

Attorno a Marin Fal(l)iero stampato

Alexander Weatherson

That an opera as momentous as Donizetti's *Marino Faliero* could have been launched in such a blaze of publicity in the French capital and yet is almost a betrayal is one of the puzzles of modern scholarship. It is like this because no one has ever been absolutely sure what anyone saw or heard on that occasion.



The tragic Doge Marin Faliero as painted by Francisco Pradilla

However did it happen? To begin with, those indicators of the form and content of operas, printed libretti, were not necessarily published by the theatre in question in Paris but farmed out to private hands - and in this instance no one seems to have bothered. Probably the composer persisted in tinkering with his score until the very last moment (it would not be the first time of course) and then the opera was on stage so briefly - five performances only - that amends could not be made in time. Hard on the première on 12 March 1835 a flood of water deluged the auditorium of the Théâtre Italien from ceiling to stalls and shut the doors. As a result no valid libretto for *Marino Faliero* was available until the London revival some

eight weeks later (14 May 1835).

Nor did the vocal score appear in print as it should have done. Donizetti had been composing the music of *Marino Faliero* in Naples before he arrived in the musical Mecca of the day so there was an unusual choice of arias, alternative *pezzi*, false starts and a host of second thoughts. The "Musical Capital of the World" presented a unique challenge to the Italian composer - concentrating his mind wonderfully and obliging him to reconsider his score in the face of all sorts of eventualities and possibilities. As a result no one can be sure that the London staging truly echoed that of Paris or that sections of the score had not been recomposed in the interim (no reliable manuscript survives in either city and in eight weeks Donizetti was eminently capable of writing an entire opera!). He made changes to be sure, maybe small ones, maybe big ones, how can anyone tell? He did not cross the channel and though the cast was the same there is no certainty that this particular league of starring songbirds did not make *aggiustamenti* of their own: "*when the cat is away the mice do play*" and Giulia Grisi, Luigi Lablache, Antonio Tamburini and Giovan Battista Rubini were very large mice indeed.

So, borrowing the lament of Elena '*Senza madre e senza sposo*' but in this instance *senza libretto e senza musica* where do we begin?

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A Parisian publisher had indeed been engaged to print a vocal score of *Marino Faliero*. That it did not materialise is yet another unpredictable intervention (after the flood), the distinguished firm of Troupenas had financial difficulties that came to a head at exactly the same time as the launch of *Marino Faliero*, all printing ceased and stocks were sold off. According to the evidence the Parisian firm of Pacini acquired the rights to the new opera instead and began to publish in the summer of 1835, in tandem (according to the imprint), with Mori & Lavenu of London. So far so good. But there are important differences between their two editions, it is not easy to determine which of them came first or why they differ, it is far from certain that the same source was used for both versions, or that another score - not necessarily authentic - was used instead.

And then there is the *spartito* published by the Neapolitan firm of Bernardo Girard. This is the only printed music that can be dated precisely: included to the Girard catalogue of 1835 (of August that year) ten pieces of *Marino Faliero* were *in print before 31 July 1835* [Pl.nos 2811-2820] it is thus the one source for the opera that could have been supervised directly by the maestro himself. The Paris and London vocal scores were published *in absentia* - only back at home in Naples could the imprint have been under his nose (he had returned there by 23 April 1835).

To make this situation even less transparent however, there is a parting-of-the-ways in the style and content of these various impressions: Pacini sides with the later Ricordi edition (of 1836); Mori & Lavenu sides with Girard. There are considerable differences between these various factions - Paris and Milan have higher keys (*pace* the presence of Rubini in the opera¹) London and Naples offer a less strenuous tessitura but a more precise notation. Added to this, there are persistent textual quirks dividing them.

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Textually, in fact, we are confronted with the most sensitive problem of all. It is not *quite true* to say that we are entirely *senza libretto* there is an elegantly printed libretto of *Marino Faliero* in the Bibliothèque Nationale:

Marino Faliero

Azione tragica in tre atti,
parole del Sigr Giovanni Emanuele Bidera,
musica del Sigr Maestro Donizetti.

