Rossini

RICHARD OSBORNE

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ROSSINI

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THE MASTER MUSICIANS

ROSSINI

His Life and Works

SECOND EDITION

RICHARD OSBORNE

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FOR
HAILZ-EMILY
AND
HARRY

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I love Italian opera—it's so reckless. Damn Wagner, and his bellowings at Fate and death. Damn Debussy, and his averted face. I like the Italians who run all on impulse, and don't care a damn about their immortal souls, and don't worry about the ultimate.

D. H. Lawrence,
letter to Louie Burrows,
1 April 1911

Tous les genres sont bons
Hors le genre ennuyeux.

Gioachino Rossini,
letter to Filippo Filippi,
26 August 1868

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Preface to First Edition (1985)

DESPITE THE WIDESPREAD POPULARITY OF A HANDFUL OF HIS works, Rossini has some claim to being the most neglected and generally misunderstood of all the great nineteenth-century composers. Indeed, it is a measure of this neglect that no full-length study of his life and works has appeared in English for over fifty years.

The reasons for the decline in Rossini's reputation in the years following his death will be touched on later; but it can be said at the outset that his art and personality have always been something of an enigma, naturally resistant to the quick and easy solutions readily on offer. The grounds for the popularity of his better-known works are not difficult to find. Rossini's most characteristic music is rhythmically vital, sensuous, and brilliant; 'full of the finest animal spirits', wrote Leigh Hunt in his *Autobiography* of 1850, 'yet capable of the noblest gravity'. It might also be agreed that Rossini's natural stance is a detached one, detached enough for his admirers to think him a fine ironist and for his detractors to dub him cynical. But the image which devolves from this—Rossini as a gifted but feckless amateur, who at an early age abandoned his career to the otiose pleasures of the table—bears no relation to the facts of the career as we have them. The man, who in his lifetime was happy to cultivate a mask of casual unconcern, was in reality an odd mixture of affability and reserve, industry and indolence, wit and melancholy. And there were other paradoxes, too. A classicist by training and a conservative by inclination, Rossini nonetheless broke the mould of the old Italian operatic order and laid the foundations for a new generation of romantically inspired music-dramatists. The persona foisted on the young Rossini by an adoring public was, in fact, little more than an agreeable fiction. Yet it was a fiction which provided Rossini with the protection he needed: both as a creative artist anxious to make his mark in a rumbustious and changing world, and as a man increasingly prey in his later years to debilitating bouts of physical and mental illness. The truth is, Rossini was not only one of the most influential, he was also one of the

most industrious and at the same time one of the most emotionally complex of nineteenth-century composers.

To understand this, it is necessary to look afresh at Rossini's life and at the conditions which existed in Italy and France during his long career; for without an informed knowledge of the context in which Rossini wrote, it is impossible to arrive at a secure idea of how the works themselves might best be assessed and revived. And unfashionable as it now is to separate out life and works, the works themselves merit separate, and chronological, treatment: for ease of reference and in order to avoid the kind of damaging generalisations which have bedevilled some earlier Rossini criticism. Only by considering each of Rossini's thirty-nine operas, his principal choral works, and the substantial body of late piano and vocal music can we properly prepare the ground for more informed, general discussion of his art and influence.

In adopting this approach, I have not, I hope, neglected some larger issues. The principal facets of Rossini's art—his mastery of the comic medium, the nature of his treatment of the seria and semiseria genres, and, above all, his evolution of those new and far-reaching forms which were to dominate Italian operatic procedures for the next fifty years—are dealt with in the context of the work-by-work guide to his output. Thus the chapters on such pivotal works as *Tancredi, L'italiana in Algeri, Il barbiere di Siviglia, La Cenerentola, La gazza ladra, Armida, Mosè in Egitto, Ermione, Maometto II,* and *Guillaume Tell* serve a double purpose: surveying the work in question, whilst at the same time examining issues central to any proper assessment of Rossini's style and method. I have included a separate chapter on Rossini's use of the overture, and another (chapter 18) setting out some of the problems we need to bear in mind as we approach the works.

Assessment of the operas continues to be hampered by the fact that none of us has seen the entire opus in the theatre, let alone the entire opus sympathetically produced and sung, with the right kind of orchestra in the right size auditorium. As Rossini himself affirmed in conversation with Wagner in 1860: 'It is only in the theatre that it is possible to bring equitable judgment to bear on music meant for the stage'. Nor do we have the benefit of a complete set of scholarly texts. Reading nineteenth-century vocal scores is no substitute for the detailed examination of the mass of materials—including the important variants sanctioned by Rossini himself—which goes to make up a critical edition. Happily, an edition is underway. And

though it will be many decades before its seventy or so volumes are complete, the initiative, begun at the Fondazione Rossini, Pesaro, in the early 1970s, has already yielded a mass of materials germane to a fresh understanding of Rossini and his music. This Rossini Edition, under the joint editorship of Bruno Cagli, Philip Gossett, and Alberto Zedda, is one of the great musicological enterprises of our time; without its example and without the detailed findings it has thrown up in the last ten years, this book could not have been written.

As to performances of Rossini's works, the situation is improving by the year and there is the added promise of significant bicentenary celebrations in 1992. In the 1950s and 1960s a number of Rossini's finest comic operas, including such rarities at the time as *Le Comte Ory* and *Il turco in Italia,* underwent stylish revival at Glyndebourne, an ideal Rossini theatre, and elsewhere. Nowadays we can, if we are so minded, travel to Pesaro itself, Rossini's birthplace, where each year the beautifully restored small Teatro Rossini becomes the focal point for a summer festival in which distinguished singers, players, and conductors, backed by the formidable scholarly resources of the Fondazione Rossini, come together to revive works which fifty years ago were written off as failures on no stronger ground than that of contemporary neglect. Meanwhile, the gramophone continues to provide inestimable help in bringing these productions to a wider audience.

The prospects, then, are bright for a just and sustained reappraisal of Rossini's music. In such circumstances enthusiasm for the Rossini cause should no doubt be tempered by a measure of Rossinian scepticism; but if the book which follows veers towards the former, I make no apology. The detractors have had their way with Rossini for far too long.

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Preface to Second Edition (2007)

NOT THE LEAST OF THE GLORIES OF THE *MASTER MUSICIANS* SERIES has been the willingness of its publishers and editors-in-chief to commission what at the time were ground-breaking works, and then to keep faith with them, allowing new editions as fresh scholarship and developing insights manifested themselves. One thinks of Edward Lockspeiser's *Debussy,* first published in 1936, eighteen years after the composer's death. A masterly study, it underwent three revisions by Lockspeiser himself, and a fourth, posthumously in 1979, by a close colleague. Winton Dean's *Bizet,* a not dissimilar project to *Rossini,* went through three significantly different editions. In the preface to the third, Dean noted: 'When the first edition of this book appeared in 1948, no adequate biography of Bizet and no thorough study of his music existed. He was not considered a worthy subject for research or a composer of much consequence'.

As late as 1979, the year I somewhat hesitantly accepted Stanley Sadie's invitation to begin work on *Rossini,* there were those who thought the composer an odd choice for so eminent a series. ('Rather scraping the barrel, don't you think?') Where Rossini studies were concerned, the centenary of his death in 1968 had been something of a turning point. Herbert Weinstock had published a compendious biography (essentially a life, no works), and a new generation of scholars was forging initiatives which would bear fruit in 1979–1980 in the form of the first publications in the Fondazione Rossini's *Edizione critica delle opere Gioachino Rossini* and the founding of the annual Rossini Opera Festival in Pesaro. Without authoritative texts, and staged performances based on those texts, no body of operatic work can hope to survive, let alone thrive.

Though Stanley Sadie's timing was as impeccable as his judgment, the first edition of this book was, in the very nature of things, a somewhat speculative affair, not least where many of Rossini's works were concerned. Declaring *Ermione,* not seen on stage since 1819, to be a masterpiece on the basis of a reading of the libretto and an examination of a mid-nineteenth-

century vocal score in the confines of the British Library was, at best, a risky procedure. That work, happily, was 'read' right. The status of other works, not least those whose qualities require a measure of special pleading, was sometimes more difficult to determine in the absence of reliable editions, stage productions, recordings, and the larger perspectives such benefits bring. It is all rather easier now. By 2005, 29 volumes of the *Edizione* had been published by the Fondazione Rossini under the editorial direction of Philip Gossett. (From 2007, further volumes will be published, under Professor Gossett's direction, by Bährenreiter-Verlag, Kassel.) These volumes have proved invaluable in the preparation of this revised edition of *Rossini*. Even where expertly edited texts have not yet been published, the editorial work has, in many instances, been completed, performances staged, and recordings made. Twenty years on, none of Rossini's 39 operas is an unknown quantity.

In 1992 the Fondazione Rossini began publication of *Gioachino Rossini: Lettere e Documenti* under the editorship of Bruno Cagli and Sergio Ragni. At the time of this writing, four volumes have appeared, taking us to December 1830, the year after Rossini's retirement from operatic composition. Though it would be wrong to suggest that the volumes radically alter one's perception of Rossini's personality or achievement, the cumulative effect of (to date) 2,760 pages of absorbing text and meticulously researched background information is both daunting and exhilarating. Most remarkable of all is *Lettere ai genitori,* a supplementary volume of 246 previously unknown and unpublished letters written mainly by Rossini himself to his parents between 1812 and 1830. Published in 2004, three years after the letters' appearance in a London saleroom, the collection must rank as one of the most remarkable musicological finds in recent memory.

The first edition of *Rossini* was generously and enthusiastically received when it appeared in 1985, not least by the late John Rosselli, who suggested in the *Times Literary Supplement* that 'it deserves to become the standard account in English'. That may have been the impression it gave at the time, though I was acutely aware that if such an accolade were even to be partly merited, it could only be so at a later date, after judgment had been passed on a substantially revised volume. I am indebted to Bruce Phillips for first proposing that such a revision be undertaken, to Stanley Sadie for his support for the project, to Kim Robinson of Oxford University Press

in New York for turning the proposal into a reality, and to Suzanne Ryan for her overseeing of the publication of the finished revision.

This is to all intents and purposes a new book. One or two chapters on the better known operas—*Il barbiere di Siviglia, La Cenerentola*—have been only lightly revised, though the majority of the chapters in the 'works' section (formerly 19 chapters, now 22) have been reordered, recast, and substantially rewritten. The 'life' retains its original narrative trajectory, but it too has been substantially rewritten and, in many places, expanded to take account of new information and documentation. (The chapter on Rossini's Paris years 1824–1829 is now twice as long.) Revising an existing work is, of course, a very Rossinian activity. As he himself never tired of demonstrating, it is something of a privilege to be able to revisit old material. New contexts offer new opportunities, and the passage of time brings fresh perspectives. As Rossini knew only too well, what looks like a chore rapidly turns into an absorbing game, and ultimately into a labour of love.

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21 Carlotta Marchisio

22 Barbara Marchisio

23 Adelina Patti (Opera Rara Collection)

24 Rossini on his deathbed: etching from a drawing by Gustave Doré

Key to Sigla

AGR	A. Azevedo. *G. Rossini: sa vie et ses oeuvres.* Paris, 1864.
BCRS	*Bollettino del centro rossiniano di studi.* Pesaro, 1955–.
BLJ	*Lord Byron. Letters and Journals,* vi, ed. L. Marchand. London, 1976.
CBI	Castil-Blaze. *L'Opéra Italien de 1548 à 1856.* Paris, 1856.
CCR	*The Cambridge Companion to Rossini,* ed. E. Senici. Cambridge, 2004.
CGV	*I copialettere di Giuseppe Verdi,* ed. G. Cesari and A. Luzio. Milan, 1913.
CLR	G. Carpani. *Le rossiniane, ossia lettere musico-teatrali.* Padua, 1824.
EM	E. Michotte. *Richard Wagner's Visit to Rossini* and *An Evening at Rossini's in Beau-Sejour,* translated and annotated with an introduction and appendix by H. Weinstock. Chicago, 1968.
FBN	Biblioteca Nazionale, Florence.
FPO	Bibliothèque de l'Opéra, Paris.
GDA	*Giornale dell'Adriatico,* Venice.
GRDS	*Giornale del Regno delle Due Sicilie,* Naples.
GREC	*Edizione critica delle opere di Gioachino Rossini.* Pesaro, 1979–2005.
GRLD	*Gioachino Rossini: Lettere e documenti.* Pesaro, 1992–.
GRR	G. Radiciotti. *Gioacchino Rossini. Vita documentata, opere et influenza su l'arte.* 3 vols, Tivoli, 1927–1929.

HCR	H. Chorley. *Thirty Years' Musical Recollections.* London, 1862, 2/New York, 1926.
HFM	F. Hiller. *Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy: Briefe und Erinnerungen.* Cologne, 1874; translated M. E. von Glahn. London, 1874.
HPR	F. Hiller. 'Plaudereien mit Rossini (1856)', *Aus dem Tonleben unserer Zeit,* ii. Leipzig, 1868, 2/1871; BCRS 32 (1992), 63.
LRM	*Lettere di G. Rossini,* ed. G. Mazzatinti with F. and G. Manis. Florence, 1902, 2/Bologna, 1975.
MBT	*Giacomo Meyerbeer: Briefwechsel und Tagebücher,* ed. H. Becker. Berlin, 1960.
MLER	M. and L. Escudier. *Rossini: sa vie et ses oeuvres.* Paris, 1854.
QMMR	*Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review,* vi. London, 1824.
QR	*Quaderni rossiniani.* Pesaro, 1954–1976.
RGR	L. Rognoni. *Gioacchino Rossini.* Turin, 1968, 3/1977.
RRO	G. Roncaglia. *Rossini l'olimpico.* Milan, 1946.
SVR	Stendhal. *Vie de Rossini,* Paris, 1824, translated and annotated by R. N. Coe. London, 1970.
WER	R. Wagner. 'Eine Erinnerung an Rossini, 1868', *Richard Wagner's Prose Works,* ed. and trans. W.A. Ellis. London, 1895.
WRB	H. Weinstock. *Rossini: A biography.* New York, 1968.
WRLT	A. Wendt. *Rossinis Leben und Treiben.* Leipzig, 1824.
WRP	F. Walker. 'Rossiniana in the Piancastelli Collection'. *Monthly Musical Record,* xc, 1960.
ZBG	A. Zanolini. *Biografia di Gioachino Rossini.* Paris, 1836.

THE MASTER MUSICIANS

ROSSINI

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CHAPTER ONE

The Formative Years (1792–1810)

LIKE MOST POPULAR RESORTS, PESARO HAS SUCCUMBED IN RECENT decades to a certain amount of commercialisation and concrete; yet the delectable small township which Stendhal evokes in the first chapter of his *Vie de Rossini* is still recognisably there, a modest port on the shores of the Adriatic, with a pleasing hinterland of woods and hills, Urbino not far distant. In Roman and Byzantine times, Pesaro was home to a prosperous colony of farming and fishing folk. Its more recent history dates from the restoration of papal power in Rome in the 1420s. Ruled for the best part of three hundred years by the Sforza and Della Rovere families from their castle fastness in Gradara, the community found itself transformed into a small but handsome Renaissance city.

In the eighteenth century it changed yet again. With the grand families gone, Pesaro was administered by bureaucrats from the Papal States, financially exacting but politically inert. By the end of the century there was an air of independence and self-sufficiency about the place. Business thrived, the classes mingled. The family into which Gioachino Antonio Rossini was born on 29 February 1792 lacked both status and money; yet at his baptism in the city's ancient cathedral later that same day two local grandees stood as godparents: the noble signor Conte Paolo Macchirelli Giordani, civic magistrate and city standard-bearer, and the noble signora Catterina Semproni-Giovannelli, a woman of 'culture and spirit', much given to making inflammatory speeches in the Jacobin cause.

Rossini's mother was a native of Pesaro but his father, the 27-year-old Giuseppe Rossini, came from Lugo, a small town to the north, 28 kilometres from Ravenna. He was an itinerant horn and trumpet player, who had arrived in Pesaro in 1788–1789 to play at the Teatro del Sole during the winter opera season. He must have liked what he saw, since he immediately sought an option on the position of *trombetta comunale* or 'town crier'. After backstairs dealing with the incumbent, Luigi Ricci, the post was vacated early in 1790 on terms favourable to Ricci. Giuseppe applied for release from his temporary position with the garrison band in Ferrara but was refused. Infuriated, and perhaps already a little drunk with revolutionary fervour, he remonstrated with the authorities and was imprisoned for insubordination. The subsequent imbroglio was a subject fit for one of his son's operas: Ricci's dismissal for attempting to barter a public office, Giuseppe's eventual release from prison, his apology to the Pesaro authorities, and his subsequent appointment to the post. The picture that emerges from this incident is of a splendidly robust character: earthy and energetic, querulous, a shade naif perhaps, but a natural improviser, an honest schemer.

'Vivazza', as Giuseppe was known to his friends, lodged with the Guidarini family. Domenico Guidarini, a baker by trade, had married Lucia Romagnoli, whose family came from Urbino. There were four children: a son and three daughters, of whom Anna was the eldest. The family supplemented their income by running a modest pensione in the house they shared in the Via del Fallo. Bed and breakfast was provided, and occasionally other services too. (By the late 1790s, Anna's younger sister, Annunziata, had a police record as a prostitute.) Anna herself became pregnant in the summer of 1791 shortly before her twentieth birthday. She and Giuseppe married in Pesaro Cathedral on 24 September 1791. Five months later she gave birth to her only child.

In his youth, Rossini had something of his mother's charm, grace, and feminine good looks. In later years he came more and more to resemble his father: the photographs of the 1850s show us a heavier, sturdier, more resilient figure, thinner-lipped but still with a lively, enquiring, ironic gaze.[1] (Rumours persisted that the real father was an aristocrat, a member of the Perticari family, perhaps. This is improbable. Rossini's remark 'Sono

[1] See plates 2, 3, and 18.

figlio di un corna', 'I'm the son of a horn', was a pun, not a complaint.) Rossini's relationship with his parents was a close one, rather closer than theirs to one another. The grief he exhibited at the time of his mother's death in 1827, and his father's in 1839, is sufficient testimony to the depth of that relationship. When Wagner praised William Tell's aria 'Sois immobile' during the conversation he had with Rossini in Paris in 1860, Rossini commented: 'I'll tell you that the feeling which moved me most in my life was the love I had for my mother and my father, and they repaid it at a usurer's rate of interest, I'm happy to tell you. It was there, I think, that I found the note that I needed for this scene of the apple in *Guillaume Tell*.'[2]

Giuseppe's enthusiasm for the republican cause sweeping Europe in the wake of the French Revolution was shared by many of Pesaro's citizens, who were similarly disenchanted with the dead hand of papal rule. It was, nonetheless, a dangerous game for Giuseppe to be playing. French forces had first entered Italy in 1792; four years later, they took Bologna and Ferrara. When troops of the pro-French Legione Lombardi marched into Pesaro in February 1797, Giuseppe was given advance intelligence of their arrival by their commander, Giuseppe Lechi. They met minimal resistance.

Napoleon's establishment of a Cisalpine republic of annexed northern states raised hopes that an independent Italian republic built on French lines might one day become a reality. Then in 1799 the Austro-Russian armies mounted a successful counteroffensive. Prominent republicans—among them Pesaro's high-profile city trumpeter, 'the excellent patriot Rossini'—were rounded up, interrogated, and imprisoned. Giuseppe remained in prison until Austria's defeat by the French at the battle of Marengo the following June. It was a sobering experience for a man with a wife and child to support; the following year he applied for a teaching position at Bologna's Accademia Filarmonica.

For the child Rossini, it was the best of times, the worst of times, exciting and disorientating. In his middle years he became ultraconservative. The revolutions of 1830 and 1848 coming in the wake of the long-drawn-out Napoleonic wars, his own exacerbated nerves, and the drift towards the right which tends to come naturally with age gave him a not unreasonable loathing of those who would seek endlessly to disorder the world. Yet, looking back on the 1790s, he concluded that the events of that turbulent

[2] EM, 69–70.

decade had changed his life for the better. 'Without the French invasion of Italy,' he told his biographer Alexis Azevedo, 'I would probably have been an apothecary or olive-oil merchant.'[3]

Italian society certainly began to change in the late 1790s, not least in the arts, where a process of democratisation set in. Admission to academic institutions became easier for ordinary folk; new music was encouraged from a wider variety of sources; ticket prices fell; women found it easier to take paid employment on the stage. This last development had enormous repercussions for the Rossini family, since it allowed Anna Rossini to earn useful money as a singer. She began her theatrical career at Ancona's Teatro della Fenice, appearing as second soprano in comic operas by Paisiello, Cimarosa, and Martini during the 1797–1798 carnival season; she ended it in the autumn of 1808 at the Teatro Comunale, Bagnacavallo, as the house's *prima donna assoluta* in performances of Mayr's *Che originali*. She had some fifteen roles in her repertory, all of them in comic operas. Rossini recalled that she had a naturally expressive voice, 'sweet like her appearance'. She could not read music, but she had a good ear and, like her son, a remarkable memory. Rossini told his friend the composer Ferdinand Hiller that she sang 'out of necessity' at a time when the family was forced to leave Pesaro.[4] This statement was not strictly true. Anna began her professional career eighteen months before the financial crisis precipitated by Giuseppe's imprisonment and a whole four years before the family's move to Lugo.

After their marriage, the Rossinis had moved to rooms in a house on Via del Duomo. When both parents were away, Gioachino was looked after by one of his grandmothers or by his aunt. If the reminiscences of his school friend Francesco Genari are to be believed, the young Rossini was a high-spirited scamp, much given to stone-throwing and the raiding of cruets in the cathedral sanctuary. He was nonetheless made to attend the local community school, where he was given a basic grounding in reading and writing, as well as instruction in mathematics, Latin, and decorative handwriting. It was, at best, half an education. (In his early years his written Italian was poor, yet in later life he wrote and spoke excellent French.) By the time of his tenth birthday, it was not unusual for his mother to take

[3] AGR, 21.

[4] HPR/BCRS, 78.

him on tour with her. This was an education in itself. By the age of 14, he already had the theatre in his blood.

Rossini's first music teacher was his father. Later, during a time when he was briefly boarded out in Bologna, he took instruction from maestro al cembalo, Giuseppe Prinetti. According to Rossini, Prinetti slept upright among the colonnades of the city and made ends meet by distilling brandy and giving keyboard lessons. In Lugo, Rossini was taught by two priests, Father Giovanni Sassoli and the talented and musically gifted Canon Giuseppe Malerbi, who taught composition and singing. The Palazzo Malerbi became a second home to the young Rossini. For the best part of three years he sang, played, and read his way through the Malerbi library: a collection of music, much of it by Haydn and Mozart, which was to leave a permanent mark on his compositional style. Another inhabitant of the palazzo was Giuseppe's brother, Luigi, a lively, caustic man whose music is said to have reflected his dispassionate view of the world. The Rossini family often dined at the Malerbi house. For young Gioachino, it was an early introduction to high living and the pleasures of the table.

In Imola in 1804 a notice was posted announcing a concert at the Teatro Comunale on the evening of 22 April. It promised arias to be sung by 'Cittad. Anna Rossini', a duetto in full costume in which she would be joined by her son, and a 'Cavatina cantata dal Citt. Gioachino Rossini', also costumed, and in the buffo style. Rossini's career as a composer was beginning. That same summer he wrote a set of six *sonate a quattro* for two violins, cello, and double bass for Agostino Triossi, a wealthy young merchant and follower of the Napoleonic cause, who had acquired land and a country home in the village of Conventello near Ravenna. Rossini in his later years would sometimes add ironically affectionate attestations to his autograph manuscripts. On a manuscript copy of the *sonate a quattro* he wrote:

> First violin, second violin, violoncello, and contrabass parts for six horrendous sonatas composed by me at the country house (near Ravenna) of my friend and patron Agostino Triossi, at the most youthful age, having not even had a lesson in thorough-bass. They were all composed and copied in three days and performed in a doggish way by Triossi, contrabass; Morini (his cousin), first violin; the latter's brother, violoncello; and the second violin by myself, who was, to tell the truth, the least doggish.[5]

[5] A. Casella, *Rossiniana* (Bologna, 1942), 37–39.

The sonatas are economically written and shrewdly paced. A mordant wit goes hand in hand with a certain sensuous lyricism, short-breathed but sweet. There is an easy mastery of simple forms, including the implied structuring of tonal contrasts, and an acute ear for the interplay of instruments of disparate tonal volumes. Very few composers speak with a voice that is recognisably their own in the prepubescent stage of their career; yet in these six string sonatas, 'innocent even when roguish and knowing',[6] Rossini does just that.

In 1804 the Rossinis decided to settle in Bologna ('the headquarters of music in Italy', as Stendhal dubbed it[7]), the better to ensure the next stage of Gioachino's education. The city's prestigious Accademia Filarmonica, founded in 1666, had won international fame in the middle years of the eighteenth century during the reign of the celebrated teacher and scholar Padre Giovanni Battista Martini. In 1749 Pope Benedict XIV granted it parity with Rome's Accademia di S. Cecilia; in 1770 the 14-year-old Mozart became an academician after a brief period of study with Martini. That fact alone would have been sufficient to commend the place to Rossini. As he later observed, Mozart was 'the inspiration of my youth, the desperation of my mature years, and the consolation of my old age'.

The home Rossini shared with his mother was a cramped, second-floor room in Strada Maggiore close to the Bologna ghetto. It was inadequate, but it was a base. In the autumn of 1805 he appeared on stage at Bologna's Teatro del Corso. The work was Paër's popular opera semiseria, *Camilla*. Rossini, who sang the role of the heroine's son, Adolfo, is said to have shown great ardour in rushing into the arms of the ampler of the two prima donnas engaged for the production's extended run. In April 1806, a month after his fourteenth birthday, he sang the alto role of Mary Magdalene in a Good Friday performance of *La passione di Nostro Signore Gesù Cristo* by Martini's pupil and confidant Padre Stanislao Mattei, professor of counterpoint and composition at the Accademia's newly founded Liceo Musicale. This was one of Rossini's last outings as an alto; at a concert given at the Accademia on 8 August 1806 he is billed as a tenor.

[6] R. Holloway, *The Spectator*, 31 March 2001.

[7] SVR, 110.

Rossini's formal admission to the Accademia took place on 24 June 1806. The minutes of the assembly read as follows:

> The petition of Sig.r Gioachino Rossini, Bolognese, approved for his practice of the Musical Art of Singing, in view of which he requests admission to our Academy, was read. The same is admitted by acclamation, being held excused from the burden of any Contribution; and this in view of the regard merited in his Progress in the Profession which he practises to such praise.[8]

Rossini was too young to have voting rights. Initially he was admitted only to the singing class, though his progress to other disciplines was rapid. During his four years at the academy, his teachers included Mattei's deputy Angelo Tesei, whose subjects were 'singing, solfeggio, figured bass and cembalo accompaniment [figured harmony]', the tenor Matteo Babini, and Mattei himself.

It is sometimes said that Rossini's real teachers continued to be Haydn and Mozart. There is an element of truth in this claim. Their forms provided him with lively and lucid models, while the music itself was rich in felicitous melody and orchestration. Haydn in particular seems to have been a kindred spirit. Echoes of his string quartets, oratorios, and cantatas abound in Rossini's compositions. Here was a man of energy and wit, a 'natural' composer (more 'naif' than 'sentimental', to use Schiller's useful distinction) with whom Rossini could readily identify. As a student, Rossini even directed a certain amount of Haydn's music. In November 1809 the Accademia Concordi'—in effect, the 'Bologna Haydn Society', which Mattei's assistant, Tommaso Marchesi, had founded the previous year—invited him to conduct some of their concerts.

The teachers at the Liceo Musicale did much to direct Rossini's enthusiasms. He learned from them what he needed to learn: simple though not necessarily conservative harmonic procedures, clear part-writing, and how to develop still further his already acute ear for instrumental sonorities. More esoteric disciplines such as canon and fugue he found less meaningful. He was not, however, a poor student. Even when he was spending a good deal of time in local opera houses working as a répétiteur and maestro al cembalo, he had a tolerably good attendance record. Padre Mattei

[8] GRLD, I, 8–9.

may well have 'hurled anathema' at him, calling him 'the dishonour of the school', but he eventually passed out of the academy in August 1810 with an 'honourable mention in the school of counterpoint'.[9]

Schoolboy exercises rarely deliver work of permanent worth. This is certainly true of the majority of the music Rossini wrote during his years at the Liceo, though one piece does perhaps merit an occasional outing: the charming short cantata *Il pianto di Armonia sulla morte di Orfeo,* which the 16-year-old Rossini wrote for the Liceo's end-of-year *accademia* on 11 August 1808. The text by Girolamo Ruggia presents Harmony (a tenor) and a group of nymphs (Rossini uses a male chorus) lamenting the death of Orpheus, the god of harmony. There are four movements, all neatly crafted. What stands out is the quality of the instrumental writing: a bustling brief overture, a beguilingly lovely obbligato cello in the recitative 'Ma tu che desti già sì dolce suono', and a virtuoso horn contribution ('Go on, Dad, play that', you can hear Rossini telling his father) in the concluding aria con coro.

This combination of rhythmic energy and lyric beauty is what distinguishes the best of the sacred music Rossini wrote during his time at the Liceo. A number of compositions have been excavated and revived in various guises (*Messa di Bologna, Messa di Ravenna, Messa di Rimini*), though establishing precisely what Rossini wrote, when, or for whom is far from easy. Much of this music was written 'in house' by groups of students for performance in local churches, generally in two sections, occasionally in three, if the 'Credo' was being set in addition to the 'Kyrie' and 'Gloria'. Even where a complete autograph manuscript exists, as is the case with the *Messa di Milano* (so-called because that is where the manuscript is lodged), it is impossible to prove that it is a single work, as opposed to a collection of individual movements brought together for the purpose of providing one.

Assembled and reordered, the Milan mass requires three soloists (mezzo soprano, tenor, bass), a three-part male chorus, and various permutations of winds and strings. The C minor 'Kyrie' broods after the manner of late Mozart, then blazes at its subsequent return. The 'Christe eleison' is a tenor aria in C. The 'Gloria' is jolly and brilliant yet not vapid, thanks to the

[9] N. Gallino, 'Lo "Scuolaro" Rossini e la musica strumentale al liceo di Bologna', BCRS 33 (1993), 35–36.

robustness of the writing for the two male soloists and the close-gearing of the interventions of the male chorus. In the 'Credo' and 'Resurrexit' the chorus ends up sounding like a band of operatic brigands. With no real contrapuntal skills to fall back on, Rossini simply fails to develop the text. The 'Et vitam venturi saeculi' does strike a properly ecclesiastical note, but this, it turns out, is largely the work of Rossini's copyist. What is striking about the *Messa di Milano* is the eloquence of the writing for the mezzo-soprano. There are three arias: 'Laudamus', 'Qui tollis' (with violin obbligato), and 'Crucifixus'. We know that Rossini loved the mezzo or contralto voice above others—rich, sensual, and, in this context, naturally self-abasing—and here is early proof of the fact.

The overtures Rossini wrote during his time at the Liceo have their own intrinsic interest, if only because this was the form destined to make its author world famous. The *Redattore del Reno* recognised as much after the work we now know as the *Bologna* overture was played at a gathering of Signora Giorgi's Accademia Polinniaca on the evening of 23 December 1808. Referring to Rossini as 'a young man of whom much is hoped', the newspaper reported: 'The sinfonia was found harmonious beyond all belief. Its type is altogether new, and the composer garnered unanimous applause'. This was not Rossini's first such overture: the spirited and charming *Sinfonia al Conventello* (another Triossi commission) dates from 1806–1807. In neither piece is everything quite as it should be from the formal point of view (in the *Sinfonia al Conventello* the second subject turns up on a solo cello in the wrong key), but the music's novelty and charm are the thing. The melodic invention was also of a high order, so much so that Rossini reused two of the ideas: the first theme of the *Overture al Conventello* in the overture to *Il Signor Bruschino,* and the second theme of the *Bologna* overture in the overture to *L'inganno felice.* The Overture in E flat (1809) was reused in 1810, with only minor alterations, in Rossini's first professional opera, *La cambiale di matrimonio.* Some other purely instrumental pieces have less bearing on Rossini's future career and are more difficult to date. These include the *Variazioni a più istrumenti obbligati,* and the *Variazioni a clarinetto,* a work generally attributed to 1809–1810, two years before clarinet classes were formally instituted at the Liceo.

What Rossini really wanted to do by 1810 was write operas, rather better operas, perhaps, than the majority of those his mother had performed

or he himself had accompanied. Where opera buffa was concerned, he already knew a substantial cross-section of the repertory. His mother had sung in opere buffe by Cimarosa, Fioravanti, Gazzaniga, Gardi, Martini, Mayr, Mosca, Paisiello, and Weigl; he himself had been maestro al cembalo for performance of works by Guglielmi, Orlandi, Paër, and Sarti, as well as Cimarosa and Weigl. He had also started composing for the stage. Two pieces which appeared on Liceo programmes in the summer of 1810 had already been put to other uses. One was a cavatina for tenor, 'Dolci aurette che spirate', which appears to have been inserted into the 1809–1810 Ferrara revival of Ferdinando Orlandi's *Podestà di Chioggia,* for which Rossini was the maestro al cembalo. The other was a much admired vocal quartet, in all probability 'Donami omai Siveno' from the opera *Demetrio e Polibio,* which Rossini wrote for the Mombelli family at around this time. It was this of which Stendhal said, 'If Rossini had composed nothing save this one quartet, Mozart and Cimarosa would still have recognised in him a man who was their equal as an artist'.[10] Rossini told Hiller that his singing teacher, Matteo Babini, had persuaded him to avoid certain melodic clichés in writing the piece.[11]

The father of the Mombelli troupe, Domenico, was an admired opera seria tenor, who was still going strong in his 50s. A widower (his first wife, Luisa Laschi, had created the role of the Countess in Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro*), he had married Vincenzina Viganò, a niece of Boccherini and sister of the celebrated choreographer Salvatore Viganò. Rossini claimed that he first encountered the troupe when a rich patroness asked him to acquire a copy of an aria from an opera by Portogallo which the Mombellis were performing.[12] The copyist declined to provide him with the material, as did Mombelli. Undaunted, Rossini returned to the opera house and wrote out the piece from memory. Mombelli was duly impressed, though, as Rossini later remarked, 'It wasn't exactly *Le nozze di Figaro!*'[13] Mombelli's wife provided the libretto for *Demetrio e Polibio,* which the troupe eventually staged in Rome in 1812.

[10] SVR, 142.

[11] HPR/BCRS, 82.

[12] They performed Portogallo's *Omar, re di Termagene* in Bologna in 1810; Rossini's account implies a rather earlier date.

[13] HPR/BCRS, 82.

Among the many fine singers Rossini heard or played for in and around Bologna during his time at the Liceo, two were especially important: the celebrated castrato Giovan Battista Velluti, and a rising star of the operatic scene, the prodigiously gifted 22-year-old Spanish-born soprano Isabella Colbran, whom Rossini would later write for and eventually marry. Colbran first sang in Bologna in April 1807, having been admitted to the Accademia Filarmonica in her absence the previous November. On that first visit, she sang only recitals. In the summer of 1809 she appeared on stage (with Velluti) at the Teatro Comunale in performances of Nicolini's *Trajano in Dacia* and Cimarosa's *Artemisia*. Hearing Colbran and Velluti working together would have been an astonishing experience for Rossini: the old order of castrati, now doomed to extinction but leaving behind a sense of the brilliance, tonal homogeneity, and stylistic address of the old bel canto style, side by side with the new order of singing actresses whose brilliantly developed coloratura techniques were in some sense a bequest from the castrati. (Colbran herself had studied in Paris with Girolamo Crescentini.) Years later Rossini recalled the impression the castrati made on him:

> I have never forgotten them. The purity, the miraculous flexibility of those voices and, above all, their profoundly penetrating accent—all that moved and fascinated me more than I can tell. I should add that I myself wrote a role for one of them, one of the last but not of the least—Velluti. That was in my opera *Aureliano in Palmira*.[14]

For Rossini, bel canto skills rested on three elements: the instrument itself (what he called 'the Stradivarius'), technical skill, and style ('taste' and 'feeling'). For the finest singers, the acquisition of the first element, the effortless emission of finely equalised tone, required years of work. Rossini told Wagner in Paris in 1860:

> [The castrati] were incomparable teachers. . . . The teaching of singing in the master schools attached to the churches, and supported at the churches' expense generally, was entrusted to them. Some of these schools were famous. They were real singing academies. The pupils flocked to them, and some of them abandoned the choir loft to devote themselves to theatrical careers. But

[14] EM, 109.

> after a new political regime was installed throughout Italy by my restless contemporaries, the master schools were suppressed and replaced by conservatoires in which, though good traditions existed, absolutely nothing of bel canto was conserved.[15]

Rossini used to claim that he himself had come 'within a hair's breadth of belonging to that famous corporation, or, let us say, decorporation'. His maternal uncle, Francesco Maria Guidarini, had suggested that the boy be castrated on the ground that the majority of operatic castrati lived in great opulence. It was an argument which might have carried weight within a less well-to-do family fifty years earlier. According to Rossini, 'my brave mother would not consent at any price'.[16] By the 1790s, that was the view of most Italian families and, indeed, of their political masters in the Cisalpine Republic, who formally outlawed the practice.

Rossini's decision not to return to the Liceo after the summer of 1810 was soundly based. It is difficult to see what practical benefit he would have reaped from a two-year postgraduate course in canon and plainsong. What he required was gainful employment. This came in the form of a recommendation from friends of his parents, the soprano Rosa Morandi and her husband, Giovanni, to Venetian impresario Antonio Cera. Rosa Morandi was appearing with Cera's company at the Teatro San Moisè. When it became clear that the season was in difficulty after a string of failures, Rossini's name was mentioned as someone who might write for them. Cera knew who he was. During his fledgling career as a maestro al cembalo, Rossini had been rebuked for laughing out loud when the soprano Adelaide Carpano, more famous for her beauty than her technique, had attempted a harmonically implausible cadenza during a performance at Senigallia's Teatro La Fenice. Carpano's 'protector' was the Marchese Francesco Cavalli, Cera's predecessor at the San Moisè, a man of power and influence, who had not been amused. Cera took the Morandis' advice and made the young scamp an offer.

It was an ideal beginning for Rossini. A small theatre, run on a shoestring, with a tolerably good company (six singers, a small orchestra, no chorus) was the perfect place for an unostentatious debut. The text he was

[15] EM, 74–75.
[16] EM, 109–10.

given—a one-act comedy featuring a Canadian businessman, an English merchant, and a pair of frustrated lovers—was no better and no worse than dozens of such scenarios extant at the time. What was different was Rossini's music, which astounded the theatre's unsuspecting clientele with its rhythmic pizzazz, sensuous lyricism, and dispassionate wit. With characteristic aplomb, he scored a bull's-eye at his first attempt.

CHAPTER TWO

Venice and Milan (1811–1814)

ROSSINI RETURNED HOME FROM VENICE WITH MONEY IN HIS pocket and the hope of a new commission. Unfortunately, Bologna was no longer the best place to be. By 1811 Milan had taken over as continental Europe's principal meeting place for impresarios and agents. Bologna was becoming a bit of a backwater. While he waited, Rossini rehearsed and directed an Italian-language performance of Haydn's *The Seasons* sponsored by the Accademia dei Concordi. He may also have written the six-movement showpiece cantata for soprano, chorus, and orchestra, *La morte di Didone* ('The Death of Dido'), which he presented to Domenico Mombelli's daughter, Ester. If he did write it in 1811, it offers a remarkable glimpse of things to come.[1]

A commission did eventually arrive. In October the local press reported 'a great flood of curiosity' sweeping Bologna after the announcement that the city's newest venue, the Teatro del Corso, was about to stage a two-act opera by Rossini. It was entitled *L'equivoco stravagante* ('The Strange Misunderstanding'), though the first-night audience may well have been wondering what this eponymous misunderstanding was, the librettist having omitted to include any misunderstandings, strange or otherwise, in the opera's opening act. It is not until act 2 that the trap is sprung by a sharp-

[1] Ester Mombelli performed the cantata at a benefit concert in Venice in 1818 when she was 24. Manuscript and printed sources suggest an earlier date of composition and rather more performances than this only known instance would suggest.

witted servant who decides to cool the ardour of the rich but dim suitor of his master's daughter by suggesting that she is a man in drag: a castrato (or 'musico', as they were euphemistically known) and an army deserter to boot.

Since the Napoleonic regime had outlawed castration, alarm bells should have rung in the local prefecture the moment the libretto was submitted. As things turned out, the censor issued a licence, only to regret it the moment the opera was staged. On 29 October, the politically compliant *Redattore del Reno* reported:

> That the libretto is, if you'll permit me, *wicked* is demonstrated by the decision taken by the ever watchful authorities, who have prohibited any further performances. Out of respect for the composer, three performances had been allowed after certain expressions, which may have seemed tolerable on the page but which were intolerable when sung, had been corrected and re-corrected. However, since the plot centres on a supposed mutilation which gives rise to a good deal of dubious language, mutilating parts of the libretto is no answer. To root out the scandal, it is necessary to suppress the libretto entirely.

The phrase 'expressions which may have seemed tolerable on the page but which were intolerable when sung' is odd. A line of recitative such as 'La credono gallina, ed è un cappone' ('I thought she was a hen and it turns out she's a capon') is either offensive or it isn't. One can only assume that the actor's gestures or Rossini's keyboard improvisations were a good deal more graphic than the line itself. Either that or the authorities were merely making the best of a bad job—finding an excuse to close down an already popular show they should not have licensed in the first place.

For the 19-year-old composer, it was no more than a strategic setback. The opera had been staged. What's more, he had made the acquaintance of a remarkable singing actress, Maria Marcolini. A gifted contralto and a fearless virtuoso, Marcolini relished the kind of showpiece finales Rossini was capable of writing for her, not least when the situation required her to don male attire and stride the stage as a lusty young blade. They may well have been lovers. (Rossini is said to have lost his virginity early.) 'It was at *her* side, upon *her* piano, and within the walls of *her* country-house at Bologna', fantasised Stendhal, 'that he wrote some of his finest pages.'[2]

[2] SVR, 97.

Sceptical as one may be about the Freudian idea that artists are stimulated only by a desire for power, wealth, fame, and the love of women, it would be idle to pretend that Rossini's liaison with Marcolini was not a stimulus. Over the next three years he would create a succession of important roles for her.

Though *L'equivoco stravagante* was taken off after three performances, Rossini stayed in Bologna to direct a number of other operas at the Teatro del Corso. During the dress rehearsal of *Trionfo di Quinto Fabio* by Domenico Puccini (grandfather of the more famous Puccini), a dispute broke out with the chorus over an aria Rossini had added for another Marcolini speciality, her entry on horseback in the final scene. Voices were raised, fists flew, and Rossini brandished a cudgel. He was arrested and ordered to keep the peace, the authorities being understandably reluctant to bring the season to a premature close by putting him behind bars. The following month he had the opportunity to escape Bologna altogether. Venice's Teatro San Moisè decided to invite him back.

Venice had also become something of a backwater. Years of unabashed hedonism had sapped the political will of this once indomitable republic. In May 1797 its demoralised citizens had allowed 3,000 French troops to sail through the Porto di Lido and occupy the Piazza San Marco. Thereafter the French and Austrians played Box and Cox with the city until it secured its freedom as part of the newly formed kingdom of Italy in 1866. Not that occupation did anything to dim Venice's long-standing love affair with music. 'Of all the lands of Italy,' wrote Stendhal 'Venetia stands supreme in the sureness of its taste and the keenness of its appreciation of music written for the human voice.'[3] Rossini's ebullient outpourings were just what the city needed to divert its attention from the somewhat grim and ignominious position in which it now found itself. As for Rossini, he would receive no fewer than six commissions in fifteen months, culminating in the twin triumphs of *Tancredi* and *L'italiana in Algeri* in the spring of 1813. He would leave the city a made man.

The first of the San Moisè operas, the superbly crafted one-act comic melodrama *L'inganno felice,* set him on the right track. The audience loved it ('doves, canaries and pheasants' were loosed into the auditorium after

[3] SVR, 50.

the first performance[4]) and so, needless to say, did the theatre's impresario, Antonio Cera. The morning after the prima on 8 January, Cera wrote a gushing letter to Rossini's mother in which he predicted that her son would be 'an ornament of Italy',[5] the undisputed heir of Cimarosa. More to the point, he offered Rossini contracts for three more farse.

Meanwhile, there was also work elsewhere. Rossini's Lenten offering to Ferrara's Teatro Comunale was *Ciro in Babilonia,* a retelling of the Belshazzar's Feast episode in the Book of Daniel, wrapped around the story of Cyrus's conquest of Babylon. This was also something of a triumph, though in later years Rossini would do his level best to convince people otherwise, most famously in a conversation with Hiller in 1855. The tale he told Hiller involved a 'fiasco', his return to Bologna, and the ordering of a marzipan ship on whose pennant was inscribed the name Ciro. 'The ship's mast was broken, its sails were in tatters, and the whole thing lay shipwrecked in an ocean of cream. Amid great hilarity, the happy gathering devoured my shattered vessel.'[6]

That the first night was far from a fiasco is confirmed both by a letter Rossini wrote to his mother from Venice ten days after the event and by a review in a local newspaper which his father kept for the family archive. 'Repeated demonstrations of applause for every number' was how the *Giornale del Dipartimento del Reno* reported the evening. True, the writer makes no mention of the hapless *seconda donna,* Anna Savinelli, for whom Rossini wrote an entire aria on what he considered to be her only good note, but there is praise for the distinguished lineup of principals: the tenor Eliodoro Bianchi, the soprano Elisabetta Manfredini, who had sung in Rossini's Bologna performance of *The Seasons,* and Marcolini herself. *Ciro in Babilonia* did not become the countrywide success which *L'inganno felice* was destined to be, but it did not sink without a trace either. Between 1813 and 1818 there were performances in Florence, Mantua, Venice, Monaco, Bologna, and Milan.

Meanwhile, Rossini's relationship with the Teatro San Moisè was not without its problems, principally on the question of the choice of libretti, a matter, for legal and commercial reasons, over which no impresario

[4] GRLD, I, 31.

[5] GRLD, I, 31–33.

[6] HPR/BCRS, 98.

could afford to cede control. Rossini and Cera were not at daggers drawn, as a bogus letter published on the occasion of the Rossini centenary in 1892 would have us believe.[7] However, the feathers of the San Moisè constituency had been ruffled by Cera's insistence on commissioning libretti based on the kind of rackety, high-speed situation comedies which had been spewing out of places of entertainment in Paris in the postrevolutionary years.

La scala di seta, which Rossini began writing in Venice in the spring of 1812, was a case in point. Cera again turned to Giuseppe Foppa, the most reliable of the house librettists, who had already worked with Rossini on *L'inganno felice.* Foppa's source was the libretto for Pierre Gaveaux's one-act opera *L'Échelle de soie* (Paris, 1808), but the story was a generic one. George Colman and David Garrick had reworked it for *The Clandestine Marriage* (London, 1766), which had inspired Cimarosa's hugely successful *Il matrimonio segreto* (Vienna, 1792). It is a tribute to Cera's sense of what Rossini might do with the subject that, though the kinship with *Il matrimonio segreto* was noted by the critics, it was not dwelt on. 'All's well that ends well', sighed one writer. The new opera was less rapturously received than *L'inganno felice* but did well enough. It was seen a dozen times between 9 May and 11 June, running in repertory with *L'inganno felice.* As the critic of the *Giornale Dipartimentale dell'Adriatico* grudgingly conceded: 'Since [Rossini] is scarcely able to restrain the outpouring of his fertile genius . . . we feel increasingly entitled to recognise him as a worthy representative of the great Italian school.'[8]

Word soon spread to Milan, where the director of La Scala, Carlo Brentano de Grianty, was given firsthand reports of the prodigy by Marcolini and the distinguished young bass Filippo Galli, who had created the role of Batone in *L'inganno felice.* With a libretto by the 61-year-old poet-in-residence Luigi Romanelli already lined up for the season's second new production in mid-September, Rossini was invited to provide the music. The story of *La pietra del paragone,* 'The Touchstone', suited him perfectly. The eponymous touchstone is emotional sincerity: something the as yet

[7] 'In making me write the music for the libretto entitled *La Scala di Seta,* you have treated me like a child, and I, in turning it into a *fiasco,* have repaid you in the same coin. So now we are quits.' Published by G. Paloschi in *La Gazzetta Musicale di Milano,* 29 February 1892.

[8] GRLD, IIIa, 12.

unattached Count Asdrubale finds singularly lacking in the bores, eccentrics, social hangers-on, and would-be lovers who flock to his country estate. Rossini began work in mid-August, composing with his customary speed and sureness of touch. Towards the end of the month he was struck down by a fever. Dosing himself with quinine helped effect a cure, or so he told his mother, who had suggested the medicine. Grianty sought a postponement of the first night, assuring Milan's minister of the interior that, with ten numbers already written, the delay would not be a significant one.

The opera eventually opened on 26 September. An immediate triumph, it ran for 53 performances. Rossini received a fee and exemption from military service, a useful concession in 1812, when more than 90,000 young Italians were conscripted and when losses in the Peninsular and Russian campaigns were especially heavy. At the age of 20 he was already a *maestro di cartello,* a composer whose name alone guarantees a public. The libretto was no masterpiece, but it allowed him to show off his paces to Italy's smartest audience as a wit, romantic tone-painter, and skilled purveyor of the atmosphere of the bustling, vituperative worlds of the theatre and the press. It also gave audiences a first glimpse of his gift for setting jangling verbal nonsense. Pacuvio's aria 'Ombretta sdegnosa', with its 'Missipipi, pipi, pipi' refrain, became a popular hit overnight, as did the cry 'Sigillara!'—'Attach the seals!'—repeated to great comic effect in the scene in which the Count, played by Filippo Galli, appears in Turkish garb and affects to take over his own possessions. For many weeks the Milanese had only one desire: to secure a seat for 'Sigillara'.

Word of the opera's success spread throughout Italy. (Rossini's first contacts with the royal theatres in Naples were made around this time.) He reveled in the success but had no time to enjoy it. The delayed prima meant that he had failed to arrive in Venice to start work on his next commission for the San Moisè, *L'occasione fa il ladro.* A letter of explanation from Milan's minister of the interior Luigi Vaccari to the head of the prefecture in Venice went some way to mitigating Cera's fury. Rossini told his mother that he wrote the opera in fifteen days. Keen to make the best of the story, the *Giornale Dipartimentale dell'Adriatico* claimed he wrote it in eleven—'too brief a period even for the impulses of so ardent a genius'.[9]

[9] GRLD, IIIa, 33.

Aside from the borrowing of storm music from *La pietra del paragone,* there are few signs of haste in the composition. It is a strong, vital, and in some ways innovative score.

Rossini's fifth and final opera for the San Moisè, *Il Signor Bruschino,* had an even more tetchy reception, though here it is possible to see why the press and some members of the public were so discomfited. Not the least of the glories of his five San Moisè farse is how different they are in temper and texture. Where *La scala di seta* scintillates and delights, *Il Signor Bruschino* ('Mr Scrubbing-Brush') excoriates. Once again, Cera and Foppa had drawn on a French source. On this occasion, however, Rossini's music was uproarious and abrasive, bordering at times on the surreal. The sound of the second violins striking the backs of their bows against the metal candle holders shortly after the start of the overture was judged 'incomprehensible' by the *Giornale.* (Rossini feared as much. 'Dio ti salvi l'anima', 'God save your soul', he wrote on the manuscript at the end of the overture.) If that was one outrage, the arrival of Bruschino's penitent son towards the end of opera, with his stuttered 'Padre mio! . . . mio, mio, mio, mio! . . . son pentito! – tito – tito' was the last straw. A 'truly monstrous concoction' was the paper's verdict. Rumours circulated that the opera was a raspberry aimed at Cera, who had been further angered by Rossini's acceptance of a commission from Venice's grandest house, La Fenice. Rossini had indeed accepted a commission from La Fenice the previous autumn. The opera was *Tancredi,* on which he began work well before the prima of *Il Signor Bruschino* on 27 January.

Moving from the Teatro San Moisè to La Fenice was a momentous step for Rossini. Though opera was considered at the time to be a cut above spoken theatre and music hall, there were significant differences in status, cost, and venue between opera seria, the more middle-brow opera semiseria, and opera buffa, which required neither a large chorus nor historically accurate sets and costumes. The subject La Fenice offered Rossini was a melodrama eroico based on Voltaire's *Tancrède* (1760), a quasi-tragic tale of love and valour set in medieval Sicily. The play had inspired a number of operatic treatments, most recently at La Scala, Milan in 1812 in a version by two of Rossini's familiars, Luigi Romanelli and the composer Stefano Pavesi, a buccaneering character whom Rossini affectionately dubbed 'mad Pavesi'. As we shall discover, it was not unusual for Rossini

to choose an extant subject which he then took to new and hitherto undreamed of heights.

Tancredi broke new ground, formally and musically, but its popularity, unstoppable for the best part of a quarter of a century, rested on its patriotic subject matter and the sensuousness and élan of the vocal writing. In spirit and style, it is an idyllic work, a late flowering of that serene, neoclassical tradition which Winckelmann had promulgated fifty years earlier. La Fenice lavished a good deal of money on the production, not least on Giuseppe Borsato's set designs, which had a visionary, quasi-expressionistic quality to them. The setting for Tancredi's Gran Scena in act 2—a mountain range, steep ravines, rushing torrents, Mount Etna in the distance[10]—was particularly praised by the critic of the *Giornale dipartimentale* after the first night on 6 February. It is an interesting detail, because it tells us how far the performance had progressed before the indisposition of the Tancredi, Adelaide Malanotte, caused it to be abandoned. The second night was similarly cursed. Only at the third performance, on 11 February, was the opera heard in its entirety. Six performances followed, after which it remained in repertory with Pavesi's *Teodoro* until 9 March, increasingly acclaimed.

Though the reviews were favourable, there is no mention of 'Di tanti palpiti', the cabaletta to Tancredi's act 1 cavatina, which was destined to become as wearisomely popular in its day as Verdi's 'La donna è mobile' would be forty years later. Possibly because Malanotte thought the music was unsuited to her full-bodied contralto, Rossini was asked to write a new cavatina. Only later did the number take off. According to Stendhal, it was dubbed 'the rice aria':

> . . . because they prefer to eat rice very much undercooked, four minutes precisely before the course is served, the chef invariably sends a minion with this important question: *bisogna mettere i risi?* When Rossini, in despair [at Malanotte's recalcitrance], returned to his lodgings, the *cameriere* asked the usual question. The rice was set to cook; and before it was ready Rossini had completed the aria *Di tanti palpiti*.[11]

[10] See M. Biggi, 'Scenografie rossiniane di Giuseppe Borsato', BCRS 35 (1995), fig. 5.

[11] SVR, 57–58.

It is a nice story, though the chronology is back to front. 'Di tanti palpiti' belongs to the original score.

Immediately after the Venice run, *Tancredi* transferred to Ferrara, where, indirectly, Malanotte brought about an even more radical alteration to the work. Her lover at the time was Luigi Lechi, the radically minded 27-year-old scion of one of Brescia's grandest families. (His brother Giuseppe had commanded the pro-Napoleonic force which had entered Pesaro in 1797 with Giuseppe Rossini's connivance.) Luigi was a respected member of a group of north Italian writers and intellectuals which included the future author of *I promessi sposi,* Alessandro Manzoni. For the Ferrara production, Luigi provided Rossini with a revised text, which restored Voltaire's so-called 'tragic' ending. This was not a new initiative. An eccentric Venetian, Count Alessandro Pepoli, had used the original ending in a libretto he had prepared for use in his own theatre in Venice in 1795. In the event, neither his version (music by Francesco Gardi) nor Lechi's was accepted by the public. Rossini withdrew the revision and, as was his habit, redistributed some of the music in later work.

Reports that the revised *Tancre*di had 'failed' in Ferrara were denied in the Venetian press. In Venice itself, a company of 'Dilettante Philharmonics' staged *L'inganno felice* as part of a Lenten charity season. At the same time, the impresario of the Teatro San Benedetto, Giovanni Gallo, announced that he would begin his spring season on 19 April with the Venetian prima of *La pietra del paragone* and a new opera by Carlo Coccia, *La donna selvaggia*. That was on 10 April. By the end of the month Gallo's plans were in disarray. Unaccountably, *La pietra del paragone* flopped. It was replaced by Pavesi's comic opera *Ser Marcantonio* and then partially reinstated with act 1 of the Pavesi playing in tandem with act 2 of the Rossini: one of those odd accommodations to which impresarios were driven and audiences accustomed. With Gallo's fortunes sinking fast, and no sign of Coccia's new opera (it eventually reached the stage on 26 June and closed four days later), Rossini was summoned to help.

In the circumstances, it was hardly surprising that an existing libretto was called into service: Angelo Anelli's *L'italiana in Algeri* (a story similar to that of Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*), which had previously been set by Luigi Mosca in Milan in 1808. It is not clear who drafted the revised libretto, but there can be no doubt that principal architect of the revision, textual as well as musical, was Rossini himself. The new opera was

completed in a little under four weeks. The recitatives and two arias were farmed out to an assistant, but the rest of the score is newly written—further confirmation of Rossini's astonishing inventiveness and the efficiency of his precociously developed compositional procedures. Needless to say, it is a far sharper treatment of Anelli's text than Mosca's. Within wittily articulated forms which Haydn might have been proud to own, every note has point and vitality.

Though Marcolini, in the role of Isabella, the Italian Girl, was said to be unwell, the opera had its first night on Saturday, 22 May. It had been cast from strength. Galli played Mustafà, Serafino Gentili sang the semi-serious tenor role of Lindoro, and Paolo Rosich, a skilful actor as well as a reputable primo basso, played Isabella's aging admirer, Taddeo. The *Giornale* reported 'deafening, continuous general applause' for a work which had 'greatly enthused a demanding, intelligent public'. Marcolini's singing of 'Pensa alla patria' was especially praised, though her indisposition forced the suspension of performances until 29 May, when the reception was even more enthusiastic, the paper now declaring with admirable prescience that the opera 'will find a place among the finest works of genius and of art'.

The Venetians were, however, watchful. In its review of 24 May, the *Giornale* had noted talk of plagiarisation, a charge it refuted. If there are echoes of extant works, it argued, then they are merely echoes; what was perhaps hinted at in some earlier compositions is now brought to a pitch of formal excellence in the newest piece. It was a sophisticated and perceptive defence, but the rumours persisted. Finally, Marcolini took the unusual step of including Mosca's setting of 'Pensa all patria' in a charity gala on 19 June. The differences between Mosca's anemic rondeau and Rossini's were so clear that the Mosca was drowned out before it was half finished.

'I am writing like an angel' is a phrase Rossini was fond of using in letters home. In October 1813 he used it to describe work on his newest commission for La Scala, Milan, a dramma serio to a text by Felice Romani, *Aureliano in Palmira*. The opera is full of exquisite things. There is some tender pastoral writing, a tiny chorus taken over from the Ferrara revision of *Tancredi*, and several winning inventions such as an overture which would eventually find its way into *Il barbiere di Siviglia*. A second *Tancredi* it is not. In terms of the scale of the writing, it might have been

better suited to Milan's newest auditorium, the intimate and elegant Teatro Re, which opened its doors to the public on 18 December 1813 with a new production of *Tancredi*. The *Corriere Milanese* reported:

> The music of *Tancredi* will always awaken enthusiasm in whomever has a soul and ears: last Saturday it garnered universal applause, although not all the intended instruments were present in the orchestra and some concerted pieces were not performed with perfect accord.[12]

Twelve days later the same paper observed: '*Tancredi* is the most beautiful musical composition of our times; as regards to effect, *Aureliano in Palmira* does not seem to be an opera by Rossini'. In a letter to his mother, Rossini admitted that *Aureliano in Palmira* had flopped on its first night. The presence in the cast of the castrato Velluti had been a talking point, but he had tried Rossini's patience with his self-regarding antics (a feud with the leader of the Milan orchestra did not help) and had disappointed expectation with undistinguished singing. ('Velluti made no more impression on the public', wrote one critic, 'than that made by the last of the damsels in the train of Zenobia.') Nor had Rossini been helped, midway through the composition process, by the withdrawal with smallpox of the brilliant young tenor Giovanni David, whose La Scala debut this was to have been. David's place was taken by the Mantuan-born Luigi Mari, for whom Rossini wrote a noticeably plainer, less adventurous second act. On 28 December the convalescent David wrote to Duke Francesco Sforza Cesarini in Rome: 'The opera by maestro Rosini [*sic*] met with no success, and the second act was mortally hissed. Of the singers, Signor Veluti [*sic*] cut the figure of a secondary part; the tenor they say has a beautiful voice but he is a veritable blockhead'.[13] Rossini was philosophical. He wrote his mother on 4 January 1814:

> . . . everybody says the music is divine but that the singers are dreadful so I don't lose credit. Tancredi has caused an irruption in the new theatre that's opened here. I'm really glad that everyone's having a great time with my music so who cares whether it's in this theatre or the other?[14]

[12] GRLD, IIIa, 57.

[13] GRLD, I, 62–63.

[14] GRLD, IIIa, 55–57.

He had already secured a contract from La Scala for a new 'Gran Opera Buffa', *Il turco in Italia,* to a libretto by a rising young star of the theatre, the 26-year-old Felice Romani, to be staged later in the year. In the meantime, he travelled to Genoa to oversee a new production of *Tancredi* at the Teatro di Sant'Agostino. The city enchanted him, and an opera was promised. When he would have written it is not clear. By mid-March he was back in Milan supervising the city's first production of *L'italiana in Algeri.* Events surrounding Napoleon's exile to Elba in early May seem to have persuaded him that it would be unwise to return to Genoa. Instead he remained in Milan before retiring to the country estate of Amelia Belgiojoso, the 30-year-old widow of Count Francesco Belgiojoso d'Este. Stendhal described her as 'one of his most adorable protectresses'; Rossini thought her 'incomparable'.

However idyllic the summer, Rossini was subjected to a rude awakening when *Il turco in Italia* opened at La Scala on 14 August. The huge success *L'italiana in Algeri* had enjoyed earlier in the year effectively blighted the fortunes of *Il turco in Italia,* which the Milanese took to be a lazily conceived sequel. Journalists had a field day:

> The Italian Girl in Algiers needed a husband; and the fecund genius of the poet and composer served as witness to her marriage with the Turk of Italy. Will children be born of his wedding? . . . Public opinion would prefer that the nuptial bed remain sterile.[15]

Such reviews—inevitable, perhaps, when critics, lacking published scores, carried in their heads only a generalised sense of a composer's style—were amusing but wrong-headed. *Il turco in Italia* is quite unlike its predecessor. Very much an ensemble piece, it is one of Rossini's most sophisticated and succinct essays in the comic style. If there was a problem with the opera, it was that it was not properly finished. The Lotus lands of the Belgiojoso estate had clearly taken their toll. Rossini eventually put matters right, removing or editing the assistant's work for what proved to be a rapturously received new production at Rome's Teatro Valle in November 1815. This was not the first occasion, nor would it be the last, on which he completed a work, as it were, in stages.

[15] *Corriere del dame,* 20 August 1814.

During 1814 Rossini stored up a number of benefits for the future. Working at La Scala and the Teatro Re, he became acquainted with the prompter and copyist Giovanni Ricordi, who was already beginning to acquire manuscripts for the music publishing house he had founded in Milan in 1809. In the middle of the century Ricordi would begin publishing all Rossini's operas in reductions for piano and voice. Rossini collaborated with the project, ruefully aware that music which he had reused from what he took to be failed operas would now be seen to have been recycled. 'A whistled-at opera', he told a friend in 1854, 'seemed to me completely dead—and, behold, everything has been resuscitated!'

One such whistled-at piece was *Sigismondo,* which Rossini wrote for Venice's La Fenice in the autumn of 1814, though legend has it that, on this occasion, the person urging the whistling was the composer himself. The libretto was based on a play by Giuseppe Foppa which he had already adapted for Carlo Coccia—the very same piece, *La donna selvaggia,* whose nonappearance in May 1813 had caused Rossini to step into the breach with *L'italiana in Algeri.* No wonder La Fenice's impresario, Luigi Facchini, felt the need to put in a good word for it when he wrote to Rossini on 1 October 1814: 'The book [Foppa] has completed is careful of everyone's interest, and leaves a vast space for the maestro to display the beneficial effects of his fantasy'.[16] That is not how the critics (or perhaps, Rossini) saw it. 'The unhappy child of a writer who now submits the hundredth proof of his ineptitude' was the *Nuovo Osservatore Veneto*'s judgment the day after the opera's first night on 26 December. Musically, *Sigismondo* is a collection of small, and not so small, operatic delights, many of which we have come to know in other guises.

Accepting the fact that certain manuscripts needed to be filed away for future use was a necessary part of Rossini's musical education. Bach had done it, so had Handel. Like them, Rossini quickly mastered the art of reworking music which had initially found itself in the wrong place at the wrong time. There are few better illustrations of his guile in exploiting what he believed to be music's essentially chameleon character than the final section of the cantata for soprano, contralto, and piano, *Egle ed Irene,* which he had written earlier in 1814 for Amelia Belgiojoso. Towards the end of a gracious, if at times rather woodenly written, salon piece,

[16] GRLD, I, 64.

there are phrases which Rosina and Count Almaviva will murmur (and Figaro ironically echo) in the nocturnal Trio in act 2 of *Il barbiere di Siviglia.* What is charming in the cantata manages to be both charming and scathing in the operatic rewrite.

Suffering from a poor press in Milan, and with Naples beckoning, the 22-year-old Rossini was approaching a crossroads in his career—as, indeed, was Europe. Following Napoleon's abdication in April 1814, there was not a great deal to be gained or lost by giving music lessons to the great man's niece, Elisa Bacchiocchi's daughter, which Rossini agreed to do in Bologna early in 1815. In March 1815 Napoleon, tired of planting mulberries on Elba, unexpectedly landed in the south of France intent on staging a counterrevolution. At the same time, his brother-in-law, Joachim Murat, a Ruritanian adventurist who since 1808 had been de facto king of Naples, launched a series of political initiatives of his own. In Rimini on 5 April he declared Italian independence from Austrian rule. Bologna responded with enthusiasm. Verses were penned by Rossini's former classics teacher, Giovan Battista Giusti, which Rossini set to music. Murat was present in the Teatro Contavalli when the *Inno dell'Indipendenza,* 'Sorgi, Italia, venuta è già l'ora', was given a rousing audition on 15 April. Unhappily for the counterrevolutionaries, the Austrians retook Bologna the following day. Years later it was claimed by Eugène de Mirecourt in his shamelessly vituperative *Rossini*[17] that Rossini had promptly altered the words and returned the music to the Austrian general tied with a red and white Austrian ribbon. The story would not be worth repeating but for the fact that Rossini attempted strenuously to deny it, thus proving the wisdom of Dr. Johnson's dictum that 'few attacks of either ridicule or invective make much noise but by the help of those they provoke'. In the absence of air travel at the time, Rossini's claim that he was in Naples on 15 April is difficult to substantiate.

The *Inno dell'Indipendenza* was not Rossini's only collaboration with Giusti, a native of Lucca who had moved to Bologna, where literature and literary infighting had supplanted hydraulic engineering as his chosen profession. Giusti is said to have introduced the adolescent Rossini to some of the great Italian classics: Dante's *Divina commedia,* Ariosto's *Orlando furioso,* and Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata,* all of which the composer would

[17] E. de Mirecourt, *Rossini* (Paris, 1855), 31.

draw on, in one form or another, during his professional career. Now in his late 50s, Giusti was working on a translation of Sophocles' last work, *Oedipus at Colonus,* the play in which Oedipus, arriving at Colonus in search of his long prophesied death, reveals his true impressiveness as a human being. Guisti's translation is of its time: which is to say, inadequate to the demands of a drama whose language has been compared to that of Shakespeare and Milton and whose formal freedom has been likened to that of the late Beethoven string quartets. Rossini's music, fourteen numbers written for solo bass, chorus, and orchestra, is dutiful rather than inspired; richest in the bass's meditation on the vanity of all earthly things, weakest in the final chorus, where the sense of release is more end-of-term than end-of-life.

We do not know why Rossini accepted the commission, or when, though the unorchestrated draft predates the publication of Giusti's translation in Parma in 1817. Perhaps the subject attracted his interest because of Antonio Sacchini's late masterpiece *Oedipe à Colone* (Paris, 1787), an opera closely studied by composers who took an interest in the Franco-Italian tradition of lyric drama. Rossini's fine setting of 'O Giove, egioco', in which the chorus invokes the power of all-seeing Zeus and his daughter Athene ('O tu, Dea virgine'), would not seem out of place in *Ermione*—Greek tragedy adapted via a French source—which Rossini wrote in Naples in 1819.

Giusti eventually came to the conclusion that he had been short-changed by Rossini. In an addendum to the published translation, he claimed that he had paid for the work only to discover that the orchestrations were incomplete. What he did not understand was that any composer of the time would have regarded the skeleton score as 'finished'. The orchestrations would have followed had a performance been imminent, but none was. Giusti grumbled, declared that Rossini was a buffoon, and subsequently satirised him in verse. As for Rossini, he took no further interest in the music until 1843, when parts of the work made an unexpected reappearance.

CHAPTER THREE

Arrival in Naples (1815)

ROSSINI LEFT BOLOGNA FOR NAPLES IN JUNE 1815, TRAVELLING via Florence and Rome. The journey from Rome to Naples was notoriously dangerous: the roads unprotected, the coaches expensive and dirty, the customs officials illiterate and corrupt. Not surprisingly, the note Rossini sent his parents on 27 June mingles relief with delight. 'I am safely arrived in Naples, everything is beautiful, everything is amazing'.[1] Stimulated by an exuberant city, a remarkable impresario, and an equally remarkable singer, he was about to enter into what, creatively, would be the heartland of his musical career.

1815 was the year in which order returned to Europe. French rule had left an indelible mark on Italy, and the seeds of republicanism had been sown, but there was a sense in which the status quo ante had been restored. Hapsburgs ruled again in the north, Pius VII governed in Rome and the Papal States, and in June, with the backing of the Austrians and the British, Ferdinand IV reestablished Bourbon rule in Naples. The city had been ruled by the Bourbons—the interregnums of 1799 and 1806–1815 excepted—since Ferdinand's father, the future King Charles III of Spain, had established sovereignty over Naples and Sicily by force of arms in 1734.

Ferdinand had been named king of Naples at the age of 8. He was a strange child and an even stranger man: uproarious, uncouth, exceedingly cruel. Hunting was his great addiction. His own annual quarry of boars,

[1] GRLD, IIIa, 84.

fallow deer, foxes, and hares was in excess of 5,000 carcasses. His private antics made fellow monarch George III seem comparatively sane; yet he was a loyal husband and was greatly beloved by the Neapolitan people, who shared many of his characteristics. Nothing, apart from hunting, gave him greater pleasure than joining ordinary folk in the rough-and-tumble of water sports in Naples's famous bay. Where music was concerned, he was polite enough to sit through an opera seria, although he was a good deal more at home with opera buffa or the scabrous stage comedies which were a Neapolitan specialty. His first wife, the politically active Queen Caroline, daughter of Maria Theresa and sister of Marie Antoinette, was a less attractive personality, a prime mover in Cimarosa's imprisonment (and subsequent death) after his involvement with the republican occupation of Naples in December 1798. Since Cimarosa's crime had been the writing of a Republican hymn shortly before Ferdinand's troops reentered the city the following June, Rossini (after his not dissimilar experience in Bologna) would have been relieved that Caroline was dead.

Whatever the Bourbons' failings, they had always been generous patrons of the arts. Within three years of coming to power, Carlos had commissioned the building of the new 2400–seat Teatro di San Carlo as part of a programme of beautification of the city. It took nine months to complete and was as handsome as any theatre in Europe; though shortly after its opening on 4 November 1737 its builder and impresario, Angelo Carasale, was imprisoned, charged with false accounting. In 1767 the interior was redesigned with the addition of several new boxes the size of small drawing rooms.[2] Visiting Naples in 1770, Charles Burney noted how even the 600 pit seats were 'roomy and comfortable, with leather cushions and stuffed backs each separated from the other by a broad rest for the elbow'.[3] It was a place that literally dazzled Burney, and also disturbed him:

> In the front of each box is a mirror 3 or 4 ft long by 2 or 3 wide, before which are two large wax tapers. These by reflexion being multiplied and added to the lights of the stage and to those within the boxes make it too much for the aching sight. . . . [The theatre] surpasses all that poetry and romance have

[2] For a full account of the theatre's architectural history see Franco Mancini, *Il Teatro di San Carlo 1737–1987*, vol.1 (Naples, 1987).

[3] Charles Burney, *Music, Men, and Manners in France and Italy, 1770* (London, 1969), 186.

> painted. But for all this, I must own, that in the magnitude of the building and the noise of the audience, one can neither hear voices or instruments distinctly, and I was told that on account of the K[ing] and Q[ueen] being present, people were much less noisy than on common nights. There was not a hand moved by way of applause during the whole representation, tho' people seemed much pleased with the music—but to say truth it did not afford me the same delight as at the rehearsal.[4]

By the time of Rossini's arrival at the San Carlo, the orchestra, which Burney had found fine but ill balanced (18 first violins, 18 second violins, 5 double-basses and 'but 2 violincellos'[5]) was judged the best in Italy. Royal funding was as lavish as ever, but gambling revenues were also important, which is why the San Carlo now had as its impresario Italy's most successful gaming magnate, the exuberant and semiliterate huckster, theatrical entrepreneur, and self-made millionaire, Domenico Barbaja.[6]

Milanese by birth, Barbaja had begun his working life as a waiter. Legend has it that he made his money out of a patent concoction of coffee and whipped cream. In reality, it was wheeling and dealing during the French wars and his exploitation of gambling franchises that guaranteed his fortune. With the spacious foyers of the big opera houses, natural gathering places for the wealthy, leased as gaming parlours, Barbaja bought himself into opera-house management. In the spring of 1805 the Milanese impresario Francesco Benedetto Ricci subcontracted to him the gambling rights of La Scala. As Napoleon's army swept through Italy, so did the new, 'democratically' accessible game of roulette. Within a year of securing the Milan franchise, the 28-year-old Barbaja was heading a syndicate which controlled gambling rights across most of northern Italy. In 1809 he moved south to Naples. A 'made' man, with land and houses to his name, not to mention racehorses, fine jewelery, and a grand if ill-assorted art collection, he would run Naples's Teatro di San Carlo and its attendant royal theatres for more than thirty years.

Barbaja was a rough diamond whose word was his bond. His letters, laboriously spelled out in a phonetic version of the Milanese dialect, are larded with expletives, cajolery, and abuse, some of it directed against

[4] Burney, 192–93.

[5] Burney, 197.

[6] Plate 4.

himself. If his opponents qualified for epithets such as 'murderer', 'thief', or 'crook', he frequently referred to himself as 'dickhead' [*coglione*], 'animal', or worse. His interest in 'questo maestro rosini [*sic*]'[7] appears to have been sparked by the triumphant reception of *La pietra del paragone* in Milan in the autumn of 1812. To a man such as Barbaja, Rossini was not so much a composer as a potentially lucrative property, a superstar in the making.

Barbaja made enemies, but the abiding impression is of a lovable rogue, a man of flair and acumen with an instinct for 'the best', even if he himself was singularly lacking in what we might choose to call good taste. His artistic achievements were formidable. As a theatre manager, he encouraged, and in some instances launched, the careers of composers as diverse as Bellini, Carafa, Donizetti, Mercadante, Pacini, Weber, and Rossini himself. Within three years of his arrival in Naples, he brought a new weight and seriousness to the city's grasp of opera seria. Productions were mounted of Spontini's *La vestale* and Gluck's *Iphigénie en Aulide*. His roster of singers was also predictably strong, headed by some of the greatest names of the day: Giovanni David, Manuel García, Andrea Nozzari, Michele Benedetti, and Isabella Colbran, who was Barbaja's mistress and, as it later turned out, the first Mrs. Rossini. Not that the risk was Barbaja's alone. He was answerable to a small army of people up to and including the king, all of whom had a vested interest in defending their appointments against the animadversions of conservatively minded academics and Naples's sophisticated but parochial theatre-going public.

The earliest reviews of the young Isabella Colbran comment on the contrast between her demure appearance and the range of a voice (G flat below the stave to E in alt) that was 'as smooth, velvety, and well nourished as it is brilliant and resonant'.[8] Even at the age of 20, when the lowest registers were not yet fully developed, there was a magnetism about what she did. 'When she sings half-voice, a light veil spreads over the sound without detracting from the expression, which is part of her talent, or the accent, which gives it charm.'[9] Out of costume, she had the air of a rather determined housewife, with short hair, a roundish face, and a cer-

[7] GRLD, I, 44.

[8] *Journal des Débats*, Paris, 5 November 1804.

[9] *Le Moniteur Universal*, Paris, 2 November 1804.

tain ironic twist to the mouth; on stage, though, she seems to have been totally transformed. Stendhal reported:

> It was a beauty in the most queenly tradition: noble features which, on stage, radiated majesty; an eye like that of a Circassian maiden, darting fire; and to crown it all, a true and deep instinct for tragedy. Off-stage, she possessed about as much dignity as the average milliner's assistant; but the moment she stepped on to the boards, her brow encircled with a royal diadem, she inspired involuntary respect, even among those who, a minute or two earlier, had been chatting intimately with her in the foyer of the theatre.[10]

This is a striking tribute from a man whose loathing of the Bourbons, and all who served them, often led him to disparage her. Like Pasta, whom Stendhal venerated above all others, the dramatically expressive Colbran alienated the canary-fanciers, those for whom Angelica Catalani, the brilliant exponent of coloratura titbits, was the contemporary ideal.

If we include *Elisabetta regina d'Inghilterra,* between 1815 and 1823 Rossini composed ten operas with Colbran's voice specifically in mind. That the voice went into decline towards the end of this period is not in question; but study of the music written for her would indicate that the decline was more gradual and was accompanied by more fascinating shifts and gradations of tone and technique, than Stendhal's writings allow. Stendhal's other charge, that Colbran and Barbaja drew Rossini away from his natural habitat—'A great *comic* poet forced against his will and judgement into the paths of *erudition*'[11]—still has currency today. The fact is, had Rossini stuck to comedy, he would have been a much diminished figure. It is on the Neapolitan opere serie that his reputation as the founding father of nineteenth-century Italian opera principally rests.

At the time of Rossini's arrival in Naples, the press and the theatre-going public knew nothing of the music, and little of the personality, of this interloper from the north. On 25 September the *Giornale delle Due Sicilie* reported:

> and finally, a certain Signor Rossini, a choirmaster, who has come, we've been told, to present an *Elisabetta regina d'Inghilterra* of his at this same S. Carlo theatre,

[10] SVR, 157. See plate 6.

[11] SVR, 171.

which still resounds with the melodious accents of the *Medea* of the distinguished Signor Mayr.

Not being known had its advantages. Rather than creating an entirely new opera for his Naples debut, Rossini reworked a substantial amount of recently written music to form the basis of a two-act dramma per musica carefully crafted to meet the expectations of the San Carlo company and audience. 'The libretto I am setting,' he told his mother on 8 August, 'has the title *Elisabella* [*sic*] *Regina d'Inghilterra ossia i Paggi di Leicester.* The poet is a bit cold but the music will be hot.'[12] The libretto was itself an adaptation. The work of the San Carlo's famously gloomy poet-in-residence Giovanni Schmidt, it had originally been set by Pavesi for the Turin Opera in 1809. As Barbaja clearly recognised, the autumn of 1815 was a good time to revive it. With the monarchy recently restored and Anglophilia again rife in Naples, the subject was propitious. Add to that the fact that Colbran had performed Pavesi's Elisabetta on stage in Brescia in 1812, and there is little wonder that Rossini was handed 'Elisabella' to set.

He served Colbran well. Stendhal noted: 'We were regaled with a sort of illustrated catalogue of all the technical accomplishments which that magnificent voice could master'.[13] The opera itself was also well received by Rossini's new audience, proving the shrewdness of a strategy which had also allowed him time to ride out the artistic storms that preceded the first night. In the weeks leading up the prima, several rehearsals were lost as a result of disputes between the management and two of the leading singers: Girolama Dardanelli, who created the role of Matilde, and the fiery, Spanish-born tenor Manuel García, who played Norfolk. On 30 September, four days before the opening, Barbaja lodged a formal complaint against García, who was summoned by the city's chief of police and bound over, on pain of imprisonment, to attend the final rehearsals.[14] An uncorroborated and almost certainly exaggerated account of the first night was later circulated by Colbran's friend, the society hostess Countess Merlin, a compatriot and former pupil of García:

[12] GRLD, IIIa, 89.

[13] SVR, 168.

[14] GRLD, I, 102–3, 107.

> Mademoiselle Colbran was in despair. 'Don't alarm yourself,' [García assured her]. 'Give me the words distinctly and, as to the music, that's my affair.' In short, he went through the entire opera with unbounded applause, but without giving *one note of the composer's music.* The fact was, during the rehearsals he had attentively studied the harmonies of the accompaniments. Having made himself thoroughly acquainted with them, he was enabled to substitute . . . [a role] of his own adaptation, improvising, as he proceeded, in the most extraordinary manner possible. Mme Rossini always mentioned this as the most astonishing example of musical talent and facility that ever came under her notice.[15]

Had *Elisabetta* failed, Barbaja and Rossini would have retreated to their fall-back position, a new production of *L'italiana in Algeri,* planned for the Teatro dei Fiorentini later that month. *L'italiana* won Rossini fresh laurels and caused no offence politically. 'Pensa alla patria', whose inflammatory nationalist sentiments would not have gone down well with the recently restored Bourbon court, was replaced by a new aria: 'Sullo stil de' viaggiatori'. Even the *Giornale* paid grudging tribute. After reminding its readers that the Fiorentini 'still resounds with the melodious accents of the imaginative Cimarosa and the tender and passionate Paisiello', it offered a 'merited testimony of praise to the young maestro'.[16]

Rossini's position with the Naples theatres was worth between 8,000 and 12,000 francs a year—rather more in later years, when, to keep Rossini in Naples, Barbaja offered him a share of the gambling revenues. Work schedules were strenuous, involving composition, rehearsal, administration, and the preparation of his own and other people's music. 'If he had been able to', Rossini later remarked, 'Barbaja would have put me in charge of the kitchen as well.' Nonetheless, work in other houses was permitted. So it was that, while the Neapolitans were rocking to the madcap rhythms of *L'italiana in Algeri,* Rossini prepared to leave for Rome, where he would write an opera which would render him unignorable by contemporaries and posterity alike.

[15] Countess Merlin, *Memoirs of Madame Malibran* (London, 1840), 141–43.

[16] GRDS, 31 October 1815.

CHAPTER FOUR

Rome and Il barbiere di Siviglia (1816)

ROSSINI ARRIVED IN ROME IN THE EARLY PART OF NOVEMBER 1815 to oversee a reworked version of *Il turco in Italia* and write a new piece for the Teatro Valle, a sentimental 'rescue' opera in the semiserio style, *Torvaldo e Dorliska*. The management assembled a strong cast for the new work, but it failed to please at its prima on 26 December. That same day, however, Rossini had signed a contract for a second opera to be performed at the management's much grander Teatro Argentina the following February. It would be based on Beaumarchais's *Le Barbier de Séville,* though out of deference to Paisiello's celebrated setting of 1782, it was to be called *Almaviva.*[1]

Rossini's contract was with Duke Francesco Sforza Cesarini, whose family had built the Argentina, Rome's most sumptuously appointed theatre, in 1731. It was a huge drain on the family finances and, in the winter of 1815–1816 Sforza Cesarini was feeling more than usually harassed. After the unsuccessful launch of *Torvaldo e Dorliska* and protracted arguments over the subject and librettist of the new opera, he ran into problems with a revival of *L'italiana in Algeri,* due to open on 13 January. He writes of 'spitting blood', of being obliged to 'put a knife to everyone's throat' to get the show on stage. He succeeded but had to spend the next day with librettist Cesare Sterbini ('gassing with the Poet') agreeing on a synopsis for

[1] Following Paisiello's death in June 1816, Rossini's opera was renamed *Il barbiere di Siviglia* for its first revival in Bologna on 10 August.

the new opera, hammering out a schedule, and finalising Sterbini's contract.[2] In another letter Sforza Cesarini writes touchingly of his longing for a quieter life. It was not to be. On the night of 16 February, four days before the prima of *Almaviva,* he suffered a seizure and died. He was 44.

Sterbini's contract, which gave him twelve days to complete the text, is given over mainly to the agreed-upon treatment. What the contract did not do was establish a fee, a curious oversight on Sterbini's part which would cost him dearly in the wake of the duke's death. Rossini's contract,[3] typical of the kind of agreements drawn up between impresarios and composers at the time, was very different. He was commissioned to write a dramma buffo to a libretto provided by the impresario. Act 1 needed to be ready for the copyist by 16 January (the date was later struck through and changed to 20 January) with a view to the complete opera being staged on or around 5 February; 'otherwise, Sig.r Maestro will expose himself to all damages, as it should be thus and not otherwise'. The composer was required to carry out any modifications to the score requested by the singers, to make himself available for the duration of the rehearsal period, and to attend the first three performances, which he was expected to direct from the keyboard. The terms that Sforza Cesarini offered Rossini, 400 Roman scudi, were not ungenerous, though it must have been galling for Rossini to see the Figaro, Luigi Zamboni, getting almost twice as much, and the Almaviva, Manuel García, being offered three times the amount. Of the first-night cast, only the 'altro buffo', Bartolomeo Botticelli, who played Bartolo, and the 'seconda donna', Elisabetta Loyselet, who played Berta, were paid less than the composer.

It is generally assumed that Rossini wrote the piece from a standing start, setting Sterbini's text as it arrived. Given that Sterbini's contract was not signed until 17 January, Rossini would have had about three weeks to complete the score—hair-raising to us but not necessarily a problem to a composer who had developed his forms and honed his musical vocabulary early. As Verdi later put it: '*Israel in Egypt* in fifteen days, *Don Giovanni* in a month, *Il barbiere di Siviglia* in eighteen days. Those men did not have exhausted blood, were well-balanced natures, had their heads on squarely, and knew what they wanted.' That said, there is every probability that

[2] GRLD, I, 130.

[3] GRLD, I, 124–26.

Rossini had been contemplating Beaumarchais's play for a considerable time, either in its original form or through the refracting medium of Paisiello's setting.

The theatre published a lengthy 'Warning to the Public', advising that out of 'respect and veneration' for the 'greatly celebrated Paisiello', the work had been renamed, newly adapted, and newly versified. It was, to borrow the opera's subtitle, a futile precaution. Such a harvest of compliments was merely grist to the mill of the *Paisiellisti* and the troublemakers whose services they engaged. They proceeded to do what factions invariably do when they are shown deference: they spotted uncertainty and determined to pounce.

Much has been written about the fiasco of the opera's first night on 20 February 1816, most of it true: the mockery of Rossini's Spanish-style hazel jacket, the rowdy animosity of the Paisiello lobby, the jeering and the catcalls ('Here we are at the funeral of Duke Cesarini'), as one mishap succeeded another. Basilio sang his 'Calumny' aria with a bloodied nose after tripping over a trap door; then, during the act 1 finale, a cat wandered onstage, declined to leave, and was forcibly flung into the wings. According to the Rosina, Gertrude Righetti Giorgi, Rossini left the theatre 'as though he had been an indifferent onlooker'. The next day he scrambled a note to his mother:

> Last Night my Opera was Staged and was Solemnly booed what mad o what Extraordinary things are to be seen in this country. I will tell you that in the Midst of it all the Music is very fine and already people are talking about its Second Evening when the Music will be heard, something that did not happen last night from the Beginning to the end there was a constant noise accompanying the whole performance. [4]

He was right about the second performance. It was a triumph, though he was not there to witness it. He spent the evening pacing his room, imagining the opera's progress scene by scene. He retired early, only to be roused by a glow of torches and uproar in the street. Fearing that a mob was about to set fire to the building, he took refuge in a stable block. García tried to summon him to acknowledge the adulation. 'F*** their bravos!' was Rossini's blunt rejoinder. 'I'm not coming out.'[5]

[4] GRLD, IIIa, 119.

[5] EM, 124–25.

Rossini returned to Naples on 29 February, his 24th birthday, though not before he had directed further performances and been offered a contract to write a new opera for Rome by the end of the year.[6] He told his mother:

> I wrote to You how My Opera was booed, now I can Write that on the second evening and all the following Performances, they cheered this work of mine with an Indescribable fanaticism for which I came out Five, six times to receive applause of a totally new kind and that made me Cry with pleasure.[7]

It had been a roller-coaster experience for Rossini. Like Figaro, he was a man of ingenuity and irrepressible energy; yet for someone whose later life provides evidence of obsessive and manic-depressive elements in his makeup, the shock of the public response to *Il barbiere di Siviglia,* an opera he knew was a masterpiece, must have been unnerving. At one point in Beaumarchais's play, in lines omitted in Sterbini's text, Figaro remarks, 'I force myself to laugh at everything, for fear of having to weep'. Though he would not admit so in public, Rossini probably shared the sentiment. Certainly, it was not long before word was abroad that Rossini was talking to friends about the possibility of retiring from theatrical life by the age of 30.

[6] *La Cenerentola.* It had its delayed prima on 25 January 1817.

[7] GRLD, IIIa, 121.

CHAPTER FIVE

Naples, Rome, and Milan (1816–1817)

ROSSINI RETURNED TO NAPLES TO FIND THAT THE SAN CARLO theatre had been gutted by fire on the evening of 13 February. The walls were still standing, but the roof and interior had been destroyed. Within a year it would be lavishly rebuilt under the supervision of the architect to the royal theatres, Antonio Niccolini.[1] Barbaja himself secured the building contract, advancing the cost of the work against an exceptionally generous concession on future gambling revenues.

Rossini's first commission was the writing of a wedding cantata to celebrate the marriage of Ferdinand IV's granddaughter, the diminutive 17-year-old Princess Maria Carolina, and the 37-year-old Duc de Berry, the second son of the future Charles X of France, for whose coronation in 1825 Rossini would write the most ambitious of all his stage cantatas, *Il viaggio a Reims.* Devised by Angelo Maria Ricci, a court official turned textual adviser to the royal theatres, *Le nozze di Teti, e di Peleo* anticipates a long, happy, and fruitful marriage. Sadly, it was not to be. In 1820 the Duc de Berry was assassinated by a Republican fanatic whilst escorting his wife to her carriage outside Paris's Théâtre Royal.

The cantata is based on the ancient Greek legend of Peleus and the sea nymph, Thetis, fated to bear a son, Achilles, who was mightier than his father. Ricci confined the action to Peleus's honouring Thetis in a love duet

[1] For his sketches of the fire and its aftermath, and his designs for the new theatre, see Mancini, 78–96.

('Costante al tuo fianco'), and a number of tableaux in which the gods Jove, Juno, and Ceres bless the nuptials and speculate on what might flow from so auspicious a day. None of the music Rossini used in *Le nozze di Teti, e di Peleo* was new. It was, however, carefully and expertly adapted: keys altered, vocal lines emended, orchestration revised. After conducting a latter-day revival of the piece, Riccardo Chailly observed, 'Even when Rossini is making a patchwork, or writing abstract music which has no strong theatrical support, the music never loses direction. In the end, he seems to be saying exactly what he *wants* to say'. Among the self-borrowings, which are as ingenious as they are wide-ranging,[2] the most readily recognisable is Ceres's showpiece aria 'Ah, non potrian resistere'. Rossini used this aria, or parts of it, no fewer than three times.[3] Of all the versions, this Neapolitan adaptation, written for Colbran, is arguably the most distinct by virtue of its colour, manner, and positioning at the heart of the cantata. The staging was extremely lavish, in particular the final coup de scène: 'Jupiter makes a sign: an image, as if painted by rays of light, is revealed, showing the royal spouses before the French throne, as King Louis XVIII gives them his fatherly blessing'. The effect was created by a 'transparency', a fine gauze, finely painted. According to the theatre accounts, it cost 241 ducats, 91 ducats more than Rossini was paid for the music.

On 30 April, Rossini's paternal grandmother, Antonia Olivieri Rossini, died in Pesaro at the age of 81; she had looked after young Gioachino during some of his parents' absences in the 1790s. Though he makes no mention of her death in his letters home, he must have mourned her passing. In May he told his mother that he was beginning work on a new opera, a setting of Shakespeare's tragedy *Othello.* An interest in plays and operas which had tragic endings had recently begun to take hold in parts of Italy; even so, the choice of *Othello* was unprecedented.[4] Rossini showed a more than usual interest in the subject ('Sarà Magnifico', 'Azione Interessantis-

[2] They include items from *L'equivoco stravagante, Ciro in Babilonia, La scala di seta, La pietra del paragone, Aureliano in Palmira, Il turco in Italia, Sigismondo, Torvaldo e Dorliska,* and *Il barbiere di Siviglia.*

[3] Count Almaviva's 'Cessa di più resistere' in act 2 of *Il barbiere di Siviglia;* Ceres's aria in *Le nozze di Teti, e di Peleo;* the closing scene of *La Cenerentola.*

[4] With the exception of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet,* which Rossini is said to have objected to because of problems in dealing with the Ghost, none of the major Shakespearean tragedies had received operatic treatment at the time.

sima'),[5] though what happened thereafter is not clear. The libretto was not passed by the Ministry of the Interior until 25 September. Then in early November Barbaja lodged a formal complaint against Rossini to Giovanni Carafa, Duke of Noja, superintendent of the Royal Theatres, stating that Rossini had promised the score by 10 October and accusing him of 'irregular and incompatible' conduct over the preceding eight months.[6] As we shall see, an extraordinary change came over Rossini's compositional style during the writing of *Otello,* something to which the longer-than-expected gestation period may have made its contribution.

Not that he was exactly kicking his heels during the summer of 1816. There was a revival of *Tancredi* to be supervised at the San Carlo's temporary home, the Teatro del Fondo, and a new entertainment to be provided for the Teatro dei Fiorentini. This latter piece, *La gazzetta,* was completed well ahead of schedule, a month before the prima on 26 September. The opera is based on Goldoni's *Il matrimonio per concorso* (Venice, 1763), a comedy about two fathers who are intent on improving their cash flow and their social standing by arranging advantageous marriages for their daughters. One uses tried and tested strategies; the other, the incorrigible Don Pomponio, decides to advertise for a suitable son-in-law in the local newspaper. There had been at least five operatic treatments of the play before Rossini's. Of these, Giovanni Mosca's *Avviso al pubblico,* to a libretto by Rossini's erstwhile collaborator Gaetano Rossi, is the most significant. Rossini, who was in Milan at the time of the production in 1814, almost certainly proposed the subject (and supplied a copy of Rossi's text) to his Neapolitan collaborator, Giuseppe Palomba.

As a concession to the dei Fiorentini, Rossini allowed the role of Don Pomponio to be rewritten in Neapolitan dialect for the benefit of the celebrated buffo Carlo Casaccia, or 'Casaccielo', as he was known by admiring locals. It was a decision he quickly came to regret. 'I don't really understand the form of the dialogue or the development of the action', he told his mother on 21 May. 'Will Heaven assist me?'[7] The Casaccia family had dominated Neapolitan musical comedy for the best part of a century.

[5] GRLD, IIIa, 132, 134.

[6] GRLD, I, 184–85.

[7] GRLD, IIIa, 136.

The founders of the dynasty were Giuseppe Casaccia and his son Antonio, 'Il grande Casaccia'. Charles Burney, who saw Antonio in an opera by Piccinni during his tour of 1770, described him as 'a man of infinite humour'. 'The whole house was in a roar the moment he appeared.'[8] Carlo, too, was a comic genius, a mountain of a man with a whining voice and a great facility for falling off chairs.

Rossini had been provided with a cast of also-rans for the Teatro dei Fiorentini's revival of *L'italiana in Algeri*. For *La gazzetta,* Barbaja engaged a roster of leading performers, including Casaccia himself, the tenor Felice Pellegrini, and Margherita Chabrand, a great favourite with Naples audiences. For the underwritten role of Filippo, he hired the 31-year-old Alberico Curioni, who was as famous for his looks as for his voice. Once again, the music was mainly adapted from operas not yet seen in Naples. *Il turco in Italia* provided an aria, a duet, a chorus, and a quintet; *La pietra del paragone* provided a trio.

