

No one who has followed the sparkling series of Donizetti revivals in the mountain village of Barga, not very far from Lucca, will be astonished to hear that as a sequel to I pazzi per progetto we are to hear Olivo e Pasquale this summer. The diminutive Teatro dei Differenti with its graceful interior is a most suitable setting for opera buffa, intimate enough for all the nuances of the text to come over with a sly persuaviveness but equally, embodying all the formality and salon-like stylishness that the comic opera of the primo Ottocento requires as an authentic framework. Olivo e Pasquale (Teatro Valle, Rome 7.1.1827) is yet another work written on the threshold of Donizetti's international career. Started in 1826 while he was in the process of digesting the romantic movement - Donizetti did not swallow Schiller, Shakespeare, Lord Byron, Walter Scott and their lesser progeny wholesale as did Bellini - coming up as he did with a mature spread of romantic works, Donizetti edged towards the feast of ideas it represented, nibbling away at this and that so the first signs of the romantic composer who was to come appeared in several of his scores before the culminating banquet of Anna Bolena in 1830. Olivo e Pasquale has its modest share of these new notions.

The music of such important early works has long been impossible to find in print, for this reason all collectors have been happy to discover that the Barga series has been carried far beyond its original proposition by the excellent publications of Edizione Musicale OTOS of Florence who have issued vocal scores of many of these rare operas. The performing edition was prepared by the distinguished conductor and musicologist Bruno Rigacci - as will the forthcoming Olivo e Pasquale and it can only be hoped that a vocal score will follow in the same way. Like the previous two operas in the series however the score will not be the first edition, the opera has already appeared in print.

The early history of Donizetti publications is typically confusing. Many of his apprentice operas were simply distributed to theatres in manuscript copies - full manuscript scores being sent out all over Italy in order to interest impresarios looking for new works: with a stage production actually in prospect this was followed up by further manuscript material - much of which has disappeared today, Ms orchestral parts have been scattered and lost, Ms vocal scores abstracted by careless or acquisitive singers. Printed vocal scores did not appear until

a composer of the day had achieved a certain renown - in the case of Donizetti around 1823/4, and often enough these were preceded by separately published numbers so that it was possible either to accumulate an entire work item by item or to buy the complete score in one grand slam.

By the time fame had really been achieved some even of the earliest works could have the belated accolade of a printed version, many however were simply shelved and later plundered for their vocal treasures. Certain operas indeed had a habit of recurring time and time again in the scores that followed on, fragments from Il paria and Il castello di Kenilworth keep turning up in other operas for almost a decade. Most of Donizetti's operas of the later 1820's and almost all of those that succeeded them were published first either by Ricordi (Milano), by Giraud/Cottrau (Napoli), or by Lucca (Milano), in those elegant, engraved oblong scores so hotly pursued by Donizettian enthusiasts: these coexist both in piano solo and in vocal score format. Printed full scores were an absolute rarity in Italy and for theatrical purposes manuscript material went on being used throughout the 19th. century.

One of the more surprising episodes in this printing history is the sudden appearance on the market of a windfall of virtually forgotten operas by Donizetti in the mid 1850's, an unexpected bonus for the lovers of bel canto and the enterprise of a Parisian publisher Schonenberger. This seems to have been the only tangible result of the settlement that Giuseppe Donizetti (the composer's brother) made with the common-law widow of yet a third brother Francesco whose unsuspected will in favour of his mistress made so much trouble for the heirs. It seems that Giuseppe and his son Andrea were all in favour of recuping as much cash as possible from their efforts, and as soon as they were free to do so sold as many scores as they possessed to the Parisian publishing house. A handful of really rare scores thus reached print including Il paria, La lettera anonima, Il giovedì grasso, La zingara, Il diluvio universale and several other fabulous items.

