile, copiosa fioritura di opere comiche noi traiamo il trifoglio: "Don Pasquale", "Elisir d'amore", "Figlia del reggimento", che vale più della sua intera tragica foresta di cipressi. Ma per quel che riguarda le tragedie liriche di Donizetti "Belisario" sta appena in seconda fila dietro a "Lucia", "Lucrezia" e "La Favorita", che eccellono tanto per invenzione musicale che per energia drammatica.

Ma se in Germania "Belisario" fiorì o vegetò abbastanza a lungo, a Parigi, accusato di essere pesante e noioso, fu ben presto esiliato per sempre. Anche nell'epistolario Liszt-Wagner vediamo emergere Belisario; al colmo del suo entusiasmo per il Rheingold Liszt annuncia al suo amico l'avvenuta rappresentazione dell'opera di Donizettti a Weimar (1855). Con nostra meraviglia la pone anche al di sopra de "Le Maçon" di Auber, il che però fa semplicemente capire che considera preziosa una cattiva tragedia, più che una buona commedia. La figura di Belisario suscita sempre una speciale simpatia nel pubblico tedesco. Negli anni quaranta combinava eroismo e piacevolezza il "Belisario" di Schenk, una tragedia con un nucleo drammatico debole ma con un torrente incredibilmente dilatato di parole. Intanto i più famosi cantanti, tra tutti Pischek, si cimentavano nel ruolo principale dell'opera di Donizetti. Il grande,

eroico contenuto drammatico è completamente assente in questa musica; comunque essa trova in molti momenti cruciali un'espressione elegiaca commovente. E questo evidentemente è quell'aspetto del Belisario, che dal pubblico è stato particolarmente gradito e al quale torna di nuovo. Un eroe che, colmo di ardente patriottismo, è tuttavia accusato vergognosamente e inaspettatamente, che nell'indigenza dell'esilio volge ogni pensiero al suo Paese e ne ottiene la liberazione a prezzo del suo sangue — vi può essere una figura più simpatica, un ruolo più gradito?



Il critico tedesco Eduard Hanslick

Quante lacrime sono piovute su Belisario accecato! Il fatto che su ordine del suo ingrato sovrano gli furono cavati gli occhi e che il cieco vegliardo doveva mendicare il suo pane per le strade di Costantinopoli, è ancora creduto da novantanove persone su cento. È una favola che deve soprattutto la sua enorme fortuna al romanzo sentimentale "Belisaire" di Marmontel, una di quelle improbabili biografie "classiche" con le quali si mantiene in vita il pessimo francese imparato da giovani. A questo Belisario da leggenda Donizetti non dà altro che situazioni sconvolgenti o eccitanti; altamente cantabili, una musica praticamente calcolata sull'effetto, che, in se stesso incolore, offre al cantante accasione per ordinare e organizzare il contenuto a sua propria e completa discrezione. Se il cantante possiede il talento della recitazione oltre a tutte le qualità vocali, e cantando con arte sa disegnare un carattere completo e personale dai contorni nettamente delineati, un importante successo di cassetta gli è certamente assicurato anche quel giorno. Il nostro "Belisario" viennese è stato reso con dignità e qualità intellettuali; ma il ruolo del protagonista si è completamente perduto nella resa generale del palcoscenico. Similmente è accaduto con i ruoli secondari che offrirono esecuzioni soltanto corrette ma senza colori stimolanti, forti. Con uno spettacolo che è solo accurato, decente, pulito non si può salvare un'opera come questa. Richiede nello stesso tempo voci brillanti e cantanti inconsueti, che si adagino con gioia entro queste melodie stantie. E, io credo, che oggi a quegli artisti che le cantassero, ma non alla musica di Donizetti, si dovrebbe dire grazie.

Donizzettis "Beliſar" — neu einſtudirt am 11. Februar 1888? In der That, wir haben richtig geleſen wenn auch nicht völlig verſtanden. Welch geheimnißvolle Macht bewirkte wohl die Ausgrabung dieſes byzantiniſchen Feldmarſchalls, der ſeit vielen Jahren ſo ſchön und verläßlich todt gelegen? Er war niemals ein unterhaltender Herr geweſen; in ſeinen letzten Jahren vollends mochte niemand mehr ſeine Klagelieder anhören. In Venedig hatte er 1836 zuerſt das Lampenlicht erblickt, und noch im ſelben Jahre huldigte ihm Wien, damals die italieniſchеſte Stadt des deutſchen Bundes. Die doppelte Vergoldung, in welcher Beliſar ehedem durch Neuheit ſeiner Melodien und den Zauber italieniſcher Stimmen erglänzte, ſie hat ſich durch halbhundertjährigen Gebrauch gründlich abgerieben. Der Gesangſtil des "Belisar" iſt unſeren, nach ganz anderer Richtung ausgebildeten Sängern wildfremd geworden; ſie finden ſich ebenſo ſchwer darein, wie die Zuhörer. Nach wenigen Scenen glauben wir in dieſer Honigflut von Terzen= und Seytengängen zu ertrinken, in der Stickluft dieſes Triolen-Accompagnements zu verſchmachten. Wie Tannhäuser im Venusberg[1] lechzen wir "nach Bitterniſſen",[2] nach einigen contrapunktiſchen[3] Gifttropfen, nach rhythmiſchen Nadelſtichen und inſtrumentirten Brennneſſeln. Das charakteriſtiſche Element fehlt allerdings nicht ganz und gar. Weder Gibbon, noch Ranke oder Mommſen vermögen den tiefen Verfall des römiſchen Reiches ſo überzeugend zu ſchildern, wie es die unglaublichen Uniſono-Ehöre der Patres conscripti und die Militärbanda in der Oper "Belisar" thun.[4] Dieſe zählte niemals zu dem Beſten, was Donizettis fruchtbares und glänzendes Talent hervorgebracht hat. Von ſeinen liebenswürdigen, in Einem Guß hinſtrömenden komiſchen Opern ſehen wir ganz ab; das Kleeblatt: "Don Pasquale", "Liebestrank", "Regimentstochter" iſt mehr werth,[5] als ſein ganzer tragiſcher Cypreſſenwald.[6] Aber ſelbst unter Donizettis lyriſchen Tragödien ſteht "Belisar" nur in zweiter Reihe hinter "Lucia", "Lucrezia" und "La Favorita", die ihn an muſikaliſcher Erfindung wie an dramatiſcher Energie übertreffen.

