

Books

Gioachino Rossini: Lettere e Documenti, Volume 1 2 febbraio 1792 - 17 marzo 1822, a cura di Bruno Cagli e Sergio Ragni, Pesaro, Fondazione Rossini 1992. Libreria Musicale Italiana, Lucca. pp682+XXXVII (Lit.120.000)

Tutti i Libretti di Rossini, a cura di Marco Beghelli e Nicola Gallino. Garzanti, Milano 1991. pp1014+XXXVII (Lit.80.000)

In contrast with last year's vast output of literature on Mozart, the publications in this year's Rossini bicentenary are manageable. It is, however, necessary to distinguish between important musicological publications and minor reading-matter, of which the latter is, alas, in the majority despite great progress in Rossini-research during the last twenty years. In this context three German books have to be mentioned: *Gioachino Rossini* by Volker Scherliess (Rowohlt Verlag, Reinbek bei Hamburg), a condensed iconography recommendable as an introduction for the layman; *Gioacchino Rossini* by Wilhelm Keitel and Dominik Neuner (Knaus Verlag, München), a "life and times documentary" of delightful scholarship; and "*Der Schwan von Pesaro*", a novel by Dietrich Wolf (Nymphenburger Verlag, München) which makes brilliant use of the various Rossini anecdotes. Published in Italy was "*Lo Scherzo di Rossini*" by Damiano Cri (Camunia Editrice, Milano), a novel about the first performance of the *Stabat Mater*; and a translation from the French of Frédéric Vitoux's *Rossini*. In England, Osborne's important book is now followed by *Gioacchino Rossini*, a biography by Alan Kendall (Gollancz, London). From France we are awaiting with interest a volume by Roland Mancini. The purpose of this review, however, is to introduce the reader to two important Italian publications which will become standard documentary works and which will be of considerable interest to Rossini-friends all over the world.

In time for Rossini's 200th birthday (29 February 192) the first volume of his letters appeared in Pesaro, having been in preparation for many years under the general editorship of Bruno Cagli. With this volume a new era of Rossini scholarship has begun and no future writer on the composer can afford to overlook this vital source. Not only have all known letters been published here, but also numerous documents concerning his life and career. The title of the volume is justifiably called "*Letters and Documents*": of the 316 items in the present volume 52 are letters by Rossini, the rest comprise contracts, protocols, minutes, complaints, petitions, concessions, testimonials etc., which afford us an insight into the conditions in which the composer's creative genius had to function. Documents which seemingly do not pertain to Rossini have been included when they add information or enlighten areas of his life. These documents show how much Rossini was in demand already quite early in his life, not only in Italy,

but also in London, St. Petersburg and Paris. Rossini's own letters convey his later assessment of himself as a jolly fellow whilst his knack for negotiation and his keen business sense soon become apparent. Although the cognoscenti are already familiar with many of the documents, there are plenty of hitherto unpublished surprises to be found in the volume, e.g. numerous letters and copies of letters which were collected in a dossier by Rossini's father Giuseppe (the so-called "Archivio Vivazza"). It is understood that all material is published in its original state, including all errors. The reader has to adjust to the unorthodox style in which the rules of grammar are flouted. Unfortunately any possible printing mistakes cannot now be distinguished from errors of substance. Of course, 316 letters and papers would not take-up 682 pages of a volume. The editor, Sergio Ragni, has undertaken the enormous task of researching all the names and data which are mentioned and, where necessary, to comment on them. Thus, the volume has become an invaluable reference for the whole circle around Rossini. An excellent index concludes the volume.

Unfortunately too, this first volume stops with the year 1822, before Rossini left Italy for the first time. Although it is planned that a further five volumes will follow in yearly installments, this may prove optimistic in view of the enormous research work required. During Rossini's Paris years there is a huge increase in documents which so far have only been researched in part. Even if all the documents up to the end of Rossini's composing career in 1830 have been established and commented upon, a new and complete biography would need the investigation of another 40 years of his life for which there exists fewer documents but many more of his own letters.

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One of the most despised aspects of any opera production has been, since time immemorial, the libretto, and quite especially the one's of Rossini's time have met with an ill-informed attitude which derived from a one-sided comparison with literature. Even today, Radiciotti's damning criticism of many of Rossini's libretti seem like an eternal curse. Only recent specialised studies have enabled the libretto to be viewed in its own right. For some of Rossini's operas it has been impossible to find a published libretto, but now the Milan publishing house of Garzanti has issued a complete collection of 41 of Rossini's original opera texts, including two pasticcios (in which Rossini had a hand) *Ivanhoe* and *Robert Bruce*. For the four French operas a synopsis in Italian has been included, as well as important variants by Rossini himself, e.g. the second finale of *Tancredi*. As was cointemporary practice, the libretto for the first performance was printed, due to lack of time, from the text supplied by the librettist, while the composer was still making adjustments. The text of the full score is, therefore, often not quite identical with the libretto as here printed. This difference allows us to draw conclusions about Rossini's method of working.

Editorial work on the text is limited to uniform layout and the removal of contemporary spelling and printing mistakes. The long preface by Marco Boghelli contributes importantly to Rossini research: various aspects of his creativity are discussed as well as the problems of working from a libretto; after twenty years of misunderstandings over the text of *Aureliano in Palmira*, Felice Romani has finally been declared the real author. The introductory sketches of history for each opera, if read consecutively, would make a miniature biography of Rossini's life. Of course yet more information would always be welcome; a synopsis for each opera; biographical details of the librettists; and sources for the libretti. But with its 1000 pages, this will remain a comprehensive tool for anyone concerned for, and working with, Rossini's music.

Reto Müller