



Fausta is the 39th of Donizetti's 71 operas and stands between La Romanziera and Ugo, Conte di Parigi. First given at the San Carlo, Naples 12th January 1832 it had Tamburini as the Emperor Constantine, Ronzi-de Begnis as Fausta and Basadonna as Crispo. Gilardoni's libretto is based on various sources of the Fausta Maxima Flavia saga but ultimately from the tragedy of Corneille. Previously, the same story had been set by Fr. Rossi (1653), Pollarolo (1710), Gasparini (1711), Orlandini (1731), Stuntz (1820), Persiani (1829), Bandini (1886), Catenario (1913) and Bianchi (1908), also composed operas on the subject. Gilardoni died in 1831 and Donizetti completed the libretto.

Following the Naples prima Fausta was given in all the principal Italian cities and as far away as Vienna, Havana, Madrid, Lisbon, Berlin, London (29 May 1841 w. Grisi & Tamburini). The last performances were given at La Scala during the 1859 season.

Like L'Esule di Roma (1828) the opera went through many changes during its career; La Scala had "Par che mi dica ancora" from Kenilworth (1829), Donizetti wrote a 'nuovo finale' for Pasta at Venice and introduced in Act 1 'Se potessi, o Dio scordami' from Sancia di Castiglia which had received its prima in Naples the previous November. Strangest of all is the addition of the aria 'Se crudele così m'estimi' composed by the sinister Cesare Pugni to many of the Italian stagings in the 1830's.

The London staging in 1841 didn't go too well with the critics; 'Tamburini, already too old, did not please because he has lost the energy and noble appearance, the singing monotonous': Grisi; (who sang the Sancia aria) 'sang very badly in the finale! The forthcoming edition is by Saverio Durante and Donizettians will be grateful for his excellent work in bringing this opera to light.

Synopsis:

Fausta (soprano) is the second wife of the Emperor Costantino (baritone) and loves her stepson, Crispo (tenor). Although she tries to conceal her passion from her husband, she cannot restrain herself from confessing it to Crispo. When Costantino discovers them together, Fausta accuses Crispo, who is speechless, of making advances to her. Costantino orders Crispo into exile. Fausta's father, Massiminiano (bass), leads a conspiracy against Costantino. Crispo overhears their plotting and starts after them sword in hand; suddenly finding himself before his father, he drops his sword. The Emperor's suspicions seem confirmed when Massiminiano hypocritically accuses Crispo of intended parricide. When Crispo is tried before the Senate, Costantino can hardly bring himself to sign the death sentence against his son, although the Senate insists upon it. Massiminiano hurries off to have Crispo executed without delay. When Fausta realizes she is powerless to save Crispo, she drinks poison from her ring. Learning of Massiminiano's conspiracy, Costantino hurries to save his son, but he is too late. Dying, Fausta confesses her guilt to the horrified Emperor.

William Ashbrook



1380. Luigi Vacca: « Fausta » di Donizetti