



LUCREZIA BORGIA

John Watts

This production had originally been planned for June Anderson but she had a change of mind some time previously and had been replaced by Renée Fleming at an early stage. The staging, by Hugo de Ana, was lavish as only La Scala can afford these days. The settings hardly evoked Venice or Ferrara but were dramatically effective and the costumes stunning.

Giuseppe Sabbatini who I had seen as a fine Gannaro two days previously at the *prova generale* then withdrew, due to a family bereavement, and was replaced - this time at very short notice - by Marcello Giordani. Michele Pertusi was an excellent Don Alfonso but Sonia Ganassi a rather negative Orsini.

The opera, of course, depends on the singer of the title role and it is a great pity that Maria Callas never attempted it. Renée Flemming looked the part but the drama was lacking both in the voice and the characterisation. It may be that she was affected by the intense summer heat in Milan which had [at least in part, as there were health issues now happily resolved Ed.] caused the conductor Gianluigi Gelmetti to collapse near the beginning of the opera (he carried-on after a rest).

I first encountered Renée Flemming in Rossini's *Armida* at Pesaro in 1993 and she has gone on to distinguish herself in operas by Mozart, Strauss and Massenet, a territory she should retain. I do not feel that, at the present time, there are many great singers about who can excel in the major operas of Donizetti - or even justify their revival - we may be in for a long wait before a few more come along.

What I suspect these anniversary years will be remembered-for are not the operas that have been re-exhumed - but for important books like the Annalisi Bini /Jeremy Commons *Le prime rappresentazioni delle opere di Donizetti nella stampa coeva* (Skira, Roma 1997). This enormous volume of a closely-printed 1652 pages contains first performance details of all Donizetti's operas, together with all contemporary reviews. The amount and scale of work which has gone into this book is staggering...

[PS Note that Sabbatini sang in later performances; for other casting see previous notice Ed.]