Otello would be very different. Apart from the overture, which was a modified version of the overture to *Sigismondo,* and a duettino adapted from *Aureliano in Palmira,* the score was essentially new. The choice of subject was almost certainly that of the librettist, Francesco Maria Berio, Marchese di Salsa. His tastes were certainly cosmopolitan. The Irish novelist and socialite Lady Morgan recalled:

> The *conversazione* at the Palazzo Berio is a congregation of elegant and refined spirits, where every body converses, and converses well; and best (if not most) the master of the house. The Marchese Berio is a nobleman of wealth, high rank, and of very considerable literary talent and acquirement, which extends itself to the utmost verge of the philosophy and belles-lettres of England, France, Germany, and his native country. He has read every thing, and continues to read every thing; and I have seen his sitting-room loaded with a new importation of English novels and poetry.[9]

One of the sensations of the 1814 London season had been Edmund Kean's first Othello. A year previously, and closer to home, *Othello* had been played in Naples in a 'version' by Baron Giovanni Cosenza. Berio's

[8] Burney, 159.

[9] Sydney Morgan, *Italy* (London, 1821), III, 278.

libretto has been harshly, perhaps too harshly, criticised through the years. Stendhal, a friend, dubbed him 'that unmentionable literary hack'.[10] It is true that the libretto is a strange amalgam. The first two acts are the stuff of conventional Italian melodrama: a secret marriage, an aggrieved father, duelling rivals. It was this that so outraged Byron when he saw the opera in Venice in 1818:

> They have been crucifying Othello into an opera (Otello by Rossini)—Music good but lugubrious—but as for the words!—all the real scenes with Iago cut out—& the greatest nonsense instead—the handkerchief turned into a *billet doux,* and the first Singer would not *black* his face—for some exquisite reasons assigned in the preface.[11]

This criticism, however, is to reckon without the opera's final act. Strongly influenced by Rossini himself, it is an imaginative and, in many respects, loyal reworking of the Shakespeare original from the final scene of act IV to the end of the tragedy. Meyerbeer spoke for a whole generation (*Otello* was to be one of Rossini's most frequently played scores) when he wrote:

> The third act of *Otello* established its reputation so firmly that a thousand errors couldn't shake it. This third act is really godlike, and what is so extraordinary is that its beauties are quite unRossini-like. First-rate declamation, continuously impassioned recitative, mysterious accompaniments full of local colour, and, in particular, the style of the old romances brought to the highest perfection.[12]

The opera, which opened on 4 December, was triumphantly received, an indication, noted the critic of the *Giornale del Regno delle Due Sicilie,* of how much, and how quickly, public taste had changed in recent times. The tragic ending no longer seemed shocking. As for the music, one could only marvel at the composer's 'supreme ability to link all the pomp of Italian song with the tragic force that the subject required'. Among the performers, Colbran was accorded the most column inches and greatest plaudits for her performance of what is, in effect, the opera's leading role. 'Signora Colbran, grand in the so-called 'bravura pieces', and extremely

[10] See R. Marvin's 'Il libretto di Berio per l'*Otello* di Rossini'. BCRS 31 (1991), 55.

[11] BLJ, 18.

[12] MBT, 359.

happy in passages in the form of arpeggios and rapid runs, has no rivals in tragic and declamatory music, and in the difficult talent of expression', noted the *Giornale.* It would be left to Stendhal, however, to evoke the splendour of the Otello, Andrea Nozzari:

> His magnificent stature, which could convey so stirringly an impression of grandeur tinged with melancholy, was extremely valuable to him in expressing certain aspects of the part, and in interpreting conceptions of which the librettist had probably never dreamed. I well remember the astonishment with which the Neapolitan audiences reacted to the pure beauty of his gestures, and to the general impression of rare and graceful majesty which was characteristic of Nozzari in the part; incidentally, the style of his acting on this occasion was quite outside his usual repertoire.[13]

Conscious, perhaps, that the composer had not been as idle as Barbaja's letter of 5 November had implied, the Duke di Noja wrote Rossini a glowing letter of thanks, describing the opera as 'superb', 'a total triumph'.[14] Meanwhile, Rome beckoned. At some point Rossini must have informed Pietro Cartoni, the Teatro Valle's genial impresario, that the opera he had signed up to earlier in the year for delivery in time for a Boxing Day prima would have to be rescheduled. A letter sent on Cartoni's behalf to the Naples police on 17 December, summoning Rossini to Rome, confirms the fact.[15] When Rossini eventually reached Rome, the situation had become even more desperate. Cartoni's choice of a risqué French comedy about the dangers of court life to innocent young ladies had been vetoed by the Papal censor, and neither he, Rossini, nor the librettist, Jacopo Ferretti, could think of an alternative.

Cartoni was typical of impresarios of the day. A grocer by trade, he supplied chocolate and candles to the Capranica and Sforza Cesarini families, whose theatres he helped run. His shop and apartment, like the Teatro Valle itself, were housed within the Capranica palace. And it was there that the impasse over the new opera was resolved in the early hours of the morning of 23 December. According to Ferretti's own subsequent account, the three men had sat, chilled to the marrow and drinking 'Jamaica

[13] SVR, 221.

[14] GRLD, I, 190.

[15] GRLD, I, 191.

tea', turning over 'twenty or thirty subjects for a melodramma'. Some were too serious for the Carnival season, others too costly; some were too complex, others ill-suited to the available singers. With Ferretti half asleep and Rossini having climbed into a bed 'the better to concentrate', the following exchange is said to have taken place:

FERRETTI: (murmuring) Cinderella?

ROSSINI: (sitting bolt upright in bed) Would you have the courage to write me a Cinderella?

FERRETTI: Would you have the courage to set it to music?

ROSSINI: And the outline?

FERRETTI: You can have it in the morning if I go without sleep tonight.

ROSSINI: Good night! (Wrapping himself in the bedclothes and falling 'like Homer's gods' into a blessed sleep.)[16]

Like most acts of reminiscence, this gives events a shape which at the time they did not necessarily possess. Yet the alacrity with which Rossini responded to the Cinderella idea is of interest. The substance of the Cinderella story as Rossini received it drew from him music in which the tragicomic rhythm of the fairy tale is tellingly, at times movingly, pointed. Where Ferretti is downright disingenuous is in his suggestion that he conceived and sketched the libretto in a flash of nocturnal inspiration. Two texts apt to Rossini's style and interests were extant: Charles-Guillaume Étienne's libretto for Nicolas Isouard's *Cendrillon,* which itself influenced Felice Romani's libretto for Stefano Pavesi's *Agatina* (Milan, 1814). Not for the first time, we find Rossini and his librettist reshaping an old text rather than creating a new one. Most of Rossini's music was new. Three of the original numbers were the work of Luca Agolini, who also wrote much of the recitative, and there were two significant self-borrowings: the overture, taken from *La gazzetta,* and the music for Cenerentola's rondo finale, which was based on 'Cessa di più resistere' from *Il barbiere di Siviglia.*

Righetti Giorgi, who had sung 'Cessa di più resistere' in a revised *Il barbiere* in Bologna the previous summer, headed a cast of tried and tested Rossinians. They needed to be. According to Ferretti, the act 2 duet between Dandini (Giuseppe de Begnis) and Don Magnifico (Andrea Verni)

[16] A. Cametti, *Un poeta melodrammatico romano* (Milan, 1898), 80.

was still being rehearsed in the break between acts on an opening night which was almost as noisy and accident-ridden as the first night of *Il barbiere.* By now, however, Rossini was impervious to the antics of the Roman mob. *La Cenerentola* quickly won international acclaim and was for many years more popular than *Il barbiere di Siviglia.* It is certainly the most humane of Rossini's great comedies.

If there was an exception to the rule that impresarios of the period were moneyed amateurs or wheeler-dealing businessmen, it was the man responsible for Rossini's next commission, the lawyer, diplomat, and former private secretary to the finance minister of Napoleon's kingdom of Italy, Angelo Petracchi. Backed by a trio of Milanese bankers, he ran La Scala, Milan from 1816 to 1820, an experience which convinced him that if opera was to survive, opera houses would need to be state-funded and publicly administered.[17] Rossini had signed a contract with Petracchi the previous October. Determined to restore his standing with the Milanese public after the disappointments of *Aureliano in Palmira* and *Il turco in Italia* two years previously, he left Rome on 11 February. After a brief stopover in Bologna, he arrived in Milan, where he remained until the new opera was safely launched on 31 May.

On 19 March he told his mother: 'I'm writing an opera called *La gazza ladra.* The story's been versified by a newcomer and as a consequence I'm being driven crazy; however, it's a most beautiful subject and I hope (God willing) we'll be able to create a Fine Fiasco'.[18] The 'beautiful subject' was taken from an actual occurrence in which a French peasant girl was convicted and hanged for thefts later discovered to be the work of a thieving magpie. As to the 'newcomer', the man who turned this French 'mélo-historique', *La Pie voleuse,* into an opera libretto, he was very grand indeed. A doctor by training, but a poet, translator, and philologist by inclination, Giovanni Gherardini earned his living as editor-in-chief of the *Giornale Italiano,* the kingdom of Italy's official newspaper, a position to which he had been appointed in 1806 at the age of 28. His reworking of *La Pie voleuse,* pompously retitled *Avviso ai giudici* ('A Warning to the Judges'), had originally been completed as a submission to a libretto-writing competition organised by La Scala, Milan, in 1816. It did not win. The 1,000

[17] A. Petracchi, *Sul reggimento dei pubblici teatri* (Milan, 1821).

[18] GRLD, IIIa, 162.

Austrian Lire first prize (about $1,500 in today's money) went to a rising young star of the Italian theatre, Felice Romani. However, La Scala's plan to offer the winning libretto to Rossini quickly ran into trouble. After an exchange of letters between Petracchi and Rossini in February 1817, the Gherardini was chosen. We know from a letter written by one of the adjudicators, Romani's mentor, Vincenzo Monti, that the libretto had been well thought of by the panel—not least for its orderliness at a time when, according to Monti, libretti were threatening to become little more than 'monstrous coagulations of nothing but senseless words'.

The opening on 31 May 1817, with a strong cast headed by Filippo Galli as the girl's deserter-father, Fernando, was a triumph. Newly written, long, and carefully crafted, the score captured the audience's attention from the overture's opening summons on the snare drum and the imposing maestoso marziale which follows. What the first-night audience could not have known was how well tailored the overture was to the events which were about to unfold on stage. The opera's genre was again a 'mixed' one; but where *La Cenerentola* veered towards comedy, *La gazza ladra,* part pastoral comedy, part rescue opera, occasionally came close to tragedy.

During his time in Milan, Rossini met Peter von Winter, whose opera *Maometto* had opened at La Scala on 28 January. Legend has it that Winter was a sloppy eater, something which did not commend him to the fastidious Rossini. (Cartoni's poorly cooked, overspiced food caused Rossini to seek out new places to dine during his time in Rome.) It must be a matter of speculation as to whether Rossini, an obsessive by nature, was equally fastidious when it came to the conduct of his numerous sexual liaisons. If he was, that did not prevent him from contracting gonorrhea at a relatively early stage in his career. We get a glimpse of Rossini the young Don Juan in a letter he wrote to his friend the engraver Pietro Folo shortly after leaving Rome in February 1817. After enquiring about the portrait Folo was working on, Rossini enquires about a passing fancy: 'How is Clementina? Does she remember me? Does she think me a fool? Were it so, I forgive her because I'd die without the hope that she wouldn't care for me'.[19] The serious love of his life was Isabella Colbran, whose favours he was sharing with Barbaja, and anyone else on whom the diva chose to look kindly in the sexually liberated world of the arts and high society. In July

[19] GRLD, IIIa, 205.

1817 they holidayed with Barbaja at his villa on the island of Ischia. Though he bathed and took the waters for his 'illness' ('maluccio'), Rossini was bored to distraction.

It was now that he began work on an opera about the fabled temptress Armida, which it is not fanciful to see as a sustained love letter to Colbran. A dozen composers, including Lully, Handel, Gluck, and Haydn, had been drawn to Tasso's tale; so had Goethe, whose verse adaptation was to lure Brahms into writing a surprisingly erotic cantata. Rossini's approach, to the first act in particular was remarkably clear-sighted; yet the subject could not be adequately tackled without further expansion of his armoury. In addition to the need for ballet music and an extended role for the chorus, the writing itself took on a sensual quality not previously heard in his music. This was Rossini's first opera for the rebuilt and redesigned San Carlo Theatre, which had reopened on 11 January 1817. In a letter to Giuseppe Rossini, Colbran's father described the music of Armida as 'angelic'. Rossini added a postscript boasting that he was 'immersed in glory'.[20]

Before the year was out, he was back in Rome setting Giovanni Schmidt's *Adelaide di Borgogna* for the Teatro Argentina, which Cartoni continued to administer on behalf of Sforza Cesarini's widow. The opera, which draws on an important episode in pre-medieval Italian history, disappointed expectation. 'Rossini's genius,' observed one paper, 'seems to have temporarily gone to sleep, though from time to time he wakes up with some beautiful novelty.'[21] Rossini was not written out, merely resting. A new 'grand oratorio', *Mosè in Egitto,* to be performed shortly before Easter, had already been announced in the Naples papers. By 2 January he was back in Naples, 'safe and sound and close to the oratorio'.[22]

[20] GRLD, IIIa, 189–91.

[21] *Notizie del Giorno,* 9 January 1818.

[22] GRLD, IIIa, 195.

CHAPTER SIX

Mosè in Egitto *and Return to Pesaro* (1818)

'BARBAJA WANTS ME TO WRITE TWO OPERAS DURING THE COMING year but I'm not keen', Rossini told his parents shortly before leaving Rome.[1] As things turned out, he met Barbaja's demands. *Mosè in Egitto* was finished in mid-February, ahead of its first performance on 5 March, and the libretto for a second opera, *Ricciardo e Zoraide,* was in his luggage when, in mid-April, he left Naples to spend three months in Bologna. Also in his luggage was a contract for a private commission from a patron in Lisbon, Gaetano Pezzana, about whom nothing is known other than what is relayed in a letter he wrote to Rossini in December 1817:

> Most Esteemed Signor Rossini—the friendly regard which I treasured, and still treasure, for a lady who sings here at the Royal Theatre S. Carlo, leads me to make her a present of a new comedy in music. I know of no better way of moving you to agree to write such a farsa than by appealing to your renowned talents which would surely secure me success and favour with the Signora.[2]

The letter went on to say that the libretto would be of Rossini's choosing; that Lisbon boasted an excellent orchestra and chorus; and that the signora's preferred range extended from 'do' on the bottom line of the stave to 'fa' above it. Odd as the commission was, it was not untypical of the interest now being taken in Rossini beyond Italy, in places as far afield as

[1] GRLD, IIIa, 193.

[2] GRLD, I, 234–35.

Paris and Saint Petersburg. Closer to home, the building of a new theatre in Pesaro was also nearing completion. Rossini had already been sounded out about the possibility of his choosing an opera for the opening night and overseeing its staging. Now, as he worked on *Mosè in Egitto,* the planning for the Pesaro gala began in earnest.

By designation, *Mosè in Egitto* was an oratorio, or azione tragico-sacra, a drama appropriate to the season of Lent. This is not to say that it was untheatrical or lacking topicality. The tale of a captive people being led to the Promised Land would have struck many observers in postrevolutionary Bourbon Naples as bordering on the inflammatory. In what was an unusual piece of casting, the role of Moses was given to the house's principal bass, the popular and accomplished Michele Benedetti, playing opposite the Pharaoh of another bass, the equally distinguished Raniero Remorini. Nozzari sang Osiride, the Pharaoh's doomed son. Colbran created the role of the Aida-like heroine, Elcia.

Stendhal tells us how he attended the San Carlo with 'a marked lack of enthusiasm for the plagues of Egypt'. Libretti based on holy scripture, he suggested, are more to the taste of the Bible-reading English. He also confessed to a predisposition to mock the stage effects in the opera's first scene—prematurely, as it turned out:

> When the curtain went up, I am afraid that I simply burst out laughing at the sight of all those wretched little groups of Egyptians, plunged into Stygian darkness by the Plague of Dimmers, lost in the wilderness of an apparently boundless stage, and praying like fury. Yet before I had heard twenty bars of this superb introduzione I could see nothing less profoundly moving than a whole population plunged into deep misery.[3]

Certainly, the first act of *Mosè in Egitto* (act 2 in the 1827 Paris revision) ranks with the third act of *Otello* in terms of musical, theatrical, and imaginative skills memorably sustained. Stendhal was also much impressed by Benedetti's Moses:

> [he] entered, wearing a costume which was sublime in its very simplicity, and had been copied from Michelangelo's statue in the church of San Pietro in Vincoli, in Rome. . . . Moses was no longer a shoddy conjuror turning his rod into a serpent and playing cheap tricks on a primitive simpleton, but a great

[3] SVR, 319.

> Minister of the All-Powerful, who could cause a vile tyrant to shake upon his throne. I can still recall the overwhelming impression produced by the first hearing of the words: 'Eterno, immenso, incomprensibil Dio!'[4]

In the phrase 'vile tyrant', we catch an echo of Stendhal's anti-Bourbon views. Lady Morgan contested this interpretation by noting how the potentially unsympathetic king of Egypt was shown 'every possible delicacy' in the San Carlo production.

One of the triumphs of *Mosè in Egitto,* something entirely lost in the Paris rewrite, was the electrifying climax to act 2. By contrast, act 3 in the 1818 version was not a success. The dividing of the Red Sea, a challenge to any stage technician, was poorly handled. (The occupants of the boxes had a bird's-eye view of young urchins gamely manhandling the 'raging billows'.) Nor had Rossini written music of sufficient quality to sustain the short but important final scene. By March 1819 he had completely redrafted it. The story of how he went about doing this, including composing the famous prayer 'Dal tuo stellato soglio', is one of Stendhal's more outrageous fictions, but his account of the impact of the revised act 3 is worth quoting, if only because it communicates the emotions which this famous scene was to arouse in the breasts of his contemporaries. After the stage management's disasters of the previous year, many in the audience had turned up to enjoy another fiasco.

> The laughter was already bursting forth audibly from the pit, when the audience suddenly became aware that Moses was starting an unfamiliar aria—a prayer which all the people echo in chorus after Moses.

The effect of the new aria and chorus was a powerful one:

> People stood up in their boxes and leaned over the balconies, shouting to crack the vault of heaven. I have never known such a triumph—which was all the more tremendous since everyone had come expecting to laugh or jeer. Who will deny, in the light of such an experience, that music can provoke an immediate and physical nervous reaction?[5]

Though the original 1818–1819 *Mosè in Egitto* tends, even now, to be eclipsed by Rossini's own inflated and in some respects unsatisfactory

[4] SVR, 320.

[5] SVR, 324–25.

revision for the Paris Opéra in 1827, it won a considerable international reputation at the time. Only the 'Bible-reading English' were less than enthusiastic.

The Lisbon commission, *Adina, o Il califfo di Bagdad,* was completed and delivered in the early summer. Only three of the numbers were newly written, one of them for Adina herself. Dismay was expressed about the absence of an overture. Rossini countered by pointing out that none was asked for in the contract. For reasons that have never been made entirely clear, it would be eight years before the opera was staged in Lisbon.

Towards the end of January, Rossini finally turned his attention to the matter of the gala reopening of Pesaro's Teatro Nuovo. The project's sponsors were Count Giulio Perticari and Pesaro's gonfalioner, Marquis Antaldo Antaldi, who had made the original approach.[6] Rossini's initial plan had been to attempt to engage Colbran and Nozzari with a view to staging his newest Neapolitan opera, *Armida.* The negotiations dragged on for two months, during which time it became clear that Pesaro could neither afford such celebrities nor give any clear indication as to when they would be required. In the end, *La gazza ladra* was chosen, though this was even more difficult to cast and just as expensive to stage, thanks to Rossini's insistence on employing the original designer, Sanquirico, as well as Sanquirico's even more famous teacher, Paolo Landriana.

The surviving correspondence, the only letters we have detailing Rossini's involvement in the staging of one of his own operas, confirms what informed Rossinians have long known but what the public image of him as an idle bon vivant has tended to obscure: his huge capacity for work and an attention to detail that borders on the obsessive. The casting was a particular problem. When a plea to his old friend Rosa Morandi to sing Ninetta came to nothing, Rossini engaged the 18-year-old Giuseppina Ronzi De Begnis and, at a reduced fee, her husband, Giuseppe De Begnis, as the Mayor. The savings made on the De Begnises enabled him to cast the tenor Alberico Curioni as Giannetto and, as Ninetta's soldier father, Raniero Remorini, fresh from his success as Pharaoh in *Mosè in Egitto.* Discovering that he was the lynchpin of the production, Remorini demanded extra music. 'He has put me through three days of hell. Oh, what

[6] GRLD, I, 209–10.

trouble!' Rossini told Perticari on 20 May.[7] A cavatina was provided, taken from the Duke's entrance in *Torvaldo e Dorliska*. The music had originally been written for Filippo Galli and was probably coveted by Remorini, who had also sung in the Rome prima.

Rossini took immense care over the production. Every inch the perfectionist, he insisted on nominating and acquiring the finest local instrumentalists. In a succession of letters, the layout of the orchestra was specified, including the measurement of the spaces between the players and how the music stands should best be lit. The coordination of designers and stage machinists was set in motion; a reminder was issued about the whereabouts of a fake magpie. In a preface to the printed libretto, the impresario, Giovanni Massei, announced that the opera had been 'revised and expanded'. The main change involved replacing the duet for Ninetta and Giannetto at the start of act 2 with the love duet from *Armida*, 'Amor, possente nome'. Dramatically indefensible (it would be difficult to find two heroines more different than Ninetta and Armida), the decision is perhaps understandable within the context of a gala opening. The performance began on the evening of 10 June, but it was not until dawn the next day that the official and unofficial junketings were over. Shortly afterwards, Rossini was struck down with a 'severe inflammation of the throat'. Newspapers in several European cities, including Naples and Paris, reported his death. Happily, he survived, nursed back to health at the Villa Perticari.

The first night of *Ricciardo e Zoraide* should have been on 26 September, but Rossini's illness caused a two-month postponement. Further delays followed. During the dress rehearsal on 27 November, Colbran injured herself in a fall; four days later Giovanni David fell ill. The opera finally reached the stage on 3 December. Musically, there was no indication that the composer had been under the weather. One of Rossini's richest scores, it was rapturously received by the Naples audience, a foretaste of the opera's popularity with audiences throughout Europe over the next twenty years. Rossini valued the music but seems to have had little faith in Berio di Salsa's libretto, a farrago of high passion and knightly daring based on cantos from Niccolò Forteguerri's briefly fashionable epic

[7] GRLD, I, 303–4.

poem *Il Ricciardetto.* Within months of the first performance, Rossini was reusing parts of the score for a new Venetian opera.

Meanwhile, from Milan, the 27-year-old Giacomo Meyerbeer was reporting rumours of problems with the Italian Opera in Paris: of approaches to Rossini, of his terms (said to be 'unusually extravagant and demanding'), of the possibility of his writing for the Opéra itself.[8] It would be six years before the rumours became a reality, but the speculation was broadly right. Rossini's Italian career was moving into its final phase.

[8] MBT, 360.

CHAPTER SEVEN

1819–1821

IF ROSSINI WAS CONTEMPLATING FRESH WOODS AND PASTURES NEW, the events of the next few months would do little to discourage him. Shortly after lauding to the skies the dramatically flawed *Ricciardo e Zoraide,* and just three weeks after acclaiming the revised *Mosè in Egitto,* the Naples audience gave short shrift to his newest work, *Ermione,* an opera Rossini knew in his bones to be one of the finest he had yet written. Skilfully adapted from Racine's *Andromaque* by his more than competent librettist, Andrea Leone Tottola, *Ermione* ran for just five performances in late March and early April 1819, with two performances of act 1 added a fortnight later. Rossini immediately withdrew the score. He would later make use of some of its music, but he became less and less inclined to try to revive the opera itself. '*Ermione* is my little *Guillaume Tell,*' he told the Escudier brothers in Paris in the 1840s, 'and it will not see the light of day until after my death.' It was the defensive action of a wounded man. The opera's triumphant revival at the 1987 Pesaro Festival proved just how wrong the Neapolitans had been.

Whilst Rossini was working on *Ermione* 'like a soul that is damned',[1] there were domestic chores to attend to: short pageants to be composed for the king, recently recovered from a serious illness, and for the state visit in early May of the king's son-in-law, the emperor of Austria. The lumberingly titled *Humble Homage to His Majesty by the artists of the Royal San*

[1] GRLD, IIIa, 229.

Carlo Theatre on the first occasion of his appearance in the Royal Theatre following his most happy recovery was staged on 19 February: a theatrical spectacular devised by the theatre's architect Antonio Niccolini, who also wrote the words of 'omaggio umiliato' itself, sung to the king by Colbran and the assembled company. Musical features included an ensemble of 120 wind instruments drawn from the combined bands of the Marines and the Grenadiers under the direction of 'the valorous Signor Caligari'.

Some of the music was reused for the emperor's state visit on 9 May. Rossini was away from Naples throughout April and May, so the music must have been arranged before he left. It includes a trio, performed by Colbran, David, and Rubini, some short dance movements, and a three-part harmonisation of Haydn's Emperor's Hymn to accompany the pageant's visually spectacular conclusion.

> At the end of the performance, while the chorus directed prayers to Felicity, and sang
>
> Serba AUGUSTO ai prodi suoi
> E a noi serba il PADRE e il RE
>
> a beautiful transparency appeared at the back of the stage, in which the KING our Lord was seen in the act of greeting his august nephew, relation, and friend, the EMPEROR.

Whilst the emperor was being feted in Naples, Rossini was being feted on an even more extravagant scale in Venice, as an eye-witness account by Lord Byron makes clear:

> There has been a splendid opera lately at the San Benedetto, by Rossini, who came in person to play the harpsichord. The people followed him about, cut off his hair 'for memory'; then he was shouted, and sonnetted, and feasted, and immortalised much more than either of the Emperors.[2]

The cue for this furor was *Eduardo e Cristina,* a work accurately described by its co-librettist, the painter and theatre designer Gherardo Bevilacqua, as a 'pasticcio melodrammatico'. It was certainly a pastiche. The libretto, and the bass aria 'Questa man la toglie a morte', were borrowed from an earlier *Eduardo e Cristina* by Rossini's chum 'mad' Pavesi. Bevilacqua relates

[2] BLJ, 132.

how he and Tottola ('Torototela', as Rossini jokingly called him) worked with Rossini on the original libretto, adapting it to numbers taken from *Adelaide di Borgogna, Ricciardo e Zoraide,* and *Ermione.* The story describes the king of Sweden's outrage at the secret marriage of his daughter Cristina to Eduardo, a gallant Swedish soldier, by whom she has had a child. Eduardo is imprisoned but is released to lead the army's defence against a Russian invasion, whose defeat is the cue for a reconciliation between the king and his errant son-in-law. Apart from the secco recitatives, some choruses, a duettino, and a 'battle and skirmish', all the music came from extant sources.

As with *Adina,* Rossini was clearly unembarrassed about making money out of a patron whose primary consideration was the exploitation of his name. The impresario of the San Benedetto, Giuseppe Cortesi, whose daughter played Eduardo, was later ridiculed in the press, not least by Stendhal.[3] Cortesi could not have cared less. He had a hit on his hands and money in the bank. Back in Naples, the *Giornale* reported, pointedly:

> [Rossini's] music, written for Venice's theatre S. Benedetto, was a triumph like no other in the history of our musical stages. The first performance, begun at eight in the evening, ended two hours after midnight because of the enthusiasm of the audience, which required repetition of nearly all the numbers and summoned the composer out onto the stage many times.[4]

For obvious reasons, *Eduardo e Cristina* never played in Naples, though it was hugely popular elsewhere in a bewildering array of editions, many of which helped themselves to music other than that used by Rossini in the original production.

On the way back to Naples, Rossini visited Pesaro for what should have been a pleasant reprise of the previous year's celebrations. In fact, it all went horribly wrong. With Count Perticari away in Rome, Rossini took rooms at the Hotel Posta, a safer choice than being left alone in the Palazzo Perticari with the count's nymphomaniac wife, whose antics the previous year had included lying naked on Rossini's unmade bed. Not that this was the only legacy from the earlier visit. In 1818 the Perticaris had advised Rossini not to accept invitations from Caroline, Princess of Wales, the es-

[3] SVR, 400.

[4] GRDS, 1 June 1819.

tranged wife of Britain's future King George IV. The problem was not so much the pleasant and much put-upon Caroline herself as the Italian gigolo Bartolomeo Bergami, whom she had taken into her service. Rumour had it that Rossini had snubbed her invitations the previous year with such ill-judged witticisms as 'certain rheumatic afflictions, having deprived him of elasticity in his spine, do not permit him to make the accustomed bows prescribed by court etiquette'. True or false, the refusals were sufficient to rile Bergami. As Rossini entered the orchestra pit of the Teatro Nuovo on the evening of 24 May 1819, Bergami's thugs began whistling and booing. The audience drowned them out, but it was a dangerous situation given the fact that the troublemakers were spread out through the theatre and armed with knives and pistols. Rossini was ushered into the relative safety of a box, where he stayed until the conclusion of the ballet. He was then spirited back to his hotel and, a few hours later, out of Pesaro itself. The townsfolk were deeply ashamed. In the days that followed, motions were passed deploring the disturbances. A gala was proposed in Rossini's honour, and a bust was commissioned. The Bergamis, however, were equally well organised, threatening disfigurement or death to anyone who publicly supported Rossini. In the end, the Papal delegate intervened, banning all events or speeches on Rossini's behalf that might lead to public disorder. Though Rossini survived into his 77th year, he never set foot in Pesaro again.

Arriving back in Naples in early June, Rossini received another unpleasant surprise. With nothing required of him by the San Carlo in the autumn of 1819 (Barbaja had signed a contract with Spontini for what he hoped would be two operas), Rossini had accepted an offer, first mooted in May 1818, to write a new opera for La Scala, Milan. Now news reached him that, confronted by an edict from the authorities in Berlin, Spontini wished to withdraw from his contractual obligation to the San Carlo. Faced with an embarrassingly large gap in his autumn schedule, Barbaja turned to Rossini. In earlier times, an existing libretto would have been pressed into service, but not now. A brand-new subject was chosen, as adventurous as it was unexpected: a reworking of Sir Walter Scott's narrative poem *The Lady of the Lake.* In his preface to the printed libretto, Tottola stated that the 'impresario of the royal theatres chose for me this difficult task', a remark which does not necessarily invalidate the story of 21-year-old Prix

de Rome winner Désiré-Alexandre Batton, who claimed that it was he who gave Rossini a copy of the poem, in French translation, earlier in the year in Rome.

Rossini began work on *La donna del lago* whilst overseeing a sumptuous new production of *La gazza ladra,* revised and expanded to meet the demands of a star-studded cast headed by Colbran, David, Nozzari, and Pisaroni. He required help with the new opera (most of the recitatives and Douglas's aria 'Taci: lo voglio' are by an assistant), and even then it missed its September deadline. Nonetheless, it is astonishing what he and Tottola achieved in so short a time: a complex and sophisticated theatrical structure, an unusually rich vein of dramatically viable melody, exquisite orchestrations, and a striking use of the kind of offstage effects Rossini had been experimenting with in the royal pageants and *Ricciardo e Zoraide. La donna del lago* single-handedly launched the vogue for 'Walter Scott' operas. Not for nothing did it become one of Rossini's best-loved works.

Within a week of its delayed first night on 24 October, Rossini was in Milan. Stendhal claimed to have met him the moment he arrived. In a waspish letter to his friend Adolphe de Mareste, he reported:

> I saw Rossini yesterday upon his arrival. In April [*sic*] he will be twenty-eight, and wishes to retire at thirty. He is avaricious and four years ago didn't have a sou. He has just placed 100,000 francs with Barbaglia [Barbaja] at 7½ a year. He receives a thousand francs a month as the despotic director of the San Carlo theatre, . . . Apart from that, he receives 4,000 francs for every opera he writes, and he has requests for as many as he is able to compose. His *Dama* [*sic*] *del Lago,* on a subject taken from Walter Scott, had an enormous success. Soon he will present us with *Bianca Capello* [*sic*], which we shall judge on 26 December. We shall be severe.[5]

Bianca e Falliero opened as advertised on 26 December. The libretto, by Felice Romani, was an essentially old-fashioned structure, cast in eleven long movements, a world away from the altogether more fluid prototype music-drama Rossini and Tottola had fashioned for *La donna del lago.* The story is not dissimilar to that of *Eduardo e Cristina.* With experienced singers, a fine orchestra, and appropriately monumental designs by Sanquirico, the production ran for a record 39 performances, despite a mixed

[5] *Correspondance,* I, 995.

response from the Milan audience to the music itself. The composition of *Bianca e Falliero* is a fine example of Rossini's professionalism and chameleon-like skill in adapting his art to the particular needs of the commissioning theatre. His creation within the space of six months of the innovatory *La donna del lago* and the very different *Bianca e Falliero* is one of his most characteristic achievements.

The year 1820 brought with it the measure of respite Rossini had looked for in 1819 but not found. Unusually, it began with him devoting a good deal of his time not to his own music but to Spontini's: the first Italian performance of a revised version of one of the operas Barbaja had been hoping to stage the previous year, the tragédie lyrique *Fernand Cortez*. A Colbran benefit evening on 7 February, consisting of act 1 of *La donna del lago* and act 2 of *Fernand Cortez,* gave the *Giornale* the opportunity to compare the 'grateful and melodious style' of Rossini with the 'exhausting and studied' manner of Berlin's new Generalmusikdirektor.

On 28 February Colbran's father died in Bologna. It was a distressing event not only for Isabella but for the Rossini family, not least for Rossini himself, who felt moved to reaffirm his deep affection for his own parents. Materially, Colbran was now exceptionally well off. In addition to the country estate at Castenaso which her father had acquired from a Spanish vendor during the land-price depression of the Napoleonic years, she inherited capital as well as land in Sicily. Conversely, she had lost the mainstay of her life, a role which now passed to Rossini at a time when skill and sensitivity were needed in managing a voice and a career which were already in decline. Some time after the funeral, Rossini wrote to an acquaintance, the sculptor Adamo Tadolini, with a view to commissioning a funerary monument. Tadolini was a pupil of Antonio Canova, and there was something Canova-like about the design sketched by Rossini in a second letter to Tadolini. The daughter at the foot of the mausoleum, Rossini suggested, should be seen weeping for her father; on the other side, there should be a singer chanting his glories.[6] The mausoleum, which Rossini now formally acquired, was eventually designed not by Tadolini but by Del Rosso, a sculptor from Carrara. Isabella is buried there, and so too are Rossini's parents.

[6] GRLD, I, 416.

As usual, Rossini wrote a new work for the Lent season, though for the first time in his professional career it was not an opera. It was a *Messa di Gloria,* one of a trio of important sacred works by him which would also include the *Stabat mater* and the *Petite messe solennelle.* As the title suggests, the setting confines itself to the 'Kyrie' and 'Gloria' of the mass. Written for four soloists, chorus, and orchestra, the ten-movement setting was first performed on March 24, on the feast of the Sorrows of Our Lady, in the church of San Ferdinando, adjacent to the San Carlo theatre. The *Giornale* found Rossini's foray into sacred music 'gifted, serious, and sublime', but posterity preferred a racy and in places unreliable account of the occasion by the German composer Carl von Miltitz which first appeared as a footnote in the German edition of Stendhal's *Vie de Rossini.* The Protestant Miltitz found the occasion itself unimpressive:

> The organ playing throughout the rite was deplorable. With the orchestra tuning up at the same time and Rossini calling in a loud voice now to this member, now to that member of the orchestra, one can well imagine how the sanctity of the place was respected.

Curiously, Miltitz approved of the 'Gloria', despite the fact that its inclusion and treatment might be thought more appropriate to Christmas than to Lent. 'The 'Gloria', which the Neapolitans applauded as if they were in a theatre, was conceived as the juxtaposition of an angel choir and the rejoicing of the shepherds—not a new idea but an agreeable one.'[7] It must have made an odd bedfellow for Pergolesi's *Stabat mater,* which was also included in the programme, though not mentioned by Miltitz.

By May, Rossini had accepted a new commission from the Teatro San Carlo to set a libretto by another of the city's leading men of letters, Cesare della Valle, Duke of Ventignano. Based on della Valle's own recent play *Anna Erizo, Maometto II* would be the most ambitious of all Rossini's works for the Italian stage. Its composition process was long and laborious, the circumstances of its making unexpectedly fraught. Della Valle's play is a tragic love story set against the background of fifteenth-century Turkish–Venetian wars. It must have seemed a safe enough subject when Rossini took it on. By midsummer, however, Naples itself was teetering on the brink of civil war.

[7] WRLT, 210–12.

In early July a group comprising Carbonari, disaffected army officers, and anti-Bourbon fellow travellers led by General Guglielmo Pepe captured the hill town of Avellino 50 kilometres east of Naples. They then marched on Naples, demanding an audience with King Ferdinand and a new constitution such as had been granted to Spain in 1812. Perhaps it came as no surprise that Ferdinand, with his rough and ready ways and his fondness for rubbing shoulders with ordinary folk, gave in on the spot. On 6 July, Naples became a constitutional monarchy, to the dismay of the 'Great Powers', and to the consternation of court dependants such as Rossini, who were less than reassured by the sight of Pepe, now 'Inspector General of Militia', marching through the city at the head of a gun-touting, knife-brandishing, tricolour-carrying mob shouting 'King and Constitution' and 'Liberty or Death'.

Subsequent elections produced a moderate parliament of respected familiars. To Metternich, who saw in Europe's newly influential professional and intellectual classes the seedbed of future revolutions, this relatively peaceful transfer of power was a good deal more worrisome than bloody revolution, which could have been addressed by military means. In January 1821 a still nervous Ferdinand was summoned to a meeting of European leaders in Laibach. He attended with the permission of the Naples parliament but promptly betrayed it by seeking military intervention from Austria. Since the British had refused point-blank to grant Austria a right of general intervention in Italy but had nonetheless conceded certain limited interests, Metternich acceded to the request. 'This is the third time I have put Ferdinand back on his feet', he is said to have remarked. 'He thinks that the throne is an easy chair to sprawl and sleep in.' On 7 March, Austrian troops defeated Neapolitan revolutionaries 40 miles north of Rome; a fortnight later they entered Naples itself. Ferdinand delayed his own return by two months, by which time the newly restored regime had shown its fangs with a programme of bloody reprisals, which further dismayed the already disillusioned Metternich. It was against this bizarre and troubled background that Rossini was destined to see out the final twenty months of his time in Naples.

Not surprisingly, *Maometto II* missed a number of deadlines before finally reaching the stage on 3 December. In September the San Carlo had come under the control of a new 'Regolamento Organico de' Teatri'. Carafa and Barbaja remained in place, but for how long could only be guessed at. Rossini, meanwhile, was modifying della Valle's libretto, accentuating the

human aspect of the tragedy, playing down the political and nationalistic elements. Lines in the final scene in which the heroine pours scorn on those who would presume to conquer Italy, sentiments which would have been music to the ears of the new constitutionalists, appear to have been removed by Rossini in a prudent act of self-censorship. Was he aware that he was still regarded by the Austrian secret police as someone 'strongly infected by revolutionary principles'?[8] Or was he simply taking politics out of art, hedging his bets in advance of the possibility of artistic preferment in Vienna, Paris, and London?

Creatively, Rossini had set himself a mountain to climb. *Maometto II* is the first Rossini opera for which working sketches have survived of the kind we might expect to find for an opera by Beethoven or Verdi. Sketches for earlier operas may have been made and lost, though as Philip Gossett notes in a discussion of the *Maometto II* sketches, the skeleton scores of most of Rossini's earlier works are largely free from errors or uncertainties: 'The clarity of the composer's thought, even in complex ensembles, is extraordinary. The internal voices in a sextet such as 'Quest'è un nodo avviluppato' from *La Cenerentola* are written with precision and conviction, even though they are entered in ink'.[9] Even Mozart began revising in the final phase of his career. Rossini, as he approached his twenty-ninth year and his twenty-ninth opera, was heading in a similar direction.

The reception of this epic, richly worked score was not as chilly as that accorded *Ermione,* yet it was further confirmation that Rossini was moving in a direction the Naples audience was reluctant to follow. Not that he had much time to ponder reactions to his latest offering. On 20 November his doctor had been asked to send a sick-note on his behalf to the superintendent of theatres in Rome, where Rossini had been expected some weeks earlier by the Teatro Apollo's unforgiving owner, Giovanni Torlonia, Duke of Bracciano. A wealthy banker who would later take over most of Rome's theatres, Torlonia had recently bought and restored the Apollo. Rossini's new opera was meant to open the season. In desperation, *La Cenerentola* was substituted, followed by an opera by Filippo Grazioli. Not until 24 February, only ten days before the start of Lent, did the new opera finally reach the stage.

[8] Memorandum, Venice, 3 March 1821; GRLD, I, 482–83.

[9] CCR, 77.

Rossini had thought to finish the half-started piece once he reached Rome but, from the outset, chaos prevailed. First, the libretto he had brought from Naples based on J.-M. de Monvel's *Mathilde de Morwel* was neither complete nor entirely suitable. His old friend Jacopo Ferretti was summoned to provide some kind of solution. Ferretti, who was already up to his eyes in work, took down a libretto he had begun to adapt from François Benoît Hoffman's libretto for Méhul's opera *Euphrosine et Coradin, ou Le Tyran corrigé*. Names were a problem (*Matilde* had already been announced to the public), but as Ferretti later explained: 'Since the subject was not an historical one and the lovely enchantress who softened Ironheart in the old comedy was called Isabella Shabran, I took the liberty of changing the title and calling my melodrama *Matilde di Shabran*'.[10]

The result of Ferretti's labours, as hasty as they were Herculean, was a vast, action-packed, hilariously disjunct melodramma giocoso which even Rossini was incapable of ingesting in the time. Faced with turning *Matilde di Shabran* into pastiche or treating it as a new work, parts of which would have to be 'made good' at a later date, Rossini opted for the latter course. The most substantial self-borrowings were a tenor aria for the hero Corradino, 'Anima mia, Matilde', taken practically without change from the tenor cavatina, 'S'ella m'è ognor fedele' from *Ricciardo e Zoraide,* and the overture, largely derived from *Eduardo e Cristina*. Then, with time running out and six numbers still to write, he turned to his young friend Giovanni Pacini, whose *La gioventù di Enrico V* had just opened at the Teatro Valle:

> One fine morning, toward the end of Carnival, the following note was delivered to him. 'Dearest Pacini! Come to me as soon as you can, for I need you. In these circumstances one knows one's friends!' G. Rossini. As can be easily understood, Pacini was there very quickly. [Rossini explained] 'Torlonia is tormenting me, and rightly so, which is why I thought of dividing the effort with you: that is, you will compose three pieces and I will compose three. Here's a paper and chair—write!' Pacini said nothing but set to work.[11]

As Pacini later put it, 'It was a great honour to be the companion in misfortune of the Maestro of Maestri'.[12]

[10] GRR, 414–15.

[11] F. Regli, *Dizionario biografico* (Turin, 1860), 370–71.

[12] It was a temporary honour. In November 1821, Rossini staged a revised version of the opera at Naples's Teatro del Fondo under the title *Bellezza e Cuor di ferro* ('Beauty and Ironheart'). All

Misfortune was not confined to the writing of the opera. Shortly before the first night, the first violin and director of the orchestra, Giovanni Bollo, suffered a seizure. The first horn was also taken ill. Bollo's replacement was Niccolò Paganini, no less, who led the orchestra and played an important horn obbligato on the viola. Rossini and Paganini had first met and played together in Bologna in the spring of 1818, though Paganini's interest in Rossini's music, source material for some of his most dazzling and imaginative improvisations, had begun five years earlier with the publication of *Tancredi*. It was a friendship that would last until Paganini's death in 1840.

The opera, an uproarious mock-heroic comedy rich in send-ups of the very genre it was meant to represent, was noisily received by Rome's usual pro- and anti-Rossini factions. There was also a serious dispute between Rossini and Torlonia, who refused to pay the contracted 500 scudi on the grounds that *Matilde di Shabran* was late and not entirely Rossini's own work. Rossini, a reluctant payer himself but a ruthless pursuer of others, immediately reclaimed the vocal and orchestral parts, at the same time taking the precaution of informing Cardinal Tommaso Bernetti, governor of Rome and head of the theatre and police commissariats, of the action he had taken. Since the opera played continuously until the end of the carnival season, we must assume that Torlonia backed down.

With *Matilde di Shabran* safely out of the way, Rossini and Paganini became involved in a carnival masquerade celebrated in the memoirs of their fellow reveller and future prime minister Massimo d'Azeglio:

> We decided to mask as blind people and sing requests for charity as they do. We put together four lines of verse which said

Siamo cechi; siamo nati	We are blind; we were born
Per camper di cortesia.	To survive on courtesy.
In giornata d'allegria	On this happy day
Non si nega carità	Don't refuse us charity.

> Rossini and Paganini had to act as the orchestra, strumming two guitars, and they decided to dress as women. Rossini filled out his already abundant form

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Pacini's contributions were removed, with the exception of his secco recitatives, as was the music borrowed from *Ricciardo e Zoraide*. This new version of the opera might well have been regarded as definitive had Rossini not recast the role of the poet Isidoro in Neapolitan dialect.

> with bundles of straw, looking absolutely inhuman! Paganini, as thin as a door, and with a face that seemed to be the neck of his violin, appeared twice as thin and loose-limbed when dressed in drag.[13]

As an old man, Rossini paid tribute to Paganini in one of his 'Sins of Old Age', the Elegy in D for violin and piano, 'Un mot à Paganini', an expressive and virtuosic piece whose principal theme would be the envy of any writer of salon music, however distinguished.

By early March, Austrian troops were advancing south towards Naples, which they reached on 23 March, the same day as Rossini and Paganini, whose journey must have involved some form of secure escort. Rossini immediately set about rehearsing Haydn's *The Creation* for performances on 10 and 12 April. The soloists were Colbran, Rubini, Nozzari, and Benedetti. Rossini's more or less exact contemporary, the French composer Hérold, was invited to attend the performances. He was on a scouting mission from Paris, recruiting singers for the Théâtre Italien, but was also charged with approaching Rossini about the possibility of a French production of *Mosè in Egitto.*

It would be a summer of international negotiation. With Ferdinand restored to his throne courtesy of Metternich and the Austrian army, and with Metternich himself in thrall to the music of Rossini, Barbaja was able to drive forward plans for the San Carlo Opera to play the 1822 spring season in Vienna as part of the Hapsburg's programme of leasing the Kärntnertortheater to enterprising foreign impresarios. The repertoire was designed to include a new opera by Rossini which the company would premiere in Naples towards the end of the 1822 carnival season. Meanwhile Rossini himself had begun detailed discussions with the agent and impresario Giovanni Benelli about the possibility of Benelli's sponsoring a Rossini season in London, for which, it was proposed, two new operas would be written.[14]

It is clear in retrospect that Rossini was planning to leave Naples for good and that Colbran would be leaving with him. He had been frank with his parents about his own personal situation: the fact, for instance, that he

[13] M. D'Azeglio, *I miei Ricordi* (Florence, 1888/*R* Rome, 1965), 220–21. When Ricordi published the piece in 1847 as *Carnevale di Venezia,* it emerged as an ensemble for 2 T, 2 B, and pf.

[14] GRLD, I, 544–45; GRLD, IIIa, 301.

had been suffering from gonorrhea. Now he prepared to broach an even larger subject, one that would please his mother and agitate her in equal measure. On 30 November he wrote to announce that he and Colbran were to marry. It is a long letter by Rossini's standards and it begins in a more than usually high-flown and convoluted style:

> My good Mother.
> Time, Reason that oversee everything, establish everything, have led me into the path of reason and happy tranquillity. Until now, I looked after you, my good parents, and while I was taken up with these noble feelings, there was a person who prepared for me a most beautiful future. This is La Colbran whose heart and character bound me by an indissoluble knot. You know how much she loved her good father: how this comforts me because I know she will love you, and I know how happy I shall be among all those things of yours for which I would happily shed my blood.

Having written the most difficult part of the letter, Rossini moved into a more businesslike mode. He and Isabella would be happy for Anna to leave Bologna (where she had for some time being living separate from her husband) to share their home at Castenaso. As to the practical benefits of the relationship:

> Since I gave myself to her, I did not suffer from any disease, I changed my impetuous character for a sweeter one, I used to be untidy, now I am as impeccable as my mother.[15]

Disingenuous as this may have been, it was what his mother wanted to hear. The wedding date was set for mid-March, between the end of the Naples season and the start of the Viennese tour.

A few days after the wedding, Rossini wrote to Benelli, 'I do not want to return to Naples after Vienna nor do I want my wife to return there'.[16] If the die was cast, the Naples authorities could only have half guessed at the fact. Aware, perhaps, that some gesture towards him would not come amiss if the city was not to lose him entirely, they granted Rossini a benefit evening at the San Carlo. On 10 August he informed his mother that he was writing a pastoral cantata in honour of the king's aunt, Maria Luisa

[15] GRLD, IIIa, 302–6.
[16] GRLD, II, 2.

di Borbone, Duchess of Lucca. It was called *La riconoscenza* ('Gratitude'), and it received its first public performance at the Rossini benefit evening in the presence of 'the Royal family, all the ministers, and the cream of society' on 27 December. The evening yielded 3,000 ducats, about $50,000 at today's rate.

The text for *La riconoscenza* was the work of the Neapolitan poet Giulio Genoino, whose specialty was verses for court occasions. A shepherd and shepherdess, Argene and Melania, discuss the source of the blessings they have received. They are a gift from the gods, suggests Argene, who finds in Melania an apt and enquiring pupil. They visit an Arcadian grove where the philosopher Fileno celebrates the harmony of the world about him. After meeting the priestly Elpino and watching shepherds offer sacrifices to the gods, Melania expresses gratitude for her new-found knowledge, at which point the assembled company hymns the beneficent deities. The music itself reaffirms the lyric-idyllic aesthetic of *Tancredi* and parts of *La donna del lago,* whilst foreshadowing (in the opening duet for Argene and Melania, for example) the enriched version of the aesthetic that will be encountered in *Semiramide.* The work's high point is Fileno's Ossianic 'In giorno si bello', an exquisitely crafted aria with harp and horn accompaniment, written for the preternaturally gifted young tenor Giovanni Battista Rubini. Rossini had heard him as the Prince in *La Cenerentola* and seems to have recognised at once what he later called 'singing which you can feel in your soul'.[17] Rubini and Comelli, who sang the role of Melania, would have had their own reasons to be grateful; they had married the previous March. Today it is difficult to see *La riconoscenza* as anything other than a court pastoral, a rather dated piece of *Gebrauchsmusik.* It was, however, historically significant: the first royal gala in the annals of Neapolitan music-making when the composer was king.

Rossini was again royally treated after the prima of *Zelmira* on 16 February 1822. The opera had been on the stocks since the previous August. As summer turned to autumn, he took time out to oversee the Naples prima of the revised, all Rossini version of *Matilde di Shabran. Zelmira,* though, was clearly a labour of love. It was not the most interesting subject he had tackled during his time in Naples. Musically, however, it was both a summation and an advance, an Italian opera written with a Viennese audience

[17] Letter, 15 June 1851; RGR, 302.

in mind. The critic of the *Giornale* sensed as much in his review of the first night:

> The latest crown which [Rossini] gains in [Naples], the homeland of harmony and musical expression, is not to be confused with his earlier crowns: in our opinion, this one is worth all the others put together. Rossini is taking great strides along the road to perfection.[18]

On 10 March, Rossini conducted a Lenten performance of Mayr's oratorio *Atalia,* an occasion complicated by Colbran's refusal (or inability) to sing the title role and the consequent need for Rossini to adjust parts of the role for the darker-voiced and not wholly adequate substitute, Giuseppina Fabbré. A few days earlier Mayr's pupil, the 24-year-old Gaetano Donizetti, arrived in Naples. In a letter to Mayr, he complained vigorously about Colbran's defection, about the cuts which were being made in the music, about Rossini's 'jesuitical' complaints about the singers and his habit of gossiping with prima donnas during rehearsal when he would have been better employed conducting.[19] By contrast, a report which appeared in the *Journal des Débats* on 11 March gives a rather different picture of Rossini's rehearsal methods during the preparations for *Zelmira:*

> Rossini has a way of rehearsing which is entirely his own. He never gets ruffled; he hardly says two or three words, and trusts the work of [Giuseppe] Festa [the orchestra's famously exacting leader] completely. His principle is not to upset the orchestra and, above all, not to humiliate the singers. His prodigious memory allows him to make his observations to each one in particular after the rehearsal. Leaving the San Carlo, I accompanied him to the house of the copyist, to whom he pointed out some fifty mistakes without looking at the score! The more one observes this man at close quarters, the more one finds him a superior being.'[20]

The king attended three of the eight performances of *Zelmira,* including the closing night, 6 March, at which the company was wished 'bon voyage' as it prepared to leave for Vienna. On 11 March, Rossini packed his effects for the journey north. It would be seventeen years before he saw Naples again.

[18] GRDS, 18 February 1822.

[19] GRLD, I, 584–85.

[20] GRR, I, 432–34.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Vienna, Verona, Venice (1822–1823)

ROSSINI AND COLBRAN WERE MARRIED ON 16 MARCH 1822 IN the church of the Blessed Virgin of Pilar on the Castenaso estate, a sanctuary dating back to the Spanish conquest of Bologna in the fourteenth century.[1] The ceremony and the setting meant a great deal to Colbran, a devout Catholic who never forgot her Spanish roots. The wedding was attended by Rossini's parents, along with Nozzari, David, and Ambrosi. Two servants stood witness. Rossini's legal entitlement under the terms of the marriage dowry has been estimated at 40,000 Roman scudi.[2] Inevitably, tongues wagged. His motives for marrying were questioned; the disparity in their ages was exaggerated. (She was 37, he was 30.) Unhappily, the gossips were proved right. The marriage was not a success. There were a number of reasons, principal among which was the fact that whereas Rossini's career was about to move into a new and even more exalted sphere, Colbran's was all but over. In the 1830s, when Rossini was working in Paris and already living with Olympe Pélissier, whom he would marry after Isabella's death in 1845, it was his widowed father back in Bologna who had to put up with Isabella's gambling, tantrums, and deepening disaffection.

Barbaja was not at the wedding. Relations had begun to cool between the two men, partly as the result of a dispute over the rights to the *Zelmira*

[1] The Colbran villa, but not the church, was destroyed in the Second World War.

[2] In excess of $100,000.

manuscript. Contemporary practice was that ownership of a manuscript reverted to the composer after one year. In the case of *Zelmira,* which Barbaja had commissioned for the Kärntnertortheater, Rossini not only retained the manuscript, but in April 1822 sold the rights directly to Viennese publisher Domenico Artaria as part of a three-opera deal that also included *Maometto II* and *Matilde di Shabran.* Barbaja's response was to withhold from Rossini the capital and interest he had invested in Barbaja's theatre and gaming empires, a matter which was not fully resolved until 1826.[3] The *Zelmira* standoff was not simply a question of Rossini's rebelling against his old mentor. It marked the moment when he finally took charge of his own career. From this point on he was both a composer and an autonomous brand.

The Rossinis arrived in Vienna on 23 March. Four days later they attended a performance of Weber's *Der Freischütz.* Weber was another of Barbaja's 'artists' and an important part of his strategy for the Kärntnertortheater. A new opera, *Euryanthe,* had been commissioned for the following year. Perhaps it was a happy chance that Weber left Vienna two days before Rossini arrived. His fear of Rossini, like his fear of Beethoven, bordered on paranoia, not least because there were qualities in the music to which he was drawn. He had heard *La donna del lago* in Dresden and is said to have fled from a performance of *La Cenerentola* after the Dandini-Magnifico duet, muttering 'I'm beginning to like this stuff!' According to his son, he feared that *Euryanthe* would be no more than 'dreamy moonlight' compared with the 'bright day' of Rossini's writing. The two men did eventually meet when Weber, already a dying man, called on Rossini in Paris in 1826. 'Not having foreseen his visit', Rossini told Wagner in 1860, 'I must admit that when I found myself unexpectedly facing that composer of genius, I felt an emotion not too unlike the one I had felt earlier upon finding myself in the presence of Beethoven'.[4] To Rossini's embarrassment, Weber had come to apologise for his earlier attitude to his rival's music. For his part, Rossini tried, unsuccessfully, to dissuade Weber from travelling to London.

The San Carlo's Vienna season opened on 13 April with *Zelmira.* The omens were not good: Colbran sang through an 'indisposition', she and the

[3] GRLD, II, 154–56, 523–27.

[4] EM, 34.

rest of the cast were troubled by a smaller auditorium than they were used to in Naples, and Rossini thought the orchestra, though superbly drilled, deficient in power. Nonetheless, the opera, its author, and the company were greeted with acclamation. The season continued with *La Cenerentola* and, on 7 May, *Matilde di Shabran* in the Naples revision with Giovanni David in the title role. Rossini wrote no new music for the revival but David was given an extra aria, Orestes's cavatina 'Che sorda al mesto pianto' from act 1 of *Ermione*. Beethoven's amanuensis, Anton Schindler, quoted the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* on the opera's reception:

> It was really enough, more than enough. The entire performance was like an idolatrous orgy; everyone acted there as if he had been bitten by a tarantula; the shouting, crying, yelling of 'viva' and 'fora' went on and on.[5]

It was a long evening, as Rossini was the first to notice. Some days later the same paper reported: 'Rossini has now grasped, with an able and decisive hand, the cutting scissors'. The production remained in the Kärntnertortheater's repertory for some years, often with David as Corradino. It was after seeing a performance of *Corradino* in Vienna in 1824 that the German philosopher Hegel (an ardent admirer of Rossini, as were Schopenhauer, Heine, and other German intellectuals mesmerised by the abstract power of music and the lure of the south) made the memorable remark that Italian music is made for Italian throats as surely as Strasbourg pâtés are made for the throats of gourmets'.[6]

If Vienna was gripped by Rossini fever, Rossini himself was gripped by curiosity as to the whereabouts of the city's most important resident, Beethoven. He knew some of Beethoven's music and would hear the *Eroica* Symphony during his visit, but what of the man himself? The famously mendacious Schindler reports that Beethoven refused to see Rossini but there is documentary evidence to refute this claim. It is true, preliminary overtures through Artaria came to nothing. It was left to Salieri and Rossini's principal publicist in Vienna, Giuseppe Carpani, to arrange a meeting, which Rossini would later recount in detail to Hiller, Wagner, and the Viennese critic Hanslick. Alexander Thayer, in his *Life of Beethoven*, quotes Hanslick's reiteration of Schindler's story and Rossini's response that, on

[5] A. Schindler, *Beethoven as I Knew Him*, translated by C. Jolly (London, 1966), 271.

[6] *Briefe von und an Hegel* (Leipzig, 1887), 154.

the contrary, he was received promptly and politely, albeit briefly, given the fact that conversation with Beethoven was nothing less than painful. The meeting took place at one of the most absorbing moments in Beethoven's career. Litigation, hard work, and illness had borne down upon him; yet only weeks before, he had finished the benedictory Opus 110 Piano Sonata, the *Missa Solemnis* was nearing completion, and the Ninth Symphony was begun a few months later. In his conversation with Wagner, Rossini talked of the 'indefinable sadness' which spread across Beethoven's features, 'so that from under heavy eyebrows there shone, as if from the depths of caverns, two eyes which, though small, seemed to pierce you'.[7]

Beethoven thought Rossini a talented and melodious composer, suited to the sensuous and frivolous spirit of the times. What had really stirred his interest was *Il barbiere di Siviglia,* an uproarious, disciplined, iconoclastic piece, which Beethoven had read with more pleasure and understanding than did many of his contemporaries. According to Rossini, he was sceptical about the ability of any Italian composer to treat serious subjects. Despite Carpani's singing the praises of *Tancredi, Otello,* and *Mosè in Egitto,* Beethoven's parting remark to Rossini was, 'Above all, make lots of Barbers!' It is a measure of the taste of the times, however, that at a concert in Vienna the following May 'Di tanti palpiti' was sung between the 'Kyrie' of the *Missa Solemnis* and the finale of the Ninth Symphony.

The disorder and apparent poverty in which Beethoven lived came as something of a shock to Rossini, the more so when contrasted with the glitter of the many receptions and dinners he himself attended at Metternich's bidding during his time in Vienna. The situation moved Rossini to speak of the need to find Beethoven better lodgings and greater recognition from Viennese society. He even contemplated launching a subscription, but the idea was poorly supported. To the Viennese, Beethoven was an odd bird, an outsider. Give him a house, they said, and he will sell it. The two men never met again. It is said that when Schumann heard of their meeting, he remarked: 'The butterfly crossed the path of the eagle, but the latter turned aside in order not to crush it with the beating of his wings'.

Enthusiasm for Rossini's music reached even dizzier heights when *La gazza ladra* was played on 21 June. There were also two benefit evenings

[7] EM, 44.

for the Rossinis. Rossini had suggested a performance of *La Riconoscenza* for the Colbran benefit on 30 May; she chose *Elisabetta, regina d'Inghilterra* instead. For his own benefit evening on 8 July he offered a one-act digest of *Ricciardo e Zoraide.* Before leaving Vienna on 22 July, he wrote a song, 'Addio ai viennesi', which he would reuse, suitably amended and called 'Addio di Rossini', as his farewell to a number of cities. The first stanza, in the minor, speaks of leave-taking; the second pays tribute to the people, 'nobile e sincero', from whom he is reluctantly departing. The third is a covert tribute to the sensuality of song, after which Rossini asks his audience to imagine him expressing his feeling with 'a crescendo of sighs', the famous crescendo punningly alluded to, before being subsumed in a grand yet perfectly scaled peroration with which he makes the Danube (Thames, Seine, or whichever) resound to the applause of the adoring multitude. The song is quintessential Rossini: affecting yet ironic, propelled and coloured by harmonies which are as unobtrusive as they are ingenious, gloriously laid out for the voice, grand but never pompous, and not a moment too long. No wonder they were charmed by him.

No one regretted Rossini's departure more than Metternich. On 14 April he confided to his diary: 'It is difficult to understand the enormous pleasure [Rossini's music] gives to a music enthusiast like me. In these moments, a shaft of sunlight penetrates the darkness of my prison: such is the extent of my emotion and my feeling'.[8] With a difficult summit meeting of European leaders scheduled to take place in Verona in November, Metternich invited Rossini be the event's 'official composer'. His fee, *The Times* reported on 28 October, was 50,000 francs.

At the same time as Rossini was talking to Metternich about Verona, he was also brokering deals with the Teatro La Fenice in Venice. A revival of *Maometto II* would be followed by a new opera, *Semiramide,* during the 1823 Carnival season. On 10 July, Rossini wrote to theatre's director, Camillo Gritti:

> Since I must leave for Italy in a few days, and I was planning to spend a day in Padua to hear the opera, I failed to write to you about the requirements for me and my wife, believing that it would be better to come to a verbal agreement either in Padua, if you can join me, or in Venice. . . . In case you can't

[8] BCRS 49 (1999), 11.

> meet me during my journey, please give instructions to our friend Peruchini, with whom I can negotiate everything. Please pay particular attention to the company because I cannot be of any use to you unless I have fine singers. As to my financial demands, you will find them more than reasonable.[9]

'More than reasonable' turned out to be a deal whereby La Fenice bought the opera, the manuscript, and all attendant rights in exchange for a greatly enhanced flat fee. In the end, they paid Rossini 26,000 lire, half the theatre's budget for the entire production. As Rossini anticipated, and the theatre soon discovered to its cost, protecting its investment against piracy was both time-consuming and expensive.

Back in Castenaso, Rossini concerned himself with domestic affairs, composed (partly with Colbran in mind) an elaborate set of vocal exercises, *Gorgheggi e solfeggi,* and in early October summoned librettist Gaetano Rossi to begin work on *Semiramide,* a subject (albeit a different aspect of it) which Rossi had previously worked on with the young Meyerbeer. Rossi was bowled over by Rossini's new home. Reporting back to Meyerbeer, he observed:

> Delicious, really, in all its pleasant surroundings: beautiful gardens, a voluptuous small chapel, lake, hills, woods, and a magnificent, elegant house. We're drafting the outline: he approved all the situations that I had already settled on. He began to compose yesterday.[10]

With November and December largely spoken for, Rossini forged ahead with the opera, driving Rossi hard, overseeing every aspect of the work. 'We've made an Introduzione à la Meyerbeer', Rossi reported triumphantly on 28 October; 'even Colbran will appear in it. A grand spectacle, an imposing picture'.[11]

Despite Metternich's personally overseeing Rossini's travel arrangements to the Verona congress, his arrival was delayed by several days, Isabella having retired to bed with a fever. The congress itself was an expensive month-long junket which ended in failure when Great Britain, the architect of the post-Napoleonic political consensus, broke ranks. Though neutral on the question of Austria's control over Italy, the Wellington-led

[9] GRLD, II, 13.
[10] GRLD, II, 44.
[11] GRLD, II, 53.

British delegation declined to back Spain in its dispute with its South American colonies. Wellington also indicated a measure of support for the Greeks in their fight for independence, an idea that was anathema to Metternich. It was the end of the Holy Alliance, an arrangement which, as Rossini himself was fond of pointing out, was neither holy nor an alliance.

The majority of the public functions—assemblies, banquets, ballets, musical and theatrical spectaculars—took place in the open-air arena where an 128-strong band was on hand, its contribution described by one observer as 'horrendous'. Rossini was feted, flattered, gratified, bored, and exhausted in more or less equal measure. In addition to being asked to oversee revivals of *L'inganno felice* and *La donna del lago* at the Teatro Filarmonico (Metternich had asked for *Zelmira* but Colbran was too ill to perform), he was contracted to provide music for two major events. The first, *La santa alleanza,* which took place in the Arena on 24 November, was a celebration of the Holy Alliance for which a censored, watered-down text was set to the music of the 'Chorus of the Bards' from *La donna del lago.* The second, *Il vero omaggio,* an indoor event at the Teatro Filarmonico given before the assembled heads of state and their delegations, took place on 3 December. For this, Rossini wheeled out *La riconoscenza* in an adaptation that accommodated Velluti as Alceo and the tenor Gaetano Crivelli as 'Il Genio dell'Austria'.

This project too ended in an unseemly dustup when an official from Verona's Chamber of Commerce demanded that the librarian hand over Rossini's autograph manuscript, which the Chamber claimed was its property. Rossini wrote two letters, the first angry (which received a threatening reply), the second laconic and laced with irony. Since he had taken the precaution of asking for his fee to be paid in advance, the Chamber was in no position to haggle. It sought legal advice but was advised, first, that it had no case, second, that Rossini was a close personal friend of Metternich, a point about which this foolhardy band of local worthies was apparently unaware.

Rossini was left with less time than he might have liked to prepare his Venetian version of *Maometto II* for the start of the 1822–1823 season on 26 December. It was, nonetheless, a distinctive edition. An overture was added and, to spare Venetian sensibilities, a happy ending provided ('Tanti affetti' from *La donna del lago*) as the Turks fail to destroy the Venetian-held Negroponte. Colbran appeared as Anna, and three days later as Zoraide,

but she remained in poor health and indifferent voice. That her art was still intact is proven by some sympathetic reviews, but audiences were restive. In the new year a blasphemous version of the kind of notice Italians publish when a family member dies began appearing on flyers near the opera house:

Pregate
† Per L'Anima †
Della
Colbran Rossini

It was not a good omen for the opening night of *Semiramide,* preparations for which were interrupted by the arrival in Venice of Metternich, accompanied by the tsar of Russia and the emperor of Austria. Rossini conducted two concerts in their honour and also sang for them. The tsar rewarded him with a diamond-encrusted ring, the emperor with a polite smile.[12] *Semiramide* opened on 3 February. The legend of Queen Semiramide, much used by earlier composers and rich in dramatic archetypes, drew from Rossini a score which would resonate down the years. As the apotheosis of the Italian neoclassical style and a consummate example of music's ability to map sensation for sensation's sake, it was destined to hold the stage for as long as there were singers to sing it.

Another artist who had imbued neoclassical forms with lyricism, grace, and a certain voluptuous charm was the Italian sculptor Antonio Canova, who had died in Venice at the age of 64. On 12 March, Rossini travelled north to meet the president of the University of Treviso. The unveiling of a memorial bust to Canova was due to take place on 1 April and Rossini was invited to provide a musical 'homage'. The result was *Alla memoria di Canova. Omaggio pastorale*: two movements from *La riconoscenza,* prefaced by the recently written overture to *Maometto II.* A brief stretch of recitative, fashioned to some 'appropriate' words, was the only new music Rossini was required to provide.

The spring and summer of 1823 were spent at Castenaso, where Rossini was able to give thought to the renovation of the palazzo he had acquired in Bologna's Strada Maggiore the previous November, and to prepare for his forthcoming appearances in Paris and London. He and Isabella left Castenaso on 20 October, stopping in Milan, where they re-

[12] AGR, 175.

ceived letters of introduction from the Duke of Devonshire to prominent members of London society. A letter to Artaria in Vienna, written in Geneva on 4 November, requests the loan of a score and parts for *Semiramide* and hints at some kind of reciprocal arrangement regarding the new opera Rossini was planning to write in London.[13] The following morning they began the four-day journey north to Paris.

[13] GRLD, II, 191–92.

CHAPTER NINE

Paris and London (1823–1824)

'NAPOLEON IS DEAD; BUT A NEW CONQUEROR HAS ALREADY shown himself to the world', wrote Stendhal in September 1823. 'From Moscow to Naples, from London to Vienna, from Paris to Calcutta, his name is constantly on every tongue.'[1] The Rossinis arrived in Paris at the rue Rameau on 9 November 1823 as guests of the Genoese writer Nicola Bagioli. They stayed for a month, during which time they had vivid foretastes of Parisian salon society and the socialising, gourmandising, and musical infighting which was to come. The grandest event of Rossini's stay took place at the Restaurant Au Veau-qui-tette in the place du Châtelet on Sunday, 16 November. Over 150 guests, drawn from the cream of Parisian society, paid to attend. Musicians who were present included Auber, Boieldieu, and Hérold, as well as a number of singers, among them the 22-year-old Laure Cinti-Damoreau,[2] whose talent and beauty would be an inspiration to Rossini in the months and years to come. Rossini himself was seated between two established stars, Giuditta Pasta, the *prima donna assoluta* of the Théâtre Italien, where *Tancredi, Il barbiere di Siviglia, Otello,* and *La gazza ladra* had recently played to packed houses, and the great comic actress Mademoiselle Mars, doyenne of the Comédie-Française. Also present was the painter Horace Vernet, whose mistress was Olympe Pélissier, the woman destined to become Rossini's second wife.

[1] SVR, 3.

[2] See plate 15.

The event, described by one newspaper as 'a colossal picnic', was dominated by all manner of visual, gastronomic, and musical manifestations of the Rossini fever. It even spawned a theatrical sequel, a one-act vaudeville by Eugène Scribe and Edmond Mazères entitled *Rossini à Paris, ou Le grand dîner,* which opened at the Théâtre Gymnase-Dramatique on 29 November.[3] Rossini accepted an invitation to attend the dress rehearsal. He found nothing to cause offence but was surprised by the music for the chorus 'Rossini, Rossini . . . Pourquoi n'es-tu pas ici?' It was an early version of the cancan. 'If this is the French national music', he is reported to have said, 'I may as well pack my bags. I shall never succeed in such a genre'.

Private receptions were arranged in Rossini's honour by the widow of the Duc de Berry, by Mademoiselle Mars, and by the 32-year-old Countess Merlin, the glamorous, musically gifted, Spanish-born friend of the Rossinis whose salon was without rival in its blend of intellectual accomplishment and social grace. Rossini also braved the public theatres, attending the Opéra on 10 November and accepting the plaudits of the Rossini-besotted dilettanti of the Théâtre Italien the following evening after a performance of *Il barbiere di Siviglia.* He also attended a charity performance of *Otello* starring García and Pasta. Politically, he was aware that he needed to tread carefully. As a foreign interloper in a city whose own musical traditions were being called into question, even by some of its most faithful adherents, he judged it expedient to honour the old order. At the

[3] Scribe would be Rossini's librettist for *Le Comte Ory. Rossini, ou Le grand dîner* satirises the Rossini craze sweeping Europe. In a plot that predicts Gogol's *The Government Inspector,* Rossini is expected in town at any moment, though no one knows what he looks like. A landlord by the name of Biffteakini plans a grand dinner. It will bring him large profits and will unite his two great passions, food and music, though he and his cronies are in a state of some consternation. Rossini may be a god, but all Italians are rogues. Biffteakini has a daughter who has been unsuccessfully put to music; after three months at the academy she still lacks a voice. ('How do you make an omelette without eggs?' she asks.) She does, however, have an eye for the boys. When a young student, Giraud, turns up at the inn, she takes to him at once. Giraud is a penniless conservatoire student with an ambition to produce a great edition of French operas by subscription (a jibe directed at the current state of French music publishing). News that Rossini has reached Paris leads Biffteakini and his friends to mistake Giraud for the eagerly awaited visitor. A special soup is concocted in his honour, though whilst it is being prepared Biffteakini is much exercised as to which Rossini air he should sing during the cooking; wryly, Scribe settles for 'Di tanti palpiti'. Toasts are proposed to great composers: Paisiello (a nice touch), Mozart, and Gluck. Grétry is proposed but dismissed as a purveyor of 'petite musique'. Finally, there is the grand dinner itself, the apostrophising of Giraud, and the revelation of his true identity.

dinner on 16 November he replied to the toast by asking the company to drink to 'the composers of the French school' and 'the prosperity of the Conservatoire'.

Rossini fever had only recently overtaken Paris. Beginning with a poorly received production of *L'italiana in Algeri* in 1817, the Théâtre Italien had staged eleven of his operas, albeit in what were occasionally dismembered versions. The theatre had been founded in 1801 as the 'Opéra Buffa', the brainchild of Napoleon, who wanted to bring the joys of Italian opera to the French capital. Between 1801 and 1818 it closed four times and moved to a new location five times. Its director since 1812 had been the Italian composer Ferdinando Paër. Twenty-one years Rossini's senior, Paër had a reputation for being antagonistic to the younger man's music. He was accused of delaying the staging of Rossini's operas, of promoting the weaker scores, and of mutilating the finer ones. It is difficult, however, to blame Paër alone. When theatres and their confederates in the publishing world ended up mangling a work such as *Il turco in Italia,*[4] the problem lay as much with muddle, inadvertence, and unruly artistic pragmatism as with deliberate malice. In 1822 119 of the theatre's 154 performances featured works by Rossini. Paër may have disliked Rossini and plotted against him, but there was precious little he could do to stem the flow of Rossini mania.

Rossini's cultivation of the French musical establishment during his month's visit was part of his long-term strategy. Shortly after arriving in London, he presented a four-point plan to the French government which he hoped would form the basis of a formal contract.[5] The plan proposed the writing of a new grand opera for the Académie Royale du Musique (the Paris Opéra) and an opera buffa or an opera semiseria for the Théâtre Italien, where he would also stage one of his existing operas, *Semiramide* or *Zelmira.* In return, he requested a benefit evening at the Opéra and a fee of 40,000 francs.[6]

[4] Music from several Rossini operas, principally *La Cenerentola,* was imported into the Théâtre Italien's production of *Il turco in Italia.* The version was widely circulated by French publishers whose editions were used as the basis for cheap twentieth-century reprints. As late as the 1970s it was not unusual to read reviews which claimed that *La Cenerentola* relied heavily on music written for *Il turco in Italia.*

[5] GRLD, I, 195–96.

[6] About $375,000 at today's rates.

The Rossinis arrived in London on Saturday, 13 December 1823. Rossini told his mother that the channel crossing had been 'felicissimo' and that he and Isabella had been unaffected by the stormy seas. In fact, the experience of having to endure several hours of winter weather on the open deck of a flimsy steam-driven mail boat traumatised him. He suffered a nervous collapse and was confined to his rooms in the handsomely colonnaded Quadrant of John Nash's newly built Regent Street for the best part of a week. The Russian ambassador, an acquaintance from the Verona Congress, called with an invitation from King George IV, but Rossini begged leave to decline until he was fully recovered. On 29 December he travelled to Brighton, where the court was in residence in a very different Nash creation, more theatre set than formal palace, the recently completed Royal Pavilion.

Rossini's immense fame, and a wallet full of letters of introduction, were not enough to keep at bay the more snobbish and xenophobic members of the court and press. Those who were determined to dislike him thought him casual before the king and were scandalised by his singing of Desdemona's 'Willow Song' in falsetto as a demonstration of the art of the castrato. The *Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review* was not scandalised, though it took the liberty of observing that the 'humanity and modesty of the English' had long since banished the castrato from the stage.[7] Rossini also sang the obligatory 'Largo al factotum', in which the king attempted to join. It is not recorded whether the two men compared notes on the behaviour of the king's former wife, Queen Caroline, now sadly disgraced and dead.

Those who met Rossini found him genial and rather bland. 'He certainly looks more like a sturdy beef-eating Englishman than a sensitive, fiery-spirited native of the soft climate of Italy', reported the *Quarterly*. 'His countenance when at rest is intelligent yet serious, but bears no marks of the animation which pervades and indeed forms the principal feature of his compositions.'[8] In his journal of 7 March 1824 Thomas Moore noted 'a fat, jolly-looking person, with a sort of vague archness in his eye, but nothing further'. He added: 'His mastery over the pianoforte is miraculous'.

[7] QMMR, 50.
[8] QMMR, 49–50.

Opinion on Rossini's music was divided. Old-timers such as the influential amateur musician the Earl of Mount Edgcumbe, a Paisiello man if ever there was one, were unsettled by the new phenomenon. Today we forget how noisy Rossini's music must have seemed then. Mount Edgcumbe thought 'the lavish use of noisy instruments' and 'warlike accompaniments' in *La gazza ladra* singularly inappropriate to so touching a subject. Touching it may be, but an opera set in a time of revolution, which includes among its principal characters an army deserter, and whose penultimate scene involves a march to the scaffold, has some right to 'warlike accompaniments'. Other reservations are more difficult to counter. For example, Mount Edgcumbe suggests that music which is the product of formula and mannerism is difficult to lodge in the memory. He also sensed that Rossini's imagination 'seems already to be nearly drained'.[9]

Some commentators, less musically informed than Mount Edgcumbe, opposed the Rossini cult merely on principle. Chorley tells us that when the name of Rossini was mentioned to the poet and dilettante Samuel Rogers, he would merely 'raise his eyebrows and speak of Paisiello'. The most balanced view of Rossini's music by a contemporary English writer is probably that of Leigh Hunt. Like many people, Hunt had given *Il barbiere di Siviglia* a dusty reception when he first heard it in London in 1818. By 1819 he appears to have recovered sufficiently from the shock to write a more constructive piece on *L'italiana in Algeri:*

> The author seems to delight in expressing a precipitate and multitudinous mirth; and sometimes works up and torments a passage, and pours in instrument upon instrument, till orchestra and singers all appear drunk with uproariousness, and ready to die on the spot. He carries this feeling, we think, to a pitch of genius, and even to something exclusive and peculiar to himself—nor does it hurt perhaps the general effect and character of this species of talent, that nothing seems to come amiss to him when he gives way to it, old or new, masterly or indifferent. He is like a wit, fond of punning and intoxicated with social enjoyment. Old jokes and new, his neighbours' and his own, all run merrily through his hands. His good things exalt the occasion; the occasion, in return, does as much for his bad.[10]

[9] R. Mount Edgcumbe, *Musical Reminiscences of an Old Amateur* (London, 1825, 2/1827), 126.
[10] *The Examiner,* 31 January 1819, 77.

By 1824 Hunt had come to the conclusion that a man who failed to be fired by Rossini's music must be lacking in animal spirits, though, like many writers, he felt compelled to compare Rossini with Mozart: the smart schoolboy, Hunt suggests, alongside the true man of sentiment.

Apart from allegedly working on a new opera for London—'Rossini is to compose two Operas during the season', enthused the *Morning Chronicle* on 15 December—his immediate responsibility was the musical direction of the Rossini season at the King's Theatre, Haymarket, which the profligate Benelli had leased from its manager, John Ebers. Eight operas were scheduled, alongside works by Mozart, Mayr, and Zingarelli as well as guest performances by the biggest box-office draw of her day, Angelica Catalani, now at the end of her career and something of a financial liability. Neither *Zelmira* with the failing Colbran nor *Il barbiere di Siviglia* with Vestris, a singer English audiences appear to have treated harshly at the time, were much liked, an expensive mistake when Colbran's fee was £1,500. *Otello* and *Semiramide,* with Pasta and García, were equally costly, with fees of £1,400 and £1,000 respectively, but they won a larger measure of public approval. In an absorbing brief comment, the *Quarterly Musical Magazine* noted that Rossini's were operas which 'not only tax the execution of the singer but which, by identifying ornament with expression, stimulate [García] to new experiments'.[11] According to Chorley, Rossini was less enamoured of Pasta ('she always sang false') than he was of Colbran or Malibran, though he must have coached her for the London *Semiramide.* Hunt thought her 'a great tragic actress; and her singing, in point of tone, tenderness, and expression, was equal to her acting'.[12]

Rossini himself won plaudits for the improved quality of the orchestral playing and chorus work during the season, a change directly attributable, suggested *The Times,* 'to the personal superintendence of a man of real talent'. For his wife, however, it was a very different story. 'Isabella is greatly enjoying London', Rossini told his father on 26 February.[13] Perhaps she was. The press, however, was busy preparing her artistic obituary. Even before she had sung a note, *The Harmonicon* reported:

[11] QMMR, 58.

[12] Leigh Hunt, *Autobiography* (London, 1928), 159.

[13] GRLD, IIIa, 368.

> Her style is pure, and her ornaments are graceful without being redundant. The delivery of her voice is in the manner of the best school; what remains of it is sweet, but we fear that the devouring Time has not left much of the original substance for us to judge by, and that her power will be found quite inadequate to the parts which she will have to sustain, and to the capacity of the theatre that she ought to be able to fill.[14]

The *Quarterly Musical Magazine* rallied to her defence after her performance of Zelmira on 24 January, which it thought stylistically magnificent and, some doubtful intonation aside, generally polished in its general execution.[15] *The Times,* however, was damning: 'She may have possessed the voice and style suited to a prima donna, but the period has passed, and we can only recommend that Signor Benelli place her on his retiring pension-list as speedily as possible'.[16] He had no need. Her final stage appearance in an operatic role took place in the King's Theatre on 23 March when she sang the role of Zoraide. It was not her final appearance in public. There were further concert engagements during the London season, and in the summer of 1827 she joined Rossini and the 19-year-old Michael Balfe in a recital in Dieppe. But to all intents and purposes her career was over.

The vast sums of money Rossini made in London (the only occasion in his career, he told Hiller in 1855, when he earned enough to set aside and invest) derived mainly from the many private parties he was pressed to attend in the drawing rooms of everyone from the Duke of Wellington downwards. 'They wanted to see my nose and hear my wife', he told Hiller. What they really wanted was to hear him play, instruct their daughters, and place his signature in the family song album. At a time when the best teachers were being paid a guinea a lesson, and the best conductors five guineas an evening, Rossini's appearance fee was 50 guineas, a fee he often doubled in a vain attempt to stem demand. The press had a field day, chronicling what one paper called 'the unsparing generosity of our affluent countrymen'. One widely circulated report concerned 'a rich Jew in the city', who had presented Rossini with £200 of shares in a newly launched company which Rossini had promptly sold for £300. This was almost certainly the 25-year-old David Salomons, a banker and amateur cellist, who

[14] *The Harmonicon,* I, January 1824.

[15] QMMR, 56–57.

[16] *The Times,* 26 January 1824.

commissioned from Rossini a three-movement Duetto for cello and double bass to be played with the great double bass virtuoso Domenico Dragonetti, a long-standing London resident whose interest in good food and high fees matched Rossini's own.[17] It is a pleasing work. Rossini's ear for the colours of the cello and the old three-string bass is everywhere apparent. As for the bass's gift for expressing a kind of grumbling good humour, that is as evident here as it is in the six *sonate a quattro* of 1804.

Rossini directed and sang in two subscription concerts at Almack's Rooms in St James's, a ballroom and dining club ruled over by a feared committee of society ladies: the arbiters of who was, or was not, acceptable in fashionable London society. *The Harmonicon* was suitably amused. Noting the huge sums Rossini was already earning, it explained that the concerts were being arranged 'for the purpose of more adequately rewarding the *gran maestro* for the risque he encountered and the inconvenience he endured, in crossing the abominable Straits of Dover'. A ticket for both concerts cost three guineas, available only to applicants known to, and approved by, the lady patronesses.[18] The roster of singers was dazzling: Pasta, Catalani, García, and Remorini, as well as Colbran and Rossini himself. At the second concert, on 11 June, Rossini sang the solo tenor role of Apollo in the first performance of his cantata in memory of Lord Byron, who had died of fever in Greece on 19 April. *Il pianto delle muse in morte di Lord Byron* ('Ahi, qual destin crudel') is an elaborate arrangement for solo tenor, six solo voices, a three-part male chorus, and small orchestra of the haunting womens' chorus 'Nume, cui 'l sole è treno' from the final scene of *Maometto II*. According to *The Examiner,* Rossini's singing was too histrionic by far:

> There was something very foreign, not to say Frenchified, about the style; and the excess of grief which he endeavoured to express, now faltering in his accents, and then shouting out with the fullest strength of his lungs, was most extravagant, and would have been ludicrous, had not our feelings for the deceased got the better of our propensity to laugh.[19]

[17] Sir David Salomons (1797–1873) became the first Jewish lord mayor of London in 1855. The Rossini commission may also have involved Salomons's second cousin Philip Joseph Salomons (1797–1866). A man about town known in fashionable circles as 'the golden calf', he was one of the best amateur double-bass players of his day.

[18] *The Harmonicon,* II, June 1824.

[19] *The Examiner,* 20 June 1824.

The performance of the cantata provided suitable cover for a notice which appeared the following day in the *Morning Post:*

> Signor Benelli has the honour to announce, that the anxious wish of Signor Rossini to surpass all his former Works, in the intended new Opera of *Ugo re d'Italia,* has placed him in the situation of being unable to complete it until a very late period in the Season: under the circumstances, Signor Benelli has thought it right at once to substitute the Grand Serious Opera of *Semiramide.*

Clearly, the original plan to set a libretto entitled *La figlia dell'aria* had foundered. As the *Quarterly Musical Magazine* elegantly put it, the maestro's preoccupation with 'circles of haut-ton' meant that 'his public obligations have been postponed to his private engagements'. In its place, a face-saving new agreement had been drawn up for *Ugo, re d'Italia* to be 'commenced and in part finished' by 1 January 1825. Rossini's plan was to rework an existing opera, probably *Adelaide di Borgogna* whose story charts the events which followed the deposition of Ugo, King of Italy in 947. Music from *Ermione* would also have been used.[20] Before leaving the country, Rossini was required to deposit his preliminary workings, and a bond for £400, with Benelli's bankers.

On 2 July he travelled to Cambridge to appear at the city's annual music festival in two programmes which also featured Angelica Catalani. On this occasion he played to his strengths. *The Times* observed that were Rossini offering himself as a professional singer he would be considered defective in style and manner: the voice, 'a high tenor, full, rich, and flexible', giving 'no indication of practice or cultivation'. What was remarkable, however, was 'an uncommon play of countenance' married to taste and skill in selecting 'those pieces where humour is the material requisite'. Rossini was clearly very funny. In the reprise of a duet from Cimarosa's *Il matrimonio segreto,* Catalani was beside herself, 'literally convulsed with laughter'.[21]

The Rossinis left London on 25 July, never to return. Perhaps the visit had always been an essentially speculative affair. (If not, the Channel crossing probably made it such.) Throughout January and February 1824 Rossini had been in regular contact with the French government, with whom he signed a one-year agreement at the French embassy on 27 February. In

[20] Pirro's aria (no.6), the act 1 finale (no.7) and Ermione's scena (n.9).

[21] *The Times,* 6 July 1824.

January 1825 Benelli was declared bankrupt and fled the country, sealing the fate of *Ugo, re d'Italia*. His creditors and Rossini both laid claim to the £400 bond and the two packets of papers Rossini had deposited with the bank.[22] The case rumbled on for over seven years. In February 1830 *The Times* reported:

> Mr Benelli having become bankrupt . . . a bill of equity has been filed against Messrs Morland and Co. by the assignees, to obtain the music and the money; and Messrs Morland have also filed a cross bill, urging their liability to Rossini. In this state the question now rests, waiting the decision of the Lord Chancellor. It is almost to be regretted, in this case, that the passport system was not in force as in France; as Rossini might then have been prevented from leaving England until he had completed the contract.[23]

Two packets of papers and a residual sum of £321.9s.0d. were reported to have been handed over to Rossini the following year.

John Ebers recovered his theatre and most of his property, and in 1826 he set out for Paris with a view to securing the future of the King's Theatre in a triple alliance with Barbaja and Rossini. He succeeded in signing Filippo Galli but not 'the director and bon vivant' himself. The death of Rossini's mother in February 1827 was blamed by Ebers for the breakdown in negotiations; and he himself died soon afterwards.

[22] The packets may have contained the autograph manuscript of *Adelaide di Borgogna* which has been lost.

[23] *The Times*, 4 February 1830.

CHAPTER TEN

Paris (1824–1829)

SINCE THE END OF THE NAPOLEONIC WARS, THE FRENCH CAPITAL had been inundated with arrivistes from the provinces and abroad, swelling the ranks of an increasingly influential bourgeoisie. By 1830, 55 percent of the registered electors of Paris were immigrants to the city. Rossini had arrived in the right place at the right time. Over the next twelve years he would write three new operas and renovate two others, preside over a famous chapter in the history of the Théâtre Italien, add considerably to his personal fortune, and secure his long-term financial future. It was a formidable achievement, though there were times when expectation outran events.

His return to Paris in July 1824 was relatively brief. Affairs in Bologna needed looking to before what promised to be a protracted stay abroad. His mother was no longer in the best of health, and plans for the renovation of his newly acquired palazzo were already running into difficulties. Before leaving for Bologna on 4 September, he was received by Louis XVIII and had discussions with the new controllers of the Opéra, the 39-year-old Viscount Sosthène de La Rochefoucauld, 'chargé du Département des beaux-arts', and the viscount's father, the Duc de Doudeauville, 'Ministre de la Maison du Roi'. The fact that La Rochefoucauld was a member of the old order did not blind him to the fact that, though the Théâtre Italien was newly fashionable with aristocrats, dilettanti, young *mélomanes,* and the increasingly prominent haute bourgeoisie, the Opéra itself was in the doldrums. Its repertory was moribund and its subscriptions were at an all time

low. Ninety percent of its receipts were from sales 'on the door' to tourists and visitors from the provinces. Like the Bourbons, so the saying went, the Opéra 'had learned nothing, forgotten nothing'.

La Rochefoucauld's strategy was to ask Rossini to write new operas for both houses in both Italian and French. More problematically, he also wanted him to run the Théâtre Italien in a form of 'cohabitation' with its existing director, Ferdinando Paër. As a way of ensuring that Rossini remained in Paris, this was a shrewd move, albeit an expensive one. It did, however, create problems of its own. Aside from the fact that appointing Rossini to the Théâtre Italien would likely make it even more fashionable than it already was, the strategy showed an amateur's ignorance of the fact that creative work and administrative duties rarely go together. Rossini knew this perfectly well, but had other priorities. He needed time—a year, possibly two—in which to study the Parisian operatic scene. If he was to write for the Opéra, his knowledge of French prosody and French declamatory style would need to be worked on. And there were the singers. A rich pool of talent was available, but in a competitive international market artists needed to be signed and retained as part of a semipermanent troupe. Some would need retraining as part of the process of realigning the French and Italian traditions.

While the Rossinis were in Bologna, Louis XVIII died. It was left to the new king, Charles X, to approve La Rochefoucauld's plans, which he did almost immediately. Paër was not happy but had little choice in the matter. On 25 November, Rossini signed a contract which effectively reversed the priorities of the one he had signed in London earlier in the year. There were four principal clauses in the new agreement. The first two gave Rossini overall responsibility for the running of the Théâtre Italien. They accorded him the title 'Directeur de la musique et de la scène' and guaranteed him accommodation appropriate to his position. The third clause reaffirmed the indivisibility of the administration of the Opéra and the Théâtre Italien. The fourth required Rossini 'to compose the works that may be asked of him' by either theatre, at a rate of 5,000 francs for a one-act opera and 10,000 francs for a longer work, the scores to remain the property of the composer.

Rossini's accommodation was a large apartment at No. 10 Boulevard Montmartre. The composer François-Adrien Boieldieu had a flat on the floor above; Rossini's friend Carafa also had lodgings in the building. Since

the 48-year-old Boieldieu was France's leading composer of opéra comique, there was an element of risk in making the two men neighbours. In fact, they got on famously. Writing to Charles Maurice, fixer-in-chief among Parisian music critics and editor of the virulently anti-Rossini *Courrier des Théâtres,* Boieldieu made a hard-headed assessment of the Rossini phenomenon:

> I am as much a 'rossiniste' as any of those yelping fanatics, and it is because I really like Rossini that I am angry when I see his art degraded by bad imitations. . . . I believe that one can write very good music by imitating Mozart, Haydn, Cimarosa, etc. etc. but that one is only a cheap mimic if one imitates Rossini. Why? Because Mozart, Haydn, Cimarosa, etc. etc. always speak to the heart, the spirit; they always speak the language of sentiment and reason. But Rossini, whose music is filled with catchy ideas, with 'bon mots', cannot be imitated; one must either steal from him outright or be altogether silent when one is incapable of inventing other 'bon mots', which would make for an entirely new creation.[1]

It could never be quite as clean-cut as that. There are traces of Rossini's style in Boieldieu's comic masterpiece *La Dame blanche,* which opened to huge acclaim in Paris in December 1825, just as there are traces of *La Dame blanche* in *Le Comte Ory,* which Rossini, striving to write his own exemplary comic opera, completed three years later. No one took more pleasure in the success of *La Dame blanche* than Rossini. At a reception at the Maison du Roi, he joined Boieldieu in performing extracts from the opera, after which the two men returned home, where they 'laughed like madmen' playing over their favourite numbers.[2] Boieldieu knew he was no Rossini. Leaving his friend's apartment to go to his own rooms on the floor above, he remarked, 'Remember, the only time I'm above you is when I sleep!'[3]

Even before Rossini had signed his new contract in November 1824, the administration's 'jury littéraire', of which Boieldieu was a member, had approved Étienne de Jouy's libretto *Le Vieux de la montagne* for his immediate attention. The subject matter was surprisingly radical: a Persian lib-

[1] G. Favre, *Boieldieu, sa vie, son oeuvre* (Paris, 1944–1945), I, 227.

[2] A. Pougin, *Boieldieu* (Paris, 1875), 237.

[3] Pougin, 240.

ertarian's fight for survival against the incursions of a radical Muslim sect, the Assassins. Rossini accepted the libretto and said nothing. Like *La figlia dell'aria, Le Vieux de la montagne* was often rumoured to be imminent but never was. Even La Rochefoucauld was fooled. In a memorandum dated 25 December 1826 he declared that both operas were 'just about finished' and submitted budget estimates accordingly.[4]

Rossini's first duty as director of the Théâtre Italien came with the celebrations surrounding the coronation of Charles X in the spring of 1825. The ceremony itself, which took place in Reims Cathedral on 16 May, restored the sacred procedures of the ancien régime. It was followed by more than a month of official entertainments: plays, concerts, vaudevilles, divertissements, and other *pièces de circonstance* too numerous to count. The Paris Opéra's principal offering was *Pharamond,* a joint venture by Boieldieu, Kreutzer, and the anti-Rossini polemicist Berton. It was clear from the outset, however, that Rossini's *Il viaggio a Reims,* which premiered at the Théâtre Italien nine days later on 19 June, was the true climax of the festivities. A lavish musical entertainment, it made powerful demands on the already stretched resources of the Académie de Musique.

Il viaggio a Reims had been designed to work at several levels: as an act of homage to Charles X, as a piece of international musical razzmatazz, and as a showcase for a troupe of star singers led by Pasta, Cinti-Damoreau, Donzelli, Pellegrini, and Levasseur. What the house librettist Luigi Balochi had provided for Rossini was an episodic *pièce à tiroirs* in which an array of guests from different countries meet at the Albergo del giglio d'oro in Plombières on their way to the coronation in Reims. The characters, eighteen in all, were representative of the cosmopolitan elite that now flocked to the Théâtre Italien itself: their intermingling a token of the new era of international goodwill it was hoped Charles X's ascent to the throne would bring about. There was no drama as such, only what one critic described as 'conversations de bon ton'. This, however, turned out to be a subject in itself, since Balochi's text appropriated, and to some extent satirised, Mme de Staël's 1807 romantic novel-cum-guidebook and fantasy autobiography, *Corinne.* La Rochefoucauld declared the entertainment 'truly ravishing', a view widely shared by those who attended the three

[4] GRLD, III, 83.

performances. Sadly, the king himself was bored to distraction: gazing up at the ceiling, counting the gas outlets for the lights, and emitting an all too audible groan when a glance at the Duchesse de Berry's libretto revealed that the evening was only one-third over.

