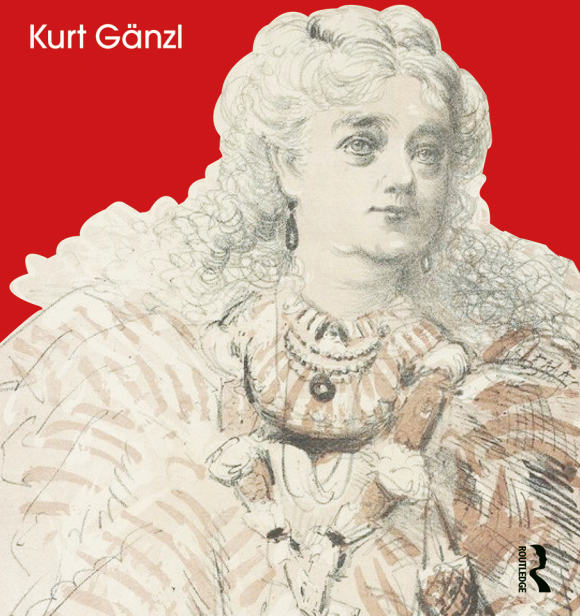


VICTORIAN VOCALISTS

Kurt Gänzl



ROUTLEDGE



VICTORIAN VOCALISTS

Victorian Vocalists is a masterful and entertaining collection of 100 biographies of mid- to late-19th century singers and stars.

Kurt Gänzl paints a vivid picture of the Victorian operatic and concert world, revealing the backgrounds, journeys, successes, failures and even misdemeanours of these singers. This volume is not only an outstanding reference work for anyone interested in vocalists of the era, but also a compelling, meticulously researched picture of life in the vast shark tank that was Victorian music.

Kurt Gänzl is one of the most important chroniclers of the world's history of music and theatre. His numerous works on the subject include *The Encyclopedia of the Musical Theatre* (1994, 2001), *The British Musical Theatre* (1986), *The Musical: A Concise History* (1997), *Gänzl's Book of the Musical Theatre* (1988) and biographies of such artists as Lydia Thompson (2002), Willie Gill (2002) and Emily Soldene (*In Search of a Singer*, 2007).



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

VICTORIAN VOCALISTS

Kurt Gänzl

First edition published 2018
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

© 2018 Kurt Gänzl

The right of Kurt Gänzl to be identified as author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Trademark notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Gänzl, Kurt author.

Title: Victorian vocalists / Kurt Gänzl.

Description: First edition. | Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY : Routledge, 2017.

Identifiers: LCCN 2017016188 | ISBN 9781138103177 (hardback) |

ISBN 9781315102962 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Singers—Great Britain—19th century—Biography.

Classification: LCC ML400 .G32 2017 |

DDC 782.1092/241 [B]—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2017016188>

ISBN: 978-1-138-10317-7 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-315-10296-2 (ebk)

Typeset in Bembo
by Out of House Publishing

*For BETSY MILLER, who has spent much time in the
Victorian era with me in the last ten years*



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

CONTENTS

<i>List of figures</i>	<i>xii</i>
<i>Preface</i>	<i>xv</i>
Ada Adini	1
Luigi Fernando Agnesi	3
Augusta Albertini	6
Giulia Amadei	12
Émilie Ambre	16
Mathilde Bauermeister	30
Giovanni Battista Belletti	37
Anna de Belocca	44
Emily Berry Greening	48
Abigail Betts	54
Charlott(e) Ann Birch and Eliza Birch	66
Pasquale Brignoli	82
Susan Bruce	90

Contents

Arthur Byron	93
Enrico Campobello	99
William Candidus	120
Anna Giovanna Caradori	123
Rosalbina Caradori Allan	132
William Castle	151
Emilia Chiomi	156
Giuseppe Ciampi	162
Helen Condell	167
Rosa Csillag	174
Giuseppe de Begnis	182
Catherine Delcy	192
Ilma di Murska	197
Julie Dorus-Gras	204
Maria Louise Durand	213
Lucy Escott	219
Robert Farquharson	224
Rita Favanti	230
Guglielmo Fedor	237
Claudina Fiorentini	241
John James Frazer	249
Thekla Friedländer	257

Contents

Émilie Gaveaux-Sabatier	260
Fanny Gordosa	265
Julia Gould	271
Elizabeth Greenfield	276
Charles Guilmette	279
Edna Hall	286
Laura Harris	290
Adelina Hirlemann	297
Gustav Hölzel	299
Priscilla Horton	304
Eliza Jones	318
Elena Kenneth and Susan Kenneth	321
Florence Lancia	330
Alberto Laurence	347
Luise Liebhart	351
Charles Lockey	361
Charles Lyall	365
Elizabeth Mascal and Mary Mascal	377
Michael Maybrick	382
Joseph Mengis	387
Sophia Messent	394
Mira Miran	400

Contents

Marie Monbelli	404
Dolores Nau	408
Nikita	419
Elizabeth Nouver	425
Aline Osgood	428
Frederic Packard	433
Maria Palmieri	436
John Parry	443
Mary Ann Paton	459
Mrs Howard Paul	480
Emma Pearce	498
Rosina Penco	501
Henry Phillips	507
Marietta Piccolomini	536
Johann Baptist Pischek	543
Elizabeth Poole	550
Louisa Pyne	562
George Robinson	580
Arthur Rousbey	583
Fanny Jervis Rubini	586
Hermine Rudersdorff	590
Lewis Bernard Sapio and Antonio Sapio	601

Contents

Mademoiselle Sarolta	606
Edward Scovel	609
Mathilde Sessi	612
Mrs Alfred Shaw	615
Jane Shirreff	622
Clarice Sinico	626
Joseph Staudigl	641
Agostino Susini	654
Emily Sutton	658
Zare Thalberg	662
Lewis Thomas	670
Annie Tonnellier	675
Ostava Torriani	682
Annie Tremaine	692
James William Turner and Charles Turner	695
Michele Urio	700
Pauline Vaneri	705
Louisa Vinning	716
Giovanni Vitelli and Annie Vitelli	728
Henry Whitworth	732
Josephine Yorke	744

FIGURES

Illustrations are taken from the author's collections and from the Harvard Theatre Collection, the Porträtsammlung Manskopf at the Goethe Universität, Frankfurt am Main, and the private archives of Allister Hardiman and Mrs Elizabeth Mills.

1	Mathilde Bauermeister	31
2	Giovanni Battista Belletti	38
3	Abigail Betts	64
4	Pasquale Brignoli	83
5	Enrico Campobello	101
6	Rosalbina Caradori Allan	133
7	William Castle	154
8	Emilia Chiomi	160
9	Giuseppe Ciampi	163
10	Rosa Csillag	176
11	Giuseppe de Begnis	186
12	Ilma di Murska	198
13	Maria Louise Durand	214
14	Robert Farquharson	225
15	Fanny Gordosa	266
16	Laura Harris	292
17	Priscilla Horton	312
18	Dolores Nau	409
19	Maria Palmieri	438
20	John Parry	445
21	Mary Ann Paton	460
22	Rosina Penco	502
23	Henry Phillips	508
24	Johann Baptist Pischek	544
25	Louisa Pyne	577
26	Hermine Rudersdorff	599
27	Emily Sutton	659

List of figures

28	Zare Thalberg	669
29	Annie Tonnellier	678
30	Ostava Torriani	683
31	Annie Tremaine	694
32	Pauline Vaneri	706
33	Henry Whitworth	734

Unless otherwise noted in the text, all images are from the author's personal collection.



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

PREFACE

Victorian vocalists

This is a collection of a hundred inquisitively factual articles on some of the most interesting singers of the Victorian age, in or from Great Britain, the ‘colonies’ and Europe.

The hundred are part of a collection of some 900 (to date) that I have put together, over the past many years, simply for the knowledge and amusement of myself and my circle of super-inquisitive musico-historical friends. In the process of our various writings and researchings, we – yes, I, in particular – had come upon so many people whose names meant little to us, and so many people whose names did mean something but whose histories (as show-business histories are inclined) have been, to some degree, falsified, in newspapers, books and, of course, these days, on the wicked worldwide web. So I decided that, in my retired and slightly invalided years, I would try to do something about the situation. I’ve been at it, now, for ten or twelve wobbly, one-fingered-typewriting years ...

But, of course, as my oldest and wisest musicologist friend, Andrew Lamb, said: ‘all that work, and, if you drop dead, it will be lost.’ So, after a bit of a health fright, I decided to go public – with some of ‘my folk’, at least. All of them would make an awful lot of volumes.

You may find some of this material unbearably detailed. Well, some people collect stamps or Pokemons or CDs. I collect facts. And, in the modern manner of biography, the ‘laundry list’ variety, I put most, if not always an overwhelming all, of them in to my writings. You can skip the bits that don’t interest you, but they may, conversely, be the very bits that do interest someone else. That’s my excuse, anyway. Something for everyone.

Frequently, here, I point out errors in other writers’ work. This is not bloody-mindedness. I need you to know that I’ve seen their versions of ‘facts’ and checked them out from primary sources (often at considerable cost), and they are wrong. Half the work in assuring that you get the correct information is to ensure that you don’t get the wrong information. Alas, compilers of reference works, producers of recording and programme notes, writers of other people’s biographies, and their like, too often just copy their ‘facts’ from such a work as Fétis, Grove, the *Dictionary of National Biography*, the horrifying Brown and Stratton, the far-from-horrifying Baker, their European equivalents, or some newspaper article or publicity puff which has been reproduced over and over on the web. Thus, the lies and errors have been perpetuated. So, like St George on his Dragon, I am flying to the rescue of that beautiful damsel, the Truth. Which, actually, surprisingly often turns out to be much more fun than the lies!

Preface

I'm not pretending I'm perfect – well, not quite. There are lacunae. I can no longer zoom around the world, as I used to, in search of information. My Swedish, Portuguese and Hungarian are grim. And yes, I nod occasionally. One does after the age of seventy. I'm just saying (chuckle) that I'm more accurate than just about anyone up-to-now else. In fifty years, when research has become even more easy from home, and Google Books eliminates those senseless 'snippets', someone will probably look at my work and say, 'Oh, Gänzl ... soooo incomplete'. Well, annoyingly (to me), I am sometimes incomplete. If I had a few thousand pounds to throw around, a lot of the birth and death data, for example, could be uncovered by paying for certificates. Maybe by the next generation all public records will be available to the public freely and at no cost. But, until then, you'll have to make do with my little inexactitudes, if not, hopefully, incorrectitudes! And I hope that scholars of the future will use my articles as a basis for their further research. This book is just a heartfelt effort to collect and make generally available the maximum amount of information that I could gather, with the means accessible to me during a decade of digging.

Any collection or 'Encyclopaedia' (which I guess is what this is – the whole 900, I mean) has to choose who to put in and who to leave out. Unless there was a good reason, I've left out (except by accident or indignation) any artist to whom an entire biography has been already devoted. Yes, I know, some of those biographies are a bit – and even very – hairy, and the autobiographies are usually 'selective' in what they tell you, and both are frequently (my war cry!) incorrect, but if someone's taken the trouble to write a whole book ... sorry, I can't compete in an article. Except to say 'this is wrong, that is wrong', which is a boring game.

Most importantly, however, this definitely isn't a hit parade – neither the whole 900, nor the selection from them which makes up this book. It's not saying 'these are the best' or even 'the most successful' singers of the Victorian era; these are purely and simply a hundred of the folk upon whom I have chanced, in my long, long strolls through the world of 19th-century music and theatre, who have caught my fancy and who have inspired me to some major digging. Whether because they had a grand career, up till now unreported properly, or a colourful life, in and out of music, or ... well, it's simple: if somebody quite simply fascinates me, they are in! If they don't, they aren't. At least, not till we get to volume ten. This is, rather, a quick picture of a cross-section of the Victorian vocal scene and its artists, successful, less successful and, sometimes, ridiculously unsuccessful.

So, have a dip – they're only in alphabetical order because, well, what else? – and, please, if you can find a lost grave, or a missing baptism, do let me know. All copies of birth, death and marriage certificates very gratefully received. And if, among this little sampler, you haven't found the Victorian vocalist that especially interests you, feel free to get in touch. There are hundreds and hundreds more of these pieces where this selection came from.

But, most of all, just enjoy wandering through this most fascinating era of music and theatre and its people. Victorian vocalists – of all sorts.

Kurt Gänzl

The Encyclopaedia of the Musical Theatre
Yamba, New South Wales
June 2017

ADINI [ADINY], ADA [SCHILLINGER, ADA]

(b Boston, ? 1 March 1856; d Pourville,
Dieppe, 22 February 1924)

Ada Adini, or Adiny (as she seems, latterly, to have preferred), had a career that went crescendo, from indifferent beginnings as a light soprano to a position as one of the stars of the turn-of-the-century Wagnerian stage.

The lady has confused many a writer. She is said, erroneously, to have been born ‘Adele Chapman’. Her date of birth is unconfirmed, but it ranges wildly through the 1850s and into the 1860s. Her marital life (like her mother’s before her) seems to have been irregular. And one writer has warned against confusing the ‘Ada Adini’ who toured and sang with the tenor Aramburo in the 1870s with Madame Adiny, the famous Brünnhilde of the 1900s, who was the wife of the writer Paul Milliet. They were, of course, the same person.

Ada was born in Boston. Her mother was Elizabeth (‘Lizzie’) Doane Chapman (b Boston, 31 January 1839; d Florence, 22 October 1863); her father, Franklin B[enjamin] Schillinger, was a painter from Poland, Maine, whom sixteen-year-old Lizzie had wed on 1 January 1855.

I’ve no idea what became of Mr Schillinger (though I see he later wed and bred with another wife), but Mrs Schillinger seems to have gone, pretty soon, to Italy to study singing, taking her little daughter with her. And she didn’t come back. She married (!) the well-known Florentine singing teacher Luigi Vannuccini and died at the age of 24.

So Ada grew up in Florence and studied singing, first with her sort-of step-father and then with Pauline Viardot-Garcia in Paris. And, while in Paris, she became involved with the fifteen-or-so-years-older tenor Antonio Aramburo (1838–1912). They may have married – they probably didn’t – but they did have a daughter, who was baptised, safely, Elisabetta Aramburo Chapman Schillinger. All bases covered.

Ada is said to have made her first stage appearance either in *I puritani* at Casalmonferrato or as *Dinorah* in Varese in 1876 – I can track down neither – followed by engagements in Mantova (*Rigoletto*), Madrid and Prague, then, in October 1879, she returned to America, having been engaged by Mapleson for a season. She sang *Rigoletto* and *Il trovatore*, but was comprehensively outshone by the other prime donne of the company, Émilie Ambre and Alwina Valleria. Aramburo caused scenes, and finally the couple did a moonlight and left town.

In the following years, I spot them in South America, with Merelli’s Italian opera season at the Central Skating Rink in Berlin (Sister Lucrezia in Bimboni’s *Das Modell*, *Lucrezia Borgia*, Selika in *L’Africaine*), with Strakosch in Barcelona, and singing *Aida*, *Lucrezia Borgia*, *L’Africaine*, *Il trovatore*, *La traviata* and *Rigoletto* for Merelli at the Neustädter Theater in Prague (August 1882). In 1883–4 Ada – without Aramburo – was at

the San Carlo in Naples (Ines in *L'Africaine*, Adalgisa to the *Norma* of Therese Singer, Rossini's *Stabat Mater*, *Lucrezia Borgia*, *Poliuto*), and in 1885 she travelled to South America with Dufriche and Borghi-Mamo.

On Ada's return to Europe, things would be different. She was singing in Verona when she was spotted by Gailhard of the Paris Opéra. He took her to Paris, put her under his prize singing teacher Sbriglia, and launched her on 6 May 1887 as Chimène in *Le Cid*. The Parisian music press tried not to be impressed: 'L'Opéra, à la recherche d'une Falcon, a mis la main sur une cantatrice américaine, Mlle Ada Adini ... la voix est d'un métal solide, mais mal assoupli, et l'éducation de l'artiste est encore bien incomplète. Elle chante par coups de gosier, par poussées, et force souvent le son jusqu'au cri ...', but admitted: 'elle a du temperament ... elle pourra prendre à l'Opéra une place honorable.'

And she did. Over the years that followed, Ada played at the Opéra as *Aida*, opposite Jean de Reszke, as Valentine in *Les Huguenots*, Selika in *L'Africaine*, Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni*, Brunehild in *Sigurd*, Rachel in *La Juive* and Catherine of Aragon in *Henry VIII*, as well as creating the role of the Duchesse d'Estampes in Saint-Saëns' *Ascanio* (1890).

In the 1890s, Madame Adini established herself as a Wagnerian singer throughout Europe, and she also married. Presumably for the first time. On 15 January 1893, at Paris, Ada Schillinger (*sic*) wed [Jules Alexandre] Paul Milliet [Monchicourt] (b Rio de Janeiro, 14 February 1855; d Paris, 21 November 1924), the well-known librettist (*Hérodiade*, *Werther*, *Esmeralda*, Isidore de Lara's *Amy Robsart*), adapter, and editor of *Le Monde Artiste Illustré*.

Ada played three seasons at La Scala (*Die Walküre*, *Sigurd*, *Siegfried*, Dolores in Paladilhe's *Patrie*, *Le Cid*, *Werther*) and four at Covent Garden – as Valentine ('intensity and dramatic fervor somewhat marred by vibrato'), *Aida* ('imposing presence and unquestionable histrionic powers ... hard quality of her voice'), Donna Anna, and Venus in *Tannhäuser*, as well as in *Walküre*. Thereafter she was at the Hofoper in Vienna (*Aida*, Valentine, Brünnhilde), the Neues Deutsches Theater in Prague, the San Carlo at Naples, the Teatro Argentina in Rome (*Walküre*), at Leipzig, Stettin, Amsterdam ('her tour of Europe') and in the operatic seasons at Monte Carlo, where she appeared as *Amy Robsart* and as Frédégonde in César Franck's *Ghiselle*.

She also sang the principal duos of *Amy Robsart* in concert in London, created Milliet's *Histoire d'amour* (music: Spiros Samara) in a private concert at the Palais Bourbon, and gave the principal airs from such as *Mademoiselle de Belle-Isle* (Samara) in Parisian concerts. Among the recordings which she made in Paris when around her fiftieth year were numbered several pieces by Milliet.

In the 1890s and 1900s, Ada made a particular success of the Brünnhilde of *Die Walküre*, and, following her first Isolde, at Leipzig (in the presence of the composer's family), she repeated that role frequently. She appeared on the stage as Eva, Elsa, Venus, Brünnhilde of the *Crépuscule des dieux* et al, and performed the Wagnerian bon-bons regularly in concert. At the Concerts Colonne, she sang Senta's Ballad, the Liebestod and a Rhinemaiden in one performance; at another, the *Faust* of Schumann.

Mme Adiny-Milliet also turned her hand to teaching, and numbered among her pupils the mezzo-soprano Maria Gay.

She was still to be heard on the platform well into her fifties: I spot her on 4 May 1910 singing new songs by de Falla at a soirée at the Salle Gaveau.

Madame Milliet died in 1924, followed later in the same year by her husband. Daughter Elisabetta married (1903) into the Italian nobility, becoming the wife of Arturo Berlingieri, Marchese di Valle Perotta. Well, the aristocracy have always favoured a bit of illegitimacy. They had three sons and one daughter, Eleonora (25 August 1913), after which the Almanach de Gotha loses her, and so do I. So did Arturo, who went on to much more newspaper-worthy wives.

AGNESI, LUIGI FERNANDO
[AGNIEZ, LOUIS [LOEDWYCK]
FERDINAND LÉOPOLD]

(b Erpent, Namur, Belgium, 17 July 1833; d 56 Loudon Road, St John's Wood, London, 2 February 1875)

The Belgian bass-baritone Agnesi, always praised for his artistry and musicianship, rose to a high place in the British music world of the 1870s.

Agniez was educated, not primarily as a vocalist, at the Brussels Conservatoire. In the 1850s he became maître de chapelle at the Église Ste Catherine, taught music, and penned a regular flow of songs, signed L F Agniez-Scribe. This strange semi-pseudonym had an odd origin. At the age of nineteen, Agniez had married one of his singing pupils, Joanna Augustina Julia Scribe, and, in a reversal of the usual style, had appended her name to his. At the time of her marriage, Mme Agniez (b 1 April 1809; d Mechelen, Antwerp, 19 April 1886) was forty-two.

On 10 March 1858, Agniez' two-act opera *Hermold le Normand* (lib: C P F Michaëls) was staged at Brussels' Théâtre de la Monnaie. The piece was a failure, and thereafter Agniez angled his musical life rather towards singing. He can be seen performing occasionally in Belgium in 1859, and in 1860 he appeared at London's Crystal Palace, at August Manns's annual concert (11 August) alongside Parepa, Augusta Thompson, Belletti, Wilbye Cooper et al. He sang 'O thou, Palermo' and an aria from *Judas Maccabaeus* and was adjudged 'a highly promising singer'.

However, Agniez moved on to Paris to study with Duprez, at the latter's École de Chant, and when he performed at his teacher's concert in March 1861 the music press noted: 'M Agniez a été remarquable par sa bonne diction et par l'habileté avec laquelle il conduit sa voix si belle et si sympathique.' During the season, Duprez took some of his pupils, headed by Maria Brunetti, to Saumur, where they played two acts of *Rigoletto* in what seems to have been the young singer's first stage appearance. There would soon be plenty more. I see him in May in the role of Basilio in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, Assur in *Semiramide*, *La favorita*, and Dandini in *Cenerentola* with a Merelli Italian company, at the Leipzig Stadttheater, at the Berlin Opera, and in Vienna, Pest and Prague, well into 1862. At the end of that year he was engaged by Merelli for the Paris Italian Opera.

As Signor Agnesi, he made his debut in November in the role of Assur, alongside Rosina Penco, Alboni and Vidal: 'nous avons eu, cette semaine, trois représentations de la *Sémiramide*, salle Ventadour, pour les débuts d'une basse chantante, M Agnesi, qui est bien plutôt un bel et bon baryton ... Le rôle d'Assur est donc trop grave pour la voix de M Agnesi, qui ne s'en est pas moins tiré en excellent musicien et souvent en bon chanteur.' In fact, the role of Assur would turn out to be one of Agnesi's most celebrated and successful

assumptions, his smooth, accurate singing and precise mastery of the Rossinian coloratura winning over a decade of grand reviews. That his 'basse chantante' was less dark and plumbier than that of some celebrated basses meant that he was suited to some 'bass' roles more than to others, and Assur was probably the best.

In 1863, Agnesi was engaged for the Italian theatres of Paris (where he gave his Assur with the Marchisio sisters), in Madrid ('un Assur comme on rencontre peu'), for a Merelli season at the Vienna Carltheater (Rodolfo to the *Sonnambula* of Patti, Don Basilio, Bide-the-Bent in *Lucia di Lammermoor*, Leporello, Grenville in *La traviata*) and at Frankfurt. At the Opéra, he also appeared as one of the conspirators in *Un ballo in maschera* and as Mephistopheles to the Marguerite of Patti in one act of *Faust* in a charity concert. In the season, the company emigrated to the Casino at Baden-Baden, where Agnesi appeared in *I puritani* and as Fernando in *La gazza ladra*; he also sang at Spa in concert with Sarasate.

Back in Paris, Agnesi played more performances of *Un ballo in maschera*, appeared as Dandini in *Cenerentola*, sang at Rossini's soirees, and took the role of Margutte, with delle Sedie, Mme Charton-Demeur and Fraschini, in Graffigna's *La duchessa di San Giuliano* for the six performances it lasted. Much more successful was the production of *Crispino e la comare*, in which Agnesi was cast in the comical role of pharmacist Mirabolano and made a hit, with Zucchini and Mercuriali, in the trio 'Ma signori, perchè tanta questione?'. He would repeat his role countless times over the following years. On 13 March 1864, at the home of Count Willet-Pill, he took part, with the Marchisios and Gardoni, in the first performance of Rossini's *Petite messe solennelle*.

In 1865, Agnesi was engaged for London's Italian Opera to play the role of Il Prefetto alongside the *Linda di Chamounix* of di Murska, Carrión and Grossi. He was thoroughly liked, and later in the season he gave his Assur with Titiens and Trebelli and Figaro in *Le nozze di Figaro* with the same stars plus Santley and Sarolta. In between times he took part in the fashionable London season, appearing for Mariot de Beauvoisin, Arditi, Cusins, Mlle Enequist, Ganz, Benedict, Mme Lemmens-Sherrington and the Giuglini Benefit, often with the aria 'Sorgete' from Rossini's *Maometto*.

At the end of the London season, Agnesi returned to Baden-Baden, where he played Sparafucile to the Rigoletto of delle Sedie ('Agnesi est une basse chantante, au timbre doux et puissant à la fois ... Dans le rôle de ce chenapan de Sparafucile, Agnesi sait encore intéresser par son chant et son talent'), and then to Paris for more *Crispino* and more *Linda di Chamounix* and to play Burger in Mercadante's *Léonora*.

The Italiens company visited Rouen and Brussels with their *Semiramide*, and I spot Agnesi at Bilbao, Saragossa, Douai, and again at Baden-Baden (*Rigoletto*, *Crispino e la comare*, *Marta*, *Don Pasquale*, *Faust*, *Il barbiere*), before the annual return to the Italiens. This season he was cast as Belcore to the Adina of Patti and the Dulcamara of Zucchini, as Calisto in a little piece by Alary, *Locanda gratis*, and as Giorgio Walton in *I puritani*, duetting 'Suoni la tromba' with Napoleone Verger. This season, he played more roles than previously: Count Robinson in *Il matrimonio segreto*, Severus in *Poliuto*, Il Dottore in *Columella*, Rodolfo in *La sonnambula* and Fernando in *La gazza ladra*, as well as the inevitable *Crispino* and *Semiramide*. Away from the stage he premiered the Baronne de Maistre's *Stabat Mater* and Prince Poniatowski's *Mass*.

After a round of concerts (Caen, Arras, Amiens, Boulogne sur Mer) and the annual season of the usual operas at Baden-Baden, Agnesi returned to Paris, which brought rather more originality: the 1867-8 season included *Tancredi* (Orbazzano) with Grossi and Laura Harris, *Ernani* (Silva), *Marta* (Plunketto), *Don Giovanni* (Commendatore), Nicolai's *Le Templier/Ivanhoe* (Cedric), *Il trovatore* (Ferrando), *Matilda di Shabran* and Poniatowski's *La stella d'Amalfi* (*La contessina*), as well as more Belcores, Mirabolanos and Giorgios in *I puritani*.

The death of Bénazet, the manager at Baden-Baden, ruffled the 1868 season there, so Adelina Patti took a company, including Agnesi and Désirée Artôt, for two months to Homburg (*Fille du régiment*, *Marta*, *Faust*, *L'elisir d'amore*, *Il trovatore*, *Semiramide*, *Rigoletto*, *Linda di Chamounix*). Although Agnesi was inevitably liked and appreciated, it seemed that his career had somewhat stagnated. He was allotted some nice parts and some decidedly secondary ones, and one year followed the previous one in seemingly the same format. The

1868–9 season saw him playing Bide-the-Bent to Patti's *Lucia* and the Ashton of Verger, and Tidmann, the Pastor, in Mme de Grandval's *Piccolino*, or, out of town, Malatesta in *Don Pasquale* with Minnie Hauk, along with a series of repeats. One of the repeats was Rossini's *Stabat Mater*, which he sang at the composer's funeral.

