

MERCADANTE

2 CDs

I Briganti

Maxim Mironov • Petya Ivanova • Vittorio Prato
 Bruno Praticò • Rosita Fiocco • Atanas Mladenov • Jesús Ayllón
 Camerata Bach Choir, Poznań • Virtuosi Brunensis
Antonino Fogliani



WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING

Saverio
MERCADANTE
(1795-1870)

I Briganti

Melodramma serio in Three Parts
Libretto by Jacopo Crescini
after Friedrich Schiller's play *Die Räuber*

Massimiliano, Graf von Moor Bruno Praticò, Bass
Ermano, his son Maxim Mironov, Tenor
Corrado, his son Vittorio Prato, Baritone
Amelia, his ward Petya Ivanova, Soprano
Teresa, her friend Rosita Fiocco, Mezzo-soprano
Bertrando, a hermit Atanas Mladenov, Baritone
Rollero, a robber Jesús Ayllón, Tenor

Camerata Bach Choir, Poznań (Chorus-master: Tomasz Potkowski)

Virtuosi Brunensis (Artistic Director: Karel Mitáš)

Antonino Fogliani

Répétiteur: Achille Lampo

Performance material:

New edition from the manuscripts after the research of Dr Michael Wittmann, edited by Florian Bauer

Recorded live at the Trinkhalle, Bad Wildbad, 14th, 18th and 21st July, 2012

for the XXIV ROSSINI IN WILDBAD Festival

(Artistic director: Jochen Schönleber)

CD 1

- Part I**
- 1 1a Introduzione:** Le gramaglie, i funebri doppiieri
(Coro)
- 2 1b Scena ed Aria:** Perché non posso
(Corrado)
- 3** Ove a me rivolgi un guardo
(Corrado)
- 4** Per lei che mi sprezza
(Corrado)
- 5 2a:** Come un etereo spirito dileguasi
(Coro di Donne)
- 6 2b Scena e Cavatina:** Tu piangi?
(Teresa)
- 7** Ah! tu m'ami
(Amelia)
- 8 2c Scena e Duetto:** Ite, vani ornamenti
(Amelia)
- 9** Se per te non ha diletto
(Corrado)
- 10** Perché di pianti
(Amelia, Corrado)
- 11 3a Finale primo: Scena:** Prode garzone
(Ermano)
- 12 Cavatina:** Questi due verdi salici
(Ermano)
- 13 3b Romanza:** Qual soave armonia!
(Ermano)
- 14 3c Coro religioso:** Tutto quaggiù si solve
(Amelia, Coro)
- 15 3d Duetto, Largo e Stretta:** Come turbar poss'io
(Ermano)
- 16** Sempre ripete mi / No, no, non crederlo
(Amelia, Ermano)
- 17** Erman
(Rollero)
- 18** Incerto, che penso?
(Amelia, Teresa, Ermano, Rollero, Corrado)
- 19** Scopri allfin il tuo disegno
(Coro, Tutti)

67:58

CD 2

- Part II**
- 1 4a Coro e Tempesta:** Accorrete
(Coro)
- 2 4b Scena ed Orgia:** Giunge Ermano
(Coro, Ermano)
- 3 5a Scena e Preghiera:** Ermano, ove sei tu?
(Ermano)
- 4** Qual gemito!
(Ermano)
- 5 5b Scena e Duetto:**
Chi mi sveglia dal mio sepolcro?
(Conte)
- 6** Deh, risparmia ch'io racconti
(Conte, Ermano)
- 7** Io sì, che un figlio avea
(Conte, Ermano)
- 8** Tu lo conosci?
(Conte, Ermano)
- 9 5c Stretta finale:** All'armi!
(Ermano, Coro)
- Part III**
- 10 6a Coro:** Notte, il silenzio doppia
(Coro)
- 11 6b Scena ed Aria:** Tutto riposa
(Corrado)
- 12** Ah! no: vivi e spargi un fiore
(Corrado)
- 13 7a Scena e Preghiera:** Dove corre quell'empio?
(Amelia)
- 14** Ciel! del mio prode Ermano
(Amelia)
- 15** Amelia, esulta
(Amelia, Coro)
- 16 7b Terzetto finale:** Giunge alcun
(Amelia, Conte)
- 17** Così serbi il giuramento
(Conte)
- 18** Sul mio fronte
(Conte, Ermano)
- 19** Deh! non scemar con lagrime
(Conte, Ermano, Amelia, Coro)

69:54

34:57

3:32

4:21

4:22

3:18

2:04

4:26

4:20

3:06

5:28

34:57

3:20

2:13

5:09

1:39

3:17

5:26

5:16

1:53

2:58

3:46

Saverio Mercadante (1795-1870): I Briganti (The Brigands)

