



## ***I Puritani a Londra: rassegna stampa (maggio - ottobre 1835)***

**Alice Bellini - Daniela Macchione\***

Si pubblica qui di seguito una raccolta di recensioni relative alla prima stagione dei *Puritani*<sup>1</sup> di Vincenzo Bellini al King's Theatre di Londra (21 maggio-15 agosto 1835). Le fonti utilizzate comprendono un'ampia varietà di periodici, senza tuttavia alcuna pretesa di completezza. I due omaggi alla memoria di Bellini aggiunti alla fine della rassegna, espressione di due differenti correnti critiche, sono stati scelti tra i vari articoli pubblicati a Londra alla notizia della morte del compositore; essi riassumono i primi sei anni di presenza belliniana sulle scene inglesi e illustrano la controversa recezione critica dell'opera italiana a Londra.

I documenti sono presentati in ordine alfabetico per testata e cronologico per data di pubblicazione. L'ordine cronologico qui adottato ha il vantaggio di mettere in evidenza la particolarità delle somiglianze tra articoli pubblicati in diverse testate, dovute plausibilmente soprattutto all'autoimprestito, una pratica comune nella pubblicistica musicale londinese del tempo, così spiegata da Leanne Langley:

Music journalists were obliged to be neither thorough nor objective; literary recycling and self-borrowing (often without acknowledgment) were common practices; most London music journalists, then as now, were freelancers working for more than one periodical, often anonymously and perhaps shading the tone and content of their writing to suit a given journal's market profile; anyone's musical opinions can change with time and repeated hearings of a work; wider public opinion, demonstrated for instance by continued patronage of an opera, may not have coincided with critical opinion.<sup>2</sup>

L'ordine cronologico permette inoltre di verificare la recezione dell'opera nel corso della

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\* Nella redazione del presente contributo documentario Alice Bellini è responsabile della raccolta e trascrizione del nucleo originario delle recensioni qui pubblicate e Daniela Macchione di alcune recensioni aggiuntive («The Athenæum», 22.VIII; «The Court magazine and belle assemblee», 6.VI; «The London Review», 3-4, VI.1835-I.1836; «The Morning Post», 6., 12., 15.VI, 3., 10., 15., 31.VII; «The Musical Library Monthly Supplement» VII, X) e dei due necrologi londinesi, della revisione e organizzazione del materiale e del relativo apparato critico; è altresì autrice della presente introduzione alla rassegna.

<sup>1</sup> *I Puritani* furono rappresentati per la prima volta al Théâtre Italien di Parigi il 24 gennaio 1835. Su libretto di Carlo Pepoli, il soggetto dell'opera è tratto dal dramma storico in tre atti *Têtes rondes et Cavaliers* di Jacques-Arsène-François-Polycarpe d'Ancelet e Joseph-Boniface-Xavier de Saintine, rappresentato per la prima volta al Vaudeville di Parigi nel settembre 1833, e a sua volta derivato dal romanzo *Old Mortality* di Walter Scott. Per maggiori informazioni sull'opera, si veda VINCENZO BELLINI, *I Puritani*, a cura di Fabrizio Della Seta, Milano, Ricordi, 2013 («Edizione critica delle opere di Vincenzo Bellini», vol. 10).

<sup>2</sup> LEANNE LANGLEY, *The Musical Press in Nineteenth Century England*, «Notes», XLVI/3, March 1990, pp. 583-592: 584. Sulle conseguenze di questo aspetto nello studio delle fonti periodiche dell'epoca, cfr. EAD., *Italian Opera and the English Press, 1836-56*, «Periodica Musica», VI, 1988, pp. 3-10, *on-line* sul sito del RIPM, [http://www.ripm.org/periodica\\_musica.php](http://www.ripm.org/periodica_musica.php). Sullo *status* sociale e le condizioni di lavoro dei critici musicali in Inghilterra nell'Ottocento, si veda inoltre CHARLES VILLIERS STANFORD, *Some Aspects of Musical Criticism in England*, «Fortnightly Review», 55, 1894, pp. 826-831.

stagione e di mettere a confronto le diverse opinioni critiche dopo uno stesso numero di rappresentazioni.

La tabella sottostante elenca le fonti della rassegna per cadenza di pubblicazione delle testate e date dei numeri utilizzati.

QUOTIDIANI	SETTIMANALI	BISETTIMANALI	MENSILI	TRIMESTRALI
«The Courier» 22.V.1835	«The Athenæum» 23.V.1835 30.V.1835 22.VIII.1835	«The News» 24.V.1835 31.V.1835	«The court magazine and belle assemblée» 6.VI.1835	«The London Review» 3-4, VI.1835- I.1836
«Evening Chronicle» 23.V.1835	«The Atlas» 24.V.1835		«The Musical Library Monthly Supplement» VII.1835 X.1835	
«Globe and Traveller» 22.V.1835	«John Bull» 24.V.1835			
«The Morning Chronicle» 22.V.1835	«The Examiner» 24.V.1835 31.V.1835			
«Morning Herald» 22.V.1835 27.V.1835	«The National» 24.V.1835 31.V.1835			
«The Morning Post» 22.V.1835 27.V.1835 29.V.1835 1.VI.1835 6.VI.1835 12.VI.1835 15.VI.1835 3.VII.1835 10.VII.1835 15.VII.1835 31.VII.1835	«The Observer» 24.V.1835 31.V.1835			
«The Times» 22.V.1835 27.V.1835	«The Satirist» 24.V.1835			
«The True Sun» 23.V.1835	«The Spectator» 23.V.1835			
	«The Sunday Times» 24.V.1835 31.V.1835			

Come gran parte degli articoli musicali pubblicati in quegli anni a Londra, le recensioni della presente rassegna sono tutte anonime.<sup>3</sup> Al tempo della prima dei *Puritani* a Londra, tuttavia, il giornalismo operistico era la principale occupazione di pochi critici oggi conosciuti, spesso collaboratori di più testate. Gli articoli della rassegna si possono dunque plausibilmente attribuire ai seguenti giornalisti: Thomas Massa Alsager (1779–1846),<sup>4</sup> al «Times» dal 1817, di cui fu collaboratore e per il quale curava anche le pagine finanziarie, insieme a Thomas Barnes (1785–1841), *editor* dello stesso quotidiano; William Ayrton (1777–1858),<sup>5</sup> curatore del «Musical Library Monthly Supplement»; Henry Fothergill Chorley (1808–1872),<sup>6</sup> collaboratore dell'«Athenæum» dal 1834; Charles Lewis Gruneisen (1806–1869),<sup>7</sup> critico musicale del «Morning Post» dal 1833; George Hogarth (1783–1870),<sup>8</sup> al «Morning Chronicle» dal 1834 e *co-editor* dell'«Evening Chronicle» dal 1835; Edward Holmes (1797–1859),<sup>9</sup> collaboratore dell'«Atlas» dal 1826; Thomas Love Peacock (1785–1866),<sup>10</sup> scrittore,

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<sup>3</sup> Pur non direttamente d'aiuto per la rassegna qui trascritta, uno strumento fondamentale per l'attribuzione degli articoli inglesi è *The Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals, 1824-1900* (3 voll., Toronto, University of Toronto Press, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966-79), monumentale lavoro di indicizzazione oggi disponibile anche in formato elettronico.

<sup>4</sup> Alsager è tra l'altro il fondatore della Beethoven Quartet Society (1845) di Londra. Cfr. DAVID B. LEVY, «Alsager, Thomas Massa», *sub voce*, in *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, consultato nel dicembre 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Tra il 1816 e il 1827, Ayrton assunse per più stagioni la direzione del King's Theatre. Tra il 1823 e il 1833 fu *editor* del mensile musicale «Harmonicon», fino al 1826 è documentata la sua collaborazione al «Morning Chronicle» e dal 1837 all'«Examiner». Per maggiori informazioni, cfr. LEANNE LANGLEY, «Ayrton, William», *sub voce*, in *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, consultato nel dicembre 2014.

<sup>6</sup> Chorley fu attivo anche come librettista, curatore delle versioni inglesi di varie opere, e come scrittore e traduttore di testi di canzoni. Nel 1862 pubblicò le sue memorie critico-musicali, *Thirty Year's Musical Recollections* (2 voll., London, Hurst and Blackett). Per maggiori informazioni, cfr. ROBERT BLEDSOE, «Chorley, Henry F(othergill)», *sub voce*, in *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, consultato nel dicembre 2014.

<sup>7</sup> Autore del libro *The Opera and the Press*, pubblicato nel 1869, oggi disponibile nella ristampa curata per i tipi di Kessinger (2010), e di un libro su Meyerbeer, *Memoir of Meyerbeer, with notices, historical and critical, of his celebrated operas* (London, Brettell, 1848). Su Gruneisen, si veda il *Dictionary of nineteenth-century journalism in Great Britain and Ireland*, ed. by Laurel Brake and Marysa Demoor, Gent, Academia, 2009, p. 263.

<sup>8</sup> George Hogarth è autore di vari libri di argomento musicale (sulla storia della musica, su singoli compositori, sull'opera e sulla critica musicale); le sue memorie operistiche sono state pubblicate in due raccolte: *Memoirs of the Musical Drama* (2 voll., London, Bentley, 1838) e *Memoirs of the opera in Italy, France, Germany, and England* (2 voll., London, Bentley, 1851). *Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, consultato nel dicembre 2014.

<sup>9</sup> Holmes scrisse per vari altri periodici, tra cui «Foreign Quarterly Review», «Monthly Chronicle», «Musical World», «Spectator», «Fraser's Magazine e Musical Times». Nel 1828 pubblicò *A Ramble among the Musicians of Germany, giving some account of the Operas of Munich, Dresden, Berlin, &c. with remarks upon the church music, singers, performers and composers; and a sample of the pleasures and inconveniences that await the lover of art on a similar excursion* (London, Hunt & Clarke). Per maggiori informazioni cfr. LEANNE LANGLEY, «Holmes, Edward», *sub voce*, in *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, consultato nel dicembre 2014.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Love Peacock, scrittore di romanzi satirici e poesie, è noto anche per la sua vicinanza a Shelley, di cui fu esecutore testamentario. Su Peacock e sulla sua attività di critico musicale, cfr. HOWARD MILLS, *Peacock. His circle and his age*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1969.

recensore operistico dell'«Examiner» dal 1830 al 1835 e autore, sotto le iniziali M.S.O., del necrologio belliniano apparso sul «London Review»; Edward Taylor (1784-1863),<sup>11</sup> critico musicale per «The Spectator» dal 1829. Le reti di rapporti e corrispondenze testuali fanno ipotizzare le responsabilità di alcuni degli articoli apparsi sulle altre testate.

Riguardo ai criteri della trascrizione, l'ortografia inglese del tempo è stata rispettata e i refusi e gli errori sono stati segnalati (il *sic* è segnato tra parentesi quadre per differenziarlo da analoghe indicazioni originali); i corsivi originali sono stati preservati, mentre il maiuscolo, conservato nei titoli di rubrica, è stato riportato al carattere tondo normale nel corpo degli articoli, dove negli originali era usato per mettere ad esempio in evidenza i nomi propri. I rientri di prima riga non sono stati ripetuti, mentre la centratura di alcune citazioni rispecchia l'allineamento del testo originale. Infine, per una storia della stampa periodica musicale e della critica musicale in Inghilterra nell'Ottocento, si rimanda al contributo di Leanne Langley.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Taylor, cantante, insegnò al Gresham College a partire dal 1837. Per le scene londinesi curò le versioni inglesi dei testi di vari lavori teatrali. Liberale, fu anche attivo nella vita politica. Cfr. LEANNE LANGLEY, «Taylor, Edward», *sub voce*, in *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, consultato nel dicembre 2014.

<sup>12</sup> Cfr. LEANNE LANGLEY, *The English Musical Journal in the Early Nineteenth Century*, Ph.D. diss., Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina, 1983.

## «The Courier»

Venerdì, 22 maggio 1835<sup>13</sup>

King's Theatre – Bellini's new opera, *I Puritani*, was performed last night, for the first time in England, for the benefit of Mdlle. Grisi.<sup>14</sup> The action of the piece takes place in England during the civil wars, and the scene lies in a fortress occupied by the adherents of Cromwell. *Lord Walter Walton*, the governor of the place, has a fair daughter, *Elvira*, who loves and is beloved by *Lord Arthur Talbot*, a young cavalier, devoted to the Royal cause. *Elvira*'s hand had been promised to *Sir Richard Forth*, a friend of her father's, and, of course, a zealous Roundhead; but the old gentleman is moved by the young lady's tears to break faith with the Puritan lover, and to bestow her on the man of her heart. *Henrietta Maria* of France, the widow of Charles the First, is a prisoner in the fortress under a feigned name, and is on the point of being brought before the Parliament to be tried for her life. The young Cavalier, who is about to be united to his mistress, discovers the Royal prisoner, and moved by her danger, contrives to effect her escape, and accompanies her in it, even when the bridal procession was moving to the altar. The poor bride, conceiving that her intended had eloped with another woman, becomes insane. The fugitives are pursued, but in vain; and *Talbot* is outlawed and condemned to death by the Parliament. Some months afterwards he returns in disguise to the residence of his mistress, whom he contrives to see, and a touching scene takes place between them, during which they are surprised by the Puritans. His rival gives orders for the immediate execution of his sentence; but, as he is on the point of being put to death, a horn is heard, and a messenger arrives, with a dispatch from Cromwell, announcing a new victory, and pardon for all prisoners to the Commonwealth. The finale is, therefore, abruptly changed from melancholy to jubilant, and the lovers are united. Bellini's music in this Opera is not so even in its merit as in that of the *Sonnambula*<sup>15</sup> – its choruses are, on the whole, inferior to those of the latter work. They have not the melodious subject, and they are rather too noisy. Bellini would seem to have been in a drum fever when he composed them. Still there is a vigour about them which carries them off successfully. Neither are there so many melodies in the lighter parts of this as in the other opera; but, on the other hand, it has some of more spirit – more fire. Grisi's music in *Elvira* was almost all good – some of it exceedingly beautiful. She made a splendid display of her powers as an actress in this opera. The air in which she gives vent to her joyous feelings, "Son vergine vezzosa," is charming, and nothing could be more delicious than the manner in which she sang it. When the cup of happiness is suddenly dashed from her lips – when she believes that her lover has abandoned her at

<sup>13</sup> Alcuni paragrafi sono in comune con gli articoli apparsi sul «Sunday Times» e «The Morning Chronicle».

<sup>14</sup> Giulia Grisi (Milano 1811 - Berlino 1869), soprano; il suo debutto a Londra risale al 1834, al King's Theatre, nel ruolo di Ninetta nella *Gazza ladra* di Rossini. A Parigi, nel 1835, creò i ruoli di Elvira nei *Puritani* di Bellini e di Elena in *Marino Faliero* di Donizetti.

<sup>15</sup> La prima londinese della *Sonnambula* (Milano, Teatro Carcano, 6.III.1831) risale al 28 luglio 1831 al King's Theatre.

the very altar – there is something terrific in the aspect of her despair, even before she articulates a word or utters a sound. – Rubini,<sup>16</sup> in the character of *Arthur*, acted and sung very beautifully; but there was nothing in the music of his part that was at all striking. Tamburini<sup>17</sup> had the part of *Sir Riccardo Forth*, and Lablache<sup>18</sup> that of *Sir Georgio*, an uncle of the heroine – a personage who has little to do with the business of the piece, except singing certain duets and filling up the bass in the concerted pieces. Grisi's performance was enthusiastically applauded, and, on her appearing before the curtain at the conclusion of the opera, wreaths of flowers were flung upon the stage – a piece of mummery of which an English audience ought to be ashamed. The piece was announced for repetition on Tuesday, by command of the Queen.

### «Globe and Traveller»

Venerdi, 22 maggio 1835<sup>19</sup>

King's Theatre – Bellini's new opera – Signor Bellini's new opera, entitled *I Puritani e I Cavalieri* (the Puritans and the Cavaliers), was produced last night for the benefit of Mademoiselle Grisi. The fame of this opera had been trumpeted forth by the friends of the *giovine maestro* with extraordinary perseverance, and we have reason to think that its merits were proclaimed actually before a note of it was put on paper. The fact, however, is, that Bellini had declared about a year ago that he would withdraw from the world, and retire to a remote cottage for six months; after which he would return with the best opera that he had yet written. He did so, and we are bound to say, by what we heard last night of the produce of his labours, that he has most faithfully acted up to his intentions. So far as we are able to make out the author's meaning, it would seem that *Lord Arthur Talbot* (Rubini), a partisan of the Stuarts, was in love with *Elvira* (Mdlle. Grisi), daughter of *Lord Walton* (Giubilei),<sup>20</sup> and niece of *Sir George* (Lablache), both of them commanders of the forces of the commonwealth, under Cromwell. We are given to understand in the course of the piece that *Lord Arthur* has a rival in *Sir Richard Forth* (Tamburini); but though this personage seems to be desperately in love, and appears to intrigue in order to get *Lord Arthur* out of the way, he nevertheless continues to be a rejected suitor. *Elvira* becomes mad in consequence of a notion that *Lord Arthur* is in love with *Henrietta of France*,

<sup>16</sup> Giovanni Battista Rubini (Romano [Bergamo] 1794 - 1854), tenore, fece il suo debutto a Londra nell'estate 1831.

<sup>17</sup> Antonio Tamburini (Faenza 1800 - Nizza 1876), baritono, debuttò a Londra al King's Theatre, il 23 giugno 1832, nel ruolo di Valdeburgo, in occasione della prima londinese della *Straniera* di Bellini.

<sup>18</sup> Luigi Lablache (Napoli 1894-1858), basso, debuttò a Londra nel marzo 1830 al King's Theatre, nel ruolo di Geronimo nel *Matrimonio segreto* di Cimarosa.

<sup>19</sup> L'articolo rivela analogie con quello pubblicato dal «Times» del 22 maggio.

<sup>20</sup> Antonio Giubilei fece il suo debutto a Londra nel 1834, nelle vesti del Podestà della *Gazza ladra*.



widow of Charles I. (Mrs. E. Seguin).<sup>21</sup> The whole closes after three acts' display by the return from exile of *Lord Arthur*, and the dissipation of the ravings of *Elvira*. Bellini is, like Donizetti,<sup>22</sup> guilty of not having given an overture to his new opera.<sup>23</sup> The whole of the first act of this opera, however, so far as music is concerned, is a work of very superior merit. It abounds in richness of harmony, in fullness of orchestral accompaniment, and in happy inspirations. Bellini never wrote so exquisite a *morceau* as the *polacca*<sup>24</sup> introduced in the eighth scene of the first act. It was sung by Mademoiselle Grisi, and by Lablache and Giubilei, who take up the *ritournelle* with her in so tasteful and highly finished a manner, as to elicit bursts of applause evidently quite spontaneous. The *polacca* was, of course, called for a second time, and applauded even with more warmth than before. The second act is also full of excellent music, and contains more concerted pieces than the first. The whole of it was given with so much effect, that a call was set up at the end of it for Lablache and Tamburini, who had to re-appear. The third act is the weakest of the three, but it has some very good concerted pieces. The whole opera abounds in choruses, some of which only were given owing to the shortness of the time allowed for the rehearsals after the arrival of the score. On this account many parts of the *libretto* were skipped over, and the performance was necessarily a good deal shortened. If all the choruses be as good as the few that were given, they should not by any means be left out in future. The performance was greatly applauded throughout by a crowded audience who, at the end, insisted on the re-appearance of Mademoiselle Grisi, on whom crowns and garlands were immediately showered from the parts of the house nearest the stage. After the opera Mr. Laporte<sup>25</sup> came forward and announced that her Majesty had commanded that the new opera should be repeated on Tuesday next; and on the following Thursday it is to be given for the benefit of Mr. Laporte, together with *La Prova d'un Opera Seria*,<sup>26</sup> and the ballet *La Sylphide*,<sup>27</sup> in the last

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21 Elizabeth Seguin (Londra 1815-1870), soprano, appartenente a una famiglia di cantanti, fu la madre di Euphrosyne Parepa-Rosa, anche lei soprano e fondatrice, insieme al marito Carl Rosa, dell'omonima compagnia teatrale operistica.

22 Si veda ancora, più avanti, la recensione apparsa su «The Satirist» il 24 maggio. Il riferimento è all'allestimento londinese di *Marino Faliero* (Parigi, Théâtre Italien, 12.III.1835), al King's Theatre il 14 maggio, appena una settimana prima dei *Puritani*. Secondo Bellini, il debutto della sua opera era stato posticipato per paura di replicare il fiasco che a Parigi aveva suscitato il confronto tra i due titoli (si veda la lettera di Bellini a Francesco Florimo, datata 18 maggio 1835, in CARMELO NERI, *Vincenzo Bellini. Nuovo Epistolario 1819-1835*, Aci Sant'Antonio, Agorà, 2005, p. 407).

