

Inside the Concert with Albert Combrink
Friday 5 May - Levy Sekgapane In Concert with Jeremy Silver

From *Arie Antiche: ad una voce per canto e pianoforte*:

Già il sole del Gange (Alessandro Scarlatti)

Per la gloria (Giovanni Bononcini)

Intorno all'idol mio (Antonio Cesti)

O del mio dolce ardor (Christoph W. Gluck)



Though also a composer, Alessandro Parisotti is better known today as the original editor of a Three-Volume collection of songs known as *Arie antiche*. Parisotti collected these in what was the 19th century vogue for discovering hitherto forgotten old or “antique” music from the Classical and Baroque eras. The most famous example of this would be Mendelssohn’s revival of J.S. Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion* in Berlin in 1829, which saved Bach from sinking into virtual obscurity.

Parisotti found forgotten scores and wrote simple arrangements for soloist and piano accompaniment. He also romanticised the pieces by altering the word-placement, occasionally the chordal structure, or using more modern harmonies or even ornamentation to suit modern tastes. A case has been made that Parisotti might have snuck in one or two of his own compositions and passed them off as great masters of the past.

i *Già il sole del Gange* – the bouncy song describes a sunny day over the Ganges river turning into a night with stars painted in the sky

ii *Per la gloria* – The poet revels in unrequited love “without a hope of pleasure”

iii *Intorno all'idol mi* – A prayer for the winds to merely touch the sweet cheeks of their beloved, and to whisper words of love in their ear.

iv *O del mio dolce ardor* – A poet is finally reunited with the object of their affection, and perhaps now this longing which fills their bosom can finally be sated.

Le Sylvain (Romance from *Péchés de Vieillesse*, Vol. 3, No. 9)

Gioacchino Rossini (1792 - 1868)

Addio ai viennesi

Rossini is best known for his 39 operas and one or two sacred works. In 1829, at the age of just 37, he astonished the musical world by retiring from composition. Rossini was to live for 40 more years but, despite frequent pleas, never composed another opera. He did, however, write some smaller works for his own entertainment.



Péchés de vieillesse (Sins of Old Age) is a collection of 150 vocal, chamber and solo piano pieces, collected, sold and published by his widow, shortly after Rossini’s death in 1868. The collection is deliberately “Salon Music” – lighthearted and less serious in intent than formal concert music, and meant for performance by himself and his friends at his home in Passy. Nonetheless, the collection contains music of very high calibre.

Le sylvain- *Silvanus* (meaning “of the woods” in Latin) was a Roman tutelary deity of woods and uncultivated lands. As protector of the forest (*sylvestris deus*), he especially presided over plantations and delighted in trees growing wild. The song is a heartbroken ode to the paleskinned nymphs who have left the darkfaced poet in the forest, alone, unloved and unwanted. He would even be prepared to swap his divinity with Adonis for his looks.

In *Addio ai Viennesi*, Rossini depicts himself saying goodbye to Vienna with good humour, and promises to be back soon in the city where he was so happy.

La Ricordanza

Vincenzo Bellini (1801 - 1835)

Dating from 1834, *La Ricordanza* (The Recollection) was included in a collection of four Bellini songs to texts by Carlo Pepoli, who would eventually serve as librettist of Bellini's final opera, *I puritani*. The song presents a memorable melody for the tenor voice that Bellini subsequently gave to Elvira, heroine of *I puritani* (written the year after *La Ricordanza*). The centerpiece of Elvira's celebrated mad scene is the despairing, aching beautiful cavatina *Qui la voce*, which epitomizes Bellini's unique expressive eloquence. Bellini developed that aria from *La Ricordanza*, with its gentle slow pacing and lovely arpeggiated accompaniment.



La Ricordanza describes the poet remembering that moment in the middle of the night, when their beloved finally acknowledged her love and they “placed their hands on each other’s hearts”. Even if they were to have died in that moment, it would have been the greatest moment of their lives.

La Speranza più soave from Semiramide

Gioacchino Rossini (1792 - 1868)

Written in 1823, based on Voltaire's tragedy *Semiramis*, the opera *Semiramide* was Rossini's final Italian opera before his early retirement. It marks a return to serious opera, after a period of successful comedies, inspired by his new love-interest - the great dramatic soprano Isabella Colbran, who was first his mistress, then his wife. She created the leading female roles in *Elisabetta, Regina d'Inghilterra* (1815), *Otello* (1816), *Armida* (1817), *Mosè in Egitto* (1818), *Maometto II* (1820), and five other Rossini operas up to and including his final contribution to the genre, *Semiramide*, which was also written with Colbran in the major role.

In **La speranza più soave** Idreno has been offered the hand of Azema, but he wishes that she would fall in love with him and would want to marry him voluntarily.

Aprile Sogno

Sir Francesco Paolo Tosti (1846 - 1920)

Tosti is remembered for his light, expressive songs, which are characterised by natural, singable melodies and sweet sentimentality. He is also known for his editions of Italian folk songs entitled *Canti popolari Abruzzesi*. His style became very popular during the *Belle Époque period* and is often known as “salon music”.



