Piero Mioli *Manuale del melodramma* Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, Milano 1993, 434pp. Lit.20.000

Truly, it is hard to imagine a more useful book than this. A complete glossary, a virtual vade mecum at the disposal of listeners and writers of the terms used and abused about opera, in one handy volume, paper-back, modest in format and presentation. To be stuffed in the pocket as well as to languish on the shelves, replete with hard facts, arcane derivations, information compressed to be sure but angled from many viewpoints, and dispensed with the characteristic irony, wit, good humour and resignation of the indefaticable author.

He told me about its projected appearance last year I seem to remember but its realisation in a flash and with such attention to detail is to the admiration (and despair) of us all. With such a prestation all those multi-volume compendia of operatic lore we know so well must be looking to their laurels; Grove must be turning in his grave.

This admirable book supplies not just an alphabetical coverage of musical terms but is infinitely enlarged by an explanation of jargon, emotive lore, technical details and philosophic groundings. Thus, *Adagio* is preceded by *Acciaccatura, Accidente, Accompagnamento, Accordo,* and *Acuto*, and followed by *Addio, Ad libitum, Affetto, Affettuoso, A fior di labbro, Agente, Agilità* and so on, comprehensive enough for anyone. What is more, many of these entries are given in scholarly depth, extensive and original, not just reduced to the repetitive bathos of received information. Like all the best works of reference it makes compulsive reading, bedside book as well as last resort, a checklist crossed with debunking agent and instant access to operaspeak.

The fact that this irresistible listing is an account of current *Italian* usage makes the book especially valuable, and not only to Donizettians, it eschews much of the modish jargon emenating from the *oltralpini* and thus is a better witness to the essential *italianità* of up-to-date operatatic terminology in the peninsula than any other glossary I am aware of. Two of the shorter entries - chosen almost at random - well illustrate the virtues of this volume that should be in every back pocket:

Iperbole

Un'esagerazione, come figura poetica. La Lucrezia Borgia di Romani e Donizetti dice, straziata,"Mille volte al giorno io moro/mille volte in cor ferita". E l'Elvira di Pepoli e Bellini, nei *Puritani*, dice che i tre mesi di separazione da Arturo "fur tre secoli/di sospiri e di tormenti/fur tre secoli d'orror!".

Sincope

Quando si prolunga un suono debole oltre la fine della battuta, fino a invadere il suono forte. Garcia, che insiste sull'accento dovuto alle sincopi ("non come l'eco, che segue il sistema opposto"), offre numerosi esempi: fra l'altro da *Don Giovanni* sceglie il duetto fra Anna e Ottavio, alle parole "vammi ondeggiando il cor"; dall'*Italiana in Algeri* il duetto di Mustafà e Lindoro, dove il tenore passeggia e poi sale all'acuto cantando "ah mi perdo: mi confondo,/quale imbroglio maledetto".

Alexander Weatherson