

# Opera Rara

THE FIRST TEN YEARS.....  
Patric Schmid talks to  
John R. Carter

JC. Patric Schmid, we are this month (July) celebrating the 10th anniversary of Opera Rara's foundation with its first concert at London's Elizabeth Hall in 1970. Tell me, how did it all begin and did you have a definite policy right from the beginning?

PS. I arrived in London in 1969. I was amazed at the superb young musical talent available in Britain - and equally stunned by what little use was made of that talent by the major opera companies and recording companies. There was also a famine of operas outside the normal repertoire. It seemed to me for a time as though Michael Scott and The London Opera Society was fighting this dearth single handedly. At the beginning of 1970 Don White and I decided we would start an enterprise specialising in non-repertoire works and, at the same time, promote Britain's young musicians. It is interesting to note that of the virtually unknown artistes appearing in our first concert on July 12, 1970, John Brecknock has gone on to sing at Covent Garden and the Metropolitan, Christian du Plessis became a principal with The English National Opera and is now embarking on an international career. Sona Ardontz is a respected voice teacher in Europe. Denny Dayviss went on to run the London Opera Society single handedly. Erica Busch is now a music therapist for autistic children. Our pianists, Nina Walker and Max Morris went on, too - Nina Walker is now a well-known accompanist and conductor and Max Morris has been responsible for a number of recent editions of Offenbach operettas. The young Chilingirian Quartet are now highly reputed all over the world.

JC. After concerts devoted to Mayr and Mercadante, concerts at The Hintlesham and Bath Festivals and London performances of Meyerbeer's Crociato in Egitto and Mayr's Medea in Corinto you gave your first complete Donizetti opera: Maria Padilla at the Q.E.H. on April 8, 1973. The Donizetti Society was founded just four days before, has the Society and its activities caused you to re-think your programming in any way?

PS. In fact, our first Donizetti opera was the original one-act version of 'Le Convenienze Teatrali' staged at the Camden Festival in 1972 and later the same year at the Hintlesham Festival, providing a debut for Michael Aspinall - now touring the world with his 'one-woman (!)' opera evening.

The biggest re-thinking we had to do after the formation of the Society was when you announced Les Martyrs on the same day that we announced it. We switched to Maria de' Rudenz and since then have always given the Society plenty of warning about the Donizetti works we are planning !. There are many differences between Opera Rara and The Donizetti Society. Firstly, Opera Rara puts on fully professional performances, while the Society's productions are, necessarily, using forces consisting of both professional and amateur musicians; secondly, the Society's Donizetti performances - Rohan, Pia de' Tolomei, Furioso etc - are works that have already been revived this century, while Opera Rara specialises in works that are usually receiving their first performance in more than 100 years.

JC. You have given memorable performances at The Camden Festival of Torquato Tasso (twice), Castello di Kenilworth, both fully staged, and concert versions of Maria de' Rudenz, Rosmonda d' Inghilterra (London and Belfast) and L'Ajo nell'Imbarazzo for the Wexford Festival. One of the things that has concerned our Members the world over is that, until quite recently, your performing editions have not been taken up by the world's operahouses - have you any views on this?

PS. Many of Opera Rara's editions are in use around the world. Maria de' Rudenz will be performed in Venice, Paris and Holland in the next eight months. L'Ajo nell'Imbarazzo has been given in Switzerland and Germany and this year goes to Buenos Aires. Christopher Columbus has been done all over America and Australia, and is scheduled for Vienna. Robinson Crusoe has been seen in the USA and Australia. Medea in Corinto was given at the San Carlo, Naples and Torquato Tasso is still scheduled to be given in Genoa in the future with Renato Bruson in the title role, and Renata Scotto still says, in interview, that she will perform Maria Padilla on stage, while Caballé plans a concert performance of Mercadante's Virginia.

