

Patti's Palace

In the spring of 2002 together with three friends I decided to visit the last home of Adelina Patti, an opera was being performed in the private theatre of her Craig-y-Nos by the Opera School of Wales. One of these friends owns two paintings of the diva and was offering to loan one of them to the Management, so through him we were offered a tour of the theatre and castle. Such a trip should not be taken lightly as it is in a fairly remote part of the Brecon Beacon and requires a car and overnight accommodation.

The hub of Craig-y-Nos Castle is the seventeenth-century tower. and some century-and-a-half ago a local man built himself a grey limestone house against the tower. In 1878 Patti purchased this house and a good deal of land. She added more buildings in pink sandstone, landscaped the gardens and built a theatre; the total result is a somewhat eclectic mass of colour and styles, standing quite near a country road but at the back commanding a view over a wooded valley where a river runs, and there is a tiny railway halt to which Patti's private coach would be diverted and where her carriage would be waiting for her. Today the gardens are sadly neglected but the surroundings, now designated Craig-y-Nos Park, are administered by the Brecon Beacon National Park and are open to the public.

The theatre is in very good repair and nicely decorated, it is said to be based upon Bayreuth (!) It is not intended to discuss the opera we heard here but the following day we went a short tour, saw the "chariot" front-curtain at close quarters and the mechanism which, operated manually, and taking three hours, can either rake the floor of the auditorium for performance or lay it flat for use as a ballroom. It seats about one hundred and fifty spectators. This theatre is used occasionally by touring companies and a singer friend - the tenor Ramon Remedios (brother of Alberto - the *heldentenor*) told me that he had sung there several times when he was with the Welsh National Opera.

After the death of the diva in 1919 the Castle became a hospital for tuberculosis patients and later still a geriatric centre closing in the 1980's. It now belongs to a millionaire who is hoping to refurbish it as a high-class hotel destined for sportsmen (shooting and fishing). At present part of it is a modest hotel run by two young men; we saw the large music-room, now a dining room, and most of the uninhabited part - still looking-like a hospital, forlorn and shabby, even Patti's private quarters need much tender, loving care. There are apparently no Archives, nothing to tell us how Patti entertained her guests in this Castle but it is agreeable to think that here she regaled them with extracts from *Lucia*, *Linda*, *L'elisir*, *Don Pasquale* and *La Fille du régiment* - all, as we know, at the heart of her repertoire. **Marigold Mann**