Und dennoch florirte oder vegetirte[7] "Beliſar" auffallend lange gerade in Deutſchland, während er in Paris, ſchwerer Langweiligkeit angeklagt, bald für immer verbannt ward. Sogar in dem Liszt-Wagneriſchen Briefwechſel ſehen wir Beliſar auftauchen; mitten in ſeinem Rheingold-Enthuſiasmus meldet Liszt ſeinem Freunde die Aufführung der Donizetttiſchen Oper (1855) in Weimar. Er erhebt ſie ſogar zu unſerer Verwunderung über Aubers "abgeſchmackten Maurer und Schloſſer", was doch wohl nur begreifen kann, wer eine ſchlechte Tragödie für werthvoller[8] hält, als ein gutes Luftſpiel. Die Geſtalt des Beliſar belaß von jeher die beſondere Sympathie des deutſchen Publikums. In den vierziger Jahren gaſtirten Heldenſpieler mit Vorliebe in Schenks[9] "Belisar", einem Trauerſpiel von ſchwachen dramatiſchen Kern, aber mächtig aufgeblähtem Wortſchwall. Daneben glänzten die bedeutendſten Sänger, allen zuvor Piſchek,[10] in der Titerrolle von Donizettis Oper. Das Große, Heldenmäßige fehlt gänzlich in dieſer Muſik; sie findet hingegen für das Elegiſche in manchem entſcheidenden Moment einen rührenden Ausdruck. Und dies iſt offenbar diejenige Seite Beliſars, welche dem Publikum werthvoll geblieben iſt und auf die es immer wieder eingeht. Ein Held, der, von glühender Vaterlandsliebe erfüllt, dennoch ſchmählich angeklagt und hinausgeſtoßen wird, der noch im Elend der Verbannung mit allen Gedanken am Vaterlande hängt und deſſen Rettung mit ſeinem letzten Blute erkauft — kann es eine ſympathiſchere Gestalt, eine dankbarere Rolle geben? Wie viele Thränen[11] ſind ſchon dem geblendeten Beliſar geſtoſſen! Daß ihm auf Befehl ſeines undankbaren Herrn die Augen ausgeſtochen wurden und der blinde Greis in den Straßen Konſtantinopels ſein Brot erbetteln mußte, glauben heute noch von hundert Menſchen neunundneunzig. Es ist eine Fabel, die ihre ungeheure Verbreitung zumeiſt Marmontels[12] sentimentalem Roman "Belisaire" verdankt, einer jener angeblich "klassischen" Biographien, mit welchen man der Jungend das Franzöſiſchlernen zu verleiden pflegt. Dieſem legendariſchen Beliſar giebt[13] Donizetti lauter erſchütternde oder rührende Situationen; dazu eine ſangbare, praktiſch auf den Effect berechnete Muſik, die, an ſich farblos, dem Sänger Gelegenheit bietet, den pathetiſchen Inhalt ganz nach eigenem Ermeſſen zu ordnen und zu gliedern. Beſitzt der Sänger nebſt allen Vorzügen der Stimme und Geſangskunſt das ſchauſpieleriſche Talent, in flüchtig gezeichnete Erfolg auch heute noch ſicher. Unserem Wiener "Beliſar" gebrach[14] es an geiſtiger Ueberlegenheit und Würde; die Rolle ging ihm ganz in das Allgemeine des Bühnenmäßigen verloren. Aehnlich verhielt es ſich mit den übrigen Rollen, die nur richtige Eonturen ohne belebende, kräftige Farbe boten. Mit einer blos[15] ſorgfältigen, anſtändigen, ordentlichen Aufführung iſt eine ſo gänzlich vermitterte Oper nicht mehr zu retten. Es bedarf dazu genialer Stimmen, außerordentlicher Sänger, die ſich mit Wonne in dieſe abgeſtandenen Melodien stürzen. Und ſelbst dann, glaube ich, würde man heute nur dieſenGeſangskünſtlern, nicht aber der Donizettiſchen Muſik Dank wiſſen

---

[1] Il nome della mitologica montagna nelle cui caverne Tannhäuser trascorse un anno in adorazione della dea Venere.

[2] Allusione al Tannhäuser heiniano che abbandona Venere perché non sopporta più l'imperturbabile felicità di quel paradiso artificiale: «Ich schmachte nach Bitternissen» ("Io agogno l'amaritudine").

[3] Per *kontrapunktischen*.

[4] Per *tun*.

[5] Per *wert*.

[6] Per *Zypressenwald*.

[7] Per *florierte oder vegetierte*.

[8] Per *wertvoller*.

[9] Eduard von Schenk (1788-1841).

[10] Johann Baptist Pischek (1814-1873).

[11] Per *Tränen*.

[12] Jean-François Marmontel (1723-1799).

[13] Per *gibt*.

[14] Probabile errore di stampa per *gebracht*.

[15] Per *bloß*.

Maria Stuarda receives its first performance ever in New Zealand

Jeremy Commons

New Zealand is far removed from the operatic capitals of the world, and developments in specialised areas such as the 'Donizetti Renaissance' have scarcely begun to impinge here. Apart from an occasional production of *Lucia di Lammermoor* we have, within living memory, seen none of Donizetti's serious operas until last month. But then, on 10 and 18 August, Wellington was treated to two performances of *Maria Stuarda*. It was the first time the opera had ever been mounted in this country, and it enjoyed a veritable triumph.

This was all thanks to the initiative and drive of one singer, soprano Rhona Fraser. After training, a number of years ago now, at Victoria University of Wellington, she went to England to continue her studies and sang there successfully for several years. Then, however, she and her husband decided to return home and bring up their young family in New Zealand. Once back here she found herself, like many another returning singer, overlooked by the country's very few established companies, but then, nothing daunted, she decided to take matters into her own hands. In 2010, she began to mount small-scale but meticulously performed productions in her own seaside garden, a natural amphitheatre in itself. *The Marriage of Figaro* was given in the summer of 2010, *Il viaggio a Rheims* in 2011, and Handel's *Alcina* early this year. Then in August – midwinter in this country – she moved indoors, into Wellington's Catholic Cathedral, for *Maria Stuarda.*

All of these operas have necessarily been given in English with reduced orchestration, but to counterbalance this the very best of Wellington's up-and-coming young singers have been employed. And indeed this latest venture into Donizetti saw a further development, with the engagement of top-notch professional singers who rank among the best New Zealand has produced or who are resident in New Zealand.

Rhona Fraser herself sang Maria, bringing to the part both an extremely sympathetic personality and a clear, pure beauty of tone and sense of a legato Donizettian line. The Elisabetta was Lisa Harper-Brown, an Australian mezzo who has sung with Opera Australia and in various cities in Germany, and who has recently come to live in Wellington. Tall and willowy, she made a most elegant but also imperious Elisabetta, and sang with strong, firm and radiant tone. Leicester was interpreted by Ben Makisi, probably the best Donizettian and Verdian tenor in the country, while Paul Whelan, one of the finest baritones New Zealand has produced in recent years, was able to stop off on his way home to New York from an engagement with Opera Australia, to contribute all his international experience, his enormous voice and sense of style to the part of Talbot. The director was Sara Brodie, who in recent years has been bringing a most live-wire and inventive

imagination to productions in the Wellington region, and the conductor was Michael Vinten, one of the very few experienced operatic conductors working here.

The Catholic Cathedral was packed for both performances, and two highly-elated audiences lauded the performances long and enthusiastically. The pity of it – the only regret one wishes to voice – is that in a country as parochial as this, with each city a self-centred and self-satisfied entity unto itself, this very real achievement will have virtually no impact outside Wellington. The production deserved to be heard from one end of the country to the other. Instead it enjoyed only two performances, in a cathedral of limited capacity, here in the capital.



A cantata ritrovata

Our friend Mario Villani has kindly confirmed both the date and the place of the first performance of the cantata by Donizetti [See Newsletter 116 p26] '*Cantata per la partenza del Lugotenente Generale Marchese Ugo delle Favare*' the manuscript of which was recently discovered in the Conservatorio Library at Palermo. The necessary information is contained in an issue of *Teatri Arti e Letteratura* then called 'Cenni Storici intorno alle Lettere Invenzioni Arti Commercio e Spettacoli Teatrali' and printed in Bologna. Parte Terza - n° 69 - Giovedi 18 agosto 1825, page 175 reads:

PALERMO TEATRO CAROLINO

Li 25 Luglio

Prima che S.E. il Luogotenente Generale si fosse imbarcato per recarsi a Napoli, si trattenne al teatro di musica sino alle ore quattro d'Italia. In quella sera la rappresentazione solita fu preceduta da una Licenza appositamente scritta per la circostanza, ed in poche ore posta in musica dal maestro Donizzetti. Questo estemporaneo lavoro dal pubblico applaudito, ci ha dato il primo saggio de' suoi talenti e ci ha fatto conoscere in lui un professore colmo di genio, di estro, e di vivacità.

I tre attori che hanno avuto parte in quella Cantata, cioè la signora Ferron, ed i signori Winter, e Tamburini hanno concorso a renderla più gradita, abbenchè fosse mancato loro il tempo di poterla animare con un libero atteggiamento, tuttavia il signor Winter che ha dovuto agire sinora in opere buffe, ha fatto in questo incontro conoscere quanto meglio debba valere nelle interpretazioni serie, e per la forza della sua chiara voce, e per lo spirito che dà all'azione; come altresì il signor Tamburini ha mostrato di avere tanta dignità nelle parti gravi, quanta grazia ha sviluppata sinora nelle piacevoli, che ha sostenute.

