

Chapter One

Trionfi e fiaschi

His torrent of music supplied a backdrop to every major event between *Restaurazione* and *Risorgimento*. No other major Italian composer could say the same. His name was familiar to every operagoer and cherished by every diva in the land, his impact upon the stage and altar was as integral to the *Ottocento musicale* as that of Donizetti (who kept him under close observation), and Bellini (who did the same without the same motivation), Rossini held him in great esteem and affection while Verdi's silence spoke volumes.ⁱ As much as any of these familiar names Giovanni Pacini represented the Italian operatic universe at its most buoyant and impregnable.

The son of Luigi Pacini, at Giovanni's birth a tenor but soon to become one of the most sought-after *buffi* of the day, Giovanni Vincenzo Benedetto Pacini was born in Catania on 11 February 1796.ⁱⁱ His mother, Isabella Paulillo ⁱⁱⁱ came from the fortress city of Gaeta while Luigi – *discendente da famiglia dell'Appennino pistoiese* according to local legend - was born in Rome according to his son.^{iv} Their joint presence on Sicilian soil was entirely fortuitous: Papa was there to sing. ^v Though such a volcanic cradle never quite succeeded in making a *catanese* out of the maestro he took great pride in adding its proud accreditation to his signature whenever he found it expedient to do so.

Misrepresentation no doubt, he was more *Sicilian* than his fellow citizens could ever agree to acknowledge, he was among the tiniest of new born babies destined for a foot on the theatrical carousel - so small and fragile that he was left behind when his father and mother went on their way. Two years passed before he was reclaimed by which time he seems to have ingested the singleness of purpose and rock-solid endurance of that resilient birthplace - a flair and resolution that stood him in good stead throughout a long and trying presence in the public eye.

Not much is recorded of his earliest peripatetic existence. Decades of trailing after his increasingly famous father it consisted of an endless succession of lodgings in the shadow of great opera houses. He had no formal education. It was a life cramped by domestic ingenuity, by insubstantial friendships rapidly won and lost and a talent for self-sufficiency. If he sought refuge in excess in later life it was a form of compensation. There were summer holidays with siblings on his mother's fortified rock. If he was early drawn towards music this enthusiasm appears not to have been encouraged by his father, Luigi's high-spirits and love of farce (his father's genius for comedy never failed his son) did not disguise the wearisome grind he had embraced. Like

many a responsible parent he would have chosen a dull professional career for his offspring - architect, lawyer, doctor or chemist even would have been better than subservience to his elusive art...



LUIGI PACINI

For such an imaginative offspring, however, in the wake of rootless parents with footlights before his eyes from birth, the stage proved far too dazzling; in 1808, as Pacini recounts in his *memorie* it was agreed to make him a *ballerino*. Overfull of energy, light on his feet (qualities he retained to the end of his life) he would seem to have all the necessary qualities had not the brutalities of the bar proved quite so unendurable. One day, finding himself clamped between two heavy boards intended to straighten his knees he escaped his captors and ran home wearing nothing but his rehearsal slip and dancing pumps. As it was mid-winter he narrowly avoided pneumonia.^{vi} After a beating, his father agreed to allow him to take a less perilous path. Or at least to let him have singing lessons until his voice broke.

At the start he had all sorts of tutors, doting family cronies and retired artists for the most part with affectionate memories of virtuosi and a shared longing for forgotten musical mentors like Caldara, Vinci, Leo, Jommelli, Pergolesi et al in the pursuit of which the compositional template of the infant maestro became fixed on a legacy of exit arias and

sustained fioriture. Pacini forever cherished these superannuated idols and despised the attempts of nineteenth-century claimants to borrow their fame. After some tentative singing lessons he made his stage-début at Bologna where the family was then resident as an angel in an opera *Gedeone* by Stefano Pavesi.^{vii} His divine apparition before the public was not the message of hope that was intended: the cords by which the near-naked apostolic visitor was to be lowered from the centre of the proscenium arch became so entangled that the stage-hands shouted for them to be cut, at which the terrified Nino let out a yell that interested the house though the spectators could not (as yet) see its actual source. The music stopped and the half-strangled putto was lowered sideways into view so scared that he got the words of his heavenly communication mixed-up and everyone roared with laughter. Whenever Pavesi encountered Pacini in later life he said: “*Do you remember when you ruined my opera?*”

Following this essay in suspended animation Pacini (though it was much less well-paid and far less prestigious a *métier*) decided to become a composer. The archaic coterie among whom Luigi Pacini permanently sought refuge immediately intensified their tutorial efforts as a result of which a backlog of theatrical *convenienze*, modes and methods, traditional scoring, workmanlike counterpoint and so on became part and parcel of his musical makeup, tempered by snatches of up-to-date harmony introduced in the first place by Luigi Marchesi^{viii} - at least according to repute, and then later, if very briefly, by the redoubtable Padre Mattei^{ix} at the Liceo Filarmonico of Bologna. On an even later occasion in the paternal circuit he may have taken some lessons – or so at least he claimed - in composition from Bonaventura Furlanetto^x former Director of the Cappella di S. Marco in the musical Mecca of Venice. All these amounting to a capricious preparation for the stage.

Such lyrical stints lasted for just as long as his father had an engagement in the city concerned. His induction as a maestro was fragmentary and subject to unavoidable interruption but was real, intensive, and undoubtedly expert thanks to a background of practical knowledge from retired professionals aided by a lively curiosity and a surprising scholarly bent within an unassailably mischievous personality. These factors led to a comprehensive if idiosyncratic career.

It seems that Luigi pressed him to become a church composer, the only secure vocation music then offered, but Nino spurned the organ loft and abetted by his elderly entourage at sixteen years of age composed his first opera based upon a Goldoni play with a text supplied by a family friend. This was *Don Pomponio* and seems not to have been performed^{xi} but opened a tap never to stop running. Scores began to flow. At the end of 1813, thanks to paternal intervention his début as a putative maestro

occurred with an opera called *Annetta e Lucindo* and a prima at the newly-refurbished Teatro Santa Radegonda of Milan. A lifelong musical automaton had begun. In this particular instance, the printed libretto for *Annetta e Lucindo* took the trouble to include an apology for the youth of its author as a result of which the adolescent Pacini's operatic exordium was greeted with the kind of generous admiration Italian audiences reserved for children held up to be admired. No one expected the work to be momentous and it was not. *Annetta e Lucindo* was a string of solos with modestly linking recitative, a perfectly sensible recipe for a beginner.

