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The Emergence of the Modern Conductor in 19th-Century Italian Opera

Luke Jensen

Gabriele Dotto describes the total control that Toscanini exercised in the preparation and performance of the first production of Puccini's *La Fanciulla del West*.¹ Given the acoustical problems of the Metropolitan Opera House in New York City and the relative strengths of the performers, the conductor made alterations to the score, some of which were tacitly accepted by the composer for later performances. Even though the practice of altering a score for the means of a specific production fits squarely within the tradition of nineteenth-century Italian opera, this incident illustrates the absolute control and respect that the modern conductor of Italian opera had acquired by the beginning of this century. During the first half of the nineteenth century, the performance of Italian opera was a much more collaborative undertaking: one person prepared the singers, another the orchestra, while the duties of training the chorus, of staging the opera, of integrating set and costume designs could all be assigned to yet more people. As in all collaborative efforts, the strongest personality could dominate the entire process. But with more than one strong personality, including the ego of many singers, and with divided responsibilities, the potential for clashes was high.

1. Gabriele Dotto, "Opera Four Hands: Collaborative Alterations in Puccini's *Fanciulla*," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 42 (1989).

Although the modern conductor may have many collaborators, he is usually in charge of all aspects of the music of a given production, while the *direttore d'orchestra*, on the other hand, was only the leader of the orchestra, and little more. Frequently, moreover, the director was the first violinist, often called the *violino principale*. In his 1811 treatise,² Giuseppe Scaramelli described preparing the orchestra and holding a performance together as the duties of the *violino principale*. While playing he was able to indicate the proper tempos with his bow, and if a member of the orchestra or one of the performers on stage lost their place, he recommended playing their part on the violin until they found it. He admitted that occasionally a performer would become completely lost and throw the other members of the ensemble off so that the only solution was to bring down the curtain and start over, but this happened rarely.

In Scaramelli's view, once the performances began, the *violino principale* became the pivotal person responsible for holding the entire troupe together. He called the use of two harpsichords outdated and rarely encountered, and he argued forcefully against the practice of leading from the keyboard. But his biased vantage point would naturally have him opposed to the authority of the *maestro al cembalo*. His preference for the violinist-conductor was probably based on background, the familiar argument of who makes a better conductor, one with training in the orchestra, usually a violinist, or one with a keyboard background. In any case, Scaramelli's preference for the *violino principale* seems to have been the popular choice in Italy during the *primo ottocento*. Leading with a baton did not enter into the discussion.

In 1813 a report appeared in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, describing performances in Milan, Naples, Rome, Florence, Bologna, Venice, Turin, Genoa, Verona, Brescia, Bergamo, Piacenza, and Parma. The report in the German periodical states:

Each opera was directed by the first violinist, who occupied a somewhat elevated position in the middle of the orchestra. The *Kapellmeister am Klavier* [*maestro al cembalo*], practically in a corner between the first double bass and violoncello, is hardly visible with his score and plays a very minor role, which is not rarely limited to merely turning pages. Only in Florence did I find an orchestral arrangement entirely after the German fashion. Here, Hr.

2. Giuseppe Scaramelli, *Saggio sopra i doveri di un violino principale, direttore d'orchestra* (Trieste, 1811).

Kapellmeister Bondi sat in a somewhat elevated position in front of the harpsichord [*Klavier*] and directed the opera by beating time.³

Gregory Harwood used this report in his article on "Verdi's Reform of the Italian Opera Orchestra," to demonstrate the Italian practice of placing the orchestra leader (whether violinist in most cases or harpsichord in exceptional ones) between the audience and the orchestra rather than between the orchestra and the stage. It also demonstrates the Italian preference to use the *violino principale* to lead the performance rather than the *maestro al cembalo*. Harwood demonstrates that the Italian tradition of placing the conductor between the audience and the orchestra remained until at least 1872 when Carlo Romani, a newly-appointed orchestra leader at the *Teatro della Pergola* in Florence, wrote to Verdi to ask his opinion as to whether it is better to place the conductor directly behind the prompter "as was practiced outside of Italy" or near the retaining wall between the orchestral area and the public, "as was practiced in Italy."⁴

Evidence found in contemporary scores and parts confirms the role of the *violino principale*. It is clear that full scores were not used in leading performances. Many of those dating from the *primo ottocento* in oblong format lack the necessary number of staves for all of the parts to be presented on the same page. For example, in finales where more staves are required, all the parts would not fit onto the same page, whereby the lines for some instruments, perhaps low brass and percussion, would be copied into the score on the pages following all of the other parts for that number. Additionally, many of these scores have a clean, unused appearance. Some of the most interesting pieces of physical evidence relating to the practice of leading with the violin are the various extant copies of parts prepared specifically for this purpose. The *violino principale* did not lead performances with the complete score before him, but rather with a first violin part prepared with additional cues for the rest of the orchestra and for the singing parts on stage. These cues range from a few rudimentary indications of the other parts to complete sets of staves dedicated to the stage parts and various sections of the orchestra. The general practice of preparing the *violino principale* parts lasted at least until the early 1860s when Ricordi engraved a *violino principale* part for *Un ballo in maschera*.

3. *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* 15 (1813), 267, as quoted by Gregory Harwood, "Verdi's Reform of the Italian Opera Orchestra," *Nineteenth-Century Music* 10 (1986), 121-22.

4. Letter of 28 August 1872 (AIVS Reel S.A. 10) as quoted by Harwood, "Verdi's Reform," 122.

In France, conducting operas with a baton began to gain acceptance during the 1820s and 1830s; one of the most widely-read French critics spoke out against it. In a series of three articles "On the Performance of Music," François-Joseph Fétis wrote in his journal, *La Revue musicale*, on the advantages of conducting with the violin.

Une autre question se présente parmi nous: est-il plus avantageux de diriger avec le bâton de mesure qu'avec le violon? Je pense que l'usage gothique de se servir d'un bâton pour indiquer la mesure, usage qui a pris naissance dans les églises, n'est point applicable à l'exécution du théâtre. Quand il s'agit de déterminer promptement un changement de mouvement, ou de ramener à la mesure un orchestre en désordre, ce bâton n'est presque d'aucune utilité, à moins qu'on ne prenne le parti de frapper à grands coups les temps sur le pupitre, ce qui produit toujours un fort mauvais effet. Le chef d'orchestre qui joue bien du violon, et qui a de l'énergie, imprime bien mieux l'exemple de la chaleur: c'est une chose dont on peut se convaincre au Théâtre-Italien et dans nos bons concerts. Quelques-uns de nos directeurs d'orchestre ont imaginé une méthode qui me paraît plus vicieuse que celle du bâton de mesure: elle consiste à tenir à la main un violon dont on ne se sert pas, et à battre la mesure avec l'archet: cette frêle baguette, qui n'a pas même l'énergie du bâton, ne sert qu'à marquer des temps vagues en l'air. Je ne comprends pas comment un homme, doué de quelque chaleur, ne pulvérise pas plusieurs archets dans une soirée en suivant cette méthode. Sans parler de ce qui se fait dans les pays étranger,

Another question arises: is it better to direct with the baton or with the violin? I think that the gothic practice of using a baton for indicating the beat, a practice that began in the churches, is not appropriate for performances in the theater. When a sudden change in tempo is to be executed, or when the orchestra is in disarray and needs to be reminded of the beat, the baton has very little use except for slashing the beat with large strokes from the position of the podium, which always produces a very bad effect. The *chef d'orchestre* who plays the violin well, and who is energetic, conveys the spirit of the music much better: one has only to go to the *Théâtre-Italien* and to our good concerts to see this. Some of our *directeurs d'orchestre* have imagined a method that seems to me even more vicious than that of the baton: it consists of holding in the hand a violin that is not used, and of beating time with the bow: this frail stick does not even have the energy of the baton, and does nothing but vaguely mark time in the air. I do not understand why a man, having some spirit, does not pulverise many bows during one evening following this method. Without speaking of what happens in foreign countries,

Mestrino, Bruni, La Houssay, Blasius et Grasset ont toujours conduit avec le violon, et ce sont les meilleurs chefs qu'on puisse citer parmi nous.⁵

Mestrino, Bruni, La Houssay, Blasius and Grasset have always conducted with the violin, and they are the best *chefs d'orchestre* among us that we can cite.

