

# Rossini

## OVERTURES



Orchestra del Teatro Comunale  
di Bologna

**Michele Mariotti**

**Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868)**

**Overtures:**

1	La Scala di seta (1812)	5. 57
2	Tancredi (1813)	6. 00
3	L'italiana in Algeri (1813)	8. 09
4	Il barbiere di Siviglia (1816)	6. 53
5	La gazza ladra (1817)	9. 51
6	Matilde di Shabran (1821)	9. 39
7	Semiramide (1823)	12. 35
8	Le siège de Corinthe (1826)	9. 36
9	Guillaume Tell (1829)	12. 11

Total playing time: 81. 37

**Orchestra del Teatro Comunale di Bologna**

Conducted by **Michele Mariotti**



I grew up breathing Rossini. This composer is by now part of my life, and not only from an artistic point of view. I think this album is the result not only of intense days of recording, but also of a journey that began more than 30 years ago and that saw the Orchestra del Teatro Comunale di Bologna fulfilling a seminal role in the Rossini renaissance of the last three decades.

We have chosen the most grandiose and well-known overtures, combined with other less performed ones. In Rossini's operas, the overtures rarely serve as mere introductions to the work, but most often contained and anticipated the elements and situations that would then characterize the musical drama. These overtures represent the summation of the poetics of the Pesaro composer: a theatre of disenchanted music, which in its abstraction, however, managed to express the deepest affects of man, without ever falling into the rhetoric and exhibitionism typical of that Romanticism that soon would be imposed, and that Rossini always avoided.

- Michele Mariotti -

## A Soundtrack for the Present

The overtures that Gioachino Rossini composed during his relatively short career as author of operas (1810-1829) have long been staples of the orchestral repertory. In fact, they are played much more often than the operas to which they are appended. This unique situation stems from a variety of factors, but perhaps the most important is linked to the reputation that Rossini's operas have enjoyed -- or perhaps I should say suffered -- since their first appearance. These works have always been praised for their music: the sweetness of their melodies, the richness of their harmonies, the brilliance of their orchestration, the power of their rhythms, and so on. Their reputation as dramas, however, has never equalled their musical one, to say the least.

In preparation for the imminent premiere of *Semiramide* at La Fenice in Venice in February 1823, a Venetian newspaper published an extended discussion of Rossini's output to

date that summarized the main objections to the composer, including the following, oft-repeated accusation: "He is a frenzied gatherer of sounds, always deafening, sometimes brilliant, and never suited to the sentiment that they should express". When it came to the connection between words and music, or, to use a recurring term in the early nineteenth century, "imitation", Rossini's operas were heard as exhibiting a cavalier, unconcerned attitude. After hearing *La gazza ladra* (1817) for the first time, a Florentine critic exploded: "Music must be suited to the passions that one wants to awaken. Didn't you hear how at times jollity spreads where words invite weeping, and at other times a character sings calmly where desperate accents should be heard? My heart remains arid, and my ears are pitilessly tortured". Among the few who leapt to Rossini's defence, writer Giuseppe Carpani was perhaps the staunchest, and certainly the most articulate. In his pamphlet *Le Rossiniane* (1824), far from denying the critics' accusations about Rossini's lack of proper

imitation, Carpani defended the composer in terms of music's duty to follow its own logic rather than the text's: "Expression is not rarely very appropriate, and when it is not exactly so, this is due precisely to the wisdom of the composer, who, forced at times to sacrifice either expression or cantilena ["beautiful melody" or "proper melody"], abandons the former rather than losing the latter; this is because in music the first to be rescued must be music, since where cantilena ends, there is no longer a thread to the musical discourse, there is no thought. Music disappears, and noise takes over". Elsewhere in his text Carpani synthesized his view by saying that Rossini's music had such enormous success because it was full of "*cantilena*, and eternal *cantilena*, and beautiful *cantilena*, and new *cantilena*, and magic *cantilena*, and rare *cantilena*."

