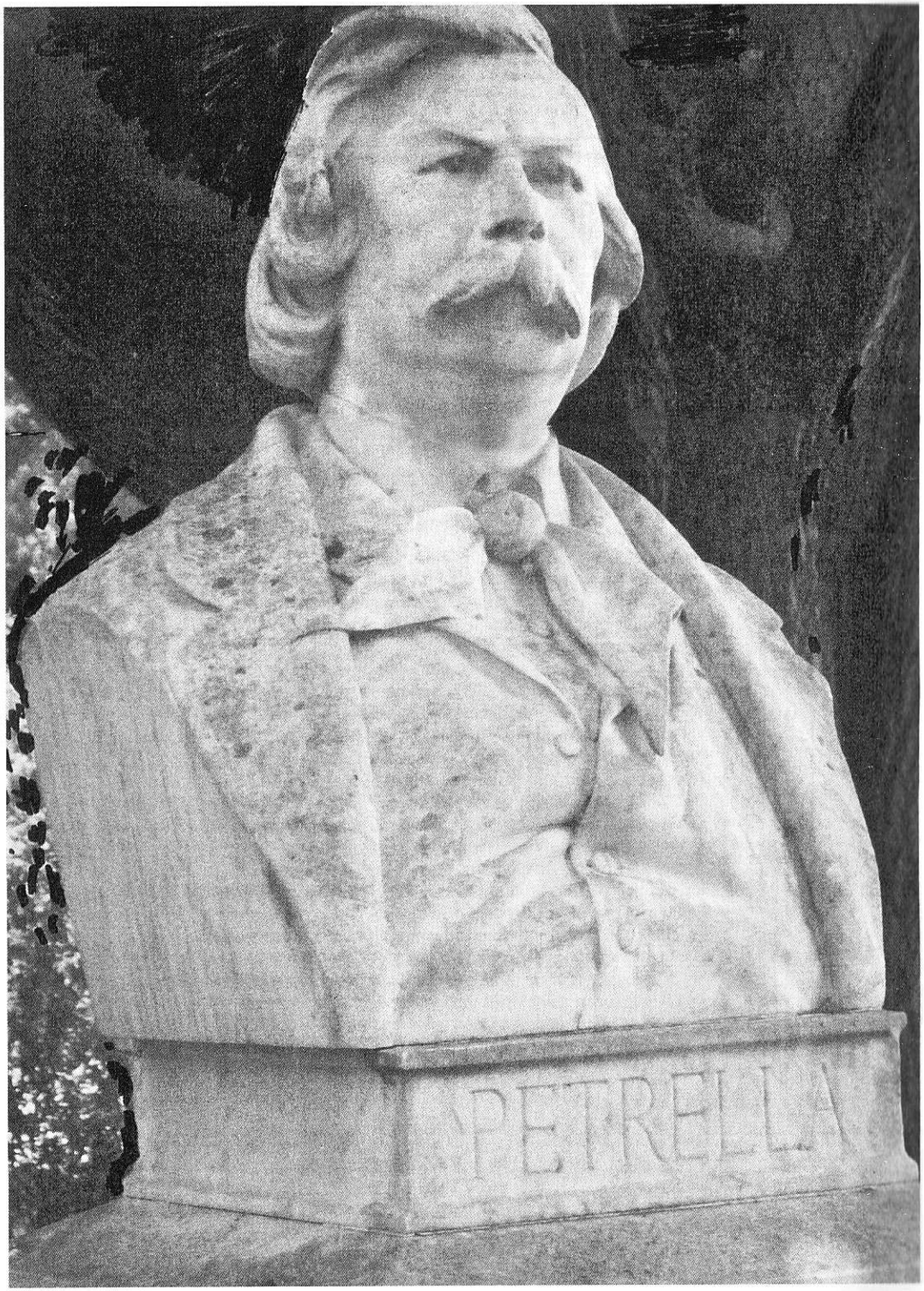


"Musica adattata all'intelligenza ed alle esigenze del pubblico": Giuseppe Verdi, Errico Petrella, and their Audience*

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> When the company arrived, the people of Pescara were frantic with expectation....In the streets, in the piazzas, on all the walls, large handwritten posters announced the performance of *La contessa d'Amalfi*. The name Violetta Kutufà gleamed in vermilion letters. The hearts of the Pescaresi were ignited. The long-awaited evening had arrived.[1]

The event so eagerly awaited by the Pescaresi in one of Gabriele D'Annunzio's early *Novelle della Pescara* is a performance of Errico Petrella's *La contessa d'Amalfi* by the provincial diva Kutufà and her third-class opera company. Labeled "one of the fashionable operas" by Francesco Florimo even twenty years after its premiere, the opera later fell into complete oblivion, as did its composer.[2] It was not by chance that D'Annunzio chose this opera for his caricature of Italian society of the early 1870s. With the calculated sensuality of the *femme fatale*, Leonora, at its center, the plot of *La contessa d'Amalfi* made a good background for that of the novella, in which the petty bourgeois Don Giovanni Ussorio is smitten by the diva Kutufà. Furthermore, Petrella's opera was particularly popular with the audience D'Annunzio wanted to portray, although it was regarded with condescension by the experts.

In fact, Petrella did not flatter himself too much when he observed that "after Verdi's, [my operas] are the most sought after and applauded in the Italian repertory."[3] For a long period at mid-century—until the generation of Filippo Marchetti (*Ruy Blas*, 1869), Antonio Carlos Gomes (*Il Guarany*, 1870), and Amilcare Ponchielli (revised version of *I promessi sposi*, 1872) emerged—Petrella was the most performed of all living composers in Italy after Verdi. He was at the zenith of his success in the 1860s. In 1862 the journal *Il trovatore* joked that

> During this carnival season in Milan, Petrella is like Figaro in the *Barbiere: tutti lo vogliono, Petrella qua, Petrella là*—at La Scala with *Jone*, at the Carcano with *Precauzioni*; and if there were yet another theater, we would not be surprised to see a Petrella opera being performed there too.[4]

But of course, it was not without justification that the period between Donizetti's last operas and the rise of the "giovane scuola" was called the "periodo verdiano." Even at the peak of their success, Petrella's 22 operas could not compete with the popularity of Verdi's–a matter that was something of a disappointment for the publisher Lucca, who tried to establish Petrella as a rival to Verdi.

Although Petrella was born in the same year as Verdi, his career really began only in 1854, with *Marco Visconti*. He had written several operas before this date but had never managed to establish himself as more than one of the numerous Neapolitan composers who produced dialect operas for the smaller local theaters. After 1854 the lighter early works *Le precauzioni* (opera buffa, Naples, 1851) and *Elena di Tolosa* (opera semiseria, Naples, 1852) gained a new audience both in Italy and abroad. It was also around this time that Petrella turned his primary attention to serious opera, of which *Jone* (after Bulwer-Lytton's *The Last Days of Pompeii*, Milan 1858), *La contessa d'Amalfi* (Turin 1864), and *I promessi sposi* (Lecco 1869) were his most durable successes. As one fairly representative verdict from the period put it, "Petrella is no genius; he is neither a Rossini, Verdi, Bellini, Donizetti, nor even a Mercadante, yet his *Precauzioni* and *Jone* are works that do honor to a composer."[5] Thanks to their solid position in the repertories of traveling Italian opera companies, Petrella's operas were heard even in locales as remote as Calcutta and Manila. His popularity began to fade gradually even during his lifetime, although some of his operas continued to be performed occasionally in Italy even up until World War I. "I subject myself willingly to the severe (but always just) judgment of the times!" declared the self-confident composer in an 1868 letter.[6] A few years later, Petrella came to be considered a "jettatore" (a carrier of bad luck), after a theater in Naples had caught fire while the orchestra played the famous *Marcia funebre* from *Jone*. And as if that bad luck has finally caught up with him, he is virtually forgotten today.

One benefit of exhuming this briefly successful contemporary of Verdi is that certain aspects of Petrella's career throw into relief the very different professional and artistic paths taken by Verdi. As we shall see, the two composers can be understood as opposites in many respects. While some superficial details of Verdi's style were imitated by contemporary operatic composers, Verdi should be understood as exceptional, as pursuing a unique path amidst the Italian opera of his time. Rather than imitating either the concision of Verdi's operas or their even more striking dramatic intensity, Petrella and most other Italian composers of the period instead downplayed these elements and sought instead to develop melodic appeal above all.

II

There is barely an article on Petrella that can resist the temptation to quote Verdi's statement that "Petrella does not know music." Verdi expressed his animosity towards Petrella on several occasions: for example, in his annoyance that Petrella had written to Alessandro Manzoni for permission to write an opera based on *I promessi sposi* and received a flattering letter in response, and that Petrella, after having accepted the invitation to contribute to the *Messa per Rossini*, refused to compose the movement assigned to him.[7] And although Verdi's dislike may have been exacerbated by Petrella's character and his extraordinary and undisguised thirst for recognition, Verdi's criticisms were also aesthetic. In reaction to an article in the journal

Arte that lauded Petrella as one of the most important composers of the "scuola napoletana" and championed him as the best candidate to succeed Mercadante as director of the Conservatorio di San Pietro a Maiella, Verdi asked Cesare de Sanctis rhetorically, "Paisiello, Cimarosa, and Jomelli [*sic*], did they never write better operas than *Le precauzioni*?" The famous attack runs in full:

> Petrella does not know music, and his masterpiece, *Le precauzioni*, may please the *orecchianti* [people who love opera, but cannot read music] for its several brilliant violin melodies, but as a work of art, it cannot stand up either to the great works or even to operas like *Crispino, Follia in Roma*, etc., etc. In these operas Ricci relies not on *parlanti* but on good melodies. The characters are well defined and the opera has substance. Not so with *Le precauzioni*.[8]

In a sense, Verdi's comparison of *Le precauzioni* with the operas of the Ricci brothers (which were written for Venice and Paris) represents a confrontation between northern and southern opera buffa. Petrella's first six operas belong to the genre of Neapolitan dialect opera, a style cultivated in the smaller theaters of Naples (Teatro Nuovo, Teatro La Fenice, and others), differing from northern comic opera mainly through its use of spoken dialogue rather than recitatives and of local dialect for some roles. Verdi's charge that *Le precauzioni* is dominated by parlando is justified: except for a *barcarola* for tenor, an aria for soprano, a duet for soprano and tenor, and the aria finale (later replaced by an ensemble), the numerous comic characters are on stage and singing in patter or parlando through most of the opera. But what Verdi did not realize (or refused to acknowledge) is that the opera's extensive use of parlando is not a sign of Petrella's laziness or lack of melodic invention, but rather grows directly out of the dramaturgy of Neapolitan dialect operas, with their strong vestiges of *commedia dell'arte*, constant allusions to local circumstances, and their almost slapstick comedic style played by numerous buffoons who sing patter while the orchestra provides melodic continuity.[9]

Petrella was often accused of lacking technical competence, a verdict that was mostly based on his free use of the "ritmo," e.g., his irregular periods. It was this idiosyncrasy that prompted the critic Girolamo Alessandro Biaggi to publish the defense "Petrella ed i pedanti" in the *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* on the occasion of the composer's death in 1877.[10] Some critics considered this an aspect of Petrella's personal style, while others saw it as another trait of the Neapolitan school.[11] But Verdi's critique seems rather to be focused on Petrella's *conception* of opera. It is certainly true that Petrella wrote for the "orecchianti," but his willingness to please a wide audience was shared by most nineteenth-century Italian composers including Verdi; what differed was the means. Petrella was perhaps guided by the advice of his teacher Nicola Zingarelli, the director of the Naples Conservatory:

> If you sing in your compositions, rest assured that your music will be found pleasing. If you amass *harmonies, double counterpoint, fugues, canons, notes, contranotes,* etc. instead, the musical world may applaud you after half a century or it may not; but the audience will certainly disapprove of you. They want *melodies, melodies*, always *melodies*. If your heart can give birth to them, learn to express them as simply as possible, and your success will be secure: you will be a composer. Otherwise, you will be only a competent organist in some village.[12]

Berlioz noted that Italian audiences demanded operas that could be understood immediately, a tendency that was of course particularly pronounced among the "*orecchianti*." This sense of a divided audience and a majority of listeners who listened purely for melodic pleasure is neatly expressed in a review of the Venetian premiere of *Stiffelio* in the *Gazzetta ufficiale di Venezia*:

> Opinions on *Stiffelio* are divided. On one side are the orchestra, the presidents, the composers, those who consider art for art's sake and who study the beauties of music as a mathematician studies the solution to a mathematical problem; such listeners proceed from theories and principles, and a canon, a fugue, or a pedal point can make them jump with joy. On the other side are lined up the amateurs from the wonderful Rossinian days: the youngsters . . . who seek, as with virtues, *simple* melodies....One can easily understand that the first group found everything [in *Stiffelio*] golden . . . while the others estimated it as dross and wanted to throw it to the ground or into the mud.[13]

