

Viva la Mamma at Dordrecht September 2000

After hosting the Society's AGM and staging *Il Borgomastro di Saardam* two years ago, the Belcanto Festival in Dordrecht returned to Donizetti with three performances of *Le Convenienze Teatrali* (now usually known as "Viva La Mamma").

With so many unjustly neglected works of the maestro (including several one-acters which could be combined into a double bill) this was a somewhat disappointing decision. Even at the time of the Savona revival in 1981 (with the young Matteuzzi and Alaimo) *Viva La Mamma* was already a popular opera in Northern Europe and in the meantime there have been performances in Lausanne (1989 under Zedda), Goslar (1995), Wuppertal, Essen (1999), a splendid one by Morley College in London and others elsewhere.

There are also many versions of *Viva La Mamma* but few libretti available, so it was a pity that the revision by Roger Parker and Anders Wiklund for Dordrecht was far removed from, and seemed little improvement on, the other texts. Matters were not helped by a programme synopsis only in Dutch, which ignored or did not explain many points in the staging, such as the two arrest scenes, the Siren's aria and Procolo's long aria in defence of his wife, the prima donna, and himself against the accusation that they were really sellers of pastries.

It was also unfortunate that the first performance of the opera was interrupted by rain in the first act and that we all had to move into the nearby Augustine church after the interval. However the cast and orchestra coped bravely with these difficulties while the audience was immensely sympathetic. In particular Paolo Bordogna's *Mamma Agata* was a comic tour de force, well supported by Kristine Becker-Lund as the prima donna, Arda Aktar as Procolo and Giovanni Botta as the German tenor. The whole company performed with obvious delight in Donizetti's music, which was inspiringly conducted by Gabriele Bellini.

Once again the setting of Dordrecht itself and the other events added to the enjoyment of the Festival. I attended a violin recital, by the brilliant young Belgian Hans van Kerckhoven, of works based on various operas and also the now traditional brunch with young singers from the Belcanto Summer School, well coached by William Matteuzzi, Michael Aspinall, Luca Gorla and others.

For future years, I have already made a plea to the Festival Director for a libretto of the opera as sung to be on sale, or if this is not possible, at least a good programme synopsis in English. And with the vagaries of September weather in Holland, could we not return to the charming indoor Schouwburg, which was used until 1996?

SAM EADIE