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# *New Donizetti ?*

This is too extravagant of course, but though "new" as a description of these discoveries is a question of terminology only it is quite close to reality. These two Donizettian items represent important overlooked initiatives that fill gaps in our chronology as well as offer significant insights upon the tipping points of the composer's all-too-short career. Both the educationally rococo Accademia Finale - the *pasticcio* often incorrectly attributed wholly to Donizetti and entitled *I piccioli virtuosi ambulanti* - a witness to the terminus quo of his earliest years, and its companion novelty the longtime languishing manuscript of *L'Ange de Nisida* - a witness to his mid-life rebirth in France are from the world of dreams but some of their music will not be unfamiliar and those who presume we are scraping the bottom of the barrel will be in for a surprise.

The first of the two - the crazily erudite *piccioli virtuosi* was the initiative of someone we cannot now identify - maybe it was Mayr who supplied some if its music, maybe it was its librettist Bartolomeo Merelli who supplied virtually all of its text - it could even have been Donizetti as a significant contributor - it is anyone's guess, but this engaging fantasy uncovers the fertile sub-culture of his earliest years and strikes at the heart of his exordium under Mayr. Therefore it is much more than the sum of its disparate parts. *L'Ange de Nisida* is even more precious a document as it is manifestly autograph - but even more obscure as it was never performed and was intended to be the initial cornerstone of the Gallic centrepiece of his career. Its revival too marks an exordium - that of his descent upon the cobbled and testing streets of the "Musical Capital of the World" and his début as a genuinely international composer.

Our good fortune is that all this is in impeccable hands. We know where *L'Ange di Nisida* will emerge at the time of writing: the Royal Opera House Covent Garden will stage two concert performances of the long awaited opera under the ægis of Opera Rara in July [See Diary], its realisation being in the hands of Dr Candida Mantica, Irish Research Council Postdoctoral Fellow at Maynooth University, and Managing Editor of the *Edzione critica delle opera di Vincenzo Bellini* (Casa Ricordi); while the amazing reappearance of *I piccioli virtuosi ambulanti* is in those of Nicolas Trees, Artistic Director of I Virtuosi ambulanti of Munich, one of the few truly innovative opera companies whose sophisticated revivals are at the very apex of all possibilities. We are awaiting the exact venue and date of such an appropriate revival with impatience.

AW





# *I Virtuosi ambulanti* entdecken *I piccioli virtuosi ambulanti*

Die einzige, 1819 gedruckte Librettoauflage von ***I piccioli virtuosi ambulanti* (*Die kleinen Straßenmusikanten*)** ist mit der Genrebezeichnung *Azione drammatico-musicale (dramatisch-musikalische Handlung)* überschrieben. Gattungsspezifisch – besonders im Hinblick auf die musikalische Substanz des Werkes – darf man hier von einem *Pasticcio* sprechen.

**Aus *welcher* Musik dieses Pasticcio exakt und im Detail besteht, war allerdings bis dato, trotz einiger Titelhinweise im Textbuch, nicht restlos geklärt.**
Nicht wenige Musikwissenschaftler hielten das 1819 in Bergamo uraufgeführte Stück von Johann Simon Mayr (1763-1845), Gaetano Donizetti (1797-1848) et al. daher für unvollständig oder gar verloren.
Unter Experten waren in erster Linie die Existenz von Donizettis eigens für das Werk geschriebene *Introduzione* sowie die Tatsache bekannt, dass er eine Arie aus seiner, zum fraglichen Zeitpunkt noch gar nicht uraufgeführten Opera buffa *Le nozze in villa* (*Die Hochzeit auf dem Dorf*, Mantua – 1820/21) in das Pasticcio eingefügt hat.
Vollkommen im Dunkeln blieb aber bislang die Provenienz und Existenz derjenigen Musiknummern, die vermutlich (da 1819 im gedruckten Libretto nicht namentlich genannt) von der Hand des bayerischen Komponisten Johann Simon Mayr stammen.

Nicolas Trees, der künstlerische Leiter des Münchner Vereins *I Virtuosi ambulanti e.V.* hat mittlerweile alle bisher noch fehlenden oder unbekannten Musiknummern lokalisiert und sie erstmals eindeutig und zweifelsfrei dem Pasticcio *I piccioli virtuosi ambulanti* zugeordnet – insbesondere die fehlenden Stücke von Mayr.

**Die Wiederentdeckung von *I piccioli virtuosi ambulanti* hat somit den Status einer absoluten musikhistorischen Neuigkeit.**

**Das Werk stellt eine veritable Kollektivkomposition aus der musikdramatischen „Kreativ-Schmiede" der *Lezioni caritatevoli* dar – Mayrs 1805 in Bergamo gegründeter Musikschule:**
Sowohl der Chef als auch sein Meisterschüler haben offensichtlich gemeinsam oder in gegenseitiger intensiver Absprache Hand angelegt, komponiert und die von anderen Komponisten übernommenen Musiknummern bearbeitet.
Eines soll nicht vergessen werden: Auch der Bergamasker Librettist des Stücks, Bartolomeo Merelli (1794-1879) wird ein paar Jahre vor der Entstehung der *piccioli virtuosi ambulanti* – ebenfalls im Rahmen der *Lezioni caritatevoli* – gemeinsam mit seinem Kommilitonen Donizetti als Kompositionsschüler von Mayr unterrichtet.

Möglicherweise arbeiten die beiden während der Entstehung der *piccioli virtuosi* gemeinsam an *Le nozze in villa*.
Unser Pasticcio dürfte daher wohl – maßgeschneidert – in permanentem künstlerischem Dialog entstanden sein.

**Merellis augenzwinkerndes Libretto schildert die umtriebigen Vorbereitungen von Musikstudenten zu einer Abschlussveranstaltung im Rahmen der *Lezioni caritatevoli.*** Durch einen dramaturgisch geschickt platzierten Zwischenfall wird die muntere Studenten-Gesellschaft während ihren Proben unvermittelt von der bitteren Realität der Straße eingeholt – und reagiert äußerst souverän.
**Über weite Strecken ist der Text in gesprochenen Dialogen geschrieben** – teilweise in voller, im Libretto explizit festgehaltener Absicht, die rhetorischen Fähigkeiten der Schüler zu trainieren. Die Gattungsbezeichnung *Azione drammatico-musicale* veranschaulicht, welchen Stellenwert das gesprochene Wort in diesem Übungsstück hat – und haben soll.

**Theatergeschichtlich ist Merellis Libretto für die *piccioli virtuosi* den sogenannten *Meta-Dramen* zuzurechnen.**
Leicht verkürzend ausgedrückt reflektiert diese dramatische Gattung in erster Linie sich selbst: Sie macht das Theater oder Theatermilieu zum Hauptgegenstand der Handlung, sehr oft in humoresker und satirischer Weise. Derartige Sujets waren um 1800 in der italienischen Oper sehr beliebt.
**Mayr selbst hat mehrere davon vertont:** *Che originali!* (*Was für Originale!*, Gaetano Rossi, Venedig – 1798), *L'accademia di musica* (*Die Musikakademie*, Gaetano Rossi, Venedig – 1799), *I virtuosi* (*Die Virtuosen*, Gaetano Rossi, Venedig – 1801). Für die Studenten seiner *Lezioni caritatevoli* richtet er zudem 1810 in Bergamo *La prova dell'Accademia finale* ein (*Die Probe für die Schlussakademie* – 1997 in Bergamo wieder aufgeführt) und 1811 *Il piccolo compositore di musica (Der kleine Komponist)* – beide mit dem jungen Gaetano Donizetti als Interpret und Darsteller.

**Mayrs renommiertester Schüler bleibt vom effektvollen und beliebten Genre des Meta-Dramas nicht unbeeinflusst:** Mit den verschiedenen Fassungen von *Le convenienze teatrali* (*Sitten am Theater*, Neapel – 1827) beziehungsweise *Le convenienze ed inconvenienze teatrali* (*Sitten und Unsitten am Theater,* Mailand – 1831) landet Donizetti einen Erfolg, der bis auf den heutigen Tag andauert. In Mitteleuropa wird das Werk aktuell meist unter dem Titel *Viva la Mamma!* gegeben.

