

Giuseppe Verdi *Le Trouvère* (French version of *Il trovatore* in a critical edition by David Lawton), Teatro Regio, Parma 13 September 1990

Among the many interesting events of the 1990 Verdi Festival (which included *Alzira* at Fidenza), the Teatro Regio of Parma arranged performances of *Le Trouvère*, which Verdi revised for the Paris Opéra in 1857. The performing edition of the score had been prepared with meticulous care by David Lawton, and it is to be repeated in the USA.

The interest of this version of one of the most familiar works in the repertoire is the addition of some 25 minutes of ballet - the music is known from records, but how does the ballet integrate into the work, and does it unnecessarily delay the action? Secondly, Verdi revised the orchestration in a number of places, and totally rewrote the final pages - are these improvements? Thirdly, Verdi himself revised the French translation in consultation with the singers what effect does the sound of the French words have on the performance? Alas, answers to some of these questions will have to await another hearing.

Due to last minutes changes in cast, the work was given in concert form (opera in the concert hall being a contradiction of terms in any case). Consequently the ballet, and the ballet music, were omitted. Nevertheless, Verdi's revisions came over very well, and in so familiar a score were instantly recognisable. Writing for a Paris opera orchestra, Verdi naturally used cornets as well as trumpets, and the transfer of a number of running passages to the cornet (e.g. at 'Tua prole, o turpe zingare' in Act III scene 4) had a remarkable effect of blunting the cutting edge of an accompaniment which too often sounds intrusive. The new ending, insofar as could be judged in the concert rendering, should be very effective on stage: the return of the 'Miserere' and Manrico's despairing farewell to life give more time for his execution, even if Azucena's last words 'Oui! le ciel a vengé ma mère' gives a new slant on who should take credit for the revenge!

The greatest disappointment was the performance. The Paris Opéra Orchestra and chorus played and sung with complete professionalism and no little élan. What they must have thought of the Italian soloists' pronunciation of the French text doesn't bear thinking about, for it was almost without exception simply execrable.

So what should have been a most instructive experience turned out to be a disappointment, though there was much to be enjoyed. A great masterpiece was, as usual, indestructible, but it showed up how difficult it is for non-native French speakers to sing in French.

John Black

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