Si vende in Parigi

Chez L'Éditeur, rue Grange-Batelière, No22

A LA LIBRERIE CENTRALE, rue des Filles-Sainte-Thomas,

No5 Place de la Bourse

M.DCCC.XXXV²

This has parallel texts in Italian and French but is otherwise extremely puzzling. Could it have been a proof copy? It contains penciled comments which show that it was used, but despite its bilingual verse (in use only at the Théâtre Italien) it does not mention that theatre, nor does it contain the names of the singers, only their roles. For whom then, how and when, *actually*, was it printed? Did it represent the composer's *first* thoughts on his opera or could it have been simply a species of testament?

It should be stressed that the “*rue [de la] Grange-Batelière*” runs into the street in Paris in which Donizetti³ had his lodgings at the time of *Marino Faliero* so this libretto was conjecturally printed with his consent. In it are provocative sections of text, enough to identify an opera focused almost entirely upon the celebrated voice of Luigi Lablache who together with Rubini, Tamburini and Ivanoff makes a clean sweep of almost all the dramatic opportunities on offer, leaving the *primadonna soprano* sadly in the shade. (Later sopranos, as we know well, simply added music of their own)

¹ Rubini's music was invariably printed in lower keys in order to avoid discouraging less gifted tenors (and sales of his music)

² The code for this libretto is Th.B 3713

³ He was living at 32 rue Taitbout on this his first visit to Paris, adjacent to Auguste de Coussy (his banker) who had an apartment at 15 rue de la Grange-Batelière; the latter was almost certainly responsible for this printing

These are very challenging changes. The opera is much longer than the *Marino Faliero* that has come down to us but its many divergences are fully reflected in the London libretto of 1835. Despite its lack of attribution this libretto⁴ suggests a version of *Marino Faliero* that was conceived in Paris, sung in Paris, and repeated in London (also in the London revival of June 1836) but in no way reflects any of the vocal scores that soon emerged in Paris, London, Naples or Milan. All these scores show a milk and water version of the action in which the violent final scenes of protest and resistance by the Doge - whose spectacular *gran'scena finale* features boldly in the libretti above - have been discarded in favour of a modest edition ending in his decorous resignation.

The many adjusted items can be briefly listed here: there is a differing text and music in Act I Sc.IV (coro), Sc.V (Fernando), Sc.VIII (Faliero), Sc.XII (Israele/Faliero), Sc.XX (finale primo); Act II Sc.IV (Faliero); Act III Sc.V (Elena), Sc.VI (coro), Sc.VII (Israele/Faliero/coro), Sc.IX (Faliero) and Sc.X (Faliero).

Scholarly opinion has tended to insist that Donizetti rejected most of the music he wrote in Naples.⁵ These libretti take issue with this assertion. For example it is believed that the text of the cabaletta sung by Fernando to end his Act I cavatina in the Naples autograph material was revised for Paris discarding the two quatrains:

In terra straniera
Mia tomba sarà,
Non pianto, preghiera
Giammai non avrà.

In spiaggia deserta
Chi perde sua vita
Compianto non merta,
Né preci o pietà.

but according to the libretti both in Paris and London the first quatrain of the Naples autograph *was* used as part of a triple-quatrain cabaletta:

⁴ The libretto notes, in pencil, that some of the items earned a "*bravo*" from the public

⁵ The *prima stesura* holograph of *Marino Faliero* is preserved in the library of the Conservatorio di S. Pietro a Majella of Naples

In terra straniera
Mia tomba sarà;
Non pianto o preghiera
Giammai non avrò,

Un solo conforto
Il cor mi sostiene,
Pensar che gl'affanni
Rattempro al mio bene:

Se render mi è dato
Men tristo il suo fato
L'esiglio e la morte
Fien' dolci per me.