**Auch andere Komponisten der Zeit verschließen sich nicht der Faszination dieses theatralischen Genres. Zu ihnen gehört Joseph Weigl** (1766-1846)**, der in *I piccioli virtuosi ambulanti* auch mit einem von Mayr bearbeiteten Stück vertreten ist:** Der österreichische Komponist lanciert 1802 in Wien mit der komischen Salonkantate *Le pazzie musicali* (*Die musikalischen Verrücktheiten,* anonym) einen Vorläufer des absurden Musiktheaters.



Noch weitere zeitgenössische Tondichter liefern beliebte und oft gespielte *Meta-Opern:* Erwähnt seien Domenico Cimarosa (1749-1801) mit seiner satirischen *farsa L'impresario in angustie* (*Der Theaterdirektor in Bedrängnis*, Giuseppe Maria Diodati, Neapel – 1786) und dem komischen Intermezzo *Il maestro di cappella* (*Der Kapellmeister,* Libretto: anonym – Berlin 1793) sowie Ferdinando Paër (1771-1839) mit *Le maître de chapelle, ou Le souper imprévu* (*Der Kapellmeister oder das unerwartete Abendessen*, Sophie Gay, Paris – 1821).

**Bezogen auf seine inhaltlich-dramaturgische Dimension steht das Werk in der Tradition jesuitischer oder benediktinischer Schuldramen und -Opern,** wie sie über Jahrhunderte, beispielsweise in den Benediktinerabteien von Ottobeuren, Engelberg oder Einsiedeln, gepflegt wurden.

**Dem Libretto vorangestellt ist das Motto: *Ah! Che il Ciel non lascia mai / Senza premio la pietà*** *(Der Himmel möge Erbarmen niemals ohne Belohnung lassen).*
Es handelt sich um ein Textzitat aus der von Mayr vertonten, nunmehr einwandfrei den *piccioli virtuosi* zugeordneten *Aria Svizzera*, der Romanze *Suonatore sventurato (Unglücklicher Musikant).*
**Dieses Motto wird im** (ebenfalls von Mayr komponierten und neu identifizierten) **Finale des Werkes sowohl inhaltlich als auch musikalisch erneut aufgegriffen und sinngemäß eingelöst mit dem Schlusssatz des Librettos: *Così dal ciel costante / Si premia la pietà*** *(So wird vom beständigen Himmel Erbarmen belohnt).*

**Von den Benediktinern in der Abtei Weltenburg an der Donau wird auch der siebenjährige Johann Simon Mayr ab 1769, für ungefähr drei Jahre, in der Klosterschule unterrichtet.** Er erhält dort eine umfassende musikalische Ausbildung und spielt nach kurzer Zeit so gut Klavier, dass er dadurch (den Aufzeichnungen des damaligen Abtes zufolge) sein soziales Umfeld vollkommen verblüfft.

**Weitere musikalische Beiträge für die *piccioli virtuosi ambulanti* stammen unter anderem von Gioachino Rossini** (1792-1868) **– das Duett *Amor, possente nome*** *(Liebe, gewaltiger Name)* **aus *Armida*** (Giovanni Schmidt, Neapel – 1817) – und vom schon erwähnten Joseph Weigl – Haydns Patensohn, geboren in Eisenstadt im Burgenland: *Pria ch'io l'impegno* aus *L'amor marinaro* (*Matrosenliebe*, Giovanni de Gamerra, Wien – 1797) **wird von Mayr zu einem witzigen Quartettino mit dem Titel *Pria che di nuovo* umgearbeitet.**
Es handelt sich um dieselbe Melodie, die Beethoven (1770-1827) 1797 dem dritten Satz seines Trios Op. 11 in B-Dur (*Gassenhauer-Trio*) zugrunde legt und die 1818 oder 1828 auch Niccolò Paganini (1782-1840) in seiner *Sonata con variazioni* M.S. 47 (*Pria ch'io l'impegno*) verwendet.

**Dieses Pasticcio ist demnach weit mehr als „nur" eine banale Kompilation erfolgreicher Musiknummern der damaligen Zeit:** Donizetti und Mayr haben dafür nicht nur neue Musik

geschrieben, sondern, wie oben erwähnt, die Anleihen von ihren Kollegen bearbeitet und sie in eine dem Stück gemäße Form gebracht.
**Dadurch gewinnt es einen singulären Status – und wird zum musik- und kulturhistorischen Unikat: Im Zeitalter des *Belcanto* verkörpert das Werk die einzige überlieferte und verbürgte transalpine, bayerisch-italienische Opern-Zusammenarbeit überhaupt.**

Mit derartigen „Schul-Opern" reiht sich der Komponist aus Mendorf/Markt Altmannstein in eine Tradition ein, die 1830/31 vom spanischen Tenor Manuel García (1775-1832) erneut aufgegriffen wird: Er schreibt für seine Gesangsstudenten fünf kleinere (in der Gegenwart teilweise wieder aufgeführte) Opern mit Klavierbegleitung. Analog verfährt Garcías Tochter, die berühmte Mezzosopranistin Pauline Viardot-García (1821-1910): Sie vertont in der zweiten Hälfte des 19. und zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts, auch für ihre Gesangsschüler, mehrere kleinere Werke (ebenfalls mit Klavierbegleitung), die mit Genrebegriffen wie *Opérette de salon* (Salon-Operette) überschrieben sind. In diesem konkreten Fall handelt es sich um *Cendrillon (Aschenbrödel* – 1904). Das bekannteste Werk der französischen Komponistin hat in den letzten Jahren mehrere Neuproduktionen erlebt.

***I piccioli virtuosi ambulanti* in ihrer originalen Form, auf Basis der vorliegenden Notenmanuskripte und des gedruckten Librettos von 1819, sind für neun mitwirkende männliche Studenten/Schüler konzipiert .**
Zwei davon spielen laut Libretto-Anweisung im Stück zusätzlich Klavier, zwei weitere Violine und einer Gitarre. Sechs der Studenten haben im Rahmen der Partitur tragende, teils sehr anspruchsvolle Gesangsrollen. In chorischen Momenten wird jedoch von allen neun Mitwirkenden gesangliche Präsenz verlangt.

**Sämtliche Schüler treten unter ihren vollständigen bürgerlichen Namen quasi als ihre eigenen Rollen auf.** Wenn die munteren Aufführungsvorbereitungen im Stück urplötzlich von den kleinen Straßenmusikanten mit ihrem traurigen, „realen" Handlungshintergrund und den „konkreten" Bedürfnissen unterbrochen werden, **dann scheint die dramaturgische Basis-Konstellation von Luigi Pirandellos** (1867-1936) **Schauspiel *Sechs Personen suchen einen Autor*** (Rom – 1921) **greifbar vorweg genommen.**

**An diesem Punkt schließt sich der Kreis zum Meta-Theater endgültig.** Der Inhalt von *I piccioli virtuosi ambulanti* ließe sich aufgrund der Disposition des Librettos permanent weiter fortschreiben, wie ein Sequel einer beliebigen *Telenovela* oder US-amerikanischen *Soap-Opera*.

Eine moderne Aufführungsfassung wird sich mit Fragen der stimmlichen Besetzung der einzelnen Partien, aber auch mit der Existenz und Vermittelbarkeit des gesprochenen italienischen Dialoges sehr gründlich und sorgfältig auseinandersetzen müssen.



