Le Teatro Donizetti de Bergamo nous a donc offert avec *Marino Faliero* deux représentations de grande qualité qui lui ont valu un succès non usurpé. Au mérite d'offrir une œuvre trop négligée du *maestro*, il ajoute celui de le traiter avec un grand respect et un soin digne des ouvrages les plus prestigieux ! A tout seigneur, tout honneur : mon dernier bravo de ce jour va donc, et très sincèrement, au Teatro lui-même ! Bravo Teatro !

Stella Rollet

Gems of Irish Opera

12th November 2008, The National Library of Ireland

Not so long ago such a programme would have promised a string of mainly tenor arias (including some from the inappropriately named 'English Ring') and an encore from Moore's Irish Melodies. How times have changed: this Dublin recital (a joint effort by The National Library of Ireland and Opera Theatre Company, utilising their Young Associate Artists) offered substantial chunks from unknown operas, culminating in what was probably the Irish premiere of an operetta by Balfe. After a rousing performance of his Italian opera Falstaff less than 2 months ago in the nearby National Concert Hall this was more than sufficient incentive for me to re-cross the Irish Sea. The limited facilities of a seminar room at the National Library might seem a deterrent, but it fact the only problematic restriction was to the size of the audience. The close acoustic benefited singers and accompanist, and the running commentary by John Allen brought a kind of drawing room intimacy to the whole evening.

The second half took the form of a complete performance of Balfe's late operetta *The Sleeping Queen*. This was the original 1-act version with piano, written most likely for salon performance (the composer later orchestrated the music and added some choral parts for theatrical use). Certainly the venue for the first performance in 1864 (The Royal Gallery of Illustrations, London) seems an ideal precedent for this in the National Library. The lack of any staging or spoken dialogue (John Allen's brief outlines were probably preferable to Victorian prose) did not discourage any of the four young singers from lively characterisation, adding greatly to audience enjoyment. Any suggestion that lack of orchestral clothes might make the music less interesting was soon dispelled by the sparkling overture, colourfully played by Una Hunt (the real hero of the night).

There is a danger that any late-nineteenth century operetta may be eclipsed by Gilbert & Sullivan's string of successes that dominate musical

memories of the period. But Balfe does not suffer by such a comparison: his music is at least as effective (a verdict hopefully to be confirmed by a modern staging).



From a single hearing it is difficult to register all the detail but two items stood out for me. First an 'un-love' duet between the Regent (who aspires to the throne) and the Queen's Maid of Honour, Donna Agnes. The Regent's wooing and the Maid's counter-demands for a favour on behalf of a young exile Philippe d'Aguilar (son of the Regent's enemy) builds to an effective climax. Gavan Ring (baritone) seemed comfortable as a scheming courtier and Ann Hogan (mezzo-soprano) put much gusto into her tricky negotiations. The other notable item was another duet, this time between Queen (a nice line in coloratura) and the Regent during which a piece of paper (containing an affectionate poem addressed by her to Philippe d'Aguilar) floated to the floor. Even without stage business we could hear

the incriminating paper and follow its fateful descent to the floor (echoed lightly and benignly at the end of the duet as the Queen falls asleep).

The later stages of the short drama (subtitled as the 'events of a summer's afternoon') apparently gave fewer opportunities to poet and composer. So we had to rely on John Allen's narrative to learn of Philippe's intrusion to kiss the Queen whilst she slept and the subsequent accusation of *lèse majesté* (as ever, a capital offence in operetta-land) to be reversed by the obvious solution of disposing of the Regent.

The singers all relished the opportunities to ham it up a bit during the short musical items. Amongst them only Dean Power as Philippe had, unfortunately, too few chances to sing, but all came right for him in the closing ensemble: he won the Queen and thereby the throne.

All the items in this adventurous recital were pleasant surprises and well worth the trip. It demonstrates the extensive legacy of theatre music with roots in the Emerald Isle, so we must not be surprised that only some will win their way back on stage. But without Una Hunt and the investment of time and effort by these young performers it would be impossible to discover which. The major 'find' on this occasion would seem to be Balfe's *The Sleeping Queen*. That's another worthwhile trophy to add to *Falstaff* among the modest celebrations devoted to the 200th anniversary of his birth.

Douglas M. Bennett



LES

QUATRE FILS AYMON,

OPÉRA-COMIQUE EN TROIS ACTES,

PAR MM. DE LEUVEN ET BRUNSWICK,

Représenté pour la première fois, à Paris, sur le théâtre royal de l'Opéra-Comique, le 15 juillet 1844.

PERSONNAGES. ACTEURS.

LE BARON DE BEAUMANOIR..... M. GRIGNET.
OLIVIER, RICHARD, ALLARD, RENAUD, quatre frères..... M. MOCKER. M. EMON. M. SAINTE-FOY. M. GUSSO.
YVON, cadet des quatre frères..... M. HERMANN-LEON.
MAITRE GAUDRIOT, homme de loi..... M. DUVERNOY.
HUBERT, majordome du baron de Beaumanoir..... M. DABAT.
HERMINE, fille du baron de Beaumanoir..... Mlle DARCIER.
CLAIRE, YOLANDE, ISLANTINE, nièces du baron de Beaumanoir..... Mmes REMY-POTIER. Mmes VILLE-MÉNOTTE. Mlles SAINTE-FOY.
GERTRUDE, vieille servante..... Mme BLANCHARD.
UN ENVOYÉ DU DUC DE BRETAGNE..... M. RENOU.

SOLDATS. — VASSAUX du baron de BEAUMANOIR.
VASSAUX, etc.