

Ricordo di Alexander Weatherson

Fulvio Stefano Lo Presti, February 12, 2024, translated by Alan Jackson

In 1973 a small group of enthusiasts and scholars created the Donizetti Society in London. Alexander Weatherson and this writer, who became affiliated a few years later, were not yet part of it, while the expansion of the Society was gradually taking on less exclusively *British* connotations hand in hand with the increasingly ambitious worldwide recovery of Donizetti's largely forgotten operas: the *Donizetti renaissance* in progress. From being a fervent animator of the Society, Weatherson became its daring Chairman and maintained this responsibility until the end, making the Society acquire a high profile at an international level, thanks also to contacts and fruitful and friendly relationships with major musicologists, critics, conductors, singers and various personalities, including Montserrat Caballé, Alberto Zedda, William Ashbrook, Patric Schmid, Leyla Gencer, Philip Gossett, Joan Sutherland, Franca Cella, Sergio Segalini, Piero Mioli.

Born on 6 October 1927 in Mansfield (Nottinghamshire), the son of a Scottish doctor whom he did not know and a French noblewoman descended from a branch of the Rohan family, he also lived in France and Portugal and met Charles De Gaulle in his London home.

After his professional medical experience as a hospital psychologist, his artistic activity as a painter who soon became established, and his career as a university lecturer - he told me that once, as dean of the faculty, he received Mrs. Thatcher, then Minister of Education, in his office - Weatherson arrived at musicology as a full and conclusive vocation with a lively and assiduous commitment and an enviable competence. First of all, the greatest attention was paid to Donizetti, among other things writing conspicuous essays, even trivial ones, and countless reviews: wide-ranging writings in which shine through the sharp gaze and humour of a person of vast culture, but with his feet in everyday life, a Donizetti scholar who has assimilated the spirit and verve of the Bergamasque composer like few others. He supervised the publication of the various Journals of the *Donizetti Society*, which reached Number 7 in 2002. For decades he edited almost all the Society's *Newsletters*, a series that finished in the summer of 2022 with issue 146. Each *Newsletter* comprised around thirty pages, containing articles, his own and by others, of irresistible content and considerable interest. As well as this paper bequest, his publications are collected on his own website.

But the specificity of Weatherson's commitment lies in the penetrating and critical overview in which he places Donizetti's personality and *opus*, and in the panorama of nineteenth-century melodrama that he offers that ranges from Rossini to Verdi, including the most varied characters of the populous Sistine Chapel of Italian opera: Simone Mayr, Carlo Coccia, Saverio Mercadante, the brothers Luigi and Federico Ricci, Nicola Vaccai, Giuseppe Lillo, Alessandro Nini, as well as the Italian side of Giacomo Meyerbeer, each with their own individuality not hastily considered - not to mention others not listed here. A special place in Weatherson's heart, however, has always been occupied by Giovanni Pacini from Catania, who is badly mistreated and vilified, alas, in his hometown. On Pacini we cannot ignore Weatherson's painstaking essays happily delivered to the web under his name.

To say goodbye to Alex, who died in London on February 7th, I borrow the words of Horatio, Hamlet's friend, *Good night, sweet prince*.