Whatever its effect upon its listeners, however, it was clear that it was a first offering by a young man who had no youth. The opera was applauded - not as juvenile revelation - but for its air of maturity thanks to the near-geriatric coterie surrounding him. In no way was it a harbinger of the teenage misfit about to appear. It was a dutiful essay whose academic virtues *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* reported in its solemn columns^{xii} quoting the breathless insistence of its progenitor that he was "*studying Haydn and Mozart*" a statement intended exclusively for Germanic ears and not even hinting at his trust in a gamut of unmodish composers once the staple of his famous father and friends.

Even these serious *altromontani*, however, cannot have been unaware that he was born on and for the stage. His apparent modesty drawing a protective cloak of aged maestri around his small frame. This unusual adolescent egging them on to adventures that brought them little credit but much diversion. For them (*pace* Pavesi's *Gedeone*) the ingenious youngster was an angelic messenger to warm their old age. In the next two years with their antique encouragement he wrote a handful of small operas, all slight, all mischievous and dated, full of old-fashioned pranks no less barbed than amusing.

It was this elderly coro too that laid the ground for his *real* inauguration. One that would put a cap on the earlier pubescent series with the most extravert operatic collusion imaginable - a bizarre pairing with an eminent operatic versifier three times his age and a trio of impudent spoofs that set all Milan laughing. Venerable antagonism and a beginner's effrontery back-to-back before a convulsed audience with a mixture of cynicism and cheek quite unlike anything that particular stage would ever be willing to have to endure again. Such was the impact of Giovanni Pacini in his very first years.

But before this could happen Milan became untenable. War and insurrection emptied the city. Everyone unconnected with fighting and politics fled. Giovanni followed his father to Firenze where they joined a band of enforced exiles and in tandem with such unemployed talent took over the Teatro Pergola. An *ad hoc* opera/ballet company was formed with make-do costumes and tattered sets. The season began with an expert *L'italiana in Algeri* of the *pesarese* which escapist dream triumphed as was to be expected; then came a ballet *L'incendio di Troia* by Lorenzo Panzieri - far too topical at that fiery moment in the political meltdown but well received too, if less so. After this came two offerings by the juvenile maestro; first a flimsy *farsa*, *La Rosina* with a text by Giuseppe Palomba which was memorable only for one delicious duet 'Se voi non mi diverte' whose title in retrospect seems to have been rather like a challenge followed by an *opera buffa* of more substantial facture: *L'ambizione delusa*, a complicated *dramma buffo* in due atti staged in May 1814 which true to its title suffered a noisy and monumental fiasco. Inconsequential witticisms in a score without novelty fell on unfriendly ears at this political watershed and was dismissed in a gale of hissing and booing.

Its composer - not mincing his words - does not conceal its unhappy reception despite the efforts of its heroine, the celebrated Maria Marcolini, and careful rehearsal. He says too that as a result of its removal he was compelled to give singing lessons to survive. Another augury, together with the failure itself - his very first - of lean times to come in his theatrical destiny.

It seems probable that some sort of reckoning was under way. That there was resentment among the cast of *L'ambizione delusa*. Luigi was pushing his offspring as he always did but this time with negative results. A series of dominating roles expressly tailored for his voice provoking a hostile backlash backstage. But there could in fact have been a more validly professional explanation: the plot of *L'ambizione delusa* was pure routine and Palomba's text even less inspiring than that of *La Rosina* - a *mezzo* heroine of Rossinian facture courted by a *tenorino* lover in a crowd of hovering *buffi* in which Luigi was far too prominent did not impress a ragbag company of experienced artists. The music was not without merit but its conception far too trite for a company of vocal experts eager to endorse their professional standards in a sophisticated house and a rejection redoubled by cynical summer audience and an exhausted and hard-pressed cast. All this notwithstanding it was Luigi's *ambizione* for his son that was called into question by rebellious delusion. Not that of the son.^{xiii}

This first fiasco changed little however. The audience hissed in vain. It would be some years before Giovanni Pacini could truly be called a master of his own operatic soul.

Another Tuscan engagement followed, this time in a less challenging Pisa. Here, at the Teatro Costanti, the young Nino staged a *piccola farsa* on 18 December of that same year which was received with enthusiasm, even with amused equanimity. Pisa was not Firenze and *L'escavazione del tesoro* may well have benefitted from the charity of its spectators - Pacini himself says that its good reception was more out of kindness to his smooth cheeks than to any fundamental merit either of music or plot. A minor success merely in an un-memorable Christmas season it should be noted that music from this passingly insignificant opera would reappear almost at once with a new title, plot and cast of singers.^{xiv} And it filled empty seats and pockets. The composer had a benefit performance on the third evening that brought him all of fifty francs, ensuring penurious survival after months of exile.

And too, such an excavated treasure heralded a welcome closure to foreign threats. Return to the *status quo* in much of the Italian peninsula being now in the air, together with father and family Giovanni set off eagerly to retrace his steps to Milan.

Some kind of intellectual re-evaluation had taken place in the interim. The composer insists that at this time he had been employed by a homesick Frenchman to play Gluck's scores to him - including *Alceste*, both the *Ifigénie*, and *Armida*. But any re-evaluation - or revelation - if such was the case - being merely pianistic and in a Pisa drawing-room, would be in utter contrast with his next musical offering, the opera that marked his reappearance in Milan, *Gli sponsali de'silfi*, was more than appropriate to the carnival season at the Teatro de'Fildrammatici and not on the surface evidence of any serious musical realignment. To all intents and purposes the opera was a light-hearted sport that aroused gales of irreverent laughter despite some carping about the quality of the cast.^{xv} With a libretto by Francesco Marconi, in fact, this *Gli sponsali de'silfi* had a neat and engaging score and sparse instrumentation of the kind that Pacini tended to deprecate in his later career. Slight, skittish, witty and perfectly-timed, it was a covert commentary upon the mood of the Lombardian capital in 1815 where one detestable occupying power had departed and the city was blissfully engaged in welcoming home its occupying predecessor! An opera whose irony may indeed have owed something to Gluck. Even if his music has not changed in structure or content on his return, the composer has evolved on closer examination.