It is interesting to note that Fétis did not call his preference for the Italian practice an older, more reliable method. He merely refers to it as the preferable alternative.⁶

D. Kern Holoman has shown that the two traditions, conducting with the baton and conducting with the violin, coexisted in Paris during the middle third of the nineteenth century, but while various *chefs d'orchestre* led concerts and operas for certain periods at the Théâtre-Italien, baton conducting was the norm at the prestigious Opéra.⁷

The Parisian journal *L'Illustration* began publication in 1843. In its third issue (18 March) an engraving of the final scene of Halévy's *Charles VI* demonstrates the now fully entrenched method of conducting at the Opéra. The conductor, positioned in the orchestra at the edge of the stage, leads with a baton with the orchestra at his back also facing the stage,⁸ as seen in illustration 1. Two weeks later, *L'Illustration* published an engraving of a scene from the second act of *Don Pasquale* as performed at the Théâtre-Italien. Here, too, there is a conductor with a baton, but at his left shoulder a violinist is either standing or seated on a level higher than the rest of the orchestra, facing away from the stage, as in illustration 2. We do not know if this person would have been called the *violino principale* or the *violino di spalla* [violinist at the shoulder]. The *violino di spalla* was the player in many Italian houses who was second in command to the *violino principale*, and as we shall see, led the performances in the absence of the *violino principale*.⁹ This single

5. François-Joseph Fétis, "De l'exécution musicale," *Revue musicale*, Tome 2, vol. 2, 577-83. I would like to thank Diane Cloutier of the Center for Studies in Nineteenth-Century Music at the University of Maryland in College Park for bringing several references on conducting in the *Revue musicale* to my attention.

6. Note the reviews by Fétis of concert performances conducted by François-Antoine Habeneck, where his use of the violin is preferred over his use of the baton, which he is constrained to use at the Opéra (Fétis, "Régénération de l'école royale de musique," *Revue musicale*, Tome 3, vol. 3 ([Mars] 1828): 145-49. Later reviews praise his use of the baton at the Opéra.

7. D. Kern Holoman, "The Emergence of the Orchestral Conductor in Paris in the 1830s," *Music in Paris in the Eighteen-Thirties*, vol. 4, edited by Peter Bloom (Stuyvesant, N.Y., 1987), 387-430.

8. H. Robert Cohen, *Les Gravures musicales dans "L'Illustration"; 1843-1899*, vol. 1, 1843-1863 (Québec, 1983), 2 [3b]. I would like to thank Professor Cohen for his generosity in facilitating the reproductions from *L'Illustration*.

9. *Ibid.*, 6 [5c].

engraving indicates that the Italian tradition of leading the orchestra with the violin had not been completely abandoned at the Théâtre-Italien.

Conductors who led with a baton were not necessarily unknown in Italy. *L'Illustration* published an engraving of a concert given in Turin, the most French of Italian cities. This view of a musical evening at the *Accademia filodrammatica* shows the orchestra on stage with the conductor in front of them leading with a baton and facing the audience,¹⁰ as may be observed in illustration 3. We must bear in mind that these *soirées musicales* were one-evening affairs unlike the many repetitions of a production known in the opera house, and that the traditions of these two kinds of music-making were very different. The entrenchment of the *violino principale* at the Italian Theater in Paris was still evident in 1850 when *L'Illustration* published a caricature of the *maestro di capella* of the theater, reproduced in illustration 4. The picture of a tired old violinist waving his bow and keeping time with his foot was probably not intended to be complimentary.¹¹ Productions of Italian operas outside of Italy did not necessarily follow Italian customs. *L'Illustration* described Castle Garden in New York as the Italian Theater, as seen in illustration 5. The interior view shows the north-European practice of having a conductor lead with a baton and a prompter in the prompter's box,¹² as in illustration 6. This practice is also seen in views published in *L'Illustration of the Grand-Théâtre* in St. Petersburg.¹³ Italian *direttori* whose careers developed outside of Italy were more likely to follow the north-European method as seen in an engraving of Costa directing *Semiramide*, which was published in the *Illustrated London News* on April 10, 1847 (see illustration 7).¹⁴

One piece of evidence that shows one experienced conductor in Italy leading operas with a baton relates to the practice used in St. Petersburg. On 9 May 1854 Federico Ricci, better known today for having collaborated with his brother Luigi in composing comic operas, wrote to Tito Ricordi. Giovanni Ricordi had died over a year earlier (March 15, 1853), and Ricci opened his letter to Tito Ricordi in offering his condolences and attempting to smooth over the fact that it had taken him over a year to express them. Ricci's letter appears to be a response to a note from Tito Ricordi enquiring after the composer's activities. Ricci related his experiences in St. Petersburg as follows:

10. Ibid., 51 [76B].

11. Ibid., 213 [404Q].

12. Ibid., 245 [444C & 444D].

13. Ibid., 245 [323A & 234B].

14. Reproduced from *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (vol. 11, p. 160), by courtesy of the Board of Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

