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Interpolation and Superfetation. The Archaeological Restoration of an Unfinished Work. Donizetti-Battistelli's *Le Duc d'Albe*

ABSTRACT

Background

The unfinished work *Le Duc D'Albe* is a grand-opéra in four acts, to a Libretto by Eugène Scribe and Charles Duveyrier, which Donizetti began to write in 1839 and never brought to completion.

In recent years, the opera has been staged by Thomas Schippers for the *Festival dei due Mondi* in Spoleto (1959) and by Giorgio Battistelli, whose remarkable reconstruction, based on the original sources and the first French libretto, was performed at the Vlaamse Opera in Ghent (2012). However, the staging history of *Le Duc* has never been easy, due to the incompleteness of the manuscript, which shows missing parts, including the finale.

In September 1881, Giovannina Lucca, a relentless rival of the publisher *Casa Ricordi*, bought the score. She subsequently entrusted Matteo Salvi, who had studied under Donizetti in Vienna, with the completion of the opera. Furthermore, she gathered a group of experts - Antonio Bazzini, Cesare Dominici and Amilcare Ponchielli, all teachers at the Conservatory in Milan - to join forces with Salvi. The writing of the new libretto was assigned to Angelo Zanardini, who translated Scribe's from French into Italian and reduced the whole grand-opéra to three acts.

To complete *Le Duc*, Salvi confronted a challenging task because the manuscript displayed an array of difficulties; from pages missing the orchestration of only one section of instruments to others that had to be completely reimagined. These cases required different types of inferences and solutions.

One can concede that at the time criteria such as 'critical edition' or 'respect for the original' had a different meaning than they have nowadays. However, Salvi took into account all the cues, sketches and marginal annotations left by Donizetti and he successfully imitated the composer's style, especially when writing from scratch the parts that were completely missing. Although in his version of the opera the score was dramatically shortened down, amended, and new parts were interpolated in the text - such as the well known aria *Angelo casto e bel-*, the final result was welcomed and staged at the Teatro Apollo on March 22, 1882, a good forty years after the opera had been originally conceived.

Over a century later, contemporary composer Giorgio Battistelli, was entrusted to complete the opera again. Looking back at his predecessor's work, he thus commented: «Salvi operated on the work as a plastic surgeon, taking from the first two acts, the only ones that were complete, small fragments that he used as connecting tissue for the rest of the opera. In the finale, however, there wasn't simply a gap, there was a true void. And so Salvi cut the text and shortened it, as if to shorten

also his agony as ghost composer. The only way to give Donizetti's work the proper relevance was, instead, to keep one's aesthetic distance from it. In this I found myself immediately in agreement with Aviel Cahn: to complete *Le Duc D'Albe* one had to underline differences, not hide them. My task was not to repair but to rewrite, and this really intrigued me».

Consequently, Battistelli turned to the original libretto and to the score, as had been edited by Roger Parker, with a twofold disposition. He had to respectfully relate to a distant musical universe and preserve its patina on the one hand and to make his solutions musically acceptable for the modern audience and for scholars on the other.

It cannot be ruled out that Battistelli may have drawn inspiration from Cesare Brandi's *Theory of Restoration*, possibly the most important disquisition on restoration and reconstruction procedures produced in the 20th century. As a matter of fact the techniques he used are as not different from those outlined in Brandi's treatise.

Brandi maintains «restoration must aim to re-establish the potential unity of the work of art... without producing an artistic or historical forgery». In addition, he believes that «time cannot be reversed and history cannot be abolished». Therefore, each restoration or reconstruction process must: account for the passage of time (e.g. Preserve parts that show what the work looked like before restoration); respect the build up of history; preserve the aesthetic principles on which it was originally based without ignoring the change in taste that takes place over time.

Building on Brandi's ideas one can confidently outline four phases in the work by Battistelli:

- Primary reconstruction;
- Secondary reconstruction;
- Philological completion;
- Hypothesis-based creation and completion.

In the archaeological restorations Brandi refers to, primary reconstruction coincides with the process called *anastylosis*, by which a work of art is rebuilt using fallen parts or incorporating new materials. When it comes to Donizetti's score under analysis, a good example of anastylosis is represented by how Battistelli's dealt with bars 33 to 35 in the *Scène de la conjuration* (Act II). Here the orchestration was almost complete, however the parts for first and second violins and for the violas were missing. Focussing on the orchestration of the strings in bars from 17 on in the same scene, Battistelli noticed that Donizetti had iterated a modular structure. The cellos and the basses played a quaver note on the beats of the four quarter notes, whereas the violins and violas played a quaver on the upbeats. Repeating this aspect of the orchestration in the few bars in which the strings were missing was therefore the most suitable strategy to adhere to Donizetti's style.