In its wake and now with a claim to be a "name" in the capital Pacini settled down to divide his career between Venice and Milan. The vivacity of the first and the social standing of the second from now on would supply the canvas upon which he could depict his burgeoning status.

Melodramatic life in Italy was quickening though Giovanni Pacini could not have been aware of it. Giuseppe Verdi had drawn his first breath; Michele Carafa had returned from icy débâcle in Russia; Gioacchino Rossini now reigned in place of his vanquished idol, Napoléon; Mayr was a great star; Carlo Coccia and Nicola Vaccai - both basically under Neapolitan influence had come on stream in their different ways; while Gaetano Donizetti and Vincenzo Bellini at disparate ends of the peninsula were on the brink of arrival.

It is at this pregnant moment in operatic history that Pacini began his fruitful partnership with Angelo Anelli. A pairing that would bring his juvenile high-jinks to a head. This unusual youngster's taste for antique collaborators was to reach an apotheosis. Anelli ^{xvi} though fêted as a clever librettist with a handful of important texts to his credit, a literary malcontent and a freemason who wore his apron on his sleeve, a professional outsider who courted confrontation and camp subversion whenever he could - to the astonishment of all had found a kindred spirit in this feckless youngster.



Angelo Anelli 1761-1820

Their first collaboration fell far short of expectation, he and the teenage stripling concocted a sequel to his *Ser Marcantonio*, a cruel comedy of 1810 set to music memorably by Stefano Pavesi and due to achieve permanent fame worldwide very many years later as the source for Donizetti's *Don Pasquale*.

But the *Il seguito di Ser Marcantonio* of this strange coupling at the Teatro San Moise in Venezia did not encroach on the future Donizettian masterpiece in any way whatsoever. Whereas the Bergomasc maestro offered an unforgettable re-run of the original Anelli plot the Anelli/Pacini's recreation of 1815 was devised merely as a *sequel* to *Ser Marcantonio* and proposing nothing to modify its prototype argument. Nor did its reception even begin to threaten *Don Pasquale* in spite of a witty presentation. The fact is, ill-timed and unimaginatively sung before rows of wooden faces their joint re-creation was conspicuous only for some scatological intentions and a monumental boredom on the part of the audience. Pacini himself recorded its passing with a scathing "*come corpo morto cadde.*" (At Ferrara some five years later and Lazarus-like, *Il seguito di Ser Marcantonio* arose to have another lease of life)

But the young composer's taste for veteran poets remained undimmed. And then its successor opera, *L'ingenua*, with its libretto by Francesco Marconi had an even worse reception. It was not his fault nor that of his librettist. Though at the height of his career he might enjoy unlimited adoration from *primedonne* it was not at all the case at the start. Commissioned by the neighbouring Teatro San Benedetto in that same city on 4 May 1816 *L'ingenua* foundered in one of those acrimonious wars of attrition that were such a feature of life backstage in the days when famous singers had all the musical reins in their hands.

The mezzo-soprano Rosa Morandi, primadonna of the summer *stagione* at the Teatro San Benedetto was fighting a running battle with the rest of the cast. New operas by Coccia, Vaccai and Pacini fell like hay before her.^{xvii} *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* did not let the occasion pass without drawing its own smug conclusion that Pacini's *L'ingenua* was simply too feeble to follow Rossini's *Il turco in Italia*^{xviii} (starring his famous father) despite the puff in the printed libretto stating untruthfully that he was an "*allievo dell'Istituto Filarmonico di Venezia.*" And indeed, apart from an amusing drunken scene written for paternal exposition, there was very little of interest in *L'ingenua*.

But the horrified Germans did not care to print the whole story: Morandi's absolute determination to sing only the pieces she chose and in the way she chose in every opera of the *stagione*, tampering with *all* the scores she was contracted to sing, confronting everyone and everything - composers and fellow artists however important or unimportant with her demands - had led to a stalemate of sufficient violence to banish the

entire season from the stage. Pacini's opera vanished like a mirage with all the rest.

One positive feature only of this abortive season was indicative of economic advance, however, if in its way almost as perverse: Pacini received a commission for his first "official" cantata. This was *La felicità nel Lario* for the Teatro Nuovo of Como and a trailblazer in what would be his very long list of *scorretto* political cantatas. Its dedicatee was the King of Lombardy - the Emperor Francesco I - who arrived to grace the royal box of the Teatro Nuovo and hear a specially commissioned musical welcome-back after his protracted absence from northern Italy with a musical entertainment whose concept challenged the entire gamut of nationalistic political views. This particular spectacle was truly lavish and flattering for the protagonists and still-obscure composer with a décor by the glorious star of La Scala - the gifted architect/set-designer Alessandro Sanquirico no less - and featured a monumental pasteboard *Arco di trionfo* to greet the Austrian Sovereign's footfall on the Como lakeside to be lauded by a coro of five Olympian soloists with suitably sycophantic verse by Francesco Marconi mellifluously set by Pacini.^{xix} This cantata, exceptionally well received, enhanced the young composer notably in official circles.

Before this year actually ended there was a great convocation of the old men dear to the maestro with a burlesque component no doubt missing on that last occasion. On 22 November 1816 appeared on stage at La Pergola in Firenze (with a cantankerously spiky argument by Angelo Anelli) *Lo sprezzatore schernito* in honour of Geltrude Righetti-Giorgi.^{xx} This multi-composer *burletta in musica a quattro voce in un atto* boasted a coven of maestri whose combined ages would have been stratospheric except that it included the nineteen-year-old "catanese." It featured an overture by Ferdinando Paër,^{xxi} an aria by Ercole Paganini,^{xxii} a duetto by Pietro Carlo Guglielmi,^{xxiii} an aria by Francesco Sampieri,^{xxiv} another by Pietro Generali,^{xxv} a duettino by Marco Portogallo^{xxvi} and another by Giuseppe Farinelli^{xxvii} the whole headed by a cavatina for *basso buffo* by the barely adult maestro as cheerleader for this veteran assemblage.

It would seem that such a sabbath of ancient sorcerers was the special choice of the formidable Righetti-Giorgi and given a seamlessly happy performance. Louis Spohr, who was in the audience, was astounded at the extent of the voice of the diva (two and a half octaves) but found her florid singing far too aggressive for Northern ears. He made no comment on its elderly constitution, alas, nor on Pacini's cavatina except that the latter's 'Tren la donna quattro mali' with its execrable comic verse was sung impeccably by Paolo Rosich.^{xxviii} But, in such company and after a traumatic year, Giovanni must have thought himself in Heaven at long last.