Saverio Mercadante ranked among Italy's most productive composers of the nineteenth century. Instrumental and church music stand alongside 57 operas in his output. From 1808 to 1816 he studied violin and composition at the Conservatorio di San Sebastiano in Naples and, like Vincenzo Bellini, was a pupil of Niccolò Zingarelli. In 1819 he made his début as a composer at the Teatro San Carlo in Naples with the opera *L'apoteosi di Ercole* and in 1821 in Milan gained European fame with *Elisa e Claudio*. From 1823 to 1825 he was Rossini's successor as the house composer at the Teatro San Carlo and from 1826 to 1831 he worked as a composer and conductor in the Iberian peninsula. From 1833 to 1840 he held the office of *maestro di cappella* at Novara Cathedral in upper Italy. He owed a stay in Paris in 1835/36 to his knowledge of French *grand opera*, whose principal elements he adapted to Italian theatrical practice in his 'reform operas', above all in *Il giuramento* and *Il bravo* (Milan, 1837 and 1839). Long before Verdi, Mercadante transformed pure *bel canto* opera into real music drama. In 1840 he succeeded his teacher Zingarelli as director of the Naples Conservatory and in 1843 was appointed chief conductor at the Teatro San Carlo. With the onset of blindness in 1862 his public activities ceased but he remained active as a composer and teacher right up to the end, when he taught and also dictated his own new works to his pupils.

When Mercadante set off for Paris in the summer of 1835 he was planning to stay for three months at the most. The fact that he was there for more than six months was due to Felice Romani. Mercadante had originally planned to stay in Paris from the end of 1835 into the beginning of 1836, but it was then that Romani, the original librettist for *I Briganti*, came up against deadline difficulties. Thus the commission for a new libretto passed to Jacopo Crescini, an Italian expatriate and poet who was then living in Paris, but who at that time had never written a libretto. The choice of subject fell on Schiller's drama *Die Räuber* (The Robbers). This was a wise decision on two counts: on the one hand the dramatization of a stage play, as opposed to a libretto based on a novel, spared the librettist work and on the other Schiller's play had been in the repertoire of Parisian theatres since the time of the French Revolution. Crescini, therefore, could proceed on the assumption that the opera-going public would be familiar with the rather complex nature of the plot. As a result, he declined (unlike Verdi in *I masnadieri*) extensively to develop the action and focussed instead entirely

on the tragic ending (although he took great pains, often only in half-sentences, to call to mind the work's complex back story).

With its coherent plot, Crescini had produced a libretto which from his dramaturgical point of view aligned itself with French opera of the time, rather than with Italian practice. Mercadante, who had travelled to Paris with the naïve notion that the difference between Italian and French opera consisted merely in the fact that in Paris more value would be put on a lavish production, had meanwhile realized full well that *grand opera* was more than simply a succession of virtuoso vocal pieces. He therefore organised the four scenes into seven large-scale musical numbers, which nevertheless contained within them the traditional Italian forms such as *scena* and *aria* or prayer and duet, which he used, however, as an additional element and which was bound together through the use of through-composed transitional music (and which would pre-empt applause for the singers, a practice which was then customary in Italy).

The second act in particular can be recognized immediately as being through-composed. It is worth noting also that although Corrado has two big arias, there are none for Ermano or Amelia in this act. They are compensated for this lack by being given shorter character numbers (drinking song, *romanza*, prayer etc). Clearly it would be wrong to label *I Briganti* simply as *grand opera*. It is, and remains, as its unique hybrid form suggests, a *bel canto* opera. It arose out of a troupe of singers, including the same ones who gave the première of Bellini's *I puritani* in 1835. And of course *I puritani* was the yardstick by which Mercadante would have wanted to prove himself to the Paris public. So it was that the meeting with the quartet of singers from *I puritani* was, for Mercadante, almost like a family reunion. Admittedly, he was writing for Giuditta Grisi for the first time, whereas he had already played together with Luigi Lablache in the conservatory orchestra. At the beginning of their careers around 1820 Antonio Tamburini and Giovanni Rubini had both sung in Naples and had created the principal rôles in Mercadante's second opera (*Violenza e costanza*) and in his third (*Anacreonte in Samo*), so Mercadante was very well acquainted with their vocal possibilities. And the score gives the impression that he intended to offer his friends something quite special – vocal parts which would also pose a real challenge to superstar singers. Only this can explain the sometimes extremely high tessitura of the vocal writing. Furthermore, close inspection

reveals that Mercadante came up with a very independent type of *canto fiorito* (lit. flowery singing) of his own devising (and not one simply modelled on Rossini). Likewise this intensification of possibilities of *canto fiorito*, in conjunction with the adaptation of a dramaturgy stemming from *grand opera*, accounts for the distinctiveness of this opera, which outdoes Bellini and paves the way for Verdi's later dramas. In palaeontological parlance one could describe Mercadante as the "missing link" between Bellini and Verdi.