Since no artists in royal employment had a 'coronation' clause in their contracts, payments were at the discretion of the king. Boieldieu was paid 500 francs for his contribution to *Pharamond;* Victor Hugo received 1,000 francs for an *Ode du sacre.* For *Il viaggio a Reims,* La Rochefoucauld secured for Rossini 3,000 francs, payable in kind in Sèvres porcelain.

It had been a massive labour. Struck down with a fever in early July, Rossini retired to the country for most of August. In addition to the three scheduled performances in June, Rossini allowed a fourth on 9 September as a benefit for the victims of a devastating fire in Salins in east central France, though he turned down a request to transfer the performance to the Opéra's larger Salle Le Peletier with its greater revenue-raising potential. The reason for his refusal still has relevance for us today. Experience had taught him that operas such as *Mosè in Egitto* and *La donna del lago* worked better in smaller auditoria. In this he was at one with his archenemy Charles Maurice, who had written a withering account of how *La donna del lago* had appeared shrunken and diminished when staged at the Opéra.

The benefit performance proved how difficult *Il viaggio a Reims* was to revive. Not only was it hugely expensive to stage, but a theatre's entire troupe needed to be on hand. (A performance asked for in early July by the Duchesse de Berry had fallen through because of contractual problems with Felice Pellegrini, the Don Profondo.) The press made a good deal of the absence of a proper run of performances. The opera was dubbed 'le voyage interrompu', though an article in *La Pandore* recognised that the music needed a more viable context and a better long-term resting place.[5] It is possible that Rossini was thinking of using music from *Il viaggio a Reims* for the long-expected *La figlia dell'aria.* As things turned out, it was *Le Comte Ory* which was the appropriate beneficiary.[6]

[5] *La Pandore,* 4 July.

[6] A theme from the final section of the grandiose hymn for soprano, bass, choir, and orchestra, *De l'Italie et de la France,* which Rossini wrote for Charles X's name-day on 3 November 1824 also found its way into *Le Comte Ory.*

The additional performance on 9 September adversely affected preparations for the Paris premiere of Meyerbeer's *Il crociato in Egitto,* which had to be postponed. Rossini was widely criticised during his first period of tenure at the Théâtre Italian (1825–1826) for what was alleged to be his poor management. The lack of new operas was one criticism, though, as the troubled launch of *Il crociato in Egitto* suggests, events were more to blame than policy. (There is evidence that as early as the summer of 1824 no fewer than fifteen operas, new or new to Paris, had been earmarked by Rossini for production.) Events were also largely to blame for problems with singers at the start of what, in retrospect, would be seen as a golden age in the theatre's history. A much publicised mishap occurred in December 1825, when the superbly gifted Joséphine Fodor-Mainvielle, returning to the stage too soon after an illness, lost her voice during the Paris premiere of *Semiramide.* She was 36, and to all intents and purposes her career ended that evening. Pasta replaced her.

Engaging leading singers was a time-consuming process, which Rossini handled personally. In the case of the much sought-after Domenico Donzelli, a bitter dispute broke out between Rossini and Barbaja. In February 1826 Rossini had written to Donzelli suggesting ways in which he might wriggle out of his commitment to Barbaja:

> The day you leave Florence you must write a letter to B. telling him that your advancing years and the impossibility of making your fortune with him oblige you to leave Italy, and that you are going to France and to England, where you are certain to become very rich in a few years. You must try to touch his heart, so that he doesn't make you pay the whole fine, but rather himself suggests a compromise. . . . In short, you must write to him in a loving manner, so that he is not too bitter about it. He will certainly want the whole fine and Sig. La Rochfa [Rochefoucauld] will pay it, as I've told you.[7]

The fine was paid on 27 April, but Barbaja was still not satisfied. In July, Rossini expressed his frustration in a letter to him, which makes full use of the kind of professional ploys—the rhetoric, the appeals to friendship and self-interest—which he himself had partly learned from Barbaja:

> You are going to leave Paris, then, without having settled anything! What will they say in Italy? They will say that you have wasted time and money. To

[7] GRLD, II, 481–83.

> avenge yourself for that, what will you do? You will seek, during these five years, to bring actions, will incur expenses in order to ruin the father of a family. Donzelli has no funds in hand: do you think he will be such a fool as to have any on his return to Italy? In proving to singers that they can break their contracts, you will make possible many things that could be more harmful to you than the loss of Donzelli. You will engage in a struggle with the financial resources of a Government! My friendly and disinterested mediation has not found even a small place in your heart. With immense regret I see that you are still bitter about the Donzelli affair. He has certainly been guilty of an oversight, but what he did was for the good of his family. Do you, yourself a most loving Father, wish to regard Donzelli as an assassin, and contemplate blows which will fall on the heads of the innocent? No: this is not worthy of you, and allow me to say that it is unworthy of a man of honour, with a heart like yours. I don't mean by this letter of mine to be anyone's advocate, but I do mean to speak to a friend of fifteen years in the language of probity and of the heart.[8]

The year 1826 was a critical one in Rossini's Parisian adventure. Eighteen months after his arrival in the city, he had achieved most of what he had intended under the terms of the original agreement with La Rochefoucauld. Through his running of the Théâtre Italien, and the writing of such compositions as he had been obliged to undertake, he had, as it were, created his palette. Over the next three and a half years he would paint the picture. Beginning with *Le Siège de Corinthe* in October 1826, four new or partly new Rossini works would be staged at the Opéra, deploying a hand-picked ensemble of singers, designers, and technicians drawn from the pooled resources of both houses. To this end, he asked for, and was eventually granted, a new contract, by which he resigned his position as director of the Théâtre Italien and returned to full-time composition as the handsomely salaried 'Compositeur du Roi & Inspecteur général du Chant'. The latter part of the title greatly upset the 66-year-old Cherubini, who saw it as an unnecessary affront to himself and to the singing teachers at the newly constituted Paris Conservatoire, of which he was director. Happily, his argument was with La Rochefoucauld, not with Rossini, who regarded the title as something of a joke.

[8] GRLD, II, 587–88.

La Rochefoucauld proposed the new titles to Charles X on 17 October 1826, eight days after the 'succès éclatant' (La Rochefoucauld's phrase) of *Le Siège de Corinthe.*[9] The months leading up to this successful debut at the Opéra had been far from easy. Maurice had launched a series of bitter attacks on Rossini's running of the Théâtre Italien, accusing him of 'laziness, impertinence, and breaches of contract'. Paër smirked and gossiped on the sidelines; then, not content with subverting his co-director's work at the Italien, he became involved in strategies to disrupt preparations for the technically complex and visually elaborate *Le Siège de Corinthe,* which the Opéra was struggling to prepare alongside its regular schedule of opera and ballet performances. On 22 May, after what had clearly been a badly disrupted technical rehearsal for act 1 of *Le Siège,* Rossini wrote to La Rochefoucauld wishing him well for a forthcoming journey but adding: 'It is particularly unpleasant for me that at the very moment when I need your support and protection you will be far away from Paris'.[10] In addition to seeking La Rochefoucauld's 'protection', Rossini made no secret of the fact that he was preparing to consider an offer from John Ebers, whose plan for a joint London-based operatic venture by himself, Rossini, and Barbaja had finally taken shape. Details were forwarded to Rossini in late November; on 5 January, Rossini accepted La Rochefoucauld's latest terms.[11]

He also gave permission to Paris's Théâtre de l'Odéon to stage *Ivanhoé,* an operatic pastiche based on Walter Scott's novel, with music drawn from some of Rossini's choicest scores.[12] The perpetrator of the pastiche was the composer and publisher Antonio Pacini (not to be confused with Giovanni Pacini, who produced his own ill-fated *Ivanhoe* in Venice in 1832) and his librettists Émile Deschamps and Gabriel-Gustave de Wailly. Scott saw the production and thought it 'superbly got up', adding the proviso: 'It was an opera and of course the story greatly mangled and the dialogue in a great part nonsense'.[13] The story is, indeed, 'greatly mangled'.

[9] GRLD, III, 4–5.

[10] GRLD, II, 536.

[11] GRLD, III, 52–53, 91–93.

[12] Use is made of music from two 'chivalric' operas, *Armida* and *Aureliano in Palmira,* as well as from *La Cenerentola, La gazza ladra* (staged by the Odéon in 1824), *Torvaldo e Dorliska, Mosè in Egitto, Bianca e Falliero,* and *Semiramide,* which provides the overture, the act 2 trial scene, and Boisguilbert's act 3 aria (Assur's 'Deh! ti ferma').

[13] *The Journal of Sir Walter Scott,* ed. W. E. K. Anderson (London, 1972/*R*1998), 258.

No Robin Hood, no Richard Coeur de Lion, the Jew Isaac changed to the Muslim Ismael, and the two heroines, Rebecca and Rowena, merged into a single character: a device which drives a coach and horses through Scott's original narrative. Rossini smiled and pocketed the money, though it is perhaps no coincidence that two years later he produced his own rollicking send-up of the Romantics' preoccupation with medieval chivalry in *Le Comte Ory.*

Le Siège de Corinthe, like *Moïse et Pharaon,* which followed shortly afterwards, was an adaptation of a Naples opera. What the two adaptations shared was a storyline which could be linked with the most fashionable political cause of the decade, Greece's fight for independence. A preoccupation with classical antiquity, and Byron's death in Greece in 1824, had already inflamed pro-Greek and anti-Turkish sentiment. The French government had temporarily and pragmatically sided with the Turks; influential writers such as Chateaubriand, Hugo, and Lamartine favoured the Greeks. On 28 April 1826 Rossini conducted a charity concert in Paris organised on behalf of the Greek patriots. With 20-franc tickets changing hands for seven or eight times their face value, substantial sums were raised, not all of it for charity.

In redrafting *Maometto II* as *Le Siège de Corinthe,* Rossini and his librettists redefined the background, making the drama unequivocally a tragedy of the Greek people. (One of the opera's few wholly new numbers was Hiéros's blessing of the Greek banners before the final catastrophe.) In the gruesome finale, the heroine's suicide was secondary to the carnage taking place all around her as the Greeks were slaughtered by the Musulmans. The staging, which had caused so much trouble in rehearsal, was as spectacular as it was shocking. The final tableau, depicting the sacked and burning Corinth, must have horrified contemporary audiences as pictures of Dresden or Hiroshima horrified populations more than a century later. Reaction to the opera was largely positive. For La Rochefoucauld it was a dream come true, though he thought the ballet too long and wanted a bolder use of fire in the concluding holocaust. Even Paër approved, whilst waspishly telling his friend Benelli about the 400 free seats that had been handed out to the city's Greek community.[14] Conservatives complained

[14] GRLD, II, 639.

that Rossini's music was now nosier than ever, which was precisely the point. In the final pages, Rossini turns the orchestra into a state-of-the-art machine, an implacable force in its own right.

In theatrical terms, *Le siège de Corinthe* is an advance on *Maometto II,* but it would be wrong to assume, as many have routinely done, that the Paris revisions are necessarily superior to the Neapolitan originals. The Parisian authorities had long been interested in Rossini's *Mosè in Egitto.* (As we have seen, Hérold had been dispatched to Naples in 1821 to conduct negotiations and recruit singers.) The sticking points were the libretto and the mise-en-scène, neither of which was considered sufficiently spectacular for the Opéra. The revision of *Mosè in Egitto,* which Rossini was now encouraged to make, acknowledged this problem. A celebrated clerihew has it that:

> Cecil B. De Mille
> Rather against his will
> Was persuaded to leave Moses
> Out of the Wars of the Roses.

De Mille would have approved the decision by Rossini, de Jouy, and Balochi to import into the Paris version the episode of the handing down of the Ten Commandments. In the Exodus story, Moses brings the tablets down from Sinai after the Israelites departed from Egypt. Placed within the drama of *Mosè in Egitto,* the episode was as theatrically inept as it was biblically awry. The revision also relegated the Scene of the Shadows, one of the finest opening movements in opera, to act 2, upsetting the formal balance of the drama as well as its simple harmonic patterning. From start to finish, *Moïse et Pharaon* showed scant regard for the integrity and simplicity of the original. Scenes were indiscriminately reordered, arias were reallocated, and newer, grander ideas were liberally imported. More bloated and less radical that *Le Siège de Corinthe,* it ushered in the age of the operatic blockbuster.

Foreign critics smiled at the theatrical excesses of the rewrite. (One German writer praised Rossini's skill in handling a libretto that contained 'eleven, yes, I said eleven, invocations and prayers'.) Locally, it was better received. The *Gazette de France* noted:

> [*Moïse et Pharaon*] amounts to nothing less than an operatic revolution brought off in four [*sic*] hours by Sig. Rossini. From now on the *French shout* is banished for ever: at the Opéra singing will be as good as at the Théâtre Italien.[15]

This was a tribute both to Rossini and to the singers he had trained: Levasseur and Dabadie in the title roles, Adolphe Nourrit as Aménophis, and Laure Cinti-Damoreau as Anaï. It was also a further vindication of La Rochefoucauld's vision for the Paris theatres. Whilst *Moïse et Pharaon* triumphed at the newly invigorated Opéra, *Mosè in Egitto* continued throughout the 1830s to play to packed houses at the Théâtre Italien.

As with *Le Siège de Corinthe,* the process of getting the new opera on stage was a troublesome one. The revision was required for a premiere in late March, 'a few days before holy week'. At a board meeting on 13 January—attended by Rossini, his chorus-master, Hérold, stage and costume designers Pierre Ciceri and Hippolyte Lecomte, and choreographer Pierre-Gabriel Gardel—it was agreed that Rossini should begin delivering material to the copyists (generally regarded as the weak link in the chain of any new production) within the week.[16] 'Rossini is hard at it, plastering new French words over his old *Mosè*', sneered Paër. 'This delights his protector the Viconte.'[17] Over the next six weeks work continued apace, which was just as well, since towards the end of February Rossini's world was thrown into turmoil by the news that his mother had died in Bologna.

Rossini had known for some time that her health was failing. She had a history of heart trouble and had recently suffered a painful aneurysm. Towards the end of 1826 he had been advised by his close friend the Bolognese surgeon Gaetano Conti that she was seriously ill. Rossini was prepared to travel to Bologna, but Conti's curious, though perhaps convenient, advice was that a visit from her son might hasten her end. Rossini never forgave himself for not being with his mother when she died. Nor was that the only problem. His father, too frightened to break the news directly, had asked intermediaries to do it for him. Anna died on 20 February. On 26 February, Giuseppe wrote to his brother-in-law, Francesco

[15] GRR, II, 85.
[16] GRLD, III, 102–4.
[17] GRLD, III, 114.

Maria Guidarini, in Pesaro: 'Gioacchino would have been here some time ago but was advised not to do so because if he arrived she would surely have died in his arms. Two years ago, when he came to Italy, simply seeing him, out of happiness left her ill in bed for more than a fortnight.'[18] On 5 March, Rossini wrote to his father from Paris. The more than usually neat calligraphy bespeaks a careful response, long pondered. His letters to his father invariably began 'Caro Papà', 'Caro Padre', or even 'Carissimo Padre'. Here there is no greeting of any kind.

> From the moment of that ill-fated letter of Doctor Giorgi about my mother's health, I never ceased fixing my eyes on those who surrounded me in order to understand from their silence the fatal announcement that my father himself should have made to his son! Because of your age, I forgive you the lack of courage you showed at a time when there was a need for virtue and steadfastness of spirit; I did not cry, but turned to stone. I feel this loss; I bind myself to the anchor that remains to me; together we will find a new source of love in honouring the memory of the wife and the mother, it is the best choice we can give ourselves. I grieve because I did not share with you the sorrow and the great consolation of giving the last comforts to my good mother. Nevertheless, receive my feelings of sympathy and also my good wishes for your preservation, since you give proof of love and courage. Your personal duty is the burial of the cold corpse; later her son will do what is owed to the one who gave him life. . . .[19]

Rossini invited his father to Paris. Giuseppe demurred, citing his age, a touch of constipation, the inclement weather, the fearsome journey,[20] but was persuaded nevertheless. On 3 April he set out for Paris, accompanied by one of Isabella's servants. He would remain in Paris until the spring of the following year. If this was not enough for Rossini to cope with, there were problems with Isabella. They continued to live together, but she also was in poor health, infected, among other things, with her husband's gonorrhea. During the winter of 1826–1827 Rossini had spent time away from their city apartment, sharing a house in the village of Puteaux with the Galli and Levasseur families. An account dated 9 December 1826 suggests

[18] GRLD, III, 172–74.
[19] GRLD, IIIa, 433–36.
[20] GRLD, III, 188–91.

that the three of them would drink a bottle of wine each of an evening.[21] Not entirely well within himself, Rossini was looking for solace elsewhere.

His first completed work after his mother's death was a cantata for six voices and piano written for the baptism of the son of Rossini's newest Maecenas, the 42-year-old Spanish-born banker and industrialist Alejandro Maria Aguado. Aguado would render Rossini innumerable services over the next few years: as a host, as a financial adviser, and as the provider of places to write and socialise away from the prying eyes of the press, opera house gossips, and his own immediate family. While Aguado was helping Rossini consolidate his own considerable fortune, La Rochefoucauld was locked in a summer of negotiation with the royal household about how best to deal with the shortfall in opera house finances which Rossini's various contracts had brought about.

During the summer of 1827 Rossini talked openly about returning to Italy and retiring from operatic composition. On 24 July he wrote to Conti in Bologna: 'Embrace all our friends for me, and tell them that your departure [from Paris] has brought to life in me more than ever the need to repatriate myself, something I'll do sooner than you believe'.[22] That very same day, Giuseppe wrote to his brother-in-law: 'He wants to retire home from everything by 1830, to enjoy acting the gentleman and being allowed to write what he wishes since he has been exhausted enough (may Heaven desire it, as I want it in my heart)'.[23]

In August the Rossinis visited Dieppe, where the 29–year–old Duchesse de Berry had taken up residence. The duchess and the railways were destined to 'make' Dieppe, which was the closest seaside resort to Paris. Half a century later, when the young Marcel Proust fell in love with its dunes and glens, and the old ramparts encircling what had once been a medieval village by the sea, Dieppe had become one of Europe's most fashionable resorts. In the summer of 1827 the Rothschilds, the de La Rochefoucaulds, the Talleyrands, and the Rossinis did not quite know what to make of the duchess's passion for spa treatments and sea-bathing. Nor were the lavish entertainments she arranged in her nearby chateau always in the best of taste. Rossini later described himself as being 'horribly bored', though he

[21] GRLD, III, 77–78.

[22] GRLD, III, 263–64.

[23] GRLD, III, 265–68.

wrote a short cantata for the unveiling of a portrait of the duchess in the Town Hall and oversaw a number of indoor and outdoor musical entertainments, in which he was joined by Isabella (her last public appearance as a singer) and a new young protégé, Michael Balfe. Balfe's mixture of verve, musicianship, and a tolerably fine baritone won him preferment at the Théâtre Italien, where Rossini arranged for him to sing the role of Figaro. *Il barbiere* also featured in the duchess's summer season at Dieppe, Rossini casting a fatherly eye over the proceedings.

Back in Paris, he chivvied Conti over the still unfinished renovation of his palazzo in Bologna. In November he wrote: 'I beg you to tell Professor Santini [the architect] that I am completely desolated to learn that he has not yet finished painting the bottom of the staircase and that I beseech him to bring to an end something that I had thought completed long since'.[24] Not that Rossini was planning a move just yet. During the winter of 1827–1828 he finalised plans for the work which would bring the current phase of his French career to a close. He also hatched a second plan, which, when it came to fruition, caught the whole of musical Paris, even the Opéra itself, entirely off guard.

At what point Rossini finally decided to abandon once and for all both *La figlia dell'aria* and de Jouy's *Le Vieux de montagne* is not clear. A number of ideas for a new grand opera were considered. One later became Halévy's *La Juive,* another, which the Maison du Roi would have felt bound to censor, became Auber's *Gustave III* and Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera.* In the end, the choice fell on Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell,* which de Jouy was asked to turn into a four-act opera. One of the more fascinating aspects of the making of *Guillaume Tell* was the degree to which the entire company was involved from the outset: composer, librettist, revisers of the libretto, scenic and costume designers, theatre technicians, and singers. The administrative burden was immense, complicated by the fact that the estimated six-month production period eventually stretched to sixteen.

The pioneering new approach was due in part to shortcomings in the Opéra's procedures and facilities that had been revealed on the occasion of Rossini's two previous operas. Less than a fortnight after the premiere of *Moïse et Pharaon* in March 1827, the Maison du Roi appointed a powerful new 'Comité de mise en scène', whose brief was to make the Paris Opéra

[24] GRLD, III, 298–99.

second to none in the field of production and design. The committee, of which Rossini was a member, included such heavyweight figures as David's pupil and former assistant, the celebrated court painter François-Pascal-Simon Gérard. The first fruits of the policy were seen on 29 February 1828, the opening night of a technically spectacular production of Auber's *La Muette de Portici,* the work generally credited with launching the phenomenon of 'Grand Opera'. In Auber's final scene, Vesuvius erupts. The challenge to Rossini and the production team working on *Guillaume Tell* was 'follow that'.

In November 1827 Aguado acquired the Château de Petit-Bourg, a residence a few miles south of Paris, originally built by Louis XIV for his mistress Mme de Montespan. It was here that Rossini completed his splendid *Rendez-vous de chasse* for four horns and orchestra, a piece Weber or Schumann might have been pleased to write. With its picturesque, alfresco mood, it sounded like an epigraph to the mighty *Guillaume Tell,* which was soon to follow. Not that Rossini became a recluse. Away from the tranquillity of Petit-Bourg, he continued to frequent fashionable Parisian society. One invitation came from a charming young daredevil, Édouard Benazet, whose father ran the gaming rooms at the Palais Royal. It was Édouard who, later in the century, turned Baden-Baden into the summer social capital of Europe. In the spring of 1828 he was simply one of 'une Bandes de bons Garçons presque tous amateurs du champagne' who hoped the great man might dine with them.[25] The records of the orders for wine which Rossini placed at the time with Loupot & Priolet Le François in Reims show a connoisseurship of French wine in general and champagne in particular. It was an interest which his friendship with Aguado would have further stimulated; in 1836 Aguado acquired the prestigious Bordeaux property Châteaux Margaux.[26]

It was amid this agreeable mix of rural seclusion, fine living, and youthful roguery that Rossini sprang the biggest surprise of his Parisian career: the swift and unexpected completion of a two-act comic opera about

[25] GRLD, III, 343–44.

[26] Château Margaux was later bought from the Aguado family by another Rossini patron, Comte Pillet-Will.

Comte Ory, a famously dissolute young aristocrat from medieval times. *Le Comte Ory* had its premiere at the Paris Opéra in August 1828; yet as late as 11 June the director of the Opéra, Émile Lubbert, appeared to be unaware of its existence.[27] By the end of the month the cat was finally out of the bag. A report sent to the Maison du Roi by the Department of Fine Arts on 30 June expressed alarm at the prospect. Setting aside the question of how 'so ticklish a subject' could have been chosen in the first place, the report went on to point out that after the 'scandal' of Hérold's ballet *La somnambule*—in which the heroine had appeared barefoot and in her nightdress—it was important that the Opéra did not put on 'another work that comes so near to indecency'.[28]

There was no question of the opera's not being put on. A new work from Rossini, unlooked for and a comic opera as well, came as manna from heaven. Some changes were insisted on. It was stated that in act 1, where Ory appears disguised as a hermit, under no circumstances should he appear dressed as a 'Capuchin or any Ecclesiastical Character'.[29] The last thing the Opéra needed was a writ served on it by the archbishop of Paris, a proven meddler in the house's affairs. In fact, very little was altered. Such nervousness as existed among minor functionaries was quickly countered. Rossini knew most people who mattered; and co-librettist Charles Delestre-Poirson, an intimate of the Duchesse de Berry, was also exceptionally well connected. In the end, what made *Le Comte Ory* untouchable was the fact that it was a quintessentially Gallic piece. The French loved it, guaranteeing the Opéra substantial box office returns for years to come. It was in Italy, where the ecclesiastical authorities were more powerful and less forgiving, that the work ran into difficulties.

Le Comte Ory derived in part from *Il viaggio a Reims,* but that fact does not explain the impulse behind the work, the speed with which it was composed, or why, amid the gloom surrounding his mother's death, Rossini should have been moved to write an unasked-for opera. Perhaps, like Mozart writing *Don Giovanni* immediately after the death of his father, Rossini found refuge in returning to the thing he did best. The manic-

[27] GRLD, III, 352–53.
[28] GRLD, III, 358–59.
[29] GRLD, III, 364.

depressive cycles which would blight the middle years of Rossini's life had already been hinted at. In the wake of his mother's death, they were beginning to manifest themselves publicly.

The opera itself revisited the world of opera buffa and stood it on its head. In *Il barbiere di Siviglia* and *La Cenerentola* the frustrated lovers, the mezzo-soprano and the serious tenor, won through at the eleventh hour; in *Le Comte Ory* the tenor, witty and urbane, is a comic antihero who fails twice over. A few days after the first night, Cherubini wrote to a friend: '[Rossini] has just given us an opera, Le Comte Ory, the greater part of which is parody. The music is delicious'.[30] It is, indeed, delicious: witty, wry, and in the great trio 'À la faveur de cette nuit obscure' which crowns act 2, alluringly, even disturbingly, beautiful. There is nothing quite like it in either the French or the Italian repertoire. It was Rossini's farewell to comedy, after which, like Ory hearing the crusaders' return, he slipped quietly into the night.

Troupenas paid Rossini 16,000 francs for the publication rights to *Le Comte Ory;* the box office took in 7,000 francs a night during the preliminary run. Everyone was happy. Meanwhile, work on *Guillaume Tell* was well advanced. Towards the end of October Troupenas informed Rossini's Viennese publisher, Artaria, that the opera was finished. Rehearsals, it was rumoured, would begin on 1 November. This was not entirely true. The panoramic first act and the epic second were complete, but the third and fourth acts were still being worked on. Troupenas also told his Viennese colleague: 'It is probably the last work he will compose for the theatre, his intention being to return to Bologna at the start of next spring to rest from his labours'.[31]

During the late autumn and winter of 1828–1829 a series delays set in. First, Cinti-Damoreau, for whom Rossini had written the role of Mathilde, announced that she was pregnant. Then Rossini decided to reopen negotiations on those parts of his contract which had not yet been formally resolved. The first delay was not unwelcome. Though the Opéra had been working on the production for several months (Ciceri, the scenographer, had been dispatched to Switzerland in late June), the 'jury littéraire' was

[30] GRLD, III, 379.

[31] GRLD, III, 387.

not satisfied with act 4, which it thought overlong. There were also concerns, later overruled by La Rochefoucauld, about the safety of the singer who was playing Tell's son Jemmy in the scene, where he sets fire to Tell's house as a signal to the confederates. Making *Guillaume Tell* as spectacular as *La Muette de Portici* was a time-consuming business.

The argument over the new ten-year contract resumed on New Year's Day 1829. At the heart of the dispute was Rossini's request for a guaranteed lifetime pension of 6,000 francs a year, as a reward for services already rendered and as a recognition of his willingness to make a longer-term commitment to the Opéra. A new man had replaced La Rochefoucauld's father at the Maison du Roi. He was Baron de La Bouillerie, Napoleon's former treasurer. La Bouillerie clearly smelled a rat. Why pay the pension now, he asked La Rochefoucauld: surely, it would be more appropriate to pay it after the ten-year contract had run its course.[32] He too had heard rumours and read the reports that *Guillaume Tell* was likely to be Rossini's last opera.

It was a not unreasonable position, and a contract was issued, on La Bouillerie's terms, on 4 April.[33] Unfortunately, it failed to take account of the fact that Rossini still had in his possession the third and fourth acts of *Guillaume Tell*. On 10 April he wrote to La Rochefoucauld claiming that offers were reaching him from England, Germany, Russia, and Italy. Continuing in the same slightly disingenuous vein, he suggested that he would be interested in retiring, were it not for the esteem in which he held the French king and the Opéra itself. The letter ended with a threat. If his terms were not met, 'it will be impossible to give *Guillaume Tell* this spring, as you desire'.[34] La Rochefoucauld's reply is not extant, but it would seem that some attempt was made to reassure Rossini of the good faith of the administration. On 13 April, Rossini again wrote to La Rochefoucauld. In the course of a carefully plotted, decorously phrased letter, he moved from polite generalities, through a shrewdly placed and, as it turned out, prophetic observation ('Men do not always remain in the same position; other men may neither think nor act like them'), to an unvarnished demand for an unconditional granting of the pension.[35] With rehearsals temporarily

[32] GRLD, III, 463–64.
[33] GRLD, III, 474–76.
[34] GRLD, III, 480–81.
[35] GRLD, III, 482–83.

suspended and Opéra director Émile Lubbert pressing for an early settlement of the dispute,[36] La Rochefoucauld had no option but to inform La Bouillerie of the grim reality of the situation in which they now found themselves.[37]

On 29 April, after consulting with Charles X, La Bouillerie gave in to Rossini's demands. On 8 May a new contract was issued, which the king signed.[38] The signature later proved vital. In the wake of the 1830 July Revolution, when the contract was cancelled and the pension suspended, Rossini instituted legal proceedings against the government of Louis-Philippe. He eventually won the case, the court deeming that, since the king had signed the contract, the agreement was with the French government and should be honoured as such by all subsequent administrations. The deal done, *Guillaume Tell* immediately went back into rehearsal. Rossini completed the orchestration of the third and fourth acts and wrote the famous overture. A July premiere was planned, but Cinti-Damoreau fell ill. The opera eventually reached the stage on 3 August. Habeneck conducted. In addition to Cinti-Damoreau, the cast included Henri-Bernard Dabadie as Tell, and Adolphe Nourrit as Arnold.

Like *Le Siège de Corinthe* and *Moïse de Pharaon, Guillaume Tell* was, in part, an opera about the liberation of a downtrodden people. Not that Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell* (the opera's principal source, though not its only one) was in any sense a revolutionary work. In addition to the pastoral and folk elements, and a feeling for the picturesque, which Rossini and the Opéra's huge production team could readily exploit, the play explored the nature of familial relations in the context of a wider exploration of the politics of a people who seek independence with peace. The philosopher Susanne Langer has described Schiller's play as 'a species of serious heroic comedy'. As such, it was heir to a tradition with which Rossini had closely engaged in his opere serie in the years 1813–1823. Langer explains:

> Tell appears as an exemplary personage in the beginning of the play, as citizen, husband, father, friend, and patriot; when an extreme political and social crisis develops, he rises to the occasion, overcomes the enemy, frees his country, and returns to the peace, dignity and harmonious joy of his home. The balance of

[36] GRLD, III, 477–78.

[37] GRLD, III, 493–94.

[38] GRLD, III, 498–500.

> life is restored. As a personage he is impressive; as a personality he is very simple. He has the standard emotions—righteous indignation, paternal love, patriotic fervour, pride, anxiety, etc.— under their obvious conditions. Nothing in the action requires him to be more than a man of high courage, independent spirit, and such other virtues as the mountaineers of Switzerland boasted, to oppose the arrogance and vanity of foreign oppressors. . . . Such are the serious products of comic art; they are also its rarer examples. The natural vein of comedy is humorous—so much so that 'comic' has become synonymous with 'funny'.[39]

Rossini had become a master of the comic style in both its aspects: comedy as humour and comedy as a vehicle for expressing vitality, continuity, and harmony in human affairs, however strong the potential for disorder in those affairs might be.

The public was polite, the press generous, but the work itself was destined to have a somewhat chequered history. The score underwent numerous changes, a process initiated immediately after the premiere by Rossini himself who cut two dances, several recitatives, and an aria for Jemmy before the apple-shooting. It was not long before others were making even more savage cuts.

From the outset Nourrit experienced difficulties with the role of Arnold. The problem was soon rectified by a new breed of tenor, led by Gilbert-Louis Duprez, who sang the fusillade of high Cs from the chest, not the head. (Rossini loathed the effect, but it helped keep the show on the road.) Later generations of tenors tended to fight shy of the role. 'It would have ruined my voice', said Luciano Pavarotti, explaining his refusal to make his La Scala debut as Arnold, though he did later record the opera in an Italian translation.[40]

Before leaving Paris for Bologna, Rossini had an audience with the king, who conferred on him the Légion d'honneur. That evening members of the Opéra assembled beneath Rossini's apartment window for a grand serenade (it included Habeneck conducting the overture to *Guillaume Tell*),

[39] S. Langer, *Feeling and Form* (London, 1953), 338.

[40] The first Italian production of the opera took place in Lucca in 1831 in a translation by Calisto Bassi. For a discussion of the problems associated with performing *Guillaume Tell* in Italian see Philip Gossett's *Divas and Scholars: Performing Italian Opera* (Chicago, 2006), 364–65, 381–94.

noisily applauded by a large crowd of partisans and well-wishers. Boieldieu came downstairs and warmly embraced his friend. Paër and Berton, eating ices at the nearby Café des Variétés, are said to have looked at one another and murmured: 'The art is lost!' Pending his return to Paris, Rossini drew up a power of attorney, placing his affairs in the hands of his friend Carlo Severini, a partly reformed spendthrift from Bologna who was now general manager of the Théâtre Italien. The Rossinis left Paris on 16 August. Isabella never returned.

On the way to Bologna, Rossini attended a performance of Bellini's *Il pirata* at the Teatro della Canobbiana in Milan, where he met the 27-year-old composer. According to Bellini, Rossini commended the 'great feeling' in his music, adding 'your operas begin where others have left off'.[41] He also spoke of a finish and discipline in Bellini's work that belied his years. Did the emergence of this newest star on the horizon give Rossini further cause to ponder the possibility of his own retirement from the operatic stage?

[41] *Lettere di Vincenzo Bellini (1819–1835)*, ed. C. Neri (Palermo, 1991), 123–24.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Retirement from Operatic Composition

IN 1829–1830 THE LIKELIHOOD OF ROSSINI'S RETIREMENT FROM operatic composition was a widely reported news story; by the end of the decade it was a fact of life, regretted by some, understood by most. It would never be that simple again. To the post-Romantic mind, retirement at the age of 37 suggested creative failure; to more earnest souls, it suggested moral turpitude, a failure of resolve. By the 1930s neither of these parties set much store by Rossini's music or knew much about it, which is where they differed from their predecessors. The opera-going public of the late 1820s was almost as exhausted by Rossini's music as the man who had composed it. For them, the writing of thirty-nine operas in nineteen years, several of them masterpieces, few of them outright failures, was seen as a fair return on anyone's money. Yet the question remains, how and why did 'the great renunciation' (Francis Toye's phrase) come about?

In 1829 Rossini was at an age which has often proven critical in the lives of musicians, painters, and writers. Lapses into silence far more complete than Rossini's, creative failures, suicides, and unanticipated deaths have been common in the middle to late 30s. As Charles Rosen has noted, 'It is the age when the most fluent composer begins to lose the ease of inspiration he once possessed, when even Mozart had to make sketches and to revise'.[1] In Rossini's case, absolute ease of inspiration probably began to desert him soon after the composition of *Il barbiere di Siviglia* in 1816—at

[1] C. Rosen, *The Classical Style* (London, 1971), 386.

the very time, it so happens, when rumours began circulating that he planned to retire from the operatic stage at the age of 30. The ability to write at pace never entirely left him, as we see in 1827–1828, when *Le Comte Ory* was completed, along with the first two acts of *Guillaume Tell*. However, from the late Naples period through to the completion of *Guillaume Tell*, it is not the speed of composition which impresses but the scale.

If internal evidence from the works themselves (including the many works completed after 1829) suggests that Rossini's creative powers were largely unimpaired, what other factors were at work? The early signs of the debilitating physical and mental conditions which would reduce his creative output to a trickle in the 1840s and early 1850s were beginning to manifest themselves; but the period of near total collapse was still some time away. One of the wilder ideas put forward suggests that his retirement was the manifestation of an oedipal condition triggered by his mother's death in 1827.[2] Not only is this notion far-fetched, it is contradicted by the works Rossini completed in the immediate aftermath of her death. Indeed, his decision in 1831 to accept a commission to set the *Stabat mater* may have been, in some measure, a homage to her memory.

The desire for a life of rather greater leisure than he had hitherto been able to enjoy was self-evidently a factor in Rossini's thinking throughout the 1820s. His renovation of the palazzo in Bologna, his stage-managing of the lucrative London season, and, more specifically, his ruthless pursuit of a life pension from the French government, all point in this direction. Acquisitive and anxious, as those who have experienced real poverty often are, he was unusually careful with money. He knew that living off capital, his own or Isabella's, was not an option. What the government annuity provided was a secure base from which he could earn lucrative fees from new work as the need arose. Nor was it long before he was keen to be back in harness. By May 1830, after a gloomy winter in Bologna, he was chafing at the bit, demanding to know why he had heard nothing from his Parisian librettists. Two months later the July Revolution drove a coach and horses through his carefully laid plans. Not only was his contract with the Opéra void, the annuity itself was suspended, pending the resolution of the inevitable court case.

[2] D. W. Schwartz, 'A psychoanalytic approach to the great renunciation', *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 1965, xiii, 551.

Whatever chance there may have been of Rossini's resuming his stage career had largely vanished by the time the case was won. Problems with his health suggested that he was no longer capable of undertaking the huge labour of operatic composition. And the world itself had moved on. Berlioz's star was rising and, despite often execrable performances, the influence of Beethoven's music on audiences and fellow musicians was being increasingly felt. (An article in Fétis's *La Revue Musicale* comparing Rossini, the man of the moment, with Beethoven, the man for all seasons, showed which way the wind was blowing.[3]) During his second spell as director of the Théâtre Italien (1830–1836), Rossini was able to observe and encourage a new generation of Italian composers. His grief at Bellini's early death in 1835 was significant. Difficult though Bellini could be, he was the most talented of Rossini's surrogate sons, the exemplary bearer of the torch which he himself had lit.

The case for believing that Rossini would have written no new operas after 1829, revolution or no revolution, rests on the idea that his entire output reached a natural cadence in *Guillaume Tell.* Two things stand out in his post-1820 operas: a degree of self-parody, evident in *Matilde di Shabran, Il viaggio a Reims,* and *Le Comte Ory,* and the implications for opera in general of Rossini's grandiose transformations of works as individual, local, and finely proportioned as *Mosè in Egitto* and *Maometto II.* The self-parody, the wry recollection of procedures established in the heyday of *Tancredi,* implies the existence of a musical code, complete and stable enough to merit ironic appraisal. Indeed, it is a measure of the extent of Rossini's achievement, and a token of his own intelligent self-awareness, that he should view his achievement with so amused and objective a gaze. If Rossini was in some sense aware of a natural rounding out in his career as an opera composer, he must also have been conscious of his own complicity in helping to shape a style of grand opera which was paradoxically alien to his own background and instincts. He was less hard on Meyerbeer, both as a man and as a musician, than many have subsequently been, but it was Meyerbeer who, in Peter Conrad's phrase, 'mechanized' the epic.[4] *Robert le diable* appeared in 1831, *Les Huguenots* in 1836. Robbed of Rossini's authority and classical breeding, grand opera became in lesser hands both lavish and impersonal.

[3] Reprinted by *The Times,* 15 March 1830, 5.

[4] P. Conrad, *Romantic Opera and Literary Form* (London, 1977), 16.

Rossini was never shy of discussing the matter of his retirement. Writing to Metternich in June 1858, he observed: 'I left my career just at the moment where I felt superior, indifferent to the judgment of men. I haven't regretted it'.[5] Perhaps the wisest of his remarks on the subject, the one which most closely corresponds to the personal and musical facts of the case, comes in a letter he wrote to Giovanni Pacini in 1866:

> This art, which has its sole basis in 'idealism' and 'sentiment', cannot separate itself from the times in which we live; and idealism and sentiment have nowadays been exclusively turned over to 'steam', 'robbery', and the 'barricades'. . . . Dear Giovanni, be calm; remind yourself of my decision to abandon my Italian career in 1822, and my French career in 1829; such a presentiment is not given to everyone; God granted it to me and I bless Him for it every hour.[6]

Rossini's life after 1829 was rich in incident. During the years when he was well, he would write some of his most moving, diverting, and influential music. Yet he was probably right to jettison opera. In its way, *Guillaume Tell* is as exemplary a resting point as Shakespeare's *The Tempest* or Verdi's *Falstaff*. As Hamlet notes in the 37-year-old Shakespeare's most famous play, 'the readiness is all'.

[5] B. Kern, 'Rossini e Metternich', BCRS 49 (1999), 18.

[6] LRM, 295–96; RGR, 321–22.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Bologna, Paris, Madrid (1829–1834): Stabat mater, *Olympe Pélissier, and Balzac*

ARRIVING IN BOLOGNA ON 6 SEPTEMBER, THE ROSSINIS SPENT THE autumn of 1829 at Castenaso. One visitor found Rossini in a gardening smock, planting cabbages, chatting with the peasantry. He was much preoccupied with making an 'English' garden, an unheard of initiative in those parts. The rural idyll lasted until November. With Giuditta Pasta leading a Rossini season at the Teatro Comunale, the Rossinis took up winter residence in the still not completely renovated palazzo in Bologna. The winter was the worst in living memory, with persistent, heavy snowfall. In parts of the city, accumulations stood two storeys high where snow had been cleared from roofs which were in danger of collapse. Rossini endured a number of winter ailments; Isabella became dangerously ill. 'My house turned into a veritable hospital', he told Hippolyte Bis the following May.[1]

The Théâtre Italien's Édouard Robert spent the winter on a long-drawn-out scouting mission through Italy, beginning and ending in Bologna. He was looking for singers and operas, but he was also acting as a courier between Rossini in Bologna and Severini and Aguado in Paris, as plans were laid for the triumvirate to take over the administration of the theatre. Getting access to Rossini was Robert's principal problem, particularly on his return to Bologna, when lack of space in the unfinished palazzo obliged him lodge in a local pensione. Writing to Severini in March 1830,

[1] GRLD, III, 656.

he complained that most of Rossini's waking hours between noon and one in the morning were taken up with 'Bolognese jokers who swarm around him, not leaving me a quiet quarter of an hour'.[2] The fact is, Robert was little more than a frontman, a helping hand for the triumvirate. When the Maison du Roi published its ordinance confirming the group's responsibility for the Théâtre Italien on 29 June 1830, Robert was named co-director with Severini—the token Frenchman alongside two Italians and a Spaniard.

As the snows receded and Rossini was able to return to the country, the urge to work reasserted itself. In a letter to Henrietta Sontag, Robert predicted that there would be a new work ready for performance in Paris in the autumn. Unfortunately, Rossini lacked a libretto, a fact he made much of in letters to La Rochefoucauld, Lubbert, Bis, Nourrit, and others, which he entrusted to Robert when he left for Paris in early May. Goethe's *Faust* was what principally interested Rossini. When nothing arrived from Jouy, he began drafting his own synopsis. There can be no doubt that he missed Paris. Italian provincial life merely irked and amused him. Voltaire's *Candide* was one of his favourite books, but a life cultivating the garden at Castenaso held few attractions. 'At the bottom of my heart I am always French', he told Lubbert in his letter of 4 May.[3]

With the new partnership at the Théâtre Italien due to take effect on 1 October, Rossini remained at Castenaso throughout the summer, making occasional excursions to Bologna and to Florence, where he sat for a bust by Lorenzo Bartolini, Napoleon's favourite sculptor. (Rossini's reported judgment on the bust was that it made him look like 'a fat Bacchus'.) In August the well-to-do amateur composer Francesco Sampieri, an old friend, threw a lavish party in Rossini's honour at his Villa di Casalecchio. Rossini's initial inclination was to decline the invitation, 'preoccupied as I am with affairs of the very greatest importance to me in France'.[4] The letter is dated 12 August, a fortnight after the violent 'July Revolution' in Paris and a week after the flight into exile of the illiberal and now widely despised Charles X. The king had attempted to abdicate in favour of his grandson, thereby ensuring the Bourbon line, but on 9 August the Cham-

[2] GRLD, III, 628–30.

[3] GRLD, III, 652–55.

[4] GRLD, III, 686–87.

ber of Deputies proclaimed as king the 56-year-old Louis-Philippe, Duc d'Orléans. Though related to the Bourbons, Louis-Philippe came with proven liberal credentials.

With the dissolution of the Bourbon court, Rossini was left without a contract. On 4 September he left Bologna for Paris, promising to be back before the winter. He next saw Bologna in June 1834. Whilst Rossini was travelling to Paris, Severini used his power of attorney to write to the Commissioners of the Civil List requesting payment of the arrears due on Rossini's pension. The initial response was positive. By honouring the agreement, an internal memorandum noted, the government would be performing an act not only of justice, but of recognition of the immense services Rossini had rendered the art of music in France.[5] Unfortunately, that was not the new government's final position. For all their alleged illiberality, the Bourbons had been extraordinarily generous to the arts in Paris in the 1820s. Under Louis-Philippe, however, belts were tightened. More accountable to the Chamber of Deputies than was its predecessor, his government cut expenditure on the Civil List from 40 million francs a year to a mere 12 million. Rossini's annuity was one of the cuts. So began a long and expensive legal battle. In March 1834 a tribunal found in Rossini's favour. The government lodged an appeal which was overturned on 24 December 1835, at which point Rossini was awarded the restitution of his pension and back payments to June 1830.

With a theatre to run and litigation to fund, Rossini settled into a new kind of life in Paris. Arriving there on 12 September, he stayed with Aguado at Petit-Bourg but soon moved to an apartment on the top floor of the building which housed the Théâtre Italien. Climbing the stairs, he said, kept him slim. The fact is, he had become worryingly corpulent. Concerned about the effect of this on his general health, he made it his business to rise early and take a brisk walk. Sweating profusely after the final ascent to his flat, he would be doused in iced water by his manservant. The regime, he said, kept him 'supple'.

Back in Bologna, Giuseppe and Isabella sat and waited. A letter which reached them just before Christmas was grudgingly acknowledged by Giuseppe on New Year's Eve: 'We have spent the holy Christmas holidays better, but like two lost souls, and on Christmas Day our table was made up

[5] GRLD, III, 695–96.

of your wife, me, and two servants. You can imagine with what happiness that was.'[6] Over the next few years, relations between the two went from bad to worse. In August 1833 Giuseppe wrote to his son:

> When your wife left for the country, she had everything locked up, so that I had to buy plates, glasses, and bottles, a thing they don't do even in Turkey. And how one has to behave to live and get along with a proud and disgraceful woman, a spendthrift who looks only for ways to show spite, simply because one doesn't want to kowtow to her grandeurs and insanities; and she does not remember her birth, that she too was the daughter of a poor trumpet player like me [Isabella was the daughter of a court violinist] and that she has a sister in Midrit [Madrid] who bombards her with letters. . . . And I do say only: 'Ev-viva' the Venetians for the time they hissed her to death, it would have been better if they had done away with her as they intended, and then my poor wife would not have died of distress, and if things go on in this way I too shall go crazy. You are lucky to be far away, and may God always keep you thus so that you can always be tranquil and enjoy your peace, which you probably could not enjoy near her; she thanks the Heavens a thousand times for having taken you as a husband; for if she had married a man who thought as she thinks, by now they would both be in the poorhouse.[7]

Giuseppe grumbled like an elderly disaffected retainer, but Isabella's own situation was increasingly desperate. She was in poor health, bored, and addicted to gambling. In an undated letter to Bartolini, she wrote:

> When Fortune frowns everything conspires against one. I have need of a friend and my mind turns to you. You know that my health is always poor, that my affairs go from bad to worse. To distract myself I turned to gambling, with such misfortune that I cannot pick up a card that is not beaten. The idea that my luck would change has caused me to go too far and to get into difficulties.

She went on to explain that she had a valued portrait in miniature from her Naples years which she believed could fetch a handsome sum:

> There are so many English people at Florence who collect fine things. Couldn't you try to sell it for me? Believe me, dear Bartolini, I am in a most horrible

[6] GRLD, III, 728–29.

[7] FBN, CV58, 177; WRB, 175.

> situation. You have shown me friendship, in all circumstances,—don't abandon me.[8]

Gambling debts were not something Rossini was willing to underwrite. During his early months in Paris he showed some consideration to Isabella, making funds available for medical expenses. Nonetheless, letters advising thrift in Castenaso when he himself was living the good life on vacation in France and Spain made difficult reading. As his own health deteriorated, so his attitude towards Isabella became chillier and more distant. She, by contrast, never lost her fondness for 'the maestro', even after their formal separation in 1837.

Most opera houses have 'golden ages' on which historians look back with fascination. For the Théâtre Italien, the period 1830–1836 was just such an age. Rossini's role in the new management was effectively that of artistic director. He oversaw repertory, recommended and recruited singers, monitored the quality of the orchestra, and consulted closely with the stage director, his friend and former fellow student at the Bologna Liceo, Domenico Ferri. He also advised on the increasingly important position of chief conductor. This was a new phenomenon, different from the position of chief coach or *maestro concertatore* held by Rossini's loyal friend and assistant, the composer Giovanni Tadolini.

Rossini also kept a keen eye on costs. The theatre was not entirely without financial support from the government, but for Aguado, Severini, and Rossini it was a major investment. If the theatre made a profit, which it invariably did, it was they who benefited; if it ran up a deficit, the liability was also theirs. The partnership had its enemies. Some of those who in the 1820s had been opposed to Rossini the composer now attacked him from a different angle, accusing him of being little more than a self-serving *capitaliste d'affaires.* As long as his bonds continued to increase in value, this was precisely the kind of criticism Rossini was happy to ignore.

The roster of singers the theatre was able to draw on was without equal anywhere in Europe. Like any good artistic director, Rossini was mindful of old-timers who still had a contribution to make: Filippo Galli, for example. But it was youth that excited him most. Outstanding among the

[8] WRP, 144.

young talent was Manuel García's daughter, Maria Malibran, who had made her Paris debut in *Semiramide* in 1828 at the age of 20. Many years later Rossini told Michotte:

> Ah, that marvellous creature! She surpassed all her imitators by her truly disconcerting musical genius, and all the women I have known by the superiority of her intelligence, the variety of her knowledge, and her flashing temperament, of which it is impossible to give an idea. Knowing the most diverse languages, she sang in Spanish (her native tongue), Italian, French, German, and after eight days of study, she sang *Fidelio* in English in London. She sketched, painted, embroidered, sometimes made her own costumes; above all, she wrote. Her letters are masterpieces of subtle intelligence, of verve, of good humour, and they display unparalleled originality of expression.[9]

With first-rate casts, Rossini's own operas thrived, as did the operas of rising young stars such as Donizetti and Bellini. Donizetti's *Anna Bolena* featured in the 1832 season with a cast which included Pasta, Rubini, and Lablache. That same year, Bellini's *La straniera* was revived in a special 'Rubini edition'. In 1835 the theatre staged newly commissioned works from both composers: Bellini's *I puritani* and Donizetti's *Marin Faliero.* Bellini resented the fact that the more fluent Donizetti was also being favoured by Rossini, though as the operas went into production Rossini gave both men the benefit of his wisdom and experience. The cast for *I puritani* featured Rubini, Tamburini, Lablache, and the young Giulia Grisi: the legendary 'puritani quartet', as it came to be known. The quartet also sang in *Marin Faliero,* which featured another Rossini protégé, the Russian tenor Nicola Ivanoff, as the Gondoliere.[10]

One of Aguado's long-standing ambitions was to introduce Rossini to his native Spain, where he still had extensive interests in banking and public works projects. Tempted by the prospect of an all-expenses-paid winter break, Rossini set out with Aguado for Madrid on 4 February 1831. Nine days later, on the evening of their arrival, he conducted *Il barbiere di Siviglia* to great acclaim in the presence of King Ferdinand VII. In the days which followed he was feted by the Spanish court: by the king,

[9] EM, 121–23; see Plate 14.

[10] See Plate 17.

with whom he declined to share a cigar on the grounds that he could not guarantee the consequences, and by the king's opera-loving brother, who delivered himself of a somewhat histrionic account of Assur's aria from *Semiramide* in the composer's presence. Ever the master of the post-performance pleasantry, Rossini observed that he had never heard anything quite like it.

What Rossini was not prepared for was the revelation that the archdeacon of Madrid, Manuel Fernández Varela, had set his heart on possessing a new and original manuscript by the master. The request could have been politely declined were it not for the fact that Varela was a close personal friend of Aguado. A *Stabat mater* was suggested, an added burden for Rossini, given the existence of Pergolesi's widely respected setting. As a compromise, he agreed to set the poem on the understanding that after the initial performance the manuscript would be retained by Varela and remain unpublished. A gold snuff box studded with diamonds was given in lieu of a fee.

If Varela had hoped to have the work by the following Easter, he was due for a disappointment. By the spring of 1832 Rossini had composed six of the twelve movements (Nos 1, 5–9 of the work as we now have it). Unable to face the task of completing the textually less promising sections of the poem, he asked Tadolini to complete them for him. This Rossini–Tadolini *Stabat mater* was performed in Madrid on Good Friday 1833. When Varela died in 1837, leaving his considerable fortune to charitable causes, the manuscript, contrary to Rossini's instructions, was sold to a private buyer, who in turn sold it to a Parisian music publisher. Given the work's value, not to mention the embarrassing fact of its dual authorship, this was a vexing situation. Though in poor health, Rossini moved swiftly to reclaim the composition and then, in 1841, it to attend to its completion.

In 1832 a cholera epidemic swept through Paris. At first it seemed confined to the deprived areas of the city, but when corpses began appearing on the streets and the minister of the interior himself died, there was a more general exodus. Rossini joined Aguado and his family in Bayonne, which bored him, and then in the Pyrenees, which he found more agreeable. By September the house party had moved on to Toulouse. The cholera epidemic was receding in Paris, but those who could afford to do so continued to keep their distance. It was in Toulouse that Rossini met a young

man destined to be one of France's greatest organ-builders, the 21-year-old Aristide Cavaillé-Coll. The Cavaillé-Coll family had recently developed a 'Poikilorgue', a form of harmonium, which fascinated Rossini. (He would later score his *Petite messe solennelle* for two pianos and harmonium.) Rossini strongly advised Aristide to move to Paris to continue his studies, which he did the following year.

As Aguado was clearly aware, Rossini's health was increasingly a matter of concern. The gonorrhea from which he had suffered for a number of years was causing severe urethritis and painful urethral strictures. He also suffered from hemorrhoids, and his weight veered alarmingly. It is impossible to gauge the extent to which these unhappy (often humiliating) physical conditions affected his mental state. By 1832 what had previously been interpreted as natural mood swings—spells of intense activity followed by quieter, more withdrawn periods—was beginning to look like a form of manic-depression. What Rossini needed more than anything else at this stage of his life was a 'carer', someone who would attend to his mental, physical, and domestic needs on a daily basis. Astonishingly, just such a person had already come into his life, and from a most unexpected quarter.

Olympe Louise Aléxandrine Descuilliers was born on 9 May 1797. The illegitimate daughter of Adelaide Descuilliers, she was brought up in the house of her stepfather, Joseph Pélissier, whose name she took. At the age of 14 she was put out to hire, seeking out well-to-do 'protectors' in smart Parisian society. Since she was shrewd as well as alluring, a first-rate housekeeper who was also a successful *cocotte,* she slowly acquired wealth as well as a position in society. The circles she moved in during the 1820s included those of Rossini's superiors at the Opéra, men such as Lauriston and La Rochefoucauld. She was briefly the mistress of the painter Horace Vernet, who used her as the model in his *Judith et Holophernes.* The young Balzac thought her 'the most beautiful courtesan in Paris' and might have married her (for her money rather than for her dark eyes and raven hair) if Olympe had been imprudent enough to accept. Having risen sexually, socially, and economically to the point where she presided over her own salon, profited from her own gaming tables, and made financial loans at steep rates of interest to a dissolute patrician elite, she was not in the business of underwriting the career of a bustling young writer.

In 1831 Balzac had his first public success with *La Peau de chagrin*. In a celebrated incident in the novel, the hero, Raphaël de Valentin, conceals himself in the bedroom of the alluring and influential Fedora. It was widely rumoured that the incident had actually taken place during Balzac's pursuit of Olympe Pélissier, though Balzac himself always denied the fact. Fedora was not Olympe, but it is difficult to ignore the portrait Balzac painted of her: physically opulent, sexually chilly, snobbish and insecure, yet possessed of a strange inner warmth and private serenity, a quality which manifested itself when, to Raphaël's astonishment, she gave a solitary rendition of an air from Cimarosa's *Il matrimonio segreto* in a voice of 'true pitch and liquid clarity'.

It is not clear when Rossini and Olympe first met. Whenever that was, the relationship itself appears to have taken root in 1832. A letter to Balzac dated 2 January invited him to supper in the company of Rossini. Olympe was banking on Balzac's being his 'charming self', 'more brilliant than ever', after the Christmas break.

It was a curious, and in many ways fortunate, meeting between two not dissimilar men. Like Rossini, Balzac was a stocky, short-necked, full-bellied man, a classic example of the pyknic type; he was also immensely productive and, like Rossini, subject to a form of manic-depressive illness. They seem to have dined together a good deal in the years 1832–1835, and clearly had more in common than the friendship of Olympe. Both moved in well-to-do society, which they observed at a distance; both distrusted public opinion ('that perverted trollop', as Balzac called it); both were suspicious of the new liberal-democratic mood which arrived with Louis-Philippe. ('You may tell as many lies as a newly crowned king', observes a character in *La Peau de chagrin*.)

Music, Rossini's in particular, was also important to the texture of ideas in *La Peau de chagrin*. Seen from one perspective, Rossini was an urbane figure from a bygone age, a composer devolved from the school of Cimarosa and Paisiello, an emblem of classical sweetness and decorum which the besotted wretches of Parisian society yearned for in their morning-after moods. Seen from another perspective, Rossini's music, judged by staid bourgeois taste to be merely noisy, was itself party to a clamourous, dissipated world of high living and heightened sensation. It is as though Balzac was seeking not only the truth about the enigmatic Fedora but also the truth about this most enigmatic of composers who seemed to feed classical

and romantic sensibilities with equal ease. Six years later Balzac wrote *Gambara,* a 'philosophical study' of music about a composer who went mad pursuing his dream of the perfect symphony. There were Rossinian overtones to the tale (Gambara lodged with a restaurateur, whose search for the perfect dish had led to his expulsion from Italy because his food was so revolting), but Gambara was not only Rossini. He was also Beethoven ('the only man who ever made me feel jealous' said Balzac, referring to the Fifth Symphony), not to mention a tribe of cranks and bores whose endless experiments came to nothing.

Rossini's friends were not universally pleased to find a new woman in the composer's life. Édouard Robert, who liked to have Rossini to himself, dubbed her 'Mme Rabatjoie No. 2', 'The Second Mrs. Spoilsport'. Rossini made his own feelings known in 1832 by writing a cantata for voice and piano which he dedicated to Olympe. It was *Giovanna d'Arco,* a twenty-minute *gran scena* in which high drama was distilled into private soliloquy. Rossini is said to have considered writing an opera on the Joan of Arc story, another tale of a nation's struggle for liberty, but rejected the idea because of the absence of a love interest—or rather because of the implausibility of its introduction into this particular story.[11]

Rossini's relationship with Olympe, which had begun as a discreet liaison among the drawing rooms and at the dinner tables of fashionable Paris, grew into something altogether deeper, stabilising two unstable lives. Olympe found security of a kind in Rossini's reputation and in his continuing trust, even though the duties that were demanded of her were formidable and marriage was impossible whilst Isabella was alive. For over twenty frequently bleak years she encouraged, comforted, and nursed Rossini through long periods of physical and mental illness, more a second mother than a would-be wife. After the death of Anna Rossini in 1827, it was Olympe who emerged as the one reassuring presence in Rossini's often troubled world.

[11] GRR, II, 198n.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Paris, the Rhineland, and Return to Italy (1835–1846)

THE YEAR 1835 WAS ONE OF UPS AND DOWNS FOR ROSSINI. HE was in better health, mentally and physically, than he had been in some time. A new work was published, and the dispute over his government pension was finally resolved in his favour. On the debit side, Bellini's death from amoebic dysentery at the age of 33 came as a great blow. The funeral service in Les Invalides was a grand one; the honorary pallbearers included Carafa, Cherubini, Paër, and Rossini himself. Later Rossini braved the mud, the rain, and the slow march to Père-Lachaise cemetery in order to be at the graveside. He wrote to Filippo Santocanale on 3 October:

> A military band of one hundred and twenty musicians escorted the procession; every ten minutes a blow on the tamtam resounded; and I assure you that the throng of people and the sorrow reflected in their faces made an inexpressible effect; I cannot tell you how great the affection was which this poor friend of ours had inspired. I am in bed, half dead, for I won't hide from you that I wanted to be present when the last word was pronounced over Bellini's grave.[1]

Rossini now spent a good deal of time ensuring that Bellini's estate was properly settled. Bellini's father, Rosario, later wrote to him:

> You always encouraged my son in his work; you took him under your protection, you neglected nothing that could increase his glory and his welfare. . . . I am overcome with gratitude for your great kindness, as well as for that of a

[1] LRM, 62–64.

> number of distinguished artists, which I shall never forget. Pray, sir, be my spokesman and tell these artists that Bellini's father and family, as well as our compatriots in Catania, will cherish an imperishable recollection of this generous conduct.[2]

Rossini continued to receive operatic commissions. Some were clearly in vain. On 24 August 1833 *The Times* had reported: 'Mr Bunn, who has been some time in Paris, has offered Rossini 20,000 francs to write an opera for the English stage, which will be produced about April next'. A more serious proposal came from the Kärntnertortheater in Vienna in the spring of 1836. Rossini declined. At this point, one senses, his career as an opera composer was definitely over.

Since his return to Paris in 1830, he had taken to writing occasional items for individual singers and particular social gatherings, principal among which was the salon of the dazzling, sexually wayward Cristina Belgiojoso-Trivulzio (1800–1871), the 'revolutionary princess', whose activities on behalf of the Italian liberation movement caused Metternich to think her one of the most dangerous woman in Europe. Her home in the rue d'Anjou was a meeting place for leading writers and musicians, including Chopin, Dumas *père,* Heine (with whom she had one of her many affairs), Victor Hugo, Liszt, de Musset, George Sand, and Rossini himself. Count Carlo Pepoli, another high-born liberationist with a love of literature and Italian opera, was a regular fixture at the Belgiojoso salon. He had provided the libretto for Bellini's *I puritani* (possibly on Rossini's recommendation), and it was he who wrote eight of the twelve poems for Rossini's sophisticated and entertaining *Les soirées musicales,* a set of eight arias and four duets for voice and piano, which Troupenas now published.

Rossini had made a brief visit to Bologna in the summer of 1834 and was about to go there again when, in June 1836, the banker Lionel Rothschild proposed a trip to Belgium and the Rhineland. Rossini was generous in his praise of the landscapes, towns, churches, cathedrals, and paintings of the Flemings and Rhinelanders. Only the railway journey from Antwerp to Brussels unnerved and displeased him. Many years later he composed a not altogether amusing piano piece, 'Un petit train de plaisir comico-imitatif", in which genial mimicry of the train's progress is overtaken by a fatal derailment, the contemplation of the heavenward flight of

[2] GRR, II, 181.

the victims' souls, and a sardonic coda in which the heirs of the more well-to-do victims cut a few celebratory capers.

During the tour Rossini met the 27-year-old Felix Mendelssohn. In his book on Mendelssohn published in 1874, Ferdinand Hiller wrote:

> Rossini had lost the enormous corpulence of former years: his figure was still full but not disproportioned, and his splendid countenance, which displayed both the power of the thinker and the wit of the humorist, beamed with health and happiness. He spoke French quite as well as Italian, and with the most melodic voice; his long residence in Paris, and intercourse with people there, had transformed him from a haughty young Italian into a man of the world, dignified, graceful and charming, and enchanting everyone with his irresistible amiability.[3]

Away from the social throng where men and women were 'ready to faint with fear and surprise when he appeared',[4] Rossini was able to be his witty and charming self. His admiration for the economy, sensitivity, and vivacity of Mendelssohn's music was instinctive and deep-seated, and he treated him as an equal. Mendelssohn, by contrast, appears to have shown some initial nervousness with the great Italian. Rossini's amused and by no means uncomplimentary remark that a caprice by Mendelssohn had the smell of Scarlatti about it caused some offence. But this was not typical of their relationship. Not only did Mendelssohn find Rossini infinitely amusing, he was also touched by his surprising and sincere veneration of the music of Bach.

Rossini finally arrived back in Bologna in late November. He missed Olympe, but plans were afoot to bring her to Italy after what was, in the end, an amicable agreement that Isabella and he should apply for a formal separation. Early in 1837 Olympe made her will, piled her worldly possessions into her rickety carriage (which broke down on the Pont Neuf within minutes of leaving), and set off for Bologna. Édouard Robert again expressed his disapproval. What could Rossini possibly want with two boring wives in Bologna when there was that wonderful brothel by the Palazzo Guidotti? Strangely for so close a colleague, Robert appears to have had scant understanding of Rossini's situation and needs. Olympe

[3] HFM, 56.

[4] HFM, 59.

was concerned about how she would be received in Bologna. There was no question of her living with Rossini. Even so, the relationship, sincere and firm-rooted though it was, required discreet handling. Above all, it was vital that Isabella should accept her; so it was no doubt a relief to all concerned that a luncheon at Mme Rossini's went off without incident. Resorting to diplomatic jargon, Rossini described the meeting as 'friendly'.

At the end of 1837 Rossini and Olympe travelled to Milan, where they passed the winter season. As ever, Rossini was the centre of social and musical attention. Writing to Antonio Zoboli in November 1837, Olympe noted:

> We stayed five days with la Pasta and on our return Rossini opened up our house and all Milan wants to visit us. On Fridays we have soirées which Rossini calls musical evenings; next Friday our amateurs will perform *The Creation,* and the celebrated pianist Litz [Liszt], with his rare talent, will for the second time play some new pieces. In short, the Milanese musical world is enchanted.[5]

Rossini would develop a not dissimilar lifestyle in Paris in the 1860s. In December 1837 Liszt gave a solo recital at La Scala, Milan, somewhat to the bemusement of the Milanese. 'I come to the theatre for enjoyment, not study!' complained one listener. Liszt and Rossini would meet and correspond for the next thirty years. At first Liszt thought Rossini 'rich, idle, and illustrious'. For his part, Rossini was both diverted by Liszt (in later years he would produce at least one wicked parody of Liszt's music) and impressed by him, though Liszt's mistress, Countess Marie d'Agoult, was less than friendly towards Olympe. A fortnight after the Milan recital the countess gave birth to Liszt's second daughter, Cosima. In essence, the countess's relationship with Liszt was no different from Olympe's with Rossini. Liszt, by contrast, showed no such aristocratic condescension towards his fellow composer. As an earnest of his goodwill (and no doubt to ingratiate himself with the Italian public) he made piano transcriptions of the complete *Les soirées musicales.*

On the night of 14–15 January 1838, tragedy struck. A fire in the scenery store of the Théâtre Italien spread through the entire building, gutting the theatre as well as the nearby residential accommodation where Rossini himself had once lived. Robert was badly burned, but escaped.

[5] WRP, 145.

Severini, jumping from a first-floor window and landing awkwardly on a pile of stones, broke his spine, and died almost instantly. The shock was enormous. Severini had been a friend to everyone: to Olympe and her mother, to Isabella, and above all to Rossini. The previous year he had thought of retiring to Bologna, where he had bought a property (instantly dubbed 'La Severiniana' by Rossini), but Robert had persuaded him to return to Paris. Rossini lost papers and scores in the fire, but these were of little account. His primary concern was Robert's health and the releasing of the necessary funds to secure the theatre's, and Robert's, survival. Robert made a slow recovery but in November 1838 handed over management of the theatre to Louis Viardot. It was the end of an era, the breaking of Rossini's last professional link with Paris.

The first indication that Rossini's father was ailing came in the spring of 1838, when Rossini and Olympe were forced to return to Bologna from Milan. It was a false alarm, but a year later, on 29 April 1839, Giuseppe died at the age of 75. Seriously depressed, Rossini wrote to a friend:

> I have lost all I possessed that was most precious to me on earth. Without illusions, without a future, imagine how I spend my days! My doctor wants me to go to Naples to take mud-baths, sea-baths and another medicinal cure. I endured a winter so cruel that I shall have to make up my mind to this trip, which in other circumstances would have been delightful, but which, in the grief of my present life, will be a matter of utter indifference to me. If only I could get over my glandular troubles and the pains in the joints that transfixed me all last winter.[6]

Merely setting eyes on objects which reminded him of his father caused Rossini to weep uncontrollably. In May, Olympe reported: 'He is with friends of his who do not know how to explain a sorrow that, despite his superiority, resists even his self-love; he is sick, he can neither sleep nor eat'.

Unsurprisingly, given its associations, Rossini decided to sell his palazzo on Strada Maggiore. Ever thoughtful and hospitable, Aguado wrote from Paris offering him rest and quiet at Petit-Bourg. Medical advice was against his going there, so it was left to Olympe to supervise a summer visit to Naples. Neither the change nor the so-called cures appear to have done Rossini's health much good. Still, Olympe was greatly amused by Barbaja,

[6] WRB, 204.

with whom they stayed, and it is difficult to think that Rossini was not in some way cheered by the company of his old mentor, friend, and sparring partner.

It would have been easy for Rossini to lose himself completely in morbid introspection. Happily, Bologna's Liceo Musicale harboured the hope that he might busy himself with its affairs. In January 1839 he had been offered the position of 'Permanent Honorary Adviser'. In a letter dictated during his father's final illness, he gratefully accepted the proposal as a token of his own former debt to the school. Although he attended the Liceo only once before setting out for Naples in June 1839, he promptly set in motion an attempt to attract Mercadante to the position of professor of counterpoint and composition, a post which carried with it the executive directorship of the school. The plan foundered, but Rossini continued conscientiously to carry out his duties, attending the Liceo almost daily: supervising teaching, presiding over rehearsals, lavishing on students and teachers a wealth of care and experience. He himself had been brought up in an age when skills were handed down on a one-to-one basis. As a consequence, he had serious misgivings about the new conservatoires and their 'singing classes'. In Bologna he divided the classes, differentiating between those students who were capable of following advanced vocal studies and those who needed instruction in basic sight-reading. The Chair of Singing was thus divided between 'Canto Perfezionato' and 'Solfeggio e Vocalizzo'. He also instituted a Chair of Accompaniment.

In the autumn of 1840 *Guillaume Tell* was staged in Bologna as *Rudolfo di Sterlinga.* It can hardly have excited Rossini, but the production had the merit of featuring his protégé Ivanoff. Acting on Ivanoff's behalf, Rossini tried to interest Venice's Teatro La Fenice in the project, but the management was not interested. The response was hardly surprising given Rossini's refusal three years earlier to direct a revival of *Guillaume Tell* as part of the reopening of La Fenice after a serious fire. Writing in one of his self-deprecatory moods, he suggested that music of 'a melancholy tint, peasants, mountains, and miseries' was not suitable for such a happy occasion. (Heedless of Rossini's advice, *Lucia di Lammermoor* was chosen instead.)

Though it can hardly have been good for them, Rossini and Olympe idled away their time in Bologna, eating too much and taking too little exercise. In August 1840 Olympe wrote her Parisian lawyer, Hector Couvert: 'I am a fat woman, preoccupied with digestion from morning till night,

looking to outwit the ravages of time. Now my hair is grey, I pretend it is blond. I no longer know what sex I am'.[7] Meanwhile medication appears to have worsened Rossini's physical condition. The gonorrhea continued to produce secretions and blockages. A catheter was used regularly to stop the retention of urine, and the urethra dosed with a bewildering variety of concoctions: mallow, gum, sweet almond, flower of sulphur mixed with cream of tartar. There were warm baths, salts, castor oil, and purgative broths. Leeches were applied to haemorrhoids and to the perineum; there were rashes and infections of the scrotum, and debilitating bouts of diarrhea. Much of this treatment is detailed in a doctor's report compiled in Bologna in 1842 and sent by Olympe to Couvert in Paris.[8] Using terminology which Petrarch or Chaucer would have understood, the doctor described Rossini as being of the lymphatic or sluggish temperament rather than, as superficial appearances might suggest, sanguine. His nervous system was said to be highly sensitive. In a notable euphemism, we are told that he 'abused Venus' in his earliest youth, from whence the gonorrheal condition had derived. The report stated that the patient had begun to moderate his sexual activity in 1836 but that the present condition, established some time later, had become critical by 1841–1842. The report concluded that many of the treatments had merely irritated Rossini's mercifully robust system. Not surprisingly in the circumstances, Rossini himself had become prey to morbid speculation about the precise nature and extent of the disease.

As the latest health crisis neared its peak, the case of the *Stabat mater* swam back into view. In September 1841 the original purchaser of the manuscript from the Varela estate sold it to the Paris music publisher Antoine Aulagnier. Acting with due propriety, Aulagnier wrote to Rossini seeking formal permission to publish it. Rossini's reply was swift and combative, arguing that the work had merely been dedicated to Varela and that all rights remained with the composer. Furthermore, it was incomplete, as would be evident to any competent musician who took the trouble to examine the manuscript.

Events moved quickly. By the end of September, Rossini had drawn up a contract turning over the rights of an all-Rossini *Stabat mater* to Troupenas

[7] BCRS 38 (1998), 41n.

[8] WRB, 379–81.

for the sum of 6,000 francs. He was also busy composing. A letter of 24 September mentioned three fully scored numbers which were being forwarded to Paris; it also derided Aulagnier's counterclaim that the gift of the gold snuff box constituted a contract of sale and that Rossini was no longer the manuscript's legal owner. Aulagnier, meanwhile, had ordered plates to be made of the Rossini–Tadolini *Stabat mater* in Hamburg. When Troupenas heard of this, he instituted legal proceedings. A bitter, sometimes violent, court case ensued, at the end of which Rossini was deemed to be the lawful owner of his own work. Aulagnier was left with the Tadolini infills.

Extracts from the new all-Rossini *Stabat mater* were performed privately in Paris before the brothers Léon and Marie Escudier staged the work's premiere at the Théâtre Italien on 7 January 1842. Whilst still in their teens, these enterprising young men had founded *La France musicale* as a rival of Italianate orientation to the *Revue et Gazette Musicale de Paris,* owned by Aulagnier's confederate, Maurice-Adolphe Schlesinger. Adolphe Adam, who wrote glowingly of private previews of the *Stabat mater,* was among the journal's earliest contributors, as were Balzac, Castil-Blaze, Gautier, and Schumann. In the Aulagnier-Troupenas dispute the Escudiers were naturally on the side of Troupenas, to whom they made an offer of 8,000 francs for an exclusive three-month option on the performing rights.

The management the Théâtre Italien showed no interest in the new work. Undaunted, the Escudiers hired the theatre at their own expense and set about assembling a distinguished quartet of soloists. According to their reminiscences, the bass, Tamburini, was so taken with the 'Pro peccatis' that he persuaded Grisi, Albertazzi, and Mario to accept the brothers' offer.[9] The clamour to attend rehearsals was intense, but the Escudiers barred all visitors, further heightening the sense of anticipation. In such an atmosphere, the work might easily have failed; in fact, it was a triumph. The next day, the Escudiers tell us, the manager of the Théâtre Italien was at their door begging permission to stage further performances. The Escudiers took a 12,000-franc profit and, with remarkable generosity, ceded their rights to the theatre, which netted an additional 150,000 francs during the remainder of the season.

[9] MLER, 261.

Plans were immediately begun for an Italian prima in Bologna. As part of his eventually unsuccessful strategy to tempt Donizetti into accepting the directorship of the Liceo, Rossini invited him to conduct the performance. Ivanoff and Clara Novello were also natural choices. Rossini had known and admired Clara Novello since, as an 11-year-old, she had been brought by her parents to the Institution de Musique Religieuse in Paris. Subsequently she had sung for Mendelssohn in Germany and had made her Bologna debut as Semiramide in 1841. As a token of his affection, Rossini wrote a charming cadenza to be inserted at the end of the 'Sancta Mater'. For the rest, Bologna had to make do with what it could rustle up. The contralto and bass solos were sung by talented amateurs, whilst Rossini himself urged, cajoled, and flattered able singers and instrumentalists to serve in the specially assembled chorus and orchestra. The performances which took place in Bologna's ancient Archiginnasio on 18–20 March were a further triumph, though it is said that Rossini was reduced to 'a trembling and copious sweat' by an abusive newspaper article about the work.'[10]

Donizetti was embraced in public by Rossini and given a set of diamond studs. Rossini continued to negotiate with him about the Bologna post, but Donizetti's eyes were set on Vienna. To extricate himself, he made unrealistic demands, which Rossini countered with a firm, fair, and generous letter, offering terms as liberal as local resources permitted. He offered help with the investment of capital and pointed out that in Bologna one could live like a lord on a few scudi. But it was to no avail. Donizetti had success with *Linda di Chamounix* at the Kärntnertortheater in May 1842 and, ironically, with Rossini's *Stabat mater.* Shortly afterwards he was offered the position of Kapellmeister to the Austrian court. It was a more prestigious post than anything Bologna could provide and gave him generous leave in which to write the handful of operas he was able to complete before the onset of the illness which was to bring his career to a swift and premature close.

Rossini continued to busy himself with the propagation of 'new' music at the Liceo (Beethoven's *Egmont* Overture was programmed) and

[10] There is no indication of who wrote the review. Wagner's malicious *ad hominem* article on the legal maneuvrings surrounding the revised *Stabat mater* had appeared in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* on 28 December 1841.

with fund-raising. Olympe, meanwhile, was concerned with medical matters. The Bologna physician's report had been forwarded to France's most acclaimed urologist, Jean Civiale. In May 1843 Rossini set out with Olympe for consultations and treatment by Civiale in Paris. The composer's arrival created an inevitable and unwelcome furor. His apartment became like a theatre foyer, people hustling and queuing to call on him. They were to be disappointed. Civiale quickly placed the patient under a medical regime that proscribed all socialising.

Civiale's skill was in catheterisation. His manual dexterity with the instrument had enabled him to develop an early form of lithotripsy which enabled bladder stones to be crushed by a device inserted through the urethra. For the best part of three months Rossini was kept in almost total isolation whilst he received medical and surgical treatment. Without it, he would probably have succumbed to a fatal obstruction of the bladder. Civiale averted that and, by advising Rossini on the correct procedures for catheterisation, enabled him to manage his own condition. Many years later, visitors to Rossini's study were surprised to see catheters openly on display alongside the wigs and musical instruments. It was, he said, 'the best of instruments'.

During his stay in Paris, Rossini had been approached by the director of the Opéra, Léon Pillet, to write a new work for the stage. He declined, adding that *La donna del lago* still awaited a satisfactory production in the city. Pillet bided his time and then, in the summer of 1846, visited Bologna with a view to commissioning a new French-language version of *La donna del lago* suitable for the Opéra. The plan was to keep the music but recast the drama, replacing Scott's *The Lady of the Lake* with an account (also taken from Scott) of Robert Bruce's defeat of the English and his humiliation of the arrogant and effete Edward II. Knowing that the ailing Rossini would merely advise on the adaptation, Pillet took with him the composer Louis Niedermeyer, of whom Rossini remained exceptionally fond, and the librettist Gustave Vaëz. Once work began, Rossini also allowed other music to be used. Movements from *Zelmira* opened and closed act 1. *Zelmira* was also the source of Robert Bruce's brooding nocturnal meditation beneath the ramparts of Sterling Castle which opened act 3. Apart from a reprise of the 'Chorus of the Bards', this final act managed perfectly well without *La donna del lago.* A chorus from *Armida* sounded more like a Witches' Sabbath than a Gathering of the Clans, but that was the only misjudgment.

The adaptation had its premiere at the Paris Opéra on 23 December 1846, after which it played to packed and appreciative audiences throughout the winter. Had it been a new opera, it would have been a critical success. Unfortunately, pasticcio, once so popular, was now more or less taboo. A long and bitter controversy ensued, with contributions from Heller, Berlioz, and even Olympe herself, who announced that she was sending a pair of ass's ears to the editor of the *Journal des Débats* and to Berlioz. The critics were right to be sceptical. Unfortunately, justifiable criticism of *Robert Bruce* was used as a basis for wider-ranging attacks on Rossini's personal and artistic integrity at a time when his stock was already falling in informed musical circles. In assisting with the preparation of a pastiche, he had surrendered a number of hostages to fortune. As for Pillet, *Robert Bruce* effectively ended his rule at the Opéra and that of his influential mistress, the mezzo-soprano Rosine Stolz, whose out-of-tune singing (gloatingly chronicled by Berlioz) caused a furor, to which she responded by shredding a fine lace handkerchief, hurling unladylike imprecations at the audience, and striding from the stage.

In March 1844 Rossini wheeled out the 'Chorus of the Bards' as the basis for a cantata, 'Santo Genio dell'Italia terra', to a text by Marchetti, as part of the tercentenary celebrations of the birth of Tasso. Later the same year he responded to another small commission. He had recently turned over to his friend Gabussi the publishing rights to the incidental music for *Edipo coloneo.* During a visit to Bologna, Troupenas persuaded Rossini to create a choral triptych by adding a third chorus to two from *Edipo coloneo.* The new work took as its title St Paul's famous trinity of moral imperatives: faith, hope, and charity. French texts were quickly assembled. 'Dall'alma celeste' from *Edipo coloneo* furnished music for 'La foi', and 'O Giove, egioco' became 'L'espérance'. The transcriptions were for piano and twelve female voices, one of whom has a small solo role. The chorus which Rossini added to complete the triptych was soirée music, yet it was full of distinctive touches, notably in the harmonisation of the piano part, which kept sentimentality at bay. The work was first heard in the Salle Troupenas in Paris in November 1844. Adam enthused and Berlioz bitched. 'M. Rossini's alms-giving will not ruin him' was his uncharitable conclusion.[11]

[11] *Journal des Débats,* 6 December 1844.

Liszt was more impressed; in 1847 he made a transcription of 'La charité' for voice and organ.

In May 1844 Rossini journeyed to Ferrara to hear Donzelli, now nearing the end of his career, in Mercadante's *Il bravo.* He also continued to promote Ivanoff's career by commissioning and funding a new grand aria to be written by Verdi for Ivanoff's exclusive use in act 2 of *Ernani.* One imagines that Verdi's gracious andante suited Ivanoff better than the strenuous cabaletta. According to Chorley, who had admired Ivanoff's Rodrigo in Rossini's *Otello,* his strengths were neatness of execution and a 'delicious' tone, gentle and sweet. He was less impressed by Ivanoff's presence on stage. 'Like an automaton not wound up' is how he put it.[12]

In October 1845 news arrived that Isabella was gravely ill. It had become an increasingly grim period for Rossini. Shortly after the deaths of Severini and Rossini's own father, Adolphe Nourrit committed suicide by jumping from a hotel window in Naples. In 1841 Barbaja died assisting building workers at his villa in Posillipo; the following year Aguado collapsed and died after a strenuous walk on a road that had been blocked by snow. By 1850, others in the musical world would be gone too: minor figures such as Rossini's friend Gabussi, alongside the grander talents of Chopin, Mendelssohn, and Donizetti. Isabella was 60. Rossini had seen little of her since their formal separation eight years earlier, but he now drove post haste to Castenaso. He spent half an hour at her bedside and was, we are told, much moved. As Ernest Newman noted at the time of the death of Lady Elgar, 'The severance of a long tie must inevitably mean much bitterness and suffering, much dwelling in the past and self-reproach. We always seem heavy debtors to the dead: we feel that they have not had their chance and that life has given us an unfair advantage over them'.[13] Such thoughts must have crossed Rossini's already troubled consciousness as the woman whom he had in some sense abandoned lay gravely ill. For a month he received daily reports on her condition. She died on 7 October, allegedly murmuring Rossini's name. With both parents and now Isabella dead, he was even more an exile in his own country. His remaining tie was with the French-born Olympe, whom he married, after a decent interval, on 16 August 1846.

[12] HCR, 54.

[13] V. Newman, *Ernest Newman: A Memoir by His Wife* (London, 1963), 18.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Times of Barricades and Assassinations: Bologna, Florence, and Departure from Italy (1847–1855)

ROSSINI'S *CANTATA IN ONORE DEL SOMMO PONTEFICE PIO NONO,* written to celebrate the elevation of Pope Pius IX, had its prima in the Palace of the Senate on the Capitol in Rome on 1 January 1847. The commission had come from the Torlonia family, with whom Rossini had crossed swords over *Matilde di Shabran* twenty-five years earlier. The new pope's decision to grant amnesty to all political prisoners within a month of his election in June 1846 inspired the belief that he would heal wounds and unite Italy. Rossini tried to reduce the scale of the commission, but the Torlonias, jealously guarding their reputation as power-brokers and patrons within the Papal State, persuaded him to do otherwise.

The cantata, to a text by Giovanni Marchetti, lasts forty-five minutes and was on a very grand scale indeed. Rossini dispatched the text's more overtly sycophantic sentiments in recitative:

> Pius's great clemency poured new and accustomed gentleness into my heart. From the very moment when he was crowned with laurel, I breathed air of a sweetness beyond words; the sky seemed more serene than usual . . . all seemed to say to me: you will be satisfied.

The recitatives apart, none of the music was new, though characteristically Rossini selected shrewdly and patched expediently, shaping the cantata into a series of interlocking tableaux. The first (overture, chorus, and Agorante's cavatina from *Ricciardo e Zoraide*) featured the prisoners Pius has pardoned, along with Public Love, who praised Pius on their behalf. In the

second, Hope joined Christian Spirit, Public Love, and the leaders of the people in imagining a new political order which would be more loved than feared (chorus from *Ermione,* quartet from *Armida*). The concluding tableau (Air with chorus, 'Quel nuage sanglant', from *Le siège de Corinthe*) was less benign. It was a call to arms by the church militant, which proponents of the Risorgimento had no difficulty in hearing in explicitly revolutionary terms. If the choice of *Armida* (Christian knights) and *Le siège de Corinthe* (doom-laden liberation music) seemed merely expedient, the recycling of the powerful opening sequence from *Ricciardo e Zoraide* was something of a masterstroke. Such is the chameleon character of music, the effect was both moving and inspiriting. The opera's overture-cum-introduzione, with its expressive horn solo, skirling obbligato woodwinds, and offstage banda, encapsulated in a single movement the cantata's idea of a great crusade, at once resolute and humane, in which the papacy and the people would be one.

Given Rossini's essentially conservative temperament, his involvement in the popular enthusiasm surrounding the election of Pius IX must be seen as a further example of his being inadvertently caught up in events he could neither predict nor influence. With hard-line activists urging popular uprising, the abolition of the Papacy's temporal powers, and the setting up of a united democratic Italian republic, the initiatives of tentative liberalisers such as Pius IX and Charles Albert of Piedmont were treated as cues for more radical reforms. The Sicilian revolt of 12 January 1848 set in train a series of uprisings throughout Europe. Bologna was quickly involved and, as inevitably happens at such times, matters quickly got out of hand. Hot-headed republicans, fellow-travellers, and marauding soldiery, some of it Sicilian in origin, were suspicious of 'rich reactionaries', among whose number Rossini was unhappily counted. He had, in fact, signed a liberal, pro-nationalist petition to Cardinal Riario Sforza and made some modest contributions towards nationalist funds; but it was no secret that he was disturbed by much of the political violence, in particular by a series of arbitrary and uninvestigated assassinations which had taken place in Bologna. After a disturbance outside his house on 27 April, he deposited his will with a local notary (the city's Liceo was the principal beneficiary) before beating a hasty retreat to Florence. His departure caused consternation in Bologna. Pro-Rossini demonstrations were put in hand and windy speeches were made at torch-lit meetings. From his Florentine fastness,

Rossini replied decorously and at length to a humble request from the papal legate, Padre Ugo Bassi, for his return to Bologna. Not unreasonably, Rossini pleaded ill health as the cause of his being unable to return to his 'second home', though he accepted Bassi's suggestion that he should compose music for a nationalist hymn. When Bassi was wounded in action, the task of providing the words was handed to Filippo Martinelli. Rossini sketched a choral march and left the writing of the band accompaniment to his friend the clarinettist Domenico Liverani. A succession of euphuistic letters flowed between Bologna and Florence as arrangements were made for the first performance in Bologna's Piazza Maggiore on 21 June, but Rossini stayed away. Whilst in Florence, he composed his melodically varied and in the end strangely belligerent 'Hymn to Peace' ('È foriera la Pace ai mortali') for baritone, male chorus, and piano. This was written as a thank you to the painter Vincenzo Rasori, who had presented Rossini with a canvas depicting the sacred power of music (King David seated at a harp). A private offering for private consumption, the hymn may not be quite what it seems. Was Rossini doffing his hat to the young Verdi or satirising him? If the gloriously written final stanza is anything to go by, the latter explanation is the more probable one.

During the period 1848–1850 Rossini appears to have been generally unwell, worrying about the minutiae of domestic and legal matters he had left unattended in Bologna. He initiated a stream of enquiries into everything from ink pots to horses. Such concerns may have been rooted in reality but were clearly magnified and exacerbated by his manic-depressive condition and obsessive concern for detail. By September 1850 the political situation in Bologna was sufficiently stable for him to return there to settle his affairs, though he was prudent enough to request a police escort for the latter stages of the journey. He found Bologna tense and inward-looking. He also found the feeling of hostility towards the Austrians, and to the city governor in particular, too much to stomach. When a message had reached him in Florence that an Austrian officer was living in his Bologna apartment, he had expressed himself honoured but asked that the linen be looked to. It was a characteristic response. A keen sense of self-preservation was joined to an instinctive ability to relegate political concerns below social and aesthetic ones. Like Richard Strauss's attitude to events in Germany some eighty years later, Rossini's demeanour was one of public compliance and private disdain.

During the winter Rossini oversaw the packing of his household effects. He also sold the villa at Castenaso, which had been rented out since Isabella's death. He left Bologna in May 1851 and never returned. Indeed, in later years he developed a morbid dislike of the city. Looking back to those 'times of Barricades and Assassinations' in 1862, he told Ivanoff: 'You inhabit a city [Bologna], the sons of which, great and small, live by their Wits, by Fraud and by Lies. I still feel remorse for having induced you and the good Donzelli to establish yourselves in that Sewer. May God forgive me!!!'[1]

Rossini's four years in Florence seem to have coincided with some of the deepest troughs in his depressive cycles. Many who visited him during this time reported extreme nervousness or morbid excitability. He suffered from insomnia, loss of appetite, and a series of physical disabilities which often reduced him to a childlike dependence on Olympe and their servants. Writing to Santocanale in February 1855, he admitted that he was incapable of dressing without help. Conversation became difficult, and visitors were often burdened with elaborate details of his illnesses. In the summer of 1854 he visited the baths at Lucca, to no avail. Despairing of doctors, he submitted to a number of patent treatments, including a bogus 'magnetic' device. He was advised to take opium as a cure for insomnia but feared it would damage his mind still further. He talked of suicide but claimed that he was too cowardly to take the final step. Gossips as far afield as Paris and Milan reported him incurably insane.

He remained physically robust, however. The earliest known photograph, a rare daguerreotype dating from about 1850, shows a substantial, corpulent figure and an alert albeit pensive expression.[2] During periods of hyperactivity the Rossini of popular legend would occasionally shine through, rumbustious and amusing. A letter to Giuseppe Bellentani, a pork butcher in Modena, dated 'Florence, 28 December 1853' was addressed from 'The so-called Swan of Pesaro to the Eagle of Estenesian Sausage Men':

> You have wanted to impress me by soaring very high, by bestowing upon me specially prepared zamponi [stuffed pig's trotters] and cappelletti [meat-filled ravioli]; and it is entirely proper that I, as though from the marshy homelands of the ancient Padusa [Po], should raise a loud cry of special gratitude to you.

[1] WRP, 147.

[2] See plate 18.

> I found your collected works complete in every way; and I am as pleased by the internal mastery as by the joy of delighting in the finesse of your renowned compositions. I do not set your praises to music because, as I told you in another letter, I live in the world of harmony of an ex-composer.[3]

The letter, a good example of what Frank Walker has called Rossini's epistolary buffo style, did not have an entirely happy outcome. The butcher was so excited by it that he was obliged to take a rest cure in a nearby asylum. Two months later Rossini himself was ill again. Thanking Bellentani for a new consignment of delicacies, he regretted that persistent nervous ailments had prevented him from sampling them. 'I limit myself to reading the historical notes on gastronomy which you have sent me.'[4] In his more lucid moments he also wrote about music. Towards the end of 1852 he told his friend the scholar Luigi Cristostomo Ferrucci:

> The contralto is the norm against which the other voices and instruments must be gauged. If you want to do without the contralto, you can push the *prima donna assoluta* as high as the moon, and the *basso profondo* right down to the bottom of the well. And this will leave you with nothing in the middle. One should concentrate on the central register in order to be always in tune; at the extreme ends, what you gain in force you often lose in grace, and by this abuse you paralyze the throat, resorting as a remedy to *canto declamato,* that is, out-of-tune shouting. Then it becomes necessary to give the orchestration more body in order to cover the excess of the voice, to the detriment of good musical colour.[5]

In the same letter he also warned against the domination of the voice by the new instrumental forces which contemporary composers were deploying: 'The head will conquer the heart, science will lead art to its ruin under a deluge of notes; what is called "instrumental" will be the sepulchre of voices and of feeling. May it not come to pass!!!' The classical ideals of clarity, elegance, and balance were what Rossini continued to commend to friends and students. Trying his best to avoid the music of Liszt and Wagner, he took refuge in the new Bach–Gesellschaft edition, the first

[3] WRB, 254.
[4] WRB, 255.
[5] RGR, 306–7.

volumes of which were beginning to appear, and in the music of Palestrina, Haydn, and Mozart.[6]

Music would occasionally be heard in Rossini's apartment, usually among friends, after dinner, with the lights subdued. Only rarely would he himself be induced to play, and when he did he was often left in a distressed and tearful state. Yet the old mastery had not left him. Emilia Branca Romani, who was present on such an evening in Florence in 1854, noted the brilliance of his improvised accompaniment for Matilde Juva in 'Bel raggio lusinghier' from *Semiramide* and noted too that his own improvisations ('a fantasia alla Thalberg') on the prelude to Desdemona's 'Willow Song' were 'magnificent, astonishing, dumbfounding'.[7]

Of all the great Italian cities, Florence suited Rossini as well as any, a civilised milieu in which he had an honoured place. Unhappily, neither it nor the Italian spas he visited each summer were effecting any kind of cure. Olympe hankered after Paris—its society and its doctors. By April 1855 preparations had been completed to return there. It was a bold decision and, for whatever reason—a new environment, new doctors, or simply physical changes within Rossini himself as he moved into his mid-sixties—it proved to be an efficacious one.

[6] In 1856 Rossini made an enquiry to the André family about the whereabouts and possible terms of sale of the autograph manuscript of *Die Zauberflöte*.

[7] WRB, 257–59.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Return to Paris (1855)

THE JOURNEY FROM FLORENCE TO PARIS TOOK THE BEST PART OF a month. There was agreeable spring weather and a stopover in Nice, where Rossini was serenaded by local musicians in the garden of his hotel. Yet he still suffered. Olympe had taken an apartment in Paris's quartier Montmartre, to which only their closest friends were admitted: Count Frédéric Pillet-Will, Baron Lionel de Rothschild, Auber, Carafa, and Sampieri. As Rossini later explained, there was a formidable triple defence: first, the concierge ('a small fortress'), then his manservant Tonino ('a formidable bastion'), and finally Olympe ('to get past her, one needed to be invincible').

In July 1855 he travelled to the fashionable Normandy beach resort of Trouville, where Ferdinand Hiller was also staying. Hiller chronicled their conversations the following October in the *Kölnische Zeitung,* an eight-part serialisation, later reprinted in his memoir *Aus dem Tonleben unserer Zeit.* If Rossini had been ravaged by illness, Hiller saw little evidence of it.