Illustration 1

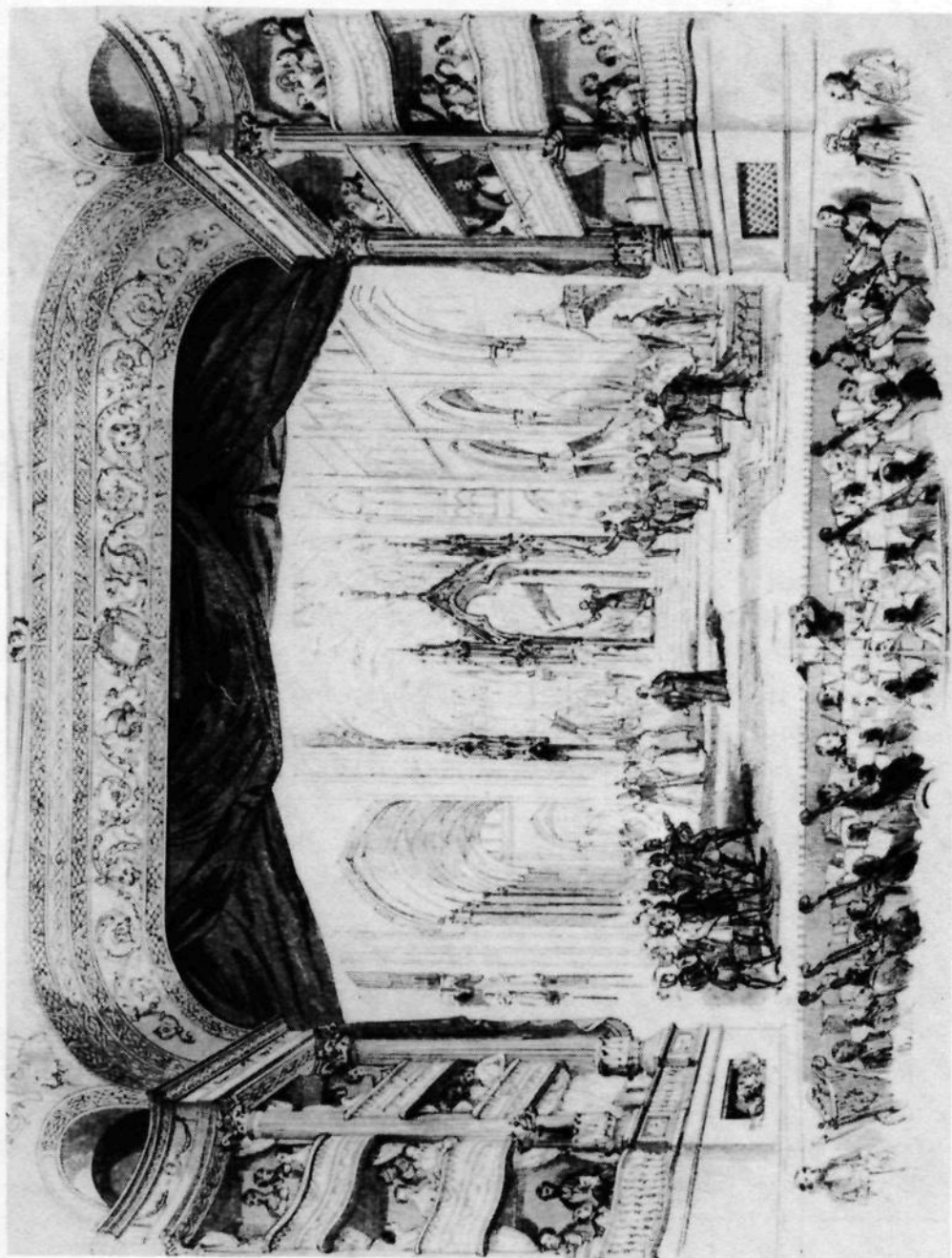


Illustration 2

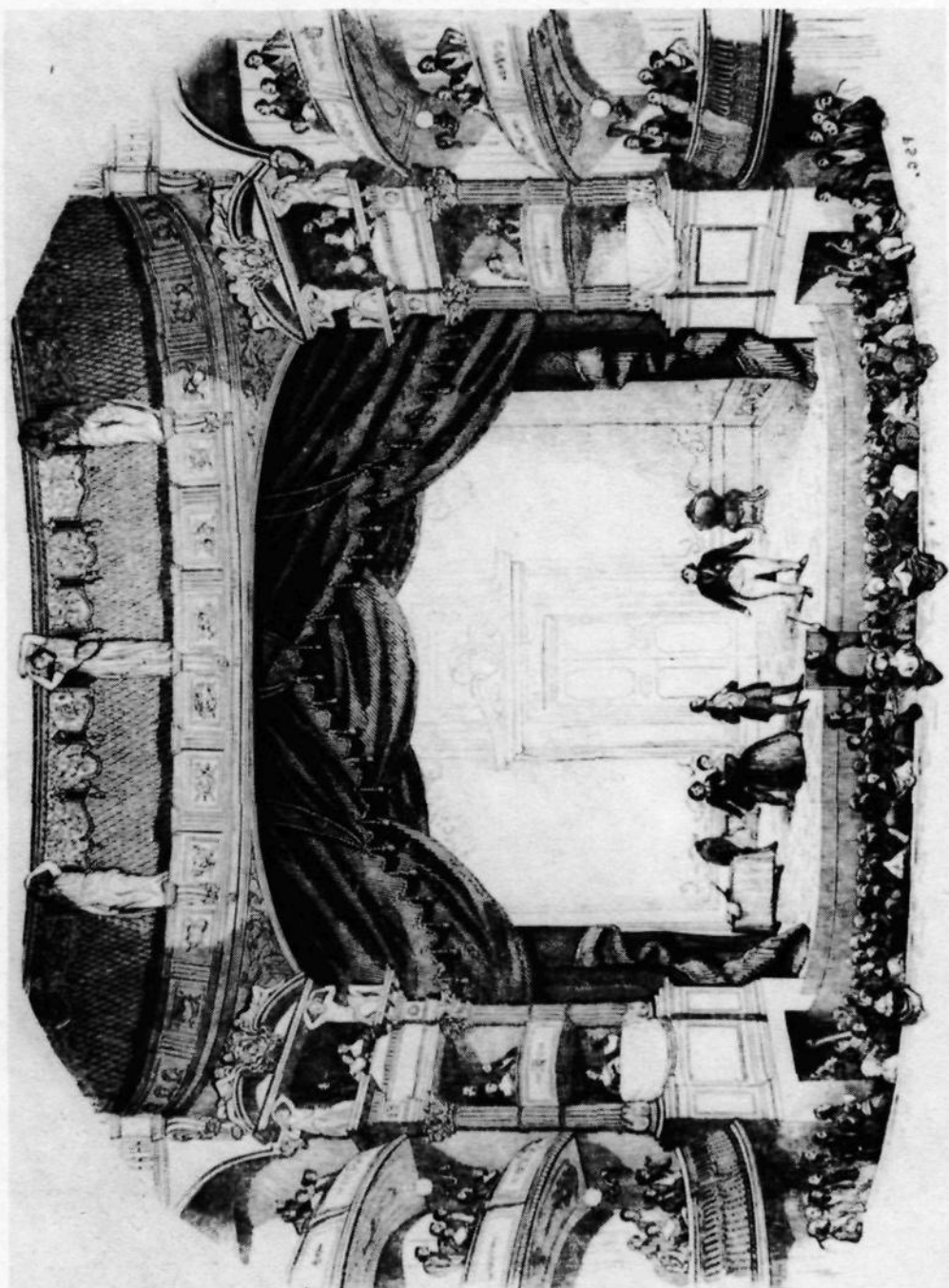
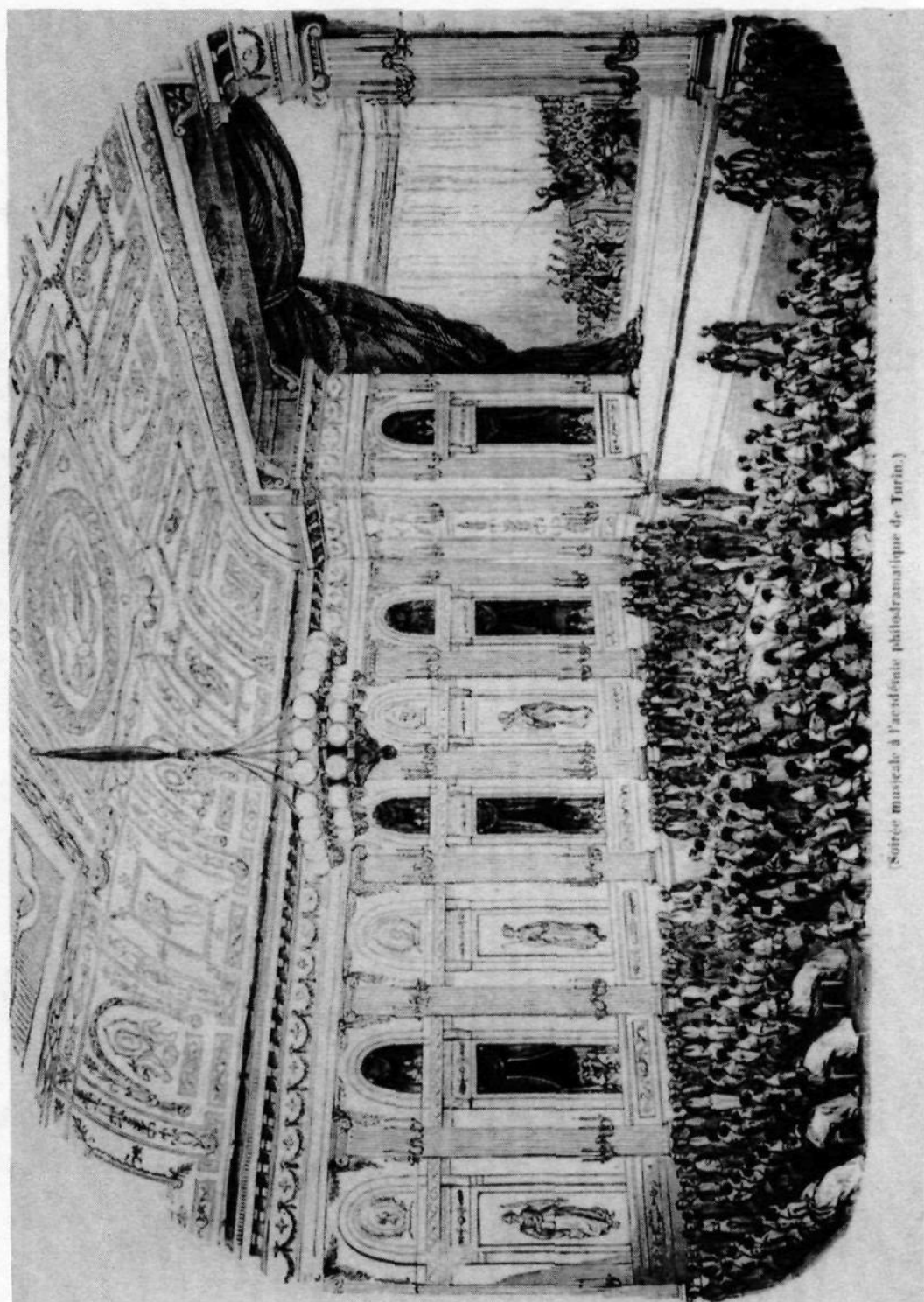