Furthermore, Mercadante's stay in Paris in 1835/6 heralded a decisive turning-point in his own career, inasmuch as from then on he concentrated completely on the Italian market. His opera *Il giuramento*, which was given its première in 1837 in Milan, drew on his Parisian experiences and expanded on them. On the one hand he abandoned the Italian practice of providing all the soloists with extensive solo arias, while on the other he cut back on excessive *canto fiorito* in the solo parts – as he had done already in Corrado's second aria in *I Briganti*. In contrast he posits a *canto drammatico*. But this is not a fundamental contradiction: Mercadante did not reject *bel canto*, but opted instead to cut back on *canto fiorito* wherever there was a danger that it would run counter to the dramatic truth of the action. Transgressing this boundary remained reserved for

Synopsis

Part I

[1] The old Count Massimiliano has died and his second son Corrado has come into the inheritance after he had earlier involved his father in a plot to disown the first-born son Ermano. Ermano is thought to have died abroad, whereas in fact he has joined up with a band of brigands which specifically targets the aristocracy and, although of noble birth, he has meanwhile become the band's leader. Meanwhile Corrado believes that his own scheming has achieved its end: at this very time he has made it known that he wishes to shorten the appropriate period of court mourning (for the count) so that he can marry Amelia, the old count's ward. After a few bars of orchestral introduction, the opera begins with a chorus expressing hope that, from now on, happiness will come again to the castle.

[2]-[4] Corrado enters and makes known his plans for Amelia. In the following aria he turns out to be at odds with himself: driven by a desire for power, yet fearful of being unmasked as the murderer of his father.

[5] A chorus of Amelia's ladies-in-waiting invites her to join in the celebrations.

middle-period Verdi who, with his insistence on *far brutto*, finally placed veracity of expression above its beauty.

It was precisely this boundary which Mercadante in his late period was unable or unwilling to cross and it highlights the distance between his works and those of Verdi from the end of the 1840s. For the short period between 1836 until about 1840 Mercadante was busy with his 'reform operas'. He was at that time Italy's leading, most advanced, composer of operas. After completing *Il giuramento* in 1837, Mercadante also revised *I Briganti* (for La Scala, Milan). His working manuscript shows how he revised the Paris version of the opera almost bar for bar in order to assimilate his newly-acquired aesthetic of opera. With today's ears, one would not readily rate a performance of this Milan version any higher than one would early Verdi. Admittedly Mercadante had to tone down the plot on grounds of censorship: at the end of the Milan version Ermano stabs himself to death. Such a simple *melodramma romantico* comes out of Schiller's *Sturm und Drang* play. Remarkably enough the Paris version, which is generally accepted to be the stronger, enjoyed success also in Italy and was heard for the last time in 1847 in Pisa.

Michael Wittmann

[6]-[7] But Amelia is still in mourning for the old count, as well as for his first-born son Ermano, whom she once loved.

[8]-[10] Corrado enters and explains to Amelia that he will not now marry her. Amelia is incensed and a violent argument ensues.

[11]-[12] Meanwhile, the brigands, quite by chance, find themselves taking a path close to Ermano's home castle. That night Ermano steals into his father's castle, seeking his forgiveness. The finale begins. After an extended orchestral introduction the despairing Ermano reflects on past happiness.

[13] A harp sounds and from afar he hears Amelia singing a melancholy ballad.

[14] This is interrupted by a chorus of mourning for the dead count.

[15]-[16] Ermano is in a state of shock. Amelia appears and Ermano makes himself known to her, but he does not dare confess to her his allegiance to the revolutionaries. Amelia declares her undying love for him.

[17]-[19] They are both surprised by Corrado, who at first simply thinks that there has been an intrusion into the castle. Finally Ermano reveals himself also to Corrado. The members of the court now have divided loyalties. The brothers challenge each other to a duel at dawn.

Part II

① On a stormy night the brigands assemble in a wood.
② They try to cheer up the despondent Ermano by singing him a drinking song and he extols the virtues of the brigand culture and its ideal of an autonomous life.
③ As his companions retire for the night, Ermano can find no sleep. He comes across the picture of the Virgin Mary before which, long ago, he had pledged his troth with Amelia; suddenly he becomes aware of the discrepancy between the social-revolutionary requirements of the partisans and the reality of their banditry. He offers up a prayer.
④ From afar he hears a plaintive voice.
⑤-⑧ He surprises an old hermit bringing meat and drink to a prisoner. Ermano sets the prisoner free and realizes that it is none other than his own father. The hermit had persuaded the hired killer contracted by Corrado not to kill the old count and had concealed this from Corrado. The count bemoans his sad fate; Ermano (at first pretending to be one of his own friends) tells of his own sad fate abroad and of the plot with which his brother had discredited him to their father. Finally Ermano makes himself known to his father.

⑨ The old count is overjoyed, yet at the same time alarmed at Ermano's appearance. Ermano's men swear to restore the count's rights to him. Corrado is to be spared.

Part III

⑩ The brigands have seized the castle.
⑪-⑫ Corrado, close to madness, realizes that, as the perpetrator of the intrigue, his guilt has been revealed and he resolves to seek death in battle.
⑬-⑭ Amelia worries about Ermano's fate and prays for him.
⑮ Women's voices are heard proclaiming that the old count is still alive and Amelia is reunited with him.
⑯-⑰ Then Ermano appears with a blood-stained sword. The count accuses him of fratricide. In vain Ermano tries to explain to his father that Corrado has killed himself with his own (i.e. Ermano's) sword.
⑱ Ermano's followers enter. They are encircled and in danger and urge Ermano to flee with them. He is aware of his duty and follows them. Only now does Amelia realize that Ermano has become a brigand and she falls down dead. The old count is left as though petrified.