Tosti wrote well for the voice, allowing - indeed encouraging- interpretation and embellishment from operatic singers. Most artists, therefore, specialising in the classical Italian repertoire have performed and recorded Tosti songs; yet Tosti never composed an opera.

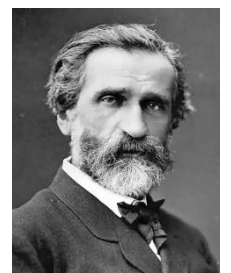
Aprile - April is the season of love! – please come, my lovely one, to the flowery meadow.

Sogno is a description of the poet having a dream about his beloved in which they declare undying love.

Il tramonto Lo spazzacamin

Giuseppe Verdi (1813 - 1901)

Verdi wrote songs throughout his life, and in fact had a volume of songs published at 25 before he wrote his first opera. Many of his songs are charming salon pieces, *lyriche da camera*, written for the extensive amateur market. In these, we can see Verdi testing his powers at setting dramatic verse, and in some cases, draft themes that would later grow into his most famous opera arias.



Taken from Verdi's *Composizioni da Camera*, **Il tramonto** is a soaring depiction of a romantic sunset.

Lo spazzacamin is a cheeky description of a chimney-sweep.

**Romanza *Por el humo se sabe dónde está el fuego*
from *Doña Francisquita***

Amadeu Vives (1871 - 1932)

Vives was a Catalan composer of over 100 stage works, specialising in the *Zarzuela*: a Spanish lyric-dramatic genre that alternates between spoken and sung scenes, incorporating operatic and popular songs, as well as dance. With a clear nationalist content, it sought to present an authentically Spanish alternative to theatre sung in Italian, in a similar way to how the *Singspiel* had offered music theatre in German.



Doña Francisquita is one of his most famous *Zarzuelas*, filled with easy lyricism and boasting fluent orchestration and colourful evocation of 19th Century Madrid. The story has the usual love triangle: it reminds one of the shenanigans in Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore* where forlorn lovers try to inspire jealousy in the object of their affection, and *Don Pasquale* where a would-be lover (naturally a baritone) has to realise that perhaps he is past his prime and should leave romancing the youthful heroine (naturally a soprano) to the young hero (naturally a tenor).

In this **Romance**, the character Fernando explores the idea that jealousy is born from the smoke which love produces when burning. All this, including some cross-dressing disguises, ends well, with the lovers riding off to get married and inheriting a fortune from an old uncle.

***Fantaisie aux divins mensonges*
from the opera *Lakmé***

Léo Delibes (1836 - 1891)

Delibes was a French composer best known for ballets and operas. His works include the ballets *Coppélia* (1870) and *Sylvia* (1876) and the opera *Lakmé* (1883). *Lakmé* brings together many popular themes of opera in the 1880s: an exotic location - already in vogue thanks to Bizet's *The Pearl Fishers* - mysterious religious rituals, the beautiful flora of the Orient, and the general novelty of Western colonials living in a foreign land. Composers Jules Massenet and Giacomo Meyerbeer wrote operas with similar elements, and those dramas were also popular in Paris.

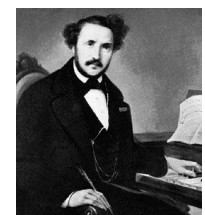


Lakmé is set in British India in the 19th century. Lakmé and her servant Mallika take off their jewellery to swim in a river, singing the famous "Flower Duet". Nearby, British officers Gerald and Frederic are on a picnic with two young English girls and their governess. The girls notice Lakmé's jewellery and want sketches of the pieces. Gerald agrees to stay behind to make the drawings and he sings of the imagined beauties these jewels might adorn.

***Partir deggio... T'amo qual s'ama un angelo*
from Act 2 of *Lucrezia Borgia***

Gaetano Donizetti (1797 - 1848)

Donizetti, Bellini and Rossini form a holy trinity of 19th century Bel Canto operatic style, and with 70 operas, Donizetti was certainly the most prolific. As Rossini retired and Bellini died at 35, it left the field open for Italian opera to move from comedies popular with audiences, to a more serious *dramma tragico* which blurred the lines between recitatives (more spoken dialogue) and sung arias, introducing longer *Scenas*.



At the same time, continental audiences of that time seemed to be fascinated by the Tudor period of 16th century English history. Large historical dramas became popular, and the new wave of Romantic music gave birth to works like *Lucia di Lammermoor*. *Lucrezia Borgia* may not belong to the "Tudor Trilogy" of Donizetti operas, but it is still among the most challenging operas for the lead soprano in the composer's oeuvre. The extreme difficulty for the other voices is often overlooked: in fact, the tenor aria heard in tonight's concert is usually cut from live performances of the full opera.

The opera is set at a party where a group of men remove the letter B from the Borgia name, leaving the name "Orgia" – a comment on the decadent lifestyle of the Borgias. Lucrezia wore a special ring which held poison. She poisons the perpetrators, only to find out that one of them, Gennaro, is in fact her son. She offers him the antidote, but he refuses it, and dies. In the aria, Gennaro sings that he loved his mother all his life, even though he had never met her.