In 1869–70 Agnesi sang at Lille, Orleans, Caen and Poitiers, then visited Homburg again with Patti and Brussels for a Belgian Music Festival. On his return to Paris, he appeared as Pizarro in *Fidelio*, in *Paradise et la Péri*, in Reyer's Baden opera *Erostrate*, as Medicis in *Guido e Ginevra*, Sulpicio in *La Fille du régiment*, Alfonso in *Lucrezia Borgia*, Oroveso in *Norma* ... There was one more visit to Baden, a longer one to Belgium and then a even longer one. To Britain.

Agnesi made his re-entry at Her Majesty's Italian Opera in the same role he had played there on his debut, Il Prefetto in *Linda di Chamounix* ('thoughtful excellence') with Ilma di Murska, but this time he followed up swiftly in a line of other parts: *Sonnambula* with Marimon and Fancelli, *Fidelio* with Titiens, Sulpicio with Marimon, Saint Bris in *Les Huguenots*, Un Prêtre in *Roberto il diavolo*, Assur, and, in August, a much praised Henry VIII to the *Anna Bolena* of Titiens. He also appeared in Henry Leslie's parallel series of concerts at the Albert Hall, and the combination of Agnesi with Titiens, Trebelli, and Reeves or Cummings became a frequently heard team there.

Agnesi made a first appearance with the Sacred Harmonic Society (1 June 1871), was summoned to Buckingham Palace for the State Concert of 21 June (*Maometto*, 'Bella imago degli dei' with Alboni), took part in the Crystal Palace Handel Festival, visited Ireland and Scotland with the Maplesonian Opera, and depped for Myron Whitney at Exeter Hall ('as fine and noble as it were possible to desire') until Mapleson stepped in to enforce his exclusive contract. Agnesi was suitably apologetic, and remained happily linked with the Maplesonian management to the end of his career and life. Signor Agnesi sang only 'by permission of'.

The pattern set up in 1871 continued in the years that followed. The London season at the Italian Opera, the Mapleson national tour, regular oratorio and concert appearances at the Albert Hall, a handful of approved concerts (with such esteemed musicians as Ganz and Kuhe). 1872 saw Agnesi as Basilio in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, as Michele in *I due giorni* and at Exeter Hall singing the title role in *Elijah*; 1873 found him touring in a concert party with Titiens, then in opera with the same prima donna (*Oberon*), and come the autumn he was hired – alongside Titiens and Trebelli – to share the bass roles with Santley at the Three Choirs Festival at Hereford. He sang Rossini's *Stabat Mater*, a *Semiramide* selection and *St Paul*, and gave 'Sorge infausta' (*Orlando Furioso*), 'Non più andrai' and 'Ai capricci' (*Italiana in Algeri*) in the concerts.

In spite of his still slightly recalcitrant English ('he takes great pains'), Agnesi was now rated highly as an oratorio singer; he was seen in the *Christmas Oratorio* (15 December 1873) and *Messiah* at the Albert Hall, in *The Creation* for Hallé in Manchester, with the Sacred Harmonic Society in a *Palestine* which attracted much attention (23 January 1874), at the Crystal Palace in *Theodora* (7 February 1874) and in the 1874 Handel Festival, among a long list of engagements. At the opera, he took up a new role as Rebolledo in *Les Diamants de la couronne*, while outside he performed again both in a State Concert and at the Three Choirs Festival (8 September), as well as at the Leeds Festival (14 October). On Christmas Eve he sang a *Messiah* at the Albert Hall, and a little more than a month later he was dead.

I suppose a death certificate would tell us why and how.

Agnesi's wife was long departed. The marriage had proved a mistake, and in 1865 she had sued for a judicial separation ('corps et biens'). Perhaps she had lots of 'biens'. Anyway, it turned into quite a fuss over whether the case came under French or Belgian jurisdiction and consequently made the papers, where the elderly wife with the teenaged husband was mocked, as the 23 years' difference in age grew, in reporters' ink, to 30 or 40 years. Actually, she survived him by more than a decade, and died in Belgium in 1886.

ALBERTINI, AUGUSTA [AITCHI(N) SON, AUGUSTA ROSINA]

(b Bristol, bap 5 June 1823; d Florence, Italy,
23 January 1898)

Augusta Albertini was undoubtedly one of the outstanding English sopranos to be heard on European operatic stages in the 1840s and 1850s. She was well enough considered in Italy that she was one of just four British vocalists whom the important music and theatre writer Francesco Regli thought worthy of inclusion in his celebrated (and much plundered) operatic who's who of the 1860s. However, since she lived almost the whole of her life in Europe, and her only substantial professional visit to Britain lasted but one short season, her reputation in her 'home country' was limited. Not so on the Continent.

'La Albertini' was reportedly (and actually) born with the surname of Aitcheson or Aitchison or Aitchinson. The reason that I couldn't, for years, be more precise than that is that she was always said to have been born not in Britain, but in Europe of British parents. I even found a couple of second-hand references – including one in an *Enciclopedia dello spettacolo* – which averred that she was born in Florence. Alas, I had not the Florentine birth registers at my command, so I could confirm neither that, nor the spelling of her birth name, nor indeed the date of her birth, but persistence pays, and, as you will see above and below, when I had long finished compiling this article, I ultimately cracked her.

I could have cracked her earlier, had I dug up *Lusitanian Sketches of the Pen and Pencil* (1845) by W H G Kingston (author of 'The Circassian Chief', 'The Prime Minister', etc), which describes the Lisbon musical scene of the 1840s and reveals her identity. Kingston also describes her: 'Her figure is very elegant, though small, her features engaging, her eyes dark, with much expression, and her forehead high and expansive ... her voice is sweet, powerful and flexible ... She is capable, with the greatest apparent ease, of mounting to the highest notes, and her low ones are particularly fine. I have never seen an actress with such complete abandonment of self.' Regli says simply that Albertini was 'of a distinguished English family' and that her mother was a well-known amateur pianist and harpist. He also records that she pursued her early studies in Florence, with Geremia Sbolci and Ferdinando Ceccherini, at the Accademia delle Belle Arte of that city, then subsequently with Giuliani and definitively with Carolina Ungher. Which sounds logical.

I find a first mention in print of 'la giovinetta signora Albertini' (as opposed to the older Chiara Marchesini Albertini or the prima donna buffa Virginia Albertini) making what was, however, apparently not her first appearance at the Bologna Casino in February 1842. And she apparently took her first theatrical engagement, 'at the age of seventeen' (she was 20), at the Teatro San Carlo in Lisbon, beginning on 7 March 1844. Her debut was in the title-role in *Parisina* ('Frl Albertini ist in der *Parisina* mit sehr günstigen Erfolge aufgetreten'). Soon after her arrival at the San Carlo, a new tenor, Enrico Tamberlik, joined the company, and the two highly successful young singers were featured opposite each other in a series of the theatre's productions.

Augusta remained at Lisbon through to mid-1845, singing Elizabeth to the Mary of Giovanna Rossicaccia in *Maria Stuarda*, in *Adelia* and, alongside Tamberlik, the title-role of the two versions of *Gemma di Vergy*, otherwise *Gabriella di Vergy*. She sang in *Nina pazza per l'amore*, in *Nabucco*, as Leonora in *La favorita* and as Giselda in *I Lombardi*, and she and Tamberlik made a particular hit together in *Ernani* (1 January 1845). The pair continued on to Oporto (where Mr Kingston saw her and, he tells us, mother came too), to Cadiz (so he says) and to Madrid, where the Albertini–Tamberlik duo fulfilled another substantial engagement at the Teatro del Circo, opening on 10 August with Donizetti's *Adelia* ('not fully recovered from illness'), and going on to play *La sonnambula*, *La favorita* (20 November) and *Gemma di Vergy* with Ferlotti (10 December).

Albertini apparently remained in Spain in 1846, but the next time I spot her is in 1847 in, of all places, London. The Italian Opera at Her Majesty's Theatre was playing 'extra nights' at the end of the season, and Mlle Albertini 'of the Royal Italian Theatres of Madrid and Lisbon' was cast to sing one performance as Adalgisa in *Norma* (15 July). The role of Norma was sung by Jenny Lind.

In early 1848, Augusta made her first appearance in Rome: 'an English girl, a pupil of Carolina Ungher', reported the British music press of her debut in *Norma*, alongside the celebrated Ivanhoff, 'who has grown very fat'. 'A young singer of great merit, named Albertini, has made a great hit at Rome in *I masnadieri*', reported another. During that season she seems also to have sung in *Nabucco*. From Rome, she continued on to the Teatro Comunale of Bologna, where she played in Sanelli's *Gennaro Annese*, singing Catherine Hayes's role of Adele alongside Emilio Naudin (Toraldo) and Cesare Badiali (Annese), in *Lucia di Lammermoor* and in *I masnadieri*, and in February 1849 I spot her singing more *I masnadieri* at Modena. She made the international papers when her performances were made the target of a bit of tawdry political demonstrativeness.

In May 1849, La Albertini was engaged at the San Carlo in Naples, where she again sang in *I masnadieri*, this time alongside Felice Varesi and the tenor Carlo Baucarde. The paths of the prima donna and the tenor soon parted – Baucarde went to London and made a British debut opposite Sontag in *Luisa Miller*, while Augusta went back to Rome, to the Teatro Apollo, where she had 'culled glowing laurels two years earlier' and where her co-prima donna was Clara Novello – but they would soon be back together again.

At the Teatro Apollo she sang in *Matilde di Shabran* (and doubtless others) over the Carnevale season before moving on to sing *Macbeth* and *Luisa Miller* with Marcucci and Colini at the June fiera festival at Forlì. 'The audience surged up from their seats with excitement', reported the music press. Albertini made an unscheduled trip to Faenza to replace an ailing Salvini–Donatelli in *I masnadieri* (and apparently inserted arias by Pacini and Sanelli) before, still under the management of the Marzi brothers, continuing to the new Teatro Ventidio Basso, Ascoli, where she and Naudin gave *Luisa Miller* for the opening of the theatre (26 October 1850).

When Augusta again returned to the Tordinona in Rome, for Carnevale 1850–1 to sing *Luisa Miller*, the tenor was booed off the stage after Act I, and the management had hastily to call in Naudin. *I due Foscari* and *Stiffelio*, played as *Guglielmo Wellingrode*, with Naudin and Ferlotti ('admirable') were also played, and the London *Morning Post* picked up that 'the prima donna is a young Englishwoman, who appears by the name of Signora Albertini.'

Augusta was now capturing general attention and, when she went for Quaresima to Florence, even the French music press reported: 'Mme Albertini fait la grande sensation en ce moment au théâtre de Pergola à Florence. Le journal *L'Arte*, qui se publie dans cette ville, assure que cette cantatrice n'a plus de rivale en Italie, surtout dans la musique de Verdi. Elle vient de jouer *Luisa Miller* avec un succès qui rappelle les plus beaux triomphes des Malibran, des Pasta, des Frezzolini.'

During 1851 'la Albertini' was seen around Italy. After Rome and Florence, she went with tenor Malvezzi and baritone Varesi to Ferrara and Forlì (*Luisa Miller*, *I Lombardi*, *Maria di Rohan*, etc), then on to Sinagaglia, where she was reunited with Baucarde (*Luisa Miller*, *Attila*, *Parisina*, etc). 'She goes to Trieste for the autumn, Genoa for the carnival and in the spring to Vienna, and she is already engaged for next year's carnival at Turin.' In August, she was giving her *Luisa Miller* at the Teatro Comunale in Fermo.

Around this time, the journal *France Musicale* reported that Carlo Baucarde had wed a soprano in Madrid. The lady was named as the French diva Noémie de Roissi. Whether this was correct, an error of reportage or malicious gossip, I do not know. But Augusta Albertini – whose name had previously been romantically linked with the baritone Giovanni Battista Bencich and the tenor Fraschini – was to be very obviously ‘Madame Baucarde’ till the end of the tenor’s life. Maybe it was she whom he married and *France Musicale* got its sopranos wrong. Or maybe not. Augusta wasn’t billed as Madame Albertini-Baucarde for another five years yet. And she sang alongside Bencich frequently.

In November, at the Gran Teatro Civile, Trieste, Augusta sang *Rigoletto* (‘furore’), *Luisa Miller*, *I Lombardi* and *Armando il gondoliero* with Gaetano Ferri and Settimo Malvezzi, and the gossip seeped into the world’s music papers: ‘The papers talk of an English girl performing at Trieste destined they say to become the rival of Lind and Grisi ...’ – as *La Fama* printed a laudatory acrostic on her name.

At the Carlo Felice, Genoa, she sang the title-role in Chiaramonte’s unsuccessful *Giovanna di Castiglia* (12 February 1852: ‘O Filippo, tu soltanto’) and appeared as Lady Macbeth, after which she progressed to the Merelli Italian opera at the Kärntner Theater in Vienna, where Baucarde was principal tenor (*Linda di Chamounix*, *I puritani*). She returned to scenes of her triumphs in Trieste in the autumn, with *Rigoletto*, *Stiffelio*, *Luisa Miller*, *I puritani* and Nicola de Giosa’s *Folco d’Arles* and took the title-role in the premiere of *Maria di Brabante* by Achille Graffigna, alongside Bencich and Fraschini. Both of them.

At the end of 1852, Augusta moved on to the Teatro Regio in Turin (*Robert le diable*, *Luisa Miller* – ‘successo trionfale’ – and Rossini’s *Stabat Mater*), and in the autumn of 1853 she and Baucarde created Pollione Ronzi’s *Gastone d’Anversa* alongside *I due Foscari* and *Il trovatore* at the Pergola in Florence.

Baucarde, meanwhile, had fulfilled a much more important new performance when he had created the title-role of Manrico in Verdi’s *Il trovatore*, and on 26 December 1853 Augusta, teamed with Mirate, Bencich and Secchi-Corsi, introduced that opera to Venice, at the Teatro Fenice, with an ‘esito clamoroso’ ‘ha piaciuto immensamente’ ‘cresce sempre in successo’. ‘Madame Albertini’ was also seen in a remake of *I Lombardi*, in Rossini’s *Otello*, in *Rigoletto* with the same co-stars, and in Pacini’s new *La punizione* (8 March 1854, Lidia) during the Carnevale.

In 1854, I sight Augusta in May at Ravenna (*Rigoletto*, played as *Viscardello*, *Maria di Rohan*), then at Lucca (*Il trovatore*, *Viscardello* with Giuglini), for the autumn season at Treviso (*Luisa Miller* with both Baucarde and Bencich) and, finally, at La Scala di Milano, where she opened the season on Boxing Day singing Petrella’s *Marco Visconti* with Raffaele Mirate and Gaetano Ferri. One critic reported: ‘[she has] a powerful voice but not of the most agreeable quality particularly in the upper register.’ It was a niggle which would be repeated on occasion, particularly by those critics with a devotion to bel canto. Albertini was, however, an undoubted success, ‘molti applausi e appellazioni’, and she went on – while Eliza Hensler gave *Linda di Chamounix*, Giuseppina Sanchioli *Il barbiere* and *La vestale*, and Catherine Goldberg-Strossi *Nabucco* – to star with Mirate, Ferri and de Gianni-Vives in *Il trovatore* (17 January 1855) to a rapturous reception, Chiaramonte’s unfortunate *Ines de Mendoza* (14 February 1855, ‘canta maestrevolmente’), *Rigoletto* and *I Lombardi*. A summary of the carnival season’s performances reported that *Il trovatore* had been played 24 of the 64 nights, and that the outstanding stars among the season’s artists had been Albertini, Mirate and Ferri.

As the music press buzzed with reports of mirabolific offers from overseas turned down, Baucarde and Albertini – now definitely a pair – moved on to the Teatro Paganini of Genoa (9 April), where they performed together in *Rigoletto* (‘L’Albertini a fait admirer sa magnifique voix et son exquise méthode’), *I due Foscari* (‘nuove palme’) and *Il trovatore*, and thence to Treviso (*Il trovatore* with ... Baucarde and Bencich) and the Teatro Comunale of Bologna, where they also appeared as Alfredo and Violetta in *La traviata* (played as *Violetta*) (22 November: ‘recalled three times after the first act, we have rarely here been the witness of a triumph more complete’; ‘au-dessus même de sa grande reputation’), the San Benedetto of Venice (*I Lombardi*) and the Teatro Filarmonico of Verona (*Il trovatore*, *Giovanna di Guzman*).

The *Musical World* reported ‘Mme Albertini Baucarde née Aitcheson, one of the most finished artists in Italy, has a lucrative engagement at Verona ... a young Englishwoman whose great powers as a singer and actress have recently created a strong sensation throughout Italy.’ It seems to have been on this occasion that she was heard by Meyerbeer, who noted: ‘Madame Albertini, an Englishwoman, must once have had a really fine voice, in the mode of Cruvelli; the middle and lower registers are still lovely, but the higher, while still strongly resonant, is already.’ Showing a little wear and tear, is that what he means?

Yet when the pair appeared at the Teatro delle Antiche Stinche, Florence, in May 1856, in *Giovanna di Guzman*, they were cheered to the echo, their next performances were sold out in advance, and on their last night Augusta was dragged back to repeat the bolero, and the trio from *I Lombardi* one more time, at the end of the show ... while the French press declared: ‘L’Albertini a chanté à perfection’.

The couple continued on from their Florentine triumph to Benjamin Lumley’s Italian opera season at London’s Her Majesty’s Theatre. It was a season in which it would be hard to make an effect, given that it included the sensational debut of Maria Piccolomini in *La traviata* and the adored performances of Marietta Alboni, but if Baucarde was judged to be on the decline (the Miserere had to be transposed down for him) in comparison with his appearances of half a dozen years earlier, his wife won sufficient plaudits in her performance (2 June 1856) of *Il trovatore*:

... she is tall and slight, stately and dignified in deportment and her countenance beams with intelligence. Madame Albertini made an even deeper impression by her singing than by her looks and demeanour. Her voice is a pure and splendid soprano of great power and compass, the low notes rich and full, the middle ones strong and clear, and the upper tones – except one or two which are rather worn and fatigued by ‘hallooing’ and singing of Verdi – brilliant and resonant as a bell. Madame Albertini’s sotto voce singing is exquisite and she has a perfect shake on several divisions of the scale – a very rare gift. Moreover her intonation is faultless.

Another paper chipped in:

[she is] worthy of her Italian reputation ... a powerful tragic actress and an accomplished singer ... a pure soprano of great power and compass. In quality too it is fine ... in pathetic passages when she subdues her voice its high tones are often exceedingly sweet and her ‘dying falls’ – sustained sounds gradually diminished to an extreme pianissimo are often as exquisite as anything we have ever heard. Her execution is clear articulate and brilliant ... We do not know her age, but her powers seem to be fully matured and she is a finished and cultivated artist.

The anti-Verdians, of course, had their word, but guardedly, for it was clear that the new prima donna was a successful artist:

Mlle Albertini is an English lady who has become in Italy a mistress of her art and, as a favourite prima donna of the Italians, has shrieked for them the songs of their beloved Verdi until her voice has been we fear a little (certainly only a little and in its least valuable part) damaged by the exercise. Her perfect success in her own country will give her occasion, we trust, to sing in London, season after season.

News seeped across the Atlantic too, and America was able to read:

She has been before the public a good many years and has established her reputation as an accomplished singer and a powerful tragedian. Her figure is tall and commanding and her features,

though perhaps not regularly handsome, are striking and impressive. Her voice is a real soprano, of great power and compass, though it seems to have suffered a little in the highest part of the scale, probably in consequence of her being accustomed to sing the music of Verdi, which tries severely the strongest voice. Madame Albertini in order to give her high notes sufficient power is apt to force her voice too much and make it somewhat shrill and piercing. Notwithstanding this defect, however, her voice is a superb organ and she uses it like a most accomplished artist. Her execution is clear and brilliant and her method of vocalization is that of the best Italian school. She is peculiarly excellent in the delivery of recitative ... Everything she does both as an actress and a singer, is full of intelligence and feeling.

After *Il trovatore*, Augusta was brought out in *Lucrezia Borgia*, and the music press found her 'hardly seen to as much advantage in her second part as her first ... but occasionally in her acting and her singing [she] created an immense sensation. "Com'è bello" was charmingly given and she showed real dramatic power in Act I finale.' Elsewhere, it was agreed that, in spite of the hovering shadow of Grisi in the role, she had been 'highly and deservedly successful'.

At the end of the opera season, the couple sang in concert, but when they were engaged for the Liverpool Philharmonic Concerts they found on their arrival that there were no parts for the orchestra. The management had expected them to bring their own, like some variety act. The pair departed, leaving such as the pontifical H F Chorley to sneer at 'these Italians who come to England and expect to take it by storm'. Albertini, he pouted, had a good voice, but 'without a spark of musical or dramatic intelligence'. More intelligently, Lumley, in his memoirs, reported that her good work had simply been overlooked in the fanatical fashion that had developed around Piccolomini.

Back in Italy, Mme Albertini returned to the Fenice for the autumn (*Giovanna di Guzman*, *Gemma di Vergy*, etc) and to Rome for Carnevale (Pacini's *La punizione* and Petrella's new but unsuccessful *L'assedio di Leida*). She appeared for the faithful Marzi brothers at Mantova during Primavera, at Florence (*Giovanna di Guzman*, *Simone Boccanegra*, and as Potiphar's wife in Pietro Raimondi's oratorio *Joseph*), and at the end of 1857 she reappeared at La Scala, also now under the Marzi management, to repeat *Giovanna di Guzman* and to introduce Petrella's new *Ione, ovvero L'ultimo giorni di Pompeii* (26 January 1858). *Ione* was played 26 times, unlike Vincenzo Lutti's *Berengario d'Ivrea*, in which Augusta sang the role of Adelaide, and which folded after one night. She also appeared in *Nabucco*. However, 'la egregia Albertini' took a while to get into her stride, and it was reported that in certain circles she was being referred to as 'l'ombra'.

Later that year, I spot the couple at the Teatro Sociale, Rovigo, in *Il trovatore* and *La favorita*, in the summer Fiera at Udine (*I vespri siciliani*, *Lucrezia Borgia*, *I due Foscari*), and Augusta sang at Milan's Teatro Radegonda on the occasion of the debut of the young English baritone Alberto Laurence in *Beatrice di Tenda*. Evidently her Italian upbringing hadn't helped her mastery of the tongue. One paper wrote that the baritone 'sang in Turkish and she in Chinese'!

In 1859, after it had been announced that she was 'held in London by private engagements' and would not accompany her husband to America, Augusta arrived in New York on the *Ocean Queen* on 25 October; interestingly, she gave her principal residence to the officials of America not as Italy but as France. The couple began their performances, under the management of Bernard Ullman, at the New York Academy of Music. Augusta made her debut in *Lucrezia Borgia*, alongside Baucarde, Ardavani and Mme d'Ormy, and the *New York Herald*, more accustomed to hurl forth exaggerated flights of language, simply agreed: 'All the artists acquitted themselves well, and Madam Albertini was particularly good. She gave to the music a degree of passionate intensity which electrified the audience. The great scene in the second act has rarely been so well expressed here'; '[she has] a fine mezzo soprano voice of good quality and compass, her method is good and her acting appropriate and vivacious.'

She followed up in *Il trovatore* and *Poliuto*, handicapped by an under-the-weather tenor, before moving to Niblo's (12 December 1859). When, on 14 January, she sang the *Pirata* duet and a Pacini *Niobe* aria in concert, the press commented: 'The *Pirata* duet was given with all that precision and elegance which distinguish the vocalism of these artists who are, perhaps, the most purely Italian in their method of any now in this country.'

The couple appears to have travelled from America, to the south, but they were back in Italy by Carnevale 1860–1, which they spent at Reggio Emilia.

Following her return to Italy, Madame Albertini was rather less prominent than before. I spot her in the early 1860s at Milan, at Malaga and, of course, at Florence, where she seems, as often as not, to have taken part in society musical occasions with such as the 'Marchese Maria Piccolomini' or the English tenor Tom Hohler. It was not until 1872, however, that she formally announced her retirement. In English. In the British press: 'Florence: Mme Albertini Baucarde (late prima donna of the Theatres Royal La Scala, San Carlo, etc) having relinquished public engagements has decided to give lessons in singing at her residence No 12 Piazza dell Indipendenza, Florence.'

Baucarde, whose career, it was said, had been prematurely ended by a penchant for the bottle and 'exhaustion due to the excitement of gambling', died on 22 January 1883. His wife, or 'wife', continued to teach music (and to sing in the odd local concert) in Florence up to her death in 1898. The most successful among her pupils was the soprano Clementine de Vere Sapio.

Described during her career as 'una di più encomiate prime donne', and 'une des meilleures chanteuses d'Italie', 'Madame Albertini' had made and kept her fame very largely in Europe, but throughout – and it may have been her Italian pronunciation! – she was referred to inevitably as 'an English prima donna' – she who not only sang but little in Britain but apparently rarely even visited the country. She is also referred to as 'eccentric' and 'difficult' and her career as 'brilliant', but 'agitato'. She is further cited as being responsible for keeping Baucarde on the stage after his voice was gone. But the last word lies with Verdi, who wrote that he could not have Albertini for his new opera because he wouldn't put up with her argumentative (etc) husband. Just a typical 19th-century Italian opera couple, it seems ...

So. The identity. And how I found it.

Augusta left a will in her native country. £398 11s 2d to be administered by one Mrs Ellen Ada Daniel. I clearly had to investigate. Well, to see if Ellen Ada was an Aitchinson. You never know. But Ellen (d 1902) was born in Bristol as Ellen Ada Phipps Hood, the daughter of one Stephen Hood, a commercial traveller, and his wife Letitia, née Morgan (d 1843). Not a relation, it seems. A friend ...?

But there was an Augusta Aitchinson born in Britain round this era. Augusta Rosina Aitchinson, daughter of James and Eliza Ellen Aitchinson, was baptised on 5 June 1823 at – guess where – St Stephens, Bristol, even though James and Eliza Ann (*sic*) were spelled 'Aitchison' on their wedding registration (Westbury-on-Trym, 20 August 1822). And the new Mrs Aitchison was ... née Morgan, 'the youngest daughter of Mr John Morgan of Queen's Square of this city [Bristol]'. Connection made! Morgan. Identity proven.

So, Augusta was not born in Florence at all. She was born in Bristol. And Augusta and Ellen were cousins. I don't know if the Morgans were 'distinguished' and whether the Morgan girls played the harp, but one of them married a commercial traveller.

James and Eliza Aitchi(n)son do not appear in any other British documents after their marriage and the birth of their daughter, so I imagine they did emigrate. To Florence? Why? I guess that's another tale for someone to investigate.

But Augusta's origins? Found.

Little footnote. Died of typhus fever at Bristol, 5 May 1829, Edward Augustus son of Stephen Hood aged eight, 'whose amiable disposition and musical talent excited general admiration'. Maybe the Morgan girls did play the harp. Anyway, Augusta sang. Boy, did she sing.

AMADEI, GIULIA [FRY, NÉE LAMOND, ISABELLA HUME]

(b Edinburgh, 24 November 1826; d 26 Midvale Road,
St Helier, Jersey, 13 February 1864)

Many vocalists and stage performers of the Victorian era hid their identity under a foreign or would-be-aristocratic pseudonym. Some of them did it quite casually and made no secret of the fact that they were using a simple nom de théâtre; others did it a little more determinedly; but a handful seem to have wanted to go further and to create for themselves a whole alternative, imaginary persona. It is particularly difficult to unravel the truths of these last folk, for they inclined to stretch their imagination so far as to fill in official documents, which are among the most important clues we can use to sort out fact from fiction, with blatant fibs. However, stretch a fibber over twenty or thirty years and they will often slip up, let a little of the truth out, and then, as long as one is intuitive enough to recognise that rare bit of truth, it can all come tumbling out. ‘Madame Amadei’ is a case in point.