Michael Wittmann

English translations by David Stevens



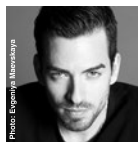
Maxim Mironov

The tenor Maxim Mironov was born in Tula, Russia and studied at the Gnessin Institute in Moscow, becoming a member of Helikon Opera. He won second prize at the 2003 New Voices Competition and has secured a place for himself as one of the leading Rossini tenors of his generation. He is a regular performer at the Pesaro Rossini Opera Festival and has also undertaken engagements throughout Europe with a repertoire that includes Rameau's *Castor et Pollux*, Mozart's *Così fan tutte* and *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, Rossini's *L'Italiana in Algeri*, *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, *Il viaggio a Reims*, *Otello*, *La Cenerentola* and, for Rossini in Wildbad, *La donna del lago*.



Petya Ivanova

Petya Ivanova trained as a singer at the Vesselin Stanov Music School in Russia and at the Lubomir Pipkov National Music School in Sofia. Prizes and awards have included second prize at the Adami Corradetti International Competition in Padua, the second and audience prizes at the International Bel Canto Contest in Rijeka, first prize at the Maribor Ondina Otti International Competition and the special prize at the Boris Christoff International Opera Contest in Sofia. Her breakthrough came when she sang the Queen of the Night in *Die Zauberflöte* at the Vienna State Opera and in Hamburg. Her repertoire includes the rôles of Zerlina in *Don Giovanni*, Elvira in Bellini's *I puritani*, the title-rôle in Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*, Gilda in *Rigoletto* and Violetta in *La traviata*. She has appeared in leading opera houses and concert halls throughout Europe.



Vittorio Prato

The baritone Vittorio Prato studied in Lecce, where he was born, in Bologna and in Moscow. In 2003 he won the International Mattia Battistini Competition in Rieti as Malatesta in Donizetti's *Don Pasquale*. He joined the Rossini Academy in Pesaro and for the Pesaro Rossini Festival sang in *Il barbiere di Siviglia* and *La gazza ladra*, and in Rossini's *Le nozze di Teti e Peleo*. As well as Italian opera of the nineteenth century he specializes in the baroque, and has appeared throughout Europe with musicians such as René Jacobs, William Christie, Alan Curtis, Andrea Marcon, Diego Fasolis and Philip Pickett. For Rossini in Wildbad he first appeared in 2006, singing Plagio in Michele Carafa's *I due Figaro*.



Bruno Praticò

Born in Aosta, Bruno Praticò studied singing with Giuseppe Valdengo and attended special courses at La Scala Milan under Rodolfo Celetti. He went on to specialise in *basso buffo* rôles with appearances at La Scala, the Teatro La Fenice in Venice, the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, the Vienna and Bavarian State Operas, the Opéra National in Paris and the Teatro San Carlo in Naples. Engagements have taken him to Bologna, Florence, Rome, Lausanne, Stockholm, New York, San Francisco and Tokyo. He has worked with distinguished conductors, including Claudio Abbado, Riccardo Chailly, Alberto Zedda and Carlo Rizzi. His repertoire includes Rossini rôles such as Bartolo in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, Mustafà and Taddeo in *L'Italiana in Algeri*, with comic bass rôles in *Il viaggio a Reims*, *La cambiale di matrimonio* and *Le Comte Ory*. He has appeared regularly at the Pesaro Rossini Festival since 1993, with a Rossini d'Oro award for his portrayal of Don Magnifico in *La Cenerentola* in 1998. His various rôles for Rossini in Wildbad include those of Don Geronio in *Il Turco in Italia*, Don Magnifico in *La Cenerentola* (2010) and Bruschino padre in *Il signor Bruschino* (2009).



Rosita Fiocco

The mezzo-soprano Rosita Fiocco studied at the Corelli Conservatory in Messina and made her début in 2010 in the leading female rôle of Sofia in Rossini's *Il signor Bruschino* in a Studiamo l'Opera production. The following year she sang Berenice in *L'occasione fa il ladro* under Antonino Fogliani at the Teatro Vittorio Emanuele in Messina. She has participated in workshops with Rinaldo Alessandrini, Bruno Praticò and Raúl Giménez and at the Accademia Musicale Chigiana in Siena with Giuseppe Sabbatini and Raina Kabaivanska. She now studies under Bruno Praticò and Raina Kabaivanska at the Vecchi Tonelli Institute in Modena.



Atanas Mladenov

The bass Atanas Mladenov was born in Sofia and studied there at the Pancho Vladigerov National Music Academy, continuing his training at the Rossini State Conservatory in Pesaro. In 2010 he was awarded first prize in the Karlovo Rose of Euterpe International Competition for young opera singers in Bulgaria. His performances have included appearances in Donizetti's *Rita*, Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi*, *Madama Butterfly* and *Tosca* and, at the Sofia State Opera, in Offenbach's *Tales of Hoffmann*. Rôles sung at Pesaro include Germano in Rossini's *La scala di seta*.