> Rossini is now 63 years old. His features are little changed. It would be difficult to find a more intelligent face than his: a well-chiselled nose, an eloquent mouth, expressive eyes, and a magnificent forehead. His physiognomy is of a Southern vivacity, truly eloquent in jest or in earnest, irresistible in expressing irony, a mood, roguishness. His voice is as pleasant as it is flexible; no South German can sound more pleasant to the ear of a well-educated North German than Rossini. He is the most sociable nature imaginable. I do not think

> that he ever tires of having people around him, of conversing, of telling stories, and—what is more commendable—listening.[1]

During conversations about the music of the great masters, Rossini revealed an astonishing memory for themes, phrases, even whole movements. 'Such energy, such elegance!' he exclaimed after singing the opening phrase of a string quartet by Haydn. Later, while commending to Hiller Haydn's cantata *Arianna a Naxos,* a work for which Rossini had a deep and abiding affection, he sang most of its central arioso 'Dove sei, mio bel tesoro'. On another occasion he burst forth with the start of the finale of Beethoven's *Septet,* followed by the opening of a Beethoven scherzo. 'Which symphony is that from?' he asked. 'The *Eroica.*' 'So it is. What power, what fire there was in that man.' There were also memories of figures from Rossini's youth, including Paisiello ('pleasant, strong, almost imposing, but terribly uneducated') and Cimarosa ('a very different person, a fine educated mind'), whose opera buffa *Le trame deluse* Rossini recommended even more strongly than *Il matrimonio segreto.*

Slowly his health began to improve. In 1856 he made a stately progress via Strasbourg to the spa town of Wildbad, where one observer noted an elderly man, 'a little tremulous in his motions but with an open face and a lively eye'. Rossini had become resigned to (indeed, appears rather to have relished) the role of what he called 'un vieux rococo'. He also visited Baden-Baden, which his young champagne-drinking friend from the late 1820s, Édouard Benazet, had transformed into Europe's most fashionable spa.[2]

That year's Parisian summer was stiflingly warm. For much of it, the Rossinis rented a villa at Beau-Séjour by Passy, a suburban village on a wooded hillside overlooking the River Seine, where well-to-do bourgeoisie had built out-of-town houses since the seventeenth century. (Balzac had rented accommodation there in the 1840s, in what is nowadays the 'Maison Balzac'.) In 1858, just two years before Haussmann absorbed the village into his plans for a redesigned greater Paris, Rossini purchased a parcel of land for his own summer villa. To Olympe, it was as clear an indication as

[1] HPR/BCRS, 72.

[2] Benazet was now married to Louise Carlier, to whom in 1835 Rossini had presented a personally revealing *Album de Musique* of seventeen songs by Bazzini, Bellini, Bertin, Berton, Bruguière, Cherubini, Costa, Gordigiani, Mercadante, Meyerbeer, Morlacchi, Onslow, Paër, Panseron, Spontini, Tadolini, and himself ('Mi lagnerò tacendo'). The album was recorded in 1956 by Suzanne Danco and Francesco Molinari-Pradelli.

any that there was now some hope for the future. The cornerstone was laid on 10 March 1859. Rossini thought it might be amusing to baffle future archaeologists by burying beneath the cornerstone a recently excavated coin from the baths of Caracalla; in the end, he settled for a casket containing a medallion struck in honour of the *Stabat mater.* Olympe planted a rose bush where the bedroom was to be. Building began two months later. Ever the obsessive, Rossini kept a close eye on the project, often rising at seven in the morning to walk to Passy to supervise progress. The building, along with its spacious gardens, orangery, Chinese kiosk, and gardener's cottage, was completed in time for the Rossinis' summer residency in 1861.[3]

The house was designed to be light and airy, open and uncluttered, the obverse of a city apartment. The décor was more elaborate, a reflection of Rossini the bourgeois gentilhomme. The ceilings of the main reception rooms, decorated by Italian craftsmen, had cartouches containing portraits of musicians: Mozart, Cimarosa, Haydn, and Palestrina in the salon, Beethoven, Boieldieu, and Grétry in the dining room. Outside, the flowerbeds were laid out in the shapes of musical instruments, though there was also a substantial kitchen garden designed to supply the Rossinis' table. A bill from Vilmorin, the celebrated firm of Parisian nurserymen, listed an astonishing array of vegetables, including two kinds of peas and beans, five different kinds of lettuce, three sorts of chicory, and choice varieties of savoy cabbage and brussel sprouts. The most amusing external detail was the topping out of the entrance gate with a golden lyre. When raised, it indicated that the maestro was in residence. (The poet Lamartine, a near neighbour, adopted a similar device. When it was rumoured that this radically minded former aristocrat was facing financial ruin, Rossini remarked that a collecting box might be more appropriate.)

The earliest sign that Rossini was responding positively to his new environment came in the spring of 1857 when he began to compose again. The first of these *péchés de vieillesse* ('sins of old age'), as he liked to call them, was a set of six settings of favourite lines by Metastasio, 'Mi lagnerò tacendo / della mia sorte amara' ('I shall suffer mutely / my miserable fate'). However gloomy the words, it was a marvellous gift for Olympe on

[3] The villa no longer exists. It was badly damaged during the war of 1870 and subsequently pulled down.

her name-day, 15 April. At the head of the score, with its wry, Satie-like title, 'Musique anodine', Rossini wrote:

> I offer these modest songs to my dear wife Olympe
> as a simple testimonial of gratitude for the
> affectionate, intelligent care of which she was prodigal
> during my overlong and terrible illness
> (Shame of the [medical] faculty)

Rossini used to say that composing was an addiction: when he was well, he could not stop himself from doing it. With the resumption of composition, and with it a widening social life, the Rossinis needed larger and more fashionably situated winter quarters. A spacious second-floor apartment was found in the rue de la Chaussée d'Antin, which would remain their winter residence until Rossini's death in 1868. The apartment was admirably suited to its dual purpose as private home and social meeting place. There was a spacious entrance hall and grand salon, complemented by a private sitting room and a series of separate bedrooms. Rossini's own bedroom, which he used as a study and where he often received visitors, either bewigged or with his magnificent domed head swathed in a huge coloured handkerchief, was filled with private icons and memorabilia, prime among which were a small painting of the Virgin and Child, which he believed to be by Leonardo, a copy of Raphael's *Madonna at Chantilly,* and an embossed silver cup attributed to Benvenuto Cellini. There were also signed photographs, a clock topped with a bronze bust of Mozart, numerous insignia and decorations, Isabella's jewelry, a number of musical instruments (including a small Pleyel piano), some firearms, a priceless collection of gold and hardstone snuffboxes, and a tobacco jar from Scotland with a silvered goat's horn.

Reports vary on the state of the room. Pauline Viardot was surprised by the random juxtaposition of musical instruments, wigs on long poles, and catheters. An American visitor in 1864 reported a mess of items on one of Rossini's tables: brushes, combs, toothpicks, and a tube for making macaroni. The overall impression, though, was one of orderliness. Guglielmo De Sanctis, the Italian painter for whom Rossini sat in 1862, observed the scene with a painter's eye for detail and a shrewd sense of the personality which it reflected:

> Rossini takes the greatest pains when copying out his writings, never wearying of perfecting them, often going back to read them over and alter notes, which he is in the habit of erasing with a scraper with truly singular patience. One never would say that a man of such fervent imagination could lend himself to such minutiae. Another thing that I observed about him was the regularity of his habits, not to mention the symmetrical order in which he placed the furniture and objects around him. The room that he habitually occupied for many hours each day, both for receiving and for working, was his bedroom. There, the writing table was in the centre, and on it set out in perfect order were the papers, his indispensable scrapers, the pens, the inkstand, and whatever else he needed for his writing. Three or four wigs were placed in a row on the mantel, evenly spaced. On the white walls hung some Japanese miniatures on rice paper, and some Oriental objects had been placed like a trophy on the chest of drawers; the bed, against the wall, always neat; a few simple chairs around the room. When, struck by that perfect orderliness, I showed my surprise to the Maestro, he said to me: 'Eh, my dear fellow, order is wealth'.[4]

In his classic study of the psychology of the creative mind, Anthony Storr set De Sanctis's description of Rossini's room alongside similar descriptions by Nabokov and Ramuz of Stravinsky's study in Hollywood, where the careful ordering of furniture, books, scores, and the like was complemented by a writing desk on which inks, erasers, rulers, and knives were laid out in an elaborate hierarchy, each item, Ramuz suggests, playing its part in the ordering of Stravinsky's art.[5]

Although De Sanctis seems to have been mildly surprised, as many people are, to find so much order in the room of an artist, especially an artist as allegedly casual as Rossini, creativity and obsessional behaviour are not incompatible. (Interestingly, Storr treats Rossini the composer as an obsessive, not a manic-depressive.) There is no evidence that Rossini's tidiness was pathological, that he merely tidied and never wrote. His productivity in his last years was remarkable, as was the productivity of other obsessives listed by Storr: Beethoven, Dickens, Ibsen, Samuel Johnson, Swift. Certainly the ordering process can itself help generate the conditions in which creative work is possible; it may also be what Storr calls an outward

[4] WRB, 317–18.

[5] A. Storr, *The Dynamics of Creation* (London, 1972/R1976), 131–34.

and visible sign of that very order which the creative artist aims to perfect in his finished composition.

Just as Rossini's rooms and working conditions were meticulously ordered, so was his daily routine. Whilst the building in Passy was in progress, he would sometimes get up early. More normally, he rose at 8.00 and breakfasted on a roll dipped in coffee or, in later years, on two soft-boiled eggs and a glass of claret. After breakfast Olympe would read his mail to him and, if the weather and he were well suited, he would walk or drive, doing some light shopping and very occasionally calling on a strictly limited circle of friends. He rarely ate lunch, but as his health improved, he ate handsomely enough at 6.00 P.M. His knowledge of French and Italian food was legendary. According to Michotte, he shocked an expatriate Italian grocer by returning some 'Neapolitan' macaroni on the eminently justifiable ground that it clearly came from Genoa. (When told that the customer was the celebrated Rossini, the grocer is said to have retorted, 'If he knows as much about music as he does about macaroni, he must write beautiful stuff'. The remark amused Rossini. 'None of my panegyrists has risen to such a hyperbole of praise!') After dinner he would take a nap and sometimes smoke a cigar. At 8.30 he would hear the papers read and might receive a small number of guests. Their departure was on the stroke of 10.00, 'the canonical hour'.

He and Olympe dined out twice a year: with the dancer Emilie Bigottini's son on arriving in Passy each summer, and with Count and Countess Pillet-Will on returning to the city in the autumn. The musical life of Paris was decidedly lively—this was the age of Offenbach and the Bouffes-Parisiens—but Rossini attended very little. Performances of his own music were no lure either, though he did make a rare outing in April 1859 to attend a concert, given in the presence of the Empress Eugénie, featuring music from the *Stabat mater* and *Moïse et Pharaon*. The ovations were long and heartfelt, and Rossini was much moved. The occasion was, however, an exception. Such careful managing of his time and energies did much to restore his health and sustain and prolong his working life.

In March 1860 Rossini was visited by Richard Wagner. On the face of it, this was an odd meeting, a musical summit between the leaders of the old order and the new. In the event, mutual curiosity, good manners, and a shared absorption in the business of music-making in general and opera

in particular ensured that the meeting was both keen and affable. Also present was the 30-year-old Edmond Michotte, a well-to-do amateur musician from Brussels, who later published a transcript of the conversation.[6]

From the outset, Rossini was at his most disarming, pleading ignorance of Wagner's music in the theatre (the only context for proper judgement, Rossini averred) and trying to lay the dust of some of his own alleged witticisms at Wagner's expense. Though Wagner was clearly fascinated by Rossini's reminiscences of Beethoven and Weber, he was less tactful about those operas which rely on the very formulas Rossini had done so much to develop and extend. He was scathing about bravura arias, insipid duets, vocal hors d'oeuvres which hold up the stage action, and banal end-of-act septets. 'The row of artichokes' was Rossini's tolerant rejoinder. 'I assure you I was perfectly aware of the silliness of the thing. It always gave me the impression of a line of porters who had come to sing in order to earn a tip.'

On the question of libretti, there seemed to be no common ground, with Rossini genuinely surprised by the suggestion that a composer should write his own text. Wagner's response was robust. Why should a composer not study literature, history, and mythology? Wagner went on to argue that composers necessarily involve themselves in shaping the text at key points in the drama. Shrewdly, he cited the oath-swearing scene in *Guillaume Tell*. 'What you say is true', Rossini conceded. 'That scene, in fact, was profoundly modified to my specifications, and not without trouble.'

Emboldened by Wagner's detailed knowledge of *Guillaume Tell*, Rossini turned to the fraught question of 'declamatory recitative'. Wagner's defence of a text-based melodic line, one that registers each verbal nuance whilst remaining interesting in its own right, was full and impassioned. 'The funeral oration of melody', Rossini rejoined, but Wagner merely restated his case, attacking 'symmetrical periods, persistent rhythms, predictable harmonic progressions, and obligatory cadences'. Melody, he argued, must be free, independent, and unfettered. He went on to cite Rossini's own 'Sois immobile', Tell's address to his son before the apple-shooting. Rossini's response, 'So I made *music of the future* without knowing it', was as disarming as his remark explaining the swift composition of *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, 'I had facility and lots of instinct'.

[6] EM, 1–90; original French text RGR, 385, BCRS 44 (2004), 80.

It is clear that Wagner recognised his debt to works such as *Otello, Mosè in Egitto,* and above all, *Guillaume Tell* rather more clearly than did some of his biographers. In retrospect, he is said to have found Rossini simple, natural, and serious: a genius led astray by his Italian scepticism and the Latin's natural reluctance to treat art as religion. As for Rossini, he followed Wagner's career with renewed interest. In the end, their aesthetic positions were irreconcilable. Wagner thought Rossini unserious; Rossini thought Wagner 'lacked sun'. Wagner also became the butt of a phrase Rossini had used down the years to describe musicians about whom he had certain reservations—'He has some beautiful moments but some bad quarters of an hour!'

Other visitors called that summer, less demanding but less interesting. There was Ignaz Moscheles: like his music, all fluency, grace, and guile. Rossini praised Palestrina and Marcello; Moscheles praised Clementi, much of whose music Rossini knew by heart. Wagner's archenemy, the Vienna critic Eduard Hanslick, also paid his respects. Hanslick described his host as 'an epicurean sage' who had spent thirty years of his life in a 'soft, smooth tide of secure leisure'. As a picture of Rossini's life post-1829, it is cruelly inaccurate. Hanslick was on safer ground when he adjudged Rossini a 'disinterested spectator, a man who watches without envy or bitterness, though not always without irony'.[7]

[7] E. Hanslick, *Aus dem Konzertsaal* (Vienna, 1870), 475.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Saturday Soirées and a New Mass

THE FIRST OF THE *SAMEDI SOIRS* WAS HELD ON 18 DECEMBER 1858. Over the next ten years, artists, scientists, politicians, diplomats, and the pick of Parisian society attended the Rossinis' salon in the rue de la Chaussée d'Antin to mingle with and hear a galaxy of musical talent. Composers who attended and sometimes performed included Auber, Boito, Gounod, Liszt, Meyerbeer, Anton Rubinstein, Saint-Saëns, Thomas, and, as Louis Diémer put it, 'the taciturn Verdi'. Foremost among the singers were Alboni, Jean-Baptiste Faure, Grisi, the Marchisio sisters, Nilsson, Patti, Tamberlik, and Tamburini. Pianists, all of whom appear to have marvelled at Rossini's own playing, included Diémer and Thalberg as well as Liszt and Saint-Saëns. Violinists included Joachim and Sarasate. Many of the artists were young and on the threshold of their careers. Patti was 21 when she made her Paris debut, and Diémer was still a teenager when Rossini entrusted to him the task of playing through and memorising newly written pieces during preparations for each soirée. Like Patti, Diémer survived into the next century and made gramophone recordings. He also taught: Cortot was a pupil, as was Robert Casadesus.

'My living room's been turned into a café', Rossini used to quip. Though the Rossinis would entertain up to a dozen guests privately on a Saturday evening, the 'gala soirées', as Michotte called them, began later, between 8.30 and 9.00, giving the fashionable hordes time to pick their way through platefuls of unappetising titbits, many of them from the store of gifts and samples of pasta, cheese, olives, and wine with which Rossini was inundated

from all corners of Europe. Socially, the evenings were overseen by Olympe, who held court in the grand salon; and woe betide anyone who did not make proper obeisance to her. Rossini tended to distance himself from the social hubbub, closeted in an adjacent room with special guests and those whom Pauline Viardot called the 'second-rate hangers-on' who enjoyed his witticisms and coarse jokes.

Principal among these was his old friend Michele Carafa. Blaze de Bury, who observed Carafa in Paris, suggested that he resembled one of 'those chamberlains in attendance on exiled royalty who are unwilling to resign themselves to their lot and who continue the observance of court etiquette towards their sovereign'. Rossini is alleged to have said to him, 'Carafa made the mistake of being born my contemporary'. Yet he was generous to Carafa in practical ways. After Rossini gave him the French rights to *Semiramide,* Carafa was able to adapt the opera, add ballet music, and supervise a lavish new production, which opened at the Paris Opéra on 9 July 1860. The production marked the Paris debut of the Marchisio sisters,[1] whose singing recalled for Rossini a vanished age. 'My dear babies', he told them, 'you have brought a dead man back to life!' In a presentation copy of the French edition of the opera, he wrote: 'To my beloved friends and incomparable interpreters, Carlotta and Barbara Marchisio, possessors of that song which is sensed in the soul'.

The programmes for the soirées were carefully assembled by Rossini and handsomely printed. Many of the pieces were his own, most of them newly written. Music by Pergolesi, Haydn, Mozart, Gounod, and Verdi was also performed. On one occasion Rossini added his own preface to the trio from *Attila,* 'to stop conversation and draw attention to Verdi's music', signed 'without the permission of Verdi'.[2] Sometimes new music by other composers would be heard: a short chamber opera by Weckerlin and the first public hearing of Liszt's two *Légendes.* A new duo for flute and clarinet by Saint-Saëns was passed off by Rossini as his own, to the consternation of Rossini's simpering admirers when the ruse was revealed.[3] Longer items were rarely included, though Rossini did programme his cantata *Giovanna d'Arco,* an ideal piece for such a gathering, the more so as it was written

[1] See plates 21 and 22.

[2] See plate 19.

[3] C. Saint-Saëns, *Ecole buissonnière,* Paris, 1913, 261.

for Olympe. The most striking exception to this rule came in 1861. Soirées would occasionally be held on a Friday; thus on Good Friday 1861 Rossini devoted the entire evening's music-making to his *Stabat mater,* sung by a quartet which included the Marchisio sisters, accompanied by a double string quartet. Two years later he varied the idea, interleaving piano pieces and an aria by Haydn with extracts from his own and Pergolesi's settings of the *Stabat mater.*

Sometimes there would be skits and music hall chansons arranged by Gustav Doré; and for those who could catch them, there were Rossini's own wry asides on the proceedings. Singers in particular were closely scrutinised by their host, who allowed no loose, ugly, or unstylish effect to go unremarked. In the most quoted of all interventions, the young Adelina Patti was brought down to earth when her overdecorated account of Rosina's 'Una voce poco fa' was met with the rejoinder. 'Very nice, my dear, and who wrote the piece you have just performed for us?'[4] A soprano Rosina would not have been entirely to Rossini's taste, but it was the ornamentation, almost certainly the work of Patti's mentor, Maurice Strakosch, which irked him. 'Strakoschonné!' ('Strakoschonised!') was the neologism he coined for the occasion. Young as she was, Patti appears to have taken offence; but Saint-Saëns tells us that she had the good sense to return to Rossini for advice. He was to invite her to many subsequent soirées, when she was often accompanied by Rossini himself or, as was the case on 9 March 1866, by the distinguished Belgian harpist and pianist Félix Godefroid. The programme on that occasion was as follows:

Première Partie

1. PRÉLUDE DE MON TEMPS
ROSSINI
Exécuté par Mr. Diémer
2. *Quatuor de* MOÏSE
ROSSINI
Mlles. A. Patti et Zeiss
Mrs. Delle-Sedie et Zucchini
3. *Duo de* CENERENTOLA
ROSSINI
Mrs. Delle-Sedie et Zucchini

[4] Saint-Saëns, 261.

4. CANZONE
ROSSINI
Mr. Fraschini
5. *Trio dell'* ITALIANA IN ALGERI
ROSSINI
Mrs. Tamburini, Gardoni et Zucchini
6. *Romance d'*OTELLO
ROSSINI
Mlle A. Patti
Avec accompangement par Mr. Félix Godefroid

Deuxième Partie

1. *Duo* 'Mira la bianca luna'
ROSSINI
Mlle A. Patti, Mr. Gardoni
2. *Romance del* BALLO IN MASCHERA
VERDI
Mr. Delle Sedie
3. *Duo d'*OTELLO
ROSSINI
Mrs. Fraschini et Verger
4. CANZONE
ROSSINI
Mr. Gardoni
5. *Duo del* BARBIERE DI SIVIGLIA
ROSSINI
Mlle A. Patti, Mr. Tamburini
6. *Trio del* CRISPINO E LA COMARE
RICCI
Mrs. Agnesi, Zucchini et Mercuriali
Impromptu, composé et exécuté par Mr. F. Godefroid
Piano: Mr. A. Peruzzi

Another time, Patti led a memorable performance of the quartet from *Rigoletto* with Alboni, Gardoni, and Delle-Sedie. Giulio Ricordi noted that only Verdi could have accompanied as expertly and as sympathetically as Rossini did on that occasion.

Though Rossini closely followed the fate of Verdi's *Inno delle nazioni* at the London Exhibition in 1862, he declined to contribute the triumphal march he himself was asked for. Adopting the persona of a retired recluse, he told Her Majesty's Commission for the Exhibition, 'If I still belonged to the musical world, I should have made it a duty and a pleasure to prove on this occasion that I have not forgotten the noble hospitality of England'.[5] In 1863 he completed the most substantial work of his final years, the *Petite messe solennelle.* Part mass, part cantata, it was quintessential Rossini, a serious, beautifully ordered, at times strikingly novel work. Even here, though, his written remarks about the piece were jocular and self-effacing. In the celebrated epigraph, he told his Maker that the *Messe* is 'the last mortal sin of my old age'. He continued in his quipping, punning style:

> Dear God, here it is finished, this poor little Mass. Is this sacred music which I have written or music of the devil? [*Est-ce bien de la musique sacrée que je viens de faire ou bien de la sacrée musique?*] I was born for opera buffa, as you well know. A little science, a little heart, that's all. Be blessed, then, and admit me to Paradise. G. Rossini. Passy 1863.

It was a witty preface but a defensive one, as though Rossini was reluctant to appear in public without his cap and bells, his jester's garb. And yet, as anyone who is attentive to the music will quickly recognise, this is a work which is as anxious as it is serene, as melancholy as it is jocund. It is said that he brooded over it for a long time and was unsettled during its composition.

The death of friends, and the contemplation of his own mortality, may well have been a cue for the writing of the *Messe.* One such friend was the Swiss-born musician Louis Niedermeyer, whom Rossini had known since Niedermeyer first introduced himself as a boy of 17 in Naples in 1819. Niedermeyer never entirely succeeded as a composer, but Rossini continued to think well of him. He had used him as a collaborator in the Paris Opéra *Robert Bruce* project in 1846 and saw a good deal of him after his own return to Paris in 1855. By this stage, having abandoned opera, Niedermeyer was pouring all his energies into sacred music and song. He was also refounding a school of church music which had first opened its doors in Paris in 1818. One of the school's aims was to revive Gregorian

[5] *The Times,* 4 July 1861.

chant and the work of the old masters of vocal polyphony; another was to encourage new settings of the Catholic liturgy. Saint-Saëns taught there; Fauré was an early pupil.

Rossini took a close interest in the work of the school and was clearly much affected by Niedermeyer's death in 1861; so much so that he incorporated into the *Petite messe solennelle* a movement from the *Messe* Niedermeyer had written in Paris in 1849. It is the unaccompanied 'Christe eleison', taken over with simple skill and sensitivity from the 'Et incarnatus' of the Niedermeyer mass. Though this might appear to be a shameless act of plagiarism, it was almost certainly a private tribute to an old friend. Niedermeyer died on 14 March 1861 at the age of 58. The fact that the *Petite messe solennelle* had its first performance on that same day three years later may or may not be a coincidence.

To all outward appearance, Rossini was not a religious man. 'A joker and a cynic' was how his friend the cellist Gaetano Braga described him, though Braga was well aware that behind the mask there lurked a different Rossini. The Abbé Gallet de St.-Roch reported the dying man meeting the ritual question on belief with the words, 'Would I have been able to write the *Stabat* and the *Messe* if I had not had faith?'[6] Rossini's faith was neither formal nor institutionalised, and it was probably crossed with uncertainty. As his contemporary the poet Tennyson wrote, 'There lives more faith in honest doubt / Believe me, than in half the creeds'. Rossini was, however, a man in whom the primary affections and loyalties were strong; and primary forms of belief often inspire and sustain the finest religious art. Though the language of the *Messe* was of its time (even, in some respects, a harbinger of things to come) the work itself embodied an old man's vision of the past, of the methods and ideals of an age which was seemingly simpler and less cluttered than the one in which he now found himself.

The Mass's title is not a joke. 'Petite' indicates a certain economy of scale, the orchestra banished,[7] the voices accorded their old primacy; 'solennelle' tells us that this is a sung mass (a *missa solemnis* as opposed to a *missa lecta*) whilst at the same time suggesting the order and propriety of ritual obser-

[6] Abbé Gallet, *Le Figaro*, Paris, 27 February 1892.

[7] The two pianos and harmonium are crucial to the work's character and colour. Rossini orchestrated the *Messe* (1867) in order to prevent others from doing so.

vance. Because of the Papal ban on the use of women's voices in church, Rossini conceived the *Messe* as a private work for private performance in the chapel of the newly built town house of the Count and Countess Pillet-Will. In an age when the idea of the court composer was more or less a thing of the past, the *Petite messe solennelle,* like a number of the operatic and orchestral works of Richard Strauss, breathes the spirit of a courtlier age.

Rossini supervised the rehearsals with wry humour and an air of seeming indifference. Braga tells a story against himself of a moment when the tenor Italo Gardoni misread a note in the 'Credo'. 'Bravo, Gardoni!' exclaimed Rossini. 'Bravo, my foot', muttered Braga. Rossini held up a hand: 'Mesdames et Messieurs, recommencez, car Monsieur Braga n'est pas content'. The first performance, on 14 March, coincided with the dedication of the chapel. The four soloists were the Marchisio sisters, Gardoni, and the Belgian bass Louis Agniez; the choir consisted of eight singers hand-picked by Auber from the Conservatoire. Rossini stood by one of the pianists, Georges Mathias, giving the tempi and turning the pages. The audience was small and select: Auber, Carafa, Meyerbeer, and Thomas were among those present. The second performance, which Rossini appears not to have attended, drew a larger society gathering. Meyerbeer came a second time and was again so effusive that Rossini was all solicitation: 'Will his health permit these emotions?' he worriedly asked when he heard of Meyerbeer's state. It was a prudent enquiry; seven weeks later Meyerbeer was dead.

The death of Meyerbeer on 2 May 1864 moved Rossini to write what is in some ways a poignant coda to the *Messe,* his 'Quelques mesures de chant funèbre: à mon pauvre ami Meyerbeer'. It is written for four-part male chorus accompanied by nothing more than a series of sombre taps and rolls on a drum. The light march rhythm, the text's gentle rhetoric, which might sound trite in another language but which was lofty enough in French ('Pleure, pleure, muse sublime'), the simple declamation, the fine part-writing, the limpid modulations, and the hieratic calm of the twice-uttered closing 'Requiem', pitching lower, all make for something which is exquisite, touching, perfectly judged. Meyerbeer's nephew is also said to have written a funeral march in his uncle's honour. 'Excellent', observed Rossini, inspecting the piece, 'but wouldn't it have been better if you had died and your uncle had written the march?' True or not, it is a story Verdi enjoyed recounting.

The *Messe* added yet more lustre to Rossini's name. In the summer of 1864 he was made a grand officier of the Légion d'honneur, the order's highest rank, by Napoleon III. In Passy there were celebrations in honour of his name day. Pesaro too was en fête, though by now wild horses could not have dragged Rossini back to his native land.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Last Years (1865–1868)

THE *PETITE MESSE SOLENNELLE* WAS THE LAST SUBSTANTIAL SIN of Rossini's old age. His desire to have the work sung in church led him into correspondence with Liszt, who had taken minor orders in 1864, and with Pope Pius IX. What Rossini sought was a revocation of the papal bull forbidding mixed choirs in church, a tradition deriving not so much from St Paul (1 Corinthians xiv.34) as from St Jerome and other influential anti-feminists in the fourth and fifth centuries. A lover of women's voices and the old castrati, Rossini found boys' voices 'sour and out of tune'. The pope's reply, when it came, was full of gracious platitudes but disobligingly failed to mention the question of the bull. The idea of the Swan of Pesaro confronting the Vatican had the international press by the ears.

Most of Rossini's initiatives were unsuccessful in later life. In earlier years he had been shrewd and successful in his dealings with impresarios, singers, governments, and kings. Now he was either inept or too fond and sentimental. The Broglio affair, which cast a shadow over the last months of Rossini's life, arose from what appeared to many to be his all too enthusiastic response to a letter from Florence's minister of public education, Emilio Broglio. The letter proposed the setting up of a Rossini Society, but in so doing it also proposed what today would be termed the privatisation of Italy's leading musical conservatories. The letter's style, rambling and obsequious, was brilliantly parodied by Boito,[1] who at least injected a degree

[1] *Il Pungolo,* 2 May 1868.

of humour into a controversy which fired many, Verdi among them, to extreme anger. When Rossini realised what he had done, he wrote a letter, subsequently released to the press, affirming his support for the conservatories, as well as restating some of his old preoccupations ('simple melody, clear rhythm') and his distrust of the 'new philosophers' whose music lacked 'ideas, inspiration'.[2]

His continuing fondness for the many musicians to whom he had acted as a surrogate father is best seen in his long and buoyant correspondence with Michael Costa, who ruled the London musical roost for well over forty years. In 1865 Rossini gave Costa support and encouragement for his oratorio *Naaman:*

> My dearest Son,
> Just a few lines to convey my Joy at being able to embrace your good Brother and at his bringing me the oratorio (which has so augmented your Fame), together with your letter. The promises that you make me in it are true Balsam to my Paternal Heart. Continue then in this Oratorical Speciality of yours and write a third one, in the certainty that *Trinum est perfectum.* Choose a good subject, work on it without a word to anyone, and if you are satisfied with your work, in three years' time, and *not before,* let it see the light. Three years are needed to confirm the fame of your *Naaman;* otherwise, as the proverb says, one will smash the other! It is not given to us to change the nature of Swinish Humanity! I have a friend who knows English well and who will help me to read your *Naaman.* As you can well believe, the feeling that predominates in such reading is not mere Curiosity but rather true Joy, for him who will always be glad to be able to call himself
> Your affectionate Father,
> ROSSINI[3]

A plan to link the French premiere of *Naaman* to the opening of a new concert hall in the rue Scribe came to nothing, though Rossini's letters on the subject are long, detailed, and enthusiastic. He had more success with Costa's gifts of English cheeses, 'lo Stilton' as well as Cheddar:

> The cheese sent me would be worthy of a Bach, a Handel, a Cimarosa, let alone the old man of Pesaro! For three consecutive days I tasted it and moistened it

[2] LRM, 325–27.
[3] WRP, 208.

with the best wines in my cellar and I swear I never ate better food than your Chedor Chiese (cursed be the Britannic Spelling!)[4]

In December 1866 Rossini had some kind of stroke or thrombosis, but he survived well enough to be able to receive the many greetings and honours lavished on him the following February, his 75th birthday. A year later, on 10 February 1868, he was similarly fêted on the occasion of what the management of the Paris Opéra claimed was the 500th performance of *Guillaume Tell.* The soirées continued, and Olympe went on masterminding his life with her usual rigour. (When Ricordi appeared one day with some royalties secured under a new legal agreement, Rossini dropped the money into a drawer. 'Pocket money', he murmured, conspiratorially.) His penultimate public composition was the *Hymne à Napoléon III et à son Vaillant Peuple,* which had its premiere in Paris's Palais de l'Industrie on the occasion of the distribution of prizes at the Exposition Universelle on 1 July 1867. The work has one of Rossini's trademark subtitles: 'Hymn (with accompaniment for full orchestra and military band) for baritone solo (a Pontiff), a Chorus of priests, a Chorus of camp-followers, soldiers, and the people; Dances, Bells, Snare Drums, and Cannons: *Excusez du peu!!* [Sorry there's not more!!]'. It was designed, he joked, to be sung *en famille* in his garden in Passy. It is exceptionally grand and also rather amusing (like much of his late music, it borders on parody), with a peroration involving church bells and cannon fire that anticipates Tchaikovsky's *1812* overture by thirteen years.

Rossini's last official offering came in 1868 when King Victor Emanuel II nominated him for the Grand Knight of the Order of the Crown of Italy. His response was a fanfare for military band, including saxophones. As things turned out, the piece was not played until ten years after Rossini's death. Its first performance took place in Rome on 25 November 1878, played by seven massed bands and a contingent of thirty additional drummers, an act of musical supererogation if ever there was one.

In the early part of 1868 Rossini was unwell with severe catarrh and a general malaise thought to have been brought on by the winter weather. An examination by Dr. Vio Bonato revealed what Bonato took to be a rectal fistula, but in view of the patient's general condition he took no immediate action. In early August, Rossini sent a generous and witty reply to a

[4] WRP, 208.

young man, Costantino Dall'Argine, who proposed to dedicate to him his new setting of Sterbini's libretto for *Il barbiere di Siviglia*![5] Later the same month he wrote a long letter on music and musical aesthetics to the critic and Wagner apologist Filippo Filippi.[6] In the letter he affirmed for the last time his belief in the classical virtues, adding for good measure the maxim:

> Tous les genres sont bons,
> Hors le genre ennuyeux.

> All genres are good,
> Except the boring one.

At the start of the winter season Rossini was well enough to attend a soirée on 26 September, but within a month he was bedridden in Passy, seriously ill. Recognising that the 'fistula' was in fact a rapidly spreading carcinoma, Bonato consulted Auguste Nélaton, Napoleon III's physician and a professor at the Hôpital St Louis. Nélaton proposed surgery, albeit of a limited nature in order to minimise the risk of cardiac failure under chloroform. As things turned out, it would have been better if Rossini had suffered heart failure, or simply been sedated and left to die in peace. After a five-minute procedure on 3 November to remove some of the malignancy, Nélaton returned two days later. Alarmed by what he found, he performed a further short operation. For Rossini, whose life had been bedevilled by incompetent doctors and the vagaries of medical knowledge, it was the start of an agonising few days in which the combination of high fever and excruciating pain turned his waking hours into a living hell. The pain was caused not by the cancer but by a rapidly spreading infection of the skin and subcutaneous tissues, almost certainly from an infected scalpel. (The elderly Nélaton was either unaware of or had ignored Joseph Lister's pioneering work on antisepsis developed in 1865–1867.) Four assistants were drafted to assist Olympe in moving and caring for the patient. All Rossini wanted was ice to cool his fever. Sometimes he abused his helpers. At one point he suggested that the best thing they could do would be to toss him out of the window and let him die.

Reluctant to agree to the administration of the last rites, he was eventually prevailed upon to receive a visit from Abbé Gallet. 'If I had dealt

[5] LRM, 328–29.
[6] LRM, 329–33.

only with French priests', he murmured diplomatically, 'I would have been a practising Christian'. He was Catholic enough to call out to the Blessed Virgin in the seemingly endless watches of the night, and shortly before his death he received extreme unction. Alboni, Tamburini, and Patti were at Passy at the time; Patti was said to have been more than usually distressed. Rossini's last recorded utterance, before the septicaemia finally took its toll and he lapsed into a coma, was the name of the woman who had cared unstintingly for him over a period of more than thirty years; though he was also heard to murmur the names of Santa Maria and Sant'Anna, a last fleeting thought, perhaps, for his beloved mother. He died at 11.15 P.M. on Friday, 13 November.

The following morning Gustave Doré made two sketches of Rossini on his deathbed,[7] after which the body was embalmed and placed in a temporary tomb in the Madeleine. The funeral, which took place on 21 November in the newer, larger Église de la Trinité, was predictably lavish, despite the stipulation in Rossini's will that no more than 2,000 francs be expended. Over 4,000 mourners crowded into the church; thousands more lined the route of the funeral cortège to Père-Lachaise.

The obituaries were generous and perceptive. *The Times* noted that Rossini was sought out and courted not merely on account of his fame as a composer but for his wit, his humour, his amiability, and his goodness. 'With him', it concluded, 'has departed one of the most remarkable geniuses, and one of the kindliest spirits of the nineteenth century'.[8] Works, both sacred and profane, were revived in a host of memorial concerts throughout the world. There was just one sour note. Verdi proposed that the leading Italian composers of the day contribute movements to a Requiem Mass in honour of their great predecessor; it would have its prima in Bologna, 'Rossini's real musical homeland'. Sadly, the powers-that-be in Bologna rejected the idea; Rossini's 'city of assassins' had the last word.

Rossini left a large estate, distributed according to the terms of his will of July 1858, to which numerous codicils had been added.[9] After small bequests to members of his family in Pesaro and Bologna, the bulk of the

[7] See Plate 24.

[8] *The Times*, 16 November 1868.

[9] WRB, 382–85.

estate was left, for the perpetuity of her life, to Olympe, 'to whose merit every praise would be inferior'. After her death, the will stipulated, the entire estate should to pass to the Commune of Pesaro for the founding and endowing of a Liceo Musicale. (It opened on 5 November 1882.) Rossini also left enough money for the building of a home for retired operatic performers in Paris, the 'Maison de Retraite Rossini'.

In a codicil dated June 1865, Olympe was also given absolute control over Rossini's autograph manuscripts,[10] including the manuscripts of the large number of unpublished pieces written in his final years. Principal among these was the *Petite messe solennelle,* which she sold to Strakosch for 100,000 francs in January 1869. The work had yet to be heard by the public at large, an omission Strakosch proposed to rectify. On 28 February it was performed before a paying public for the first time in the version Rossini had prepared for voices and orchestra. Strakosch quickly recouped the cost of his purchase. The receipts for the first performance alone were 22,000 francs, and he later toured the world with the piece.

Olympe also tried to sell the manuscript performance copies of the *Péchés de vieillesse* so that they too could be put into the public domain. This task proved more problematic. It resulted in a row, which eventually ended up in court, with Émilien Pacini, the author of some of the texts. There was also a serious falling out with family friend Edmond Michotte over his arranging unauthorised performances of some of the items. Selling the *Péchés* was not easy. Most were too short and there were too many of them (more than 150) for a single publisher to cope with. The often flippant titles were also a disincentive to potential buyers. The set was eventually bought by Baron Albert Grant, an English businessman who had been given an Italian baronetcy for his involvement in work on Milan's celebrated shopping precinct, the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele. Grant himself published only four items, two of which, 'Le Chant des Titans' and 'Cantemus Domino', got a cool reception when they were performed at the 1873 Birmingham Festival.[11] When Grant himself came to try to sell the

[10] All but three of the autograph manuscripts of Rossini's 39 operas have survived. Olympe had nine in her possession. Four were passed to friends, possibly in lieu of payment for professional services, five were gifted to the city of Pesaro, where the Fondazione Rossini was founded to administer the bequest.

[11] 'Had we not positive knowledge that it ['Le Chant de Titans'] is signed by so great a name, we should never have imagined its origin.' *The Musical Times,* XVI, 368, 1 October 1873.

collection in separate lots shortly after Olympe's death, he too found the task an uphill one. Press commentary was largely negative, though the critic of *Le ménestrel* suggested that the day would eventually come when these late works would be more soundly and impartially judged.[12]

Some years after Rossini's burial in Père-Lachaise, plans were set in motion for a reburial in the 'national' church of Santa Croce in Florence. At first Olympe insisted that she should be interred in the same place. The suggestion scandalised the Italians, not least Verdi, and she later relented with a melancholy grace. 'After the removal of my husband's mortal remains to Florence', she stipulated in her will, 'I shall remain there [in the cemetery of Père-Lachaise] alone: I make this sacrifice in all humility; I have been glorified enough by the name I bear. My faith, my religious feelings, give me the hope of a reunion which escapes earth.'

Though she suffered some privation in the Paris Commune of 1870, she lived on in all her mingled grandeur and oddity until 1878. A letter survives in which she wrote to Romanina Castellani:

> My dear,
> I expect all three of you to dine with me tomorrow, the 9th. It is hot; I am stupid as a goose but my heart is as warm as a duck for you and for my Castellani.
> Your old,
> O. Rossini[13]

One of the most remarkable of all the wives of the great composers, she died on 22 March 1878 at the age of 80.

Nine years later, on 3 May 1887, Rossini's body was ceremonially laid to rest in Santa Croce, though it was not until June 1902 that the famous memorial was erected. On the cartouches at the foot of the memorial are the words 'Pesaro—Firenze—Parigi', a slight to Bologna and to Naples, and another of those pieces of misinformation which have done so much to obscure a proper understanding of the life and achievement of this complex, generous, and prodigiously talented man.

[12] *Le ménestrel,* 16 June, 1878.

[13] WRP, 147.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Entr'acte: Some Problems of Approach to the Works

THE DECLINE IN THE POPULARITY OF ROSSINI'S OPERAS, WHICH Chorley had noted as early as the 1840s, was followed after Rossini's death by a decline in his overall reputation and in the care shown by musicians and critics for his work. Though the reputation of *Il barbiere di Siviglia* continued to soar, much else of quality was lost to the general public. One of the first to notice the change was Wagner, whose own work had done much to bring about the new aesthetic priorities of the 1870s. Having met Rossini in Paris in 1860 and, years earlier, studied his music with evident interest, Wagner was intelligently aware of the gap between the real Rossini and the careless, sceptical fellow characterised by what Wagner called 'the gaping herd of parasites and punsters' who surrounded him in his later years. In a fine posthumous tribute, Wagner noted that Rossini was as important to his age as Palestrina, Bach, and Mozart were to theirs, yet he suggested that Rossini's star would remain obscured until historical and musical perspectives on the early years of the nineteenth century were properly reestablished. 'Our age boasts progress in the arts', he observed, 'but neglects to note the downfall of an earlier refinement'.[1]

The low point in the understanding of Rossini can be traced from the 1880s to the outbreak of the First World War. Fed on a diet of Victorian performances of the *Stabat mater* and pier-end renditions of the more popular overtures, George Bernard Shaw was able to declare on the occasion

[1] WER, iv, 269–74.

of the centenary of Rossini's birth that he was 'one of the greatest masters of claptrap that ever lived'.[2] Rossini's reputation took a turn for the better in the 1920s, helped in part by the emergence of a new neoclassical school of composition; it was also greatly enhanced by the publication between 1927 and 1929 of Giuseppe Radiciotti's three-volume *Gioacchino Rossini: Vita documentata, opere ed influenza su l'arte.* Radiciotti, a child of the age of verismo, showed scant understanding of Rossini's vocal style. Nonetheless, his study was a milestone in Rossini scholarship. Other studies followed: in England, Lord Derwent's *Rossini and some Forgotten Nightingales,* in Italy, Roncaglia's *Rossini l'olimpico.* Radiciotti's work was also drawn upon by Francis Toye for his affable *Rossini: A study in Tragi-comedy.* A less thorough and less well informed book than Derwent's, it assumed the status of a standard work merely by staying in print.

With few singers willing or able to perform Rossini's music, with knowledge of the Rossini style in abeyance, and with musicological interest virtually nonexistent, it is not surprising that no more than a handful of the thirty-nine operas remained in the repertory. In a series of lectures delivered at Cornell University in 1937–1938, Edward J. Dent, a musicologist, translator, and critic who had done much to advance the cause of opera in general and Italian opera in particular, was generous to *Guillaume Tell* and had no difficulty in acknowledging the merits of *Il barbiere di Siviglia* and *La Cenerentola.* As for the rest:

> It might be possible to revive *La gazza ladra;* but otherwise the earlier Rossini may be dismissed as dead and buried. The most famous of the serious operas were *Semiramide* and *Mosè in Egitto;* both of them are hopelessly artificial and unreal. They were composed with a view to quick popularity, and they have paid the penalty for it.[3]

Dent was praising what he had heard and seen, condemning what he had not. Such was the nature of the vicious circle in which Rossini's reputation found itself, and continued to find itself until the centenary of his death in 1968. It was at this point that the real revolution began. By the end of the century every one of the operas had been staged and recorded, many of them with conspicuous success.

[2] *Illustrated London News,* 5 March 1892.

[3] E. Dent, *The Rise of Romantic Opera* (Cambridge, 1976), 118–19.

Some questions never seem to go away where Rossini is concerned, prime among them the question of self-borrowing. Rossini was accused of this, wrongly as it turned out, as early as 1813–1814 by Italian critics and trouble-makers (often one and the same party) who mistook his characteristic voice and style for self-borrowing. His image did not help. It helped feed the suspicion, easily rooted in the public consciousness, that self-borrowing is a sign of congenital laziness, and that speed of composition implies glibness of spirit.

Rossini's own position on the matter, as he came to formulate it in later years, was more aesthetic than practical. In 1836, his Bolognese friend, Antonio Zanolini, reported that for Rossini 'music is, in a manner of speaking, the moral atmosphere which fills the place in which characters of the drama represent the action'.[4] In other words, text matters but it is not an all-determining force. Rossini was conscious of the fact that, in an age which increasingly revered originality and the autonomy of the individual art work, self-borrowing was seen as a form of dishonesty. For him, however, the real concern was not the fact of the self-borrowing but the manner of its reworking and the efficacy, or otherwise, of the result.

The cue for self-borrowing was largely practical. Like Bach and Handel before him, Rossini was spurred by a desire to retrieve and reuse worthwhile music which, for one reason or another, had fallen by the wayside. Few of Rossini's self-borrowings are cynically done; the majority show taste and judgment in the choice of material, and skill and industry in the process of adaptation. 'Patching' ideas into a settled structure took little effort; by contrast, reworking a scene or an aria could be immensely time-consuming, especially when, as was often the case with Rossini, a librettist was re-engaged and the entire concept re-examined, including the orchestration.

Rossini's adaptive skills were as extensive as they were unassuming, fine examples, as often as not, of the art which disguises art. Yet there was another reason why Rossini, far from recoiling from the idea of revisiting extant material, positively welcomed it. With a busy schedule, it gave him

[4] ZBG, 21. The philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer attributed music's unique power among the arts to the fact that it speaks in a language that the reasoning faculty does not understand. Not surprisingly, he was an avid admirer of Rossini's music. 'And so, in spite of envy, Rossini's wonderful melodies have spread across the entire globe and refreshed every heart, as then, so still today, and in *saecula saeculorum*'. Arthur Schopenhauer, *Sämtliche Werke,* VI (Leipzig, 1877), 495.

both time and that longed-for commodity, perspective. This benefit was particularly apparent in his fondness for using the emergencies which frequently occurred in the commissioning process as an excuse to take on subjects—in the case of *L'italiana in Algeri* an actual libretto—for which a contemporary operatic treatment already existed. With the text known in advance or already actively contemplated, he was able to concentrate his attention on formulating specifically musical answers to the problems and opportunities afforded by the text. The difference between Rossini's *L'italiana in Algeri* and Luigi Mosca's is the superior quality of the internal musical organisation of Rossini's score. Working under pressure but thinking in an intelligent and original way, Rossini was able to emulate Mozart in making form a potent force in the comic method. As we shall see in chapter 23, Rossini's attention to word-pointing, rhythmic characterisation, and orchestration, as well as a quality of formal ordering undreamt of by Mosca, are central to the work's success (a success which producers would do well to note; the best jokes in Rossini are usually the musical ones). The methodology also helps sustain the persistent play of irony in Rossini's music, not least in those passages where the librettist's characters assume heroic or sentimental postures.

The more we learn about Rossini's methods, the more we can discount the long-held view that he 'lacked literary taste and was a poor judge of a dramatic text'.[5] True, there is no one partnership in Rossini's career to compare with that of Da Ponte and Mozart, Boito and Verdi, or Hofmannsthal and Strauss. On the other hand, we know that Rossini himself invariably chose, advised on, or emended the texts which he set. The evidence we have suggests an alert and engaged mind, whilst the range of subjects he tackled is striking: librettos derived from Racine, Voltaire, Beaumarchais, Schiller, and Scott, alongside skillful appropriations of fairy-tale and biblical mythology. It would be wrong to claim intrinsic literary merit for the work of the majority of Rossini's librettists. But the true test of a musical text is its appropriateness to musical setting and here Rossini's judgment was rarely found wanting.

On the matter of 'comic' and 'serious' modes in Rossini's music, and his seemingly indiscriminate stylistic commuting between the two, a major misunderstanding has arisen. Dent's assertion that Rossini 'makes no

[5] W. Dean, *The New Oxford History of Music*, ed. G. Abraham (London, 1982), viii, 406.

attempt to distinguish between the serious style and the comic'[6] is palpably false. Added to which, as the late Professor Joad would have said, it all depends on what you mean by 'comic' and 'serious'. Susanne Langer has defined the comic experience, as opposed to the tragic one, as an image of 'human vitality holding its own in the world amid the surprises of unplanned coincidence'.[7] In the chapters which follow it will be possible to examine the nature of Rossini's 'serious' art, its heroic, idyllic character, whilst at the same time stressing the importance of those stylistic features which the seria, semiseria, and buffa genres legitimately have in common. It will also be possible to examine the degree to which Rossini's comic operas are themselves a game within a game.

Communal, invigorating, concerned with continuity rather than with change and thus precluding the need to search out the inner lives of individual characters, the comic spirit, which embraces *Guillaume Tell* as surely as it embraces *Il barbiere di Siviglia,* is the one which is most consistently explored by Rossini. In this respect there is a measure of wholeness about his work, a degree of inner consistency, which becomes clear when the opus is examined in its totality.

[6] Dent, 117.

[7] Langer, 331.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

The Early Operas (I): Farse for Venice's Teatro San Moisè

IN 1810 ITALIAN OPERA WAS IN SERIOUS NEED OF A REBIRTH. Cimarosa was dead, Paisiello had retired; such emergent talent as there was generally lacked personality, vision, and the power to innovate. Rossini, who possessed all three qualities, was 18 when he made his professional debut at the Teatro San Moisè with *La cambiale di matrimonio* ('Marriage by Promissory Note'). As he later recalled, conditions in shrewdly administered theatres such as the San Moisè were ideal for an apprentice composer. The cast usually consisted of six singers: a soprano and a tenor as the romantic leads, a seconda donna, and either a trio of comic basses or a pair of basses and a tenor. There was no chorus. Working to a strictly limited budget, with minimal scenery and limited rehearsal time, the company would stage two or three new one-act operas per season. The designation of these operas was farsa, a term which has little to do with the English word 'farce'. Some of them are funny but not all.

Not the least of the strengths of Rossini's debut opera is the template on which it is based. Devised in part by Venice's leading writer of farse texts, Giuseppe Foppa, it would be exploited and modified in the quartet of popular successes (*L'inganno felice, La scala di seta, L'occasione fa il ladro,* and *Il Signor Bruschino*) which Rossini wrote, three of them with Foppa himself as librettist, for the San Moisè in 1812–1813. The shape of these 85-minute pieces is that of an arch. A multi-movement introduzione and a finale (both essentially tripartite) are the two plinths; a long central ensemble is the keystone. It is a structure Rossini would eventually use as the

basis for the first act of such two-act pieces as *L'italiana in Algeri* and *Il barbiere di Siviglia*. In outline, the prototype consists of an overture and eight movements:

1 Introduction. (A tripartite structure, usually consisting of a duettino, a short aria, and a concluding trio with two allegro sections framing a central cantabile.)
2 Duet. (*L'inganno felice* and *L'occasione fa il ladro* have an aria here.)
3 Aria.
4 Central ensemble. (Usually a trio, but a quartet in *La scala di seta,* a quintet in *L'occasione fa il ladro.*) The ensemble is the equivalent of the act 1 'finale of confusion' in the two-act form.
5 Aria.
6 & 7 Duet and aria for supporting player ('mezzo carattere'). (*La scala di seta* has two arias.)
8 Tripartite finale.

This preoccupation with form does nothing to inhibit the rhythmic drive of Rossini's music or its sensuous lyricism. Indeed it was this very combination of the cerebral and the visceral which gave his early operas their power and underpinned their appeal.

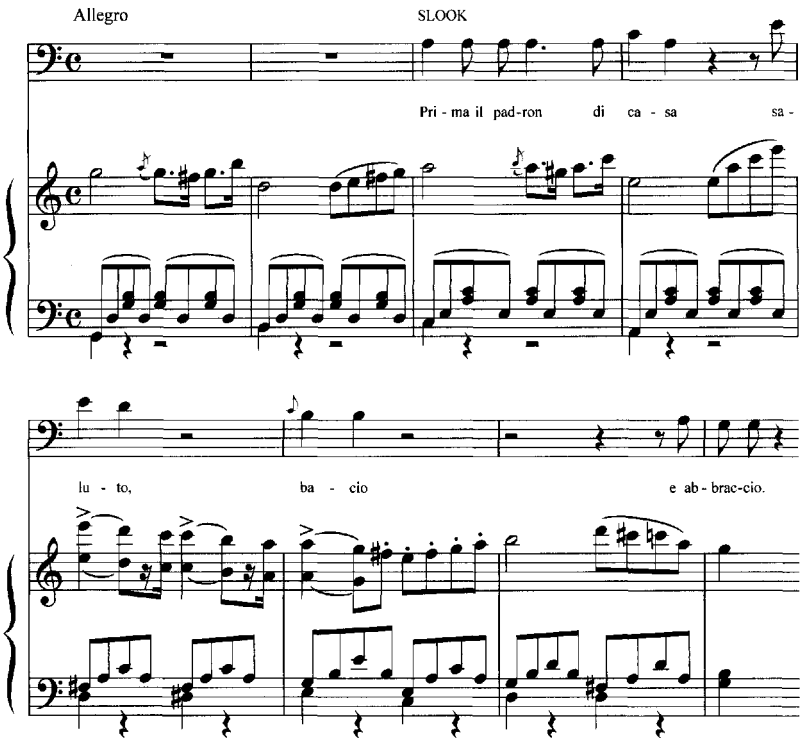
The libretto for *La cambiale di matrimonio,* like many provided for Rossini or knowingly chosen by him, had a previous record. Carlo Coccia, a Paisiello pupil, had set a not dissimilar adaptation of Camillo Federici's play in Rome in 1807. The story is an early attempt to make sport of the American in Europe: in this instance, the egregious Slook, who comes to purchase a wife from Tobias Mill, the English merchant whose hardheaded commitment to the law of supply and demand allows him to trade his daughter, Fanny, on much the same terms as he trades his other merchandise. The libretto makes little of the international theme. Slook, who turns out to have a heart of gold, is merely charmed and outwitted by Fanny and her penniless lover, Edoardo Milfort.

There are moments of lyricism in the score, but in this, his first fully fledged public commission, Rossini is more the bright schoolboy than the man of sentiment. Throughout the opera we are aware of his extraordinary energy, something which manifests itself in the overture (a revision of the Overture in E flat written in Bologna in 1809) and in the numerous motivating rhythmic figures, or 'gossiping themelets', as Luigi Rognoni

calls them. It is an early example of what Carl Dahlhaus has described as Rossini's tendency to give rhythm precedence over themes, intensified repetition over motivic manipulation.[1]

The funniest episodes are the duets of Mill and Slook. In the first, Slook is challenged to a duel after announcing that he no longer wishes to 'purchase' Fanny, even though he is willing to pay compensation. In the second, Mill arrives for the duel fully armed (Rossini's music for this number is pure burlesque), only to be met by Slook wearing a beret and brandishing a pipe. As portraits of American businessmen go, Slook is no Lambert Strether, but Rossini shades and shapes the musical portrait with intelligence and delight. Slook's entry into the Mill household is rich in new-world decorum, something which Rossini reciprocates (ex. 1) with an orchestral accompaniment that is both witty and generous.

Ex. 1



[1] C. Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music* (Berkeley, 1989), 59.

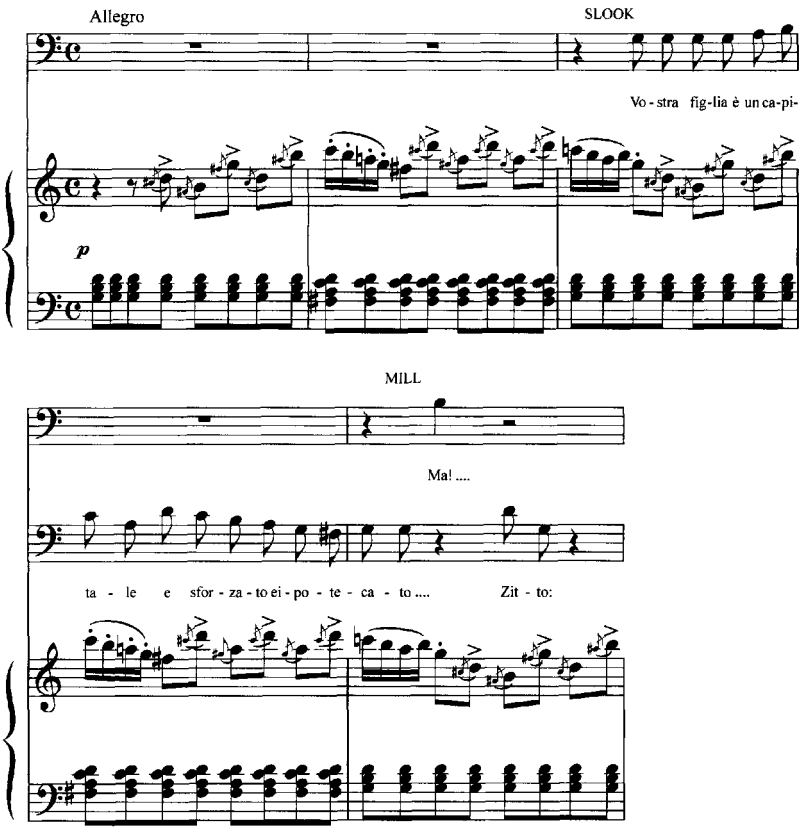
It is a somewhat cheekier Slook (ex. 2) who announces to an astonished Mill that he has already generously underwritten Fanny's forthcoming marriage with Edoardo.

SLOOK: And you ought to be ashamed of yourself. Your daughter is stock that's tied up and mortgaged.

MILL: But!

SLOOK: Quiet!

Ex. 2



Fanny's aria, 'Vorrei spiegarvi il giubilo', her enraptured response to Slook's offer to make Edoardo rich enough to marry her, is also crammed with good things, not least an idea which Rossini will reuse in Rosina's duet with Figaro in act 1 of *Il barbiere di Siviglia*.

L'inganno felice ('The Fortunate Deception'), which followed fourteen months later in January 1812, enjoyed remarkable contemporary success in Italy and abroad. Within a year of its prima it had been revived in Venice and staged in Bologna, Florence, Verona, and Trieste. It was the first Rossini opera to be played in Austria and Germany, and would feature in his opening seasons in Naples and Paris. He also included it in the music he provided, at Metternich's request, for the Congress of Verona in 1822. The fact that it is not a comedy but a romantic melodrama with comic interludes tells us a good deal about the musical and aesthetic tastes of the time. It also explains why Rossini quickly established a Europe-wide reputation as a purveyor not only of comedy, but of the 'ideally beautiful'. We experience this in the opera's introduzione, a movement which confines itself to just two characters: the heroine, Isabella, and her rescuer and adopted uncle, Tarabotto. Isabella's sad, chaste cavatina 'Perché dal tuo seno bandire la sposa' throws the comic bustle of Tarabotto's music into unusually sharp relief.

The text again derives from an earlier model. Giuseppe Palomba's libretto for Paisiello's *L'inganno felice* (Naples, 1798) was reshaped for Rossini by Giuseppe Foppa. Set in a seaside mining community, the story concerns the discovery and rehabilitation of Isabella, Duke Bertrando's wronged and, so he thinks, long-dead wife. The villains of the piece, all basses in a work which asks for three basses in a cast of five, are Ormondo, a confidant of the Duke, and his henchman, Batone. It was Ormondo who years before had attempted to dispose of Isabella after she had refused his sexual advances. Floated out to sea, she survived long enough to be rescued by Tarabotto, the respected leader of the mining community. The arrival of the Duke, Ormondo, and Batone in the village where Isabella now mysteriously resides triggers the action. Both the Duke and Batone are amazed by the resemblance of Tarabotto's 'niece' to the late-lamented Isabella. Ormondo, who is not so much amazed as downright suspicious, instructs Batone to abduct the woman and kill her. In the opera's spaciously conceived final scene, Tarabotto and the Duke (now no longer estranged from Isabella) set a nighttime trap for Ormondo and Batone amid the mines and mining galleries of the village. It is a movement rich in tension and mystery, touched with moments of special eloquence: not least the entry of the Duke (ex. 3), where the writing predicts that most exquisitely conceived of Rossini's nighttime trysts, the trio in act 2 of *Le Comte Ory*.

Ex. 3

Andante marcato
DUCA
mp
In quel - le ca - ve o - scu - re ce - liam - ci o fi - di
p
dolce
mf
mie - i Per-chè vi - d'i - o co - ste - i,

Of the four solo arias in the opera, only Isabella's 'Al più dolce e caro oggetto' has real distinction, though the Duke's 'Qual tenero diletto' is workmanlike, with enchanting writing for obbligato flute. It is in the ensembles that Rossini's mastery shines through: in the trio and the finale, and in the opera's one explicitly comic number, the duet 'Va taluno mormorando', in which Tarabotto and Batone try unsuccessfully to find out what the other knows. This is a fine early example of the conspiratorial buffo number in which words are subject to manic repetition, the music mimicking and mocking the characters' desperation ('O what gossip! O what lunacy') with repetitions and alliterations of its own (what Alessandro

Baricco has called Rossini's 'sabotaging the signifying function of words'[2]). Elsewhere in *L'inganno felice* it is the clarity and expressive elegance of the writing which is the hallmark of the score, qualities which are prefigured in the charming overture.

Anyone in search of a summary profile of *La scala di seta* ('The Silken Ladder') need look no further than the celebrated overture. Though it has no thematic connection with what follows, its manner is absolutely that of the work itself: swift-moving, sharp-witted, gossipy, unimpeachably elegant, as warm as sunlight on ice. This was Rossini's first Venetian farse to have a French source, and it shows. Giuseppe Foppa derived his libretto from François de Planard's *L'Échelle de soie,* which Pierre Gaveaux had set in Paris in 1808.[3] It is a brilliantly contrived comedy built around the familiar theme of a secret marriage. Everything about it suited Rossini's purpose, not least the element of danger that the inevitable comparisons with Cimarosa's *Il matrimonio segreto* were bound to induce.

In Foppa's version of the story, the well-to-do Giulia is secretly married to Dorvil, in spite of her guardian's wish that she marry Dorvil's preening friend, the young army officer Blansac. The only way out of Giulia's dilemma is for her to encourage Blansac and her cousin Lucilla to fall in love, a plan which is realised more or less by mistake after a series of whispered meetings and misheard conversations. Secret closets and the eponymous silken ladder which hangs from Giulia's balcony also play their part in the unravelling. Two characters dominate the action: Giulia, and her curmudgeonly, not-as-dim-as-he-seems servant, Germano. Their opening confrontation, which sets the scene and establishes the themes, is remarkable for its lively, cut-and-thrust character: an early example of that 'accuracy of declamation' which so impressed Verdi in Rossini's finest comic writing. Giulia and Germano appear together in four of the opera's eight movements (1, 2, 4, and 8). Each is also given a dramatically and musically important solo scene (6 and 7, respectively) ahead of the finale itself. Giulia's 'Il mio ben sospiro e chiamo' is an aria of some grandeur, richly orchestrated. Germano's scene is even more remarkable. Convinced that

[2] A. Baricco, *Il genio in fuga* (Turin, 1997), 33.

[3] Gaveaux's principal claim to fame is his pre-Beethoven *Léonore* (Paris, 1798), in which Gaveaux himself sang the role of Florestan.

Giulia has made a midnight assignation with Blansac, he contemplates the wonders of love in a bass aria of great charm and beauty ('Amore dolcemente'). Bemused, tired, and slightly drunk, he drifts into a gentle slumber from which he is roused by Blansac who is mystified to learn that Giulia is expecting him in her room at midnight.

Two other characters, Dorvil and Lucilla, have solo arias. Dorvil's 'rò qual sommo incanto' is arguably more characterful than the character himself. A coloratura outpouring in binary form, it is backed by an exceptionally powerful orchestral accompaniment. Rossini had evidently established a close relationship with the creator of the role, the 30-year-old Raffaele Monelli.[4] Over a notated cadenza at the end of the cantabile of the aria, Rossini has added the words 'Dolce per le cinque piaghe di Cristo' ('Sweetly, by the five wounds of Christ'). Lucilla's blithe and folksy 'Sento talor nell' anima' is as dazzling an aria 'mezzo carattere' as any in the repertory, jauntily accompanied by two piccolos. The thematic material was later reused for the gipsy chorus at the start of *Il turco in Italia*.

The opera's key 'structural' ensembles—the introduzione, the midway quartet, and the multi-sectioned finale—are all memorably written. The quartet, in which Blansac protests his willingness to be faithful to Giulini, whilst Dorvil fumes and Germano smiles, is highly contrived. The quasi-fugal writing, central to which is a melody repeated in canon in octaves, holds the characters in a vicelike grip. They may protest, grumble, and laugh to their hearts' content, but their destiny, the musical mechanism suggests, is no longer in their hands. In the finale Rossini takes a slightly different approach, abandoning his role as composer-puppeteer, revelling instead in parody and wit, as the conventions of the sentimental eighteenth-century happy ending are gently and occasionally uproariously mocked.

L'occasione fa il ladro ('Opportunity Makes the Thief'), which followed six months later in November 1812, was written at speed in the wake of the triumphant opening in Milan of Rossini's two-act melodramma giocoso *La pietra del paragone*. That said, the only evidence of speed of composition is in the urgency of the writing. It is a dashing score, shot through with moments of sentiment. It is also a highly assured work, finely struc-

[4] Monelli had previously created the role of Bertrando in *L'inganno felice*. Rossini also wrote an aria for Monelli to insert into in Giovanni Mosca's *I pretendenti delusi*.

tured, with a well-defined and clearly differentiated sextet of players. The experience of writing *La pietra del paragone* had evidently been helpful, though it is also clear that the 20-year-old Rossini was getting better by the month.

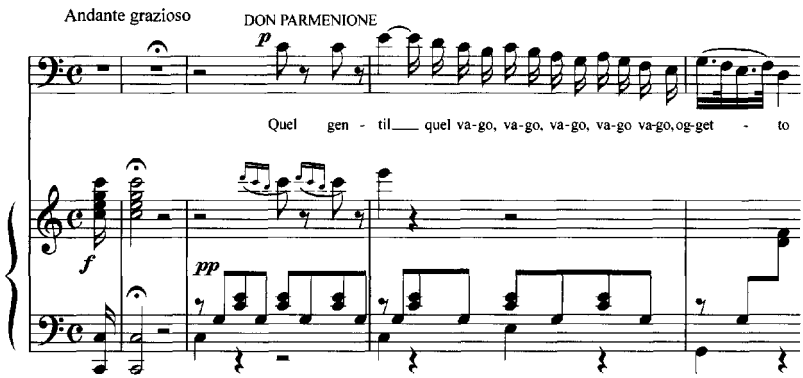
The libretto, supplied by impresario Antonio Cera, was again French in origin, an adaptation of the 19-year-old Eugène Scribe's recently staged *Le Prétendu par hazard, ou L'Occasion fait le larron* (Paris, 1810). A close contemporary of Rossini, Scribe was already demonstrating that he had few rivals when it came to the mechanics of play making: inventive plots, cogently ordered, with a liberal use of surprise and suspense. He would write over 140 librettos of his own (Rossini's *Le Comte Ory* among them), but these early comédies-vaudevilles were a gift to enterprising hacks such as Luigi Prividali, the theatrical agent, journalist, and part-time transcriber of French vaudeville who provided the San Moisè text. Once again we see Rossini developing the reach and complexity of key ensembles. The central quintet is longer than the sextet in Mozart's *Don Giovanni;* indeed, it is almost as long as that opera's act I finale. Rossini also found time to write an additional large-scale aria for the heroine: a response to the presence in the cast of a rising young star of the Italian stage, the soprano Giacinta Canonici.

The opera opens in a hostelry near Naples. A storm is raging, borrowed from *La pietra del paragone* but skillfully adapted as an allegro movement which, with the aid of a slow introduction, allows Rossini to dispense entirely with a formal overture. As the storm music dies away, we discover Don Parmenione, later described in an engaging short aria by his manservant, Martino, as an insolvent, egocentric, two-faced, wine-bibbing, womanising man of the world. Also sheltering himself from the storm is Count Alberto, on his way to Naples to take delivery of his bride-to-be, Berenice, whom he has never met but whose portrait has been sent to him by the girl's obliging uncle. The part is nicely written for a well-groomed tenore di grazia, though, with Don Parmenione and Martino in the company, his cavatina quickly becomes a drinking song. The opera gets its subtitle, *Il cambio della valigia,* from the picking up of the wrong suitcase by Alberto's comatose servant. Whilst Alberto is travelling to Naples with Don Parmenione's dirty laundry, Parmenione and Martino are busy sifting through the count's belongings. When money, papers, and the portrait of the beautiful Berenice are found, Parmenione resolves to make his way

to Don Eusebio's house with every intention of passing himself off as Berenice's aristocratic husband-to-be. The scene ends with a sizzling stretta, rich in buzzing onomatopoeia, as Parmenione, and Rossini, whirl us off into an hour of amorous intrigue.

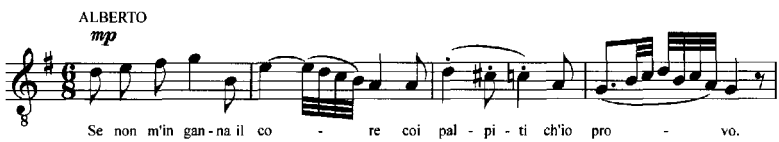
Berenice's music, like Alberto's, is simple and melodious, though the characterisation is by no means monochrome. Her cavatina suggests a girl who is moody and guileful but fundamentally sweet. Resorting to the oldest ruse in the book, she decides to test her lover's credibility by exchanging clothes with her servant, Ernestina. This leads to the quintet 'Non so più cosa far', which begins with Parmenione's first encounter (ex. 4) with the elegantly attired Ernestina.

Ex. 4



Where Parmenione stutters nervously in front of someone whom he takes to be a lady of quality, Alberto treats the maid-servant with proper aristocratic condescension, a quality defined by Rossini in writing (ex. 5) whose elegance Donizetti will one day seek to emulate.

Ex. 5



When Berenice's guardian, Don Eusebio, joins the ensemble, what has until now been a contrasted pair of duets develops into what in a two-act opera would be the act 1 finale: a moment of stasis as identities are pondered and emotions contained, followed by one of those Gadarene stretti during which the characters hurtle through what Rossini's librettist calls 'the dark and hideous vortex of misunderstanding'.

In the opera's second half Berenice's lightning cross-examination of Parmenione is exceedingly brilliant and has the merit of unmasking the old adventurer. Such is Alberto's attachment to the 'maid', he is happy to strike a bargain with Parmenione. All, however, is not resolved in Berenice's own mind. Though touched by Alberto's sincerity, she is angered by the continuing confusion over his identity. The result is her grand aria con pertichini (Alberto and Parmenione are both in attendance), 'Voi la sposa pretendete'. In another context, this could form the basis of the opera's finale. Here, though, it is simply an additional movement before the finale: further proof that this is a work in which Rossini invested a good deal of musical capital, if not time.

Il Signor Bruschino, first heard in January 1813, is the last of the Venetian farse and the most scabrous, a fiercely written piece in which a good deal of frenzied fun is crossed by the moments which border on the bizarre and the downright cruel. Foppa's libretto is again derived from a French source, *Le Fils par hazard* (1809) by Alissan de Chazet and E.-T. Maurice Ourry. At the heart of the drama are Sofia and her lover, Florville, and the Bruschinos: Signor Bruschino himself, and his feckless, much talked of, and largely absent son. Bruschino Junior is contracted to Sofia, though none of the parties has ever met. En route to the house of her guardian, Signor Gaudenzio, he has run up a huge bill at the local inn, where he has been detained by the landlord, Filiberto, pending payment. Hearing of this fracas, Florville pays off part of the debt, asks that the lad be detained for the time being, and passes himself off to Gaudenzio as Bruschino's long-awaited son. By the time Bruschino-*padre* arrives, everyone is convinced that Florville is the younger Bruschino. When the elder Bruschino vehemently denies this fact, he is judged by the assembled company to be insane, a condition to which he more or less succumbs as the situation goes from bad to worse.

It is a score full of strange sonorities, from the violins tapping the metal candleholders on their music stands with the backs of their bows in the savagely brilliant overture, to Signor Bruschino's groaning, brow-mopping incantation 'Uh, che caldo!' 'Oh, the heat!' A sign that the opera is going to be something of a switchback ride comes right at the start, when Rossini sets the overture cheek-by-jowl with the lovesick Florville's cavatina—brought forward from its expected place midway through the introduzione. After a flurried exchange between Florville and the maid Marianna, the music settles for a second time to thoughts of love in the exquisite duettino for Florville and Sofia, in which Rossini knowingly reuses the (to him) much-loved duet from *Demetrio e Polibio* (see ex. 7, p. 192). It is all very beautiful, but Sofia's revelation that she has been promised, sight unseen, to the son of Signor Bruschino intrudes with all the force of a crockery crash. The score's second movement, the duet in which Florville bribes the innkeeper Filiberto, completes the exposition.

Initially Gaudenzio is the least troubled of the characters, though even his big, free-wheeling cavatina, 'Nel teatro nel gran mondo', is darkened by an *a piacere* passage in which he bemoans his lack of success. From here the music becomes increasingly fraught. First Gaudenzio, who has taken to Florville little knowing that he is not young Bruschino but the son of his fiercest enemy, tries to apologise for the boy's behaviour to a hot and irate Bruschino. He then attempts to reconcile them, bringing an extremely nervous Florville forward to meet his angry 'father' in the trio 'Per un figlia già pentito'. The ostinato figure underpinning the music is quite literally that: obstinate, bullish, grotesque, Rossini building Bruschino's grunts and groans—the cries, in effect, of an exasperated animal—into a bizarre sonic mix.

Sofia's aria 'Ah! donate il caro sposo' comes as an interlude in the gulling of Bruschino. It is notable both for the expressive intricacy of the recitative and for the use of the cor anglais: the instrument's plaintive colour exactly right for so fraught and edgy a context. As evidence piles on evidence, Bruschino is turned into a bear at the stake. His aria 'Ho la testa, o è andata via?' is effectively a mad scene for bass, with contributions from Gaudenzio, the commissioner of police, Sofia, and Florville. By the time Filiberto appears to support Florville's story that he is young Bruschino, a major ensemble has developed. At the height of Bruschino's bemusement and anguish (ex. 6), his vocal line advances in disjunct octave leaps, the or-

chestra cackling poisonously below, while Sofia's rejoinder, sensuous in G minor with upward-curving fifths and minor sixths, at once intensifies the mockery and points up the pathos and the cruelty.

Ex. 6

BRUSCHINO
Allegro
Se lo son mi ca - schi il na - so, se lo
p
SOFIA
Ahi! che do - glia io pro - vo in se - no!
son mi ca - schi il na - so.
f
pp
qua - si, o cie - - lo, ven - - go me - - no

As the sequence nears its end, Foppa and Rossini provide an outrageous parody of opera seria as Bruschino pauses to declare 'Dei tiranni, i casi miei/ Deh vi muovano a pietà' ('Tyrannic gods, O let my plight/Move you to pity').

The truth of the situation comes out when Filiberto asks Bruschino to settle the balance of his son's debt. Realising what has really being going on, Bruschino now holds all the aces. Meanwhile Gaudenzio is trying to press Sofia into an early acceptance of marriage with the man he thinks is young Bruschino. Their duet sums up the opera's mix of sentiment and burlesque as Sofia, who desperately wants to marry Florville ('Oh, give me a husband and give him me quick'), wheedles, charms, and plays hard to get. When young Bruschino finally appears at the end of the opera, his plea for forgiveness is cast in the form of a quirky, nervous minor key march, with the crucial word 'pentito' quickly robbed of its first syllable and turned by Rossini into a gibbering act of childish self-abasement. In the end, Bruschino is able to turn the tables on Gaudenzio by obliging him to accept Florville, the son of his old enemy, as Sofia's husband. Like Verdi's Falstaff, Bruschino may have been duped, driven, and humiliated, but he too finally has something to smile about.

The radicalism of *Il Signor Bruschino* points forward to certain aspects of the writing in *Il barbiere di Siviglia,* its zest for parody and burlesque to *Matilde di Shabran.* It was not, however, popular in Rossini's lifetime. It shocked and disturbed audiences. And yet by the time Offenbach made a spirited attempt to revive it in Paris in 1857, it also seemed a bit old-fashioned. The one-act form also worked against it, as it did against all these Venetian farse. Then as now, audiences were not keen on two-opera evenings. Like its great successor, Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi, Il Signor Bruschino* is not staged as often as it ought to be.

CHAPTER TWENTY

Overtures

A REMARKABLE FEATURE OF *IL SIGNOR BRUSCHINO* IS ITS OVERTURE. of the several forms Rossini revolutionised and made peculiarly his own during his apprentice years in Venice in 1810–1813, this was the one which was to bring him his greatest fame. From *Demetrio e Polibio* onward, it had been his habit to preface his operas with an overture, 'a musical visiting-card' as Gino Roncaglia aptly dubbed it. It took Rossini the best part of six years to perfect the archetype; and, having perfected it, he developed, modified, and, where necessary, ignored it at will. One of the most atmospheric of all his operatic openings, the 'Scene of Shadows' in *Mosè in Egitto* banishes the overture entirely. In his Naples years he either abandoned the archetype or freely adapted it. The *Ermione* overture incorporates an off-stage choral lament for the fall of Troy. In *Ricciardo e Zoraide* it is a multi-movement instrumental preface, whose coda does not arrive until the very end of the 25-minute introduzione, of which the overture is an organic part. Rossini returned to the archetype for what was in effect his farewell to the Italian stage, *Semiramide,* in Venice in 1823, after which it was heard no more. *Le Comte Ory* is prefaced by a cryptic, 170-bar 'Introduction', *Guillaume Tell* by a four-movement tone poem.

Overtures were sometimes adapted or reused, to the great joy of the anti-Rossini brigade, who were fond of pointing out that whereas Beethoven wrote four overtures for one opera, Rossini wrote one overture for three operas and would have probably used it for a fourth had the need arisen. (The overture Beethoven finally lighted on for *Fidelio* is, in fact, a buoyant

curtain-raiser *alla* Rossini.) The overture to *Aureliano in Palmira* (Milan, 1813), which Rossini later reused with expanded orchestral forces in *Elisabetta, regina d'Inghilterra* (Naples, 1815) and, unmodified, in *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (Rome, 1816), is curiously unrepresentative in two ways. First, music from the overture, including the whole of the Andante maestoso, recurs in the main body of the original opera, a form of thematic recurrence condemned by the 63-year-old Rossini, even though he himself had adopted it in a number of his works. Second, no other Rossini overture was so obviously and extensively redeployed. Not that redeployment is unthinkable if an overture is intended to be no more than a curtain-raiser and when the music itself is in no sense programmatic. The andante maestoso of the *Aureliano in Palmira* overture is sufficiently neutral to serve its several appointed functions, though the minor-key wit of the first allegro subject (perhaps it is mere familiarity which prompts the idea) does seem curiously well suited to its eventual resting place as part of the overture to *Il barbiere di Siviglia.* In other instances, overtures are not transferred by Rossini but elements within them are (*Il turco in Italia, Sigismondo,* and *Otello* all have material in common), a process made increasingly easy by Rossini's evolution of a method which confers autonomy on individual units within the structure.

In its stabilised form the Rossini overture comprises a slow introduction, first and second subjects, a recapitulation, and a coda: a functionally elegant scaling down of a classical sonata-form movement, which Rossini proceeds to transform through the outstanding quality of his invention. George Bernard Shaw, no Rossini lover, commended the irresistible piquancy of the allegro subjects; but there is also the subtle drive of the rhythms, the brilliance of the orchestration, and the elegiac beauty of the melodies Rossini writes for solo wind instruments in the central movement of the slow introduction. First subjects tend to be presented by the strings, though in *L'italiana in Algeri* it is the woodwinds which launch both the first subject and (their more usual function) the second subject as well. The second subject will normally be in the dominant, or in the relative major where the first subject is in the minor, as it is in *Il barbiere di Siviglia* and *La gazza ladra.*

This basic plan takes no account of the variant procedures which exist within the structures. There is the skill with which Rossini shapes and times the leads towards the release of the Allegro. (The launch of the Allegro in

La scala di seta is a typical piece of harmonic dissimulation.) There is also the complex interplay of rhythm, phrase length, and harmony in the first subject group of the more mature overtures, the length of transitions between subjects, the variety of modulations Rossini introduces into his codas, and the simple skill with which some overtures are stopped. The overture to *La scala di seta,* one of the quickest and most brilliant, distinguished throughout by glorious *concertante* wind writing, slaloms to a halt with all the grace of a downhill ski champion.

The variant procedures give individual overtures a newly minted feel, which is why, though the form and manner could be copied by lesser talents, the bespoke product could not. Chorley noted that every great Rossini overture begins in a different way. The range of ideas is certainly astonishing. There is the awesome quiet at the start of *L'inganno felice,* the helter-skelter of *La scala di seta,* the side drum's call to arms before the marziale of *La gazza ladra,* and the unforgettable colloquy for solo cellos at the start of *Guillaume Tell. L'italiana in Algeri* begins with a Haydnesque preface, which has suggested to one writer the movements of a guilty husband creeping home in the early hours of the morning and knocking over the grandfather clock. *Semiramide,* one of the finest of the overtures to exploit the full archetype, actually begins with a crescendo. One of the most extraordinary is *Il Signor Bruschino.* The start is remote from the tonic, quick rather than slow, aggressive and reflective, and brazen enough to reduce the motivating figure (which recurs throughout the overture) to a skeletal form which the violins tap out with their bows against the metal shades of the candleholders on their music stands. A mildly anarchic gesture in 1813, it is a good example of Rossini's inadvertently writing what he once wryly called 'the music of the future'.

The celebrated crescendo, first tentatively employed in the overture to *L'inganno felice,* takes some of its features from standard classical practice. The crescendo at the start of the development of the first movement of Beethoven's *Pastoral* Symphony, with its overlapping rhythmic (8 × 3) and harmonic (12 × 2) movement in the 24-bar period, is an example of one basic structural principle used by Rossini. In addition, Rossini tends to stabilise the harmony by an arrested, tonic-dominant oscillation. Hypnotised by this, and by the sudden drop to piano or pianissimo, the audience is able to register his skillful structuring of the crescendo, dynamically and instrumentally, as wind and percussion instruments are progressively added to

the texture, often in extreme or unusual registers, yet added in a way which preserves the clarity and brilliance of the orchestral palette. In *L'italiana in Algeri* the crescendo is launched by strings and oboes, the violins exploiting the icy, close-to-the-bridge *sul ponticello* sound: an effect which makes for a remarkable conjunction of rhythmic fire and sonic ice.

Shaw's talk of 'textures thickening and warming until finally the big drum and the trombones [are] in full play'[1] reflects an experience of late nineteenth-century reorchestrations, and an overexposure to brass band transcriptions. In its original state, Rossini's orchestration is astonishingly economical, not a single instrument surplus to requirements. However, as Philip Gossett has noted, 'This apparent simplicity is deceiving, for instrumentalists are continually asked to play like soloists: not only are the scores difficult to execute, but they demand great skill if their orchestral qualities are not to be trivialised'.[2]

'Music that is speedy must strip', wrote Richard Capell, and Rossini invariably does exactly that in the early comedies, where colour, tonal volumes, and amusing incongruities of instrumental register are exploited with a skill which Stravinsky was to revive and reappropriate in his own neoclassical phase. As good an example as any also comes from *L'italiana in Algeri*. Initially the second subject is given out by the oboe, but it is recapitulated by, of all things, piccolo and bassoon, greeting the world with all the physical incongruity of a pair of music hall comedians—Laurel and Hardy or, indeed, Paganini and Rossini in the 1821 Roman carnival. At moments such as this, Rossini's inventive genius never ceases to astound.

[1] G. B. Shaw, *Illustrated London News*, 5 March 1892.

[2] CCR, 79.

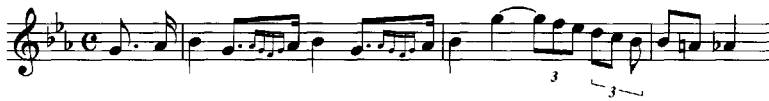
CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

The Early Operas (II): Demetrio e Polibio, L'equivoco stravagante, Ciro in Babilonia, La pietra del paragone

ROSSINI WAS 12 WHEN HE WROTE SIX VIVACIOUS AND CHARACterful string sonatas. At much the same time, he took the first step towards translating these precociously developed instrumental skills into his mother's world of stage play and song. They were piecemeal efforts, of course; as was *Demetrio e Polibio,* the opera he assembled at the request of the Mombelli family to a libretto by Vincenzina Viganò-Mombelli whilst still a student in Bologna. Technically it is his first opera, though it was not staged professionally until 1812.

The opera's title refers not to the young lovers, but to their fathers, the kings of Syria and Parthia. The kindlier Polibio is a father twice over: father to his daughter, Lisinga, and adopted father to her lover, Siveno, the estranged son of Demetrio, who is now living in the Parthian court. Demetrio, by contrast, is very much the villain of the piece. Turning up in disguise, he demands Siveno's return to Syria and becomes aggressive when Siveno is reluctant to obey. Demetrio's seizing of Lisinga and Polibio's tit-for-tat arrest of Siveno precipitates the opera's one moment of genuine confrontation and the famous quartet 'Donami ormai Siveno'. The score's other highlight is the duet 'Questo cor ti giura amore', during which the lovers pledge themselves before the high altar. It is a classic Rossini melody (ex. 7), announced in thirds after a rapt, horn-led introduction.

Ex. 7



It was a melody he reused on a number of occasions. And no wonder, for it is an early example of Rossini at his most sensuously beguiling, a touchstone for those hedonists who see him, in Peter Conrad's phrase, ministering to 'the delicious idleness of private life, the dreamy connoisseurship of sensation'.[1] It is doubtful whether Padre Mattei would have approved of much of the music. The overture, which has some accomplished solo woodwind writing, is so badly assembled that when the publisher Diabelli, greedy for anything Rossinian, published it in piano reduction in Vienna in the 1820s, he restructured parts of it, tidying up the second subject group and writing a more formally correct recapitulation.

L'equivoco stravagante was Rossini's second professional opera but his first in the longer two-act form. It means 'The Strange Misunderstanding', though, as we have seen in an earlier chapter, what was truly strange was the failure of the Bologna censor to sniff out what was later deemed to be an inappropriately salacious subject. In the opera itself there are no misunderstandings, strange or otherwise, until act 2, when a duplicitous gentleman's gentleman by the name of Frontino decides to cool the ardour of Buralicchio, the suitor of his master's daughter, Ernestina, by suggesting that Ernestina is a man in drag: a castrato and an army deserter.

The libretto is the work of Florentine wordsmith Gaetano Gasbarri. Its principal weakness is structural—in particular, the failure to trigger the transvestite idea nearer the start of the drama. Jokes about cross-dressing were not, however, the only ones which interested the composer and his librettist. Gasbarri loved word play and the satirising of social and linguistic pretension. A good deal of act 1 is devoted to mocking the verbal convolutions of the recently ennobled ex-farmer Gamberotto and Ernestina, his bookish daughter. That kind of thing still 'plays' today to an Italian-speaking audience or in a good translation. By contrast, Gasbarri's parodies

[1] Conrad, 12.

of Metastasio, the grand panjandrum of eighteenth-century librettists, tend to fall flat, though we can be assured that at the time Rossini himself was much amused by them. The fact that the finished product is less tightly ordered than it should be suggests a certain lack of control over the drafting of the shape of the libretto, a failure which Rossini, a fast learner, never allowed to happen to this degree again. Even here he may have made some important late interventions. The second act is beautifully brought off. It is the first act which tends to ramble. There are too many solo arias, which are either less than first rate musically (this is not a score with much lyric beauty in it) or, in the case of the servant-girl Rosalia's aria, inappropriately placed dramatically.

What Rossini wanted above all was good situations. The act 1 duet in which Gamberotto greets his would-be son-in-law is the first number of quality. Elsewhere in act 1 it is the ensembles which work best. The quartet in which Ernestina inspects her two suitors—the declared front runner Buralicchio and Ermanno, the dark horse of the race—in the presence of her father prefigures a comparable examination of an ungainly suitor by the rather more outspoken Isabella in *L' italiana in Algeri*. Better still is the 'scene of the lady's foot' (cut by the Bolognese censor) in which Buralicchio pays court to Ernestina in phrases dictated to him by the increasingly preposterous Gamberotto. The act 1 finale includes Ermanno's fake suicide and the sudden arrival of the police.

Act 2 begins with an introduzione and aria for Frontino, who is about to unleash his 'Ernestina is a man' stratagem on an unsuspecting household. From this point on, Rossini is in his element. The duet in which Ernestina pays her respects to Buralicchio, who is terrified by the thought that he is about to be married to a draft-dodging eunuch, is worthy of inclusion in any of Rossini's comic operas. The high point of the act is the quintet in which Ernestina and Ermanno, the man she really fancies, are caught canoodling by a household which now thinks that Ernestina is Ernestino. 'Ernestino' is arrested as a military deserter, at which point, the censor must have assumed, everyone has a field day speculating what precisely it was Ermanno and Ernestino were planning to do together. With its shocked moment of stasis before the helter-skelter cabaletta, it is a scene which anticipates the act 1 finale of *Il barbiere di Siviglia:* everyone at sixes and sevens, the Rossini train swaying vertiginously over the points. And that is part of the trouble, of course. In a better ordered libretto, this scene

would have been the act 1 finale. On the principle 'if you can't beat them, join them', Ermanno engineers Ernestina's escape from prison by dressing her as a soldier, a dénouement tailor-made for the 31-year-old Maria Marcolini.

In the new political and moral climate, Rossini saw little chance of the opera's being revived, though he thought well enough of some of the numbers to reuse them elsewhere. Unfortunately, the autograph manuscript has not survived.[2] Nor has the overture. (Modern productions have tended to use the overture to *La cambiale di matrimonio.*) The music itself was revived in Trieste in 1825 with a new libretto, to which was added a ballet written and directed by Giuseppe Sorentino. As for the first post-1811 revival of the opera itself, that did not take place until September 1965, when a 'version' by Vito Frazzi was staged in Siena with Margherita Rinaldi as Ernestina. The 1960s was a time of moral and sexual liberation, when double entendre and camp innuendo were the rage. Even so, as one pundit put it, '*L'equivoco stravagante* may have an air of modernity about it but, alas, it no longer shocks'.

Ciro in Babilonia was Rossini's first essay in the semisacred genre deployed to comply with regulations governing the use of theatres during Lent. It was commissioned by the Teatro Comunale in Ferrara, probably on the recommendation of Maria Marcolini, who played the title role. The Bible's contribution is the story of Belshazzar's feast, taken from chapter 5 of the Book of Daniel. Since this material was insufficient to occupy a complete two-act opera, local writer Francesco Aventi married it with Cyrus's conquest of Babylon as told in book 1 of Herodotus's *History.* The result is a libretto whose plot and character archetypes closely resemble those later encountered in several Rossini operas, most notably *Ermione,* where a tyrant king will again threaten a grieving woman and use her young son as a pawn in an ugly game of sexual politics. In *Ermione* it is Pyrrhus who is the tyrant; in *Ciro in Babilonia* it is Belshazzar (Baldassarre). He has abducted Amira, the wife of Cyrus, king of Persia, and their son. He intends to marry Amira and make her his queen. Cyrus, disguised as an ambassador, gains access to Amira but is discovered and arrested. He

[2] A manuscript copy with the original, uncensored text is extant. It forms the basis of Marco Beghelli's critical edition.

and his family are condemned to death but are freed when Persian forces conquer Babylon.

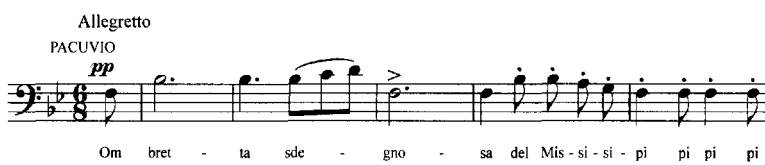
The role of Baldassarre was written for the tenor Eliodoro Bianchi. Rossini would create some memorable parts for coloratura tenors: real tyrants and the occasional papier-mâché one. This role, though, is merely a pen-and-ink sketch. At the age of 20, sweet grieving is more in Rossini's line than visceral anger, which explains why the most memorable music in *Ciro in Babilonia* is written for Ciro and Amira. With their dawn-of-time freshness and inborn sense of gentle melancholy, they look back to the lovers in *Demetrio e Polibio,* forward to Tancredi and Amenaide. There are dying falls aplenty in Ciro's cavatina 'Ahi! come il mio dolor', as there are in the prison duet at the start of act 2, which Baldassarre's presence turns into a fine trio. Rossini evidently took a good deal of trouble over Amira's two arias: 'Vorrei veder lo sposo', later reused in the 1818 version of *Mosè in Egitto,* and the prayer and cabaletta with violin obbligato 'Deh, per me non v'affliggete'. The finest music of all is reserved for the opera's penultimate scene where Ciro, condemned to death and on his way to a public execution, takes leave of his family. Just as in later years the scene of the apple in *Guillaume Tell* would draw from Rossini writing inspired by familial affection, so here one senses that the subject has touched him deeply. Drawing on material first used in *Demetrio e Polibio,* he assembles a fifteen-minute scene that is varied and eloquent.

There are virtually no big ensembles in *Ciro in Babilonia:* a fair indicator that we are dealing with one of Rossini's less ambitious works. The banquet scene in which Amira is prepared for marriage to Belshazzar is strikingly handled (Rossini's first essay in stylised storm music, driving home the fact that in every sense the writing is on the wall for the tyrant king), but the act 1 finale is brief and perfunctory, and the recitatives and aria for the prophet Daniel are astonishingly poor. Against this weakness can be set the care Rossini evidently took over the orchestrations. The evocation of the prison at the start of act 2 is a case in point, as is the beguiling accompaniment for obbligato strings to the aria which Rossini aficionados smiled over for decades. Challenged by the vocal limitations of Ferrara's seconda donna, Anna Savinelli, Rossini built Argene's aria di sorbetto 'Chi disprezza gl'infelici', around a single note, B flat. This is easier said than done if the harmony is to remain stable in music of such vitality and charm.

Rossini's first Milanese opera was *La pietra del paragone* ('The Touchstone'), a melodrama giocoso by one of the Teatro alla Scala's house librettists, Luigi Romanelli. Dramatically, it suffers from some otiose maneuvrings of plot, a failing that is more than compensated for by the sheer variety of character and incident. The story is set in the country house of the wealthy young Count Asdrubale, the romantic lead cast, not as a tenor or travesti mezzo-soprano, but as a bass. Amid elegant apartments, rustic arbours, and forest vistas, a house party is in progress. The guests include the heroine, the lovely and demure Marchioness Clarice (Marcolini's role), her frustrated admirer, the poet Giocondo, and a notable quartet of bores and imposters: Baroness Aspasia; the poetaster, Pacuvio; his escort, Donna Fulvia; and the journalist, Macrobio ('incompetent, presumptuous, and venal'). Asdrubale is much taken with Clarice, and she with him, but she fears that in such company her affection for him may well be thought mercenary and insincere. He too fears insincerity, to which end he and his servant, Fabrizio, test the guests' good intentions by announcing that Asdrubale has lost all his money. Asdrubale himself turns up in the guise of a foreign potentate to slap the famous seals ('sigilli') on the count's possessions. Clarice, needless to say, remains loyal, but in an epilogue to the original plot she is also given the chance to test Asdrubale's good faith. Dressed as a captain of the Hussars, she poses as Clarice's brother who has come to take her away from these 'ill-starr'd shores'. Asdrubale's response in his aria 'Ah! se destarti in seno' is desperate enough to convince Clarice of the real depth of his feelings.

La pietra del paragone is full of highlights, Rossini filling out Romanelli's spacious blueprint with music of unflagging vitality and invention. The first act is launched by a brilliant, large-scale ensemble for Asdrubale's guests, during which Pacuvio's celebrated ditty 'Ombretta sdegnosa/Del Missipipi' is hinted at before it is winningly unfurled (ex. 8).