With the cost of opera productions today, it is hardly surprising that opera companies think twice before admitting a rarity into their repertoire, where its life may be short. Wexford have already performed our Medea in Corinto and the Ricci Serva e l'Ussero and this is also planned for performances in Italy and Belfast. The very first edition we ever did - Maria Stuarda has been recorded twice (by Sutherland and Sills) and given in Bologna, Philadelphia, Amsterdam, Melbourne, San Francisco, Las Palmas and Covent Garden. Once an edition has been completed, Opera Rara's job is over - bringing the work back to life. While we are delighted when any other company

makes use of the edition, we are more concerned with the next opera we are working on.

JC. In London, August 7th 1977 you gave your last concert in the capital; the Jubilee Gala at Sadlers Wells and in November 1978 presented at The Belfast Queens Festival a Donizetti world premiere, Gabriella di Vergy, which turned out to be your last performance in the U.K. Do you regret this departure from active concert promotion to concentrate on your Record Club? there must be many of your supporters who attend your performances but do not necessarily buy gramophone recordings? PS. Our last London concert was, in fact, Offenbach's Christopher Columbus at the Queen Elizabeth Hall in September 1977. In 1978 we gave the world premiere of Gabriella di Vergy in Belfast, and earlier this year gave four performances of Christopher Columbus in Hong Kong. If the Musicians Union and the BBC have settled their differences, by the time this Newsletter is published we will have given Offenbach's Robinson Crusoe at The Albert Hall on August 16, and we are already planning to stage an opera in London in 1981.

Our main reason for cutting down our concert activities is the unrealistic cost of putting on concerts today - even with a full house at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, you will lose in excess of £4000. We would rather use that money towards new recording. A concert, after all, is over and gone in three hours, a recording can bring unknown works to people all over the world for many years after.

JC. Unlike The Donizetti Society you have never involved yourself with reprints of vocal scores, music editions etc; is this because you feel that the market is adequately served? or are there any other reasons?

PS. Reprints of vocal scores have never been a part of Opera Rara's policy. However, a vocal score of Christopher Columbus has been published by Weinberger, and they are also planning to issue Crusoe, and volumes of rare arias for tenor, soprano, mezzo and baritone in the future.

JC. Your performing edition of Gabriella di Vergy and subsequent recording in The Opera Rara Record Club has, on the whole, been received warmly. How do you answer your critics who feel, not without some justification, that Donizetti's orchestration may have been 'treated' in some way. Do you advocate that middle-late period Donizetti needs to be strengthened at all? or is it justified when making a modern recording of an opera with all the technical gadgetry available?

PS. I have never heard any critic suggest that Opera Rara has ever tampered with Donizetti's orchestration, Gabriella di

Vergy was performed as Donizetti wrote it. As detailed in the booklet that accompanies the recording, two sections of the Sterling Library manuscript were incomplete - 31 bars (scene 7 of Act 1) and 8 bars (the bridge passage between the verses of Filippo's cabaletta). These were filled from Adelia (the opera that Donizetti used so much of the di Vergy music in, later,) and of course are still Donizetti's authentic orchestration. We are most strongly against tampering, and abhor the Italian practice of re-orchestrating in order to obtain copyright. (The editions of Maria Stuarda performed by Caballe and Sills - except in the recording - are far from authentic in orchestration.) Operas should be performed the way the composers wrote and orchestrated them.

JC. How do you view your next ten years? you have already announced a long list of proposed opera recordings, all very exciting for followers of the Ottocento, so your time will be fully taken up - if the situation arises, with the appropriate financial backing, do you envisage a return to the opera house and staged productions?

PS. Who knows what can happen in ten years. We will continue to record, and the Donizetti works planned for this period are L'Ange de Misida, Dom Sebastien, La Romanziera, Elvida, Sancia di Castiglia, Adelia and, of course, L'Assedio di Calais which we take into the studio next spring. We also plan to record the Colombo cantata with Christian du Plessis next year. Our 'rarities' will include Mercadante's Statira, Lachner's Catherina Cornaro and Ricci's Corrado d' Altamura. As I said earlier, we certainly will be on the opera and concert stage, although not always in London - and as Society members know, they will hear about it first in your pages.

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