The contralto billed simply as ‘Madame Amadei’ appeared on the London concert scene in 1853, shot swiftly to the forefront as one of the most appreciable native contraltos of the day, and then, half a dozen seasons later, vanished as quickly and as wholly as she had come, leaving behind very little trace and very little in the way of hints as to who she really was and whence she had come. But hints there were and had been over those six years. The only trouble was, so many of them were false.

Madame Amadei made her first appearance on the London concert platform on 5 October 1853, at the first soiree of the winter season at Willert Beale’s Réunion des Arts, 76 Harley Street, a venue which was known for giving a chance to young and aspiring artists. On this occasion, the other vocalists were the thoroughly established Georgina Weiss and Jean-Baptiste Rommi, a French baritone – ‘a useful and ready man in secondary characters’ – at the Italian Opera. The debutante’s selected solo was ‘Per sua madre’ (*Linda di Chamounix*), and she joined Rommi in the *Semiramide* duet ‘Bella imago degli dei’. The *Musical World* was impressed: ‘Her voice is a contralto of excellent quality, considerable power and flexibility. She sings with an abandon and feeling that prove her Italian training – although we understand she is English by birth – her phrasing is good and her intonation perfect.’ It went on to give a little physical glimpse of the lady: ‘[she has] a handsome and expressive face, and in figure she is quite an Albani.’ The last was a mildly polite way of saying that ‘Madame Amadei’ was a big, big girl.

So, she is English by birth, and she has trained in Italy. Actually, she wasn’t and she almost certainly hadn’t for long. But that was the story for the moment.

But Madame Amadei was definitely a success, and a few weeks later she made her debut at Exeter Hall, in the London Wednesday Evening Concerts (23 November). This time she was billed as ‘prima donna

contralto assoluta of La Scala, Milan'. Which, of course, she wasn't. She had, indeed, sung in Milan earlier in the year, but at the Carcano, not the Scala, as Isabella in *L'Italiana in Algeri*, and the fact had been reported in *The Athenaeum*.

Anyway, she was the only contralto on this Exeter Hall programme, alongside such top singers as Charlott Ann Birch and Frédéric Lablache, and her 'Se m'abbandoni' left no doubts as to her talents. Her voice was 'almost approaching in roundness and beauty the voice of the incomparable Alboni'. *The Times* agreed: 'since Alboni came out at the Royal Italian Opera, a purer, more satisfactory and beautiful voice of its class has not been heard. In the brindisi from *Lucrezia Borgia* ... this opinion was further strengthened. With such a treasure at command whose fault will it be if Madame Amadei, evidently young, does not become a singer? She produced a marked impression.' The *Musical World* assured us that she had 'sometimes' been named 'the English Alboni'. And presumably not just because of her size.

Madame Amadei became a regular at the Exeter Hall Wednesdays, she returned to the Réunion des Arts, and she began singing in private concerts in and out of town – I spot her in Norwich the week before Christmas – giving her 'Se m'abbandoni' with 'luscious voice and large expressive style'. But Mr Beale had moved swiftly to sign up his newest discovery, and on 21 January 1854 the new contralto was sent on the road with a Beale concert party consisting basically of herself, Georgina and Willoughby Weiss, accompanist Edward Land, pianist Arabella Goddard and cellist Prosper Sainton. 'Madame Amadei is an untried singer', reported the trade press, 'and goes before her provincial audiences without a widely circulated reputation. Her name in the prospectus may, therefore, lead to interrogations. Nevertheless, we consider that the projectors of the tournée are fully warranted in engaging the new-found and little-known contralto. Madame Amadei possesses a magnificent voice, and has already produced an unmistakable sensation at the Réunion des Arts and the Wednesday Evening concerts. We cannot doubt that she will be equally successful in the provinces.'

And she was. Her contribution to the programmes included her preferred 'Se m'abbandoni', Meyerbeer's 'Ah! mon fils', a *Semiramide* aria and duet ('Bella imago degli dei' with Weiss) and 'Il segreto', as well as one of Land's little ballads, 'Angel forms shall guard thee'; the team also gave the cantata *Fridolin*.

Back in town, during the season proper of 1854, Madame Amadei became a familiar figure on the concert stage. She appeared in the oversized programmes given by Allcroft and Howard Glover, made a mark with Rossini's 'Pensa alla patria' at Mr Sommer's big charity concert, and sang at the Beaumont Institution with Sims Reeves and at Willis's Rooms in the opening Musical Winter Evenings concert. She participated in the concerts given by Sig Briccialdi, Sophia Messent, Mrs Arthur Stone, G T Kiallmark ('Ebben a te ferisci' with Louisa Pyne), Madame Puzzi ('Ah! quel giorno'), the McAlpine sisters, and the pianist Wilhelmina Clauss, in which she 'greatly distinguished herself in Mozart's "L'addio"'. She sang at Willis's Rooms alongside Caradori, the Pyne sisters, Gardoni, Bettini and Belletti, took part in Sims Reeves's own Benefit concert at Drury Lane, and accomplished a thoroughly full season with considerable success.

During the 1855 season, although she can be seen out on platforms from the Crystal Palace to the Beaumont Institution or the New Philharmonic Society, Madame Amadei seems largely to have preferred the provincial concert circuits. I spot her at Leeds with the Weisses, in Dublin giving 'Il segreto' and 'The Last Rose of Summer' at the Rotondo, and at Leeds and Liverpool as part of another concert party tour with Evelina Garcia, Gardoni and Graziani. In December, she went out with another party including Lucy Escott, George Tedder and Signor Onorati. Early in 1856 I also find her performing in oratorio: a *Messiah* at Myddelton Hall, an *Eli* at Dublin, or a sacred concert at Brighton with the Pavilion band.

As the season warmed up, Madame Amadei was seen regularly on the London platform, giving the brindisi from *La traviata* and joining in 'Dal tuo stellato' (with Marian Enderssohn) at Frank Bodda's concert, performing a *Torquato Tasso* at Mlle Sedlatzek's concert, and appearing for such fashionable concert-givers as Mme Anichini and Mrs Anderson or at Covent Garden on Ash Wednesday (brindisi, 'one of the most perfect contralto voices we have ever heard'). On 21 June 1856, when she took part in Ellen Day's

concert at the Harley Street rooms, singing a new Balfe song, 'The Reaper and the Flowers', with the composer at the piano, she had a new tag to her name. The 'of La Scala' had been quickly dropped; now she was 'by permission of Mr Lumley'. Madame Amadei had been hired for the Italian Opera at Her Majesty's Theatre.

On 12 July 1856, Madame Amadei made her operatic debut in the part of Maffeo Orsini in *Lucrezia Borgia*. Johanna Wagner was the Lucrezia, with Charles Braham in the role of Gennaro. The reviews tell us that she sang the famous 'Il segreto' in a transposed version, 'which spoiled it', but do not say whether it was transposed up or down. I suspect 'up'. It is also related that those friends who had come to support her in her first attempt on the stage rather overdid their enthusiasm to the extent of crowning her with a laurel wreath. As for her singing, she 'acquitted herself respectably'.

Lumley did not put up Madame Amadei in a second role during the season. But she appeared at the Surrey Gardens and Exeter Hall in concert along with other members of the Italian company and, when the company moved to Drury Lane to play out the last weeks of E T Smith's season there, she added to her Maffeo Orsini a first performance as Azucena in *Il trovatore*.

The Times had some reservations: 'she displayed a beauty of voice in a certain part of the register (not in the lower tones) which left little to be desired, although other requisites dramatic and vocal were less immediately at hand.' *The Musical World* made the point more bluntly. 'She exhibits many vocal beauties.' It seems Madame was not getting any less large of figure.

In any case, neither Lumley nor Madame Amadei was prompted, it seems, to pursue the operatic experiment. Instead, she and Charles Braham visited Manchester for a Christmas *Messiah* with Mme Lemmens-Sherrington and Weiss. They then teamed up with Hermine Rudersdorff, Allan Irving and musical director Randegger for a substantial spring provincial concert tour, which (with Lewis Thomas replacing Irving) was reprised in the autumn. In the usual fashion, in certain towns the party acted as soloists for local choral concerts, but in Hull they gave the Rossini *Stabat Mater* alone, not only singing the solos but performing the choruses as a quartet.

In 1858, again, Madame was little seen in town, but took once more to the road, this time with Irving, Mlle Sedlatzek, Sims Reeves's brother and pianist Henri Laurent. But in 1859 things had slowed thoroughly. On 6 February, she performed at the Crystal Palace ('Il segreto', 'Regret'), ten days later she sang 'Di tanti palpiti' and a ballad at Howard Glover's latest monster show at Drury Lane, after which she sang in concert in Birmingham ('Angel forms shall guard thee there', 'Il segreto', 'O Willie we have missed you', 'Home Sweet Home') and joined the veteran Henry Phillips in what was virtually his farewell performance in the city. He was not the only one who was saying a virtual farewell.

I spot Madame Amadei singing at the Hanover Square Rooms for Miss Alexander on 31 May and for Eleanor Armstrong on 30 June. And then, nothing. What happened?

Ah, but I know what happened.

Miss Armstrong's concert was not quite the last time that the name of 'Madame Amadei' appeared in print. On 14 June 1861 G M Lott's choir gave a concert in St Helier, Jersey. Local soprano Anna Wyatt, basso Henri Drayton and Madame Amadei were the soloists. Alone, that probably wouldn't have jogged me, but then I found another concert report dated 14 March 1862. Jersey again.

So I looked, without much hope, for 'Amadei' in the Jersey 1861 census. And there she was: 'Isabella J Amadei, born Rome, lady vocalist, married, aged 30', living at 20 David Place, St Helier, with a twelve-year-old son named Thomas Fry. Eureka! Now I would unravel her. The only trouble was, as I was soon to find out, that half of that entry was false.

And so I went to Jersey, and in the library I found the street directories of the day. Madame Amadei was listed in 1863 and 1864 under teachers of singing. But not in 1865. Had she died? Remarried? Left the island? I moved on to the Jersey Archives and headed for the death registers for 1864, and there she was. Giulia Isabella Smith Fry aged 34. And someone had inked in 'Amadei' between the Smith (Smith!?) and the Fry. Well, I knew now why she had disappeared. But Giulia, born Rome, aged 34. I didn't think so.

Perhaps I should try to find her grave. So I took down the cemeteries register and headed for 1864 and Fry. And, sure enough, on 14 February 1864 one George Fry had bought a plot at Mont à l'Abbé cemetery for the burial of his wife, George. Now at last I knew Mr Fry's name. Now I could find him.

And I did. George Fry, MD MRCS, a doctor by profession and the son of Robert Fry and his wife Caroline, née Stone, was married on 23 July 1848 to Miss Isabella Hume Lafond in the city of Edinburgh, and on 28 April 1849, at St Leonard's, Sussex, she gave birth to a son named not Thomas, but Hume Lamond Fry.

The little family can be sighted living at 28 Marina, St Leonards, in the 1851 census: George Fry, aged 30, MRCS, London general practitioner, born Mayfield, Kent, Mrs Isabella Hume Fry, aged 24, born Edinburgh, baby Hume and two servants.

Not much time in between marriage, baby and census to go off to Italy and become prima donna at La Scala, is there?

The International Genealogical Index provides the rest of the information we need, now we know what we are looking for. Isabella Hume Lamond (daughter of one Alexander Lamond, of number 1 Thistle Street, Edinburgh, accountant, and his wife Jane) was not English but Scots, and born in 1826. So she was 37 at her death.

I visited the cemetery and photographed Isabella's grave (now, alas, weathered of all its inscription) and then, to tie up the dossier, I popped into one more Jersey office: the Registry, where a slim bound volume gave me my last facts. Giulia Isabella Smith Amadei Fry, née Lamonte (*sic*), had died on 13 February from 'apoplexy'. Undoubtedly a stroke, and probably brought on by the weight problems which seem to have caused the afflictions which had already led her to quit England, her husband and the world of music for the quiet life of the Channel Islands.

Dr Fry, 'gentleman and medical practitioner', lived on till 26 September 1873. His son, Hume Lamond Fry, can be seen in 1881 working as a tea merchant, manager and clerk (*sic*) in Lewisham, and he is married to a Miss Sophie Crocker 'of Manchester', who appears to have been a theatrical performer. Hume (d 1 May 1911) and his family emigrated to California, so it seems the line of 'Madame Amadei' may live on somewhere around Alameda County.

I wonder if anyone has a photograph.

AMBRE, ÉMILIE [AMBROISE, ÉMILIE GABRIELLE ADÈLE]

(b Place Kléber, Oran, Algeria, 6 June 1849;
d St Ouen, Paris, 13 April 1898)

Émilie Ambre was a fine performer, possessed of an excellent voice, considerable acting ability, a goodly dash of charisma, and striking looks. She also accomplished several notable deeds on the operatic stage – introducing Massenet’s *Manon* to French provincial audiences, under the delighted baton of the composer, after its premiere in Belgium, and the French version of *Aida* to Paris. But she is remembered today – when she is remembered – not for her singing, her acting, her achievements or even, wholly, her looks.

Her name is scattered around the Googable parts of the Internet for other reasons: first and foremost, in variously coloured tales about her probably veritable relationship with King William III of the Netherlands, but also because, dressed in the costume of Bizet’s *Carmen*, she was the subject of a portrait by an artist friend and colleague: one Mons Edouard Manet. Her association with Manet has resulted in her being written about (with largely second-hand source material and many an ‘I suppose’) on web ‘histories’ with names such as *Nineteenth Century Art Worldwide*.

Now, when a girl has such strings to the bow of her celebrity, she is easy meat for the imaginative pens of the gossip journalists and their modern equivalent, the semi-semi-factual Internetters, and they – as early as the days of her youth – have taken considerable advantage, down the years, of the opportunities she offered.

The first opportunity came from the circumstance of her birth: the dashing Mlle Ambre was from Algeria, and she would later be advertised and paragraphed as ‘the first Moorish prima donna’. ‘She was born in Oran, Algeria, to a French father and a half-Arab mother, and her stage name, Ambre, referred to the golden colour of her complexion’, lyricked one writer. ‘Her parents belonged to a distinguished Moorish family ... highly regarded in the Court of the late emperor’, insisted the *Musical World*, while the Aberdeen press went even further: ‘of Moorish blood, the daughter of a prince’. And the date of her birth? One revered organisation, copying another revered organisation without taking the care to check, has her listed in their catalogue – along with the gossips – as ‘b Oran 1854’.

Well, most of that is nonsense.

I cannot be totally sure about the degree – if any – of Arab or Moorish blood that Émilie Ambre carried. The Manet painting shows what seems to me to be a thoroughly Caucasian lady. But another illustration I have to hand seems to have a definite air of colour to it. However, since that picture shows her in the role of *Aida*, we may be looking at greasepaint rather than blood. And I cannot forget that *Les Soirées parisiennes* reported, on her assumption of the role, how odd it was that her arms had been appropriately blackened but her face left ... white!

The only photographs I have glimpsed, one a poor thing by Mora, another in Odell's *Annals of the New York Stage*, make her look perhaps indeterminately Jewish rather than Arab or African, and also rather uncharismatic. So, was Émilie Ambre the first internationally successful prima donna of colour ... was her mother, indeed, 'half-Arab'? It seems unlikely, for the maternal lady in question did not come from Algeria but from the decidedly un-Arab city of Toulon. And she was, I would imagine, no more high-society and pally with the local royals than her husband.

Étienne Ambroise (d Ghar Rouban, Algeria, 5 September 1864) was a simple whitesmith ('ferblantier') from St Tropez. And his wife, Olympe Louise, née Romain (d Place Kléber, Oran, 25 July 1851), was, as I say, from Toulon.

And therein is the story of the family. Émilie (and not, O dear Wikipedia, 'Eléonore d'Ambre!') wasn't, as the lyrical would have it, stage-named 'Ambre' because she was slightly tinted; she was 'Ambre' because her real name was 'Ambroise'. Even though *Le Gaulois* later chuckled informatively (?) that the name of Ambre seemed 'predestined'.

Also, from a young age, she had almost no family. Her mother died giving birth to her sister, Julie Marie, when Émilie was two. Her father died, at the age of 48, when she was just fifteen. In 1864. For Émilie – alas, O Philadelphia Museum of Art, ancestry.com and all your confrères – was, of course, not born in 1854, not by a long chalk. She was born on 6 June 1849, and the vital records of the Algerian administration of the era are there, in brown and white, to prove it.

The tales which have been told about our future diva don't agree on what happened next, either. Some have her beginning her singing career in Algeria, where 'she was greatly appreciated by the late Emperor of Morocco', others not. So, did the sisters stay in Algeria following their father's death, or not? The one thing that seems to be generally and unspectacularly agreed is that Émilie at some stage attended the Marseille Conservatoire. I think Julie (who would also go on to become a singer) probably went too. Some of the 'biographies' have her beginning to sing in public at Marseille. I find no evidence, but it of course is perfectly possible. Apparently she continued forth from Marseille to Paris, where she took lessons with several teachers, including the formerly famous tenor Roger, after which, we are told, 'she debuted at the Théâtre de la Monnaie, Brussels, in 1874.'

Nearly. She actually debuted at the Monnaie in 1872, when she was hired for a season as 'première dugazon' of the resident company, a company which featured prime donne such as Rosa Csillag and Sarolta Bujanovics at its head. Quite what she sang I have not been able to discover, but at the end of her contract she was reported by the local press to have had 'une très honorable carrière en qualité de première chanteuse légère'.

Mostly, chroniclers leap straight from Marseille and her studies to Émilie's engagement in Holland. After all, that's the juicy bit, and they are in a hurry to get to it. But one or two can be found who recognise that there were, in fact, four years between her beginnings at Brussels and her arrival in The Hague. They even mention Nancy and Geneva. And rightly so. But, first of all, 'Mlle Ambre' fulfilled an engagement at Mons. I spot her there in the early months of 1873, singing Gabrielle in *Les Cent Vierges* ('un brillant succès') and appearing in *Bonsoir Monsieur Pantalon*, *Comte Ory* and, on the night of her Benefit, as Offenbach's *La Belle Hélène*. In the autumn and winter of 1873–4 she was engaged at Geneva, as dugazon to the appreciable Mme Naddi-Vallée. The repertoire for the season included *Haydée* (with Émilie as Raffaella), *La Fille de Madame Angot* (Clairette), *Le Beau Dunois* and *La favorita* (Ines).

From Geneva, both Émilie and Mme Naddi moved on to Troyes, where the singer Bassé was making a first effort as an impresario. Again, she made a considerable impression, both as a singer and an actress ('une dugazon très appréciée et très applaudie') and as an attractive woman, as Clairette, Betly and the like, through a two-month season. In 1875 she was engaged at Nancy (I spot her only as Bavolet in *La Jolie Parfumeuse*) and at Dunkerque, as 'première chanteuse troisième série d'abonnement', and in 1876 she was at Caen in *La Juive* (Eudoxie), *Charles VI*, *Les Huguenots* and *Le Prophète*, at the Théâtre des Arts, Rouen, and at Nantes. The burning down of the Nantes theatre brought the name of Mlle Ambre into the press as the

only member of the former company who made the trip to perform at the Benefit held for the sufferers from the fire.

Finally, in the company of sister Julie, the 27-year-old soprano crossed to Holland, and to the famous engagement at The Hague and Amsterdam.

Given the noise which this engagement finally aroused, it is annoyingly difficult to find hard primary-source facts about it. Although it is reported that she made her debut as the Queen in *Pré aux clercs*, alongside Adèle Isaac, the first review I have dug up is from earlyish January 1877, when Émilie is playing Graziella in *La Petite Mariée* ('une vraie Graziella dans tout sens du mot'), followed a fortnight later by Tao-jin in Auber's *Le Cheval de bronze*. She is described by the press as 'aussi bonne cantatrice qu'excellente comédienne' and as having 'charmé les oreilles et les yeux du public'. In February, she gets the top notice for her singing of the Queen in *Les Huguenots*, and at some stage the company did Guiraud's *Piccolino* with Émilie in the title-role and Julie supporting ('Mlle Ambre n'a rien à envier, dans cette création, à Mlle Galli-Marié'). She evidently topped all her previous efforts, however, when on 1 March 1877 manager Dr Campbell put up *Carmen* with soprano Émilie in the title-role and Julie as Mercedes. *Le Monde Artiste* raved:

Nous ne pensons pas que le rôle de Carmen ait été nulle part mieux étudié et mieux rendu au point de vue dramatique que par Mlle Émilie Ambre. Il est regrettable pour cette artiste que le rôle n'a pas été écrit dans le registre de sa voix, parce qu'alors elle eût trouvé comme chanteuse tous les effets et les applaudissements obtenus par la comédienne. Malgré cela cette création fait le plus grand honneur à Mlle Ambre qui a si soigneusement détaillé le type de bohémienne emprunté à la nouvelle de M Prosper Mérimée. Ses grands yeux noirs, tantôt langoureux et chargés d'électricité comme une bouteille de Leyde tantôt éclatants et lançant des éclairs, reflètent avec ses nuances la caractère capricieux et fantasque de la Carmencita.

She was seen as Rachel in *La Juive*, stepped in for a bereaved colleague as Stephano in *Roméo et Juliette*, played more *La Petite Mariée* ('elle atteint la perfection', 'si malicieusement candide') and scored another major success in *Mignon* ('un exemple de souplesse, de talent bien extraordinaire, [elle] s'est réellement surpassée dans le rôle de Mignon').

Émilie went down enormously well with the Dutch public, who – when the time came for her to depart – cried out to their director to re-engage her, and Holland's greatest actress, who came to see the show, prophesied a great dramatic career for the young *Mignon*. Caen re-engaged her for the month following the Dutch season ... and M Vizentini of the Paris Italian Opera signed her for three years thereafter.

She was everywhere appreciated during her several months in the Dutch theatre, and, of course, among the most decidedly appreciative in the land was William III, the lady-killing king of the Dutch. Their relationship must have blossomed pretty swiftly, for by April 1877, when Émilie headed on to the next stage of her career, it had apparently already provoked something of a political crisis. It seems to be a fact that the king proposed to make the young singer hismorganatic wife, and that he created her a peeress of Luxembourg and 'Comtesse d'Amboise', a title which held certain historical associations.

And she didn't go to Caen. She (or the king) paid a 2,000 franc forfeit, and Mlle Ambre stayed in The Hague.

By now, the soup of gossip was well and truly boiling. In November 1877 the press reported: 'The Countess of Amboise is at the moment in the land of her future husband ... but she is on her way to her hotel on the rue de Clichy where she intends to receive a great deal this winter ... in her quality as future queen she is going to build a great artistic salon of painters and musicians.' Apparently, as part of this artistic effort, the 'Comtesse d'Amboise' hired a French authoress, Mme de Voisin ('René de Camoi', 'Pierre

Cour’) to write something – at one stage it was said to be a learned work, at another an operatic libretto – and the whole affair ended up in court.

There was also reference to a ‘château de Mont-Allée at Meudon, not far from the ruined former villa of Prince Jérôme Napoléon’, which the king was said to have bought for her.

In *Le Gaulois*, Jean Walter devoted more than an entire front-page column to the latest stories on the ‘Countess’, under the heading *Indiscrétions parisiennes*, and even in America there hit the presses pieces such as ‘The King of Holland’s mistress, Émilie Ambre, is about to return to the operatic stage. The King is opposed to this step but she says she wants money and he won’t give her any.’ As history shows, the marriage didn’t happen. King William was persuaded by his parliament into a more suitable alliance, and the operatic romance seemingly faded briskly away.

All this demi-mondaine chit-chat provided a dangerous lead-up to Émilie’s first Parisian appearance. A portion of the press had its knives whetted for ‘la favorite’ of the foreign monarch, and no matter how well she performed she was pretty surely going to be slaughtered. Especially given the fact that she had chosen (or manager Escudier had chosen for her) to make her debut as the scandalous heroine of *La traviata*, a role which, in any case, had been recently sung by Emma Albani, whom the adoring press had dubbed ‘the star of the season’.

The event took place on 24 April 1878, with the new prima donna teamed for the occasion with Nouvelli as Alfred and Pandolfini as Germont père, and the result – for all that the anti-royalists and anti-foreigners could do – was an undoubted success. *Le Monde Artiste* recorded sagely: ‘Peu importe que Mlle Ambre soit Algérienne, qu’elle ait préféré l’art à un trône etc, etc ... Nous avons entendu une véritable artiste et la voulons applaudir selon notre envie.’

C’est une femme charmante. Elle est jolie d’abord; elle est même plus que jolie, elle est originale. Ensuite elle a ce charme qui résulte du naturel uni au talent. Elle a des mouvements brusques qui pêchent peut-être au point de vue classique, mais qui frappent par leur vérité d’expression. Ce n’est pas une comédienne d’école, et c’est une ravissante comédienne. Ce n’est pas une cantatrice exempte de défauts, et c’est une adorable cantatrice. Elle est Émilie Ambre et n’est pas telle ou telle autre; enfin elle a une originalité ... Or, nous savons tous que c’est rare, l’originalité dans le talent.

And, indeed, ‘original’ was precisely what Émilie Ambre was.

Le Comédie reported with respect: ‘We don’t know what M Escudier’s secret is in finding singing stars, but he’s very good at it ... this year he’s brought us the “plus belles voix” that we’ve heard in Paris ... Albani, Litta, Maria Durand ... et nous venons encore d’adresser nos bravos bien mérités à Mlle Émilie Ambre dont la voix pure et fraîche fait merveille dans *La traviata*.’

The French chroniqueurs Noël and Stoullig would later summarise: ‘Elle est d’ailleurs accueillie avec une entière bienveillance par le public du théâtre Italien.’ Later, when the anti-Ambre brigade tried to pretend that her debut had been a failure, they were overwhelmed by those who affirmed her ‘éclatant succès’.

However, the management of M Léon Escudier at the Salle Ventadour was not such a ‘dazzling success’, and when he carried on, after the closing of his Italian opera season, with another of French opera he did even less well. He produced first Pessard’s *Capitaine Fracasse*, which lasted eleven nights, and then followed up with a French edition of *Aida*, which he had played in Italian, with Amalia Fossa in the title-role, earlier in the year. For the French version (1 August 1878), he engaged his successful French prima donna Émilie Ambre, along with the equally French ‘Mlle Bernardi’ (who had been singing the role in Brussels) and the tenor Ottavio Nouvelli.

Aida, it was reported, worked less well in French than in Italian, and Émilie was rather unfavourably compared with the Paris original, Rosine Stoltz, without being in any way declared ineffective. Noël and Stoullig – who were in the (in)famous Stoltz camp – summarised: ‘Les débuts de Mlle Ambre avait fait

quelque bruit au mois d'avril dernier. Fille d'Algérienne et née à Oran, Mlle Ambre a bien le type africain, ce qui lui a permis de ne pas trop se noircir pour jouer Aïda. Cette femme à la mode a quitté son hôtel et remis ses diamants à l'écrin pour interpréter le rôle d'Aïda, qu'elle a consciemment étudié. Elle le joue avec intelligence et tire tout ce qu'elle peut d'une voix sympathétique, qui n'est pas toujours assez forte pour remplir la salle Ventadour.'

The Paris correspondent of *The Era*, who belonged firmly to the anti-Ambre camp, was strangely appreciative:

The new heroine is Mlle Émilie Ambre, a lady whose very indifferent debut in *La traviata* at the same house last April I was unable to speak of in any but severe terms. It is with no little pleasure consequently that I feel myself enabled to say on the present occasion how much more favourable an impression she made on me. ... Mlle Ambre does not deserve any deprecatory criticism. She acts with energy and sings, if not very agreeably – for her voice is not a pleasing one – at least to the utmost of her power, never sparing her exertions for an instant. I do not for a moment suppose that that she can ever arise to the lofty position in the profession to which it is understood she aspires, but she has certainly improved within three months, and should the progress continue may attain a respectable position as an operatic singer. The audience was prodigal of applause to Mlle Ambre.