**Zwei der jungen Interpreten von *I piccioli virtuosi ambulanti* lenken das ganz besondere Interesse des Musikhistorikers auf sich:** Dies ist einerseits den exorbitanten gesanglichen Anforderungen geschuldet, die mit der Interpretation dieses Werkes an sie gestellt werden, andererseits ihren außergewöhnlichen Biographien, welche diese Studenten später durchleben:

**Der eine ist der Bergamasker Sänger, Gesangslehrer und Komponist Girolamo Forini (1806-1876), der andere der zukünftige Tenor Carlo Trezzini (1805-1835), ebenfalls aus Bergamo stammend.**

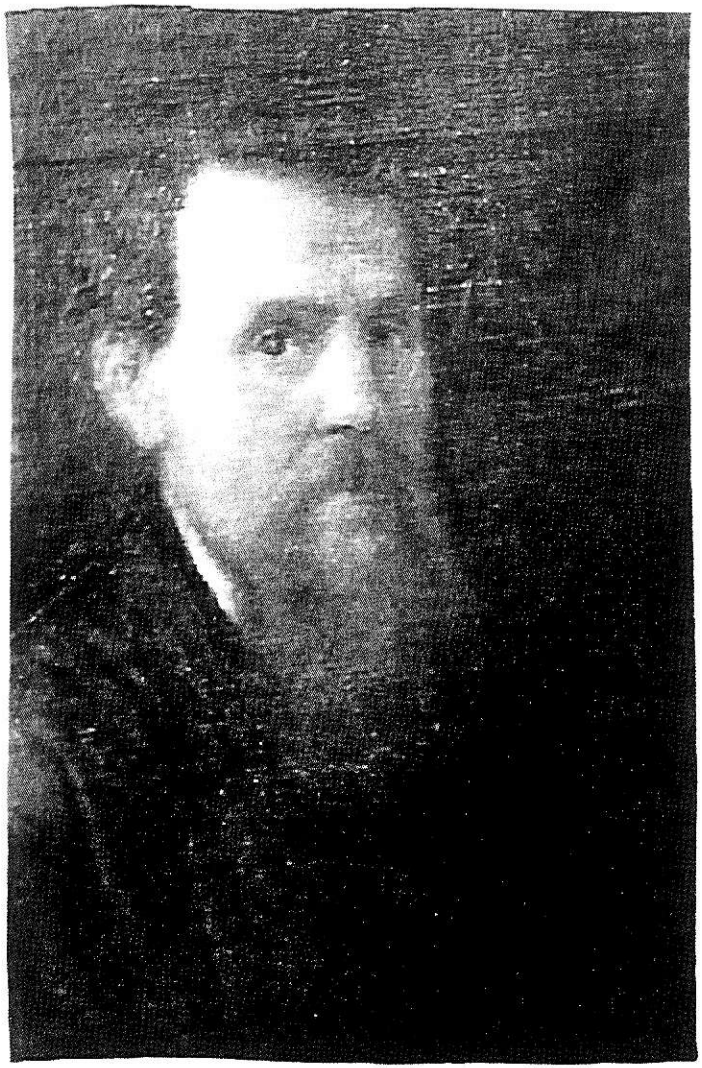
**In den Biographien beider Künstler spielen – zufälligerweise und aus vollkommen unterschiedlichen Gründen – Bayern und München eine große Rolle.** Es ist unglaublich spannend, wie vielfältig und intensiv sich die kulturhistorischen Wechselwirkungen und Verknüpfungen im Falle eines einzelnen Werkes wie *I piccioli virtuosi ambulanti* zwischen zwei Kulturzentren auf beiden Seiten der Alpen, in diesem Fall Bergamo und München/Bayern entwickeln.

Im Rahmen der *Lezioni caritatevoli* wird **Girolamo Forini** 1811, mit nur gerade fünf Jahren, Mayrs Schüler und entwickelt sich bald zu einem seiner besten Studenten. Dies zeigt sich sehr anschaulich in den hochvirtuosen Gesangsnummern, die Mayr und Donizetti dem 13-jährigen Jungen in den *piccioli virtuosi* abverlangen: *Non mostrarmi in tale istante* – in Donizettis späterer Opera buffa *Le nozze in villa* Sabinas Arie – und Rossinis imposantes, mindestens ebenso virtuoses Liebesduett *Amor, possente nome* aus *Armida*.

**1823 wird Forini außerdem Mayrs Kompositionsschüler.** In diesem Feld ist er später mit Salonkompositionen und geistlichen Stücken sehr aktiv. Er komponiert ebenfalls mehrere Opern, darunter die *Tragedia lirica Lutalto di Vicolungo* (Libretto: G. Benedetto Pucci), die 1842 in Bergamo erfolgreich uraufgeführt wird. Mit diesem Werk erringt er sich den speziellen Respekt seines Freundes Donizetti (der eigens zur Uraufführung kommt).

**1829 wird Forini als *Maestro di bel canto / Maestro di canto e declamazione* an Mayrs *Scuola Caritatevole di Musica* in Bergamo berufen. Den Posten hat er 40 Jahre inne. In dieser Disziplin erarbeitet er sich denn auch eine ausgezeichnete Reputation:**
Zu seinen Schülern zählen unter anderem historische Belcanto-Grössen wie die Sopranistin Benedetta Colleoni-Corti (1811-1873) **und, in ganz besonderem Maße, der Bass Ignazio Marini** (1811-1873), der als bedeutender Donizetti- und Verdi-Interpret Musikgeschichte schreiben und Rollen wie Guido in Donizettis *Gemma di Vergy* (Giovanni Emanuele Bidera,

Neapel – 1834) sowie die Titelrollen in Verdis *Oberto* (Antonio Piazza/Temistocle Solera, Mailand – 1839) und *Attila* (Temistocle Solera, Venedig – 1846) kreieren wird.



**Girolamo Forini**



1848 lernt Forini in Milano den fränkisch-bayerischen Juristen Georg von Dessauer (1795-1870) und dessen Familie kennen: Georg gehört einer weit verzweigten, ehemals jüdischen, zum Katholizismus konvertierten Familie an. Sie stammt ursprünglich aus dem Badischen. Zur Zeit der Bekanntschaft mit Forini arbeitet Georg unter anderem als Rechtsberater des bayerischen Königshauses.
Er lädt den Bergamasker *Maestro di bel canto* nach Bayern ein, um dort seine Töchter von ihm in Gesang unterrichten zu lassen: Krankheitsfälle in seiner Familie und finanzielle Sorgen lassen Forini die Einladung annehmen. **Er reist für zwei längere Aufenthalte nach Bayern, von Februar 1849 bis Februar 1850 und von Oktober 1852 bis März 1853.**

Die Dessauers leben im Winter in München, verbringen jedoch die Sommer am Fuße der bayerischen Alpen, in Kochel am See. Dort besitzt die Familie eine Residenz, zu jener Zeit *Villa Dessauer* genannt. Ein ausführlicher Briefwechsel zwischen Forini und seinem Freund und Studienkollegen Antonio Dolci (1798-1869) – ebenfalls eng mit Donizetti befreundet – gibt lebhafte Einblicke in Forinis Aufenthalte in Bayern.

**Die weitere Geschichte der *Villa Dessauer* zeigt exemplarisch, *wie* weit in eine verschattete und düstere Zukunft des 20. Jahrhunderts die heiteren Strahlen eines unbeschwerten, 1819 von Musikstudenten uraufgeführten *Pasticcio* reichen können:**
Wer heute via Google Informationen über eine *Villa Dessauer* in Kochel am See abruft, landet im Nichts. In einer zweiten, detaillierteren Recherche stellt sich allerdings heraus, dass das Anwesen heute noch existiert und *Schloss Aspenstein* genannt wird:
**1936 gelangt die Villa – wie genau muss im Detail noch abgeklärt werden – in die Hände der NSDAP und dient forthin dem „Reichsjugendführer", späteren „Reichsstatthalter" und „Gauleiter" von Wien, Baldur von Schirach (1907-1974), bis 1945 als Wohnresidenz.**
Heute wird in dem Schlösschen – in Zusammenarbeit mit der Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung – von einem überparteilichen Verein eine gemeinnützige Bildungsakademie betrieben, die sozialdemokratischen Idealen nahesteht.