Illustration 3



(Sortie musicale à l'Académie philodramatique de Turin.)

Illustration 4

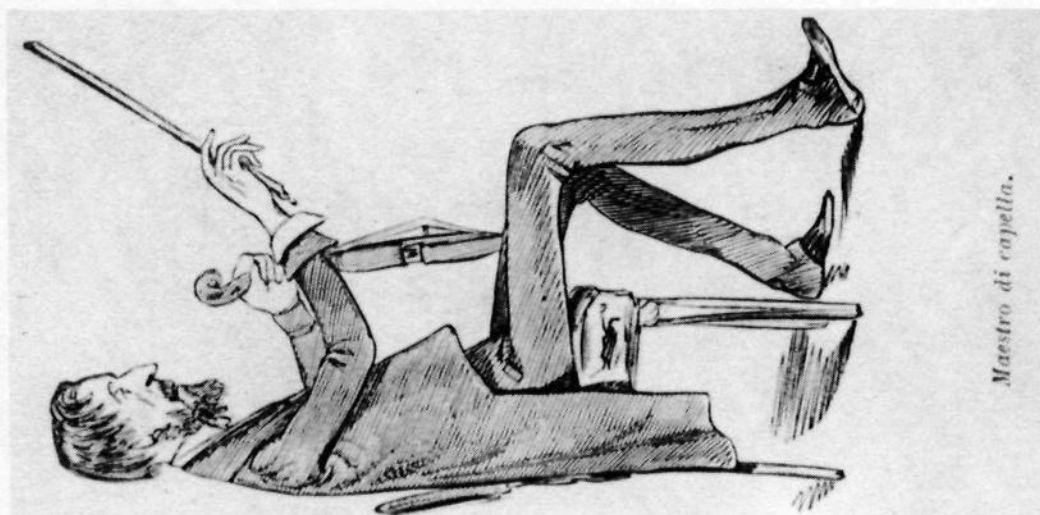
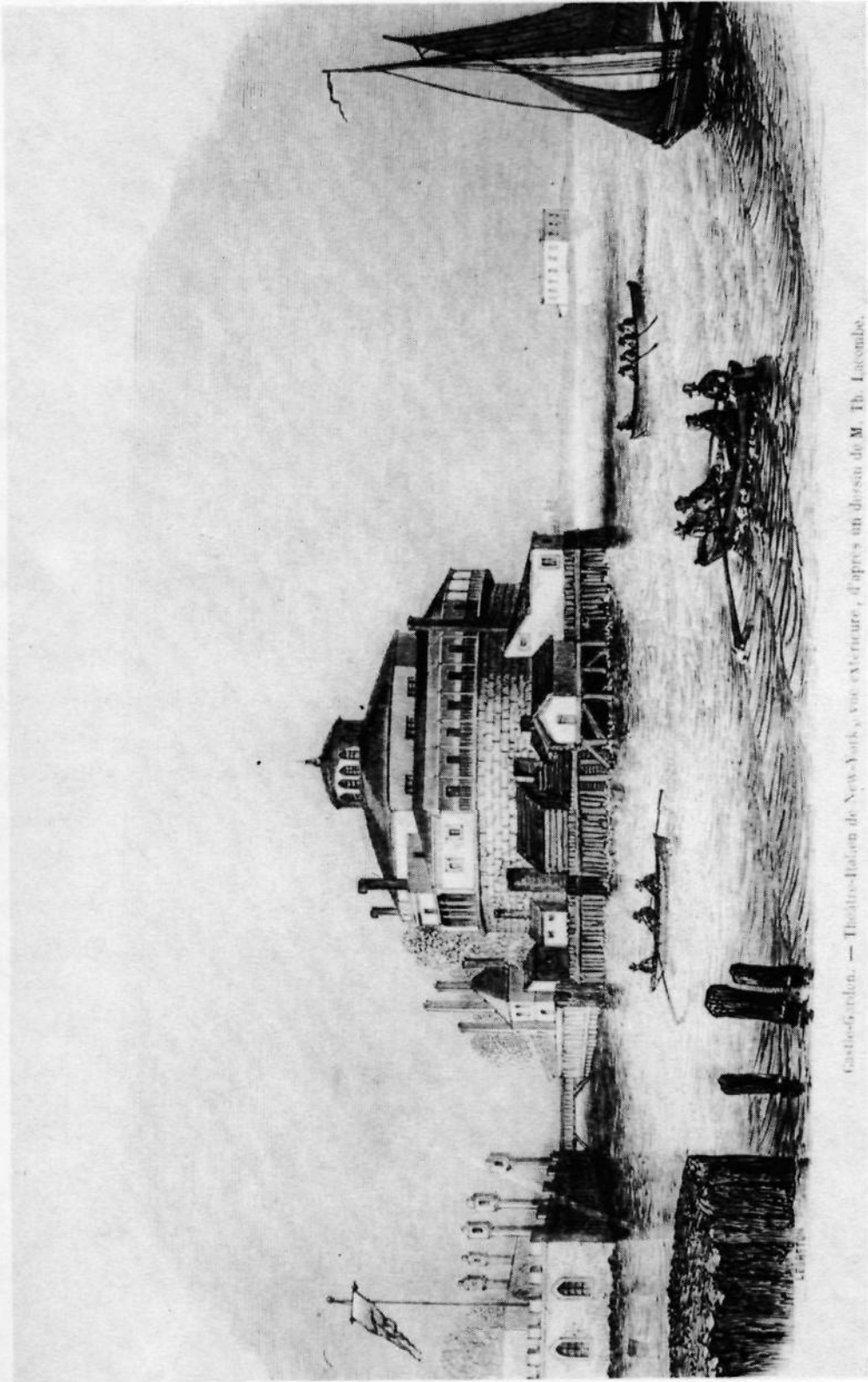


