

ENVOI

and reflections on Pacini's

Alessandro nell'Indie

This Newsletter began with, arguably, Italy's best librettist, Jacopo Ferretti and ends with, uncontestedly, its worst, Giovanni Federico Schmidt. His stream of uninspiring texts is truly momentous: "*Il verseggiatore Smith*" Pacini calls him, he was the last resort for routine tasks such as the dusting-off of Metastasio for *Alessandro* which he tackled with a characteristic phlegm. Nino's own footnote [*Le mie memorie artistiche* (1865), np33] strikes a familiar chord of ribaldry:

Lo Smith era un uomo di qualche ingegno, ma la miseria era sua indivisibile compagna, talchè per il di lui carattere, affliggente oltre ogni dire, spirava melanconia al solo vederlo. Egli ripeteva sovente, presentandosi sulla porta della stanza, in cui io era:

Sto in divorzio con l'oro e l'argento,

Ed il rame veder non si fa

Era infine, in tutta l'estensione del termine, un vero Don Eutichio!!!

There can't be much doubt that Pacini had an unnerving effect on poets but there may well have been another comedy in the offing. Schmidt, poor fellow, was (?) of English descent. *Un inglese italianato* and therefore *diavolo incarnato*. Pacini, only too familiar with his Tuscany and its quirky communities, calls him "Smith" advisedly. Germanification cut no ice at all. A native of Livorno he was credibly born of one of those Anglo-Saxon colonies that gave birth to the 'Lekhorn' straw hat.

Sources for this *Alessandro nell'Indie* are not lacking of course, Metastasio struck compositorial gold with his exotic argument. But which setting is Pacini likely to have studied even before (ie Meyerbeer's *Semiramide*) such *ripristinati* were in vogue? I should like to suggest that it was the relentless brio of J.C. Bach's *Alessandro nelle Indie* (Naples 1762) that gave birth to the momentum of Pacini's adolescent *farse*, those wash-board rhythms, pressured *ostinati* and irresistible syllabic repetitions in which the German master excelled. An instance, maybe - and the other side of the coin where *opera buffa finali* are deemed to have come to the aid of a languishing opera seria - where opera seria vitality can be credited with having impelled *farse* to an unexpected apogee. A side yet to be explored in depth.

AW