Jesús Ayllón

Jesús Ayllón first studied the trombone before embarking on vocal training at the Rafael Orozco Conservatory in Córdoba. He continued his studies at the Bruno Maderna State Conservatory in Cesena. He made his stage début in the zarzuela *Bohemios* by Amadeo Vives. Other rôles have included Orfeo in Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice* and Nemorino in Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore*. He has appeared in concerts and recitals in Spain and Italy, and collaborated with Rafael Frühbeck de Burgos, Christian Zacharias and Andreas Spering, among others. In the 2010/11 season he was a soloist with the National Chorus of Spain in Mahler's *Das klagende Lied*, Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* and *Missa solemnis*, and Prokofiev's *Alexander Nevsky*.



Antonino Fogliani

Antonino Fogliani graduated first in piano before studying conducting with Vittorio Parisi at the Giuseppe Verdi Conservatory in Milan. He specialised in Siena at the Accademia Chigiana with Franco Donatoni and Ennio Morricone and served as assistant to Gianluigi Gelmetti. He made his celebrated début at the Pesaro Rossini Opera Festival in 2001 with Rossini's *Il viaggio a Reims*, followed by various engagements in Pesaro and in leading opera houses, including La Fenice in Venice, the Teatro dell'Opera, Rome, the San Carlo in Naples and the Opéra Comique in Paris, as well as the Bergamo Donizetti Festival. At La Scala, Milan, he conducted,

among other works, Donizetti's *Ugo, Conte di Parigi* and a new production of Donizetti's *Maria Stuarda*. In the 2011/12 season he directed *Aida* at the Houston Grand Opera and at the Teatro Regio in Parma, *Lucia di Lammermoor* at the Nationale ReisOpera in Enschede and at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, *L'amico Fritz* at the Tchaikovsky Concert Hall in Moscow, and *La traviata* at the Opéra de Montréal. He made his début at Rossini in Wildbad in 2004, leading to a series of further performances and recordings. He was appointed musical director of Rossini in Wildbad in 2011.



Camerata Bach Choir, Poznań

The Camerata Bach Choir was founded in 2003 by Tomasz Potkowski in Poznań. The members are for the most part soloists from the Poznań Opera chorus and the Kraków Philharmonic. The choir collaborates closely with the Wrocław Philharmonic. Its repertoire includes works by Johann Sebastian Bach, George Frideric Handel and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Since 2010 the choir has served as ensemble in residence for the Rossini in Wildbad Festival.



Virtuosi Brunensis

The Virtuosi Brunensis is a young chamber orchestra, established in 2007 from two of the best known Czech orchestras, the Brno Janáček Theatre Orchestra and the Brno Philharmonic. Under its artistic director Karel Mitáš the orchestra has appeared, among other engagements, at the Bad Herzfeld Opera Festival and with Rossini in Wildbad, where it has recorded operas including Rossini's *L'italiana in Algeri* and Vaccaj's *La sposa di Messina* for Naxos. Under the name Musica Figuralis the ensemble also gives Bach concerts on historical instruments conducted by Siegfried Heinrich.

Saverio Mercadante (1795-1870):

I Briganti (Die Räuber)

Saverio Mercadante (1795-1870) gehörte zu den produktivsten Komponisten Italiens im 19. Jahrhundert. Instrumentalmusik und Kirchenmusik stehen in seinem Schaffen seinen 57 Opern gleichwertig gegenüber. Von 1808 bis 1816 studierte er Violine und Komposition am Conservatorio di San Sebastiano in Neapel; wie Vincenzo Bellini war er Schüler Niccolò Zingarelli. Er debütierte 1819 am Teatro San Carlo mit *L'apoteosi di Ercole*. Zu europäischer Berühmtheit gelangte er mit *Elisa e Claudio* (Milano 1821). Von 1823-1825 war er als Nachfolger Rossinis Hauskomponist am Teatro San Carlo in Neapel. 1826-1831 wirkte er als Komponist und Dirigent auf der iberischen Halbinsel. 1833-1840 bekleidete er das Amt eines Domkapellmeisters im oberitalienischen Novara. Einem Aufenthalt in Paris 1835/36 verdankte er die Kenntnis der französischen *Grand Opéra*, die er in seinen eigenen Reformopern, allen voran *Il giurmanto* und *Il bravo* (Milano 1837 und 1839) nutzbar machte. 1840 wurde Mercadante Nachfolger seines Lehrers als Direktor des Konservatoriums in Neapel; 1843 auch Chefdirigent am Teatro San Carlo. Seine Erblindung setzte 1862 seinem öffentlichen Wirken ein Ende; als Komponist und Lehrer blieb er jedoch bis zuletzt tätig: er unterrichtete, indem er Schülern eigene neue Werke diktierte.

