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**Vincenzo Bellini Carteggi.** Edizione critica a cura di Graziella Seminara. (*Historiae Musicae Cultoris*, 131.) Firenze: Leo S. Olschki, 2017. [vi, 618 p. ISBN 978-88-222-6487-9. €76]

Do we need a new edition of Bellini's correspondence? Bellini's own letters have been served pretty well by modern critical editions. Graziella Seminara's contribution is certainly no exception; indeed, it represents a culmination of work by Luisa Cambi (1943), Francesco Pastura (1935 and 1959), and Carmelo Neri (1991, 2001, and 2005), and deserves to become the primary reference work on the subject. For the first time, practically all the known letters, not only sent by Bellini, but also those written to him, amounting to 517 items in all, are presented together in one chronological sequence, fully annotated with bibliographical concordances and scholarly apparatus. The new *Carteggi* is a serious and very well-produced volume, clearly and elegantly laid out, strongly bound with the signatures properly stitched. It certainly looks the part: well up to the standard of the comparable scholarly collections of Verdi and Rossini currently growing along university library shelves.

In this field, Bellini has fared better than Donizetti, for whom our first port of call is still Guido Zavadini's *Donizetti: Vita, musiche, epistolario* (Bergamo: Istituto italiano d'arti grafiche, 1948); despite additions in *Studi donizettiani*, there seems no sign yet of a comprehensive edition. It is only since 1992 that a reliable modern edition of Rossini's letters has started to appear; for many years we were dependent on Giuseppe Mazzatinti and Fanny and Giovanni Manis's collection of 1902 (*Lettere di G. Rossini* [Firenze: Barbèra]). One reason is that Rossini and Donizetti wrote so many letters that encompassing them in a single series is a daunting prospect. Bellini died at the age of thirty-four, after a career of little more than eight years, and he was a fairly private individual: his correspondence is far smaller than Mendelssohn's, although far larger than Schubert's. Whereas there are only

just over 400 surviving letters by Bellini, Rossini appears to have written thousands: the *Lettere e documenti* will evidently take decades to complete, as the five 800-page volumes issued so far take us only up to 1835. With Verdi, of course, you have to expect a series of scholarly volumes like this one, each devoted to his exchanges with a single correspondent, such as Ricordi, Cammarano, Lanari, and others, which is indeed just what the Ricordi edition has undertaken.

What do Bellini's letters tell us? The first point to make is that a large number have been lost: they are relatively plentiful from 1828 and again during 1834–1835 (about half the contents in this book date from these final two years), but on average only about thirty a year survive from 1829–1833. So, they tell us about the genesis of operas like *La straniera* (1829) and *I puritani* (1835), and rather less about his two masterpieces of 1831, *La sonnambula* and *Norma*. Bellini talks a lot about his operatic ambitions in general and prospects for specific commissions from opera houses. Except for one famous letter to Carlo Pepoli, his inexperienced collaborator on *I puritani* (no. 291), Bellini does not usually discuss his dramatic aims and intentions with regard to specific operas, as Verdi does with Piave and Cammarano; indeed, there are few letters to librettists. However, in 1828 on *La straniera*, and in 1834 on *I puritani*, he transcribes passages of the librettos in his long and informative letters to his college friend Francesco Florimo. Unfortunately, on his own admission, Florimo appears to have destroyed practically all those he received from Bellini between March 1829 and March 1834, which explains the curious profile of the *Carteggi* and the paucity of comparable insights into the most famous operas. What you get instead is an appreciation of Bellini's aesthetic outlook, regarding both opera generally and its singers in particular, which is notably different from how later composers felt about their art. We discover why Bellini was so devoted to Rubini and Pasta and why he did not discuss with his great librettist, Felice Romani, what the subject of his next opera should be. Bellini's letters paint an intimate, if not always flattering, portrait of a man not noted for his humour or his sympathetic regard for his colleagues. Bellini discusses composers like Donizetti, Pacini, and

even Rossini almost always as rivals, often displaying petty competitiveness. So one looks in vain for the attractive personality evident in Donizetti's letters, let alone the integrity and determined vision in Verdi's.