To imagine that Petrella conceived his operas for such an audience, either consciously or unconsciously, helps to explain certain stylistic tendencies such as his use of the "*melodie facili*"—features that, if we are to believe the Venetian critic, were demanded by his target group. From this point of view, Petrella's often criticized "conventionality" also begins to appear less as an aesthetic failing and more as a careful, and even a democratic, calculation of style in which the balance between "old" and "new" elements, between accessible, tried and true structures that could be easily followed by listenters and innovations departing from these structures was carefully calibrated.[14]

III

Some literary exaggeration aside, the vignette from D'Annunzio's *Novelle della Pescara* quoted above depicts what would have been a fairly common setting for performances of Petrella's operas. The theater in Pescara, where the performances of *La contessa d'Amalfi* take place, is a typical "teatro minore":

> The theater was in a hall of the old military hospital at the end of the city, near the sea. The hall was low, narrow, and long like a corridor: the stage, was constructed completely of wood and painted paper, rose a few hands' breadths above the floor; against the main walls were the galleries, constructed out of boards and tables, covered with tri-color flags. . . . The chairs, taken from the church, occupied half of the parquet. Benches, taken from the schools, filled the rest.[15]

D'Annunzio's description of the town notables sitting in the best seats provides an image of the audience that we may also take as typical. This petty bourgeois public must have irresistible target of parody for an intellectual like D'Annunzio:

> Don Giovanni Ussorio dominated, well-groomed, with magnificent black and white checkered trousers, an overcoat of glossy beaver fur, a great quantity of jewelry from Chieti on his fingers and his shirt. Don Antonio Brattella, ... a man who exuded his importance through all his pores and particularly through the lobe of his left ear, which was as large as an apricot, recited aloud Giovanni Peruzzini's lyric drama; and the words, coming out of his mouth, took on a Ciceronian rotundity.[16]

Petrella's operas disappeared from the programs of the major theaters only a few years after they first saw the light of day, but they remained important much longer in the repertories of the minor theaters, whose aim was not to satisfy the needs of the experts but those of a wider public. For example, Naples' Teatro San Carlo performed *Jone* for the last time in 1869, while the local Teatro Bellini kept the opera in its repertory until 1913. One typical "teatro minore"was the Milanese Circo Cineselli,[17] later known as the Teatro dal Verme. "Among the popping of corks and cigar smoke, opera buffa and opera seria have made their triumphant entry in those two popular theaters, called the Nuovo teatro Re and the Circo Cineselli," one reads in the *Gazzetta musicale di Milano*; "we will not go to such places to seek sublime art."[18] Especially after Italian unification, more of these houses opened; their audience was mainly the growing middle-class, a wider public than that which frequented the major theaters.[19] The repertory tended to be narrow, avoiding those works considered "difficult" operas and concentrating on Verdi's most popular operas such as *Il trovatore* and *La traviata*, established "classics" like *Il barbiere di Siviglia* or *Lucia di Lammermoor*, a handful of works by now-forgotten composers, and, later in the century, also some French operetta. During its first season in 1866, in what seems to have been a representative program for these minor theaters, the Circo Cineselli staged Petrella's *Le precauzioni*, Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, and Serafino De Ferrari's *Pipelet* (Venice, 1855).[20]

The existence of these theaters confirms the thesis—proposed most famously by Antonio Gramsci—that opera in nineteenth-century Italy took the place of an almost non-existent popular literature: for reasons of both economics and taste, these minor theaters could be genuinely "popular" in a way that the major opera houses never were. In 1874 a writer for the *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* attempted to explain *Jone*'s popularity with reference to this notion of an influential popular audience, with tastes quite distinct from those reflected by critics:

> that score, although criticized by the scholars, always exerts a fascination for the masses, who, without spending their time quibbling over the incorrect musical periods, faulty rhythm, and banality of certain numbers, find in it a wealth of melody and effect: in short, much to enjoy.[21]

An 1883 review from the same journal underlines the importance of Petrella's works within this repertory:

> At the Carcano we have had yet another production . . . of *Jone*, an opera that should be given a bit of a rest, along with those other works that are.... the [war horses] of the minor theaters. It seems impossible that, while Italy produces about fifty new operas every year, between the good, the mediocre and the bad, if an impresario wants to open a theater he must always turn back to the oldest and most worn-out scores.[22]

Verdi's operas were performed in such theaters but also in first-class opera houses, while from a certain period onwards Petrella's works were played only in the minor theaters. In other countries, the entertainment of a wider public was taken over by the operetta. It is true that the works of Offenbach and Lecocq were performed all over Italy beginning in the 1860s, but Italy developed an operetta tradition of its own only slowly. As Volker Klotz points out,

> while elsewhere during the late nineteenth century the public's relentless longing for melodious sound was increasingly disappointed by the opera and satisfied instead by operetta, Italian opera remained obliged to the *bel canto* tradition.... Operetta as a clear alternative and as a provider of musical gratification was therefore not needed.[23]

The Italian opera of the nineteenth century has often been compared with the cinema, a comparison which seems more applicable for the minor theaters than for the major opera houses. A certain number of the former were indeed converted into movie theaters. In 1854 a critic praised Petrella for having written with *Marco Visconti* "a work suited to the intelligence and the needs of the audience."[24] The public whose needs were satisfied with Petrella's operas no longer exists. Verdi's operas have retained their public.

Notes

* I would like to thank David Rosen and Mary Ann Smart for their comments and suggestions about earlier versions of this article.

[1] Gabriele D'Annunzio, "La contessa d'Amalfi," in *Le novelle della Pescara* (Rome: Newton, 1995) [first published 1902], 117. (All translations are mine.) "Quando la compagnia giunse, i Pescaresi smaniavano nell'aspettazione. . . . Per le vie, nelle piazzette, su tutti i muri, grandi scritture a mano annunziavano la rappresentazione della *Contessa d'Amalfi*. Il nome di Violetta Kutufà risplendeva in lettere vermiglie. Gli animi dei Pescaresi si accendevano. La sera aspettata giunse."

[2] Francesco Florimo, *La scuola musicale di Napoli e i suoi conservatorii*, 4 vols. (Naples: Vincenzo Morano, 1880-82), 3: 372.

[3] Letter to an unknown correspondent of 17 August 1868; see Werr, *Die Opern von Errico Petrella. Rezeptionsgeschichte, Interpretationen und Dokumente* (Vienna: Edition Praesens, 1999), 213.

[4] *Il trovatore* (1862), No. 5, 1. "Petrella a Milano in questo carnovale è il Figaro del *Barbiere; tutti lo vogliono, Petrella qua, Petrella là*, alla Scala colla *Jone*, al Carcano colle *Precauzioni*; se ci fosse ancora un altro teatro d'opera non ci faremmo meraviglia di vedere anche in quello rappresentarsi un'opera di Petrella."

[5] *Il trovatore* (1869), No. 7, 1. "Petrella non è un genio; non è nè un Rossini, nè un Verdi, nè un Bellini, nè un Donizetti e nemmeno un Mercadante; ma le sue *Precauzioni* e la *Jone* sono opere che onorano un compositore."

[6] Werr, *Opern von Errico Petrella*, 213. "volentieri mi sottometto al severo giudizio (ma sempre giusto) del *tempo*!"

[7] See Verdi's letter of 3 August 1869 to Opprandino Arrivabene, *Verdi intimo: carteggio di Giuseppe Verdi con il conte Opprandino Arrivabene [1861-1886]*, ed. Annibale Alberti (Milan: Mondadori, 1931), 107-8.

[8] *Carteggi verdiani*, ed. Alessandro Luzio, 4 vols. (Rome: Reale Accademia d'Italia and Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1935-47) 1: 128-9. "Petrella non sa la musica, ed il suo capo-d'opera, *Le precauzioni*, pos-

sono piacere agli orecchianti, per alcuni brillanti motivi di violino, ma considerato questo lavoro, come cosa d'arte, non regge al confronto, non solo dei capi-d'opera, ma nemmeno ad opere come *Crispino, Follia in Roma* etc. etc. In queste opere Ricci non va avanti con dei *parlanti* ma con dei buoni motivi. I caratteri son segnati ben e l'opera esiste. Non così delle *Precauzioni*."

9 Werr, *Opern von Errico Petrella*, 29-63.

10 *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* (1877), 131.

11 See Jonathan Cheskin, *Catholic-liberal opera: Outline of a Hidden Italian Musical Romanticism* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1999), 196.

12 Florimo, *Scuola musicale di Napoli* 2: 413. "Se canterete nelle vostre composizioni, siate pur certo che la vostra musica piacerà. Se invece ammasserete *armonie, contrappunti doppi, fughe, canoni, note, contronote* ecc. forse sì e forse no il mondo musicale vi applaudirà dopo mezzo secolo, ma certo il pubblico vi disapproverà. Egli vuole *melodie, melodie*, sempre *melodie*. Se il vostro cuore saprà dettarvele, studiatevi di esporle il più semplicemente possibile, e la vostra riuscita sarà sicura, voi sarete compositore; in contrario non sarete che un buon organista di qualche villaggio."

13 Mario Medici (ed.), *Stiffelio*, Quaderni dell'Istituto di studi verdiani, 3 (Parma, Istituto di studi verdiani, 1968), 129. "Le opinioni sullo *Stiffelio* sono divise. Da una parte stanno l'orchestra, i presidenti, i maestri, coloro che considerano l'arte per l'arte, e studiano le bellezze della musica, come un matematico la soluzion d'un problema; che muovono da teoriche, da principii, e un *canone*, una *fuga*, un *pedale* farebbero saltar dalla gioia; una *stretta* leverebbe al settimo cielo. Dall'altra si schierano i dilettanti de' bei dì rossiniani; i giovani che cercano, come le virtù, le melodie facili....Di leggier si comprende che i primi trovano tutto oro...mentre gli altri tutti stimano scoria e vorrebbero gittarlo a terra, o nel fango."

14 An examination of the scores shows that Petrella's operas are far from completely conventional. Filippo Filippi called the "scena del delirio" that forms the Act II finale of *Jone* "one of the most beautiful pages of Italian music, inspired with elevation and composed with a rare distinction of form and accompaniment." In this mad scene for a male character, Petrella follows the multisectional formal scheme of Italian opera, but instead of a fast cabaletta he resumes the drinking song of the first act's *introduzione* to illustrate the tenor's mental confusion; as the orchestra repeats the complete song, Glauco's participation becomes more and more reduced. A similar variation of the *solita forma* to confound expectations can be found in the Act I finale of Petrella's next opera, *Il duca di Scilla* (Milan 1859). After the concerto most of the singers rush off stage, and instead of a fast movement the act ends with the tenor singing in declamatory style while the orchestra plays the theme of his cabaletta from the beginning of the act. And to give one last example, the most effective number of *La contessa d'Amalfi*, the love duet at the end of Act II, shows a similar procedure: the cabaletta suddenly breaks off, and the tenor's strophic song (originally heard as part of the *primo tempo*) is resumed, first in the orchestra, then alternating between the soloists, and the act ends with the voices dying away behind the scenes.

15 D'Annunzio, "La contessa d'Amalfi," 117ff. "Il teatro era in una sala dell'antico Ospedale militare, all'estremità del paese, verso la marina. La sala era bassa, stretta e lunga come un corridoio: il palcoscenico, tutto di legname e di carta dipinta, s'inalzava pochi palmi da terra; contro le pareti maggiori stavano le tribune, costruite d'assi e di tavole, ricoperte di bandiere tricolori. . . . Le sedie, tolte alle chiese, occupavano metà della platea. Le panche, tolte alle scuole, occupavano il resto."

16 Ibid., 118. "Don Giovanni Ussorio primeggiava, bene curato nella persona, con magnifici calzoni a quadri bianchi e neri, con soprabito di castoro lucido, con alle dita e alla camicia una gran quantità di oreficeria chietina. Don Antonio Brattella, . . . un uomo spirante la grandezza da tutti i pori e specialmente dal lobo auricolare sinistro ch'era grosso come un'albicocca acerba, raccontava, a voce alta, il dramma lirico di Giovanni Peruzzini, e le parole, uscendo dalla sua bocca, acquistavano una rotondità ciceroniana."

17 The name goes back to the trick rider Gaetano Cineselli, who first showed his horsemanship there.

18 *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* (1866), 131. "Fra lo sparo delle gazzose e il fumo degli zigari, l'opera buffa e l'opera seria hanno fatto il loro ingresso trionfale in quei due teatri popolari che si chiamano il Nuovo teatro Re ed il Circo Cineselli. . . . Non andiamo a cercare in questi ambienti il sublime d'arte."

19 John Rosselli, *Music and Musicians in Nineteenth-Century Italy* (London: Batsford, 1991), 138ff.

20 Antonio Calzoni, *Per la storia di alcuni minori teatri milanesi* (Milan: Tipografia dell'autore, 1932), 63ff.

21 *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* (1874), 347 ("quello spartito, malgrado la critica dei dotti, esercita sempre un fascino nelle massi, le quali, senza star tanto a cavillare sul periodo musicale scorretto, sul ritmo sbagliato e sulla banalità di certi canti, vi trovano della melodia a profusione e grandi effetti, insomma molto da divertirsi)."