To the dismay of Rossini's critics, the public seemed to agree with Carpani, since they flocked to hear the composer's operas. They seemingly did not care whether what they

heard was appropriate to the words and situations represented onstage: they just wanted to hear his beautiful music, again and again and again. Indeed, the success enjoyed by Rossini's operas in early nineteenth-century Europe was absolutely extraordinary, unlike anything witnessed until then. The beginning of Rossini's first biography, written by none other than Stendhal and published in 1824, has become famous in this respect: "Since the death of Napoleon, another man has appeared who is talked about every day in Moscow as in Naples, in London as in Vienna, in Paris as in Calcutta. The fame of this man knows no bounds save those of civilisation itself; and he is not yet thirty-two!" As Stendhal's comparison with Napoleon suggests and countless other contemporaneous texts confirm, Rossini's music was heard as quintessentially modern. Features such as rapidity, novelty, intensity, loudness, excitement are mentioned over and over again. But these features were also considered typical of the present time by people in the early nineteenth century, a

period characterized by the unprecedented upheavals caused by the aftermath of the French revolution and by the Napoleonic wars. In a sense, Rossini's music was heard as the soundtrack of the present -- a fast, noisy, confusing but exciting present. And nowhere did Rossini's music seem faster, noisier and more exciting than in his overtures. These pieces, with their sweet *cantilene*, their rich harmonies, their brilliant orchestration, and their powerful and exciting rhythmic drive encapsulated all that was modern, exhilarating and electrifying in Rossini's music. Moreover, the fact that they were instrumental pieces seemed to solve the problem of imitation, since there were no words that demanded attention.

The status of Rossini's overtures as "pure" music is enhanced by the fact that most of them do not contain themes or ideas that will be found later in the operas which they precede, and in the rare cases when they do, these ideas are not particularly significant in the musical economy of the drama. They

were conceived as largely independent pieces meant to announce the beginning of the evening's entertainment and to get the audience excited for it. In fact, they were so independent from the drama that Rossini did not refrain from using some of them for several operas. The most notorious case is that of the piece that most of us know as the overture to *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (1816), but that was originally composed for an opera seria, *Aureliano in Palmira* (1813), and then reused, partially re-orchestrated, for another serious work, *Elisabetta regina d'Inghilterra* (1815), before ending up in *Il barbiere*. But there are other cases in which overtures were re-used in whole or in part, among them that of *La pietra del paragone* (1812), which also opened *Tancredi* the following year.

Almost all Rossini's overtures are structured according to the same plan. They begin with a slow introduction that wanders through tonal space while throwing together a number of musical ideas of different, indeed contrasting nature. This is followed by the

core of the piece, a fast section, usually Allegro, structured as a sonata without development, that is, a two-part form in which the exposition of a certain number of musical ideas over a tonal trajectory that moves from the home key to its dominant (for example, C major to G major) is followed by a varied repetition of the same ideas, called recapitulation, that remains strictly in the home key instead. Rossini was famous for his *cantilene*, those catchy, beautifully shaped and memorable tunes of which his overtures abound. But perhaps even more famous was his ability to build overwhelming tension, whose eventual release would bring a deep-seated sense of satisfaction to the audience. His main tool was the crescendo, a section, placed toward the end of the exposition and in the same spot in the recapitulation, that consists in the progressively louder reiteration of the same phrases. The sense of excitement derives not only from the increase in volume, but also from the technique with which phrases are linked: the final beat of each phrase corresponds to the initial beat

of the following one, so that phrases are not separate, discrete units, but systematically overlap. The final effect is that of an elastic that is gradually but inexorably pulled almost to breaking point, and then eventually released.

When Rossini moved to Paris and closed his operatic career with a few French works, he evidently tried to link music more closely with the drama. This is evident also in the two overtures he wrote there, for the first and last of his French operas, *Le siège de Corinthe* (1826) and *Guillaume Tell* (1829). In the first, the military march that follows an initial orchestral flurry and functions as the extremely long slow introduction of the piece anticipates the sounds of war and strife that will echo throughout the drama, while the Allegro is also permeated by military colours.