Illustration 5



Castles Garden. — Theatre-Italian de New-York y vue extérieure, d'après un dessin de M. Th. Lacombe.

Illustration 6

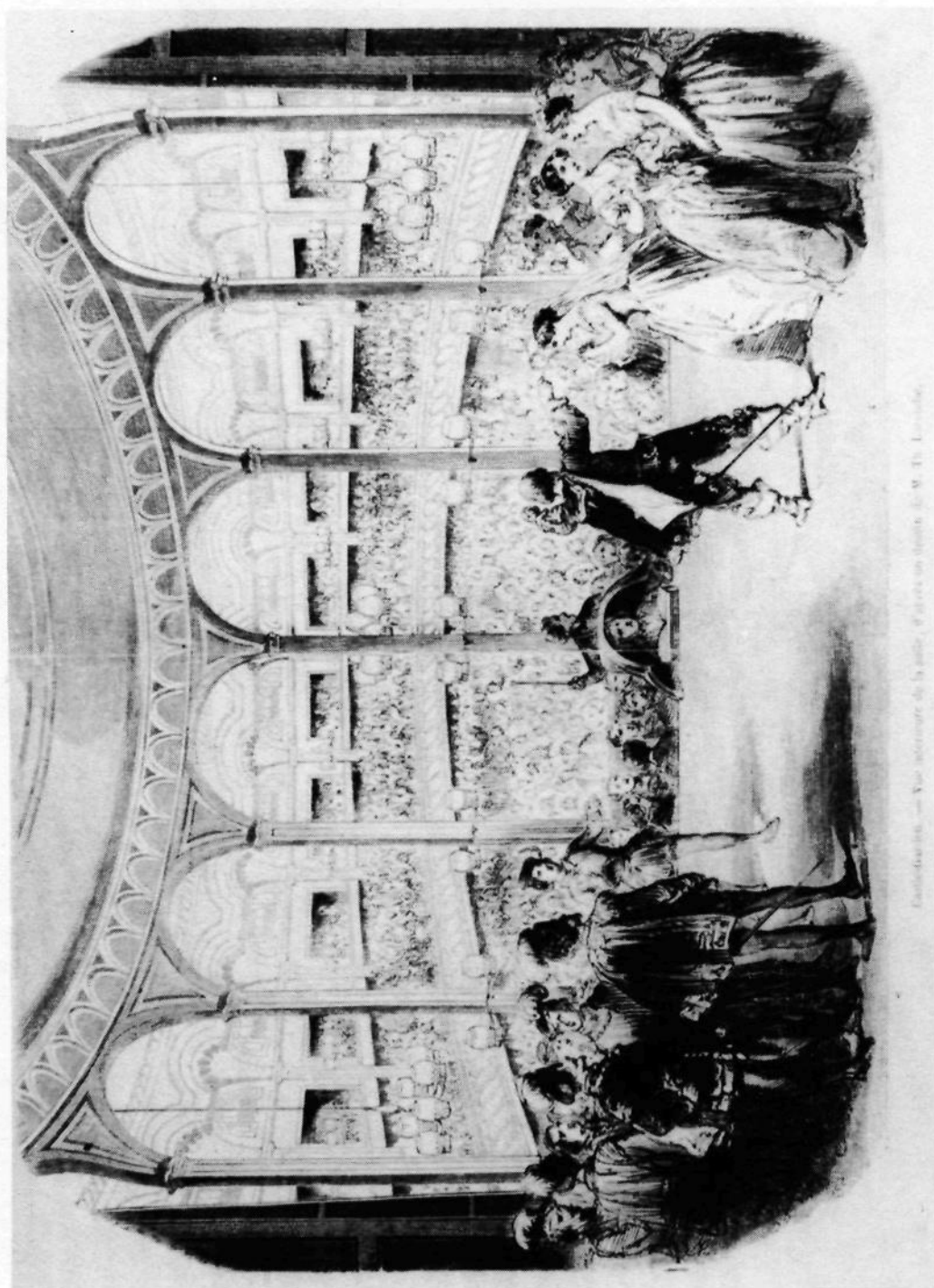
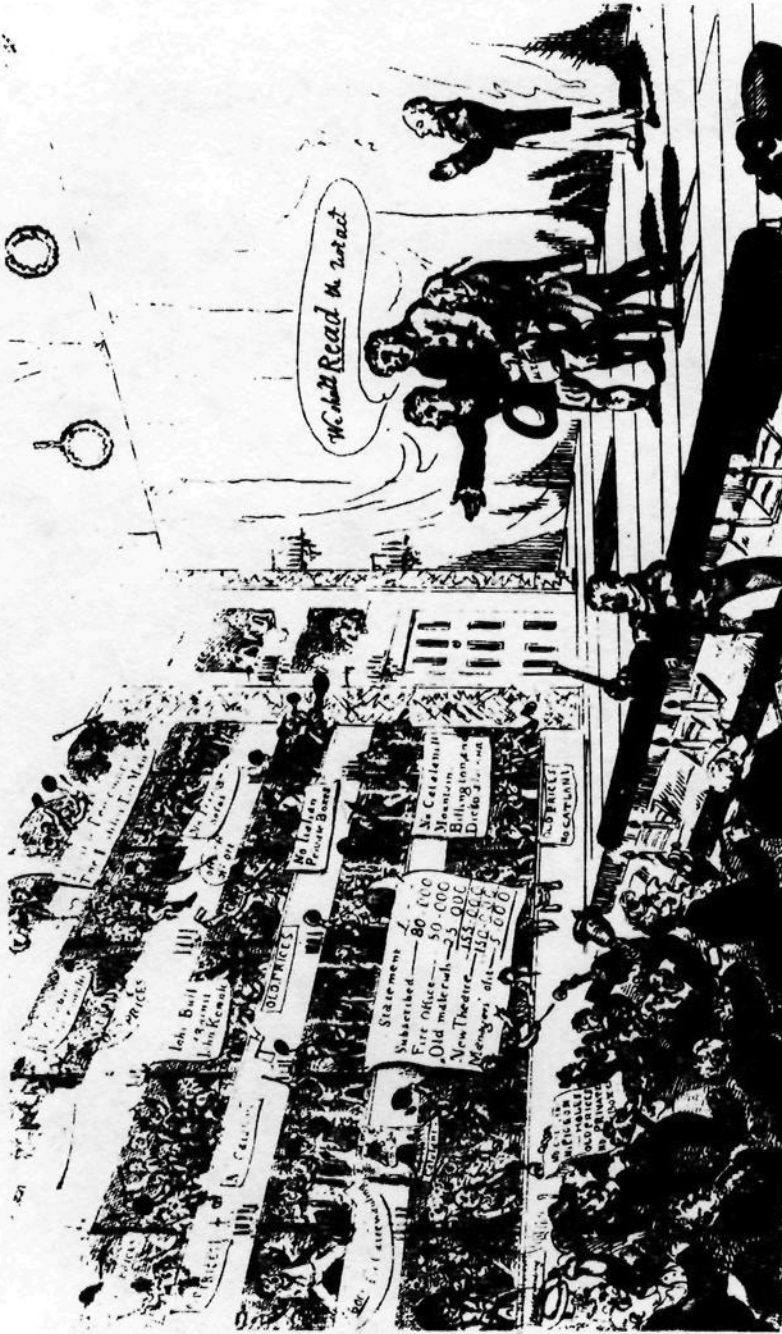


