parfaitement la pensée du compositeur lorsqu'il dépeint cette mère qui veut voler la vedette à sa fille le jour même de ses noces. Il ne manque plus à cette fête qu'Enrico qui est, par son jeu comique, la pièce maîtresse non seulement de cette scène mais de toute la partition. En effet, la voix n'est peut-être pas assez puissante ou manque certainement de couleur mais Massimiliano Gagliardo fait largement oublier ces imperfections par son jeu. C'est un acteur-né ! Il déploie une verve comique sans faille et qui ne laisse pas le moindre répit au spectateur... Qui s'en plaindrait ? L'aveu de sa triple infidélité à Serafina, sa pantomime devant la porte chaque fois qu'il appuie sur la sonnette ainsi que le monstrueux désordre qu'il provoque dans l'officine du pharmacien lorsqu'il effectue un mélange improbable avec toutes les drogues qui lui tombent sous la main, sont les moments qui ont déclenché la plus grande hilarité.

Comme le lecteur l'aura compris, on s'amuse donc beaucoup plus aux bouffonneries du *Campanello* qu'à celles de *Rita*. Il est vrai aussi que le livret offre davantage de situations comiques. Notre satisfaction musicale a été également plus grande dans cette deuxième œuvre. Les voix sont plus riches et plus colorées.

Si en terme de décors et de mise en scène les deux œuvres sont donc traitées avec le même sérieux, *Il Campanello* est indéniablement favorisé par sa distribution. Sans doute le trio femme-premier mari-deuxième mari et le thème de la violence conjugale ont-ils bien moins inspiré les artistes que le traditionnel trio femme-mari-amant !

Stella Rollet

DONIZETTI'S *IL CAMPANELLO* and *RITA, OU LE MARI BATTU*

Over a period of many years I have seen several of Donizetti's one-act operas singly and in various combinations. In January, 1970, there was a double bill in Bologna of *Rita* and *Il giovedì grasso* (1828). In January, 1997, in Modena there was *Il campanello* combined with *Betly* (1836), like *Il campanello* composed for Naples' Teatro Nuovo a couple of months after *Campanello*'s debut and perhaps to capitalize on its success. And finally, the most enlightening combination, *Il campanello* and *Rita ou le mari battu*, the latter performed in the original French, at Liège's Opéra Royal de Wallonie. Donizetti composed many one-act operas through his long career (beginning with his very first, *Pigmalione*) to *Rita*, first performed posthumously in 1860 at the Opéra Comique.

After *Rita*'s premiere, it was forgotten for almost a century when it was revived in Italian translation in Bergamo in 1955. (The Liège program implies that the first modern outing was at the Piccola Scala in 1965, but in the same program there is a photograph of the setting from the '55 Bergamo production from the collection of Donizetti Society Press and Public Relations Representative Fulvio Stefano Lo Presti's collection, and a recording on the Cetra label had come out in the late 1950's.) Since then *Rita* has been produced from time to time, often by small companies or young artists' groups, but for some reason the Liège production was the first modern one in the original French, at least as far as I know. Seeing it in French (I saw two performances) reveals what should have been clear to me for years, that *Rita* is really an opéra comique in miniature and not an Italian opera buffa. Pairing it with *Il campanello* also made the difference in the libretto types and musical conventions clear. *Rita*, written around 1840 (though not produced until 1860) is the little sister of *La fille du régiment*, while *Campanello* is the child of *Elisir d'amore* and the progenitor of *Don Pasquale*.

Il campanello really derives from *commedia dell'arte* and even more distantly from ancient Roman comedy and even earlier from Greek New Comedy even though the direct progenitor

is a French farce, *La sonnette de nuit*. The types are eternal: the foolish old pharmacist Don Annibale Pistacchio--what a name! Hannibal Pistachio Nut--is the foolish old medicus of Plautine comedy or Dottor Balanzon and his medical, academic and legal confrères from the *commedia*. Enrico, who thwarts his wedding night with a series of disguises is the Roman *adulescens* or the *commedia*'s wily Arlecchino, and Serafina, the young bride, is like the Roman *virgo* or any number of female lover-ingenues in *commedia*. There is even a *matrona* (Rosa, the bride's mother) and a *servus* (Spiridone), standard types from Roman comedy. The plot of *Il campanello* is also derived from *commedia* and Roman plot types: the young person (Enrico) outwits the foolish old man so that he can have the young woman that the old guy has so foolishly married, using a series of *equivoci*, in this case disguises to put off the wedding night until Don Annibale has to leave for Rome early the next morning.