23 La constatazione dell'assenza di una sinfonia d'apertura si riscontra anche nell'articolo pubblicato sull'«Observer» del 24 maggio.

24 Si tratta della polacca di Elvira dell'Atto I, «Son vergin vezzosa».

25 Pierre-François Laporte (Parigi 1799-1841), impresario del King's Theatre dal 1828. Sulla gestione Laporte e le relazioni con il Théâtre Italien di Parigi, cfr. ALESSANDRO ROCCATAGLIATI, *Parigi-Londra andata e ritorno: musiche, cantanti e faccendieri fra i teatri d'opera italiana (1830-38)*, in *Pensieri per un maestro. Studi in onore di Pierluigi Petrobelli*, a cura di Stefano La Via e Roger Parker, Torino, EDT, 2002, pp. 193-209.

26 *La prova d'un'opera seria* (Milano, Teatro alla Scala, autunno 1805), melodramma giocoso in due atti con testo e musica di Francesco Gnecco (Genova 1769 - Milano 1810), ebbe un duraturo successo nei teatri europei.

27 *La Sylphide*, balletto su libretto del tenore Adolphe Nourrit (Montpellier 1802 - Napoli 1839), musica di Jean

of which Mademoiselle Taglioni<sup>28</sup> is to make her first appearance this season.

### «The Morning Chronicle»

**Venerdì, 22 maggio 1835** (testo apparso identico nell'«Evening Chronicle» del 23 maggio 1835)<sup>29</sup>

King's Theatre. Bellini's new opera, *I Puritani*, was on Thursday night performed for the first time in England, for the benefit of Mdle. Grisi. The *libretto* is a pleasing little drama, somewhat absurd in its incidents, but possessing a good deal of interest, and affording considerable room for the display of tragic power on the part of the heroine. The action of the piece takes place in England during the civil wars; and the scene lies in a fortress occupied by the adherents of Cromwell. *Lord Walter Walton*, the governor of the place, has a fair daughter, *Elvira*, who loves and is beloved by *Lord Arthur Talbot*, a young cavalier, devoted to the Royal cause. *Elvira*'s hand had been promised to *Sir Richard Forth*, a friend of her father's, and, of course, a zealous Round-head; but the old gentleman is moved by the young lady's tears to break faith with the Puritan lover, and to bestow her on the man of her heart. *Henrietta Maria* of France, the widow of Charles the First, is a prisoner in the fortress under a feigned name, and is on the point of being brought before the Parliament to be tried for her life. The young Cavalier, who is about to be united to his mistress, discovers the Royal prisoner, and moved by her danger contrives to effect her escape, and accompanies her in it, even when the bridal procession was moving to the altar. The poor bride, conceiving that her intended had eloped with another woman, becomes insane. The fugitives are pursued, but in vain; and *Talbot* is outlawed and condemned to death by the Parliament. Some months afterwards he returns in disguise to the residence of his mistress, whom he contrives to see, and a touching scene takes place between them, during which they are surprised by the Puritans. His rival gives orders for the immediate execution of his sentence; but, as he is on the point of being put to death, a horn is heard, and a messenger arrives, with news that the Stuarts had been defeated, and the prisoner pardoned. The violent shocks of grief and joy have a salutary effect on the young lady's mind; and all parties (except, of course, the disappointed rival) are happy. The piece is written in very "choice Italian," and contains many pleasing and even poetical passages.

The music of this opera is precisely what we expected from the former productions of the composer. The airs are pretty, but common, and there is an eternal repetition of phrases and passages which we have heard again and again. The choruses are little better than mere noise; and, indeed, the general character of the music may be designated by the word "*strepitoso*." The

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Schneitzhoffer (Toulouse 1785 - Paris 1852) e coreografia di Filippo Taglioni (Milano 1777 - Como 1871), fu allestito per la prima volta all'Opéra di Parigi nel 1832, con Maria Taglioni (Stoccolma 1804 - Marsiglia 1884), figlia del coreografo, nel ruolo della protagonista.

<sup>28</sup> Si veda la nota precedente.

<sup>29</sup> Alcuni paragrafi sono in comune con gli articoli apparsi su «The Sunday Times» e «The Courier».



orchestra is incessantly kept at hard duty, particularly the brazen instruments and drums, the braying and beating of which hardly ever intermit from the beginning to the end of the piece. An essayist of the last century, describing the fashionable bucks of his day, said that they looked fierce that they might not look sheepish; the modern Italian composers are boisterous that they may not seem feeble. Their music, however, shows off the florid style of the present race of singers; and the public, it appears, would rather hear Grisi and Rubini indulge in an interminable tissue of *roulades* and flourishes in a song of Bellini's or Donizetti's, than sing, with a chasteness and purity of which they are very capable, the divine melodies of Cimarosa or Mozart. Surely, as the Tories say, there must be a *re-action* one of these days.<sup>30</sup>

Grisi made a splendid display of her powers as an actress in this opera. She appears at first all radiant with loveliness and joy, indulging in all the exuberance of youthful spirits, and exulting in the prospect of an immediate union with him she loves. The air in which she gives vent to her joyous feelings, "Son vergine vezzosa," is, in our apprehension, the most charming thing in the opera; and nothing could be more delicious than the manner in which she sang it. When the cup of happiness is suddenly dashed from her lips – when she believes that her lover has abandoned her at the very altar – there is something terrific in the aspect of her despair even before she articulates a word or utters a sound. Grisi's representation of melancholy madness is full of truth and beauty, except when it is marred by the necessity of singing long tissues of florid passages, the execution of which is incompatible with expression of any kind. Rubini in the character of *Arthur*, acted and sung very beautifully; but there was nothing in the music of his part that was at all striking. Tamburini had the part of Sir *Riccardo Forth*, and Lablache that of *Sir Giorgio*, an uncle of the heroine – a personage who has little to do with the business of the piece, except singing certain duets and filling up the bass in the concerted pieces. Grisi's performance was enthusiastically applauded, and, on her appearing before the curtain at the conclusion of the opera, wreaths of flowers were flung upon the stage – a piece of mummery of which an English audience ought to be ashamed. The piece was announced for repetition on Tuesday, by command of the Queen.

### «Morning Herald»

Venerdì, 22 maggio 1835<sup>31</sup>

The King's Theatre. Grisi had her benefit here last night, and a house which attested her popularity in the most unequivocal manner, as it was full in every part, even up to the top of the gallery. Her Royal Highness the Duchess of Kent,<sup>32</sup> the Princess Victoria, and his

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<sup>30</sup> Il critico del «Morning Chronicle» sarebbe stato presto accontentato: in «The Court magazine and belle assemblee» del 7 luglio 1835 apparve infatti la recensione di un concerto ben riuscito, organizzato il 30 maggio dai García, durante il quale Giulia Grisi, insieme a Maria Malibran e a Manuel García (figlio) cantarono il terzetto «Le faccio un inchino», dal *Matrimonio segreto* di Cimarosa.

<sup>31</sup> Alcuni paragrafi sono in comune con gli articoli apparsi in «The Observer» e «The Courier».

<sup>32</sup> La futura regina Vittoria del Regno Unito (Londra 1819 - Isola di Wight 1901) era figlia dei Duchi di Kent, Edoardo Augusto, figlio di re Giorgio III, e Vittoria di Sassonia-Coburgo-Saalfeld. Il Duca di Cambridge

Royal Highness the Duke of Cambridge were amongst the audience. Bellini's opera *I Puritani* was produced on the occasion, and was well calculated to display the various excellences of the fair *prima donna*. The libretto of this opera is of about an average merit, and rather gives opportunities for fine acting, than in itself develops a powerful dramatic action. Its plot is laid, as the name implies, in the days of the roundheads, and after the death of Charles. It opens with the approaching nuptials of a young nobleman *Lord Arthur Talbot* and *Elvira*, the daughter of *Lord Walton*, the commandant of a fortress in the interest of the Puritans. At the same time, a female of rank, whose life is compromised as an adherent of Royalty, is a prisoner to *Walton* and about to be sent off to London for judgement. *Talbot*, who is a loyalist at heart, manifest some pity for her situation, upon which she reveals to him privately that she is the Queen in disguise. In the ardour of the moment he devotes himself to her protection, and, as the only means of getting her beyond the fortress walls, in which the scene is laid, induces her to assume and conceal her features under the bridal veil of *Elvira*, in the momentary absence of the latter. A Puritan colonel, who is his rival for the hand of *Elvira*, is about to hinder his exit with the Queen, when perceiving the features of the latter he gladly assent to their departure, in the hope that *Talbot* maybe in every way compromised. The fugitives escape, the alarm is given, and poor *Elvira*, as needs must in dramatics, goes mad in white satin. After the safety of the Queen is supposed to be secured, *Talbot* returns in disguise to the residence of his mistress. He serenades her, and obtains an interview with her, which, as she is still mad, is of the most tragic kind. At its conclusion he is surprised, made prisoner, and informed that, for his connivance in the Queen's escape, he is condemned to death. The announcement of this sentence is comprehended by *Elvira*, and has the effect of at once restoring her senses. A scene of the most pathetic kind then takes place between her, her father,<sup>33</sup> and the two rival lovers, and a most tragic consummation seems impending, when, with dramatic *opportuneness*, a despatch comes from Cromwell, announcing a new victory, and a pardon for all prisoners to the Commonwealth. The finale is, therefore, abruptly changed from melancholy to jubilant, and the lovers are united. Bellini's music in this opera is not so even in its merit as in that of the *Sonnambula* – its choruses are, on the whole, inferior to those of the latter work. They have not the melodious subject, and they are rather too noisy. Bellini would seem to have been in a drum fever when he composed them. Still there is a vigour about them which carries them off successfully. Neither are there so many melodies in the lighter parts of this as in the other opera. But, on the other hand, it has some of more spirit – more fire. Grisi's music in *Elvira* was almost all good – some of it exceedingly beautiful. The polonaise in the eighth scene, first act, 'Son vergin vezzosa' is one of the most graceful *allegros* we have heard, and, indeed, the whole *scena* to which it belongs is quite beautiful. Grisi, who looked a lovely bride, supported the spirit of this part of the composition with acting of the most animated and elegant *naïveté*. In the last scene of the same act she had a pathetic *scena* also, commencing with the passage 'Arturo! Ah già ritorni', which had a full and most feeling effect. In the second and third act there was a good deal of highly-wrought

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qui citato era Adolfo, zio di Vittoria, fratello minore del padre.

33 In realtà si tratta dello zio di *Elvira*, sir Giorgio, dal momento che si fa riferimento al Finale ultimo dell'opera.

music, particularly the air 'Qui la voce sua soave' in the one, and the duet 'Vieni fra le mie braccia' in the other. We do not think Grisi has ever been in finer voice than she was on this occasion. In the first-act music to which we have alluded, there were some passages which drew forth from her some of the purest and most sustained vocal melody that we have ever had the good fortune to hear. At the conclusion of the opera, the feelings of the house seemed quite enthusiastic, and when Grisi was called forth before the curtain showers of bouquets and wreaths were flung towards her from all parts of the house, so that the stage was quite covered with them, and Tamburini and Lablache had no trifling labour in picking them up. Rubini took the part of Arturo, and had some sweet melody to sing in it, especially the air in the first act 'A te o cara!' the subsequent concerted conclusion of which was one of the most charming parts of the opera. Tamburini appeared as the rival lover, Sir Ricardo Forth, and Lablache as the father of Elvira;<sup>34</sup> both acted and sung admirably. Their martial duet, at the end of the second act, 'Chi ben la patria adora', a remarkably spirited composition, in the same bold vein as the celebrated duet in the second act of *Otello*,<sup>35</sup> was enthusiastically encored, and the applause was continued after the curtain had fallen, so that both had to come forward and receive a fresh peal. At Paris Bellini himself had to appear, and accept this species of compliment. On the whole the opera went off most successfully. It is, throughout, as we have implied, composed at least with *vivida vis* and it was acted with a sympathetic spirit. At the fall of the curtain Laporte came forward and announced that it would be repeated on Tuesday night next, at the command of her Majesty.

### «The Morning Post»

Venerdì, 22 maggio 1835

The Opera – King's Theatre. Production of *I Puritani e I Cavalieri* – We are not at all surprised that Grisi should have fixed upon Bellini's last production for her benefit, since the part assigned to her affords opportunities for the display of capabilities, vocal and histrionic, which her powers, however extraordinary, have not before exhibited. The attendance of the fashionable world and of *dilettante* included almost every person of note. Royalty was not exempt from the interest excited on behalf of the young and beautiful *bénéficiaire*, and her Majesté as well as the Duchess of Kent and the Princess Victoria occupied boxes on this interesting occasion, while every portion of the house displayed animated proofs of the deserved estimation in which the talents of Grisi are held. The *Puritani* was first produced in January last at the Théâtre Italien in Paris, where it met with considerable success. The *libretto* is from the pen of Count Pepoli,<sup>36</sup> known from his writings on the fine arts, and by some

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<sup>34</sup> Anche in questo caso si tratta di una svista, dal momento che Lablache interpretava il ruolo di Sir Giorgio, zio e non padre di Elvira.

<sup>35</sup> Il riferimento sembra sia al Duetto «Non m'inganno» da *Otello* di Rossini. *Otello ossia Il Moro di Venezia* (Napoli, Teatro del Fondo, 4.XII.1816) fu rappresentato per la prima volta a Londra, al King's Theatre, il 22 maggio 1822.

<sup>36</sup> Carlo Pepoli (Bologna 1796-1881), poeta e librettista, conobbe Bellini a Parigi, dove si trovava in esilio

poetical works of merit, who borrowed the subject from a piece played about two years since at the Vaudeville, under the title of *Têtes [sic] Rondes et des Cavaliers*, which was written by M. Ancelot.<sup>37</sup> The drama is told in good poetry, and in an interesting and intelligible manner, which left to the composer the requisite latitude for diversified expression. How far Bellini has availed himself of the scope for good music we are about to describe, so far as first impression will allow us, and consistently with the space and time which can be allowed to the examination.

The parts were thus distributed:

Lord Arthur Talbot.....	Signor Rubini
Sir Giorgio.....	Signor Lablache
Sir Riccardo Forth.....	Signor Tamburini
Lord Gualtiero Valton.....	Signor Giubilei
Elvira.....	Mdlle Grisi
Enrichetta di Francia.....	Mrs E. Seguin

In the place of an overture a quick movement of a military *motivo*, followed by a succession of passages on the wind instruments, which did not come up to the expectations raised by the first burst, precede the rising of the curtain, discovering a view of Plymouth (as we understood), but which we will take for granted was intended for some fortress at the period of the wars of the Commonwealth. The opening scene partakes of a triple character – the military, the religious, and the nuptial. The first struck us as based upon a Spanish bolero; the second is one of great merit, although characterised by an inconsistency. The Puritans sing the morning prayer, with the accompaniment of an organ, which they never used for their devotions. The voices of Grisi, Lablache and Tamburini are heard in this division of the chorus with a very pleasing and devotional effect. The nuptial is the most original bit of this introduction, and is wound up very spiritedly. *Richard Forth* then sings an agreeable cavatina ‘Ah per sempre io ti perdei,’ beautifully executed by Tamburini, descriptive of his affection for *Elvira*, which is not returned by her, as she had formed an attachment for a noble cavalier, *Arthur Talbot*. The next scene passes in *Elvira*’s room, and a fine duet ‘Piangi, o figlia, sul mio seno,’ takes place between her and *Sir George*, her uncle, a brother of *Lord Walton*, the governor of the fortress and one of Cromwell’s party. This duet is replete with happy and melodious phrases, and was done ample justice by Lablache and Grisi. The uncle has procured the consent of *Lord Walton* for the union between *Lord Talbot*, a partisan of the Stuarts, and his daughter, although he had affianced her in the first instance to *Richard Forth*. The breaking of the joyful intelligence to *Elvira*, and her rapture when informed of the completion of her hopes, were admirably developed in this duet. In the next scene the Cavalier arrives, and Rubini has a very sweet air to sing, which precedes a well written

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in seguito alla partecipazione ai moti italiani del 1831. Si trasferì poi a Londra per insegnare Letteratura italiana all’University College. Al tempo della prima dei *Puritani* il librettista era già a Londra (si veda la lettera di Bellini a Filippo Santocanale, datata 14 maggio 1835, in CARMELO NERI, *Vincenzo Bellini. Nuovo Epistolario 1819-1835* cit., pp. 405-406).

<sup>37</sup> Si veda la nota n. 1.

quartet, which was encored, sung by him, Grisi, Lablache, and Giubilei, beginning with 'Senza occaso questa aurora,' and descriptive of the happiness of the father, uncle, daughter and lover. The nuptial entertainment is about to proceed when an unknown prisoner, a female of high distinction, arrives, who is informed by the Governor that the Parliament requires her presence. *Arthur* is interested in her fate and ascertains that she is *Henrietta of France*, the widow of *Charles I*. He is determined at all hazards to save her from her impending fate. It is here that the *bijou* of the opera is sung. It is one of the most agreeable and catching airs, and executed by Mademoiselle Grisi, was enthusiastically applauded and encored. In the *polacca*, which is supported by Lablache, Rubini and Mrs. E. Seguin, Grisi sings the burden with a grace and elegance without parallel, first luxuriating in roulades of exquisite finish and precision, now ascending in *alt*, then dropping octaves, revelling in triplets of a charm absolutely ravishing, leaving the melody and returning to it with a refined *gusto* coupled with the most astonishing facility of tone. The other three singers aided and abetted in this attack upon the sense of hearing, until every listener almost imagined he was in fairyland, and the sounds were of no mortal origin. This *polacca* will become an established favourite. The singing of Grisi in it is beyond all praise. The *naïveté* of her acting when she placed the nuptial veil on the head of *Henrietta*, in order to behold how it would attract the attention of her lover, was an admirable keeping with her astonishing vocal efforts. *Arthur*, warmed by his loyalty to the Stuarts, however, takes flight with *Henrietta*, to save her life, and leaves his bride at the altar in her wedding garments, in order to protect the proscribed Queen of England. *Elvira*, overwhelmed by the unexplained flight of *Arthur*, loses her reason on learning the fact, and the finale of the first act is then gone through. The andante is here well conceived, and the conflicting emotions of the various persons engaged in it dramatically described. It is a pity that Bellini did not embrace the situation to make the music of *Elvira* more strongly marked. He may not always have a *cantatrice* who can express so much by the 'silent system' as Grisi. The concluding burst of the puritan soldiers – their curse on the fugitives – was powerfully delivered and met with much approbation. In the second act there are some remarkable *morceaux*. The first is the opening air of *Sir George*, most touchingly delivered by Lablache, who tells the tale of the madness of his niece to a chorus of peasants. A mad scene of *Elvira* follows, forming a trio between her, *Richard*, and *George*. Grisi created the most profound interest in the whole of this most difficult position, and, whether in the description of deep and calm despair, of ardent love for her supposed faithless *Arthur*, or of the desperate violence and recklessness of a 'wrecked mind', she was equally grand, moving and terrible. The variety of expressions which she infused into the signs of insanity was in every point evidence of the thorough knowledge and conception which she possessed of the attributes of this most frightful of all disorders. A magnificent duet between Lablache and Tamburini closed the second act. *Sir George* engages *Sir Richard* to endeavour to save the life of *Arthur*, condemned to death by the Parliament. This forms the subject of the duet. After a beautiful symphony on the horn, very well played by Platt, it commences with a musical dialogue, in which the questions are given with dignity on the one hand, and stern defiance on the other. Each singer then urges his reason separately for the course to be pursued, and *Sir Richard* having at length consented to the proposition of *Sir George*, they break out in unison in a most energetic declaration of acting together for the good of the country. We never heard more tremendous cheering as each singer gave the following words in turn, and then took them



together:

“Suoni la tromba e intrepido  
Io pugnerò da forte,  
Bello è affrontar la morte  
Gridando libertà.  
Amor di Patria impavido  
Mieta i sanguigni allori  
Poi terga i bei sudori  
E i pianti la pietà.”