He had to admit that, on a return visit, 'I heard more genuine applause the other evening than any bestowed during the remarkable execution of *Aïda* by its original brilliant performers', and ended: 'The role of Verdi's dusky heroine is more suited to her capabilities.'

And so it was to prove. But not yet. Escudier's *Aïda* was played just three times, and his management came to an end.

But Émilie was not short of an engagement. She zipped off to Liège to play *Faust* and *La traviata* (4 and 7 November 1878: 'Sans avoir de bien grandes qualités, Mlle Ambre possédait une voix fort agréable et très flexible, elle était beaucoup supérieure dans le second des ces opéras, ou elle étalait des toilettes d'une richesse éblouissante et des bijoux d'un prix inestimable') and then headed for London, engaged by Colonel Mapleson for the Italian Opera at Her Majesty's Theatre, accompanied by paragraphs, even columns, in the British provincial press about her romance with the king of Holland, who was now being lined up to marry a twenty-year-old German princess.

Émilie Ambre made her debut at London's Italian Opera 16 November 1878, singing Violetta alongside Runcio and Mendioroz. And she scored an undeniable success. *The Graphic* reported:

Among the many representatives of Violetta we have seen, Mlle Ambre can fairly take rank with some of the best ... Mlle Ambre's performance in no way disappointed the expectations raised by the eulogies of the Continental critics. On the contrary, it upheld them. In the first act her spirited delivery of the bacchanalian 'Libiamo, libiamo' and the genuine expression she threw into the pathetic soliloquy, 'Ah! fors'è lui', at once gained unanimous approval. The second act brought out her talent as an actress in still greater prominence; and the last which shows the penitent and despairing Violetta in her dying moments, established the position of Mlle Ambre, the audience bearing willing and ample testimony to her merits as a lyric comedienne of the highest promise ... she possesses the indispensable qualifications – youth, a voice both flexible and of sympathetic quality, an agreeable personal appearance and, before all, an earnestness apparent in everything she does, the surest guarantee for continued progress. She already proves herself a musician born, and the fairest hopes may reasonably be entertained of her. About the impression produced on Saturday there can hardly, we think, be two opinions. Mlle Ambre made 'a palpable hit'.

Elsewhere that opinion was confirmed:

We are able, without flattery, to commend her singing and her style. Seldom has the beautiful melody ‘Ah! fors’è lui’ been sung with truer expression, and if the joyous sequel ‘Sempre libera degg’io’ was given with less fluency than some other representatives of Violetta have accustomed us to, it had a spirit and a character of its own. In the duet with the elder Germont (Act 2), besides penetrating vocal tones Mlle Ambre showed unmistakable dramatic instinct. The last act, however, was her best in all respects and may be praised not only for pathos but for unexaggerated sentiment throughout. ... Altogether the debut of Mlle Ambre warranted the expectations raised respecting her ... That she has plenty of voice and also the ‘instinct’ of an actress we have already seen and her future career will be watched with interest.

The Times, after recounting the Algerian and Dutch tales, referred to ‘success legitimately earned’, going on:

Her performance on Saturday night sufficed to show that the encouragement she has received and the praises awarded to her have neither been indiscriminate nor unwarranted by the acquirements she possesses. In regard to physical resources, if not gifted with a voice of exceptional power, she has one sympathetic and charming in quality, the command she has obtained over which can only be the result of earnest and assiduous study. It is a genuine soprano, more telling – at least to judge by her method of using it – in the upper tones than in other departments of its range. The voice, moreover, is flexible and may ... ‘be attuned to the finest issues’. Her subdued singing is all that could be desired. The middle and lower notes, though, as we have suggested, not powerful, are managed with extreme finesse, and her mezza voce singing ... is to musically regulated ears, extremely attractive. Moreover, and last but not least, her intonation is distinguished by almost uniform correctness. In short, if Mlle Ambre is not already a perfect singer, she has most of the requisites to become one.

Not mentioned, however, was the fact that this French singer used the French style of vibrato. Other writers, to whom this was anathema, mentioned it with distaste.

The Times critic also heaped eulogies on her acting, before finding, as others had before and would again, ‘the charm exercised by Mlle Ambre was her entire originality’ and expressing anxiety to hear her in a further role. He was soon to be gratified. After a quick visit to Liverpool, to deputise for William Candidus in a concert by the local Philharmonic Society, on 28 November (‘Libiamo’, ‘Habanera’, ‘Connais-tu le pays’) Émilie came out in some offerings of *Faust*, most recently played on that stage by Marie Marimon. Unfortunately, come the night, she had a cold, but, unlike many a prima donna, she declined to scratch and went ahead with a performance which, if a bit under par vocally, once again won accolades for acting and for ‘originality’.

The cold was seemingly gone when she gave *Rigoletto* on 3 December, teamed once again with Runcio and Mendioroz.

On 13 December she played one more *Traviata* (‘she more than confirmed the favourable opinion ... and in the last scene “took the house with her”’) and then bowed out for the season. *The Times* summarised: ‘This lady exhibits a strong individuality which, being pleasing as well as strong, can hardly fail to win general sympathy ... in Mlle Ambre the director of Her Majesty’s Theatre has found a new lyric artist from whom the highest things may be expected.’

Not every critic agreed with *The Times*. Those who preferred bigger voices found her ‘weak’, one writer complained that she did her shake on the wrong notes, but no one had fault to find with her acting and her stage presence (although one paper found that she lacked physical attractiveness!). *The Pall Mall Gazette*

assured their readers that her Violetta was her best role, as it gave her the opportunity for emotional acting which was more than the usual prima donna-ish throwing around of arms, and confirmed ‘she excels in the rendering of expressive rather than brilliant music.’

However, it would be the fate of Émilie Ambre ever to attract decidedly diverse notices – whether because of her on-stage abilities or her off-stage activities, I cannot tell. But I suspect.

From London, Émilie returned to Paris, where she was engaged for a season at the Théâtre de la Gaîté, to sing Juliette to the Roméo of Capoul in a production of d’Ivry’s *Les Amants de Vérone*, the piece which had been scheduled by Escudier to follow her *Aida* at the Salle Ventadour. The show had gone on, with Marie Heilbronn as Juliette, and Capoul had made a personal hit which would earn the opera a future.

But before Mlle Ambre could again make the musical pages of the Paris press, she made the ‘faits divers’ columns. She was, it was said, to marry a certain (Comte?) Amédée Gaston Ludovic Rousseau de Beauplan, sometime soldier, sometime secretary to Jules Simon, sometime ‘un peu de tout’, and the only son of Victor Arthur de Rousseau de Beauplan (1823–1890), sometime theatrical author, sometime sous-directeur of the ministry of Beaux-Arts, chevalier de la Legion d’honneur, etc. Once again, Émilie encountered an implacable family. Father de Beauplan went to law to have his son declared ‘imbécile’, listing in his cause all the troubles into which the young man had plunged since his twentieth year. The list was vast, and the press gobbled it up gratefully.

Various authors, mostly writing about Manet, refer to de Beauplan as Émilie’s ‘first husband’. In fact, the relationship was never regularised, and the American journalist who referred to him as her ‘ami intime’ was more on the ball.

Quite who was originally intended to take up Heilbronn’s role for this reprise I cannot discover, but it was Émilie Ambre who – having advertisedly learned the role in four days – appeared (18 February 1879) alongside Capoul’s Roméo at Mons Léonce Detroyat’s Théâtre de la Gaîté in the role of Juliette, with Lhéritier as the nurse, Fromant as Mercutio and Christoph as Tybalt.

‘Mlle Ambre est une Juliette hors ligne’, reported *L’Orchestre*, ‘chantant bien et pleine de maestria, on l’a acclamée avec Capoul dans la scène finale du tombeau ...’, but the opposition would not let go, and *The Era* correspondent worried his old bone:

It is not very long since this lady appeared on London boards heralded by noisy trumpeting of her success in Paris. That it was ever attained I seriously question; no unbiased critic that I know of here expressed admiration of her. ... Now she has returned to Paris blowing to the four winds the echoes of the triumph she secured it seems, in London. Her successes among you are supposed to dazzle us here. Frankly speaking they will do nothing of the sort. All we wonder at here is what your English critics could have found to admire in Mdlle Émilie Ambre – except her diamonds. To us she appears void of charm either in voice or manner and, speaking for myself alone, I have seen her appear in no role to such disadvantage as in Juliette. The mere recollection of her performance in it makes me miserable. A more wooden representative of Capulet’s daughter surely never trod a stage. But you admire Mdlle Émilie Ambre in London so it seems, so I can only wish you joy of your taste. Paris will not dispute her possession with you.

Her diamonds? Yet Arnold Mortier had specifically written in the Paris press about the fact that, unlike many another prima donna, Mlle Ambre (‘although she possesses plenty’) had precisely not come on to the stage glittering with her royal Dutch diamonds in the role of Aida. ‘Just a simple diamond ring’, he recorded approvingly, ‘although she made up for it with her hair, waves of black hair behind her like a train. How lavish!’

The Era's critic undoubtedly plays with the truth. Many a Parisian critic, doubtless less biased than himself – the important Mortier, for one – had indeed expressed admiration of the 'new prima donna', but much Parisian criticism was notably venal ... and London?

After her season at the Gâté, Émilie returned to London for the next season of the Italian Opera, and on 29 April 1879 she reopened as Violetta, alongside Frappolli and Galassi. *The Era's* London correspondent did not share the view of his Paris colleague:

Mdlle Ambré, who made a successful debut here last year, again appeared as Her Majesty's Theatre as the heroine of Verdi's *Traviata*. Mdlle Ambré who was well received last year made a decided step in advance last Tuesday by her careful and effective representation of Violetta. Her singing of the brindisi in the opening scene was very effective, but her success was much greater still in the pathetic air 'Ah! fors'è lui' which she gave with genuine feeling. In her dramatic conception of the character, Mdlle Ambré takes care not to sin against good taste and, while sufficiently realistic, the impersonation was moderate in tone. Her voice is adequate to the demands upon it and, if not distinguished by power beyond the average, is equal throughout its compass, sympathetic and sufficiently bright in its upper notes. Her intonation is seldom at fault whether in subdued or forcible utterance.

The Times concurred, filled most of its column with description and praise, and chronicled the fact that 'her success was unquestionable'.

Mlle Ambre was evidently a London success. Not only had Mapleson recalled her, he would make considerable use of her during this season. Partly, however, this was owing to the occasional mishap to one of his shiningest stars: Etelka Gerster. Mlle Gerster was off during May, and Mlle Ambre went on as *Lucia di Lammermoor*; Mlle Gerster was off in June, and Mlle Ambre went on in *Rigoletto*. And she did well: she played Lucia 'in such a satisfactory style as to greatly lessen the disappointment which might otherwise have been felt. Her singing in each scene was remarkably clever and exhibited an improvement even upon her performance as Violetta. The opportunity for dramatic display afforded at the end of the first and second acts was not lost, for in her acting as well as her singing there was much deserving of admiration. Mdlle Ambre is an earnest artist, possessed of considerable gifts, her appearance is interesting and if she is not altogether the best Lucia of modern times, she represents the part fairly and intelligently.'

Elsewhere she was rather oddly cast. As Isabella to the Alice of Christine Nilsson in *Roberto il diavolo*, and again as Queen Marguerite in *Les Huguenots*, she 'sang the music with fluency. As there is little scope for acting ...'

It was to be yet another scratching which gave her her next opportunity. From London, Mapleson was heading for America with a company of which Christine Nilsson was to be the star attraction. But Nilsson decided not to go, and Émilie Ambre went instead.

The Mapleson company opened its American tour at New York's Academy of Music on 20 October 1879, and the opera chosen was *La traviata* with Émilie Ambre as Violetta and with Campanini's sort-of-understudy, Runcio, as Alfredo. The gossip press had done its work, which may have been why Émilie was, as the *New York Times* reported, 'not cordially received on her appearance at the beginning of the first act'. She began nervously and shakily but 'steadily improved and continually gained the favour of her audience. Her voice became steady and clear, she showed more strength and gave up singing out of tune and at the end of the [2nd] act she had justified her reputation as a soprano capable of singing the leading roles of Italian opera.' By the end of Act II, indeed, she had won her audience over and was called before the curtain, while, 'in the third act, she finally established her claim to distinction', ending on a high.

The same critic described her voice and had the impression that it was really a mezzo-soprano, with a floated top. 'The tone is pure and musical and she can execute florid music with finish.'

Four nights later, after Alwina Valleria had appeared in *Faust*, Émilie gave a second *Traviata*, this time with Campanini, who, *The Times* decided,

indirectly contributed to the superior performance of Mme Ambre who was enabled to do herself justice and feel she was efficiently supported ... a second hearing shows her voice to be of considerable range, the upper register being of the best quality. She has a good style and sings with much dramatic power and is moreover an actress who possesses the sympathetic force which enlists the attention of her audience. She gave an artistic rendering of the part from a strictly musical point of view and her acting was in good taste thought and in the last act was indeed excellent.

Valleria and Ambre held the season up for several weeks (Émilie even sang in a performance of the Rossini *Stabat Mater*), until Marie Marimon arrived from Europe and immediately established herself as the star attraction. But Mme Ambre was still well in evidence, appearing in the title-roles of both *Mignon* and *Aida*, which turned out to be 'the hit of the opera season in New York', and as Gilda in *Rigoletto*. On 26 November, she made a first appearance in the role of *Carmen*, hitherto the province of Minnie Hauk. The *New York Tribune* was not impressed: 'Mme Ambre had a thankless task to perform in assuming the role of Carmen, partly because the music lies outside the effective range of her voice, still more because an audience which has seen Miss Hauk in that character is not likely to be satisfied with anybody else. But making all proper allowances for these disadvantages, Mme Ambre's personation must, nevertheless, be called intrinsically weak, weaker than her Violetta or Aida – a mere nothing.'

After the New York season, the company headed on to Boston ('she made a most agreeable impression as Aida ... Marimon, Ambre and Valleria are much liked'), Chicago, St Louis, Cincinnati, Detroit and Philadelphia, where Valleria had to deputise for her in *Aida*. But when she returned she 'delighted the quakers with her rendition of the title-role which was remarkable for intensity, complete unity and careful elaboration of detail. Her voice is wonderfully rich, passionate and sympathetic and both her voice and dramatic method are thoroughly artistic. She made a pronounced success.'

However, by this time it seems that Mme Ambre was, in spite of taking up the role of Valentine in *Les Huguenots* and also playing some performances of *Faust*, definitely third in the prima donna pecking order. It seemed that her appeal for the American public was not in the same class as that of Marimon or even Valleria.

Mapleson described her in his memoirs as 'a Moorish prima donna of some ability and possessing great personal charms'. He writes of 'the furious jealousy that the personal popularity in Baltimore of Mdlle Valleria as Aida succeeded in arousing in Madame Ambre' and continues: 'Madame Ambre, notwithstanding much puffing, was not by any means a draw. Her voice was a fine organ, and her appearance prepossessing, and yet – well, in spite of her having appeared in *La traviata* in one huge blaze of diamonds – not paste, mark you, but real brilliants (and the gifts, so it is said, of the King of Holland, who was devoted to "Art") – she failed to secure public sympathy, and became a decided drug in the market.'

The company returned to New York, where the press noted that she 'is but seldom heard of late' but had 'never has given a more powerful performance as Aida'. She also appeared with success as Valentine in *Les Huguenots*. It was remarked that 'she seems to improve with the public ...', but it is evident that the American tour was less than a wholehearted success for Émilie Ambre.

Yet she would very soon be back.

Here, I have to include a parenthesis. In spite of the fact that Émilie's trip to America was apparently a hastily arranged thing, it was on this first (for her) voyage to America that she and Gaston de Beauplan brought with them Manet's painting *The Execution of the Emperor Maximilian*, which they exhibited in

several cities during the company's tour. The story of this venture, its very limited success, and the pair's relationship with Manet (from which a number of letters survive in various collections round the world) I leave to be related by the biographers of Manet, and I return to the world of music.

I'm not quite sure what Émilie did in Europe in the middle months of 1880, as I have spotted only a performance of *Faust*, in September, at the Casino, Copenhagen, before on 19 October she touched down back at New York, on the *St Laurent* out of Le Havre. She was not, however, alone. She was accompanied by de Beauplan and by a company of over a hundred singers and musicians brought from France for a major operatic season at the French Opera House in New Orleans. She also arrived accompanied by a new and yet more preposterous wave of paragraphs on her private life, which credited her with having been the mistress not only of King William but also of Louis Napoléon, and announced that she had given up the titles they had lavished upon her in order to marry de Beauplan.

Except, of course, she hadn't married de Beauplan. Not in the legitimate sense.

Gaston de Beauplan had not stinted on the company for his venture into theatrical and operatic management. Mlle Ambre was, of course, *assoluta*, but in support he had hired the celebrated contralto Mme Deméric-Lablache (plus her debuting daughter) and the tenor Gabriel Tournié, who had been the first French Radames in the hit production at Brussels, soon joined by the fine Belgian soprano Marie Lagye, who would act as Émilie's number two.

The new company opened with considerable *éclat*, playing *Robert le diable* to a splendid reception. The *New York Dramatic Mirror* (which was anti-Ambre) reported: 'Mme Ambre has met with a warm reception in New Orleans, greatly in contrast with her New York welcome. They think down south that she is a charming prima donna.'

Émilie followed up with *La traviata*, *Les Dragons de Villars*, *Il trovatore*, *La favorita*, *Si j'étais roi* and *Faust* ('her Marguerite was a magnificent performance') before *La Fille de Madame Angot* was given. Émilie these days played Lange and no longer Clairette. One evening they gave a Benefit for the 'poor of New Orleans', and Émilie was presented with a block of ice with a bouquet frozen inside it.

Émilie and de Beauplan pressed on, producing *La Juive*, *Carmen* ('her singing was of course excellent and her acting very clever'), *Le Barbier de Séville* with Mlle Lagye as Rosina, *L'Africaine*, *Paul et Virginie*, *Haydée*, *La Dame Blanche* and *Mignon* before the 75 subscription nights came to an end. A further season of 50 nights was promptly announced for the winter before the company took to the touring circuits.

On 14 March they arrived at Pike's Opera House, Cincinnati ('Ambre is the acknowledged bright particular star'), and then, without any pre-publicity, at McVickers Theatre, Chicago. The city was caught unawares and delighted, and the press reported that, in spite of having 'no stars', 'the company have completely captured Chicago ... it is generally felt that in the tout ensemble no opera has ever been rendered in this city so satisfactorily as by this troupe.' They were retained for a second week.

But all was not well. The 'success' in New Orleans had been an artistic one, but de Beauplan's inexperience as a theatre manager resulted in financial problems. He had borrowed money, and now his creditors were calling for payment. Tales were circulated that Émilie had 'pawned her jewels'. But they continued to Philadelphia, where they opened with Émilie as Valentine in *Les Huguenots*. 'Very excellent singing', reported the local press, 'a clear, strong and in every way agreeable voice'. 'The duet between her and Raoul in the fourth act was given with a power that electrified all who heard it.' But, once again, the company, lacking star names and hectic publicity in a time and place that thrived on such things, failed to fill their houses. In fact, bookings were so bad for Baltimore that they simply cancelled and announced three extra performances in Philadelphia. They took \$80 advance, and again they scratched.

But de Beauplan was in even greater trouble. Along with his opera company, he had imported a dramatic company which was holding open the New Orleans Theatre until his and Émilie's return. The actors were unpaid and awaiting their tickets home.

Up north, the opera company limped on to Brooklyn and finally to the Academy of Music, New York: 'De Beauplan's opera company which has had a most successful career through the southern

and western states having played an unprecedented engagement of four months in New Orleans.' They opened on 25 April 1880, with an announced repertoire of *Les Huguenots*, *La Juive*, *L'Africaine*, *William Tell* and *Robert le diable*, but come Friday night it all fell in a heap. Several of the leading singers refused to go on unless Émilie guaranteed their salaries personally. Émilie's reply was that she was not part of the management. Later, she would say she had lost \$80,000 in the venture. And so the de Beauplan opera company folded, and it folded with a little more scandalous publicity.

Émilie and the tenor Tournié departed by ship for France, and it was bruited in the avid press that they had eloped. Mme Tournié rushed to the police and the papers – the *Omaha Bee* was doubtless not the only journal to print a column of page 1 wifely vituperation headed 'New York Sensation' ('The company hated Ambre because she was so domineering ... if it had not been for her everything would have sailed along smoothly ... she is a perfect fiend') – and then to the next ship out. De Beauplan insisted that the tenor was merely escorting the lady (whom no one seemed seriously to believe to be Mme de Beauplan, although the voluble Mme Tournié insisted she was) back to France. Elsewhere, it was hinted – in press columns of speculation and 'facts' – that the whole thing was a financial set-up. Later, Tournié (who would go on to have a respectable career – with Mme Ribes-Tournié – as a theatre manager at Nantes, Lyon and Toulouse) threatened to sue one newspaper which published a decorative version of the tale of the elopement.

Well, whether they did, or whether they didn't, and whatever they had done before, Gaston de Beauplan now seems to vanish from Émilie's life and from the annals of the theatre. He died at Montpellier on 28 February 1890, unmarried, at the age of forty.

I next spot Émilie Ambre singing *La traviata* in the pretty French spa town of Bagnoles de l'Orme (18 August 1882), and at Lyon, playing in *Les Contes de Hoffman* ('Mme Émilie Ambre a executé avec une dextérité et une précision parfaits tous les mouvements automatiques de cette Galathée allemande qui se nomme Olympia. ... Mme Émilie Ambre est une excellente comédienne, elle l'a prouvé avant-hier, mais c'est aussi une chanteuse de talent. Elle a dit avec beaucoup de goût la romance du deuxième acte et a fait valoir au troisième d'une manière tout à fait charmante et passionnée, la figure si sympathétique d'Antonia'). The following month she was at Luchon, playing *Carmen* and *Mignon* at the Casino Theatre. The local press didn't forbear to comment that she was 'ancienne dame d'honneur du roi des Pays Bas', with whom she had visited the spa six or seven years previously.

In 1883, I spot her at the Grand Théâtre, Lille, as Carmen, Galathée and Marguerite in *Faust*. She 'won a considerable success', reported one portion of the music press, while opining that 'her voice was in tatters' and that she 'has reached the difficult age where one is no longer a leading lady, but not yet a character lady.' Six months later, he would be obliged to eat those words. On 8 March 1884, at that same theatre in that same city, Émilie Ambre opened in the first French provincial production of Massenet's new opera *Manon*. The composer was at the baton for the occasion and was apparently delighted. A proof copy of the opera's score survives in Stanford University library, inscribed 'A Madame Émilie Ambre, à ma charmante interprète, à ma première Manon en France. Lille, 8 mars / 84 J. Massenet'.

I don't quite get this. *Manon* was surely introduced at the Paris Opéra-Comique on 19 January of 1884, with Marie Heilbronn as Manon. Did Massenet not count Paris as France? Or did he mean 'première' in quality?

Anyway, at 35 years of age, Mme Ambre scored one of the most effective hits of her career. The Lille performance, with Massenet in charge, was a triumph ('la représentation a été magnifique', 'un enthousiasme immense'), and Hippolyte Clauss in the local *Echo du Nord* had no doubts: 'Avant tout, un éclatant hommage est dû à Mme Émilie Ambre; je ne sais comment traduire l'enthousiasme qu'a manifesté hier soir le public du Grand Théâtre pour cette artiste admirable qui, durant cinq actes l'a, tour à tour, fait rire et pleurer, l'a tenue sous sa charme de son double et merveilleux talent de comédienne et de chanteuse de façon qu'on ne saurait dire si c'est à l'oeuvre ou à son interprète qu'on doit le plus le plaisir, l'émotion qu'on éprouve à entendre l'une et l'autre.' He went on to report how she was complimented and thanked

by Massenet at the end of the performance and called back six times by the public, and summed her up as in the front line of sopranos of the French school.

Théo Bergès in *Le Progrès du Nord* was no less delighted: ‘Mme Ambre a fouillé le rôle de Manon avec le plus grand soin, elle a souvent atteint la perfection; comme comédienne lyrique nous la croyons sans rivale.’

From Lille, Émilie took *Manon* to the corners of France.

Émilie’s stage activities during the year 1885 began at Lille, where I see her in January playing Filina in *Mignon* with sister Julie as Frédéric, before a season at Rouen’s Théâtre des Arts (*Les Dragons de Villars, La traviata, La Fille du régiment, Faust*, etc) and another at Dijon (*La Fille du tambour-major, Le Pardon de Ploërmel*). But that was not all. In 1885, Émilie Ambre turned novelist. Her novel, published by Ollendorf in Paris, was initially entitled *Yvonne, la comédienne* but finally came out under the title *Une diva*. It was, of course, the colourful story of the life of an operatic singer, and the press was not slow to hint at the possibility of a roman à clef. According to *Le Livre*: ‘L’histoire d’une diva imaginaire contée par une diva des plus authentiques. Certes, voilà un livre fait pour piquer la curiosité et éveiller dans l’esprit du lecteur de vagues soupçons d’autobiographie. Est-ce bien elle-même que Mlle Émilie Ambre a voulu peindre dans sa charmeuse Yvonne Bertini? Nous le souhaitons pour l’auteur, qui a su nous présenter une fort séduisante héroïne et la mêler à des aventures dont le romanesque est peut-être la simple vérité.’

But Émilie’s effort at authorship was not simply a naughty book. It turned out that she had a colourful flair for telling a tale. Even if it wasn’t quite a tale. ‘Bâclé à la diable, écrit dans une language bizarre, il est curieux, ce roman, il s’en dégage surtout une saveur personnelle qui manque à bien de livres d’écrivain de profession. Mais tout le monde ne s’est pas trouvé dans les mêmes conditions d’études que Mme Ambre.’

The book, which was well liked enough to go into a fourth edition, seems however, to have been a one-off. Émilie had told the one story she had in her.

But she still had a few more years of singing career to go. Over the next few years I spot her singing *Manon* at the Rouen Théâtre des Arts with the tenor Mauras and with Massenet again in charge of the production, in *Lakmé, La Dame Blanche* and a piece entitled *Stenio* composed by Frédéric Le Rey, and, amazingly, as Micaëla to the Carmen of a certain Mme de Villeraie. Madame was apparently not so hot, and Émilie was judged ‘une Micaëla parfaite!’ I spot her at Luchon (*Lakmé, Mireille, Mignon, Faust*), at Royan (*Lakmé*), and at the Grand Théâtre at Le Havre, apparently doing *Lakmé, Mignon, Manon, Carmen* and *Hamlet*.

In spite of published rumours that she would return for another season in New Orleans, my final stage sighting of Mme Ambre on the operatic stage is in January 1888, when she sang *Hamlet* at Toulouse. But there may very well have been more.

The name of Émilie Ambre, however, still appeared from time to time in the press. In America, in Scotland, around Europe. It was always the same thing, the latest, more coloured-up, more imaginative rehash of the ‘Queen of Holland’ story. The *Alta California* of San Francisco spent most of its tired gossip article telling the tale of Madame Musard, an earlier conquest of King William’s, but Émilie got her mention. ‘She is now living obscurely in the provinces’, insisted the American scribe.

She wasn’t.

She was in Paris, where, if she was not performing, she was teaching and certainly involved in the musical world. I spot her promoting a concert in 1890. It has been said that she ‘left the theatre in 1891’. Maybe. Certainly in the year of 1891, in the 14th July honours list, she was created an ‘officier de l’Académie’. It appears that the Countess of Amboise was now regarded as respectable.