In quella sera medesima la signora Ferron, malgrado gli ostacoli della sua non ancor ferma salute, si è fatta a sufficienza ammirare in un nuovo tema scelto e le sue variazioni nella farsa il Trionfo della Musica; ed essendosi in seguito, anche rappresentato un'atto del Matrimonio Segreto; abbiamo, in unica volta, veduta in scena quasi tutta la compagnia; rimanendo sempre più convinti, esser questa forse la sola, che presenti nella totalità de' soggetti gradevoli anche per le parti ultime, e meno interessanti.

Here is a rare and welcome glimpse of Donizetti's initial offering for a very challenging musical Palermo, a contemporary confirmation that this cantata was the very first music he wrote for that city. [The farsa "*Il Trionfo della musica*" was none other than Mayr's *Che originali* in the composite form it had assumed over the years which he had refurbished in a very great hurry for an ad hoc cast. Note especially "*un nuovo tema scelto e le sue variazioni*"!]

Donizetti at Milan and Venice

James Keolker

Youthful exuberance and masterful conducting brought sparkle and musical integrity to Donizetti's two comic masterworks, *Don Pasquale* and *L'elisir d'Amore* at Italy's foremost opera theatres this past summer, the Teatro alla Scala in Milan and the Teatro La Fenice in Venice.

Foremost at the Scala *Don Pasquale* production was the conducting of Enrique Mazzola (heard on July 4th), whose brisk pace kept his young cast on task while still allowing for this score's many nuances and instrumental shading. No stranger to Donizetti, this young Spanish conductor is known for his dynamic leadership elsewhere of *L'elisir, La Favorita, Lucia*, and the rarely heard, *Il duca d'Alba*. He was matched in almost every way by basso Nicola Alaimo as Pasquale, the troublesome septuagenarian who decides to marry in spite of forbidding his young nephew Ernesto to do the same. The 34-year old Alaimo, madeto be Falstaffian in girth, moved with magisterial poise, sang with plush tone, and wisely varied his scenes of bluff and bluster, articulating Felice Romani's witty text with affable ease. Alaimo is likewise no novice when it comes to Donizetti, having sung Belcore, Ashton in *Lucia*, Dr. Dulcamara, and recording the rarely produced *Belisario*. But the fulcrum of the comedy to bring old Pasquale to his senses, is Norina who is not only Ernesto's lover, but pretends to be Pasquale's "bride"as well. Soprano Ludmilla Bauerfeldt seemed to take glee in her double role, singing with consistently bright coloratura, first as Ernesto's lover and then as the vocally shy "Sofronia" fresh from the convent. She also projected Donizetti's important change of character when she slaps the old man in comic frustration, yet immediately recoils at what she has done (*È duretta la lezione, this lesson has gone too far*).

This moment of compassion is significant since it sets Donizetti's comedies apart from his contemporaries, most especially those of Rossini. Where Rossini's comic characters are delineated by a web of brilliant *fioriture*, Donizetti's characters take a compassionate turn, their music becoming softer, more filled with feeling. Young Miss Bauerfeldt and maestro Mazzola communicated this moment of change perfectly.The joke of the plot, however, is communicated by Pasquale's best friend and confidant, Dr. Malatesta. And while baritone Filippo Polinelli has had singing experience at La Scala and has appeared in televised opera, he was the weakest of the leading trio. He appeared far too young to be a credible intimate of old Pasquale. And while he possesses a strong voice, his delivery was too often hollow-sounding and his demeanor fussy to the point of distraction.

In contrast was the ardent lyricism of tenor Leonardo Cortellazzi as the put-upon nephew, Ernesto, who easily caught Donizetti's character in his every gesture and stance. Young Cortellazzi is a natural *leggiere*, phrasing beautifullyin the *legato* passages, and in this performance, artfully blending with Norina in their romantic garden duet (*Tornami a dir che m'ami, Tell me once again that you love me*), which brought much earned and prolonged applause. Isabella Bywater's production was set in a three-tier doll house, which added comic point by showing the many activities of Pasquale's obviously underpaid and dour servants. However, Jvan Morandi's lighting was so flat the audience often didn't know to which room to direct its attention, and the garden scene lacked any kind of leafy romance. Stage veteran Jonathan Miller directed this Accademia alla Scala production and Alfonso Caiani supervised the very fine and active chorus.

Conducting and stellar singing were likewise the features of a delightful *L'elisir d'Amore* at the Teatro La Fenice (heard on July 11th). Maestro Omer Meir Wellber led a strong quartet of young singers, most notably soprano Desirée Rancatore as Adina, the rich little farm girl; tenor Celso Albelo as Nemorino, the impoverished lad who loves her; baritone Alessandro Luongo as his military rival, Belcore; and bass Bruno de Simone as Dottore Dulcamara, whose cheap wine just might solve all their problems. The simple setting (in contrast to the gilded splendor of the rebuilt Fenice) was a series of mezzo-tint hangings: a tree, a church, and for Dulcamara's "carriage" an expanse of circus canvas. The popular Mr. Albelo sang his part almost to a fault (Nemorino in Italian means *little nobody*), shamelessly crooning his shy attraction to Norina. Meanwhile Rancatore's Adina (which means *my little weakness* in Italian) tried herbest to encourage him, her multiple notes often flung in flurries of frustration. And then came Sergeant Belcore, *(Sergeant Good Heart* in Italian), and the plot's comic rivalry took shape. Mr. Luongo proudly purred Belcore's opening aria, *Come Paridevezzoso* (*As the gallant Paris gave away the apple...*), his baritone rich with insinuation toward Adina as his troops strutted to Donizetti's amusing little march. Not to be outdone, Mr. Albelo's singing responded with love, longing, and potent pleading.

But Donizetti is a master craftsman, and he knows just how long to keep his characters in conflict before adding yet another element, in this case, the arrival of the flamboyant itinerant salesman, "Doctor" Dulcamara (*Dr. Bittersweet* in Italian). It was here de Simone released his considerably opulent baritone, grandlysinging one of the most beloved patter songs in all of opera buffa, *Udite, udite, o rustici* (*Listen up, listen up,you rustic ones*), a glorious catalog of aches and ills that can only be remedied by buying his *elisir* of cheap wine. De Simone

sang with Donizetti's requisite *velocissimamente*, that is, with rapidity, clarity, and great gusto, instantly winning over not only Adina, Nemorino, and the villagers, but his audience as well. Meanwhile Adina decided to force Nemorino into action by agreeing to marry Belcore, and Donizetti's moment of sentiment comes to the fore with
Nemorino's *Adina credimi* (*Adina, wait a while*), a passage of plaintive beauty made indelible by Maestro Wellber's highlighting the soft, downward cast of the horns. This is but prelude, however, to Nemorino's later *Una furtiva lagrime* (*One furtive tear*), one of the most endearing of all tenor arias and Donizetti's plea for compassion. Mr. Albelo sang passionately, giving value to every *rubato,* every *diminuendo*, every ravishing *pianissimo* and *filo di voce* that Donizetti so carefully sets out for his singer. The audience responded in kind, and while the Italians shouted out *Bis!* (*Encore!*), Mr. Albelo kept his rendition as a solitary moment to be cherished. Meanwhile Nemorino enlists with Belcore for money with which to buy the vaunted elixir. But when Adina finds out, she buys his contract back, as sure a sign of love as one can find in a comic opera. Her ensuing duet with Dulcamara (*Una tenera occhiatina, With a tender look I'll charm him*) was a classic, marred only by this singer's persistent shaking of curls and stamping of feet, evidently not yet secure in trusting Donizetti's music to make her point. (Likewise her habit of hiking her skirts to show her underthings, something Donizetti perhaps would have enjoyed but not condoned in 1832!) But all ends happily, as the *elisir* proves to be just the placebo thateveryone needs: Nemorino with his Little Weakness, Belcore with the village girls, and Dulcamara off again to sell his wares, much to the audience's delight.