Putting this new edition into context, Bellini's character is already well-known from the existing editions of his letters. Most modern biographies have been indebted to Luisa Cambi's *Epistolario* (Milano: A. Mondadori, 1943), a tremendous book, given the time and circumstances of its publication. It contained 264 Bellini letters, well-footnoted with source notes, and supplemented by newspaper reviews of his operas (not present in this new edition), along with illustrations, facsimiles, and first-hand accounts of the composer's death. In the decades following, further letters appeared in various places, notably in Pastura's 1959 monograph *Bellini secondo la storia* ([Parma: Guanda]; 713 pages without an index!), and in important contributions by Frank Walker (*Lettere disperse e inedite di Vincenzo Bellini* [Catania: Rivista del Comune Catania, 1960]), Cambi herself ("Bellini, un pacchetto di autografi", in *Scritti in onore di Luigi Ronga* [Milano: Ricciardi, 1973], 53–90), and Friedrich Lippmann ("Belliniana", in *Il melodramma italiano dell'Ottocento: Studi e ricerche per Massimo Mila* [Torino: G. Einaudi, 1977], 281–317). Carmelo Neri's editions, published in Sicily in 1991 (*Lettere di Vincenzo Bellini, 1819–1835* [Palermo: Publiciscula Editrice]) and 2005 (*Vincenzo Bellini: nuovo epistolario, 1819–1835* [Aci Sant'Antonio: Editoriale Agorà]), gathered together all these disparate sources and added well over 100 hitherto-unpublished letters (some found in auction catalogues), providing a comprehensive collection of 407 items. In 2001 Neri also published an edition of about 100 letters written to Bellini (*Caro Bellini—: lettere edite e inedite a Vincenzo Bellini* [Catania: Prova di Autore]), including nearly all those in the new *Carteggi*. Distribution of Neri's works outside Italy was patchy, particularly the *Nuovo epistolario* of 2005 (WorldCat lists four copies held worldwide). One cannot help feeling that, not being part of the university system, Neri remains a sort of "unsung hero" of Bellini studies, but Dr Seminara certainly benefited from him.

By my reckoning, this new edition contains only about thirty letters that can be called "hitherto unpublished" (depending on what you count), which is not a lot for an imposing tome of over 500 items. Although one to his uncle on 26 June 1819 is Bellini's first known autograph letter (no. 2), none of the other "new" items seems particularly striking and many are very short, including some notes and visiting cards. Inevitably, since its publication, a few more have already appeared that are not caught here but, essentially, I feel that this will remain the corpus. At least thirty-five letters have appeared at auction over the last forty or fifty years (a few more than once), and in a number of cases the understandably incomplete texts in the *Carteggi* depend on catalogue descriptions. It is not always evident how much of a letter is being transcribed; sometimes indeed, it is a mere fragment. Although the auction catalogue will not provide a scholarly text, it will normally indicate how long the letter is, and it would have been helpful to have included this information.

How important is this new edition? You could say that all the long and important Bellini letters, like those to Florimo, are already available in Cambi's edition. On the other hand, the scholarly rigour and the "strong production values" evident in the *Carteggi* certainly represent a "step up" (from Neri's 2005 edition, for example). Dr Seminara has carefully checked the known letters with the originals where accessible, including a few not traced before, and she implies that her transcriptions are more accurate, at least compared to Neri's. I have not been able to check this thoroughly, although I sense that regular use over time will probably justify her claims. The production quality of this new edition can be seen in one of the few letters where Bellini transcribes music, namely from *Il pirata*, writing to Florimo on 16 January 1828 (no. 15). In Cambi and Neri (1991), the two short examples are realised from handwritten notation, which look fine, if a bit old-fashioned; in Neri's second collection (2005), they are facsimiles of Bellini's autograph, which sounds like a good idea, but is poorly executed. In the new edition, the music appears beautifully type-set, with explanatory footnotes, illustrated by corresponding extracts from the vocal score. Great

care is also given to the deletions and superscripts present in Bellini's written text in the letter itself. Indeed, everything is designed and laid out most elegantly, and one wishes that the composer had quoted more elsewhere.