Als Mercadante im Sommer 1835 nach Paris aufbrach, dachte er an einen Aufenthalt von höchstens drei Monaten. Dass daraus dann mehr als ein halbes Jahr wurde, ist das „Verdienst“ Felice Romanis. Da Mercadante den Parisaufenthalt aber ursprünglich für das Jahresende 1835/36 geplant hatte, kam nun Romani in Terminschwierigkeiten. So ging der Auftrag für ein neues Libretto an Jacopo Crescini, einem in Paris lebenden italienischen Exilanten und Dichter, der allerdings bis dato noch nie ein Libretto geschrieben hatte. Die Wahl fiel auf Schillers Drama *Die Räuber*. Dies war aus doppeltem Grund eine kluge Entscheidung: Zum einen ersparte die Dramatisierung eines Theaterstückes gegenüber einer Romanvorlage einen Arbeitsgang des Librettisten; zum andern stand Schillers Stück seit den Tagen der Revolution in Paris auf den Spielplänen der Theater. Crescini konnte also davon ausgehen, dass jedem Opernbesucher die recht komplexe Handlung vertraut war. Als Konsequenz verzichtete er (anders als Verdi in den *Masnadieri*) darauf, die Handlung umfänglich zu entwickeln und konzentriert sich ganz auf das tragische Ende, (wiewohl er, oft nur in Halbsätzen, sich sehr wohl bemühte, die komplexe Vorgeschichte in Erinnerung zu rufen).

Mit seiner klaren Handlung hat Crescini ein Libretto vorgelegt, das sich in seiner Dramaturgie nicht an der italienischen, sondern an der zeitgenössischen französischen Oper orientierte. Mercadante, der mit der naiven Vorstellung nach Paris gereist war, dass der Unterschied zwischen italienischer und französischer Oper einfach darin bestünde, dass man in Paris mehr Wert auf eine opulente Ausstattung legen würde, hatte inzwischen sehr wohl erkannt, dass eine *Grand Opéra* mehr war, als eine Abfolge virtuoser Gesangstücke. Und so gliederte er die vier Bilder in sieben große musikalische Nummern, die zwar in sich die traditionellen italienischen Formen wie Scena ed Aria oder Paghiera und Duetto enthalten, die aber von ihm in additiver Weise verwendet und durch auskomponierte Übergänge verbunden wurden (und die den in Italien üblichen Sängerapplaus verhindern). Namentlich den zweiten Akt kann man ohne weiteres als durchkomponiert bezeichnen. Bemerkenswert auch, dass zwar Corrado mit zwei großen Arien bedacht wird, solche aber für Ermano und Amelia fehlen. Diese werden durch kürzere Charakterstücke (Trinklied, Romanza, Paghiera etc.) entschädigt: Freilich wäre es falsch, die *Briganti* selbst als *Grand Opéra* zu bezeichnen. Sie ist und bleibt, was wohl ihr eigenartiges Zwitterwesen ausmacht, auch eine *Belcanto*-Oper. Dies ergab sich schon aus der Sängercompagnie, die dieselben Sänger umfaßte, wie Bellinis 1835 uraufgeführten *I puritani*. Und natürlich waren die *Puritani* die Meßlatte, an der Mercadante sich vor dem Pariser Publikum zu bewähren hatte. Dabei war die Begegnung mit dem berühmten *Puritani*-Quartett für Mercadante fast so etwas, wie ein Familientreffen. Zwar schrieb er für Giuditta Grisi zum ersten Mal, mit Luigi Lablach hingegen hatte er, wie oben erwähnt, schon im Konservatoriumsorchester zusammengespield. Antonio Tamburini und Giovanni Rubini hatten zu Beginn ihrer Karriere um 1820 in Neapel gesungen und die Hauptrollen in Mercadantes zweiter (*Violenza e costanza*) und dritter Oper (*Anacreonte in Samo*) kreiert. Mercadante kannte deren stimmliche Möglichkeiten also ganz genau. Und die Partitur erweckt den Anschein, als ob er seinen Ehrgeiz darin gesetzt hätte, seinen Freunden etwas ganz Besonderes zu bieten, nämlich Gesangspartien, die auch für Weltstars eine echte Herausforderung darstellen würden. Nur so ist die teilweise extrem hohe Tessitura zu erklären. Beachtung verdient überdies, dass Mercadante über eine ganz eignen Art an selbständig entwickeltem (nicht einfach Rossini

nachgebildeten *canto fiorito* verfügte. Eben diese Zuspitzung der Möglichkeiten des *canto fiorito* in Verbindung mit der Adaption einer aus der *Grand Opéra* stammenden Dramaturgie macht die Besonderheit dieser Oper aus, die darin über Bellini hinausgeht und den späteren Dramen Verdis den Weg ebnet. In der Sprache der Paläontologie könnte man wohl von dem *missing link* zwischen Bellini und Verdi sprechen.