This animated peroration, brilliantly executed, with an exhilarating accompaniment of trumpets, was compelled to be repeated, and the excitement of the audience at this duet, which terminated the second act, was not allayed until Lablache and Tamburini had appeared after the fall of the curtain. The last part of the opera is taken up with the melancholy wandering of *Arthur*, who returns at the risk of his life, to explain to *Elvira* the cause of his flight. He meets her; but finds that her reason has fled, and, becoming indifferent to his lot, is surprised by Cromwell's soldiers. *Arthur* is about to be removed for execution when *Elvira* recovers her reason, at the threats of the Puritans, and avows her determination of dying with her lover, which *dénouement* is changed to the more acceptable one of a happy *finale*, in consequence of the publication of an amnesty by Cromwell. The duet between Rubini and Grisi is the most choice *morveau* in the last act. The opera upon the whole seemed to impart unmixed satisfaction, although in our minds it is a composition of very unequal merit. Bellini has, it must be admitted, notwithstanding, added materially to his reputation by the *Puritani*. There is decided evidence of improvement in his instrumentation, and there are some striking bits which will outlive the opera itself, that is, if singers can be found to do the music – a question, we are incline to think, rather problematical – equal to those of the present company at the King's Theatre. Our reminiscences now cling to the *polacca*, and to the duet between Lablache and Tamburini; of the rest we can speak but imperfectly, as it has not dwelled in our memory. As an opera *de circonstance* it must enjoy popularity, for there are attractions in it apart from the merits of the music, which are all sufficient to insure it success. We have not done justice to Grisi, and it is not in our power by any feeble attempt of ours to convey an accurate notion of the excellence of her singing and acting. She was immensely applauded throughout the opera, and had to encounter at the termination a shower of wreaths, bouquets, etc., which the active exertions of Lablache, Tamburini and Rubini, were called into requisition to collect. We have but to notice one defect which was observable, and that applies to her costume. This was unquestionably of too costly a nature for a Puritan's daughter. Lablache was a living impersonation of one of Sir Walter Scott's covenanters – we never beheld a more striking *tableau vivant*. His walk, action, and gestures were all equally adapted to his part. We shall have another occasion to notice his singing as well as that of Tamburini and Rubini, who both acted up to their characters with zeal and energy. M. Laporte, after the principal performers had appeared and retired, came forward to announce that by command of their Majesties the opera would be repeated on Tuesday in their presence. This statement was received with much satisfaction.



## «The Times»

Venerdì, 22 maggio 1835<sup>38</sup>

King's Theatre. Signor Bellini's new opera, entitled *I Puritani e I Cavalieri* (The Puritans and the Cavaliers), was produced last night for the benefit of Mademoiselle Grisi. The fame of this opera had been trumpeted forth by the friends of the *giovine maestro* with extraordinary perseverance, and we have reason to think that its merits were proclaimed actually before a note of it was put on paper. The fact, however, is, that Bellini had declared about a year ago that he would withdraw from the world, and retire to a remote cottage for six months; after which he would return with the best opera that he had yet written. He did so, and we are bound to say, by what we heard last night of the produce of his labours, that he has most faithfully acted up to his intentions. *I Puritani* turns out to be most certainly the best opera of Signor Bellini; but from the high rank in which it deserves to stand to the very highest of musical composition there is yet no small distance, and we wish Signor Bellini's friends would in future be more sparing of their praise, and more prodigal of their good advice, so that he may continue writing "best" operas, in order to reach the point of perfection to which his talents would carry him if he chose to exercise them properly. It would be desirable, too, that he should make a better selection of a dramatic subject than that of *I Puritani*, the story of which is not merely without any regularity, link, or interest of accident, but quite incomprehensible in many parts, and perfectly flat throughout. The author of the story ought to have attached a short notice by way of preface or appendix to his *libretto*, in order to make it intelligible. In contradistinction to the new opera of Donizetti, which this one has closely followed, the story appears to run entirely on love, and the *libretto* is almost wholly filled with erratic exclamations, ending in the monotonous and commonplace *cor, amor, errante, piante, amorosa, lamentosa, etc.* So far as we are able to make out the author's meaning (if he really intended giving any meaning to his story), it would seem that Lord Arthur Talbot (Rubini), a partisan of the Stuarts, was in love with Elvira (Mdlle. Grisi), daughter of Lord Walton (Giubilei), and niece of Sir George (Lablache), both of them commanders of the forces of the commonwealth, under Cromwell. We are given to understand in the course of the piece that Lord Arthur has a rival in Sir Richard Forth (Tamburini); but though this personage seems to be desperately in love, and appears to intrigue in order to get Lord Arthur out of the way, he nevertheless continues to be a rejected suitor. Elvira becomes mad or "delirious", as the *libretto* has it, in consequence of a notion of hers that Lord Arthur is in love with Henrietta of France, widow of Charles I (Mrs. E Seguin), and many and various are the distresses occasioned by this "delirious" malady of hers. She and others appear in diverse interesting situations in consequence thereof; and the whole closes after three acts' display by the return from exile of Lord Arthur, and the total dissipation of the "delirious" ravings of Elvira. We should not omit saying that Sir George appears to take a much greater interest in the love affairs of his niece than her father, Lord Walton, inasmuch as this enables Signor Lablache to figure in almost every scene, in the absence of his Lordship,

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<sup>38</sup> L'articolo è quasi del tutto uguale, con toni decisamente più critici, a quello apparso lo stesso giorno sul quotidiano «Globe and Traveller».

who makes a short appearance and a final exit in the course of the first act. Signor Bellini is, like Signor Donizetti, guilty of not having given an overture to his new opera. Do these young composers feel the consciousness of incapacity to write a good overture? None of the great masters before them have ever been guilty of such a piece of negligence, and the great masters are models worthy of being imitated by such composers as Messrs. Bellini and Donizetti. The whole of the first act of this opera, however, so far as music is concerned, is a work of very superior merit. It abounds in richness of harmony, in fullness of orchestral accompaniment, and in happy inspirations. Bellini never wrote so exquisite a *morceau* as the *polacca* introduced in the eighth scene of the first act. It was sung by Mademoiselle Grisi, and by Lablache and Giubilei, who take up the *ritournelle* with her in so tasteful and highly finished a manner, as to elicit bursts of applause that were evidently quite spontaneous. The *polacca* was, of course, called for a second time, and applauded even with more warmth than before. The second act is also full of excellent music, and contains more concerted pieces than the first. The whole of it was given with so much effect, that a call was set up at the end of it for Lablache and Tamburini, who had to re-appear. The third act is the weakest of the three, but it has some very good concerted pieces. The whole opera abounds in choruses, some of which only were given, owing to the shortness of the time allowed for the rehearsals after the arrival of the score. On this account many parts of the *libretto* were skipped over, and the performance was necessarily a good deal shortened. If all the choruses be as good as the few that were given, they should not by any means be left out in future. The performance was greatly applauded throughout by a crowded audience, who, at the end, insisted on the re-appearance of Mademoiselle Grisi, on whom crowns and garlands were immediately showered from the parts of the house nearest the stage. This practice, which a few contemptible sycophants have introduced among us within the last four or five years, is an exceedingly silly one, and not at all in harmony with English notions and English customs. We wish its authors would testify their admiration by some other mode more suitable to our national manners. A shower of cabbage-leaves is surely a very little better compliment than a volley of rotten eggs. After the opera Mr. Laporte came forward and announced that Her Majesty had commanded that the new opera should be repeated on Tuesday next; and on the following Thursday it is to be given for the benefit of Mr. Laporte, together with *La Prova d'un Opera Seria*, and the ballet *La Sylphide*, in the last of which Mademoiselle Taglioni is to make her first appearance this season.

### «The Athenæum»

**Sabato, 23 maggio 1835**

The new opera by Bellini which has been so popular in Paris, was produced on Thursday night, for Grisi's benefit. We should not wonder if 'I Puritani' prove as great a favourite here as it has been in France; for the sake of Rubini's romance in the first act,<sup>39</sup> Grisi's

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<sup>39</sup> Si tratta dell'Aria di Riccardo «Ah, per sempre io ti perdei».

charming Polonaise ‘Son vergin vezzosa,’ and the duet between Lablache and Tamburini,<sup>40</sup> which was *encored* with a storm of applause, and the two singers compelled to appear before the curtain at the close of the second act. For the rest, we can hardly recollect one phrase or combination, which is strikingly original, and must wait for Tuesday, when it is to be repeated by command of Her Majesty, to give a fuller account of both story and music. In the meantime, however, we ought to say that Grisi exerted herself to the utmost, and that, having set the example of *garlands* for her, we have no fault to find with the armful of wreaths, with which Lablache followed her off the stage, when she was called for at the conclusion of the piece, to receive the congratulations of her friends and the public. We suspect, that the English are in a fair way to become *fanatici per la musica* after all.

### «The Spectator»

Sabato, 23 maggio 1835

Bellini's new opera. Bellini's last opera, *I Puritani ed i Cavalieri* – inimitably translated by the doer-into-English of the libretto, “The-Puritans and the *Knights*”<sup>41</sup> – was performed on Thursday, for the benefit of Grisi. The drama is the work of a Count Pepoli, who enjoys some literary reputation in Italy; and it is certainly a good deal superior to the productions of the hackney scribblers attached to the Italian theatres and denominated “poets.” There is in many places a warmth in the thoughts and expressions, and a graceful flow in the verse, not unworthy of the better days of Italian poetry. The troubadour song in the last act, “A una fonte afflitto e solo,” might have been written by Metastasio. Had it been united to a kindred melody, it would have been a perfect gem. The story is not taken from the writings of Sir Walter Scott, as people supposed from the title of the piece, but apparently invented by the author. It is a mere tale of love and madness, without any thing characteristic of the

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<sup>40</sup> Si tratta del Duetto Giorgio-Riccardo dell'Atto II, «Il rival salvar tu dêi», la cui stretta, «Suoni la tromba, e intrepido», riscosse particolare successo.

<sup>41</sup> Il libretto del primo allestimento londinese dei *Puritani* fu pubblicato, con traduzione inglese a fronte, a cura di Federico Massimiliano Doca, traduttore in quegli anni di altri libretti per il King's Theatre e amico di Bellini. Doca inviò al compositore il 26 luglio un gustoso resoconto dell'accoglienza dei *Puritani* alla prima stagione londinese (VINCENZO BELLINI, *Epistolario*, a cura di Luisa Cambi, Verona, Mondadori, 1943, p. 569). La stessa traduzione non sembra esser stata invece apprezzata dal critico del «Musical Library Monthly Supplement» (luglio 1835, si veda più avanti nella rassegna stampa), che la definisce «quite as absurd as the drama». La traduzione non è metrica, ha il tono prosastico delle parafrasi; raramente restituisce le figure retoriche della poesia italiana e talvolta ne liquida le ridondanze anche con asciutte omissioni, seppure minime. Fra i vari esempi, la metafora «Giunse a me l'estrema sera» di Enrichetta di Francia è resa con «my career is ended»; «Mia man non è ancor gelida» di Giorgio è resa con «My hand is not yet frozen by age»; anche l'intensità icastica del sangue, dei sudori e delle lacrime versati per l'impavido amor di patria e tersi dalla pietà, nella seconda quartina della stretta «Suoni la tromba, e intrepido», è ristretta nei toni smorzati della frase «Let the love of our country reap crowns of laurels, and then let pity wipe our brows!». Dalle lettere del 1835 di Bellini a Doca, si intuisce comunque che quest'ultimo era amico, oltre che di Costa e Gabussi, del librettista dei *Puritani* Carlo Pepoli, da poco trasferitosi a Londra (cfr. CARMELO NERI, *Vincenzo Bellini. Nuovo Epistolario 1819-1835* cit., pp. 425-426).

country or period in which the action is laid, except its English names, and the division of the characters into Puritans and Cavaliers, – for which Guelphs and Ghibellines, or any other contending parties, might have been substituted with equal propriety. Grisi plays the part of a young lady, Elvira, the daughter of a Puritan officer, who is betrothed to a young nobleman of the Royalist party, Arturo Talbot. Talbot discovers that Queen Henrietta, the widow of Charles the First, is imprisoned in the fortress where the nuptials are about to take place; and chivalrously assists her to escape, and accompanies her, at the moment the bridal procession is approaching the altar. The lady, thinking herself deserted by a faithless lover, runs mad; and continues in that state till Talbot, who had been proscribed and condemned to death, returns in disguise, and pursued by his enemies, who surprise him in the midst of a tender interview with his mistress. They are about to put him to death on the spot, according to his sentence (though that is not the way in which sentences of death, even in those days, were executed in England), when the catastrophe is suddenly changed, after the fashion of the *Beggar's Opera*,<sup>42</sup> by some one crying “a reprieve!” The lover is pardoned, nobody knows why; the lady recovers her senses; and the curtain falls to the sound of a joyous chorus.

It may easily be imagined that this subject affords great scope for Grisi's powers as an actress. She appears at first as a light-hearted and playful-girl, unable to contain the exuberance of her joy; and in this mood, she sings the prettiest thing in the piece, “Son vergine vezzosa,” – a sort of rondo *alla polacca*, which she gave with exquisite grace and beauty. From this state of unbounded happiness *Elvira* is, in one moment, plunged into the very depth of despair, which rapidly turns to madness. The sudden change which takes place in Grisi's whole appearance is really appalling. In the forlorn being who stands before us, with dim and rayless eyes, sunk and meaningless features, and a voice hollow, tremulous, and hoarse, not a vestige remains of the lovely and splendid creature we had seen an instant before. Had the composer known how to write the musical language requisite for such a part, Grisi's triumph throughout would have been complete. But, instead of searching among the natural tones and inflections of the human voice when under the influence of emotion, for those simple and penetrating sounds which would express the workings of “an o'er laboured soul,” Bellini had nothing to give but his eternal succession of elaborate and unmeaning flourishes, which constantly drove away from our mind's eye the unhappy “pazza per amore,” and brought before us the skilful Signora Grisi. Even Bellini could not damp the ardour of her genius; but, when she achieved a triumph of expression, it was not by his help, but in spite of him.

Of the other parts there is little to be said. Rubini's character, that of *Arturo Talbot*, the Cavalier lover, is made up of commonplace materials and Tamburini and Lablache have no opportunity of displaying their talents, either dramatic or musical. Lablache, however, looked like the picture of a fine old bluff Roundhead captain, walked out of its frame.

As to the music of this opera generally we discern no improvement whatever in the author's style. His orchestral writing is as unskilful as ever, and considerably more noisy than in his former productions. His choruses and concerted pieces are destitute of ingenuity and effect; and all that can be said of him in the way of praise is, that he introduces pretty melodies which he has not skill and knowledge enough to turn to their proper account. And yet it is

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<sup>42</sup> Opera comica in tre atti (Londra, Lincoln's Inn Field, 29.I.1728) su libretto di John Gay (Barnstaple 1685 - Londra 1732) e musica di Johann Christoph Pepusch (Berlino 1677 - Londra 1752).

for him, and such as him, that we are deprived of the works of Paer, Mayer, Cimarosa, Rossini, and above all Mozart!

## «The True Sun»

Sabato, 23 maggio 1835

King's Theatre. The second of the operas so anxiously awaited in this country was given last night for Grisi's benefit. The house was crowded at an early hour, and perhaps a more numerous assemblage of the *dilettanti* of London, never marked their admiration of a performer's merits. The plot of *I Puritani*, the opera in question, is exceedingly simple. As the name implies, the action is laid in the stirring times of the Cavaliers and Roundheads. One of Cromwell's officers, *Lord Walton*, (Giubilei), the governor of a fortress, has a fair daughter, *Elvira* (Grisi), who is beloved by a friend of her father's, *Sir Richard Forth* (Tamburini), a Puritan colonel. The young lady, however, has will of her own, and has already fixed her affections on an officer of the King's party, *Lord Arthur Talbot*, (Rubini). On the interference of *Sir George* (Lablache) a Puritan officer, and brother to the governor, he consents to his daughter's union with the cavalier. Matters are in this state when the opera opens, all is joy at the approaching nuptials, and everything appears to promise happiness to the lovers; but the young cavalier having discovered that a lady confined in the fortress is *Henrietta* (Madame Seguin), the Queen of Charles I., he sacrifices love to duty, and flies with the prisoner in order to save her life. *Elvira's* reason gives way at discovering the supposed treason. As to her lover, he is condemned to death by the Parliament, and rewards are offered for his apprehension. His desire to see his mistress urges him to return to the fortress, and having, in an interview with her, cleared up his conduct, is again received into favour. At this moment the Puritan soldiers arrive, seize the cavalier, and are on the point of leading him away prisoner, when the joyful tidings of a general amnesty are announced, and the opera concludes. It will be perceived by this sketch, that there are but few opportunities for dramatic effect in the piece. The strongest point, the cavalier's struggle between duty and love, is made nothing of, absolutely flung away. The other, where after the reconciliation of the lovers, they are again to be separated, and forever, is also treated carelessly. As far then as Count Pessoli [*sic*] (the writer of the opera) is concerned, not much has been done to obtain success. All rests on the music, and in it we perceive wonderful inequality. The opening chorus of sentinels on the ramparts mingled with the sounds of the Puritans inside, and the morning hymn of the latter afterwards, is not remarkable for any particular effect. The ophicleide was used in accompanying the hymn, probably to imitate the organ; and if such was the intention, it does not exhibit much acquaintance with the religious customs of the Puritans. *Richard*, who enters after the opening chorus, sings a cavatina "*Fior d'Amore*," of which the accompaniment is exceedingly sweet. When Lablache and Grisi enter as the uncle and niece, the business of the opera really begins. Lablache's appearance as the old, sturdy, independent but kind-hearted Puritan was most picturesque. A Vandyke seemed to have left his frame, to walk through life again. He relates to his niece his exertions in her favour, and his recital and her gratitude and joy were well expressed. A trumpet is heard outside; they listen, and their attitudes at the moment formed a most



beautiful picture. The lover enters, and a quartetto is given by Lablache, Rubini, Giubilei, and Grisi, that *must* become a universal favourite. Grisi's sustained treble during the long passages, and Lablache's bass, were wonderfully fine. Another quartetto is given before the first act finishes, which was even more rapturously received, we mean "*Son Vergin vezzosa*," that in which *Elvira* places the bridal veil on the Queen, in order to see how she herself will appear in the same dress afterwards. Grisi's playfulness, innocent joy and devotion to her lover were admirably painted. In this quartetto, Lablache's staccato accompaniment to the rest was as perfectly executed as anything we ever heard. It was *encored*, and the audience seemed well inclined to have it a third time. The first act concludes with a chorus expressive of horror and anger at the cavalier's desertion. Tamburini and Lablache were heard in it to great advantage. The two other acts are occupied by Grisi's madness in different places. Her acting throughout such trying scenes was most expressive and natural. Some of her quiet touches were inimitable. When she regards *Sir Richard* steadfastly in the face, and, seeing that sadness has laid its impress there, exclaims "*ei forse amò*," what can be more mournful and true than her action and voice? Again, in the beautiful trio which follows, how touching is her "*essa piange e ti sospira riedi, o caro, al primo amor*." Her duet also with Rubini at the end was nobly given, and her volume of voice in "*Caro, non ho parola*," was extraordinary. All the performers exerted themselves, and in some instances it was a complete *assaut de chant*. In a duet between Lablache and Tamburini, in the second act, the sound of the trumpet was exceedingly grand. Lablache's second to Tamburini is a musical curiosity. The duet deserved and obtained an *encore*.

On the whole, the music of this opera is too noisy and unequal. There is no unity of plan well conceived, and strictly adhered to – but there are *morceaux* of exquisite melody, which whoever has musical taste will be delighted with, and which must make the opera popular. Bellini had implicit confidence in the *artistes* to whom he entrusted his production. Some parts last night were given in an astonishing manner, and we never saw an audience more *enthousiasmé* than at the second quartetto of the first act, and the noble duet between Lablache and Tamburini. It is not to be wondered at, such sounds will never be surpassed, and perhaps never equalled. Grisi has added to her fame by last night's representation. She is certainly a great actress. At the termination of the opera, showers of flowers were thrown on the stage, and Lablache crowned her twice with green wreaths thrown amongst the rest. M. Laporte announced that the opera would be repeated on Tuesday by command of her Majesty.