To set this ancient and comfortable comic plot Donizetti composed tuneful and comfortable music in what William Ashbrook defined as his 'popular' style derived from Neopolitian song. The one or two forays out of this style into the "higher" serious style common in the tragic works are clearly parody. The little work opens with a tuneful chorus celebrating Annibale's wedding to Serafina; the first solo, for Don Annibale, is buried in it ("Bella cosa, amici cari"). Here Annibale imagines his future life surrounded by his children, with babies babbling at his knee. Like Messer Nicia in Machiavelli's Roman-influenced Renaissance comedy *La mandragola*, Annibale might have children with his young wife, but they are not likely to be his! The arrival of Enrico, Serafina's former boy friend, throws everything into chaos. Mother-in-law Rosa obligingly dances Don Annibale away, leaving Enrico and Serafina alone. In a mock-tragic duet, almost, but not quite in the ornamented high style, Enrico accuses Serfina of faithlessness--how could she have agreed to marry without his permission ("Non fuggir! ...T'arresta, ingrata!")? His flame, he tells her, is as mighty as an Etna and, switching tact into an operatic cliché of clichés, he declares, "Ma ben presto un freddo avello/tanto incendio estinguirà" ("But too soon a cold grave will extinguish that great fire.") Why not marry, she replies, in the best dramatic style, after all he was faithless to her with two women. We realize that the archetypal Donizetti tune is just as much parody of opera seria as are the words when Enrico accuses her of lying. There were not two other women--there were three! ["Enrico: Menzogna infernale! Serafina: (con sicurezza) Ne son certa, ed invan lo negate altre due. Enrico: No, ti dico...son tre. Donna infida, leggera, sleale...." 'Enrico: Infernal lies! Serafina: (with certainty) I am sure of it, and you deny the other two in vain. Enrico: No, I tell you...there are three. Faithless woman, fickle, disloyal...'] Just as the words parody an exaggerated lovers' spat, the music, in the overly dramatic high style, does too.

Next Enrico plays a ridiculous scene from a "tragedia classico-romantica" as a way of explaining why Annibale and Rosa have just found him on his knees before Serafina; he was just rehearsing the scene. The scena is entitled "Zasse, Zanze and Zonzo." Enrico plays Zasse, who adores Zanze and wants to steal her from his rival Zonzo. In playing the scene Zanze is to be Serafina and of course Annibale is the hapless Zonzo. This gives Enrico the chance to embrace and kiss Serafina under the nose of Annibale-Zonzo. Most of this is done in overly dramatic recitative, but when music comes, it does as a parody of what was probably the most iconic tragic aria in early nineteenth century opera, the willow song from Rossini's *Otello*, here transformed from "Assisa a piè d'un salice" to "Assisa a piè d'un gelso": the willow song becomes the mulberry song.

Annibale wants everyone to leave, but to prolong the party a little longer Enrico proposes a toast to the catchy brindisi "Mesci, mesci e sperda il vento." Now, a few months earlier this tune (with the same words) had been published as a tenor-mezzo duet in *Les Nuits d'été a Pausilippe* and was dedicated to Tamburini, who was perhaps the most famous baritone of the

age. Is there an inside joke here? Tamburini could not have sung the duet in *Nuits d'été*, but he could sing it in Enrico's version. Is Donizetti making fun of his unabashed attempt to enter the Parisian market with an Italian-French collection which called Posilippo Pausilippe, Italian songs for a French audience, in his thoroughly Italian farce based on a French original, *Il campanello*? First Donizetti parodied Rossini' s Willow Song and then he introduces his own song in a not unusual bit of self plagiarism, but perhaps it is an inside joke nonetheless.

Everyone leaves and the interruptions begin, based on the law that a pharmacist must answer the "campanello" if anyone calls for medicine in the night. There will be three callers--all Enrico in disguise. The first is a Frenchman who has stomach problems, perhaps a reference to the French source of the libretto, *La Sonnette de nuit*, a vaudeville by three Parisians. In fact, although the characters and plot are pure *commedia dell'arte*, the farce is "French" in one important aspect: Serafina is a married woman pursued by a young lover, not a lover who wants to thwart an upcoming marriage so that he can marry the young woman, as in *Don Pasquale, Barbiere*, et. al. Certainly Italian comedy historically countenanced infidelity, but in the censorious regimes of the early nineteenth century it was usually a situation of thwarting a marriage, not having an affair. The cure for the Frenchman's stomach ills, by the way, is wine, reminiscent of the "bordo" in *Elisir*.