22 *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* (1883), 19. "Al Carcano abbiamo avuto una nuova edizione ... della *Jone*, opera che bisognerebbe lasciar riposare un po,' insieme con parecchie altre che sono come si dicesse i cavalli di nolo dei teatri minori. Pare impossibile, che mentre l'Italia produce ogni anno una cinquantina d'opere nuove tra buone, mediocri e pessime, se un impresario deve aprire un teatro debba poi sempre ricorrere agli spartiti più vecchi e più sfruttati."

23 Volker Klotz, *Operette. Porträt und Handbuch einer unerhörten Kunst* (Munich/Zurich: Piper, 1997), 283. "Während anderswo im späten 19. Jahrhundert die ungebrochene Sehnsucht des großen Publikums nach Wohlklang in der Oper zunehmend enttäuscht und ersatzweise durch die Operette befriedigt wurde, blieb die italienische Oper auch fortan dem Belcanto verpflichtet. Operette als deutlich alternative und besondere Erzeugerin von Ohrenschmaus war da nicht eigens gefragt."

24 *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* (1854), 140 ("una musica adattata all'intelligenza ed alle esigenze del pubblico").

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Errico Petrella a Genova

Tra Giuseppe Verdi e Angelo Mariani

Francesco Cento

Giuseppe Verdi avrebbe asserito che preferiva il soggiorno a Genova, non tanto per il clima, quanto perché i genovesi pensavano più al commercio, allo stoccafisso (al brodo di trippa[1], aggiungiamo noi) che all'arte, lasciando in pace l'autore di *Aida* e *Otello* ed evitando di tediarlo con visite e noiose venerazioni dovute alla celebrità dell'ospite[2].

La frase esatta non è proprio così ma in parte è vera per quel minimo di riservatezza che a Genova si respira ancora. Il grande Verdi e la Peppina abitavano a Genova nei periodi estivi (beninteso… nel Palazzo del Principe Andrea Doria a Fassolo!) ma nessuno si è mai provato a seccare entrambi con tediose questioni artistiche come, per esempio, la commissione di un'opera prima per il Carlo Felice. Sicuramente Verdi fu lasciato in pace (naturalmente non mancano amicizie genovesi nella vita e nella corrispondenza di Verdi nella quale la reverenza al grande compositore è condizione imprescindibile). Ma aldilà di Verdi e nonostante Verdi, la vita musicale genovese fu parecchio viva ed, evitando il pleonastico riferimento a Paganini (e Sivori), basterà prestare attenzione alla presenza, in città (e nella regione), dei numerosi teatri e auditori musicali[3] ovvero ai musicisti, liguri o genovesi, di nascita o di adozione, più o meno famosi. Come, per esempio, Antonino Rebora (1815 – 1861); Vincenzo Sassaroli (1816 – 1904); Romualdo Marenco (1841 – 1907); Achille De Marzi (1844 – 1899)

In questo ambiente si va ad innestare l'attività artistica di Errico Petrella, palermitano di nascita e napoletano di formazione, il quale, in varie occasioni, raggiunse il capoluogo ligure indipendentemente dalla rappresentazione delle proprie opere. Tali rappresentazioni, però, venivano seguite con un certo interesse dal compositore che si preoccupò sempre di sostenere, con una lettera o un breve scritto, gli spettacoli genovesi. Nella lettera che scrisse, in data Roma 20 novembre 1872, all'impresario del Carlo Felice, per esempio, descrive minuziosamente ciò che serve per una rappresentazione di *Manfredo*. E così conclude:

> *Se vi bisognano altri schiarimenti, poteste scrivermi; se io mi ricorderò di altre cose, ve ne terrò avvertito. Quel che vi raccomando in particolare è che nell'atto terzo; all'alzarsi della tela, la scena deve essere un po' buia, come lo vorrà lo Scenografo; fo notare che tale oscurità non deve durare che quanto basti all'effetto della scena. Deve cominciare a far chiaro alla fine dell'aria della Donna, per trovarsi tutta luce all'arrivo del tenore.*
> *Raccomando scenario, vestiario e che i cori impariscono [sic] a tempo le loro parti.*
> […][4].

Allo stesso modo scrive ad Angelo Mariani, una lettera data Roma 5 ottobre 1872:

> *Mio caro e amato Mariani,*
> *Sono felicissimo che dopo Napoli, dove, come sai, il mio Manfredo ebbe uno splendido successo, che perfino i miei più accaniti avversari si mostrarono meno ingiusti nel giudicarmi, sia Genova, che mi fu sempre cortese del suo compatimento, quella che dovrà riconfermare questo giudizio; e tanto più che ha la fortuna di aver il Gran Mariani. Affido quindi a te con quella premura ed affetto che ha un padre pel suo figlio, questa mia nuova opera. E sicuro che, con la tua grande anima di artista e l'amicizia che hai sempre nutrita per me, porrai sotto la tua tutela e cura il mio Manfredo in modo che esso dal tuo genio ispirato possa farsi accogliere benevolmente dal colto pubblico Genovese […].*[5]

Ma il 26 dicembre del 1872, pare che il *Manfredo* non abbia suscitato grande entusiasmo, forse per colpa della troppa pubblicità prima della rappresentazione, forse per colpa della partitura con più ombre che luci, secondo quanto sottolineato dall'articolo apparso sulla «Gazzetta di Genova» qualche giorno dopo la prima.

"Il Cimino tolse materia al suo nuovo libretto da una leggenda antichissima calabrese, il cui eroe è Manfredo d'Atripalda, pauroso al popolo pe' suoi delitti e cantato pe' suoi amori e per la sua patita espiazione, come avverte in un proemio il suo autore. Questa nuova opera del maestro Petrella fu rappresentata lo scorso anno per la prima volta a Napoli, e il favore straordinario con cui là era stata accolta, il tono trascendentale con cui l'encomiarono i giornali di colà, avean fatto nascere in molti un'aspettazione, a cui convien dirlo, l'esito non corrispose. Se il pubblico del Carlo Felice fece al nuovo spartito un'accoglienza piuttosto fredduccia, lo si deve in gran parte al troppo bene che se n'era detto prima che lo mettesse in scena; tanto è vero che il troppo stroppia. Il giudizio però che se ne diede fu benevolo e in molti punti soddisfacente. Quella vena facile, spontanea e spesso briosa che forma il vero pregio caratteristico della musica del Petrella, in quest'opera fa spesso difetto. Vi si scorge un maggior studio, una più grande ricercatezza, sia nel modo di finire il periodo musicale, sia nello in strumentare: si conosce chiaramente che l'autore ha voluto tener conto delle nuove e più recenti maniere musicali, le quali danno al lavorio degli strumenti una parte maggiore, e ammettono una maggiore indipendenza di forme e di concetto. Ma non sempre ciò che costa più studio e più tempo riesce meglio in fatto d'arte: né ciò che s'ingegna d'esser più nuovo riesce sempre più bello. Il Petrella ha voluto uscir dalla sua via per mettersi su quelle degli altri, e ci ha scapitato di originalità.

Tutto ciò non toglie però che il nuovo spartito non abbia esso pure le sue e non spregevoli bellezze. Bello e delicato è il preludio del prologo; il primo atto contiene uno splendido coro di mietitori e mietitrici; una romanza del tenore meritatamente applaudita, e un affettuoso duetto fra soprano e tenore, e un altro fra soprano e baritono. Nel secondo atto è degno di nota il finale per contrasto di varii affetti riprodotto con gran magistero di arte. Nel terzo atto piacquero sovra tutto la scena e la preghiera di Lina, e il duetto fra soprano e tenore."

I

Errico Petrella nacque a Palermo il 10 dicembre 1813 (lo stesso anno di Verdi e Wagner). Studiò a Napoli con Furno, Ruggi e Niccolò Zingarelli (ebbe come "maestrino" Vincenzo Bellini). Esordì a sedici anni con l'opera comica *Il diavolo color di rosa*, con straordinario successo. Seguiranno *Il giorno di nozze* (Teatro Nuovo,1831) e *Lo scroccone* (1836) *Le miniere di Freinberg* (1839). Ma la maturità artistica giunge con le *Precauzioni* (1851). Nel decennio fino al 1860 Petrella scrisse sette melodrammi[6]. E il successo con la già accennata *Jone* che, rappresentata alla Scala di Milano il 28 gennaio 1858, ebbe la ventura di incrociare la sua sorte con gli eventi storici concomitanti. La prima volta fu l'11 luglio 1858 quando, a Padova, l'opera fu rappresentata senza la *Marcia funebre* perché la banda militare (austriaca), cui toccava per lunga tradizione la presenza sul palco, era impegnata nelle manovre che porteranno, qualche mese dopo, alla Seconda guerra d'indipendenza italiana. La seconda volta fu a Genova, quando Napoleone III (*le petit*, per dirla alla Hugo) si presentò alla città (18 maggio 1859) entrando trionfalmente al Carlo Felice, tra un atto e l'altro, durante la rappresentazione dell'opera.

La permanenza e la formazione napoletana di Errico Petrella permise un contatto diretto con i compositori napoletani della sua generazione. Fu apprezzato da Donizetti, che lo conobbe agli esordi, il quale pur non avendolo tra i suoi allievi, gli fu di una certa famigliarità se poteva tacciarlo come «Petrellone impoltronito». Lo stesso Petrella amava sempre ricordare con orgoglio quando Donizetti, avendo assistito ad una replica dei *Pirati spagnuoli*, nella primavera del 1838, ponendo una mano sulla spalla del giovane compositore gli disse: «Enrico, che bei motivi sai fare!»[7].

Le voci della tradizione dicono che Giuseppe Verdi non amasse particolarmente Petrella. Così come Verdi pare avesse sempre espresso un certo fastidio per alcuni esponenti della giovane generazione operistica napoletana, spesso formatasi con Zingarelli, quando non con Donizetti. Per esempio, con Nicola De Giosa, allievo del Bergamasco, ebbe una lunga diatriba a proposito del valore della frequenza del diapason[8], faccenda che Verdi si legò al dito. Quando, nel 1871, si trattò di scegliere il direttore d'orchestra per la prima di *Aida*, al Cairo, Verdi non volle De Giosa, nonostante che quest'ultimo fosse, in quel frangente, direttore d'orchestra al Teatro Vicereale della capitale egiziana.

L'antipatia di Verdi per Petrella potrebbe essere sorta per un "riflesso condizionato" legato al rapporto conflittuale del Cigno di Busseto con il direttore d'orchestra del Carlo Felice, Angelo Mariani, quando gelosie private si andarono ad intersecare e contrapporre con interessi professionali ed artistici[9]. Tra il 1869 e il 1870, Angelo Mariani dirige, a Bologna, alcune opere tra le quali *Un ballo in maschera* e *La forza del destino* di Verdi. Nel 1871, a proposito di questa opera, Verdi stesso, scrivendo all'editore Ricordi, criticò alcuni effetti che Mariani usava fare nella sinfonia utilizzando gli ottoni con un «fortissimo» inopportuno. Certo questa critica, che risale alla fine degli anni '60, risente già dei rapporti tesi tra il compositore e direttore d'orchestra. Qualche eco di queste critiche dovette giungere agli orecchi di Mariani al tempo del carnevale del 1868-69, mentre stava mettendo in scena, al Carlo Felice, *I vespri siciliani* riscuotendo un grande successo. Per contro, durante la stagione successiva, curò la rappresentazione di una splendida *Jone* di Petrella creando intorno a questa opera, tenuta in cartellone per 29 sere, un'atmosfera di trionfo. Nello stesso periodo faceva applaudire un'altra opera nuova del Petrella: la *Contessa d'Amalfi*.

Al Carlo Felice, Mariani parteggiava apertamente per Petrella prova ne sia che, ormai malato, ebbe la forza di dirigere e portare al successo il *Manfredo*, come sopra detto, scrivendo poi all'autore per complimentarsi del successo della sua opera «in barba a colui che vorrebbe essere il solo al mondo».[10]

Dopo qualche anno si ammalerà anche Petrella, che morirà poverissimo in una casa in San Francesco in Albaro, presso Genova, il 7 aprile 1877. Il tentativo di soccorrere lo sventurato Petrella vide gli ambienti artistici genovesi in prima linea, con serate musicali per la raccolta di fondi da devolvere all'illustre compositore. Perfino Verdi offrì una somma che arrivò a destinazione quando Errico era già morto.