Headed by *La chiarina*^{xxix} in Venice, the year of 1817 was to prove to be the most memorable of all in the ascent to fame of the young composer. A year of advance on all fronts marking both his prowess as a resourceful opportunist and staking place in the romantic evolution now about to take shape in the shadow of Rossini.

Could it have been his damp squibs that set Pacini on course for lyrical revenge, had *L'ambizione delusa* and the antics of Morandi put him on the same wavelength as Anelli? Once he and the rancorous librettist met again in Milan they put their heads together to plot what must have been the most memorable confrontation of the day as well as a source of wicked joy to the chronically acrimonious poet. As far as Pacini was concerned it was this hilarious coup that put his name on the map.^{xxx}

It all began when Angelo Anelli became seriously annoyed with Vincenzo Monti^{xxxi} with a starting date of 6 January 1816. During the French occupation of Italy abjectly prostrate before a triumphant Bonaparte the vainglorious Monti - his Italian *poet laureate* - on this January occasion and predating *La felicità nel Lario* was discovered to have supplied the text for a congratulatory cantata to rejoice in the return to power of the Austrian Emperor

*'Il ritorno di Astrea' Azione drammatica da rappresentarsi nel I e R
Teatro alla Scala alla presenza delle LL.MM.II.RR. L'imperatore e re
l'imperatrice e regina*

which was greeted with antagonism, amusement and despair by Monti's admirers and detractors. Its music was by Joseph Weigl and the resounding literary rhetoric "*ricevuti con vivi e ripetuti applausi*" according to the official press gave rise to nothing less than pure choleric fury on the part of the long derided and despised poetic Angelo.

But it was simply a point of departure. A few weeks later the incoming impresario of La Scala, the *cavaliere* Angelo Petracchi, launched a competition to ensure a supply of lofty texts to add lustre to his great stage now about to be returned to autonomy after years of rigid control. Radical in intention it invited selected poets to write worthy libretti to be submitted to a jury presided over by none other than Vincenzo Monti!^{xxxii}

All this was too much for Angelo Anelli who was not among the selected candidates as a result taking a wildly sarcastic view of the entire project, its intentions, its management and most specially the seamless effrontery of its presiding 'Sunflower' whose Gallic stance in occupied

Italy, had, in his view, “*seriously damaged the reputation of Italian poetry.*”^{xxxiii}

Without hesitation Anelli began a war of words publishing a searing directive ‘*Il ritorno della clemenza*’^{xxxiv} jeering at Monti’s ‘*Astrea*’ mimicking its text and parodying its dedication to great effect - a merciless epistle read with great joy in intellectual and liberal circles.

It was the offended former laureate’s wounded riposte in the *Biblioteca Italiana* claiming international protection that added unwise verbal fuel to the whole business, above all simply resulting in adding Germaine de Staël’s name to Anelli’s list of targets.

The whole thing smouldered and burst into flame in the following carnival. On 2 January 1817 in the modest Teatro Re – a vaguely anti-establishment stage confronting La Scala on the opposite side of the square on the site of a vanished church in the via San Salvatore – there emerged a thoroughly disreputable spectacle: *Dalla beffa il disinganno ossia La poetessa, drama buffo in un atto*, an undisguised slanderous confection with the bland assertion in its heading that “...*Per una gara collo Scannamuse, in meno di otto ore il presente drama fu inventato e dettato da Gasparo Scopabirbe.*”

It proposed a riotous entertainment which could have left no one in any doubt about its targets, its implications or its intentions. At first shocked, then delighted, intellectual Milan was convulsed by a wicked compound of libel, invective and improper insinuations about the intimate relations between a priapic Vincenzo Monti - thinly disguised as ‘Giovan Matteo’ and sung by Luigi Pacini - and a blowsy Egeria (Camilla Ferlendis) got-up to look like Germaine de Staël (*La poetessa*), whose contribution to the *Biblioteca Italiana* had included an unwise defence of the limited skills of the unfortunate Monti as a translator.

It offered a feast of scathing ridicule for a learned audience at the expense of the two sacred targets. Now and then quoting from Mme de Staël’s ‘Corinne’ and the poet laureate, above all supplied with a glittering score by Giovanni Pacini featuring a zany selection of frivolous musical quotation and snatches of popular song while investing in quotes from Simon Mayr’s hysterical *Che originali* (1798) with its absurd personaggi and grotesque indulgence in make-believe discovery. The whole sung and danced with a verve not far short of indecency.

This “*Marriage of Inconvenience*” between the wounded Napoleonic apologist and the internationally celebrated female literary authority in exile led to Anelli’s parting dismissal of them both...

‘Alla Beffa il giubbilo

*Succeda e il Disinganno
Chi semina discordie
Sempre ha la beffe e il danno.
Forse a più d'un proficua
Questa lezion sarà'*

Initially disbelieving, then outraged, the suffused poet ran to the Viceroy (the Archduke Anton Victor) at this personal attack upon the dignity of distinguished notables in his realm and with his amused compliance the naughty spectacle was shut-down after three neo-apoplectic appearances.^{xxxv}

According to plan, its authors then stepped-up their torment. Hardly had the theatre closed when the curtain rose again on an even more slanderous offering. On 11 January emerged a second version: *Il matrimonio per procura* - a gross repeat of the earlier scurrilous cohabitation the joke being that its libellous components were exactly the same as that of the preceding - its arias the same, sung by the same vocal protagonists to the same music with replacement texts ingeniously contrived by Anelli to fit the music that Giovanni had already supplied.

With new and even more fantastic sets, its libretto written "*in meno di nove ore*" (which might even have been true) the entire coup fully packaged in advance: new costumes, parts distributed and rehearsed; libretto reprinted; sets re-built and re-painted and with its distribution now including Serafina Rubini and Domenico Ronconi bent to the same wicked task in an even more depraved farcical confection. Its fake wedding causing such a furore in the streets around La Scala that once again a laughing Viceroy was begged to intercede and it too was removed as swiftly as before.