Olivo e Pasquale was one of these happy resurrections but even so had not been completely forgotten, it did in fact receive sporadic revivals in Italy and in 1850 for instance a certain H. Rosellen had published in Paris - N° 6 of his 'Répertoire des Jeunes Pianistes' a 'Petit-Fantasia a Quatre Mains pour

piano sur Olivo e Pasquale'. The Schonenberger score has the same format and somewhat skimpy presentation as its fellows in the series; it seems to have been printed in considerable haste as four of the eight names of characters in the opera are incorrectly named in the table of contents:

| | | |
|---------------------|---------|--|
| Il signor OLIVO |) barit | Brothers. Merchants |
| Il signor PASQUALE |) bass | |
| ISABELLA | sop | Olivo's daughter |
| MATILDE | mezzo | her maid |
| 'CAMILLA' (sic) | tenor | CAMILLO An apprentice |
| 'M. le BROCC' (sic) | tenor | LE BROSS ^{negotiant} a merchant |
| COMELLA' (sic) | tenor | COLUMELLA from Cadiz |
| 'DIEJO' (sic) | | DIEGO a poor gentleman |
| | | DIEGO a servant |

The score indeed - just like many of its fellows - immediately precipitates a minor mystery - a game of vocal hide and seek. Olivo e Pasquale, as far as its early history is concerned, is a comedy of sex changes. Something Donizetti may have never envisaged, or not at first.

The cast at its Roman prima was as follows (7.1.1827)

| | | |
|-----------|--------------------------|---------|
| OLIVO | Domenico Cosselli | bass |
| PASQUALE | Giuseppe Frezzolini | bass |
| ISABELLA | Emilia Bonini | soprano |
| MATILDE | Agnese Loysellet | mezzo |
| CAMILLO | Anna Scudellari-Cosselli | mezzo |
| LE BROSS | Giovanni Battista Verger | tenor |
| COLUMELLA | Luigi Garofolo | barit |
| DIEGO | Stanislao Pro | barit |

A very different vocal ensemble from that of Schonenberger's score!

It was possibly the persuasion of Cosselli, in half the title role, that induced Donizetti to preempt the trousers of the hero in the person of his wife Anna Scudellari. This together with the unsatisfactory nature of the first performance made some urgent changes due. Oddly enough the critics blamed the prima donna for the coldness of the reception of the opera (so much so that she wrote a letter to defend her singing which was published shortly afterwards); it was not the vocal casting that upset the Roman patrons.

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| <p>OLIVO E PASQUALE (1827) AT THE 1980 BARGA OPERA FESTIVAL 27, 29, 31 July</p> |
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For its revival, even so, Donizetti switched the voices:
 Teatro Nuovo, Naples 1827

| | | |
|-----------|-----------------------|------------|
| OLIVO | Vincenzo (?) Galli | bass |
| PASQUALE | Gennaro Luzio | bass/barit |
| ISABELLA | Annetta Fischer | soprano |
| MATILDE | Francesca Checcherini | mezzo |
| CAMILLO | Francesco Regoli | tenor |
| LE BROSS | Carolina Manzi | mezzo |
| COLUMELLA | - De Nicola | bass |
| DIEGO | Giuseppe Papi | barit |

So the musico role now was the anti-hero Le Bross. It was not unusual for tenors and mezzos to be interchanged, there are examples as early as Zoraide di Granata (1822) and as late as Pia de' Tolomei (1837) but this change is extraordinary simply because by such a switch the vocal timbre of the male quartet - the high spot of the score - was thus compromised. (It was originally a quartet for 2 basses, 1 barit and 1 tenor)

By the spring of 1830 both Camillo and Le Bross were tenors. Teatro Canobbiana, Milan 1830:

| | | |
|-----------|--------------------------|---------|
| OLIVO | Luciano Mariani | bass |
| PASQUALE | Vincenzo Galli | bass |
| ISABELLA | Elisa Orlandi | soprano |
| MATILDE | Teresa Ruggeri | mezzo |
| CAMILLO | Lorenzo Lombardi | tenor |
| LE BROSS | Giovanni Battista Verger | tenor |
| COLUMELLA | Francesco Biscottini | bass |
| DIEGO | Domenico Spiaggi | barit |

London, behind the times as usual, gave a performance on the 31st March 1832 with Camillo as a mezzo as in the first version. It is anyone's guess at what stage Columella - as in the Schonenberger score - became a tenor! Torpedoing the vocal quartet in no uncertain fashion. Did Donizetti agree to this? Was it an innovation of the French with their faible for high voices?

This kind of vocal - not to say sexual - ambivalence was not like Donizetti who cast his roles according to timbre rather than range. No doubt the comic propensities of the plot of Olivo allowed more license than usual but in no way can one imagine Nemorino being sung by a mezzo when, as in 1832 his comic operas had reached full theatrical maturity.

As to what we shall hear at Barga, who can say. What do you propose; Olivo a tenor, Pasquale a mezzo, Matilde a bass?

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