Sets and costumes were by Gianmaurizio Fercioni, the dimensional lighting by Vilmo Furian, and the comic movement by Barbara Pessina. Claudio Marino Moretti was in charge of the excellent, incisive chorus. Venetian director Bepi Morassi added a number of theatrical touches: flyers came cascading over the audience advertising Dulcamara's elixir, Belcore's comic cannon exploded with such vigor it quickly quelled the cowering chorus, and a stage full of village washwomen synchronized their scrubbing to Donizetti's jaunty tunes.

In summary, despite today's many instances where opera is often demeaned and frequently diminished, it is refreshing to witness somewhere in the world, most especially in Italy, where Donizetti's masterworks are still being given life, love, and youth.

Dr. James Keolker is a professor of Opera Studies at the Fromm Institute at the University of San Francisco, USA.

UN PO' DI LUCE SU TEODORO GHEZZI

Mario Villani

Bergamo Alta. Scendendo lungo via Arena, appena oltrepassata l'entrata della Basilica di Santa Maria Maggiore, il vecchio acciottolato della strada conduce il turista interessato ad un ampio portone, sulla destra. Varcandolo, dopo un piccolo cortiletto, due rampe di scale conducono alle sale del Museo donizettiano. In ogni bacheca un cimelio: una lettera, una partitura, un libretto, un ritratto, un oggetto che riporta alla luce ed al ricordo la vita intensa ed attiva di uno dei più grandi geni dell'arte musicale di ogni tempo. Ritratti dei cantanti che, lui vivo, hanno portato sulle scene le sue opere e fra essi i più noti ed apprezzati artisti dell'epoca. Strumenti musicali, abiti, decorazioni. Ogni cosa lascia un vivo e commovente ricordo del grande bergamasco. La piccola sala in fondo è forse quella che conserva i più intimi e dolorosi ricordi di Gaetano. Non solo il pianoforte sul quale compose moltissime delle sue opere più note (con inciso il testo della lettera, scritta al cognato Toto con la quale, donandogli quel prezioso oggetto, gli chiede di non venderlo per qualunque prezzo: "Dal 1822 l'ho nelle orecchie...Vissi con quello l'età della speranza, la vita coniugale, la solinga...Tutti ci ha visti, conosciuti, tutti l'abbiamo tormentato, a tutti fu compagno e lo sia eternamente alla figlia tua qual dote di mille pensieri tristi e gai."), ma anche il letto che raccolse l'ultimo respiro del musicista e quella poltrona, già in casa Rota-Basoni, dove Donizetti trascorse le sue ultime ore, travolto da quel male inesorabile che ne aveva spento da tempo l'intelletto ed il genio creativo. Un piccolo supporto serviva al povero malato per sorreggere il capo che, ormai, non riusciva più a mantenersi eretto. Quanta tristezza! Alle pareti vari quadri. Davanti ad uno, in particolare, mi fermo sempre a lungo, ad ogni mia visita.

Un ritratto di donna, Virginia Vasselli, amatissima sposa del Maestro, che lo precedette nella tomba, neppure ventinovenne, nel 1837, in una Napoli assediata dal colera. Il dipinto la ritrae poco dopo il loro matrimonio. Virginia è quindi poco più che ventenne; il bel viso incorniciato da boccoli di capelli scuri che si arricciano e le ricadono ai lati del volto. Le labbra atteggiate ad un dolce sorriso. Il vestito, elegante, le lascia scoperte le spalle e fa risaltare la bellezza della figura.

E' il ritratto che Gaetano inviò ai suoi genitori per far loro conoscere, almeno in pittura, la sua donna ed il suo ideale femminile. Certo, di persona, i suoceri non conobbero mai la loro nuora. Il viaggio di Andrea Donizetti e Domenica Nava da Bergamo a Napoli, più volte auspicato da Gaetano, pare non abbia mai avuto luogo. La fotografia, a quei tempi, muoveva timidi passi e per arrivare ai primi dagherrotipi erano necessari ancora più o meno dieci anni. A quell'epoca Virginia era già morta e solo questo ritratto e pochi altri ne fissano le sembianze.

Chi dipinse quel quadro? Teodoro Ghezzi.

Teodoro fu uno degli amici più intimi di Donizetti. Gaetano, in virtù del suo carattere e della sua professione, aveva amici ovunque e fra tutti i ceti sociali: dall'oste Bettinelli, che nella natia Bergamo, gli preparava polenta e osei all'Osteria "I Tre Gobbi", all'Imperatore d'Austria, dal Principe di Metternich e Ferdinando II di Borbone, Re delle Due Sicilie, a qualche popolano bergamasco o napoletano che, magari, incontrandolo per strada, in Contrada di San Cassiano o in Strada Nardones, si levava il cappello a salutare..."il Maestro". A Napoli Donizetti aveva moltissimi amici: oltre a Teodoro Ghezzi, Aniello Benevento, Salvatore Sarmiento, Tommaso Persico, Federico Raffaele, Lorenzo Zino ed altri ancora, forse meno intimi, come Montuori, Bidera, Martino, Rubino, Mira, Marra. Essi compaiono spesso nelle lettere di Gaetano, ai quali egli invia regolarmente i suoi saluti.

L'Architetto Carlo Moscarino ha molto opportunamente messo a disposizione degli studiosi e degli appassionati la sua raccolta, di inestimabile valore storico, di lettere di Donizetti e di altri personaggi a lui intimamente legati: il cognato Antonio Vasselli e molti degli amici napoletani del Maestro. Il volume che raccoglie questo prezioso materiale si intitola: *"Caro Aniello – I Carteggi donizettiani del Fondo Moscarino (1836 – 1847)"* ed è stato pubblicato nel 2008

Dalla Fondazione Donizetti. Esso fornisce molte informazioni, in gran parte inedite, sull'ultimo periodo della vita e della malattia di Donizetti e sulle azioni che gli amici del compositore misero in atto in conseguenza di questa penosa situazione. Certo l'amicizia, come forse tutti i sentimenti umani, era a quei tempi più profonda e sentita di adesso. Questa odierna società "vorticosa", che ci trascina e ci obbliga a modi e tempi di vita che di umano hanno ben poco, si è un po' portata via il senso degli affetti sinceri e disinteressati che, forse, si cementano e rafforzano maggiormente nelle difficoltà e nella sofferenza. Basta ricordare come gli amici di Donizetti si strinsero compatti attorno a lui, per sostenerlo e forse per impedire alla sua mente sconvolta gesti estremi, quando, con la morte di Virginia, la sua stabilità mentale sembrava compromessa. L'arte poi lo salvò, prima dell'ultima battaglia con la malattia. Battaglia, allora, impossibile da vincere.

Molti degli amici di Donizetti (almeno quelli più intimi) ci sono, in qualche modo, noti. Forse il più sconosciuto di tutti è stato proprio Teodoro Ghezzi, l'autore del quadro di Virginia. Cosa strana a dirsi, poiché il Ghezzi fu artista di non trascurabile talento e forse la storia avrebbe potuto darci di lui qualche informazione in più, in considerazione di questo fatto.

Il Dizionario illustrato dei pittori, disegnatori e incisori italiani moderni e contemporanei di A.M. Comanducci – 3a edizione – 1962, volume secondo, pagina 835, gli dedica solo queste poche ed in parte inesatte parole:

"GHEZZI TEODORO Pittore napoletano, attivo in Napoli nel primo Ottocento. Amicissimo dei coniugi Donizetti-Vanelli (sic) durante il soggiorno (1828-1838) là della famiglia del grande musicista, si recò poi a Parigi per lui e si adoperò, con l'aiuto della contessa di Löwenstein, per il rilascio dalla casa di cura del demente e per il suo trasferimento a Bergamo (ove morì nell'aprile 1848)". Nomi e date errati e nessun riferimento all'attività artistica di Ghezzi che, a leggere quanto sopra, sembrerebbe essere morto lui nel 1848, anziché Donizetti. Cosa del tutto fuorviante ed inesatta, come vedremo.

