

IL CAMPANELLO DI NOTTE - JULY 1999

In a strange parallel with Bergamo's revival of *Pigmalione* and *Rita* in October 1998, the July 1999 Buxton Festival staged Suppé's version of the *Pygmalion* story, *Die schöne Galatée* (1865) and Donizetti's *Il Campanello di Notte* (1836), also as a double bill. It even found some real and some imaginary links between the two composers: Suppé presented himself to Donizetti when the latter came to Vienna for the premiere of *Linda di Chamounix* in May 1842 and was invited to work with the maestro for the rest of his stay. However the Suppé- Donizetti letters allegedly found under the seat on the top deck of a night bus in Hartlepool and reproduced in the Festival programme proved to be an amusing figment of Colin Bell's imagination.

On the other hand our Pip Clayton's background article in the programme was an excellent introduction to the *Campanello*; both operas were given in good (but unattributed) English translations and in imaginative productions, the Suppé by the well-known baritone Donald Maxwell, who is also this year's Festival Director, and the Donizetti by Caroline Clegg, who was full of ideas in her transposition from nineteenth century Naples to Derbyshire of the 1950s. I particularly liked the first aria by the elderly pharmacist Don Annibale (Jonathan Best), where repetition was made credible as an inability to find the second page of his wedding speech notes, and the disguises of the jealous young Enrico (Mark Stone) as various troublesome night patients, which were convincingly very funny.

I was also full of admiration for the adaptability of Michelle Walton, the only principal in both operas (as *Ganymede* in the Suppé and as *Serafina*, the young bride, in *Il Campanello*).

The enthusiasm of the well-rehearsed casts, the effervescent warmth of the Northern Chamber Orchestra under Wyn Davies and the skill of the two directors combined to produce an evening of pure delight; is it too much to hope that this could inspire others to devise other double bills, say including *Betly*, *L'Ajo nell'Imbarazzo* or even *I Pazzi per Progetto*?