Der Parisaufenthalt 1835/36 markiert zudem auch den entscheidenden Wendepunkt in Mercadantes eigener Karriere, insofern er sich fortan ganz auf den italienischen Markt konzentrierte. Seine 1837 in Mailand uraufgeführte Oper *Il giuramento* verarbeitet dabei die Pariser Erfahrungen und weitet diese noch aus. Zum einen verzichtet er darin auf die italienische Gepflogenheit, alle Solisten mit umfänglichen Solarien auszustatten, zum andern beschneidet er – wie in den *Briganti* schon in der zweiten Arien Corrados angelegt – auch in den Solopartien den exzessiven *canto fiorito*. Dagegen setzt er einen *canto drammatico*. Das ist freilich kein fundamentaler Gegensatz: Mercadante ging es nicht um eine Abschaffung des *Belcanto*, sondern um Beschneidung des *canto fiorito* überall dort, wo dieser Gefahr lief, der dramatischen Wahrheit der Handlung zuwider zu laufen. Diese Grenze zu überschreiten blieb dann dem mittleren Verdi

Die Handlung

Teil I

[1] Der alte Graf Massimiliano ist verstorben, sein zweitgeborener Sohn Corrado hat das Erbe angetreten, nachdem er einst durch eine Intrige seinen Vater dazu gebracht hatte, den erstgeborenen Sohn Ermano zu verstoßen. Dieser soll in der Fremde gestorben sein, tatsächlich aber hat er sich einer Bande von Guerillas angeschlossen, die gezielt gegen Adlige vorgehen. Trotz seiner adligen Abkunft ist er inzwischen zu deren Anführer aufgestiegen. Corrado indessen glaubt sich am Ziel seiner Machenschaften: Soeben hat er bekannt gegeben, die eigentlich schickliche Zeit der Hoftrauer zu verkürzen, um endlich das Mündel des alten Grafen, Amelia, heiraten zu können. Die Oper beginnt nach wenigen Takten Orchestervorspiel mit einem Chor, in dem dieser der Hoffnung Ausdruck gibt, dass nunmehr wieder Freude im Schloss einkehren werde.

[2]-[4] Corrado tritt auf und gibt seine Pläne hinsichtlich Amelia bekannt. In der folgenden Arie erweist er sich als zerrissene Persönlichkeit: getrieben vom Willen zur erlangten Macht und

vorbehalten, der mit seiner Forderung des *far brutto* letztlich die Wahrhaftigkeit des Ausdruckes über dessen Schönheit stellte. Genau diese Grenze konnte oder wollte der späte Mercadante nicht überschreiten und das markiert dann auch den Abstand zwischen Verdis und Mercadantes Produktion seit Ende der 1840er-Jahre. Für die kurze Zeit von 1836 bis etwa 1840 war Mercadante aber mit seinen *Reformopern* tatsächlich der avancierteste und maßgebliche Opernkomponist Italiens. Unter diesen Aspekten hat Mercadante nach der Fertigstellung von *Il giuramento* 1837 auch die *Briganti* (für die Mailänder Scala) überarbeitet. Das Arbeitsmanuskript Mercadantes zeigt, wie er die Pariser Fassung quasi Takt für Takt revidierte, um sie seiner neu gewonnen Opernästhetik anzupassen. Eine Aufführung dieser Mailänder Fassung würde man mit heutigen Ohren wohl ohne weiteres als frühen Verdi einschätzen. Allerdings mußte er dabei aus Zensurgründen die Handlung entschärfen: am Ende der Mailänder Fassung ersticht sich Ermano selbst. Aus Schillers revolutionärem Sturm- und Drang-Stück wird so eine einfaches *melodrama romantico*. Bemerkenswerterweise hat sich aber auch in Italien die dramaturgisch stärkere Pariser Fassung durchgesetzt, die letztmals 1847 in Pisa erklang.

Michael Wittmann

der Furcht als Mörder seines Vaters entlarvt zu werden.

[5] Ein Frauenchor aus Amelias Hofdamen fordern diese auf, in die Freude einzustimmen.

[6]-[7] Doch Amelia trauert weiterhin dem alten Grafen, aber auch dessen erstgeborenen Sohn Ermanno nach, den sie einst geliebt hat.

[8]-[10] Corrado tritt hinzu und erklärt Amelia, dass er sie nunmehr heiraten werde. Amelia weist dies entrüstet zurück und es kommt zu einer heftigen Auseinandersetzung.

[11]-[12] Zufällig führt der Weg die Briganten in die Nähe von Ermanos Heimatschloss. In der Nacht schleicht er sich in seines Vaters Schloß, den er um Verzeihung bitten will. Damit beginnt das Finale: Nach einem längeren Orchestervorspiel gedenkt der verzweifelte Ermano vergangenen Glückes.

[13] Harfenklänge ertönnen und er vernimmt aus der Ferne eine traurige Romanze Amelias.

[14] Diese wird unterbrochen durch einen Trauerchor für den toten Grafen. Ermano steht unter Schock.

[15]-[16] Amelia erscheint und Ermano gibt sich ihr zu erkennen, wagt aber nicht, ihr seine Zugehörigkeit zu den Revolutionären zu gestehen. Amelia gesteht ihm ihre ungebrochene Liebe.

17-19 Beide werden von Corrado überrascht, der zunächst einen einfachen Eindringling vermutet. Schließlich gibt sich Ermano auch diesem zu erkennen. Die Hofgesellschaft ist gespalten, wem ihre Loyalität gelten soll. Die Brüder verabreden sich zum Duell im Morgengrauen.