Dice molto di più l'amico Francesco Cento, artista e studioso, oltre che appassionato e competente donizettiano, che nel suo Dizionario dedicato al grande bergamasco intitolato: *"Poiché cantar vi alletta – Dizionario donizettiano"* (opera documentata e di ampio respiro, al momento inedita, ma spero ancora per poco), alla voce Ghezzi Teodoro, cita le seguenti opere conosciute del pittore: un olio del 1841: Donne che dissetano due pellegrini (Milano, Coll. Privata) e la realizzazione di due tavole: Pescivendolo e Venditrice di acqua sulfurea, per i due volumi *"Usi e Costumi di Napoli e contorni descritti e dipinti"*, opera di Francesco De Bourcard, edita a Napoli nel 1858.

Ma quali erano, fino a questo momento, le informazioni in nostro possesso su Teodoro Ghezzi? Oltre alle summenzionate opere pittoriche ed alle lettere citate nel volume della raccolta Moscarino, l'epistolario di Guido Zavadini riporta una postilla di Ghezzi ad una delle lettere più strazianti di Gaetano, scritta al cognato immediatamente dopo la morte di Virginia, in cui l'amico, presente al luttuoso evento, ricorda gli ultimi istanti di vita dell'amatissima compagna di Donizetti.Il 7 marzo 1860 il giornale napoletano l'Omnibus pubblicò un articolo di Ghezzi, intitolato "Seguito de' ricordi su Donizetti", con alcune notizie biografiche del compositore. Il titolo presupporrebbe l'esistenza di una prima parte ma, da un mio controllo forse troppo frettoloso, non mi è riuscito di reperirla (nell'eventualità sia stata effettivamente pubblicata). E' possibile che qualche Chiesa di Napoli od altra collezione privata conservi ulteriori sue produzioni artistiche. Una più approfondita ricerca in loco potrebbe far rinvenire contratti per opere a lui commissionate o ricevute di pagamenti delle stesse.

Parlando con l'amico Fulvio Stefano Lo Presti il nome di Ghezzi è comparso spesso, così come il condiviso desiderio di conoscerlo meglio. Ho intrapreso quindi una piccola ricerca, utilizzando, per ora, solo il computer e con l'ausilio di molte persone gentili e collaborative (che doverosamente citerò alla fine di questo piccolo contributo), adesso possiamo dire che, finalmente, Teodoro Ghezzi sta uscendo dall'anonimato, poiché siamo venuti in possesso di alcune notizie precise su di lui, sulla base di documenti ufficiali.

Innanzitutto "*Gli Annali Civili del Regno delle Due Sicilie – Volume II – Maggio Giugno Luglio ed Agosto 1833*", in nota ai "Dialoghi sopra alcune opere di Pittura, Scultura, Architettura ed Intaglio messe in mostra nel Real Museo Borbonico il dì 30 di maggio dell'anno 1833", citano a pagina 58: "Meritarono nella pubblica concorrenza dell'anno 1833 (omissis)...Le Medaglie di argento di seconda classe: Per le opere – Di pittura di figura, di paese, di genere e di disegno.

I Signori:... Teodoro Ghezzi..." (ometto il lungo elenco degli altri premiati).

A meno che non si tratti di un caso di omonimia è possibile che Ghezzi si sia dedicato anche ad attività alternative alla pittura. Infatti *"Lo stabilimento tip. dei classici italiani"*, nel 1859 pubblicò: *"Maurizio di Treuil – Romanzo di Amedeo Achard; prima versione dal francese di Teodoro Ghezzi"*.

Ghezzi compare anche nel carteggio di Verdi con Salvatore Cammarano, nell'anno 1850. Verdi si rammarica per una lettera che si diceva gli era stata consegnata da Ghezzi, con la preghiera venisse da Verdi stesso recapitata al segretario dell'editore Lucca. Verdi però conferma di non aver mai conosciuto Ghezzi di persona e s'infervora al solo pensiero di non aver adempiuto ad una commissione richiestagli, anche se così...nebulosa. Cosa impensabile per lui! Ad onor del vero, Ghezzi non era responsabile del "pasticcio" poiché, come confermato da Cammarano a Verdi, Teodoro, non avendo trovato alcuno che lo presentasse al compositore di Busseto, all'albergo napoletano ove questi alloggiava, aveva consegnato la lettera al cameriere che... si era scordato di portarla a Verdi che, quindi, non l'aveva mai vista. Incolpevole Teodoro!

Cammarano dà, nello stesso anno, in una sua lettera a Ricordi, indicazioni sulla partitura del Poliuto e del dono che Donizetti fece della stessa al nostro Ghezzi.

Ma quando nacque Teodoro e dove? Quando morì? Era napoletano?

Il certificato di morte, conservato presso il Comune di Napoli, toglie i punti interrogativi a tutte queste domande. Prima di trascriverlo dirò che il cognome Ghezzi non risulta essere di provenienza napoletana. *Il Dizionario dei cognomi italiani di Emidio De Felice* cita: "Ghezzi è un cognome diffuso in Lombardia, in particolare a Milano, con ceppi in Toscana, Emilia Romagna, Trentino e Lazio". E ancora: "Durante il medioevo, quando in una schiatta nascevano due o più capostipiti il cognome trasformava al plurale. Così Ghezzo diventa Ghezzi. Ghezzo nasce da un antico soprannome per indicare un egiziano o persona dalla pelle scura, nericcio come un egiziano. Dal greco Aigyptios dal latino Aegyptius = egizio. Egizio, Eghizio, Ghizio, Ghezio, Ghezzo, Ghezzi". Consideriamo comunque che a quei tempi Napoli era una delle città più popolose d'Europa ed un fulcro culturale per l'Italia dell'epoca. Indubbiamente deve aver rivestito un'attrazione particolare per moltissime persone, provenienti da altre zone d'Italia, che vi si recavano per lavoro, per cercar fortuna, per iniziare un'attività artistica. Nel solo campo musicale moltissimi compositori famosi, non napoletani, studiarono nei suoi Conservatori, come Bellini, o vi si stabilirono a lungo, come lo stesso Donizetti.

Ma ecco il testo dell'atto di morte del nostro Teodoro. Esso risulta registrato al Numero d'ordine 912 con l'indicazione del defunto: "Ghezzi Teodoro dico Ghezzi Teodoro" (Il funzionario voleva essere ben sicuro!). E' redatto su modulo prestampato per il testo fisso stabilito dalla procedura e completato manualmente dal funzionario incaricato:

"L'anno milleottocentottantuno, addì due di Novembre, a ore pomeridiane una e minuti....., nella Casa Comunale.

Avanti di me Cavalier Errico Guida vice Sindaco Aggiunto e per delegazione del Sindaco del nove Dicembre milleottocentosettantanove Uffiziale dello Stato Civile del Comune di Napoli quartiere Pendino, sono comparsi Cesare Ghezzi, di anni ventiquattro impiegato, domiciliato in Napoli, e Giuseppe Togna, di anni trentadue, tartarugaro, domiciliato in Napoli, i quali mi hanno dichiarato che a ore antimeridiane tre e minuti..... di oggi, nella casa posta in vico di S. Vito a' Bottonari al numero diciotto, è morto Teodoro Ghezzi, di anni settantacinque, Professore di belle arti, residente in Napoli,

nato in Napoli, dal fu Antonio, domiciliato in vita a Napoli, e dalla fu Raffaela Pone, domiciliata in vita a Napoli, celibe.

A quest'atto sono stati presenti quali testimoni Luigi Togna, di anni trentaquattro commerciante ed Angelo Silvestro, di anni cinquantatre tartarugaro, ambi residenti in questo Comune. Letto il presente atto a tutti gl'intervenuti, l'hanno meco sottoscritto meno Silvestro perché analfabeta".