Battistelli also had to face a secondary type of reconstruction. In archaeological terms, this should not collide or show discrepancies with the survived elements of an artefact. This was necessary, for example, in Act III, bars 355 to 367, a much longer passage, which needed a deeper knowledge of Donizetti's music, so as to produce a stylistically adequate result. In the above-mentioned bars, the composer-restorer had the bass and vocal lines, but the strings' orchestration was missing. Unlike the previous case, his choice here was not mandatory. He certainly could not disregard the extant written parts, yet he had a number of options to complete the score. Battistelli decided to write the strings' orchestration following both Donizetti's unique stylistic traits and his own convictions and ideas. For example, in the *duo Henri Duc* episode (bars 200-204), Donizetti had written the bass, the cello and Henri's lines. Elaborating on the rhythm pattern used for the bass line - namely two semiquaver quadruplets - Battistelli created all the missing orchestration through a superfetation of musical ideas. The rhythmic element thus ended up affecting the harmonic structure of the piece.

When a large fragment of an ancient work of art is missing, a philological reconstruction is necessary. Scholars need to pinpoint the precise stylistic traits that characterized the age in which that work of art was created. This is how Battistelli tackled bars from 425 to 432 (Act I Scene II), in which Donizetti only composed the parts for the choir, the basses and the flutes. Here, again, a number of solutions were possible. Firstly because such bars are completely isolated both from the previous and from the following sections, secondly because the *pizzicato* of the basses and the *staccato* of the flutes, although idiosyncratic, were not so peculiar as to impose specific sorts of orchestrations. In Battistelli's solution the cellos keep the *pizzicato*, but the bassoon and clarinet sections are added, the second violins and the violas play *staccato* as well as the flutes and the horns, though, the latter, an octave lower than the flutes. Only at the end of the above bars (430) do the woodwind and brass sections play *legato*, subsequently concluding (431) with a *staccato crescendo*, in which the eighths in the second half of bar 431 are performed *forte*, thus mimicking the extant lines of the choir.

A hypothetical restoration/completion (fourth level) occurs when collating literary and iconographic sources. *Le Duc d'Albe* needed this type of restoration/reconstruction too. From the very first bar, in Scene IV Act II, all parts are missing. «A pit», in Battistelli's words, that he had to fill recreating the introduction to Hélène's *Romanza (Ombre Murmure)*. In order to successfully accomplish this undertaking, Battistelli availed himself not only of his full grasp on philology, but also of his expertise on 19th century music. Without disregarding modern taste, he tried to create the missing part while at the same time following Brandi's idea that history cannot be reversed. He therefore used stylemes and rhythm patterns widely present in the part of the score written by Donizetti, such as, just to mention a couple, the iterated occurrence of the *brevis-brevis-longa* sequence, in which the first note is always accented, or the syncopated rhythm patterns of the violins occurring from bar 34 to 41, which are meant to prepare the listeners to the beginning of the *romanza*.

The *Prelude* to the opera is another example of the same type of recreation. Here the scope was much wider than

in previous cases, and Battistelli's artistry was certainly as important as Donizetti's, who left no sketches of such piece, not even a single clue on what he intended to write. Therefore Battistelli had no extant elements on which he could base his artistic creation, not even the poetic text of the libretto. This would be the case of the Colosseum floor reconstruction, which was made of wood beams and is nowadays completely lost. Art scholars, archaeologists and restorers know it was there, but they completely ignore what it looked like. The *Prelude* is therefore a separate element, merely juxtaposed to the body of the opera. It is comprised of 63 bars, which begin in the *B minor* key. Here the composer used rhythm patterns (such as the already mentioned *brevis-brevis-longa*), and horizontal and vertical allusions, namely both harmonic and melodic references to original parts of the score. Bar 46, for example, shows both a modulation from the *B minor* initial key to *G major*, (which connects the piece to the *Introduction* to Act I without any further interruptions) and a time change from 4/4 to 6/8, a stylistic trait that the Donizetti had used a number of times, for example in Act I Scene II, where it occurs again in bars 21, 39 and 46. All these strategies have twofold significance. Not only are they used to connect the *Prelude* to the part of the score written by Donizetti, but they also foreshadow elements the audience will meet again in the rest of the opera, so that the *Prelude* may come across as perfectly in line with the author's style.

Aims and repertoire studied

My aim is to approach the problems related to the completion of an unfinished opera, using the sketches and musical ideas of the second composer.

Giorgio Battistelli finished Donizetti's *Le Duc d'Albe* (1839) in 2011, and this opera was performed for the first time in 2012, with the conduction of Paolo Carignani for the Opera Theatre in Ghent.

Methods

Using the conceptual categories of archeological restoration, the study attempts to provide four levels of restoration work on the score: primary reconstruction, secondary reconstruction, philological completion, hypothesis-based creation and completion.

Implications

This work has come to the conclusion that it is possible to identify a scientific method of restoration of the score: an artistic restoration is not just mere closing process, but also the artistic spirit of two composers who come to meet.

The studies that could begin from this initial work involves great possibilities for improvement and conceptualization of the study on operatic completions; helping draw up a possible scientific method.

Keywords

Contemporary Music, Opera, Unfinished Music, Completions, Music Theory.

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