

Marino Faliero

Washington Donizetti Festival 29 March 1998

Faliero is a story of conspiracy, betrayal and the downfall of the Doge of Venice. It was premiered about a month after Bellini's *Puritani*, and both were composed for the unrivalled quartet of Giulia Grisi, Rubini, Tamburini and Lablache. These brilliant singers successfully sang both operas in Paris and London but while *Puritani* was to achieve instant fame *Faliero* soon faded. Though it was happier in London, the critic Henry Chorley wrote: "*Marino Faliero languished, in part from want of interest in the female character - a fault fatal to an opera's popularity*".

The romantic Byron wrote a poem about Marino Faliero; the egalitarian French dramatist Casimir Delavigne based an emotional play on the same story. From these Donizetti and Bidera contrived their tragic melodrama. The title-role was tailored to the talents of Lablache whose huge voice and titanic size matched his acting abilities. Rubini was praised highly for his contribution: Donizetti wrote "*Rubini has sung as I've never heard him sing before*" but for Lablache, the praise was unending, even Queen Victoria drew his portrait in purple robes holding a sword. The "Times" thundered à propos its hero-

"...the stem character of the plot, and the necessity of creating out of its most striking parts situations calculated to keep up the same interest in the lyric adaptations of the drama, have necessarily preserved it pure from many of the trashy frivolities which abound in Italian dramas"

No doubt there was a moral satisfaction that a crowned commoner - like Anna Bolena - ended improvingly on the block.

Joseph McLellan, in the **Washington Post** of our day was less sanctimonious: "**Donizetti of Distinction...**" he said after the Friday prima (25 March 1998) "**...anyone in Washington DC should not miss this final extraordinary performance...**"

This was the cast. I heard -

Doge Marino Faliero	Yuri Dobrovolsky
Israele Bertucci	Jason Stearns
Fernando	Christopher Petruccelli
Steno	Eugene Galvin
Leone	Wayne Kemp
Elena	Raya Gonen
Irene	Denise Young
Vincenzo	Donato Soranno
Un gondoliere	John Schultz

Other roles: Marzio Gaiani: Ozie Jamison: José Sacin: with the Chorus of the Opera Camerata of Washington: Chorus Mistress; Cora Alter: Organ; Mark Husey: Piano: Boris Gurevich: 'cello: Jerome Wright.

Conductor: **Micaele Sparacino**

The level of the singing was of the highest international caliber, boasting six outstanding soloists and a first-class chorus. First, however, is the magnificence of the score itself - no wonder Bellini jealously feared that this work would eclipse his own. After a Gothic and tersely dramatic introduction there follows, perhaps, the largest male chorus in the entire canon of Italian operas. It runs almost twelve minutes and is completely *bravura*. It brought down the house, as they say, and no principal artist had sung a note yet!!! I should like to add at this point that the performance received a standing ovation after Act I - I'm sure Maestro Sparacino would agree that the ovations are not only for splendid singing - the audience also expressed delight over the incredible music of Donizetti.

As for the tenor, Christopher Petrucelli was stellar...four stars! He sang high C's in every way...*piano*...*forte*...*staccato*, and then there were the two D flats and three D naturals. His heroic voice, to me at first, did not seem right, but he threw himself into the role with such bravado that I became ecstatic! Wow! I never heard anything like it! As for Faliero himself, the Russian bass Yuri Dobrovolsky had the most noble tone and dramatic presence. His great duet with the baritone Jason Stearns is as exciting as Bellini's "Suoni la tromba" [something of a favorite of mine]. Mr Stearns, by the way, has two large arias with cabaletta which he literally tossed up to heaven, capped each time with a sustained high A. It was amazing. The Israeli soprano, Raya Gonen, was also astonishing, a truly great Donizettian. Her Act III *scena* had everything but time for the audience to catch its breath, and she too ended the execution scene with a sustained high D. *Marino Faliero* is a real showpiece, a thrilling sequence of one great melody after another.

I travelled across the whole country just for this opera and I must admit that the emotional impact bowled me over. How I loved it! I must congratulate Micaele Sparacino for having the foresight and courage - and I mean this from the bottom of my heart - to put-on this rare work so that we could all enjoy it. And how difficult it must have been - the different editions of the available scores were not less than a nightmare to co-relate I understand...

Clarissa Lablache

PS. I've been told there is likely to be a CD. Let's hope it crosses the Big Pond! AW