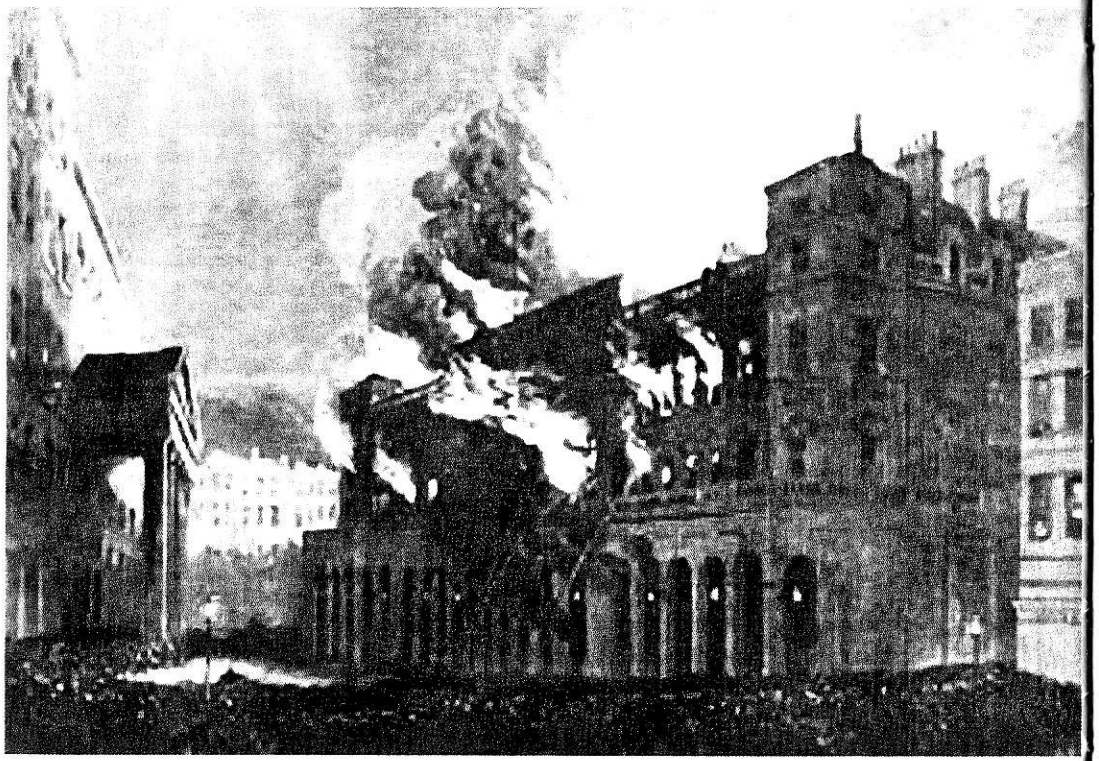
Seguono le firme di Cesare Ghezzi, Giuseppe e Luigi Togna e del funzionario Errico Guida. Ecco finalmente i dati che cercavamo e che forniscono preziose indicazioni sul buon Teodoro: alla luce di quanto sopra egli risulta nato a Napoli nel 1806, avendo 75 anni al momento della morte. Non essendosi sposato, il Cesare Ghezzi, presente alla redazione dell'atto, potrebbe essere un nipote.

E' curioso notare la professione di alcuni dei testimoni: tartarugaro. Come, molto opportunamente, mi ha fatto notare l'amico Fulvio Stefano Lo Presti, tale attività non va intesa come appartenente a persona che alleva o vende tartarughe, ma ad un artigiano che lavorava i gusci di tartaruga per ricavarne spazzole, pettini ed altri oggetti simili. Ennesimo esempio della versatilità del popolo partenopeo, dote così utile per inventarsi le attività più diverse per campare, in una realtà quotidiana spesso difficile da gestire.

Come ho ricordato all'inizio, sono certo che ulteriori indagini, necessariamente da condursi in loco, potranno sicuramente condurre al reperimento di altri documenti e di ulteriori notizie su Ghezzi, sulla sua vita ed attività artistica. Ma, almeno, un primo passo per toglierlo dall'oblio è stato fatto. Un altro tassello dell'immenso mosaico donizettiano è stato recuperato. Spero di poter dire: il seguito alla prossima puntata.

Infine mi è doveroso ricordare qui tutte le persone che hanno reso fruttuosa questa ricerca: in particolare i funzionari dell'Archivio di Stato di Napoli, Dott. Ferdinando Salemme e il Direttore Dott.ssa Imma Ascione, che mi hanno fornito preziose indicazioni sul modo più corretto ove indirizzare la mia ricerca, i Dott. Giacomo Di Palo e Vincenzo Barile, Esecutori Amministrativi del Servizio di Stato Civile del Comune di Napoli, che mi hanno favorito con la copia del tanto ricercato atto di morte di Teodoro. Un grazie particolare all'Architetto Alfonso Ghezzi (che non è un discendente di Teodoro), Dirigente della II Municipalità di Napoli, della quale fa parte il quartiere di Pendino il quale, molto gentilmente, si è trasformato per me in perito calligrafo, identificando il nome corretto della via in cui è morto Ghezzi, di difficile traduzione. Il toponimo corretto risulta quindi: S. Vito a' Bottonari – vico 2°. Esso risulta inserito nell'elenco della parrocchia di San Giovanni in Corte - anno 1859. Quartiere di Pendino. A Pendino molte vie e vicoli erano intitolati a professioni. Il Celano nel suo *"Delle notizie del bello, dell'antico e del curioso della città di Napoli"* scrive: "...a destra vedesi la strada già detta dell'Armieri, al dirimpetto la strada che va alla chiesa di San Vito detta de' Bottonari, perché in questo luogo si vendono i bottoni". Anche questa zona di Napoli è rientrata, a fine Ottocento, nel programma di risanamento edilizio che ha interessato varie zone della città ed è stata pesantemente colpita dai bombardamenti del secondo conflitto mondiale.

Un grazie infine al carissimo amico Fulvio Stefano Lo Presti, al quale dedico questo modesto contributo. Devo certo a lui la curiosità di scoprire qualcosa di più su Teodoro Ghezzi. Spero di esserci, almeno in parte, riuscito.



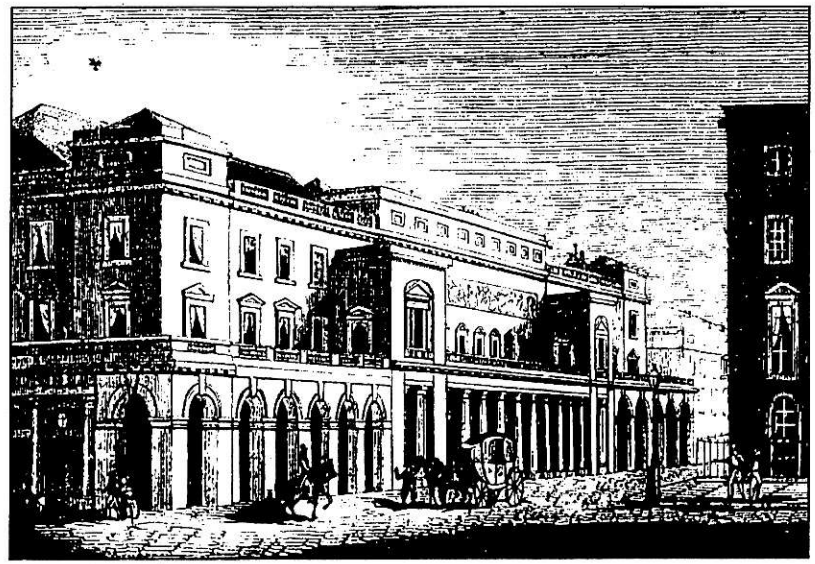
Past, Present and Proposed No.15

Pip Clayton

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

The Second Theatre part 3

The second theatre had opened in 1791 and by 1818 with the completion of the colonnade around three sides of the building and the Royal Arcade on the fourth side the King's Theatre did look a most impressive edifice. (**illustration 1. 1843.**)