And then, in 1894 (30 January), Émilie Ambre got married. Officially and legally married, for the first time. How do I know that? Why, from the Asnières marriage registers, where she is listed as ‘Mademoiselle Émilie Gabrielle Adèle Ambroise’. Mademoiselle. Émilie’s husband was a musician, a dozen years her junior, by the name of Marc (or Marie) Émile (Charles) Bouichère. Bouichère was also born in Algeria (b

Djidjelli, 11 April 1861), the son of a French military man. He had studied at the École Niedermeyer and subsequently held organ and choral posts in several Parisian churches, culminating in an engagement at the Chapelle de la Trinité. The couple's married life was to be but a short one, for Bouichère died in Paris on 4 September 1895.

Madame Ambre–Bouichère spent the last years of her life as a busy, highly respected and successful singing teacher in Paris, where she died in the first part of April 1898, just short of her fiftieth birthday.

As an aside, sister Julie Marie, who pops up playing Frédéric in *Mignon* here and there, wed (25 May 1902) Julien Eugène Mallet and disappears from my view.

I also notice a Mons Gaston Romain, 'nephew of Mme Ambre', in 1882 'des Italiens'. I'm not sure whether the 'des Italiens' belongs to him or to her. But 'nephew'? How?

Émilie Ambre has, as I said at the beginning of this article, been remembered (when she is) in this day and age simply because of the king of Holland and/or of Manet. As late as 1908 the *New York Tribune* was still rabbiting on about the king and his paramours. But those who saw her perform and who had liked her (which some, curiously, had almost violently not) found her unforgettable.

On the occasion of Patti's first *Aida* in America, the *New York Times* wrote of Émilie as 'the artist who most effectively realised the ideal of the heroine from a dramatic point of view and invested the part with an Oriental grace and tragic intensity which made her effort a memorable one in spite of her somewhat worn voice.' And in France, too, speaking of an 1894 production of *Manon*: 'although the creation of *Manon* goes back several years, no artist has been able to make us forget, in this complex role, Mme Émilie Ambre who gave to the character such a lively and vigorous relief.'

After her death, Émilie's possessions were put up for auction at the Salle Drouot. *Les Quotidiennes*, under the title 'La Favorite', wrote:

On a vendu hier après mort et avec un véritable insuccès les meubles, bibelots, partitions d'une femme qui a eu son heure, et Paris a laissé partir sans attention, cette intéressante Émilie Ambre qui fut pourtant un peu reine, avec un sceptre de main gauche et une couronne ... de roses. Telle qu'elle est restée dans mon souvenir, alors qu'elle chantait en province Haydée et Mignon, elle n'était point belle, ni même jolie, mais avec ses cheveux et ses yeux noirs, son teint pale, un long nez à l'arête fine, sa bouche dentée, elle avait un type qui aurait pu faire honneur indifféremment à Naples ou à Alger – et qui a trouvé son triomphe à La Haye. C'est là qu'un jour elle vint, se fit voir, et vainquit.

The *New York Times*, which had so praised her *Aida*, reported with or without truth that the main buyer at the sale had been the Dutch government, come to buy back some of the works of art which Émilie and her king had allegedly 'looted' from the country's patrimony. It would seem that they got their soi-disant patrimony 'back' rather cheaply. If they did. Paragraphs of denials followed and were grabbed greedily by the part of the American press that lived on tales of European royalty: 'There is no truth whatever in the story published to the effect that the Baron von Zuylen has been purchasing on behalf of the Dutch government the bric-à-brac and art treasures alleged to have been presented by the late king of Holland to the Parisian demi-mondaine, Émilie Ambre.' It would be interesting to see the auctioneer's records ...

There were some seemingly extravagant tales told of Émilie's life by theatrical memoirists such as Armand Silvestre, who was pro the de Beauplan family (*Mémoires de fin de siècle*), but perhaps the most insidious 'obituary' came from the minor actress and trash novelist known as Marie Colombier (1841–1910), the same woman who had won her 'fame' by fictionalising the life of Sarah Bernhardt under the title *Sarah Barnum*. She swiftly shoved the just dead Émilie into her latest book of demi-semi-imaginary, and of course lewd, 'memoirs'. Among the tales she recounted were one of William the king catching Émilie and de Beauplan in flagrante delicto, another of de Beauplan dying of morphine, of an 82-year-old

Émilie Ambre

grandmother shuffled around on the American tour, and of a miserable life and a miserable death following the loss of her 'second' husband. The trouble is, as with so many such rubbishy 'writers', inside the rubbish there is always just enough recognisable truth to make you wonder about the rest.

So we may or may not know all of the truth about Émilie Ambre, but at least now we know more than we did, and – above all – a good many lies and inventions have been weeded out of the story of her interesting life and career.

BAUERMEISTER, MATHILDE

(b Hamburg, ?1849; d Herne Villa, High Street,
Herne Bay, 4 October 1926)

Mathilde Bauermeister became a special kind of name in the operatic and musical world, and books of reference and, of course, the Internet therefore carry endless Bauermeister potted biographies, the one, of course, in general, knowledgelessly copied from the other and, thus, in the usual way, perpetuating not only a dose of fact but – by statement or by omission – a goodly dose of fiction.

Mlle Bauermeister did not become a name because she was a prima donna. There were, indeed, nights in her long performing life when she was propelled onto the Italian opera stage to sing a leading role, but these were, pretty much one and all, unscheduled moments. For Mlle Bauermeister spent almost the entirety of her career of thirty years and more as a comprimaria, a small-part player, in Italian opera. She was, however, a comprimaria who had the ability to go on for any role, no matter how large, and sing it to perfection, in any language, at any time, and inevitably to the great satisfaction of the public. And, time and again, she did. Over the years, Mlle Bauermeister became a fixture on the bills of the Italian operatic seasons of Britain and, later, America, establishing herself as a fondly regarded ‘mascotte’. When she finally took her farewell of the boards, in 1905, some forty years on from her first appearance on a London platform, Nellie Melba herself organised a Farewell Matinee at which she and Caruso sang, one last time, alongside ‘little’ Bauermeister.

The eulogies flowed. *The Times*, reporting the Farewell – in which Mlle Bauermeister had sung her eternal role of the nurse in Gounod’s *Roméo et Juliette* – described how she broke down and cried

in full view of the audience, when Mme Melba, with great tact and cleverness, turned the scene into one of favour and prettiness not often seen in the theatre. Mlle Bauermeister was of course required to make a little speech, which she did with the utmost grace and modesty, referring to what she had done ‘in her little way’. One cannot but hope that this great example of what can be done ‘in a little way’ will be copied by some of the members of the company, and some effort made to take the place of this great, but self-denying, artist. No one has ever deserved a compliment of this kind better than Mlle Bauermeister for she has seldom in her long career been placed in a position where the appreciation of the public could be manifested in the ordinary way ... She has filled an immense number of parts, has sung in four languages with the ease and certainty of a native in each, and has supported every great prima donna who has appeared in London, from Titiens to Melba. Her life may have lacked the dazzling brilliance that must haunt the prima



Figure 1 Mathilde Bauermeister

donna, and must have often have seemed very humdrum and wearisome, but her habitual self-repression and the circumstances of the kind of parts she played must have given her opportunities for the study of human nature which very few other people can have had.

Melba later wrote: 'De Reszke and I used to love to sing with her. We always called her our mascot, because whenever she sang with us the performance went so well.'

Late in her career, another reviewer wrote: 'In her own department Mdlle Bauermeister has no rival and her rendering of the character of Martha in Gounod's *Faust* has never been equalled.' Others preferred her *Roméo et Juliette*, her Mamma Lucia in *Cavalleria rusticana* or her Marcellina in *Le nozze di Figaro*. But Dame Martha Schwerlein remained perhaps her most famous role. She played it to the end. And she had played it for the first time at Her Majesty's Theatre in 1866. At the age, so we are told, of seventeen. Hmmm.

Anyway, it is a pretty story. And, yes, Mlle Bauermeister was a veritable personality in the Victorian operatic world and also a much loved performer and a much loved person. As for her career, it is recorded in the journals of her time for all to see, even if it has become a little falsely summarised by the potters of her tale. The story of nearly forty years' endless work for the Italian opera is, for a start, not quite true. But, more than that ... who exactly *was* Caroline Augusta Johanna Mathilde Bauermeister?

Mathilde Bauermeister lived for twenty years after her retirement. At first, she taught singing – in 1910 an advertisement places her at 'Rosedale, Beechdale Rd, Brixton Hill' – though latterly she retired to Herne Bay, and it was there that she died in 1926. Her will referred to her by her full name, and as

‘spinster’. The probate stated that she had died at Herne Bay on 4 October 1926 at the age of 77. Probate was granted on 6 November to the Rev Emil Augustus Ehrmann (clerk) and John George Godard (solicitor): Effects: £2,396 18s 4d.

Curious. Was she really just 77 years of age? Could the London debut of ‘Miss Bauermeister’ (*sic*) have really been made at fourteen? So what else can we discover? How about investigating the birth, death and marriage registers. Not the birth ones, for we are told she was born in Hamburg and ‘came to England as a child’. With whom, to whom, when, why? But it is there in the deaths and also (with a slight variation in the order of the extra forenames) in the marriages. In the December quarter of 1867. So the description ‘spinster’, which she wore for so long, is evidently false. Whoever she married, it does not seem to have been a lasting thing, but Miss Bauermeister would not go through life thereafter as a solo woman. No. She had a long-standing partner. She bore him a child. And both her de facto husband – under whose surname she does indeed appear in a census, touring in opera in Burnley, in 1881 – and her young son lie, together, in London’s Norwood cemetery. Indeed, only just before her retirement did she again effectively become a ‘spinster’. Or a ‘widow’. So, if the details of the professional life of Mlle Bauermeister are mostly quite clear, those of her personal life are decidedly not.

Well, ten years after writing those lines, I thought to investigate that probate a little deeper, and guess what? I found some of Mathilde’s family. Sister Bertha Dorothea and sister Juliane Wilhelmine. Sister Bertha (b 1832) married Dr Karl Eugen Schlund on 22 August 1857 in Islington; sister Juliane was witness, and the registration tells us that the girls’ father was George Lewis (ie Georg Ludwig) Bauermeister DM (a doctor?). But Juliane (1836–1903) is the key. On 30 August 1867, after her father’s death, she wed Jacob Heinrich Ludwig Ehrmann, merchant. Ehrmann. So the Reverend gent who probated Mathilde’s will was her nephew. Connection made! Further probing turns up another sister, (Emma Louisa) Hermine (1848–1912), and a brother, too: August Wilhelm. I suppose that’s why Mathilde called her baby August. And, I wonder, who is the Emma H(enriette) Bauermeister (1818–1899) from Hamburg in the 1851 census governing in the wealthy Harley Street mansion of Dr H H Southey FRCS. Oh, Lord ... father Georg Ludwig Bauermeister, mother Catharina Christiana Henrietta née Gercke ... Auntie Emma?

Anyway now, at last, we more or less know how and why Mathilde Bauermeister ‘came to England as a child’. Family.

The first visible sign of Miss Bauermeister performing on the public platform is on 25 April 1863. The occasion is a concert given at the Hanover Square Rooms in aid of a Polish charity, and the performers are the prima donna Terez Ellinger from the Vienna Opera, San Carlo Naples and currently London’s Italian Opera, a basso yodeller known as Herr Johann, and ‘Miss Matilde Bauermeister’. And – heavens above! – ‘some appropriate recitations’ were given by Dr and Madame Schlund! Family again. There’s no mention of her being a child performer, but ...

In 1864, Caroline Augusta Johanna Mathilde Bauermeister was admitted to the Royal Academy of Music. At the end of the year, when the scholarship awards were made, Megan Watts was given the prestigious King’s Scholarship, Arabella Smythe the Westmoreland, and Mathilde was ‘highly commended’. After a school concert, the press remarked: ‘[She] has a soprano voice of no great power, but of needful flexibility. With the exception of two low notes (which might be better managed), the quality of the voice is far above the average.’

And just a few months later, on 5 July 1865, Mlle Bauermeister made her debut at Her Majesty’s Theatre, in the Italian Opera, cast as the first boy (to the second of Mlle Zandrina and the third of Mlle Drasdil) in the first London performance in fifteen years of *Il flauto magico*.

Now, one version of the story has the young soprano taking her early lessons from the RAM’s Francesco Schira. Another has her taught by Therese Titiens. A third has her taught by Schira and Titiens (presumably not at the same time). Titiens? Yet, at the same time, the very Mlle Zandrina mentioned above, who was in real life Frln Auguste Kruls, the daughter of Titiens’ sister, was being rather embarrassingly advertised as ‘niece and only pupil of Mlle Titiens’. An 1898 article gave a slightly more likely version of Mathilde’s

scholarisation: '[she] was educated at the Royal Academy of Music where her great ability attracted the attention of Mme Titiens. The great prima donna recommended Mlle Bauermeister to an operatic post.' Certainly, if Mr Mapleson's peerless prima donna suggested to her manager that a young singer be given an opportunity, that singer would be given said opportunity pronto. This season, it seems, both Mlle Zandrina and Mlle Bauermeister owed their place to Titiens, and Mlle Drasdil hers to another splendid prima donna, Hermine Rudersdorff. I wonder a little why Madame Titiens preferred the 'great ability' of Bauermeister to that of, say, the Misses Watts and Smythe. As a fellow Hamburgerin, perhaps? Or was there some slightly closer tie? Suffice it, however, that the choices of Mlles Bauermeister and Drasdil were excellent ones and, teamed with the rather less remarkable Zandrina (whose career would be long finished while her two associates were still steaming along, well established in the forefront of their profession), they won very pleased reviews.

At the end of the year, Mlle Bauermeister was awarded the King's Scholarship. This time Miss Watts was simply 'commended'. The pecking order had changed.

And so began what would be a regular routine. Each year, henceforth, when the Italian opera season opened at Her Majesty's Theatre, the company included Mlle Bauermeister. In 1866, already, the teenaged performer was entrusted with a whole series of roles: the soprano goatherd in *Dinorah*, the bridesmaid in *Der Freischütz*, Diana in *Iphigenia in Tauris*, more *Zauberflöte* (when the critic lauded the three boys but crucified the comprimarie cast as two of the Queen's ladies), Inez in *Il trovatore*, Curra in *La forza del destino*, Clotilde in *Norma*, the Mermaid in *Oberon* with her pretty solo ('in an state of extreme nervousness') and, improbably, Dame Martha in *Faust*. She had begun as she would carry on, working most nights of the week in small, if not always negligible, roles.

During the season, she appeared, also, at a number of concerts, including those given by Mapleson in conjunction with the opera; on these occasions, she got to show her abilities a little more fully ('She sang "O luce di quest' anima" very neatly', etc). Then, at the end of the season, her time at the Academy now over, she was sent out on a Mapleson concert party tour. The party consisted of Titiens, Santley, Mme Deméric-Lablache, Tom Hohler and 'little Bauermeister'.

Back at Her Majesty's Theatre for the 1867 season, Mathilde slotted into her now established position, sharing the comprimaria roles with the equally efficient Madame Tagliafico. She sang Annina in *La traviata*, the dama d'onore in *Les Huguenots*, and an already much less nervous Mermaid. When, on the production of *Don Giovanni*, several of the company's principals – Trebelli and Deméric-Lablache included – were brought on to give weight to the finale, Mlle Bauermeister was one of them. There was, however, no doubt about her moment of the season. When Titiens gave her *Medea*, the young performer was cast as Dirce. 'For the first time a Dirce able successfully to grapple with the very trying air assigned in the first scene to that comparatively subordinate character', cried *The Times*. 'A pure light soprano of fresh and musical quality and she sings with good intonation and much quiet grace and genuine expression', applauded the *Musical World*, going on to say she was a great improvement on her predecessor in the role. The gentleman obviously meant it: but the previous Dirce, for heaven's sake, had been the superb Laura Harris! Laura Harris, who would go on to starry triumphs the length and breadth of Europe.

Again, during this season, she took part in a number of concerts at the Crystal Palace. 'A useful member of the company at Her Majesty's', nodded the press after her delivery of 'Ah! non giunge'. However, when she appeared at the Agricultural Hall's Fairy Palace, she won an altogether more enthusiastic notice: 'Mlle Bauermeister sang the cavatina "Come per me sereno" with ease, grace and clearness ... in the execution of the [upper notes] even at the highest points she maintained peculiar definiteness and fullness ... very encouragingly commended for her singing of "Son vergin vezzosa".'

And, at the end of the opera season, off she headed once more to the country with Titiens, Drasdil, Hohler and Santley for another concert tour.

Nobody actually mentioned the fact, but at the beginning of the 1868 season there was seemingly no sign at Her Majesty's Theatre of the previously ubiquitous Mathilde. Was she ill? I think not. Just married.

Apparently to one Alfred Aimé Rucht. And maybe pregnant? Anyway, she was in Hamburg singing the *St Matthew Passion* (7 April 1868) with Julius Stockhausen ('eine kleine Stimme und dito Idee von Bach'ser Musik').

But it was not for long. Soon she was back again, for *Les Huguenots*, for *Medea* ('she sings the by no means easy air in the first act remarkably well'), as Alice in *Lucia di Lammermoor* and now as Lisa in *La sonnambula*, as second lady in *Il flauto magico*, and so forth, as well as in the usual matching set of concerts ('Ah! Si ben mio', 'Come per me sereno', 'Willow Song' 'Gli angui d'inferno', etc), followed by trips to Dublin, Glasgow and elsewhere in opera and in concert.

1868 was the year of the destruction of Her Majesty's Theatre. And thus it came to pass that the opera season of 1869 took place at Covent Garden, and Inez in *La favorita* and Giacinta in *Le Domino noir* were added to the Bauermeister repertoire.

The provincial tour of 1870–1, however, brought an unexpected first. The company was in Glasgow, with *Il flauto magico* programmed. But Ilma di Murska had missed her train for Scotland. It was announced that Madame Léon-Duval would go on, in her place, as the Queen of the Night. But when the Queen made her entry, it was a rather tinier Queen than the French prima donna. Mademoiselle Bauermeister was doing what would be among the most memorable of her numerous many 'saving the ship' acts. Somehow, the orchestra transposed the infernal arias down a tone, and 'this young lady secured a large share of the applause of the evening'. But for the evenings that followed it was back to the Mermaids ('received her usual encore for her charming rendering of the Mermaid's song'), the Lisas and the Marthas.

The 1871 season saw Mlle Bauermeister take on the aged Marchesa in *La Fille du régiment*, Maddalena in *Linda di Chamounix* ('a pretty and tender mamma to the heroine'), Giovanna in *Rigoletto*, Berthe in *Le nozze di Figaro* and Marzelline in *Fidelio*. Thereafter she was cast as an 'excellent' Marcellina in *Il barbiere di Siviglia* and as Angelina in Cherubini's *Le due giornate* – and so it went on, always with the occasional bacon-saving act – as when she replaced an indisposed Mila Rodani as Oscar in *Un ballo in maschera* (November 1877) – and she was given perhaps her most consequent role to date as Ännchen alongside the Agathe of Marie Roze in *Der Freischütz* ('lively and competent', 'real point and humour').

In between times, Mlle Bauermeister was booked to take a turn on the road with Harry Campobello's opera company. Campobello's wife, Clarice Sinico, and a certain Mme Laville-Ferminet 'from the Theatre Royal, The Hague', were to be the prime donne, so it seems that Mathilde was intended to take part in her usual capacity of 'singularly useful person'. However, since she was under exclusive contract to Mapleson, I am not at all sure that she went.

In early 1878, Italian opera was for a time replaced at Her Majesty's Theatre by English opera. Many of the sopranos chosen for this season were young and inexperienced. Mathilde Bauermeister was only young. She was allotted the role of Eily in *The Lily of Killarney* with George Perren, Edward Cotte, George Fox, Signor Franceschi, Alice Barth and Bessie Palmer, and, for once, she was seen on the Opera House boards as a leading lady. In English.

The 1878 season of Italian operas saw Mlle Bauermeister promoted to Papagena in *Il flauto magico*, and when *Carmen* was given its first British production she 'created' the part of Frasquita. There was a moment, so it is said, when she might have done better. Nobody, it appears, wanted to play the 'minor' part of Micaëla, and one scornful soprano tossed out her refusal by replying to the offer: 'Give it to Bauermeister.' But, in the end, Alwina Valleria accepted to play Micaëla, and Mathilde was allotted Frasquita. It was a role that would rank among her most often played, for she was seen in the part in Britain and in America right up to the end of her career, more than a quarter of a century later. Later in the season, however, she replaced Alwina Valleria as Micaëla for some performances. The aria and duet of the role were, perhaps unnecessarily, cut, but she sang her part in the finale 'as though she had been singing it night after night'. Of course. On some occasions, she also played both second lady and Papagena on the same night in *Il flauto magico*.

Mademoiselle Bauermeister had also a few other chances at a leading role when she guested with the Alexandra Palace opera, singing Violetta with J W Turner and George Fox, and with Richard Temple's

opera company at the Crystal Palace, singing Leonora in *Il trovatore* to the Manrico of J W Turner and the Luna of George Fox.

George Fox again. And in 1879–80 the names of Mr Fox and Miss Bauermeister are linked again when, ‘by kind permission of Ernest Gye, Esq’, she creates the leading soprano part in his cantatas *The Babes in the Wood* and *Imogene* (St George’s Hall, 14 April 1880). Mr Fox was, of course, the man in her life.

In 1879 the name of Mlle Bauermeister was missing, for the first time in more than a decade, from the lists of the Italian Opera. Mme Deméric-Lablache was Martha, Mlle Robiati was Frasquita. In fact, it would be five seasons – contrary to the ‘myth’ – before Mathilde made her return to the Mapleson fold. In 1880 she featured in an autumn opera season stage by Mapleson’s son-in-law, Lieutenant Armit, at Her Majesty’s. Compared to the companies with which she had played since her debut, it was a weak affair, with only Zélie Trebelli of the big names taking part. Mlle Bauermeister did her Inez and her Bertha, but she also got to play Adalgisa when *Norma* was produced. Mme Quintina Lorenzini-Gianoli was the druidess for the occasion, and Mathilde’s Adalgisa, it appears, simply wiped the scheduled star out. Another of Armit’s new prime donne, Elise Widmar, was cast as Marguerite for *Faust*, but she cried off on what was to have been her debut night, and ‘little Bauermeister’ duly climbed up from Dame Martha to the heroine’s role and did quite splendidly.

A few months later, in early 1881, Mathilde went on the road with Auguste van Biene’s English Opera Company, and this time she was cast from the start to play Marguerite. George Fox went too, and the pair of them can be seen together, in the April census of the year, in Burnley, listed as Mr and Mrs Fox. But then Mlle Bauermeister vanishes quite from view. Or, rather, ‘Mrs’ Fox does. And the records of the British nation show why: in the March quarter of the year is registered the birth of one ‘Augustus George Fox’. Oddly enough, I can’t find *him* in the census. For he didn’t die as an infant. He died at the age of eight. And he was buried, as I related above, on 8 May 1888 under the name of Auguste H George Bauermeister.

In 1884, the name of Mlle Bauermeister reappears, billed alongside that of Fox, as part of an ambitious Royal English Opera Company, due to start touring at Birmingham, August 18. She is billed, but so far I’ve found no evidence that she actually performed. George didn’t, for in October he suffered a ruptured cardiac valve.

So it may very well be that Mathilde’s return to the stage, after an apparent five-year hiatus, was right back with Mapleson. Not in Britain, this time, but in America. On 2 November 1885, she made her debut at the New York Academy of Music singing the role of Frasquita in *Carmen*, as she had in the British premiere, alongside Minnie Hauk. From then on, she would become as ubiquitous on the American operatic stage as she had been – and now would be again – on the British, singing at first for Mapleson’s companies, later for those of Abbey and Grau and, from 1891 to 1906, at the Metropolitan Opera. In London, where she worked at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, at first for Mapleson and later for Augustus Harris et al, she appeared annually from 1887 until 1905.

She repeated, over and again, her most frequent roles – Martha, Frasquita, Marcellina (‘Mlle B was the same capable and charming Marzelline that she has been for more years than it is necessary or becoming to count’), Bertha, Alice in *Lucia*, the lady-in-waiting in *Les Huguenots*, Annina in *La traviata*, Giovanna in *Rigoletto*, Inez in *La favorita*, plus Jemmy in *William Tell*, Magdalena in *Die Meistersinger*, the goatherd in *Tannhäuser*, the priestess in *Aida*, the housekeeper in *L’amico Fritz*, a small part in *I Rantzau*, Mamma Lucia in *Cavalleria rusticana*, Poussette in *Manon*, Mary in *The Flying Dutchman*, one of the Valkyries, Gertrude, and the nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*, which would become one of her latter-day specialities, as would the role of Amor in Gluck’s *Orfeo*. In 1896 she made a mark as the Dewman in *Hansel and Gretel* at Covent Garden, and *The Times* remarked pertinently that she ‘succeeded where so many younger artists have failed in singing the song of the dewman in perfect tune.’ In 1897 she took part in the premiere of d’Erlanger’s *Inez Mendoza*. So frequently was she seen, indeed, during each and any Italian opera season that *Punch*, which always had a good word for her (‘Wonderful, time cannot stale her infinite variety’, ‘no one now cares to see an opera without Mlle Bauermeister in it’, ‘she would be anything and do anything well’), remarked

humorously, à propos of the production of *Le Prophète*, 'remarkable ... an opera without Mlle Bauermeister in it!'

Outside the opera seasons, in these later days, she appeared only occasionally elsewhere. In September 1887, she took the leading role opposite Fox in his opera *Macaire* at the Crystal Palace and for two months of touring, and in 1890 she was announced, again with Fox, as prima donna of a Grand National Opera Company sponsored by Messrs O'Connor and Odoardo Barri.

In October 1891 the couple took part in a 'popular prices' English-language *Carmen* at Drury Lane under Augustus Harris, in which Daria Farini played the gipsy. Durward Lely was Jose, Fox was the toreador and Mathilde, 'who has undertaken so many parts of late years, and shown excellent qualities in work of all varieties, made a welcome appearance as Micaëla and, of course, delighted her hearers by her sympathetic study.'

In the same year, Fox's new opera, *Nydia, the Blind Girl of Pompeii*, was announced for production. 'Mrs Fox' was, of course, to play the leading role. But she didn't. The production was postponed, and when it finally took place the following year the American soprano who called herself Giulia Valda sang. Valda also sang Fox's new mass for its premiere the following year. It seems that George Fox and Mathilde Bauermeister were no longer a couple.

Fox, in fact, was ill. He lived another ten years, but he never worked again. Alas, the censi haven't revealed to me whether he lived the last decade before joining little George in Norwood cemetery in the company of his long-time partner or not. But I think not.

As for Mathilde, she worked on, as we have seen, dubbed 'indispensable' (even if she had been dispensed with for half a dozen years in the middle of her career) and building herself a place in the history of Italian opera in England and America which has never been approached by any other artist.

I'm pleased that I finally found out who she 'was'. That she was indeed veritably 'Bauermeister', that she came from a large Hamburg family, that she was at one stage a wife, a de facto wife, a mother. And not, as the will of her younger sister Hermine Bauermeister, who died at Beechdale Road, Brixton, on 27 February 1912, insists, a spinster. Now, how to find out about Mr Rucht ...?

BELLETTI, GIOVANNI BATTISTA

(b Sarzana, Liguria, 17 February ?1813; d Sarzana,
27 December 1890)

One of the outstanding baritone singers of the Victorian era, reckoned by many equal or superior to Tamburini and Ronconi in opera and second to no other in oratorio, Belletti has been somewhat diminished in too many 20th-century writings by his connections ('as a subordinate') with the much hyped Jenny Lind.