(*continua*)

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[1] Rimandiamo al nostro: *Oberto, conte di San Bonifacio e il brodo di trippa*, Newsletter 109, London, Donizetti Society, 2010, pagg. 3 - 5

[2] La frase è ripresa a grani linee dall'incipit dell'articolo di Achille De Marzi, *La musica a Genova*, sta in *Il Teatro illustrato e la musica popolare*, Milano, VII (1887), n. 77 (maggio) p. 79

[3] Nell'Ottocento ricordiamo, senza voler essere pedanti, il Carlo Felice (1828); il Teatro Diurno dell'Acquasola (1826) poi (1868 / 70) Politeama Genovese; il Teatro Paganini (1855); il Teatro Andrea Doria (1855) poi Politeama Regina Margherita (1885); il Teatro Colombo (1852); il Teatro Apollo (1853); il teatro Gustavo Modena (1857) a Sampierdarena; il Teatro Sociale di Sestri Ponente (1840); il Teatro Chiabrera (1853) a Savona; il Teatro Camillo Sivori (1879) a Finale Ligure.

[4] Sebastian Werr, *Die Opern von Errico Petrella, Rezeptionsgeschichte, Interpretationen und Dokumente*, Edition Praesens, Wien, 1999, pag.227.

[5] Idem. Pag.229.

[6] *Elena di Tolosa* (1852); *Marco Visconti* (1854) *Elnava o L'assedio di Leida* (1855); *Ione* (1859); *Il Duca di Scilla* (1859); *Morosina* (1860); *Il folletto di Grésy* (è una commedia del 1860).

[7] Giuseppe Cosenza, *La vita e le opere di Enrico* [sic] *Petrella*, Roma, Tipografia della Rivista d'Italia, 1909. pag. 8.

[8] Episodio, questo del diapason, che vide De Giosa e Verdi su fronti contrapposti. Verdi propenso verso gli 864 vibrazioni semplici al minuto, contro De Giosa che ne proponeva 870. Il dissenso tecnico tra i due fu insanabile e Verdi, permaloso com'era, rimase caparbiamente sulle sue (anche quando nel Congresso di Vienna del 1885, indetto per deliberare in merito a livello internazionale, decise di adottare il diapason a 870, dando ragione al De Giosa che però non era più tra i vivi).

[9] È bene ricordare come il Mariani iniziò a parteggiare verso la musica straniera, Wagner in particolare, e come, la lite con Verdi si estese anche alle case editrici (concorrenti). La frase sdegnosa di Verdi a Giovannina Lucca «Ella che è donna vada a far la calza, e non s'immischi di cose non sue» ebbe come risposta la minaccia di Giovannina a Verdi di cavargli gli occhi coi ferri della sua calza.

[10] Giovanni Monleone, *Storia di un teatro: il Carlo Felice*, E.R.G.A., Genova, 1979, pag.205.



The Simon Mayr Jubilee 2013

The printed programme for the forthcoming 250th birthday celebrations of Donizetti's beloved teacher will almost certainly not have appeared before the preparation of this Newsletter, even so, an account of one or two of the principal features can be included here. The high point of the anniversary will be the **Jubilee-Concert on Friday 14 June in the Concert Hall of Ingolstadt of Mayr's *Ginevra di Scozia* with the Munich Radio Orchestra conducted by George Petrou.** This has as its predecessor the truly memorable 200th birthday Concert of *Medea in Corinto* by that same orchestra so many years ago in Munich, and is underscored just as irresistibly by the Radio Orchestra's concert performance of *La Lodoiska* just two years ago in Ingolstadt.

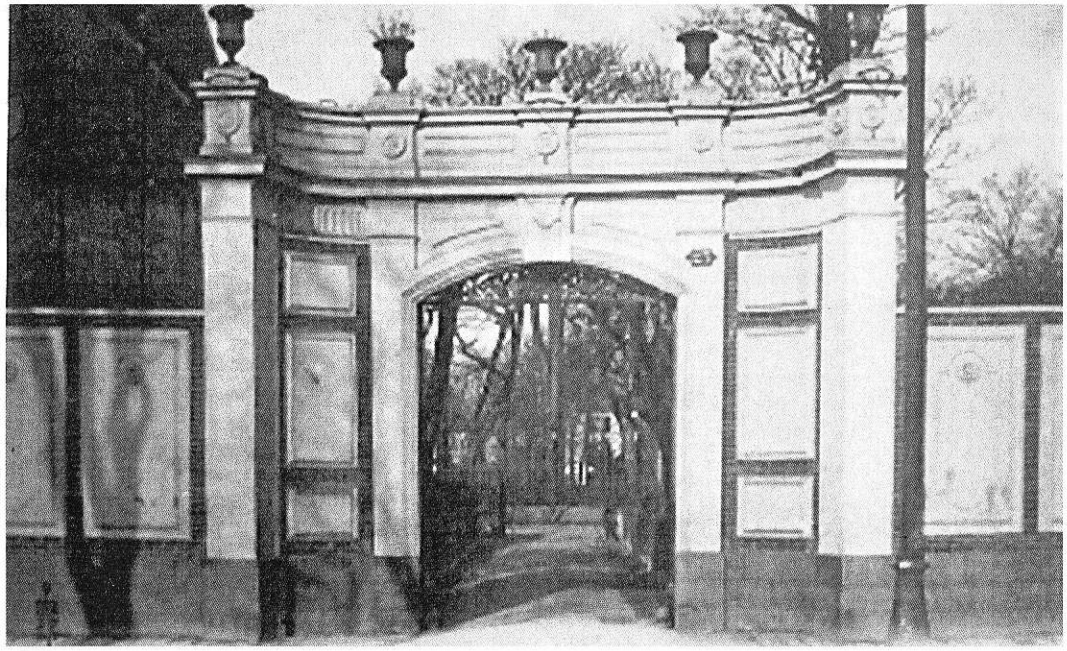
This ***Ginevra di Scozia* will be repeated at the Teatro Donizetti in Bergamo on 16 June**, thus marking indelibly the twin geographical destiny of the composer who laid the foundation stone for Nineteenth-Century Italian Opera.

The Municipality of Ingolstadt together with the Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt will present an **International Symposium upon Simon Mayr at the Stadtmuseum Ingolstadt between 13 June and 15 June 2013.** The intention will be to put Mayr into his correct musical perspective.

Donizetti at Ivry

Notes from a tragic coda

On a freezing February day in 1846 Donizetti clambered awkwardly into his carriage aided by his servant who sat down beside him, his nephew Andrea took the seat facing, they were on their way to Vienna – or so the stricken composer had been told. Luggage was placed all around them. Another carriage followed containing Dr Philippe Ricord the famous *syphiligraphe*. After driving for three hours they turned under an ornamental arch in a leafy suburb. Donizetti had come to the end of his journey.



He had arrived at the maison de santé founded in 1828 by the *aliéniste* Jean-Étienne Esquirol (1772-1840), usually called the Maison Esquirol, with an address of 7 rue de Seine in the outer-Parisian conurbation of Ivry-sur-Seine. This secluded establishment was now in the hands of his



nephew, another psychiatrist, Jules-Étienne-Frumental Mitivié (1796-1871) and an upmarket refuge for the shelter of people in the public eye – or rich enough – and all diagnosed as suffering from mental illness. Under the supervision of Dr Ricord (1800-1889) Donizetti had been discreetly hidden away.

This was a period, most especially in France, of great advance in the understanding and treatment of insanity, these doctors – among the most celebrated in their world - were renowned not just for their science but also for their gentle and sympathetic approach to treatment. The régime at the Maison Esquirol resembled that of a health spa, a collection of pavilions dispersed throughout a park with a central hospital more-or-less in the guise of a country house. It was a psychiatric environment that patently refused the barbarism of the recent past and was soon to be enhanced in France by the genius of Jean-Martin Charcot (1825-93) who paired fundamental studies in neurology, clinical discipline and various monumental diagnostic topics, with works on hysteria and hypnotism, the latter leading - if in no way intentionally – to the age of Freud and psychoanalysis.

Drs Mitivié and Ricord, together with Dr Gabriel Andral (1797-1876)[1], had examined the still articulate Donizetti on their momentous visit to his bedside early in August 1845 at the Hotel Manchester when the gravity of the illustrious composer's illness had become apparent. After a period of monitoring and obvious decline the journey to Ivry had become a quasi-inevitable sequel. Once inside, he was told there had been an accident of some kind outside those monumental gates, that something had been stolen, that providentially he had found himself outside a "comfortable inn", but his servant was mysteriously whisked away and when he tried to leave after a few days of enforced residence – when he actually attempted to find his way to an exit - he was restrained. All sorts of confabulation was thrust on him. Humouring or lies, it depends on your viewpoint, the physicians certainly believed that it was their duty to dissemble as much as possible but it was from here in the days that followed that Donizetti sent his heartbreaking appeals for help to be released, scribbling messages to all and sundry – to Dolci, to Zélie de Coussy, to the Ambassadress contessa Appony *"Pietà, Pietà, M'hanno arestato; perché? Il servo, pare che fosse un ladro. – Tenetevi la carozza; ma, arrestarmi anco me?"* panicky,

[1] See: Alexander Weatherson *Dr Gabriel Andral: a Footnote* [in] Donizetti Society Journal 7 (Bergamo 2002) 23-27 and also its French counterpart as: *Un lotois au chevet de Donizetti* [in the] Bulletin de la Société des Études du Lot CXXIV avril-juin 2003, 145-148

(opposite: Dr Philippe Ricord)

dreadful, confused and desperate scraps of paper in a mixture of Italian and French that were never delivered.

Who had decided upon his incarceration? It seems to have come about as a result of a further examination on 26 January 1846 by Drs Mitvié and Ricord together with another psychiatrist Dr Juste-Louis Calmeil (1798-1895), but what or who exactly gave their clinical judgement the force of law and obliged him to be transferred to Ivry (as so it would later transpire) is anyone's guess. Clearly, however, the all-powerful *Préfet* of the Paris police Gabriel Delessert (1786-1853) had a hand in the proceedings. Of the Maison Esquirol we know only the diminutive photographs printed on page 42 of the commemorative volume printed in 1897[2], a tiny view of the park and a pointless view of the chapel. And we know little of the financial background to this decision – we know only that his accommodation cost 500 francs a month [3] - Auguste de Coussy was reluctantly obliged to foot the bill, but it was fairly lavish: a "*suite of three rooms, opening on to a garden*".

How was Donizetti actually treated in this institution? Everyday attention seems to have been in the hands of Dr Jacques-Joseph Moreau de Tours (1804-1884), a pupil of Esquirol. The treatment he received can only be conjectural, nothing in the way of records has survived. Philippe Ricord was renowned for providing bold therapeutic programmes especially for secondary and tertiary forms of syphilis: mercury for secondary syphilis, potassium iodide – administered internally – for the treatment of tertiary syphilis. He was credited with the invention of a Ricord "tea with iodine" and the use of a "Neapolitan unguent" - a blend of mercury and balm - which had to be rubbed-in. These medicaments, whatever horror they may provoke in the twenty-first century, were pacific methods of approaching a condition that had invariably resulted in mindless brutality in earlier years, specifics in accordance with his seminal *Traité pratique des maladies vénériennes* of 1838 that had changed the outlook of the world upon such treatment. The famous composer was certainly handled with great care by the famous doctor. The personal supervision of such an important physician gave complete assurance and irrespective of the dismay of Donizetti's friends, his treatment - whatever it may have been - had its successes, however fleeting. There is no actual reason for disbelieving (especially in the light of Andrea Donizetti's rabid fear of his uncle's

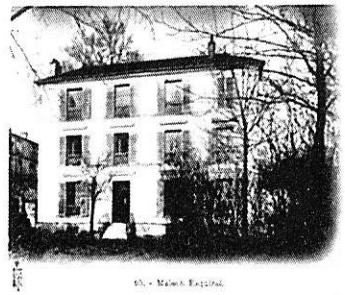
[2] Various authors: *Gaetano Donizetti/Numero unico nel primo centenario della sua nascita 1797-1897* (Bergamo 1897), 42

[3] Letter of Baron Eduard von Lannoy to Giuseppe Donizetti 26 January 1847, Zavadini 152

covey of female admirers – lovers – mistresses – besotted friends or whatever other role flawed history has allotted to them) the account of the gräfin Sophie von Löwenstein that she had walked and talked lucidly with Donizetti in the garden at Ivry on the one visit she was permitted. Perhaps she did exaggerate, she was infatuated, a little unbalanced herself, but her account probably has a nucleus of truth in that his condition had its ups-and-downs for several months. A stream of visitors was shocked by his appearance, by the sad shadow that remained of his brilliant intelligence, by his changed affect and vanished musical genius, but there were no complaints of his care, his clothes, or of the attention accorded to him by the staff. He had a new servant and there were other servants around. A few of the things he said made it seem that he was far from unaware of his dire condition but alas he became more and more bodily deformed as his mental state vegetated, a condition for which there was no treatment whatsoever.