However when researching these articles I became very aware of all the changes and rebuilding that took place. As early as 1825 one of the external walls was in a parlous state and near to collapse and had to be demolished. Digging down to strengthen the foundations, the original foundation stone for the Queen's Theatre of 1704 was discovered. Perhaps the biggest change was in the auditorium, in 1809 the boxes and the proscenium arch were radically altered and then again in 1825, not satisfied with this arrangement it was all demolished and completely rebuilt at a later date. The forward thrust stage also saw change by being altered to a straight frontage behind the proscenium arch or a curved edge in front of it. The area backstage must have been a nightmare for artists and stage-hands. The management built a large room as a Green Room not for the artists but for subscribers to meet and hold a social gathering. The principal singers and première danseurs demanded private dressing rooms while the chorus and corps de ballet were left to dress and undress in whatever private space they could find. There were one hundred stage hands to operate the machinery for scene changes and effects. In 1850 over one hundred extra stage hands were recruited to handle the sets and transformation effects in Halevy's *La Tempesta*. The auditorium had to be cleaned and repainted regularly due to the tallow candles, patrons

complained of wax dripping on their clothes and gas jets were installed and patrons complained of the hiss from them A gas chandelier hung from the dome and at one time all three forms were in use at the same time. Both audience and performers had to contend with the young men of fashion who had more money than sense who paraded in Fop's Alley. This was a central aisle that run from the back of the Pit up to the orchestra rail and throughout the performance they talked to one another, greeted friends even waved handkerchiefs at those in other parts of the house. But by 1860 Fop's Alley was finally done away with. As for the posh lot they drew the curtains of their box played cards, gossiped or took tea served by their servants until it was time to open the curtains and listen to the latest star singer or to admire the curves of the young dancers.

New Management

Lord Ward, the Earl of Dudley after ousting Benjamin Lumley in 1858 had closed Her Majesty's and did not reopen the theatre until 1860 when he leased the theatre to a Mr E.T. Smith who was then the lessee of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane. He also owned the Alhambra Theatre in Leicester Square, the Cremorne Gardens in Chelsea and various restaurants, a shrewd business man but was not interested in opera and engaged John Mapleson to manage the theatre. Smith had an eye for making money and he advertised in the Press that after the first World Title fight the two boxers would be seen at the theatre the following evening. The fight which was bare knuckled and illegal took place between the Englishman Tom Sayers and the American John C. Heenan just after dawn on the 17th April 1860 at a secret location somewhere in the country. **(see illustration by Currier & Ives.)** It might have been illegal but in the crowd of spectators was Charles Dickens, William Makepeace Thackery, Lord Palmerston the Prime Minister, and the nineteen year old Prince of Wales. The two bruised and battered pugilists were seen in a box the following evening drinking Brandy and Champagne but they left after the first act. Because Smith put all the proceeds from his different venues into one bank account no accurate tally could be made as to what money belonged where. Mr Smith's tenancy came to an abrupt end when he accepted a bribe of £4000 from the management of Covent Garden not to give a season at Her Majesty's in the year 1861



Enter now the second person who had a profound impact on opera in England during these early years. This was John Henry Mapleson and unlike Benjamin Lumley there is a lot of information about him which is available to the public, so just a brief description of his career and influence in the world of opera during the second half of the nineteenth century, not only in London and the provinces but also in America. He was born in May 1830 and at the age of

fourteen he became a student at the Royal Academy of Music where he studied the violin and piano. In the 1848 and 49 seasons he played in the
orchestra at Her Majesty's. In the autumn of 1849 he organized his first group of musicians which included Henrietta Sontag, Enrico Calzolari, Luigi Lablache and the pianist Sigismund Thalberg to tour the provinces. After a concert at Salisbury they visited Stonehenge where in the light of the moon Sontag sang *Casta Diva.* For the next three years he went to Milan to study singing with Alberto Mazzucato at the Conservatorio. Returning to England in 1854 he appeared at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane in Auber's Masaniello. He was a failure, the Morning Post had this say, *The cast was excellent, with the exception of Mr Mapleson, a young gentleman who undertook with considerable imprudence the part of Alphonso. We have rarely met with a person so thoroughly inexperienced in the ways of the stage and venturing a character of importance.* Two years later he opened an agency in the Haymarket engaging artists for both Lumley at Her Majesty's Theatre and Frederick Gye at Covent Garden. In 1858/59 he managed Mr Smith's opera seasons at Drury Lane and then the last one in 1860 at Her Majesty's. He must have felt certain of his ability to run an opera house as in 1861 he took the Lyceum Theatre for his first season as an independent manager. The first opera to be given was *Il Trovatore* on June 8th followed on the second night by *Lucrezia Borgia*. But the biggest test was the English premiere of Verdi's newest opera *Un ballo in maschera* on the 15th. The artists in that first season season included Therese Tietjens, sop., Maria Alboni, con., Antonio Giuglini, ten., Enrico delle Sedie and Edouard Gassier, baritones. Other operas heard were *Norma* and *Les Hugenots*, the season closing on July 6 with a loss of £1.800. Mapleson had thrown down the gauntlet with a vengeance, the management at Covent Garden took notice and the infamous Gye - Mapleson rivalry began.

Early in 1862 he obtained a lease for Her Majesty's Theatre for twenty-one years from Lord Dudley with a deposit of £4000 on the understanding this was a deposit to remain as security for the rent during his tenancy. Lord Dudley thought otherwise and demanded a further £4000 to be paid before he could enter the theatre. This extra amount was borrowed from a friend, a Mr Mitchell. (In all my research this is the only mention of a Mr Mitchell that I have come across. But I think it may be John Mitchell who run a theatrical agency who together with a Mr Ashton started the oldest theatre ticket agency in London until its closure in 1982.) There was no new opera in that first season, which opened April 26 with *Un ballo in maschera* followed by *Semiramide* on May 1. Another singer whose name has rung down over the years joined the company, this was the French mezzo-soprano Zélia Trebelli who made her London debut as Maffio Orsini in Donizetti's *Lucrezia Borgia* on May 6. A revival of *Robert le Diable* with new scenery and costumes was produced on June 14, but a promised revival of Weber's romantic opera *Oberon* did not. But an oddity was given on May 24, this was Verdi's cantata, *Inno dei Nazioni* composed for the opening of the 1862 Exhibition but had been rejected by the Royal Commissioners (and Michele Costa). It is for chorus and a tenor solo written specifically for Enrico Tamberlik, who was then singing at Covent Garden. Gye refused to release Tamberlik to sing at Her Majesty's and as Verdi was in London the score was altered to suit Tietjen's voice. Its première followed a performance of *Il barbiere di Siviglia,* all the company of singers sang in the chorus and the whole cantata had to be repeated. There were five further performances.

. The Gye - Mapleson Rivalry and the Year of Faust

That petty refusal by Gye was not the first time he had sabotaged Mapleson's plans. In 1861 Mapleson had heard a young singer and decided to engage her for his season at the Lyceum. She arrived in London together with her brother-in-law Maurice Strakosch who acted as her manager earlier than expected while Mapleson was still on the continent. But before the

contract prepared by Mapleson could be signed, Gye had loaned Strakosch £50 for which he asked for a signed receipt. When Mapleson returned Straosch told him that he had borrowed £50 and on looking at the so called receipt it turned out to be a contract for Adelina Patti to sing exclusively at Covent Garden. An attempt to break the contract was unsuccessful and Patti became the main singer at that opera house apart from a couple of seasons, until 1885. Many years later on inspection it was found that contract was invalid as at the time of signing she was underage. The following year Gye attempted to lure Thérèse Tietjen's away from Mapleson by giving her a contract to sign with where the amount she would receive conspicuously blank. She had carte blanche to fill in whatever sum she liked. Tietjen's replied 'I have given my promise to Mr Mapleson, which is better than all contracts'.

