

Gomes at the Bloomsbury

Keith Larsen

In earlier years, when I used to travel with a London-based entrepreneur, I began to hear about Gomes. It was this travel expert who had an ambition to take a party of people to Brazil to hear some of his works. He had had to be content with some hazy, distant, pirate LP's of his operas, and distributed these with some enthusiasm. 1996, the 100th Anniversary of the death of Antonio Carlos Gomes [1839-1896 **Edit**] was to have been the occasion of this journey.

It didn't take place because of financial considerations. I was rather relieved. I had seen a film of Werner Herzog's 'Fitzcarraldo' in which it was implied that the only way to reach the isolated Opera House was in an unappealing row-boat with Claudia Cardinale and Klaus Kinski. My geography is rather unclear, but this theatre is, I think, in a rubber plantation somewhere up the Amazon.

But since then we have had a revival of Gomes. Bonn and the excellent Chelsea Opera Group have done *Il Guarany* and in 1998 we had *Fosca* at Wexford.

Salvator Rosa in revival by Dorset Opera [11 and 12 August 2000 **Edit**] has, in common with the *Fosca* production, a libretto by [Antonio] Ghislanzoni [1824-1893 a neo-Bergamasco **Edit**] and the same excellent tenor [Fernando Del Valle **Edit**] in both.

We, in the Donizetti Society have to be grateful to this small company for the performance of two rarities of our maestro *Gabriella di Vergy* and *Maria Padilla*. Also, of course, *Lucia di Lammermoor*. Trips to Dorset, and the school theatre [Sherbourne School Hall **Edit**] ushered-in by polite schoolboys and *haute cuisine* in the Town Hall. All *very* enjoyable.

But this time, they came to us, for a third performance at our forlorn but indispensable Bloomsbury Theatre [in London **Edit**].

Criticism isn't really fair at this stage. I await the arrival of the promised CD's to become more familiar with the work, but as with the other recently seen works, his music remains curiously unsatisfactory I feel. "Scrawny" [(!) **Edit**] is the unhappy word that comes to mind. The arias don't live in the memory. Settings and scene changes are too many and too confused.

Andres Baker worked hard in her breeches-role [*Gennariello* **Edit**] and seemed to me to be the best of the principals. Del Valle [*Salvator Rosa* **Edit**] had an heroic presence.

Michael Glücksmann (listed as a "Scarpia") sang expertly as *Masaniello*. We should have him at the ENO. [(!) **Edit**]

The production was dire. Heavy clumsy sets, old-fashioned and oppressive (copied from Liebig meat-extract cards, I suspect). So much could have been achieved with less. Crowd scenes were impeded by unnecessary props.

But, we are grateful for the chance to see this rare opera from a composer who was spoken of well by Verdi. Or was he simply damning by faint praise?

Thank you Dorset Opera. Can we have some more Donizetti please?