**Für Carlo Trezzini – ein Jahr älter als sein Kommilitone Forini – ist der Auftritt in *I piccioli virtuosi ambulanti* 1819 der zweite öffentliche Auftritt als Sänger überhaupt.**

Zwei Jahre später wird der 16-Jährige nach München an die Königliche Hofoper engagiert, **in *das* Rossini-Epizentrum (und erstem Aufführungsort von dessen Opern) nördlich der Alpen:**

Dort feiert er 1821 erste Erfolge als Giacomo V in *La donna del lago* (*Die Frau vom See,* Andrea Leone Tottola, Neapel – 1819). Seine Mitwirkung als Idreno in der Münchner Erstaufführung von *Semiramide* (Gaetano Rossi, Venedig – 1823) wird 1824 für ihn zum persönlichen Triumph.

In den nächsten Jahren bleibt er dem Repertoire eines *Tenore di grazia* treu, feiert Erfolge in Torino, Bergamo, Trieste und Barcelona, wo er 1828 in Pacinis *Die Vestalin* (Luigi Romanelli, Mailand – 1823) singt. 1829 wird Trezzini für ein musikhistorisch denkwürdiges Ereignis nach Parma verpflichtet: Er singt den Corasmino in der kalamitösen Uraufführung von Bellinis und Romanis *Zaira* (mit sehr guten Kritiken für den Sänger).

**Anschließend macht der Tenor etwas für die damalige Zeit sehr unübliches: Er zieht sich von der Bühne zurück, pausiert und beginnt erneut zu studieren.** Nach diesem „Sabbatical" nimmt er 1830 im renommierten *Teatro Real* in Madrid, dessen Opernensemble durch Saverio Mercadante (1795-1870) zusammen gestellt worden ist, die beruflichen Aktivitäten wieder auf.

Sein lokales Début gibt er in keiner geringeren Partie, als in der Titelrolle von Bellinis *Pirata.* Erfolg und Kritiken sprechen für sich:
***„Trezzini hatte einen Erfolg, der in die triumphale Geschichte dieses Theaters eingehen wird. Der Sänger war wieder im Vollbesitz seiner kostbaren Stimme, machte damit die Zuhörer sprachlos und rief eine einhellige Begeisterung hervor, die alle Zeichen einer entschiedenen Raserei trug. […] In Madrid ruft man einhellig aus: Trezzini ist ein großer Tenor."***

Er bleibt bis 1832 in der spanischen Hauptstadt und feiert herausragende Erfolge in den schwierigen Tenorpartien von *Anna Bolena* (Felice Romani, Mailand – 1830), Pacinis *Gli Arabi nelle Gallie* (*Die Araber in Gallien*, Luigi Romanelli, Mailand – 1827) und *L'ultimo giorno di Pompei* (*Der letzte Tag von Pompei*, Andrea Leone Tottola, Neapel – 1825) sowie – besonders hervorzuheben – in Mercadantes *Melodramma buffo La rappresaglia* (*Die Vergeltung*, Felice Romani, Cádiz – 1829).
Bei seiner Rückkehr nach Italien winkt ihm ein lukratives dreijähriges Engagement in Mailand mit renommiertem Auftritten an der *Scala* und am *Teatro della Canobbiana.*

**An *diesem* Punkt greift das Schicksal grausam und irreversibel in Carlo Trezzinis erst 27-jähriges, blühendes Leben ein:** Er ist wohl dem Stress der dauernden Reisen und dem Druck von immer neuen *Scritture* nicht mehr gewachsen und produziert zunächst mehrere Misserfolge. Im Mai 1835, während der laufenden Uraufführungsserie von Luigi Sommas (n.d.) *Tragedia lirica Ildegonda e Rizzardo* (Libretto: Giuseppe Sapio) am *Teatro della Canobbiana* in Milano, erleidet er einen schweren psychischen Zusammenbruch.
**Er verliert die Kontrolle über seinen Verstand und wird mit der Zustimmung seines Vaters zurück in seine Heimat in die Nervenheilanstalt von Astino gebracht, wo er am 4.**

**Juni 1835 im Alter von nur 29 Jahren stirbt…** Ein tragisches Sängerleben, wie es in einer romantischen Künstleroper nicht bewegender hätte vertont werden können!
Der spanische Musikwissenschaftler und Dirigent Dr. Gustavo Sánchez, Dozent an der *Universidad Autónoma de Madrid* (UAM) und an der *Universidad Internacional de La Rioja*,



war bereits in vergangenen Produktionen ein unverzichtbarer Mitarbeiter von *I Virtuosi ambulanti e.V.*
Mit dem Ziel, diese einzigartige musikdramatische Kostbarkeit im 21. Jahrhundert, 200 Jahre nach ihrer Uraufführung, erstmals wieder zu neuem Bühnenleben zu erwecken, arbeitet er aktuell an einer Aufführungsfassung von *I piccioli virtuosi ambulanti.*

**Der Blog *Protokoll einer Entdeckung* auf www.virtuosi-ambulanti.de informiert fortlaufend mit News und Updates zu unserem Forschungsprojekt der Wiedererschließung von *I piccioli virtuosi ambulanti.***

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I

# PICCIOLI VIRTUOSI AMBULANTI

*AZIONE DRAMMATICO-MUSICALE*

PER

## L'ACCADEMIA FINALE

DEGLI ALLIEVI DELLE LEZIONI CARITATEVOLI

*SOTTO GLI AUSPICJ*

DELLA

## CONGREGAZIONE DI CARITÀ

DI

BERGAMO

DALLA TIPOGRAFIA SONZOGNI

1819.



# ATTO UNICO

### SCENA PRIMA

*CAMERA nel Locale destinato per le Lezioni caritatevoli di Musica.*

*Evvi un Pianoforte, una tavola nera per gli esercizj d'aritmetica, un tavolino da studio, e delle carte geografiche*

*Forini, Cantu', Gorini, e Trezzini*

*Forini ( alla tavola nera facendo dei conti )*

Tre per sei...
*Cantù ( al tavolino scrivendo )*
Discorda in caso....
*Forini* Sei per dieci... *( come sopra )*
*Gorini ( avendo innanzi a se delle carte geografiche )*
Oriente.... Occaso...
*Trezzini ( con un manoscritto in mano, e passeggiando per la camera )*
I Romani in decadenza...
Di Trajano la clemenza...
*Gorini* Per Zodiaco che s'intende?... *( come sopra )*
*Trezzini* Di Neron la crudeltà...
*Tutti*
Anche un cieco qui comprende,
Che si studia, che si fà.

*Forini* Da mezz' ora e provo e tento *( come sopra )*
Questo conto indiavolato,
Ma alla fine l'ho trovato, *( tutto allegro )*
E mi posso assicurar.

*Cantù* Tutto regge, e ben concorda,
Nome, verbo, tempo, e caso;
Ah! che a pien son persuaso, *( tutto gajo )*
Che m'avranno da premiar.

*Forini e Gorini*

*a 2*
Più ci guardo, Più ci penso, son contento,
E non deggio / c'è da dubitar.

*Trez.* Di Trajano la bontate
Mi sta in testa... ma Nerone!!!
Perchè mai le bricconate
Va la storia a rammentar?...

*Gorini* In fra l' Artico e l'Antartico *( come sopra )*
Io sudai tutto il mattino;
Nell' esame, ch'è vicino *( contento di se )*
Qualche onore m'ho da far.

*Cantù* Ancor io son persuaso,
Che m' avranno da premiar.

*Forini* A me pure in questo caso
Qualche cosa ha da toccar.

*Trez.* Piano, piano, attenti bene! *( agli altri )*
Dir è far, non è lo stesso:
Di presumer non conviene,
Per non farsi corbellar.

*Forini, Gorini, e Cantù ( deridendolo )*

*a 3*
Bravo! bravo! bel riflesso! —
Ma non c'è da dubitar.



*Cantù* Un grammatico par mio
Sa ben tutto concordar.

*Gorini* Un geografo par mio
Sa ben tutto misurar.

*Forini* Computista qual son io
Non può i conti mai sbagliar.

*Trezzini* Ah! presumer non conviene,
Per non farsi corbellar.

