

Thursday, March 17, 2016

Conductor, Victor DeRenzi

Chorus Master, Roger L. Bingaman

Sinfonia in G Minor

Allegro Vivo; Andante; Allegro Vivo, Allegro
Sarasota Opera Orchestra

"Tantum Ergo"

Sean Christensen, tenor
Sarasota Opera Orchestra

"Momento Domine David" - Psalm 131

Sarasota Opera Orchestra and Chorus

"Pater Noster" Original version (The Lord's Prayer)

Text attributed to Dante

Sarasota Opera Chorus

"Io la vidi"

Matthew Vickers, Il Solitario
Raymon Godfrey Geis, Corrado
Sarasota Opera Orchestra

"In convertendo Dominus" - Psalm 125

In convertendo Dominus Allegro
Converte Domine Andante Sostenuto, Recitativo, Allegro
Euntes ibant Largetto, Recitativo, Larghetto
Sicut erat Allegro, Presto

Christopher Trapani, tenor solo
Andrea Baker, soprano; Kathleen Shelton, contralto
John Overholt, tenor; Vincent Grana, bass

Sarasota Opera Orchestra and Chorus

Sinfonia in C Major

Presto
Sarasota Opera Orchestra

INTERMISSION

"Non t'accostare all'urna"

Text by Jacopo Vittorelli

Rebecca Witty, soprano
Aaron Breid, piano

"More, Elisa, lo stanco poeta"

Text by Tommaso Bianchi

Andrew Surrena, tenor
Aaron Breid, piano

"In solitaria stanza"

Text by Jacopo Vittorelli

Andrew Surrena, tenor
Aaron Breid, piano

"Nell'error di notte oscura"

Text by Carlo Angiolini

Alexander Charles Boyd, baritone
Cory Battey, piano

"Perduta ho la pace"

Text by Goethe, Italian translation attributed to Luigi Balestra

Elizabeth Tredent, soprano
Kevin Miller, piano

"Deh, pietoso, oh Addolorata"

Text by Goethe, Italian translation attributed to Luigi Balestra

Elizabeth Tredent, soprano
Kevin Miller, piano

Nocturne for three voices "Guarda che bianca luna"

Text by Jacopo Vittorelli

Kate McNamara, soprano
Samuel Hall, tenor
Costas Tsourakis, bass
Amanda Blaikie, flute
Michael Spassov, piano

L'esule

Text by Temistocle Solera

Matthew Vickers, tenor
Howard Lubin, piano

"Oh potessi ritornar"

Song Fragment

Mary-Hollis Hundley, soprano
John F. Spencer IV, piano

Piano piece in 6/8 (dedicated to Madame Hiller)

John F. Spencer IV, piano

"O virtù che provvidente"

Chorus Fragment for Female Chorus

Sarasota Opera Chorus
John F. Spencer IV, piano

Sinfonia in D Major

Maestoso, Allegro
Sarasota Opera Orchestra

Program notes start on page 12

Translations start on page 14

Verdi Before Opera

As a young musician in Busseto, Verdi composed a variety of non-operatic works, sacred and secular, instrumental and vocal. As he attested in mid-career: "From the age of 13 to the age of 18 (when I went to Milan to study counterpoint), I wrote a hodgepodge of pieces: hundreds of marches for band, perhaps just as many small *sinfonias* that were played in church, the theater, and concerts; five or six concertos and variations for piano, which I myself played in concerts; several serenades, cantatas (arias, a lot of duets, trios) and diverse pieces for the church, of which I remember only a *Stabat Mater*. During the three years I was in Milan I wrote very few 'free' compositions: two *sinfonias* that were performed in a private concert ..., a cantata, ... and various pieces ... that the Maestro [Vincenzo Lavigna] had me write as exercises, which I did not even orchestrate. After returning to my hometown, I began writing marches, *sinfonias*, vocal pieces, etc., an entire Mass and an entire Vesper service, three or four *Tantum ergo*, and other sacred pieces that I do not remember. ... It is just as well that everything is lost, with the exception of a few *sinfonias* that they still play here [in Busseto] but that I never again wish to hear"

As Verdi noted, most of those youthful compositions did not survive. A few early works have, however, surfaced, several of which are on tonight's program. This evening marks the premiere of the critical edition of some of the juvenilia, music definitively attributed to Verdi and music that may, possibly, have been composed by him; it also features other works that Verdi wrote before his first opera, *Oberto, Conte di San Bonifacio* (1839). The instrumental and choral works may have been performed by the Società Filarmonica of Busseto or the Accademia dei Filodrammatici of Milan, both ensembles smaller than typical groups today.

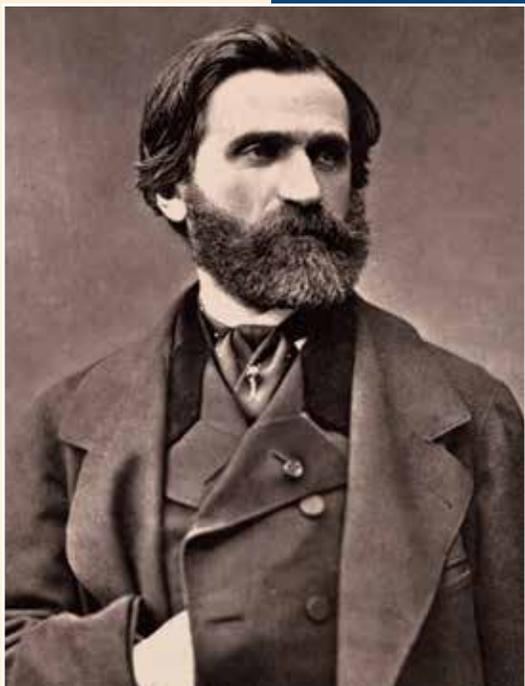
Among the instrumental pieces that Verdi composed during his early years were two *sinfonias*. The *Sinfonia in D Major* may date from the early 1830s (possibly before). A single-movement composition, with traditional "classical" symphonic scoring, it may have been performed in concert at the home of Verdi's patron and father-in-law, Antonio Barezzi. The *Sinfonia*