The second interruption involves more musical parody as Enrico disguises himself as a singer who has lost his voice. As he "regains" it thanks to Don Annibale's pills, he tries singing a piece from "Campanello, nuovissimo spartito." But the aria is not "nuovissimo" and not even "nuovo," and it is not found first in that "brand new" score, *Campanello*. It is however another example of the French-Italian connection, the barcarolla "Or che in cielo alta è la notte" from *Marin Faliero*, Donizetti's debut opera for Paris in 1835. Is Donizetti making fun of the self borrowing so common in his works? The words of the barcarolle fit the situation here more or less: "Dormi, o bella, mentre io canto/La canzone del piacer" ('Sleep, o beautiful one, while I sing/The song of pleasure.') But as our voiceless singer murders the music, we recognize parody here too. *Il campanello* contains (at least) three musical pieces from other places, which put in this context make musical parody.

Finally, the third interruption (*coitus interruptus* indeed!) is a man with a sick wife and a delicious patter aria ("La povera Anastasia") full of medical improbabilities and absurdities, which cannot help but remind us of Dr. Dulcamara's "Udite, o rustici" but is also part and parcel of *commedia*, which we may know through several Molière comedies or even from *La mandragola* where the befuddled old man consults the lover who pretends to be a doctor. When the man finally leaves, the bell sounds once more and everyone (Rosa, Enrico, chorus) arrive to help Annibale greet the dawn after his wedding night and remind him that the diligence is about to arrive and it is time for him to leave for Rome. Serafina has a reassuring final wish; she will be "sempre fida ed amorosa" to her new husband. The sappy, cookie-cutter tune gives the lie to the conventional sentiment. Enrico and the chorus sarcastically offer their best wishes to Don Annibale: 'May your sweet pleasures not be interrupted or disturbed, and may life be as good for you as it was this night." Annibale leaves and the way is clear for Enrico.

Il campanello was written at a particularly difficult time for the city of Naples and for Donizetti personally. It was written when the theaters of Naples were all closed due to a terrible cholera outbreak which wiped out 14,000 people in Naples and its environs and caused over 65, 000 deaths in Sicily. As for Donizetti himself, in the space of a year he had lost both his parents, his young wife Virginia and a still-born daughter. Burdened by so much real life sorrow, Donizetti did what he always did even when the way to production was unclear--he wrote. And his farce was just what the people (and perhaps he himself) needed, a funny, tuneful work based on comforting old forms and filled with comforting "popolaresco" music. And ever genial, Donizetti makes fun of himself and his older contemporary Rossini

with parodistic self-references and reminiscences. No wonder that the most memorable melody in the work is that brindisi originally written a few months earlier to the words:

Mesci, mesci e sperda il vento
ogni cura, ogni lamento.
Solo il canto del piacere
risuonar fra noi s'udrà....
And the darker central section:
Lunga è l'ora degli affanni
ha il piacer fugaci ivanni,
il momento del godere
brilla e rapido sen và.

Drink, drink and may the wind
dispel every care, every sorrow.
May the song of pleasure
be the only one heard by us....

The time of suffering is long,
pleasure is a fleeting moment,
the moment of enjoyment
shines and rapidly goes away.

The words might remind us of the famous brindisi from *Lucrezia Borgia* (1833) and they give us brief window into the suffering that lies in the background of this farce, for which Donizetti was both librettist and composer.

Rita is a different matter entirely. Alexander Weatherson has recently given us an illuminating analysis of *Rita* in *Donizetti Society Newsletter* 108, and I will not repeat his comments on the spoken dialogue and his debunking of the myths surrounding its composition. The "deux hommes et une femme" (the title preferred by Donizetti) bear little resemblence to *commedia* character types, but they are more typical of French farce. A powerful woman, Rita, is at the center of it all, a woman who runs her own business, beats the husband who works for her and who accepts her situation as a bigamist with equanimity when her first husband, Gaspar, shows up unexpectedly. Her current husband Beppe sees a way out of his marriage where he is an abused husband, but he is ultimately outfoxed by Gaspar, who is off at the end to marry his "Greenlander bride" in spite of still being married to Rita. The ancient comic topos of youth outwitting old age so that the young people can unite in fertile union is not here at all. In *Rita* the two men gamble not for who gets the girl, but for who loses her. When Beppe think he has won his freedom by losing the game, he is "joyeux comme un pinson." Freedom is in fact what all the characters want. Rita stresses her freedom in her opening aria; as a business woman who owns her own inn and controls a docile husband, she is free and happy. Beppe and Gaspar both want their freedom too--from Rita. Rita is really more like the French farces which will lead to Feydeau's bedroom comedy than it is to *commedia dell'arte*.

