



L'Armonia

Another Mayr masterwork has been revealed in Ingolstadt, the 'azione drammatica' *L'Armonia*, a work that may well be described as the composer's last opera. It was performed on 30 June 1825 commemorating the visit of the Emperor Francis I to Bergamo; undoubtedly the Ingolstadt revival was but the second performance of the work. It was originally sumptuously presented at the Teatro Riccardi with sets by Sanquirico and the whole work was born out of an idea Mayr had whilst suffering from a bad attack of influenza.

In a letter to Marco Bonesi, Mayr writes '*ho dovuto pasticciare una Composizione per la venuta dell'Imperatore...*' Well, the music is of such maturity, Donizettians beware, for when the work is later issued on Naxos you will have many surprises. We have the picture of Mayr lying in bed with a fever and coming up with the idea of a work set in the world of Ossian, The first scene brings together the Celtic peoples meeting in a landscape that we associate with Scotland. The Leader of the Clans (B) expresses the values of a sound society based on work and the lack of poverty. The warriors and their Leader (T) approach and sentiments regarding the need for peace are expressed (the fall of Napoleon), and that all should make haste to greet the coming of their king. All this sounds pretty tame until you realise that we have on stage, besides the soloists, a double chorus, and a vast orchestra in the pit as well as a big off-stage band. The scene ends with a 'cabaletta' sung by the tenor with comments from the band, totally original in effect, only that on the evening of the performance, the young Albanian tenor did not see eye to eye with the musicians and it was cut. Fortunately I had been at the rehearsals and recording sessions. Mayr's autograph and letter tell us that during the change of scenes a violin concerto was played and this I suspect lies in the folders of Pietro Rovelli's compositions in the Biblioteca Civica, Bergamo. Rovelli was the violinist who taught at Mayr's School after the death of Capuzzi. Franz Hauk inserted at this point an amazing dramatic interlude taken from *Ercole in Lidia*, composed for in Vienna, 1803. Free of Italian conventions and restraints we hear yet another aspect of Mayr's orchestral genius. Surely this will be on the Naxos recording.

The second scene is the hall of trophies of the Clans. The bard (S) has a splendid aria with words that emphasise the true nature of inspiration, this is followed by a terzetto and a grand finale. I will say no more so as not to spoil the surprises that Donizettians will have when they will hear this extraordinarily beautiful music. It is interesting that in my correspondence I had recommended a performance of *L'Armonia* for the first Mayr

Symposium in 1992. On that occasion the *Te Deum* composed for Napoleon's Milan coronation (1815) was performed. Gradually we are gaining a more balanced understanding of the composer's genius, from the first Venetian oratorios to the last great works. These were the years when Mayr was out of favour with the Rossinians and his operas were dreadfully treated. He tells that he composed with 'malincuore', but here with *L'Armonia*, he was working with his fellow Bergamasques and felt relaxed – and with what results! Once again we must thank Franz Hauk for his dedicated hard work that has brought to our attention yet another Mayr masterwork. The evening concert also included Beethoven's Coriolan overture (a play that Mayr had wished to turn into an opera), the Cantata per la Morte di Beethoven, and the overture to *Fedra*.

Remember that the big exhibition dedicated to Mayr, his life and work, opens in September next year in Ingolstadt (it will subsequently move to Bergamo). *Fedra* will be performed on 3 October before being staged for two further performances in the splendid Altes Residenztheater, Munich. The exhibition will have a substantial catalogue supplemented by a book of essays gleaned from the lectures to be given in Ingolstadt. *Fedra* in Anders Wiklund's critical edition is the first volume of the Mayr Foundation publications to be issued by Ricordi of Munich.

One final comment, Dr Iris Winkler is working on an aspect of Mayr that has been up to now ignored, 'Mayr and his political compositions'. *L'Armonia* is one such work. If my catalogue is consulted it will be appreciated what an interesting avenue of work this is and which offers the promise of fascinating revivals.

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