But Monti's (second) sigh of relief was misplaced. In a theatre packed to the limits, the audience now completely aware of the malicious intentions of its progenitors the curtain rose yet again. This third essay in derision: *Il carnevale di Milano* opened on 23 February with an identical cast, identical music and identical verve but even more ridiculous settings (Chinese) and costumes, with a libretto by '*Paolo Lattanzio*' and a parade of parodies in a succession of carnival masks among whom were all the earlier targets posturing wildly as never before. With two small changes: an now enchanted Pacini had added a memorable aria for an extravagantly dressed Ser Gasparo (sung by Ronconi) and a new and glossy finale of triumph to bring the whole to a riotously improper conclusion.

At this third flowering the Imperial Governor washed his hands and refused to intervene further. Monti fled to the country and the culprits

hugged-themselves publicly on stage with self-satisfied glee before an incandescent house full to bursting.^{xxxvi}

However disreputable, this trio of *farse* was a sequence not without historic roots, *opera buffa* had found itself once more conforming to its traditional task: that of deflating the pompous and bringing the powerful to ridicule. An ethos dear to Pacini's old men the century before.

The dismay of its victims and the delight of its victors had added hugely to the fun. But for the composer this trio was more than simple notoriety; his perverse skill in turning the "Tartar" music of *Dalla beffa il disinganno* into the "Chinese ballet" of *Il carnevale di Milano* gave him a new professional fillip. From now on he was a composer to be noted. His fluency was confirmed - that he could flower on the spin of a coin was a real portent for the future. His melodies were whistled in the streets. And for the benefit of posterity they were not lost in the usual way of parallel musical ephemera - sections of the brazen score ended-up in Pacini's wildly successful *Il barone di Dolsheim* the following year.

It was one of the very rare occasions when the tiny Teatro Re could get in its oar before the giant neighbour across the way.^{xxxvii}

Pacini's romantic potential was not in demand by any such frivolous assault. Nor did the scores that immediately followed confirm him to be anything but an entertainer. Only five days later the Teatro Re mounted a light-hearted coda: *La bottega da caffè* with its Goldonian charm as adapted by Anelli. Never again would Pacini find such a colleague, they had arrived at a joint fantasy rarely achieved on stage.

Alas, it was not destined to last, their final stage venture came unstuck. *Piglia il mondo come viene* had actually been written before the Monti *farse* (the autograph score is dated "1816"). Was this too early for a symbiosis to become truly unassailable? Mounted in the wake of their triumph at the Teatro Re on 29 May 1817 and with enthusiasm for its authors still running high the first act was applauded with cheering and demand for repeats, Pacini and the poet embraced several times before the stage curtain, but the second act fell so flat that the audience shuffled out in silence. Though the cast was exemplary, including his father and most of the anti-Monti stars *Piglia il mondo come viene*^{xxxviii} was withdrawn and never seen again.

It was a severe blow. Anelli was ill. Even Pacini's fertile pen was stymied by this deluge of opera, He had staged no less than five – possibly six^{xxxix} operas in the course of one year and another six month

period was to elapse before he took the stage again, and then he re-emerged as a different composer.

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How this fundamental evolution came about has never been clear. Maybe such a burst of levity proposed a compensating awareness of the ephemeral nature of comic success? Perhaps he knew he had gone too far? Probably it was a dawning recognition that the real destiny of Italian opera lay somewhere other than in comic defamation. At any rate it was news of the radical season of 1816 in Naples with Rossini's *Otello* and Carafa's *Gabriella di Vergi* that brought the stream of Pacinian *farse* to an end.

It will always be obvious that this composer was never less than modish in his choice of arguments. That one ear would always be bent to current modes. He had never wanted to be a mono-directional maestro – a trait that would be in evidence throughout his life. His view of comic entertainment had never been totally immune from extraordinary imagery, to exaggerated depiction, extravagant behaviour and the bizarre and picturesque – a fantasy often enough reflected in the moist eye of popular fiction. And then probably it was a chance encounter with another librettist, this time with the Venice-based Gaetano Rossi^{xl} whose well-known preoccupation with rocks and ruins and *semi-seria* plots would bring about a radical change of direction in the young composer. This poet was the other side of the coin from Angelo Anelli, all-encompassing in his literary roots, open-minded, and accessible to every current trend with an ear to sentimental drama. After 1817 the stage was ready for change all over Europe, the goods-and-chattels of a prospective Romanticism already endorsed by the onset of a *Restaurazione* which brought money back into opera houses everywhere, encouraging composers to write for bigger voices and bigger orchestras – *via sacra* to a more expansive artform.

Romanticism on the musical stage in the Italian peninsula was not due to any passionate access to composers across the Alps (whatever *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* would have liked to suggest), if it was due to any foreign impulse at all it was due to Gallic literature whose wide dissemination was the unintended lyrical legacy of Napoleonic occupation. Pacini was certainly perfectly familiar with Andea Leone Tottola's^{xli} high profile libretto for Valentino Fioravanti's *Adelaide maritata* (Teatro Nuovo, Naples 1812) a changeling grandchild of Baculard d'Arnaud's lachrymose "Les amants malheureux ou le comte de Comminge" from as far distant as 1765 which had gone the rounds in a cultured Europe and had won a surprisingly extended operatic destiny.^{xlii} In a truly remarkable move Pacini – at this critical moment in

his career - asked Rossi to supply him with a similar text.^{xliii} An inspirational change of focus as the opera was yet again intended for the Teatro Re.

This was not a house where audiences expected to weep with emotion. Its reputation remained confrontational and would continue to be so for any identifiable future.

ADELAIDE E COMINGIO

Melodramma semiserio in due atti. Libretto by Gaetano Rossi

Source: 1. François-Thomas-Marie de Baculard d'Arnaud *Les amants malheureux ou Le comte de Comminge* Paris 1765. 2. Giacomoantonio Gualzetti d'Eriso *Gli amori di Comingio, Adelaide maritata, and Adelaide e Comingio romiti* [It.trans. Naples 1789]

3. Andrea Leone Tottola *Adelaide maritata* (music by Valentino Fioravanti) Naples 1812

1stPerf: Teatro Re, Milan 30 December 1817

Cast: *Carolina Brizzi* (Adelaide), *Domenico Ronconi* (Comingio), *Luigi Pacini* (Maresciallo di Benavides), *Michele Cavara* (Conte di Benavides). *Antonio Razzani* (Lorenzo), *Serafina Rubini* (Lisaura), *Angelo Ferri* (Alberico)

The impact of this his new offering was to be completely unpredictable. Staged at the end of December *Adelaide e Comingio* was received with handkerchiefs and moist eyes (though it should be observed that *farse* had to be played between the acts to keep house traditions intact!) Against all the odds Pacini carried the day even with the critics. Yesterday's *enfant terrible* was suddenly a respectable maestro. In this way the year of 1817 was allowed to continue its evolutionary course.