*Tutti*
Alfine al bel cimento
Propizio il cielo arrida:
Appieno omai ci affida
La nota altrui bontà;
E il giovanil talento
Premio gradito avrà. (*)

*Trezzini* Ma cari amici!... permettete, ch' io ve lo dica... sembrami veramente, che un poco troppo vi vantiate: dice il gran Maestro di Nerone...

*Forini* Eh! lasciaci un pò stare con quel tuo Seneca svenato . . . Non è gia presunzione la nostra, è coraggio. Convien dire che tu non rammenti più quel, che il Maestro ci dettò, cioè: che " *La soverchia timidezza è un ostacolo al progresso delle belle arti* ,,

*Gorini ( agli altri )* Vi spiegherò io il mistero, perchè gli duole, che seco noi ci rallegriamo del fatto nostro... ( *piano* ) Egli non sa ancor bene la parte sua, e perciò *( forte )* vorrebbe, che le orecchie abbassassimo, come i Dottori di Se-

(*) La composizione musicale è del Sig. *Gaetano Donizetti.*

# The elusive
# Bartolomeo Merelli
## Librettist/impresario extraordinary

Alexander Weatherson

*Enrico di Borgogna! Le nozze in villa! I piccioli virtuosi ambulanti!*
What do we have here but a come-back for this fellow classmate of Gaetano Donizetti, this loyal Bergamasc painfully discounted, but now at the cutting edge of modern rediscovery. An ingenious pupil of Mayr destined to become one of the master movers of his day whose frayed reputation (discarded by Donizetti and repudiated by Verdi) swept him under the carpet. Now perhaps is the time such a dismissed protagonist, such an all-powerful magus of La Scala[1] and far-from negligible scribbler of libretti, can be permitted a virtue or two…



Schmidl[2] seems to be the only authority that finds truly heartfelt words of praise for this operatic black hole: " *uno dei più illuminati e potenti impresari, che*

[1] He was Impresario From the autumn of 1836 to 30 November 1850, and again from1 August 1861 to the beginning of 1863. Verdi's contest with Merelli - accused of having gone behind his back with Verdi's publishing rights - was the reason for the latter's absence from La Scala for thirty-six years but without Merelli he would never have been there in the first place

[2] Carlo Schmidl *Dizionario Universale dei Musicisti* Vol.2 (Milan 1929) 89



*aveva saputo destare tante vive emozioni coi suoi superbi spettacoli nei maggiori pubblici d'Europa.*" And it is a fact that so many of our supermarket brands date from his stint at La Scala.

The endearing text of *I piccioli virtuosi ambulanti* could well be the best witness to his finest qualities - to his sympathy for his native city and empathy for the musical culture of which he was a part. Not only was he a favoured pupil of the Bavarian maestro but Mayr made a gift of Merelli's texts to his most gifted pupil, it was the young Bartolomeo Merelli (1794-1879) who supplied his first real libretti to the young Donizetti – in all, four or so texts - not among the most daring but among the most formative; he wrote several libretti for Mayr at much the same time and a similar handful for the young Nicola Vaccai including the outrageous text of *Il precipizio o le fucine di Norvegia* (1826) in which there is a mandatory appearance of the *aurora borealis* - one of those scenic marvels that were such an impediment to revival, then as now.

Indeed, as regards his brief literary parabola he must have been one of those inflexible poetasters who felt it their duty to spur their composers to dangerous limits, even Verdi can be regarded as benefiting from such a persuasion (it depends how you look at the facts). His Bergamasc classmate was spared such extremes: *Enrico di Borgogna* and *Una follia* both from 1818 were staged comparatively uneventfully in Venice (barring singer's problems); *Le nozze in villa* officially dates from the following year and was mounted modestly in Mantua (so modestly indeed that it vanished). Merelli's libretto for *I piccioli virtuosi ambulanti* dates from 1819 and too has its puzzles, it quotes engagingly from *Le nozze in villa* but the *azione drammatico-musicale in un atto i piccioli virtuosi ambulanti* is supposed to be set in 1817 (three years before *Le nozze in villa* arrived on stage). Lapse of memory? It is very improbable. He also supplied the text for Donizetti's *Zoraida di Granata* in 1822 but it was turned inside out by Jacopo Ferretti two years later.

These early operas of Donizetti's shared the poet's desk with the libretto for *Il lupo d'Otende ossia L'innocenza salvata dalla colpa* for Vaccai, also for Venice, but display little of the bizarre fantasy Merelli piled upon that surprisingly docile maestro, in fact in respect of the sequence and content of these libretti a puzzling picture of Bartolomeo Merelli emerges: however did he manage to juggle the romantic historical *Enrico di Borgogna,* the semi-serious phantasmagoria of the Belgian wolf, *Le nozze in villa* and the schoolboy sentiment of his quasi-autobiographical *virtuosi ambulanti* all at the same time? However did he keep it all in the air? Wasn't it rather indigestible? Truly Merelli is an elusive figure.

All the evidence points to the fact that Merelli was exceptionally well-read as well as remarkably worldly - not something one can say with certainty about his early clientèle but something Mayr must have spotted at an early age. He was both a scholar and creatively imaginative unlike his hard-nosed rivals in the

music business, educated beyond his years, wise before his time he put his money where his interests lay in later life but seems to have lacked the necessary social skills or diplomacy to make a bridge with his clients. He was not always prudent. He was a fixer, but lacked useful powers of communication except when writing libretti. Clearly an enlightened impresario, not more devious than Barbaja or Lanari but far less adroit and famously unlucky in his choice of protégés (!)

What can one say about his more tender contacts, that is, the fellows displayed so graphically in his libretto for *I piccioli virtuosi ambulanti*?

Schoolboy nostalgia? The participants are named thus in the libretto:

Carlo Trezzini
Girolamo Forini
Giovanni Gorini (sic)
Giacomo Cantù
Gio. Battista Rossi
Orazio Campana
Filippo Perico
Pietro Ceribelli
Francesco Ceruti
*Tutti Allievi delle lezioni caritatevoli di Bergamo*

*Il fatto si suppone nell'anno 1817*
*L'azione è nel Locale della Scuola Musicale*

What do we know of them? Well we know Giovanni Corini (correct spelling) was an accomplished pianist as we are told in the libretto that during the event he played a piano concerto by Antonio Gonzales (who was *maestro di cembalo e organo della Scuola*) while prefacing the performance was a concerto for two violins by Joseph Kreutzer played by two pupils who were not otherwise participants in this *accademia finale*: Giovanni Vailati and Antonio Piatti. Fortunately Girolamo Forini is the subject of a book devoted to this world: Pierluigi Forcella's invaluble opuscolo [3] is a goldmine of insights and information by a Bergamasc fully worthy of that splendid city; from this inestimable source we know that Giovanni Corini "*fu pianista presso la corte del Re di Sardegna a Torino*" that Giacomo Cantù "*si impose come compositore, organista e pianista*" and also that Mayr prepared the way for the concert with a sextet expressly for six sopranos: *Quali accenti* that involved Forini, Corini, Cantù, Campana, Rossi and Trezzini. These sopranos were due to flower vocally and quite soon: Carlo

[3] Pierluigi Forcella *Girolamo Forini maestro di bel canto da Bergamo alla Baviera* (Bergamo 1998)



Trezzini became a celebrated tenor and had a fine international career, [4] alas his life ended abruptly at the age of 29; Gio. Battista Rossi also a tenor "*era cantante a Venezia e altrove*" while Forini himself maintained a high-profile orbit both at home in Bergamo and in Mayr's fief of Bavaria; baritenore, composer and teacher he was an important vocal coach whose expertise was recognised by Donizetti. He also wrote an opera for home consumption, with the title *Lutalto da Vico-lungo* with a libretto by G.Benedetto Pucci staged at the Teatro Sociale of Bergamo in the carnival of 1842; Giuseppe Zobboli sang the title role and Carlotta Griffini that of Nelinda.[5]

Amusingly, in *I piccioli virtuosi ambulanti* it is for Forini that Merelli ascribes his premonitory one-liner: [6]

*" Computista qual son io*
*Non può i conti mai sbagliar"*

an in-joke – but clearly one shared by Donizetti!