And indeed this longer cabaletta appears now and then in subsequent revivals. It was sung at the Pergola in Florence in 1837 when the role of Fernando was taken by Duprez who may have heard or been given a copy of the music as sung by Rubini in Paris and no doubt elected to sing it in Rubini's key of B flat Major. Was it pruned as too arduous for lesser tenors? Who knows?

An imposing plea, nowadays omitted, ends the Fernando/Faliero duet in Act I Sc.VIII, while the Isreale/Faliero *stretta* of the duet in Sc.XII ends with an irresistible part *unisono* call to arms["*con gran forza, ma subito dopo apparisce profondamente commosso*"]

Isra. Il sangue Veneziano
Gelar to fa d'orror.
Ma se la patria opprimono
Che geme tra gli affanni
Periscono i tiranni,
Salviam la patria ancor.

Fal. Fratelli, amici furono:
Contr'essi armar...
È sangue Veneziano!
Rabbrivido d'orror.
Ma se la patria opprimono
Che geme tra gli affanni,
Periscano i tiranni,
Salviam la patria ancor.

However could such vehement lines have been discarded? Furthermore in Act II there are even more severe conflicts with the version of the opera that has come down to us. Faliero has a violently impassioned biographical cry, echoed by a coro of congiurati in Sc.IV:

Quello schiavo coronato
Che spezzò la sua corona
Che dal trono dispregiato
Verso voi rivolge il piè.
Di cento Isole soggette
Resse il fren, or reca a voi
L'odio suo, le sue vendette
Contro i perfidi oppressor.

thus encapsulating his motivation - the “crowned slave” flouting his destiny. How could such an eloquent mission statement have been dropped? Is it not essential to the plot? In Act III Sc.V Elena (who is short-changed throughout) has lost her recitative; in Sc.VIII - the poignant scene where Israele says farewell to his sons condemned to die before him - the text is literally castrated, the whole reduced to banalities and the truly touching *addio* of the libretto now no more than a pitiable fragment.

This situation does not necessarily run counter to Donizetti's view, expressed later, that the Girard *spartiti* presented his music in its most viable form: “*Essi hanno il vero Marino, la vera Lucia*” he said of the Girard editions.⁶ In the pragmatic eyes of the Maestro such a pruning was positive in that, wise to the fallibility of later singers, he had made a decision he was able to accept in tranquility. But clearly it did not mean that it was the “true” *Marino Faliero* as he wrote it - or as first heard in traumatic form in Paris and elsewhere.

It would be counter-productive here to go into fine detail through all the commissions and omissions represented by the Paris and London libretti in the face of the music which today is performed.⁷ The most profound *lacuna* – that which leaves a vast hole in dramatic terms - surrounds the powerful and arduous set-piece enshrining the *preghiera* of Act III Sc.X which survives as far as I have been able to ascertain in no vocal edition whatsoever.

That Donizetti may have been responding to the advice of friends (Rossini?) in being persuaded that such a prodigious stint by the famous bass would hinder revival is obvious - and convincing enough to ensure its discarding. The great Lablache himself may well have complained of its herculean challenge at this point in his career, but the loss to dramatic credibility is manifest. As the climactic focus of the opera the difference between the current version of *Marino Faliero* and these surviving

⁶ The Girard score of *Marino Faliero* that provoked this opinion was the edition of 1835 in the text above, with Plate numbers 2811-20, not the later vocal score to be printed

⁷ The issues surrounding the *sinfonia* alone are enough to insist upon a separate study

documents could not be more striking. What in the vocal score is one single page of dialogue - in the libretti is a terrifying clash between the defeated Doge and his hated enemies.

The music of the central *preghiera* (Act III Sc.X) is present in the Naples material: the text is as follows:

Gran Dio, che in tua virtù
Dal sen d'eternità
Quanto nel mondo sta
Muovi col ciglio.
Dal soglio di pietà.
Volgi lo sguardo a me,
Or ch'io ritorno a te
Dal tristo esiglio.

