

Bergamo

Musical notices from Città e Provincie



Events marking the Mayr anniversary in 1995 concluded with a concert of his music by students of the Istituto Musicale Donizetti which they had been proud to have given earlier in the year at Altmannstein and Eichstitt; their contribution to Italo-German exchanges during the celebrations. Thoughts now turn to 1997 (and 1998); Maestro Gavazzeni has been appointed Artistic Superintendent and his wife, Denia Mazzola (recently awarded the gold medal of the *Premio Donizetti*) is to be Artistic Director. There has been a public commitment by the local authorities to the prospective celebrations without specific terms but referring (pointedly?) to Pesaro's contribution to the Rossini Festival of 9 *miliardi lire* (nine thousand million - in America 9 billion). Better financial details should emerge this year though "bids" are already being made - the Istituto Musicale Donizetti "looking forward to 1997" was 2½ *miliardi* for urgent attention to the premises in the Via Arena, parts of which date back to the 13th century with the whole structure much modified in 1864. There will be hopes for financial support from regional authorities as well; in 1995 there were 35 million lire for the Locatelli and Mayr celebrations at the Teatro Donizetti. Two comparisons that may arouse interest: 140 million for the Brescia-Bergamo Piano Festival, and 77 million for Bande and other instrumental and choral groups.

A sponsorship experiment for the Teatro Donizetti which involved a display of sporting goods (and a glass of wine for patrons) was felt not appropriate for the "tempio della lirica in Bergamo" that deserves to be respected as such. There were also complaints about the season containing more concerts than performances of opera, an imbalance that some felt had detrimentally affected the Mayr celebrations. The theatre was not the right place for chamber music concerts and it was hoped lessons would be learned before devising programmes for 1997. The local Council has agreed a commission be set up to consider what can be done with the Teatro Sociale. Closed in the 50's

there have been repairs to enable its use for exhibitions; further work could create facilities for concerts, providing the Festival organisers with a viable alternative to the larger Teatro Donizetti and the smaller venues such as the Sala Piatti etc.

The first steps in providing "*un centro di documentazione di materiali donizettiani*" and a 'happy anticipation of 1997/98' was how the opening (at 5 Via Rocca) of Fonovideoteca di Città Alta was described. Here are available nearly 600 recordings, from all sources, of Donizetti's music, Fabrizio Capitano, working of a revision of the catalogue of the Civico Museo Donizettiano, discovered a previously unknown piece by the Maestro, a *canone infinito a 5* originally part of a letter it seems, written from Palermo in 1825 to his elder brother Giuseppe, then in Genoa.

It was in 1820 when Francesco, the composer's other brother (older by 5 years) applied to the Municipality of Bergamo for a civic band to be formed. Permission was granted on 1st August and so the Banda Civica came into existence; later it became the Banda di Bergamo though popularly known as the Banda Bigoni. Michele Bigoni had been one of the prime movers of the enterprise with Francesco and eventually, though only the cymbalist, was such an influence as to be known as 'the soul of the band'. In the 1850's he set out to reorganise the band; a Società dei Bandisti was created whose members, that is the bandsmen, were laid under certain obligations in return for which they were paid 3 lire a day when called upon to perform. Bigoni died in 1871, of advanced years - as we know that as early as 1793 he was being paid to ring the bells of the Torre del Comune (at the south west corner of the Piazza Vecchia where 'his' band played). In the Rivista *ARCHIVIO STORICO BERGAMASCO No.2* (Nuove serie), some of the highlights of Bigoni's early career as bellringer make fascinating reading, their interest and charm enhanced by evidence of his partial illiteracy. He records the events that prompted the ringing of the bells, the payments he received, and the name of the town official or luminary who retained his services. On 12th May 1799 the bells were rung as part of the celebrations following the departure of the French a month after the arrival of the Austro-Russian forces; the Piazza was illuminated and the famous tenor Giacomo David gave a concert in the Teatro Cerri. This small theatre was located within the Palazzo della Ragione; the local authority let the first floc to Francesco Cerri for 10 years from 1797 after the little theatre in the Citadella had been deliberately destroyed so leaving the Città Alta without a theatre. During the ten years before it ceased activity (when the Teatro Sociale opened in 1808) there were performances of operas by Anfossi, Cimarosa, Paisiello, Zingarelli and - during the Carnevale 1804/5 - Mayr's *Lodoiska*. Later in 1799, Bigoni tells us of a ceremony in the Duomo when Carlo Lenzi, maestro di musica at Santa Maria Maggiore, directed the choir in two cantatas before lunch, and in the Vespers afterwards. Not surprisingly our campanologist was in great demand in March 1816 when the Emperor Francis I visited Bergamo; arriving during the afternoon of the 11th, he was greeted by all the nobility of the city and its environs before retiring to the Palazzo Terzi, said to be the most beautiful residence in the old part of Bergamo. The next day the Emperor visited Santa Maria Maggiore, the ginnasio and the liceo before seeing the churches of S.Grata and Carmine. He was again attended by the nobility after lunch and in the evening was to be at the Teatro Sociale for the performance of a cantata especially written for the occasion by the "*callebre Simone Mair*" (sic). In the event the Emperor did not put in an appearance as he was indisposed - "*per ogeti di malatia*" (sic). On the 13th, after meeting with civic dignitaries and visiting the Duomo, he did attend a second performance that evening. All the arrangements during the Emperor's visit had been supervised by the Podestà, Rocco Cedrelli, who paid Bigoni the sum of 50 lire for "*il sono dele canpane*" (sic!).

Brian Thornton

PS Marcello Ballini somewhere recalled the ten years or so of the 'Donizetti Society di Londra', "*con tipico 'humour' britannico*". Is there a transcript available somewhere?

*founded in 1973