And so we come to 1863 the year of *Faust*. Gounod's opera had premiered in Paris at the Théatre Lyrique in 1859. Mr Gye had gone to Paris to see it and it made no impression him, in fact he said there was nothing in the music except the "Chorus of Soldiers." The music had been bought by Frank Chappell on behalf of his brother Thomas the English music publisher from Choudens the Parisian publisher for the little sum of 1,000 francs (about £40). Mr Mapleson also went to Paris and felt convinced it would be a great success in London but then found that Chappell's had approached Gye for a production at Covent Garden which after a little consideration he refused. Chappell's now offered Mapleson the right to give *Faust*, even offering £200 towards the production costs. Mapleson went back to Paris and purchased the score from M. Choudens, together with the orchestral parts and the rights of performance for the opera. He also visited Gounod who agreed to come to London and superintend the production. Back in London arrangements were put in hand: Tietjens was to sing Marguerite; Antonio Giuglini the title role; Zelia Trebelli was to be Siebel; the French bass-baritone Edouard Gassier Méphistophéles and the English baritone Charles Santley was to take the role of Valentine. In the meantime Gye had been busy explaining widely how he had turned such a "poor opera" down. As a result only a few seats had been sold before the opening night. When Mapleson asked the box-office staff how sales had been, he was told there was "no demand and only a few seats sold". He then had a brilliant idea. The opera would be given four nights in a row and that for the first three no more tickets were to be sold, if any one wanted a ticket they were to be told it was sold out and if they asked for the next performance that also was sold out. What happened of course is that word got around and the public started to buy tickets for later performances. Mapleson took the tickets for the three performances and distributed them far and wide around the suburbs. He also took the ticket agencies into the plot and placed advertisements in The Times of tickets "returned for sale". The first performance was on June 11 but not to a full house and at the end was well applauded but not with much enthusiasm. By the fourth night the house was packed and the demand was so great that it was given for a further six nights in succession.

So successful was *Faust* as a result of this ploy with both the press and the public that Mr Gye had second-thoughts and decided to produce it at once, it opened at Covent Garden on July 2 with Marie Miolan-Carvalho (creator of the role) as Marguerite and with Tamberlik in the title role. It had six performances before the close of the season on Auugust 1. Not content with the result Gye now attempted to obtain payment of £800 for each performance given at Her Majesty' Theatre and also of those given in the provinces during 1863 and 1864. Mapleson refused and Mr Gye brought an action against him.

The hearing was finally ended when it was found that, owing to some error in regard to registration, no exclusive rights of performance could be secured for *Faust* in England by anyone. The only loser was Gounod as he received no royalties. These productions created discussion and arguments as to their merits, at Her Majesty's the prayers of Marguerite take place *outside* the Cathedral and is followed by the death of Valentine and at the finale Faust is saved, whereas at Covent Garden the original order is restored. An argument for and

against still takes place today. In January 1864 during the winter season at Her Majesty's *Faust* was given in English and the tenor Sims Reeves took over the role of Faust while Charles Santley as Valentine had the new cavatina, 'E'en the bravest heart' to sing.

The main season of 1864 opened on April 9 with Rigoletto, ten days later Giuseppe Garibaldi the Italian patriot was in London as the guest of the Duke and Duchess of Sutherland and was among the audience to hear Tietjens as *Lucrezia Borgia*. Two operas had their London premiers in this season the first on May 3 was Nicolai's *Merry Wives of Windsor* given as *Falstaff* with Tietjens as Mrs Page, the second was Gounod's *Mireille* on July 5.

In 1865 a number of structual changes were made to the auditorium, the number of private boxes was

reduced and the remainder were enlarged, also the proscenium boxes were removed and the drop curtain advanced by about sixteen feet thus enlarging the stage area. Only one new opera was presented in this season, Cherubini's *Medée* with of course Tietjens in the title role. Among the new artists who were making their debut in London that year were Ilma di Murska as Lucia di Lammermoor on May 11 and a Signor Foli as Saint-Bris in *Les Huguenots* and Second priest in *Il flauto magico*. (This young Irish bass, real name Alan James Foley soon became a favourite and during his time in London and sang over sixty different roles at Her Majesty's, Covent Garden and Drury Lane). Just before the close of the season Mr Gye struck again. He had leaflets printed and they were placed on every seat which read as follows, (note how he has the audacity to promote his own name but gives the Earl a minor role)

Mr Gye has the honour to announce he has transferred the proprietorship of The Royal Italian Opera, Covent Garden to a Public Company.
Mr Gye will occupy the position of General Manager.
The Company has now made arrangements for purchasing of The Right Hon. the Earl of Dudley his Lordship's interest in Her Majesty's Theatre, Haymarket.
The Prospectus of the Company will be issued in a few days.

No new operas were given in 1866 but the revivals included *Don Pasquale, Iphigénie en Tauride, Il Seraglio, Semiramide, Ernani and Lucrezia Borgia*. Making a return after twenty years to revisit the theatre of her early triumphs to sing this role was the great soprano Giulia Grisi. The performance was on May 5. (The Prince and Princess of Wales were in the Royal Box.) She seemed to be in command as always and sang the two verses of 'Com'è bello', but omitting the cabaletta, but signs of nervousness were seen. At the end of the prologue where Lucrezia is taunted by her victims Grisi sank to her knees. Unfortunately she was cut off-by the fall of the curtain behind her. Suffering with arthritis she was obliged to appeal to the stage attendants in order to rise. In the first act all went well, but at the end of the trio she made an unsuccessful attempt to reach a top note which left her confused. At the very end of the opera she approached Mapleson and told him *'that it was all over, and that she could never appear again'*.

Also in 1866 Gye tried to put into effect his printed leaflet from the previous year. But it was stopped by an injunction against him obtained by a Colonel Brownlow Knox to stop him from dealing with Covent Garden as his own property. This gentleman was one of Gye's wealthy subscribers and in 1860 had guaranteed £5000 so that Gye could manage Covent Garden on his own. Gye took the money, but it appears the Colonel saw no return for his

money, resulting in a number of legal actions instigated in 1861 which it appears were never resolved satisfactorily.

Another of those magical names from the history of Her Majesty' theatre made her debut on 8 June in 1867, this was the young Swedish soprano Christine Nilsson when she sang Violetta in *La traviata* and it was a further point of history in London as this was probably the first time the cast had been dressed in modern costumes. Other roles in which Nilsson appeared to increasing success were Flotow's Martha, Queen of the Night, Marguerite and Donna Elvira in *Ernani.* It was a good year for Verdi, it seems he was beginning at last to be appreciated by press and public alike. At Covent Garden there was *Un ballo in maschera* and a new production of *Don Carlos,* while at Her Majesty's *La traviata, Ernani, I Lombardi* and on June 22, the London première of *La forza del destino*,

But it was a bad year for Mr Mapleson. The Winter season opened on October 26 and he had engaged a femail harpist, only to receive a 'Round Robin' from the orchestra threatening to walk-out at the end of the week unless she was replaced by a male player. Mapleson answered this by insisting on receiving the week's notice for any change which he was entitled to receive. He then took out a court summons against every member of the orchestra. On the day of the hearing the musician's solicitor excused his clients as they had not been able to prepare their case. The Trade Union Movement then in it's infancy, flexed it's muscles and promised the musicians unlimited support towards maintaining their strike!

At last the case was heard, the Magistrate deciding to give his verdict later. But fate stepped in. The following events cast all this in the shade. Near the end of November Mapleton's Insurance Broker urged him to insure all the properties in the theatre, ie scores, scenery costumes etc. On the morning of December 6 he called again to write the Policy but was told that the value of the costumes had not yet been ascertained. Mapleton agreed to insure for £30,000. The insurance agent then suggested a payment of £10 which would hold the Policy on account until the following Monday. Mapleson declined. That same evening the theatre was seen to be on fire and by morning all that was left was a smoking ruin.

(see: The fire! p31)

Only the Opera Arcade behind the theatre escaped unscathed (and survives to this day). According to Mapleson in his Memoirs he was ordered to 'keep out of the way' while the fire-fighters smashed their way in. Mapleson also asserts that it took three hours for the fire to reach the offices etc., to which he held the keys. Thus it is quite clear from newspaper accounts of the fire that a lot of records, scores etc., could in fact have been saved.

The only person to benefit was of course Lord Dudley via his buildings insurance. This was surely a case of the very old and famous dictum: 'For the want of a nail!'

But in the eyes of History the Golden Age of Opera was at an end.