Illustration 7



ACTING MAGISTRATES committing themselves being their first appearance on this stage as performed at the
National Theatre Covent Garden Nov^r 24 1843

[. . .] Fin dall'anno scorso ebbi la carica di *Chef d'orchestre* al Teatro Imperiale di Pietroburgo, carica che mi è stata confermata per altri tre anni, e poi ci resterò finché voglio, perchè, tu sai che una volta che si ha la fortuna d'incontrare in quei paesi si ci resta fino a che si vuole. Il M.o Cavas è rimasto al suo posto: Egli particolarmente ha il titolo di lo *Registeur*. E' lui che distribuisce agli attori le parti che devono fare. Lui fa anche le prove al Cembalo delle Opere. Quelle poi d'Orchestra sono di mia mansione, come pure secondo l'uso della Germania io diriggo in Orchestra con la bacchetta tutte le rappresentazioni. Eccoti detto quanto domandi sul mio nuovo impiego. Facenda che ho accettato assai volentieri, perchè mi rende più che mi rendeva lo scrivere Opere [. . .] I-Mric.¹⁵

[. . .] Since last year I've had the post of *chef d'orchestre* at the Imperial Theater of St. Petersburg, a post that has been conferred on me for another three years, after which I'll stay as long as I want, because, as you know, once you have the fortune of success in those countries you can stay as long as you like. Maestro Cavas has remained at his position: in particular he has the title of *registeur*. He's the one who assigns the actors the parts that they must do. He also leads the keyboard rehearsals for the operas. Then those for the orchestra are my task. Also, according to German practice, I direct all of the performances in the orchestra with the baton. Here then is everything said that you asked me about my new job. Something that I very gladly accepted, because I earn more than I earned writing operas [. . .]

The *registeur* corresponds to the *maestro concertatore* of the Italian tradition. This position was known as the *maestro al cembalo* at the beginning of the century. The division of labor between the *violino principale*, whose main charge was the orchestra, and the *maestro concertatore*, who trained the singers, had the potential of causing conflict. In many theaters they shared the responsibility of directing, a practice described by Charles Santley, who wrote in his memoirs about the 1865-66 season at La Scala.

In his article "Verdi and the Contemporary Italian Scene" Julian Budden writes of the importance of the rise of the "professional conductor" who eventually dislodged "the prima donna from her long-held pride of place."¹⁶ This was accomplished in part by combining in one person the role of the *maestro concertatore* with that of the *violino principale*. Angelo Mariani played an important role in this development, a point his contemporaries noticed and appreciated. In a series of six articles on the

15. Correspondence preserved in the archives of G. Ricordi & C., S.p.a. in Milan, Italy; hereafter referred to as I-Mric. It is organized in chronological files for each author. My thanks to Sig.ra Mima Guastoni for giving me access to this documentation and to Sig.ra Luciana Pestalozza for facilitating my research.

16. In *The Verdi Companion*, edited by William Weaver and Martin Chusid (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1979), 96-97.

biography of Mariani, published in the *Gazzeta musicale di Milano* in 1867, Antonio Ghislanzoni refers to Mariani as both *maestro concertatore* and *direttore d'orchestra*. In the fourth article Ghislanzoni points out that Mariani was the first to combine the two roles in Italy and that in doing so he "taught by example the best method for achieving, in large musical productions, a true unity of conception."¹⁷

Extant correspondence in the Ricordi archives shows that Mariani knew of the articles about him and even supplied some information, but Ghislanzoni also spoke with first-hand knowledge of Mariani's career. In 1847 while the future librettist of *Aida* was pursuing a career as a baritone, he performed at the Teatro Carcano in Milan under the direction of Mariani. A new opera by Fontana, *I Baccanti*, had been commissioned, but because of the intrigues of the prima donna, the company did not rehearse the opera thoroughly enough before they were required to perform it. On the day that the first performance was scheduled, Ghislanzoni sent a note to the impresario declaring that he would not appear in *I Baccanti* with so few rehearsals. He knew that a replacement could not be found on such short notice, that failure to perform the required opera would be a source of embarrassment to the local government, and that Count Bolza, the local magistrate appointed by the Austrian government, would send the police to find him and constrain him to perform. Ghislanzoni went into hiding and circulated word of the imbroglio, thereby filling the house with Italian partisans. When the management finally admitted that *I Baccanti* would not be performed, the theater erupted into a demonstration against Austria and Count Bolza in particular. At the last minute, they substituted *Nabucco* for the new opera, further fueling the patriotic sentiment of the public. Much of the credit for the success of this performance went to Mariani, who led with such fervor and enthusiasm that as a consequence his name became well known as the preeminent *direttore d'orchestra* in Italy. The success allowed him to demand greater fees and greater control over all aspects of productions.

After this incident, Mariani's career took him to Copenhagen and to Constantinople, where his fame as a conductor and composer of chamber music grew. In 1852, he accepted the permanent post of *direttore d'orchestra* at the Teatro Carlo Felice in Genoa where he built one of the finest orchestras in Italy. Even though he must have come into contact with the northern tradition of conducting with a baton

17. "[...] insegnasse coll'esempio il miglior mezzo per ottenere, nelle grandi esecuzioni musicali, una vera unità di concetto." *Gazzetta musicale di Milano*, 22, no. 34 (25 agosto 1867), 266-67.

during his travels, Mariani continued to lead the orchestra with a violin in hand. In a review of a performance of *La Traviata* at the Carlo Felice in January 1855, the *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* remarked on the quality of the chorus and orchestra:¹⁸

[...] Toccando dell'esecuzione in generale, vanno lodati i cori e l'orchestra principalmente che eseguì col massimo impegno, ottimamente guidata dall'abilissimo arco dell'egregio Mariani [...]

[...] Touching on the performance in general, praises go to the chorus and primarily to the orchestra that performed with the greatest diligence, excellently guided by the very capable bow of the distinguished Mariani. [...]