It would seem that Bartolomeo Merelli – though senior to Donizetti - was as familiar with these juvenile voices as was the composer, he even knew what café's they frequented where they went to eat and drink.[7] Forini and Rossi have been given major items to sing and Trezzini what amounts to an *aria finale* - a distribution anticipating their forthcoming transit of the stage. In the course of the text a didactic fable translated from German by Merelli "L'Ussignuolo, le Rane, ed Il Poeta" declaimed by Perico is nothing more or less than a species of *Credo* on the part of the librettist while all the ensuing verses as declaimed by Campana and Cantù are simply a musicological diatribe designed to display as much as possible the learning of the poet as that of the talented students. The interpolated extracts of music by Weigl,[8] Rossini[9] and Donizetti[10] to be heard within the action being chosen solely to demonstrate the current vocal strengths of the Scuola, while the casting of Ceribelli and Ceruti as the *piccioli virtuosi* indicates that they were demonstrably diminutive musical *ragazzi* - small boys,

[4] Luigi Pilon *Cantanti bergamaschi all'epoca di Donizetti* Vol 1 *La Vocalità e i Cantanti* [in] *Il Teatro di Donizetti*, Atti dei Convegni delle Celebrazioni (Bergamo 1997) 62-66

[5] Stieger gives Giambattista Poggi as librettist; the Teatro Sociale chronology of 2009 ascribes it to Pucci (the latter no doubt correct); Forini was *maestro al cembalo* at the performance with his former fellow student of Mayr,Antonio Piatti as its conductor

[6] In the detailed distribution of the *Scena Prima* quartetto whose music was written expressly (it would seem) by Donizetti

[7] Viz. the reference in *Scena Quarta* to Pino da Giacomo *"Padrone di una delle botteghe di caffè che trovansi in piazza"*

[8] A coro from his *L'amor marinaro*

[9] The celebrated duet from *Armida 'Amor possente nome"*

[10] From *Le nozze in villa*: Sabina's scena ed aria *'Voi v'opporreste invan/Non mostarmi in tale istante'*

in need of succour and support. However diverting, funny, ironic, erudite, tear-jerking or tongue-in-cheek this libretto by Merelli was both apposite and to the point as far as the prospects of his cast was concerned, as well as passingly poignant.

His own career may have been no less poignant. Having spent many years in Vienna in semi-control of the Kärntnertortheater in parallel with that of La Scala, with the Risorgimento Merelli gave up his sway in Milan and went into uncomfortable retirement, his resources much eroded. Like many establishment figures he was accused of being an Austrian *aficionado*. But political conviction and patriotism were not necessarily subject to the same clear divisions cherished by lofty historians today. In those years of passionate evolution like all those other unfortunates responsible for the direction of Opera Houses he resisted change - committed to a financial rule of thumb if not by nature or personal opinion - he preferred the status quo without which fingers were burned on a regular basis.

So what have we learned from this corporate musical fable for talented beginners? It was both a *jeu d'esprit* and full of engaging details about real people at a critical moment in their development. It has delicious music. It confirms too that we know almost nothing of its author. This once supremely powerful pupil of Mayr - this impresario/librettist seems even less accessible after reading this key libretto! But some facts do emerge: the text of *Le nozze in villa* was apparently conceived under juvenile auspices and the opera may have been ready for performance two or three years earlier than is supposed; Merelli seems never to have offered operatic overtures to his fellow *virtuosi* in later life - with the exception of course of Gaetano Donizetti and this did not end well; he did not abandon Bergamo but Bergamo may alas be accused of having abandoned him. All the composers to whom he had supplied libretti abandoned him once they had attained a secure niche in the repertory! And this applies supremely to those he championed...

In advanced age Bartolomeo Merelli probably reflected that composers and gratitude, material reward, and even musical satisfaction were irreconcilable concepts!





# Donizetti's *Gemma di Vergy* in London

**Russell Burdekin**
March, 2018

Donizetti's *Gemma di Vergy* is probably best known today for the recording featuring Montserrat Caballé in a concert performance at Carnegie Hall, New York, on March 14, 1976 that stemmed from a production the previous December in Naples. It has since been staged at Bergamo in 1987 and 2011. The Society's website recently received an email from a singer considering staging it in London and enquiring about its past performance history in the UK. In fact it has only been staged here once, in 1842, but the reactions to that throw an interesting light on performance priorities and on attitudes to Donizetti in mid-19th century Britain.

In the decade or so following its premiere at La Scala, Milan, on December 26, 1834, *Gemma* was one of Donizetti's most successful operas in Italy and was staged in several other countries. It fell out of favour along with so many *bel canto* operas in the latter half of the 19th century and was not revived until the 1975 Naples production. Its British production was at Her Majesty's Theatre, London, on March 12, 1842 where it continued to be performed for the best part of a month. Gemma was Adelaide Moltini, Ida di Greville – Madame Bellini, Conte di Vergy – Signor Santi, Tomas – Signor Guasco, Rolando – Signor Galli and Guido - Signor Panzini. The cast was not well known in Britain, only Madame Bellini and Signor Galli having appeared here previously. Benjamin Lumley, who was Her Majesty's Theatre manager at the time, wrote that the opera was the choice of the singers rather than his and reflects how singers were the main force in opera at this time (*Reminiscences of the opera*. London: Hurst and Blackett, 1864: 36).

To say that the opera was badly received in London would be an understatement. The main problem for critics seems to have been the opera rather than the singers or the production. *The Spectator* (Apr. 30 1842: 417) wrote that "To criticize such a wretched composition would be a waste of words. It has not a single musical excellence of any sort – not a gleam of sunshine – not a solitary bright speck." J.W.Davison in the *Musical World* (Aug. 25 1842: 269) wrote that it was "a very poor, weak, washy out-pouring of a very soul-less composer" and that Moltini was "a very clever singer, and a very sweet woman but utterly destitute of genius". *The Court Magazine* (Jan-June 1842: 403) noted that "no one greatly esteemed *Gemma di Vergy* – indeed everyone we believe was of opinion that it was one of the poorest things that Donizetti, no small proficient in poverty, ever brought forth". The best known critic of this era, Henry Chorley, after "Passing the music, as its composer's feeblest, and the story, as one of the most improbable and sickly which ever

came out of the brain of enervated libretto-monger" quickly moved onto a lengthy appraisal of the singers, again emphasising their centrality to opera at this time (*The Athenaeum*, 1842: 260).

Other publications were more nuanced or at least more expansive in their reactions even if they did not like the opera. The *Evening Chronicle* (Mar. 14 1842: 3) after accusing Donizetti of scribbling with "railway speed", a nice reference to the new technology of the day, thought that the character of Gemma "far too fierce and vindictive to be interesting", a verdict that tallies with William Ashbrook in his modern appraisal of the opera (*Donizetti and his operas*. Cambridge: CUP, 1982: 365-368). Ashbrook saw it as an uneven work let down by the plot generating little sympathy for Gemma and composed while Donizetti was concentrating on an opera for Paris. The latter point could be seen as reflected, if rather harshly, in the report from *The Era* (Mar. 20 1842: 5):

> *Gemma di Vergy* was repeated on Tuesday night, and the singers had the advantage of repose from the fatigue of travelling and rehearsals, acquitted themselves with spirit and effect. The subject of this opera has much tragic capability, but is marred by the poverty of the poetry, and its want of construction. The incidents are huddled together, and the result fails to impart any lasting impression. The music is in Donizetti's usual manner, and though possessing *morceaux* full of feeling and taste, wants breadth of design, and simplicity of purpose. It is characterless, and might well serve for a libretto on a different subject; there is no originality; the ordinary number of solos, choruses, etc. occur in their usual places, and the same means are used to accomplish the same ends.