The music too differs from *Il campanello*. As an opéra comique with spoken dialogue, *Rita* contrasts to the secco recitativo of *Il campanello*. The opera opens not with chorus and introduction, but with arioso for Rita which slips almost without our realizing it into formal aria. In fact *Rita* displays great balance and *raison*, those very French ideals. Each of the three characters has an aria and there are three duets with the three possible combinations: Rita-Beppe, Beppe-Gaspar, and Rita-Gaspar. Two trios round out the little work, which

comes in at exactly one hour if the tempi are correct. There is certainly a Donizettian *popolorесco* element to the music, but with French twists. There is much less ornamentation in the vocal lines of *Rita* than in the Italian *Campanello*, and when Rita ornaments the line in her aria it is with a "la-la-la" almost landler-like yodel. Beppe's "Je suis joyeuse" ("Allegro io son" in the Italian) has some leaps, but no real ornaments. The orchestration is more subtle too.

Still *Rita* has an Italian connection (aside from the composer!) just as Campanello has a French one. This may be an opéra comique, but it is an Italianate one. "Ah! j'aime les italiens," says Rita, and to prove it she has married two of them. Donizetti, moving easily between the Italian and French opera worlds, repaid the compliment in *La fille du règiment*'s "Salut à la France."

The Liège performances were quite charming, and they will have been seen via internet streaming by many Donizettians. *Rita* came first with a traditional set depicting the courtyard of "Chez Rita." Customers played cards and drank pastis while the little drama whirled around their tables and chairs. If none of the principals were top flight singers, they were mostly equal to the task and well rehearsed and funny. Priscille Laplace made a pert Rita. Beppe was Aldo Caputo (who doubled as Spiridone in *Il campanello*). He was most amusing as the "mari battu," but vocally he was not always up to the task, especially the high notes required in his aria (which has been recorded by Juan Diego Florez). A real veteran, Alberto Rinaldi, was Gaspar. Like the others, he was amusing if not always equal to the vocal requirements at this stage in his career, which began in the 1960's.

Il campanello opened with the wedding celebration in the courtyard of "Chez Rita." When the guests left, the set revolved to reveal the exterior and a cut away interior of Don Annibale's pharmacy. Upstairs, Serafina could be seen in a short pink wedding night nightie and high heels getting ready for bed and cooling her heels while waiting for her poor husband who was receiving his continuous interruptions downstairs in the shop. Each of these interruptions was more manic than the last until the final one when liquids and powders of various colors were flung madly around the "shop." The acting and singing here were first rate. Don Annibale was Domenico Colaianni, who has sung in numerous rarities including Donizetti's *La zingara* and *Il fortunato inganno* at Martina Franca. He is an accomplished buffo. Serafina, whose role is decidedly less important than Rita's, was once again Priscille Laplace, who held her own vocally and looked appropriately sexy and pouty. However, it was the Enrico, Massimiliano Gagliardo, who stole the show. He was very funny in all of his roles and his fine baritone was always on point in the two performances I saw. Another veteran, Claudio Scimone, led the orchestra in both works with appropriate thrust and brio. The lively direction was by Stefano Mazzonis di Pralafera and the amusing sets were the work of Jean-Guy Lecat.

Only the ridiculous wigs of the chorus seemed to be going too far into absurdity as they made the hairstyles of Mrs. Slocum of the beloved "Are You Being Served?" seem positively sedate. Even Don Annibale had so much white hair, such a bushy beard and such absurd white eyebrows that he looked like a short St. Nicholas in his white wedding suit. The action seemed updated to the 1950's (in both *Rita* and *Campanello*), but the comedy is timeless.

The Opèra Royal de Wallonie is performing these days in a large tent as the opera house in town is under renovation, but the locale mattered not a whit. They gave us two sparkling comedies by a master, two jewels which show us not just how Donizetti was adjusting his Neopolitan style to the realities of Paris, but how his unfailing sense of melody and good fun can be just as delightful in the twenty-first century as it was in the nineteenth.

Charles Jernigan