in C Major, similar in scoring (though with a single flute and oboe, no timpani, and added "serpent" [a distant ancestor of the tuba]), may have been composed mid-late 1830s for Pietro Massini's Milanese ensemble; Verdi incorporated some of this music into his second opera, *Un giorno di regno* (1840).

Among the sacred works that Verdi wrote while *maestro di musica* in Busseto (spring 1836 – autumn 1838) is a *Tantum Ergo* (in G major). Composed in November 1836, the work was first performed on New Year's Day 1837 at the Collegiate Church of San Bartolomeo in Busseto, with the composer's friend Luigi Macchiavelli, an amateur tenor, as soloist. In 1893, Verdi acknowledged paternity of the piece, writing on the score's cover: "I admit, alas! having set to music, around sixty years ago, this *Tantum Ergo*!!! I advise the owner of this unfortunate composition to throw it into the fire. These notes have neither the slightest musical worth nor a shadow of religious sentiment!!"

Another work, a two-part women's chorus "O virtù che provvidente" with piano accompaniment, for which only a fragment survives, may be from around the same time. "Io la vidi," believed to date 1834-1836, when Verdi was studying with Lavigna, is, in all probability, the earliest surviving secular vocal work by the composer. With poetry from Calisto Bassi's libretto *Il solitario di Eloisa*, the multi-movement aria for two tenors and orchestra anticipates Verdi's early operatic style.

Verdi's earliest published music is a set of six *romanze* for solo voice with piano accompaniment, printed in Milan by Giovanni Canti in 1838 and dedicated to Count Pietro Favagrossa. In these songs, which open the second half of tonight's program, the interest lies primarily in the melody; the metrical accentuation results in natural declamation patterns; the designs range from simple strophic settings to through-composed sectional forms, which were typical of the contemporary Italian song repertory. The following year Canti published three more of Verdi's vocal works; two of these are performed this evening. *Lesule* ("Vedi! la bianca luna") for solo voice and piano, dedicated to the bass Pietro Minoia,



A young Giuseppe Verdi

takes the typical form of a multipartite operatic aria. *Notturmo* (“Guarda che bianca luna”) for soprano, tenor, and bass, with flute obbligato and piano, was dedicated to the tenor Cesare Sangiorgi; it was described in one contemporary review as “an inspiration, an enchantment of delicate sentiment [...] fragrant with simplicity and Italian musical splendor.” Publication of these songs would have furnished a means for the young Verdi to position himself as a professional composer before the Milanese public while he was composing *Oberto*.

Verdi’s authorship of the abovementioned compositions is not in doubt; in other cases, however, his involvement is unclear. A collection of manuscripts housed in Busseto’s municipal library contains music used by the Società Filarmonica during the nineteenth century. Many of the works represent compositions by Verdi’s teacher Ferdinando Provesi or other local musicians. Among the treasures in the collection are several pages of music – scores and instrumental parts – partially or fully in Verdi’s hand, a consequence of various tasks the young musician may have been assigned under Provesi’s tutelage (as Dino Rizzo, co-editor of the early works, has observed). Designed to help Verdi gain practical skills and apply

his newly acquired theoretical knowledge (as well as to assist his teacher), such assignments may have involved copying out instrumental and vocal parts for members of the town’s ensembles; transcribing, orchestrating, or arranging existing works; revising previous arrangements for different ensembles. Verdi perhaps even “completed” Provesi’s compositions, and, as one scholar has suggested, given Verdi’s ambition to compose for the theater and his consequent frustration as *maestro di musica* in Busseto, it is possible that, rather than generating new music for use in the town’s churches, he finished works left unfinished by his former teacher, especially sacred ones. Thus, even when music appears written out in Verdi’s hand in the Busseto manuscripts, we cannot assume that Verdi actually composed that music.

Among the works of questionable authorship are two choral psalm settings, *Memento Domine David* (Psalm 131), and *In convertendo Dominus* (Psalm 125). The manuscripts for each of these works contain the hand of Provesi and of Verdi, likely date from the first years of the 1830s, and have some plausible contribution from Verdi. The collection also holds a *Sinfonia in G Minor* for which only an incomplete set of orchestral parts survives, most of them written out by Verdi, and dating from mid-late 1830s. Although we cannot be certain that these three works were composed by Verdi, we also cannot be sure that they were not. Either way, hearing these pieces today provides an exciting glimpse into the young musician’s musical journey and experiences.

We can be thankful that not all of Verdi’s early works were “lost,” for although he may not have thought much of them, shining from within are glimmers of the composer who was to be.

Roberta Montemorra Marvin is the author of *The Politics of Verdi’s “Cantica” and Verdi the Student – Verdi the Teacher* (awarded the *Premio Internazionale Giuseppe Verdi*). She has edited seven books, including *The Cambridge Verdi Encyclopedia*, and two volumes in *The Works of Giuseppe Verdi*.