The comment about fatigue shows that the singers turned up only a few days ahead of the performance, in fact Guasco did not arrive until the day before having been held up by a hurricane in the Channel (*The Examiner*, Mar. 12 1842: 171). Moltini had sung the role at Bergamo and Piacenza and Guasco at Udine but the group do not appear to have sung together in any previous production so one can only surmise that the staging must have been very rudimentary and centred on the individual singer's performances. This idea is supported by Chorley's (*ibid.*) observations that "The orchestra is now superb; and the chorus improved, though still too circular in its disposition, and too statue-like in its utter renunciation of stage business". The scenery would, no doubt, have been put together as indicated in the libretto or from instructions sent ahead from Italy. There seems to have been no comment on it as was often the case in reviews at this time. We can also note that no reviews mentioned the conductor, presumably Michael Costa the theatre's chief conductor, showing how peripheral his contribution was considered.

There were more favourable notices. *Bell's New Weekly Messenger* (Mar. 20 1842: 5) thought it "dramatically effective" and that Donizetti had treated it



"with becoming spirit and excellence". The *Gardener's Chronicle* (Mar. 19, 1842: 199) that clearly spread its interests beyond plants reported that "Moltini… is a fine woman, with an expressive countenance and handsome person. Her voice is a clear soprano, of large compass; her style is good, and her intonation true. She was energetic and impassioned; and her performance elicited frequent applause". The other singers were also complimented. "The choruses were well sung, and there was a good deal of applause at the fall of the curtain.… The house was well filled, and many persons of distinction were present."

Overall, Lumley's (36) verdict rings truest:

> *Gemma di Vergy*, although abounding in melody and effects, both dramatic and musical, was not esteemed one of Donizetti's finer compositions, albeit a favourite opera in many parts of Italy. Donizetti, likewise, had found, up to this time, but slight favour with the English public, or, at all events, with the English press. He occupied, then, in this country, a position similar to that which afterwards fell to the lot of his successor, Verdi; and even among a great portion of the numerous critics, amateurs as well as 'professionals', he was pronounced, by many arbiters of taste, "flimsy", "meretricious", "noisy", "unsound", "plagiarist" and so on.
>
> Gemma was unquestionably a failure; as, indeed, it would have proved under these prejudices with even stronger claims to approbation. I may take occasion to remark, that a criticism is still extant condemning the *Barbiere di Siviglia*, when first represented in England, as utterly "worthless". Rossini is now classic, but in his early days he was treated with as little respect as Donizetti and Verdi at later periods.

One might ask why Donizetti and later Verdi received such a negative press. The answer lies in a number of factors. There was the identification of Italian opera with the upper classes at a time when the middle classes, the origin of most music critics, were pushing hard for political influence recently reflected in the 1832 reform act. Further, the upper classes were seen as being primarily interested in the social aspects of opera going rather than any musical values, "Let an opera be only new, and the fashionable crowd will flock to it, expiring in affected rapture over the poorest commonplaces" (*Evening Chronicle* Mar. 14 1842: 3). This was at a time when musicians were trying to raise the status of music from being seen as mere bought in entertainment to being considered on a par with other arts. Central to this was an advocacy for German/Austrian music, both opera but increasingly importantly "pure", non-vocal, music that was seen as involving serious musical thought and intent as against ephemeral, crowd pleasing, Italian opera. *Ainsworth's Magazine* (1842: 254-255) touches on this in its dismissal of *Gemma,* whose only virtue in its opinion was that it

was not as offensive as *Lucia di Lammermoor* with its "desecration of Scott's most exquisite 'tale of tears'":

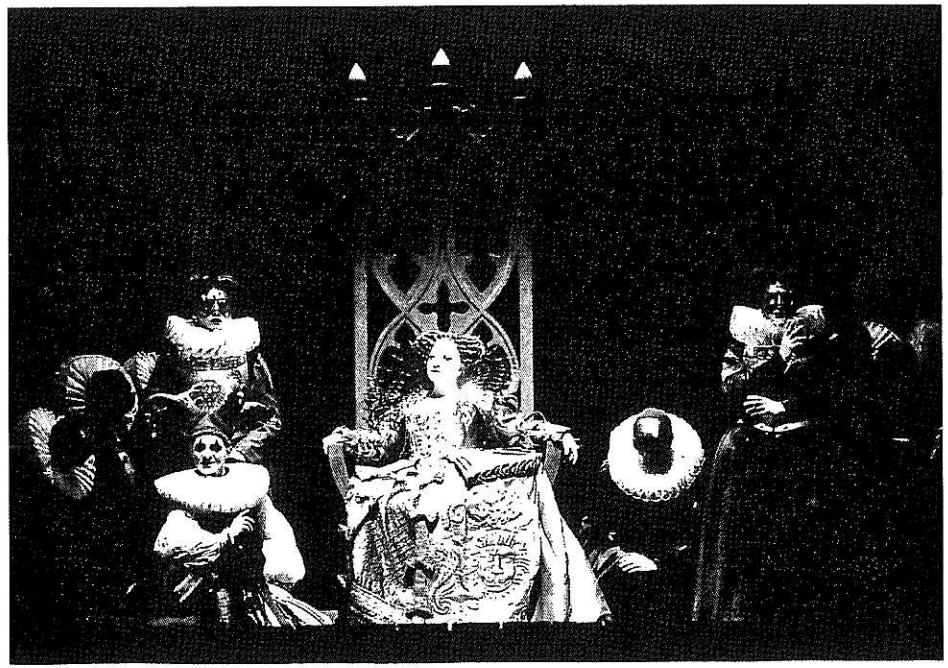
> It will be easily admitted that times are changed; and that so, in like manner, is what was called the taste of the town; when we find that the earnest, sublime music of Handel and Mozart is appreciated, and night after night, throughout a season, applauded by crowded audiences consisting of the humble classes of society; while the clattering noise of Donizetti is provided constantly as the appropriate entertainment for the ears of the higher classes.

Donizetti, probably more so than Verdi, was unfortunate to be active at a time when these various forces were at their height. Hopefully, any future London performance will get a more sympathetic hearing.





[below and left]
**Two images from the wonderful Roberto Devereux at the Teatro Regio di Parma in March 2018 with Mariella Devia as Elisabetta, Sonia Ganessi - Sara, Stefan Pop - Roberto and Sergio Vitale as Nottingham. To the left Stefan Pop behind bars in the title role, and below --Mariella Devia very appropriately enthroned**



# Il ritorno dei *Lombardi*

Al Teatro Regio di Torino *I Lombardi alla prima crociata* di Giuseppe Verdi latitava dal 1926. La sua ripresa, ad aprile 2018, è stata perciò salutata con entusiasmo dalla piazza torinese, contenta di rispolverare uno dei lavori capitali del Risorgimento italiano e un esempio pressoché paradigmatico di melodramma primo-ottocentesco.

Nei *Lombardi*, infatti, in ossequio a una ricetta molto gradita al pubblico dell'epoca, vengono amalgamati, su uno sfondo di elementi storici (per quanto il manzoniano "vero storico" e "vero poetico" non sempre vadano a braccetto), una storia d'amore, prevedibilmente osteggiata da una serie di eventi e personaggi, una storia corale, agnizioni, maledizioni, pentimenti e perdoni: buoni pretesti per inanellare arie solistiche, duetti, terzetti, cori, interludi strumentali dal sapore ora guerresco, ora mesto, ora riflessivo... Se poi il pubblico fosse riuscito a leggere in filigrana il destino e le (dis)avventure del popolo italiano e ad ascoltare con maggiore trasporto, tanto meglio.

Quarto parto teatrale del cigno di Busseto in ordine cronologico, dopo *Oberto, conte di San Bonifacio* (1839), *Un giorno di regno* (1840) e *Nabucco* (1842), scritto su libretto di Temistocle Solera (che gli fornì anche i versi dell'*Oberto*, del *Nabucco*, della *Giovanna d'Arco* e dell'*Attila*) basato sull'omonimo poema di Tommaso Grossi, i *Lombardi*, del 1843, è tutto questo e anche di più: nata come gemella del *Nabucco*, per replicarne il successo (squadra che vince non si cambia, compreso il librettista in comune), da questo si distacca, segnando un passo in avanti nel linguaggio di Verdi.