His beginnings in music (and his birth details) have been somewhat romanticised in the tales of Lind, and guesstimates of his year of birth range from 1811 to 1815, but it is more or less agreed that in his late teens he was sent to the Conservatorium of Bologna to study. The names of Donelli and Giuseppe Pilotti are mentioned. His studies completed, he returned to Sarzana and took a post at the local cathedral until he was persuaded by the expatriate Swedish sculptor Johan Niclas Byström to venture onto the stage. It was apparently Byström who arranged for him to be heard by the Royal Stockholm Opera House, where he was signed in 1839. Various sources say that he debuted as Figaro, or as Ashton in *Lucia*. I can find only reports of him appearing as Bertram in *Roberto il diavolo* with Elma Ström and Julius Günther, with Johan Isidor Dannstrom in *I Capuleti e i Montecchi*, as Dulcamara in *L'elisir d'amore*, then later as Enrico Ashton to the Lucia of Mlle Ström, as Marcel in *Les Huguenots*, in *Chiara di Rosemberg* and in Cherubini's *Faniska*. When Jenny Lind returned to Sweden and joined the company, the two evidently played in opera together, but I can find them only in a little one-act piece 'with songs and dances' produced on 11 May 1843 under the title *Ein Majtag i Wärend*. Belletti played an Italian called Farniente.

His term at Stockholm ended on 1 July 1844, and Belletti (and apparently Byström) returned to Italy, where he is said to have continued his studies in Genoa. I spot him in concert there in August 1846, described variously as 'un giovane di distinta abilità and as 'l'egregio basso cantante' with reports of his success in Sweden. 'La sua voce è bella, piena e robusto, possiede bella agilità e canta in conseguente la music di Rossini come pochi possono cantarla al giorno d'oggi.' That was an opinion which would never be gain-said during Belletti's career, even by those who mumbled Ronconi or Tamburini. His voice is described repeatedly as a baritone of wide range (he would sing bass and buffo music with facility) and of the most extraordinary flexibility and accuracy, supported by a faultless technique. And that never altered throughout his two decades and more of career.

Belletti's theatrical career moved on to its decisive arc when he took up his first job in the Italian theatre, in the Carnevale and Quaresima seasons (1846–7) at the Pergola in Florence, where he appeared as Figaro in *Il barbiere di Siviglia* with Signora Marziali, in *La figlia del reggimento*, as Rodolfo opposite Henriette Nissen and as Graziani in *La sonnambula* (21 February), and seemingly in *L'assedio di Corinto*, *Il birraio di Preston* and *I due Foscari*. From Florence, he went on to Livorno, where he again played Maometto in



Figure 2 Giovanni Battista Belletti

Source: Image courtesy of Porträtsammlung Manskopf at the Goethe Universität, Frankfurt am Main

L'assedio di Corinto, in *Gemma di Vergy* with Emilia Goggi and Sinico, and the title-role in Ricci's *Corrado di Altamura*, before heading back for a re-engagement at the Pergola, where his merit had been thoroughly recognised: 'ha bellissima voce, ottimo metodo di canto, e possiede un' agilità delle più belle e delle più grande.'

But Belletti was not destined for the traditional rounds of the Italian provincial theatre. In his first season he had caught the ear of the powers that hire at Her Majesty's Theatre, London, and, his date at Florence ended, he departed straight away for England.

Belletti made his first appearance on the English stage on 19 February 1848, alongside Sophie Cruvelli and Cuzzani, in a curious version of *Ernani*, where the role of Carlo V had been transposed to a tenor register. Cruvelli's debut was a huge success, but Belletti notched up 'a triumph not less decisive', winning 'unqualified praise and congratulation'. With a 'small neat figure and a face of remarkable expressiveness ... one of those pure, clear well-tutored baritone voices ... he was encored in "Infelice, e tu credevi"?' He was teamed with Cruvelli in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, in *Attila* and as Zaccaria in a version of *Nabucco*, while taking part in the Italian opera concerts (Mme Puzzi, Benedict, Thalberg), where he featured in the trio for three basses in Meyerbeer's *Marguerite d'Anjou* with Lablache and Coletti and delivered *Maometto's* 'Sorgete', one of his regular standbys.

On 8 June, he was reunited with his Stockholm colleague Miss Lind, when they played together in *L'elisir d'amore*, with Lablache as Dulcamara, and in a really peculiar *Robert le diable* which simply cut out the co-prima donna! The same could not be done with *Le nozze di Figaro*, and Belletti gave his already famous Figaro with Lind and Cruvelli, and the same prime donne took part in Balfe's *Falstaff*, in which Belletti played Ford to Lablache's Falstaff.

After the closure of the season, Miss Lind led out a concert party with Frédéric Lablache, Belletti and the tenor Roger which played a mixture of operatic performances – the usual operas with but a few principals: *La sonnambula*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *La figlia del reggimento* – and concerts through a wide-ranging tour of five solid months, which included a date at Windsor Castle ('Ecco il pegno', 'Per piacere').

The 1849 season at Her Majesty's Theatre opened with *Cenerentola*, starring Marietta Alboni and with Belletti as Dandini, and a repeat of *Ernani* in which he 'equalled if not excelled the best of his former essays'. Miss Lind returned for a concert *Il flauto magico* which mobilised the whole company. Lablache was Papageno, Coletti sang Sarastro and Belletti the versatile sang Monastatos, and was encored in his air! Before Miss Lind went her way they gave their *La sonnambula*, and a few days later it was *Il barbiere* with Alboni, then *Lucrezia Borgia* (cast as Gubetta behind Lablache's Alfonso!) and finally a run of pieces with Sontag – as the prefect in *La gazza ladra*, *La sonnambula*, *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, *Otello* and *Le nozze di Figaro*. Belletti was scheduled also to play Malatesta in *Don Pasquale* but missed opening night through illness.

This year it was Sontag who led the team to the provinces, with the junior Lablache, the tenor Calzolari and Belletti, and in February 1850, with Parodi added to the company, they even played Paris.

During the 1850 London season, Belletti sang with Parodi (*Medea*, *Ernani*, *Le nozze di Figaro*), Sontag (*Don Pasquale*, *La sonnambula*, *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, *Le nozze di Figaro*) and Frezzolini (*L'elisir d'amore*), but there was no tour this year. Signor Belletti was off to America (21 August), with Julius Benedict and Jenny Lind, for a concert tour under the aegis of Mr P T Barnum.

Many tales have been told about this tour, a large number exaggerated or fictional, and some doubtless true. One of the preferred games of the American press was marrying off the favourite soprano. Burke, the violinist, was one contender, but the hot favourite was ... Belletti. Anyway, they all got it wrong, for when the tour was over and Belletti returned to Europe (5 August 1851), Miss Lind married the accompanist Otto Goldschmidt, whom no journo had even tipped.

Mr Lumley was at that time running both the London and Paris Opera Houses, and, it being the French season, Belletti was deployed to the Théâtre des Italiens. He played Assur in *Semiramide* with Barbieri-Nini, *L'Italiana in Algeri* and *Cenerentola* with Angri, *Fidelio*, *La sonnambula*, *Il barbiere di Siviglia* with Cruvelli and

L'elisir d'amore with Corbari during the five-month season, before crossing to London to do much the same thing all over again. Italy was left to ponder how it had missed out on this star: 'il Belletti nell' esordire sulle scene del teatro Italiano si mostrò degno successore di Tamburini e rivale fortunato di Ronconi.'

Belletti did not stay the entire 1852 season at Her Majesty's Theatre, and later in the year he branched out into a new field, appearing in the concerts at the Birmingham Festival and then at the Norwich Festival, where he took part in the two new works of the event, sharing the bass music with Weiss and Formes in *Israel Restored* and Pierson's *Jerusalem*.

In November he returned to Paris, where a new management had taken over the Italian Opera (*Otello*, *La sonnambula*, *Il bravo*, etc) and when the English season dawned it was seen that Belletti had changed managements there, too. He was now part of the Italian Opera at Covent Garden. He appeared in *Ernani* with Bosio, Ronconi and Tamberlik, played the role of St Bris in *Les Huguenots* for the first time, was Alfonso in *La favorita* with Grisi, played Tristano in *Jessonda*, and got one of his rare somewhat negative reviews when he tackled the title-role in *Don Giovanni*. Not for his singing – that was as impeccable as ever – but for his characterisation.

In 1854, Belletti turned fully to the concert and oratorio scene. He appeared in the title-role of *Elijah* with Julius Benedict's Harmonic Union (23 January) and followed up in the same role on 9 and 17 February at Exeter Hall with the Sacred Harmonic Society, alongside Louisa Pyne, Charlotte Dolby and Sims Reeves. For the next eight years he would feature regularly in the Sacred Harmonic Society's performances, and if at the beginning there were some queries as to his English accent (one critic very appositely noted it was a darned sight better than most English singers' Italian), there were none about his singing or, above all, his style. By 1862, the critic could write: 'Though a foreigner, this accomplished artist, in English oratorio singing, has no superior.'

During the year Belletti appeared in *The Creation* with the Society, in *Acis and Galatea* with the Harmonic Union, as Elijah in a special charity performance at Exeter Hall and at the grand opening of Liverpool's St George's Hall, and in Wylde's *Paradise Lost* with the New Philharmonic. He shared the bass music of the year's Norwich Festival with Weiss, performing *Acis and Galatea*, Rossini's *Stabat Mater*, *Elijah*, *Messiah* and *The Creation*, as well as taking part in the miscellaneous concerts, where he performed, among others, 'Sorgete' from Rossini's *Maometto* and 'Di militari onori' from Spohr's *Jessonda*. These two arias featured in his repertoire frequently and were sung many times during the year, for Belletti, freed from his operatic obligations, appeared in countless London concerts in 1854, including most of the most fashionable ones. The concerts of the Philharmonic Society were at the top of the 'classy' list, and Belletti appeared with them no fewer than three times, giving the *Jessonda* aria, which he would repeat there on several occasions, 'Hai già vinto la causa', and duets with Sims Reeves and Clara Novello. He would take part in all but one single season of the Society's programmes right up until the end of his career.

Signor Belletti was heard at concerts given by Benedict, Mrs Anderson ('His "La Danza" kept the audience in a mingled state of mirth and admiration'), Madame Puzzi, Charlotte Dolby and Madame Anichini – top-of-the-range dates – and he also began what would become another fertile source of income: the private concert. Society hostesses rivalled one another with their balls and soirees and the entertainment they offered thereat, and, among the basses and baritones, even Lablache himself was not more popular than Signor Belletti as an attraction. During the season, I see him at Gloucester House ('Sulla poppa') with Clara Novello and Gardoni, at Lansdowne House joining Bosio, Nantier-Didiée and Mario in the *Rigoletto* quartet, and at Lady Manners's on a bill with Ronconi. Countess Waldegrave, Mrs Sartoris, Princess Marcelline Czartoryski (née Radziwill), Lady Wetherell Waterford, the Marchioness of Londonderry, Lady Overstone, the Marquis of Lansdowne, Mrs Petre e tutti quanti were among those who followed, and Belletti also became a regular at the concerts given at Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle.

At the end of the year, Belletti returned to Italy and spent the Carnevale season at the Teatro Regio in Turin. I see him as Marcel in *Les Huguenots* and as Iago in *Otello*, and since they played *Il barbiere di Siviglia* I imagine he gave his Figaro. By Easter, however, he was back in Britain for a new but shorter season of

concerts as classy as the previous ones: the Sacred Harmonic Society (*Israel in Egypt*), the Philharmonic Society under the direction this season of Richard Wagner ('Sulla poppa', Paer's 'Agitato', *Jessonda*, 'Quel sepolcro'), the Harmonic Union (*Elijah*), the concerts of Benedict, Miss Dolby and Puzzi, at Liverpool with Alboni, and the now usual mass of private engagements.

He visited Turin again at Carnevale time, where he gave his Figaro and his Dandini, and arrived back in London in time to begin the 1856 season at Her Majesty's Theatre. He was welcomed back to the British stage with acclamation, and when he and Marietta Alboni gave their 'Dunque io son' in *Il barbiere di Siviglia* the press enthused: 'one of the most perfect pieces of Rossinian singing that could be conceived'. He appeared as Dandini, as Baldassare to the *La favorita* of the great prima donna, played Sulpicio to the *Figlia del reggimento* of Piccolomini and Malatesta to her Norina in *Don Pasquale*, and joined Augusta Albertini, now as Alfonso, in a most successful *Lucrezia Borgia*. Later in the season he teamed with Johanna Wagner and Charles Braham in the same opera.

Jenny Lind, now retired from the stage, visited London, and Belletti was reunited with his old colleague at Benedict's concert, where soprano and baritone joined together in the composer's 'I Montanari', a pasticcio of European tunes fabricated for them in American days. Miss Lind also gave a concert of her own, at which Belletti delivered his *Jessonda* aria and joined her in 'Per piacere' (*Il seraglio*).

The fashionable concerts and the private engagements continued through the season, and come Festival time he headed for Bradford. Five basses had been hired, among whom it was Weiss who performed *Elijah*, so Belletti's contribution was suprisingly limited. But he was soon out on the road, teamed with Marietta Piccolomini and the bass Beneventano at the head of a concert and opera party (Germont, Sulpicio, Figaro, Malatesta) which ran till November.

There was no trip to Turin this year, and 1857 started with a return to the Sacred Harmonic Society (*Stabat Mater*, *Eli*, *The Creation*, *Israel in Egypt*) and the Philharmonic Society, before the opera season started in April. Alboni (*Barbiere*, *Cenerentola*) and Piccolomini (*L'Elisir*, *Le nozze di Figaro*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*) were again the leading ladies, and Belletti played Enrico Ashton here for the first time and Giorgio in *I puritani* with Mlle Ortolani. He also took part in a *Don Giovanni* which opened up all the traditional cuts, but this time Beneventano took the title-role and Belletti was cast as Leporello! His singing, as always, was vastly admired, but another 'tradition' went out the window. Leporello had been long played as a buffoonish, ancient-style Italian low comic. Belletti threw all that out and played the part for plain pure comedy. And the critics were delighted.

This year, the opera season stretched, with off-and-on 'extra nights', right into the new year, and the last new offering was a production of *The Bohemian Girl* in Italian, with Piccolomini in the title-role and Belletti in Henry Phillips's role. The opera performances were interspersed with provincial dates, with Piccolomini and Giuglini, and included a Norwich Festival appearance, before the official 1858 season began at Her Majesty's. This year was, however, a little different: Piccolomini and Alboni were still there, but a new star had arrived: Therese Titiens. Titiens played Donna Anna, Lucrezia and Valentine with Belletti, as Alboni and he gave their umpteenth *Barbiere*. Piccolomini was Arline, Lucia and Norina, with Belletti as Arnheim, Ashton and an adored Malatesta ('the best by far that we have ever witnessed in this country').

He also fulfilled the usual run of concerts – including several visits to the royals – and when he trotted out to sing at Reading the local critic gasped: 'He is taking a first-rate position among the artists of the present day and will soon rival the most celebrated.' Reading was a little out of touch: Belletti had been the best florid baritone in the world for some time.

In September he took part in the Birmingham Festival, singing the role of Eli in Costa's oratorio of that name, Holofernes in Henry Leslie's new *Judith*, and Polyphemus in *Acis and Galatea*, as well as sharing *Messiah* with Weiss, and he ended his year with more *Messiahs* at Exeter Hall and Manchester. 'An excellent Handelian singer', proclaimed the press, which rarely allowed such a qualification to any non-anglophone singer.

From 1859 on, Belletti did not partake of the operatic season and devoted himself wholly to the concert scene, the concerts of the Sacred Harmonic Society at the head – two *St Pauls*, *Elijah*, four *Messiahs*, *Israel in Egypt*, *Judas Maccabaeus* and *Eli* in 1859, *Samson*, the ‘Dettingen’ *Te Deum*, *Lobgesang*, *The Creation* and another *Israel in Egypt* in 1860, with repeat performances in the two following seasons. The Philharmonic Society, too, called upon him regularly, teaming him variously with Anna Bishop, Louisa Pyne, Louise Michal and Euphrosyne Parepa, and he took part in the festivals at Bradford, Gloucester (1859), Norwich, Worcester (1860) and Birmingham (1861), as well as the Handel Festivals at the Crystal Palace (1859, 1862). His performance of the ‘Dettingen’ *Te Deum* was particularly admired: ‘[he] did honour to his attainments, greater than those of any Italian we have ever heard, as a sound Handelian singer.’ And the superlatives flowed on: ‘showed himself a truly great artist’, ‘One of the greatest artists of the day’, ‘not to be equalled by any living baritone’, ‘beyond doubt one of the most consummate artists of the present day’, ‘sustained his reputation as one of the most artistic singers of the Italian school’ ...

Belletti took his original part in the first London performance of *Judith* at St Martin’s Hall (8 March 1859), sang *Elijah* and *Messiah* at Manchester, *Elijah* at the Crystal Palace, *Messiah* with Jenny Lind and her husband in Dublin (1859) and *The Creation* at several other dates, and when the Goldschmidts came again to London in 1861–2 he accompanied them on another concert tour and performed in *Messiah*, *The Creation* and *Elijah* at Exeter Hall with Miss Lind, Bessie Palmer, Sims Reeves and Weiss. Once again the press confirmed, ‘Though a foreigner, this accomplished artist, in English oratorio singing, has no superior.’

Outside the oratorios, Belletti appeared in a multitude of concerts – those at Crystal Palace (including the role of Buff in a performance of *The Impresario*), the New Philharmonic Society (Choral Symphony), the Musical Society of London, Buckingham Palace (the State Concerts), the Vocal Association and the Hallé, plus Howard Glover’s hefty programmes and Benedict’s fashionable ones. There were a mass of others besides, from the usual private society ones to those personal evenings and matinees at London’s and Manchester’s principal concert venues: Louisa Vinning and Allan Irving, Mrs Anderson, Giuseppina Finoli, van Praagh, Derffel, Anna Bishop, Sims Reeves, Augustus Harris, Joseph Richardson, Emmanuel Aguilar, Mme Sainton–Dolby, Mme Lemmens–Sherrington, Piatti, Signor Pezze, Clari Fraser, Miss Oldfield, Ciabatta, Miss Billings, Sophia Messent and Jenny Holman–Andrews were all among those who called on the services of Signor Belletti.

And then he simply stopped. In 1862 he fulfilled the concert party tour in the company of the Goldschmidts and Sims Reeves, topped off by their oratorio season in May–June in London. On 19 May he sang for the last time at the Philharmonic Society, on 23 June he sang with Weiss in the Crystal Palace Handel Festival and on 30 June at Benedict’s concert, and then – in what seems to have been his suitable farewell – on 6 August he appeared with the Sacred Harmonic Society, Sims Reeves and Helen Lemmens–Sherrington in *The Creation*.

I don’t see any big announcements of ‘farewell’ or ‘retirement’. He just went back to Italy, to Sarzana, as he did regularly, and this time he didn’t return. He had stopped. He apparently lived out his life in comfort. When the musician Alessandro Pilotti, his old teacher’s son, long resident in England, was bankrupted some years later, it was revealed that he had ‘borrowed’ £3,500 from Belletti. I suspect he was not the only one who profited from the baritone’s long years of high earning.

I know nothing of Belletti’s family life. Neither his forebears (‘respectable people engaged in trade’, says one ‘source’) nor, if there were any, a wife and family (‘he lives a life of seclusion, universally respected, and surrounded by his family and relations’, says the same source, delicately avoiding any question of a wife). I don’t know if he was in any way connected with the Sarzana-born painter Luigi Belletti: no one says so, so I guess he wasn’t. It’s a common enough name. Indeed, there was at least one other G(iuseppe) Belletti (baritone) who followed our man onto the operatic stage.

So that is it. Maybe this lack of colourful personal detail is part of the reason that Giovanni Battista Belletti, arguably the first baritone in the world in his era, has been – I can only call it – ‘diminished’ in

his rightful reputation and fame in after years. The names of Ronconi, Tamburini, Santley, Formes and Weiss echo down the reference books and years with much more resonance than that of Belletti. 'Italian baritone connected with Jenny Lind', says one much copied piece. Certainly he sang with Lind, but he also sang for years with Alboni and Piccolomini ... but it's the case of the buzzword diva, I fear. And his diminution is not something new. When *Grove's Dictionary* was first published, the London *Times* reviewer objected to the description therein of Belletti as 'great' and sneered at him as 'second-rate'. That's journalism for you.

I hope this little piece will help re-establish a great singer – yes 'great', and acknowledged as such during his working years – on the very top shelf where he belongs. 'Italian baritone connected with Jenny Lind', indeed!

BELOCCA [BEL(L)OKH], ANNA DE

(b ?St Petersburg, 4 January ?1854; d unknown)

The mezzo-soprano known as Anna de Belocca was hailed by some as a ‘great’ of the operatic world of the 1870s. Quite how much of the hailing was genuine and how much the result of influence, beauty and charm we cannot know; suffice it that, after an early career of much interest, she settled into a place as rather a secondary star before vanishing from the world of music.

‘Mdlle de Belocca’ appeared in Paris in early 1873. The story – which may well have been true – was that she was the daughter of a gentleman named de Bèllokh, ‘savant distingué, ... aujourd’hui conseiller d’État près la cour de Russie’. Those words were thereafter (in whichever language) used to describe her parent in the many biographical notes of the lady which appeared around the world. Sometimes he was Count (de) Bel(l)okh as well. The only independent snippet I can find which mentions him refers to him as a ‘conseiller de l’instruction publique’, which I presume is something like an advisor on education. Which seems reasonable, if he was a ‘savant’.

After the usual ‘don’t let you daughter on the stage’ bit, Anna was apparently put to study at the St Petersburg Conservatoire, under Henriette Nissen-Saloman, and at some stage into the sphere or hands of Moritz Strakosch. One fanciful bit of journalism has her placed by her father into Strakosch’s care, to run her whole career, from the beginning. Strakosch was, of course, the impresario-musician who claimed Adelina Patti (his sister-in-law) as his original pupil, but who was also responsible in his time for the risible débâcles of such as Louise Nicholson (Nikita) and Mary Brown (Stella Faustina).

Anyhow, from Russia, Anna went to Paris, where, under the patronage of the well-and-later-royally-connected Madame la Baronne de Caters (née Lablache), she continued her studies under Nicolas Lablache. Apparently Madame de Caters, who was a prized vocalist in the best Parisian churches, introduced her protégée quietly at the Église de Saint-Pierre de Chaillot, l’Église Saint-Eugène and the Chapelle de Versailles before she was presented publicly at the Holy Week concerts at the Odéon. The programme included Saint-Saëns’ Psalm XVIII, César Franck’s *Rédemption*, and an ‘Ave Maria chanté par madame de Katers et madame Bellocca, une comtesse russe, engagée à l’Opéra de Moscou à raison de vingt-cinq mille francs par mois pour six mois.’ Tiens, really? Strakosch and his ‘merde de taureau’ have clearly arrived. Quite what Anna sang is not clear, but one writer said that ‘she was applauded in a phrase of ten bars’. But the Paris society and music press had spotted her: ‘La voix de Mlle Belocca est un contralto du plus pur métal, ne descendant pas caverneux à la cave, ne montant point essoufflé au grenier.’ Mezzo-soprano then.

Strakosch, however, was to prove his worth. The Italian Opera of Paris was due to reopen, and under his management. And on 15 October 1873 he launched Anna at the Salle Ventadour as Rosina in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*. Delle Sedie was Figaro, Zuchelli was Bartolo, and Brignoli, Almaviva. She was young, she was pretty,

she was unembarrassed ('self-possession astonishing'), she acted delightfully, and her voice was completely suited, as was her person, to the role. To the delight of the cognoscenti, she sang the music in its original mezzo-soprano key, skipped easily through the frills of 'Una voce' and was a 'success from first to last' ... 'indiscutable'. Her modest selection of the Russian song 'Solové' from Alexander Seroff's opera *Rogneda* for the lesson scene was varied by 'Il segreto' and later pieces from *Mignon*, Grandval's *Piccolino* and Mme Willy Rothschild's 'Si vous n'avez rien à me dire'.

While the music press quibbled over what was to come next, Anna waited till the new year before, on 6 January 1874, coming out in a second role: *La Cenerentola*. The notices were good, but something of a let-down after her Rosina, and when on 3 March she teamed with Marie Belval in *Semiramide* there was a division of opinion. Some praised her to the skies ('already the most engaging of all living Arsaces'), some found her too inexperienced and young to play the role, but all agreed 'nature has gifted her with a voice so pure and sympathetic ...' with an 'absence of all violence or obvious effort in her singing'. *Cenerentola* would not become a regular in Anna's repertoire, *Semiramide* a little more.

That year, come Holy Week, she sang the Rossini *Petite messe solennelle*, not in a church but on the stage of the Ventadour; on 3 May she took a Benefit in *Barbiere* and the third act of Vaccai's *Romeo e Giulietta* with Bianca Donadio, which act the two ladies repeated for charity on 3 June, and the season tolled to its end.

'The only real success of the season is Madlle Belocca, a Russian lady with personal attractions (a supreme necessity in these days) and a most magnificent contralto voice', reported a Paris correspondent to Britain. And Britain reacted with plenty of column space for the new star who was coming their way. Only, in a manner that would characterise her career, she didn't. Not yet, anyhow. She went home to Russia, returning to France in September. But not to the Ventadour. This year, there was another manager, so Mlle de Belocca gave her Masses at the Salle Herz and was then whisked off to the Théâtre de la Monnaie, Brussels, to give them her Rosina (with the brindisi and Mme Rothschild's song). From there she went to The Hague and to Lille, and in January 1875 to Marseille, Nice and Monte Carlo, later to Bordeaux and Pau, all under the management of M Strakosch.

It wasn't until 24 April 1875 that Anna made it to London's Italian Opera. She opened in *Il barbiere* with Brignoli again as her Almaviva, and 'her success was unquestionable'. A month later it was *Le nozze di Figaro* with Titiens as the Countess and the Belgian soprano Pernini as Susanna. London was used to Trebelli's interpretation of the role, but, though Anna played it differently, she scored again. During the season she sang in several concerts – at Brighton, with Christine Nilsson, at Buckingham Palace, giving 'Si la stanchezza' with Nicolini – and in September she appeared at the Norwich Festival, where she took part in Rossini's *Stabat Mater* (with Lemmens-Sherrington, Lloyd, Guy and Foli) and gave 'Di tanti palpiti', Glinka's Lullaby, Cherubini's 'Ave Maria', 'Connais-tu le pays', 'Ah! quel giorno' and 'Voi che sapete' in the concerts. She was decidedly well liked, but it was not an experience she would repeat.

In the latter part of 1875 and the early months of 1876, she toured. I see her at Stuttgart ('Die Sterne erster Größe'), at Colmar, Paris, Nantes, singing in *Mignon* at Lille, and guesting at the theatres at Basel and Strasbourg, before boarding the ship *Germanic*, in the company of her protector and a certain Russian Madame Saltarelli, and heading, as a Strakosch 'pupil' might, for America, for a New York season under Strakosch and his brother Max.