What remains materially of this establishment? Two postcards survive, the first of a pair of detached pavilions (which perhaps postdate Donizetti's day), the second, a view of the main building, modestly domestic but undoubtedly of the correct period with its short flight of steps, slightly unkempt vegetation and prim array of shutters:





The monumental arch of such import to the Donizettian coda has long gone. Despite Andrea Donizetti's reluctance to allow people to see his uncle a number of resonant names walked under that arch and along the sad avenue to the house: Balfe, Teodoro Ghezzi, his librettists Royer and Vaëz, Accursi, the great tenor Duprez who sang to him (there was a piano in his room we know because Duprez recounts how Donizetti tried to play it), Florimo, and of course Zélie de Coussy, this last, to Andrea's impotent

fury, on innumerable occasions, alone or with her husband and her daughter. The maison Esquirol was hidden away from intrusive eyes close to where the town hall now stands and not far from the busy railway station today struggling with throngs of commuters, thus, and paradoxically, not an establishment wholly shuffled away into a wilderness of obscurity distant from everyday life. It has gone. Gone completely. The establishment survived until 1949 or so, retaining most of its layout and philosophy to the last under a succession of psychiatric banners. It was still a place to hide away important people in the world of artists, Antonin Artaud died there as late as 1948. Where once were glades of trees now is a glaring red-brick monument to 1950's tastes that covers all the site, a miniscule scrap of greenery survives metamorphosed into a politicised communal garden. The *cité Maurice-Thorez*, designed by the architects Henri and Robert Chevallier, built between 1952 and 1953 now covers the site and is listed as belonging to the "*Patrimoine du 20eme siècle*" by the Ministry of Culture. Donizetti's tragic refuge now is replaced by vast cliffs of flats in aggressive slabs of building with two of fourteen floors, the first skyscrapers of an Ivry bent on another, and less lyrical, destiny.

Alexander Weatherson



« Donizetti et la France - histoire d'une relation ambiguë (1831-1897) »

Thèse soutenue par Stella Rollet, le 13 juillet 2012, à l'Université de Versailles Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines, et réalisée sous la direction en cotutelle de MM. Jean-Yves Mollier et Jean-Claude Yon.

Paris, au XIX^{e} siècle, est l'eldorado culturel des musiciens du monde entier. Gaetano Donizetti partage avec eux l'espoir d'y connaître la réussite. Il y fait ses premiers pas en 1831 avec *Anna Bolena*. Après ce premier succès, il aspire à une réelle carrière parisienne et s'en ouvre à son éditeur : « Per carità Parigi, Parigi, Parigi ». Ses vœux sont finalement exaucés. En premier lieu, il devient le principal fournisseur du Théâtre-Italien, qui s'approprie ses principales créations parisiennes (*Lucia di Lammermoor*, *Lucrezia Borgia*, *L'Elisir d'Amore*…) et pour lequel il compose aussi plusieurs partitions originales (*Marino Faliero* et *Don Pasquale*). Rapidement, il est également sollicité par les autres théâtres lyriques parisiens qui plébiscitent ses ouvrages et veulent se l'attacher. C'est d'abord le Théâtre de la Renaissance (*Lucie de Lammermoor* puis, après ce premier succès, *L'Ange de Nisida*, qui servira de base à l'écriture de *La Favorite*). Viennent ensuite l'Opéra-Comique (*La Fille du Régiment*, *Rita ou le mari battu*) et surtout l'Académie royale de Musique (*Les Martyrs*, *La Favorite*, *Dom Sébastien* et les projets du *Duc d'Albe* et de *Jeanne la Folle*). La disparition prématurée du musicien, en 1848, ne met pas un terme au succès de ses opéras puisque, de 1831 à 1897, pas moins d'une trentaine de ses ouvrages sont représentés à Paris, dont six créations posthumes. Ce sont ainsi plus de 3 000 représentations (45 par an en moyenne) qui sont données, rien que dans la capitale. En province, une étude partielle montre, entre 1846 et 1848, un résultat encore plus spectaculaire : plus de 2 100 représentations en trois ans soit, en moyenne, deux par jour dans le pays. Par ailleurs, si toutes les œuvres de Donizetti ne se maintiennent pas durablement au répertoire, plusieurs – *La Favorite* et *Don Pasquale* notamment – continuent longtemps à être acclamées par le public.

Ces données semblent faire de Donizetti un compositeur incontournable de la période et le placer au premier rang des musiciens des années 1840. La réalité est toutefois plus complexe, plus ambiguë. D'abord, Donizetti, qui ne rêvait que de consécration parisienne, paraît détester de plus en plus cette ville au fur et à mesure qu'il en découvre la face cachée. Comment expliquer un tel revirement ? Le poids que représentent, pour lui, les mondanités ne peut, seul, le justifier. Il trouve sa cause principale dans l'ambivalence de certaines attitudes à son égard, notamment celle de certains directeurs et d'une partie de la presse française. Ainsi, Duponchel a besoin de lui mais le méprise. Léon Pillet, plus respectueux, est pourtant toujours prêt à le sacrifier à Meyerbeer. De même, certains critiques n'ont pas de mots assez durs pour dénoncer sa facilité. Et que dire de Berlioz qui l'accuse ouvertement de vouloir faire passer une œuvre écrite pour l'Italie pour une partition originale ? Si ce dénigrement n'est pas général, il semble avoir profondément marqué Donizetti et contribue certainement à son rejet d'une capitale dont il attendait tant.

Ainsi, cette étude a pour objet de mesurer l'importance de Donizetti dans le paysage musical parisien du XIX^{e} siècle et de comprendre ce que la France lui a apporté ou refusé, notamment en termes de fortune, de gloire ou de reconnaissance. Mais ce n'est pas son unique ambition. Ce cas particulier permet d'apporter un éclairage supplémentaire sur différents aspects du monde musical parisien, grâce à un dépouillement intégral de la presse ou encore à la consultation de nombreuses archives – en France comme en Italie – qui ont permis de multiplier les angles d'approche. Ainsi,

au travers des grandes étapes de la carrière parisienne de Donizetti, ce sont aussi ses relations avec les différents acteurs de l'univers musical qui sont évoquées de même que la question des droits d'auteur, tout particulièrement traitée. L'étude prend également en considération des éléments comptables (nombre de représentations, recettes, etc.) et diverses sources littéraires ou iconographiques, afin d'analyser la réception des œuvres autrement qu'au travers du seul prisme de la presse. Elle s'efforce enfin de mesurer le degré d'exemplarité de Donizetti sur plusieurs points : non seulement la genèse et le développement de sa carrière parisienne, mais également son rôle à la fois en tant qu'agent de transferts culturels et en tant que passeur établissant, à Paris, des liens avec ses réseaux italiens, dans des milieux divers (chanteurs, éditeurs, etc.).

Cette thèse de doctorat s'inscrit donc, par son objet comme par ses démarches, dans le champ d'investigation de l'histoire culturelle des spectacles. Elle répond à ses codes et à ses impératifs. Sans porter de jugement esthétique, elle s'intéresse au musicien, à son œuvre ainsi qu'à son environnement. Elle relève aussi de l'histoire sociale car elle étudie les relations au sein d'un microcosme très influent, dans lequel les intérêts mercantiles l'emportent souvent sur les préoccupations artistiques.

Stella Rollet

Estreno de "I due Figaro" de Mercadante en Buenos Aires

En Buenos Aires, la última ópera de Mercadante de las varias que se habían cantado en el Siglo XIX había sido "La Vestale" en 1873. Ahora, ciento treinta y nueve años después, Mercadante ha vuelto a un escenario lírico argentino con todos los honores.

Se trató del estreno sudamericano de "I due Figaro" en el Teatro Colón. Como sabemos, se trata de un melodramma buffo con libreto de Felice Romani, que Mercadante compuso para su accidentada visita a España (1826), y que tras las vicisitudes de su demorado estreno en 1835, su partitura quedó juntando años y olvido en los archivos de la Biblioteca Municipal de Madrid, a donde los musicólogos Paolo Cascio y Víctor Sánchez Sánchez fueron a rescatarla y editarla, para que fuese exhumada bajo la conducción de Riccardo Muti en los Festivales de Salzburg y Ravenna, y en el Teatro Real de Madrid.

Ese mismo espectáculo fue trasladado ahora (con decorados, vestuario, solistas, coro y orquesta) al escenario del Teatro Colón de Buenos Aires, con un lleno absoluto de público a lo largo de cuatro representaciones (sin duda, convocado por el gran prestigio del maestro concertador y director musical). Las opiniones sobre sus valores musicales fueron divididas.

Algunos la juzgamos una deliciosa hermana (aunque menos afortunada) de las inmortales de Mozart y Rossini, con los arrebatadores temas populares españoles de su obertura, sus concertantes y crescendos dignos de las mejores óperas buffas rossinianas, su sólido sexteto de estructura magistral, y – entre otras páginas admirables - un soberbio dúo de Susanna y Figaro que nos recuerda que Mercadante fue un digno condiscípulo del divino Bellini en el Conservatorio de Nápoles.

Otros, en cambio, optaron por un juicio más sumario y trivial, sin molestarse en escucharla al menos una segunda vez, y hasta no faltó algún crítico que se sintió feliz con la boutade de que "Mercadante es el Salieri de Rossini", como si Salieri no fuese nada más que la caricatura apócrifa trazada por Peter Shaffer y repetida por el filme de Milos Forman.

La representación alcanzó en cambio el entusiasmo unánime de todo el público, que ovacionó interminablemente a los intérpretes. El principal, por supuesto, fue Riccardo Muti, que logró una lectura realmente alada, tan llena de souplesse en su espíritu como ajustadísima en tempi y estilo, al frente de su orquesta "Giovanile Luigi Cherubini" excelente tanto en su conjunto como en sus solistas, y un coro no menos afortunado (Philharmonia Chor Wien) dirigido por Walter Zeh. Simplemente encantadora resultó la mise en scene de Emilio Sagi, con escenografía de Daniel Bianco y vestuario de Jesús Ruiz, pues supo lograr una evocadora ambientación de patio andaluz y jardín sevillano, con mil y un detalles y guiños que demostraron una absoluta comprensión del sutil texto y cada uno de los personajes en perfecta conjunción.

Los cantantes fueron tan jóvenes como entusiastas, con una unánime calidad vocal y preparación detallada de la parte musical y también psicológica. Dentro de un nivel de similar excelencia podemos celebrar la lozanía canora de Eleonora Buratto (Susanna), Rosa Feola (Inez), Asude Karavayuz (Rosina), Annalisa Stroppa (Cherubino), Saimir Pirgu (Almaviva), Mario Cassi (Figaro), Omar Montanari (Plagio) y Anicio Zorzi Giustiniani (Torribio). En suma: un espectáculo de una calidad de esas que hoy – por desgracia – sólo tenemos aquí cada varios años, y que querríamos tener mucho más.

José Luis Sáenz



An American Premier: Amore Opera's Captivating *Olivo e Pasquale*

Richard B. Beams
Opera con Brio

At the end of August, 1826, Donizetti left Naples for Rome, where he signed a contract for a new opera buffa to be presented in the upcoming Carnival season. A month later he wrote to Mayr that he had finished the un-orchestrated score up through the middle of Act Two. The work was *Olivo e Pasquale* on a libretto by Jacopo Ferretti, who based his work on a comedy of the same name by Antonio Sografi (Venice, 1794). The idea probably goes all the way back to Terence's ancient Roman comedy *The Brothers* (160 BCE), itself based on earlier Greek comedies. Like the ancient comedies, Sografi/Ferretti's works are concerned with two brothers, one strict and grumpy and the other mild and kind. There is romantic intrigue in all of these works, but the main argument of Terence's play revolved around whether a strict or a lenient education is best for sons. The nineteenth century comedies stick with the romantic intrigue, and background the philosophical argument.

Jacopo Ferretti was, of course, a well-known Roman librettist who had already written two libretti for Donizetti (*L'ajo nell'imbarazzo* and *Zoraide di Granata*) and would write two more (*Il furioso all'isola di San Domingo* and *Torquato Tasso*). Rossini's *Cenerentola* and *Matilde di Shabran* are his work as were libretti for Mercadante, Pacini, Luigi Ricci and Zingarelli). Ferretti's libretti for Donizetti are among the better ones for the composer's pre-*Anna Bolena* operas. Sografi was a noted librettist himself, active mostly in the last decade of the eighteenth and the first decade of the nineteenth century. Donizettians will recognize his name as the author of the two comedies (of 1794 and 1800) on which Domenico Gilardoni based his amusing libretto for *Le convenienze ed inconvenienze teatrali*.

Olivo e Pasquale met a lukewarm reception at its Roman premiere on January 7, 1827, at the Teatro Valle, probably because of the company. The prima donna, Emilia Bonini, was not so good, and Donizetti had to write the role of Camillo, the prima donna's love interest, for a *musico* or contralto *in travesti*, a tradition which by 1827 seemed old fashioned. Nonetheless, the opera ran up several performances and the following September Donizetti revised the score for Naples (at the Teatro Nuovo), and Camillo became a tenor. The opera went on to have a respectable career during the next several decades, including a production in London in 1832.