## «The Atlas»

**Domenica, 24 maggio 1835**

Italian Opera. A new opera in three acts, entitled *I Puritani e I Cavalieri*, the music by *Maestro* Bellini, was produced on Thursday, for the benefit of Mademoiselle Grisi. This production, it is said, the composer wrote in retirement, and at the expense of far more care and thought than musicians usually lay out in pieces destined to the short-lived existence of the Italian stage. We wish the composer had found a *libretto* that would have better seconded his endeavour to produce a good work than the one that has fallen to his lot – which is



unusually fertile in the common places of the Italian stage, with the additional disadvantage of a story that reveals itself with difficulty. It is, however, something to see Tamburini, Lablache, and Grisi, in the pitoresque costume of the time of Cromwell. Though the male performers generally look well, Lablache in particular bears about him all the interest of an historical portrait, and seems to have walked out of some ancient gallery a living actor in those sturdy times. Costume is one of the chief sources from which the work derives its favour; another is, that it was written expressly with a view to the powers of the performers who are now employed in its principal parts, and develops with skill and success all the strong features of their respective talent. For instance, all the roundest and richest notes of the charming voice of Lablache are displayed with effect in his different pieces by the choice of a key which throws them entirely within his compass – the pathetic powers of Tamburini are well employed, and sometimes the three bass voices of these singers and Giubilei are heard in rich and unusual combination. Rubini has received a part which exactly suits him, and lastly the heroine, Madlle Grisi (though her bravura music has too frequently the air of mere *soffeggi* for the voice, and is much of it without dramatic interest) is exhibited as a singer in a manner that has not been equalled by any of the other characters in which she has yet performed. The consequence of all this may well be imagined, and to judge by the pervading feeling of a brilliant and crowded house, it was a complete evening of excitement and operatic triumph. For our own part we confess that though we admire many spots in the music – especially the concerted music of the principal voices mixed with chorus, in which there are occasional touches of greatness rarely found in the works of a modern Italian – yet the composition is, on the whole, to our feeling, spun out to a most unreasonable length, especially, as in the *cantilena* of its airs of tenderness and expression, there is a great monotony. Composed into two acts, we cannot help thinking that the brilliant powers now employed upon it would be heard to still greater advantage.

An idea of the interest which it is the attempt of the drama to create, may be conveyed in a few words. Lablache and Tamburini belong to the party of the Puritans. Grisi, who is the ward of the former, and is beloved by the latter, is engaged in a mutual attachment with a young cavalier (Signor Rubini), and is upon the point of being happy with him, when her knight, happening to perform some service for another lady who belongs to the royal house (Mrs. Seguin), she goes mad by a mistaken jealousy. She remains mad during the second act, but recovers her senses in the third, through the impassioned singing of her lover, and then, according to the accustomed conclusion of the nursery tale, ‘they all live happy afterwards’.

The opera is without an overture, and the slight instrumental introduction, during which the curtain ascends, affords any but a favourable impression of the music to come. This is, however, dispelled in the first scene. The chorus kneel at the exterior of a chapel, and from within proceed the sounds of persons at their devotions; and here the voices of Madlle. Grisi, Lablache, etc. are to be recognised with very pretty effect, before their persons are visible. In the finale to the first act are some very effective and novel employments of the chorus, and we must also remark a quintett for three basses, a tenor and soprano, sung by the principal male singers and Madlle. Grisi, a piece of remarkable richness in the combination and beauty of effect. A polacca, sung by Grisi, displayed great brilliancy of execution, but it was dramatically out of place. Tamburini and Lablache sang, at the close of the second act, a duet, in *unison*, with such amazing potency of lungs, that it was *encored* by acclamation. The

opera, on the whole, found great success.

## «The Examiner»

**Domenica, 24 maggio 1835**

A house crowded to the roof witnessed the production of Signor Bellini's new opera on Thursday last. The greater attraction of the evening was the circumstance of its being devoted to the "benefit" of Mademoiselle Grisi. Every expectation raised must have been, or at least ought to have been, satisfied. The composer more than redeemed, we think, the promise of his former writings, and the genius of the artist was triumphantly displayed.

*I Puritani e I Cavalieri* is not, as a whole, we should say – in purpose, conception, and expression – equal to *La Sonnambula*, but it has finer detached passages, and gives unquestionable proof, generally, of an advance of vigour and power. The choruses are poor, – excessively noisy and inexpressive. The recitative, too, is at times singularly common-place. But there are some excellent concerted pieces, and two or three admirable duets; while the majority of the airs are charming, full of ardent and fine expression, touched with the most simple elegance, or deepening into passages of strikingly unaffected pathos.

The story of the opera is one of love and madness, wound up with a marriage. Its scene is laid in a fortress occupied by the Puritans, in the neighbourhood of Plymouth. *Lord Walter Walton* (Giubilei), the Roundhead governor, has a daughter, *Elvira* (Grisi), devoted, as a matter of course, to a gentleman of the opposite party, *Lord Arthur Talbot* (Rubini). Contrary to all precedent, however, the course of their true love is running as smoothly as possible before the second scene of the opera is over. Though the old Roundhead had promised *Elvira* to a youth of his own inclining, *Sir Richard Forth* (Tamburini), he is coaxed and wheedled out of this promise by the suffering of the girl, and the good-natured interference of his brother, *Sir George* (Lablache), who is, as the *libretto* informs us, 'a Colonel on Half-pay', thus delicately intimating the spare time he has upon his hands for transacting other people's business. Everything, then, for the lovers, as we have already observed, is going on swimmingly, when *Lord Talbot* most unfortunately discovers his Queen, *Henrietta*, in one of the inmates of the fortress, and, finding that she is discovered also by the Puritans, resolves on accomplishing her rescue. Availing himself of an artifice suggested by the affectionate joy and happiness of *Elvira*, he effects this, and accompanies *Henrietta* away at the very moment that his bridal procession is moving to the church. The poor bride, conceiving that her intended had eloped with another woman (no unnatural thought of hers, by the way, for though in the secret all the time, we protest we had misgivings ourselves) becomes insane. The fugitives are pursued, but in vain; and *Talbot* is outlawed and condemned to death by the Parliament. Some months afterwards he returns in disguise to the residence of his mistress, whom he contrives to see, and a scene takes place between them, during which they are surprised by the Puritans. *Sir Richard Forth* triumphs over his rival, whose immediate death is resolved on. His Roundhead friends are on the very point of carrying the sentence into effect, and all is distress and horror – when, by one of those

happy incidents which so often occur (upon the stage), an order arrives “in the king’s name,” (who has just been restored) commanding the parties to “drop their daggers,” and all is happiness and joy.

If any one supposes this story very absurd, he will suppose what is exceedingly evident; but he will not think of any absurdity during Grisi’s performance, or think of anything but of her joy and her sorrow. In the character of *Elvira* she makes the fullest use of her delightful powers. Her singing in “Son vergin vezzosa – in veste di sposa?” is a perfect marvel of expression and execution. Never, in any fairy tale, were pearls scattered about with such divine abundance as were her notes through that exquisite composition. She reminded us of the wonders of Paganini himself – the only person who has realised in our time the stories of ancient music, and made the god-like power of Orpheus scarcely a fable –

Less than a god there could not dwell  
Within the hollow of his shell,  
Which spoke so sweetly and so well.<sup>43</sup>

The fervency of Grisi’s joy is so great and true, that it partakes of the character of pathos.

Her singing and acting in the more passionate scenes of the opera rose with the passion. Her mute action in the scenes of madness was as fine as anything could possibly be. When she slowly ascends the stage, after that divine air “Vien, diletto, è in ciel la luna,” grasping with her hand the imaginary form of her lover, nothing can be conceived more natural, more beautiful, or more affecting. She pauses for a moment, silent, at the top of the stage, and never was still and breathless passion so fearfully expressed or so truly! It is for a moment, only, but as she stands there you feel her hand relaxing as the lover glides away, and, with his form, the illusion of fondness. When she suddenly rushes off, as if to recover their images again, we feel the uselessness of words or music to assist triumphant nature. The heart can break while the tongue is silent! This is only one instance, and her performance was filled with such, but we would particularly mention the scene which it closes, as the noblest and most touching picture of the various aspects of one madness we have ever witnessed on the stage. When she enters singing that fine air

“O rendetemi la speme  
O lasciatemi morir!”

her feeble step and melancholy restlessness betray her *consciousness* of sorrow. She tries one scat, then another, but rest is impossible. The *unconsciousness* of madness returns: –

“Padre mio?... Mi chiami al tempio?”

and her face is now intent with passionate sorrow, now radiant with ghastly joy; and we

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<sup>43</sup> La citazione è tratta da *A Song for Saint Cecilia’s Day* di John Dryden (Aldwinckle 1631 - Londra 1700), del 1687.

see her, smiling or grave – angry or affectionate, yet the same: true to eternal nature, and, by her truth, lifting all things round her from the “sullen earth;” for a moment shattering, even here, all that is affected, all that is conventional, all that is critical; disturbing the fashionable self-possession of indifference; leaving not the thought of a cap or a coronet in box or stall; pouring forth a wealth of emotion, which, while it enriches all, makes all seem poor.

Rubini, Tamburini, and Lablache, did more than justice to their respective parts, which present little for the exercise of such genius as theirs. The martial duet at the close of the second act: - “Suoni la tromba, e intrepido,” was magnificently sung. Lablache never poured forth a more musical torrent of sound.

### «John Bull»

**Domenica, 24 maggio 1835**

On Thursday night, Bellini's new opera of *I Puritani* was performed for the first time in England, for the benefit of Mlle Grisi. The house was crowded, and the attendance included almost every person of note in the fashionable world. The Queen, with the Duchess of Kent and the Princess Victoria, were present. Grisi was in excellent voice, and executed the part assigned to her with more than her usual ability. The singing in the various parts of this beautiful piece was beyond all praise. Lablache, Tamburini and Rubini supported their characters with ability and energy. M. Laporte, after the principal performers had appeared and retired, came forward to announce that, by command of their Majesties, the opera would be repeated on Tuesday in their presence.

### «The National»

**Domenica, 24 maggio 1835**

On Thursday evening Grisi took her benefit, selecting for the occasion Bellini's new opera *I puritani*. We are compelled to defer till after the next representation the detail of this opera, the crowded state of the house presenting our getting more than an occasional glimpse of the stage. We are enabled, however, to state, that it was decidedly successful, and will be repeated next Tuesday, by command of her Majesty.

## «The News»

**Domenica, 24 maggio 1835<sup>44</sup>**

King's Theatre – On Thursday night Bellini's new opera, *I Puritani e i Cavalieri* (the Puritans and the Cavaliers) was produced for the benefit of Mademoiselle Grisi. The action of the piece takes place in England during the civil wars; and the scene lies in a fortress occupied by the adherents of Cromwell. *Lord Walter Walton*, the governor of the place, has a fair daughter, *Elvira*, who loves and is beloved by *Lord Arthur Talbot*, a young cavalier, devoted to the Royal cause. *Elvira*'s hand had been promised to *Sir Richard Forth*, a friend of her father's, and, of course, a zealous Roundhead; but the old gentleman is moved by the young lady's tears to break faith with the Puritan lover, and to bestow her on the man of her heart. *Henrietta Maria* of France, the widow of Charles the First, is a prisoner in the fortress under a feigned name, and is on the point of being brought before the Parliament to be tried for her life. The young Cavalier, who is about to be united to his mistress, discovers the Royal prisoner, and moved by her danger contrives to effect her escape, and accompanies her in it, even while the bridal procession was moving to the altar. The poor bride, conceiving that her intended had eloped with another woman, becomes insane. The fugitives are pursued, but in vain; and *Talbot* is outlawed and condemned to death by the Parliament. Some months afterwards he returns in disguise to the residence of his mistress, whom he contrives to see, and a touching scene takes a place between them, during which they are surprised by the Puritans. His rival gives orders for the immediate execution of his sentence; but, as he is on the point of being put to death, a horn is heard, and a messenger arrives, with news that the Stuarts had been defeated and the prisoner pardoned. The violent shocks of grief and joy have a salutary effect on the young lady's mind; and all parties (except, of course, the disappointed rival) are happy.

Grisi's music in *Elvira* was almost all good – some of it exceedingly beautiful. The polonaise in the 8th scene, 1<sup>st</sup> act, "Son virgin vezzosa," is one of the most graceful *allegros* we have heard, and, indeed, the whole *scena* to which it belongs is quite beautiful. Grisi supported the spirit of this part of the composition with acting of the most animated and elegant *naïveté*. In the last scene of the same act she had a pathetic *scena* also, commencing with the passage "Arturo! ah già ritorni," which had a full and most feeling effect. In the second and third act there was a good deal of highly-wrought music, particularly the air "Qui la voce sua soave" in the one, and the duet "Vieni fra le mie braccia" in the other. In the first act music there were some passages which drew forth from her some of the purest and most sustained vocal melody that we have ever had the good fortune to hear. At the conclusion of the opera, the feelings of the house seemed quite enthusiastic, and when Grisi was called forth before the curtain showers of bouquets and wreaths were flung towards her, so that the stage was quite covered, and Tamburini and Lablache had no trifling labour in picking them up. Rubini

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<sup>44</sup> Alcuni paragrafi sono in comune con gli articoli apparsi su «The Courier», «The Morning Chronicle» e «The Morning Herald».

took the part of *Arturo*, and had some sweet melody to sing in it, especially the air in the first act “A te oh cara!” the subsequent concerted conclusion of which was one of the most charming parts of the opera. Tamburini appeared as the rival lover, *Sir Ricardo Forth*, and Lablache as the father<sup>45</sup> of *Elvira*; both acted and sung admirably. Their martial duet, at the end of the second act, “Chi ben la Patria adora,” a remarkably spirited composition, in the same bold vein as the celebrated duet in the second act of *Otello*, was enthusiastically encored, and the applause was continued after the curtain had fallen, so that both had to come forward and receive a fresh peal. On the whole, the opera went off most successfully. It is, throughout, as we have implied, composed at least with *vivida vis*, and it was acted with a sympathetic spirit. At the fall of the curtain Laporte came forward and announced that it would be repeated on Tuesday night next, at the command of her Majesty.

### «The Observer»

**Domenica, 24 maggio 1835<sup>46</sup>**

King's Theatre. Grisi had her benefit here on Thursday night, and a house which attested her popularity in the most unequivocal manner, as it was full in every part, even to the top of the gallery. Her Royal Highness the Duchess of Kent, the Princess Victoria, and his Royal Highness the Duke of Cambridge were amongst the audience. Bellini's opera *I Puritani* was produced on the occasion, and was well calculated to display the various excellencies of the fair *Prima Donna*. The *libretto* of this opera is of about an average merit, and rather gives an opportunity for fine acting, than in itself develops a powerful dramatic action. Its plot is laid, as the name implies, in the days of the Roundheads, and after the death of Charles. It opens with the approaching nuptials of a young nobleman, *Lord Arthur Talbot* and *Elvira*, the daughter of *Lord Walton*, the Commandant of a fortress in the interest of the Puritans. At the same time, a female of rank, whose life is compromised as an adherent of Royalty, is a prisoner to *Walton*, and about to be sent off to London for judgement. *Talbot*, who is a loyalist at heart, manifests some pity for her situation, upon which she reveals to him privately that she is the Queen in disguise. In the ardour of the moment he devotes himself to her protection, and, as the only means of getting her beyond the fortress walls, in which the scene is laid, induces her to assume and conceal her features under the bridal veil of *Elvira*, in the momentary absence of the latter. A Puritan Colonel, who is his rival for the hand of *Elvira*, is about to hinder his exit with the *Queen*, when perceiving the features of the latter he gladly assents to their departure, in the hope that *Talbot* may be in every way compromised. The fugitives escape, the alarm is given, and poor *Elvira*, as needs must in dramatics, goes mad in white satin. After the safety of the *Queen* is supposed to be secured, *Talbot* returns in

<sup>45</sup> Si vedano le note 31 e 32.

<sup>46</sup> L'articolo è una composizione delle recensioni apparse il 22 maggio su «The Morning Herald» e «Globe and Traveller».



disguise to the residence of his mistress. He serenades her, and obtains an interview with her, which, as she is still mad, is of the most tragic kind. At its conclusion he is surprised, made prisoner, and informed that, for his connivance in the *Queen's* escape, he is condemned to death. The announcement of this sentence is comprehended by *Elvira*, and has the effect of at once restoring her senses. A scene of the most pathetic kind then takes place between her, her father,<sup>47</sup> and the two rival lovers, and a most tragic consummation seems impending, when with dramatic *opportuneness*, a despatch comes from Cromwell, announcing a new victory, and a pardon for all prisoners to the Commonwealth. The finale is abruptly changed from melancholy to jubilant, and the lovers are united.

Signor Bellini is, like Signor Donizetti, guilty of not having given an overture to his new opera. Do these young composers feel the consciousness of incapacity to write a good overture? None of the great masters before them have ever been guilty of such a piece of negligence, and the great masters are models worthy of being imitated by such composers as Messrs. Bellini and Donizetti. The whole of the first act of this opera, however, so far as music is concerned, is a work of very superior merit. It abounds in richness of harmony, in fullness of orchestral accompaniment, and in happy inspirations. Bellini never wrote so exquisite a *morceau* as the *polacca* introduced in the eighth scene of the first act. It was sung by Mademoiselle Grisi, and by Lablache and Giubilei, who take up the *ritournelle* with her in so tasteful and highly finished a manner, as to elicit bursts of applause that were evidently quite spontaneous. The *polacca* was, of course, called for a second time, and applauded, even with more warmth than before. The second act is also full of excellent music, and contains more concerted pieces than the first. The whole of it was given with so much effect, that a call was set up, at the end of it, for Lablache and Tamburini, who had to re-appear. The third act is the weakest of the three, but it has some very good concerted pieces. The whole opera abounds in choruses, only some of which were given, owing to the shortness of the time allowed for the rehearsals after the arrival of the score. On this account many parts of the *libretto* were skipped over, and the performance was necessarily a good deal shortened. If all the choruses be as good as the few that were given, they should not by any means be left out in future. The performance was greatly applauded throughout by a crowded audience, who, at the end, insisted on the re-appearance of Mademoiselle Grisi, on whom crowns and garlands were immediately showered from the parts of the house nearest the stage.

After the opera Mr. Laporte came forward, and announced that her Majesty had commanded that the new opera should be repeated on Tuesday next; and on the following Thursday it is to be given for the benefit of Mr. Laporte, together with *La Prova d'un Opera seria*, and the ballet *La Sylphide*, in the last of which Mademoiselle Taglioni is to make her first appearance this season.

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<sup>47</sup> Si vedano le note 31, 32 e 43.

## «The Satirist [The Age]»

Domenica, 24 maggio 1835

Italian Opera. – Bellini's new opera of *I Puritani*, produced on Thursday night, for the benefit of Mademoiselle Grisi, realised all the expectations with which report had inspired us, and fully justified the enthusiasm with which it was received by the Parisians. With the exception of Rossini, Bellini is unquestionably the best Italian composer of the present day, and although his imitations of Rossini's style are sufficiently abundant, his genuine conceptions are marked with a naïveté, a freshness, and a brilliancy, which shine forth in grateful contrast to the servile plagiarisms of many of his contemporaries, and make us regret that he does not entirely depend upon his own inspirations. By the opera of *I Puritani* his reputation has been greatly enhanced – it is beyond all question the best that he has yet produced. Its music is infinitely superior to that of the *Sonnambula* – its popularity, of course, as an opera, can never be equal.

Now, in the first place, we cannot perceive any reasonable ground for the practice of substituting a brief introduction for an overture – a practice which, it seems, we are henceforth to be called upon to tolerate. There is no overture to *I Puritani*, there is none to *Marino Faliero*, and we suppose it is the intention of both Bellini and Donizetti never to compose another. Why is this? Surely it does not proceed from conscious incapacity? Bellini at least should eschew this system. We know that it is generally regarded as a test of the composer's talent, and there certainly is nothing in the overture to *La Sonnambula* which can by any means be said to be peculiarly striking, but the practice of omission ought not to prevail. This, however, by the way – Mademoiselle Grisi displayed excellent judgement in choosing this opera for her benefit.

The first act of *I Puritani* is decidedly the best. The chorus in the first scene, *Quando la tromba*, and that in the second, *A festa! – A tutti ride il cor*, have a grand effect, and are admirably instrumented. The duet in the fourth scene, between *Elvira* and *Sir Giorgio* (Grisi and Lablache) commencing *Piangi o figlia* is exceedingly rich; but the *polacca* is the most delightful *morceau* we ever remember to have heard. In this Mademoiselle Grisi surpassed herself. Her execution was truly brilliant, and the ease, the elegance, the charming playfulness, with which she adjusted the veil on the head of *Henrietta*, contributed to an effect which electrified the audience and drew down thunders of applause. The surprising powers of Grisi were never displayed to so great an advantage. There was no labour – no effort in her execution: the most sparkling and difficult passages were given with an ease and brilliancy which excited the highest admiration – the *polacca* on the whole may, in short, be pronounced incomparable. The second act is not so happy. The “madness” of *Elvira* is not equal in intensity to that of *Anna Bolena*.<sup>48</sup> It is a different species of madness – it partakes of the character of a temporary delirium, and fails to enchain the senses, or sufficiently to rivet the attention. It was, nevertheless, made the most of. But the principal part of this act

<sup>48</sup> *Anna Bolena* (Milano, Teatro Carcano, 26.XII.1830) fu rappresentata per la prima volta a Londra nel luglio 1831.

is in the hands of Lablache and Rubini,<sup>49</sup> and in speaking of the splendid duet, *Suoni la tromba e intrepido*, with which it concludes, we need not say more than that it was not only encored, but it rendered the appearance of Lablache and Tamburini imperative after the curtain had fallen. In the third act, Grisi and Rubini were again truly great. The opening scene, indeed, was somewhat heavy, but it was beautifully relieved by those which followed, and the finale gave éclat to one of the most effective operas that has been produced for years.