The venture was not entirely successful. They opened at the Academy of Music on 17 April 1876 with *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, and Anna scored largely. The press was delighted: 'a grand success', 'Youth, beauty and voice combined to make a grand operatic impersonation', 'a consummate actress and an accomplished singer', 'We have rarely seen better acting on the lyric stage'. After listing the great Rosinas New York had previously seen – Bosio, Sontag, Alboni, La Grange, Patti, Gassier, Parepa – the conclusion was: 'She acted and sang as if the part were written for her.' Well, it certainly was, more than for those almost entirely soprano ladies! The New York press, however, was not to be schemozzled by Strakosch's claims of 'great'. Anna was delightful, she was perfect in the role, but from there to 'greatness' ... Large articles on the new prima donna appeared in the press. It was announced that she would next appear in *Mignon*, but she didn't. The

blame went largely upon the managers: they had surrounded their star with an underpar cast, including a 'nearly voiceless' Ferranti as Figaro, and Anna was carrying the whole affair on her back. The season collapsed, while Strakosch supplied columns about sick tenors and a restart ... and they were already on their way to the West Coast, with tenor Tom Karl and the useful Tagliapietra.

They opened at San Francisco's Baldwin Theatre on 7 June 1876 for a series of concerts in which Anna displayed a large, ever-changing repertoire of pieces ('in seven languages'), including both standards such as 'Una voce' or 'Connais-tu le pays' and a wider selection: Glinka's Cradle Song, Wallace's 'Good night and pleasant dreams', 'I tanti palpiti', 'Si vous n'avez rien à me dire', 'La mandolinata', 'Voi che sapete', 'Kathleen Mavourneen', Faure's 'Alleluia d'amour', 'Adelaide', the Butterfly song from *La contessa d'Amalfi*, the goat-herd's song from *Dinorah*, Malibran's 'Rataplan', Gounod's 'Maid of Athens', 'A mile from Edinboro Town', a Spanish song by Orlanova, 'Der Wanderer', the Salutaris and trio from the *Petite messe solennelle*, Godard's 'Dites-moi', a Ricci Valse, and duets with each of the men.

San Francisco proved extremely receptive, the press noticed her 'increasing popularity', and Strakosch scheduled performances of both *Il barbiere* and *La favorita*, for which the aid of the now local Karl Formes was co-opted. And then it was back eastwards for more opera and more concerts ('Belocca captured Baltimore'). Strakosch had freshened his company with soprano Maria Palmieri and tenor Brignoli, with whom *La favorita*, *Il barbiere* and *Semiramide* were given in Philadelphia and New York, before they headed for Boston and Europe.

The press reported that Anna was en route for Madrid, but she escapes my gaze through most of 1877, save for a sighting in Yonkers in April and a few Parisian concerts, until she turns up in Ireland in the Mapleson company from Her Majesty's Theatre, along with Caroline Salla, Mila Rodani, Marie Roze, Alwina Valleria and Émilie Deméric-Lablache. She appeared first as Nancy in *Marta* and then as Rosina, to the usual response – 'in a manner we have never seen surpassed for intelligence ...', 'her voice was marvellously pure and sympathetic which the ringing clearness of its very highest note proved of what it is capable', 'a character to be remembered'. She sang Urbano in *Les Huguenots*, Siebel in *Faust*, and Cherubino and Zerlina in *Don Giovanni* as the company headed on to London, where, beyond those roles, she played the part of Casilda in *Ruy Blas*.

After another (?) trip to Madrid, she returned for the next London season, but not to Mapleson. In the prospectus for Her Majesty's Anna was listed for only a couple of roles, so it was perhaps no surprise when she turned up instead at the rival establishment at Covent Garden, on 14 June 1878, alongside Mlle Cepeda and Gayarre in *Les Huguenots* ('young and prepossessing artist ... charm of voice and unaffected elegance of style') and followed up as Siebel and in Flotow's *Alma l'incantatrice*. Alboni had made a personal success in this unremarkable piece in Paris, and she came to London to repeat her role. Anna was cast as Zingaretta. Thus the two choice real-register Rosinas of the era ended up, if not for long, playing opposite each other.

Back in Europe Anna toured in concert, appeared at the Russian concerts of Nicolas Rubinstein in Paris, performed in *La favorita* in Reims ('Succès complète') and in concert at Orléans, Tours, Angers and points beyond, then returned to Covent Garden for the 1879 season. Covent Garden had now discovered Sofia Scalchi, who was cast in such roles as Arsace, Siebel and Urbano, while Rosina was taken by ... Adelina Patti. Anna was little seen ('on some few occasions Mlle Belocca has sung'), as Nancy to the *Marta* of Zare Thalberg or in the comic role of Lady Allcash in *Fra Diavolo*. She sang in the associated concerts at the Floral Hall, the Alexandra Palace and the Crystal Palace, but it was pale stuff for a girl who had been hailed a 'great' a few seasons earlier.

She spent the 1879–80 period in America, touring with a Strakosch company of limited appeal, and at the end of year with a more substantial Mapleson troupe headed by Campanini and Etelka Gerster. Now, she played *Carmen*, Pierotto in *Linda di Chamounix*, Maddalena in *Rigoletto*, Leonora in *La favorita*, a surprising Ortrud in *Lohengrin* and, in the tradition of Trebelli, the third boy in *Zauberflöte*. When the Mapleson troupe returned to London for the season, Anna remained with them and on 7 May 1881 appeared as

Rosina, with del Puente and Ravelli, at Her Majesty's Theatre. She repeated her Frederic to the Mignon of Nilsson, and took the role of Martha/Pantalis in *Mefistofele*, before finally returning to France – 'De retour d'une brillante et laborieuse saison en Amérique et en Angleterre, Mlle de Belocca vient d'arriver à Paris, se préparant à partir pour Cauterets.'

Over the next few seasons she appeared in concert in Paris and the provinces, especially at Nice and Monte Carlo, with periodic visits to Russia, but effectively her major career was over. My last glimpse of her on the operatic stage is in 1885, playing Martha in *Faust* at Monte Carlo. After 1887 she is gone from the world of music. In her early thirties.

Most biographies of Anna Belokh end here. In a dead end. But mine doesn't. 1887 was a crucial year for Anna. Moritz Strakosch died.

Their son, Jacques Maurice de Belocca, was born on 12 April 1877 in Yonkers. I only tracked down his existence because – years later – he started calling himself Mons Strakosch de Belocca. Anyway, he and his mother can be seen at Paris's rue Galvani 8 in the early years of the 20th century. Anna made the news one last time (16 May 1910) when her car was run into at a Parisian crossroads and she received face wounds to the extent of 3,000 francs damages – a sum seemingly less than she had donated, not many years previously, to a charity for wounded Russian soldiers.

Paris remained 'home' for Jacques, so I would imagine for his mother, too. And I imagine that she was dead by 1929, when he started sporting his double-barrelled surname.

But I can't yet be sure.

BERRY GREENING, EMILY [GREENING, EMILY ELIZA]

(b 3 Carlton Cottages, Stoke Newington, London,
5 February 1838; d Los Angeles, 27 May 1915)

The name of the soprano known as Miss Berry Greening was, for a brief period in the 1860s, a decidedly familiar one in the London concert world. From the time that the young lady in question – already 28 years of age – first appeared on the British musical scene in 1865 (initially as ‘Miss Berry’), and for several seasons thereafter, her determinedly populist concerts and the oddly extravagant advertising with which she promoted them made her an unusual and colourful figure in the accustomedly polite hallows of the Hanover Square Rooms and St James’s Hall.

Emily Greening apparently made a late start as a professional vocalist, after a period spent as a schoolmistress. For she was already 23 when the census-taker of 1861 visited number 1 Browns Terrace, next to the Castle Tavern, Belinda Street, Camberwell, and enumerated the widowed Mr James Berry Greening, his two daughters, their cook and housemaid. And the elder daughter, Emily, was listed, indeed, as ‘schoolmistress’. Though undoubtedly a comfortably-off one. For Mr James Berry Greening (1812–1872) was a man of substance, a master printer and the owner of a considerable printing works, situated in Greystoke Place, Fetter Lane, where he employed no fewer than ‘fifty men and fifteen boys’ in the exercise of his profession.

Greening had married, as his first wife (at Newington, on 7 October 1836), Miss Elizabeth Jefferys, with whom, before her early death, he had had three daughters and a son – Emily (1838), Laura (1841), James Washington (1842) and Agnes Louisa (1850).

When Emily’s talent for music showed itself, she was evidently sent to study abroad. She said, on one occasion, that it was at the Paris Conservatoire. Wherever it was, however, it seems to have been effective, for when the time came for her to return to London and put herself up on the public platform the initial reaction was distinctly favourable. Her voice, her method, her well-tailored singing – particularly of the kind of national songs of which she made a speciality – all won distinctly positive notices, and ‘Miss Berry’ (as she was for the nonce) seemed assured of a good career as a concert vocalist.

‘Her first appearance in England’ was made at the concert given by pianist Madeline Schiller at the Hanover Square Rooms on 26 May 1865. Euphrosyne Parepa, Louisa van Noorden, Florence De Courcy and Alexander Reichardt were the other vocalists, Herr Carl Rose was the featured violinist, Ganz conducted, and Emily contributed ‘Cherry Ripe’ and ‘Believe me, if all those endearing young charms’. It was a contribution not quite as folksy as it sounded, as Miss Berry’s version of ‘Cherry Ripe’ had been somewhat overhauled and was equipped with a set of exceptionally florid variations. This, however, did not blind the critics to her good points. The *Musical World* praised ‘a very nice and well regulated ballad voice’, and *The Era* expanded: ‘Rarely has a young vocalist been heard more duly entitled to the encouragement

she met with. The debutante has a charming voice as to quality, a clear bright soprano, and sings with rare simplicity of expression. There is a freshness and unaffected charm in her style which will inevitably take her to a high position among our native vocalists.'

Miss Berry won several other engagements during the last weeks of the season. She gave her English songs and an Italian version of 'Chacun le dit' at one of Howard Glover's spectacles (8 June), sang for Mathilde Enequist (20 June), in the company of Sainton-Dolby, Reichardt and Agnesi at Collard's Rooms, at the latest Madeline Schiller matinee on 23 June, and was engaged by Ganz for the Royal Masonic Institute for Boys' Benefit in July. She repeated her 'Cherry Ripe' and also gave Bishop's 'My heart and lute'.

In August, Miss Berry joined up with the boy pianist Willie Pape for a series of concerts in the provinces, after which she proceeded to Paris, from where the first evidence of her gift for publicity emerged when the newspapers printed a paragraph linking her name with Auber and Rossini (who were both said to have presented her with autographed portraits) and with Gounod, who was said, in the too familiar phrase, to have composed a song 'especially for' the new soprano. The song ('Where the wild flowers grow') would soon come to light, 'especially composed for' or not, although it seems to have vanished from Gounod's known oeuvre.

Emily advertised her 'return from the Continent' and her song, and her advertisements solicited not only 'engagements' but also 'pupils'. For, even at her peak as a singer and a concert promoter, she remained above all a music teacher. And although the important part of her career as a performer would last just a handful of seasons, her life as a music teacher would span as many decades. Already, she could advertise from her new home at 64 Kensington Gardens Square, 'Miss Berry visits Notting Hill and Bayswater professionally twice a week, Belgravia once a week c/o Cramer and Beale.'

For the meanwhile, however, performing was de rigueur, for 'Miss Berry has won honourable mention singing English ballads in many quarters during the London season.' However, when she joined Luise Liebhart and Pietro Ferranti on the programme at the Crystal Palace (7 October; '[her] singing of native ballads has been highly commended'), the critic sounded off a warning shot over her 'Cherry Ripe': '[she has a] sweet voice and good method but somewhat over-elaborate for a simple ballad. Miss Berry may leave her voice now and then to nature.' Her singing of the *Figaro* letter duet with Mme Liebhart seems to have gone down better.

In November, Miss Berry joined the select ranks of young singers (Misses Banks, Henderson, De Courcy, etc) selected to illustrate Mrs Macfarren's piano lectures before setting out for variegated dates in the provinces. Each of which was announced by Miss Berry's now familiar advertisements in the press. 'Cherry Ripe', in spite of all strictures, remained her basic number throughout, but she also picked up on the popular ballads of the day. At William Carter's concert she gave his 'Beautiful Clouds', while at Mme Eugene Oswald's concert and the Freemasons' Hall she opted for P E van Noorden's 'Corall'd Caves' and Benedict's 'The bird that came in spring'.

10 February 1866 was a landmark date for Miss Berry. On the one hand she now announced (liberally) in the press her intention henceforth to be known as 'Miss Berry Greening', and in tandem she announced, in multiple adjacent advertisements, the first concert of her own at St James's Hall. She announced her Gounod song, she announced a new 'composed expressly for' Wilhelm Ganz piece entitled 'When we went a-gleaning', and she announced – in five adjacent advertisements – Mr Sims Reeves as her duet partner and for three whole songs. Bessie Palmer, Louisa van Noorden, Laura Baxter, Ferranti, Ciabatta, Chaplin Henry, the German tenor Fass, and a line-up of instrumentalists topped by Miss Schiller and by Benedict and Lindsay Sloper playing duet piano and accompanying didn't make the ads, but they added to a programme which won decidedly positive reviews.

The Era devoted much of its review to the lady of the evening: 'From the first, Miss Berry Greening principally turned her attention to songs and ballads of the pure native school and, doubtless, many among the audience at her excellent concert of last Saturday night found their anticipations regarding her progress in the profession she has chosen completely realised. Miss Berry Greening has the advantages of youth and

evident enthusiasm for the art. She can, we are told, produce testimonials as to vocal ability from the highest authorities and has certainly made a most satisfactory entrance into the musical profession.'

Emily did not stick to ballads for her first show. She started off with 'Vedrai carino' ('welcomed in a most cordial manner'), was 'rapturously encored' in the Ganz song, gave her *Fille du régiment* aria successfully and then brought out her Gounod. Here the critic jibbed: 'the composer has struck out a new style quite unworthy of his great reputation.' Her big moment, however, came when she joined Reeves in 'Parigi o cara'. Reeves obviously enjoyed himself, for he actually consented, on that evening, to give an encore of 'Come into the garden, Maud'.

Her first concert over, Miss Greening had the wind behind her. She promptly announced a series of three 'People's Saturday Night National Concerts' – English (10 March), Irish (17 March) and Scots (24 March) – at St James's Hall. Admission one shilling, except for the five shilling and half-crown balcony. There was no Sims Reeves this time, but the Weisses, Laura Baxter, Alberto Laurence and Frank Elmore headed the English concert. However, Miss Berry Greening, 'carrying out the principle of so-called National Concerts to a greater degree than usual', was featured, giving 'Our own Fireside', another P E van Noorden ('especially for'), 'Will you love me then as now', 'I dreamt I dwelt in marble halls', 'Britannia, pride of the ocean' and 'Ever of thee I'm fondly dreaming' as her contribution to the English night, and once again drew not only a large shilling audience but also the plaudits of the critics, who reported so many encores as to become tedious. The shilling public were, as ever, after the biggest shillingsworth they could get. And Miss Berry Greening gave them not only songs but also the massed bands of the Coldstream Guards and the Grenadier Guards under Dan Godfrey!

On Irish night, the bill was less classy, but Georgina Weiss and the Coldstreams repeated, and the young impresario weighed in with 'Believe me, if all those endearing young charms', 'Barney O'Hea', 'The Minstrel Boy', 'The Last Rose of Summer', 'The Low-Backed Car' and 'The Four-Leaved Shamrock'. *The Era* again gave her space:

The popular character of these entertainments asserts itself in every possible manner. To begin, a flaring gas device over the Regent Street portal of the hall informs the outer world of the kind of enjoyment to be found within. This alone is a departure from the usual stately order of things here; and the vociferous behaviour of the public is eminently characteristic of those persons who prefer to pay a trifling sum for admission and intend to secure as long an evening with the National melodies as possible ... It was essentially by means of essentially native songs and ballads that Miss Berry Greening first obtained recognition as a vocalist last season ... Her voice is of sweet quality in the upper register, and the particular pains she takes to articulate final consonants must be regarded as an evidence of extreme carefulness; indeed the young lady might soften these consonants with advantage and so avoid a pedantic effect.

On Scotch night, the critic was a little less enchanted. The Scots audience, clearly out for a good time with their old favourite airs, pushed the cheering and encoring to what he considered 'stupid' excess, and Emily – half way through 'Bonnie Dundee' – forgot the words and ground to a halt. The audience cheered some more, at which she laughed and then continued. 'An objectionable kind of exhibition not often seen in a concert room', pouted the critic, drawing the line at too much of a relaxed atmosphere at St James's Hall. Another critic summed up: 'if not a very perfect singer [she] is a very attractive one, and is always sure to please a mixed public. Her voice is of a most agreeable quality, she has great powers of expression, and evidently views music through a powerful dramatic lens.'

Through the season of 1866, Miss Berry Greening fulfilled a vast number of engagements. We know about them because she scrupulously listed them in her regular advertisements. She was to be seen most weeks at least once at St James's Hall but also – sometimes daily – at other city, suburban and home counties concerts. Her repertoire stayed basically the same: 'Cherry Ripe', 'I dreamt I dwelt in marble halls',

'Corall'd Caves' and other van Noorden ballads, 'Vedrai carino', 'Come per me sereno', 'Parigi o cara' – these days mostly with Jules Mottes (with whom she also gave 'Mira la bianca luna') – 'Beautiful Clouds', 'Chacun le dit', the heavily publicised 'Gallant, so gay' and occasionally a novelty such as Mrs St Leger's 'The Lovers' Walk'. It was by no means all folk songs and ballads and, if that and the 'popular' label was what stuck, it was perhaps only because of the unusual character and attitude Miss Greening professed.

On 25 June she produced her fifth concert of the year. But this time there was no shilling touch. Miss Berry Greening mounted a matinee musicale at the Beethoven Rooms for which the tickets were a full fashionable guinea. Georgina Stabbach, Laura Baxter and Jules Mottes shared the vocal duties, and Emily sang not 'Bonnie Dundee' but Gounod's Serenade and 'Rejoice Greatly'. On 20 July, she sang at the Royal Dramatic College Concert on a bill topped by Grisi, Santley, Trebelli, Bettini, Edith Wynne and Emily Soldene. But, in between, she also appeared for the same college at their Fancy Fête at the Crystal Palace. On this occasion she was the only concert vocalist on the huge programme, whose bill ranged from Lydia Thompson and Mrs Howard Paul to the nearly professional Misses Pelham!

The season over, Emily set off tirelessly on the road, giving 'The Lover and the Bird', Edward Land's 'The Italian Flower Girl' and, of course, 'Cherry Ripe' (or overripe) and the rest to the southern counties, and her Scots songs when she ventured to the north. At Settle, she sang the soprano music in *The Creation*.

1867 started much as 1866 had done. Emily, 'vocalist to his Imperial Majesty the Emperor of the French', launched a concert at the modest Myddelton Hall (14 January), at which she introduced her newest Irish song, Mrs Edward Thomas's 'The sacret yez thrusted to me', and come March (9, 16, 23) she again promoted her triple-header of National Concerts at St James's Hall. Georgina Stabbach, Rebecca Isaacs, Lewis Thomas, Alfred Hemming, Seymour Smith, Lucy Leffler, Julia Derby, Mr and Mrs Suchet Champion, Trelawny Cobham, the Mascall sisters, Thomas Whiffen, Chaplin Henry and Ganz (conductor) took part, and 'I won't be a nun', 'Bid me discourse', 'Where the bee sucks', 'We have lived and loved together', 'I know a bank' (with Miss Stabbach), 'I'm not the queen' (with Stabbach and Hemming), Alfred Mattacks's 'Do you think I would tell', 'Nora Creina', 'The Irish Emigrant', 'Erin go Braugh', 'Barney O'Hea', 'Flow on shining river' (with Miss Derby) 'Cherry Ripe', 'Buy my moss roses', 'Auld Robin Grey' and 'The sacret yez thrusted to me' confirmed Miss Berry Greening's reputation as a singer of the old songs.

During the season, however, she seems to have been much less prominent than the previous year. The advertisements cease, and I spot her only giving her 'Bid me discourse' at Helen Hogarth's concert. Only in September is she back in print, advertising her 'Cherry Ripe' and two new songs, van Noorden's 'Bright Blinks' and 'Songster of Spring' by Alfred Carder and W Brooks Stevens at Oxford, York, Birstall, Gomersal, Batley, Leeds, Settle, Manchester, Lancaster, Liverpool, Birmingham and dates beyond on her 'northern tour' and her 'tours in the midlands and eastern counties'.

1868 saw Emily's activities shrink even further. This year she ventured on her St Patrick's Day Irish concert (17 March; 'The Minstrel Boy', 'Believe me, if all those endearing young charms', 'That Rogue Reilley', Crouch's 'The Echo') with a bill on which Cobham, Elena Angele and Lewis Thomas were the main names. Her performance went a little awry, and she had a mishap with her top note in the Crouch song.

A venture at the Islington Scientific and Literary Society (2 April) and her 'annual matinee' (5 June) at the Hanover Square Rooms served principally to introduce two of her pupils, the Misses Edith Kingsley and Melanie Attila. Later in the year, Miss Kingsley gave her own concert at the Birkbeck Institution, at which her teacher sang and sister Agnes Greening played. Another family connection came into play when she sang for the Printers Pension Almhouse and Orphan Asylum dinner at the London Tavern.

Over the next two seasons, Miss Berry Greening was seen performing only on occasion, although she kept the St Patrick's Eve Irish concert going until as late 1872 ('her seventh annual'). She seems, however, in these last years to have formed a connection with one of the outstanding vocalists and teachers of the period, Hermine Rudersdorff, with whom she appeared on a number of occasions in London and the

provinces in concert and in oratorio. On one such occasion, in Manchester, she shared the platform with two ancient glories in Henry Phillips and H R Allen.

In 1872, Miss Berry Greening (whom I cannot find in the 1871 census) seemingly bowed out of the concert world. Her annual concert was advertised without her, and it was reported that she was 'ill' in Nice. And then comes a report from Lyon, France. In that city, on 29 June 1872, Miss Emily Eliza Greening of London and Guildford was, so the records say, married to a certain Comte de Marsoueshscwsnoff (*sic*). It was to be a brief marriage, for the Count died at Fontenay on 2 December of the same year, at the age of 47.

In early 1876 the Countess, as it seems she genuinely was, resurfaces in Hackney. Not only teaching singing (which I'm sure she was doing) but getting married. Again. The bridegroom was apparently another Frenchman, 'a captain', by name Étienne Lassangue or Lassaugue or Lassaugne (Emily was never consistent with the spelling), and his appearance at the altar is almost the only evidence I have of his existence. Or, should I say, altars. For, curiously enough, just a few months previously the same gentleman (with his name spelled two ways!) had got married in Brighton. The bride on that occasion gave her name as the Countess Emily Marsoueshscwsnoff (*sic* in the British records). The second time, she used her less complicated maiden name.

If the French gentleman rarely again appears to our ken, Emily does. For Emily Lassaugne (or variant) emigrated in 1881 (so she said) to America.

It appears that her first years in the United States were spent fairly anonymously teaching in New York and Washington, but by the time she hit the headlines, in 1884, she was in Los Angeles. She had been hired to teach singing at \$800 per annum at a new ladies' college by the name of Ellis Villa, of which the instigators were one Rev James W Ellis, a prominent local Presbyterian minister, and a Michigan pedagogue, ex of the Napa Seminary, by name D W Hanna, who also sported Presbyterian credentials and a removable 'Rev'. Emily was, for an extra \$300 per annum, also to sing in the choir at the Rev Ellis's church.

Quite what happened is not clear. Emily's tale and that of the two Revs (who actually showed quickly weakening solidarity when trouble struck) differed, both in the press and in the subsequent court case. It seems that, at the end of month one, no money was forthcoming, also that the Revs attempted both to renegotiate Emily's contract and, when she refused, to get rid of her. In the ensuing brouhaha, Hanna laid hands on Emily and, as a result, found himself sued for battery. 'Reverend hands laid violently on a defenceless woman', howled the *Los Angeles Times*, referring to Ellis Villa as 'Dothegirls Hall' and to Emily 'as a woman whom they had lured over 3,000 miles from home by glittering promises which they failed to fulfil'. The Revs hastened to push their version of the tale of 'this terrible French woman' (*sic*) into print before the case came to court, but, when it did, the jury failed to agree. Meanwhile, Hanna resigned and promptly started up another school. Like Ellis Villa, it was doomed to failure.

Emily, meanwhile, mounted a Grand Concert at the Los Angeles Turnverein Hall, at which she featured alongside a solid list of pupils. Her own contribution was familiar: 'Come per me sereno', 'The Emigrant's Lament', 'Rory O'More' and 'Songsters of Spring', which she was now claiming (and would publish!) as all her own work. The evening was adjudged 'a creditable success' by the *LA Times*. But the formidable Mme Lassangue didn't stop there. She, too, set up a school, 'the Lassangue Musical College', and advertised with all the zing of twenty years earlier in a paragraph headed 'How to sing like Patti and Gerster': 'Mme Lassangue prima donna from London and Paris. Colleague of Patti, Titiens, Parepa, Rudersdorff, Sainton-Dolby, etc. Teachers trained. Lessons at any hour both private and in class also piano lessons and organ. Daily practice at the Lassangue Musical College, Roeder Block, 23 South Spring Street, Los Angeles, Cal.

Her pupils – a heap of them – were up on show, soon after, 'in the double parlours of Mme Lassaugne in Roeder Block', which were crowded for the occasion. Emily ended the evening with a gracious performance of 'Songsters of Spring'.

The following month, J W Ellis resigned from his church, allegedly to devote himself to his school.

Emily stayed some three or four years in Los Angeles before removing to the greener pastures of San Francisco. During that time I find her concertising at the LA Grand Opera House (16 December 1885), and the *Daily Nevada State Journal* of 28 May 1886 reports: 'Madame E Lassaugne [*sic*], Directress of the Musical College of Southern California, paid this office a visit yesterday. This talented lady intends making an extended visit in Reno for her health, and while she does not desire to overwork herself, will receive a limited number of scholars in French and singing lessons. She can be found at the residence of Mrs Henry Johnson.' The trade directories list her at 36 S Spring. But in November of the same year she is in Salt Lake City, advertising a very private vocal concert at Calder's Music Palace.

My next sightings of our vocalist are rather more alarming.

The first is in St Paul, Minnesota, where, in 1893, she was fined \$50 for 'the larceny of certain furniture from a dwelling house'. And then, in April 1898, in San Jose, California, where the local press reported: 'In the County Jail awaiting trial on a serious offense is a woman whose singing has thrilled audiences in England, Europe and the United States. This personage is none other than Madame Louise, who is charged with throwing muriatic acid in the face of E F Robinson, her landlord. The woman's right name is Mrs Emily E Lassangue, and a few months ago she conducted a music studio at Kohler and Chase Hall 28 O'Farrell Street, San Francisco ... Mme Lassangue came to San Jose about three months ago and opened dressmaking parlours in the Ryland block under the name of Mme Louise ...' 'Mme Lassangue states that dressmaking has a fascination for her and it was this that led her to desert her vocal calling. She says she is a natural born dressmaker, and she thought that a change and rest would benefit her health.' So, when her landlord came round for the eternally unpaid rent, she threw acid at him.

The odd mention of her appears over the years, and in 1899 the *Los Angeles Times* reports: 'Mme Emily E Lassangue who will be remembered as a famous vocal teacher and singer here in the 80s has returned to Los Angeles after eleven years absence in San Francisco, the East and Europe, to find the Angel city quite grown out of her recollection.'

And, sure enough, there is Emily travelling from Buenos Aires to England on the *Clyde* in June 1895 ('aged 24'), and a year later ('aged 31'), on 11 December 1896, arriving in New York on the *Spre* from Bremen and Southampton.