Early this fall, the work received its belated American premiere from the young and enterprising New York based company Amore Opera, which continued its exploration of little known bel canto treasures. Having last year presented the American premiere of Mercadante's recently rediscovered *I due Figaro* of 1826, they opened their fourth season this year with this equally pleasing and tuneful jewel of the early Donizetti canon. This American premiere was an equally successful venture, well worth the wait. The production moved the archetypal *commedia dell' arte* plot, in which a stubborn father has his own ideas of how a young daughter should marry, from Lisbon to Palermo in the 1830's. Portuguese merchants in the original, the cranky father Olivo and his more easy-going brother Don Pasquale, also a bass, own an olive oil export business in Palermo. Quoting Nathan Hull, the director:

> The early 1830's is a time of transition in Sicily, and with the recent end of feudalism, law enforcement has broken down leaving powerful rival families to enforce their own laws. The fierce Olivo is such a man, supplementing his family's legitimate business with smuggling and a nascent version of the "protection racket." In fact, there seem to be a curious number of people in the town who consider Olivo to be their "Godfather."
> On the other hand, while Olivo may be "fire" his brother Pasquale is "ice" and just wants everybody to love him and live together harmoniously. As sometimes happens with such an authoritative man, Olivo's household is not as easy to control as his "business" is. He has a very spoiled daughter, Isabella, whom he wishes to marry to his powerful business associate, Malatesta, a smuggler who is nicknamed "Le Bross." Not surprisingly, his willful daughter has her own ideas.

Indeed, she loves Camillo, the "shop clerk." Like Slook in Rossini's early farce *La Cambiale di Matrimonio*, Le Bross, realizing the situation, eventually helps out the young lovers. Naturally, all ends well - the father chastened and the young lovers happily united.

On the afternoon of October 28, just hours before hurricane Sandy immobilized New York, a fine young cast brought the fun and glitter of this entertaining *buffa* work to life in a simple and effectively updated production. Bass Duncan Hartman as Olivo (the only singer not double cast) led the way firmly, complemented by the other bass of this cast, Jacopo Buora, as his softhearted brother. Their vibrant, playful "fire" and "ice" buffo duet of Act II, "Siete un asino calzato," ("You are an ass dressed in trousers") was a great hit, as such duets usually are in Donizetti. In Rossini's *La Cambiale di Matrimonio*, the benevolent Slook is the opera's second bass; in Donizetti's *Olivo* however, his counterpart Le Bross (in our production his name was Malatesta--shades of the later *Don Pasquale*!--but he is "known as Le Bross") is a tenor, and was performed as such in one of the alternate casts; in the performance I attended, however, a delightful mezzo (Hayden De Witt) transformed Le Bross into a trouser role. In the other cast, Ms. De Witt performed Camillo, the bookkeeper and secret admirer of Isabella, which was written as a trouser role before Donizetti turned him/her into a tenor for Naples. With the role cast as a mezzo, the lovely, sympathizing duet between Le Bross and the soprano heroine, Isabella, in the second act ("Voi veniste") took on an especially appealing and appropriate bel canto tinge.

All three lead female singers in fact contributed to the success of the evening: not only the two mezzos, De Witt and the more smooth-toned Erika Hennings as Camillo, but especially the spritely soprano, Sheena Ramirez (who stood out for me in her days at the New England Conservatory). She was especially adept in the coloratura of the traditional Rondo Finale.

All in all, what a delight this opera was on stage, not just because of the charming production and performance, but also because of the opera itself. There are shades of Rossini of course (to say the least), but for the most part the opera is simply the young comic Donizetti at his best, which came through even with the rough-edged orchestra, albeit led ably and with brio by conductor Gregory Buchalter. Much anticipated the more mature *L'Elisir d'Amore* and *Don Pasquale*, which Amore Opera was also presenting in the same period as a kind of sequel. One could argue that in Mercadante's *I Due Figaro*, for all his Rossinian style, there were sections where the artisan ruled over the artist. Not with Donizetti, however; the work highlighted all the ingredients with genuine comic flair: lyrical invention, sparkling vitality, and both musical and dramatic artistry. It's hard to imagine that this engaging work had never been performed in this country before, especially being so tuneful and funny – as it was in this tasteful and idiomatic performance. One writer, David Wright, once commented: "to think of Donizetti as the composer of half a dozen staple works of the opera repertoire would be like thinking of Beethoven as the author of five piano sonatas instead of thirty-two." Our thanks indeed to Amore Opera for unearthing this comic gem, keeping us alert to the wealth of Donizetti's extraordinary output.

Robert le Diable

Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, London, 18 December 2012

Alan Jackson

The remit of the Donizetti Society is to promote interest, learning and understanding in the works of Donizetti and the music of his day. *Robert le Diable*, first produced in Paris in 1831 was so influential, so esteemed in much of the nineteenth century, that a major production of it should not go unremarked in our newsletter.

I would so like to report that a masterpiece has been unveiled, if only to confound the bile poured on Meyerbeer by, among others, Wagner and Schumann. Yet honesty compels me to say that, speaking personally, the case has still to be made - and not just because Covent Garden's production introduced a jarring element of camp and picture book chivalry. As with *Les Huguenots* (see my review of the 2005 Liège production in Newsletter 96) I find too much that is musically unconvincing. *Robert* started out life as an *opéra comique*, only later being changed into *grand opéra* format. Now I know that *opéra comique* does not mean comic opera, yet much of Act I sounds to me too close to something out of an Offenbach operetta (or even G & S). The damage is done. Meyerbeer's orchestration, which no doubt sounded so new in 1831, sounds like effects, sometimes too often repeated, rather than convincing portrayal of character. Roger Parker makes the interesting point (Opera magazine, February 2013) that Meyerbeer needs period instruments for a proper effect, but my instinct is that there is a more deep-seated problem. Similar doubts arise with the vocal writing. The unaccompanied trio in Act III had me on the edge of my seat, but with concern that it might end up out of tune (it didn't). And in Isabelle's Act IV aria "Robert, toi que j'aime" (perhaps the opera's most famous number) I found myself thinking that maybe it would be more effective with one less repetition of the "Grâce" refrain, despite excellent singing from Sofia Fomina. Robert's many excursions into the vocal stratosphere were brilliantly managed by Bryan Hymel, but they sounded super-imposed – compare Donizetti's Dom Sébastien in his "Seul sur la terre" where the high Cs and high D*b* arise naturally. In short, there is something wanting in the music. It has workmanship in abundance, but genuine large scale inspiration is lacking.

For more on the production, including photos, visit our website www.donizettisociety.com for Russell Burdekin's report.

Covent Garden's programme book contains an essay on Meyerbeer by Robert Letellier, who is a passionate advocate for the composer. He maintains that his work "often dismissed as meretricious and bombastic, is in fact a profound reflection on some of the most serious of life's concerns", faith, society, personal choice and their interaction with intransigent religion and politics. See www.meyerbeer.com/nexus.htm for an extended exposition of Letellier's ideas. My problem is that, experiencing Meyerbeer's operas in the theatre or on CD, I remain more convinced that they were written primarily with a view to what would prove successful with the Parisian public between 1830 and 1865, rather than with any higher intent.

2012 has been a good year for opportunities to see French *grand opéras* with Auber's *La Muette de Portici* and Donizetti's *Le Duc d'Albe* on offer in Paris and Ghent, albeit in productions that many people found to have serious limitations. While I am grateful that I have now seen *Robert le Diable*, it is the Auber and Donizetti works that I would much prefer to see again.

"Maria Stuarda" al festival Donizetti di Bergamo

La città di Donizetti sta lavorando alacremente sulla candidatura a Capitale Europea della Cultura per il 2019. Il catalogo operistico lasciato dal genio bergamasco è universalmente noto e contribuisce certamente alla diffusione del nome di Bergamo e del suo patrimonio artistico nel mondo, ecco dunque che il settimo cartellone del Festival adotta come sottotitolo *La musica di Donizetti. Per Bergamo candidata Capitale Europea della Cultura 2019*, cercando così di rafforzare l'identità culturale di Bergamo e attrarre turismo qualificato. A poco più di dieci anni dall'ultima rappresentazione bergamasca, della donizettiana "**Maria Stuarda**", esso ripropone al pubblico il celeberrimo titolo, collocandolo dopo "Belisario", richiamando così una sequenza de i due titoli, che fin dalle origini li vedeva accomunati nella medesima stagione, a breve distanza l'uno dall'altro. L'opera, su libretto di Giuseppe Bardari, fu scritta per la stagione del 1834 del Teatro San Carlo di Napoli, dove però non andò in scena come era stata concepita ma rimaneggiata e con altro titolo per questioni di censura regale.Solo dopo un'anno si riuscì a farla rappresentare nella prima versione, e accolta inizialmente in maniera tiepida riscosse giusto successo nelle recite a seguire, per finire poi per essere di nuovo proibita, sempre per questioni di censura.

La riproposizione bergamasca, si basa sull'edizione critica Ricordi-Fondazione Donizetti a cura di Anders Wiklund. La quale tiene particolarmente conto di tutte le indicazioni dell'autore, a partire dall'autografo, conservato nella collezione svedese di Rudolph Nydahl presso la Fondazione per l'Avanzamento della Cultura Musicale. "Maria Stuarda", titolo che un tempo era destinato alle varie "renaissance", ha oggi guadagnato una costante presenza nei cartelloni lirici europei sicuramente grazie anche alle pregevoli e ispirate pagine melodico-compositive, in essa presenti. Come si sa, il gusto teatrale ottocentesco era soggiogato dalla riproposta scenica del destino travagliato di figure femminili, ancor più accattivanti se di provenienza storico-regale .Molto spesso però la versione scenica delle vicende storiche di tali protagoniste subiva una profonda ed evidente stilizzazione e idealizzazione che rispondeva più alle esigenze delle convenzioni teatral-musicali che non alla fedeltà storico-documentaria.

Si giunge così ad una sorta di vittimizzazione ideologica che può arrivare addirittura a stravolgere la realtà storica stessa. Com'è appunto il caso della sovrana di Scozia, le cui gesta nella vita non furono propriamente riconducibili alla mitezza e pacatezza di un sovrano illuminato e umano. Ecco dunque che una simile proposizione scenica della protagonista di quest'opera, ha trovato in **Mariella Devia**, soprano ligure ormai con quarant'anni di carriera, un testimone eccellente in quanto a impegno vocale e scenico, dimostrando ancora una volta di quanta e quale alta professionalità sappia ancora dimostrare , in un ruolo che le calza, tutt'ora, alla meglio.

Anche i recitativi, momenti che un tempo le erano meno congeniali, ora vengono affrontati con intensità ed espressione meditate e convincenti.La sua padronanza del canto *legato*, della presenza e pienezza di suono anche nei diminuendi è tutt'ora strepitosa. Grazie ad una grande capacità di sostegno del fiato, e impostazione del suono. Il quale arriva e si posiziona sempre con la giusta intensità e intonazione. Impeccabile nei duetti come nelle arie arriva alla grande scena finale un pò affaticata, ma avvalendosi di un'eccepibile bagaglio tecnico vocal-espressivo, riesce a dissimulare la stanchezza regalandoci un'esecuzione ancora straordinaria, sotto tutti i punti di vista. Nella seconda recita, il ruolo del titolo è stato affrontato in maniera corretta ed elegante ma meno espressiva sotto l'aspetto melodico-drammatico dal soprano irlandese **Majella Cullagh**, che comunque ha riscosso un soddisfacente e compiaciuto esito complessivo. **Josè Maria Lo Monaco**, come Elisabetta I, ha una voce secca e dal timbro aspro di buona ampiezza, ma a suo agio soprattutto nel registro medio-grave. L'emissione era così, spesso sgraziata con suoni spesso forzati e spinti. Così che il ruolo della sovrana si evidenzia più per la resa scenico-gestuale che non per

quella vocale, ad onta di un costume che ricordava la Regina della notte mozartiana che non la grande "Regina vergine". Il tenore **Dario Schmunck** (come Leicester) è interprete piuttosto credibile e sebbene non possieda un timbro vocale particolarmente affascinante, ha dato un'ottima lettura del ruolo, soprattutto nella seconda recita. Assolutamente convincente il Talbot di **Mirco Palazzi**: gradevole voce di *basso cantante*, sebbene il timbro sia ancora leggero, ma già ben compatto e robusto per affrontare il ruolo, capace di una buona rotondità d'emissione e lodevoli mezzevoci. Piacevole in scena come all'ascolto, l'Anna di **Diana Mian**, mentre un po' sottotono è parso il Cecil di **Marzio Giossi**.