It cannot be imagined that Donizetti did not warm to these heartfelt lines however predictable their context, and their appearance as an emotional calm in the eye of the storm could not be musically more impressive or worthy of the maestro.

Escorted before the Dieci, in the initial version of the opera (Act III Sc. IX), Faliero's contemptuous descent upon that menacing cabal complacently seated in their red robes is a confrontation of legend:

Sedereste voi qui? Voi (d'ira fremo)
Schiavi d'Turchi alle catene e al remo,
A me note d'infamia?
Ma sulle torri dell'Europa ov'io
Plantai le insegne del Leone alato
Ivi scritta si mostra
Stolti! Non già l'infamia mia; la vostra.

backing his bitter sarcasm with a sulphurous prophesy for the destiny of Venice soon to be become true;⁸ he tears off his ducal crown:

A terra a terra abbominata insegna
D'infamia: io ti calpesto.
(*he throws down his tiara followed by his royal robes*)

Iniqua
Crudel città non t'allegrar del fato
Di questo vecchio. Già l'ore in silenzio
Stan generando l'ultimo tuo giorno.

⁸ A text in "*virgolati*" in Bidera's manuscript libretto at Naples but was sung in London and in Paris so it must be presumed that Donizetti revised his view of this powerful denunciation with its unparalleled potential and decided to set it to music

Muta sarà tua morte! Di Signora
Sarai vil mercenaria infame serva.
Vituperio d'Italia unqua non visto.

This unparalleled denunciation offered a species of scenic drama that puts a lie to the spineless acquiescence in defeat of the reformist veteran Soldier-Doge with which we are familiar in the standard edition.

The fascinating sight of the great basso cantante as the betrayed Faliero furiously lashing his enemies with a stream of scalding vituperation before turning his back on them and dismissing them - his discarded robes at his feet - as they slink away was indisputably the high profile *quadro* of the opera as originally conceived. A calculated riposte to the anodyne depiction of disgrace and decapitation of the fallen Doge that survives in the memory of the world.



Lablache turns his back on his enemies,

The *point-de-repère* of the entire plot, visually and vocally, an insulting dismissal succeeded by his prayer, then by his reunion with Elena who remarks upon his recovered composure (an illogical feature in the modern score) marks the true climax of his stupendous operatic fate as it was first presented to the public.

It is precisely this unforgettable Lablache as Doge Marin Faliero, in the central position of what is nothing less than a boldly re-mastered *gran'scena finale* that features in the musical press; Queen Victoria (then Princess Victoria) at the London prima bore her own royal witness and made a vivid little drawing of the compelling sight - but this vocal climax fails to appear in any approved score! You will not hear its music in any recording. The fact is, in its first version of *Marino Faliero*, the

opera had an ultimate climactic exposition in one long scarifying dramatic sequence in which he savages the aristocratic caucus, becomes reconciled to his young wife Elena who has truly betrayed him - and at the end - a proud but divested quasi-sovereign goes to his death at peace with his conscience, his wife forgiven, to lie by the side of his beloved nephew Fernando who has died defending his honour.

But while the original cast went on singing this version in the two rival operatic capitals the maestro was constrained to prepare a second score, more concise, less dominated by the title-role, swifter, less historically abrasive and demanding and with a tessitura more accessible to lesser singers. This second version becoming available in print from Messrs Girard, Pacini, Mori & Lavenu and Ricordi - but not immediately - which in part explains its lack of convergence and its quirks (Ricordi, alas, even misspelling the name of its protagonist!)

An opera dramatically misspelled? Is not this the term? Has not the baby been thrown-out with the bathwater? Whatever the passion, the patriotism and nocturnal seduction that kept the opera on stage almost to the end of the century, as a result of its surrender to historical predictability the culminating tragic spectacle of *Marino Faliero* that survives to our day is, alas, merely a blurred reflection of the *azione tragica* that had first been seen and heard on its contentious début. Neither the musical capital of the world nor anywhere else was destined to see or hear its like again.