Teil II

- 1 Die Räuber versammeln sich in stürmischer Nacht im Wald.
- 2 Sie versuchen den niedergeschlagene Ermano aufzumuntern, in dem sie diesen ein Trinklied anstimmen lassen, in dem dieser das Leben eines Briganten und dessen Ideal eines selbstbestimmten Lebens preis.
- 3 Während seine Gefährten sich zur Ruhe begeben, findet Ermano keinen Schlaf. Er entdeckt das Marienbild, vor dem er sich einst mit Amelia verlobt hatte: schlagartig wird ihm die Diskrepanz zwischen dem sozialrevolutionären Anspruch der Guerilla und der Realität der Strauchdiebe bewußt. Er stimmt ein Gebet an.
- 4 Aus der Ferne hört er eine klagende Stimme.
- 5-8 Er überrascht einen alten Einsiedler, der einem Gefangenen Speis und Trank bringen will. Ermano befreit diesen Gefangenen, in dem er seinen alten Vater wiedererkennt. Der Einsiedler hatte die von Corrado gedungenen Mörder überzeugt, den alten Graf nicht zu töten und diesen vor Corrado versteckt. Der alte Graf beklagt sein trauriges Geschick; Ermano erzählt (zunächst als angeblicher Freund) vom traurigen Schicksal Ermanos in der Fremde und der Intrige, mit der ihn sein Bruder beim Vater in Misskredit

gebracht hat. Schließlich gibt er sich dem Vater als Ermano zu erkennen.

9 Der alte Graf ist übergelücklich und zugleich beunruhigt über das Aussehen Ermanos. Dessen Leute schwören, den alten Grafen wieder in seine Rechte einzusetzen. Corrado soll verschont werden.

Teil III

- 10 Die Räuber haben das Schloß angegriffen.
- 11-12 Corrado, dem Wahnsinn nahe, erkennt, dass er als Schuldiger seiner Intrige entlarvt ist und beschließt, im Kampf den Tod zu suchen.
- 13-14 Amelia sorgt sich um das Schicksal Ermanos und betet für ihn.
- 15 Frauenstimmen ertönen und verkünden, dass der alte Graf noch am Leben sei. Es kommt zum Wiedersehen Amelias mit dem alten Grafen.
- 16-18 Da erscheint Ermano mit blutverschmiertem Schwert. Der alte Graf bezichtigt ihn des Brudermordes. Vergeblich versucht Ermano, seinem Vater klar zu machen, dass Corrado sich selbst in das Schwert des Bruders gestürzt hat.
- 19 Da treten die die Gefolgsleute Ermanos auf. Sie sind in Gefahr umzingelt zu werden und fordern Ermano auf, mit ihnen zu fliehen. Ermano kennt seine Pflicht und folgt ihnen. Amelia erkennt erst jetzt, dass Ermano Brigant geworden ist. Sie bricht tot zusammen; der alte Graf bleibt wie versteinert zurück.

Michael Wittmann

Also available



8.660312-13



8.660295-96



8.660331-32



8.660282-83

A highly regarded composer in his day and considered the equal of Rossini, Bellini and Donizetti, Saverio Mercadante pioneered the transformation of *bel canto* opera into real music drama. He wrote the operatic tragedy *I Briganti* (The Brigands) not only to prove himself to the Parisian public but as a direct challenge to Bellini's *I puritani*, premièred the previous year. Mercadante's individual style of *canto fiorito* and distinctive theatricality demonstrate that opera need not be a mere succession of virtuoso vocal arias, and it paved the way for Verdi's later dramas. Prepared from a new critical edition, this production was described as 'outstanding' by *The New York Times*.

Deutschlandradio Kultur

Saverio
MERCADANTE
(1795-1870)

ROSSINI
IN WILDBAD
Belcanto Opera Festival

Playing Time
2:17:52

I Briganti

Melodramma serio in Three Parts • Libretto by Jacopo Crescini

WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING

Massimiliano Bruno Praticò, Bass
Ermanno Maxim Mironov, Tenor
Corrado Vittorio Prato, Baritone
Amelia Petya Ivanova, Soprano
Teresa Rosita Fiocco, Mezzo-soprano
Bertrando Atanas Mladenov, Baritone
Rollero Jesús Ayllón, Tenor

Camerata Bach Choir, Poznań • Chorus-master: Tomasz Potkowski

Virtuosi Brunensis • Artistic Director: Karel Mitáš

Antonino Fogliani

CD 1	1-19	Part I	67:58	CD 2	1-9	Part II	34:57
					10-19	Part III	34:57

Recorded live at the Trinkhalle, Bad Wildbad, Germany, 14th, 18th and 21st July, 2012
for the XXIV ROSSINI IN WILDBAD Festival (Artistic director: Jochen Schönleber)

A Co-production with Deutschlandradio Kultur • Producer: Siegbert Ernst

Engineers: Norbert Vossen and Siggie Mehne • Editor: Stefan Lang • Booklet Notes: Dr Michael Wittmann

Cover photo: Patrick Pfeiffer • New edition from the manuscripts after the research of Dr Michael Wittmann,
edited by Florian Bauer • The Italian libretto may be accessed at www.naxos.com/libretti/660343.htm