Romantically paced and coloured, there were good arias and ensembles for everyone in the cast and though not deprived of humour (Luigi Pacini had a major role) the wistful ending left many spectators sniffing happily as they left their seats. Remarkably the composer's Leipzig-based critic had something good to say about the opera: that Pacini "*began to flower*"; and that some of the arie were "*beautiful and new*".^{xliv} This *Adelaide e Comingio* the very first Pacini opera to circulate widely, getting a boost the following year when Giuditta Pasta sang Adelaide at Padua – a high profile staging for which (the Pacini touch to come) he supplied a large quantity of new music. The celebrated soprano remained faithful to the opera for some years, singing her *aria di sortita* 'Alme belle, che spiegate' in concerts initiating a gala performance in Rome when the opera was revived under the replacement title of *Isabella e Florange* on 13 April 1819 before the Emperor Francesco I for his State Visit.^{xlv}

Adelaide e Comingio – in many ways was his real beginning as an adult protagonist remained in the Italian repertoire for two decades until such time as the romantically sentimental melodrama faded before the arrival of the "*veleni, pugnali, e morte*" of the Donizetti/Bellini apogee.

ⁱ Correspondingly Pacini makes no mention of Verdi in his memoirs

ⁱⁱ His date of birth is almost invariably wrong in encyclopedias, where it appears as 17 February. His baptismal certificate reads as follows:

**MAGNAE ARCHIEPISCOPALIS CURIAE GENERALE
NECNON ET CIVITAS CATANENSIS
UNICUM PAROCHIALE ARCHIVUM**

Die undecima Februarii 1796

Ego Sacerdos Franciscus Xaverius Riccioli Concappellanus Curatus Sacramentalis Ecclesiae Curatae Sanctae Mariae, translatae in Ecclesiam Sanctiae Mariae de Auxiliis hujus Urbis Cataniae, baptizavi infantem in hora 10 circiter natum ex Isabella Paulillo, et procreatum ab Aloysio Pacini, jugalibus, cui imposita fuere nomina Joannes, Vincentius, Benedictus, Patrinus vero fuit Ill.mus Don Vincentius Benedictus Paternò, et Tedeschi.

It will be apparent that Pacini shared the same musical god-father as Bellini and partly the same Christian name - as a consequence of which the latter's fervent antagonism might have found additional fuel for its fire

ⁱⁱⁱ She is often reported to have been a singer upon the evidence of papers surviving from her husband's engagement at the private "*teatrino in Via Abate Ferrara*" of Catania where her name features on the payroll of artists. But this could have been a financial disposition only or that she was among the *comparsa* (she was in a state of advanced pregnancy at the time). When her son created an opera for family entertainment *Il convitato di pietra* in 1832 in which his immediate family was recruited to sing it is notable that Isabella was the *only* member not to take part. She was still alive in the early 1850's

^{iv} According to a fragmentary autobiographical memoir in the hand of the composer conserved in the Fondo Pacini at Pescia. There is no trace of his birth at Popiglio di Piteglio (Pistoia) where he is often claimed to have been born but which might well have seen the family origins. Luigi Pacini was educated in Naples under Giacomo Tritto which would appear to confirm his Roman orientation

^v The house where Pacini was born, 12 Piazza Sant'Antonio in Catania, on one side of a dusty square on two levels with a few battered plants and some benches is not far from the via Abate Ferrara where Luigi Pacini was engaged to sing. There is a bust of Giovanni Pacini on the facade and a memorial plaque. Bellini's more frequented birthplace is a few streets away

^{vi} Two of his uncles were dancers. His revenge may have been the ballets he insisted upon inserting into many of his operas in later life (ballets were almost invariably hissed by audiences who wanted only to hear the latest diva). But he was probably impelled to do so by modish Parisian emulation

^{vii} The diverting account of his stage debut appears in his memoirs (pages 3-4) but lacks, as so often in that amusing book, the correct date. Pacini gives a date "*quaresima del 1809*" whereas the printed libretto reads as follows:

Il trionfo di Gedeone
Dramma sacro per musica
da rappresentarsi nel Teatro del Corso
la quadragesima del 1810
in Bologna

Its failure (with Pacini's assistance) was so complete that the unhappy Pavesi only consented to revive it in concert form in Modena ten years later, and then with no juvenile angels hanging around. Pacini insists that he was so nervous suspended from the shrouds that he sang 'Non temer Zabaion' instead of 'Non temer Gedeon' which saucy plea may (or may not) have been actually uttered. He enjoyed inventing comic anecdotes about himself. Stefano Pavesi (1779-1850) almost immediately responded to the Pacini-led fiasco at Bologna replacing it with another *Dramma sacro Giobbe* (also of 1810)

viii These lessons may well be apocryphal, the great *castrato* Luigi Marchesi could scarcely have been expected to give any sort of lessons to a child!

ix Stanislao Mattei (1750-1825), teacher, amongst others, of Rossini and Donizetti.

x If nothing else, Bonaventura Furlanetto (1738-1817) author of a Treatise on counterpoint, may have been the inspiration for Pacini's own didactic ambitions much later in life.

xi The obliging family friend and librettist was "Il signor dottor Paganini d'Oleggio" an aged paternal crony. Autograph fragments of this initial opera have survived (in the Fondo Pacini, in the Biblioteca Civica di Pescia)

xii AMZ April 1814, 231 "*Den 18ten Octbre. gab man im Theater St. Radagonda (sic): Annetta e Lucinda (sic), eine Farce, mit Musik von Hrn. Pacini, dem sechszehnjährigen Sohne des obenerwähnten Buffo. Sie wurde mit Beyfall aufgenommen, und ist die erste Oper, welche der junge P. zu schreiben unternahm; er gab dadurch viele Beweise von musikal. Talent. Mit Vergnügen bemerkte ich, dass ihm auch die deutsche Musik nicht ganz fremd sey. Fahrt er fort, wie er begonnen, so kann er einst brav werden.*"