Con riferimento alla recita di domenica 22 aprile 2018, si può ragionevolmente parlare di una ripresa in grande stile, un successo unanime di pubblico e critica, a cominciare dal direttore, Michele Mariotti, al suo primo ma già maturo cimento coi *Lombardi*: Mariotti dimostra infatti una sicura tenuta dell'orchestra, un senso spiccato del ritmo (quanto è importante il ritmo in Verdi!), sempre incalzante, quasi mai piatto, fortunatamente poco macchiettistico, un modo attento di affrontare i differenti contesti musicali e un sapiente dialogo coi cantanti, che non vengono mai coperti, ma anzi aiutati a concertare le parti d'insieme: tutto questo in un'opera in cui l'orchestra è ben più che un semplice sostegno armonico delle voci, ma talvolta una protagonista che incarna sguardi e sentimenti. Quando poi si può fare affidamento a un'orchestra sicura e preparata come quella del Teatro Regio, il risultato è senza paragoni (plauso particolare al primo violino Stefano Vagnarelli, interprete del lungo assolo dell'atto IV su un violino Francesco Ruggeri del 1686).

Il cast ha soddisfatto le aspettative più rosee, a cominciare dalla Griselda di Angela Meade, soprano americano che ha fatto del belcanto italiano il suo cavallo di battaglia (basti scorrere la sua discografia), acclamatissima per la sua voce piena, potente, modulata ad arte (sebbene con qualche minimo calo nei filati), a suo agio in tutti i registri e dotata di buona dizione italiana: il *Salve, Maria* dell'atto I e il *Se vano è il pregare* dell'atto II sono stati due *specimina* di tenuta, legatura, agilità e delicatezza, e pazienza se le capacità attoriali abbiano difettato qua e là di



verosimiglianza. Degna controparte di Angela Meade, Francesco Meli torna a ricoprire il ruolo di Oronte (già sostenuto nel 2009 al Teatro Regio di Parma sotto la direzione di Daniele Callegari) e a distinguersi per la sua voce calda, pienamente padrona delle emissioni, in special modo nel registro medio. Lo si apprezza particolarmente nella cavatina *La mia letizia infondere* dell'atto II, lungamente applaudita, alla fine della quale evita lo scivolone grazie alla solida tecnica preparatoria. Notevole il Pagano di Alex Esposito, al suo primo confronto con un personaggio verdiano di rilievo, tratteggiato a tutto tondo, con pienezza di carattere e voce solida, senza difetti. Penalizzato Giuseppe Gipali nel ruolo di Arvino e, contemporaneamente, in quello di Oronte per la seconda compagnia, cosa che gli causa un affaticamento di voce e il calo di una prestazione peraltro di qualità, priva solo di quello smalto che gli sarebbe derivato da un riposo maggiore. Prova convincente, infine, per i ruoli secondari, tra cui la Sofia di Alexandra Zabala e il Pirro di Antonio di Matteo. Completa il cast il valido e compatto Coro del Teatro Regio, preparato da Andrea Secchi (succeduto all'ormai storico Claudio Fenoglio), chiamato a cantare non solo il famosissimo *O Signore, dal tetto natio*, ma anche i numerosi interventi che punteggiano l'opera per tutta la sua lunghezza.

Il nuovo allestimento è in coproduzione con l'Opéra Royal de Wallonie-Liège, per la regia di Stefano Mazzonis, torinese d'origine e che dell'Opéra Royal è direttore generale e artistico. Tale allestimento sceglie una lettura tradizionale dei *Lombardi*, e, pur con diverse semplificazioni, soprattutto per quanto riguarda le scenografie asciutte e senza fronzoli di Jean-Guy Lecat (ridotte a pilastri inclinati per simulare la caverna dell'eremita/Pagano e a tre fondali, uno per la piazza di Sant'Ambrogio, uno per l'interno del palazzo di Acciano e uno per la città di Gerusalemme), non stravolge eccessivamente impianto e situazioni fondamentali dell'opera (poco ci manca, di questi tempi, che registi degeneri ambientino, un giorno o l'altro, una *Maria Stuarda* sulla Luna… e possano ancora ricevere applausi e incoraggiamenti…): non posso non concordare con la dichiarazione di Mazzonis: «Sono convinto che la gente vada all'opera per sognare, e che la regia debba rispettare la musica e la drammaturgia […]. Le trasposizioni lasciano il tempo che trovano». Volutamente, tale allestimento è stato ripreso identico da quello della *Jérusalem* rappresentata a Liegi nel 2017, a sottolineare lo stretto rapporto che lega le due opere, quest'ultima nata come filiazione dei *Lombardi* nel 1847 per l'Opéra di Parigi e di cui riprende l'argomento storico legato alle crociate, oltre che buona parte della musica. I costumi di Fernand Ruiz non sempre risultano coerenti, come la corona puntuta di Sofia, i copricapi fantasiosi delle schiave dell'harem di Acciano o gli elmi delle guardie. Ciò che ha fatto più storcere il naso è stata la serie di movimenti convulsi sul palco nel momento del parricidio (Pagano che esce da una parte del palco, dove si suppone ci sia la camera da letto del padre, e rientra dalla parte opposta: che giro avrà mai fatto?) e l'utilizzo di un frammento dell'*Aleksandr Nevskij* di Ėjzenštein, proiettato su un telo appositamente calato subito dopo *O Signore, dal tetto natio*, in corrispondenza della Scena, Inno di guerra e Battaglia per ovviare al problema di musica senza azione scenica: il contesto è diversissimo (il principe Aleksandr Nevskij è conosciuto per aver liberato la Russia dai Cavalieri Teutonici e dalla Chiesa di Roma), ma i costumi possono più o meno (più o meno…)

ricordare quelli dei crociati. E allora via all'imprestito. Il *clou* dell'incoerenza è stato però raggiunto nella scena finale, in cui cristiani e musulmani, sulle parole del coro: «Te lodiamo, gran Dio di vittoria, / te lodiamo, invincibil Signor!» si scambiano le sciarpe e fanno gran gesti di fratellanza: i musulmani sono appena stati sconfitti, Gerusalemme è in mano dei cristiani, il coro inneggia a un dio che non è il loro… e tutti insieme si scambiano le sciarpe? Certo, più che la reale situazione, tale gesto richiama l'utopistico «Seid umschlungen, Millionen!» schilleriano: ma, volendo trovare in ciò un filo logico, se è vero, come dice Mazzonis, che la gente va all'opera per sognare, perché non mettere in scena il sogno di un'umanità finalmente pacificata, ancorché ciò sia e rimanga, nella migliore delle ipotesi, un sogno?

Christian Speranza

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# Diary

London, Cadogan Hall, Chelsea Opera Group
*Thaïs* (Massenet) 23 June 2018 (concert perf)

Milan, Teatro alla Scala
*Il pirata* (Bellini) 29 June, 3/6/9/12/14/17/19 July
(w. Sonya Yoncheva)

Festival Della Valle D'Itria, Martina Franca
*Giulietta e Romeo* (Vaccai) between 18 July and 4 August



London, Royal Opera House, Covent Garden
*L'Ange de Nisida* 18/21 July (concert perfs)
(w. El-Khoury,Kim,Tézier,Naouri,Stavinsky Cond. Elder)

Wildbad Rossini Festival
*Zelmira* (Rossini) 27 July (concert perf)

Innsbruck, Tiroler Landestheater
*Didone abbandonata* (Mercadante) 10 August
(w. Emilie Renard)

Venice Teatro La Fenice
*Semiramide* (Rosssini) From 19 October
(w. Pratt, Iervolina, Esposito, Rocha Cond. Frizza)

Berlin, Staatsoper Unter den linden
Medée (Cherubini) 10/12/17/20/25/28 October
(w. Sonya Yoncheva, Charles Castronova Cond. Barenboim)

Bergamo Teatro Sociale, Donizetti Festival
*Enrico di Borgogna* 23/25 November, 1 December
*Il castello di Kenilworth* 24/30 November, 2 December

**To be noted:**
London, Barbican, Opera Rara
*Il paria* (Donizetti) June 2019 concert perf.
(precise date awaited)

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