At the conclusion Grisi, Rubini, Tamburini, and Lablache, according to the most approved custom, were loudly called for, and immediately they appeared the stage was literally strewn with wreaths and bouquets – the reception of which had certainly a very imposing effect. The house was brilliantly attended. Her Majesty, the Duchess of Kent, Princess Victoria, &c., were present, and *I Puritani*, which will be decidedly *the* opera of the season, was announced for Tuesday by royal command. On Thursday (the benefit of M. Laporte) it will be again performed with *La Prova*, in which, we believe, Laporte himself will take the part of the poet! Taglioni will also make her first appearance on this occasion, in the admirable ballet of the *Sylphide*.

### «The Sunday Times»

**Domenica, 24 maggio 1835<sup>50</sup>**

King's Theatre – On Thursday last *I Puritani*, the second of the promised new operas of the season, was produced with success. The story is taken from a drama, played about two years ago, called *Têtes Rondes et Cavaliers*. The action of the piece takes place in England during the civil wars, and the scene lies in a fortress occupied by the adherent of Cromwell. Lord Walter Walton, the governor of the place, has a fair daughter, *Elwira*, who loves and is beloved by Lord Arthur Talbot, a young cavalier devoted to the royal cause. *Elwira*'s hand had been promised to Sir Richard Forth, a friend of her father's, and, of course, a zealous Round-head; but the old gentleman is moved by the young lady's tears to break faith with the Puritan lover, and to bestow her on the man of her heart. *Henrietta Maria* of France, the widow of Charles the First, is a prisoner in the fortress under a feigned name, and is on the point of being brought before the parliament to be tried for her life. The young cavalier, who is about to be united to his mistress, discovers the royal prisoner, and, moved by her danger, contrives to effect her escape, and accompanies her in it, even when the bridal procession was moving to the altar. The poor bride, conceiving that her intended had eloped with another woman, becomes insane. The fugitives are pursued, but in vain; and *Talbot* is outlawed and condemned to death by the Parliament. Some months afterwards he returns in disguise to the residence of his mistress, whom he contrives to see, and a touching scene takes a place between them, during which they are surprised by the Puritans. His rival gives orders for the immediate execution of his sentence; but, as

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<sup>49</sup> Si tratta di una svista subito dopo non ripetuta. Il duetto del secondo atto infatti è tra Sir Giorgio (Lablache) e Sir Riccardo Forth (Tamburini). Rubini interpretava il ruolo di Arturo Talbot.

<sup>50</sup> La prima parte della recensione è uguale a quanto pubblicato in «The Morning Chronicle» e «The Courier».

he is on the point of being put to death, a horn is heard, and a messenger arrives, with news that the Stuarts had been defeated and the prisoner pardoned. The violent shocks of grief and joy have a salutary effect on the young lady's mind; and all parties (except, of course, the disappointed rival) are happy.

The piece is written in very 'choice Italian' and contains many pleasing and even poetical passages. Bellini, in this opera, has written rather above his usual mark – he has soared into higher and grander regions of composition, but his success has been very uneven. His instrumentation is considerably improved. The opera is largely indebted for its success to the brilliant talent of those who fill the principal parts. If performed by *artistes* inferior to Grisi, Lablache, Tamburini, and Rubini, we doubt whether it would have obtained that favour which it enjoyed in Paris, and which, during the present season, at least, it is likely to secure in this country. The choicest *morceaux* in the opera are a polonaise in the first act, which was sung by Grisi with superabundance of exquisite ornament, and a duet at the conclusion of the second act, between Lablache and Tamburini, which produced an unanimous *encore*. The music of the third act is dull in the extreme – there is scarcely one passage of redeeming merit in it. Grisi, if possible, surpassed anything she ever before attempted. Lablache was a most perfect picture of the Cromwellian Roundhead. Upon the four leading performers coming forward at the conclusion of the opera, there was a regular horticultural shower of wreaths and bouquets, and it employed Lablache, Tamburini, and Rubini some moments to collect and assign them to the keeping of the fair *cantatrice* and *beneficiaire* of the evening. At the fall of the curtain Mr. Laporte appeared on the stage to announce that, by command of their Majesties, the opera of *I Puritani* would be performed in their presence on Tuesday next.

### «Morning Herald»

**Mercoledì, 27 maggio 1835**

The King's Theatre. The new opera, *I puritani*, was last night performed at the command of her Majesty, who came to the house, not in full state, but almost in the unostentatious manner in which she frequently indulges her taste for the entertainments of this house. When her Majesty entered the box the national anthem was not performed, no doubt in consequence of directions to that effect, nor did the very crowded audience which filled the house interfere with the privacy which was thus implied until, as her Majesty retired from the theatre, there was a general and warm round of applause. The Duchess of Cambridge accompanied her Majesty, and her Royal Highness the Duchess of Kent and the princess Victoria also occupied their box. The opera went off with great success. The polonaise and the military duet were both encored. The music throughout was listened to attentively, which in the house it was the best compliment it could receive.

## «The Morning post»

Mercoledì, 27 maggio 1835

The Opera – King's Theatre. Bellini's last opera, of *I Puritani e I Cavalieri*, was performed yesterday evening for the second time in this country, by special command of the Queen, who honoured the theatre with her presence. At eight o'clock her Majesty entered the box prepared for her reception, accompanied by her usual suite. From the retired seat occupied by the Queen, her entrance was noticed only by a few persons, who did not make known by audible sounds the attendance of the illustrious visitor, and it was only at the termination of the opera, when her Majesty rose to depart, that she was recognized by the audience. A round of hearty applause followed the recognition, which the Queen acknowledged in her most gracious and graceful manner. We observed the Duchess of Kent and the Princess Victoria in their box, as well as a long list of fashionable company. The pit was crowded to excess, and the whole interior, in fact, presented a very animated appearance. The opera went admirably as regards the principal performers, and with some signs of improvement on the part of the chorus. We are little disposed to vary the opinions, formed from our first impressions, of the merits of the composition. There is some pretty and vigorous writing; there are some sparkling *morceaux*; and the general effect is essentially dramatic. There are melodies which catch the ear, and there are some harmonies worthy of a master of higher and more classical pretensions than Bellini. The composer is profoundly indebted to the unequalled artists who immortalized his work in Paris, and who are now electrifying the *dilettante* in London. We question whether the *furors* of the Parisian opera-frequenter could exceed that of our opera-goers; and, in truth, there are two pieces which set at nought all critical acumen and compel the listeners, *nolens volens*, to give themselves up to the illusion of the moment. We allude, of course, to the polacca in the first act, sang by Grisi, assisted by Mrs. E. Seguin, Lablache, and Rubini; and the heartstirring duet between Lablache and Tamburini in the second act. In the former, which was rapturously encored, Grisi again exercised a potent sway over the feelings of her auditory. The melody itself is of a light, graceful character which fixes attention immediately, but, executed by the rich Italian soprano of Grisi, with her exquisitely round, full, and clear tones, with an intonation faultlessly pure, and with a facility of execution which the best instrumental player might envy, it is rendered peculiarly fascinating. This is literally no exaggeration: the breathless silence which reigns during the progress of the polacca – the evident anxiety not to lose the last dying vibration of a single note – and the tremendous approbation which follows its conclusion, must be sufficient evidence of the spell under which the hearers of this charming Polonaise are labouring. The repetition of the duet was insisted on, and Lablache and Tamburini had, as at Grisi's benefit, to come forward again, after the fall of the curtains, to receive renewed marks of the satisfaction afforded by their matchless display of vocal power. The entire duet is well written; the various emotions are correctly described; and the gradual preparation for the unison of the two voices chanting the paramount duties of patriotism reflects the highest credit on Bellini for his happy conception. The amateurs bestowed an *encore* also on the opening aria of Rubini, "A te, o cara, Amor talora," with its accompanying quartet, "Senza occaso questa aurora." Grisi, Lablache, Giubilei, and Rubini rendered every justice to the composition. The duet "Piangi o figlia, sul mio seno," between Lablache and Grisi, in the



first act, although much applauded scarcely received enough notice. It is a very clever, as well as pleasing, duet. The third act went heavily, notwithstanding there is a fine duet between Rubini and Grisi, which they sing with delicious expression. The acting in the chief parts is worthy of a separate notice. Grisi is equally great in the delineation of the joys or sorrows of *Elvira*. Her mad scene is a prodigious effort, and is only approached in excellence by the accurate discrimination of the one in which the recovery of reason is depicted. Some of her attitudes with Lablache, in her first scene, were perfect studies. This celebrated singer, and, we may add, actor, has made quite a picture of the Puritan soldier. His gait and bearing are also very characteristic. Tamburini shared, as he deserved to do, in the honours of the evening. He sang with the most impassioned feeling the beautiful cavatina, "Ah per sempre io ti perdei." Rubini was in fine voice, and although his part was somewhat *triste*, he made a gallant cavalier. It would be an act of injustice to pass over the names of Mrs. E. Seguin and Giubilei, as, although they have little to do, it is done well, and they are, therefore, addition to the strength of the cast. At the end of the opera the prolonged cheering induced Grisi, Rubini, Lablache, and Tamburini to conform to the custom imposed upon them, of appearing before the curtain.

### «The Times»

**Mercoledì, 27 maggio 1835**

King's Theatre. Her Majesty having fixed on the evening of yesterday for the purpose of honouring with her presence the performance of *I Puritani*, that opera was given last night for the second time. Her Majesty entered her box at 8 o'clock precisely, and immediately after the curtain rose. The polacca in the first act was again encored, and so was the duet between Signori Lablache and Tamburini in the second act. On a closer acquaintance with this new production of Signor Bellini's pen, it is easy to trace his style of composition in almost every bar. The cavatina assigned to Signor Rubini in the first act reminds us strongly of the scene of the *Pirata*,<sup>51</sup> which Signor Rubini has rendered remarkable by the style in which he gives it. But this is a more complete work than any other of the same composer. The fault hitherto peculiar to his compositions, of sudden interruptions of a well-chosen *motive*, does not exist in this opera. The legitimate school of composition has been resorted to, and merit of a very high order is evinced throughout the work. We think, however, upon the whole, that this opera is too long, and that its length imparts a degree of heaviness to the performance which might prove detrimental to its popularity. This is a fault, however, which may be easily corrected by the curtailment of matter that may be easily shortened or left out altogether, so as to compress the three acts into two.

The Queen's box had been considerably enlarged, preparatory to Her Majesty's visit. The Duchess of Cambridge, Lady Clinton, two Maids of Honour, and Lord Howe, sat in the box with Her Majesty. The Duchess of Kent, with the Princess Victoria, was in the next box but

<sup>51</sup> *Il pirata* (Milano, Teatro alla Scala, 27.X.1827) fu la prima opera di Bellini a essere rappresentata a Londra il 17 aprile 1830.



one, which is her own. The young Princess, who is an assiduous frequenter of this theatre, always appears to take a real and quite *naïf* interest in the business of the scene. Her Royal Highness has the appearance of enjoying the best health.

## «The Morning Post»

Venerdì, 29 maggio 1835

Review of Thursday's performance: King's Theatre. The most crowded house of the season was the one collected last night, for the benefit of M. Laporte. Hundreds of persons were admitted on the stage, as the first rush, at the opening of the doors, completely filled every space in the pit and gallery, which could command a view of the stage. The *bénéficiaire* has fairly earned this compliment, by his exertions in securing such a combination of talent, and, as his outlay must necessarily be heavy he deserves the fullest support. *I Puritani e il Cavaliere* was repeated for the third time, with increased effect. The most enthusiastic encores were bestowed on Rubini's first air, 'A te, o cara, amor talora,' with the accompanying quartet 'Senza occaso questa aurora,' the exquisite polacca of Grisi; and the splendid duet 'Il rival salvar tu devi' between Lablache and Tamburini. The four performers whom we have named were called for at the conclusion of the opera, after which M. Laporte had to go through the same ordeal. The ballet *La Sylphide*, compressed into one act, followed, and introduced the Taglioni, for her first appearance. She was most heartily greeted, and never danced better. Of a *danseuse* so justly celebrated, and so well known in this country, it would be difficult to say anything in the way of praise. Although eulogium may be fairly said to be thoroughly exhausted in her case, yet the utmost extent of commendation has not yet done justice to the extraordinary grace and exquisite finish of her *pas*. Taglioni is the *déesse* [*sic*] *de la danse*; and all who have followed in her steps have proved but sorry subjects in the way of comparison. There was an additional attraction in having Perrot<sup>52</sup> in the same ballet. He did the 'amiable' to the Mountain Sylph, and bounded about with a *fiercé elastique* worthy of the 'being of air' with whom he was associated. The *pas de deux* between these two illustrious disciples of the *pirouette* was of course received with unbounded approbation. After the ballet *La prova d'un'opera seria* (The rehearsal of a serious opera) was announced to be given, but from the lateness of the hour at which the performance terminated only a portion of the composition, the music of which is by Signor T. [*sic*] Gnecco, was done. It is a very lively affair, and is extremely well acted. Lablache, in the part of Campanone, the composer of the music of an opera to be played at a theatre in Lisbon, sang and acted with considerable humour. His directions to the orchestra, and drilling of the principal singers and chorus, were productive of infinite merriment. Ivanoff<sup>53</sup> introduced a very sweet air, which would have been encored had it been sung at an earlier period. Grisi was full of animation, and proved that she was

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<sup>52</sup> Jules Perrot (Lione 1810 - Parigi 1892), ballerino e coreografo.

<sup>53</sup> Nicola Ivanoff (Poltava 1810 - Bologna 1880), tenore russo. Debuttò in Italia a Napoli nel 1832, nelle vesti di Percy in *Anna Bolena* di Donizetti, ruolo anche del suo debutto londinese al King's Theatre nell'aprile 1834.

as much endowed with the *vis comica* as with her tragic qualifications. The quarrelling duet between her and Lablache, where they give an imitation of each other, was very amusing, and convulsed the house with laughter. The amateurs who have never had an opportunity of hearing Grisi sing out of tune, may be gratified by her 'sweet discord' in *La prova*. We should mention that between *The Puritani* and ballet, the national anthem was called for, and performed amidst great cheering, the first verse being sung by Grisi with great power and sweetness, and the second and third by Mrs. E. Seguin, who sang with an energy which brought down tremendous applause. The lines –

“Confound their politics,  
Frustrate their knavish tricks”<sup>54</sup>

were vehemently applauded. The appearance which the house presented at this moment was very grand and exhibited. The whole audience standing, the stage crowded to excess, and every person apparently animated with loyal feelings towards the Monarch of these realms. At the end of the ballet Taglioni and Perrot were summoned to appear before the curtain, which they submitted to with becoming resignation.

### «The Athenæum»

**Sabato, 30 maggio 1835**

King's Theatre – ‘La Gazza Ladra’<sup>55</sup> was given this day week, and, in spite of our knowing it so thoroughly that we could act as prompter from memory, and in spite of our opinion, that it is by no means Rossini's strongest opera, – its music came upon our ears with such a startling force and freshness of effect, as assured us that the operas we have been lately hearing can never stand in competition with those by him of Pesaro. This made us listen with more than usual attention to Bellini's ‘I Puritani’, which was repeated on Tuesday last, to a very crowded audience, and, at the close of the performance, our conviction was, if anything, strengthened. Much controversy has been held about the merits of Bellini in general, and this opera in particular. Lord Mount Edgumbe,<sup>56</sup> who rejects Rossini's music as noisy and unmeaning, seems to find in the composer of ‘Il Pirata’, a Paisiello or Cimarosa *redivivus*; and we have very recently heard it advanced, that he has spoiled his own sweet natural style, in attempting to please the public by imitating the arch-deceiver, as some are pleased to style Rossini, – and his ‘Beatrice Tenda’<sup>57</sup> is spoken of as a charming

<sup>54</sup> I due versi sono una citazione dalla seconda strofa dell'inno nazionale inglese «God Save the Queen».

<sup>55</sup> La prima rappresentazione londinese della *Gazza ladra* (Milano, Teatro alla Scala, 31.V.1817) risale al marzo 1821, al King's Theatre.

<sup>56</sup> È datata 1834 la pubblicazione della quarta edizione delle memorie musicali di Lord RICHARD MOUNT-EDGECUMBE (Earl of), *Musical reminiscences; containing an account of the Italian Opera in England from 1773*, London, Andrews, 1834.

<sup>57</sup> *Beatrice di Tenda* (Venezia, Teatro La Fenice, 16.III.1833) fu rappresentata a Londra per la prima volta nel

specimen of what he could do, were he to follow the bent of his inclinations. Now, with all deference to critics of such authority, we must say, that our opinion of Bellini is not so high. We regard him as a melodist at times very sweet (almost to sickliness), and at times stirring and vivacious; but (our friends the musicians will understand us) he seems to possess an entirely *pianissimo* or *fortissimo* fancy, (which, by the way, makes his music suit Rubini's *extreme* style of singing so much better than that of any other composer) – and either to want, or, at all events, never to have shown, that artistic power of conception, of grasping a whole subject, and working out its intermediate links – its gradations of emotion, – which it is necessary, above all other things, for a dramatic composer to possess. His recitatives are insipid and fragmentary – (can the condemners of Rossini forget the recitatives of 'Otello'?) – his *cantabiles* are rendered painfully lame by the constant use of the *appoggiatura* – and his power of contrivance very limited; as, for instance, in the duet in 'I Puritani,' 'Il rival salvar tu devi,' where the same thoroughly commonplace phrase – which, of itself, is rather suited for the opening of a love scene than the place it occupies – is made to do duty three times over in a passage of very impassioned dialogue. This is either carelessness or incompetence; but, in considering his merit as a composer, it cannot be overlooked. On the whole, then, we consider him as well endowed with gifts, which he has not yet wrought out, – but still needing the acquisition of others, before he can hope to take a permanent place among the composers of the day: and we put this our opinion on record – that his operas live by their singers, and not their intrinsic merit – with the music of 'I Puritani,' and 'La Sonnambula,' fresh in our ears. We are inclined, however, to rank this last work as among his best. The story is not a very simple one: the scene is laid at Plymouth, in the early days of the Commonwealth; and its interest turns upon the interrupted marriage of a Puritan leader's niece with a young Cavalier, who, just in the hour of his nuptials, recognizes Her Majesty Henrietta of England (a widow of King Charles the First, as the *libretto* informs us,) in the disguise of a stranger; and, urged by his loyal wish to save her, hurries her away, wrapped up in the bridal veil, without farewell or explanation to his betrothed. Upon which *Elvira* (and no wonder!) goes mad in white satin, after the proper fashion of Puritan 'Tilburinas,<sup>58</sup> and remains so for the rest of the piece, till the *finale* comes, and sets all matters right. The remainder of the plot turns upon the struggle between revenge and generosity in a Puritan lover, rejected by the maiden, who has some power over his rival's life. These end in the triumph of virtue, and his resolving to set off to the wars, which he does with a vengeance, to such a spirited duet as we shall never hear again, save from himself ('Tamburini) and the Puritan leader (Lablache). The fugitive returns, and is condemned to death. *Elvira* is restored to reason by the shock; but the heralds come in, and announce the triumph of 'Cromvel guerriero,' and the pardon of all prisoners – upon which lucky turn of the wheel she is made happy with the hand of her 'Talbo Cavaliero.' – (A pleasant notion have these Italians of our English history!). Such is the story: we have already given our general opinion of the music.

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marzo 1836.

<sup>58</sup> Il riferimento è probabilmente a Tilburina, protagonista femminile di *The Critic, or a Tragedy Rehearsed*, dramma satirico sul teatro del Settecento di Richard Brinsley Sheridan (Londra, Drury Lane Theatre, 1779).