[Trans. 18th October Annetta e Lucinda was played at the Teatro S. Radegonda, a farce with music by Pacini the 16 year old son of the buffo. The opera was applauded and is the first opera which the composer has undertaken to write. He thereby gave many proofs of musical talent. I noticed with pleasure that he is also no complete stranger to German music. If he goes on as he has started he will be very good one day"]

This brief notice was Pacini's honeymoon with this famous German publication and it would not last.

xiii Though *L'ambizione delusa* (surely one of the most appropriate titles available for a disappointed apprentice) was treated badly it was more more than once revived - even being described later as his "*applauditissima opera*"

xiv The following title was *La ballerina raggiratrice*, farsetta in un atto, with a replacement text by Giuseppe Palomba reappearing promptly at La Pergola in Florence with exactly the same music. A trial run it would appear for a composer reusing an intact score to supply the music for a brand new opera, a feat to be repeated momentarily with hilarious results in the Teatro Re in 1817

xv It is not impossible that some of the younger Pacini family members took part - an exercise in economic barrel-scraping that did not escape the alert *milanesi*. A hint of this emerged

when he composed his *Il convitato di pietra* (1832) for a family staging, including arie sung or rehearsed for him by members of his family on earlier occasions

^{xvi} Angelo Anelli (1761-1820)

^{xvii} This perennially difficult diva also succeeded in ruining Vaccai's apprentice opera *Malvina* (8 June 1816), as well as Coccia's *Etelinda* (26 June 1816), neither of which, like Pacini's *L'ingenua* which had preceded them in the same season with the same prima donna ever recovered. Luigi Pacini sang in all three

^{xviii} *AmZ* July 1816, 49

^{xix} Pacini's manuscript calls it "*La felicità di Lario*" as the autograph score sold at Sotheby's in London on 6 December 1991 confirms. The classical name "Larius" for Lake Como had long been italianised as "Lario" Pacini's cantata is a voluble and colourful piece for five soloists and orchestra which, supported by the full weight of the I&R Teatro alla Scala (together with Sanquirico), shows how promising his potential was viewed there. A support that would be in evidence later - most notably in his conflicts with Bellini

^{xx} Geltrude Righetti-Giorgi (1793-?)

^{xxi} Ferdinando Paër (1771-1839)

^{xxii} Ercole Paganini (1770-1824)

^{xxiii} Pietro Carlo Guglielmi (1763-1827)

^{xxiv} The *marchese* Francesco Sampieri (1790-1863)

^{xxv} Pietro Generali (1783-1832)

^{xxvi} Marcos Antonio da Fonseca (dit *Portogallo*) (1762-1830)

^{xxvii} Giuseppe Farinelli (1769-1836)

^{xxviii} The *pasticcio* nature of *Lo sprezzatore schernito* is self-evident, but some pieces were written expressly for the occasion and as one or two of the composers were apparently present it is probably best described as a "collaborative" score

^{xxix} Perhaps a spin-off from Anelli's preparation with Farinelli of the text for *Lo sprezzatore schernito*. *La chiarina* was put on in a hurry and taken off equally quickly. Pacini had merely supplied a surface refurbishing to some of the more dated music to his own taste rather than to that of the Venetians

^{xxx} As well as in the black books of the hard-pressed Austrian Governor

^{xxxi} Vincenzo Monti (1754-1828). His claims as a translator earned him the contempt of Italian scholars especially his classical posturing in view of a notoriously poor command of ancient Greek. All this had been brought to a high level of ridicule by his enthusiasm for Germaine de Staël and her fundamental article *Sulla maniera e utilità delle traduzioni*

in the *Biblioteca Italiana* with its contentious contribution to the on-going polemic between Classicists and Romanticists

xxxii On 5 April 1816 Felice Romani was awarded 1.000 Austrian lire for his text of *La testa di bronzo o sia La capanna solitaria* to be set to music by Carlo Soliva.

xxxiii Monti's unstable political affinities have been extravagantly criticised. A poet with conventional papal affiliation in his youth, he first was an apologist for the *ancien-régime* with his Dantesque 'Bassvilliana', later making a bold U turn by accepting a republican Chair of Rhetoric at Pavia. This was followed by his appointment as an officer of the Cisalpine Republic and then by the post of Official Poet of Napoleon's Kingdom of Italy. With the return of the Austrians he began to write poems in honour of the Dual Monarchy bobbing to the surface like a proverbial cork

xxxiv Angelo Anelli *Il trionfo della clemenza* "componimento in terza rima pel solenne ingresso in Milano delle LL MM II RR pubblicato pel fausto giorno natalizio di SM L'Imperatore e Re Francesco I°"

xxxv This banning has a parallel in the suppression of Joseph Haydn's juvenile opera *Der neue krumme teufel* (1752) with a similar justification in that it too was a libelous satire upon a theatrical notability - in this case Giuseppe Afflisio. This last opera also survived for just three appearances. The Pacini/Anelli offering had far less a decorous sequel but Pacini (who had studied Haydn) was probably aware of the parallel. Could it have been Pacini, in fact, rather than Anelli, who proposed the actual sequences of the 1817 spoof?

xxxvi This precise appearance of these *tre operette* (as Pacini calls them) is confirmed by Pacini himself in *Le mie memorie artistiche* (p 11); by *AmZ* July 1817, 470; and by the dated libretti. It is clear even from the state of the surviving fragmented autograph manuscripts in the Ricordi Archive that considerable musical preparation went into the planning of these disreputable farse, including a bold change of plot, and some very considerable re-phasing of the music. It is a confusing picture, but the existing printed libretti establish the sequence and the roles. The actual music (and no doubt some of the actual manuscript pages used for the three *farse*) re-appears partially in the score of *Il barone di Dolsheim* (La Scala 23 September 1818) in a decidedly cheeky riposte to the authorities who had banned these mischievous operas a year earlier. Incestuously united in an attempt to discredit Vincenzo Monti and his literary crony Giuseppe Acerbi, these three *farse* can easily be referred back to the bitter war-of-words surrounding the publishing of the *Biblioteca Italiana* in 1816 in which Mme de Staël played a leading role. Anelli was incensed by Monti's dismissal of his talents in this latter and set about revenge.

