A (false?) note upon *L'elisir d'amore*

Our readers thrown by the problems of 'Prendi, per me sei libero' must resort to the quite sensational piece of musicological sleuthing which featured in Alberto Zedda's Critical Edition of *L'elisir d'amore* (Ricordi 1979), in which he pointed out that the reason, uniquely, that Donizetti's celebrated autograph score is split into two halves, in two distant libraries, (Act I in the Conservatorio di S.Pietro a Majella of Naples, Act II in the Museo Donizettiano of Bergamo) is because he himself highjacked his own autograph manuscript of Act II when leaving Naples for Paris. Why? Because he intended to revise that section of the music beginning with 'Prendi, per me sei libero'! That moment in the plot when everything comes to its emotional climax but which he had found to be too awkward. Among Maestro Zedda's revelations was the discovery in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris of an alternative autograph version of, of all things, 'Una furtiva lagrima' (transposed to G minor/G Major) complete with astonishing variants in the reprise, together with four pages of autograph score in the large oblong folios he had used during his Parisian years of precisely that touching aria 'Prendi, per me sei libero' "with a cabaletta, of which only the beginning and ending were preserved" . [Subsequently he succeeded in identifying the missing music of this cabaletta amid a collection of pages catalogued as *"unidentified fragments of Italian operas"* - how familiar is this happy resolution to the bemused addicts of that wonderful but baffling library?] Though in this version the wording of 'Prendi, per me sei libero' remains unchanged, its music is *"presented in a quite different musical form"* These autograph manuscripts with their remarkable changes have been carefully dated by Maestro Zedda to the very end of his compositional career (Autumn 1843). *Cfr Edizione critica*

Indeed, it would seem that the doubts of the Bergamasc about this particular aria were of long date. Is it for this reason that we find ourselves hearing replacements both by omisson and commission, *carte blanche* to a Malibran (or de Bériot)? Could Donizetti have turned what amounts to a blind ear? It seems amazing that what most listeners consider to be such a core moment in Italian opera could not have been carved in stone.

As for Malibran, her "intervention" may have been earlier than anyone has been led to believe. The first pieces of *L'elissirre di amore* (sic), eleven items in all, were published by Bernardo Girard of Naples between 1832-34 (before Pacini of Paris). Almost the last of these Pl.no.2325, was "Prendi, per me sei libero' the only item to be specifically designated for mezzo-soprano. The fabulous Maria was in Naples at this time, as was of course the composer. Could this have been a prime example of Donizetti transposing for Malibran? Or Malibran composing for Donizetti? **AW**

(opposite) L'elisir d'amore: *Ingresso di una fattoria* scena di Sanquirico