Ex. 8



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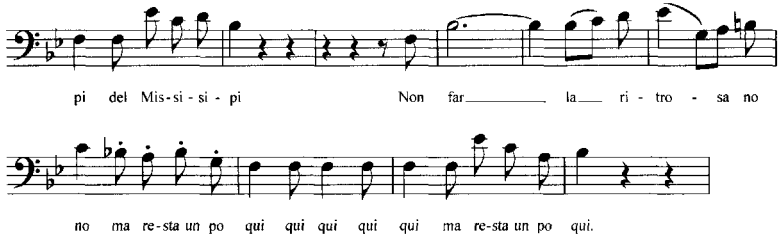
Ex. 8 (*Continued*)



There are sober-minded souls who will think this piece trivial, with its jaunty folk rhythms and love of verbal nonsense, but there is an aspect of it which is quintessential Rossini. More sophisticated is Macrobio's narrative aria on the power of the press. Stendhal, who knew a thing or two about journalists, described Macrobio as 'an intriguer and a coward, and above all a *braggart,* spiteful but by no means foolish'.[3] The aria may lack the economy of Figaro's famous cavatina, but it has pace and variety. Much of the thematic material is lodged, not with the voice, but with the orchestra. Clarice's cavatina is a horn-accompanied aria with offstage echo effects from the Count: a romantic episode of lyric charm. The first act culminates in a 25-minute sequence of great reach and energy. Fulvia and Aspasia launch the movement by announcing the Count's bankruptcy ('Oh, caso orribile!') with all the frenetic sweetness of the girls in *Così fan tutte,* before the Count enters in disguise with his cries of 'Sequestrara! . . . Sigillara!' ('Take possession! . . . Attach the seals!'). Clarice laments the Count's change of fortune, at which point the 'ruined' man returns to receive the sympathy of friends. As they are making their excuses and heading for their carriages, Fabrizio appears with proof that the Count is not ruined after all, a revelation that leaves the assembled company in a state of moral and musical vertigo.

The second act begins with an ensemble built on the kind of subject Haydn liked to use in his more joky slow movements. There is also a richly scored hunting chorus and a storm (the same storm that passes over Naples in *L'occasione fa il ladro* and over Seville in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*), which catches the hapless Pacuvio out in the forest. Like Beethoven before him, Rossini uses the storm to effect a magical transition to pastoral quiet and

[3] SVR, 93.

a song of thanksgiving, in this instance Giocondo's plaint to Clarice's beauty, 'Quell'alme pupille'. The Count's deception is eventually revealed. Donna Fulvia is entirely undismayed and reveals as much in a brilliant aria di sorbetto. Macrobio is less fortunate. He is confronted by the Count and Giocondo and proves himself a veritable Aguecheek in the duel which follows, the trio 'Prima fra voi coll'armi'. This is typical early Rossini, well enough liked by the composer for him to reuse it in Naples in 1816 as part of *La gazzetta.* Clarice's additional appearance dressed as her soldier-brother, a rerun of Marcolini's travesti appearance at the end of *L'equivoco stravagante,* was thought by Stendhal to be de trop, but it makes a generous end to an opera which will always make a full and diverting evening's entertainment.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Tancredi:
Heroic Comedy and the Forming of a Method

TANCREDI WAS THE WORK WITH WHICH, IN GAETANO ROSSI'S phrase, Rossini 'rose to glory'. It was his fully fledged opera seria and it established him, more or less instantly, as Italy's leading composer of contemporary opera. He was not yet 21. As a musical strategist, he was wise beyond his years, yet the music itself was utterly without guile. A contemporary opinion, quoted by Stendhal in his *Life of Rossini,* puts it well:

> In *Tancredi,* the most striking feature is the youthfulness of the music. There is nothing but purity and simplicity in every note; not an atom of embellishment, just genius in all its primitive innocence; genius which, if I may be permitted the expression, is still virginal. [1]

Tancredi charmed audiences even as it refreshed and inspired them. One factor was its seemingly endless flow of pristine melody: 'Cantilena and always cantilena, beautiful cantilena, new cantilena, magic cantilena, rare cantilena', as the poet Giuseppe Carpani later wrote.[2] Another was the grace and dash of its rhythms. The opera gave instant pleasure, yet it also struck a deeper note. The 75-year-old Goethe spoke for many when he dubbed it a 'pastoral fable', a reminder to a world sullied by war, revolution, and Romantic excess of a prelapsarian state of untarnished beauty, order, and equilibrium.[3] A case of 'Et in Arcadia ego', 'I, too, lived in Arcadia'. The

[1] SVR, 68.

[2] G. Carpani, *Le Rossiniane, ossia, Lettere musico-teatrali* (Padua, 1824), 74–75.

[3] J. W. Goethe, *Briefe der Jahre 1814–1832* (Zurich, 1951), 616–17.

opera is a limpid, lyrical, predominantly major-key work. In the original Venetian version, only Amenaide's prison scene is cast in the minor (in Rossini's key of darkness and incarceration, C minor), though the aria itself is in the major. Like Amenaide's prayer before Tancredi's battle with Orbazzano ('Giusto Dio che umile adoro') and Tancredi's own 'Ah! che scordar non so', whose introduction contains a melody of Verdian amplitude, this is music, seemingly simple on the page, which a great singer can transmute into sublime song.

Rossini began work on the opera towards the end of 1812. With *L'occasione fa il ladro* about to go into production and *Il Signor Bruschino* not yet completed, he might have been expected to call in an assistant to write the recitatives and whatever arias the bit-part players might require. In the event, he wrote everything. (One of the features of the score is the liveliness of the secco recitatives and the aria-matching eloquence of the accompanied ones.) The overture and some thematic borrowings aside,[4] the score was entirely new. Inasmuch as there were problems with the opera, they concerned the dramaturgy.

Rossi was not the first librettist to adapt Voltaire's *Tancrède* (Paris, 1760), nor was he the first to substitute a happy ending for Voltaire's original 'tragic' finale. For a latecomer into the field, his handling of the story line is singularly inept, even by the standards of an age which tended to look for narrative verisimilitude only in comedy. The principal problem lies in the fact that the love between Amenaide and Tancredi, a young knight who has been wrongly exiled by their native Syracuse, predates the start of the action. The play begins with Tancredi's return to Syracuse, disguised and in imminent danger of arrest and execution, in order to defend his homeland against the Moors and win the hand of Amenaide. A misdirected letter drives them apart. For this plot device to have any credibility, the lovers must spend relatively little time together. In Voltaire they meet only once, and in public; in Rossi's careless adaptation there are recitatives, scenas, and duets sufficient for them to dictate their entire life stories to one another.

At the centre of the tale with which Rossi found himself grappling are two families in eleventh-century Syracuse, a Sicilian city-state that has kept the Saracens at bay whilst maintaining a measure of independence from the Byzantine Empire. Like the Montagues and Capulets in Renaissance

[4] The overture is taken from *La pietra del paragone*.

Verona, the houses of Argirio and Orbazzano are locked in a historic feud. During a period of Orbazzano ascendancy, Argirio's wife and his daughter, Amenaide, have been exiled to the Byzantine court, where Amenaide has met Tancredi and been wooed by the Saracen leader, Solamir. On her deathbed, Amenaide's mother has given her blessing to her daughter's marriage to Tancredi. Events at home are less propitious. Harassed by Solamir and ineptly led by the fatuous Orbazzano, the Syracusans put Argirio at the head of their army. The Saracens are driven back, but Argirio is shrewd enough to realise that the city cannot survive whilst it remains divided against itself. As a gesture of reconciliation, he offers Amenaide's hand in marriage to Orbazzano, at the same time agreeing to seize the Tancredi family estates and condemn Tancredi to death in his absence. As the opera starts, Amenaide, who is largely ignorant of these events, has sent an anonymous note to Tancredi, urging him to return to Syracuse.

None of these troubles are evident in the opening scene of the opera, which is sunny and relaxed. In an F major chorus, free of any taint of militarism or rancour, Argirio's knights celebrate 'peace, honour, faith, and love', those classical ideals which bind communities together in disinterested acts of charity. *Tancredi* celebrates these ideals but evokes them in a more populist manner and embodies them in larger, more continuous forms than any of Rossini's Italian predecessors. It is the start of a process which will lead him to become what Julian Budden has called 'the reluctant architect of Italian romantic opera',[5] the inventor and purveyor of forms which Verdi will democratise, develop, and endow with a new kind of psychological realism.

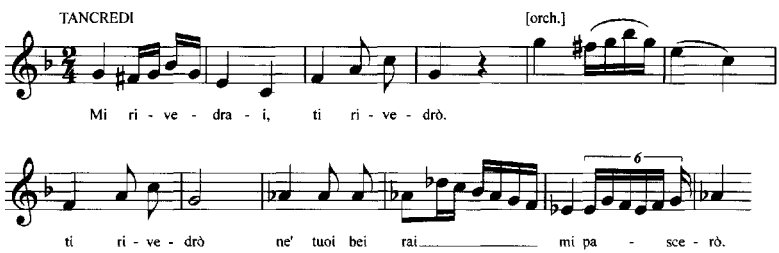
Rossini's Tancredi is a handsome young knight on whose banner are inscribed the words 'Faith, Honour'. Played by a woman rather than by one of the now discredited castrati, he has the kind of androgynous charm with which the Victorian painter G. F. Watts endows his youthful St. George (a 'moral' portrait, designed to 'affect the mind seriously by nobility of line and colour', which is nonetheless disarmingly feminine). As Rossini conceives him, Tancredi is closer to Mozart's Cherubino than to Wagner's Lohengrin, ardent but essentially innocent.[6] He arrives by boat to the accompaniment of a limpid C major barcarolle. In a celebrated recitative, he

[5] J. Budden, *The Operas of Verdi*, Vol. 1 (London, 1973), 8.

[6] Wagner parodies Tancredi's 'Di tanti palpiti' in the Tailors' Song in act 3 of *Die Meistersinger*.

greets his homeland in terms guaranteed to stir any Italian audience of the day. Stendhal preferred the recitative to the maestoso which follows, 'Tu che accendi questo core', out of which emerges the disarmingly charming cabaletta 'Di tanti palpiti', the number which made Rossini famous throughout Europe. Whatever its intrinsic merit, this buoyant plea for mercy after painful love-longing is wonderfully unaffected. In the morning-time of his art, Rossini seems to lack all artifice, though the craft is consummate. The music's character derives from folk song. Like many of the best folk songs, it is based on an instantly memorable melody, which is nonetheless rich in harmonic surprises. Take, for example, the sly upward elision to A flat on the word 'pascerò' (ex. 9).

Ex. 9



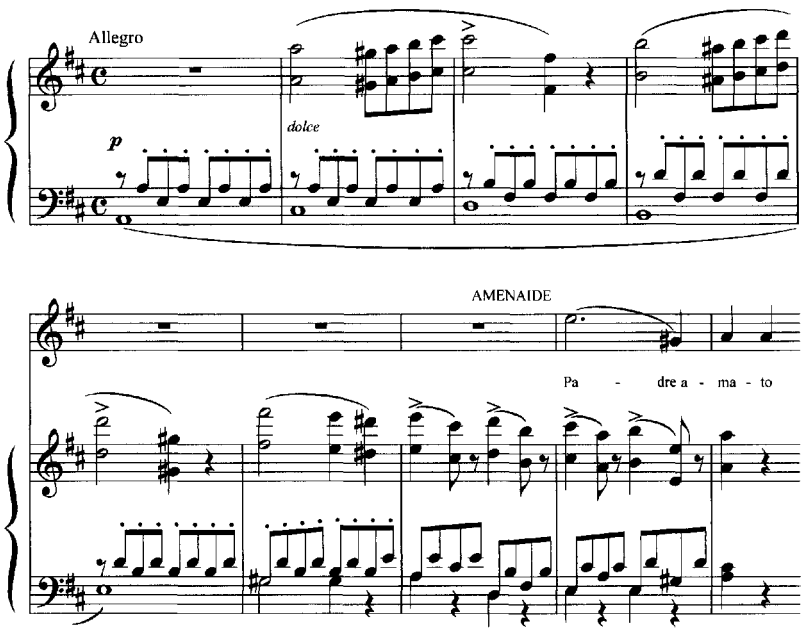
It is a characteristic gesture (the move to the flattened third is always a happy hunting ground for Rossini, locally or in larger harmonic structures), one which nicely conveys Tancredi's youthful unpredictability and charm.

If 'Di tanti palpiti' establishes Tancredi's youthful insouciance, other numbers underline his sensibility and his sense of chivalric purpose. The act 1 and act 2 duets are of importance here, despite their being dramatically repetitive. In *Semiramide,* which Rossi drafted under Rossini's watchful eye a decade later in 1822, the cues will be better judged, justifying the symmetry of a major duet for the lovers in each act. In *Tancredi* it is the beauty of the writing and the final unveiling of Rossini's three- or four-part duet structure which is of special interest. The act 1 duet, 'L'aura che intorno spiri', outlines the form: a vivid initial statement by Amenaide, spaciously built in semibreves, answered by Tancredi; a lyric central section, 'Quale per me funesto', the voices in rapt accord in thirds and sixths; a freely modulating transition, and a blithe and buoyant cabaletta. The duet was omitted after the Venice performances but is rightly seen as belonging to the

opera, whatever edition is being used. Musically, the act 2 duet, 'Lasciami: non t'ascolto', is even finer. There is a stronger sense of confrontation and a richer use of quasicanon and expressive trills in the central movement, 'Ah! come mai quell'anima'. In the Ferrara edition, which is clearly concerned with tightening the opera's dramatic argument, the duet is brought forward to act 1, supplanting 'L'aura che intorno spiri' and introducing a not entirely plausible note of confrontation into the lovers' first encounter.

The act 1 finale, in which Amenaide is wrongly accused of communicating by letter with the enemy Solamir, provides an expanded version of a similar structure, a four-part movement for principals and chorus, prefaced by a wedding chorus. (Amenaide is now promised in marriage to Orbazzano.) Philip Gossett has identified this as a 'pure' example of the form.[7] The finale is launched by a slow D major sextet in which communal feelings of shock and horror are duly expressed. A quick movement follows, in the key of the dominant with an important motif (ex. 10) to which Rossini later returns.

Ex. 10



[7] P. Gossett, 'The *candeur virginale* of *Tancredi*', *Musical Times*, cxii (1971), 326.

Amenaide pleads first with her father, then with Tancredi and Orbazzano, all of whom reject her, precipitating a freely modulating passage in which she attempts to reaffirm her innocence. The third section, a slow quartet, consolidates the situation after which the chorus, which is poorly used elsewhere in the work (the 'Reign of Terror' chorus in act 2 is anything but), launches the final quick, or 'kinetic', section. Suffering from a growing and understandable paranoia, Amenaide renews her plea in an increasingly fraught intervention based on ex. 10. Her confidante, Isaura, stands by her, but her enemies are reduced to a few lapidary utterances as the chorus bays for blood. The stretta is arrived at via the dominant of the relative minor, as is the recapitulation in the stretta itself. It is a neat, unobtrusive device which points underlying tensions and gives variety of musical perspective whilst at the same time retaining the stability of the larger structure. There are also frequent shifts of harmony within the stretta. By the time we reach the ominous 'Suon di morta gela il core' ('Freezing our hearts with sounds of death'), we have already passed through B minor and G major and arrived in E minor.

Once established, these structural and harmonic procedures are used by Rossini in the act 1 finales of works belonging to both the opera seria and opera buffa genres. The harmonic structuring of the stretta at the end of act 1 of *Il barbiere di Siviglia* is in some respects identical to that in *Tancredi,* though something like the act 1 finale of *Semiramide* is longer, more minor key, and with a stretta in a retarding 3/4 rhythm. It has often been said that Rossini's use of identical methods in different genres is cynical and unthinking. This argument neglects the chameleon power of music. It is also on uncertain ground where verisimilitude is concerned. The idea that the world is a mad and dangerous place is as germane to the act 1 finale of *Tancredi* as it is to the act 1 finale of *Il barbiere di Siviglia.* Rossini's sense of the unstoppable whirl of human endeavour, something induced in part perhaps by his sense of the often frantic and disordered state in which Europe found itself in these years, is one of the central images of his art.

Rossini's growing fascination with larger forms can be seen in his shaping of the role of Amenaide, which he wrote for the mezzo-soprano Adelaide Malanotte. Where Voltaire's Aménaïde is passionate, haughty, and quick-tempered, Rossini's is sweet-natured and timorous, qualities perfectly expressed in Amenaide's act 1 cavatina 'Come dolce all'alma mia'. Her act 2 prison scene, 'Di mia vita infelice', strikes an altogether deeper

note. A broodingly expressive ritornello is followed by a superb terror-struck accompanied recitative, and a long-drawn Andante giusto with cor anglais obbligato. Her final recitative and aria, 'Gran Dio! deh, tu proteggi . . . Giusto Dio che umile adoro', a troubled prayer that turns into an outburst of unfettered joy at news of Tancredi's victory over Orbazzano, is a multimovement structure of mixed emotions—in effect, a summation of the character and role.

Rossini has a nice balance of voice types in *Tancredi:* mezzo-soprano and soprano, tenor (Argirio) and bass (Orbazzano). In later operas he tended to cast baritones in the role of the all-powerful father. On this occasion the role was written for a tenor, Pietro Todran. Argirio is a strongly drawn character, blinkered, strict, but by no means uncaring, as we see in his act 1 aria 'Pensa che sei mia figlia' and the duet in act 2, 'Ah se de' mali miei', in which he and Tancredi share their differing sorrows. Rossini also wrote a grand set-piece soliloquy for Argirio in which he wrestles with the fact that it is his daughter he is condemning to death. It is one of the most difficult of all Rossini's arias for solo tenor. There is no evidence that Todran sang it at the first performance, and it was quickly cut; however, it too deserves restitution if there is a tenor capable of performing it with character and style.

As Rossi and Rossini first conceived it, the opera ended happily. After the overthrow of Orbazzano, and Tancredi's reluctant but successful intervention on the Syracusan side, the Saracens are defeated and Amenaide's innocence and good faith are finally established. To repeated cries of 'felicità!' the opera ends with a vaudeville finale, charming but of no great distinction. In Voltaire, and in Luigi Lechi's well-translated and theatrically scrupulous Ferrara revision, Tancredi is mortally wounded and dies accepting Amenaide's pleas of innocence and vows of love. In addition, the Ferrara revision brings forward Voltaire's act IV, scene iv, the lovers' only encounter in the original drama, and shapes it into Tancredi's rondo 'Perché turba la calma', sung to Amenaide before his departure to fight the Saracens.

The idea of Rossini's operas belonging to an eighteenth-century tradition of heroic comedy has already been touched on in connection with Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell.* In *Feeling and Form,* Langer prefaces her remarks on Schiller with a more general comment:

> These stately Gallic classics are really heroic comedies. They are classed as tragedies because of their sublime tone, which is associated, in our European

> tradition, with tragic action. . . . But there is no question of how the heroes will meet circumstances; they will meet them rationally; reason, the highest virtue of the human soul, will be victorious. This reason does not grow, through inner struggles against passional obstacles, from an original spark to full enlightenment, as 'the tragic rhythm of action' would demand, but is perfect from the outset.[8]

This is, indeed, the world of *Tancredi*. There may be misunderstandings in Syracuse leading to confrontations and even death, but there is no sense of this being a corrupt society or even (by the standards of its time) a violent one. Nor is there anything intrinsically 'tragic', in the strict theatrical sense of the term, about Tancredi's death. Bruno Cagli has described the Ferrara ending as a serene leave-taking, a tableau reminiscent of a marble bas-relief. This is well put. But how is the effect achieved?

After the battle, Tancredi is carried in, mortally wounded. First we hear a plaintive A minor chorus, 'Muore il prode, il vincitor', twenty-four bars long, with not a note wasted. It crops up again as a prisoners' plea for clemency to the compromised Queen Zenobia in *Aureliano in Palmira,* a plausible new context, and a perfectly good resting place for a marvellous small invention which Rossini no doubt thought lost to the world when the Ferrara finale of *Tancredi* proved unacceptable to contemporary taste. A string-accompanied recitative follows, finely written (Lechi's response to Voltaire's phrasing and prosody is sensitive) and expressively set. Finally there is the death itself, the 'cavatina finale', which begins and ends in C major. Broken string phrases set the scene, ominously overhung by the sound of two clarinets. Later, voices and strings alternate but never merge. This is not a dialogue such as the one in the slow movement of Beethoven's G major Piano Concerto, where an angry mood is assuaged by an emollient solo voice. Here the solo voice grieves alone, while the strings enact the role of solicitous bystanders awaiting the inevitable outcome. With a fading shudder of tone, the opera ends.

Perhaps Lechi and Rossini should have redrafted the whole drama. Had they done so, Rossini might have changed the course of Italian opera even more radically than he was already doing. But this was not practicable. Despite its stylistic oddity, the Ferrara ending is a sobering and finely judged resolution to a sad, touching, exquisitely imagined heroic idyll which lifts the spirits and lightens sense.

[8] Langer, *Feeling and Form*, 337–38.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

L'italiana in Algeri: *Formal Mastery in the Comic Style*

PRODUCED IN VENICE IN MAY 1813 TO A LIBRETTO BY ANGELO Anelli previously used by Luigi Mosca, *L'italiana in Algeri* was the first full manifestation of Rossini's comic genius. Stendhal thought it 'perfection in the opera buffa style'. It was, he argued, an opera so rich in enchantment and sensual delight that critical judgment is actively suspended, a work of pure escapism 'gay as our world is not'.[1] This last point is an interesting one which might well be both sustained and contradicted by something like the great act 1 finale, where the characters are nonplussed and frozen in time before being released into a rising tide (the image of shipwreck is in the text) of rhythm and melody which finally engulfs them. Rossini's world is indeed irrepressibly gay; but his great first act finales, like the uproarious galley scene at the end of act 2 of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra,* provide images of human vitality and riotous hedonism alongside those of vanity, instability, and the vulnerability of powerful men. The lascivious, posturing Mustafà of Rossini's opera is no Napoleon and is temperamentally far removed from the sanctimonious (if slightly tipsy) Octavius Caesar of Shakespeare's drama; but he is as perplexed and vulnerable as any of the world's power brokers. Stendhal is right to stress the vitality of *L'italiana in Algeri* and the delirium it induced in its first, and subsequent, audiences; but the music's appeal rests in some measure on our awareness of the thinness of the ice on which we skate. Nor does it need Rossini's sly allusion to 'La marseillaise' before Isabella's 'Pensa alla patria'

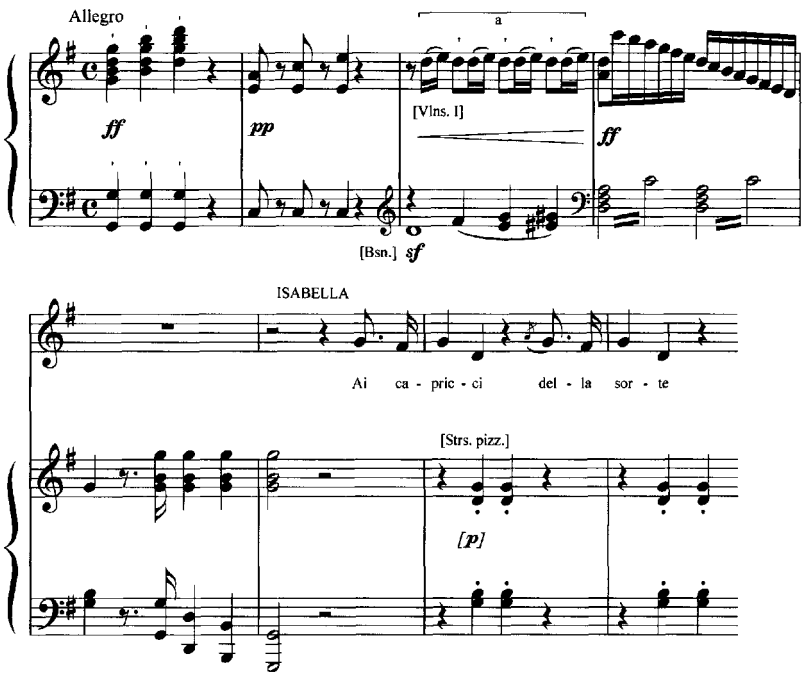
[1] SVR, 73.

for us to be reminded that in 1813 Europe was itself, militarily and politically, a madcap place.

That *L'italiana in Algeri* is Rossini's first full-fledged comic masterpiece is due in no small measure to the fine formal ordering of the score and to Rossini's increasingly sophisticated sense of the interplay of musical styles, qualities which stand out even more clearly when Rossini's treatment of Anelli's text is set side by side with Mosca's, which is long on bustle and charm but short on stylistic self-awareness and formal control.

Take, for instance, the two composers' setting of the duet 'Ai capricci della sorte' in act 1 of the opera. The revelation by Haly, the Algerian pirate king, that Mustafà is in search of a pretty Italian girl has Isabella's ageing admirer, Taddeo, beside himself with jealousy. Isabella's response is a waspish rebuke, beginning with some capricious remarks about 'fortune', the comic counterpart of that 'cruel fate' she has just apostrophised in her cavatina 'Cruda sorte!' From the outset Rossini's shaping of the duet is masterly. We tend to take formal incipits for granted, but where Mosca's is breathless and dynamically bland, Rossini's opening bars (ex. 11) have both economy and wit.

Ex. 11



There are details here whose absence would render the music commonplace but which are happily grist to the mill of a Haydn or a Rossini: the silent upbeat in bar 1, the thinning out and fragmenting of dynamics, texture, and rhythm in bar 2, the bassoon's comically forceful entry in bar 3, the skittish violin figure (fig. *a*), which will later take on the function of an important motor-rhythm, and the deliberately narrow, petulant-sounding intervals of the vocal line itself. Out of such detail is great comedy made.

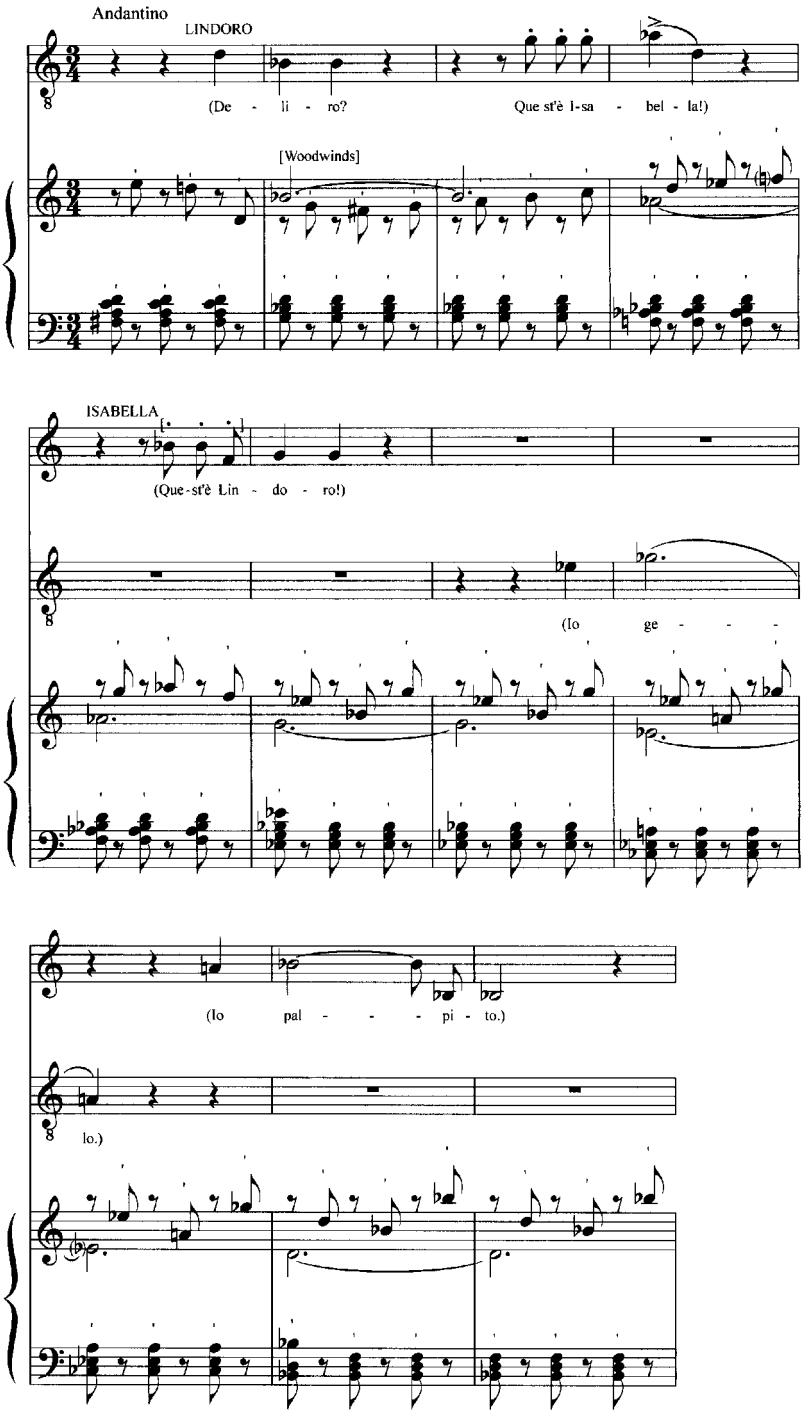
Anelli's text determines the shape of the duet's exposition, Isabella and Taddeo establishing their respective positions in formal stanzas. Strings and winds are discreetly supportive during these exchanges. In the repartee which follows, it is figure *a* which carries the drama forward until, in a simple stroke of comic genius, theatrical and musical elements perfectly aligned, Isabella silences Taddeo's grumblings by recapitulating the opening theme (ex. 11, bar 6). Though her language is far from elegant—'Go to the devil, and good riddance!'—it is the fact of the musical recapitulation which gives her riposte its authority: verbal abuse endowed by the formal recapitulation with all the force of an axiomatic utterance. It is a brilliant tactic, by Isabella and by Rossini. There is no such equivalent in Mosca's score.

Recapitulation might imply imminent closure. However, the music continues towards a second bridge, a simple arching transition on the first violins, which drops us down into B flat major as self-doubts begin to cloud the minds of the antagonists. The timing is exquisite. With the mood newly relaxed, and figure *a* now playing the role of an amused spectator, Isabella and Taddeo contemplate the dangers facing them in overlapping soliloquies. The transition to the stretta is clear enough in the libretto, but in his search for novel effects Mosca unsettles the one-line exchanges—'Donna Isabella?'/'Messer Taddeo', etc.—where Rossini, with an Olympian simplicity of means, treats the stichomythia as a cat-and-mouse game linked by suave violin sextuplets, before the coda's launch, Allegro vivace in G. This final movement has a military feel about it (love as a battleground is an old conceit) with skirling winds and mock-heroic gestures which digress into coloratura display. During Isabella's big cadential flourishes it is almost impossible for poor Taddeo to get a word in edgeways. Having been silenced by an act of recapitulation earlier in the duet, he now finds coloratura rhetoric barring his path. This is musical comedy of a high order.

It would be wrong to suggest that Rossini parodies the opera seria manner in *L'italiana in Algeri;* rather, he allows his heroine to deploy it as a powerful strategic weapon in her politico-sexual armoury. What is more, the heroic style is carefully balanced by much lighter, catlike writing. 'Cruda sorte!', whose structure is not dissimilar to that of Rosina's cavatina in *Il barbiere di Siviglia,* follows heroic posturing with the lightning 'Già so per pratica', a movement specially drafted for Rossini's setting of Anelli's libretto. These additions to Anelli's libretto are of obvious interest for the light they throw on Rossini's needs and preoccupations. Most obviously, verses are expanded or modified and new alliterative and onomatopoeic effects added when characters are in extremis, as they are, for instance, in the act 1 finale. But there are also omissions. There is no love duet for Isabella and Lindoro in the Rossini version. It is an omission which has much to do with Rossini's dislike of duets written for the male and female voices, though there are those who will choose to see it as evidence of that absence of heart which Verdi's wife, Giuseppina Strepponi, fancied she detected in Rossini's psychopathology. In this score, passion is communicated by indirection, most obviously in the rapt and sensuous 'Per lui che adoro' in act 2, where Isabella expresses her feelings in the knowledge that she has a hidden audience crouching nearby: the besotted Mustafà and her two outraged admirers, Taddeo and, the real object of her affections, Lindoro. Above all, it is the act 1 finale, and its two great recognition sequences, which convey Isabella's passion for Lindoro and its comic correlative, her contempt for Mustafà.

The tonal structure of the finale need not detain us, though it is representative of Rossini's method: a C major movement framing episodes in keys a minor third apart, the flattened mediant, E flat major, and the flattened submediant, A flat major. Of special interest, however, is a freely modulating episode which grows out of a delectably scored minuet-like andantino in the key of the dominant. Mustafà's wife, Elvira, her confidante, Zulma, and Lindoro steal in to take their leave of Mustafà, who has granted Lindoro his freedom provided he takes Elvira away with him. It is at this point that Lindoro and Isabella recognise one another. It is a truism that, in the hands of a master, a recognition scene can be a thing of special potency. Here Rossini demonstrates his mastery by dropping us quietly into the minor key and a series of modulations (ex. 12a) of hypnotic simplicity.

Ex. 12a

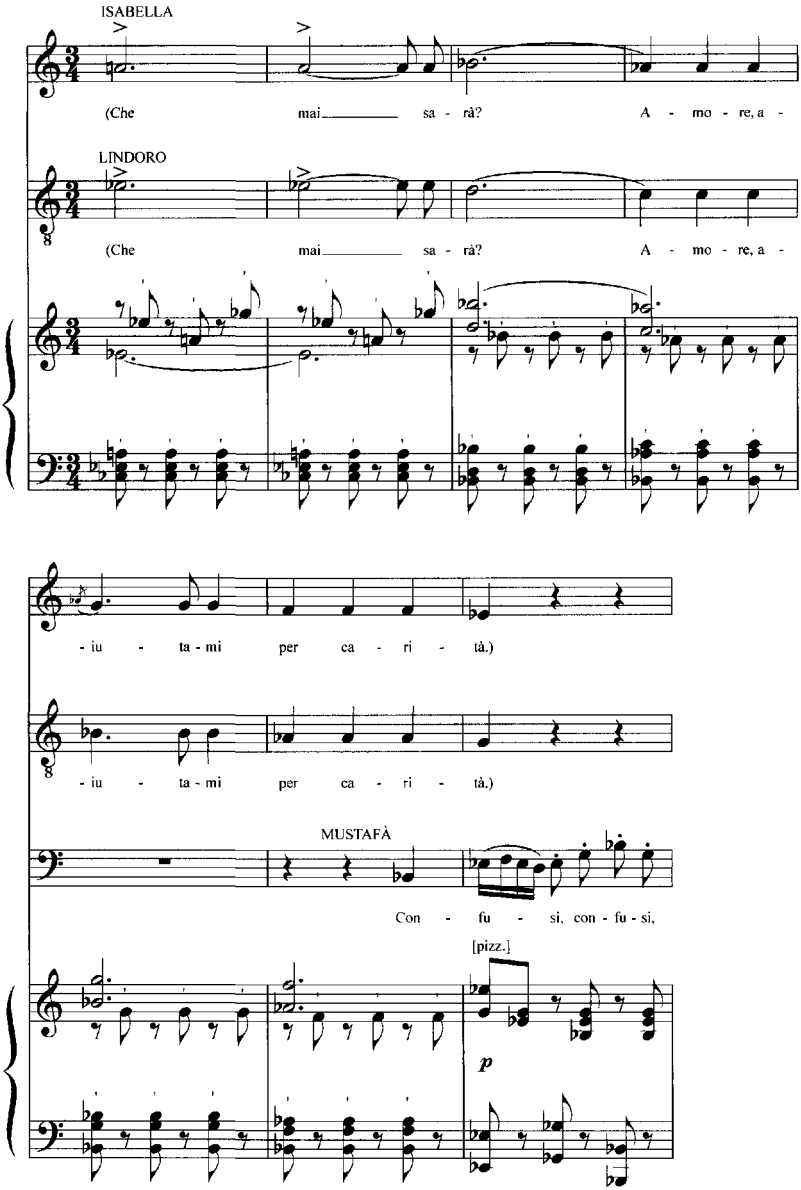

Andantino
LINDORO
(De - li - ro? Que st'è I-sa - bel - la!)
[Woodwinds]
ISABELLA
(Que-st'è Lin - do - ro!)
(Io ge - - -
(Io pal - - - pi - to.)
lo.)

The text is no more than nine lines of stereotyped exclamation, and musically the passage is little more than a transition back to the local home key of E flat; yet the transition stands at the very heart of the opera, the lovers' suppressed ardour touchingly juxtaposed with Mustafà's bumbling expression of earthbound bemusement (ex. 12b). At moments such as this, Rossini, like Mozart before him, shames his more long-winded successors by his simplicity of means.

Mustafà, arrogant and domineering, is caricatured at the opera's outset, rendered ridiculous in the introduzione by grotesque intervals and elaborate coloratura. But Rossini's musical characterisation in the lead towards the act 1 finale is carefully balanced. When Mustafà is finally convinced that his wife is off his hands, he contemplates new erotic adventures ('Già d'insolito ardore nel petto') in terms robust enough to predict Sir John Falstaff's 'Va, vecchio John!' in Verdi's opera. Mustafà's meeting with Isabella, the first of the recognition scenes in the act 1 finale, is an essay, not in comic pathos, but in burlesque. It is prefaced by a chorus which appears to allude to Figaro's 'Non più andrai, farfallone amoroso' from Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro.* This is not the only arcane reference in the score's choral writing; as has already been mentioned, 'La marseillaise' crops up in a later number. The Mozart allusion comes as the second tenors intone the name 'Mustafà' and whilst the first tenors and the basses declare him to be 'the scourge of women'. If the quotation is deliberate—and Rossini must have envied Mozart a number he could have well written himself—it is a masterstroke of comic prolepsis. In Mozart, Figaro tells Cherubino that his philandering days are over, which is precisely the situation towards which Mustafà is unwittingly heading. What's more, Da Ponte's Italian text provides Rossini with a ready-made ambiguity, for depending on the sense in which we take the word 'farfallone', we have either an amorous butterfly (Cherubino) or an amorous blunderer, which is as apt a description of Mustafà as any we are likely to find. The reference, inspired by Rossini's favourite composer, is one of his most sophisticated small jokes.

At Isabella's entry, the music stops and the strings make a furtive step-by-step ascent from C to E flat, as if following Isabella's gaze as it travels upward towards Mustafà's face. A slow round begins with the words 'O che muso'—'My god, what a mug!'—a line which Conchita Supervia

Ex. 12b


ISABELLA
(Che mai sa - rà? A - mo - re, a -
LINDORO
(Che mai sa - rà? A - mo - re, a -
- iu - ta - mi per ca - ri - tà.)
- iu - ta - mi per ca - ri - tà.)
MUSTAFÀ
Con - fu - si, con - fu - si,
[pizz.]
p

made every bit as memorable as Edith Evans's exclamation about the handbag in Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*. What follows wonderfully imitates the furtive co-existence of solemnity and barely suppressed laughter, with Rossini's wealth of comic detailing in the orchestra, and his sure formal patterning, greatly assisting any stage director modest enough to base the action on the music. The finale ends with Rossini's most uproarious stretta. Isabella's turning on Mustafà sends the whole company into a state of delirium, their heads full of the sounds of bells ('din din', the women), a hammer ('tac tac', Lindoro), crowing ('cra cra', Taddeo), and a cannon ('bum bum', Mustafà). The text was specially written for Rossini. It makes a brilliant effect, provided that the conductor follows Rossini's precise annotation of extreme dynamic levels.

As is often the case with Rossini, the second act is not quite as full of good things as the first, though the second act of *L'italiana in Algeri* has some memorable episodes in it: the investing of Taddeo with the spurious order of Kaimakan, the famous sneezing quintet, and Mustafà's initiation into the order of the Pappataci. Such initiation ceremonies are a stock-in-trade of plays derived from the Commedia dell'Arte tradition (one thinks of Molière's *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*). Pappataci, a nonsense word, implies not so much a cuckold as the kind of long-suffering husband immortalised by the hangdog creature forever trailing after his formidable wife in Jacques Tati's *Les Vacances de M. Hulot*. A satire on Masonry has also been suggested here. Be that as it may, Mustafà is persuaded to do nothing but eat, drink, and sleep. The act 2 finale promises well but is short-winded, with the quintet and Isabella's rondo, 'Pensa alla patria', proving difficult acts to follow. In Naples in 1815 'Pensa alla patria' was banned, its revolutionary sentiments replaced by 'Sullo stil de' viaggiatori'. This is a big, striking number, carefully worked from materials which include the overture's second theme; but it lacks the glorious, long-breathed solemnity of the cantilena which is at the heart of the original, a melody which must still strike Italian ears as eloquently as an Elgarian *nobilmente* strikes English ones.

L'italiana in Algeri is a score of great richness and sophistication; it is also notably free from any kind of self-borrowing. With Rossini working to an exceptionally tight deadline, an assistant composed the secco recitatives, Haly's 'Le femmine d'Italia', and (in all probability) Lindoro's act 2 cavatina

'Oh come il cor di giubilo', an aria later replaced by Rossini. Such pieces, gracious and undemanding after the manner of the period, serve to remind us how fiercely the flame of Rossini's comic invention burns elsewhere in an opera which transcends Mosca's *L'italiana in Algeri* as surely as *Il barbiere di Siviglia* will later transcend Paisiello's revered version.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Milan and Venice (1813–1814): Aureliano in Palmira, Il turco in Italia, Sigismondo

THE THREE OPERAS ROSSINI WROTE BEFORE HIS DEPARTURE FOR Naples in 1815 includes one of his rare failures, *Sigismondo,* and two operas, *Aureliano in Palmira* and *Il turco in Italia,* which displeased the Milanese but won appreciative audiences elsewhere.

Aureliano in Palmira is the only opera Rossini wrote with a castrato, Giovan Battista Velluti, in a principal role. One of the reasons for the opera's failure was Velluti's failure to make an impression as Arsace, prince of Persia. The other was the sudden indisposition of the tenor Giovanni David, Rossini's Aureliano, midway through the composition process. Act 1 had already been completed with the gifted 23-year-old in mind; for act 2 a change of tactic was needed if the altogether more modest abilities of the Mantuan tenor, Luigi Mari, were not to be overstretched. The text is the work of the 25-year-old Felice Romani, then near the start of a career which would make him the most sought-after librettist of the age. It is a conventional dramma serio, affecting and stirring by turns, but neither Romani's verses nor Rossini's writing (touchingly naif but neither advancing nor even fully consolidating the achievements of *Tancredi*) take it out of the realm of the workaday.

The story is based on historical fact. Lucius Domitius Aurelianus (215–275 A.D.) was a humble man who rose to supreme power after a brilliant military career. He did much to restore order both inside and outside the boundaries of the Roman Empire, and did indeed tangle with the expansionist Queen Zenobia, whose conquests in Syria, Egypt, and Asia Minor

were not taken lightly in Rome. The Arsacids, a line of feudal aristocrats who had fallen from power two centuries earlier, were probably made of sterner stuff than Rossini's Arsace, a tender, sweet-natured, but somewhat effete young man much taken with the beautiful Queen Zenobia. There is no evidence that such a trio of personalities ever met in real life, though Aurelianus's magnanimity to the defeated lovers at the end of the opera is rooted in historical fact; after ceding the kingdom of Palmyra to Rome, Zenobia was granted a pension and a villa at Tibur.

Arsace's love for Zenobia is expressed at the very outset in the duet 'Se tu m'ami, o mia regina', which forms part of the introduzione. Away from Arsace, Zenobia is very much the warrior queen, using coloratura display as a weapon; in his presence, she is altogether sweeter and more accommodating. Aureliano, who wants Zenobia's kingdom and her love, offers her 'gloria e amor'. It has been suggested that Romani portrays Aureliano as an antihero. The music written for David in act 1 partly confirms this. His cavatina, 'Caro patria! Il mondo trema', with its sinister horn obbligato, catches both his stature and his potentially vicious nature. He does not have to wait long for his victory over Arsace and Zenobia, but her refusal to hand her kingdom to Rome produces political stalemate and, with it, a less than remarkable act 1 finale.

In act 2 Zenobia and Arsace find each other as refugees in an Arcadian landscape. For someone who was easily bored by the countryside and country vacations, Rossini was a gifted purveyor of the idea of the rural idyll, from *Demetrio e Polibio* to *Guillaume Tell*. The lovers' pastoral vigil in *Aureliano in Palmira* is enchantingly written in a fresh, unsentimental style, which Rossini seems to have learned in part from Haydn. The use of the overture's slow introduction to preface these scenes is not the best of moves, but Rossini was clearly much taken with the music. As an image of rustic calm and continuity amid the carnage of imperial wars, these pastoral scenes must have struck a responsive chord with contemporary audiences. The words of the shepherds' chorus, 'O care selve, o care/Stanza di libertà', the woods apostrophised as the source of inner freedom, are set by Rossini in a manner clearly intended to rouse strong feelings. The use of a solo violin is unusually affecting.

The opera's military interludes are highly stylised, though there are memorable small inventions within the military and political scenes, not least the prisoners' plea to Zenobia, salvaged from the Ferrara finale of *Tancredi*.

What *Aureliano in Palmira* lacks in splendour, originality, and drive, it to some extent makes up for in sensibility and charm.

The idea that a drama can be propelled into life by an onstage surrogate dramatist predates Luigi Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (Rome, 1921), the play which famously embodied the concept within its title. In 1788 Caterino Mazzolà, the man described by his protégé Lorenzo Da Ponte as 'possibly the first to know how to write a comic libretto', used the idea in a text he provided for Franz Joseph Seydelmann. Its title was *Il turco in Italia*, and it was to this work that the sophisticated and widely read Romani turned for his second collaboration with Rossini in Milan in 1814, borrowing and modifying Mazzolà's text for a libretto which (with what was possibly an excess of modesty) he once again declined to claim as his own. As Romani and Rossini were both aware, Mazzolà's libretto had yielded distinguished progeny the following year when Da Ponte made productive use of his friend's idea of the onstage puppetmaster in his libretto for Mozart's *Così fan tutte*. With the shadow of Mozart hovering over the proceedings (*Così fan tutte* was playing in Milan at the time of the composition of *Il turco in Italia*), Rossini set about producing one of his own most carefully crafted scores.

Rossini's instinct for detached observation, not to mention his dislike of gaudily descriptive music, were well served by a story whose leading character gently mocks the vogue for all things Turkish whilst smiling wryly at the operatic procedures and conventions that give it life. Romani's Poet (not referred to by name in the opera, as befits his puppetmaster status) introduces himself as a man in search of just such a subject. It soon appears in the form of some gypsies ('local colour!' he remarks sarcastically) and Geronio, the dispirited husband of the 'capricious but respectable' Fiorilla, who will shortly find herself in thrall to Selim, the eponymous 'Turk in Italy'. At the start of the act 1 finale, as Selim prepares to elope with Fiorilla, he comes face to face with the former love of his life, the Turkish slave girl Zaida. Young girls generally faint at such a juncture, the Poet surmises, as the music slips key. He goes out to fetch a chair, but no one faints, leaving him deploring the plot's failure to comply with the usual rules.

It is clear from the opera's elaborately constructed opening sequence, up to and beyond Selim's arrival by boat (an event Mazzolà did not attempt

to stage), that Rossini and Romani intended this to be an ensemble piece. The Poet has no solo numbers, a fact wittily alluded to in the autograph manuscript where Rossini annotates a fermata with an aside to the singer, Pietro Vasoli, which says, in effect, 'Here's your chance!' The Poet does, however, play a part in one of the opera's finest numbers, the trio 'Un marito scimunito!' in which Geronio and Narciso strenuously question the roles they have been allotted by him. The trio begins and ends with a broad-based theme in semibreves over which a second orchestral subject, at once delighted and resigned, is triggered into life (ex. 13).

Ex. 13

Allegro

POET

Un ma-ri-to sci-mu-ni - to,

p legato

u-na spo-sa ca-pric-cio - sa, no, di me-glio non si dà, no,

What follows is finely honed. Skillfully varied buffo declamation, wry modulations, and the elegant interjection of phrases from the opera's overture sit cheek-by-jowl with a certain kind of serene, untroubled beauty: juxtapositions which take us closer to the spirit of Mozart than does any

alleged connection between the start of the trio and the finale of Mozart's *Jupiter* Symphony.

This is all a far cry from *L'italiana in Algeri*, whatever the Milanese may have thought in 1814. Even where situations may appear to be broadly similar, their musical and emotional trajectories are very different. The duet 'Per piacere alla signora', in which the hapless Geronio is challenged, charmed, dressed down, and dismissed by Fiorilla, begins more busily than the parallel number in *L'italiana in Algeri* but reaches an altogether starker climax in the tragic power (falsely applied) of Fiorella's great outburst 'Voi, crudel, mi fate oltraggio?' Maria Callas, who could play the tragedienne and the minx better than most, was memorable at this point, weeping with tragicomic intensity on the words 'pietà, pietà' before the music resolves itself disarmingly into G major for the winsome cabaletta in which Fiorilla assumes the disinterested manner of a sophisticated woman of the world.

It is a situation, the duet tells us, which is perhaps more perilous than we had imagined. And so it proves to be. In Romani's second act all the principal characters (Selim and Geronio, Fiorilla and Zaida, along with the feckless ladies' man Don Narciso, who also loves Fiorilla) are thrown into an ever deepening state of confusion as to their own identity and the identities of those around them. Two memorable duets, miniature dramas within the larger drama, dominate the early part of the act. In the first, Selim tries to persuade Geronio to sell his wife, a request which is met with anger and disbelief; in the second, Selim and Fiorilla play their own private game of emotional hide-and-seek. The process culminates in the quintet 'Oh! guardate, che accidente', in which Geronio, having been lured to a masked ball, is presented with a pair of Selims (the real one and Don Narciso) and a pair of Fiorillas (the real one and Zaida). Like parties in the plays of Harold Pinter, this one is funny, up to a point. That the whole thing is a game, albeit a somewhat menacing one, is confirmed by the featherlight canonic allegro ('Questo vecchio maledetto'), the quintessence of the spirit of play, which flourishes briefly before the quintet spins to its delirious conclusion. What had begun with Geronio in despair at not being able to recognise his wife ends with his fearing he is about to murdered whilst gamely continuing to affirm his sanity.

In the opera's penultimate movement it is Fiorilla's turn to suffer. Informed by the Poet that Selim and Zaida have made up their differences and are about to sail for Turkey, she now finds herself banished by Gero-

nio: clothes returned, doors barred, a letter inviting her to bury her shame in Sorrento. What in the duet 'Per piacere alla signora' had been an affectation of grief at her mistreatment turns into the real thing in the magnificent aria 'Squallida veste, e bruna'.[1] In the end she and Geronio discover that they cannot bear to be apart. There is no ambiguity here as there is at the end of *Così fan tutte,* which also deals in crises born of the entangling of feigned feelings with real ones. Romani and Rossini settle for a happy ending, though how happy they themselves were with what they wrote is open to speculation. The act 2 finale was one of the numbers which Rossini originally entrusted to an assistant, possibly Vincenzo Lavigna, Verdi's counterpoint teacher (a man, according to Verdi, 'who didn't care for any music but Paisiello's'). Geronio's act 1 cavatina and an aria di sorbetto for Zaida's confidant, Albazar, were also farmed out.

The overture was new, a charming and ebullient piece, notable for the length and power of the transition to the second subject. In this respect the original score of *Il turco in Italia* is fairly well 'finished', the use of an assistant notwithstanding. That said, Rossini continued to work on it, notably on a revival which took place in Rome in November 1815, shortly before the writing of *Il barbiere di Siviglia.* For this, the two non-Rossini arias were cut. Geronio lost his act 1 cavatina but gained a superb buffo aria about the perils of marriage, 'Se ho da dirla, avrei molto piacere'. Meanwhile the role of Don Narciso, which had already been modified to take account of the virtuoso skills of its creator, Giovanni David, was further expanded with the addition of an act 1 cavatina, 'Un vago sembiante'. Since solo arias do not sit comfortably within the context of this ensembled piece, there would be a case for ignoring them. Smaller houses should probably adopt this strategy. On the other hand, it would seem like cheeseparing if a larger house capable of employing a first-rate tenor and a top-ranking basso buffo did not opt for the even more substantial all-Rossini Rome revision.

Rossini's last pre-Naples score, *Sigismondo,* has suffered greater and largely understandable neglect. A dramma in two acts, it concerns Sigismondo, king of Poland, who has expelled his wife, Aldimira, from the

[1] It is a telling comment on the state of Rossini scholarship at the time that this all-important aria is absent from the recording Maria Callas made under the direction of Gianandrea Gavazzeni in Milan in 1954.

court on the advice of Ladislao, his rancorous chief minister and frustrated admirer of the exiled queen. Stricken by remorse and already teetering on the verge of insanity, Sigismondo has further reason to rue his fate when Aldimira's father, Ulderico, king of Bohemia, makes war on Poland. As in many such fables, the exiled Aldimira, though thought to be dead, is in fact alive and under the protective wing of the kindly Zenovito. With Sigismondo's agreement, Zenovito plans to return Aldimira to the court as his own daughter, 'Egelinda'. Ulderico will see her there and assume all is well. Ladislao smells a rat and warns Ulderico, who cannot decide whether the woman is his daughter or not. In the end, a letter is produced proving Aldimira's identity. The surprisingly contrite Ladislao is sentenced to life imprisonment; the rest live happily ever after.

The impresario of La Fenice, Luigi Facchini, had hinted to Rossini that the libretto was not up to par, and Rossini seems to have taken him at his word. *Sigismondo* is a treasury of fine ideas and memorable short phrases, of which few if any are developed into memorable solo numbers or larger ensembles. It is a short-winded, bits-and-pieces score, which only begins to put on weight, strange to relate, in the act 2 denouement, at the point where Ulderico fails to recognise his daughter and Ladislao begins to develop a conscience. Parts of the score are interesting inasmuch as they allow us to glimpse the eccentric, slightly bizarre side of Rossini's character. In a work such as *Il barbiere di Siviglia* these characteristics are clearly there, contained in the larger whole, as they are in a crazy but essentially well-adjusted human being. In *Sigismondo* there is no such advantageous context. Sigismondo's entrance aria, a half-formed mad scene, sticks out like a sore thumb, as does the weirdly imaginative writing for cellos and double basses which underpins Zenovito's act 1 aria 'Tu l'opra tua seconda'.

The overture borrows material from *Il turco in Italia* but will later be reused for *Otello*. This practice is not untypical of the score as a whole. There are bequests to several other operas, including motivic material for the introduzione of *Il barbiere di Siviglia* and Don Basilio's famous calumny aria. The debt owed by *Il barbiere di Siviglia* to musical ideas formed during the writing of a trio of works in 1814–1815—*Aureliano in Palmira, Sigismondo,* and *Elisabetta, regina d'Inghilterra*—suggests that, creatively speaking, this period was one of retrenchment for Rossini after his career's daredevil launch.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Arrival in Naples (1815–1816): Elisabetta, regina d'Inghilterra; La gazzetta

THE SUBJECT FOR ROSSINI'S FIRST NAPLES OPERA WAS SHREWDLY chosen. The year was 1815. The Bourbon monarchy had been newly restored; Anglophilia was in the air. The tale of an English monarch who defeats would-be rebels and binds the wounds of her people with striking acts of clemency could hardly have been more timely. It also suited the San Carlo's *prima donna assoluta,* Isabella Colbran. A specialist in royal roles, she had played Queen Elizabeth in Pavesi's *Elisabetta, regina d'Inghilterra* three years earlier.

The version of the Elizabeth and Leicester story set by Rossini has its origins in *The Recess* (1785), an innovative historical novel by the English writer Sophia Lee (1750–1824), which had enjoyed considerable success in England and abroad. Carlo Federici's play *Il paggio di Leicester* was one of the intermediate sources used by the San Carlo's house librettist, Giovanni Schmidt; there would have been others. The principal virtue of the libretto, which makes no claim to historical authenticity, is its clarity. Queen Elizabeth's favourite nobleman, Leicester, has returned in triumph from the Scottish wars with hostages in his baggage train, among them a young woman, Matilde, whom he has secretly married. Though Leicester did not know it at the time, Matilde was no sweet country girl but the daughter of Mary, Queen of Scots. Leicester reveals the details of his marriage to the unreliable Norfolk, who stirs a hornets' nest of emotional intrigue by communicating the fact to Elizabeth. Leicester is arrested but Norfolk, angered by the queen's coolness towards him and frustrated by the people's loyalty

to both Leicester and Elizabeth, attempts to assassinate the queen as she visits the prison cell to which Leicester has been condemned. The attempt is foiled by Matilde and her brother. After pardoning both Leicester and Matilde, Elizabeth vows to renounce all passions, except those which will enhance her glory and her capacity for mercy. It is a story which is partly retold in Walter Scott's novel *Kenilworth* (1821) and Donizetti's *Il castello di Kenilworth* (Naples, 1829).

Rossini's treatment of the subject is fresh and exhilarating, with passages of splendour and power at nodal points. Gone is the lack of ambition which had affected aspects of his work in the aftermath of *L'italiana in Algeri*. ('Some wonderful moments but some bad quarters of an hour', to use one of his own favourite expressions.) The reasons for this fresh access of energy are not difficult to determine: a well-chosen and competently crafted libretto, a lavishly appointed opera house which was home to Italy's finest orchestra and some of Europe's finest singers, and a new and stimulating environment. The singers were not easy: Colbran already possessed superstar status, Girolama Dardanelli (Matilde) was a demanding young soprano eager to impress, the multitalented Manuel García (Norfolk) already had more irons in the fire than he or the theatre management cared to contemplate. The role of Leicester was written for the 40-year-old Andrea Nozzari, a celebrated virtuoso who was about to enter the high noon of his career as a darker-voiced, more baritonal tenor. The fact that the Naples company was overburdened with fine tenors (Giovanni David and Giuseppe Ciccimarra were also part of the troupe) influenced the casting of many its operas. In any other house the villainous Norfolk would have been played by a baritone.

The opera's opening scene, Leicester's triumphant return to London ('Più lieta, più bella'), is a cue for writing of charm and youthful insouciance into which Norfolk's gloomy ruminations briefly intrude before Elisabetta's own ecstatic welcome. From the formal point of view, the opera's progress beyond this opening sequence is clear and logical, innovative at times but never controversially so. A pair of duets, separated by an aria and cabaletta for Matilde, lead fairly swiftly towards the act 1 finale. The first duet ('Incauta! che festi!'), a hurried minor-key confabulation between Leicester and Matilde, lacks a slow central section. This omission makes sense dramatically, as it will again in the duet towards the end of

act 2 when Leicester and Norfolk have their final confrontation. The second duet in act 1 charts Norfolk's revelation to the queen of Leicester's secret marriage and her reaction to it. It is notable for the quality of the writing and the tension it generates ahead of what is by any standards a most compelling act 1 finale, in which Leicester and his wife are summoned to a public audience with the queen, who proceeds, with manic irony, to heap praises on the bewildered Leicester. She even offers to take him as her consort before, in a terrible moment, the mask is finally dropped. Stendhal saw the finale as a grim showcase of primary impulses: '*jealousy,* which is tormenting Elisabetta to the very brink of madness; *despair* growing ever blacker in Leicester; and *love,* unbelievably sad and touching in his young wife.'[1]

Stendhal claimed (and it is a plausible claim) that it was Rossini himself who proposed that the act 2 duet, in which Elisabetta persuades Matilde to renounce her marriage, should grow into a powerful trio as Leicester sweeps in and tears up the renunciation. The scenes which follow are equally rich in interest. Norfolk's attempt to subvert the people takes place in the context of a scene and aria prefaced by a melancholy chorus, 'Qui soffermiamo il piè', in which citizens and soldiers express sympathy for their imprisoned hero. Norfolk's eloquent defence of love, 'Deh! troncate i ceppi suoi', is a disingenuous plea on behalf of Leicester and Matilde, designed to stir animosity towards the queen. This and other scenes are most imaginatively orchestrated by Rossini.[2] The care is in the detail, though the use of a pair of piccolos and cor anglais at the start of Leicester's prison aria ('Sposa amata') is openly experimental; as indeed is the semidelirious dream state Rossini attempts to characterise.

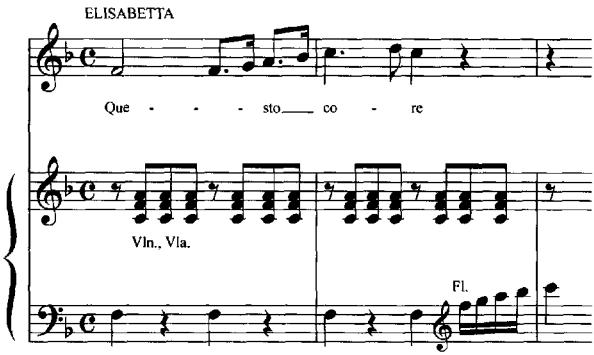
In later years Rossini's heroines were rarely accorded brilliant arias at both ends of an opera. Here Elisabetta is richly provided with an entrance aria and a showpiece finale, the latter admirably blending cool display with an extraordinary inwardness in the lyric sections, the exfoliations of the vocal line creeping over the orchestra's slender trelliswork with magical effect. The entrance aria is Rossini at his most winning, though it is also a good (and to anti-Rossinians, controversial) example of his adaptive

[1] SVR, 160.

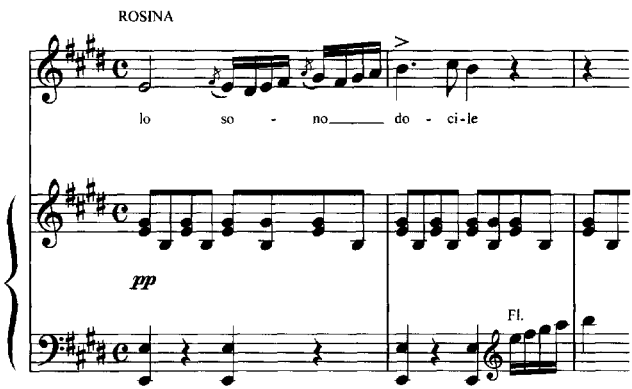
[2] The authentic orchestrations can be heard on the 2002 Opera Rara recording.

techniques. Sections of the cabaletta ('Questo cor ben lo comprende') would be used four months later in Rome in Rosina's cavatina 'Una voce poco fa'. Since both heroines are vital and combative creatures, the music is apt to both, though in recasting Elisabetta's music for Rosina, Rossini gives it a certain added shrewishness. The sharper pointing can be seen at the outset (ex. 14) where Elisabetta's line, if left undecorated, is a good deal more placid.

Ex. 14a

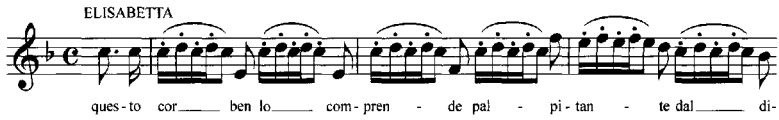


Ex. 14b

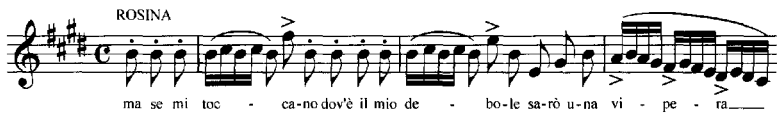


Later the line is more florid and free-wheeling (ex. 15a), whereas the adaptation for Rosina is tauter and simpler, with a keener sense of timing and a productive tension between syllabic and melismatic writing, which allows for an altogether deadlier kind of rhetoric (ex. 15b).

Ex. 15a



Ex. 15b



There are phrases and ideas in *Elisabetta* which can be traced back to earlier pieces. However, the only number to be taken over wholesale from a previous opera is the overture (from *Aureliano in Palmira,* later reused in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*), though even this was substantially rewritten for the larger Naples orchestra. Contrary to popular supposition, *Elisabetta* is a work which bequeaths as much as it borrows.

This was not the case with *La gazzetta,* the frolicsome dramma buffo which Rossini wrote for the Teatro dei Fiorentini in Naples in the summer of 1816. Goldoni's acerbic romantic comedy *Les deux italiennes,* or *Il matrimonio per concorso,* as it was known in its 1763 Venetian edition, had already been set by two composers when Giuseppe Mosca devised a new version for La Scala, Milan, in the winter of 1813–1814. Since the libretto of what was now called *Avviso al pubblico, ossia La gazzetta* was by Rossini's collaborator Gaetano Rossi, and since Rossini himself was in Milan at the time of the production, it is reasonable to assume that he had *Il matrimonio per concorso* in his mind (and in his luggage, in all probability) when he set out for Naples the following year. He also had with him many of his own manuscripts. No fewer that four numbers are taken in their entirety from previous works. Lisetta's cavatina, the duet for Lisetta and Don Pomponio, and the quintet all come from *Il turco in Italia* in its original or revised versions. The trio comes from *La pietra del paragone.*

Rossi's libretto was adapted for Rossini by two of Giovanni Schmidt's colleagues on the roster of Neapolitan theatre poets Giuseppe Palomba and Andrea Leone Tottola. One of their tasks was to rewrite the role of

Goldoni's Pandolfo (Don Pomponio in *La gazzetta*) in Neapolitan dialect for the express use of the singer and comedian Carlo Casaccia. An ambitious, fantastical character, the nouveau riche Pomponio is seeking a rich husband for his daughter, the scheming and flirtatious Lisetta. He advertises in the local newspaper, unaware that Lisetta has fallen in love with Filippo, the owner of the hotel where she and her father are staying. Meanwhile the wealthy and feckless Alberto has turned up at the hotel, also in search of a wife. He falls for Doralice, daughter of the cantankerous Anselmo, who has promised his daughter to an old roué called Monsù Traversen. With an itinerant busybody, Madama La Rose, fluttering on the periphery of the action, the whole thing is very lively and very local. Party games and masked balls help resolve events in the lovers' favour.

The prominence given to Casaccia in the rewrite shifted the dramatic focus. The bustle of Goldoni's play is retained (the whirling energy of the opening inn scene prefigures the first act of *Il viaggio a Reims*), but the balance between Goldoni's large cast of nubile girls, aspiring husbands, and assorted social riffraff is altered, with Pomponio, his daughter Lisetta, and the scheming innkeeper, Filippo, scooping most of Rossini's best moments. (The Teatro dei Fiorentini compensated for Alberto's diminished role by casting Alberico Curioni, 'the handsomest tenor in Italy'.) The decision to use the chillingly funny 'Turkish' quintet from act 2 of *Il turco in Italia* also involves a second change of disguise for Don Pomponio. In Goldoni, Pandolfo passes himself off as an army colonel of Eastern European origin; in Rossini he dresses up as a rich Quaker in act 1, a Turkish sultan in act 2.

The autograph manuscript of the opera is not complete. The omission of Pomponio's words from the final section of the quintet is easily rectified. More difficult to deal with is the fact that no music survives for scenes 6–8 of act 1. The libretto shows Doralice and Alberto falling in love and a quintet of confusion led by Pomponio ('Questo? Questa? Come? Che?'). Rossini clearly worked on the scene. Ideas he later used in the act 2 sextet of *La Cenerentola* (January 1817) may have been toyed with; the famous stretta which had ended act 1 of *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (February 1816) could also have been under consideration. What is needed here is some additional borrowing or a piece of inspired fakery. If keeping the audience abreast of the action is the only criterion, a brief stretch of plot-related recitative does just as well. Curiously, the opera was provided with a new overture, a piece sufficiently distinguished to be reused in *La Cenerentola*.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

Il barbiere di Siviglia
and the Transformation of a Tradition

IL BARBIERE DI SIVIGLIA WAS NOT, IN ITS EARLIEST YEARS, ROSSINI'S best-liked opera. Its arrival at classic status came rather later, at a time, ironically, when Rossini's general stock was beginning to fall. Today we accept its status but tend to overlook the radical impact it had at that time. In 1816 Rossini's Figaro shocked and stirred a largely unsuspecting public. Here, in its newest manifestation in Figaro's 'Largo al factotum', was the embodiment of the old driving force itself, the libidinous *élan vital* which underpins much that is innovative and youthful in human affairs. In his book on Rossini, Lord Derwent spent no more than a couple of pages on *Il barbiere di Siviglia*. A good wine, he suggested, needs no bush, though before moving on he noted among other things the opera's 'nervous outburst of vitality',[1] a quality which must have commended the opera to Beethoven, whose reported enthusiasm for it seems entirely plausible in view of his own achievement in, for example, the Eighth Symphony. The opera has other qualities as well. There is Rossini's ear for vocal and instrumental timbres of a peculiar astringency and brilliance; his control of form and the controlled explosions within the forms which are so much a feature of this opera; his quick, intelligent word-setting; and what Verdi, one of the opera's best and shrewdest advocates, would later call 'the abundance of true musical ideas'.[2]

We must assume that Rossini had pondered the idea of the opera for

[1] Lord Derwent, *Rossini and Some Forgotten Nightingales* (London, 1934), 141.
[2] CGV, 415.

some time. Beaumarchais was evidently a kindred spirit, though choices were circumscribed. *Le Mariage de Figaro* was out of the question; Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* was already *hors concours.* Paisiello, by contrast, was fair game. His setting of *Le Barbier de Séville* had been prepared for the St Petersburg Court in 1782. Rossini was not himself averse to playing the role of court composer; in his old age he wrote his *Petite messe solennelle* in a context, if not a style, which is distinctly courtly. But it was plain to see that Paisiello's opera, for all its charm and accomplishment, was too decorous, too much a creature of the old order, to do justice to the explosive possibilities of Beaumarchais's vibrant new comedy.

Comparing Rossini's setting of the play with Paisiello's is an unnerving experience; for whatever protestations of respect were made in the libretto's 'Warning to the Public', Rossini's attitude to the music of his distinguished predecessor was that of a cat to a cornered mouse. The mouse may be allowed a few brief independent flurries (Rossini made no attempt to emulate the wonderful trio for Bartolo and his sneezing, yawning servants, Wakeful and Youthful) but it is soon scotched and dispatched. This scotching of Paisiello is seen in a number of places. In both operas Count Almaviva's appearance as Don Basilio's assistant is characterised by a monotonous nasal whine, but Rossini's setting is made funnier by excruciating violin colours and by the lightning parlando interludes which remind us of the multiple perspectives from which this drama of intrigue, deception, and disguise can be viewed. The cruellest cut of all is Rossini's launching his own self-evidently superior setting of Basilio's calumny speech with a repeated-note figure which occurs midway through Paisiello's version.

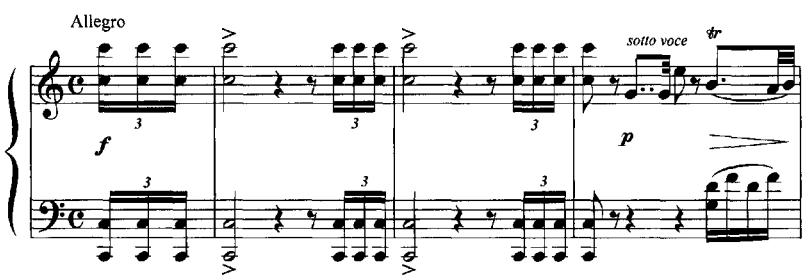
As Beaumarchais himself somewhat disingenuously observed, the plot is familiar enough. An elderly amorous gentleman intends to marry his young pupil but is foiled by a younger, more adroit lover, who, under the old man's nose and in his own house, makes her his wife that very same day. What this résumé omits to mention is the comic 'machinist' himself, the witty, peripatetic specialist in 'shaves, romances, and marriages', the adroit lover's erstwhile valet, Figaro. Beaumarchais's Figaro is, if anything, made even more vital by Rossini and Sterbini, whose adaptation feeds off the drama's debt to the farcical music- and dance-accompanied Spanish *entremés* and the subversive spirit of Carnival, just as much as it recognises its roots in Italian commedia dell'arte, and Molière-style comedy of intrigue. The idea of Figaro as a refugee from a sordid world of literary endeavour is stripped away by Sterbini, as are the gloomier *arrière-pensées* with which Beaumarchais pro-

vides him. What emerges is a creature of motion, impulse, and concentrated energy, a harbinger of the brave new world of mechanised, high-speed motion which Rossini himself would one day come to fear and deplore.

Beaumarchais's play does, of course, provide its own energy, and some specifically musical cues. When Figaro describes Bartolo as 'a stoutish, shortish, oldish, greyish, cunning, smarmy, posing, nosing, peeping, prying, creeping, whining, snivelling sort of man', Beaumarchais is indulging his own kind of dizzying verbal stretta. In Basilio's calumny speech, Beaumarchais actually invokes the dynamic extremes which Rossini was so fond of exploiting: piano, piano—pianissimo—rinforzando—the crescendo itself. Paisiello's setting notes the devices but mutes them. With him there is none of Rossini's sly, sensuous word-pointing, no chilling, buzzing string sonorities. Nor is Paisiello's crescendo as well orchestrated, as well timed, or as powerful as Rossini's, which is crowned with formidable force by the bass drum on the phrase 'colpo di cannone'.

The forms Rossini had evolved for deployment in opera buffa and in opera seria are used in *Il barbiere di Siviglia* both to contain the comedy and to furnish the characters with constraints which they either cling to or iconoclastically reject. The first act begins and ends with carefully formulated structures. The introduzione, which redeploys music first used in *Aureliano in Palmira* and *Sigismondo,* is a tripartite structure with the Count's cavatina, 'Ecco ridente in cielo', as its centrepiece and the noisy paying off of the musicians as its stretta. The act 1 finale has one of the finest of all Rossini's moments of frozen stasis ('Fredda ed immobile') and an incomparable stretta. There is, though, a disturbing rumbustiousness about the finale's first ten minutes. The annunciatory and motivating figure (ex. 16) is Beethovenian in its abruptness and thrust.

Ex. 16



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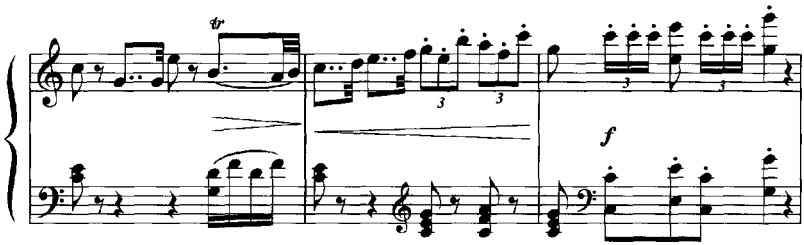
Ex. 16 (*Continued*)



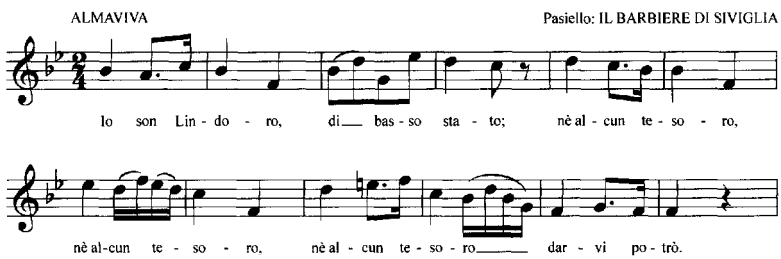
What follows—the Count's drunken entry, his confrontation with Bartolo, the appearance of Rosina, the incident of the letter—is rowdily disruptive, with frequent changes of musical pace and direction. There are also surprising touches: the sly pathos of Rosina's 'sempre un' istoria', and the magical transition for soloists and orchestra after the soldiers' arrival, a transition which drops us down into a sudden crazed vivace: a dazzling pseudo-canon in which the characters, locked by the situation into frenzied imitation, protest vehemently to the officer about each other's behaviour.

Much of the score's effectiveness in such moments can be put down to what Verdi calls Rossini's 'accuracy of declamation'. This characteristic is strikingly evident in Rosina's cavatina, 'Una voce poco fa', which Sterbini fashioned out of Rosine's letter-writing monologue in *Le Barbier de Séville,* and a line in the play ('an unjust man will make a schemer out of innocence itself'), which helps explain the paradox of Rosine's coy but assertive character. It is evident too in 'Dunque io son', Rosina's act 1 duet with Figaro, in which Sterbini's text is tellingly set by Rossini over an accompaniment of exceptional fleetness and wit. The earlier duet, between Figaro and the Count ('All' idea di quel metallo'), is more complex. As the plot to insinuate the Count into Bartolo's house is hatched, Rossini resorts to a multisectioned structure with a variety of comic devices, from the mock-solemn to the farcical, bound together by recurring orchestral figures, and the repetition of the choric, exclamatory, self-congratulatory refrain 'Che invenzione prelibata!' 'What a delicious idea!' The duet is also memorable for Figaro's cameo portrait of a drunk and for the famous stretta (the only part of the scene set by Paisiello) in which Figaro tells the Count how to identify his shop in Seville.

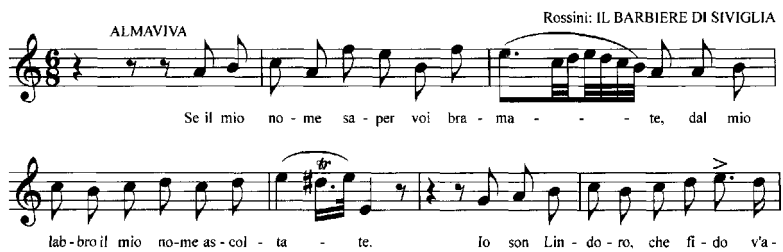
In the theatre the opera's comic thrust is an obvious one. As Rodney Milnes has noted: 'The whole joyous point is that all the characters are op-

portunist monsters; this is why, gazing into the proscenium mirror, we all love it so much'.[3] But the opera is also rich in specifically musical jokes, and not merely jokes at the expense of Bartolo's old-fashioned musical tastes or opera seria itself, both of which Rossini introduces into the singing scene. One of the best of the Beaumarchais-derived jokes comes near the start of the opera when Figaro urges the Count to serenade Rosina beneath her balcony. Sterbini's recitative foreshortens Beaumarchais's buildup to the serenade, obscuring the fact that the Count is extremely nervous, both about the words he will sing and about his guitar technique. What follows vividly characterises the Count's difficulties. Sterbini's verses are deliberately awkward and irregular, and Rossini's music, though miraculously capable of bel canto transformation, is also awkward in key, tessitura, and phrasing. Where Paisiello and his librettist give us a perfectly manicured Canzone (ex. 17a), Rossini's number (ex. 17b) is almost a parody of the form, a minor key aubade which is eloquent in spite of itself.

Ex. 17a



Ex. 17b



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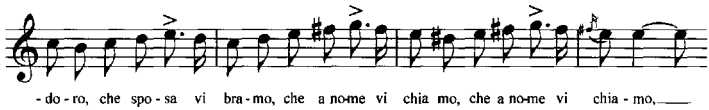
[3] 'Barber black sheep', *Spectator*, 30 March 1985, 31.

Ex. 17b (*Continued*)



Twice in the opera, comedy derives from formal musical maneuvres. Dr Bartolo's cavatina ('A un dottor della mia sorte') is given dignity and pride by its principal motivating figure, which returns with smug inevitability after a central allegro vivace, one of the fastest pieces of buffo patter ever written, and cast in, of all things, sonata form. Cavilling, correct, sharp-eared, and a worthy adversary for all comers, Dr Bartolo is characterised by Rossini in a way which suggests, if not Padre Mattei himself, then comparable academic figures who had haunted his teenage years in Bologna.

The second example is the act 2 trio, 'Ah! qual colpo', in which, to Figaro's despair, Almaviva and Rosina bill and coo after their misunderstandings have been sorted out. This trio is funny on several levels. Figaro's mockery is conveyed by a simple echo effect (first worked out in the innocuous context of the cantata *Egle ed Irene*), an effect familiar from orchestral writing in which instrumental echoes are used to punctuate, round out, or mock the vocal line at phrase ends. At this level the comedy is broad and obvious. But there is, as Philip Gossett has pointed out, the altogether subtler jest of the lovers' fatal delay being occasioned by the music's irksome compliance with the formal demands of cabaletta and cadence repeats.[4]

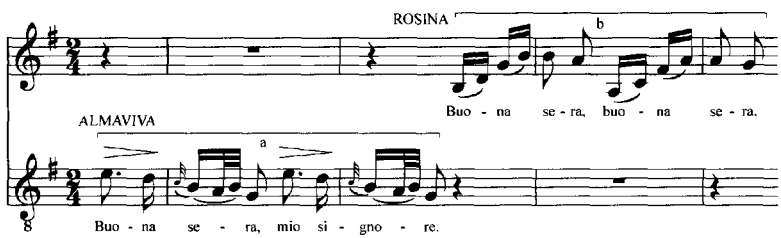
The repositioning of the storm which precedes the trio is a clever move by Sterbini and Rossini. In Beaumarchais the storm reflects Bartholo's fury in the wake of his 'scène de stupéfaction'; here it relates directly to the emotional upset of Rosina's assumption that 'Lindoro' is being unfaithful to her. Where the rest of act 2 is concerned, it is possible to feel a certain diminution of interest. Berta's aria di sorbetto, the rapid dispatch of the various intrigues in secco recitative, the Count's set-piece aria, 'Cessa di

[4] Gossett, *Grove* 6 (London, 1980), vol. 16, 233.

più resistere', and the cosy vaudeville finale all suggest not so much laziness (the Count's aria is a beautifully crafted bespoke piece) as a plot that has run its course. The trio apart, the opera never quite regains the impulse achieved in the scene in which the lovers are unmasked after the unexpected arrival and peremptory dismissal of Don Basilio.

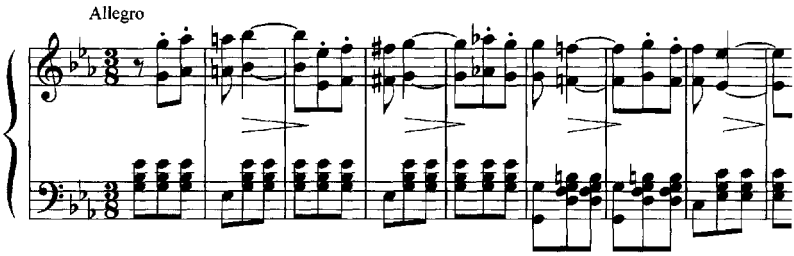
The quintet in which Don Basilio is frightened and bribed back to bed, having been convinced by the assembled company that he is suffering from scarlet fever, was always one of the opera's most popular scenes. It is also a tour de force musically. The actual farewell to Basilio (ex. 18) takes new impetus from the transition itself, G major arrived at after 'presto a letto' via the leading note of the tonic E flat. The twice-stated opening phrase (*a*), with its descending motion and snapping cadence, is urgent and dismissive, whereas the answering phrase (*b*), disingenuously soothing and later taken up by all four characters as a choric refrain, has the simple charm of a lullaby. Whilst we enjoy the music's symmetry, energy, grace, and wit, poor Basilio is trapped between the two opposing but conjunct forces.

Ex. 18



The quintet over, Rossini, ever the master of mimetic movement, gives us one of his frothiest allegros for the shaving sequence, beautifully crossed by a level crotchet motion as the lovers furtively plot. Bartolo's unmasking of the lovers undoes all this. As the characters hector and rage, the woodwinds give out a simple syncopated figure (ex. 19) which it is difficult not to identify with Rossini himself. Like his onstage surrogate, Figaro, he remains the detached and amused observer of a world full of intrigue, folly, and a strange disruptive energy.

Ex. 19



Whilst *Il barbiere di Siviglia* was being planned, Rossini and Sterbini completed *Torvaldo e Dorliska,* a two-act, semi-serious 'rescue' opera which attempts, not entirely successfully, to revisit the world of *L'inganno felice.* The story concerns the murderous Duke of Ordow and his designs on Dorliska, wife of the young knight, Torvaldo. Ambushed by the Duke, Torvaldo has been left for dead, whilst Dorliska has taken refuge in the nearest habitation, the Duke's castle. When we first encounter Torvaldo, some forty minutes into the opening act, he has entered the castle in disguise bearing a letter for Dorliska. Rossini's music during this dramatically inert preamble is dull and formulaic. The invention is keener, however, in the Trio for Torvaldo, the Duke, and the genial castle custodian Giorgio, and in the act 1 finale, where Dorliska betrays both herself and her husband with a sudden shriek of recognition. With hero and heroine now in the villain's grasp, act 2 involves the rescue itself, which the buffo Giorgio successfully engineers.

The opera, which appears to have worked rather better in a cut-down one-act form, is at its best when closest to comedy. The duet, in which Giorgio unavailingly tries to deny the Duke access to the keys of the prison, is an obvious highlight. The solo numbers Rossini provides for Torvaldo (a *tenore di grazia* role written for Domenico Donzelli) and Dorliska are not without merit, though there is nothing in those arias to compare with the exquisite short duettino for Torvaldo and Dorliska in the act 2 prison scene whose eloquence anticipates a similar episode in *La gazza ladra.*

Rossini himself was sufficiently enamoured of the Duke's defiant final aria to reuse part of it in the vengeance duet in *Otello.* That said, *Torvaldo e Dorliska* is a score that merely smoulders. The real conflagration would come with a better subject and a better libretto in *Il barbiere di Siviglia.*

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

Otello *and the Confrontation of Tragedy*

THE CULT OF THE 'UNHAPPY ENDING', OF OPERAS WHICH END IN suicide or death, began to take a tentative hold on European musical life in Italy in the late 1780s. Why the phenomenon manifested itself in Italy is not clear; revolutionary France would have seemed a likelier breeding ground. In this respect the selection of Shakespeare's *Othello* as the subject for Rossini's second opera for the San Carlo company is not as radical as it might appear. Nonetheless, the choice shows sophistication and ambition. As the century progressed, the great Shakespearian tragedies began to infiltrate the operatic repertory, but there was no such precedent in 1816. Even in England, where the actor Edmund Kean was beginning to revolutionise taste by restoring tragic endings, it was still the norm to play *King Lear* in Nahum Tate's mawkish revision.

Rossini's librettist, Francesco Maria Berio, Marchese di Salsa, was a scholar and literary sophisticate whose salon was at the centre of Neapolitan social and intellectual life. His libretto is pleasingly close to Shakespeare in act 3,[1] rather less so in the two earlier acts, which draw on a catalogue of familiar operatic devices and characters: a secret marriage, a misplaced letter, a ferocious duel, a disapproving father, a lovelorn daughter, a heroic lover, and a scheming rival. Berio needed to simplify. As an amateur music-

[1] *Otello* is Rossini's first three-act opera. An unusual array of scene changes was the principal reason for this departure from the two-act form. Rossini's only other Italian operas in three acts are *Armida* and *Mosè in Egitto*.

lover, he would have been aware of the conventions of opera seria; as a classical scholar, he would have been mindful of the need to observe the Aristotelian unities of action, place, and time. Shakespeare's text, which plays fast and loose with such ideals, would not have been his only source. A version of *Othello* by Baron Giovanni Carlo Cosenza had been played privately in Naples in 1813; a version which in turn owed something to a 1792 French adaptation by Jean-François Ducis. Rossini himself evidently played a part in shaping the libretto, in particular the musically sublime third act (revered by Verdi and partly imitated by him), though even here the signals are mixed. The voice of the offstage gondolier at the start of act 3 is mooted in the Cosenza adaptation.

Of Shakespeare's three principal characters, those of Desdemona and Othello are gifts to the lyric stage; Iago is a good deal more problematic. Rossini's Otello has theatrical presence. Andrea Nozzari, the creator of the role, impressed observers with the power of his playing. Stendhal, who had Kean's Othello as a yardstick, spoke of Nozzari's magnificent stature, of grandeur tinged with melancholy. Musically, however, Otello is under-characterised. His first utterance, as he disembarks after defeating the Turks off Cyprus, is in declamatory recitative, an idea also used by Verdi, albeit to vastly greater effect. The mood of the amorous soldier is sketched in his cavatina, sung with grumbling asides from Iago, but there is no love duet with Desdemona—'the theme of serious love is as foreign to Rossini as it is to Walter Scott', noted Stendhal[2]—and there are no subsequent solo opportunities for Otello himself.

There is a good deal of accompanied recitative in act 1. It is the weakest of the three acts, and the one which most obviously shows signs of haste in composition (a consequence, perhaps, of that 'irregular and incompatible conduct' for which Rossini was reported to the court authorities by Barbaja). The function of the act is largely expository, though it is the subplot involving Desdemona's father, Elmiro (Shakespeare's Brabantio), and Rodrigo (a conflation of Roderigo and Cassio), which gets the lion's share of the attention. In Berio's redirection of the action, Elmiro's interception of a letter from his daughter to Otello has triggered the crisis, blighting Elmiro's hope that she will marry Rodrigo. Sensing that something is amiss, the lovesick Rodrigo makes a private accord with Iago in the duet

[2] SVR, 210.

'No, non temer: serena'. Yet it is the trio, 'Nel cuor d'un padre amante', for Elmiro, Rodrigo, and Desdemona which is the act's evident highlight.

Whereas *Elisabetta* had featured two tenors to the exclusion of a baritone, *Otello* features three: Otello, Rodrigo, and Iago. Of these, the starriest is Rodrigo, Shakespeare's 'gulled gentleman of Venice', who, in Berio's rewrite, becomes the son of the Doge. The role was written for the high 'tenore contraltino' Giovanni David, who, alone among the three tenors, is granted a showpiece aria. Sung at the start of act 2 in the wake of Desdemona's revelation that she and Otello are secretly married, it portrays Rodrigo as a self-pitying narcissist, a peacock with a human heart.[3] Iago, on the other hand, is downplayed. Boito and Verdi solved the problem of rendering the character viable in music by turning Shakespeare's malign and coarse-minded soldier into a Romantic Satanist, a suave Machiavel. Berio and Rossini make no such leap of the imagination. The temptation scene, in which Iago makes Otello prey to 'the green-ey'd monster, jealousy' (the phrase itself is not used by Berio) is carried in a lengthy passage of accompanied recitative. The onus here is on the singer's own acting ability, though the final twenty-four lines are tellingly shaped. The duet which follows concludes with an oath-swearing which distantly predicts the vengeance duet 'Sì, vendetta' in act 2 of Verdi's *Rigoletto.* From here Otello is swept into a confrontation with Rodrigo, the fires burning even more brightly as the two tenors lock horns in vocal combat: fierce declamation and visceral top Cs, underpinned by plummeting bass lines in the orchestra. Since both men now distrust Desdemona, her sudden appearance turns a fraught duo into an even more scarifying trio.

Neither Rossini's Desdemona nor Verdi's is, in all respects, the same as Shakespeare's modest and domesticated young woman who entreats Othello to wear gloves and eat nourishing dishes. Manuel García is said to have advised his pupils to study great paintings of Mary Magdalene and the Pietàs of the old masters to catch her special character and significance. This is one way of looking at her: Desdemona the plaster saint. Whether

[3] Part of the aria's famously difficult, high-lying cabaletta and part of the Otello/Iago duet in the same act were joined by a certain G. Berthold to the 'Katte-Cavatine' of the Danish composer C. E. F. Weyse (1774–1842) to make the famous 'Cat Duet' or 'Duetto buffo di due gatti', which is often wrongly attributed to Rossini. See Edward J. Crafts, 'A Tale of Two Cats', BCRS 25 (1975), no.3, 5.

or not this was Rossini's view, his initial presentation of her is deliberately understated. There is no entrance aria (an omission sopranos have frequently corrected by importing one from elsewhere). Instead there is a duettino with Emilia. This begins modestly enough, though a more coquettish strain does eventually appear, crossed by long chromatic runs that suggest a kind of serene anxiety. Acts 2 and 3 increasingly place Desdemona centre stage. As Otello and Rodrigo leave to fight their duel near the end of act 2, Desdemona is left prostrate. What follows is the kind of soprano showpiece which normally comes at the end of an opera. Since this is impossible in a context where the heroine is brutally murdered, the vocal spectacle is brought forward. Desdemona is in despair. Otello's mood has turned nasty. True, he has challenged Rodrigo, but does he love her? This desperate outpouring of anxiety ('Che smania? aimè! che affanno?') has the effect of interiorising the opera's tragic momentum. The comfort of her friends is of no avail, nor does news that Otello is safe in any way release the tension. Elmiro's public denunciation of his daughter is the final straw. With Desdemona's 'L'error d'un'infelice', the domestic dimension of Berio's rewrite begins to skirt real tragedy. Stendhal wrote of the 'volcanic', 'torrential' quality of *Otello,* its 'fiery urgency'. The latter part of act 2 certainly displays that.

At the start of act 3 we enter an entirely different world. The act begins with a charged exchange between Emilia and the traumatised Desdemona ('hated by heaven, my father, and myself'). Then, in the distance, a gondolier is heard singing a sad refrain:

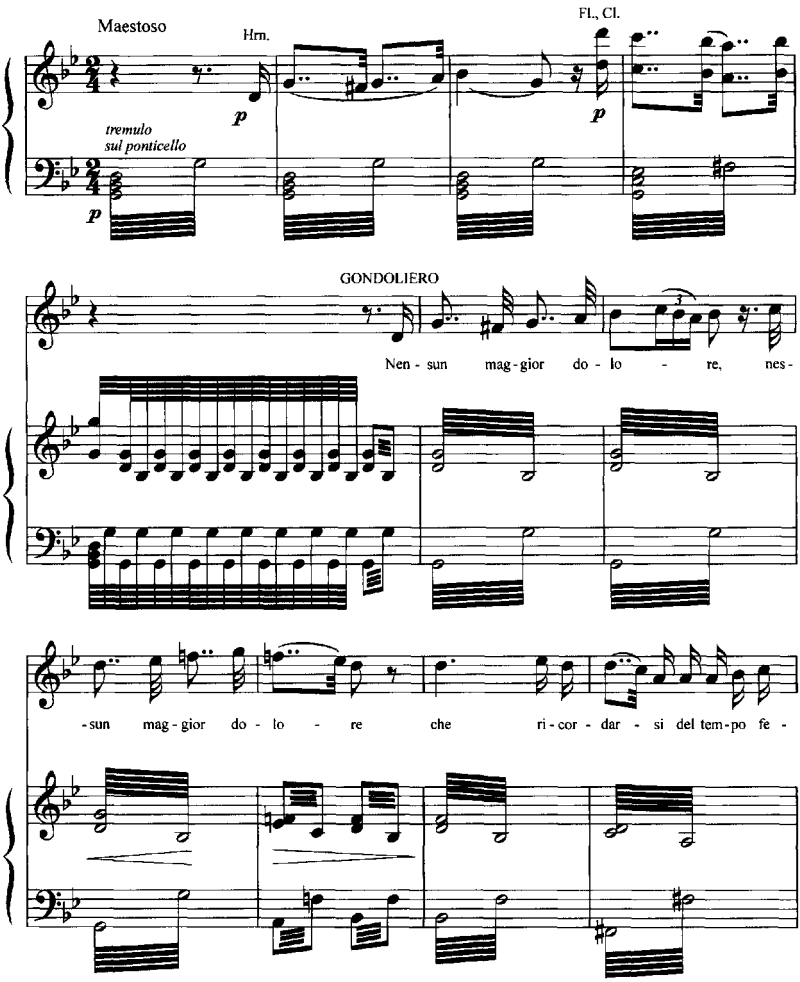
Nessun maggior dolore	There is no greater woe
Che ricordarsi del tempo felice	than to recall past bliss
Nella miseria.	while in distress.

The interlude, precursor of the sailor's song at the start of *Tristan und Isolde* and the shepherd boy's aubade in the final act of *Tosca,* casts its shadow over everything that follows. Rossini claimed that the choice of lines from Canto V of Dante's *Inferno* was his own—this in the face of Berio's somewhat high-minded objection that no gondolier would sing Dante.[4] The word-setting (ex. 20) is a fine example of Rossini's ear for the irregular contours and chromatic harmonies of folk music. The opening line is cast

[4] In his opera *La romanziera e l'uomo nero* (Naples, 1831), Donizetti produced a parody of the lines: 'There is no greater woe than to have an empty belly and to make love in time of distress'.

as a two-bar melody, which is immediately repeated in variant form in a higher register, creating a sense of desperate striving. The eleven-syllable second line is set to a separate high-lying melody, for which the third line, 'nella miseria', provides the cadence. When this pattern is repeated, however, the word 'miseria' is left suspended on a high D, the dominant of the lament's home key, G minor. Throughout the piece, which lasts for a minute and a half, the orchestration is perfect: misty string tremolos abutted by a wail of plaintive winds.

Ex. 20



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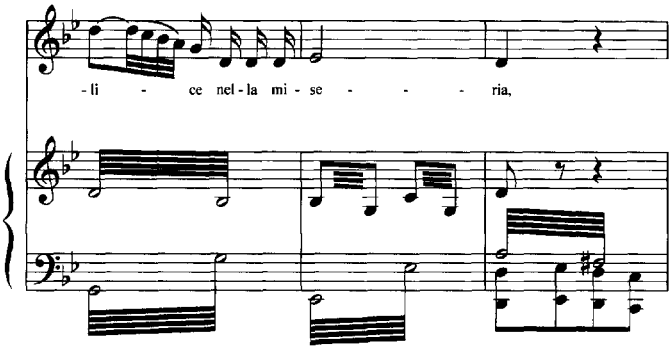
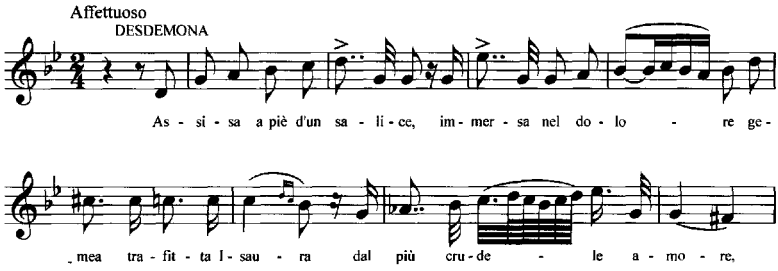
Ex. 20 (*Continued*)



The 'Willow Song', which begins in the same key as the gondolier's refrain, is scored for harp, strings, and wind. It is a wonderful invention, less highly individualised than Verdi's will later be, but touching and memorable in equal measure (ex. 21).