We may add, that in parts Bellini has, we think, strained his own fancy, to please the palate of a Parisian audience, as in the opening chorus of the second act, which is thoroughly French. His instrumentation, too, is likewise, in many places, forced, for the sake of effect. But the opera will live for a time, on the strength of four happy things – for, to the three mentioned last week, we must add Grisi's *scena* in the second act – and by the excellence of the singers now engaged in it. There are parts of Grisi's acting, in the character of *Elvira*, which give us a higher opinion of her powers than we have yet entertained; for they are her own. Her girlish and buoyant happiness in the earlier scenes – the wayward and passionate melancholy of her madness, could hardly be exceeded. Her singing was, throughout, perfect; and the delicious ease and clearness of her upper notes were never better displayed than in the *refrain* to Rubini's air in the first act. Lablache makes a famous Puritan, and plays his part to the life. The listening attitudes of himself and Grisi, in the opening scene, though but a trifling point among many excellencies, are worthy of being mentioned with admiration. We have nothing more to say, save that the last act is, we suspect, injured by sundry curtailments, which make the catastrophe too sudden, even for our operatic faith.

### «The Examiner»

**Domenica, 31 maggio 1835**

Taglioni, at her appearance on Thursday, received the most cordial and admiring of welcomes from an audience literally “overflowing.” We cannot precisely say how far it stretched up Regent street,<sup>59</sup> or how long the unlucky out-door portion of it remained there, fondly expectant. The performances, which were for the benefit of M. Laporte, were all of the most admirable order, and unwearying, though prolonged to an extremely late hour. The new opera, *I Puritani*, better sustained, if possible, than on the first night, commenced them; and a portion of *La Prova d'un opera Seria*, with the inimitable comic richness and fat fun of Lablache, and the exceedingly quiet and graceful comedy of Grisi, ended them. Between these we have an act of *La Sylphide*. Taglioni is improved in personal appearance, we think, since last season. She danced in her usual easy and triumphant manner – triumphant in conscious grace; serious and classical. Great as her dancing is, we confess we should enjoy it more, if she deemed to enjoy it more herself. Perrot exerted himself at her side with more than his usual energy, and with all his old success.

The present state of the Opera fully justifies the most sanguine anticipations indulged by ourselves and others at the commencement of the season. The subscribers and the public have every reason to congratulate themselves; and we trust that such will be the feeling of the manager, also, when the season shall have closed.

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<sup>59</sup> Strada alle spalle del King's Theatre.

## «The National»

**Domenica, 31 maggio 1835**

Italian Opera. On Tuesday evening Bellini's opera, *I Puritani e I Cavalieri*, was performed at this theatre, by the command of her Majesty, who attended, accompanied by their Royal Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, his Royal Highness the Duke of Cumberland, Earl Howe, and many other members of the Royal household. Her Royal Highness the Duchess of Kent and the Princess Victoria were also present. The house was one the most brilliant and crowded we have seen during the present season. The pit was full to overflowing, and the boxes presented their entire of beauty, rank, and fashion. Grisi never exerted herself to more splendid advantage than on this occasion in the character of *Elvira*; and the parts of *Sir George*, *Lord Arthur*, and *Sir Richard*, by Lablache, Rubini, and Tamburini, were supported in the usual style of excellence, for which those gifted artists are so justly celebrated. The opera was not concluded till near twelve o'clock; shortly after which, her Majesty and the Royal party retired, amidst cheering and applause from all parts of the house.

Mons. Laporte's benefit on Thursday evening produced one of the most crowded and brilliant audiences ever congregated within the walls of the King's Theatre. We are glad of this, as much of the worthy Manager's account in a pecuniary point of view, as that it is a convincing proof, that the Nobility, Gentry, and Subscribers to the Opera, are neither unmindful of, nor ungrateful for the great and praiseworthy exertions made for their entertainment, by the best and most liberal caterer they ever had for the King's Theatre. A more magnificent selection for one evening's entertainment was, we feel certain, never offered to the public in this or any other city in Europe – and that the receipts of the evening should have reached the enormous sum of 1,500*l.* is no more than the Manager was fairly entitled to expect. *I Puritani* was performed on this occasion, for the third time; after which, the delightful Taglioni made her first appearance this season in the ballet of *La Sylphide*. The entertainments concluded with the principal scenes from Gnecco's Opera Buffa *La prova d'un Opera Seria* – in which the unrivalled Grisi appeared to great advantage in a comic part, and was ably supported by Lablache, who sustained a *Buffo* character with great humour and spirit. At the conclusion of *I Puritani*, "God save the King" was loudly called for, and sung in honour of Her Majesty's birthday.

*Fidelio* will be the next novelty, in which Malibran will appear.

## «The News»

**Domenica, 31 maggio 1835**

King's Theatre – Bellini's *I Puritani* was performed for the second time on Tuesday night. The fame of this composition and the Queen's expected presence appeared to operate very favourably in securing a full audience, for, before eight o'clock, every box was occupied, and the pit was crowded to excess. The second representation justified the enthusiasm and applause which was elicited by the first. It appears to have been considerably and advantageously



compressed; it did not, however, terminate till a few minutes before twelve. Grisi acted and sang with her usual excellence, and in many parts strongly reminded us of Pasta, especially at the commencement of the third act – The beautiful quartette beginning “A te, o Cara,” act 1, scene 5, was encored, as was the polacca in scene 8, and the splendid duet between Tamburini and Lablache, at the end of the second act. This was an arduous performance to both, but they acquitted themselves admirably, and, as on the first night, were called before the curtain to receive the enthusiastic applause of the audience. It was a bold experiment of the composer, to bring two basses, or a baritone and bass into such close juxtaposition, and consequently into comparison; the efforts of Lablache and Tamburini ensured it a success which it might not have received had it been assigned to less skilful artistes. At the end of the opera, Grisi, Rubini, Tamburini and Lablache were loudly called for by the audience, and received the well deserved reward of their exertions. We were happily spared the silly ceremony of flinging bouquets and garlands of flowers, at the accomplished Grisi. We have no hesitation in pronouncing the opera to abound in interest, to be replete with delightful melodies, and on the whole to be decidedly successful. The feeling of enthusiasm which pervaded the audience appeared to communicate itself even to Signor Costa in the orchestra, who, baton in hand, cudgelled the music book with a vehemence that entirely distracted the attention of the otherwise delighted listeners.<sup>60</sup> Three ostrich feathers on a dress hat effectually prevented our view of the ballet, so that we are unable to speak of its merits. There is a very commodious depository for cloaks and umbrellas in the lobby; why not also for dress hats and ostrich feathers of lady sitters in the pit?

The Queen’s arrival and departure created very little sensation, and her Majesty did not come forward during the evening.

This opera was repeated on Thursday night for the benefit of M. Laporte to a house crowded – positively *crammed* – to its utmost limits, and received the same enthusiastic applause which its previous representation experienced; at its conclusion “God save the King” was loudly called for, the manager complied with the wishes of his patrons, and the National Anthem was performed by the united strength of the company, both vocal and instrumental. After the opera Taglioni made her first appearance this season, with M. Perrot, in the fairy ballet of *La Sylphide*. To speak in measured phrases of her dancing would convey but an inadequate idea of the beauty, grace, and elegance which she displays in the intricate and attractive figures of the ballet. It was truly the poetry of motion. The dancing of Perrot admirably supported the exertions of his fair partner. The corps de ballet were numerous and well appointed. The evening’s entertainments concluded with the principal scenes from Gnecco’s Opera Buffa, “La Prova d’un Opera Seria;” the principal characters were sustained by Mdle. Grisi, MM. Lablache, Ivanhoff, &c. and afforded a most excellent display of the humours of Lablache and Grisi.

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<sup>60</sup> Sir Michael (in realtà Michele) Costa (Napoli 1808 - Hove 1884), a Londra dal 1829, nel 1830 fu chiamato come maestro al cembalo per l’opera italiana al King’s Theatre, di cui dal 1831 fu direttore della musica e dal 1833 anche direttore d’orchestra. Fu anche il primo direttore d’orchestra a Londra a utilizzare la bacchetta, non senza scontrarsi con lo scetticismo di alcuni critici (si veda, ad esempio, «The Examiner», 28 luglio 1833: «All the effect of good time in the singing is destroyed by the “damnable iteration” of his obstreperous metronome. The voices seem to be going by machinery. We wonder at its being endured [...]»).



## «The Observer»

**Domenica, 31 maggio 1835**

*I Puritani*, by Bellini, was received on its fourth performance last night with every testimony of approbation. The music is by no means so good as the execution of it by Grisi, Rubini, Lablache, and Tamburini; and what composers call the instrumentation of the opera is decidedly inferior to *Anna Bolena*, and to *La Sonnambula*. This defect renders the triumph of the singers the greater, and they have skill and voices to do justice to the finest production that was ever written. Grisi and Rubini (but especially the latter) are not enough before the audience, but what they have to do they perform exquisitely. *Arturo* (Rubini) does not appear at all in the second part, three months being supposed to elapse between the first and third acts, during which *Arturo* is absent with the Queen, and which is, in fact, the whole occasion of the distraction of the heroine, *Elwira*, (Grisi), in the second act. We by no means like this *scena* so well as a corresponding one at the conclusion of *Anna Bolena*, but the air *Qui la voce sua soave* is very touching, from its mere simplicity. The duet between *Giorgio* (Lablache), and *Ricardo* (Tamburini), which finishes the act, is as fine a specimen of dramatic music as perhaps has ever been composed. Hypercritics will find fault that that part of it, *Suoni la Tromba*, is written in unison and not in harmony. To us this is a merit, for the great object of Bellini here was force and effect. There is nothing so good in the third act as in the two first – as if the composer had exhausted himself. The words of the opera are often below the subject, and the story is positively nonsensical.

## «The Sunday Times»

**Domenica, 31 maggio 1835**

King's theatre – On Tuesday her Majesty honoured with her presence the performance of Bellini's opera of *I Puritani*, which was produced by command. The house presented a very brilliant galaxy of rank, beauty, and fashion. Grisi, Tamburini, Lablache, and Rubini sang the music allotted to them with exquisite grace, feeling, and power. The cavatina, by the latter, in the first act forcibly reminded us of his celebrated *scena* from *Il Pirata*. *I Puritani* is decidedly superior as a composition, combining the classic graces of music with historic recollections, to any other opera that we know of – its chief fault is, that it is too long. The Duchess of Kent, with the Princess Victoria, occupied the next box but one to her Majesty's. The young princess appeared highly delighted with the whole performance.

Laporte took his benefit on Thursday, when in addition to the great attraction of *I Puritani*, with the same brilliant cast, Mademoiselle Taglioni made her first appearance this season as *La Sylphide*, in the ballet of that name. We need only say that this inimitable *dansseuse* has lost nothing of that grace and elegance which delighted the British public on her introduction to them. She was ably seconded by Perrot, and the corps de ballet were numerous and well appointed. The entertainment concluded with some of the principal scenes from Gnecco's opera buffa, *La prova d'un Opera Seria*, in which Grisi, Lablache, and Ivanoff sustained the principal characters. The acting of the two former was the very acmé of comedy. The house was crowded to excess.

**«The Morning Post»****Lunedì, 1 giugno 1835**

The Opera – King’s Theatre. The Opera was crowded to an almost unprecedented degree on Saturday evening, insomuch that many, as well Ladies as Gentlemen, who could not obtain even standing-room in the body of the house, were accommodated with chairs in the *coulisses*. Symptoms of disapprobation were manifested at intervals in consequence of some of the parties thus situated placing themselves so forward as to be within view of the audience, an injury to the scenic effect, which unquestionably ought, under any circumstances, to be avoided. The *Puritani* having obtained a universally favourable verdict from our musical amateurs we feel that praise has become superfluous. The Polacca “Son vergin vezzosa,” so deliciously sung by Grisi, had all its usual charms, and was of course rapturously encored. A similar distinction was conferred upon the celebrated duet “Suoni la tromba,” between Lablache and Tamburini. We heard it observed that this highly-inspiring air might appropriately be named *O’ Connell’s March*,<sup>61</sup> since it would make even a coward fight. The second act of the *Sylphide*, very much mutilated, followed, in which the honours were equally divided between the exquisite grace of Taglioni and the easy activity of Perrot.

**«The Court magazine and belle assemblee»****Sabato, 6 giugno 1835**

KING’S THEATRE. Our opera has never before been able to boast of so strong a company as M. Laporte has engaged this year, and the season is therefore superior to any preceding one within our remembrance. Our limits allow us to say only a few words of the two new operas lately brought out. “Marino Faliero,” by Donizetti, is scarcely on a par with his “Anna Bolena,” but there is a good deal of merit in it. “I Puritani e I Cavalieri” resembles all Bellini’s former productions, though, perhaps, it is the best of them, which is not however saying much in its favour. Bellini has some very pretty melodies, but is unable to work them out. He is but an indifferent harmonist, and his instrumentation is very bad. Yet, in the present degraded state of the Italian school of music, Bellini will retain his rank as a composer, because there is freshness in his melodies, and he has the good fortune to have them sung by Grisi, Rubini, and Tamburini.

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<sup>61</sup> Il riferimento probabilmente è a Daniel O’Connell (Cahersiveen 1775 - Genova 1847), avvocato e nazionalista irlandese, tra i protagonisti della vita politica di quegli anni. Sostenitore dell’emancipazione cattolica, O’Connell fu promotore dell’abrogazione dell’Act of Union, che nel 1801 aveva unito il Regno d’Irlanda al Regno di Gran Bretagna.

## «The Morning post»

Sabato, 6 giugno 1835

THEATRES. THE OPERA. - KING'S THEATRE. Considerable disappointment was excited at the substitution of Rossini's *Otello* for Donizetti's *Marino Faliero* last night. The latter had been announced on the previous day, but for some unexplained reason the former was repeated, although the performance, as it has been done on other occasions this season, could very well have been dispensed with. We believe that the change was not relished – at all events there was not that overflowing attendance which we have witnessed on the evenings appropriated to the new works of Bellini and Donizetti. They are both compositions of a very high merit; but, in assigning to *Marino Faliero* the palm of superiority over the *Puritani*, we feel confident that we are only recording the opinions of the majority of the *dilettante*. And yet Donizetti's composition has only been played twice, when it was received with the greatest enthusiasm. Added to this, it is so admirably calculated to call into action the talents of the present company by the equal distribution of the parts. We therefore hope that no petty intrigue or mean desire of the monopoly of applause can have actuated any individual performer to cause this deprivation. Under such circumstances it is the bounden duty of the manager to be firm, and the subscribers and the public will unquestionably support him in his endeavours to bring forward the best entertainment. *Marino Faliero* ought to appear in the *affiche*, or some explanation be given of the why and the wherefore it is withheld from us. *Otello* went off, upon the whole, excellently. The beautiful round, beginning “Te [*sia*] parli l'amore,”<sup>62</sup> was encored, and Grisi, Lablache, and Ivanoff, were still more successful in their second display. A similar compliment was bestowed upon a portion of the grand duet in the second act between Tamburini and Rubini. Grisi and Rubini were called for at the conclusion of the opera. *La Chasse des Nymphes*<sup>63</sup> was the ballet, which afforded Taglioni and Perrot the opportunity of exhibiting their unrivalled *tours de force*, as well as their more pleasing grace, ease, and precision. The Duchess of Kent and the Princess Victoria were in their private box.

## «The Morning post»

Venerdì, 12 giugno 1835

THEATRES. THE OPERA. - KING'S THEATRE. Although there was a numerous attendance last night, for the benefit of Signor Tamburini, the house was not so crowded as we have lately been accustomed to witness it. The first and second acts of Bellini's *Puritani e i Cavalieri*, the interesting ballet of *La Sylphide*, cruelly curtailed of its fair proportions, and a portion of the first act of Rossini's *Cenerentola*,<sup>64</sup> were the entertainments. In the first the favourite

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<sup>62</sup> Nel Finale I di *Otello ossia Il Moro di Venezia* di Rossini.

<sup>63</sup> Si tratta di un *divertissement* coreografico di Filippo Taglioni del 1834.

<sup>64</sup> *La Cenerentola ossia La bontà in trionfo* (Roma, Teatro Valle, 25.I.1817) fu rappresentata per la prima volta sulle

polacca, “Son vergine vezzosa,” sang [*sic*] by Grisi, Mrs. E. Seguin, Lablache, and Rubini, was encored, and a similar compliment was bestowed on the duet “Il rival salvar tu devi,” sung by Lablache and Tamburini. Taglioni and Perrot were much applauded in the ballet. There were so many omissions, and there was such an imperfect representation of the little that was done in *Cenerentola*, that the affair was altogether ridiculous, and is scarcely worthy of mention. Brambilla<sup>65</sup> was the heroine of this nursery story, and the music was too high for her voice. Madame Castelli<sup>66</sup> was the *Clorinda*, and some lady unknown to fame, and whose name ought to remain so, enacted *Tisbe*, for she could not sing. Lablache left out “Miei rampolli,” and Rubini almost everything. The only redeeming quality of this absurd abridgment was the fine singing of the *bénéficiaire* in Dandini’s opening air “Come un ape.”

### «The Morning post»

Lunedì, 15 giugno 1835

THEATRES. THE OPERA. - KING’S THEATRE. The united talents of the leading *artists* of this establishment completely put at defiance the state of the temperature. On Saturday night Bellini’s opera of *I Puritani e i Cavalieri* attained its eighth representation, and the house was crowded to excess in every part. The Duchess of Kent and the Princess Victoria, with a long list of distinguished and fashionable company, were present on this occasion. Grisi, Rubini, Lablache, and Tamburini were all in fine voice, and seemed inspired by the brilliant audience before them. They severally exerted themselves with their customary success, and were received with great enthusiasm, *La Chasse de Nymphes*, with Taglioni and Perrot, went off with its usual éclat.

### «The Musical Library Monthly Supplement»

XVI, luglio 1835

THE DRAMA. – KING’S THEATRE. For the benefit of Madlle. Giulietta Grisi, on Thursday, May 21st, was produced, for the first time here, a serious opera, *I Puritani* (*The Puritans*), by Bellini.

#### Dramatis Personæ

*Lord Walter Woltan*, Governor General, a Puritan

*Sir George*, his brother, a Colonel of half-pay, a ditto

Signor Giubilei.

Signor Lablache.

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scene londinesi nel 1820.

<sup>65</sup> Marietta Brambilla (Cassano D’Adda 1807 - Milano 1875), contralto, fece il suo debutto a Londra nel 1827, nel ruolo *en travesti* di Arsace in *Semiramide* di Rossini.

<sup>66</sup> Si tratta molto probabilmente di una cantante locale, indicata da Fenner come moglie di Ignaz Franz Castelli (cfr. THEODORE FENNER, *Opera in London: View of the Press, 1785-1830*, Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press, 1994, p. 339).

*Lord Arthur Talbot*, a Knight, a partisan of the Stuarts  
*Sir Richard Forth*, a Colonel, and Puritan  
*Sir Bruno Robertson*, an Officer, a Puritan

Signor Rubini.  
Signor Tamburini.  
Signor Galli.

*Henrietta of France*, a (!) widow of Charles I.,  
under the name of Mad. Villa-Forte  
*Elvira*, daughter of Lord Walton

Mrs. E. Seguin.  
Mdlle. Grisi.

The story, it may be supposed, is from the history of England, but in fact, except the title, has no more connexion with it than the Chronicles of Japan. *Lord A. Talbot* is betrothed to *Elvira*, with whom *Sir R. Forth* is also enamoured. The former discovers, on the very eve of his nuptials, that the lady disguised as *Madame Villa-Forte* is the widow of Charles I. To save the queen's life he suddenly disappears with her, and conveys her to a place of safety. *Elvira*, believing that he has transferred his affections to the lady and eloped with her, goes mad. The Puritans, with *Forth* at their head, seek to punish *Talbot* for his loyalty. The latter returns, explains his conduct to *Elvira*, who recovers her reason, the parliament pardon her lover, and all ends in a wedding.

Such is the manner in which a notion of our history is conveyed to the Italians! And the translation is quite as absurd as the drama. The music is inferior to *Il Pirata*, superior to *La Staniera* [sic], and about equal to *La Sonnambula*. It is a repetition of the composer's self, and the composer himself is only somewhat less of an imitator of Rossini than are Pacini, Donizetti, and others of the same genus. The *prettiest* piece in the opera, and that which obtains the greatest applause, and invariably an encore, is the polacca (called in concert-bills a quartet), 'Son vergin vezzosa,' sung by Grisi, accompanied by a few notes in the form of a chorus, by Rubini, Tamburini, and Lablache. There are two, if not three, compositions of merit in the opera, though we cannot extend our praise beyond this number. But we reserve ourselves on this point for the Review department of our next number.