In the *Programma di Sala* for the performance of an amusing edition of some of this music at Pesaro in 2001 Federico Agostinelli produced a vivid study of the bellicose event in itself a comedy. He also extracted from the remaining pages - some of them discarded pages in the Ricordi Archive - an opera with the title "*La poetessa idrofoba*" (this last derived from one of Anelli's sallies) from which he made a performing version. This was most diverting and valuable but has little or no correlation with the printed libretti. The pages of music used were not all autograph and the total result owes much to Rossini, a certain amount to Mayr (and a *frisson* to Johann Christian Bach). Though a setting of sorts can indeed be extracted from the disorderly surviving pages there is no certainty that any modern version is in any way definitive or establishes a precise priority for the music. The "Donna Taddea" of *La poetessa idrofoba* may well have parodied Monti as he suggests - knockabout comedy favours transvestism - but the stage appearance of "Donna Aristéa" [cfr *Che originali* of Simon Mayr] her actual counterpart in *Dalla beffa il disinganno* was contemporaneously reported as having been made-up to resemble Mme de Staël a special target and a blow below-the-belt like Ugo Foscolo's "*The Great Translator of Homer's translators*"). It is

unwise to be too dogmatic about precedence in any recreation as there has been re-circulated music and a choice of text. The precise dating and content of these three *farse* requires something more specific in view of extant contemporary reports

xxxvii *Il barone di Dolsheim*, libretto by Felice Romani. Teatro alla Scala, Milan 23 September 1818

xxxviii Though *Piglia il mondo come viene* was certainly a valedictory gesture it was not their last collaboration, this was the cantata *L'omaggio più grato* whose text was supplied by the irascible Anelli for a performance at the Teatro dei Quattro Compadroni at Pavia in 1819. Anelli died the following year

xxxix Sources, not highly reliable, name a "Pacini" opera called *I virtuosi di teatro* for this year which may, if it existed at all, have been a *pasticcio* with this rather overused title in operatic chronologies of the day

xl Gaetano Rossi (1774-1855) Hugely fertile librettist whose career was as long as that of Metastasio but who never claimed any such merit, or even any merit at all. Somewhat mechanical in the unrelenting delivery of his verse but loyal and reliable his true métier was *opera semiseria* where he could claim an innovatory role in the early decades of the century

xli Andrea Leone Tottola (?-1831) A French-inclined scholar of obscure origins and antecedents, a priest in lower orders with a taste for survival, witty and self-effacing, he managed to effect the near-miraculous transition from being *Poeta de'teatri reali* under Murat in Naples to become *Poeta de'teatri reali* under the restored Bourbons. Author of a vast but indeterminate number of libretti in every genre he served many important composers - most notably Rossini for whom he supplied texts of true significance. Much underestimated and as important as any contemporary theatrical poet he sometimes displayed a taste for self-parody that was almost a revelation

xlii The Tottola/Fioravanti *Adelaide maritata* was performed in the smaller theatres of Naples nearly every year until 1845, lasting far longer in the Neapolitan sub-culture than the Rossi/Pacini *Adelaide e Comingio* whose flowering - despite an effective lyricism and important champions - was relatively brief

xliii With the odd result that Pacini's *Adelaide e Comingio* - his first essay in operatic emotion, and highly influenced by Fioravanti's trilogy, in fact preceded the last of Tottola's three operas on this same plot. Prompting a speculation that maybe Fioravanti had not paid Tottola for his texts - a factor that could have permitted a rival poet to take up the tale with a new composer. The final opera of the Tottola series, *La morte di Adelaide*, did not reach the stage until 1818 (the printed libretto says "*Quaresima dell'anno 1817*") at the Fiorentini of Naples and may have been postponed because of Pacini's *Adelaide e Comingio*. *La morte di Adelaide* was frequently revived in Naples until 1838. This *Adelaide* series of operas, and most especially the plot as set by Pacini would have an exceptional sequel in that an *Adelaide* would become one of the root sources for Donizetti's *La Favorite* of 1840. (The incomplete manuscript of Donizetti's *Adelaide* of c1834, librettist unknown is in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris)

xliv *AmZ* February 1818, 95-6 *Gestern Abend gab man auf diesem Theater eine neue Opera semiseria , vom jungen Pacini; Adelaide e Comingio. Die Musik ist grösstentheils ein Quodlibet von andern Meistern, hat aber einige nicht üble Stücke, und die Cabalette der Arie der Prima-Donna im 2ten Act is sehr schön und neu zu nennen. Dem Brizzi war im ersten*

Acte nicht gut bey Stimme, sang aber benannte Arie in 2ten Acte meisterhafte. Meister und Sanger wurden nach jedem Acte hervorgerufen.

“At the Teatro Re in the present season all the singers are the same as I have mentioned”

[The singers engaged for the season included Carolina Brizzi (who left early), Claudio Bonoldi, Violante Camporesi and Marianna Marconi-Shonberger – it was Carolina Brizzi who sang in Pacini’s opera] *“Last evening was performed in this theatre a new opera semiseria by young Pacini Adelaide e Comingio. The music is to the greater part a mixture from other masters but contains some pieces which are not bad at all and the various cabalette to the arias of the prima donna in the second act must be described as very beautiful and new. Mademoiselle Brizzi was not in very good voice in the first act but sang these arias in a masterly fashion. The composer and singers had curtain calls after each act”.*

The *sinfonia* was an extremely accomplished composition and may well have been the kind of music instrumental in encouraging the *pesarese* to invite the young Pacini to fill in some of the gaps in his *Matilde di Shabran* (1821) when pressed by a too urgent contract and too little time. In fact, here, Pacini first essayed music beyond the limits established by the repertoire of his father, achieving a colouring and an emotion that was genuinely expressive. And despite some buffo interludes this *opera semiseria* reversed convention by beginning with optimism and ending in tragedy

^{xlv} In the audience was the poet Franz Grillparzer author of a ‘Sappho’ long presumed (incorrectly) to be the literary source for Pacini’s *Saffo* of 1840. Grillparzer did not think much of Pacini’s *Isabella e Florange* as he noted in his diary

Cfr Franz Grillparzer *Samtliche Werke* Ed. Peter Frank and Karl Pornbacher (Munich 1965)