Ex. 21



After the first stanza there are two more in which Rossini modifies the harmonies, and where the singer herself, if she has the necessary taste and refinement, may also execute subtle variants. At this point in the Shakespeare original, Desdemona is startled by a noise:

DESDEMONA: Hark! who is't that knocks?

EMILIA: It is the wind.

In the opera the moment is even more sinister. Desdemona's line 'Qual presagio funesto!' ('What an ill omen!') sent shivers down the spines of the

Neapolitans, who took it as a reference to the 'evil eye'. Unsurprisingly, Desdemona's final stanza takes on a new kind of nervous intensity. Nor does the song have a proper close, adding to that sense of irresolution which has been a characteristic of Desdemona's music up to this point.

In Shakespeare the 'Willow' scene (act 4, iii) is followed by more action on the streets of Cyprus: the botched attempt by Roderigo and then Iago to murder Cassio, after which Othello, irreversibly convinced of Cassio's guilt, exits with the words: 'Strumpet, I come. / Thy bed, lust-stain'd, shall with lust's blood be spotted'. Berio and Rossini do not need the scene; equally, they do not want Otello entering too precipitately on the end of the 'Willow Song'. Their solution is as simple as it is sublime. Desdemona kneels by her bed and prays to the Blessed Virgin in the words of the 'Ave Maria'. The accompaniment is for winds alone. Boito and Verdi also adopted the delaying device of the prayer, though, in order to avoid charges of imitation, Verdi was obliged to use a string accompaniment, a rather more conventional idea.

The entry of Otello into the bedchamber is visually impressive. Stendhal reported:

> Far away in the uttermost depths of the stage, and incredibly distant, we glimpse Otello, a lantern held high in his hand and his naked scimitar under his arm, tip-toeing towards his wife's chamber down the winding staircase of a tower. This stairway, which winds downward in a spiral, gives us glimpses of the fearful visage of Otello, a lonely point of light picked out by the lantern in the midst of this infinite ocean of darkness.[5]

The ritornello which accompanies this descent is strangely jaunty, 'like a gesture from one of Haydn's more humorous symphonies', suggests Julian Budden.[6] The recitative in which Otello contemplates the sleeping Desdemona is very fine, superior to anything Rossini has given Otello earlier in the opera. His challenging the now defiant Desdemona culminates in the duet 'Non arrestare il colpo'. Naysayers have spotted in the accompaniment a figure Rossini had recently used in Don Basilio's 'Calumny' aria in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*. (Calumny is not wholly irrelevant at this point, though it is unlikely that Rossini was deploying the motif deliberately.) In

[5] SVR, 234.

[6] Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi*, vol. 3 (London, 1981), 394.

fact, Rossini had noticed the figure and pasted a correction into the autograph manuscript, which retains the harmonic movement whilst modifying the melody and the rhythm.

After four stanzas and a six-line stichomythia, the libretto makes provision for a final moment of reflection between the estranged lovers.[7] Rossini prepares the modulation then, at Otello's 'A te sarà', plunges us into a D minor allegro and the murder itself. A storm plays about the murder, as it will later do in Verdi's *Rigoletto.* Otello does not smother Desdemona, he stabs her. With Iago dead and Otello's integrity proved (as Lucio now explains), the Doge, Elmiro, and Rodrigo make their festive entry, a fine moment of proleptic irony before Otello's swift and sudden suicide. There is no great soliloquy here as there is in Shakespeare and Verdi; nor, to be frank, do we expect it. Stendhal observed: 'This Otello is too patently shallow to convince me beyond reasonable doubt that it is not simple vanity which makes him seize the dagger'.[8] The fact is, Otello is not the key to Rossini's opera. At the work's centre stands Desdemona, one of the most strikingly imagined heroines of the ottocento, who does not deserve the neglect which time and Verdi have imposed upon her.

[7] A cantabile a 2, which Rossini may have written and later eliminated.

[8] SVR, 211.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

La Cenerentola: *An Essay in Comic Pathos*

THE ALACRITY WITH WHICH ROSSINI ACCEPTED LIBRETTIST JACOPO Ferretti's suggestion of an opera on the Cinderella story, and the speed, precision, and care with which he set the text, suggest that this was a subject, like that of *Il barbiere di Siviglia,* he may have had in mind for some time. It would, however, be a very different kind of opera from *Il barbiere.* What emerged at the prima at Rome's Teatro Valle on 25 January 1817 was a brilliant and witty piece but a moving one too: the *comédie larmoyante* element made all the more effective by the restrained way it is touched into the larger drama.

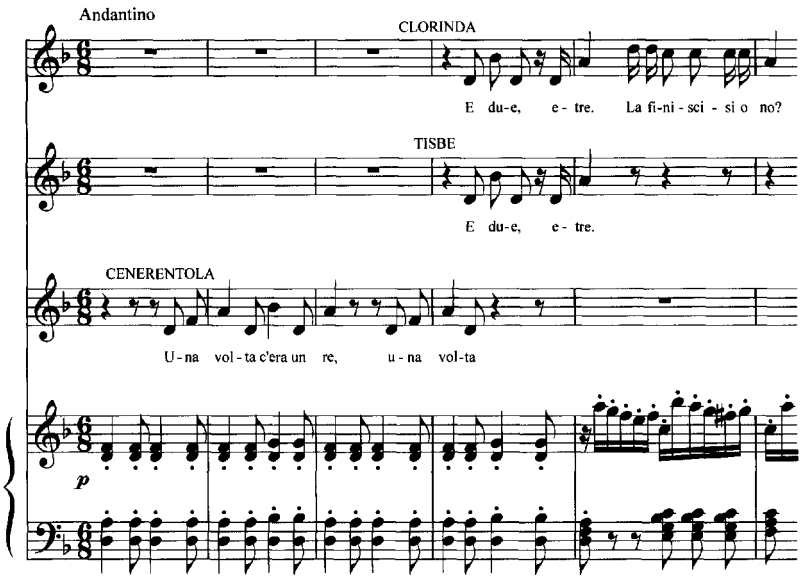
Ferretti drew on two extant libretti: one prepared for Nicolas Isouard's *Cendrillon* (Paris, 1810), the other for *Agatina* (Milan, 1814) by Rossini's friend and colleague Stefano Pavesi, both treatments apt to their time and place of origin. Specialists in folklore have identified over 300 known variants of the Cinderella story, of which there are three principal archetypes, each with its own social and psychological emphasis. The most familiar is the version which has come down to us from the seventeenth-century French writer Charles Perrault, the one with the cruel stepmother, the fairy godmother, the pumpkin coach drawn by mice, and the celebrated slipper. Feminine in orientation, it is a retelling rich in romantic fantasy. Two other variants are more male orientated. In one, instead of a stepmother there is a father or stepfather who makes emotional demands on a favourite daughter. Sexually and psychologically disturbing, its most powerful theatrical embodiment is probably Shakespeare's *King Lear.* The other, the one

favoured by the witty and humane Rossini—and by Jane Austen in her last and most affecting novel, *Persuasion*—is neither fantastic nor epic. In this retelling, the brutal, bullying stepfather is no more than an impoverished aristocrat, the ugly sisters gossiping snobs. This essentially rational, satirical version of the story is nicely adjacent to the well-known opera buffa formula of lovers, accomplices, and foolish guardians. But it is buffo comedy crossed with sentiment and pathos, and a certain residual cruelty—a curious blend of the aristocratic and the bourgeois, the urbane and the homely.

These pathetic and moralising elements are endemic in Rossini's sources. His own opera is subtitled *La bontà in trionfo;* Pavesi's is subtitled *La virtù premiata.* Links can be traced back sixty or more years through Italian operatic history to stage versions of such morally improving works as Samuel Richardson's novel *Pamela.* Not everyone approved of the tradition; Stendhal was distressed to find *La Cenerentola* infected with what he called 'a servant's hall vulgarity'. Rossini, however, is more sensitive than his urbane biographer. The very name Cenerentola (Cinderella in English, Aschenputtel in German) suggests ashes and expiation. And how better to express the solitary, expiatory mood in restrained but romantic terms than in the sad minor-key folk song which Rossini provides for his heroine? Cenerentola's song, which crops up several times in the opera, is a wonderful example of the art which disguises art. But equally, how typical it is of Rossini to hold sentimentality at bay by allowing the plaint to be cruelly mocked by the ugly sisters, Clorinda and Tisbe, at its first reprise (ex. 22). The ugly sisters resemble Baroness Aspasia and Donna Fulvia, the unlovely pair of snobs in *La pietra del paragone.* Their prim interruption of the ballad and their high, obsessive calling of Cenerentola's name in the midst of her first encounter with Prince Ramiro remind us how aptly Rossini deploys vocal texture; Cenerentola's velvety contralto is persistently thrown into acrid relief by the bright birdlike sounds of her querulous soprano rivals.

Cenerentola's pathologically nervous manner is tellingly characterised by Rossini in her first encounter with Prince Ramiro, who has exchanged clothes and outward rank with his servant Dandini. At the point where he asks, 'But, pray, who are you?' ('Ma, di grazia, voi chi siete?'), the verse lines tighten and (a point arrived at by Rossini only in his filling out of the draft score) the music pulls up short before Cenerentola launches into a panic-stricken gabble, Rossini using comic patter and a sinking tonality to con-

Ex. 22

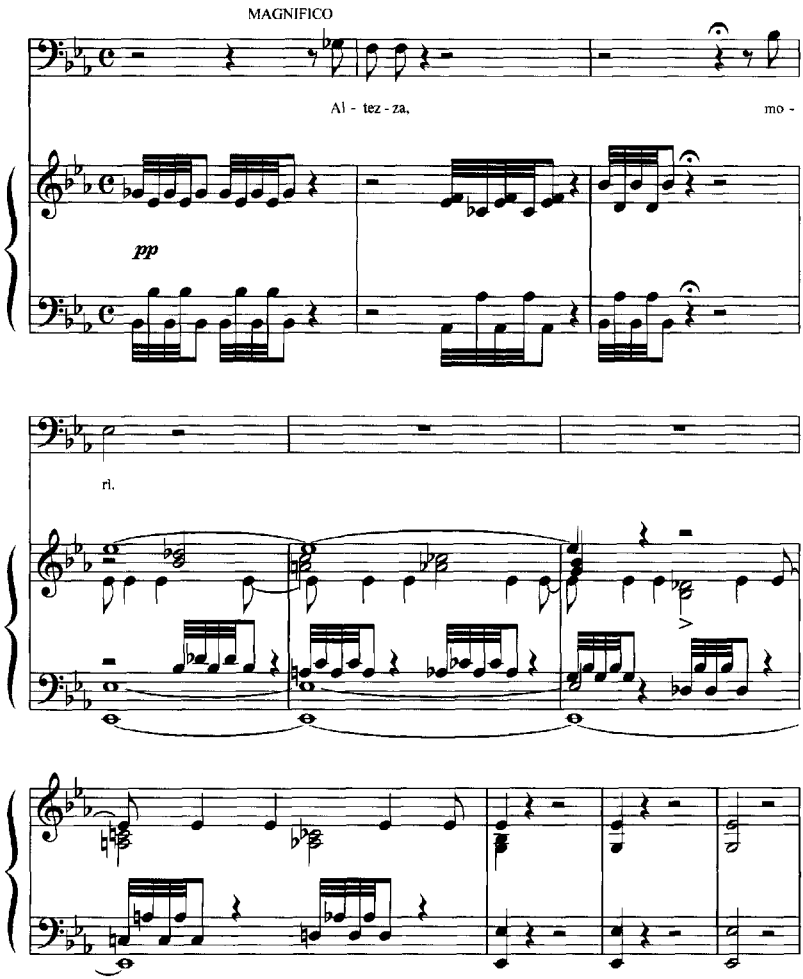


vey to us her confused state of mind. The duet is also an excellent example of Rossini's mastery of the deftly characterised, dramatically evolving ensemble. The sisters' offstage calling introduces tension and instability into a duet which has begun conventionally enough but which has already gone badly awry.

Even more arresting is the scene ('Signor, una parola') in which Cenerentola's double-dealing stepfather, Don Magnifico, attempts to ignore her plea for an hour at the prince's ball. Caught between the need to be obsequious ('Serenissima!') and ruthless ('Ma vattene', 'Get out of here'), Magnifico informs Ramiro and Dandini that the girl is a mere kitchen wench, a 'servaccia ignorantissima'. 'A servant?' the visitors incredulously ask. As the music moves forward, the woodwinds add their own wry comment, as much as to say, 'You must be joking!' It is a harder, more brittle world than that of, say, Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro,* and in some ways a more painful one. The sequence ends squarely in the tonic, which is immediately supplanted by a bold summons in E flat at the entry of Ramiro's

tutor and moral guide, Alidoro. He has a list of eligible maidens in Magnifico's household that includes three names. Magnifico blusters briefly and then, with Cenerentola standing near him, announces that the third sister is dead. In a naive aside Cenerentola denies the fact, but Magnifico, warming to his morbid lie, repeats it with a chilling assumption of sincerity, 'Your Highness, your Highness . . . dead', the orchestra producing shocked judders of sound and then (ex. 23) a plaintive descent to one of the opera's most charged silences.

Ex. 23

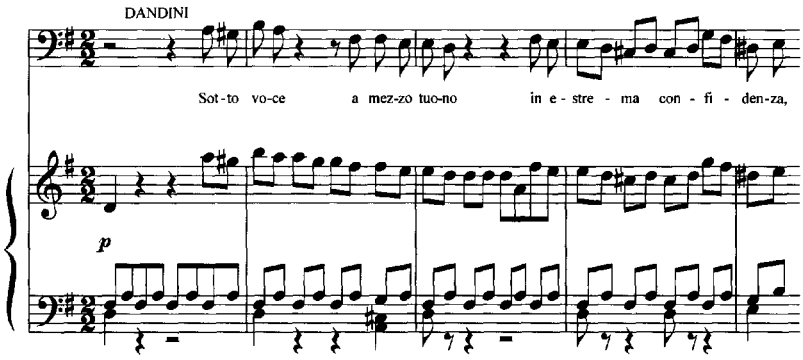


At this point, having reduced his audience to numbed disbelief, Rossini launches into one of those ensembles in which the characters attempt to work out, with dispassionate concern, who precisely is duping whom. The stretta, which restores the C major tonality, is unusually brilliant. This is a scene which tells us a good deal about a sensibility which marries an almost morbid sensitivity to suffering with a notable capacity for detachment.

Not everything in *La Cenerentola* is quite as radical as this. Away from the drama's critical moments, Don Magnifico is expansively, even loosely drawn. His cavatina describes a rather odd dream (a premonition of wealth, Magnifico thinks) involving a donkey that sprouts wings and ends up on top of a church spire. Like Macrobio's cavatina in *La pietra del paragone,* it gives Rossini scope for declamatory patter, urbane wind writing, sudden rambunctious tuttis, stalking pizzicati, and that specially manic form of verbal and musical onomatopoeia of which he remained so fond. He also makes a good deal of Magnifico's role as Barone di Monte Fiascone, literally Baron Mount Flagon. In a bibulous scene which predicts some of the carousings in *Le Comte Ory,* Don Ramiro installs Magnifico as 'Superintendent of the Wine Glass'.

Magnifico's real problem, however, is not his daughter or his own drinking habits but Ramiro's servant, Dandini. The scene in which Dandini reveals who he really is to an astounded Don Magnifico must rank as a high point in this or any other comic opera, not least for the deft way in which Rossini transforms the broken phrases of Dandini's 'Un segreto d'importanza' into the seamless flow of Magnifico's outraged 'Di quest'ingiuria, di quest'affronto', in which the poor duped man flushes into delirium. Even more than Figaro, Dandini is a somewhat sinister figure, outwitting his rivals and manipulating the drama, pulling the strings of the puppets, not unlike the Poet in *Il turco in Italia.* His entrance aria is a parody of opera seria magniloquence and includes a passage which Rognoni suggests would make an excellent parody of Verdi but which must, for chronology's sake, be seen as Rossini mocking what are, in retrospect, would-be Verdian elements in his own evolving language. In the great act 1 finale it is Dandini who unfreezes the characters who have been rendered immobile by the appearance of a strange lady at the prince's ball. And it is Dandini who launches that most brilliantly conspiratorial of all Rossini duets, 'Zitto, zitto; piano, piano' (ex. 24)

Ex. 24



Even Stendhal approved of this number, relishing what he calls 'the bounding floodtide of fantasy'. For Dandini, all the world's a game, and a high-speed, treacherous game at that. Whilst Cenerentola sighs and dreams, the rest of Rossini's characters live out quotidian lives that are every bit as hectic and confused as anything in Rossini's time, or our own. 'One man grumbles and complains, another shouts and raves; that one fumes, this one whines; we'll all end up as lunatics.' Cenerentola's transformation in the final scene is both grand and touching. As we have seen, part of the music was borrowed, perhaps at Righetti Giorgi's request, from the Count's aria at the end of *Il barbiere di Siviglia*. It was a potentially perilous act of self-borrowing, but the newer context is certainly the more productive one. That said, Cenerentola's intervention in the great act 2 sextet ('Siete voi?') is more memorable. Her gesture of forgiveness is not perhaps as moving as the countess's in *Le nozze di Figaro* or as sublime as Cordelia's in the parallel but very different context of *King Lear*, but it is a deeply affecting one, a characteristic moment in what is one of Rossini's richest and most humane scores.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

La gazza ladra *and the Semiseria Style*

THE REAL LIFE STORY OF A FRENCH PEASANT GIRL WHO HAD BEEN convicted and hanged for thefts later discovered to be the work of a thieving magpie had stimulated a substantial body of fiction, including a *mélo-historique* entitled *La Pie voleuse,* which J.-M.-T. Badouin d'Aubigny and theatre manager Louis-Charles Caigniez ('the Racine of the boulevards') had staged at Paris's Théâtre de la Porte-St.-Martin in April 1815. It was this work that Giovanni Gherardini had used as the basis for the prize-winning libretto he submitted to a panel of Milanese judges in 1816. For Rossini, the progress to this from *La Cenerentola* must have been an agreeable one. In one important respect the works are linked: the wronged servant girl, Ninetta, is an obvious variant on the Cinderella archetype. In all other respects the operas are complementary, contrasted versions of the semiseria genre with its unpredictable mix of comedy, drama, melodrama, and incipient tragedy.

Stendhal sneered at the story, just as he had sneered at that of *La Cenerentola.* 'And to make matters worse'. he wrote, 'it would seem that this disgusting little anecdote is based on reality; a poor servant girl was in fact hanged at Palaiseau and in her memory a Mass, later to be known as *The Magpie Mass,* was instituted'.[1] It is a remark that reflects the more or less unbridgeable gap which existed in France at the time between melodramas with music, to which the middle and lower classes flocked, and

[1] SVR, 266.

works staged at the Paris Opéra, which were the preserve of the aristocracy and the haute bourgeoisie. The Italians were less hidebound. With dozens of theatres looking to stage two or three new operas a season, plausible story lines were a valued commodity. Nor was Italian intellectual opinion averse to dabbling in the stuff of popular literature.

The orderliness which the Milan judges had noted in Gherardini's work was a particular virtue in the case of *La gazza ladra.* Like Dickens's *The Pickwick Papers,* which also marries high-spirited adventure with prison scenes of unusual grimness, it provides us with a wide range of characters, sympathetically, sentimentally, and occasionally quirkily drawn. The story centres on a country community, subject to the king but dominated by its bustling, sadistic mayor, a kind of rustic Scarpia. At the heart of the community are the genial, wine-bibbing tenant farmer Fabrizio Vingradito, his wife, Lucia, and their son, Giannetto, recently returned from the wars. Giannetto plans to marry the demure and charming servant girl Ninetta, who is herself surrounded by a bevy of minor characters, including the servant boy Pippo and the peddler Isacco, whose whining cavatina provoked Stendhal into inveighing against Polish Jews in terms which nowadays would have him locked up. (Trabuco in Verdi's *La forza del destino* is an obvious descendent of Isacco.) There is also the striking figure of Ninetta's father, Fernando Villabella, an army deserter, though through no fault of his own. One can only guess at the impression the humbling of this powerful and compassionate man made on Rossini when he read the libretto. His own father, a voluble republican, as honest as the day was long, had been arrested and imprisoned by the Austrians in Bologna in 1799.

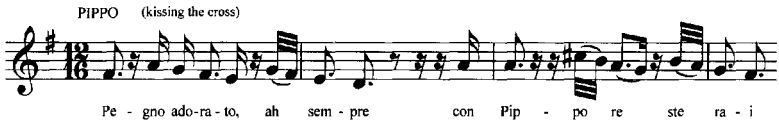
There are times when, by recognising its roots in French mélodrame, *La gazza ladra* ends up anticipating the Italian verismo style. Ninetta herself is precisely the kind of sweet, wronged woman we might expect to find in one of Puccini's operas; and it is she who is central to one of the opera's most striking sequences. In act 1, with Ninetta and her father standing before him, the mayor receives a letter which provides a full description of the army deserter. Because he has left his spectacles behind, the mayor asks Ninetta to read the description, which she does, altering it as she reads. Alexander Pushkin, who saw *La gazza ladra* in Odessa in 1823–1824, has a more or less identical scene in his play *Boris Godunov* where the False Dmitry avoids arrest by altering the details of a warrant

which an illiterate guard has given him to read. Mussorgsky included the scene in his opera *Boris Godunov,* though it has to be said that his declamatory setting of the letter-reading is a good deal less effective than Rossini's rather more radical resort to plain speech over a simmering orchestral ostinato. Perhaps it is not surprising that *La gazza ladra*'s return to the stage in the 1940s owed a good deal to an adaptation by Riccardo Zandonai, an avant-garde verismo composer whose tastes towards the end of his life turned to Rossini-inspired neoclassicism.

In most other respects *La gazza ladra* is an opera formulated on classical lines. There are no flights of musico-ornithological fancy for the eponymous magpie, nor are Rossini's own forms—duets, trios, set-piece finales, and the like—sacrificed to short-term considerations of realism. With the mayor imminent, Ninetta and her father still have their cabaletta, an expression as much of Rossini's instinct for order as for any lazy compliance with the forms he had himself initiated. Throughout the opera it is through the music itself, through rhythm in particular, that feelings of ecstasy, liberation, confusion, or entanglement are expressed. When the kindly jailer, Antonio, tries to part Ninetta and Giannetto lest the mayor discover his having allowed Ninetta a few moments outside her cell, the situation is identical to that in which Figaro is reduced to sly mockery of the dallying lovers in act 2 of *Il barbiere di Siviglia.* Not only is the scene from *La gazza ladra* bereft of comedy, the very motion of the rhythms, and the grimly militaristic ostinato which underpins the lovers' voices, tell an altogether grimmer tale. The portrait of the mayor is similarly controlled. The impression created in his cavatina, very much a buffo piece, is modified in the great trio ('Oh Nume benefico') which follows the letter-reading. Later, in the prison scene in act 2, as the mayor is called away to the tribunal, the overture's second subject, snare drum to the fore, colours the stretta in a way which is both brilliant and threatening.

It has been said that Ninetta is rather pallidly drawn. Such a view misses the artlessness of the girl and the aptness of the music Rossini provides for her. Her cavatina is charmingly fresh-faced, with its unencumbered, rhythmically spontaneous cabaletta. There is the major-key pathos of her response to Isacco's revelations in the act 1 finale ('Mi sento opprimere') and the exquisite prison duet ('E ben per mia memoria'), in which Pippo adds his own touching rejoinder (ex. 25).

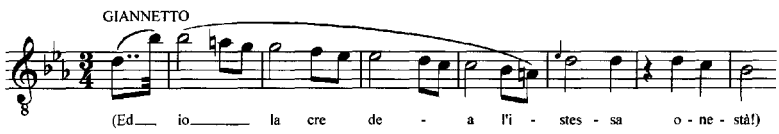
Ex. 25



There is also Ninetta's prayer at the start of the final scene ('Deh tu reggi in tal momento'), framed by an eerily scored march to the scaffold. Though in no sense a star 'vehicle', the role attracted singers such as Colbran and Pasta. Malibran was by all accounts a memorable Ninetta. Like her Zerlina, her Ninetta was deliberately and bewitchingly rustic; the realistic and idealistic elements, peasant girl and Arcadian shepherdess, fused in a way which must have struck Rossini as the ideal embodiment of his musical and dramatic vision.

Giannetto is perhaps too slightly drawn. The Milanese judges thought as much—'one might perhaps wish for a bit more resolution and military zeal'—a criticism with which it is difficult to disagree, but he has his moments, not least the despairing cry when it seems that Ninetta has indeed stolen the family silver (ex. 26).

Ex. 26



There is, however, ample compensation in the presentation of Ninetta's relationship with her father. Like Verdi, Rossini was easily stirred by the emotion of parental love; and here it is Fernando who gives the opera some of its fundamental power and appeal. His act 1 duet with Ninetta, the trio already cited, and his intervention in the trial scene are pointers to the kind of thing we shall hear in middle-period Verdi. Fernando's solo aria before the trial exists in two versions: the original and more than acceptable 'Accusata di furto', and the undeniably splendid 'Oh colpo impensato', which Rossini wrote, at Filippo Galli's request, for the Naples revival in 1820.

La gazza ladra more than matched the expectations of La Scala, Milan. The tribunal scene made a powerful impact, as did the long act I finale, which embraces the mayor's harrying of Ninetta, Isacco's testimony, and Ninetta's committal. The opera also enabled Rossini to deploy a wide range of idioms and colours. The unbuttoned mood of the pastoral jollifications prefigures the variety of choral and dance movements in Rossini's next opera, *Armida,* and his last opera, *Guillaume Tell.* There is also evidence of a yet more radical approach to orchestration.

The discovery of the magpie's nest of treasures and Ninetta's last-minute reprieve make for a jubilant close. It may not be as stirring as the end of Beethoven's *Fidelio,* but it brings to a triumphant conclusion an opera which celebrates the bonds of human affection and the resilience of the human spirit in the face of a disorderly world.

CHAPTER THIRTY

Armida *and the New Romanticism*

BY THE AUTUMN OF 1817 NAPLES HAD A NEW TEATRO SAN CARLO, rebuilt and reequipped after the fire, and a resident composer rather different from the one who had given it *Elisabetta, regina d'Inghilterra* and *Otello.* Stylistically speaking, the 25-year-old Rossini was beginning to put on weight. This added girth and power, much in evidence in *La gazza ladra* and to some extent consolidated in *Armida,* can be attributed in part to the natural processes of maturation, though by this stage in Rossini's career we have to reckon with other influences too. In Europe, Romanticism was taking on ever headier and more *outré* forms; in Naples the predilections of Isabella Colbran and Domenico Barbaja were becoming increasingly important. Colbran's style and technique were drawing on Rossini's newly enriched writing for the coloratura voice. As for her personal influence, would he have written music as erotic as much of *Armida* undoubtedly is if some kind of closer relationship was not already afoot? Even if we stop short of casting Colbran as Rossini's Mathilde Wesendonck, there is no doubting a darker, more sensual quality to the writing. There is also a new willfulness in some of the music. The marziale near the end of act 1 would not sound amiss in Verdi's *Il trovatore.* In *Armida,* Rossini's music loses some of its innocence.

The tale of Armida's enslavement of the Christian knight Rinaldo, based on Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata,* had been set many times. Its potential for spectacle alone had made it an established favourite with composers and designers of the high Baroque. The new opera was to be Rossini's debut

in the rebuilt theatre. Marrying his return to the San Carlo with a subject which exploited its state-of-the-art capacity for scenographic display was precisely the kind of commercial opportunity Barbaja was too shrewd to ignore. To judge from letters Rossini wrote in later years, he was temperamentally averse to stories which touched on the bizarre or the diabolic. Spontaneity and naturalism were his watchwords, he told Count Carlo Donà in 1835. What *Armida* proves is that, in the heyday of his career, he was not averse to experiment where it was persuasively propounded.

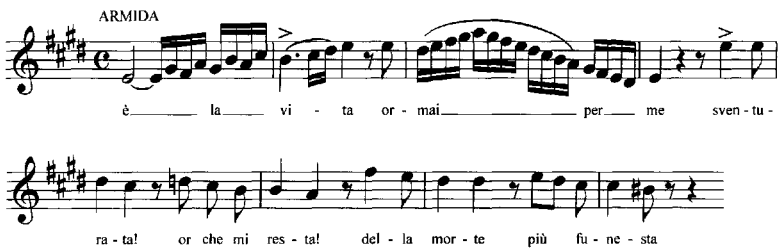
The task of providing the libretto was again given to the house poet, Giovanni Schmidt, who grumbled mightily about being made to bend time-honoured Aristotelian rules to supernatural ends. The subject itself, manly duty challenged by erotic love, had its own built-in tensions, but Schmidt was shrewd enough to realise that central to this particular show was the rather more static idea of 'love intoxicated with happiness'. His text is workmanlike. He clearly knows his Tasso (quotations from the original are embedded in the libretto), and he gives an adequate form to the drama. The shape of act 1, where we might guess at interventions by Rossini himself, is especially interesting. It is a tripartite structure whose first two movements juxtapose the bright world of chivalric endeavour with the gloomier, more sensual world of Armida, and whose third movement dramatically interlocks them. Act 2 has a more fluid, almost baroque feel to it; but act 3 reengages the Christian-pagan, light-and-dark, naif and sentimental oppositions. Characteristically, Rossini does not resolve these tensions. The opera does not end in some minor-key Faustian descent into the abyss, nor in a hymn to reason, nor in erotic apotheosis. It may be less than a day's march from Rossini's sensuous instrumental and vocal writing in 'Dove son io!' to Wagner's 'O sink hernieder', but Rinaldo is no Tristan, and though Armida is one of the first of the great nineteenth-century operatic *femmes fatales,* Rossini is not interested in her immortal soul. As D. H. Lawrence noted, Italian opera runs on impulse and does not worry about the ultimate.

Rinaldo and the Paladin knights are first revealed to us in the overture's D minor maestoso, a march subject which unexpectedly recurs within twenty-seven bars of the start of the allegro. The Paladins' moral fervour and daylight clarity of purpose are well characterised in Goffredo's brief cavatina, a heroic annunciation of the funeral rites of the dead Duke Dudone. In fact, the succession to Dudone proves to be a controversial issue;

it recurs throughout the first act, in the finale, and in the big three-part aria for Gernando, 'Non soffrirò l'offesa', the only traditional 'closed' aria in the opera. Gernando is Rinaldo's jealous rival and one of six roles, not all of them major, requiring a tenor. This is the voice type which gives to the chivalric world of Armida its peculiar *tinta;* it is also a voice type for which Rossini writes with increasing assurance.

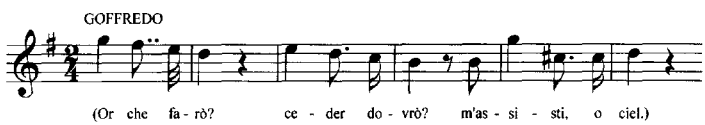
It is into this world that the Circe-like Armida insinuates herself. She has no entrance aria, a nice paradox given the degree to which Armida is *Armida.* She is, nonetheless, immediately and strikingly characterised in the celebrated quartet 'Sventurata! or che mi resta?'. On the page, the music looks merely florid (ex. 27); but as Maria Callas memorably demonstrated in performances in Florence in 1952, and as Colbran must have done in Naples in 1817, this is music in which the bel canto style is precisely and powerfully used to convey an impression of Armida—part woman, part sorceress—caught in the toils of her own fantasy.

Ex. 27



The Paladin knights are intimidated by Armida, their consciences stirred by her emotional blackmailing. In a famous phrase (ex. 28), which Rossini may have owed in part to his Neapolitan predecessor Giuseppe Giordani, Goffredo, already overwhelmed by Armida, asks what is to be done, though it is inevitable that her disingenuous request for a troupe of choicest knights to help restore her to her throne will be granted.

Ex. 28



At the centre of act 1 is the first and more famous of the love duets Rossini wrote for Armida and Rinaldo, 'Amor, possente nome!' For the modern tenor it must be a tantalising piece, its elegant lines and heart-easing modulations coupled with some exceptionally difficult internal embellishment (ex. 29).

Ex. 29

RINALDO

su quel soa——ve lab - bro nel mio do -

len - - - te—— cor!

A standard tripartite Rossini duet, it defines personalities and situations through sensuous invention and formal patterning. The lyric section in G major, 'Vacilla a quegli accenti', is no mere essay in swooning thirds and sixths; the quasi-canonic writing takes on a mimetic function, suggesting Rinaldo's dangerous proximity to, yet life-saving distance from, Armida's finely spun web of sexual allure. Even where the voices merge, Rossini makes distinctions: Armida's line rising in conventional triplets whilst, on the words 'no, no, non ho' Rinaldo's drifts helplessly down in chromatic

steps from G to E before being drawn up again into the triplet motion of Armida's plaint.

The effect of this first love duet is sustained beyond its end. Ostensibly the start of the act 1 finale returns us to the world of martial endeavour. Jealous of Rinaldo's political success, Gernando challenges Rinaldo to a duel and is killed. 'Che terribile momento!' reflect Armida and Rinaldo; but, insidiously, the contemplative moment seems to be more an extension of the love duet than a genuine reflection of the breach of chivalric decorum which has lead to the death. Goffredo is sent for, and in a second duet within the finale's structure Armida expresses her disquiet at a lover who is so exposed to mortal danger. 'Duty' is Rinaldo's answer, but the A flat lullaby is delusive. As the music sinks towards E flat minor, their disquiet is a shared disquiet. At this point, Rossini's music seems to suggest, Rinaldo is finally lost. In the aftershock of the confrontation with Gernando, he allows himself to slip into a childlike acquiescence to Armida's emotional demands. Goffredo returns and challenges him; but both Rinaldo and Armida are now determined to seize what the libretto calls Fortune's proffered forelock.

In act 2 Rossini enters a ghastly, Fury-infested forest, a Weberish world which predates *Der Freischütz* by three and a half years. Never before has Rossini resorted so promiscuously to the use of diminished harmonies, nor has he written for brass quite so robustly. The first chorus, in A minor, is imposing, the second, 'Di ferro e fiamme cinti', even more so. Here the declamatory choral writing, bright trumpets, and chilling trombones powerfully embody the Furies' fretful assertion of vanished power in what is a defiant narrative of their Fall. As the grisly forest vanishes, the stage directions tell us:

> We see a chariot, drawn by two dragons bearing Armida and Rinaldo. Armida changes the chariot into a throne of flowers. The dragons disappear. Rinaldo is almost beside himself with surprise.

There follows the most erotically intense of the duets between Rinaldo and Armida ('Dove son io!'). A cello-led ritornello of sultry charm takes up almost half the length of a number which is brief as it is intense.

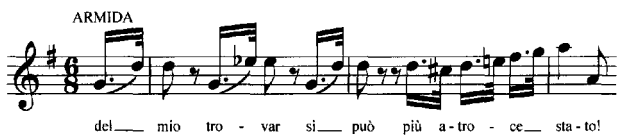
In the baroque world of *Armida,* erotic dalliance is quickly subsumed by scenic transformation, the music welling from E flat to E as a great palace swims into view. Armida's tema con variazioni, 'D'Amore al dolce

impero', reworks the idea of *carpe diem,* 'seize the day'. A virtuoso display piece, it is the blandest of the music Rossini writes for Armida. It remains, however, stylistically suited to its context. Passion is further sublimated in choral tribute and ritual dance. This is Rossini's first full ballet. In the lovely E flat andante, solo cello and horn are again prominent.

Act 3 reestablishes the tension between the two opposing worlds. Ubaldo and Carlo, the knights dispatched to rescue Rinaldo, survey the innocent-seeming rural scene in an imaginatively scored pastoral duet in 6/8 time, though fear soon sweeps over them. In a thunderous allegro, very differently scored, they denounce the falsity of the world in which they find themselves. A bevy of nymphs attempt to seduce them, to no avail. When Armida and Rinaldo appear, the two men hide. In the duet 'Soavi catene' the lovers' voices and a solo violin do indeed conjure sweet chains of sound. At the heart of the act is the famous moment when Rinaldo sees his besotted image reflected in the adamantine shield which Ubaldo and Carlo hold up before him. The trio for three tenors which follows, 'In quale aspetto imbelle', is a unique phenomenon: a brilliant realisation of the moment and a thrilling sound concept in its own right.

For Rinaldo's parting from Armida, her despair, and final furious arousal, Rossini returns to a richer palette. 'Se al mio crudel tormento' takes us back to the musical language of the act 1 quartet. The parting of the lovers is imaginatively handled, the harmonies changing beneath eighteen bars of a single repeated F sharp, dropping us down into Armida's 'Dove son io . . . Fuggì?'. Stripped of her powers, she is nothing more or less than a defeated, grieving woman (ex. 30). It is a soliloquy of near tragic import.

Ex. 30



A curious piece of allegory follows. Armida is confronted by the spirits of Vengeance and Love. Love is banished but briefly restored in a passage illumined by touching flute descants, before the Furies are summoned in a passage notable for more diminished harmonies and ominous semitone

descents. The opera ends sonorously in E flat as Armida mounts her dragon-drawn chariot and prepares to ride off in what we must assume is a fatal pursuit.

Between the autumn of 1817 and the summer of 1818 Rossini dashed off two operas for performance away from Naples: *Adelaide di Borgogna* and *Adina*. Along with the pasticcio *Eduardo e Cristina,* which he cobbled together for performance in Venice in April 1819, they are the only operas of his mature years which make no significant addition to the development of his style.

Rossini composed *Adelaide di Borgogna* for Rome's Teatro Argentina in December 1817, midway between *Armida* and *Mosè in Egitto,* neither of which it resembles. (Stylistically, it is closer to *La Cenerentola,* written for Rome's Teatro Valle earlier in the year.) Giovanni Federico Schmidt's libretto concerns itself with a sequence of events which eventually led to the crowning of the German Otto the Great (912–973) as the first Holy Roman emperor in Rome in 962.

Lotario, a Burgundian overlord and Italy's first self-styled king, has been poisoned by Berengario, Margrave of Ivrea, who now rules in his stead. Lotario's widow, Adelaide, a Burgundian princess, 'young, witty, and beautiful', has survived but is under siege in the fortress of Canossa (romantically but wrongly placed by Schmidt 'near the lake of Garda') awaiting a promised intervention by the widower king Otto (Ottone), to whom she has offered her hand in marriage. In the opera's first concerted number, Adelaide rejects Berengario's suggestion that his son, Adelberto, should marry her in return for Adelaide's restoration to her husband's throne.

Act 1 is concerned with the arrival of German troops on Italian soil and a serpentine diplomatic offensive by Adelberto. By portraying Adelaide as a vicious schemer, Adelberto convinces the German king that the situation is more dangerous than he had imagined. Shaken but undeterred, Ottone demands to meet her. The encounter provides him with a very different impression of Adelaide. An alliance is announced, military and matrimonial, between the widowed princess and the widower king, but the fortress is surprised before the wedding can take place. At the start of act 2, Ottone has fled, Adelaide is distraught, and Adelberto bemused, torn between love for Adelaide and duty towards his mother, Eurice. In the

end, Berengario's army is routed by Ottone, who takes Adelaide as his wife and future empress.

The speed at which the opera was written is betrayed by a lack of large ensembles and by the use of secco recitative (cut to the bone by Rossini, at some cost to Schmidt's historically based story-telling). The autograph manuscript is lost but it must be assumed that the recitatives, along with the arias for Berengario and Eurice, are the work of collaborators. The overture is that of *La cambiale di matrimonio* skilfully reorchestrated. All of which gave Rossini time to concentrate on the three principal players: Ottone, implausibly cast as a travesty role, Adelaide, and Adelberto. Though rarely memorable in its own right, theirs is the best music in the opera, written for a trio of distinguished singers: the coloratura contralto Elisa Pinotti, Elisabetta Manfredini-Guarmani, who had created the role of Amenaide in *Tancredi,* and Savino Monelli, the first Giannetto in *La gazza ladra.* Highlights include the act 1 'embassy' duet between Ottone and Adelberto, Adelberto's act 2 aria 'Grida, o natura, e desta', and Ottone's showpiece finale.

Virtually all the solo and ensemble work for Adelaide is fine—Rossini catching something of the woman's stature and allure. (The real Adelaide, 931–999, was canonized by Pope Urban II.) Even here, though, Rossini was not above falling back on pre-written material. Adelaide's final scene and aria, 'Cingi la benda candida', is a re-run of Ceres's grand aria in *Le nozze di Teti, e di Peleo.* Only the cabaletta is new. Rossini had already used music from the original cabaletta in two earlier Rome operas, *Il barbiere di Siviglia* and *La Cenerentola.* A third outing in front of the Teatro Argentina's volatile and sharp-eared audience would have been professional suicide.

Adina, Rossini's last Italian farsa, was a response to a private commission from a Portuguese patron which Rossini honoured in the spring of 1818. The libretto, by the Marchese Gherardo Bevilacqua-Aldobrandini, bears similarities to Felice Romani's *Il califfo e la schiava,* which Francesco Basili set at much the same time. The plot rings minor changes on the familiar seraglio story. The Caliph of Baghdad (bass) has fallen for a beautiful young slave girl, Adina (soprano). She is not averse to his approaches, but the reappearance of her boyfriend, Selimo (tenor), changes the situation. Selimo persuades her to elope with him, abetted by his servant Mustafa (buffo), who works as a gardener in the royal palace. Abductions from seraglios being in the nature of things problematic, the plan goes awry.

In a vivid little scene among the fishermen of the Tigris, the escape party is arrested. Selimo is sentenced to death; Adina swoons. It is only then that a medallion is found about her neck which reveals that she is in fact the caliph's long-lost daughter. Little of the intermediate music is new, and there is a heavy reliance on secco recitative, but Rossini did take pains over the introduzione (Selim and Mustafa in the seraglio garden), the central elopement and arrest sequence, and the finale, which is built around a modest showpiece scene and aria for Adina. As she slowly revives ('Dove sono? Ancor respiro?'), her father and her lover predict for her a cloudlessly happy future.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

Mosè in Egitto (1818–1819) *and* Moïse et Pharaon (1827)

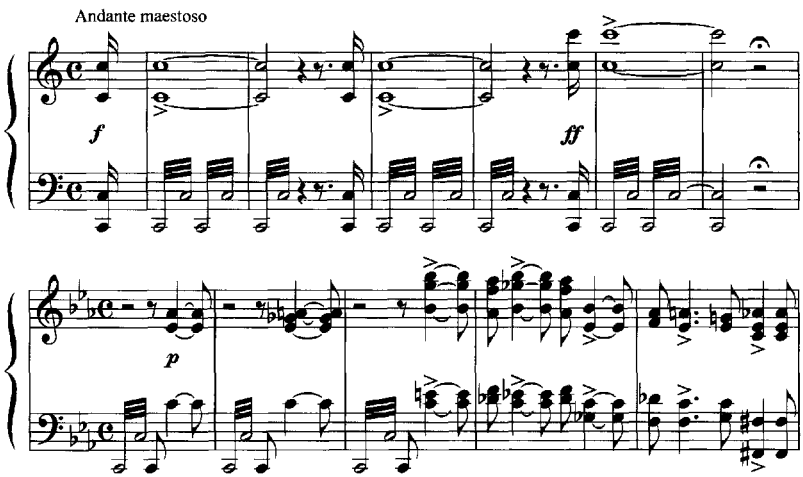
IN ITS ORIGINAL FORM *MOSÈ IN EGITTO* IS AN *AZIONE TRAGICO-SACRA*, a biblical drama suitable for staging during Lent. As was the custom, Rossini and his librettist, Andrea Leone Tottola, made the restriction palatable by grafting a secular narrative onto a sacred one. In this instance the story of the Israelites' flight from Egypt is joined with Francesco Ringhieri's 1760 romance *L'Osiride.* Thus a young Jewish girl, Elcia, falls in love with the Pharaoh's son, Osiride. Like Verdi's *Aida,* it is a tale of the tension between love and duty, of disputed homelands, and of the counterpointing of the bonds of family and the bonds of country.

For much of its length *Mosè in Egitto* has a guileless beauty about it, appropriate to the theme of young love and young nationhood, qualities which are not so much sacrificed (much of the best music is preserved) as choked and smothered in the grandiose revision Rossini prepared for the Paris Opéra in 1827. Wherever we turn in *Mosè in Egitto,* whether to the lovely quintet 'Celeste man placata!' in act 1, the famous quartet 'Mi manca la voce' in act 2, or Moses's celebrated prayer in act 3, we hear melodies that are effortlessly graceful as only Rossini could make them. The first two acts of the original score are notable for the quality of the duets. The most memorable is the woodland vigil for the lovers in act 2, 'Quale assalto, qual cimento!' where Elcia's finely drifted line and Osiride's parlando response is evidence of the flexibility and ease with which Rossini deploys the forms he has perfected. It was a duet, Stendhal tells us,

which Colbran and Nozzari made much of. There is also an earlier duet for the lovers in act 1, 'Ah! se puoi così lasciarmi'; an exquisite short duet for Elcia and her confidant, Amenosi, within the act 1 finale; and a duet for Osiride and his father, 'Parlar, spiegar non posso', which reveals the gamesome quality of this ill-fated young man. Orchestrations which make extensive use of strings, harp, and solo horn help give the opera its particular *tinta*.

In the dramatically more exacting original version, Osiride is struck dead before the second act is over. This is no way to treat one's romantic lead, but *Mosè in Egitto* is not only a love story. What makes the opera distinctive is the seriousness and sensitivity with which Rossini addresses the all-pervading Old Testament theme. As Stendhal's graphic reports made clear,[1] the 'Scene of the Shadows' is one of the most striking of all Rossini's openings. There is no overture, simply three summoning Cs followed by a charged transition to the C minor semiquaver figuration which will insinuate itself beneath the broken utterances of the Egyptians whom Moses has plunged into darkness and dismay (ex. 31).

Ex. 31



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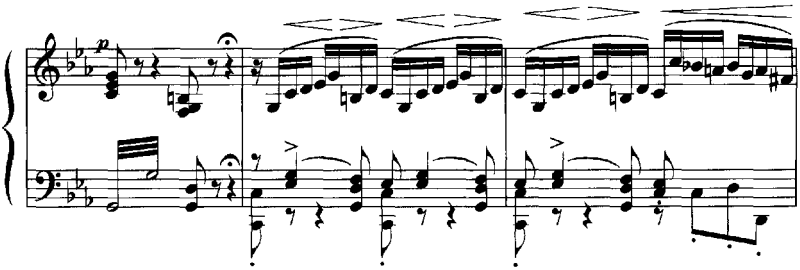
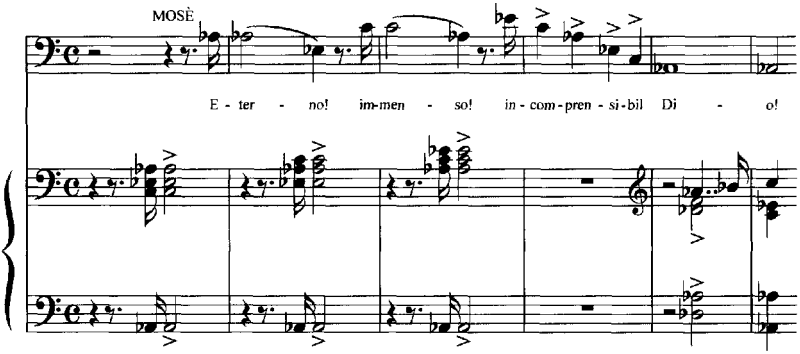
[1] SVR, 319–20; p. 53 above.

Ex. 31 (*Continued*)



Rossini follows this 75-bar prelude with Moses's invocation 'Eterno! immenso! incomprensibil Dio!' (ex. 32), a dramatic recitative accompanied with hieratic spareness by trombones, horns, and woodwinds.

Ex. 32



The model here may be the 'Tuba mirum' from Mozart's *Requiem,* just as the brilliant C major transformation which follows, Moses restoring light to Egypt, suggests a debt to the first scene of Haydn's *The Creation.* Whatever the models, Rossini's music works in its own right, grave and blazing by turns.

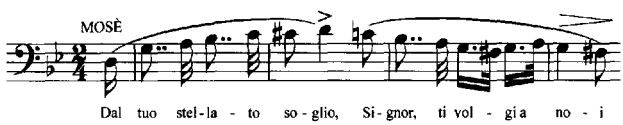
As in all the best Rossini operas, ensembles and choral numbers are the key to *Mosè in Egitto.* Tottola's libretto includes solo arias for Moses, Pharaoh, and his wife Amaltea, a woman sympathetic to the Israelite cause; yet, since none of the characters functions in the larger scheme of

the opera as a psychologically distinct individual, Rossini did his best to ignore the solo numbers. Amaltea's aria was borrowed from an earlier Lenten offering, *Ciro in Babilonia;* the Moses and Pharaoh arias were farmed out. (The aria Rossini eventually wrote for Pharaoh, 'Cade dal ciglio il velo', is rather less good than the one originally supplied by Carafa.) None of these solo numbers survived into the Paris revision.

The drama's central crisis, the death of Osiride, is splendidly engineered. Named as co-ruler, Osiride proves to be what we have long suspected: a nasty piece of work and less wise politically than his vacillating father. The crisis grows in swift and vivid recitatives towards a confrontation between Osiride, Moses, and the forlorn and emotionally riven Elcia. Her 'Porgi la destra amata' is a tender expiatory piece, the ornamentation, evidently written with Colbran in mind, capable of great poignancy. Osiride's insolent challenge to Moses is met by a fatal lightning shaft. It is a notable coup de théâtre. Pharaoh's lament for his dead son provides an example of Rossini's telling use of grotesque orchestral colour: the eerie pizzicato strappato an effect worthy of Berlioz. In the wake of Osiride's death, Elcia becomes febrile, a nascent Lucia di Lammermoor. Her twice-repeated cries 'È spento il caro bene/l'oggetto del tuo amor!' are magnificent. The breaking up of this scene is one of the more serious failings of the Paris revision.

Act 3 provides a coda to these traumatic events. Having travelled to the edge of the Red Sea, the Israelites can go no further. It is at this point that Moses leads them into the great prayer, 'Dal tuo stellato soglio', added by Rossini in 1819. The melody (ex. 33) is a remarkably simple one.

Ex. 33



First stated in G minor, it is answered in the relative major and restated in the minor. In the reprise of the choral response to the third stanza, it moves to G major, the opera's second transforming switch from minor to major.

For the 1827 Paris revision, Rossini revised the story, renamed the characters,[2] contrived to give Moses a more prominent role in the drama, and provided a great deal of spectacle, for which numerous dances, divertissements, and choral numbers were added, some newly written, some making use of music from works such as *Armida* and *Bianca e Falliero.* Three numbers are entirely new: the quartet and chorus 'Dieu de la paix', Anaï's act 4 air 'Quelle horrible destinée', and the concluding, and rarely performed, 'cantique', 'Chantons, bénissons le Seigneur', a prayer of thanksgiving sung by the Israelites beneath clearing skies on the Red Sea's distant 'flowery shore'.

The new act 1 has its splendours, notably in the choral writing; but to anyone familiar with the economy and integrity of the original, it is so much musical rodomontade. It is also difficult to be sanguine about the scissors-and-paste editing of the extant music. The new act 1 inherits the lovers' A major duet from act 1 of *Mosè in Egitto,* and the earlier act 1's finale, is now used to bring about the plague of darkness rather than, as before, to reciprocate it with fire and hailstones. Act 2 of *Moïse et Pharaon* incorporates act 1 of *Mosè in Egitto* from ex.31 to the end of the quintet; it also takes in the duet for Pharaoh and Osiride and the original act 2 finale, omitting the death of Osiride and turning Elcia's 'Porgi la destra amata' into 'Ah! d'une tender mère', an appeal by Pharaoh's wife Sinaïde to her lovelorn son.

Act 3 of the revision, set in the Temple of Isis, finds a place for the quartet 'Mi manca la voce' and the new ballet. By the start of act 4 Rossini and his librettists had still not used the lovers' G major duet from act 2 of *Mosè in Egitto.* In the earlier opera the prince is already dead by the time we reach the banks of the Red Sea. Here he is still alive, allowing Rossini, like Puccini in the last act of *Manon Lescaut,* to give us a love duet amid the desert wastes. It is an awkward transplant. The music suggests young love in a woodland setting; here the love is old, the landscape barren. To this, Rossini adds the scène et air 'Quelle horrible destinée', a grand E minor/E major piece full of powerfully swerving harmonies, at the end of which Anaï has taken the tribe's advice and become a born-again Israelite.

[2] Moïse (Mosè), Pharaon (Faraone), Aménophis (Osiride), Anaï (Elcia), Sinaïde (Amaltea), Eliézer (Aronne), Aufide (Mambre), Marie (Amenosi). *Moïse et Pharaon* adds a High Priest whose name, confusingly, is Osiride.

All of which rather upstages the famous prayer, dramatically and harmonically. It is often said that there is no evidence of long-term harmonic thinking in Rossini's operas. Such a view neglects the unassuming skill with which Rossini invariably deploys primary keys and colours. In *Mosè in Egitto,* as in the majority of his operas, major keys predominate. There is a fondness in this score for F, G, and A, with E and E flat added for ceremonial music, and C held more or less skillfully in reserve. It can be no coincidence that the *Mosè in Egitto* ends in C major, with the minor-key highpoints (the C minor 'Scene of the Shadows', the C minor close to act 1, and the G minor of Moses's prayer) strategically placed within the structure.

By contrast, the 1827 revision is quite indiscriminate. It begins in D and ends somewhat indeterminately in C (or F if we include the 'Cantique'). The new act 1 finale ends in C minor, anticipating and undermining the C minor of the 'Scene of the Shadows', which is now poorly placed at the start of act 2. Throughout *Moïse et Pharaon* Rossini seems impervious to the effect of such juxtapositions. In the revised act 4 the prayer competes not only with 'Quelle horrible destinée' but with the G major tonality of the transplanted duet. Even the end is unsatisfying, fading out in the revision into one of those night-and-silence closes which will become familiar in the nineteenth century. *Mosè in Egitto* is the source of the idea which accompanies the Egyptians' watery demise (a glorious melody underpinned with simple mastery by quiet brass chords and timpani rolls). In the original the melody is framed, and the opera itself optimistically rounded out, by a buoyant orchestral stretta.

Stendhal once said of Rossini 'he creates without knowing how'. *Moïse et Pharaon* suggests a diminution of that instinct (Balzac thought it a factor in Rossini's decision to retire from operatic composition), though it is only fair to note that, experienced as they were, librettists de Jouy and Balochi found the task of writing a new poem to old music strangely unsatisfying, and that the revision was carried out relatively quickly in the winter of 1826–1827 against the background of the final illness of Rossini's mother, who died on 20 February 1827.

Mosè in Egitto also had its teething troubles, but the finished score possesses integrity rooted in instinct and sensibility. As music-drama, it looks back to the worlds of Gluck and Monteverdi. Seen and heard in a theatre appropriate to its intimate scale, it should always make its mark.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

A Lost Masterpiece and a Forgotten Favourite: Ermione *and* Ricciardo e Zoraide

FOR MORE THAN A CENTURY AND A HALF *RICCIARDO E ZORAIDE* AND *Ermione* were the forgotten operas of Rossini's Naples years. The neglect of *Ermione* was as sudden as it was extraordinary. Taken off after a handful of performances in March and April 1819, it was not staged again until 1987, when it was successfully revived at the Pesaro Festival in a production featuring Montserrat Caballé, Marilyn Horne, Chris Merritt, and Rockwell Blake. Confirmed as the lost masterpiece a handful of scholars and writers had claimed it to be, it was widely revived in the 1990s.

The case of *Ricciardo e Zoraide* is less extreme. A fine but less radical and in some respects less obviously revivable work, it was written in the autumn of 1818, shortly before *Ermione*, at the midway point in Rossini's Neapolitan career. It was much liked at its prima and played regularly throughout Europe until the late 1830s. Thereafter, a lack of recognisable characters with which later generations of opera-goers could identify, and what was said to be an incomprehensible plot, pushed it to the fringes of the repertory, from where it was rescued in 1990 by a successful Pesaro Festival staging and, five years later, by a fine Opera Rara recording.

The plot of *Ricciardo e Zoraide* does have a somewhat convoluted hinterland; yet, like Verdi's *Il trovatore,* it works perfectly well in the theatre, where the music carries the action forward in simple narrative stages. This was Francesco Berio di Salsa's second libretto for Rossini. *Otello* had been a bold choice of subject; *Ricciardo e Zoraide* was a good deal more pretentious. Looking for an action similar to that of *Tancredi* or *Armida,* Berio

lighted on an episode in Niccolò Forteguerri's *Ricciardetto,* a mock-heroic epic in thirty cantos which had enjoyed a measure of success with literary dilettanti in the years following its completion in 1725. As a source it was not entirely practical. In order to make the episode work operatically, Berio had to modify the plot, draft in an important new character, and remove all traces of the poem's comic and satiric purpose.

As act 1 unfolds, we learn that Agorante, king of Nubia, has conquered the nearby territory of Prince Ircano and kidnapped the prince's daughter, Zoraide, whom he intends to marry, sidelining his existing wife, Zomira (Berio's addition). A Christian ambassador arrives in Agorante's capital to intercede on behalf of Zoraide and her fellow prisoners of war. With him, disguised as an African guide, is fellow Christian, Ricciardo, Zoraide's inamorato. The revised scenario places Agorante at the centre of the action. Other characters emerge more tentatively and rarely command the stage as Agorante does: Zoraide, because she is defeated and downcast (and because Isabella Colbran increasingly preferred roles which germinate slowly and blossom late); Ricciardo, because he is acting under cover for much of the opera; Ircano, because he too is acting under cover when he finally appears midway through act 2 as his daughter's 'champion'; Zomira, because Agorante's loathing obliges her to plot by indirection from the sidelines.

The scale of the drama is suggested by the grand opening sequence, which unfolds against the background of the citadel in the Nubian capital to which Agorante and his army now return in triumph. The 25-minute movement is structured like a series of Chinese boxes. The overture, whose coda does not arrive until the very end of the sequence, frames the entry of the victorious army, which in turn frames the cavatina in which Agorante proclaims his victory and reflects lovingly on his most cherished conquest, Zoraide. Crucial to Rossini's strategy here is the use of a stage band, the noisiest of his many bequests to nineteenth-century Italian opera. The overture begins with a polyphonic meditation in C minor during which the curtain rises and the stage action begins. This is interrupted by the strains of the offstage band. A second meditation follows, horn-led with gambolling clarinet and flute solos, which concludes with the arrival of the victorious army and its attendant musicians.

Nubian maidens continue the celebrations in scene 2, framing the melancholy reflections of Zoraide and her confidante, Fatima. This is another box within a box. It is also typical of an opera which repeatedly

moves the focus back towards the reflective and the humane. This pattern is evident in all the ensembles where crisis beckons. In the act 1 trio, during which Agorante confronts both his actual wife and his would-be wife, an offstage chorus of Nubian maidens (the accompaniment, for four clarinets, two bassoons, and harp, has been much admired) prays that Zoraide might yield to love. It is a device which Rossini revives in the prison scene in act 2, where an offstage chorus prays that Zoraide might 'flee her senseless love'. At the start of the act 1 finale, during the course of which Ernesto makes it plain that Agorante's refusal to release Zoraide to the Christians will be construed as an act of war, Rossini writes an exquisite canonic ensemble for four voices. Again in act 2, at the heart of the scene in which Ircano steps forward as Zoraide's champion against Agorante, there is a 30-bar a cappella meditation of great beauty. This preoccupation with humility rather than pride, humanity rather than aggression, may explain Rossini's strange decision to set Zomira's act 2 'revenge' aria as an understated aria di sorbetto.

The opera's final movement brings Zoraide centre stage, her long-delayed solo moment built into the act 2 finale. Ircano has wounded and defeated Agorante in their 'challenge', but Ricciardo has been unmasked, arrested, and sentenced to death. Ircano too has been seized and condemned to die. In her cantabile, Zoraide pleads for their release. When her plea falls on deaf ears, she yields to Agorante's demand that she marry him. At that point the citadel is 'surprised' by Christian knights. Agorante is captured, and the prisoners released. In a spirit of Christian charity, Ricciardo forgives Agorante, who, recognising his rival's magnanimity of spirit, repents of his tyrannous behaviour. There are similarities here to the way the dramatic outcome is managed in *La gazza ladra*. That said, *Ricciardo e Zoraide* is a very different kind of work musically. With its elegant vocal writing, richly inventive orchestrations, and new and radical use of musical space, it is a score whose boldness and charm transcend the limitations of its libretto.

Rossini's next opera for the San Carlo benefited from a very different kind of libretto, derived from Racine's tragedy *Andromaque* (1667). Taken, with modifications, from the play by Euripides, the tragedy was the 28-year-old Racine's first popular success. The action, which Tottola's libretto loyally replicates, is set in the court of Pyrrhus, king of Epirus, at the

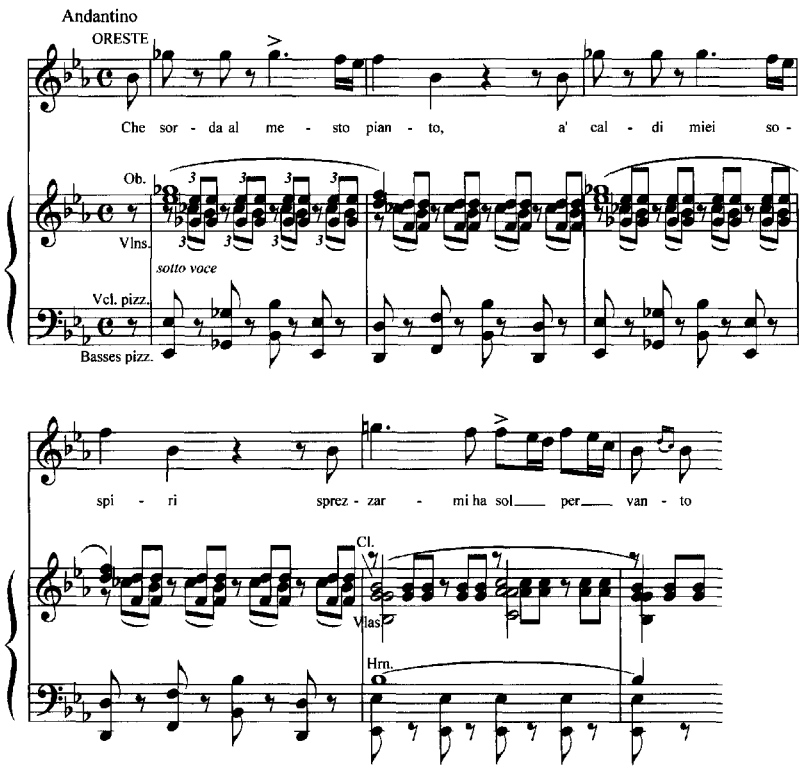
end of the Trojan Wars. A Greek delegation, headed by Orestes, is demanding the extradition of the child Astyanax, son of Andromache, widow of Hector, whose death the Greeks fear the boy may one day wish to avenge. Though betrothed to the Greek princess Hermione, Pyrrhus is besotted with Andromache, who does not return his interest. The plight of Astyanax places a powerful new weapon in Pyrrhus's hand, so much so that in the opera's act I finale a terrified Andromache agrees to marry Pyrrhus if it will guarantee her son's safety. Appalled by this turn of events, Hermione exploits the passion Orestes has for her. On Hermione's orders, Orestes murders Pyrrhus, only to find himself disowned by Hermione, who kills herself.

Whereas *Ricciardo e Zoraide* had been an essentially benign work, *Ermione* is a tale of high passion and brutal murder, the principal characters locked in a tightly organised series of soliloquies, duologues, and public confrontations into whose orbit the comprimario characters and chorus are also powerfully drawn. There are some procedural similarities with *Ricciardo e Zoraide,* though in each instance the effect is very different. The overture again incorporates a choral episode, in this instance a chorus of unseen Trojan prisoners lamenting their fate. Yet what was rousing and picturesque in the earlier opera is here grim and unexpected. The *Ermione* overture is also far more tightly written, from the stark descending F minor scale at the start to the furious stretta at its close. With characters as proud and self-absorbed as these, Rossini deploys the coloratura style in a powerfully declamatory manner, the singers frequently instructed to colour and shade their music in specific ways. It is characteristic of the opera as a whole that, in her act I duet with Pyrrhus, Ermione is directed to register irony, indignation, and anger within the space of just three lines.

In *Ermione* there is no doubt that it is the eponymous heroine who is the key to the drama, unlike Ricciardo and Zoraide, who spend the larger part of the opera as its passive agents, roles which in *Ermione* are accorded to Andromache and to a lesser extent Pyrrhus and Orestes. Andromache is defined by her act I cavatina, where it becomes clear that what remains of her power to love is directed exclusively to her son and the memory of her dead husband. The cabaletta suggests that she has an element of wildness in her nature, but the E flat andantino, with its sostenuto viola writing and rapt cantabile line, has a regality of utterance which anticipates some of Bellini's finest work.

Pyrrhus too is granted a powerful aria of self-revelation, 'Balena in man del figlio'. Delivered after a bilious row with the two women and the presentation of the Greek demand for Astyanax's death, it is one of the longest and most wide-ranging of all Rossini's tenor arias. In the quicker outer movements we hear the instability and blustering self-importance of the man; yet there is real tenderness in his address to Andromache in the central andante. Orestes's entrance is an example of Rossini's increasing desire to open out and experiment with the shape of closed forms. Orestes is a sympathetic figure whose passion for Hermione will eventually destroy him. His first words, 'Reggia abborrita!' 'Detested palace!' reflect his anger at being in the home of Pyrrhus, the man who has robbed him of Hermione's affections. The allegro scena in E flat, with its orchestral introduction and recitative, leads directly into the lyric Andantino in the tonic minor (ex. 34).

Ex. 34



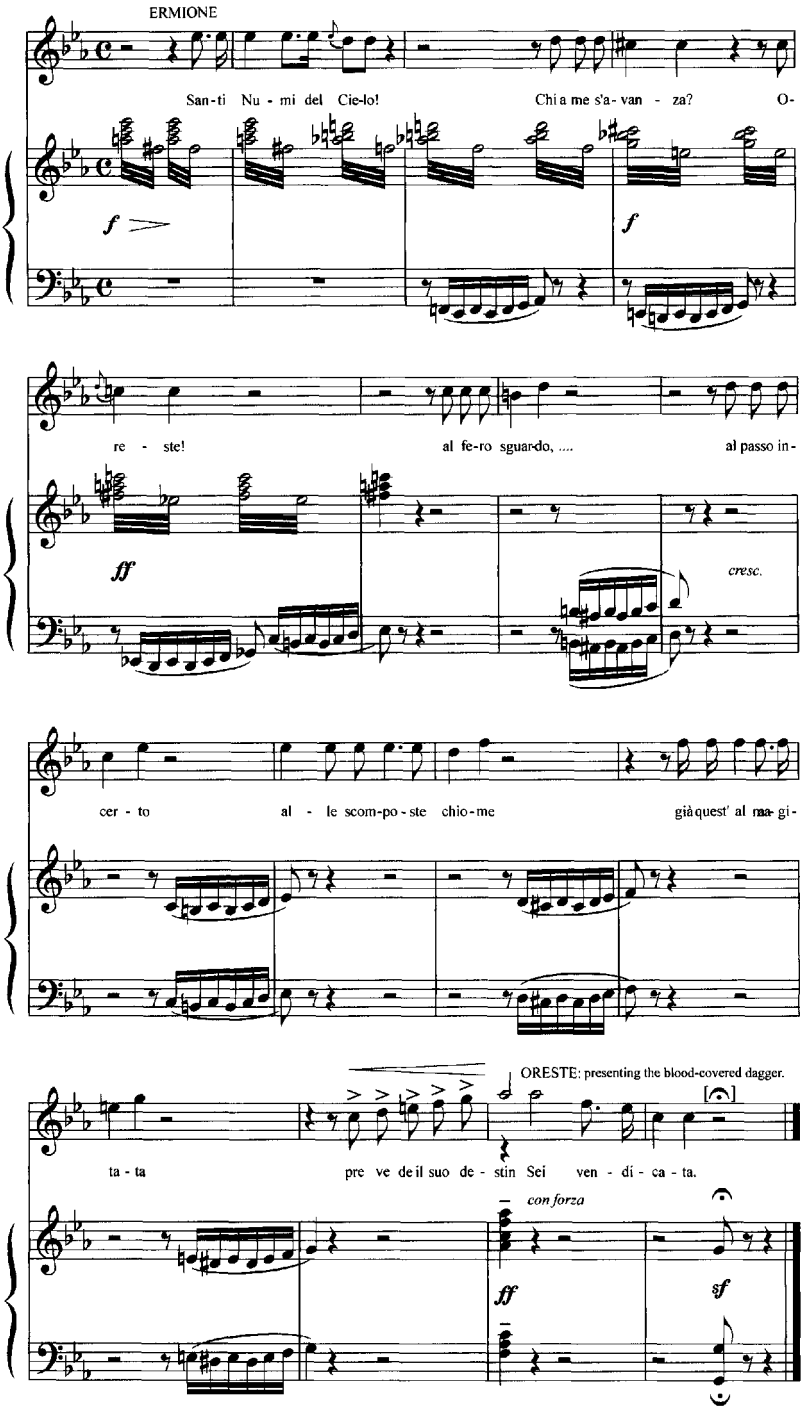
In the nineteenth century the aria won a regular place in recital programmes. In the stage version there is an important subsidiary part for Pylades. He urges restraint and offers simple advice: forget Hermione and concentrate on your ambassadorial role. The music of the cabaletta is rather more gauche but it makes an important psychological point. Orestes may be emotionally naive, but it is his very naivety which Hermione will exploit to such deadly effect later in the drama.

The relationship between Orestes and Hermione briefly flowers as Pyrrhus's stratagems drive Hermione into bold retaliatory gestures of her own. 'Amarti?' 'Do you love?' she demands at the launch of the act 1 finale, to which a despairing Orestes responds in phrases which are harmonically tense and charged with feeling. It is Pyrrhus, however, who dominates the finale, shamelessly exploiting Hermione's love for himself and Andromache's love for her son. The climax comes in a great declamatory outburst in which repeated Ds are underpinned by massive orchestral chording. The writing vividly conveys the proud singleness of a man caught in the toils of an obsessive passion.

Act 2 belongs to Hermione, its critical moments derived from the final scene of act 4 and act 5 of Racine's play. First, in music which suggests genuine love, she begs Phoenix to tell Pyrrhus of her desperation and tears. In the aria 'Amata, l'amai' a new confidence begins to assert itself, only to be dashed by the sound of an offstage wedding march as Pyrrhus prepares to lead Andromache to the altar. There is a further lyric section, in which Hermione contemplates her loss and its apparent injustice, followed by a striking passage of syllabic declamation in which she demands to know why the gods do not punish such treachery. It is at this point that Orestes enters. Hermione again asks if he loves her. 'Can you doubt it?' he replies. To his horror, Hermione hands him the dagger with which he must kill Pyrrhus. During these exchanges Rossini takes the overture's crescendo theme and holds it, stripped of the actual crescendo, as an icy ostinato. In a state of near collapse, Orestes leaves whilst Hermione sings a cabaletta of extraordinary wildness—the tonality, the phrasing, the vocal registers all contributing to our sense of the character's searing unpredictability.

A duet for Phoenix and Pylades provides a brief breathing space before the finale, which begins agitato in C minor, moves through powerful, sequential writing for Hermione, and reaches its climax in the horrifying entry of the blood-spattered Orestes (ex. 35). His cry 'Sei vendicata!' is one of the most powerful moments in early nineteenth-century opera.

Ex. 35


ERMIONE
San-ti Nu-mi del Cie-lo! Chi a me s'a-van-za? O-
f
f
re-ste! al fe-ro sguar-do, ... al passo in-
ff
cresc.
cer-to al-le scom-po-ste chio-me già quest' al ma-gi-
ORESTE: presenting the blood-covered dagger.
ta-ta pre ve de il suo de-stin Sei ven-di-ca-ta.
con forza
ff
sf

Hermione's response is strangely muted, but Orestes is too excited to notice. Suddenly she turns on him. Stunned, he asks, 'Did you not persuade me to this crime?' 'No,' she replies. 'The voice you heard was not mine. It was the voice of a delirious, love-maddened woman.' Too late, Orestes realises he has been duped; even in death, Hermione loves Pyrrhus. Hermione now calls on the Furies to destroy Orestes, but he is dragged away by Pylades and his followers, as Hermione swoons into insensibility: an onstage representation of a death which in Racine is described by Pylades in rather bloodier detail.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

Rossini and Scott: La donna del lago

As the first full-fledged opera to be derived from the works of Sir Walter Scott, *La donna del lago* is something of a trail blazer. The poet Leopardi thought it 'a stupendous thing', and Halévy vowed to read its first act through once more before he died. For over fifty years it was revived, adapted, and cannibalised. Even today it has a tentative hold on the repertoire, though the intimate scale of much of the music—its lyric-idyllic style—is ill suited to larger houses, however grand the piece can be made to seem scenically. The work's other principal limitation is its sometimes static second act. Chorley thought the act little more than a 'concert in costume'. Yet, as Philip Gossett has argued, the act works well enough if its finest number, the Trio 'Alla ragion, deh! rieda', is adequately performed. In Rome, and later in Paris, Rossini lacked suitable tenors and so could not perform the Trio.

Scott's poem had been published in 1810, before his emergence as a cult figure in European Romanticism. Like much of Scott's work, it is set in a world in which romance, chivalry, and prowess in arms are primary concerns. The central character is Scotland's King James V, a mysterious figure identified throughout as James Fitz-James (Uberto in Rossini's opera). As a young boy, James had been imprisoned by Archibald Douglas. He escaped, and Douglas fled the land, only to return under the protection of the formidable tribal chieftain Roderick Dhu (Rodrigo). As an earnest of his gratitude to Roderick, Douglas has promised him the hand of his

daughter Ellen (Elena); but Ellen is in love with the young warrior Malcolm Graeme, a love which threatens to breach the rebel alliance.

The poem has a strong narrative line, strikingly contrasted characters, and promising ambient detail: picturesque loch and mountain settings, and numerous cues for chorus and folk song in the romantic manner. Scott's own narrative is carried forward in rhyming octosyllabic couplets, helpfully offset by ballads, choruses, and laments. It was these that particularly caught Rossini's imagination. Some of the most deeply felt music in works such as *Tancredi* and *Otello* had been rooted in folk music and popular song, vocally beguiling, harmonically naive; it is this influence which now provides the prevailing mood and colour of the new opera. Nor was Scott's poem the only source of such material. Like many of Europe's men of letters, Rossini's librettist Tottola had fallen under the spell of James Macpherson's Ossianic poems, the first volume of which, *Fragments of Poetry, Collected in the Highlands of Scotland, and Translated from the Galic or Erse Language,* had appeared in translation in Italy in 1763. Forgeries they may have been, but as Matthew Arnold noted a century later, there is here 'a vein of piercing regret and sadness':

> Choose any one of the better passages of Macpherson's *Ossian* and you can see even at this time of day what an apparition of newness and power such a strain must have been to the eighteenth century. . . . All Europe felt the power of that melancholy.[1]

Tottola drew on several aspects of Macpherson's art, including his fabrication of those 'barbaric metres' that the bards of old are alleged to have used. What is remarkable about the libretto, and Rossini's setting of it, is the very real skill with which these source materials have been interwoven, giving the sense of a music-drama that has in some measure been 'through composed'. To take one very obvious example, James's 'Aurora! Ah sorgerai' near the start of the final scene was probably suggested by Scott's 'Lay of the Imprisoned Huntsman' (VI, xxiv). What is remarkable about the song is its use of the theme of Ellen's cavatina (ex. 36), which runs through the first movement of the opera like a leitmotif.

The sweep of the opera's opening movement, which closely follows the form and content of Scott's poem, is its most remarkable feature,

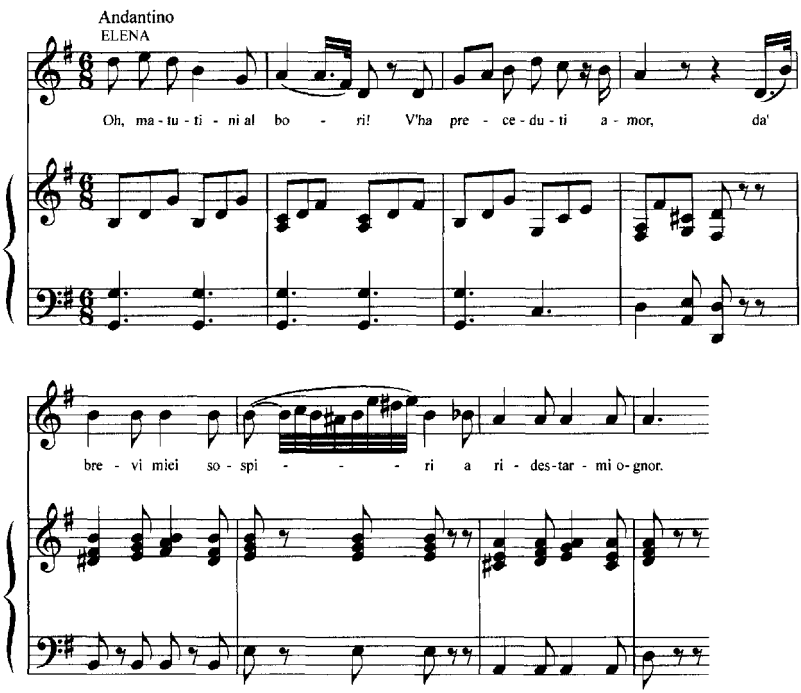
[1] *Matthew Arnold, Prose and Poetry,* ed. J. Bryson (London, 1954), 480. See also Stefano Castelvecchi, 'Walter Scott, Rossini, e la *couleur ossianique*', BCRS, 33 (1993), 57.

clearly demonstrating Rossini's evolved and evolving ideas about the structure of music-drama. Having built a chorus into a formal overture in *Ermione,* Rossini now reduces the orchestral preamble to a mere sixteen bars before switching to an ebullient chorus of country folk assembled near Loch Katrine. The visual perspectives are complemented by the stereophonic deployment of onstage horns and the sound of a distant hunt. Out of this essay in the sonic picturesque, Ellen emerges, singing her folk-cavatina from a skiff on the loch. In Scott's poem she is a creature of classical loveliness:

> And ne'er did Grecian chisel trace
> A Nymph, a Naiad, or a Grace,
> Of finer form, or lovelier face!
> (I, xviii)

These qualities are echoed in the melody Rossini has contrived for Ellen (ex. 36).

Ex. 36



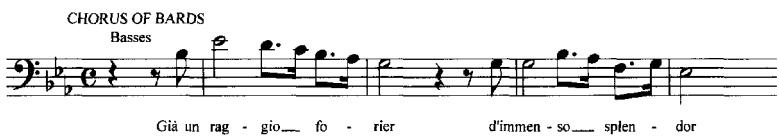
The meeting of Fitz-James and Ellen is charged but decorous, Rossini using arioso and accompanied recitative in a manner which hints at what Wagner will one day do when a warrior comes to the hearth of a strangely beautiful girl. In Ellen's quietly modulated utterances ('Amico asilo/ti sia la mia capanna' is a notable small example) Sieglinde's mood can be distantly descried. Recitative and arioso give way to tentative song in the duet 'Scendi nel piccol legno', in which the cavatina melody, example 36, remains prominent. A magnificent hunting chorus interrupts and intensifies this idyll, the huntsmen searching, as they do in Scott, for the lost huntsman, Fitz-James. The writing for male chorus, horns, and orchestra has a remarkable drive, thrust, and colour. The scene now shifts to a nearby cottage, though the music-drama is continuous. Again it is fine accompanied recitative which carries the drama forward as Fitz-James becomes conscious of the fact that the cottage, its walls imposingly hung with armour, is Douglas's. A chorus of women, Ellen's companions, breaks up this second and more expansive duet movement, the music moving through stages which would have served as fully self-contained musical units in earlier operas. The music of Ellen and Fitz-James is as brilliant as it is restrained, as expressive as it is decorous; but the drama's underlying impulse is now a strong one. Not surprisingly, this forty-minute exposition culminates in a sudden outflow of energy, the cabaletta visceral with driving rhythms and squared-off periods in the manner of the young Verdi.

After this remarkable opening, the first act tends to fall back into a sequence of entrance arias. Malcolm Graeme is given a full-dress scena e cavatina, 'Elena! oh tu, che chiamo!' which depends for its dramatic effect on the skills of the singer. The undisputed object of Ellen's affections, Malcolm is a curiously passive lover, but he is undercharacterised by Scott too. Douglas's stern invocation to duty, 'Taci, lo voglio, e basti!' florid and heavily scored, is not by Rossini. The pressure of time under which the opera was written obliged him to farm out this and some of the recitatives to an unidentified assistant. What, even before act 2, is threatening to become a concert in costume is partially redeemed by Ellen's duet with Malcolm, 'Vivere io non potrò', which returns to the sensuous, limpid style of Ellen's earlier music, a major-key duet with a minor-key feel to it, exquisitely scored for strings, clarinets, and bassoons. Whereas Ellen and Fitz-James rightly tended to set one another off, echoing rather than blending individual lines, Ellen and Malcolm are soon locked in a more or less per-

manent musical embrace, the voices sensuous in thirds and sixths. There is no cabaletta. Instead we have a warrior-chorus and Roderick Dhu's cavatina, 'Eccomi a voi, miei prodi', an extraordinarily florid piece which sounds as though it was written for Giovanni David but which was in fact allocated to Nozzari, whose fierce stage presence was required for Roderick. The F major andante of this war song is curious. So sensuous is it, we might think it out of character; yet it works as a further affecting portrait of Ellen, and it lies gloriously on the voice.

The act 1 finale reengages the cross-currents in the drama. As Malcolm's rivalry with Roderick flares, news is brought of a military challenge to the rebels, news which allows Tottola and Rossini to reintroduce the poem's bardic theme in the famous war hymn, 'Già un raggio forier' (ex. 37). This 'Chorus of the Bards' was to become one of Rossini's most famous numbers, a favourite with Italian patriots for the next fifty years. Initially the accompaniment is for harp, pizzicato violas, cellos, and a single double bass. Then, at the signal to advance, Rossini unleashes a panoply of wind and brass. Malcolm's stage band alone consists of 35 players, including five clarinets, nine trumpets, and three trombones.

Ex. 37



The central achievement of act 2 is the trio, 'Alla ragion deh rieda', one of Rossini's finest ensembles. An extended musical sequence, it conflates crucial events in Scott's poem: Fitz-James's later meeting with Ellen ('The Prophecy', IV, xvii–xix), his chance meeting with Roderick ('The Combat', *passim*), and their duel. The movement begins as a duet, but when Roderick enters unnoticed during the cabaletta the music develops into a three-part canon replete with a battery of high Cs. The second half of the movement contains one of Scott's finest moments, the sudden emergence from the heather of Roderick Dhu's warriors. In the cabaletta Verdi might have better differentiated the antagonists. In Scott, Roderick is irascible and unstable, Fitz-James his rocklike adversary; in Rossini there seems

to be little difference between the two. Perhaps Rossini was thinking of a later couplet—'No tyrant he, though ire and pride/May lead his better mood aside' (VI, xxv)—though one rather doubts it. The resolution of the crisis in the opera's concluding half hour is uncertainly handled, though Malcolm's lament for what he believes to be his loss of Ellen ('Ah si pera') is a further musical highlight.

In the final scene Ellen learns that the king and Fitz-James are one and the same person. Her father is reprieved, Malcolm is freed and given to her in marriage. Ellen's celebrated rondò, 'Tanti affetti', reminds us of Rossini's continuing capacity to write inexhaustibly brilliant coloratura. When Chorley heard Grisi as Ellen in London in 1847, he noted a grandeur of style, a finish, and a 'triumphancy' in her singing of music which is full of power, beauty, and intentional challenge. Vocally it is a royal conclusion, aided by the most subtle imaginable use of the stage band which is retained from the act 1 finale. Rossini would later bring *Guillaume Tell* to a very different kind of conclusion. It is lofty and serene where *La donna del lago* is blithe and debonair.

With *La donna del lago* safely launched, Rossini set out for Milan in November 1819 to honour a long overdue commission. The opera was *Bianca e Falliero, o sia Il consiglio dei tre* to a libretto by Felice Romani. It opened at La Scala, Milan, on 26 December. Working away from Naples, Rossini had neither the time, the freedom, nor in some instances the facilities to experiment with the kind of structure and staging which the resident librettists, designers, and stage operatives of the San Carlo now routinely afforded him. Milan offered simpler fare: a well-made libretto based on a familiar archetype (the story of *Bianca e Falliero* is similar to that of Berio's *Otello,* though without the tragic ending), and the promise of distinctive, albeit predictably monumental designs by Sanquirico and his team.

Set in seventeenth-century Venice, the story charts the machinations of a brutal father, Contareno, who would rather have the brilliant young general, Falliero, compromised, arraigned, and executed than see him marry his daughter, Bianca, for whom Contareno plans a politically advantageous marriage to a Venetian senator, Capellio. In one of the versions of Antoine-Vincent Arnault's French melodrama, *Blanche et Montcassin,* from which Romani took his libretto, Falliero comes to a grim end, much as

Cavaradossi does in Puccini's *Tosca;* but Rossini and Romani, politically prudent, opt for a happy ending.

There are signs of haste around the edges of the composition: an overture which is partly borrowed (from the pastiche *Eduardo e Cristina*), a curious mix of secco and accompanied recitatives, and a final scene which reuses, with modification, the finale of *La donna del lago.* However, the main body of the work (the introduzione, four arias, three duets, a quartet, and the act 1 finale) is grandly and at times adventurously and imaginatively written. The massiveness of many of the set pieces and the close gearing of the bel canto style to musical and psychological ends are awe-inspiring. It is an extraordinarily elaborate score and at times a very fierce one. Indeed, emotional excess could be said to be one of the opera's principal themes. Contareno's challenge to his daughter in his aria 'Pensa che omai resistere' must rank as one of the nastiest numbers ever penned for a coloratura tenor, the music suggesting moods that are in turn vindictive, suave, and willful.

The opera's climax is reached midway through act 2 when Falliero is arraigned by the 'Council of Three' (Loredano, Capellio, and Contareno himself) on a trumped up charge of treason. A vast set-piece scena, cavatina, and aria precedes the trial itself, at which Falliero, despairing of Bianca's love for him, offers no defence. Bianca's own unexpected appearance to plead Falliero's cause is the cue for the quartet 'Cielo, il mio labbro ispira', which quickly became a celebrated number in its own right. Bianca's coro and cavatina, the so-called 'garland of flowers' scene from act 1, also developed a Europe-wide career of its own.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

Maometto II (1820) *and* Le Siège de Corinthe (1826)

TO NINETEENTH-CENTURY ITALIANS, THE OTTOMAN SULTAN Mehmet II (1432–1481) was part of modern history. After the capture of Constantinople and the ending of the Byzantine Empire in 1453, the principal ambition of this self-appointed 'Kayser-i-Rûm' ('Roman Caesar') was the conquest and reunification of the territories of the former Roman Empire. By 1480 Italy itself looked ripe for the taking. Only when a rebellion in Albania fractured Mehmet's supply lines was the Pope able to launch a powerful counteroffensive. Mehmet's sudden death the following May effectively ended a campaign which could have radically altered the course of Italian history.

Rossini wrote *Maometto II* in collaboration with Cesare della Valle, Duke of Ventignano, a leading figure in Neapolitan literary life, whose libretto derives from his own play *Anna Erizo.* It is a measure of della Valle's seriousness as a scholar that the events described in the play closely follow the facts of Mehmet's conquest and destruction of the Venetian colony of Negroponte in northern Greece in 1470. The names of two of his principal characters, the Venetian commander Paolo Erisso and fellow soldier Alvise Calbo, are in the historical records. What subverts the libretto's status as a piece of postrevolutionary historical realism is its reliance on a weak and overused plot line. As the noose tightens around Negroponte, Erisso hopes that Anna, his daughter, will find happiness with a young general, Calbo. Anna loves Calbo but finds it impossible to forget a handsome stranger she met during an earlier posting in Corinth. She thinks of him as 'Uberto'; he is, needless to say, Maometto.

Corinth had fallen to Mehmet II in August 1458, though because the city had sued for peace and surrendered, there was no bloodshed. In 1826, when freedom-seeking Greeks were once again facing a hostile Turkish army led by a man called Mahomet, it was not a version of events in which philhellenes and *bien pensant* liberals were much interested. Locations were shuffled, dates changed, history rewritten. *Le Siège de Corinthe,* the slimmed down, French-language revision of *Maometto II* with which Rossini made his debut at the Paris Opéra in October 1826, ends in a holocaust.

The first version of *Maometto II* is a three-hour epic of great magnitude and splendour. Rossini planned, drafted, and wrote the work between May and December 1820. Near the start of the composition process, in July 1820, Naples was taken over by revolutionary forces. Not for the first time in his life, Rossini experienced the uncomfortable sensation of being in a war zone. Parts of that conflict are embedded in a score which, even by the standards of Rossini's late-Neapolitan manner, is unusually powerful and expressive. We experience this power in the first scene of the opera (there is no overture) as the commanders of the besieged Venetian enclave debate their strategy. Should it be abject surrender or death with glory? Inspired by Calbo's rallying cry 'May the ashes of the barbarians and bones in hundreds cover my grave', Erisso opts for the latter. As he does so, the subdued grandeur of the opening Chorus of Leaders, halting in 3/4 time, is transformed thematically and rhythmically into a brazen march.

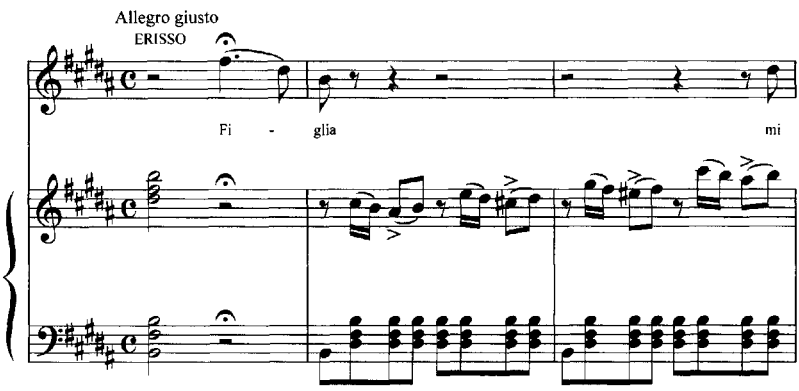
If the beginning is powerful, the end is shocking. Given the neoclassical temper of della Valle's libretto, the original audience may not have been expecting an onstage suicide, but this is what Rossini gives us when Anna, after a final confrontation with Maometto, kills herself in front of her mother's tomb. The awestruck final chorus sounds like the conclusion to a sacred work, as if in atonement for this dreadful act. When Rossini staged *Maometto II* in Venice for the 1823 carnival season, he spared Venetian susceptibilities by providing a happy ending. Nonetheless, what Henry James later called 'the imagination of disaster' had clearly taken hold. Dreadful as the end of *Maometto II* was, the end of *Le Siège de Corinthe* would be far worse.

Rossini had an outstanding cast for the opera: Isabella Colbran (Anna), Andrea Nozzari (Erisso), Adelaide Comelli (Calbo), and Filippo Galli (Maometto). The casting of a mezzo-soprano as the young warrior has an old-fashioned feel to it, though the writing for Calbo is superb. The switch to a tenor for the Paris revision makes for greater realism, though

not necessarily greater verisimilitude. Act 1 falls into two parts. A depiction of the beleaguered Venetian community is followed by the effect on that community of Maometto's arrival: his recognition of Anna and her removal in exchange for the release of Erisso and Calbo. Act 2 reverses that process. Beginning in the Muslim encampment, it ends in the catacombs of the citadel.

What is remarkable about *Maometto II* is the sheer size of Rossini's musical structures. The 90-minute act 1 comprises five interlocking movements. Two of these are relatively short: Anna's entrance aria 'Ah! che invan su questo ciglio', which lacks a cabaletta, and Maometto's 'Coro e Cavatina'. The opera's introduzione (325 bars) and the finale (855 bars) are understandably more substantial. What is truly astonishing is the pivotal third movement, the 'Terzettone' (a Rossinian neologism meaning 'a fat Terzetto'), which runs for 867 bars. During the course of the movement Anna reveals to her father and to Calbo the existence of the mysterious stranger she met in Corinth. Erisso makes it plain that he cannot abandon his strategy because of her tears, though (fatally, as it proves) he gives her a dagger for her own protection. In purely human terms, the Terzettone establishes a father–daughter relationship which is strongly felt and eloquently delineated. It is not a huge jump from Erisso addressing Anna (ex. 38a) to Verdi's Rigoletto or Germont *père*. Rossini knew quite as well as Verdi how to affect us with the teasing repetition of rhythmic-melodic fragments which are as trivial as they are emotionally charged (ex. 38b).

Ex. 38a



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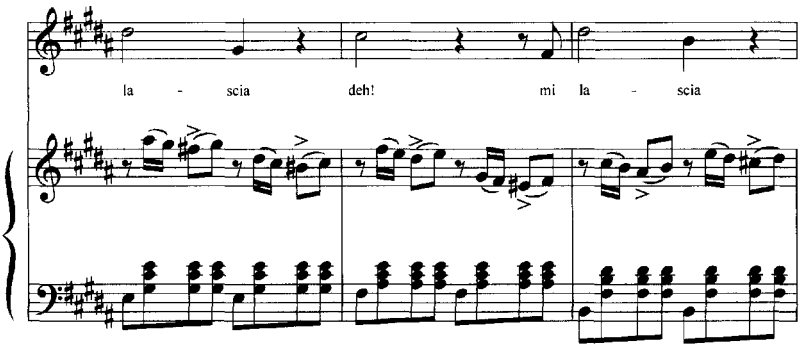
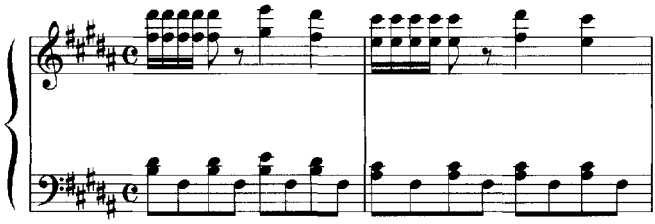
Ex. 38a (*Continued*)



Ex. 38b



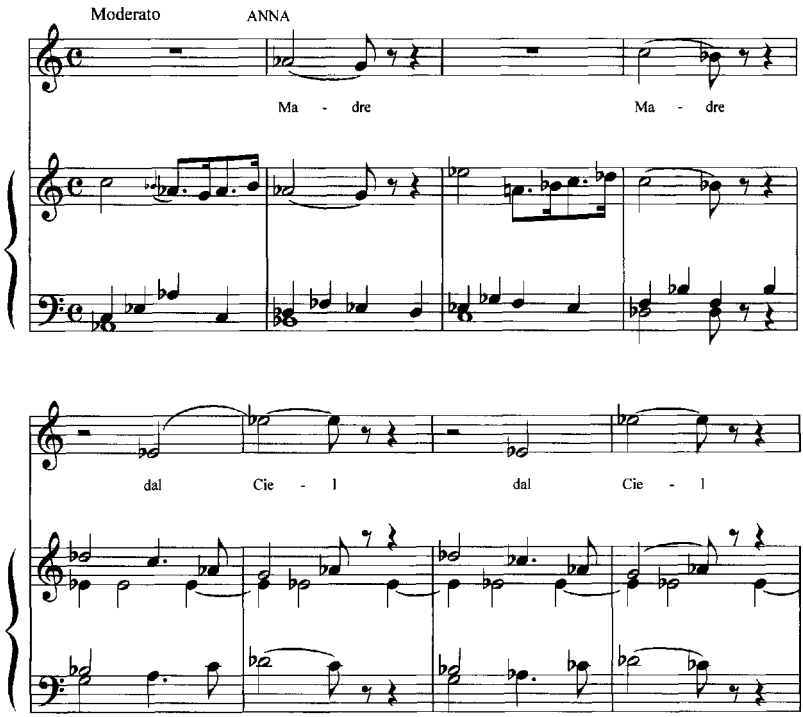
Structurally the Terzettone is able to withstand the temporary departure of two principals, intrusive cannon fire, an outbreak of popular dismay, and a prayer (later transferred to Act 3 of *Le Siège de Corinthe*) before it resumes its majestic course. Indeed it never properly ends. Conceived in E major, a key crucial to a work which, as Philip Gossett has demonstrated, [1] moves on the axis of E flat/E, it has important episodes in B and G major, the latter acting as the dominant of the stirring Muslim war-song which follows. In the Paris revision this huge movement is reduced from 867 bars to 365, gaining in pace and concentration and inheriting the exquisite prayer, but losing a good deal in range and dramatic sweep.