La direzione di **Sebastiano Rolli** è stata agogicamente discutibile (con tempi a volte troppo lenti) e dinamicamente discontinua, tanto da mettere spesso in difficoltà i cantanti e rendere inudibili i momenti d'insieme. Grazie però alla consolidata esperienza dell'orchestra del Festival , tutto ritornava sempre nel suo giusto alveo, rendendo al meglio la partitura donizettiana. Il **Coro**, (diretto da **Fabio Tartari**)per cui Donizetti ha scritto pagine particolarmente impegnative in quest'opera, ha saputo regalare un'esecuzione emozionante in più momenti della partitura ma soprattutto nella grande pagina del 3° Atto "O truce apparato!", che nella seconda recita è stata pure bissata a seguito di una richiesta a furore di popolo. La regia ad opera di **Federico Bertolani** si ricorda per una sua buona eleganza formale basata su un'idea di fondo piuttosto semplice che in concordanza con le scene di **Giulio Magnetto,** e i costumi di **Manuel Pedretti**, cerca di differenziare cromaticamente e spazialmente le tensioni politico-sentimentali in cui si svolge la trama dell'opera anche con l'aiuto dell'efficace luministica di **Claudio Schmid**. Così che i costumi dei personaggi "positivi" sono bianchi o in prevalenza tali, mentre i personaggi "negativi" sono vestiti di nero o tonalità scure. Mentre il mondo di Elisabetta è in uno spazio superiore, alto, distaccato, su una sorta di macchina scenica praticabile, da cui essa può osservare, inosservata, nella sua incomunicabile solitudine gli altri protagonisti e gli accadimenti della trama.La stessa macchina su cui essa regna e incombe, diviene poi prigione e mondo inferiore in cui vive Maria.L'unico momento in cui le due antagoniste si trovano sullo stesso piano, ad armi pari è appunto l'irrealistico incontro del 2° Atto.

Lo spettacolo ha riscosso un notevole successo sotto tutti i suoi aspetti con qualche lieve dissenso per la regia.

In quegli stessi giorni, presso la Casa Natale di Donizetti, in città alta, si sono dati appuntamento alcuni tra i più autorevoli musicologi della scena internazionale per il convegno: ***Donizetti in scena. Vedere l'opera.*** Al convegno hanno preso parte musicologi di fama internazionale, studiosi con cui la Fondazione Donizetti mantiene saldi legami di collaborazione e scambio, provenienti da tutto il mondo, rappresentanti delle più prestigiose Università, dei maggiori centri di ricerca. Tra essi Roger Parker, Franca Cella, Paolo Fabbri, Mary Ann Smart, Luca Zoppelli, Alessandro Roccatagliati, Francesco Bellotto, Gabriele Dotto, Susan Rutherford, solo per citarne alcuni. L'importanza del convegno deriva certamente dagli argomenti affrontati ma anche dal fatto che lo stesso era il primo convegno donizettiano dall'ultimo che si fece nel 1998, dedicato alla drammaturgia del compositore bergamasco (*Voglio amore e amor violento. Studi di drammaturgia*). L'occasione è stata ancora una volta molto allentante visto che l'argomento centrale era quello della messinscena nel teatro donizettiano e come questa sia influenzata dalle varie indicazioni "registiche" già presenti nei libretti delle opere, dalle note a margine delle partiture per mano dello stesso Donizetti, dalle tecnologie contemporanee della messinscena o ripresa mediatica della stessa, dalla sensibilità e gusto scenico degli artisti-scenografi contemporanei all'autore e di quelli protagonisti della scena teatrale del nostro tempo. E' assodato ormai come Donizetti fosse attento e scrupoloso nei riguardi della resa scenica e visiva delle sue opere e quanta importanza rivestisse la stessa per lui, al momento della stesura compositiva come nella verifica delle prove d'insieme.

Interesse testimoniato dalle numerose didascalie presenti sui libretti, disposizioni sceniche (soprattutto di tradizione francese)... tutti elementi che preannunciano un atteggiamento che sarà più evidente nel teatro verdiano. Il convegno, ricco di spunti e di proposte, a suscitato parecchie domande interessanti e stimolanti, soprattutto al riguardo delle attuali regie del teatro di Donizetti, e le relative riprese mediatiche, ma anche nei confronti delle cosiddette "edizioni critiche", ossia in che modo queste testimonianze debbano essere incluse in esse.

L'incontro è stato certamente un momento molto importante – sotto il profilo del confronto e della riflessione fra i convenuti e i presenti e analogamente si è posto come un'ideale cornice teorico-propositiva rispetto alla messinscena che negli stessi giorni si realizzava in città bassa.

Giacomo Branca

One of the more remarkable rumours has been that an opera by Carlo Enrico Pasta (Milan 1817 - Milan 1898) his *Atahualpa,* was about to be revived in Lima but has not shown up on the net. He was a conductor and composer who took up a post in Bolivia in 1870. Three operas and one inedita are attributed to him: *I tredici* [lib Giorgio Giachetti, Teatro Sutera, Torino 14.1.1851]; *La fronda* [Teatro Principal, Lima 4.9.1872]; *Atahualpa* [4 acts lib. Antonio Ghislanzoni, Teatro Paganini, Genova 23.11. 1875] and *Una tazza di thé* [inedita]. Also a zarzuela: *Los bombarderos* [Lima]. Whether the venue would be the Gran Teatro Nacional del Perù or the Teatro Municipal de Lima is not clear, but the name of two fabulous South American tenors among the most celebrated in the world have been put forward as possible protagonists in this unprecedented revival of a composer's heroic opera forgotten despite its great success at the Genoa prima in 1875...

LUNCHEON GET-TOGETHER

A further social event luncheon is being proposed for Saturday 16th March at 12.30am, most probably at Salieri's, 376 The Strand, London (on the corner of Exeter Street). The lunch menu there has starters at around £4 and main courses at around £7 - £9 (desserts, wine and service are extra) with meat, fish and vegetarian options on offer. There is also an extensive à la carte menu. Do join us if you can.

Please let Alan Jackson know by 8th March if you plan to come or want more details. Contact details on page 1 of this Newsletter but email would be preferred.

(Please put "Don Soc Meal" in the subject line)

Bellini: Beatrice di Tenda

Carnegie Hall, New York
December 5, 2012

Angela Meade, Beatrice di Tenda
Nicholas Pallesen, Filippo Visconti
Michael Spyres, Orombello di Ventimiglia
Jamie Barton, Agnese del Maino
Nicholas Houhoulis, Anichino

James Bagwell, Cond.
American Symphony Orchestra
Collegiate Chorale

"Freddina, freddina..."

Collegiate Chorale's recent concert outing of *Beatrice di Tenda* was reminiscent of Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express*. The conductor, the composer, the librettist, and most of the singers conspired to make what could have been a real event into a discouraging and even tedious evening.

Beatrice di Tenda contains lovely pages, some of which rise to the level of Bellini's most inspired. Yet there is no truly memorable tune, and no vivid musical portrait. To be fair to Bellini, there were in this performance numerous cuts to the score (the overture was hacked particularly brutally) and I would welcome the opportunity of someday hearing this opera again in more propitious circumstances. Dramatically, Romani's libretto seems to me seriously flawed. Though the plots of this opera and *Anna Bolena* follow a superficially similar trajectory, the comparison does not hold up. Romani's Beatrice has no weaknesses, only virtues. She is not overly ambitious, and her anger is always justified. She is not guilty of adultery even in wish or desire; Orombello's passion for her is unreciprocated. Her only affections are for her beloved subjects, her sainted former husband, and for her not-so-saintly current husband, the very one scheming to chop off her head so he can cavort with the "other woman" in the light of day. Whereas Donizetti's Anne has human frailties and surmounts them, Beatrice surmounts nothing, other than the urge to cry out at the pain inflicted by the torturer. It takes a Sutherland, a Gruberova, or a Devia to make anything at all of this supremely dull heroine. For the record, not even Pasta herself was able to do so.

As it turned out, neither did Angela Meade. For some, Meade is as close as we've come to these hallowed singers in the new crop of vocalists. It must be conceded that in many ways, she is a breath of fresh air. In these troubled times where a singer's waist size often counts for more than her actual singing, Meade is the exception. She has diligently laid her technical foundation and is reaping the rewards. At her best, she is a force to be reckoned with. I reviewed her Caramoor *Norma* in these pages a little over two years ago. It was a thrilling evening, one that had even jaded opera-philes jumping to their feet and cheering involuntarily. Bellini's homicidal Druidess (a role Meade has studied since her days at AVA) was clearly a role she did not just know, but felt in her bones. In *Beatrice*, some of what made Meade so engaging as Norma was also in evidence. The top is shimmering and beautiful, and she can float a pianissimo that is impeccable. The execution of coloratura is

near-perfect. Yet I keenly felt the absence of a key ingredient of all those great Beatrices I just mentioned: heart.

Meade's interpretations are largely bereft of real passion. We don't learn anything about who the character is, and we also don't get any idea of Meade as an artist. Vocally, she drives with the emergency brake turned on. She spins out the notes on the page, and does it well. She scrupulously observes dynamics. She ornaments in all the right places. But these accomplishments – as welcome and as necessary as they are – are not sufficient to bring these heroines to life; with Meade, they are items neatly crossed off a 'to-do' list, as if she were singing for a conservatory audition. In this *Beatrice*, if she created occasional hints of vehemence and grandeur, they were tempered. *Freddina, freddina*, Donizetti once said of Fanny Persiani. He could just as easily have been speaking of Miss Meade.

I had high hopes for tenor Michael Spyres, whose great agility, powerful baritonal register and towering passion so impressed me at Caramoor's recent *Ciro in Babilonia*. Here he certainly was no slouch, but like Meade, he seemed to be phoning it in, delivering his lines without much feeling. There was nothing to complain about in his Orombello, but nothing to rave about, either. As Filippo, Nicholas Pallesen similarly lacked real authority and menace, only really coming into his own in his final solo moments. In most of his confrontations with Meade, he was completely overshadowed by her, both vocally and in volume.

As Agnese, mezzo Jamie Barton was guilty only of being miscast. The role of Agnese is really not for mezzo at all, but for a 'soprano without a top'. Barton has a big, juicy mezzo voice; with its darkness and a nice vibrato, I'd welcome the chance to hear in other roles. But Agnese's part lay uncomfortably high for her. The voice stretched taut by the tessitura, it was difficult to really enjoy her opening offstage serenade. The role's rare dips into the lower reaches sounded so comfortable, so natural, that it made the more strenuous efforts in the top stand out that much more. But it was easy to overlook these problems, for Barton did what her cohorts failed to do: she acted with her voice, and made Agnese into a flesh-and-blood person.

Heading the performance was conductor James Bagwell, who despite his enthusiasm for the score, was completely out of his element in this style of music. Bagwell put a lot of emphasis in press interviews on Bellini's "taffy-pull" tempi. But bafflingly, he charged headlong through perfect opportunities to stop and smell the roses. The most unforgivable was the opera's single most beloved moment, the trio ;Angiol di pace' whose perfunctory glossing-over all but ruined the cathartic *finale ultimo*. The big act-finale in the trial scene was not shaped at all; these ensembles typically 'wind up' the tension in the big introductory solo passages; there is further development in which the other characters are layered in, and then that tension is released in a sweeping 'big tune', working to a climax. Pacing these numbers properly is vitally important they form, after all, the dramatic nexus of virtually every 19th century Italian opera libretto. Bagwell got us and his orchestra through the score, or what was left of it, and that's not enough. Recitatives were dry and plodding, the singers shackled to their scores, as if they had only really prepared their big solos. A lack of rehearsal seems to have been a major problem, but the lack of a strong leader and bel canto stylist must also have been part of the mix.

Not surprisingly, there were more empty chairs around me at the end of the performance than at the start. And by the time the final aria was ended, though my body was still in the seat, my brain had checked out. I was already fantasizing about Joyce DiDonato's *Stuarda* at the Met.

Dan Foley

Past, Present and Proposed No.16

Pip Clayton

Her Majesty's Theatre in the Haymarket

The Third and Fourth Theatre

With the second theatre known Her Majesty's now a ruin, James Henry Mapleson had the presence of mind to ask the management of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane if they would grant him a lease which they did, just a few hours before Mr Gye from Covent Garden turned up to try and persuade them not to do so. But how to put on a season of opera without the costumes lost in the ? The answer was the ladies of the Company, all as would be expected excellent needle women, led by Therese Tietjens set to and completed what should have been impossible and the season opened with Tietjens as *Lucrezia Borgia* on March 26. What is inexplicable is that considering the rivalry between the two men in October of 1868 Mapleson joined Mr Gye at Covent Garden where between then and 1871 nine separate seasons where given, three by Gye on his own, four by Mapleson alone and the other two as a coalition, but that is another story. Colonel Mapleson as he was known (it was an honorary rank from the Corps of Volunteers) will always be associated with the third theatre to be built on the ruined site in the Haymarket and the many operas new and old which he presented to the London public.