The *Carteggi* is a serious reference work, very exact and diligently footnoted, but also a rather sober one. It is obviously not meant to be a revealing portrait of the composer in the manner of Styra Avins's wonderful *Johannes Brahms: Life and Letters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), where her notes are as substantial as the letters they introduce. But, I miss some of the supplementary material found in Cambi's *Epistolario*, not only the reviews of the premieres, but also the facsimiles and portraits. Dr Seminara explains her editorial principles, which are of course of great scholarly merit. Nevertheless, Bellini discusses and sometimes encloses the reviews in his letters, so they seem pertinent to their publication. Neri also adduced interesting illustrations to both his editions: Bellini's letter to Santocanale (no. 233) of 25 March 1833, evidently contained enclosures about the supposed echoes of his earlier operas that critics had apparently found in *Beatrice di Tenda*. Neri (2005) prints not only the text of the review, but also a facsimile of the offending musical passages engraved and printed by the newspaper, which Bellini also sent (the reproduction is poor but the illustration entertaining and informative).

All of this is absent in the new *Carteggi*, as is any notion of the letters as physical objects, or that Bellini's originals might lie behind some (but not all) of them. My antiquarian perspective may not be shared by opera scholars. It is not really a criticism of Dr Seminara to point out that, despite the high production standards accorded Bellini's texts, there is only one illustration in the whole book, a fairly dim photograph of a relatively unimportant 1834 letter to Pepoli, placed before the opening of the series. There is no image of the integral autograph address-leaf, indicated in the entry (no. 304), and the photograph gives only an incomplete idea of what this letter looks like. Indeed, the book offers little impression of the aesthetic charm of Bellini's letters, in which he took considerable pride, often writing them on fine "Bath" or "Turkey Mill" paper. Only the text matters here, as if Bellini's letters

might just as well have been typed or existed only in the abstract. Cambi's edition contained well-produced (for 1943) illustrations of four letters dating from 1831 and 1835 (one to Malibran) and Neri also included several, although not so well printed. Compared with the illustrated new editions of Rossini's and Verdi's letters, I feel that an opportunity has been missed, presumably by the publisher rather than by the editor herself. Facsimiles of composers' letters are important to critical editions: the autograph manuscripts prove vital in determining the authenticity of letters, definitely an issue with this composer (see below). Moreover, Bellini's handwriting has often been misidentified, even in his letters, and some people after all buy these things. Although a comprehensive *Schriftchronologie* and concomitant paper-studies are hardly called for (as they are for Mozart and Beethoven), some consideration of his paper and his handwriting would be appropriate, since details changed.

If you want the complete correspondence, then this new volume will rightfully come to enshrine the texts. However, just how many letters have we lost over time? Florimo, who published the first collections of letters in 1869 and 1882, destroyed all but five of those written to him between March 1829 and March 1834, apparently in order to protect his friend's reputation. No fewer than sixty-one of the sixty-five surviving letters from 1828 were to Florimo and at least twenty each from 1834 and 1835. He also tampered with others that he did deign to share with us, and not just those written to him personally. His version of an important letter to Romani of 7 October 1834 (no. 332), was found to contain over seventy "editorial improvements" when Bellini's autograph manuscript of it finally appeared at Sotheby's in 1990, adding five complete sentences of an exaggeratedly fawning nature (duly noted by Neri and Seminara). Almost all the quotations from the letter made by Pastura in his important biography are in fact Florimo's invention, which shows that we must remain vigilant about any others whose autographs are untraced. There were also forgers of completely bogus Bellini letters active even whilst the composer was warm in his grave . . . and later. It is not easy to estimate how many letters Florimo destroyed, but it should be remem-

bered that those that survive include many of Bellini's longest and most revealing. We could have lost around 150–200, some presumably very significant, not counting the more natural depredation elsewhere over time. One wonders just how incriminating the letters that Florimo destroyed must have been.

