

Due Regine: ma è Barbara, Queen of Scots!

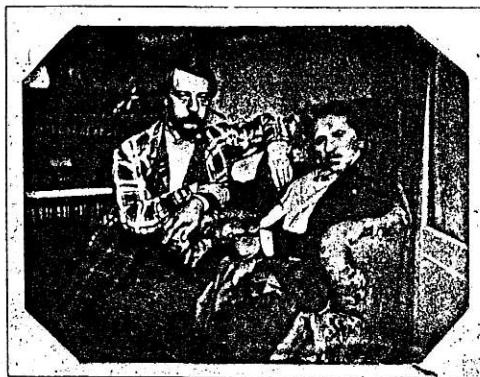
This was catwalk opera with the two prima donnas vying with each other for audience-attention with competing couture dresses. No prêt-a-porter here! Only 24 hours before it was raining cats and dogs in Edinburgh, and maybe some of last vestige of a previous dryness had lingered in the Usher Hall. At first it looked as though the weather could bring about problems in the singing of *Bel Canto*. But with the odd snort or nasal twitch all triumphed, although for Paul Charles Clarke (as Leicester, Mary's supporter) it was the harder task.

From Antonacci's first entry as Elisabetta (in shot silk cocktail dress, nearly revealing her knees) the politics of confrontation were in evidence. Frittoli, plainer, and initially more demure, entered quietly in a plain long skirt and straight hair and from there built a crescendo up to 'Vil bastarda.' It was a popular technical knock-out. The sentiment clearly had supporters here in Edinburgh. Neither leading lady put a foot wrong in racking up the anguish to the extent that wee Rachel Hynes (Anna Kennedy) in the last scene was in tears, and I don't think she was acting. The trio of men were, by comparison, somewhat mono-chromatic. The urgency of Paul Charles Clarke (Leicester) and Christopher Purves (Cecil) was overshadowed by the ladies, and Jonathan Lemalu's Talbot formed a secure but invisible anchor in the depths. But the shifty or shiftless men don't come too well out of this drama, and sure enough only Sir Charles Mackerras showed any sign of being in control of events. His imposition of some Prague precision was certainly a tonic to the musical development and ensured that the Italian freedom that they call 'rubato' remained firmly disciplined.

The only fur that flew was purely vocal, and the audience ovation was acknowledged with much linking of hands and other signs of mutual admiration.

No heads rolled.

D.M. Bennett



GATANO E ANDREA DONIZETTI.
 (Da un daguerrotypo, fatto a Parigi nel 1847, ritraente il Maestro ammalato assistito dal nipote Andrea, nella sua abitazione dell'Avenue Chateaubriand, N. 6 ai Campi Elisi).