One of the most important collaborations relating to the development of the role of the conductor was between Mariani and Verdi during preparation for the first production of *Aroldo*. When Verdi transformed *Steffelio* into his twenty-second opera, a completely new fourth act comprised the largest single body of newly composed music. Within this act a *burrasca* or storm arises with a boat on the lake carrying two principal characters, Mina and Egberto. The chorus cries about the fate of the boat, which finally arrives on shore with a broken mast and torn sail. The similarity with the opening scene of *Otello* is too noticeable to go unobserved, and its roots go back to the storm of the final act of *Rigoletto*. Budden has called it "Verdi's most striking piece of orchestral virtuosity to date,"¹⁹ and even though this evaluation may be arguable, it is certainly a fascinating piece, demonstrating Verdi's skills in orchestration.

Aroldo, Act IV

Burrasca

(It is night. The moon that had risen during the prayer is covered by large clouds; the wind whistles and disturbs the lake. Mountaineers and women enter.)

VOICES

(far off)

Al lago.

To the lake.

18. I wish to thank Martin Chusid for bringing this reference to my attention.

19. Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi*, vol. 2, *Il Trovatore* to *La Forza del destino* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 353.

OTHERS

(elsewhere)

Al lago.

To the lake.

OTHERS

(closer)

Al lago

To the lake.

(The storm breaks out. The sky is torn by lightning: the heavy crackling of thunderbolts is heard.)

CHORUS

Maina a poppa.

The stern is going under.

FIRST GROUP

A te, a prora. . .

Here, tie to the bow. . .

SECOND GROUP

Tira. . . forte.

Pull. . . strongly.

CHORUS

Gran Dio, pietà di
loro! . . Gran Dio li salva! ecc.

Great God, mercy on them. . . Great God
save them! etc.

(After several attempts by the people pulling on ropes, a half-shattered boat appears, its sails torn. In it are two boatmen, MINA and EGBERTO.)

Approda! . . è salva! . .
Lode al Signor!

It is righting itself! . . It's saved! . . Praise
to God!

(The tempest has grown calm; the voyagers step ashore)

The audible icons of a storm enter one at a time, lightning played by the woodwinds, groaning wind by the second violins (rather than the more imaginative vocal presentation in *Rigoletto*), distant thunder by the lower strings, raindrops by the first violins. The populace notice a boat in danger as the storm gathers steam. A nearby bolt of lightning, represented by a flourish in the brass, followed by roaring thunder, announce the full fury of the storm. The chorus throws a life line to the boat in distress, then prays for the boat's safety. Chromatic passages in the brass accompany the effort on stage of trying to pull the boat ashore with the ropes. The chorus continues to wail until the boat rights itself and arrives at the shore. The storm ends.

Verdi had difficulty in scoring this passage demonstrated by the numerous smudges and corrections reported to be in the autograph.²⁰ These changes reportedly occurred during the orchestra rehearsals, according to an anecdote related by Eugenio Checchi in the 1926 edition of his book *Verdi*.

Mariani was rehearsing part of the *burrasca* over and over again, striving for a particular effect, when Verdi went up to him and suggested that he pass on to the remainder of the act; Mariani reluctantly consented. Later he asked Verdi for an explanation. Verdi assured him that he intended no criticism of the players or of Mariani himself. "But," he added, "surely you must have noticed that the scoring is at fault. Tomorrow evening I promise to let you have the passage scored afresh."²¹

In addition to the spirit of cooperation between composer and conductor, an important aspect in the evolution of the role of the conductor concerns the performance materials in use for this production. Once the music was finished and the performances had begun, Ricordi became anxious over the arrival of the autograph score in Milan. Because the physical possession of an autograph score had legal implications, the publisher frequently went to extremes to insure its safe transport. In this case he had asked the composer to bring it with him upon his return from Rimini, but Mariani maintained that he needed to keep it for the duration of his stay. He wrote to Ricordi on August 16, 1857:

20. Ibid.

21. Op. cit. (Florence, 1926), 142-43, as quoted by Budden, 353.

[...] Avrò bisogno di tenere qui la detta partitura fino alla fine della stagione che sarà il giorno 25 cor; ed abbenchè Verdi mi abbia mostrato quella lettera dove tu lo preghi di portar seco detta partitura, io ti dico che assolutamente me è necessita di tenerla qui per la semplice ragione che l'adopero per la direzione; se ne volessi far di meno non saprei di quale parte servirmi, che il *principale* ne fa uso il primo violino cosidetto di *spalla*. — [...] I-Mric.

[...] I will need to keep here said score until the end of the season, which will be the twenty-fifth of this month; and although Verdi showed me the letter where you ask him to bring said score with him, I tell you that it is absolutely necessary for me to keep it here for the simple reason that I use it for direction; if I had to do without it I wouldn't know which part to use, as the *principale* is used by the first violin, so called *di spalla*. — [...]

Use of the full score during a performance emphasizes the complete control of all details that Mariani had taken in his role of *maestro concertatore-direttore d'orchestra*. Although directing with a baton is not explicitly mentioned in any of the documents I have examined, one wonders how the conductor could manage the direction of the performance with a violin in hand with the frequent page turns necessitated by the use of the autograph score.

The stature of the *direttore d'orchestra* and his second in command is illustrated in a letter Mariani wrote to Girolamo Cerri, one of Ricordi's associates, after he returned to Genoa. The opera he refers to is a comedy by Pedrotti:

[...] L'opera *Tutti in maschera* andò benone e la seconda sera presi io la direzione perchè a dir vero (in confidenza) il mio amico *Spalla* è nato per tutt'altro che per fare il *Direttore*. [...] I-Mric.

[...] The opera *Tutti in maschera* went very well and the second evening I took over the direction, because to tell the truth (in confidence) my friend *Spalla* was made for anything except to be *direttore*. [...]

Spalla is not a proper name here, but a clear reference to the *violino di spalla*.

Mariani's next collaboration with Verdi was the production of *Un ballo in maschera* in Bologna during the fall of 1860. On August 23, 1860, the conductor wrote to Ricordi from Genoa to acknowledge the receipt of a copy of the vocal score. These were page proofs he took with him to St. Agata to learn the score from the composer. On September 21 he promised to return the proofs from Bologna with Verdi's corrections:

[...] Le rimanderò quanto prima la completa riduzione per canto e piano forte perchè troverà in essa varie correzioni che Ella avrà la bontà di far praticare sulle lastre. E siccome dette correzioni sono la maggior parte nei numeri del Metronomo che indica i movimenti, bisognerà pure far correggere le partiture e la parte del direttore d'orchestra che già furono copiate. La prevengo pure che nel coro finale secondo. La *Guida* di quelli è esatta, ma le parti sono tutt'ora come fu scritto la prima volta. [...] I-Mric.

[...] I will return as soon as possible the complete reduction for voice and piano because you will find various corrections which you will have the kindness to have entered into the plates. And as said corrections are for the most part in the metronome numbers which indicate the tempos, you must also have the orchestral score and the part for the *direttore d'orchestra* corrected which were already copied. I also warn you that [we should have the changes Verdi made] in the chorus of the second finale [copied into the chorus parts]. The *guida* for those is exact, but the parts are still as they were written the first time. [...]

Changes made by the composer for this production have been discussed previously by Harold Powers. The part for the *direttore d'orchestra* (still called the *violino principale*) was eventually engraved by Ricordi and must have circulated with the other rental materials the publisher prepared for *Un ballo in maschera*. Since Mariani had seen the expediency of conducting from a full score the previous season, it may seem curious that the conductor would admonish Ricordi in the preparation of the *violino principale* part; but now he had the responsibility for all aspects of the production including its success in his absence. Just as his friend *Spalla* in Genoa might have been "made for anything except to be *direttore*," his friend *Spalla* in Bologna might equally have had difficulty stepping into the conductor's place.