The second act, which begins amid the exotica of Maometto's en-

[1] P. Gossett, 'History and Works That Have No History: Reviving Rossini's Neapolitan Operas', *Disciplining Music: Musicology and its Canons,* ed. K. Bergeron and P. Bohlman (Chicago, 1992), 95.

campment and ends in the vaults of the church of the citadel, culminates in an unbroken sequence of movements, during whose 40-minute progress Anna does not leave the stage. The theme of love and familial loyalty is further emphasised here by Anna's preoccupation with the spirit of her dead mother. At the start of the sequence, Erisso fears that his daughter is lost to Maometto. As she rushes into the vault, she assures him that this is not so. He demands that she swear an oath kneeling at the foot of her mother's tomb. She does as he asks. She will die with her fellow citizens, though she begs that she and Calbo might first be made man and wife. It is a measure of the care Rossini now lavishes on the writing of accompanied recitative that her oath, 'Madre, dal Ciel in questo cor tu leggi' ('Mother, from heaven look into my heart') is cast in a lyric recitative of exceptional beauty (ex. 39).

Ex. 39



Musically, the recitative echoes Erisso's own prayer before his wife's tomb at the start of the scene. In similar fashion, Anna's final words 'Sul cenere materno io porsi a lui la mano / il cenere materno coglie mio sangue ancor' ('On my mother's ashes I gave him my hand / Let my mother's ashes now receive my blood') are uttered over a quiet E major string tremolo which directly recalls the moment in the Act 1 Terzettone when her father handed her the dagger she now holds. Though not through-composed in the modern sense of the term, *Maometto II* is a thought through opera, grandly imagined and superbly executed.

The opera is scored for a full complement of strings and woodwinds, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, bass trombone, and an extensive array of percussion. In the Venetian scenes, where the colours are predominantly sombre, the brass writing alone can cast a pall of darkness over the proceedings. The Muslim music has its own colour. This is at its most telling in the chorus of Muslim warriors that precedes Maometto's entry in act 1. The sudden switch from the human drama that has been played out in the citadel in the 'Terzettone' to this jaunty, jangling quickstep makes for one of those juxtapositions of the sublime and the trivial which Gustav Mahler would later exploit as a metaphor for the human condition. With its asymmetrical rhythms, powerful unisons, and exotic use of percussion, the chorus anticipates the anvil chorus in Verdi's *Il trovatore.* By contrast, Rossini's orchestration of the Muslim women's rousing 'Gather ye rosebuds' chorus at the start of act 2 is wonderfully fine-grained. With its dancing strings, high woodwinds, light percussion and discreet use of the heavy brass, it is orchestration that would not seem out of place in a score by Bizet or Tchaikovsky.

The 1823 Venice revision is an interim edition of purely local interest. In addition to the imposition of a happy ending (Rossini uses 'Tanti affetti' from the finale of *La donna del lago*) and a number of internal changes, the opera gains an overture. This draws exclusively on material from the opera itself, themes which are developed at length in compliance with the rules of the Rossini archetype. Colours are dark but the mood is jaunty, rendering it unusable in the context of the original opera. The overture to the Paris revision, by contrast, is a gripping curtain-raiser, fiery and abrupt, with a hint of a funeral march near the start. Its provenance,

however, is decidedly strange. The preliminary bars are taken from the overture to *Bianca e Falliero,* after which we hear a solemn 'marcia religiosa' lifted from Mayr's oratorio *Atalia,* which Rossini had conducted in Naples in 1822.[2] Rossini's *Messa di Gloria* provides the second of the two themes in the allegro assai (ex. 47a, p. 326).

The Paris Opéra was expecting something 'revolutionary' from Rossini for his Opéra debut in 1826, and it got it. Fears that he might serve up a French 'tragédie lyrique', modestly updated, proved groundless. An opera which ends with the gratuitous slaughter, not of an individual, but of an entire population is very much a postrevolutionary piece. The French now had the stomach for this, at a time when no Italian house would have dared to commission it or allowed such a staging.[3]

Rossini's adaptation of *Maometto II* is shrewd and workmanlike. The travesti role of Calbo becomes the tenor role of Néoclès; overly florid vocal lines are severely chastened; above all, by scaling down the huge musical structures of the original, Rossini makes it a less ambitious piece but a more theatrical one. [4] The revision stays close to the original story line, moving towards its new, populist denouement only in act 3. The libretto was the work of the French poet and dramatist Alexandre Soumet (author of the play on which Bellini's *Norma* is based) and Rossini's trusted associate Luigi Balochi. It is a clear-sighted adaptation, the occasional internal inconsistency notwithstanding. Della Valle had portrayed Maometto as a bloodthirsty tyrant ('As in Byzantium, here too I have seen / My steeds swim in Christian blood'), an interpretation which is at least consistent with the image of the infidel who finally lays waste the Venetian colony. The Mahomet who enters Corinth in act 1 of *Le Siège de Corinthe* is closer to the real-life Mehmet. In Soumet's text he tells his soldiers to put up their arms: 'Respect these palaces, these prodigies of art; I wish to engrave my conquest on them, I wish to leave them to posterity in commendation of my memory'. The fact that these sentiments are seriously at odds with

[2] This in turn had been taken from Benedetto Marcello's setting of Psalm 21.

[3] Verdi's *Les Vêpres Siciliennes,* which ends with a fictionalised massacre, was also written for the Paris Opéra.

[4] Not all the music comes from *Maometto II.* 'L'hymen lui donne', sung by Ismène and a chorus of Turkish women, is a carefully reworked adaptation of the chorus 'Dall'Oriente l'astro del giorno' from Act 1 of *Ermione.*

what happens in the final scene may explain the brief addendum: 'I shall submit the universe to my power'.

Le Siège de Corinthe ends with the sacrifice of an entire people. Like Anna, Pamira does kill herself, but her act of self-sacrifice is more or less lost amid the fervour and suffering occasioned by the hell that is war. After Pamira's prayer, her reconciliation with her father, and her marriage to Néoclès, Hiéros, the spiritual leader of the Corinthians, tells his fellow citizens that their cause is lost. This leads to a new and powerful kind of exchange between soloist and chorus. Hiéros asks three questions of the people in dramatic recitative, to which the chorus replies, 'Oui, tous, nous le jurons' ('Yes, we all swear it'), very much as an individual character might at such a moment. There follows the blessing of the flags, 'Quel nuage sanglant', the most talked-about moment in the opera in 1826, a sequence so affecting it silenced even Rossini's sternest critics.

The theatre's manuscript production book describes what the audience would have witnessed at the point where Pamira kills herself: 'Through the flames and the ruins, the Musulmans are seen pursuing the Greeks and slitting their throats in fury'. As the Greeks set fire to their ruined city, the voices fall silent and the orchestra takes over with a machinelike implacability. The production book has the final word: 'The entire stage is on fire! The curtain falls on this horrifying tableau'.[5]

[5] FPO, C.4895.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

Back from the Shadows: Matilde di Shabran *and* Zelmira

IN THEIR DIFFERING WAYS, *MATILDE DI SHABRAN* (ROME, 1821) AND *Zelmira* (Naples, 1822) show a composer taking stock. Both are rich in musical invention; both were rapturously (albeit, in *Matilde*'s case, also noisily) received. Yet down the years travellers' tale about implausible plots and impossible-to-cast tenor roles led to obloquy and neglect, from which the two works have only recently emerged.

Billed as a melodrama giocoso, *Matilde di Shabran, ossia Bellezza, e cuor di ferro* ('Matilde di Shabran, or Beauty, and the Heart of Iron') is to all intents and purposes a comedy: an important staging post between Rossini's two earlier Roman entertainments, *Il barbiere di Siviglia* and *La Cenerentola,* and their Parisian successors, *Il viaggio a Reims* and *Le Comte Ory.* What is new in *Matilde di Shabran* is the extent to which the comedy is driven by a spirit of parody. Parody had always been part of Rossini's comic method, but his earlier targets had generally been older methods and older composers. Now, as his own Italian career was drawing to a close, he appears to have been moved by an irresistible desire to take a less than serious look at the new operatic order he himself had largely created. Born to comedy, he had learned to revere opera seria. Now, writing once more for the Roman carnival, he takes an affectionate, occasionally uproarious look at both genres.

The first problem to be disposed of is the alleged complexity of the plot of *Matilde di Shabran.* To be sure, its genesis was inordinately complicated, and mention of some of its salient features (a raving misogynist, a mad

poet, damsels being thrown off cliffs) may give the impression that Rossini and his librettist, Jacopo Ferretti, had temporarily taken leave of their senses. In fact it is all fairly straightforward. Corradino, a parody tyrant said to loathe women, poets, and all other affronts to his masculinity, resides in a Spanish castle in whose entrance hall are two slogans: 'He who enters here will have his neck broken' and 'He who dares disturb the peace of this place will die of hunger and thirst'. In act 1 Corradino is trapped into loving. This happens in a nicely crafted sequence of scenes in which we meet not only the master himself but an engaging array of suitors, servants, foes, and passers-by. With the tyrant now tyrannised, act 2 finds him in a series of even bigger fixes, from which he is eventually rescued by the poet he once threatened to liquidate and the woman he has loathed, loved, and tried to put to death. Ferretti was a skilled craftsman; he knew how to assemble a libretto. He also knew that, though not dissimilar formally, this was a very different kind of opera from *La Cenerentola,* for which he had also provided the text. *La Cenerentola* is a more serious comedy, incipiently distressing; *Matilde di Shabran* is to all intents and purposes a sophisticated musical game, an opera about opera.

Since a three-hour entertainment needs a well-stocked gallery of characters, Ferretti uses the first seven scenes of act 1 to introduce them, much as Romanelli does in his libretto for *La pietra del paragone.* In the by now typically large-scale introduzione, we meet the tower keeper, Ginardo, a group of nervous peasants, and Corradino's physician, Aliprando (the 'tutor' figure, in effect). The next character to turn up is the poet Isidoro, a part specially written for the Neapolitan buffo, Antonio Parlamagni, who had created the role of the journalist Macrobio in *La pietra del paragone.* Initially Isidoro appears to be little more than a tramp, albeit one with an absurdly high-flown way of speaking. By the end of the act we shall have a very different impression of him.

Corradino's entry is spectacular: a blaze of vocal fireworks delivered from the top of a grand staircase on which he appears, fully armed, and flanked by four squires. The manner is that of an Agorante or a Pyrrhus. The difference is that this is a cardboard cutout, fairground villain. As the poet is being threatened with instant death, Aliprando intervenes (to a mocking, plodding accompaniment) and a quartet ensues, at the end of which the poet can console himself with the thought that, though he is in fetters, his neck has not yet been broken.

If this opening sequence anticipates the shape and scale of the introduzione of *Le Comte Ory,* the scenes which introduce us to the rest of the characters (Edoardo, the captive son of Corradino's archenemy Don Raimondo, Matilde herself, and the bilious Countess d'Arco, who plans a 'political' marriage to Corradino) look back with a wry smile to the worlds of *Tancredi* and *L'italiana in Algeri.* Edoardo, a travesti role written for Parlamagni's daughter, Annetta, is a Tancredi-like figure, albeit one sentimentalised into comedy. (Throughout the opera Edoardo has a propensity for crying.) The cabaletta of his entrance aria may distantly recall 'Di tanti palpiti', but there is a decidedly subversive feel to Rossini's way with the phrasing and the orchestral accompaniments. Matilde, by contrast, is a feisty ingénue, an operatic sister to Isabella, Fiorilla, and Rosina. Her duet with Aliprando resembles Isabella's confrontation with Taddeo or Fiorilla's with Geronio. What makes it unusual is that she and Aliprando are not antagonists but potential comrades-in-arms in the fight to tame Corradino.

Battle is joined between Matilde and Corradino in the briefest of exchanges: 'Ehi! Donna?' 'Uom, chi sei?' ('Hey! Woman?' 'Man, who are you?'). With the Countess d'Arco now also very much in the picture, Rossini and Ferretti are ready to launch their pivotal mid-act ensemble, the quintet 'Dallo stupore oppresso', in which Corradino instantly falls prey to Matilde's charms. It is a superb ensemble, rounded out with one of those trademark strettas in which the Rossini express and its cargo of squabbling humanity goes swaying over the points at full tilt.

When Corradino declares his love for Matilde, she laughs in his face, much as Isabella once laughed at Taddeo; but again there is a difference. Taddeo was a hapless stooge; Corradino is a self-declared warrior king. This sense of comic parody is further reinforced at the end of act 1. News that Edoardo's father's army is threatening the castle is accompanied by a comic-opera march and more tears from Edoardo. Matilde's sympathy for him enrages the countess and stirs fresh fury in Corradino. Skilfully Rossini avoids the need to provide a second stretta. Rather it is the poet Isidoro who leads the assembled company off to battle. Incongruous as this may seem, it is a pointer to the opera's second act, where Isidoro will increasingly assume control of the action, much as the puppetmaster poet does in *Il turco in Italia.*

Act 2 opens with Isidoro claiming to have masterminded Corradino's victory. Edoardo's lament for his defeated father briefly threatens to bring

a more serious note to the proceedings, though the words of his aria 'Ah! Perché, perché la morte' are deliberately the stuff of cliché. The aria itself has an expressive and difficult horn obbligato, which Paganini played on the viola on the opera's first night when the principal horn fell sick. A forged letter further cranks the plot. Written by the countess, it purports to be a declaration of love by Matilde to Edoardo. Angry and distraught, Corradino rails at Matilde and condemns her to death, instructing the poet to push her off a nearby cliff. This was an ensemble which Rossini was clearly loathe to lose; it turns up again (in a slightly more urbane, less violent configuration) at the end of the opening scenes of *Il viaggio a Reims* and *Le Comte Ory.*

The opera has one last moment of comic parody. In the Rome version, Corradino has an aria at this point, borrowed from *Ricciardo e Zoraide.* In the Naples revision, Corradino, horrified to learn that the letter was a forgery, is moved to share his grief at Matilde's fate in a duet with Edoardo. Duets by their very nature require a contribution from the second party, though at one point in this newly written duet Corradino snaps back, 'Be quiet! I'm dying of grief'. Corradino decides to kill himself, though we now know that we are in a world of mock-Gothic comic fantasy in which the poet is pulling the strings. After Isidoro has conjured up, not the ghost of Matilde, as Corradino fears, but the lady herself, the two are finally united, after which Matilde is granted a blithe showpiece rondò-finale, the moral of which is 'Women were born / To conquer and reign'. Not that the jesting is quite over. After Matilde's declaration 'The gloomy trumpet is silent', is it entirely coincidental that Rossini chooses to end the opera with a brief marziale?

As Rossini worked on *Zelmira* in the winter of 1821–1822, he knew that this would be his last Neapolitan opera. He also knew that, within weeks of its prima in Naples, the production would reopen in Vienna. It was, in effect, his first commission for a foreign market. Required to write a serious opera for a serious company, he opted to provide a state-of-the-art demonstration of his own abilities in the genre whilst at the same time providing a showcase for the distinguished trio of singers—Colbran, Nozzari, David—with whom he had worked for the past six years. As an exercise, it required consolidation rather than experimentation. The task of providing the libretto fell to Tottola, who had recently developed a taste for

the work of the eighteenth-century French dramatist Dormont de Belloy.[1] After successfully adapting Belloy's tragedy *Gabrielle de Vergy* (1777) for Michele Carafa in Naples in 1816, Tottola now suggested an earlier work by him, *Zelmire.*

As a subject it was never much admired. Chorley thought it 'absurd and wearisome', a disincentive to take seriously what he judged to be 'the most gorgeously florid' of all Rossini's operas.[2] It is poor theatre, certainly; yet as an operatic vehicle it works well enough. As to the music, it is often fine, occasionally exceptional. Verdi once remarked that to compose well 'one must do so in a single breath'. Rossini was used to doing that in his comedies, and a number of the Neapolitan opere serie were probably shaped that way. (It is difficult to think that *Ermione* was not written in 'a single breath.') *Zelmira,* too, has the feel of a work that was swiftly and surely written.

Set on the Greek island of Lesbos, the story concerns the deposed King Polidoro, the adventurer Antenore, murderer of the usurper Azor, and Antenore's principal opponents: Polidoro's daughter Zelmira and her husband, the Trojan warrior prince Ilo. During the course of the opera Zelmira is the victim of various calumnies. At the outset it is put about that she has murdered Polidoro. (She has in fact taken him to a safe retreat.) Worse is to follow. When a semidelirious Ilo appears at Antenore's coronation looking for his absent son, Antenore's henchman Leucippo attempts to stab him but is prevented from doing so by Zelmira, who, appearing from nowhere, seizes his dagger. One of life's quick thinkers, Leucippo publicly accuses her of being about to stab her husband. Matters are resolved in the second act, though not before Zelmira has been tricked into leading Antenore and his men to Polidoro's hideout. She and her father are seized and sent to prison, from where they are rescued by Ilo in scenes reminiscent of the release of Lear and Cordelia in Nahum Tate's bowdlerised version of Shakespeare's tragedy.

Rossini begins the opera as he means to go on, moving quickly into the action (there is no overture) with a headlong evocation of civil unrest. The man who seized Polidoro's throne has been found murdered in his bed. Antenore and Leucippo join the people in expressing disbelief at this sudden turn of events, though we soon learn that it is Antenore who has

[1] Pseudonym of Pierre-Laurent Buirette (1727–1775).

[2] HCR, 86.

plotted the assassination and Leucippo who carried it out. The opening of Antenore's cavatina, 'Che vidi! amici! oh eccesso!' ('What have I seen! Friends! What excess!'), is a masterpiece of dissimulation: a representative example of the exemplary care Rossini takes over word-setting in *Zelmira,* and the shrewdness of the attendant orchestral commentary. Antenore (Nozzari's part) is a dyed-in-the-wool villain, amoral, emotionally unstable. His joy at being named king has a manic quality to it; his condemnation of Zelmira after the dagger episode is as brutal as the trombones that blaringly underpin it.

Ilo (Giovanni David's part) could not be more different. The young prince is gracious and high-strung, his music sweet toned and florid. His act 1 duet with Zelmira may be dramatically implausible: Zelmira's failure to explain to him what has been happening on Lesbos during his absence makes sense only in terms of the need to sustain the action. Yet that very sense of the suppression of information, and with it a deepening of the pain of what is already a fraught reunion of two people who are deeply in love with one another, turns the duet 'A che quei tronchi accenti?' ('Why these broken words?') into one the loveliest things Rossini ever wrote. It is also astonishingly elaborate. The section in which Ilo anticipates with rapture his reunion with his young son ('Ah! se caro') is a supreme example of Rossini's ability to use ornamentation to expressive effect within the context of an essentially classical melodic line. News that Antenore intends to pin the murder of Azor on Zelmira comes in mid-duet in a tempo di mezzo for Zelmira's confidante Emma and her attendants. Caught in the toils of her own 'broken words', Zelmira instructs Ilo to flee.

Giuseppe Carpani, who heard *Zelmira* in Vienna in 1822, left a vivid if perhaps somewhat idealised description of Colbran's way with this music:

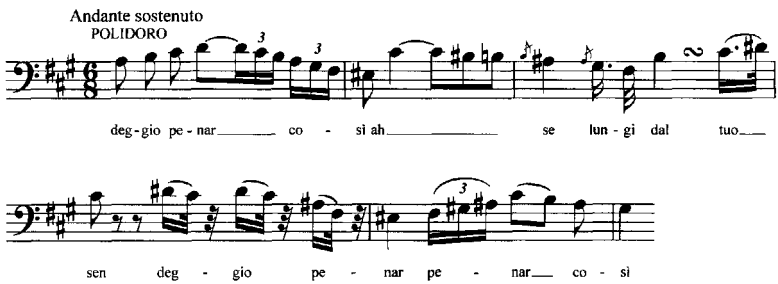
> She is a polished singer, pure and winning. She does not go in for powerful outbursts, but possesses a magnificent *portamento di voce,* perfect intonation and the most refined vocal style. Then, her every syllable, every ornament, every *gruppetto* and every trill are besprinkled with nectar by the Graces. Her two-octave scales in distinct and pearly semitones, and all the other noble devices of her singing, prove her to be a singer of the first rank.[3]

[3] CLR, 158.

At the end of the opera Rossini provides Zelmira with a blithe Rondò finale, but it is her prayer that hovers over the act 1 quintet, her duet with Ilo, and the subsequent duet with Emma during which she hands her son into safekeeping, that make the role memorable. This latter duet, a gentle F minor plaint, is accompanied by harp and cor anglais. In the scene towards the end of the opera when the boy is restored to Zelmira, Rossini uses those same instruments to underpin the recitative.

The care Rossini takes over the composing of accompanied recitative reaches new heights in *Zelmira.* A good deal of Polidoro's character is so conveyed. A sober, reassuring figure, he is provided with a gravely beautiful cavatina—a father's address to his daughter in a time of stress—which is as brief as it is intense, the kind of music the young Verdi might have been proud to shape at such a moment (ex. 40).

Ex. 40



Antonio Ambrosi created the role of Polidoro; fellow bass Michele Benedetti sang Leucippo, a comprimario role which anticipates that of Sparafucile in Verdi's *Rigoletto.*

For the Vienna production Rossini added a solo aria for Emma near the start of act 2. Later, in Paris, he remodelled the touching, orchestrally intense prison scene and the Colbran-specific rondò finale to accommodate Giuditta Pasta, a very different kind of singer. The Vienna addition has stayed with the score, the Parisian variant has not. Like a good deal of the music Rossini wrote for Colbran, Nozzari, and David, *Zelmira* struggled to find adequate interpreters, even in his own lifetime.

In 1862 Chorley wrote: 'The splendid songs of parade and passion in *Zelmira* are virtually lost, it is too much to be feared, for ever'.[4] Not quite forever. A distinguished recording featuring Cecilia Gasdia, Chris Merritt, and William Matteuzzi briefly revived the opera's fortunes in the early 1990s. But it is true: these songs of 'parade and passion' are not for every day, or every generation.

[4] HCR, 180.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

Farewell to Italy: Semiramide

SEMIRAMIDE, ROSSINI'S LAST OPERA FOR THE ITALIAN STAGE, COULD well be dubbed *Tancredi Revisited.* On 3 February 1823, almost ten years to the day after the prima of *Tancredi,* the audience at Venice's Teatro La Fenice was witnessing another Rossini opera derived by Gaetano Rossi from a drama by Voltaire. Forms that were first fully essayed in *Tancredi* are here majestically redeployed. The virginal charm may have largely evaporated but there is ample compensation in the cogency of the dramatic structure and the reach of the vocal and orchestral writing.[1] The scale of the writing is well illustrated by the celebrated overture, several of whose themes recur in the main body of the opera. In many respects this is the apotheosis of the overture archetype Rossini established in his pre-Naples years. The quality of the thematic invention is exceptional, added to which the range of the harmonic thinking and the power of the orchestration invest it with a full-bodied character more commonly associated with symphonic writing. Not for nothing was this a favourite warhorse of Arturo Toscanini.

[1] The original orchestrations of *Semiramide* were not discovered until 1989. In the period before 1840, composers wrote on oblong rather than vertical sheets. As orchestrations grew more complex, supplementary *spartitini* (little scores) were used to accommodate the wind, brass, and percussion parts in large ensembles. The *spartitini* for *Semiramide* had survived in the archives of Venice's Teatro La Fenice but had become detached from the Venice autograph. The orchestrations were published for the first time in 2001 in the critical edition edited by Philip Gossett and Alberto Zedda. A supplementary volume provided the original orchestrations of the stage band music.

Voltaire's *Sémiramis* (1748), on which Rossini's opera is based, draws on a number of powerful myths and archetypes. Semiramide, queen of Babylon, in league with Prince Assur, has murdered her husband, King Ninus, and attempted to murder her son. The son has survived the attempt and, fifteen years later and no longer known to his mother or would-be stepfather, has become a brilliant young commander on the kingdom's furthest frontier. Now known as Arsace, he returns to Babylon on a military summons (the queen is shortly to nominate her new consort), bringing with him a casket containing a sword and scrolls which were the property of his late father. It is a fateful return. Smitten by the glamorous young warrior, Semiramide announces that she will take, not Assur, but Arsace as her consort. A crisis of complex proportions is thus precipitated. Like Hamlet's father, Ninus speaks from beyond the grave, instructing Arsace to avenge the old king's as yet unexplained death.

The example of Greek tragedy lay behind Voltaire's play, with its murderous, potentially incestuous, warrior queen and her bloody accomplice. There are Shakespearian parallels as well, though in Voltaire's neoclassical world punishment is through divine retribution: the dispensation of justice remains the prerogative of the gods. Rossini's setting respects these values. Had he wanted a more Romantic or Gothic treatment of the story, he would not have employed Rossi as his librettist. (Rossi had recently adapted *Semiramide riconosciuta,* Metastasio's version of the myth, for the young Meyerbeer.) Nor would he have cast the young hero and romantic lead Arsace as a mezzo-soprano. Once again Rossini was straddling two worlds: a man in the very vanguard of his art sitting, as it were, with his back to the advance, gazing fondly at a landscape which is rapidly vanishing into the distance. As Philip Gossett has noted, it was a posture which baffled his contemporaries:

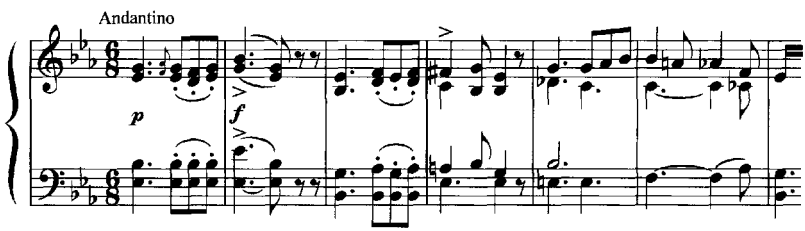
> *Semiramide* represents the apotheosis of musical neoclassicism in Italy. It is the opera to which the next generation of Italian composers returned almost compulsively, both to imitate and to abjure. Its forms provided models. Its sounds resonated in their hearts. But they rejected its classicism, its unabashed glorification of the power of music.[2]

The strategic planning of *Semiramide* is impressive. Like *Tancredi,* it opens with a movement which consolidates the drama's prehistory. *Semiramide*'s

[2] *The New Penguin Opera Guide,* ed. A. Holden (London, 1993), 791.

opening is, however, both longer (700 bars to *Tancredi*'s 400), more forward-moving, and containing its own natural points of climax. The structure is continuous and tonally coherent, an F major movement encapsulating sections in C and A flat (Rossini's fondness for major keys a minor third apart again in evidence) with a natural point of culmination in the thunderclap which greets Semiramide's first approach to Ninus's tomb. It is a movement which begins in gloom and unease. The opening pages, the High Priest, Oroe, before the altar of Baal, are scored for high winds, solemn brass, and double basses, whose colouristic possibilities will again be imaginatively exploited later in the opera. The act 1 finale has a similar scope: a 900-bar, six-movement structure, two of them in the minor, with a broad C major context. In the first episode, a slow section in E flat, allegiance is sworn to Semiramide, the overture's solemn horn subject (ex. 41) recapitulated and then redeployed in unaccompanied choral form.

Ex. 41



Voltaire's Sémiramis is on the rack from the moment she appears on stage:

SÉMIRAMIS: Oh veils of death, when will you cover
My eyes filled with tears and tired of being open!
(*She staggers across the stage, believing she has seen the ghost of Ninus.*)

Rossini and Rossi soften the outline of Semiramide's character. Not even the explosion from Ninus's tomb can dampen her spirit. Her cavatina, 'Bel raggio lusinghier', when it arrives later in act 1, is the score's most dazzling number, a brilliant showpiece that is also a love song, defining the situation and irradiating her personality. As the opera proceeds, so the skies darken. The two minor-key episodes which follow Semiramide's

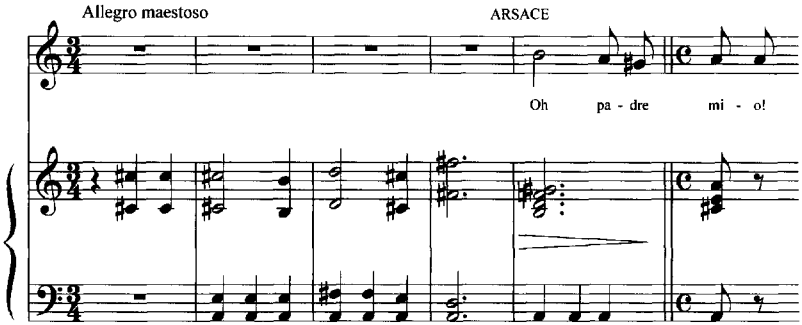
catastrophic announcement of her decision to make Arsace her consort are particularly impressive. 'Qual mesto gemito', her stunned response to the rumblings from Ninus's tomb, deploys a sombre ostinato similar to that which Verdi will later use in the 'Miserere' in *Il trovatore*. The later episode, in which the ghost of Ninus addresses Arsace, is equally powerful, restless in F minor. Chorley noted that the terror is told as much in the rhythm as in the declamation.

Like Tancredi, Arsace is omitted from the opening scene, arriving from afar for his cavatina 'Ah! quel giorno ognor rammento', the writing a world away, in terms of drive and erotic allure, from the folksy innocence of Tancredi's 'Di tanti palpiti'. In act 2, isolated by the revelation of his mother's complicity, Arsace's aria 'In sì barbara sciagura' is met by a fierce response from the chorus. Within moments he is brandishing his sword and swearing fraternity and vengeance like a figure in David's *The Oath of the Horatii;* yet his thoughts turn back to his mother in a touching eleven-bar transition, Rossini softening the outline of the character in chromatic writing which gives the portrait a certain sfumato quality before the onset of the brightly lit cabaletta.

In *Tancredi* the libretto subverts the credibility of the duets which are central to each act. In *Semiramide* the situations are much stronger. The act 1 duet ('Serbami ognor sì fido il cor') is an act of mutual misunderstanding. Semiramide seeks Arsace's love; Arsace looks for ratification of his love for Princess Azema. The use of the overture's crescendo subject as a transition within the cabaletta proves abortive as the reprise (Rossini at his sensuous, languorous best) dissipates the accumulating energies. The coda, by contrast, is gloriously shaped, with augmented rhythms in the voice part and seething figurations beneath.

The act 2 confrontation between Arsace and Semiramide, the equivalent of the closet scene in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, is very fine. It is a scene in which Ninus is also tacitly present; he is even accorded a brief theme (ex. 42). The truth revealed, Semiramide offers her life to her son ('Ebben . . . a te; ferisci'), but Arsace's response is generous. However hateful Semiramide is in the sight of heaven, she is his mother. Semiramide perceives her son's tears, and the music drops serenely into G major for the lyric andante. Faced with scenes like this, it is difficult to understand how *Semiramide* came to be thought of as a chilly bel canto showpiece.

Ex. 42



It is a token of the richness of Rossini's invention that there is a further full-length portrait to be noted: the role of the accomplice and would-be usurper, Assur, the last of the celebrated bass roles Rossini wrote for Filippo Galli. Two scenes in particular merit notice. At the start of act 2 Assur and Semiramide row like the Macbeths over events which are beginning to overshadow them. In the duet's andantino Assur reminds Semiramide of 'the night of death' in phrases which are at once suave and terrific. Semiramide responds in the minor, Assur murmuring 'Rammenta!' 'Remember!' like a ghost in the cellarage before the voices eventually come together in tenths. The second episode, near the opera's end, is Assur's mad scene. Here colours that were heard in the opera's introduzione are broodingly remixed. It is Assur's intention to murder Arsace, but standing near the tomb of Ninus, he is overcome by terrible visions. The scene is powerfully written, full of fractured declamation and fraught rhythms. Even the transition to the cabaletta brings a rich cargo of effects as Rossini charts Assur's hazy return to consciousness before the stirring marziale conveys to us the resolve of the newly restored man. It is difficult to believe that this sequence was not in some sense a model for the Banquet Scene in Verdi's *Macbeth*.

The act 2 finale is set in the depths of the Ninus monument. Arsace, on his still unspecified mission of revenge, is joined by Assur and Semiramide, who fears for her son's life. Her prayer, 'Al mio pregar t'arrendi', is not the sweetest Rossini wrote; perhaps it has about it the feel of Claudius's line in *Hamlet*, 'My words fly up, my thoughts remain below'. As the charac-

ters circle one another in the gloom, Rossini presents a stylised trio. As a point of rest before the denouement and as a metaphor of a community of fatally interlocked interests, it is not ineffective. Oroe tells Assur to strike Arsace down, but Semiramide steps between them and is killed.

There is evidence that Rossini thought the end—the death of Semiramide, Arsace's grief at her hapless killing, his attempted suicide, and his acclamation as king—too swift. For the Paris revivals of 1825–1826 he extended Semiramide's death throes. Stage decorum required that she die behind the tomb of Ninus, but there is no denying her tragic status. There is no authority for the happy ending ('Arsace stabs Assur' rather than 'Arsace stabs Semiramide instead of Assur') proposed in the libretto of the distinguished gramophone recording of the opera in which Joan Sutherland sings the title role. Like Iago, Assur is destined to meet his end by other means.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

Il viaggio a Reims (1825) *and* Le Comte Ory (1828)

WRITTEN IN HONOUR OF THE CORONATION OF CHARLES X IN 1825, *Il viaggio a Reims* was a sumptuous enough musical banquet temporarily to silence gossips and malcontents in the Parisian musical world who thought Rossini remiss in not bringing forward a new composition sooner. Yet though it was a considerable success at the time of its premiere, its subsequent history was a chequered one. Sections which were soon to form part of *Le Comte Ory* were worked over, submitted as copy to Troupenas, and subsequently lost. The autograph of the remainder survived more by luck than good management. Bequeathed by Olympe Pélissier to Rossini's doctor, Vio Bonato, it was acquired by Queen Margherita of Savoy, widow of Italy's King Umberto I, who donated it to the Santa Cecilia Academy in Rome in the 1920s. There it remained until the spring of 1977, when the librarian of the academy brought to Philip Gossett's attention a pile of disordered manuscript pages on the cover of which was written in Rossini's own hand 'Alcuni Brani [Several Pieces] della Cantata Il Viaggio a Reims. Mio Autografo. G. Rossini'. An edition was prepared by Janet Johnson, as a result of which the work was heard for the first time in nearly 160 years at the 1984 Pesaro Festival in performances conducted by Claudio Abbado.

Luigi Balochi's text and Rossini's music work at several levels. To all outward appearances *Il viaggio a Reims* was simply an elaborate act of homage to the newly crowned king by Paris's most fashionable opera company,

the Théâtre Italien. Yet it was much more besides: an Italianate entertainment, a showcase for a brilliant troupe of international singers the like of which no other European city could boast, a piece of national and international razzmatazz, and, last but by no means least, a celebration and send-up of Mme de Staël's novel *Corinne, ou l'Italie* (1807), the tale of the doomed love of an Italian improvising poetess for a melancholy and reserved Scotsman. Since de Staël's larger purpose was to explore France's place in European culture, caught between the pagan values of Greece and Rome and the new German Romanticism—Latin grace versus German feeling—it was a subject suited to the occasion, albeit one that invited a certain amount of irreverence. Rossini treats some of Corinne's most affecting moments in his own most affecting style; elsewhere he is at his most urbane, guying with deftness and wit the romantically decadent, pseudo-heroic elements of the *Corinne* phenomenon.

The work's subtitle, *L'albergo del giglio d'oro,* refers to the Inn of the Golden Lily at Plombières, where the resident staff, marshalled by Madame Cortese, are preparing their international clientele for a journey to the coronation at Reims.[1] The principal guest is Corinna herself. She has in her entourage an orphaned Greek girl, symbol of her philhellenic and humanitarian sympathies at a time of crisis in the war of Greek Independence, as well as Don Profondo, a lover of antiquities, and the 'colonnello Inglese', Lord Sidney. Both characters have important scenes. The opening sections of Lord Sidney's elaborate opera seria tribute to Corinna, with their dazzling flute obbligato, did not find their way into *Le Comte Ory,* but Don Profondo's witty disquisition on foreign characters, a strophic song written in a downward spiral of keys a major or minor third apart, turns up again when Robert explores the Formoutiers cellars in *Le Comte Ory.* The gallant young French officer, Chevalier Belfiore, and the vivacious young Countess of Folleville complete the group. The countess is a widow, despite her years, and so is the Marquise Melibea. The Polish widow of an Italian general, she is part of a formidable trio that also includes Count Libenskof, a jealous Russian much in love with the marquise, and a Spanish naval officer, Don Alvaro. The mutual antagonisms between the various

[1] There is no known overture to *Il viaggio a Reims.* The overture which is sometimes associated with the opera is a nonauthentic potpourri based on a dance from *Le siège de Corinthe.*

characters help energise Balochi's plot, though in the great sestetto amorous jousting is quickly abandoned when national and international solidarity are called for.

The sestetto, the act 1 finale in all but name and a number not reused in *Le Comte Ory,* is one of Rossini's finest late operatic inventions. It is launched in bullish style by the principal comic bass, the German Baron Trombonok. Trombonok, a retired major of no party, is a passionate lover of music and a proponent of the virtues of harmony in all its manifestations. Harmony is a thing appropriate to any international gathering, but the baron is surrounded by hysterical women (notably the Countess of Folleville, who fears that a precious bonnet has been ruined in a stagecoach accident, the mock-heroic text far funnier than its replacement in *Le Comte Ory*) and by jealous rivals. As the first movement of the sestetto majestically unfolds, so the rivalries of Alvaro and Libenskof become more explicit as they are joined by Melibea and Madame Cortese. The second movement, a period of stasis, reflection, and ironic comment, which shows Rossini's mature craft at its sophisticated best, is followed by another, very different slow movement as the lovers' tiffs are interrupted by Corinna's wafted F major song 'Arpa gentil'. Vocally intricate but spiritually tender, the improvisation elaborates folk song into high art without sacrificing that simplicity of utterance which makes Corinna's references to the Brotherhood of Man and the cause of the Greeks seem at once touching and lofty.

Elsewhere the Romantic excesses of *Corinne,* its sentimental valuations of antiquity and pseudo-heroic language, are ruthlessly mocked. In the duet between Libenskof and Melibea, 'D'alma celeste, oh Dio!' the recitative is rich in de Staël-like rhetoric, Melibea accusing the count of failing to appreciate 'the sacred and ardent passion of a great soul', an accusation which the count greets with bemusement and which Rossini subverts by writing music of peerless clarity and charm, the cabaletta smiling back to the unclouded world of *Tancredi.*

A series of treats for the musical gourmet, *Il viaggio a Reims* rises to great heights in the sestetto, and in the stupendous gran pezzo concertato for fourteen voices, which needs to be heard in its original form. The slimmed-down version in *Le Comte Ory* is, from the sonic point of view, a pale shadow of the original. In contrast to these formidable musical structures, the finale itself is a good deal more informal. Festivities are an-

nounced in Paris. The travellers must be rerouted; but before they leave, they agree to provide a spectacular evening of dance and song for the residents of Plombières. There is a ballet in a lavish garden setting, and toasts in the form of national songs provided by the principal guests. The baron sings the German national anthem to Haydn's famous tune, Melibea sings an Italianate polonaise, and Lord Sidney, thinking himself unmusical, also resorts to his national anthem: a wonderfully grandiloquent version of 'God Save the King' whose second verse is rudely interrupted by the baron's cries of 'Enough! Enough!'

With all enjoying themselves rather as they will one day do in act 2 of Johann Strauss's *Die Fledermaus,* Corinna is summoned for a second improvisation. Just as in de Staël's novel the people of Rome choose the subject ('La gloire et la bonheur d'Italie'), so here the guests put forward suggestions—Joan of Arc (Melibea), The Chrism and the Cross (Trombonok), Hugh Capet (Lord Sidney)—before Belfiore's 'Charles X, King of France' is finally lighted on. The improvisation, 'All'ombra amena', is in five sections, the first, third, and fifth strophes in A, the second and fourth in F sharp minor. As the improvisation ends, portraits of the French royal family appear, with emblems, palms, and crowns, brilliantly lit and dazzlingly refracted in an imaginative water display or *glace-d'eau.* It makes a visually spectacular end to one of the oddest and most exhilarating entertainments ever to issue from the pen of an opera composer.

After four performances Rossini withdrew *Il viaggio a Reims.* Three years later, at the end of what was more or less a secret operation, some of the music resurfaced in one of the wittiest and most finely honed of all comic operas, *Le Comte Ory.*

Details of numbers adapted from Il viaggio a Reims *for* Le Comte Ory

Il viaggio a Reims	=	*Le Comte Ory*
No.1 Introduction, 'Presto, presto, su coraggio', G, 558 mm.		No.2 Introduction, 'Jouvencelles, venez vite', G, 625 mm.
No.4 Scene and Aria, Milord, 'Invan strappar dal core', F, 419 mm.		No.3 Scene et Air, Tutor, 'Veiller sans cesse', F, 393 mm.

No.2 Recit. and Aria, Countess, 'Partir, oh ciel!' E flat, 246 mm.
No.7 Gran pezzo concertato a 14 voci, 'Ah! A tal colpo inaspettato', A, 450 mm.
No.5 Recit. and Duet, Corinna, Belfiore, 'Nel suo divin sembiante', A, 324 mm.
No.6 Aria, Don Profondo, 'Medaglie incomparabili', E flat, 309 mm.

No.5 Air, Countess, 'En proie à la tristesse', E flat, 227 mm.
No.6 Finale I, 'Ciel, Ô terreur', A, 449 mm.

No.8 Scène et Duo Countess, Ory, 'Ah! Quel respect, madame', A, 281, mm.
No.10, Scène et Air, Raimbaud, 'Dans ce lieu solitaire', E flat, 292 mm.

Chorley suggested that there was not a bad melody or an ugly bar in the entire work. Liszt went further. During rehearsals for a production he mounted in Weimar in 1850, he dubbed *Le Comte Ory* 'the champagne opera'.[2]

The legend of Count Ory, a prototype Don Juan said to have lived in Touraine around the time of the Crusades, had resurfaced in the 1780s as part of a Europe-wide revival of interest in medieval balladry. Collected and arranged by Pierre-Antoine de la Place, it relates how Ory and his men laid siege to a convent. Nine months later, we are told, 'each nun gave birth to a little knight'. In 1816 the 25-year old Eugène Scribe and his associate Charles-Gaspard Delestre-Poirson staged a one-act vaudeville on the subject at Paris's Théâtre du Vaudeville. In Scribe's version the Crusaders return before Ory and his men can have their wicked way. Was he being subversive or merely decorous? Rossini, who relished subversion and decorum in more or less equal measure, was much taken with the play, not least its downbeat end. (One of the jokes in *Il viaggio a Reims* is that the pilgrims never actually reach Reims.) More particularly, the Ory project solved two problems. First, it was the cue for something the French opera-going public craved above all else: a new *comic* opera from Rossini. Second, it was an ideal resting place for some of the music from *Il viaggio a Reims.*

The vaudeville provides the basis for the opera's second act, in which Count Ory, disguising himself as a Mother Superior and his followers as nuns, gains access to the Castle de Formoutiers in a vain attempt to woo

[2] His Intendant, Baron Ferdinand von Ziegesar, took the accolade literally. At the start of the second act several dozen bottles of champagne were distributed through the audience.

and win the countess during her brother's absence on a Crusade. As this was too short for a full evening's entertainment, Scribe and Delestre-Poirson added a prefatory act in which Ory tries a similar ploy, disguising himself as a hermit who dispenses advice to the spiritually anguished. True, the situations are repetitive, but the opera evolves towards a pair of unforgettable scenes in the second act: the carousing of Ory's 'nuns', their drinking song turning to sanctimonious prayer whenever the countess and her companions appear, and the exquisite nocturnal trio 'À la faveur de cette nuit obscure' when, in a darkened bedroom, the amorous Ory mistakes his page Isolier for the countess. What in lesser hands would have been little more than a Gallic *jeu d'esprit* ended up as sturdily built, richly orchestrated, vocally ambitious work which more than held its own in the Opéra's new 1900-seat auditorium.

Rossini was a shrewd operator. Four of the six numbers in act 1 of *Le Comte Ory* are based on music in *Il viaggio a Reims,* whereas only two of the seven numbers in act 2 are so derived. This arrangement gave him an unusual degree of control over the composition process. While the librettists were working against the clock writing a brand new act 1 for music which was already largely written, Rossini was concentrating on the original vaudeville, creating a second act which takes the composition in new and unexpected directions. He also saw to it that the two acts were not entirely unrelated. The one new number in act 1, the duet 'Une dame de haut parage', in which Isolier inadvertently reveals to Ory his plan to pursue the countess disguised as a pilgrim, has a significance beyond its immediate context. At Ory's words 'Noble page du Comte Ory', Rossini quotes the tune used by de la Place in his 1785 ballad. This in turn is fed into two other strategically important new pieces: the opera's enigmatic orchestral prelude (which so upset an otherwise admiring Berlioz) and the act 2 trio, the linchpin of the entire work.

The recycling of numbers from *Il viaggio a Reims* was carried out with expertise and aplomb by Rossini, the master reviser. The tutor's aria in *Le Comte Ory* has a new opening which reflects a character who is sterner and less sentimental than the English Milord in *Il viaggio a Reims.* Other modifications are subtler and more substantial. At the end of act 1, when the tutor unmasks Ory the bogus hermit, Rossini uses a slimmed-down version of one of the big show-stopping moments in *Il viaggio a Reims,* the 'Gran Pezzo Concertato' for fourteen unaccompanied voices. This is music

in the Italian church style. Using an a cappella church ensemble to celebrate not some Christian rite but rather the unfrocking of an impostor priest is rather a nice joke.

The music of Raimbaud's act 2 aria 'Dans ce lieu solitaire' was originally written for *Viaggio*'s fanatic antiquarian, Don Profondo. A man with a passion for classifying things, he uses his aria to anatomise the peoples of Europe. It is all vaguely amusing (Englishmen, for example, make voyages around the globe, write marine treatises, drink China tea, and interest themselves in opium and air pistols), but there is no real dramatic context. In *Le Comte Ory* it is very different. Raimbaud narrates the story of his exploration of the wine cellars as though it is a military expedition, the wines arrayed in front of him like provinces waiting to be conquered. Wittily deployed images based on the age-old conceit of love as an act of military conquest abound throughout the music and the text of *Le Comte Ory*.

The opera culminates in the glorious act 2 trio. Rarely if ever did Rossini write more sensuously for winds and muted strings. The sound worlds of Mozart and Berlioz are here celebrated and anticipated in music which is nonetheless quintessential Rossini. Chorley put it well when he commended 'a felicitous curiousness in the modulations . . . a crispness of finish, a resolution to make effects by disappointing the ear which not only bespeaks the master's familiarity with great music of the greatest classical writers, but also a wondrous tact in conforming to the taste of the new public whom he was to fascinate'. Of the trio, he wrote:

> Yet, be it French or Italian, what is there in vocal music that can exceed the final trio? The life, the unexpectedness, the delicious union of the voices, without undue platitude or perplexing intricacy, the dainty orchestral touches modestly, not timidly, introduced precisely in those places where the ear is most surely reached, make this trio, of its kind, a masterpiece, one not requiring the distortion of unnatural study for its comprehension, but which at first hearing speaks home; and which, if examined later, will repay the examiner as every specimen in which beauty, symmetry, fancy and spirit are combined must do.[3]

Though the trio has a delightfully improvised feel to it, the forms are faultlessly deployed. There is also depth to the music, a feeling of heartache and unassuaged yearning.

[3] HCR, 338.

There are no buffo stereotypes in *Le Comte Ory.* Rossini's writing for Ory himself has floridity, elegance, and grace, plus a certain feminine allure that gives him a decadent, slightly dangerous air. His prankish high Cs and the sudden unexpected rises of an octave or major sixth suggest an aspiring quality which is wittily contradicted in the cabaletta of the act 2 trio, where a rise to the tonic A, and an ignominious descent by semitones, perfectly convey the sense of a man whose fortunes are sinking fast. The message is clear enough. Ory is not Don Giovanni and is not going to hell. For the time being, however, his number is up: a case of exiting via the back door rather than the trapdoor.

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

Guillaume Tell

THE LEGEND OF WILHELM TELL, FAMOUS FOR THE BOW SHOT THAT cleaves the apple on his son's head and Tell's daring escape in a treacherous Alpine torrent from a sadistic foreign overlord, dates from the fifteenth century. The principal source of the story is the *Chronikon Helveticum* by the now largely discredited historian Ägidius Tschudi (1505–1572). Schiller used Tschudi as the starting point for his verse drama *Wilhelm Tell* (Weimar, 1804), from which the text of Rossini's *Guillaume Tell* was 'freely derived' by Etienne de Jouy. Several French versions of the Tschudi narrative were also available to Jouy, including Antoine Lemierre's *Guillaume Tell* (Comédie-Française, 1767), Michel Sedaine's libretto for Grétry's opera *Guillaume Tell* (Théâtre Italien, 1791), and a prose-drama dating from the early 1790s by the imprisoned aristocrat Jean de Florian. The result was a scrupulously researched, finely shaped, but also lengthy draft libretto to which Rossini and his reviser-in-chief Hippolyte Bis made a number of far-reaching alterations.

Schiller's play is not a revolutionary work. A tale of country men and women stirred by tyranny to acts of simple courage, it has the character of a heroic idyll. As such, it was suited to Rossini's temperament and experience. Yet the more Rossini worked on the score, the more he appears to have recognised that this is a drama in which there are, in effect, only two principal players: Tell and the Swiss people. During what was an unusually long composition period, supporting roles were either pared to the bone or omitted altogether. Even more radical was Rossini's decision to dismantle

Jouy's carefully distributed structure of set-piece arias for the five leading players. In the end he retained two such arias and a single-movement air ('Sombre fôret'), all of them in the Arnold–Mathilde subplot. This dearth of solo numbers in a score lasting the best part of four hours must have astonished the first-night audience.

In the opening pages of *Wilhelm Tell,* Schiller establishes two ideas which are also central to Rossini's treatment of the drama: the grandeur and harmony of nature, and the disruptive and unpredictable nature of politicised man. Writing in his journal on Christmas Eve 1853, the painter Delacroix reflected: 'Rossini brushes in the broad outline of a few landscapes where you can almost smell the air of the mountains, or rather you can sense the melancholy that grips the soul when face to face with the great spectacles of nature'. It is a process which begins with the celebrated overture, a four-movement programmatic piece which Rossini wrote at the very end of the compositional process. Of the four movements only the second, the storm, is less than remarkable. The opening colloquy for five solo cellos is a rare inspiration evoking, Berlioz eloquently suggests, 'the calm of profound solitude, the solemn silence of nature when the elements and the human passions are at rest'.[1] The pastoral scene which follows the storm is also memorable. The melancholy call of the Swiss cowherd, the *ranz-des-vaches,* gives Rossini material for the finest of all his many cor anglais solos, to which he adds a skirling alfresco flute and pinpricks of triangle tone which evoke the bells of the mountain sheep.

Schiller's play begins with a *ranz-des-vaches* heard against an imposing background of mountain, pasture, and lake. In his *Dictionnaire de musique* Jean-Jacques Rousseau noted that the *ranz-des-vaches* was so beloved of Swiss mercenaries that they were forbidden to sing it, on pain of death, lest doing so cause them to weep, desert, or die. This melancholy mountain mood is never far beneath the surface of Rossini's score. As a storm gathers over the lake, a herdsman (Schiller's Konrad Baumgarten, Rossini's Leuthold) appears on the distant shore. He has killed a soldier of the occupying Austrian forces while defending his daughter from rape. Horsemen dispatched by the tyrant Gesler arrive but are too late. Spurning the vacillations of his fellow countrymen and the dangers of the storm-stirred

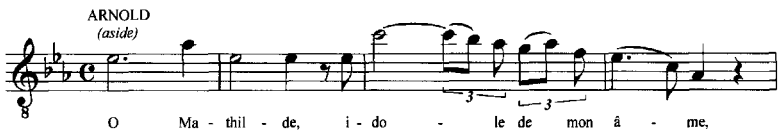
[1] H. Berlioz, '*Guillaume Tell* de Rossini', *Gazette musicale de Paris,* I (1834). Reprinted in English translation in *Source Readings in Music History,* ed. O. Strunk (New York, 1950), 810.

lake, Tell has already rowed the old man to safety, to the fury of the Austrians, who order the slaughter of animals and the razing of the village to the ground.

Much of this is in act 1 of *Guillaume Tell* but at greater length and at a more leisurely pace. The opening scene depicts the spaciousness and ease of mountain life. Villagers work in the fields or prepare for the triple wedding that is about to take place. Tell's wife weaves, her young son practices with his crossbow, a fisher boy sings on the lake. The fisher boy's love song irritates the downcast Tell, who is introduced not with an aria but in a grumbling aside. Arnold, son of the village patriarch, is similarly introduced. In the employ of the Austrians, he has lost his heart to the Hapsburg Princess Mathilde (Schiller's Berta von Bruneck, radically redrawn). Mention of the weddings irks him. 'Lovers, husbands! Ah, what thoughts beset me!'

Arnold is (initially, at least) an indecisive hero, a fair-weather patriot, immature and self-regarding. It is Tell's task to convince him of his duty to his wounded country, something he undertakes in the scène et duetto 'Où vas-tu? Quel transport t'agite?' Much of what they have to say to one another is dully written (Berlioz has two pages on Rossini's mindless use of repeated notes on the dominant), but we nod off at our peril. *Guillaume Tell* is rich in sudden illuminating strokes of genius, such as Arnold's outburst 'Ah! Mathilde, idole de mon âme' (ex. 43), where the melody alone convinces us that events will have to be dire indeed if they are to lure Arnold away from his beloved.

Ex. 43

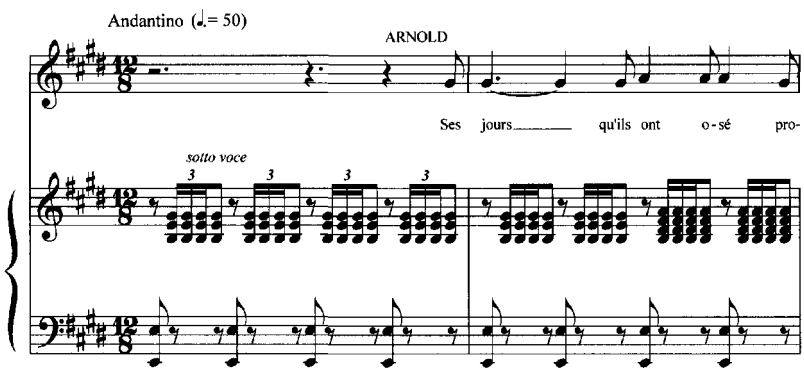


Act 1 ends powerfully in the Italian manner with two large-scale ensembles carrying forward the drama. It was not, however, mere sycophancy which prompted Donizetti to remark that if the first and last acts of *Guillaume Tell* were written by Rossini, the second act was written by God. Other composers, Berlioz and Bizet among them, thought similarly. It is sometimes said that this second act is the one which is closest to Schiller. In some respects it is, some incidental changes notwithstanding. (In Schil-

ler, old Melcthal is blinded; in Rossini he is murdered.) There is, however, one major innovation: Tell's presence during the oath-swearing of the Swiss confederates on the Rütli heights. In Schiller, Tell makes it clear to Stauffacher that he is not a man for counsels and congregations—'When you need action, call on me, I'll be there', is his boast (I, iii)—and he is absent from the oath-swearing. It has been suggested that Schiller wished to avoid any sense of the rising being inspired by one man; yet Rossini avoids the trap equally well. Rossini's Tell is very much a first among equals, a father, and a nature lover. If there is a rabble-rouser in Rossini's opera, it is Arnold, hot-headed and eloquent—a useful contrast vocally and temperamentally to Tell himself.

Act 2 begins with a hunting chorus crossed by an evening song for the workers in the mountains and fields. Mathilde, who has absented herself from the hunt, sings the air 'Sombre forêt'. Here for the first time the French audience was given a taste of the lyric beauty they so admired in Rossini's Italian operas. The duet with Arnold which follows ('Oui vous l'arrachez à mon âme') is even more overtly Italianate. If this Mathilde–Arnold duet is memorable musically, what follows is memorable as both music and drama. In the great trio 'Quand l'Helvétie est un champ de supplices' Tell and Walter Furst break the news to Arnold that his father has been murdered. When we think of *Guillaume Tell* as, in some sense, a drama of paternity, we think of Tell's 'Sois immobile' before the apple-shooting; but Arnold's response to a tragedy which is actual rather than potential is every bit as moving, a melody (ex. 44) which would not be out of place in middle-period Verdi.

Ex. 44



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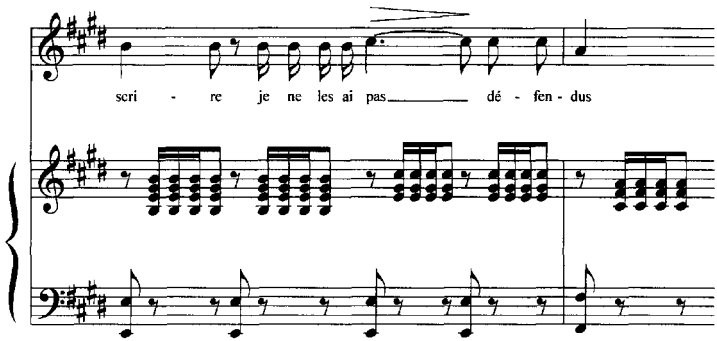
Ex. 44 (*Continued*)



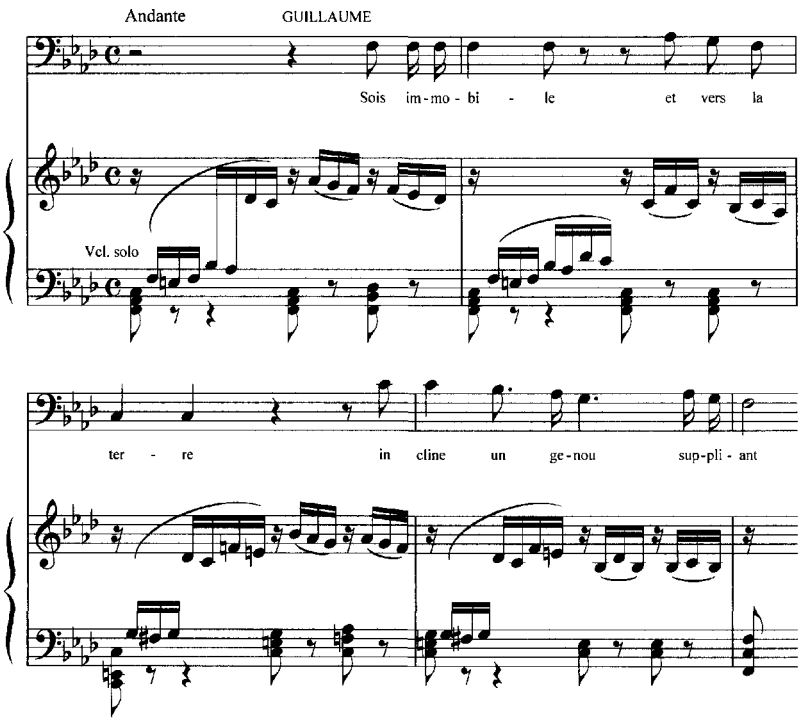
The trio builds gloriously, for though Tell and Furst will be happy to see Arnold's grief act as a whetstone to his sword, it will be crucial that any act of vengeance be contained within the communal cause, not an individual act. From this point Rossini further builds the tension with the massing of the men of Unterwalden, Uri, and Schwyz. Each group is separately characterised, our sense of the rootedness of these so-called rebels memorably caught in the idyllic music for the men of Schwyz, 'En ces temps de malheurs', where that melancholy mood Rousseau alluded to asserts itself. In 'Guillaume, tu le vois' Rossini, the unrivalled master of the conspiratorial ensemble, writes a particularly terse example of the form, after which Tell addresses the assembled group. At the great oath-taking, 'Jurons, jurons par nos dangers', the trumpets sound, but there is no baying stretta. Day breaks, a drum quietly rolls, and the cry 'Aux armes!' is three times repeated before the orchestra adds a torrential sixteen-bar coda. It is a thing of great economy and huge power. 'Ah, it is sublime', cries Berlioz at this point in his essay. 'Let us take breath'.

It is sometimes said that the opera falls away from this point, but there is no reason to agree with such a judgment. The centres of interest become more diffused, but the drama stays majestically on course. Mathilde's parting from Arnold at the start of act 3 (the magnificent 'Pour notre amour plus d'espérance', in which high fury at the crimes of her fellow countrymen gives way to unassuaged sorrow at the imminent separation) and Arnold's visit to his father's deserted cottage at the start of act 4 are memorable scenes at the periphery of the drama. The role of Mathilde, written for Laure Cinti-Damoreau, is Rossini's farewell to the opera seria heroine: beautiful, aristocratic, morally without flaw. Arnold's 'Asile héréditaire',

written for and with Adolphe Nourrit, is one of the most testing arias in the tenor repertory. Berlioz thought it the finest single thing in the score. It is another filial lament written with great finish and beauty, with a cabaletta which provides the kind of sound and fury we were rightly denied at the end of act 2.

At the heart of the opera's second half is Tell's arrest and Gesler's sadistic testing of his bowmanship. Again the buildup is leisurely. Rossini takes his time over the enforced festivities during which a reluctant populace celebrates a hundred years of Austrian rule. There is a suitably brutal chorus for Gesler's men and the famous unaccompanied 'Choeur tyrolien', in which tenors and basses give out the rhythm for the voices above. Two moments catch the attention before we reach the ordeal of the apple-shooting: Tell's remark to Gesler 'Ah! tu n'as pas d'enfant!' and his kneeling before him, 'Je fléchis le genou devant toi'. Tell's address to his son, 'Sois immobile', stands at the heart of the scene and the opera and is one of the most personal of all Rossini's musical utterances (ex. 45).

Ex. 45



A solo cello is used at the outset as it might be in a Bach Passion, but the minor-major oscillations and the lie of the line itself are fashioned by Rossini in his own special way. Verdi would follow Rossini's cues in portraying another grieving father, Rigoletto. The declamatory power of the music culminates in Tell's cry, 'Jemmy, Jemmy, songe à ta mère!' Can there be any doubt that the writing was affected by Rossini's own recent loss and the stirring within him of powerful familial affections? He confessed as much to Wagner, and the music bears eloquent testimony to the fact.

The successful bow shot does not bring about Tell's release, though Jemmy is removed from Gesler's grasp by Mathilde. The wind-accompanied trio 'Je rends à votre amour un fils digne de vous', in which Mathilde returns Jemmy to his mother, is the start of the opera's final movement. Not everything is fully worked out here. Mathilde's offer to stand hostage for Tell is blandly conveyed in accompanied recitative, though Rossini gathers his orchestral resources for the firing of Tell's house as the signal to the cantons. The prayer for Tell's safety, 'Toi, qui du faible et l'espérance', is followed by semi-stylised storm music as Tell makes his dramatic escape from Gesler's boat. The assassination of Gesler, shot by Tell as he appears on a rocky eminence above the lake, is perfunctorily treated. In Jouy's and Rossini's scheme of things, the personality of Gesler is something they are either unwilling or unable to explore. Where Schiller agonises over the ethics of assassination in a 'just' cause, Rossini (writing for an institution whose masters would not have welcomed such speculation even if it had been possible musically) passes the murder off as a self-evident necessity.

It was as a stage spectacle, expensively devised by the Opéra in collaboration with Rossini himself, that this intensely theatrical sequence of events made its mark in 1829. This is what Verdi was referring to when he wrote:

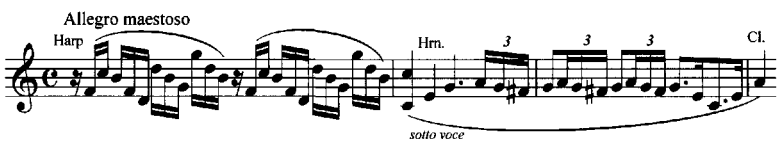
> Certainly no one will deny Rossini's genius; and yet for all that genius, you can discern in *Guillaume Tell* the fatal atmosphere of the Opéra, and sometimes—though more rarely than in other composers—you feel that there's a bit too much here and not quite enough there, and that the piece does not move as freely and as surely as *Il barbiere*.[2]

[2] CGV, 222.

On another occasion Verdi described the opera as 'chastened and correct in all its parts'.[3] That is shrewdly put. *Guillaume Tell* is a carefully written and heavily designed work. There are indeed some 'blank' spots, often in passages of accompanied recitative, where Rossini takes too complacent a view of French 'vers libre', which has little of the force and variety of the freely mingled seven- and eleven-syllable lines of recitative familiar from Italian 'versi sciolti'. Not the least of the glories of the opera's celebrated second act is the presence there of the very kind of self-generating energy we expect from Rossini at the height of his form. Like a growing number of works from this period, *Guillaume Tell* requires a first-rate conductor in the full, modern sense of the term. In addition to being a skilled accompanist, the conductor needs to be able to give shape to the entire four-act structure whilst at the same time energising those sections which require energising. Rossini's orchestrations—sumptuous, exciting, and often innovative—also need looking to.

The 1828 draft libretto provided for a reprise of the act 2 oath-swearing at the end of act 4. This was rejected by Rossini, who settled for a grander and simpler conclusion, one better attuned to opera's tableau-like character and inner mood, which is the very reverse of triumphalist.[4] After Gesler falls to his death, the confederates gather, the skies clear, and the glorious landscape is revealed in all its splendour. Moved by the scene before him, Arnold addresses his dead father: 'Ah, father why are you not here in this moment of joy for all Helvetia?' The line is not in Schiller, but it is not surprising to find it in Rossini. This touching tribute over, Rossini's hymn to nature and liberty breaks forth, the *ranz-des-vaches* (ex. 46) stealing softly in on the horns with a numinous beauty which Wagner would match but not surpass.

Ex. 46



[3] *Carteggi Verdiani,* ed. A. Luzio (Rome, 1935–1947), III, 78.

[4] In 1831 Rossini oversaw a three-act abridgement for the Paris Opéra. This ends with a victory chorus for the Swiss, based on the overture's concluding *pas redoublé.*

The hymn is ostensibly in C major, but there is a minor-key feel to much of the music (the penultimate climax arrives in A minor, not C), suggesting that, to Rossini's perception, peace and prosperity are at best provisional states, to be cherished whilst they last.

So the last of Rossini's heroic idylls reaches its appointed end and, with it, his career as an opera composer. Some months before he died in 1868, Rossini wrote to Tito Ricordi, 'Let dear Giulio [Tito's son] study with kindness my first work, *Demetrio e Polibio* and *Guillaume Tell.* He will see that I was not idle!'[5] It is a modest summary of an operatic career which is by any standards an astonishingly inventive, formally innovative, and in the end musically majestic achievement.

[5] LRM, 321–23; RGR, 328–29.

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

Sacred Music: Messa di Gloria, Stabat mater, Petite messe solennelle

OPERA COMPOSERS OF THE CLASSICAL AND POSTCLASSICAL periods are often thought, in Anglo-Saxon countries in particular, to write sacred music which is self-evidently, even shamelessly operatic, the term being loosely used to mean glib, worldly, or hedonistic. Mozart, Berlioz, and Verdi have all had this charge preferred against them, as has Rossini. For what, so the argument goes, could this unschooled, cynical *bon vivant* know of the traditions of church music or the solemn ritual of the Mass? The answer is a considerable amount.

As his punning preface to the *Petite messe solennelle* makes clear,[1] Rossini was intelligently aware of the fact that composers of sacred music could all too easily be joined to the devil's party without their knowing it. Yet in his own sacred music, the *Petite messe solennelle* in particular, he is strikingly honest. We glimpse here a darker, more troubled side to his nature, married to a compensatory love of the older, preclassical choral disciplines, and a delighted sense of new possibilities in matters of texture and harmony. A singular achievement at a time when choral music was becoming ever more bloated, the *Messe,* which it is not fanciful to see as Rossini's spiritual testament, looks back to Palestrina and forward to the sacred music of composers such as Fauré and Poulenc.

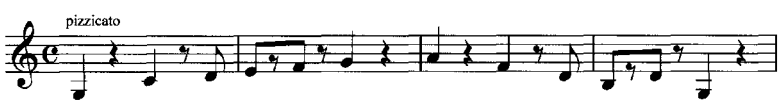
The most substantial of the sacred works dating from the period when Rossini was active as an opera composer is the *Messa di Gloria,* a nine-

[1] See p. 157.

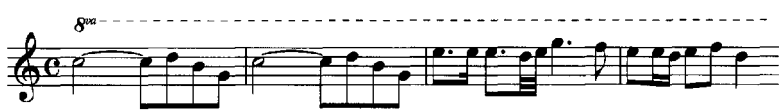
movement setting of the Mass's 'Kyrie' and 'Gloria', first heard in Naples in March 1820. This does deploy operatic forms and theatrical effects, yet it also attempts to distance itself from the theatre by reverting to older, quasi-ecclesiastical ways of doing things. The soprano's 'Laudamus' is a bipartite aria of the kind familiar from the late Neapolitan operas. On the other hand, the tenor's pastoral 'Gratias', eloquently accompanied by the cor anglais, and the bass's 'Quoniam', with its elaborate clarinet obbligato, both belong to the older 'ritornello' form in which vocal developments are confined within the melodic orbit of the introduction itself.

In three of the movements choral forces are deployed in ways which reflect the finely constructed opening scene of *Mosè in Egitto;* the orchestrations, by contrast, anticipate the splendours yet to come of Berlioz and Verdi. The 'Kyrie' is the most original of the movements, the obscured tonal orientation of the introduction giving it a strangely arresting quality before the choir's hushed entry on the dominant seventh of the tonic E flat. Such subtleties made little sense to the Neapolitans, who were more at home with the 'Christe eleison', a succulent duet for two tenors in the unexpected key of G flat, or the opening movement of the 'Gloria', which sent them into paroxysms of delight. This is built on two figures, an impish pizzicato (ex. 47a) and a swirling second theme (ex. 47b) which follows it in a brilliant ritornello, joyously crowned by soloists and chorus.[2]

Ex. 47a



Ex. 47b



[2] The magnificent fugal setting of the 'Cum Sancto Spiritu' is probably the work of the great contrapuntalist Pietro Raimondi (1786–1853). See J. Rosenberg, 'Rossini, Raimondi e la *Messa di Gloria* del 1820', BCRS 35 (1995), 85.

Beethoven was to do much the same kind of thing in the presentation of the Joy theme in the last movement of his Ninth Symphony. Contemporary writers saw the 'Gloria' as a hymn to Christ's nativity, the contrasted themes characterising the earthly and the spiritual, shepherds and angels. Whatever images one cares to attach, it is gloriously affirmative music which confirms the truth of Théophile Gautier's assertion that Italian sacred music is by nature 'heureux, souriant, presque gai, toujours en fête'.[3]

Gautier made these remarks after hearing Rossini's *Stabat mater* at its first official performance in Paris in 1842. He also praised Rossini's melody for being 'noble, simple et sévère' and 'pleine d'élan et d'effusion'. The poet Heine put it slightly differently. In a famous encomium he commended Rossini's 'eternal grace', his 'irresistible tenderness'. So glorious were the sounds which issued from the Théâtre Italien, it was 'like a vestibule of Heaven'.[4] As we have seen, the work had a curious genesis. Beginning life as a private commission, part of which Rossini farmed out to his trusted colleague Giovanni Tadolini, the all-Rossini *Stabat mater* was eventually completed and published in somewhat fraught circumstances the best part of a decade later. It is a fascinating story, made the more fascinating by the light it throws on the shrewdness of Rossini's approach to a text, a medieval Latin poem, over which he had no control.

The poem, the work of an anonymous thirteenth-century Franciscan monk, effectively falls into two sections, of which the first is generally less impressive than the second. The opening is striking enough, not least because of the euphony of the first line and the harshness of the second:

Stabat mater dolorosa
iuxta crucem lacrimosa
dum pendebat filius

The writing in the remainder of the first stanza and three stanzas which follow is surprisingly commonplace, the words merely trotting out familiar facts and emotions about Christ on the Cross and his grieving mother:

[3] L. and M. Escudier, *Resumé des opinions de la presse sur la 'Stabat Mater' de Rossini* (Paris, 1842), 63. Ex. 47a was reused, in a more martial context, at the end of act 2 of *Le Siège de Corinthe*.

[4] H. Heine, *Sämtliche Werke* VII, 217; WRB 218.

Quae moerebat et dolebat
Et tremebat, cum videbat

Then at the start of stanza 5 something remarkable happens. At the words 'Eja, Mater', the poem suddenly switches from recitation to prayer, and passionate prayer at that. There is even a form of dramatic development as we move from the opening intercession to Christ's mother, through the drama of the Crucifixion and the Last Judgment, to the poem's concluding vision of paradise. Here the words are as lyrical and solemn as the opening words were harsh and unyielding:

Quando corpus morietur
fac ut animae donetur
Paradisi gloria

Given the fact that lines 4 to 24 of the original poem offer us little more than recycled images in tired language, it may not be entirely coincidental that it is was these lines which Rossini originally farmed out to Tadolini. Had Rossini simply run out of time or become bored with the piece, he would have completed the first part of the poem and not the second. In reality, he appears to have been struck by the power of the poem's opening and by the great sequence of prayers which dominate its second half. In 1841, faced with the task of replacing Tadolini's settings of the weaker sections, he fell back on a sequence of two arias and a duet: unpretentious, straightforward pieces which to some extent mirror the commonplace nature of the words themselves. The lines 'Quae moerebat et dolebat / Et tremebat, cum videbat' become part of the celebrated tenor aria 'Cuius animam'. With the poet on autopilot, Rossini obligingly chips in with one of his most memorable melodies. It is unfortunate that both this and the bass's 'Pro peccatis' come so early in the work, fixing in listeners' minds the idea, not of a text that is banal, but of music that is 'operatic'. In fact, neither movement, formally speaking, is at all 'operatic'.

Rossini's setting of the poem's opening three lines begins with a gloomy ascent on cellos and bassoons and a broken pizzicato over which 'dum pendebat Filius' will, at the end of the movement, exhaustedly sound. Gloriously laid out for voices and orchestra, this G minor movement is as impressive in the particularity of its detailing as it is in the effective shaping

of the whole. The a cappella movements—the 'Eja, Mater' with its recitatives for solo bass, and the 'Quando corpus morietur', much admired by Wagner—place Rossini within the vanguard of those romantic composers who wished to appropriate preclassical choral styles and procedures. (Mendelssohn's famous performance of Bach's *St Matthew Passion* had been given in Berlin in 1829.) What is notable here, given the 'operatic' charge that is levelled against the work, is the music's shape and sombre mood, quite different from anything to be found in the unaccompanied ensembles in the operas. Having parodied the a cappella style in *Le Comte Ory,* Rossini now addresses it with true gravity.

The movements immediately before the 'Quando corpus morietur' are also fine, even if our Victorian forefathers did overexploit Rossini's setting of the 'Inflammatus', the work's equivalent of the 'Dies irae' (that 'spavined *cheval de bataille* of obsolete prima donnas', as George Bernard Shaw dubbed it). Compositional and vocal formulas—insistently repetitive accompaniments, symmetrically repeated rhythmic ideas—are evident at times. That said, it is possible to sense a tragic momentum beneath the gloriously phrased soprano solos in the 'Quis est homo'; and the jaunty mood of the 'Sancta Mater' is instantly dispelled by the bass's dramatic entry. There is also real seriousness of purpose in the big double fugue, written in 1841, with which Rossini concludes the work. Its first subject, 'In sempiterna saecula, Amen', is a splendid inspiration, answered and freely imitated by the second fugue on the word 'Amen'. The recollection of the work's gloomy opening phrases shortly before the end is an additional stroke of imagination, strongly tying together the work's beginning and end, and its two periods of composition.

The *Petite messe solennelle* is sometimes said to be a rather esoteric piece, a point which may or may not be lent credibility by Robert Craft's testimony that the poet W. H. Auden would sing extracts from it when drunk. Scored for twelve voices, two pianos, and harmonium, it is sparer than the *Stabat mater* and stylistically far less predictable. It is also more disturbing. In the 'Kyrie eleison' Rossini's music movingly charts a sense of bewilderment which the prayer in some sense attempts to articulate. The tonality, free-ranging and often unsettling in its fluidity, is predominantly minor key, with Rossini's fondness for keys a minor third apart (in this

instance, A minor and C minor) very much in evidence. Even more unsettling than the tonal orientations is the actual sound of the music: harmony notes sustained by the eerie-sounding harmonium, whilst the pianos sketch out skeletal, asymmetrical ostinato figures which will later accompany the voices without in any real sense sustaining them.

The choir's entry is a tautly worked contrapuntal fabric, as the realisation of the moment of Incarnation will later be: the voices bunched anxiously together before perspectives expand and we are dropped into the major and a sweet, burgeoning melody which Fauré would have been proud to own. The melody does not reverse the anxious mood; the tonal orientation is still minorward and remains so for the unaccompanied 'Christe eleison' (ex. 48). This, we now know, is a reworking of the 'Et incarnatus' from a *Messe* by Rossini's friend Louis Niedermeyer. It is extremely beautiful, though it is interesting to note that contemporary commentators (who knew nothing of the borrowing) were divided as to its suitability. One writer thought that 'from first note to last it breathes the most elevated religious feeling'; another suggested that stylistically it was at odds with its context, a 'morceau' better suited to the milieu of the salon. When the 'Kyrie' returns, Rossini uses an awed *pppp* choral entry to blur the shock of the switch from C minor to A. By the end of the movement we have adjusted to the pianos' angular rhythms and to the wheezing harmonium; but Rossini has already drawn us into a world which is a good deal stranger and more emotionally complex than we had probably bargained for at the outset.

By contrast, the 'Gloria', with its trinity of F major flourishes, is splendidly affirmative. The key changes are rich, exotic even, but the mood in which the solo voices praise, bless, and adore is one of settled calm. In the 'Gratias' three of the soloists work together independent of the chorus. Again it is a movement of great economy: the bass giving out the principal subject, then wittily underwriting the contralto's statement with a three-note, syncopated figure, the tenor illuminating the word 'gloriam' with a single high A late in the movement. The tenor's 'Domine Deus' which follows has a fine operatic melody, but the cloudy harmonies and minorward trajectory bespeak an ambiguity that is typical of the work as a whole. For the concluding double fugues of both the 'Gloria' and the 'Credo', Rossini reverts to a freely varied version of the stile antico, familiar from the writing of Italian composers as far back as Palestrina. The

Ex. 48

Andantino moderato

tutto sotto voce e legato

sotto voce

Chris - te___

sotto voce

Chris - te, Chris - te___ e -

sotto voce

Chris - te___ e - le - - - - -

sotto voce

Chris - te, Chris - te___ e - le - i - son

___ e - le - - - - - - - - -

- le - - - i - son Chris - te [e] -

- - - - - - i - son

Chris - te e - le - - - - i son

final movement of the 'Gloria', the 'Cum sancto spiritu', is based on a buoyant figure which Haydn might have dreamed up. Since the fugal subjects, and the freely modulating smorzando and homophonic writing, must be sung with accuracy and sensibility, it is vital that small forces are used.

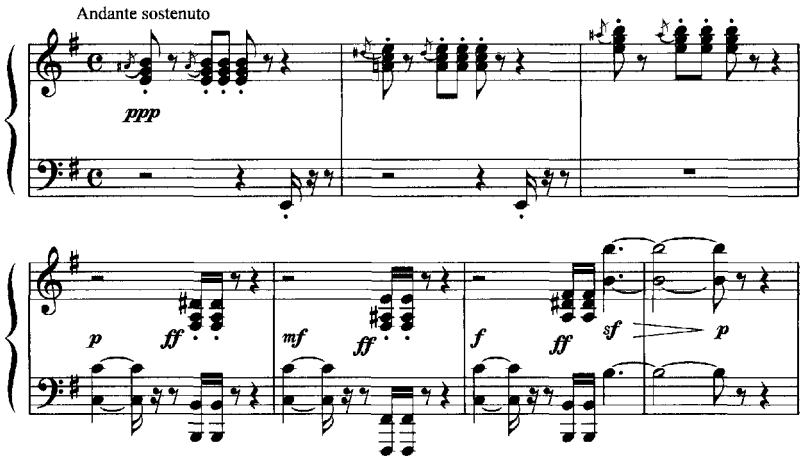
The solo and duet writing in the *Messe* is distinguished. The 'Qui tollis' clearly owes its inspiration to Rossini's artistic love affair with the Marchisio sisters. This is music of tragic eloquence, long-breathed, with the kind of rapt, gloomy beauty which the creator of Senta's music in *Der fliegende Holländer* might well have wondered at. The A flat 'Crucifixus' is a strange piece. To Rognoni it is a blues number, a not entirely fanciful view. The piano's rhythm is lazily syncopated, and the drop back to a B natural in the reiterated cry of 'Crucifixus' in bar 4 establishes the minor third's melancholy presence, something which Rossini develops midway through the movement in an agonising sequence of rising minor thirds during a further fourfold repetition of the word 'Crucifixus'.

The autograph of the work includes two movements, not part of the Ordinary of the mass, which often appear in French masses of the period: an instrumental solo written for performance during the Offertory, and a post-Communion hymn which comes before the 'Agnus Dei'. Rossini's 'O salutaris' (the already written 'O salutaris, de campagne' in an upward transposition for soprano) was not included in the first performances of *Messe;* nor is it entirely welcome after the soprano's 'Crucifixus', which is the work's principal point of meditation. The 'Prélude religieux' for piano or (less likely) harmonium is in the foreign key of F sharp minor. (To give the choir the pitch for the unaccompanied 'Sanctus' which follows, Rossini inserted a curious nine-bar 'Ritournelle' in C.) The movement owes a good deal to Rossini's study of Bach's *The Well-tempered Clavier,* though both the phrasing and the use of chromatic harmony provide a foretaste of what, in the context of César Franck's music, we shall come to know as a state of 'serene anxiety'.

The concluding 'Agnus Dei' is more anxious than serene, a two-bar unaccompanied call of 'Dona nobis pacem' notwithstanding. The movement begins with a melancholy E minor figure (ex. 49) and a syncopated ostinato, both of which might have been written by Schubert in his late, tragic vein.

The vocal line—lyrical, long-breathed, and rising to declamatory heights in the climactic cries of 'miserere'—is Rossini's last gift to the contralto, Barbara Marchisio. At its climax, the music switches as electrifyingly as Moses's prayer had done into the major. But the irksome little E minor figure returns as surely as does the Scherzo's goblin theme (E. M. Forster's

Ex. 49



famous metaphor) in the finale of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. The goblins' return was for Forster an earnest of Beethoven's honesty, allowing us to trust him when he says other things; and much the same thing might be said about the end of Rossini's *Messe.* It is a work which expresses the hopes, joys, and fears of a man for whom doubt, and with it a certain brooding melancholy, was part and parcel of a belief which was both instinctive and provisional.

CHAPTER FORTY

Vocal and Piano Music: Early Songs, Giovanna d'Arco, Les soirées musicales, Péchés de vieillesse

AS AN OLD MAN, ROSSINI REMARKED, 'I WRITE BECAUSE I CANNOT stop myself'. He may have written no operas after 1829, but his output during the remaining decades of his life was, when his health permitted, substantial. Indeed in the years 1857–1868 it bordered on the prodigious. In addition to the *Petite messe solennelle* and a number of brief public *pieces d'occasion,* he composed, and later collected into thirteen meticulously ordered volumes, the 150 songs and keyboard works to which he gave the generic title *Péchés de vieillesse,* 'Sins of Old Age'.

In the early years of his career, when opera was the be-all and end-all of his existence, Rossini wrote little nonoperatic vocal music. The folksy 'Se il vuol la molinara', about a lovelorn boy and his girl who works at the mill, has on the autograph manuscript the date '20 March 1801', though the dedication to 'my dearest Viganò' is written in a decidedly grown-up hand. The delicious tune with which the song begins also appears at the start of Roggiero's aria 'Torni alfin ridente' in *Tancredi.* The song as we now have it is probably contemporary with *Tancredi* and with *Qual voce, quae note,* which Rossini wrote for Adelaide Malanotte in 1813. Towards the end of his time in Naples he wrote the enchantingly sly *La pastorella,* about a girl three times betrayed, as well as *Il trovatore,* which chronicles the life of a lovelorn wanderer who sings to assuage his grief, and the brilliant *Canzonetta spagnuola,* 'En medio a mis dolores'. There is also the profoundly beautiful *Beltà crudele,* which Rossini copied into the albums of a number of favoured friends. Two other occasional pieces have already

been mentioned: the carnival jest concocted by Rossini and Paganini in Rome in 1821 ('Siamo ciechi, siamo nati') and *Addio ai viennesi,* written for his departure from Vienna in 1822 and later adapted for use in other cities.

After 1829 Rossini's urge to compose was channelled into smaller forms. Having pondered and rejected the idea of writing an opera on Joan of Arc, he contented himself with *Giovanna d'Arco,* a fifteen-minute cantata for soprano and piano in which full-scale drama is distilled into private soliloquy in a manner often favoured by poets when theatrical forms are unavailable or uncongenial. Rossini's Joan is bold and unadorned. In the opening recitation, she waits. It is night and nothing stirs but the wind-ruffled waters. In her country's hour of need an all-powerful force has called 'the shepherdess from her flocks'. Her mind is troubled as she contemplates her imminent departure from her family and the countryside she has grown to love. In the central lyric section, 'O mia madre e tu frattanto', she imagines her mother's sorrow and sense of loss upon discovering her daughter's departure. In the stormier recitation that follows she sees a light in the east. It is not sunrise but the return of the 'vision' which will inspire her to victory in the king's name. In the ecstatic cabaletta 'Corre la gioia di core in core' she prophesies victory in battle. Anticipating the question 'Who are you that has saved the king?' she contemplates her fervent reply, 'The virgin has triumphed who believed in God'. The model for the cantata may well have been Haydn's similarly conceived *Arianna a Naxos,* one of Rossini's favourite works.

Rossini's principal preoccupation in Paris in the early 1830s was the writing of a group of chamber arias and duets, which the publisher Troupenas gathered in 1835 under the title *Les soirées musicales.* It is more an 'Album de Musique' than a song cycle. Individual songs can be (often are) extracted from it; nor does the published order of eight songs and four duets need to be adhered to. Orchestral arrangements by Respighi and Britten have done much to popularise *Les soirées musicales,* but it is in their original form that the music most merits consideration.

Eight of the texts are the work of Count Carlo Pepoli, the remaining four are by Metastasio. Of these, the second song, 'Il rimprovero' ('The Reproach'), uses a text which would become a favourite Rossini template: the six-line 'Mi lagnerò tacendo' from Metastasio's *Siroe, re di Persia.* Dance is one of the keys to *Les soirées musicales,* beginning with 'L'orgia', a flamboyant waltz-song about the joys of wine, women, and song. 'L'invito' ('The

Invitation') deploys a bolero rhythm in the service of verses whose unblushing eroticism is perhaps more Italian than Spanish. The song of the Alpine shepherdess is a quick Tyrolean dance replete with yodelled ornamentation. 'La gita in gondola' ('The Gondola Trip') is a barcarolle; 'La danza', a tarantella napoletana. If the rhythmic basis of these pieces is frankly demotic, the writing is full of courtly sophistication. The piano writing, as we would expect of Rossini, is inventive and urbane, with shifting accents and teasing phrase rhythms slyly redirecting our attention away from routine expectation back to what he has actually provided for us. The first of the duets is the Venetian dialect song 'La regata veneziana', in which two coquettish girls urge a pair of gondoliers to put their backs into their punting; the last, 'Li marinari' ('The Sailors'), strikes a grimmer maritime note. A dramatic duologue for tenor and bass, it brings vividly to life the perils of the sea. (Was Rossini remembering his nightmare crossing of the English Channel in December 1823?) The duet's brooding mood and lyrical-declamatory style attracted the attention of the young Wagner, who orchestrated it in 1838, a year before a stormy sea-crossing of his own gave rise to thoughts of *Der fliegende Holländer.*

During the worst years of his illness in the 1840s and early 1850s Rossini occasionally wrote songs, some of which found their way into the autograph albums of friends. The lover's plaint *L'âme délaissée* ('The Neglected Soul') is a particularly fine example. Rossini's return to something like full-time composition was marked by his presentation to Olympe in April 1857 of his *Musique anodine.* The resumption of work would have been a sufficient reason for celebration, even though the music itself shows the scars of his illnesses as well as evidence of the obsessive and morbid states he had endured. The sequence consists of a piano prelude and six settings of Metastasio's 'Mi lagnerò tacendo', the lines he had returned to time and again since using them in *Les soirées musicales.* Their versatility lies in the fact that they cover a range of emotional states—grief, love, anger, each in a variety of manifestations—with an inbuilt point of drama on the word 'Crudel!'

Mi lagnerò tacendo	I shall suffer mutely
della mia sorte amara;	my bitter fate;
ma ch'io non t'ami, o cara,	but do not delude yourself, o my dear,
non lo sperar da me.	with hopes that I do not love you.

Crudel! in che t'offesi	Cruel one! Why do you continue
farmi penar così?	to make me suffer so?

By setting the same words six times, Rossini was reaffirming his long-standing belief in the primacy of music and its chameleon nature. 'Prima la musica, dopo le parole', 'Music first, then the words'. The settings are divided among three voice types: alto, soprano, and bass. The melodically appealing first setting is for alto, which also has the declamatory fifth. The third (anguished) and the fourth (flirtatious in 3/4 time) are for soprano. The baritone has the second setting (its melody's upward curve curiously predicting Verdi's 'Celeste Aida') and the sixth, which is the most bullish of the group.

Rossini continued to use 'Mi lagnerò tacendo' after 1857 in what became an increasingly elaborate game of masks and disguises, as the old master affected to conjure forth new music for the fashionable elites who attended his *samedi soirs.* Sometimes the text would be set in new ways. More usually, music already written for the text would be provided with new words designed to catch the music's innate 'atmosphere'. Songs which come into this category include 'Aragonese', 'I gondolieri', 'La fioraia fiorentina', and a Rossinian *Kindertotenlied,* 'Le dodo des enfants', in which a mother sings a lullaby to her baby son, an 'ephemeral rose' who is near to death.

Abandoned children, exiles, orphans, and beggars crop up a good deal in the forty or so songs in the *Péchés de vieillesse,* as they tend to do in a good deal of the poetry and literature of the period. Some of the songs test our patience with texts which (uncharacteristically for Rossini) outstay the music's capacity to sustain our interest in them. Not that this is always the case. One thinks of 'Un Sou', a 'complainte à deux voix' for tenor and baritone, in which two beggars, father and son, bewail their misfortune. Their dog has died and they are offering his leash, their last possession, for a penny, a sum which to them would be like 'gold from the Andes'. The song is a lugubrious cabaret-turn, a companion to the plaint of the blind beggars that Rossini, Paganini, and d'Azeglio cooked up for Roman carnival in 1821. Rossini's humour in his last years was often of the graveyard variety. Certainly there were those among his friends who would have given rather more than a sou to have Mme Rossini's dog—variously described as 'moth-eaten', 'nauseous', and 'a fetid carcass'—put away for good. A cabaret song of an altogether more cheerful nature is 'Le lazzarone'

('The Scoundrel'), an exhilarating tribute to Neapolitan life in all its garishness and charm.

Unsurprisingly, the finest songs show off Rossini's own best qualities: his wit, his panache, his sense of theatre, his ability to shape a melody in a way which briefly touches the heart. There are also many reminders of the sheer versatility of his art, ranging from the a cappella 'Cantemus Domino' ('There's a waste of time!!!' he exclaims at the end of the autograph score) to the diverting Offenbach-like 'Chanson du bébé' with its delighted regression to the language of the nursery—'Atchi!' 'Papa', 'Pipi', 'Caca'. 'La nuit de Noël', for baritone solo, four-part vocal octet, piano, and harmonium, is a fine Christmas piece, as is the brilliant four-part chorus 'Toast pour le nouvel an', in which Rossini manages the dizzying feat of celebrating both champagne and the blessed Virgin in the same song. The enchanting love duet for contralto, tenor, and piano, 'Les Amants de Séville', shows off his special love for the Spanish dance, the tirana. Amusing to the point of eccentricity, but poignant too, is 'L'Amour à Pékin'. The song tells of a Chinese lady who pines for her distant beloved, a French soldier. It begins with a series of piano solos on the 'Chinese' scale (six tones without semitones), interrupted (as if in anticipation of the methods of Auric and his friends in Les Six) by the traditional French song 'J'ai du bon tabac dans ma tabatière'. The lady's lament, when it finally arrives, is extraordinarily touching. This was one of the last of the *Péchés de vieillesse,* written by Rossini for his friend and former pupil, the great bel canto contralto Marietta Alboni.

Not all the *Péchés* were composed for performance at Rossini's private soirées. His 'Ave Maria' for four voices and organ was presented to the Empress Eugénie as part of an attempt to obtain the restoration of Michele Carafa's pension—a case of God joining hands with Mammon. The splendid hunting chorus 'Choeur de chasseurs démocrates', which adds kettledrums and tam-tam in the atmospheric 'retreat', was performed at Ferrières, the country residence of the Rothschilds, on the occasion of a visit by Napoleon III. A rather odder piece, 'Le Chant des Titans', for four basses (the sons of Titan), piano and harmonium, whose opening line is 'Guerre! massacre! carnage!' was performed in a version for full orchestra at a concert in Paris in December 1861 to raise funds for a monument to Cherubini in Florence. Its bombastic nature greatly upset Boito. 'It's only a joke!' Rossini explained.

Occasionally amid these festive and discursive pieces we encounter a genuinely great song. In 'L'ultimo ricordo' a dying man presses into his wife's hand a faded flower which she carried on their wedding day. The song's mood resembles that of the 'Agnus Dei' of the *Petite messe solennelle.* A swaying ostinato and rich, often noticeably chromatic, texturing underpin a vocal line of chiselled beauty, which itself rises to a declamatory climax similar to that in the 'Agnus Dei' or Tell's 'Sois immobile'. As in 'Sois immobile', the plea is made personal, but on this occasion Rossini goes a stage further. By deleting the poet's 'Elvira' and substituting his own wife's name ('This faded flower / I leave to you, Olympe, as gift'), he turns the song into his own private *Liebestod.* Equally remarkable, with its despairing final cry of 'Ma mère, adieu!' is 'Adieux à la vie', an 'Elégie sur une seule note', another reworking of a 'Mi lagnerò tacendo' original. In *Ciro in Babilonia* the 20-year-old Rossini's writing of the voice part of an aria on a single note is little more than a cruel prank; here the effect is quite different. Supported by another impassioned piano part, the monotone declamation can, in a skilled performance, give the song a haunted, despairing character, as shifts of key, volume, and pace articulate the text's changing perspectives.

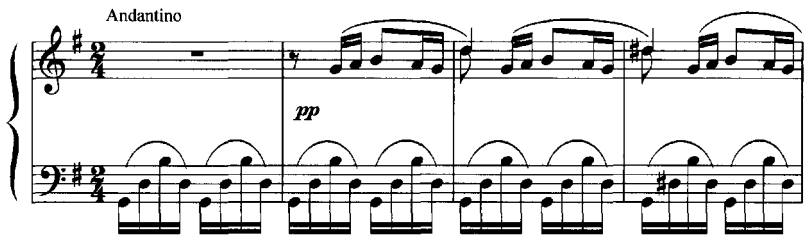
It is difficult to understand why Rossini's substantial body of late piano music remains so little known. As an old man he often signed his letters 'G. Rossini, pianist of the fourth class', a typical act of self-deprecation. Saint-Saëns was less than just when he talked of Rossini's 'scribbling' these late pieces (the autographs are beautiful calligraphic specimens), but most contemporary witnesses agreed with his judgment that Rossini played the piano 'to perfection'. His technique was precise without being dry, light-toned and sparely pedalled, yet capable of considerable sensuous beauty, the hands gliding effortlessly across the keyboard. It was a style which was very much Rossini's own, which may explain why pianists who do attempt the music occasionally find it 'tricky', the fingering in particular. There is evidence of the neoclassical brilliance of his playing in pieces such as the 'Prélude pétulant rococo' and 'Gymnastique d'écartement'; and it needs a fleet yet resilient touch to do justice to 'Un reveil en sursaut', which rouses 'Un profond sommeil' out of its Lisztian slumbers. In his earliest years Rossini had delighted in eighteenth-century Italian keyboard

music. (Clementi, by then domiciled in England, was a role model.) Later J. S. Bach's music was to leave its mark, clarifying and energising Rossini's writing, and drawing from him a succession of wry tributes in pieces such as the 'Prélude prétentieux' and the punningly named 'Prélude fugassé', with its suggestion of fugue, fleetness, and absconsion.