The performance of the principals in this opera merits every praise. Mdlle. Grisi, in exhibiting the extremes of joy and despair, is everything that the admirers of unexaggerated nature can wish. The character seems written purposely to display her versatility, and gives a force to it which lays the author under obligations to the fair *artiste* which, with all his admiration of her, he could hardly have anticipated. The *bonhomme* of Lablache is quite as delightful as his singing. Rubini never wants feeling, though the mode in which he *vocally* manifests it we cannot approve. Tamburini, both as a singer and actor, is excellent throughout; and Mrs. E. Seguin goes through the small part of *Henrietta* in a highly respectable manner. We should willingly praise the chorus, but the manner in which this is executed renders it impossible to utter a syllable but in reproof. The excuse pleaded is, that a sufficiency of rehearsals is not allowed. This certainly exonerates the individual chorists, though it is no excuse for the management. But the house fills; and M. Laporte is one of those who will say, in the language of the old borough-buyers, 'look at the poll!'

## «The Morning post»

Venerdì, 3 luglio 1835

THEATRES. THE OPERA. - KING'S THEATRE. The company assembled last night within these walls may be pronounced to have been one of the most numerous and fashionable of the whole season. We observed that their Royal Highnesses the Duchess of Kent and the Princess Victoria were in their private box, while every circle displayed members of the British Senate, distinguished Statesmen, and Diplomats, the *elite* of the fashionable world, and a formidable array of rank and beauty. The pit was not without its signs of vitality. It was crowded by a dense mass of spectators, amongst whom were several elegantly-dressed females, whose varied costume added to the *éclat* of the scene. The overflow caused an accession of visitors to the gallery and stalls, which left every point of view in the whole house commanding the stage completely occupied. It will readily be guessed that the benefit of Taglioni, to which the night was devoted, was, as it ought to be, highly productive, and the charming *bénéficiaire* with becoming gratitude exerted herself in more than an ordinary degree, so as to call down applauses of the most enthusiastic kind. She danced with Mademoiselle Clara and Perrot, between the first and second acts of *I Puritani*, the celebrated *pas de trois*, the "Tyrolienne," from the opera of *Guillaume Tell*,<sup>67</sup> with her characteristic grace. In *La Chasse des Nymphes* this exquisite *danseuse* bounded with her usual lightness, and in the *pas de trois* from *La Revolté au Sérail*,<sup>68</sup> with Mdlle. Chavigny and Perrot, she seemed at times as if she would have taken her leave altogether of the earth, and have taken her departure for the regions of air, to which she essentially appertained. To descend to the level of the earth, we must say that we never heard greater cheering than at the conclusion of this development. She was loudly called for, and *bouquets* were showered down upon the stage, which were handed to her with suitable gallantry by Perrot. In *La Prova d'un opera Seria* Taglioni appeared in a new light. She introduced the minuet and gavotte composed for her and Vestris by her father, in antique costume, with Lablache. The *pas de deux* was as if the elephant and the antelope were in a race. Taglioni looked with her powdered hair, full sleeves, large hoop, and long waist, most beautifully, and a burst of approbation greeted the beauty of the 15th century. Lablache walked through the minuet like a good English Gentleman of the olden time, but he prudently remained quiet during the gavotte. He thereby saved his breath and his reputation. It was an act of goodnature, on his part, to assist an *artiste* by the aid of his name, in an eccentric attempt, and it savoured of folly to suppose that anything beyond what was achieved by him could have been effected. Lablache retrieved himself, however, in the grand scena with his band; he convulsed the listeners with laughter, at his truly comic powers, and his duet with Grisi, "Oh guardate che figura," produced similar merriment. During the first act of *I Puritani* there were symptoms of some confusion. The opening duet between Grisi and Lablache was omitted, and considerable reluctance was evinced to obey the call for an encore in the quartet "A te o cara." It was eventually complied with, and the same

<sup>67</sup> Dall'Atto III di *Guillaume Tell* di Rossini (Parigi, Académie Royale de Musique [Opéra], 3.VIII.1829), allestito a Londra per la prima volta il 1° maggio 1830.

<sup>68</sup> Si riferisce qui al balletto di Filippo Taglioni e Théodore Labarre del 1833.



compliment was bestowed on the polacca “Son virgin [sic] vezzosa,” and the duet “Il rival salvar tu dvri [sic]” between Lablache and Tamburini. The entertainments were upon the whole of the highest order of excellence.

## «The Morning post»

Venerdì, 10 luglio 1835

THEATRES. THE OPERA. - KING'S THEATRE. Her Majesty was present last night, but the attendance otherwise, for the alleged benefit of that prince of tenors, Rubini, was very indifferent both as to numbers and as to respectability. In the latter respect we must confess that we never witnessed a more motley assemblage in the pit than on this occasion. There must surely have been gross neglect at the doors in the admittance of individuals attired in the costume of holiday visitors at Greenwich fair. If the regulations which have heretofore very properly existed as to dress are to be continued it is to be hoped that, for the future, a more strict surveillance will be exercised. We would suggest, at the same time, to some *Gentlemen* who frequent the *parterre*, that it is not the custom, in this country, to go into the society of Ladies impregnated with the fumes of tobacco.

The entertainments of the evening were two acts of Bellini's *Puritani*, the first act of which was sadly mutilated; some scenes from *La Prova d'un Opera Seria*, and the ballet of *Zephyr Berger*.<sup>69</sup> The *bénéficiaire* also gave after the *Puritani* his scena “Tu Vedrai,” from *Il Pirata*. Rubini's splendid singing of this pleasing composition of Bellini is well known and appreciated. It is unrivalled for intense expression, and, as a specimen of his florid style, is not approached by anything else which he sings. He was in fine voice, and obtained a call for a repetition of the scena, amidst great approbation. Indeed, the enthusiasm must have commenced before some parties in a private box could have reached the Opera house, for a laurel crown, classically wreathed, was cast upon the stage by them before the demand for the encore was raised. After some delay, Rubini came forward, picked up the evergreen, handed it to a fellow-pirate, and then repeated his scena with renewed effect. *La Prova* went off excellently. Lablache was in high spirits, and, amongst other exploits, imitated Grisi in the popular polacca, “Son vergin vezzosa,” to the utter amazement of the Prima Donna and the other performers. They were evidently taken by surprise, and the laughter produced was prolonged for some time. The duet between Grisi and Lablache, “Oh guardate che figura,” also elicited much merriment; but the grand climax was in the finale, where the latter was never more successful in exciting the risible faculties of the audience. There was an attempt made for an *encore*, but after a great deal of noise had been expended, Lablache appeared before the curtain, accompanied by Grisi and Rubini, who were hailed with fresh testimonials of satisfaction.

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<sup>69</sup> Si tratta del balletto del coreografo André-Jean-Jacques Deshayes (Paris 1777 - Batignolles 1846), qui al suo primo allestimento.

## «The Morning post»

**Mercoledì, 15 luglio 1835**

THEATRES. THE OPERA. - KING'S THEATRE. The popularity of *I Puritani* appears undiminished, for the house was crowded last night to excess, and the audience included most of the names of note in the fashionable world. The performers were duly inspired by the brilliant display, and exerted themselves in more than an ordinary degree to obtain the approbation of the *dilettante*, in which laudable attempt they fully succeeded. Grisi was in fine voice, and sang and acted splendidly, notwithstanding the great fatigue which she must undergo from playing every opera night, and singing at almost every public concert and *soirée musicale* given by amateurs or by the profession. The *primadonna* was supported by Lablache, and Rubini and Tamburini, in their most efficient style. The *Puritani*, altogether went off with much spirit and enthusiasm, and the four *artistes* whose names we have specified had to go through the customary ordeal of appearing before the curtain. The *Sylphide* was the ballet, but the place was almost deserted before it commenced. The Duchess of Kent and the Princess Victoria were present.

## «The Morning post»

**Venerdì, 31 luglio 1835**

THEATRES. THE OPERA. - KING'S THEATRE. The benefit of M. Ivanoff was attended last night as numerous as the lateness of the season, and the extraordinary heat of the weather, would allow. The *affiche* exhibited a singular *mélange*. The first act of Bellini's *Puritani*, the second act of Donnezetti's [*sic*] *Marino Faliero*, the last act of *Anna Bolena* by the last mentioned *maestro*, two Russian airs, sang by the *bénéficiaire*, and a portion of the ballet of *La Sonnambula*. The company, although not so *recherché* as in the palmy days of the Opera, was exceedingly enthusiastic, as will be readily conceived when we mention the encores of the evening – the quartet “A te o cara,” by Grisi, Rubini, Lablache, and Giubilei, and the polacca, “Son vergin vezzosa”, by the *Prima Donna*, Mrs. F. Seguin, Lablache, and Rubini, in the *Puritani*; the barcarole, “Or che in cielo,” by Ivanoff; and the last movement of Rubini's scena “Notte d'orrore,” in *Marino Faliero*; and Ivanoff's “Vivi tu,” in *Anna Bolena*, and one of Perrot's *pas* in the *divertissement*. The applause was also very abundant during the other operatic and terpsichorean essays, and there was therefore no complaint of a “cold audience.” Grisi and Ivanoff were likewise called for after *Anna Bolena* to crown the triumphs of the night. The Russian melodies were sweetly sung by Ivanoff, but we really cannot find room for the names of the two airs, as each would fill some lines of our type. The use of the wind instruments in the accompaniments has a very pleasing effect.

## «The Athenæum»

Sabato, 22 agosto 1835

KING'S THEATRE. The Opera closed for the season on Saturday night last, with 'I Puritani,' and one-half of 'La Sylphide.' The house was very well filled, the national anthem moderately well sung; the principal performers made their obeisances, and took their leave in the midst of thunder-peals of applause, and a shower of garlands for Grisi. These *crowning* compliments are but childish things, after all: but we know where the honours of a wreath could be more appropriately bestowed, than upon our late *prima donna*, whether in acknowledgment of the invariable pains with which she has always fulfilled her duty, or of the rapid improvement which has marked her acting, from the commencement of the season; what has wrought this, we will not stop to inquire, but in engaging her (as far as we are concerned) for the year 1836, we have only to say, that if her scenic powers continue to ripen as they have hitherto done, she may take her place on the highest pinnacle of her profession, and challenge all rivalry.

In closing our reports for the present year, it is impossible to pass the music performed in the course of it without a word. Of the two novelties produced, the worst has been decidedly the most successful, on the strength of three catching melodies, and a *libretto*, which displays the performers more equally than that of 'Marino Faliero.' For ourselves, the latter opera was a positive relief to us, after the noise and crude writing of Bellini, though neither for a moment could stand in the stead of music of a higher order and fresher fancy. We do not ask for Mozart's operas, as, under the present management, there is no chance of our hearing them respectably performed; but why have we not had other of Rossini's works, his 'Mosè,'<sup>70</sup> his 'Assedio di Corinto,'<sup>71</sup> above all his 'Guillaume Tell'?<sup>72</sup> Some of his less hackneyed and lighter pieces, 'Corradino,'<sup>73</sup> or 'Il Turco in Italia'<sup>74</sup> for instance, both admirably adapted to the strength of the company, would have been a welcome change from the tears and mad scenes of tragedy, with which we have been somewhat satiated. Why, too, were we disappointed of Cimarosa's 'Matrimonio Segreto'?<sup>75</sup> It is impossible for us to be contented another season without further and more sterling revivals; we look also, for a better *ballet*.

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<sup>70</sup> La prima versione di *Mosè in Egitto* di Rossini (Napoli, Teatro di San Carlo, 5.III.1818) fu rappresentata a Londra nel 1822 come *Pietro l'eremita*; nel 1833 con il titolo *The Israelites in Egypt; or the Passage of the Red Sea* fu allestita una rielaborazione con musiche di Haendel. Il rifacimento francese dell'opera, *Moïse et Pharaon* (Parigi, Académie Royale de Musique [Opéra], 26.III.1827), debuttò a Londra nel 1850, dove fu presentato con il titolo di *Zora*.

<sup>71</sup> *L'assedio di Corinto*, traduzione italiana de *Le Siège de Corinthe* (Parigi, Académie Royale de Musique [Opéra], 9.X.1826), a sua volta rifacimento francese di *Maometto II* (Napoli, Teatro di San Carlo, 3.XII.1820), debuttò a Londra il 6 febbraio 1834.

<sup>72</sup> Si veda la nota n. 58.

<sup>73</sup> È il titolo alternativo di *Matilde di Shabran ossia Bellezza e cuor di ferro* di Rossini (Roma, Teatro Apollo, 24.II.1821), rappresentata per la prima volta a Londra il 3 luglio 1823.

<sup>74</sup> *Il Turco in Italia* (Milano, Teatro alla Scala, 14.VIII.1814) di Rossini debuttò a Londra il 19 maggio 1821.

<sup>75</sup> *Il matrimonio segreto* di Domenico Cimarosa (Vienna, Burgtheater, 7.II.1792) fu allestito a Londra per la prima volta l'11 gennaio 1794.

Since Taglioni went, we have not given any report, for the best of all reasons, because we could not prevail upon ourselves to stay and see it.

### «The London Review»

luglio 1835 – gennaio 1836, Vol. II, n. IV

ART. X. BELLINI. The composer Bellini, who died in the vicinity of Paris on the 23rd of last September, is as great a loss as the musical stage, in its present circumstances, could well have sustained. His style had many beauties, but its chief characteristic was a deep and touching pathos; and his death comes unfortunately in support of a theory on which we have frequently meditated, that the faculty of pathetic musical composition, possessed in a pre-eminent degree, is the song of the swan –

-- ‘prophetic of the doom  
Heaven gives its favourites, -- early death.’

Need we mention Mozart and Weber? Bellini, at least, adds another name to the list of those whose music has sounded the very depths of feeling, and who have passed away while the blossom of their genius, though expanded to maturity, if judged by its actual development, could scarcely be regarded as more than a promise of the future, if judged by the ordinary relations of time.

Vincenzo Bellini was born in 1804, at Catania, in Sicily. His grandfather, father, and brothers were all composers of music, but had not the genius of Vincenzo, and wrote only church music with moderate ability.

At the age of thirteen, Bellini was placed in the Royal Musical Academy, or Conservatorio, at Naples, where his talents immediately acquired for him the title of *Maestrino* – a name given instead of that of pupil to those scholars who are advanced in the art, and are capable of giving the first instructions to the junior students. The celebrated Maestro Zingarelli<sup>76</sup> conceived a warm attachment to the young Bellini; and under his paternal instructions Vincenzo soon produced compositions in ecclesiastical music, and in all the strict forms of counterpoint, simple, double, and fugued.

Before he left the Conservatorio, Bellini evinced great intellectual aptitude, and eminent musical genius for dramatic composition, and composed the music of a melodrama called *Adderson e Salvina* [sic]. This, his first production, was performed with great success by the pupils of the Academy, and Zingarelli exclaimed, ‘*Ecco un Maestro che farà epoca!*’

His first production after leaving the Academy was the opera of *Bianca e Fernando*, which is composed with his peculiar style of sweet and pathetic melody. In the remaining nine years

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<sup>76</sup> Niccolò Antonio Zingarelli (Napoli 1752 - Torre del Greco 1837) compositore e insegnante al Conservatorio di Napoli. Tra i suoi allievi, oltre a Bellini, si ricordano Saverio Mercadante, Francesco Morlacchi e Michele Costa.

of his life he composed *Il Pirata*, *La Straniera*, *Zaira*, *Beatrice di Tonda* [sic], *I Capelletti* [sic],<sup>77</sup> *La Sonnambula*, *Norma*,<sup>78</sup> *I Puritani* – in which he enriched the Italian stage with those exquisite melodies of sweet, impassioned, melancholy tenderness, some of which *must* live till music itself shall be forgotten.

His operas from the first arrested the attention of the public of Italy, who would before listen only to Rossini. In Milan his popularity was so great from the production of the *Pirata* and *Straniera*, that he was called the spoiled child of La Scala.

Bellini was melancholy, sensitive, generous, and high-minded, and greatly beloved in the circle of his friends. After the success of his *Puritani*, he was living in retirement near Paris, and studying the prosody of the French language, with the intention of composing an opera for the Académie Royale, when a malignant intestine disorder carried him off in a few days. He preserved his serenity of mind to the last, excepting for a few moments of delirium before death, when he sprung from his bed, and called on his mother, father, and brothers – ‘*Mia madre, mio padre, miei fratelli – vi abbraccio ancora una volta!*’

His friends honoured his obsequies with a magnificent funeral at their own charge, remitting all his property to his relations. The funeral was attended by an assemblage of the élite of Parisian society, and of all that was eminent in the arts; and the same friends are preparing in the same manner to erect a monument to his memory. It is, however, a trite saying, but strictly applicable to Bellini, his best monument is in his works, which are diffused throughout the world.

Of Bellini’s operas, six have been performed in England: *Il Pirata*,<sup>79</sup> *La Sonnambula*,<sup>80</sup> *La Straniera*,<sup>81</sup> *Norma*,<sup>82</sup> *I Capelletti* [sic] e *i Montecchi*,<sup>83</sup> and *I Puritani*.

The first of these was strangely garbled on its first production in 1830; and was moreover the unfortunate vehicle of introducing a prima donna (Madame Lalande) who had been fearfully beuffed, and whose performance fell far short of her note of promise. But the *disjecti membra poëtae* were apparent, and it was obvious that at least some of the music had grace, expression and originality.

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<sup>77</sup> Mentre l’erronea lezione dei *Capuleti* (il reiterato «*Capelletti*») era già presente nelle recensioni dell’«*Examiner*» del 1833, curate molto probabilmente dallo stesso Peacock, e ha un’origine letteraria (ringrazio Fabrizio Della Seta anche per avermi fatto notare che la forma ‘Cappelletti’ viene utilizzata già da Dante nel VI Canto del *Purgatorio*), per la deformazione *Beatrice di Tonda* non sfugge la coincidenza con l’infelice battuta apparsa su un’altra testata, il «*Morning Chronicle*», nell’annuncio della prima londinese di *Norma*, il 10 giugno 1833, quando il critico, probabilmente Hogarth, citando *Beatrice di Tenda* aggiunse tra parentesi «it ought rather to be “Beatrice Tonda” if Pasta plays in it».

<sup>78</sup> *Norma* (Milano, Teatro alla Scala, 26.XII.1831) fu rappresentata per la prima volta a Londra il 20 giugno 1833, durante il soggiorno londinese di Bellini.

<sup>79</sup> Si veda la nota n. 49.

<sup>80</sup> Si veda la nota n. 14.

<sup>81</sup> Si veda la nota n. 16.

<sup>82</sup> Si veda la nota n. 76.

<sup>83</sup> *I Capuleti e i Montecchi* (Venezia, Gran Teatro La Fenice, 11.III.1830) furono rappresentati per la prima volta a Londra il 20 luglio 1833, durante il soggiorno londinese di Bellini.

*La Sonnambula* was produced for the first time at the close of the season of 1831, when the recent success and great popularity of Donizetti's *Anna Bolena* had left little space for a competitor. Pasta was the heroine of both: both parts had been expressly written for her: but all who know the great actress must be aware that she was much more at home in afflicted majesty than in a village girl walking in her sleep over panties. There were but two or three nights of the season left, and the theatre was thinly attended; but some of the melodies gave great delight to those who heard them, especially Rubini's air in the last act. We were then told by some of the superlatively knowing, that real judges did not admire this air, (real judges being those who judge like the parties who call them so,) and that it was only pleasing to the admirers of Rubini's 'vicious style:' but it delighted English audiences night after night when it was sung at Drury Lane by Templeton.<sup>84</sup> This opera had in its English dress a run of almost unexampled popularity. This success we were told was owing to Malibran, and not to the music; but Malibran, in all the splendour of her genius and beauty, could not give the same attraction to any other opera. The truth is, the entire performance of Malibran, histrionic and musical, was as nearly perfect as anything mortal can be: but it could not have produced its astonishing impression if the composer had not given to the afflicted village maid melodies that came home at once to the understandings and feelings of the audience. The unsophisticated English audience thought the music beautiful, because it abounded with expressive and intelligible melody: and it happens very fortunately for the production of the simply and naturally beautiful in all branches of art, that pedantic orations, proving to the mass of mankind that they ought not to like what they do like, have been in all ages and nations thrown away.