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**Giuseppe Sigismondo, Apotheosis of Music in the Kingdom of Naples.** Edited by Claudio Bacciagaluppi, Giulia Giovani, and Raffaele Mellace. Introduction by Rosa Cafiero. English translation by Beatrice Scaldini. Roma: Società Editrice di Musicologia, 2016. [lxxviii, 346 p. ISBN 978-88-94150-45-2. €40]

Contained in this edition is the first-ever full transcription of Giuseppe Sigismondo's 1820 four-volume manuscript *Apoteosi della musica del regno di Napoli in tre ultimi transundati secoli*, currently conserved in the Berlin Staatsbibliothek. The curators trace back the steps that brought Sigismondo's volume, one which almost certainly the author meant to publish, to the German capital. When his father died in 1826, Rocco Sigismondo submitted his manuscript to the esteemed 'marchese' of Villarosa, who deemed it a *convoluted autograph*, full of *corrections and "chiamate"*. Nevertheless, the same manuscript, which remained in the hands of the Marquis, undeniably strongly influenced his later *Memorie dei compositori di musica del Regno di Napoli* (1840). The Berlin version of the manuscript was instead owned by collector Aloys Fuchs. The previous possessor, the young Austrian military figure Franz Sales Kandler, managed to become a close friend of Sigismondo despite the age difference between them, and moved to Naples precisely to study that same school of music as well as to expand his autograph collection. And it was in that same period that Sigismondo was working on his *Apoteosi della musica del regno di Napoli in tre ultimi transundati secoli*, an effort which continued even after Kandler's departure from Naples, as evidenced by a lengthy epistolary. In her comprehensive introductory piece, Rosa Cafiero covers this fruitful relationship (pp. xxi–lxxii); she also details the numerous biographies of il-

lustrious characters that were published both preceding and following the writing of *Apoteosi*, the intellectual circles Sigismondo partook in, his friendship with Saverio Mattei, promoter of the *Biblioteca musica* belonging to the Santa Maria della Pietà dei Turchini Conservatory where Sigismondo served as its first librarian, and concludes with letters from Sigismondo to Kandler, his notes on Zingarelli from the Vienna Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, and a brief biography of Zingarelli written by Kandler and published in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*.

The first chapter begins with the biography of the author: Sigismondo studied choir and composition with Nicolò Porpora and Francesco Durante and also undertook the study of jurisprudence; additionally, in his youth, he dedicated himself to acting and even published several comedies. As a vocal teacher for several families of Naples' elite, Sigismondo tells of many notable episodes he witnessed, including important accounts of singers and composers he personally knew: of the vocalist Ferdinando Mazzanti, of his female pupils, of his first encounter with Porpora, and especially of his friendship with Niccolò Jommelli.

In the second chapter, Sigismondo describes the long and convoluted history that brought about the creation of the Conservatorio della Pietà dei Turchini's music library and that of the four ancient Neapolitan conservatories. Sigismondo already intended for his rich autograph collection to become a "public musical library for the use of those wishing to consult the contained works of art" and to this end, they had formally catalogued his possessions. Sigismondo can claim much of the credit for the foundation of the library, one boasting a collection of works vast to the point of impressing Delegate Saverio Mattei of the Conservatorio della Pietà dei Turchini, and later in 1794 earning the approval of the King, who bestowed upon Sigismondo the title of "archivario", one which he would maintain until his death (1826). Sigismondo also provides us with several first-hand accounts pertaining to the birth of the library, such as a document from 22 March 1794 signed by Saverio Mattei, as well as all the governors of the Conservatorio della Pietà dei Turchini in the account of the completion of the