

A welcome to (from) Trieste

A weekend in Trieste for the purpose of seeing "*Ginevra di Scozia*" by Johann Simon Mayr. I'm afraid I went ill-prepared not knowing anything about the city or the opera. Of course I knew that Trieste was on the coast and had been the sea-port for the Austro-Hungarian empire. As for the music the only piece I had heard was the duet from act 2 for Ariodante and Ginevra which is on CD from Vol.1 of One Hundred Years of Italian Opera released by Opera Rara. I had to fly to Milan, (Malpensa) have an hours wait then an internal flight to Trieste. The trip did not bode well. Firstly the flight to Milan was nearly 40 minutes late departing and at Milan we circled for a further 20 minutes due to a change in the runway landing pattern. Because of that however my flight to Trieste was also delayed but soon I was on my way.

In Trieste the weather was dreadful, a terrific rain storm was in progress, and crossing the piazza to the Nuova Impero Hotel I got soaked to the skin. By early evening the rain had stopped and I was able to find the opera house. That evening there was a Gala Concert for which I was able to get a ticket. The soloists were Cecilia Gasdia, Luciana D'Intino, Massimo Giordano and Giorgio Surian with the orchestra and chorus of the opera house conducted by Tiziano Severini. The programme was as follows, an enjoyable evening.

The Teatro Lirico "Giuseppe Verdi" opened 21st April 1801 with "*Ginevra*" and to celebrate the anniversary a reconstruction of the original version was being given. I must record my thanks to Signorina Nicoletta Cavalieri from the press office who arranged for a ticket to be left at the box office for me. With the ticket there was also the programme and a invitation to the reception to be held after the performance.

The theatre has a small elegant foyer with doors leading into small reception rooms, over these doors are engraved the names of Cherubini, Pergolesi, Bellini and Donizetti. The central door giving entrance to the auditorium is honoured by Verdi of whom a bust is placed in the foyer. The auditorium is a gem in red plush, cream and gold plasterwork. There are two tiers of boxes the first supported by male caryatid, the second by female. Then two galleria were it appears the box walls have been removed and rows of seats put in, and above them a balcony. To support the ceiling, arches in the gothic style painted in pale green and red, the ceiling painted with figures of mermen but with foliage garlands instead of fishtails. The whole a pronounced horseshoe shape but very pleasing to the eye.

The opera taken from an episode in "*Orlando Furioso*" by Ariosto opens with a Sinfonia, chorus of courtiers and a aria for the King. Ginevra's music is very florid with a lot of very high notes, unfortunately some of them unpleasant to the ear. Ariodante was being sung by the mezzosoprano Daniela Barcellona a role sung in the original production by the famous castrato Luigi Marchesi. All was well but suddenly the performance seemed to lose momentum. By the end of the first act after a very long aria for Ginevra accompanied by solo violin I was beginning to think I had had a wasted journey. Was it first nerves, the unappreciative audience (that was obvious by the number of empty seats after the interval) or was it me tired after a hectic day of sightseeing ?

In the interval I met other members of our Society all of whom were of the same opinion. But we went back and stayed until the bitter end.

During the first performance I found myself sitting next to Peter Moores of the Peter Moores Foundation who was with a director of Opera Rara. I understand that they are recording the performances live, hopefully for release later this year. I must admit I do not envy their task in choosing which performances or performers to record, but whatever I shall look forward to having the CD,s in my collection.

At the reception after I was asked for my opinion by Signorina Cavaliere and when I told her of my disappointment she insisted that I saw the second performance on the Sunday afternoon. I'm glad I did, The same orchestra and conductor but a different cast, the whole performance moved along with a sense of urgency (the time cut by at least ten minutes), it was like hearing a different opera. Suffice to say I thoroughly enjoyed it. It's opera seria as I like it, exit aria's, gesture's of horror or amazement and to end, a vaudeville with the seven protagonists right down by the footlights during which the house lights were brought up, a turn-about, a swift move backstage and the curtain fell; marvellous theatre, pure magic.

One last word about Trieste, there is a lot to see, from the remains of the Roman theatre and forum, the 14th C. Cathedral and many churches, the 15th C. castle to the Carlo & Vera Wagner Museum devoted to the history of the Jewish community via the Morpurgo Museum a 19th C. bourgeois house of merchant bankers and the sumptuous Palazzo Revoltella built by Baron Revoltella art collector and merchant. Or vist Castello Miramare, built by Archduke Maximilian and his consort Charlotte before he left on the ill fated enterprise to become Emperor of Mexico. But if you decide to visit this ancient and fascinating city (I intend to return) my advice is:- take a good pair of walking shoes.

Pip Clayton

PS from the Secretary (finale tragico)

This issue of the Newsletter begins a new subscription year. For those who are due, hopefully, to renew, a separate renewal form is enclosed. Once again we have made it possible to pay by Visa, Mastercard, Amex or JCB, but please remember to include the expiry date. The membership keeps up; a very stable confraternity (what is a more politically-correct word to describe us?). I do hope that all continue to find interest, information and perhaps - despite some recent productions - a little amusement from their membership.

Pip Clayton

The *Anna Bolena* so well received at Bergamo and Cremona with Dimitra Theodossiou in the title role (see Newsletter 82 ' *Anna Bolena riconosciuta* ') has been recorded by Dynamic and will be on sale about the time this Newsletter 83 appears.

First soundings are sensational.