The overture to *Guillaume Tell* does not follow the usual format, but is made up of four sections not only unrelated, but also strongly contrasting. The first, Andante, is famed

for its orchestration, dominated by five solo cellos, and for the echo effects that interrupt the regular unfolding of themes -- we should not forget that the action takes place on the Swiss Alps. The second part, Allegro, describes the storm on the Lake of the Four Cantons that will turn out to be a turning point in the action: the climax reaches a level of orchestral power and sheer noise never heard in Rossini before. The third section, Andantino, evokes the calm following the tempest with a *ranz des vaches*, a type of folk melody that was thought to be employed by Swiss shepherds to call their herds back home in the evening. Ranzes des vaches play a crucial role in the definition of the Alpine setting of *Guillaume Tell*, and this Andantino offers a first glimpse of a landscape that will return in several different guises over the course of the opera. The concluding Allegro Vivace does not exhibit any of the precise associations of the preceding three sections, but gives a sense of triumphal excitement, an almost frenetic resolution of the tension accumulated during the overture, thus anticipating the conclusion

of the opera. Indeed, if the first version of *Guillaume Tell* ends with a solemn hymn to liberty, a few years later Rossini prepared another finale in which the Allegro Vivace of the overture accompanies a choral explosion on the words "victory and freedom".

### Emanuele Senici

## Michele Mariotti Conductor

Music Director of the Teatro Comunale di Bologna (from 2015 to 2018) Michele Mariotti was born in Pesaro. Following his classical studies, he obtained a degree in music composition at the Rossini Conservatoire in Pesaro and a degree in orchestra conducting at the Accademia Musicale Pescarese with full marks and honour under the guidance of Donato Renzetti.

In September 2005 he made his operatic debut conducting Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia* in Salerno, Italy. In November 2007 he has conducted *Simon Boccanegra* for the opening of the season 2007/2008 at the Teatro Comunale di Bologna. Following the success of that production, in 2008 he was nominated Principal Conductor of Bologna's Orchestra del Teatro Comunale (until 2014, before becoming Music Director), where he has to date conducted *I puritani*, *La gazza ladra*, *Idomeneo*, *Carmen*, *Risorgimento* and *Il prigioniero*, *La*

*cenerentola*, *La traviata*, *Le nozze di Figaro*, *Norma*, *Nabucco*, *Così fan tutte*, *Guillaume Tell*, *Un ballo in maschera*, *Die Zauberflöte*, *Attila*, *Werther*, *La voix humaine*/*Cavalleria rusticana*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *La bohème*, *Don Carlo*, Verdi's and Mozart's *Requiem*, Rossini's *Stabat Mater* and numerous concerts. He has led Bologna's Chorus and Orchestra in Tokyo (*I puritani* and *Carmen*), in Moscow, in Paris (*L'italiana in Algeri*) and in Italy in Pesaro (Rossini Opera Festival), Turin (Lingotto Musica) and Bergamo (Fondazione Donizetti). With the Orchestra del Teatro Comunale di Bologna he has recorded albums with Juan Diego Flórez and Nino Machaidze.

He has conducted at La Scala in Milan, Turin's Teatro Regio, Teatro San Carlo in Naples, Teatro Massimo in Palermo, Teatro Comunale in Florence, Pesaro's Rossini Opera Festival, Verdi's Festival in Parma, Sferisterio - Macerata Opera Festival, Salzburg Festival, New York's Met, London's Royal Opera House Covent Garden, Paris Opéra, De Nationale Opera in Amsterdam, Bavarian State Opera in Munich,





Berlin's Deutsche Oper, Chicago's Lyric Opera, Los Angeles Opera, Wexford's Festival and Opéra Royal de Wallonie in Liège, among others.

He has conducted concerts with Gewandhausorchester Leipzig, Orchestre National de France, Münchner Symphoniker, Essener Philharmoniker, Turin's Rai National Symphony Orchestra, Parma's Toscanini Orchestra, Milan's I Pomeriggi Musicali, Orchestra dell'Accademia del Teatro alla Scala, at Turin's Auditorium del Lingotto, at Peralada Festival, at Barcelona's Liceu, at Madrid's Teatro Real, at Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris, at Ópera de Tenerife, at Festival de Saint-Denis and at Radio France Festival in Montpellier, to mention a few. He has been awarded the 36th "Premio Abbiati" by the Associazione Critici Musicali Italiani as best conductor of 2016.