*La Sonnambula* in the English theatres, and *I Puritani*, last season in the King's Theatre, may be regarded as the two triumphs of Bellini. *Il Pirata* never thoroughly recovered the effect of its first misrepresentation: *Norma* was admired, and Pasta was truly great in it; but the main subject and character were too like *Medea*<sup>85</sup> and *Anna Bolena* to have much effect of novelty, and the melody was too much buried in harmony, often more ambitious than appropriate. *I Montecchi e i Capelletti* [*sic*] was in spite of Pasta a total failure; but no English audience even in the King's Theatre, can ever endure such an affair as the Italian *Romeo and Juliet*; though the libretto would appear to be a favourite in Italy, being, with a few unimportant differences to suit the composer, the same in the compositions of Zingarelli, Guglielmi, Vaccaj, and Bellini.

Bellini's great force is in melody. Those who have called him an unscientific harmonist have contented themselves with the allegation and adduced no proof of it. But his harmony wants depth and variety: he rather multiplies the repetitions of the chord than gives distinct business to the several components of the score. We do not go so far as to apply to him Ritson's favourite saying: 'The only use of the harmony is to spoil the melody;' but his harmony often smothers more than it adorns the melody: it has neither the splendid variety

<sup>84</sup> Nel maggio 1833 al Drury Lane Theatre andò in scena *La sonnambula* in lingua inglese, con Maria Malibran e John Templeton.

<sup>85</sup> Durante il soggiorno londinese di Bellini del 1833, al King's Theatre nel mese di maggio furono in cartellone *Medea in Corinto* di Simon Mayr (Napoli, Teatro di San Carlo, 28.XI.1813) e *Anna Bolena* di Donizetti (si veda la nota n. 42), entrambe con Giuditta Pasta.



of Rossini, nor the consummate combinations of Mozart, nor the torrent of sound of Beethoven, with its mysterious current of murmured undersong which creeps on in such delicious and marvelous intermixture with the vast main-stream of harmony. In all these composers there was genius for harmony. In Bellini there is only genius for melody. He was a melodist by nature, and a harmonist by education. The deep and touching pathos of the simple ballad was more accordant to his tone of mind than the sublime and spirit-stirring volumes of sound which shake the modern musical stage.

Bellini had a genius for melody, and chiefly for pathetic melody, which is always the more touching, the more singly and simply it is presented. Johnny Armstrong's 'Last Good Night,' or the 'Cruelty of Barbara Allen,' with which the dairy-maid so touched Goldsmith's feelings in his youth,<sup>86</sup> that in his latest years the finest modern music was dissonance to him in comparison with its mere recollection, a difference which he ascribed solely to the tendency of age and knowledge to sour our dispositions, would even in his youth have affected him little with a full orchestral accompaniment. Sorrow is solitary. The voice of the nightingale is most affecting when it is single in the twilight. It is only in funeral hymns, and on other rare occasions that allow the expression of a common grief, that sorrow can be properly choral: even then the accompaniments are necessarily softened and subdued, and in the general effect, much is lost to the pathetic and given to the sublime. Rubini, who possesses, more than any singer we ever heard, the power of identifying the redundancies of ornament with the overflowings of feeling, gives to Bellini's melodies a force of pathetic expression, which seems to be the genuine echo of the composer's soul.

Pasta, Malibran, and Tamburini have developed in passages the full strength of the recondite feeling; but generally speaking, we have, in a quiet apartment, from, of course, very inferior, but still correct and expressive execution, felt more of the true intrinsic pathos of Bellini's music, than we have felt from all the appliances and means of theatrical decoration. Bellini has written melodies with which future maids may charm the ears of future Goldsmiths, who will afterwards think in the Italian theatre, that they hear nothing so touching as they heard in their youth.

We are desirous of enabling our readers to form their own judgment on the correctness of our opinion of Bellini's genius for pathetic melody. We shall present three specimens, each from a different opera: the first from *Il Pirata*.<sup>87</sup> The drama is taken from Maturin's tragedy

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<sup>86</sup> Il riferimento qui è a Oliver Goldsmith (Kilkenny West 1730 - Londra 1774), scrittore, poeta e drammaturgo anglo-irlandese, che nel saggio *Happiness in a Great Measure Dependent on Constitution*, del 1759, testimonia la diffusione delle due ballate qui citate. Il saggio è oggi integralmente disponibile nell'edizione delle opere di Goldsmith in quattro volumi pubblicata a Londra proprio nel 1835: *The Works of Oliver Goldsmith, M.B. with a life and notes*, vol. IV, London, Tegg, Griffin, Tegg, Wise, 1835, pp. 81-84.

<sup>87</sup> In questa sede, i tre esempi musicali sono riprodotti dall'originale in edizione anastatica. Sono tutti tratti da celebri cabalette di Bellini; per una curiosa coincidenza, qualche anno più tardi lo stesso Verdi si troverà d'accordo sull'eccezionale valore proprio delle cabalette scelte da Peacock per la seconda e la terza citazione musicale (si veda la lettera di Verdi a Giulio Ricordi del 20 novembre 1880, pubblicata in *Carteggio Verdi-Ricordi 1880-1881*, a cura di Pierluigi Petrobelli, Carlo Matteo Mossa, Marisa Di Gregorio Casati, Parma, Istituto nazionale di Studi verdiani, 1988, pp. 69-71).

of *Bertram*,<sup>88</sup> and the passage we select is adapted to the last words of *Gualtiero*, the Bertram of the opera, before he stabs himself.<sup>89</sup> He addresses the confidante of Imogene (the object of his first love, whose husband he has killed, and who has become a maniac), in the presence of the assembled knights. They are the last words of love, despair, and remorse, not unmixed with a feeling of self-vindication and gratified revenge.

*Allegro.*

Ah! non fia sem-pre o - dia - - - ta la

stén.

mia me-moria, io spe - - ro se fui spie - ta - to e

fie - ro fui sven - tu - ra - to an - cor, e

par - le - rà la tom - - ba al - le pie - to - se

gen - - - ti, de' lun - ghi miei tor - men - ti del

mio tra - di - to a - mor, e par - le - rà del - -

mio tra - di - to - a - mor, e par - le - rà - - del - -

mio - - tra - - - di - to, tra - di - to a - mor.

<sup>88</sup> Il primo esempio citato è la cabaletta dell'Aria di Gualtiero «Tu vedrai la sventurata» dell'atto II del *Pirata*.

<sup>89</sup> Il dramma qui citato è *Bertram or The Castle of St. Aldobrand* (1816) di Charles Robert Maturin (Dublino 1782-1824), scrittore e drammaturgo irlandese. La fonte del libretto del *Pirata* è tuttavia l'adattamento francese di Charles Nodier e Isidore-Justin-Severin Taylor del 1821.

The second specimen we shall take from *La Sonnambula*: it is the air to which we have previously alluded.<sup>90</sup> The words are those of Elvino, distracted between love for Amina, and conviction of her infidelity.

*Allegro Moderato.*

Ah! per-chè non pos-so o - diar - ti in - fe -  
del, com' io vor - re - i! Ah! del tut - to an - cor non  
se - i can - - - cel - la - ta, can - cel - la - ta dal mio  
cor. Possa un al - tro ah pos - sa a - mar - - ti qual t'a -  
mò que - st' in - fe - li - - - ce! Al - tro vo - to o tra - di -  
tri - ce, nò, ah! non te - mer non te - mer dal mio do -  
lor. Al - tro vo - to non te - mer non te - mer dal mio do -  
lor. Al - tro vo - to ah! non te - mer non te - mer dal mio do - lor.

The third specimen we shall take from *La Straniera*; and as this opera is less known than the two others, and the story was not at all understood when it was performed here in 1832, we will

<sup>90</sup> Il secondo esempio è la cabaletta dell'Aria di Elvino «Tutto è sciolto. Oh di funesto!» dell'atto II de *La sonnambula*.

give a brief sketch of the preliminary matter. The subject is from the Vicomte d'Arlincourt's *L'Étrangère*.<sup>91</sup> *La Straniera* is an unknown beauty, who resides in mysterious solitude among the mountains. Arthur, the betrothed of Isoletta, the daughter of a neighbouring baron, sees, loves, and pursues the fair unknown, who calls herself Alaide. The passion is reciprocal, but some fatal secret enslaves the lady. His friend Valdeburg pleads with him the cause of Isoletta. In justification of his passion, he takes Valdeburg to the dwelling of La Straniera. Alaide and Valdeburg recognize each other with marks of affection, which madden Arthur with jealousy. – Watching round her dwelling in a stormy night, he sees Valdeburg come forth, and overhears from them a determination to depart together in secret. He falls upon Valdeburg – refuses to listen to explanation: – they fight; Valdeburg is wounded, and falls into a lake. Alaide calls on Valdeburg as her brother, and the rage of Arthur is turned into repentance and grief. His disappearance causes inquiry, – suspicion falls on the lady, and she is placed on trial for his murder. Arthur appears, and takes the crime on himself. The judge is about to pass sentence, when the wounded Valdeburg enters the hall, and exhorting his sister to depart with him, tells her that fate allows her nothing but to live and die unknown. This is the subject of the air, which we select from *La Straniera*.<sup>92</sup>



<sup>91</sup> Si tratta del romanzo *L'Étrangère* (due volumi, 1825) del visconte Charles-Victor Prévost d'Arlincourt (Magny-les-Hameaux 1788 - Parigi 1856), poeta e drammaturgo francese.

<sup>92</sup> Il terzo esempio è la cabaletta dall'Aria di Valdeburgo «Sì, li sciogliete, o giudici» nell'atto II de *La straniera*.



We always thought this opera extremely beautiful. On its first production it was received with enthusiasm in Italy, and we think it deserved it. The sequel contains some very striking effects, both musical and dramatic. Alaide exacts from her lover a promise to marry Isoletta, to which after many struggles, he accedes, on condition of receiving his bride from the hands of his mistress. She consents, and having absolved her promise, issues alone from the church, and leaning on a tomb in the adjoining cemetery, gives vent to her affliction in strains of impassioned melody, which mingle in touching contrast with the pealing organ and choral song within the church. Arthur breaks from the unfinished rites, and renews his suit in an ebullition of unavailing remonstrance and passionate despair. The grand prior and the nuptial train enter in disorder. The grand prior recognizes the *Straniera*, who has thrown back her veil, which she has worn in the ceremony, hails her as queen, and informs her that she is recalled to the throne by the king her husband, from whom she had been unjustly separated. But in the midst of the salutations of honour which rise around her, Arthur stabs himself at her feet – she falls on his body, and dies of a broken heart.

The heroine of this story is Agnes de Méranie, the unfortunate wife of Philip Augustus of France. This did not appear in the libretto, as presented here, in which the name of the heroine was kept as profound a state secret as it might have been in the beginning of the thirteenth century; and the whole story was made thoroughly incomprehensible, which must have been the fault of our worthies at the King's Theatre, and not of the Italian dramatist: for *La Straniera*, so much of it as was correctly given, had all the characteristics of an excellent poem. It was, as well as the *Pirata* and the *Sonnambula*, written by Signor Felice Romani, the author of *Anna Bolena*, who has shown in all those instances a talent for dramatic poetry far above the present general level of the Italian musical stage.

Bellini's forte was in the pathetic; but he has many charming melodies of a more lively character, all tinged, however, in some degree with the tone of melancholy which was natural to his mind. There is another quality which we have remarked in his compositions, a peculiar beauty and almost classical simplicity in the rhythm of his compositions. We say almost classical, because, to be perfectly so, it is essential that metre and music should correspond syllable for note. This was indisputably the characteristic of the ancient Greek music; and from this acknowledged premise some writers have jumped to the conclusion that the great charm of ancient music, to which such wonders were ascribed, must have consisted in the accurate beating of time. They cannot imagine that music could have been brought to much perfection without the modern liberties of exuberant ornament. The pleasure which is derived from mere perfect metre is familiar to all who are familiar with classical poetry. The infinite variety of the Greek lyric metres must have afforded some scope for variety in music; but we are inclined to think that the perception of that kind of harmony which resulted from the intimate correspondence of music and metre, (adorning, in their connexion, the most perfect lyrical poetry human genius has ever produced) must have caused a degree of intellectual



delight, for which the complete independence of both metre and meaning, which modern music has assumed, may be but an indifferent compensation. It has occurred to us to try on one of those airs of Bellini, which we have called almost classical, the experiment of making it quite so; and by fitting it note for note to the pure metre, to which, with some difference, it naturally belongs, to try how far what it loses in musical ornament is compensated by the perception of metrical symmetry. We have tried this experiment with the melody of the last air of the *Sonnambula*,<sup>93</sup> which runs thus: -

*Allegretto.*

Ah! non giun - ge u - man pen - sie - ro al con -  
ten - to ond' io son pie - na: a' miei sen - si io credo ap -  
pe - na; tu mi affi - da, o - - mio te - sor. Ah! mi ab -  
brac - cia, e sempre in - sie - - me, sempre u - ni - ti in u - na  
spe - - me, del - la ter - ra in cui vi - via - mo - - ci for -  
mia - mo un ciel d'a - mor: del - la ter - ra in cui vi -  
via - mo ci for - mia - mo un ciel d'a - mor, del - la  
terra in cui vi - via - mo ci for - mia - mo un ciel d'a - mor.

This melody suggests at once the Ionic  $\bar{a}$  minor metre;

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<sup>93</sup> Si tratta dell'aria finale di Amina.



✓   ✓   -   -   -   ✓   ✓   -   -   -   ✓   ✓   -   -

Æschylus in Persis.

( ) ( ) ( ) ( ) ( ) ( ) ( ) ( ) ( ) ( ) ( ) ( )

*Æschylus in Persis.*

[illegible]

<sup>96</sup> *Ini*, pentagrammi 1-2: vv. 65-66, 70 (πεπέρακεν μὲν ὁ περσέπτολις ἤδη | βασιλείος στρατὸς εἰς ἀντίπορον  
γείτονα χώραν | λινοδέσμοι σχεδία); pentagrammi 3-4 vv.72-76 (πολύα δρου δ' Ἀσίας θούριος ἄρχων |  
ἐπὶ πᾶσαν γθόνα ποιμανόριον θεῖον ἐλαύνει | διγόθεν).

The bar takes the place of the metrical arsis. The arched lines discriminate the metres.

We give this as an experiment merely. *Valeat quantum valeat*. But we conceive it is not very discrepant from such a melody as might have been sung in the Athenian theatre. The harmony, if it had been so sung, would, according to the received opinions of Greek music, have consisted wholly of unisons and octaves. We have some reasons of our own for thinking that the Greeks had the harmony of the fifth in their choruses, which we shall hereafter endeavour to develop if we can find leisure.

To return to our subject.

Musical critics, who hear by rule, have labored to discredit Bellini. Fortunately reputations grow in despite of these systematical doctors. The feelings of the ordinary unsophisticated and unprejudiced hearer are always in advance of their rules; and that which has, in despite of them, been once stamped with popular favour, becomes a standard to the same class of critics in the next generation.

We have on occasions been very much amused by some of these gentry. Listening one evening with great pleasure to some beautiful modulations in one of the operas of Rossini, we were edified by a learned Theban<sup>97</sup> near us, who could hear nothing but a profuse use of the diminished seventh. And we have somewhere fallen in with another variety of the same genus, who, when the whole theatre was electrified by a bold and striking effect most appropriate to the scene, could only expatiate on the harmonic atrocity of consecutive fifths, by which in a great measure the effect had been produced.

It is fitting that there should be rules in science, because they are the collected and concentrated experience of ages; but they are not to be converted into pedantic fetters to bind genius through all future time. As there is no possible sequence of sounds to which human passion does not give utterance, so there is no possible consonance or dissonance which will not find its fit place in dramatic music. Nothing was more appalling than Mrs. Siddons's<sup>98</sup> scream. There was no weapon in the armoury of her art which she used so sparingly; but when she did use it the occasion demanded it, and the effect was proportionate to the occasion. Rossini has taken many liberties in opposition to rules – generally because they were appropriate in their place; but sometimes, we verily believe, with mere malice prepense, to make the hair of the disciplinarians stand on end at sequences of perfect fifths or sevenths resolved by sevenths.

Akin to the pedantry of inflexible rules is that of entrenching the want of tact and feeling behind the authority of great names – saying, 'This is nought, because it is not like Mozart, or Haydn, or Beethoven, or Handel;' and thus sweeping away all modern music as with the fire of an impregnable battery. All the great names thus used had, in their own day, precisely the same sort of artillery pointed against themselves. When Beethoven was first heard of in England, it was as a madman who wrote crazy music which nobody could perform: and even where he was better known and more justly valued, all the transcendent

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<sup>97</sup> Abitante della città di Tebe in Beozia; rinunciando alla metonimia, Peacock avrebbe potuto usare indifferentemente il termine 'beota', per il non troppo sottinteso 'idiota'.

<sup>98</sup> Sarah Siddons (Brecon 1755 - Londra 1831), considerata una delle più grandi attrici tragiche inglesi del suo tempo; magistrale la sua interpretazione di Lady Macbeth nel *Macbeth* di Shakespeare, ruolo con cui scelse di dare l'addio alle scene nel 1812.

and unrivalled dramatic talent which his *Fidelio* demonstrates, did not give him sufficient theatrical encouragement to write a second opera. Truly says Montaigne, 'Les événements sont très maigres témoins de notre prix et capacité.'<sup>99</sup> Mozart was long unknown in Paris, and has never been relished in Italy, where the anti-national use which factious pedantry has made of his name has caused him to be looked on as a sort of national enemy. Handel and Bononcini; Gluck and Piccini [*sic*]; Mozart and Rossini; the world of music has, in all these cases, been wide enough for both; yet it seems a necessary condition of society that there must be faction in all things.

But to be entrenched behind great names, which already bear the stamp of immortality, is an exceedingly safe position. It is an excellent *locus standi* for the fulmination of dogmas. The oracle shakes his head, and the profane take for granted that there is something in it. They give him credit for having approached the pure source, and drank from the same fountain with the great spirits with whom he seems so familiar. If we take the liberty to throw a shell into this oracular entrenchment, it is not against the great names which are misused in its construction, but against those who so misuse them, that we wish to be understood to direct it.

We stake our opinion of Bellini on the airs which we have selected, and of which our limits do not permit us to give more than the subject-melodies. But they are melodies that cannot die. They have been, are, and will be, felt and admired wherever unsophisticated perceptions sit in judgment upon them. But, as we have said, musical critics, *soi-disant par excellence*, who hear by rule, and whose chief seat of feeling is in their fingers, have so unworthily disparaged Bellini, that we have felt it a mere act of justice, as well as of gratitude, for the delight which those melodies alone (even if there were nothing else) have given us, to pay this passing tribute of honour to his memory.

M.S.O.

### «The Musical Library Monthly Supplement»

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On the 23rd of last month died at Pateau [*sic*], near Paris, Signor Vincenzo Bellini, composer of *Il Pirata*, *La Straniera*, *La Sonnambula*, *I Puritani*, and three or four more operas. *Il Pirata* was his earliest and his best work and the first given in this country; but so ill got up, with a *prima-donna* so incapable of sustaining the principal part, and in other respects so injuriously performed, that its success was of a very disputable kind. His *Straniera* failed entirely: it can boast but of two pieces possessing anything like decided merit. He was more fortunate in London with his *Sonnambula*, though the acting recommended it more than the music. The success at the King's Theatre of his *Puritani* cannot be disputed, but as we have said in our notice of that work, it will neither be listened to nor heard of three years hence. A lively polacca, sung in a very fascinating manner by a favourite performer, whose personal

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<sup>99</sup> MICHEL EYQUEM DE MONTAIGNE, *Les Essais*, sous la dir. de Pierre Villey et Verdun Louis Saulnier, livre III, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1965, p. 934.

and professional charms are usually great and commanding, gave a character to the whole work, and to this its good fortune in London must be mainly attributed.

We are willing to believe that had Signor Bellini not been thus cut off in almost his youth, his ambition might have led him to attempt something that would have given him a chance of being heard of in future times, for *the Pirati* exhibits traits of considerable genius. Unhappily the prevailing taste in Italian music has lately been at so low an ebb, that composers have had no motive for exertion: the most contemptible, if new, or called so, has succeeded as well as the best that a Mozart or a Beethoven, if living, could have produced – probably much better. Hence the most powerful stimulus has been wanting, - the prospect of future fame; and one object that a professional man must have in view, namely, pecuniary compensation, has been attained, with so little trouble, that any great effort could not reasonably have been expected. Labour is not diversion, and man is naturally an idle animal.

Signor Bellini has for some time past suffered from pulmonic disease; to this his death is alone attributable, and not to any extraordinary devotion to composition, as the French journals, and ours after them, have stated. He was a gentlemanlike, amiable man, much esteemed by a large and respectable circle of acquaintance, by whom his loss will be much felt.