At the same time, Rossini had followed with interest the careers of Chopin and Mendelssohn, kindred spirits in some ways, and of course Liszt. Ever the detached observer, sympathetic though sometimes acerbic, Rossini appropriates and occasionally parodies their styles, hiding behind whimsical titles and defensive verbal epilogues, lest we should be tempted to take his music too seriously. Thus we have a 'Thème naïf et variations idem', a 'Castor Oil Waltz', and a charmingly ruminative, rather Mendelssohnian piece entitled 'Ouf! les petits pois'. The victim is openly named in the 'Petite caprice (style Offenbach)', a number that is part jest and part parody, said to have been Rossini's response to Offenbach's guying of the celebrated trio from *Guillaume Tell* in act 3 of *La belle Hélène* ('Lorsque la Grèce est un champ de carnage'). Marked allegretto grotesco and fingered 22552255, so as to reproduce the sign of the 'evil eye' which Offenbach is said to have possessed, it tiptoes and occasionally blunders its way through a harmonic minefield. The caprice has become familiar in Respighi's orchestration in *La boutique fantasque,* but orchestration blunts its wit and makes the empty formal maneuvres seem less banal.

Rossini's relations with Chopin, Schumann, and Mendelssohn were more benign. 'Une caresse à ma femme', with its questioning trio (allegretto moderatissimo) and a first subject (ex. 50) of Eusebian wistfulness, could almost be by Schumann.

Ex. 50



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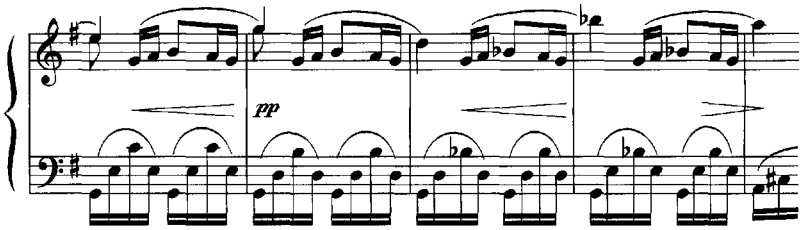
Ex. 50 (*Continued*)



Chopin is gently chided in the title of the 'Prélude inoffensif' and made to wait upon tedious warming-up exercises in 'Mon prélude hygiénique du matin', though what follows pays generous tribute to a piano style noted for the elegance of its cantilenas, the brilliance of its sonorities, and the quiet beauty of its modulations. It is here that Rossini seems most at home.

In the scrupulously assembled twelve-piece 'Album de château', Rossini gives us specimens of music from time past, time present, and time to come.[1] 'Spécimen de l'ancien régime' is a delight, with its fine-grained melodic sense, its charming Biedermeier-like waltz, and an exquisite short fugato in the style of Bach. By contrast, 'Spécimen de mon temps', though it has some coursing pages in the manner of Schumann, seems to be parodying the four-square, robustly stated melodies all too familiar from many operas of the period. Cruellest cut of all is 'Spécimen de l'avenir', a wicked parody of the Lisztian method. Elaborate harmonic blueprints are set down but, like the volcanic left-hand runs, they seem to lead nowhere; a huge accompaniment is set in motion but remains bereft of any covering melody; when a theme does finally appear towards the end of the piece, it is one of overwhelming banality. And yet, ever the enigma, Rossini is as capable of appropriating Lisztian devices as he is of parodying them, drawing on a brooding, chromatic style for some of his gloomier compositions: 'Memento homo', 'Un cauchemar', 'Un rêve'.

No one is going to mention Rossini's 24 'Quelques riens pour album' in the same breath as Chopin's 24 *Préludes,* though the music is neither negligible nor lacking in delight. (The opening allegretto begins with an

[1] The album works best when played in its entirety in the order Rossini specified. Dino Ciani (1941–1974), an incomparable Rossini pianist, made a complete recording of it, and the 'Album de chaumière', in Milan in 1968.

imitation of the chimes of 'Big Ben', which first sounded in 1859.) Despite a tasty title, 'Quatre hors-d'oeuvres' carries no particular programme. By contrast, the 'Quatre mendiants' (literally, an assortment of dried fruits and nuts) takes us directly *chez* Rossini. 'Les figues sèches' evokes the maestro's morning greeting to Mme Rossini; 'Les amandes' (subtitled 'Minuit sonne: Bonsoir Madame'), his evening farewell. Since the elderly Rossini generally retired well before midnight and rarely danced a mazurka on the way to the bedroom, there is clearly a measure of poetic licence here. Not so in the case of 'Les raisins', a joyous piece, rich in arcane references, which portrays Rossini's parrot, complete with screeched obscenities (happily untranslatable in instrumental form) and patronising remarks about his lord and master. 'Les noisettes' ('The nuts') are for the Rossinis' dog, who here receives a pedigree makeover.

For all their good humour, grace, and wit, there is a sense in which these late pieces are the work of a man of complex moods. Sometimes the humour seems morbid and coarse. The train crash piece, 'Un petit train de plaisir comico-imitatif', deploys the same joke as Lord Berners's 'Funeral March for a Rich Aunt', but in a grimmer context and a less sanguine manner. And there is Rossini's own 'Marche et reminiscences pour mon dernier voyage' to reckon with. Placed between fragments of what is in fact a funeral march are quotations from several of Rossini's best-known operas. We hear a sad echo of 'Di tanti palpiti' from *Tancredi,* brief flurries from *La Cenerentola,* and the overture to *Semiramide.* There is a snatch from the *Le Comte Ory*'s ironically sanctimonious chorus 'Noble châtelaine', after which the *pas redoublé* from the overture to *Guillaume Tell* cuts a grotesque little caper. This is followed by the melancholy strains of the Gondolier's song from *Otello* and, apt and nicely timed, the good night quintet from *Il barbiere di Siviglia.* Rossini portrays himself in a theme marked 'grazioso e leggiero', a rebuttal of corpulence and old age every bit as witty as Verdi's Sir John Falstaff recalling his days as page to the Duke of Norfolk. But the march continues to its grim close, at which point Rossini adds a single word: 'Requiem'. It is a gloomy end, though it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that, like the irrepressible Count Ory, he will be carousing again the moment our back is turned.

Calendar

Year	Age	Life	Contemporary Events
1792		Gioachino Antonio Rossini born 29 Feb. in Pesaro, only child of Giuseppe Rossini (27) and Anna Rossini (20). Rossini's parents had been married in Pesaro on 24 Sept. 1791.	Imprisonment of French Royal Family. Anfossi aged 64; Auber 10; Beethoven 21; Boccherini 49; Boieldieu 16; Carafa 4; Cherubini 31; Cimarosa 42; Clementi 40; Coccia 9; Colbran 7; Czerny 1; Dittersdorf 52; Dragonetti 28; Field 9; Fioravanti 27; Galli 8; M. García 17; Gazzaniga 48; Generali 18; Gossec 58; Grétry 51; Guglielmi 63; J. Haydn 59; Hérold 1; Hummel 13; Le Sueur 32; Mattei 42; Mayr 28; Méhul 28; Meyerbeer 6 months; Morlacchi 7; Nasolini 24; Paër 20; Paganini 9; Paisiello 51; Pavesi 13; Piccinni 64; Pleyel 34; Portogallo 24; P. Raimondi 5; Salieri 41; Schenk 38; Shield 43; Spohr 7; Spontini 17; Stamitz 46; Tadolini 2; Vaccai 1; Velluti 11; Viotti 36; Weber 5; Weigl 25; S. Wesley 26; Winter 37; Zingarelli 39.

Year	Age	Life	Contemporary Events
1793	1		Execution of Louis XVI, 21 Jan.
1794	2		Danton and Robespierre executed.
1795	3		Blake's *Songs of Experience.* Mercadante born, c. 17 Sept.
1796	4		Napoleon in Italy; Bologna and Ferrara occupied. G. Pacini born, 17 Feb.; Berwald born, 23 July; Loewe born, 30 Nov.
1797	5	French troops enter Pesaro, 5 Feb.	Spread of revolutionary sentiment in Italy. Battle of Cape St Vincent. Olympe Pélissier born, 9 May. Schubert born, 31 Jan.; Donizetti born, 29 Nov.; Heine born, 13 Dec.
1798	6	Anna Rossini begins her professional career as an operatic soprano.	French invasion of Papal States. Haydn's *The Creation,* 29 Apr., Vienna. Wordsworth's and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads.* Leopardi born 29 June.
1799	7	Giuseppe Rossini arrested and imprisoned by the Austrians.	French army suffers defeats in Italy; end of Parthenopean Republic. Beaumarchais (67) dies, 18 May; Halévy born, 27 May; Dittersdorf (59) dies, 24 Oct.
1800	8	Giuseppe Rossini freed after defeat of Austrian army at Marengo, 14 June.	Beethoven's First Symphony, 2 Apr., Vienna. Piccinni (72) dies, 7 May.
1801	9	Giuseppe Rossini appointed 'Professore di corno di caccia' at Bologna Accademia Filarmonica.	Haydn's *The Seasons,* 24 Apr. Cimarosa (51) dies, 11 Jan.; Lanner born, 12 Apr.
1802	10	Family moves to Lugo.	Peace of Amiens, Mar. Beethoven's Heiligenstadt Testament, 6 Oct. Niedermeyer born, 27 Apr.
1803	11	Rossini befriended by wealthy Malerbi family; has access to Malerbi music library; takes composition and singing lessons from Canon Giuseppe Malerbi.	Britain declares war on France. Adam born, 24 July; Lortzing born, 23 Oct.; Berlioz born, 11 Dec.
1804	12	Rossini appears in concert with Anna Rossini, Imola, 22 Apr.; programme includes a cavatina in the buffo style by Rossini. Composes six *sonate a quattro* for Agostino Triossi. Family moves to Bologna.	Napoleon becomes emperor of France, 28 May; crowned in Nôtre-Dame, 2 Dec. Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell.* Glinka born, 1 June.

Year	Age	Life	Contemporary Events
1805	13	Rossini appears as Adolfo in Paër's *Camilla* at Teatro del Corso.	Napoleon forms his Kingdom of Italy. Battles of Trafalgar (Oct.) and Austerlitz (Nov.). Schiller (45) dies, 9 May; Boccherini (62) dies, 28 May.
1806	14	Rossini enters Bologna's Liceo Musicale, Apr.; admitted to Accademia, 24 June. Overture 'al Conventello'.	Napoleon occupies Naples; Joseph Bonaparte becomes king of Naples. Deaths of Pitt (Jan.) and Fox (Sept.). Duprez born, 6 Dec.
1807	15	Colbran (23) makes her Bologna concert debut, 11 Apr.	French invasion of Spain and Portugal. De Staël's *Corinne.*
1808	16	Anna Rossini retires from operatic stage. Rossini writes choral music for Ravenna and Bologna; *Il pianto d'Armonia sulla morte di* Orfeo, 11 Aug.; Overture in D.	Joseph Bonaparte enters Madrid; Murat new king of Naples. Mosca's *L'italiana in Algeri,* 16 Aug., Milan. Costa born, 4 Feb.; Maria Malibran born, 24 Mar.; Balfe born, 15 May.
1809	17	Music for opera *Demetrio e Polibio* completed. Combines study with regular work as maestro al cembalo in local opera houses. Colbran and Velluti in stage performances in Bologna.	Battle of Corunna, death of Sir John Moore. Barbaja moves to the Teatro San Carlo, Naples. Mendelssohn born, 3 Feb.; Haydn (77) dies, 31 May.
1810	18	Declines offer of further period of study at the Liceo. *La cambiale di matrimonio,* 3 Nov., Venice.	Siege of Lisbon. Isouard's *Cendrillon,* 22 Feb., Paris. Scott's *The Lady of the Lake;* Crabbe's *The Borough.* Chopin born, 1 Mar.; Schumann born, 8 June; Nicolai born, 9 June; Ivanoff born, 22 Oct.
1811	19	Prepares performance of Haydn's *The Seasons* in Bologna; *L'equivoco stravagante,* 26 Oct., Bologna.	Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility.* A. Thomas born, 5 Aug.; Liszt born, 22 Oct.; Hiller born, 24 Oct.
1812	20	*L'inganno felice,* 8 Jan., Venice; *Ciro in Babilonia,* 14 Mar., Ferrara; *La scala di seta,* 9 May, Venice; *La pietra del paragone,* 26 Sept., Milan; *L'occasione fa il ladro,* 24 Nov., Venice. Exempted from military service.	Napoleon's invasion of Russia (June) and retreat from Moscow (Oct.). British Prime Minister Spencer Perceval assassinated. Byron's *Childe Harold,* i and ii. Dickens born, 7 Feb.; Flotow born, 27 Apr.
1813	21	*Il Signor Bruschino,* 13 Jan., Venice; *Tancredi,* 6 Feb., Venice; Ferrara revision of *Tancredi,* Mar., *L'italiana in Algeri,* 22 May, Venice. Opens Milan's new Teatro Re with	Austrian advances in Italy; defeat of Napoleon at Battle of Leipzig, Oct. Byron's *The Giaour.* Heller born, 15 May; Wagner born 22 May; Grétry (72) dies, 24 Sept.; Verdi born, 9 Oct.

Year	Age	Life	Contemporary Events
		Tancredi, 18 Dec.; *Aureliano in Palmira,* 26 Dec., Milan.	
1814	22	*Il turco in Italia,* 14 Aug., Milan; *Sigismondo,* 26 Dec., Venice.	Napoleon abdicates, 6 Apr. Beethoven's *Fidelio,* 23 May. Henselt born, 9 May.
1815	23	Murat in Bologna, Rossini's *Inno dell'Indipendenza,* 15 Apr. Austrians retake Bologna. Arrives Naples to work for Teatro San Carlo, 27 June. *Elisabetta,* 4 Oct., Naples; *Torvaldo e Dorliska,* 26 Dec., Rome.	Congress of Vienna; Napoleon's return to France, Mar.; Battle of Waterloo, 18 June; Quadruple Alliance of Austria, Great Britain, Prussia, Russia. Restoration of Louis XVIII. J. M. W. Turner's *The Founding of Carthage.*
1816	24	San Carlo gutted by fire, 13 Feb.; rowdy prima of *Il barbiere di Siviglia,* 20 Feb., Rome; *Le nozze di Teti, e di Peleo,* 24 Apr., Naples; *La gazzetta,* 24 Sept., Naples; *Otello,* 4 Dec., Naples.	Byron leaves England, publishes *Childe Harold,* iii, and *Siege of Corinth.* Coleridge's *Kubla Khan.* Sterndale-Bennett born, 13 Apr.; Paisiello (76) dies, 5 June.
1817	25	*La Cenerentola,* 25 Jan., Rome; *La gazza ladra,* 31 May, Milan. Stays with Colbran at Barbaja's home on Ischia, July. *Armida,* 11 Nov., Naples; *Adelaide di Borgogna,* 27 Dec., Rome.	Revision of Spontini's *Fernand Cortez,* 8 May, Paris. Byron's *Tasso* and *Manfred.* Keats's *Poems.* Méhul (54) dies, 18 Oct. Mme de Staël (51) dies, 14 July; Jane Austen (41) dies, 18 July.
1818	26	First version of *Mosè in Egitto,* 5 Mar., Naples. *Adina* commissioned. Gala opening of new opera house in Pesaro with *La gazza ladra,* 10 June. Reported dangerously ill with 'severe throat infection'. *Ricciardo e Zoraide,* Naples, 3 Dec.	Congress of Aix-la-Chapelle. Byron's *Childe Harold,* iv. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein.* Donizetti's debut as composer, *Enrico di Borgogna,* 14 Nov. Karl Marx born, 5 May; C. Novello born, 10 June; Gounod born, 18 June; Godefroid born, 24 July.
1819	27	*Omaggio umiliato a Sua Maestà,* 20 Feb., Naples. Revised *Mosè in Egitto,* 7 Mar; *Ermione,* 27 Mar., Naples. *Eduardo e Cristina,* 24 Apr., Venice. Returns to Pesaro, 24 May; driven out by Bergami faction. *La donna del lago,* 24 Oct., Naples; *Bianca e Falliero,* 26 Dec., Milan.	Byron's *Don Juan,* i–ii. Goethe's *West-östlicher Divan.* Scott's *Bride of Lammermoor.* Schopenhauer's *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung.* Géricault's *The Raft of the Medusa.* Ruskin born, 8 Feb.; Suppé born, 18 Apr.; Offenbach born, 20 June.
1820	28	Colbran's father dies, 28 Feb. *Messa di Gloria,* 24 Mar., Naples. Discomfited by politi-	Risings against Bourbon rule in Naples, July. Death of King George III; trial of Queen

Year	Age	Life	Contemporary Events
		cal upheavals. *Maometto II,* 3 Dec., Naples.	Caroline. Scott's *Ivanhoe.* Vieuxtemps born, 17 Feb.
1821	29	*Matilde di Shabran,* 24 Feb., Rome, conducted by Paganini. Rossini and Paganini take part in Roman Carnival. Conducts Haydn's *The Creation,* Apr., Naples. Appearances outside Italy negotiated. *La riconoscenza* as part of gala evening in Rossini's honour, 27 Dec., Naples.	Congress of Laibach, Jan. Outbreak of Greek Revolt, Feb. Austrians enter Naples, Mar.; King Ferdinand returns, May. Weber's *Der Freischütz,* 18 June. Constable's *The Haywain.* De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater.* Shelley's *Adonais.* Keats (25) dies, 23 Feb.; Baudelaire born, 9 Apr.; Napoleon (51) dies, 5 May.
1822	30	*Zelmira,* 16 Feb., Naples. Leaves Naples for season of his operas in Vienna. Marries Isabella Colbran at Castenaso, 16 Mar. Hears *Der Freischütz,* Vienna; hears *Eroica* Symphony and meets Beethoven. Works on *Semiramide* during Oct. in Castenaso; travels to Congress of Verona, Nov.; writes two official cantatas. Revises *Maometto II* for new production, 26 Dec., Venice. Acquires palazzo in need of renovation in Bologna.	Castlereagh's suicide; Canning becomes British foreign secretary. Congress of Verona convened. Rogers's *Italy,* i. Raff born, 27 May; E. T. A. Hoffmann (46) dies, 25 June; Franck born, 10 Dec.
1823	31	*Semiramide,* 3 Feb., Venice. Spends summer in Castenaso. Travels to Paris; banquet in his honour, 16 Nov. Reaches London, 13 Dec. Received by King George IV, Brighton, 29 Dec.	War between France and Spain. Weber's *Euryanthe,* 25 Oct. Byron's *Don Juan,* vi–xiv. Lalo born, 27 Jan.
1824	32	Season of Rossini operas at King's Theatre, London. Feted by the English aristocracy. Signs agreement with Maison du Roi, Paris. Writes short antata in memory of Lord Byron. Visits Cambridge. Takes up residence in Paris; contract renegotiated after death of Louis XVIII.	Meyerbeer's *Il crociato in Egitto,* 7 Mar., Venice. Lord Byron (36) dies, 19 Apr. Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, 7 May. Stendhal's *Vie de Rossini.* Louis XVIII (68) dies, 16 Sept. Géricault (32) dies, 26 Jan.; Smetana born, 2 Mar.; Viotti (69) dies, 3 Mar.; Reinecke born, 23 June; Bruckner born, 4 Sept.; Cornelius born, 24 Dec.
1825	33	Co-director, with Paër, of Paris's Théâtre Italien.	Death of Ferdinand IV (74), 4 Jan., and Tsar Alexander I (47), 1 Dec.

Year	Age	Life	Contemporary Events
		Coronation of Charles X; *Il viaggio a Reims,* 19 June. Supervises revival of Meyerbeer's *Il crociato in Egitto,* Sept.	Bellini's debut as opera composer, *Adelson e Salvini,* Naples, Feb. Salieri (74) dies, 7 May; Mattei (75) dies, 12 May; Winter (71) dies, 17 Oct.; J. Strauss (ii) born, 25 Oct.
1826	34	Conducts charity concert for Greek patriots, 28 Apr. Problems with Paër. Terms of agreement with Maison du Roi renegotiated. Paris Opéra debut, *Le siège de Corinthe,* 9 Oct.	Britain and Russia mediate in Greek–Turkish war. Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans.* Alboni born, 6 Mar.; Weber (39) dies, 5 June; Foster born, 4 July.
1827	35	Anna Rossini (55) dies in Bologna, 20 Feb. *Moïse et Pharaon,* 26 Mar., Paris. Giuseppe Rossini arrives in Paris. Visits Dieppe, Aug. Friendship with banker Aguado. Begins work on *Le Comte Ory* at Aguado's newly acquired château, Petit-Bourg.	Battle of Navarino. Bellini's *Il pirata,* 27 Oct. Manzoni's *I promessi sposi.* Beethoven (56) dies, 26 Mar.
1828	36	Maria Malibran makes her Paris debut in *Semiramide,* 8 Apr. *Le Comte Ory,* 20 Aug., Paris. Work on *Guillaume Tell.*	Outbreak of Russo–Turkish war; Wellington becomes British prime minister. Ibsen born, 20 Mar.; Schubert (31) dies, 19 Nov.; Tolstoy born, 9 Dec.
1829	37	Renews negotiations over contract; threatens to suspend work on *Guillaume Tell;* contract signed by Charles X, 8 May. *Guillaume Tell,* 3 Aug., Paris. Leaves Paris for Bologna, 16 Aug. Meets Bellini in Milan.	Mendelssohn conducts Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* in Berlin. The London Protocol guarantees Greek autonomy. Shield (80) dies, 25 Jan.; Gossec (95) dies, 16 Feb.; A. Rubinstein born, 28 Nov.
1830	38	Spends winter and spring in Bologna and Castenaso. Requests libretto for new opera for Paris. Charles X deposed in July Revolution; Louis-Philippe succeeds to throne. Rossini's contract with Opéra invalidated. Leaves for Paris, 4 Sept.	Deposition of Charles X, Paris, July. Bellini's *I Capuleti e i Montecchi,* 11 Mar.; Donizetti's *Anna Bolena,* 26 Dec.; Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique,* 5 Dec. Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister;* Cobbett's *Rural Rides.* Portogallo (67) dies, 7 Feb.; Goldmark born, 18 May.
1831	39	Visits Madrid with Aguado; conducts *Il barbiere di Siviglia*	Meyerbeer's *Robert le diable,* 21 Nov.; Bellini's *Norma,*

Year	Age	Life	Contemporary Events
		in presence of King Ferdinand VII, 13 Feb. *Stabat mater* commissioned.	26 Dec. Balzac's *La Peau de chagrin;* Pushkin's *Boris Godunov.*
1832	40	Dines with Olympe Pélissier and Balzac, Jan. *Giovanna d'Arco* dedicated to Olympe. Completes *Stabat mater* with help of Tadolini. Cholera in Paris; travels with Aguado to southwest France; meets and advises the young Aristide Cavaillé-Coll.	Otto of Bavaria appointed king of Greece; British Reform Act passed. Chopin's first Paris recital, 26 Feb. Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore,* 12 May. Goethe's *Faust* Pt 2. Manet born, 23 Jan.; Clementi (80) dies, 10 Mar.; Goethe (82) dies, 22 Mar.; M. Garcia (57) dies, 9 June; Scott (61) dies 21 Sept.
1833	41	Signs of deteriorating physical health. Continues to write occasional music. *Stabat mater* receives first performance in Madrid, Good Friday.	Hérold (41) dies, 19 Jan.; Brahms born, 7 May; Borodin born, 12 Nov.; Barbara Marchisio born, 6 Dec.
1834	42	Pension tribunal finds in Rossini's favour; government appeals ruling. Spends summer in Bologna and Castenaso; returns to Paris late Aug.	Peel becomes British prime minister. Berlioz's *Harold in Italy.* Pushkin's *The Queen of Spades.* Ponchielli born, 31 Aug.; Boieldieu (58) dies, 8 Oct.
1835	43	Théâtre-Italien stages first performances of Bellini's *I puritani,* 24 Jan., and Donizetti's *Marin Faliero,* 12 Mar. Acts as honorary pallbearer at Bellini's funeral. Ministry concedes Rossini's pension claim, 24 Dec. *Les soirées musicales* published.	Halévy's *La juive,* 23 Feb.; Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor,* 26 Sept. Cui born, 18 Jan.; Bellini (33) dies, 23 Sept.; Saint-Saëns born, 9 Oct.; Carlotta Marchisio born, 8 Dec.
1836	44	Declines invitation to write new opera for Vienna. Visits Belgium and the Rhineland with Lionel de Rothschild; meets Mendelssohn. Returns to Paris and travels to Bologna.	Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots,* 29 Feb. Büchner's *Woyzeck;* Dickens's *The Pickwick Papers;* Gogol's *The Government Inspector.* Lavigna (60) dies, 14 Sept.; Malibran (28) dies, 23 Sept.
1837	45	Formal separation from Isabella. Travels with Olympe to Milan, Nov., for winter season. Meets Liszt, who arranges *Les soirées musicales* for piano. Death of Varela; manuscript of *Stabat mater* sold.	Berlioz's *Grande messe des morts.* Balakirev born, 2 Jan.; Field (54) dies, 23 Jan.; Pushkin (37) dies, 10 Feb.; Zingarelli (85) dies, 5 May; Leopardi (38) dies, 14 June; Fioravanti (72) dies, 16 June; Le Sueur (77) dies, 6 Oct.

Year	Age	Life	Contemporary Events
1838	46	Much affected by news of death of Carlo Severini in fire at Théâtre Italien, Paris, 14 Jan. Returns to Bologna. Giuseppe Rossini not well, but celebrates 74th birthday, 13 Mar.	Bruch born, 6 Jan.; Bizet born, 25 Oct.
1839	47	Increasingly serious attacks of urethritis and depressive cycles. Giuseppe Rossini (75) dies, 29 Apr. Visits Naples during summer on doctor's advice; stays with Barbaja. Accepts position of honorary consultant to the Liceo Musicale, Bologna.	Verdi's debut as composer, *Oberto,* 17 Nov., Milan; Berlioz's *Roméo et Juliette.* Cézanne born, 19 Jan. Nourrit (37) dies, 8 Mar.; Rheinberger born, 17 Mar.; Mussorgsky born, 21 Mar.; Paër (67) dies, 3 May.
1840	48	Urethritis remains chronic, new treatments complicate condition.	Tchaikovsky born, 7 May; Paganini (57) dies, 27 May; Stainer born, 6 June. Monet born, 14 Nov.
1841	49	Manuscript of *Stabat mater* sold to Aulagnier, Paris; cedes rights to Troupenas and begins work on replacing movements originally assigned to Tadolini. Attempts to interest Donizetti in directorship of Liceo Musicale.	Adam's *Giselle,* 28 June. Donizetti's *Maria Padilla,* 26 Dec. Chabrier born, 18 Jan.; Dvořák born, 8 Sept.; Barbaja (63) dies, 19 Oct.
1842	50	Premiere of all-Rossini *Stabat mater,* Paris, 7 Jan.; huge artistic and commercial success. Italian prima, Bologna, 18 Mar., conducted by Donizetti. Efforts to interest Donizetti in Liceo directorship fail. Aguado (58) dies, Apr. Verdi visits Rossini in Bologna.	Verdi's *Nabucco,* 9 Mar.; Donizetti appointed Kapellmeister to Austrian Court. Boito born, 24 Feb.; Cherubini (81) dies, 15 Mar.; Stendhal (59) dies, 22 Mar.; Massenet born, 12 May; Sullivan born, 13 May.
1843	51	Visits Paris for treatment by surgeon Jean Civiale, May to Sept. Cedes rights of incidental music to *Edipo coloneo* to Gabussi. Hears Verdi's *Nabucco* in Bologna, Oct.	Wagner's *Der fliegende Holländer,* 2 Jan.; Donizetti's *Don Pasquale,* 3 Jan. Ruskin's *Modern Painters.* Diémer born, 14 Feb.; Patti born, 19 Feb.; Lanner (42) dies, 14 Apr.; Henry James born, 15 Apr.; Grieg born, 15 June.
1844	52	Adapts two choruses from *Edipo coloneo* and writes a	J. M. W. Turner's *Rain, Steam, and Speed.* Heine's *Neue Gedichte.*

Year	Age	Life	Contemporary Events
		third for *Trois choeurs religieux,* 20 Nov., Paris.	Rimsky-Korsakov born, 18 Mar.; Nietzsche born, 15 Oct.
1845	53	Isabella Colbran-Rossini seriously ill; visits her 7 Sept; she dies, aged 60, 7 Oct.	Wagner's *Tannhäuser,* 19 Oct. Disraeli's *Sybil;* Engels's *The Condition of the Working Class in England.* Widor born, 21 Feb.; Fauré born, 12 May; Mayr (82) dies, 2 Dec.
1846	54	Cooperates with making of *Robert Bruce,* pastiche based on *La donna del lago,* Paris Opéra, 30 Dec. Marries Olympe Pélissier in Bologna, 16 Aug.	Repeal of Corn Laws in Britain. Dickens's *Pictures from Italy.* Berlioz's *La damnation de Faust.* Weigl (79) dies, 3 Feb.; Tosti born, 9 Apr.; Dragonetti (82) dies, 16 Apr.; Gabussi (46) dies, 12 Sept.
1847	55	First performance of Cantata in honour of Pius IX, 1 Jan., Rome. Controversy in press concerning *Robert Bruce.*	Thackeray's *Vanity Fair.* Mendelssohn (38) dies, 4 Nov.
1848	56	Alarmed by revolutionary activity in Bologna, leaves for Florence, 28 Apr. Writes a choral march for Bologna's Guardia Civica but declines entreaties to return to Bologna. Takes up temporary residence in Florence.	Year of revolutions in Europe. Sicilian revolt, 12 Jan.; revolution in Paris, 22 Feb.; Metternich resigns, 13 Mar.; risings against Austrians in Milan and Venice; liberal constitutions granted in Papal States, Tuscany, Piedmont, Naples; Radetzky's victory at Custozza, 25 July. Communist Manifesto published, Feb. Duparc born, 21 Jan.; Parry born, 27 Feb.; Donizetti (50) dies, 8 Apr.
1849	57	Continues to run affairs from Florence; regular flow of letters to Bologna on domestic matters.	Republic proclaimed in Rome by Mazzini, 9 Feb.; Austrian victory at Novara, 23 Mar.; accession of Victor Emmanuel II; Pius IX restored, 4 July.
1850	58	*Inno alla Pace* written for the painter Vincenzo Rasori, 26 June. Returns to Bologna in Sept with police escort. Spends winter attending to domestic and business affairs.	Louis-Philippe (76) dies, 26 Aug.. Heuberger born, 18 June; Pavesi (71) dies, 28 July. Balzac (51) dies, 21 Aug.
1851	59	Principal possessions crated for dispatch to Florence; unnerved by continued political unrest in Bologna; returns to Florence, 5 May.	Verdi's *Rigoletto,* 11 Mar. London's Great Exhibition opens in Paxton's Crystal Palace, 1 May. Louis Napoleon's coup d'état, Paris, 2 Dec. Lortzing (49) dies, 21 Jan.;

Year	Age	Life	Contemporary Events
			Spontini (76) dies, 24 Jan.; d'Indy born, 27 Mar.
1852	60	Health remains poor; severe depressions and talk of suicide. Corresponds with Ivanoff about Verdi's *Rigoletto.*	Louis Napoleon takes title of Napoleon III; launching of expansionist financial, commercial, and industrial policies of the Second Empire. Stanford born, 30 Sept.
1853	61	Buys property in Florence for renovation. Attends performance of *Guglielmo Tell,* staged in his honour in Pitti Palace, Apr. Letters reveal continued manic-depressive cycles.	Verdi's *Il trovatore,* 19 Jan., *La traviata,* 6 Mar. Liszt's B minor Sonata. P. Raimondi (66) dies, 30 Oct.; Messager born, 30 Dec.
1854	62	Some private music-making, though visitors report acute nervousness, depression, and insomnia.	Crimean War; Battle of Balaclava; Tennyson's 'The Charge of the Light Brigade'. Catalani born, 19 June; Janáček born, 3 July; Humperdinck born, 1 Sept.
1855	63	Departure from Italy. Leaves Florence 26 Apr; arrives in Paris late May. Spends July–Sept. in Trouville, Normandy; meets Hiller. Takes up permanent residence in Paris during autumn.	Opening of Offenbach's Bouffes-Parisiens. Chausson born, 20 Jan.; Rossi (80) dies, 25 Jan. Bishop (68) dies, 30 Apr. Lyadov born, 11 May.
1856	64	Rents small villa in Passy. Visits Strasbourg in June; takes waters at Wildbad and Baden-Baden; received by Maximilian II of Bavaria in Kissingen.	Martucci born, 6 Jan.; Sinding born, 11 Jan.; Adam (52) dies, 3 May; Schumann (46) dies, 29 July; Taneyev born, 25 Nov.
1857	65	Presents his *Musique anodine* as gift to Olympe, 15 Apr. Beginning of new phase in creative and social life. Moves to apartment in Paris's rue de la Chaussée d'Antin.	Indian Mutiny. Liszt's *Faust* and *Dante* symphonies; Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal.* Glinka (52) dies, 15 Feb.; Elgar born, 2 June; Czerny (66) dies, 15 July.
1858	66	Acquires land for a new villa in Passy. Draws up will, naming Olympe as principal beneficiary and, after her death, the Commune of Pesaro for founding of a Liceo Musicale. First samedi soir, 18 Dec. Starts regular composition of the *Péchés de vieillesse.*	Assassination attempt on Napoleon III. Offenbach's *Orphée aux enfers,* 21 Oct. Leoncavallo born, 8 Mar.; E. Smyth born, 22 Apr.; Puccini born, 23 Dec.

Year	Age	Life	Contemporary Events
1859	67	Cornerstone of Passy villa laid, 10 Mar. Enthusiastically received at Conservatoire concert of his music, 17 Apr. French government committee, of which he was absentee president, reports on standard musical pitch (A = 435, enforceable by law).	Darwin's *Origin of Species.* Spohr (75) dies, 22 Oct.; L. Ricci (54) dies, 31 Dec.
1860	68	Wagner conducts concerts in Paris; visits Rossini, Mar. Debut of Marchisio sisters at Paris Opéra in new production of *Semiramide,* 9 July. Receives visits by Moscheles and Hanslick.	Garibaldi in Sicily and Naples; most of Italy united to Piedmont. Chekhov born, 29 Jan.; Wolf born, 13 Mar.; Albéniz born, 29 May; G. Charpentier born, 25 June; Mahler born, 7 July; MacDowell born, 18 Dec.
1861	69	Soirée on Good Friday, 29 Mar., devoted to *Stabat mater,* with Marchisio sisters as soloists; orchestra arranged for double string quartet. Declines commission for 1862 London Exhibition.	Abraham Lincoln takes office; start of American Civil War. Victor Emmanuel proclaimed king of Italy. Berlioz's *Les Troyens* accepted by Paris Opéra. Niedermeyer dies (58), 14 Mar.
1862	70	Sits for portrait by Guglielmo De Sanctis. Continues to compose prolifically for samedi soirs and to lead a full, if carefully regulated, social life.	Bismark becomes leading minister in Prussia. Dostoevsky's *Notes from the House of the Dead.* Delius born, 29 Jan.; Halévy (62) dies, 17 Mar.; Debussy born, 22 Aug.
1863	71	Soirée on Good Friday includes movements from Pergolesi's and Rossini's *Stabat mater.* Begins work on *Petite messe solennelle.*	Manet's *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe.* Cinti-Damoreau (62) dies, 25 Feb.; Delacroix (65) dies, 13 Aug.; Mascagni born, 7 Dec.
1864	72	Premiere of the *Petite messe solennelle,* private chapel of Count and Countess Pillet-Will, Sunday, 14 Mar. Writes his 'Quelques mesures de chant funèbre' in response to Meyerbeer's death. Made *grand officier* of the Légion d'Honneur.	Geneva Convention originated. Offenbach's *La Belle Hélène,* 17 Dec. Foster (37) dies, 13 Jan.; d'Albert born, 10 Apr.; Meyerbeer (72) dies, 2 May; R. Strauss born, 11 June.
1865	73	Visited by Weber's son, Mar. Encourages Sir Michael Costa with his oratorio, *Naaman.*	Lincoln assassinated, 14 Apr. Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde,* 10 June. Pasta (67) dies, 1 Apr.; Magnard born, 9 June;

Year	Age	Life	Contemporary Events
			Nielsen born, 9 June; Glazunov born, 10 Aug.; Dukas born, 1 Oct.; Sibelius born, 8 Dec.
1866	74	Liszt plays at soirée, Holy Saturday, 31 Mar. Rossini begins correspondence with Pope Pius IX in unsuccessful attempt to bring about revocation of papal ban on women singers in church. Mild stroke or thrombosis, Dec.	Austro–Prussian war. Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment.* A. Pacini (87) dies, 10 Mar.; Busoni born, 1 Apr.; Satie born, 17 May; Cilea born, 26 July.
1867	75	Works on orchestration of *Petite messe solennelle. Hymne à Napoléon III,* Paris, 1 July.	Verdi's *Don Carlos,* 11 Mar. Ibsen's *Peer Gynt.* Granados born, 27 July; Giordano born, 28 Aug.; Baudelaire (46) dies, 31 Aug.; Koechlin born, 27 Nov.; G. Pacini (71) dies, 6 Dec.
1868	76	'500th' performance of *Guillaume Tell* celebrated at Paris Opéra, 10 Feb. Becomes embroiled in controversy about funding of Italian musical academies. Receives letter early Aug. from composer of a new version of *Il barbiere di Siviglia.* Discusses his art and ideas in a letter to Filippo Filippi, 26 Aug. Last samedi soir, 26 Sept. Undergoes two operations for malignant rectal fistulas, early Nov. Lingers in great pain for over a week. Dies at 11.15 p.m. on Friday, 13 Nov. Gustave Doré makes deathbed drawings next morning [see plate 24]. Funeral at L'Église de la Trinité, Paris at noon on 21 Nov., attended by over 4,000 people; buried in Père-Lachaise cemetery. [Olympe Rossini died on 22 Mar. 1878. Rossini's remains were reinterred in the Church of Santa Croce, Florence, 2 May 1887. The monument for the tomb was dedicated on 23 June 1902.]	Wagner's *Die Meistersinger,* 21 June, Munich. Berwald (71) dies, 3 Apr.; Bantock born, 7 Aug. Albéniz aged 8; Auber 86; Balakirev 31; Balfe 60; Berlioz 64; Bizet 30; Boito 26; Borodin 35; Brahms 35; Bruch 30; Bruckner 44; Busoni 2; Catalani 14; Chabrier 27; Charpentier 8; Chausson 13; Cilea 2; Costa 60; Debussy 6; Delibes 32; Delius 6; Dukas 2; Duparc 20; Dvořák 27; Elgar 11; Fauré 23; Flotow 56; Franck 45; Giordano 1; Glazunov 3; Goldmark 38; Gounod 50; Granados 1; Grieg 25; Humperdinck 14; d'Indy 17; Janáček 14; Lalo 45; Leoncavallo 10; Liszt 57; Lyadov 13; Magnard 3; Mahler 8; Mascagni 4; Massenet 26; Mercadante 73; Messager 14; Mussorgsky 29; Nielsen 3; Offenbach 49; Parry 20; Ponchielli 34; Puccini 9; Rimsky-Korsakov 24; A. Rubinstein 38; Saint-Saëns 33; Satie 2; Sibelius 2; Smetana 44; Stainer 28; Stanford 16; J. Strauss, ii 43; R. Strauss 4; Sullivan 26; Suppé 49; Tchaikovsky 28; A. Thomas 57; Tosti 22; Verdi 55; Wagner 55; Widor 23; Wolf 8.

List of Works

I. Operas

Demetrio e Polibio, dramma serio per musica, 2 acts; libretto by V. Viganò-Mombelli. Composed before 1810; prima Teatro Valle, Rome, 18 May 1812.

La cambiale di matrimonio, farsa comica, 1 act; libretto by G. Rossi after C. Federici's play (1791), and G. Checcherini's libretto for C. Coccia's *Il matrimonio per lettera di cambio* (1807). Teatro San Moisè, Venice, 3 November 1810.

L'equivoco stravagante, dramma giocoso, 2 acts; libretto by G. Gasbarri. Teatro del Corso, Bologna, 26 October 1811.

L'inganno felice, farsa, 1 act; libretto by G. Foppa after G. Palomba's libretto, set by G. Paisiello (1798). Teatro San Moisè, Venice, 8 January 1812.

Ciro in Babilonia, ossia La caduta di Baldassare, dramma con cori, 2 acts; libretto by F. Aventi. Teatro Comunale, Ferrara, 14 March 1812.

La scala di seta, farsa comica, 1 act; libretto by G. Foppa after Planard's libretto for Gaveaux's *L'Échelle de soie* (1808). Teatro San Moisè, Venice, 9 May 1812.

La pietra del paragone, melodramma giocoso, 2 acts; libretto by L. Romanelli. La Scala, Milan, 26 September 1812.

L'occasione fa il ladro, burletta, 1 act; libretto by L. Prividali after E. Scribe's *Le Prétendu par hazard.* Teatro San Moisè, Venice, 24 November 1812.

Il Signor Bruschino, ossia Il figlio per azzardo, farsa giocosa, 1 act; libretto by G. Foppa after A. de Chazet's and E.-T. Maurice Ourry's *Le Fils par hazard* (1809). Teatro San Moisè, Venice, 27 January 1813.

Tancredi, melodramma eroico, 2 acts; libretto by G. Rossi with additions by L. Lechi after Voltaire's *Tancrède* (1760). Teatro La Fenice, Venice, 6 February 1813.

L'italiana in Algeri, dramma giocoso, 2 acts; libretto substantially derived from A. Anelli's libretto for L. Mosca's *L'italiana in Algeri* (1808). Teatro San Benedetto, Venice, 22 May 1813.

Aureliano in Palmira, dramma serio, 2 acts; libretto by F. Romani based on G. Sertor's libretto for P. Anfossi's *Zenobia di Palmira* (1789). Teatro all Scala, Milan, 26 December 1813.

Il turco in Italia, dramma buffo, 2 acts; libretto by F. Romani after libretto by C. Mazzolà's libretto for *Il turco in Italia* by J. Seydelmann (1788). La Scala, Milan, 14 August 1814.

Sigismondo, dramma, 2 acts; libretto by G. Foppa. Teatro La Fenice, Venice, 26 December 1814.

Elisabetta, regina d'Inghilterra, dramma, 2 acts; libretto by G. Schmidt after C. Federici's play (1814) based on S. Lee's *The Recess* (1783–1785). Teatro San Carlo, Naples, 4 October 1815.

Torvaldo e Dorliska, dramma semiserio, 2 acts; libretto by C. Sterbini based on J.-B. de Coudry's novel *Vie et amours du chevalier de Faubles* (1790). Teatro Valle, Rome, 26 December 1815.

Il barbiere di Siviglia (originally *Almaviva, ossia L'inutile precauzione*), commedia, 2 acts; libretto by C. Sterbini after Beaumarchais's *Le Barbier de Séville* (1775). Teatro Argentina, Rome, 20 February 1816.

La gazzetta, dramma, 2 acts; libretto by G. Palomba after C. Goldoni's *Il matrimonio per concorso* (1763). Teatro dei Fiorentini, Naples, 26 September 1816.

Otello, ossia Il moro di Venezia, dramma, 3 acts; libretto by F. M. Berio di Salsa after Shakespeare's *Othello* (1604). Teatro del Fondo, Naples, 4 December 1816.

La Cenerentola, ossia La bontà in trionfo, dramma giocoso, 2 acts; libretto by J. Ferretti after C. Perrault's *Cendrillon* (1697) and libretti by C.-G. Etienne for Isouard's *Cendrillon* (1810) and F. Fiorini for S. Pavesi's *Agatina* (1814). Teatro Valle, Rome, 25 January 1817.

La gazza ladra, melodramma, 2 acts; libretto by G. Gherardini after *La Pie voleuse* (1815) by J.-M.-T. Badouin d'Aubigny and L.-C. Caigniez. La Scala, Milan, 31 May 1817.

Armida, dramma, 3 acts; libretto by G. Schmidt after Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata* (1581). Teatro San Carlo, Naples, 9 November 1817.

Adelaide di Borgogna, dramma, 2 acts; libretto by G. Schmidt. Teatro Argentina, Rome, 27 December 1817.

Mosè in Egitto, azione tragico-sacra, 3 acts; libretto by A. L. Tottola after F. Ringhieri's *L'Osiride* (1760). Teatro San Carlo, Naples, 5 March 1818 (revised version, 7 March 1819).

Adina, farsa, 1 act; libretto by G. Bevilacqua-Aldobrandini. Commissioned 1818; first performed Teatro de S. Carlo, Lisbon, 12 June 1826.

Ricciardo e Zoraide, dramma, 2 acts' libretto by F. Berio di Salsa after cantos xiv and xv of *Il Ricciardetto* by Niccolò Forteguerri (1716–1725). Teatro San Carlo, Naples, 3 December 1818.

Ermione, azione tragica, 2 acts; libretto by A. L. Tottola after J. Racine's *Andromaque* (1667). Teatro San Carlo, Naples, 27 March 1819.

Eduardo e Cristina, dramma, 2 acts; libretto by G. Schmidt for S. Pavesi (1810), revised by G. Bevilacqua-Aldobrandini and A. L. Tottola. Teatro San Benedetto, Venice, 24 April 1819.

La donna del lago, melodramma, 2 acts; libretto by A. L. Tottola after Sir Walter Scott's poem *The Lady of the Lake* (1810). Teatro San Carlo, Naples, 24 October 1819.

Bianca e Falliero, o sia Il consiglio dei tre; melodramma, 2 acts; libretto by F. Romani after A.-V. Arnault's *Blanche et Montcassin* (1798). La Scala, Milan, 26 December 1819.

Maometto II, dramma, 2 acts; libretto by C. della Valle after his *Anna Erizo* (1820). Teatro San Carlo, Naples, 3 December 1820.

Matilde (di) Shabran, ossia Bellezza, e cuor di ferro, melodramma giocoso, 2 acts; libretto by G. Ferretti after F.-B. Hoffman's libretto for Méhul's *Euphrosine* (1790) and J. M. Boutet de Monvel's *Mathilde* (1799). Teatro Apollo, Rome, 24 February 1821.

Zelmira, dramma, 2 acts; libretto by A. L. Tottola after Dormont de Belloy's *Zelmire* (1762). Teatro San Carlo, 16 February 1822.

Semiramide, melodramma tragico, 2 acts; libretto by G. Rossi after Voltaire's *Sémiramis* (1748). Teatro La Fenice, Venice, 3 February 1823.

Il viaggio a Reims, ossia L 'albergo del giglio d'oro, dramma giocoso, 1 act; libretto by L. Balochi after Mme de Staël's novel *Corinne, ou l'Italie* (1807). Théâtre Italien, Paris, 19 June 1825.

Le siège de Corinthe, tragédie lyrique, 3 acts; libretto by L. Balochi and A. Soumet after the libretto for *Maometto II.* Opéra, Paris, 9 October 1826.

Moïse et Pharaon, ou Le Passage de la Mer Rouge, opéra, 4 acts; libretto by L. Balochi and E. de Jouy after libretto for *Mosè in Egitto.* Opéra, Paris, 26 March 1827.

Le Comte Ory, opéra [comique], 2 acts; libretto by E. Scribe and C. G. Delestre-Poirson after their vaudeville *Le Comte Ory: Anecdote du XIe siècle* (1816). Opéra, Paris, 20 August 1828.

Guillaume Tell, opéra, 4 acts; libretto by E. de Jouy, H. L.-F. Bis after F. Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell* (1804). Opéra, Paris, 3 August 1829.

Works derived from Rossini Operas with the composer's participation

Ivanhoé, music adapted from a number of Rossini's operas by A. Pacini; libretto by E. Deschamps and G.-G. de Wailly from Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* (1819). Théâtre de l'Odéon, Paris, 15 September 1826.

Robert Bruce, adapted from *La donna del lago* and other Rossini operas by L.-A. Niedermeyer; libretto by A. Reyer and G. Vaëz. Opéra, Paris, 30 December 1846.

II. Incidental Music

Edipo coloneo, music for Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* translated by G. Giusti, for B, male chorus, orch [orchestration completed anon.]. Composed before 1817.

III. Religious Music

Student compositions 1802–1809

Kyrie a tre voci, 2 T, B, orch; *Gloria,* A, T, B, male chorus, orch; *Laudamus,* A, bn, orch; *Gratias,* T, male chorus, orch; *Domine Deus,* 2 B, orch; *Qui tollis,* T, orch; *Laudamus, Qui tollis,* T, vn, orch; *Quoniam,* B, orch; *Crucifixus,* S, A, orch; *Dixit,* 2 T, B, orch; *De torrente,* B, orch; *Gloria Patri* T, orch; *Sicut erat,* 2 T, B, orch; *Magnificat,* 2 T, B, orch. *Messa* (Bologna) [composite mass by students of the Liceo Musicale]; *Christe eleison,* 2 T, B, orch; *Benedicta et venerabilis,* 2 T, B, orch; *Qui tollis; Qui sedes,* S, hn, orch. *Messa* (Ravenna): Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, solo male voices, male chorus, orch; *Messa:* Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, vv, male chorus, orch; *Messa* (Rimini), S, A, T, B, orch.

Quoniam, B, orch. September 1813.
Messa di Gloria, 5, A, 2 T, B, chorus, orch. Naples, 24 March 1820.
Preghiera: 'Deh tu pietoso cielo', S, pf. c.1820.
Tantum ergo. S, T, B, orch. 1824.
Stabat mater, 2 S, T, B, chorus, orch. 1st version, 1832, nos. 1, 5–9 by Rossini, nos. 2–4, 10–12 by G. Tadolini. Madrid, Good Friday (5 April) 1833. 2nd version, 1841, 10 nos. all by Rossini. Paris, 7 January, 1842.
Trois choeurs religieux. 1. La foi (P. Goubaux); 2. L'espérance (H. Lucas); 3. La charité (L. Colet), female vv, pf. Salle Troupenas, Paris, 20 November 1844.
Tantum ergo, 2 T, B, orch. Bologna, 28 November 1847.
O salutaris hostia, S, A, T, B. Paris, 29 November 1857.
Laus Deo, Mz, pf. Paris, 1861.
Petite messe solennelle, S, A, T, B, chorus of eight voices, two pianos, harmonium. Private chapel of Count and Countess Pillet-Will, Paris, 14 March 1864. 2nd version with orchestral accompaniment, 1867. Théâtre Italien, Paris, 24 February 1869.

IV. Cantatas

Il pianto d'Armonia sulla morte di Orfeo (G. Ruggia), T, male chorus, orch. Bologna, 11 August 1808.
La morte di Didone, S, chorus, orch. 1811. Venice, 2 May 1818.
Dalle queste e pallid'ombre (P. Venanzio), S, B, pf. Venice, 1812.
Apprendete, o cari amanti, S, 2 vn. Vc. Venice, *c*1812.
Egle ed Irene, S, A, piano. Milan, 1814.
L'Aurora, A, T, B, piano. Rome, November 1815.
Giunone, cantata for birthday of Ferdinando IV, S, chorus, orch. Naples, 12 January 1816.
Le nozze di Teti, e di Peleo (A. M. Ricci), 3 S, 2 T, chorus, orch. Naples, 24 April 1816.
Omaggio umiliato a Sua Maestà (A. Niccolini), S, chorus, orch. Naples, 20 February 1819.
Cantata (G. Genoino), for Francis I's visit, S, 2 T, chorus, orch. Naples, 9 May 1819.
Il voto filiale. S, pf. Naples, 1820.
La riconoscenza (G. Genoino), S, A, T, B, chorus, orch. Naples, 27 December 1821.
La santa alleanza (G. Rossi), 2 B, chorus, orch. Verona, 24 November 1822.
Il vero omaggio (G. Rossi), S, 2 T, B, chorus, orch. Verona, 3 December 1822.
Omaggio pastorale, 3 female vv, orch. Treviso, ?1 April 1823.
Il pianto delle muse in morte di Lord Byron, T, chorus, orch. London, 11 June 1824.
Cantata per il battesimo del figlio del banchiere Aguado, 6 solo vv, pf. Paris, 16 July 1827.
L'armonica cetra del nume [in honour of Marchese Sampieri], S, A, T, B, male chorus, orch. Bologna 2 April 1830.
Giovanna d'Arco, S, pf. Paris, 1832.
Cantata in onore del Sommo Pontefice Pio Nono (G. Marchetti), 4 solo vv, chorus, orch. Rome, 1 January 1847.

V. Choruses, Hymns

Inno dell'Indipendenza ('Sorgi, Italia, venuta è già l'ora') (G. Guisti). Bologna, 15 April 1815.
De l'Italie et de la France, S, B, chorus, orch. Paris, ? 3 November 1825.
Santo Genio dell'Italia terra (G. Marchetti) for tercentenary of Tasso's birth. Turin, 11 March 1844. [Based on Chorus of the Bards from *La donna del lago.*]

Su fratelli, letizia si canti (Canonico Golfieri) for Pope Pius IX, chorus, orch. Bologna, 23 July 1846. [Based on Chorus of the Bards from *La donna del lago.*]
Segna Iddio ne'suoi confine (F. Martinelli), chorus, with acc. arr. for band by D. Liverani. Bologna, 21 June 1848.
È foriera la Pace ai mortali (G. Arcangeli), Bar, male vv, pf. Florence, 26 June 1850.
Hymne à Napoléon III et à son vaillant Peuple ('Dieu tout puissant') (E. Pacini), Bar, chorus, orch, military band. Paris, 1 July 1867.

VI. Miscellaneous Vocal

Dolce aurette, T, orch. 1809.
La mia pace io già perdei, T, orch. 1812.
Se il vuol la molinara, S, pf. Before 1813.
Qual voce, quai note, S, pf. 1813.
Alle voce della gloria, B, orch. 1813.
Amore mi assisti, S, T, pf. *c*1814.
Two pieces for Giuseppe Nicolini's *Quinto Fabio,* S, T, pf. 1817.
Il trovatore ('Chi m'ascolta il canto usato'), T, pf. Naples, 1818.
Il Carnevale di Venezia ('Siamo ciechi, siamo nati'), 2 T, 2 B, piano. Rome, 1821.
Beltà crudele ('Amori scendete') (N. di Santo-Mango), S, pf. Naples, 1821.
La pastorella (N. di Santo-Magno), S, pf. Naples, *c*1821.
Canzonetta Spagnuola ('En medio a mis dolores') S, pf, Naples, 1821.
Infelice ch'io son, S, piano. Naples, 1821.
Addio ai viennesi ('Da voi parto, amate sponde'), T, pf. Vienna, 1822. [Adapted for use in other cities and known as 'Addio di Rossini'.]
Dall'Oriente l'astro del giorno, S, 2 T, B, pf. London, 1824.
Ridiamo, cantiamo, che tutto sen va, S, 2 T, B, pf. London, 1824.
In giorno si bello, 2 S, T, pf. London, 1824.
Tre Quartetti da Camera. 1. not traced. 2. 'In giorno sì bello', 2 S, T, B, pf. 3. 'Oh giorno sereno', S, A, T, B, pf. Paris, 1827.
Les adieux à Rome ('Rome pour la dernière fois') (C. Delavigne), T, pf/hp. Paris, 1827.
Orage et beau temps ('Sur les flots inconstans') (A. Betourne), T, B, pf. Paris, *c*1830.
La passeggiata ('Or che di fiori adorno'), S, pf. Madrid, 1831. [Also known as *Anacreontica.*]
La dichiarazione ('Ch'io mai vi possa lasciar d'amare') (Metastasio), S, pf. Paris, *c*1834.
Les soirées musicales. Paris, *c*1830–1835

1 La promessa ('Ch'io mai vi possa lasciar d'amare') (Metastasio), S, pf.
2 Il rimprovero ('Mi lagnerò tacendo') (Metastasio), S, pf.
3 La partenza ('Ecco quel fiero istante') (Metastasio), S, pf.
4 L'orgia ('Amiamo, cantiamo') (C. Pepoli), S, pf.
5 L'invito ('Vieni o Ruggiero') (C. Pepoli), S, pf.
6 La pastorella dell'Alpi ('Son bella pastorella') (C. Pepoli), S, pf.
7 La gita in gondola ('Voli l'agile barchetta') (C. Pepoli), S, pf.
8 La danza ('Già la luna è in mezzo al mare') (C. Pepoli), T, pf.
9 La regata veneziana ('Voga o Tonio benedetto') (C. Pepoli), 2 S, pf.
10 La pesca ('Già la notte s'avvicina') (Metastasio), 2 S, pf.
11 La serenata ('Mira, la bianca luna') (C. Pepoli), S, T, pf.
12 Li marinari ('Marinaro in guardia stà') (C. Pepoli), T, B, pf.

Deux nocturnes (Crével de Charlemagne), S, T, pf. 1. Adieu à l'Italie. 2. Le départ. Paris, *c*1836.
Nizza ('Nizza, je puis sans peine') (E. Deschamps), S, pf. Paris, *c*1836.
L'âme délaissée ('Mon bien aimé') (C. Delavigne), S, pf. 1844.
Recitativo ritmato ('Farò come colui che piange e dice') (Dante), S, pf. Florence, 1848.
La separazione ('Muto rimase il labbro') (F. Uccelli), S, pf. Paris, *c*1858.
Deux nouvelles compositions (Pacini), S, pf. 1. À Grenade 2. La veuve andalouse. *c*1860.
Mi lagnerò tacendo (Metastasio). Rossini made numerous settings of these lines, many of them as album leaves. Sometimes a new text would be added. See chapter 40.

VII. Instrumental

Six sonate a quattro in G, A, C, B flat, E flat, D, 2 vn, vc, db. Ravenna, 1804.
Overture al Conventello, D, orch. *c*1806.
Five duets, E flat, E flat, B flat, E flat, E flat, 2 hn, *c*1806.
Overture, D, orch. Bologna, 1808.
Overture, E flat, orch. Bologna, 1809.
Gran'overtura obbligata a contrabasso, D, orch. Bologna, *c*1809.
Variazioni a più istrumenti obbligati, F, 2 vn, va, vc, cl, orch. Bologna, *c*1809.
Variazioni a clarinetto, C, cl, orch. *c*1809–1810.
Andante e Tema con variazioni, F, fl, cl, hn, bn. 1812.
La notte, la preghiera, la caccia, 2 fl, 2 vn, va, vc. *c*1813.
Andante con variazioni, F, hp, vn. Naples, *c*1820.
Passo doppio, military band. 1822. Lost, but mentioned in Radiciotti.
Waltz, E flat, pf. *c*1823.
Serenata, E flat, 2 vn, va, vc, fl, ob, eng hn. Paris, 1823.
Duetto, D, vc, db. London, 1824.
Rendez-vous de chasse, D, 4 hunting horns, orch. Paris, 1828.
Fantasie, E flat, cl, pf. Paris, 1829.
Three marches for military band, G, E flat, E flat. Naples, 1837–1838.
Tema originale di Rossini variato per violino da Giovacchino Giovacchini, A, vn, pf. 1845.
Scherzo, A minor, pf. 1843, rev. 1850.
March ('Pas-redoublé'), C, military band. 1852.
Thème de Rossini suivi de deux variations et coda par Moscheles Père, E flat, hn, pf. 1860.
La corona d'Italia, E flat, military band. Paris, 1868.

VIII. Péchés de Vieillesse (1857–1868)

[* Originally written to text 'Mi lagnerò tacendo'.]
Vol.i Album italiano
1. I gondolieri (G. Torre), quartettino, S, A, T, B, pf.
2. La lontananza (G. Torre), arietta, T, pf.
3. Bolero 'Tirana alla spagnola (rossinizzata)', 'Mi lagnerò tacendo', S, pf.
4. L'ultimo ricordo (G. Redaelli), elegia, Bar, pf.
5. La fioraja fiorentina , arietta, S, pf.*
6. Le gittane (G. Torre), duetto, S, A, pf.*
7. Ave Maria su due sole note, A, pf.

8–10. La regata veneziana, three canzonettas, Mez, pf.
8. Anzoleta avanti la regatta. [Barcarolle 'Plus de vent perfide'.]
9. Anzoleta co passa la regata.
10. Anzoleta dopo la regatta.
11. Il fanciullo smarrito (A. Castellani), arietta, T, pf.
12. La passeggiata, quartettino, S, A, T, B, pf.

Vol. ii Album français (E. Pacini)
1. Toast pour le nouvel an, 2 S, 2 A, 2 T, 2 B.
2. Roméo, T, pf.
3. Pompadour, la grande coquette, arietta, S, pf.*
4. Complainte à deux voix ('Un sou'), T, Bar, pf.
5. Chanson de Zora ('La petite bohémienne') (E. Deschamps), Mez, pf.
6. La nuit de Noël, B solo, 2 S, 2 A, 2 T, 2 Bar, pf, hmn.
7. Le dodo des enfants, arietta, Mez, pf.*
8. Le Lazzarone, chansonette de cabaret, Bar, pf.
9. Adieux à la vie, élégie sur une seule note, Mez, pf.*
10. Nocturne ('Soupirs et sourires'), S, T, pf. [With Italian text as 'Il cipresso, e la rosa'.]
11. L'orphéline du Tyrol, ballade élégie, Mez, pf.
12. Choeur de chasseurs democrates, male chorus, tam-tam, 2 drums.

Vol.iii Morceaux réservés
1. Quelques mesures de chant funèbre: à mon pauvre ami Meyerbeer (E. Pacini), male vv, drum.
2. L'Esule, arietta (G. Torre), T, pf.
3. Tirana pour deux voix, 'Les amants de Séville' (E. Pacini), A, T, pf.
4. Ave Maria, S, A, T, B, org.
5. L'amour à Pékin: petite mélodie sur la gamme chinoise (E. Pacini), A, pf.
6. Le chant des Titans (E. Pacini), 4 B, pf, hmn, arr. 4 B, orch.*
7. Preghiera (Torre), 4 T, 2 Bar, 2 B.
8. Elégie, 'Au chevet d'un mourant' (E. Pacini), S, pf.
9. Le sylvain (E. Pacini), T, pf.
10. Cantemus: imitazione ad otto voci reali, 2 S, 2 A, 2 T, 2 B.
11. Ariette à l'ancienne (J.-J. Rousseau), Mez, pf.
12. Tyrolienne sentimentale, 'Le départ des promis' (E. Pacini), 2 S, 2 A, pf.

Vols. iv–viii
These were regrouped by Rossini as 'A little of everything. A collection of 56 semicomical piano pieces . . . dedicated to pianists of the fourth class to which I have the honour of belonging'.

Vol. iv Quatre mendiants et quatre hors d'oeuvres
Quatre mendiants:
1. Les figues sèches, D.
2. Les amandes, G.
3. Les raisins, C.
4. Les noisettes, B minor.

Quatre hors d'oeuvres:
1. Les radis, A minor.
2. Les anchois, D.

3. Les cornichons, E.
4. Le beurre, B flat.

Vol. v Album pour les enfants adolescents
1. Première Communion, E flat.
2. Thème naif et variations idem, G.
3. Saltarello à l'italienne, A flat.
4. Prélude moresque, E minor.
5. Valse lugubre, C.
6. Impromptu anodin, E flat.
7. L'innocence italienne; La candeur française, A minor, A major.
8. Prélude convulsif, C.
9. La lagune de Venise à l'expiration de l'année 1861!!! G flat.
10. Ouf! les petits pois, B.
11. Un sauté, D.
12. Hachis romantique, A minor.

Vol. vi Album pour les enfants dégourdis
1. Mon prélude hygiénique du matin, C.
2. Prélude baroque, A minor.
3. Memento homo, C minor.
4. Assez de memento: dansons, F.
5. La pesarese, B flat.
6. Valse torturée, D.
7. Une caresse à ma femme, G.
8. Barcarole, E flat.
9. Un petit train de plaisir comico-imitatif, C.
10. Fausse couche de polka-mazurka, A flat.
11. Etude asthmatique, E.
12. Un enterrement en Carnaval, D.

Vol. vii Album de chaumière
1. Gymnastique d'écartement, A flat.
2. Prélude fugassé, E.
3. Petite polka chinoise, B minor.
4. Petite valse de boudoir, A flat.
5. Prélude inoffensif, C.
6. Petite valse ('L'huile de Ricin'), E.
7. Un profond sommeil; Un reveil en sursaut, B minor, D.
8. Plein-chant chinois, scherzo, A minor.
9. Un cauchemar, E.
10. Valse boiteuse, D flat.
11. Une pensée à Florence, A minor.
12. Marche, C.

Vol. viii Album de château
1. Spécimen de l'ancien régime, E flat.
2. Prélude petulant-rococo, G.
3. Un regret; Un espoir, E.
4. Boléro tartare, A minor.
5. Prélude prétentieux, C minor.

6. Spécimen de mon temps, A flat.
7. Valse anti-dansante, F.
8. Prélude semipastorale, A.
9. Tarantelle pur sang (avec Traversée de la procession), B minor [also for chorus, hmn, and hand-bell ad lib].
10. Un rêve, B minor.
11. Prélude soi-disant dramatique, F sharp.
12. Spécimen de l'avenir, E flat.

Vol. ix [Album for piano, violin, cello, harmonium and horn]
1. Mélodie candide, A, pf.
2. Chansonette, E flat, pf.
3. La savoie aimante, A minor, pf.
4. Un mot à Paganini, élégie. D, vn, pf.
5. Impromptu tarantellisé, F, pf.
6. Echantillon du chant de Noël à l'italienne, E flat, pf.
7. Marche et reminiscences pour mon dernier voyage, A flat, pf.
8. Prélude, thème et variations, E, hn, pf.
9. Prélude italien, A flat, pf.
10. Une larme: thème et variations, A minor, vc, pf.
11. Echantillon de blague mélodique sur les noires de la main droite, G flat, pf.
12. Petite fanfare à quatre mains, E flat, pf or pf 4 hands.

Vol. x Miscellanée pour piano
1. Prélude blagueur, A minor.
2. Des tritons s'il vous plaît (montée-descente), C.
3. Petite pensée, E flat.
4. Une bagatelle, E flat.
5. Mélodie italienne: une bagatelle ('In nomine Patris'), A flat.
6. Petite caprice (style Offenbach), C.

Vol. xi Miscellanée de musique vocale
1. Ariette villageoise (J.-J. Rousseau), S, pf.
2. La chanson du bébé (E. Pacini), Mez, pf.
3. Amour sans espoir ('Tirana all'espagnole rossinizé'), (E. Pacini), S, pf. [Music identical with vol.i, no.3.]
4. A ma belle mere ('Requiem eternam'), A, pf.
5. O salutaris, de campagne, A, pf.
6. Aragonese (Metastasio), S, pf.*
7. Arietta all'antica, dedotta dal O salutaris ostia (Metastasio), S, pf.*
8. Il candore in fuga, no text, 2 S, A, T, B.
9. Salve amabilis Maria ('Hymne à la musique'), motet, S, A, T, B.
10. Giovanna d'Arco, cantata, S, pf, 1832.

Vol. xii Quelques riens pour album
24 pieces, pf

Vol. xiii Musique anodine
Prélude and six petites mélodies, settings of 'Mi lagnerò tacendo' (Metastasio): 1. A, pf; 2. Bar, pf; 3–4. S, pf; 5. Mez, pf; 6. Bar, pf. 15 April, 1857.

IX. Other Late Works

Canone perpetuo per quattro soprani. 4 S, pf.
Canone antisavant, words by Rossini, 3 vv.
La vénitienne, canzonetta, C, pf.
Une réjouissance, A minor, pf.
Encore un peu de blague, C, pf.
Tourniquet sur la gamme chromatique, ascendante et déscendante, C, pf.
Ritournelle gothique, C, pf.
Un rien (pour album) ('Ave Maria'), S, pf.
Sogna il guerrier (Metastasio), Bar, pf.
Brindisi ('Del fanciullo il primo canto'), B, chorus.
Solo per violincello, A minor.
L'ultimo pensiero ('Patria, consorti, figli!') (L. F. Cerutti), Bar, pf.

X. Vocal Exercises, Cadenzas

Gorgheggi e solfeggi, 1v, pf. Paris, 1827. ['Vocalises et Solfèges pour render la Voix agile et pour apprendre à Chanter selon le Goût Moderne'.]
15 petits exercises, 1v, 1858, Paris, 1880. ['Pour égaliser les sons, prolonger la respiration et donner de l'élasticité aux poumons.]
Petit gargouillement, exercise, 1v, 1867.
Variants and cadenzas provided by Rossini for his operas are widely dispersed. Collections exist in Brussels (Michotte), Chicago (University Music Library), Milan (Biblioteca del Conservatorio), New York (Pierpont Morgan Library), Paris (Bibliothèque-Musée de l'Opéra), and elsewhere.

XI. Works Spuriously Attributed to Rossini

Sinfonia di Odense, A, orch.
Duetto buffo di due gatti, 2 vv, pf.

Personalia

Aguado, Alejandro Maria (1785–1842), Spanish-born banker and from 1827 patron, friend, and financial adviser to Rossini. *Le Comte Ory* and *Guillaume Tell* were composed at Aguado's residence near Paris. In 1831 Aguado invited Rossini to join him on a working visit to Spain, during which he acted as intermediary in the commissioning of the *Stabat mater.*

Balochi [né Balloco], Luigi (1766–1832), Italian-born librettist and composer. Trained as a lawyer, he moved in 1802 to Paris, where for twenty-five years he worked as librettist and stage director at the Théâtre Italian. He provided the libretto for *Il viaggio a Reims* and oversaw the adaptation from the Italian originals of *Le Siège de Corinthe* and *Moïse et Pharaon.* He died in the Paris cholera epidemic of 1832.

Barbaja, Domenico (1778–1841), the most astute and characterful impresario of his day. A self-educated entrepreneur, who made several fortunes through gambling concessions, military supply, and building contracts, he ran the royal theatres in Naples during the years 1809–1824, 1827–1831, and 1836–1840. An important figure in the careers of a number of composers, including Weber and Donizetti, Barbaja changed the course of Rossini's career when in 1815 he offered him a long-term contract with the Naples theatres. Lessee of two Viennese theatres from 1821 to 1828, he also arranged Rossini's 1822 Vienna season. His mistress, Isabella Colbran, later became Rossini's first wife.

Bellini, Vincenzo (1801–1835), Italian composer and, with Donizetti, Rossini's most important immediate successor. Encouraged by reports of Rossini's approval of *Il pirata,* Bellini sought his acquaintance. Rossini advised on the writing of Bellini's last opera, *I puritani* (1834–1835). He was a pallbearer at Bellini's funeral and later helped settle the composer's estate.

Berio, Francesco (1765–1820), nobleman, man of letters, and part-time librettist. Heir to lands and titles acquired by his father in 1760, the Marchese Berio di Salsa presided over Naples's most fashionable salon. After writing the text for Mayr's oratorio *Cora* (1815), he provided Rossini with two ambitiously sourced libretti, *Otello* and *Ricciardo e Zoraide.*

Berlioz, Hector (1803–1869), the leading French composer of his age. His relations with Rossini were equivocal, but his essay on *Guillaume Tell,* which he proofread for the publisher, Troupenas, is both just and generous, one of the finest assessments of an opera ever written.

Bevilacqua Aldobrandini, Gherardo, (1791–1845), painter, set designer, and librettist. A Bolognese aristocrat and patron of the city's Liceo Musicale, he provided Rossini with accommodation during the writing of *Ciro in Babilonia* and helped paint the sets. He later adapted a libretto by Romani for Rossini's *Adina,* co-wrote the libretto for *Eduardo e Cristina,* and claimed authorship of the words of the Trio 'L'usato ardir' in *Semiramide.*

Boieldieu, François-Adrien (1775–1834), French composer. After scoring a popular success with his opéra comique *Le Calife de Bagdad* (1800), he studied with Cherubini and in 1804 became court composer to Tsar Alexander I in St Petersburg. He returned to Paris in 1812, where he continued a successful career as composer and teacher, culminating in the staging of his masterpiece *La Dame blanche* in 1825. Near neighbours, he and Rossini were boon companions from 1824 until Boieldieu's death in 1834 from a tubercular condition contracted during his time in Russia.

Boito, Arrigo (1842–1918), composer, librettist, poet, and critic. Described by Rossini as 'my ardent colleague', the young Boito was a frequent caller on Rossini in Paris in the 1860s. He was involved in the Broglio affair in the final months of Rossini's life.

Carafa, Michele (1787–1872), Neapolitan nobleman and composer. After study with Cherubini in Paris and military service in the republican cause in Calabria, Puglia, and the Russian expedition of 1812, he settled to full-time composition in 1814. His lifelong friendship with Rossini began in Naples in 1816, the year of his first major success, *Gabriella di Vergy.* A French citizen from 1834, he supervised a French version of *Semiramide* at the Paris Opera in 1860, for which he wrote the ballet music. He was a permanent fixture at Rossini's samedi soirs. Rossini is alleged to have said, 'He made the mistake of being born my contemporary'.

Cinti-Damoreau, Laure (1801–1863), French soprano, pupil of Angelica Catalani and Marco Bordogni. She created principal roles in Rossini's five Paris

operas in 1825–1829. Notable for the beauty of her tone and the purity of her intonation, she was the finest French Rossini soprano of her day. She also performed and published authoritative cadenzas for soprano arias from a number of Rossini's earlier Italian operas which were also in her repertory. A teacher at the Paris Conservatoire from 1834 to 1856, she published her *Méthode de Chant* in Paris in 1849.

Colbran, Isabella (1785–1845), Spanish soprano and Rossini's first wife. She studied in Madrid with her father, a violinist in the court orchestra, and in Paris with the celebrated castrato Crescentini. In 1806 she moved to Bologna, where Rossini first encountered her, and in 1811 to Naples, where she established herself as *prima donna assoluta* of the San Carlo company, revered for the evenness and flexibility of her voice through a large compass and for her striking stage presence in roles such as Giulia in Spontini's *La vestale* and Medea in Mayr's *Medea in Corinto.* During his Naples years Rossini created a succession of dramatically powerful roles for her. She retired from the stage in 1824, two years after their marriage, which was not, in the main, a success. They were legally separated in 1837.

Costa, Sir Michael (1808–1884), composer and conductor who occupied an important place in British musical life for more than fifty years. A naturalized Englishman of Neapolitan extraction, he was one of Rossini's several surrogate sons. Their correspondence is extensive and amusing.

David, Giovanni (1790–1864), Italian tenor noted for the beauty and virtuoso brilliance of his singing in high-lying roles. Two years after creating the role of Don Narciso in *Il turco in Italia* in Milan in 1814, he joined Rossini in Naples, where he created the roles of Rodrigo in *Otello,* Ricciardo in *Ricciardo e Zoraide,* Oreste in *Ermione,* Giacomo V in *La donna del lago,* and Ilo in *Zelmira.* He later taught in Naples before taking up a position in St Petersburg with the lavishly funded Italian opera troupe established by Tsar Nicholas I.

Diémer, Louis (1843–1919), French pianist, harpsichordist and composer. As a brilliantly gifted teenager, Diémer was entrusted with the preparation and performance of many piano pieces composed by Rossini for his samedi soirs in the 1860s. A classically inclined performer, he was noted for the purity and precision of his playing. His pupils included Alfred Cortot and Robert Casadesus.

Donizetti, Gaetano (1797–1848), Italian composer, close follower of Rossini, and, with Bellini, his most important immediate successor. Rossini championed his music in Paris in the early 1830s and later attempted, unsuccessfully, to engage him as a teacher of composition at Bologna's Liceo Musicale. He conducted the Italian prima of Rossini's *Stabat mater* in Bologna in March 1842.

Donzelli, Domenico (1790–1873), Italian tenor. He created the roles of Torvaldo in *Torvaldo e Dorliska* and Cavalier Belfiore in *Il viaggio a Reims;* he

was also the first Pollione in Bellini's *Norma*. He retired in 1844 though was reported to be in 'the very freshest of voice' well into his 60s. A close friend of Rossini, he stood as witness to his marriage to Olympe Pélissier in Bologna in 1846. The tenor Louis-Gilbert Duprez was one of his pupils.

Doré, Gustave (1832–1883), French painter and book illustrator. Attended many of Rossini's samedi soirs, where he sang chansons and arranged music-hall skits. Was present in Passy during Rossini's final illness, and made his deathbed portrait (plate 24).

Duprez, Louis-Gilbert (1806–1896), French tenor and composer. Sang the role of Arnold in the first Italian performance of *Guglielmo Tell* (Lucca, 1831), for which he pioneered his celebrated top C in the chest voice. Rossini disapproved, but the revival of the fortunes of *Guillaume Tell* in Paris in 1837 must be credited in some measure to Duprez's reinvention of the role of Arnold in the new tenore di forza style.

Escudier, Marie-Pierre-Yves (1819–1880) and Léon (1821–1881), French music publishers and founders in 1837 of *La France musicale,* whose contributors included Adam, Balzac, and Robert Schumann. Passionate admirers of Rossini's music, they successfully staged the premiere of the revised *Stabat mater* at the Théâtre Italien, Paris, in January 1841. Their *Rossini: sa vie et ses oeuvres* was published in 1854.

Ferretti, Jacopo (1784–1852), one the ablest and most productive Italian librettists of his day. Based in Rome, he collaborated with Rossini on *La Cenerentola* and *Matilde di Shabran.*

Foppa, Giuseppe (1760–1845), librettist. An archivist and government official, he wrote some 150 opera libretti. A master of the one-act farsa popular in Venice from the early 1790s, he drew his material from French and Neapolitan sources, the *commedia dell'arte,* and the plays of Goldoni. Sound structuring and a shrewd use of a sophisticated array of poetic metres distinguish his best work. He provided texts for three of Rossini's Venetian farse, *L'inganno felice, La scala di seta,* and *Il Signor Bruschino,* as well as the ill-fated *Sigismondo.*

Gabussi, Vincenzo (1800–1846), Italian composer and teacher who spent a number of years in London. Better known for his salon music than his three unsuccessful operas, he was greatly flattered when Rossini travelled to hear his last opera, *Clemenza di Valois,* in Venice in 1841. Two years later Rossini granted him the rights to the incidental music for *Edipo coloneo.*

Galli, Filippo (1783–1853), Italian tenor (debut 1801) who, after a serious illness, retrained to become one of the greatest basses of his day (debut 1813). Rossini wrote nine roles for him between 1813 and 1823, including Batone in *L'inganno felice,* Mustafà in *L'italiana in Algeri,* the title role in *Maometto II,* and Assur in *Semiramide.* In 1842 he was appointed 'Maestro de declamazione' at the Paris Conservatoire.

García, Manuel (1775–1832), Spanish tenor, composer, and teacher. A baritonal but famously agile tenor, he created the roles of Norfolk in *Elisabetta, regina*

d'Inghilterra and Almaviva in *Il barbiere di Siviglia* and was a celebrated Otello. He sang regularly in Paris and London between 1816 and 1825, the year in which he took the nucleus of an opera company to New York, where he staged Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and six operas by Rossini. He was father of Maria Malibran, Pauline Viardot, and Manuel García (author of *Traits complet de l'art du chant,* Paris, 1840). His pupils included the tenor Adolphe Nourrit.

Hérold, Ferdinand (1791–1833), French opera composer. He won the Prix de Rome in 1812, and his first opera was staged in Naples in 1815. Maestro al cembalo at Paris's Théâtre Italien from 1816 to 1826, and subsequently principal coach at the Paris Opéra, he did much to develop Franco–Italian relations. During a recruiting visit to Italy in 1821 he secured the services of Galli and Pasta and acquired the score of *Mosè in Egitto,* which was staged at the Théâtre Italian as a benefit evening for Pasta.

Hiller, Ferdinand (1811–1885), German composer, conductor, teacher, and writer. Encouraged by Rossini in his earlier years, he met him again in Normandy in 1855. Rossini's reminiscences, as recorded by Hiller at the time, are lively though not entirely reliable.

Ivanoff, Nicola (1810–1880), Russian tenor to whom Rossini acted as agent and adoptive father. More noted for the sweetness of his voice than for his stage presence, he sang in the Italian prima of the *Stabat mater;* he also staged *Guillaume Tell* as *Rodolfo di Sterlinga* in Bologna in 1841. At Rossini's request, Verdi wrote additional arias for Ivanoff's use in *Ernani* and *Attila.*

Jouy, Étienne de (1764–1846), French writer and librettist. A former soldier who served in French Guiana and India, he made his name with the libretti he provided for two Spontini operas: *La vestale* (1807) and *Fernand Cortez* (1809). He worked with Luigi Balochi on Rossini's translation of *Mosè in Egitto* into *Moïse et Pharaon* (1827) and wrote the libretto for *Guillaume Tell* (1829), though the text was heavily modified by Hippolyte Bis and Rossini himself. His *Le Vieux de la montagne* was submitted to Rossini in 1824 but not used.

Liszt, Franz (1811–1886), Hungarian composer, pianist, and teacher. Met Rossini in Milan in 1837 and made piano transcriptions of *Les soirées musicales.* Attended Rossini's samedi soirs in Paris in the 1860s. Rossini sought his advice during his approaches to Pope Pius IX on the matter of the Papal ban on female singers in church.

Malerbi family. Well-to-do, music-loving family in Lugo. Rossini took lessons from Canon Giuseppe Malerbi and between 1802 and 1804 made extensive use of the family's music library, in particular their editions of the works of Haydn and Mozart.

Malibran, Maria (1808–1836), Spanish mezzo-soprano, daughter of Manuel García. London debut as Rosina in *Il barbiere di Siviglia,* 1825; Paris debut in *Semiramide* in 1828. Brilliantly gifted as a singer and an actress of great

personal magnetism, she died from complications following a riding accident during a pregnancy in 1836. In later years Rossini called her the 'only' interpreter of his music.

Marchisio, Barbara (1833–1919), contralto, and Carlotta (1835–1872), soprano. The Marchisio sisters made their debuts at the Paris Opéra in *Semiramide* in 1860 to the delight of Rossini, who described them as 'possessors of that song which is sensed in the soul'. They sang for Rossini in private performances of *Stabat mater* and were a source of inspiration for the *Petite messe solennelle* (1864). Barbara sang at the Palazzo Vecchio, Florence, in May 1887 during ceremonies marking Rossini's reburial in Santa Croce. Her pupils included Toti dal Monte.

Marcolini, Maria (c.1780– ?), Italian contralto possessed of a fine voice, a fearless technique, and a brilliant stage presence, not least when appearing in male attire. Cast in 1811 in the role of Ernestina in *L'equivoco stravagante,* she was the most important female singer of Rossini's pre-Naples years. The roles of Clarice in *La pietra del paragone* and Isabella in *L'italiana in Algeri* were created for her, as were the en travesti title roles in *Ciro in Babilonia* and *Sigismondo.* She retired in 1820.

Mendelssohn, Felix (1809–1847), German composer whose youthful brilliance and serious interest in the music of Bach aroused Rossini's particular interest. The two men met in Frankfurt in 1836.

Meyerbeer, Giacomo (1791–1864), German composer, follower and later friend of Rossini. After early operatic successes in Italy in 1817–1824, he moved to Paris, where Rossini's Théâtre Italien staged *Il crociato in Egitto* in 1825. Auber's *La muette de Portici* (1828, Paris) and Rossini's *Guillaume Tell* crystallized his ideas about writing for the Opéra. *Robert le diable* (1831) and *Les Huguenots* (1836) resulted. In March 1864 Meyerbeer attended the premiere of Rossini's *Petite messe solennelle* and was much affected by it. He died six weeks later, moving Rossini to write his 'Quelques mesures de chant funèbre: à mon pauvre ami Meyerbeer' for male chorus and drum.

Michotte, Edmond (1830–1914), wealthy amateur musician and sometime administrative president of the Brussels conservatory, to which he left a valuable collection of Rossini scores, librettos, and memorabilia. His accounts of an evening with Rossini in Passy in 1858, and of Rossini's meeting with Wagner in 1860, were published in Brussels and Paris some forty years later.

Mombelli, Domenico (1751–1835), Italian tenor who with his second wife, Vincenzina (niece of Boccherini and sister of the choreographer Salvatore Viganò), and two of their daughters, Ester and Anna, formed a touring opera group. Rossini's *Demetrio e Polibio* was written piecemeal to a libretto provided by Vincenzina and first performed by the Mombelli troupe in Rome in 1812.

Morandi, Rosa *née* Morolli (1782–1824), Italian soprano and wife of the organist, composer, and singing teacher Giovanni Morandi (1777–1856). Friends

of Rossini's parents, the Morandis were instrumental in securing him his first professional operatic commission, *La cambiale di matrimonio,* in which Rosa sang the role of Fanny. She later created the role of Cristina in *Eduardo e Cristina.*

Niedermeyer, Louis (1802–1861), Swiss composer of opera, sacred music, and song, and long-standing friend of Rossini, whom he first met in Naples in 1819. Created the Rossini-derived pastiche *Robert Bruce* (Paris Opéra, 1846). Refounded Paris's school for church music in 1853. The 'Christe eleison' in Rossini's *Petite messe solennelle* derives from the 'Et incarnatus' of a Mass by him.

Nourrit, Adolphe (1802–1839), French tenor, pupil of Manuel García. He created leading tenor roles in four of Rossini's Paris operas, including the title role in *Le Comte Ory* and Arnold in *Guillaume Tell.* A subtle and intelligent singer, he was well suited to the music Rossini wrote for him, though illness and depression, brought on by overwork and rivalry with the tenor Duprez, compromised his career. He committed suicide on 8 March 1839 by throwing himself from the top floor of the Hotel Barbaja in Naples.

Novello, Clara (1818–1908), English soprano. Daughter of Vincent Novello, she was admitted to the Institution de Musique Religieuse, Paris, in 1829; Rossini was on the adjudicating panel. She made her debut in Bologna in 1841 as Semiramide and was chosen by Rossini for the Italian prima of the *Stabat mater* the following March. The cadenza Rossini wrote for her at the close of the 'Sancta mater' is extant and has been recorded.

Nozzari, Andrea (1775–1832), Italian tenor. A high tenor whose voice took on a more baritonal timbre after an early illness, Nozzari was at the height of his powers in Rossini's Naples years. Rossini wrote nine operatic roles for him: Leicester in *Elisabetta, regina d'Inghilterra,* Otello, Rinaldo in *Armida,* Osiride in *Mosè in Egitto,* Agorante in *Ricciardo e Zoraide,* Pirro in *Ermione,* Rodrigo in *La donna del lago,* Paolo Erisso in *Maometto II,* and Antenore in *Zelmira.* His pupils included Basadonna and Rubini.

Paër, Ferdinando (1771–1839), Italian composer. Rossini made his stage debut in his *Camilla* (Vienna, 1799) in Bologna in 1805. Paër worked in Vienna, Prague, and Dresden before succeeding Spontini as director of Paris's Théâtre Italien in 1812. Relations with Rossini during their co-directorship of the theatre in 1824–1826 were uneasy.

Paisiello, Giovanni (1740–1816), Italian composer who enjoyed widespread international success. A composer of the old school, his was the flag to which anti-Rossinians rallied in Italy and abroad. The rift became irreconcilable after Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia,* which treats Beaumarchais's play with a disruptive energy entirely at odds with the urbanity and grace of Paisiello's earlier setting (St. Petersburg, 1782).

Pasta, Giuditta (1797–1865), Italian soprano. From 1821 until the debut of Maria Malibran in 1828, Pasta was unrivalled as an interpreter of such roles as

Tancredi, Desdemona, and Semiramide. Though she was not Rossini's favourite singer, she was a singing actress of magnetism and persuasive power. She created the title roles in Donizetti's *Anna Bolena* and Bellini's *Norma*.

Patti, Adelina (1843–1919), Italian soprano whose career began as a child prodigy in the United States under the influence of the teacher and impresario Maurice Strakosch. She sang at a number of Rossini's samedi soirs after her Paris debut in 1862. Though Rossini rebuked her for an overly elaborate use of ornament, she remained a devoted admirer. She was present at his villa in Passy at the time of his death and sang at his funeral.

Pélissier, Olympe (1797–1878), Rossini's second wife, whom he married in 1846 after the death of Isabella Colbran-Rossini. Courtesan, mistress of the painter Vernet, and partial model for Fedora in Balzac's *La Peau de chagrin,* she became Rossini's close companion in Paris in the early 1830s. She moved to Bologna in 1837 and was responsible for Rossini's return to Paris in 1855. Her patient care for Rossini during years of debilitating illness, and her exceptional skills as a society hostess, helped sustain him through the last three decades of his life. Without her remarkable care, his return to composition in the late 1850s might not have come about.

Radiciotti, Giuseppe (1858–1931), Italian composer and musicologist. Though unsympathetic to aspects of Rossini's art, the floridity of the vocal writing in particular, his scholarly methods found their most complete expression in the pioneering three-volume study of Rossini's life and works which he published, largely at his own expense, as a handsomely designed limited edition in 1927–1929.

Ricordi, Giovanni (1785–1853), founder of Italy's most famous music publishing house. His appointment as prompter and copyist at La Scala, Milan, coincided with Rossini's arrival in December 1814. In 1825 Ricordi acquired the theatre's music archive. Between 1846 and 1864 the firm published an extensive Rossini edition. Rossini expressed alarm at the publication of works which had failed and been partly recycled, but he did not oppose the project. There is no evidence of his own editorial collaboration with the edition, nor did he benefit financially until 1867, when a small sum was forthcoming under new copyright laws.

Righetti Giorgi, Getrude (1793–1862), Italian contralto. Born and trained in Bologna, she created the roles of Rosina in *Il barbiere di Siviglia* and Cenerentola. She retired for reasons of health in 1822. A brief memoir by her, published in 1823, chronicles the fiasco of the first night of *Il barbiere di Siviglia.*

Romani, Felice (1788–1865), the most successful and sought-after Italian librettist of his day. He provided texts for Mayr, Rossini (*Aureliano in Palmira, Il turco in Italia,* and *Bianca e Falliero*), Donizetti, and all but one of Bellini's mature operas.

Rossi, Gaetano (1774–1855), Italian librettist based first in Venice, later in Verona. He wrote over 120 librettos for composers including Mayr, Rossini (*La cambiale di matrimonio, Tancredi, Semiramide*), Donizetti, and Meyerbeer. His work could be careless and lacking in dramatic credibility, but the libretto for *Semiramide,* written under Rossini's watchful eye, is eminently satisfactory.

Rossini, Anna (1771–1827), Rossini's mother. A talented, untrained soprano, she performed in a repertory of exclusively comic operas in 1797–1808. Rossini often travelled with her, gaining invaluable first-hand experience of operatic life during his most impressionable years. He remained deeply attached to her throughout his life.

Rossini, Giuseppe (1764–1839), Rossini's father, a professional horn and trumpet player. An overzealous republican whose political enthusiasms led to his imprisonment in 1799–1800, he was his son's earliest teacher and remained close to him throughout his life. After Anna Rossini's death, he spent more time than he would have wished with Rossini's first wife, Isabella, during her lonely and disaffected years in Bologna in the 1830s.

Saint-Saëns, Camille (1835–1921), French composer. His accounts of Rossini's samedi soirs, which he regularly attended, are of considerable interest. His own music shares some of the stylistic and aesthetic priorities evident in Rossini's late works.

Sanquirico, Alessandro (1777–1849), Italian scene painter and designer whose work for La Scala, Milan, (1817–1832) was widely admired and copied. His designs are notable for the fidelity, grandeur, and classical simplicity of their architectural impressions and the complementary beauty of his landscape evocations. See plates 7 and 8.

Schiller, Friedrich von (1759–1805), German dramatist, poet, aesthetician, and historian. His final play, *Wilhelm Tell* (1804), provided Rossini with a drama suited to his musical, theatrical, political, and aesthetic needs.

Scott, Sir Walter (1771–1832), Scottish poet and novelist whose works were widely taken up by musicians in the new wave of Romantic feeling which followed the end of the Napoleonic wars. Rossini's *La donna del lago* is the first important operatic setting of a work by Scott. The libretti of two operatic pastiches sanctioned by Rossini, *Ivanhoé* (Paris, 1826) and *Robert Bruce* (Paris, 1846), also derive from Scott.

Scribe, Eugène (1791–1861), French dramatist and librettist. Author of the play on which *L'occasione fa il ladro* is based, and co-author of the one-act vaudeville *Le Comte Ory* (1816), which he would later help Rossini adapt for the operatic stage. A skilled and prolific writer, he also provided libretti for Auber, Bellini, Donizetti, Gounod, Meyerbeer, Offenbach, and Verdi.

Spontini, Gasparo (1774–1851), Italian composer who strongly influenced the course of serious French opera. The formal, ritualistic aspects of his writing and his use of multiple musical perspectives made an impression on

Berlioz and Wagner, and on Rossini, who conducted the revised *Fernand Cortez* in Naples in 1820.

Stendhal [Henri Beyle] (1783–1842), French novelist and critic. A musician *manqué,* Stendhal was an early admirer of Mozart and a passionate follower of Italian opera. His *Vie de Rossini* (Paris, 1824) blurs fact and fantasy, but no other work evokes so vividly the world in which Rossini worked during his Italian years.

Sterbini, Cesare (1784–1831), librettist of *Torvaldo e Dorliska* and *Il barbiere di Siviglia.* The Jesuit-educated Sterbini was a rising star in government administration in Rome. A gifted linguist with a sophisticated literary understanding, he was well placed to provide the adaptation of Beaumarchais's *Le Barbier de Séville* that Rossini was seeking.

Tadolini, Giovanni (1789–1872), Italian composer and teacher who, like Rossini, studied with Mattei in Bologna. Worked in Bologna and at the Théâtre Italian, Paris. In 1831–1832 he was asked by Rossini to write six of the twelve movements of the original version of Rossini's *Stabat mater* (Madrid, 1833). The revised version (Paris, 1842) contains none of Tadolini's music.

Tottola, Andrea Leone (? – 1831), Italian librettist, and official poet to the royal theatres in Naples. He provided Rossini with libretti for *La gazzetta* (in collaboration with Giuseppe Palomba), *Mosè in Egitto, Ermione, La donna del Lago,* and *Zelmira.* Though not a first-rate writer, he was more skilful and innovative than is sometimes supposed. Rossini nicknamed him 'Torototela'.

Troupenas, Eugène-Théodore (1799–1850), French music publisher, whose career was effectively launched by his editions of Rossini's last four operas. On Rossini's advice he also published Auber's work from 1828 onward. His proofreaders included Berlioz, who read *Guillaume Tell* for the Troupenas edition.

Velluti, Giovan Battista (1781–1861), Italian male soprano, the last of the celebrated operatic castrati. Rossini created two roles for him: Arsace in *Aureliano in Palmira* and Alceo in the cantata *Il vero omaggio.* The purity, flexibility, and penetrating accent of the castrato voice was for Rossini the ideal of what technically accomplished bel canto singing should be.

Verdi, Giuseppe (1813–1901), Italian composer, Rossini's most distinguished successor. Relations between the two men were cordial rather than warm. Rossini commissioned and paid for two arias from Verdi for use by Ivanoff, and he included music by Verdi in his samedi soirs in Paris in the1860s (see plate 19). After Rossini's death, Verdi attempted unsuccessfully to assemble a Requiem Mass in his honour written by a number of Italian composers. Verdi later used his own contribution, the 'Libera me', in his *Messa da Requiem* (1874). In 1898, modestly overlooking the claims of *Falstaff,* Verdi declared *Il barbiere di Siviglia* to be the most beautiful opera buffa ever written.

Wagner, Richard (1813–1883), German composer. As a young man Wagner orchestrated 'Li marinari' from *Les soirées musicales* and took a close interest in

Mosè in Egitto, La donna del lago, and *Guillaume Tell.* The composers' respective styles, Wagner's written excoriations in 1841, and Rossini's many alleged witticisms at Wagner's expense suggest an unbridgeable gulf between the two men, but their meeting in Paris in 1860 was both cordial and revealing.

Weber, Carl Maria von (1786–1826), German composer whose innovative and imaginative genius was a principal inspiration to the new Romantic German school. Weber feared Rossini as a rival and envied his success, though the two men parted on amicable terms shortly before Weber's premature death. Rossini comes close to aspects of Weber's Romanticism in *Armida* and *La donna del lago,* both of which predate *Der Freischütz,* and in *Guillaume Tell.*

Zamboni, Luigi (1767–1837), Italian basso buffo, creator of the role of Figaro in *Il barbiere di Siviglia.* Born in Bologna, he made his stage debut in Ravenna in 1791, after which he travelled widely, a much sought-after performer in opera houses throughout Italy. He retired to Florence in 1825 at the age of 58.

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