The Earl of Dudley had to comply with the terms of his lease to replace the theatre and perhaps it is not suprising that he did not consult with anyone as to what would have to be considered, consequently it was thought that a magnificent theatre had been replaced by a poor one. The third theatre was built in 1868-69 to the design of Charles Lee assisted by his sons and his partner William Pain. The builders were George Trollope and Sons at a cost of £50,000. It is said that when the architects escorted Lord Dudley around the finished building hoping for some word of praise the noble Earl's sarcastic remark was *'If narrow corridors and low ceilings constitute a fine theatre you have erected one that is indeed magnificent'.*

The cause of the fire that destroyed the second theatre was never really explained but it was thought it may have been an over-heated stove, consequently extra precautions were applied in the rebuild. Unlike the two previous theatres this one only took half of the original site . A brick wall from basement to the roof separated the stage from the auditorium, with no opening other than the proscenium and the roof was held up by iron trusses, all the floors were supported on cement arches and all the staircases were of stone, enclosed within brick walls, while the sloping tiers had fireproof floors held on cantilevered wrought-iron supports. The auditorium measured approximately 100 feet from proscenium to the back wall, the horseshoe amphitheatre had a depth of 71 feet and a width of 56 feet. The decoration of the auditorium was a pale salmon with gold embellishments, the front of the grand tier had carvings representing musical instruments while the other tiers had other symbols. The circular ceiling was in blue and gold with cameo portraits of composers, among them Auber, Bellini, Beethoven, Cherubini, Donizetti, Handel, Meyerbeer, Rossini and Verdi. In the center at the top of the proscenium arch was a gilded carving of Apollo supported by Tragedy and Comedy. The chandelier had a drop of eighteen feet and was twelve feet in diameter whilst the drop curtain was an adaptation of Raphael's 'Parnassus' .

Her Majesty's Theatre remained closed, the lease was still in the name of Benjamin Lumley and now held as assignee by the Earl, but in May 1874 the whole site was put up for sale by auction. There were twenty-one lots and the first was the theatre itself. Bidding started at £15,000 and then rose in £1,000 bids until the hammer came down at £31,000. The purchaser was a Mr Last, a solicitor who was acting on behalf of an interested party whose name was not mentioned. The theatre opened on April 15 1875 not with an opera but with the American Evangelists Moody and Sankey with a season of "revivalist meetings" which were held for nearly two years.

During this period Colonel Mapleson's seasons had been given at Drury Lane and also touring the provincial cities, at the same time he was actively engaged in what was to be The National

Opera House opposite the Houses of Parliament (see Newsletter No.71) and making his first visit to the United States.

Early in 1877 Lord Dudley let it be known that he was willing to sell the theatre and despite saying he would not let to Mapleson he had second thoughts and offered the lease for £30,000 which was agreed by a deposit of £6,000 a further £6,000 in November with the balance due at a later date. In his memoirs Mapleson says that when he entered the theatre in February, "*There was not a single seat in the house, not a particle of paper on the walls; neither a bit of carpet, nor a chair, nor a table anywhere.*"

He went to Maples the furnishing company in Tottenham Court Road who for £6,000 supplied all the fittings needed which included four miles of carpeting for the staircases and passages. The season opened April 28 with Tietjens as *Norma*, the American soprano Alwina Valleria as Adalgisa, Giuseppe Fancelli was Pollione and a Sig. Broccolini as Oroveso, the conductor was Michael Costa who after a disagreement with Mr Gye had left Covent Garden and returned to Her Majesty's Theatre in 1868 (see Newsletter No.107). On 19 May Tietjens sang for the last time, it was said that at the end of *Lucrezia Borgia* when she sees her son Gennaro is dead she uttered such a scream of agony that the audience shuddered, later backstage she collapsed and despite an operation she died of cancer on October 3.That season also saw the London premiere of Marchetti's *Ruy Blas*.

But in May 1877 Lord Dudley put Her Majesty's Theatre up for auction, the bidding was sporadic and at £26,000 pounds and just as the hammer fell the successful bidder a Mr Abraham Nagle who owned the Alhambra Palace in Leicester Square cried out, "*I have just looked at my pocket book and beg to withdraw the offer.*" The auctioneers reply was, "*It has fallen to you and I must call upon you to sign.*" Even though he was declared the legal purchaser and all the documents were ready and officially stamped Mr Nagle left the auction room crying out again "*I withdraw*" without signing them. Despite a search I have not found what the solution to this contretemps was.

There were other tours and seasons Mapleson gave, in 1878 London saw *Carmen* for the first time with Minnie Haulk the American soprano in the title role, 1880 Boito,s *Mefistofele* with Romano Nannetti who had created the role at La Scala in 1868 was given. For four years 1878, 1880, 1884 and 1885 Mapleson's Company gave opera at the Academy of Music in New York on the corner of Fourteenth Street and Broadway. (This theatre had been built in 1854 on a site owned by the Manhattan Bank on land which at one time had been part of Peter Stuyvesant"s huge farm). But Mapleson lost out when the old Metropolitan Opera House opened on the entire block between Thirty-nine and Fortieth Street on Broadway in 1886. Saying "I cannot fight Wall Street" Colonel Mapleson returned to London where two years later he was declared bankrupt with liabilities of nearly £43,000, his insolvency he said was due to the non-completion of the National Opera House which lost him £30,000.

Her Majesty's Theatre was home for a number of different productions, from 1879 to 1882 the Carl Rosa opera gave seasons in English offering *Rienzi, Tannhäuser, Lohengrin* and *The Flying Dutchman.*

From the United States, Haverley's United Mastadon Minstrels a blackface troupe gave a season in 1880, a revival of Uncle Tom's Cabin two years later and in that same year, Angelo Neumann's touring Richard-Wagner-Theater gave four complete cycles in German of *Der Ring des Niebelungen* heard for the first time in England which were considered an artistic triumph. The great Sarah Bernhardt acted in 1886 and 1890 (and perhaps to prove it was no longer an opera house,) in 1889 it was used as the venue for a boxing tournament. The last production was the Christmas Pantomime *Cinderella* and when it closed on February 1st 1891 so did the theatre, putting over 500 people out of work, the following year all the furniture and fittings were sold by auction and in 1892 the theatre was demolished.

The Fourth Theatre.

For four years the ruined site was an eyesore, then the actor-manager Herbert Beerbohm Tree took an interest and decided to rebuild the opera house, he had been in management for some years at the Haymarket Theatre which stands opposite Her Majesty's Theatre. there he had been

successful with a play entitled *Trilby* an adaptation of a novel by George du Maurier which had had over 260 performances. The architect was to be C.J. Phipps who had already built or re-designed some twenty theatres in London and many more throughout the country.

The foundation stone was laid on July 16 1896 and opened less than a year later on April 28 with *The Seats of the Mighty* a dramatisation of the novel by Gilbert Parker. The theatre was on three levels, the ground floor Stalls, Pit Stalls and the Pit, the first floor was the Dress Circle and the Family Circle, whilst the second floor is the Upper Circle, Amphitheatre and the Gallery. The cost was £55,000 and the seating capacity approximately 1,319. The facade is in French Renaissance style, faced with Portland stone with five doors opening into the vestibule with access to the Stalls and Dress Circle. Above is an open loggia with four Corinthian columns. The building is topped by square structure supporting a four sided dome and pinnacle. (This part of the theatre was used by Tree as his private address, one room was set up as a banqueting hall and another as his private living room.) At the time of opening the auditorium was decorated in the style of Louis XIV. There were private boxes on each tier next to the proscenium arch which were separated from the main body of the auditorium by marble columns. The walls were covered in a light red paper while the box hangings were of cerise embroidered silk. The seats in the Stalls, Dress and Family Circles were of the arm chair style and upholstered in red velvet as were the stage curtains, the safety curtain was a painted image of a Gobelin Tapestry. The whole of the theatre was lit by Electric Light. From the centre of the dome hung a glass and brass chandelier, and brackets of Louis XIV style adorned the box fronts and side walls. The stage had a depth of forty-nine feet and a width of sixty-nine feet, but like the three previous theatres other reference books say differently, one even quotes depth as forty-five feet and width thirty-four feet!

Only half of the site was to be used for the theatre the rest was to be a hotel built in the same style as a companion to the theatre, but Phipps died in 1897 before its completion. The hotel was completed by Lewis Issacs and Partner and opened in 1899. Named 'The Carlton' after Carlton House former home of the Prince Regent which had stood nearby it was run by the Swiss Hotelier César Ritz with Auguste Escoffier as head chef.

In 1902 with the death of Queen Victoria the name of the theatre was changed by permission of King Edward VII not to the King's Theatre as expected but to His Majesty's. Two years later Tree started an dramatic school at the theatre which eventually became the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. Tree's productions were mainly spectacular revivals of Shakespeare with elaborate scenery and costumes. But the operatic flame lived on as a small flicker, in 1909 Thomas Beecham gave matinee performances of Dame Ethel Smyth's *The Wreckers* and in his two full seasons he introduced Richard Strauss's *Feuersnot* in 1910 and *Ariadne auf Naxos* in 1913.

In 1916 Oscar Asche producued the first of four shows with a oriental theme, this was *Chu Chin Chow* which opened August 31 and ran for 2238 performances, it cost £5,300 to put on and netted over £700,000. His play *Cairo* followed in 1921, then Somerset Maugham's *East of Suez* the year after and lastly in 1923 James Elroy Flecker's *Hassan* with incidental music by Frederic Delius. Sergei Diaghileff gave two season of Russian Ballet in 1926 and 1928, while in the year between, the theatre was occupied by George and Ira Gershwin's musical *Oh Kay* with Gertrude Lawrence in the title role. Noel Coward's *Bitter Sweet* ran for 697 performances from July 1929, and his *Conversation Piece* opened four years later, in between came the operetta *The Dubarry* by Carl Millocker with the young Austrian soprano Anny Ahlers and Heddle Nash, tragically she committed suicide shortly after the show opened.

This was followed by *Music In the Air* a musical adventure by Oscar Hammerstein II and Jerome Kern. It seemed the stage was set for Her Majesty's Theatre to become the home of operetta and musical comedies. There were still productions of the dramatic genre namely Shakespeare's *Henry V part I* with the comedian George Robey making a sensation as Falstaff. During the years of W.W.II the theatre housed mainly revivals such as *The Merry Widow, Irene, The Lilac Domino* and Cole Porter's *Du Barry was a Lady.*

In 1940 the Carlton Hotel was badly damaged by bombing and the British Government requisitioned what was left intact for offices in 1942 until it was finally demolished in 1957-58. New Zealand House an eighteen floor steel and glass edifice was built on the site ruining the integrated view together with Her Majesty's Theatre as a whole. The last half of the 20th century Her Majesty's Theatre had been home mainly to American musicals, this started on 14 April 1949 with *Brigadoon* an enchanting fantasy set in Scotland by Alan Jay Lerner, music by Frederick Lowe, it ran for 685 performances, followed by their second musical *Paint Your Waggon* in February 1953 with an eighteen month run. Then there came three excellent comedies the first was *Teahouse of the August Moon* with Eli Wallach as the Interpreter. One critic said, 'Occasionally America sends us a comedy which is adult, sophisticated and civilised, the others were *No Time for Sergeants* and *The Tunnel of Love*. December 1958 saw Leonard Bernstein's West Side Story with lyrics by Stephen Sondheim begin its long run of 1,039 performances only to be beaten by *Fiddler on the Roof* opening in February 1967 with Chaim Topol as Tevye which had 2,030 performances. Two other musicals are worth remembering due to their leading ladies, *Company* in January 1972 with the wonderful Elaine Stritch, and *Applause,* the musical version of *All About Eve* with Lauren Bacall as Margo Channing at the end of the year in November. July 1974 saw a version of J.B. Priestley's *The Good Companions* with music by Andre Previn and lyrics by Johnny Mercer with John Mills as Oakroyd and Judi Dench as Miss Trant in the cast, sadly it only had only 252 performances. Peter Schaffer's brilliant play *Amadeus* transferred from the National Theatre in 1981.

On 9 October 1986 Andrew Lloyd Webber's *The Phantom of the Opera* took to the stage. The story is taken from the brilliant novel *Le Fantom de L'Opera* by Gaston Leroux first published in 1910, filmed in the silent era with Lon Chaney Snr., in the title role and again later in 1943 in technicolour with Claude Rains. The role of The Phantom supprisingly was taken by Michael Crawford, many critics were sceptical of the choice as he was perhaps best remembered as the hapless Frank Skinner in the T.V comedy series *Some Mothers do 'Ave 'Em*, in fact he had appeared in other musicals previously. The role of Christine Daaé was taken alternately by Sarah Brightman (then Lloyd Webber's wife) and Claire Moore. One stroke of fortune really helped to take the production by Maria Bjornsen to the very top of the game was that she had the use of all the Victorian stage machinery to enable her to create the underground lake beneath L'Opéra to such a spectacular success, that and the Masquerade scene on the Grand Stairs are truly magnificent examples of stage-craft.

Between 1990 and 1993 a complete renovation and improvement of the theatre took place which included better toilet facilities replacing the outdated and inadequate Victorian ones, all of which took place without the theatre being closed, and in October 2010 it celebrated its 10,000 performance.

And so I have come to the end of this grossly abreviated history of the four theatres that have been built on this site in the Haymarket. I suppose in a roundabout way that Her Majesty's Theatre, in a sense, is once more engaged in opera instead of musicals and plays. It has been a labour of love and if I am sure there are errors I know too that there is a lot I have had to leave out.

This is one theatre that really merits a full and integrated volume of its history.

