

GINEVRA DI SCOZIA

Revived two hundred years to the day of the first performance in the same theatre at Trieste! It was an occasion not to be missed and the *Teatro Lirico* was not going to let the event pass by quietly.

Mayr's *Ginevra di Scozia* was commissioned for the opening of the theatre, and so here we were with '1801 – 2001' clearly printed on the programme. How much has come and gone over those two hundred years! There is no going back, simply the bringing back to the light of day masterpieces of yesterday.

Gianni Gori's splendid volume *Il Teatro Verdi di Trieste 1801 – 2001* was given to the lecturers at the day Conference that sought to set out Mayr's *Ginevra* in the context of its times. The Conference under the chairmanship of Paolo Fabbri went well and was positively reviewed in the local press. Gori's book relates the architectural background and the history of the theatre, together with the performances over years that have not only seen operas but operettas such as Suppé's *Boccaccio*, and plays with Eleanor Duse and by Pirandello gracing the boards. The illustrations are a joy to the eye evoking decades of singers. However the book was set into an even greater context with the Fondazione Donizetti publishing a handsome volume of studies, all of which relate in some way or another to Mayr and his early work. (*Attorno al Palcoscenico – La musica a trieste fra Sette e Ottocento e l'inaugurazione del Teatro Nuovo [1801]. A cura di Maria Girardi e Paolo Da Col*). Mayr studies seem to gather pace year by year. The *Mayr and Vienna* symposium awaits us at the beginning of October.

And so well armed we made our way to the theatre to hear *Ginevra di Scozia* on Saturday 21 April 2001. Patric Schmid and his team were there with microphones galore recording the opera. Hopes were high, but whether Opera Rara releases the results will be interesting to say the least. Alas, the first night brought us, with the exception of Ariodante, singers who were vocally not suited to the opera. I learnt much sitting patiently through the opera and realising that we do more harm to the cause of Mayr with poor performances than anything else. Yes, it was a privilege to hear Mayr's opera, but not with misplaced voices. Furthermore I don't think the average performer hears Mayr aright yet and is therefore lacking in understanding as to how to interpret his music. A role created by Giacomo David requires a voice of some quality with the power for good enunciation and diction; likewise *Ginevra* must be on the verge of stealing the show with the two wonderful lyrical scenes composed for her, one in each act.

This early work would have sounded quite different on period instruments. The music requires exceptional playing by the solo obbligato instruments and with chiaroscuro tones for Mayr's integrated orchestration, which as he himself asserts

in his writings, is akin to painting with its colours and hues. Mayr's use of the orchestra is idiosyncratic, a mine for others to plunder over the decades. His sometimes curious rhythms relate to the various psychic energies suggested by the text and these have to be 'stitched together' with the vocal line. It all requires great artistry. The result is dramatic flow and enunciation of words set to music. For example, all the give and take following the balcony scene and building up to Ginevra's arrest with the conclusion of the first act with the ensemble and stretta. Here, at one point, Mayr closes down the whole orchestra except for the cellos who accompany a solo cello that adds radiance to Ginevra's aria around which the ensemble is eventually woven. Ginevra's second scene is a 'concerto' for solo violin and soprano of great beauty emphasising Mayr's respect for Tartini (see my essay *The influence of Tartini over Mayr*, in the Ingolstadt 1998 *Mayr-Studen*).

Tartini? Yes, the opera is a bridge from the world of the eighteenth century. To recognise its genius it is enough to have at the back of one's mind Cimarosa's *Oriazii e Curazii* (1796). Mayr is opening a whole new world musically, vocally, and visually. My friends were constantly pointing out sources for Rossini, Donizetti and even Verdi. Visually the opera takes us into a romantic 'sehnsucht' for Ossian's world. Vocally we find the emerging structure of the operas we love. However it should be remembered that Mayr was still composing for the last of the castrati such as Luigi Marchesi; therefore, we do not find a convenient or conventional SATB breakdown of soloists. There are curious effects, for example the chorus is all male, lending a masculine feel to the opera and balancing the predominance of soprano solo voices. Musically we are tipping over from the old to the new century. However what we hear is emphatically early Mayr; his greater emphasis on lyricism seems to have begun to develop around 1805 and then builds up to circa 1813 only to find a new impetus with his last works such as *Fedra* (1820). It is good news to report that Anders Wiklund is well advanced with his critical edition of the opera. We must hope for a good and substantial performance and recording of the work which Heinrich Bauer, Anders Wiklund and myself have described as Mayr's most dramatic and beautiful opera so far to come our way. It is a curious twist of fate that when Mayr was at the height of his powers, he was no longer in favour. If you are not convinced, then listen to a tape of the Bavarian Radio *S. Luigi Gonzaga* (1822) with Arleen Auger. You will also have demonstrated how a superb singer simply lifts Mayr's music into another dimension.

If Patric is able to extract from the Trieste performances a reasonable recording we shall have an example of 'early' Mayr. We have good recordings of *Medea in Corinto* and a very mediocre *Due Rose*. If Bavarian Radio could be persuaded to issue their *S. Luigi Gonzaga* in memory of Arleen Auger and if we have a fine *Fedra*, then we will be able to focus the tragic side of Mayr's operas.

Marco Beghelli did sterling work with his reconstruction of the original version of *Ginevra di Scozia*, that is, before Weigl and Lavigna made their insertions, both anxious to get onto the Mayr bandwagon which was to sweep through the first decade of the new century. Three other names need to be recalled. Gianni Gori not only for his book but also for all his care in preparing the ground for Mayr's opera. Giandomenico Vaccari for his overall artistic direction (visually the opera did not offend as so often with modern productions, at times it caught something of Scotland, that is an operatic taste of what eventually was to lead on to *Lucia*). Maria Girardi whose notes and essays must have helped those coming to Mayr for the first time.

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