## **Orchestra del Teatro Comunale di Bologna**

Led by Sergiu Celibidache, Zoltán Peskó, Vladimir Delman, Riccardo Chailly and Daniele Gatti, the Orchestra del Teatro Comunale di Bologna has a rich tradition. After having been Principal Conductor since 2008, Michele Mariotti assumed the role of Music Director in January 2015. The orchestra has also worked with conductors such as Gary Bertini, Myung-Whun Chung, James Conlon, Pinchas Steinberg, Valery Gergiev, Eliahu Inbal, Vladimir Jurovski, Daniel Oren, Peter Maag, Neville Marriner, Kurt Masur, Riccardo Muti, Mstislav Rostropovich, Esa-Pekka Salonen, Georg Solti, Christian Thielemann, Charles Dutoit and Georges Prêtre. The Orchestra del Teatro Comunale is frequently invited abroad (in Holland, Romania, Spain, France, Switzerland and Oman) and has participated in prestigious festivals (Amsterdam, Parma, Wiesbaden, Santander, Aix en Provence, Savonlinna, Macao). Over the years it has maintained







a privileged relationship with Japan, where several tours have been made.

The Orchestra del Teatro Comunale has taken part in many significant recording productions, including Gaetano Donizetti's *La Favorita* conducted by Richard Bonyngé, Giuseppe Verdi's *Oberto Conte of San Bonifacio* under the baton of Zoltan Peskó, Gioachino Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia* led by Giuseppe Patané, Donizetti's *La fille du regiment* conducted by Bruno Campanella, Pietro Mascagni's *Le Maschere* and Giacomo Puccini's *La bohème* with Gianluigi Gelmetti conducting, Rossini's *La scala di seta* led by Gabriele Ferro, and Rossini's *Armida* conducted by Daniele Gatti. Under the direction of Riccardo Chailly, the orchestra has recorded Verdi's *Macbeth*, *Manon Lescaut* by Puccini, *Rigoletto* by Verdi, *La cenerentola* and the *Petite Messe Solennelle* by Rossini, and video productions of *I vespri siciliani* and *Giovanna d'Arco* by Verdi and *Werther* by Jules Massenet. Under the guidance of Michele Mariotti, the orchestra

recorded *Simon Boccanegra* by Verdi and *Guillaume Tell* by Rossini, an album with sacred arias as well as one with French arias with Juan Diego Flórez, and an album of Romantic arias with Nino Machaidze. The Orchestra has also recorded *Le Comte Ory* with Juan Diego Flórez, *La Nuit de Mai*, opera arias and songs by Ruggero Leoncavallo with Plácido Domingo, as well as some anthologies with Luciano Pavarotti and June Anderson.

In 2013 the members of the Teatro Comunale di Bologna and conductor Michele Mariotti starred in the inaugural concert of the fourth International Mstislav Rostropovich Festival in Moscow performing Verdi's *Requiem*. In October 2015, again with the same Music Director, they inaugurated the *Lingotto Musica* exhibition at the Giovanni Agnelli Hall in Turin, where they performed the *Stabat Mater* and the Overture and Divertissement from Rossini's *Guillaume Tell*. The same program was presented in Pesaro and Bergamo.

After a thirty-year participation with the Rossini Opera Festival in Pesaro, 2017 marked a new collaboration between the Teatro Comunale di Bologna and the Verdi Festival in Parma, which saw the Orchestra also participating in the performance of *Stiffelio*, awarded with the Premio Speciale of the 37th Premio Abbiati" by the Associazione Critici Musicali Italiani. In June 2018 the Orchestra del Teatro Comunale, led by Michele Mariotti, had a guest residence at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris.

## Acknowledgments

### PRODUCTION TEAM

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*This album was recorded at the library of the Convento San Domenico in Bologna, Italy in May 2018.*

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