In the 1900 US census, Emily, 'music teacher', 'age 36'!!, can be spotted at Sixth Avenue, Helena City, in Montana's Lewis & Clarke County, and as late as 27 October 1912 she is on the list of American citizens, 'aged 62', naturalised, 'of 346 W6th Street, Los Angeles', arriving in New York from Liverpool on the *Carmania*, after which ...

Well, there is, strangely enough, more. On 2 February 1919 there appeared a request in the *San Francisco Chronicle*. A request for the whereabouts of the Countess de Marsoueshscwsnoff, otherwise Madame Lassangue, 'wife of a retired Captain', 'former lyric artist and now aged seventy-one years old ...' It seems to be from her husband! He was too late. She had died four years earlier. Aged 77. Her death notice said 81!

And so ends, rather unsatisfactorily, the tale of Miss Berry Greening who, for a handful of seasons, entertained London concertgoers with her determinedly populist and relaxed concerts and, at the same time, rather shocked the polite concert establishment. It takes all kinds ...

BETTS, ABIGAIL

(b London, bap St Giles in the Fields, Camden, 13 April 1800; d Kennington, London, 4 May 1866)

The vocalist and actress known, through a career of some thirty years on the stage and concert platform, simply as ‘Miss Betts’ was the eldest daughter of a family of some considerable importance in the musical life of turn-of-the-nineteenth-century England.

The founding father of the family of musical Betts was John Betts (1752–1823), a violin-maker’s apprentice from his earliest teens, who went into business on his own account in 1780 in succession to his old master, Richard Duke, making, as he advertised, ‘in the neatest manner, violins after the patterns of Antonio Stradivari, Hieronymus Amati, Jacobus Stainer, and Tyrols’. In 1782, John Betts moved his workshop and shop to the ancient surroundings of the Royal Exchange, where he quickly established himself as the outstanding violin dealer of his time. Many now celebrated instruments passed through his hands, for restoration and/or sale, during his forty years in business in the City of London.

When John Betts died in 1823, he bequeathed his business to his nephew Charles Vernon and his younger brother, Arthur Betts. Arthur (b Lincolnshire 1774; d London, September 1847) was himself a skilled violinist, who had studied with Viotti and Dussek, who played as leader of the second violins in some of the best orchestras in London, and who also taught music – violin, cello and piano – and was ‘forty nine years a member of the Royal Society of Musicians’. Arthur (soon divested of Vernon) carried on his brother’s business at the Royal Exchange with increasing success. In 1825 he put himself into the history books when he purchased an old violin for a guinea, allegedly (so the varying versions go) from a grubby gypsy or ‘a gentleman’s servant’. When what is now known as ‘the Betts Stradivarius’ of 1704, and considered to be one of the greatest examples of the violin-maker’s art, was sold, it fetched 500 guineas. It last passed through the saleroom in 1929, and was bought for the American Library of Congress, when it brought many, many times more.

In 1796 (24 January, Marylebone), Arthur Betts married one Abigail Stewart, and the couple produced, in the years that followed, a healthy number of children: Abigail, Arthur, John, Charles Duncan, Alexander Stewart, Jessie and Katherine Ann. Of these, Charles – himself a concert violinist – and Arthur would continue their father’s business after his death, while Abby went on to become a singer of some considerable note.

Oddly enough, I can find no evidence of her appearing as a vocalist until the year 1822, when (unless I have erred in my genealogy) she would have been something like 22 years old. This first exhumed concert bill is dated June 1822, and it is for Mr Nelson’s concert at the Albion, Aldersgate Street. The bill

consisted vocally of Mrs Salmon, Miss Goodall, Miss Tree, Braham, Sapio, Begrez and Angrisani – royal names – alongside whom

Miss Betts, a young lady of promising qualities, appeared, we believe, for the first time before the public; and we do justice to this amiable young lady when we say she exerted herself to the utmost of her power. Her voice is sweet, melodious and flexible, and she possesses an excellent ear for music. The cavatina 'Una voce poco fa' was executed by her in masterly style; she left us nothing to wish, and the audience acknowledged her exertions by rapturous applause. It is to be wished that this young lady may continue in the career she has entered upon, and the public will be much gratified whenever she appears before them again.

She well and truly continued, and the public was gratified for many, many years.

On 14 June 1824 I see her at an evening promoted on behalf of the 'eight-year-old' (he was eleven) piano prodigy George Aspull at the King's Concert Rooms, Hanover Square. Little Master Aspull stood at his piano (he was too small to sit) and whirled out a grand concerto by Czerny and the chunks of Mozart that he'd recently performed before the king, and a whole line-up of the singing stars of the day – Miss Paton, Miss Stephens, Giuditta Pasta, Curioni, de Begnis and his wife, Mr Kellner – supplied the vocals. Miss Betts was modestly featured in the trio 'Cruda sorte' from Rossini's *Ricciardo e Zoraide*, taking the part sung by Eliza Vestris in the London production of the opera alongside Mme Ronzi de Begnis and the London 'original', Signor Garcia.

I don't see her out in public again till the following April (1825), when she appeared in several concerts at the New Argyll Rooms. The de Begnises, Miss Graddon, Rosalbina Caradori, Garcia, Mr Sola, Mr Sapio and the Demoiselles Marinoni appeared on the bill with Abby on the 14th, with a Mr Powell being billed as making a 'first appearance'. Abby was at her second, at least, but it didn't say so. Her father was one of the instrumentalists for the occasion, and his shop was, as it frequently was for such affairs, billed as a box office. At the second concert, mounted by the young harpist Miss Woodrych ('pupil of Bochsa'), Curioni, Miss Stephens and Mrs Salmon were featured and a Mlle Ferté Mikel made her debut. Abby sang an aria and joined in a quartet with Miss Stevens, Remorini and Sola, and Arthur played. On 12 May, at Mr Nicholson's concert, she sang 'Le Petit Tambour' and joined Sapio and Miss Goodall in a trio by Winter.

In 1826 she is noticed (7 April) singing at Moscheles' concert the duet 'My Dearest Love' with Phillips, alongside Miss Goodall, Mme Cornega, Braham, Torri, Pelligrini and de Begnis, at Lindley's (13 April), at Nicholson's (10 May) and at Samuel Wesley's (4 May), and later as one of the principal singers at Weber's funeral, together with Braham, Miss Cubitt, Mr Pyne, Mrs Povey, Henry Phillips and others (father played too). In 1827 she can be seen singing at Worcester for Mr Holloway (17 April), at Frank Mori's concert (18 May) at the Argyll Rooms with Pasta, Caradori Allan, Vestris, Curioni and de Begnis, and at the concert of Franz Liszt (9 June). Abby was out in grand company.

Just a handful of concerts, in admittedly grand company, in three years? It doesn't seem much. It can't have been all. The press referred to her as 'Miss Betts who has frequently been heard to great advantage at the Concerts'. But it is all I have found. Never mind. Abby Betts's career was about to take off.

On 20 July 1827, she stepped out on to the stage of the English Opera House in her first performance as a singing actress. The piece was the umpteenth reproduction of the much loved ballad opera *Love in a Village*, and Abby had been cast as the heroine, Rosetta. The same piece had, just months earlier, been seen on the stage at Drury Lane, with Braham and Dowton, and with the proven Fanny Ayton as Rosetta. A few months later, it would be Dowton, Braham, Miss Love, and Miss Paton as Rosetta at the Lane, and Sapio, Wood, Farren, Keeley and Miss Hughes at Covent Garden. Comparisons were inevitable. Here, we were offered Bartley, Pearman, 'the inimitable' Miss Kelly as the soubrette Madge, and (as so often) 'a young lady her first appearance on any stage' as ingénue. But the young lady came through, rendering nothing

to the Misses Ayton, Paton and Hughes and setting herself thoroughly on the road to a splendid career as a theatrical performer.

The principal character, that of Rosetta, was last night performed with an inconsiderable success by a young lady whose name we believe is Betts. She is in form petite, her countenance handsome, but better suited to the expression of tragic than comic feeling. Her compass of voice is moderate but she has as a singer been skilfully tutored. She does not attempt that which her natural powers will not allow her to effect. If there were no great effort there was certainly no failure. Miss Betts was encored in several of her airs but most deservedly so in 'The traveller benighted', which is the most spirited and difficult song in the opera. She appeared with all the tact of an old professor to have reserved her powers for this effort and it deserved the applause it received. Miss Betts must, if she intends to be an actress as well as a singer, study a good deal more than she has. Except while singing, she transformed the lively Rosetta – the romantic runaway – into a very dull, blushing personage indeed. Her reception as may be inferred from the number of encores was extremely flattering.

(*The Times*)

The next night, the English Opera House returned to the status quo, and the house prima donna, Miss Paton, was featured in *Artaxerxes* alongside resident tenor Pearman and Miss Goward. The following night it was *The Oracle* starring Miss Paton and Pearman, then *The Barber of Seville* with Penson and Wrench acting alongside Miss Paton's very vocal Rosina. On 27th Miss Betts made a second debut, as Leonora in *The Padlock*. The *Morning Post* wrote: 'Miss Betts' voice has considerable power and compass – its only fault perhaps is that of being occasionally over loud. We do not, however, hesitate to pronounce her an acquisition to the theatre.'

And, in the meanwhile, rehearsals went on for a new opera, due for production in mid-August – with Miss Paton, of course, starred. But Miss Paton didn't make it. Her workload proved just too much for her: her doctor diagnosed debility and purpura and ordered the lady a long rest. And so the star role of Isabella de Ligozzi in Paer's opera *The Freebooters* (20 August) was entrusted in extremis, 'under the unfortunate circumstances which have so long delayed the production of this piece', to a young lady with just a small handful of *Love in a Villages* and *Padlocks* to her credit: Abby Betts. And, although Paer's music for *The Freebooters* (*I fuorusciti*) was a very different kettle of crochets to the ballad strains of *Love in a Village*, Miss Betts again came through with sails a-flying. Her first number was encored, 'and her exertions throughout the opera were liberally applauded': 'When we first saw Miss Betts we observed that her talents appeared to have been carefully cultivated. Her performance last night convinced us of the observation. She sang correctly and tastefully. In some instances there was a degree of spirit in her expression which augured exceedingly well for her future career ...' 'This young lady, at a very short notice, has had to study a very difficult character – a character which would require the best attention even of a veteran for a considerable time to do it perfect justice. There is scarcely a scene in which Isabella does not appear and in which she has not to execute – sometimes sola and sometimes in conjunction with others – music of the most difficult but certainly of the most enchanting description.'

Her acting, however, was still found to be wanting. 'Tame' was the critic's word, as he recommended her to the Italian-style 'grace of carriage, animation of acting and a general earnestness of manner'.

The *Morning Post* even launched into poetry with an Impromptu on Miss Betts successful efforts in the new opera at the Lyceum:

Betts ran high and Betts ran low
But never under Paer
Apollo, pleased, his power would show
And made of Betts – a star!

The Freebooters was 'in the highest degree successful', and Pearman as the hero, Henry Phillips as the villain, Penson as the comic servant, and Miss Goward as soubrette were, like Abby, also successful. Her first 'creation' set her firmly in place as a favourite, and the music-sellers' windows were quickly filled with 'Gentle Hope', 'a favourite aria as sung by Miss Betts, in the grand opera called *The Freebooters*, at the Theatre Royal, English Opera House, composed by F Paer; arranged & adapted to English words by Wm Hawes; the poetry by Hampden Napier; "Oh! I can move no further" recitative and duet sung by Miss Betts and Mr. Pearman in the grand opera called *The Freebooters*; and "Softly, softly, gently, gently", the favourite quartett as sung by Miss Betts, Miss Goward, Miss Boden & Mr J Bland.'

The Freebooters was played through to the end of the season, and when the English Opera House opened its 1828 season (30 June) it was again the feature of the bill. The winter months had seen Miss Betts back on the concert stage, notably in the Ancient and Modern Sacred Music concerts at the King's Theatre ('Ah perdona' from *La clemenza di Tito* with Mme Schütz, 'Lord, remember David' from *The Redemption*), at the Choral Fund ('Let the bright seraphim', 'Gratias agimus'), at Oxford with Phillips for Mr Marshall, and for Mr Collyer, at the Argyll Rooms for Lindley ('Gratias agimus'), for Nicholson, and for Mr Welsh, at the Lyceum for Hawes, and performing 'La biondina' at Mr Fitzwilliam's Benefit, but they had also seen her taking on a new position. When the company was assembled for the season at the Opera House, there was no Miss Paton. The theatre's new prima donna was Miss Betts.

In her new position she was starred both in *The Freebooters* and (29 July) as Fiordiligi in *Tit for Tat* (a version of *Così fan tutte*) alongside Harriet Cawse (Dorabella), Elizabeth Feron (Despina), Wood, Thorne and Phillips ('she sang with much effect ... greatly applauded').

In 1829 Miss Betts climbed another notch in her profession. She was hired for a season at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, where she made her first appearance on 10 March in a pasticcio piece called *The Casket* with a score fabricated by Rophino Lacy from various works of Mozart. She played the heroine, Emmeline, to the Ludolph of Braham and the Adela of the Lane's titular prima donna, Miss Love, and once again she came through triumphant: 'Miss Betts, whose talents as a singer are already well known to the public, appeared for the first time as an actress. In the latter art she wants practice, but she appears to have perfect command of herself and will probably be able to supply the deficiencies which are at present very apparent. Her voice is powerful and flexible; and she executed her songs with great force and success. She was particularly fortunate in a song she introduced from *Idomeneo*, in which she was very warmly applauded.'

When the Lane produced *Artaxerxes*, Abby was Mandane alongside Braham, Bland and Miss Love, and when the first English production of Auber's *Masaniello* (*La muette de Portici*) was mounted under the title *The Dumb Girl of Portici*, with Braham in the tenor role, she was Elvira ('very successful'), after which she headed back to the English Opera House for another three months' season. She opened there as the heroine, Laura, in Ferdinand Ries's opera *The Robber's Bride*, starring alongside Sapio and Henry Phillips. This time the critic found her 'exceedingly efficient. She sang with great truth and power and she acted with more nature and feeling than vocalists are accustomed to display. Her scena "E'er distraction quite o'erclouded me" (a composition which brought Weber strongly to our recollection) was beautifully impressive.'

The other new production of the season was Marschner's *Der Vampyr*, and once again Abby was cast as a persecuted heroine, Henrika, to the vampire of Henry Phillips. The two Misses Cawse, James Bland and tenor Sapio made up the cast. *Der Vampyr* was a very decided hit, and Miss Betts marked up another success in a piece where, of course, most of the focus was on the title-role. However she 'executed with much grace and sweetness an extremely pleasing scena, "Day upon the krapaks shakes his golden tresses". There is a great deal of variety in this composition and Miss Betts described with taste and judgement the different emotions by which the mind of the heroine is supposed to be assailed.'

These two successful German pieces carried the Opera House season through to October, after which Abby returned to Drury Lane. She began by repeating her *Love in a Village*, and *The Times* this time rehashed the old quibble: 'The talents of this young lady, at least in the mechanical division of her art, are progressively improving. The quality of her voice is good, and her execution is sometimes brilliant; she is however

deficient in that which may be called the soul of harmony – expression.’ The Lane’s diet was largely one of drama at this stage, but the favourite musical drama of *Guy Mannering* was given its periodic showing, with Sinclair (Henry) and Miss Graddon (Julia) and Abby in the role of Lucy Bertram, and *Masaniello* was also brought back, with her and Sinclair starred, for a goodly number of nights.

The Lord of the Manor, *Der Freischütz*, *Amoroso King of Little Britain*, *Midas*, *Rob Roy* with Miss Graddon as Diana, *The Brigand*, *Don Giovanni in London* and other musical pieces were also played alongside the tragedies and comedies in which the Wallacks, Mrs and Miss Faucit, Farren, Liston, Mrs Glover and the company featured, and doubtless Miss Betts appeared in some or most of them, but in January 1830 the vocalist who had been so often criticised for her acting turned up in a slightly surprising role: she was cast as Jessica (with songs) in *The Merchant of Venice* alongside Kean and Miss Phillips.

When the Drury Lane Theatrical Fund held its thirteenth annual dinner she performed another role. Only gentlemen were invited to provide the singing entertainment, but ‘Miss Betts appeared at the piano and sang the duet of the music lesson with Mr T Cooke.’ A useful and ubiquitous lady.

In the new year she also took up once more the role of Mandane, alongside Vestris and Sinclair, in the eternal *Artaxerxes*, and *The Times* bowed to say: ‘This young lady is rapidly improving in her profession. She has great capability of organ, and no inconsiderable share of science. Both are absolutely required in this very difficult character. She sang “The solder tir’d” with much force.’ With *Masaniello* still played regularly, *The Merchant* continuing, and *Guy Mannering* brought back, Miss Betts was a well-occupied player through the season. But in April she was cast to take over from Mrs Bedford in *The Dragon’s Gift*, and she initially refused. She was docked £30 plus nine nights’ salary ... so she went on as Cherry-Chow and ...

When that season ended, she promptly migrated to the Adelphi Theatre. And there, on 5 July 1830, she was handed a role which was even more significant than those others – from *The Freebooters* through *Der Vampyr* up to *Masaniello* – which she had introduced to the English stage. On 5 July London was given a new (and rather better) English version of *Don Giovanni*, which had previously been seen in Britain, only in a rather damaged state, as *The Libertine* in 1817. Henry Phillips was the Don, Penson the comic was Leporello, a gentleman from Bath took Ottavio, and the three ladies’ roles were taken by Mrs Keeley (Zerlina), Miss Ferguson from Dublin (Elvira) and Abby Betts (Donna Anna).

With Phillips and Miss Betts in the company, an Adelphi revival of *Der Vampyr* was a natural consequence, similarly *Così fan tutte*, in which Abby repeated her Fiordiligi and Phillips his Alphonso, but she also appeared in a fresh role – as the Countess Almaviva in *The Marriage of Figaro* – and as Mme de Luceval in the little William Hawes operetta called *The Quartette* – during the three months’ season.

The first months of 1831 were spent in Dublin, playing *Cinderella*, *Der Freischütz*, *The Duenna*, *The Haunted Tower*, *The Devil’s Bridge* et al at the Theatre Royal, performing in concerts and Benefits and, on 19 January, in Mozart’s Requiem, to mark the death of Pope Pius VIII.

The next London season produced only one novelty, a Ferdinand Ries/Edward Fitzball opera written especially for the London stage under the title *The Sorceress*, in which Phillips (Black Naddock) and Miss Betts (Countess Christine), assisted by Harriet Cawse in the title-role and Mr T F Millar, previously just ‘the tenor from Bath’, attempted to repeat the too similar success of *Der Vampyr*. It was played fifteen times but was still apparently accounted ‘a complete failure’.

After another venture to Ireland, in September 1832 Abby returned to Drury Lane, where she appeared as Nysa in *Midas*, with Miss Ferguson (Apollo) and Harriet Cawse (Daphne), on the opening night of the theatre’s new season. The following month she repeated her *Freischütz*. ‘Miss Betts is an accomplished and agreeable singer’, huffed the unsatisfiable *Times*; ‘her powers are however scarcely equal to the forcible execution of the music attached to the character of Linda [i.e. Agathe]. She nevertheless evinced much ability and gave the celebrated scena in the second act with discriminating taste. The trio between [*sic*] her, Mr Braham and Miss Cawse ... was really excellent.’ He was wrong. Abby Betts would go on to many, many performances as the heroine of Weber’s extremely famous opera, and with complete success.

In *Rob Roy Macgregor* (12 October), with Macready and Braham topping the bill as the outlaw and Osbaldistone, she appeared in the vocal role of Diana Vernon, and in *The Slave* she played Zelinda to the Malcolm of Braham and the Stella of Mary Cawse. When, on 18 December, a new comic operetta, *Win Her and Wear Her*, a John Barnett musicalised version of *A Bold Stroke for a Wife*, was produced, Abby took the ingénue role of Miss Anne Lovely alongside Braham, Templeton and Miss Cawse. 'If she would learn to speak as well as to sing it would improve her performance wonderfully', grumbled *The Times*. She also took the leading role of Donna Elvina in the 'legendary operatic entertainment' by Henry Bishop and Isaac Pocock entitled *The Doom-Kiss* (29 October 1832) opposite Henry Phillips for the brief life of the piece. She repeated her Annette in *The Lord of the Manor* with Braham, Phillips and Farren, but when *The Barber of Seville* was mounted it was Mrs Wood, the former Miss Paton, who took the part of Rosina, and when *Don Giovanni* was remounted Abby was 'demoted' to the role of Donna Elvira. Not because of Miss Paton, indeed, who was cast as Zerlina, but because the management had succeeded in getting hold of the very considerable Joséphine De Méric to take the role. Braham appeared as a tenor Don, with Phillips similarly 'demoted' to the more suitable part of Leporello, making up one of the classiest Lane operatic casts for some time. And the public was duly appreciative. The production was a huge success.

Abby repeated her Jessica (*Merchant of Venice*) and created another new role when a 'ballet-opera' entitled *The Maid of Cashmere*, put together to feature some visiting French dancers, was introduced (15 March 1833). She played the ingénue Leila, with Wood as her tenor, Seguin the bass, and Mary Cawse as soubrette, but the dancers were the stars of an affair which was as much a ballet as an opera. Some nights, the unfading *Don Giovanni* and *The Maid of Cashmere* were given as the two parts of the bill, and overworked Abby must have been quite glad she wasn't playing Anna. Then, when *Don Giovanni* was given a breather, the successful *Robert the Devil* was remounted. Miss Betts was Alice, in the place of the originally announced Joséphine De Méric, Mrs Wood (the original Alice) was Isabella, her husband repeated his Robert, and *The Maid of Cashmere*, recast with non-French dancers, was still the second part.

On the night of Alfred Bunn's Benefit (22 April), another old favourite, *The Duenna*, was played, and Abby was cast as Louisa, alongside the Woods and Templeton. It was open slather as far as the always movable music of the piece was concerned, with all the singers stuffing their roles with favourite songs: Abby chose 'Lo! Here the gentle lark' and 'The soldier tir'd'. And when that was over they did *Midas*. Well, it made a change from *The Maid of Cashmere*, which seemed to have become a fixture as an afterpiece.

The next addition to the Lane's programme (1 May 1833) was a memorable one: the first English-language performance of an opera which would thereafter be one of the most frequently played on the Victorian stage. And Miss Betts was in this 'original English cast'. But she was not the prima donna. Far from it. For the English-language premiere of *La sonnambula* the management had imported from the Continent a very young lady never yet heard in Britain – Mlle Maria Malibran. Abby Betts 'created' the supporting part of the 'other woman', the innkeeper Lisa, with her 'De' lieti auguri a voi son grata' ('Sounds so joyful'), alongside Malibran, Templeton, Seguin, and Mary Cawse in the little part of Teresa. She was 'loudly and deservedly applauded' in the shadow of the overwhelming prima donna, and the rest is history. But Abby, even with a supporting role to play rather than a vast lead, still had a busy night. For *The Maid of Cashmere* was running on and on and on.

When the Lane closed its season, the Alfred Bunn production of *La sonnambula* migrated to his other theatre, Covent Garden, for some additional performances, but even then it wasn't time to take a breather. Covent Garden mounted a Benefit for Vestris (24 June), and the opera chosen was *Masaniello*. Abby was hired to play Elvira. And Vestris? She put on trousers and took the tenorish title-role. It went down so well, it was repeated, and then Malibran came back for more *Sonnambula*. The oratorio-drama *The Israelites* produced at Drury Lane the previous season was also brought back, and Abby now took Mrs Wood's prima donna part of the captive maid. Then, when the principal dancer of *Masaniello* and *The Maid of Cashmere* took her Benefit, Miss Betts again did double duty. On top of all this, the violinist Paganini

was hired for four concerts at Covent Garden, and among the support acts on his programmes was our Miss Betts, performing her preferred 'Lo! Here the gentle lark' and nothing less than the huge scena 'Non più mesta' from *La Cenerentola!* And still the season refused to end. Maria Malibran mounted a big Benefit at the King's Theatre and chose for the occasion to give a potted *Barbiere* and the whole of *La sonnambula*. Giubilei played Rodolfo, Templeton was Elvino, and Miss Betts came to the home of Italian opera to give her Lisa.

At Drury Lane, when the combined companies of the two theatres played *Comus*, Misses Inverarity, Shirreff and Betts all took part. *The Times* singled out Abby for her rendition of 'The wanton god who pierces hearts' as 'full of gaiety and spirit'.

The holiday period, when it came, didn't last long, and by October 1834 Miss Betts was back on the London stage, at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden. She gave her *Freischütz* for a series of performances, but this season the theatre's big one was Auber's *Gustavus III*, and she wasn't in it. She was able to restrict herself for a while to performing at the occasional concert and dinner, including the Royal Music Festival in Westminster Abbey in the company of all the singing stars in town, until Miss Inverarity dropped out of her role of Madame Ankarström and Abby took it over. Her next new role came in October, when Covent Garden mounted a new version of Byron's *Manfred*, with Mr Denvil featured in what was little more than a vast spectacular one-man show. Henry Bishop supplied a score of mostly concerted music, and the theatre's top soloists were brought in to sing it: Misses Shirreff, Cawse and Betts, Messrs Templeton, Seguin and Giubilei.

Julia in *Guy Mannering* and an appearance with Wallack in a remake of Farquhar's *Constant Couple (Off to the Continent)* in an ingénue role (Angelica) equipped with a handful of songs ('sung with purity of execution') were followed by some *Sonnambulas* with Miss Romer treading where Malibran had trod and a takeover from Shirreff as the heroine of the successful *The Red Mask* at Drury Lane. Then, on 21 February 1835, came the next big Covent Garden opera. It was another Auber piece, *Lestocq, or The Fête at the Hermitage*, which had been staged in Paris for the first time less than a year earlier. The Covent Garden version was cast with Giubilei, Henry Phillips and Wilson, and the Misses Shirreff, Betts and Harriet Cawse. Miss Betts played the role of the Countess Eudisia Golofkin, another persecuted and intrigued-over lady, and Auber's latest won raves. As for the cast, even *The Times* admitted 'they have never had better parts nor have even acquitted themselves more to the satisfaction of the audience.'

The run of *Lestocq* was varied by a fresh series of the Malibran *Sonnambula* with Abby in her original role, which was varied by some Malibran *Fidelio* in which Miss Betts was spared the role of Marzelline, some more *Gustavus III* with its new-look cast (more Madame Ankarström), and some more *Masaniellos* (Elvira) before the close of the 1835 season. It may have included little of novelty for Abby Betts, but it had been as busy as the past seasons.

The next twelve months were, apparently, not so busy. Covent Garden changed hands over the break, and when the new season opened the fare and the players on view there were different. For the first time in a good few years, Miss Betts was not on show in one of London's principal operatic theatres. She went instead to the provinces as 'first soprano singer of Covent Garden'. The situation was, however, only temporary. In October of 1836 she moved back into the English Opera House, replacing Jane Shirreff as Medora in Romer's opera *The Pasha's Bridal* and going on to appear, one after another, in *The Mountain Sylph* (Aeolia), *The Beggar's Opera* (Polly), in her original role in *The Freebooters*, in *Love in a Village* (Rosetta), in *The Castle of Andalusia* (Lorenza, 'first time') and in *The Devil's Bridge* (Rosalvina) in the final six weeks of the season. Her performance in *The Freebooters* led the *Musical World* to pronounce: 'One satisfaction in listening to Miss Betts is derived from the certainty one feels that she is perfect in her concerted as well as her solo music, and indeed we know no singer now on the boards who could have gone through the whole of her part, which is an arduous one, with the same precision and ability as herself.' However, not all were in accord. *The Champion* wrote of *The Mountain Sylph*: 'We are glad to see that Miss P Horton has superseded Miss Betts ... with all her musical skill and power of voice, the latter lady