

Due ore di sentinella avanzata

An unrecognised Donizetti pasticcio?

John Black

Exploring the byeways of Neapolitan opera can be a pretty unrewarding occupation, but it has its moments. For some time I had been aware of a work *Due ore di sentinella avanzata* which had half-a-dozen performances at the Fenice and Partenope theatres in Naples in 1842, but I had been unable to identify either composer or librettist; nothing particularly unusual about that - the small theatres which specialised in the vernacular/dialect tradition put on many ephemeral farces and the like, which rarely lasted long and of which only the titles have come down to us. I was beginning to think that this was perhaps an alternative title for the popular *La sentinella notturna* (music by Salvatore Agnelli; libretto by Andrea Passaro) which was running at the time when I came across an entry in the *Programma giornaliera* which gave the composer as Gaetano Donizetti and the librettist as Paolo Giaramicca. Well, that provoked more questions than it answered!

Then, for a later performance, the *Programma* announced a programme which included "*Due ore di sentinella avanzata, musica del Maestro Donizetti, di quale si cantaranno i seguenti pezzi di musica: 1. Rataplan. 2. Apparvi alla luce. 3. Voi me amate. 4. Allarmi, allarmi. 5. Sprona il tamburro. 6. Ciascun lo dice, ciascun lo sa.*"

It was a common practise to build up an evening's programme with excerpts from works in the current repertoire, so that was no surprise. What was a surprise was the titles of the excerpts. "*Rataplan*" gave the show away at once: we were dealing with something derived from *La figlia del reggimento*. In fact all the titles, except "*Alarmi, alarmi*" came from the Italian version of this opera. I have not been able to place the exception and if any member of the Society recognises it, please let me know!

There were two translations of *La Fille du régiment* in use in Italy in the 1840's, one by Calisto Bassi, *poeta e concertatore* at La Scala, Milan, which was the standard text used, and one by Andrea Passaro for use in Naples. Passaro was a prolific author of farces and similar works for the small theatres and it is not suprising to find that the titles of *pezzi* quoted from *due ore* came from the Passaro version (although in some places the two translations are similar, all five appear in