Mariani viewed his role as an interpreter of a score, the one person responsible for pulling all of the elements of opera into a cohesive, unified production. After hearing news of the poor production of *Un ballo in maschera* at La Scala, the conductor wrote to Eugenio Tornaghi, another of Ricordi's associates, on January 12, 1862. In this somewhat rambling letter, Mariani commented on the state of affairs in Milan and articulated how he saw himself. After complimenting the intelligence of the public in Milan, Mariani continued:

[. . .]Anzi ti dirò francamente, che non so capire come un pubblico simile possa tollerare le mancanze, che pur si manifestano scandalose, nell'interpretazione musicale, che, lungi dall'essere mediocrissimo, è quasi sempre ordinaria, trasandata, priva affatto di senso artistico e di senso comune. E si che mezzi ve ne sono. I cantanti, volere o non volere, sono quasi sempre i migliori; le seconde parti idem, l'orchestra, non educata alla finezza, ma pure capace di rendere i più potenti e delicati effetti; i cori numerosi, ma privi anche loro di buona scuola. Dire che un teatro con insieme simile, con una dote sonora, frequentato da un pubblico intelligentissimo, non essere in caso di rendere le opere dei nostri più classici maestri colla verità dovuta! — Di chi è la colpa? Questo si dovrebbe indagare, e il Governo, o il Municipio, dovrebbero provvederci. Non basta essere buoni musicisti, strompellatori di note musicali, mestieranti da dozzena. La musica è arte vaga, estremamente poetica, e dove manca la squisitezza del sentire, la scintilla del gusto, del genio e dell'arte, lo scopo è mancato. Dall'artista all'artigiano passa grande differenza, e basta un vero artista per infondere la vita in coloro che sono macchine per natura e che come tali devono solo operare.

[. . .] I'd even frankly say, that I don't understand how such a public can tolerate the deficiencies, and why they don't manifest themselves scandalized by the musical interpretation, that, far from being very mediocre, is almost always ordinary, neglected, completely without artistic sense and common sense. And, yes, there are means. The singers, like it or not, are almost always the best; also the secondary roles, the orchestra, uneducated to refinements, but also capable of rendering the most powerful and delicate effects; the choruses [are] large, but also without good schooling. To say that a theater with such resources, with a sonorous gift, frequented by a very intelligent public, not rendering the operas of our most classical composers with the rightful truth! — Who is to blame? This should be investigated, and the Government, or the City, should provide for it. It's not enough to be good musicians, strummers [trumpeters?] of musical notes, worthless workers. Music is an indistinct art, extremely poetic, and where refinement of listening, the sparkle of taste, the genius, and the art are lacking, the purpose is missing. There is a great difference between an artist and an artisan, and it only takes a true artist to infuse life into those who are machines by nature and as such must only work.

Mio caro Tornaghi: quando non è indovinato il colore dell'opera, quando gli effetti drammatici vengono male interpretati, quando i vaghi colori che devono presentare le voci, gli istrumenti e le masse non sono che eseguiti pel puro valore delle note, allora, credilo, le bellezze di uno spartito non possono essere comprese dal pubblico. Non basta fare tutti i *forti*, tutti i *piano* e tutti i *crescendo*, non basta misurare i tempi col metronomo. Vi è una grande differenza da forte a forte, da piano a piano, da crescendo a crescendo; come un pezzo di musica eseguito nello stesso movimento può presentare colore diverso a seconda dell'accentazione e di quel non so che, che si può far sentire, che si può spiegare all'atto pratico, ma che però non è possibile di potere indicare co' segni musicali. Prima di tutto un'opera bisogna inmedesimarla colla verità dovuta ai cantanti e poi colorirla colle tinte dello strumentale, che così bene sa trattare, fra i compositori italiani, il giustamente celeberrimo Verdi. Talvolta anche da pochi mezzi si può cavare effetti stupendi, ma per ciò ci vuole sopra tutto, squisitezza di gusto in chi trovasi alla direzione. So che il tenore Graziani ha il vizio di allargare tutti i tempi: questo però è difetto che può esser vinto, e basta abituarlo nelle prove all'andamento giusto. Mi ricordo, quando venne a Bologna, che si lamentava della *mia premura*, ma per Dio! lo facevo *andare*, e t'assicuro che colà *andava* bene, e lo vorrei sempre avere pel *Ballo in maschera*, come per altre opere, che so egli canta bene. [...]

My dear Tornaghi: when the color of the opera is not understood, when the dramatic effects and the indistinct colors that the voices must present are poorly performed, when the instruments and the masses are performed only for the simple value of the notes, then, believe me, the beauties of a score cannot be understood by the public. It's not enough to play all the fortes, all the pianos and all the crescendos, it's not enough to measure the tempos with the metronome. There is a great difference from forte to forte, from piano to piano, from crescendo to crescendo. A piece of music performed in the same tempo can present different colors according to the accentuation and that *non so che*, that can be made to sound, that can be explained in the actual act, but is not possible however to indicate with musical signs. First of all the rightful truth of an opera must be absorbed by the singers and then colored with the tints of the instruments, that among Italian composers, the justly celebrated Verdi knows how to handle. Occasionally even with small means stupendous effects can be achieved, but for that it takes above all, refinement of taste in whomever conducts. I know that the tenor Graziani has the vice of slowing all the tempos: this however is a defect that can be overcome, and it's enough to accustom him in the rehearsals to the right movement. I remember, when he came to Bologna, that he complained of my *haste*, but by God! I made him *move*, and I assure you that there he *moved* well, and I would always want to have him for *Ballo in maschera*, as well as other operas, since I know that he sings well. [...]

Povero *Coro e quartetto finale secondo!* . . . è tanto bello! . . .
 eppure mi si dice che le risate sardoniche, messe così bene dal Verdi in bocca al coro, siano eseguite con tale esagerazione da venire disgusto. A Bologna, e qui a Genova, quello fu un pezzo sempre applauditissimo, e veniva ascoltato con vero interesse. Tu sai, o mio Tornaghi, che dal sublime al ridicolo si passa con molta facilità.

Ti ripeto, quando un'opera non è indovinata dalle parti cantanti, l'orchestra non può far nulla, e per quanto suoni bene a nulla gioverà. È errore più sommo quello di avere in un teatro un maestro concertatore e un direttore d'orchestra. Se il secondo deve star soggetto al primo, non produrrà che l'effetto di una macchina: è un brutto affidare ad una macchina tutto l'edifizio di un'opera in musica! Se è un vero direttore, deve anche dirigere e regolare tutto, allora si avrà unità nella esecuzione, nel concetto, e nella interpretazione; senza questo non sarà che sconcerto e caso ogni volta che si indovina, se pure è possibile d'indovinarla. Ma così facevano i nostri padri, dicono gli imbecilli, e così bisognerà fare finché in certi teatri antiquati esisteranno antiquati artigiani. [. . .] I-Mric.

Poor *Coro e quartetto finale secondo!* . . . it's so beautiful! . . .
 and yet they tell me that the sardonic laughter, set so well by Verdi in the chorus, was performed with such exaggeration to provoke disgust. In Bologna, and here in Genoa, that piece was always much applauded, and it was heard with real interest. You know, my Tornaghi, that to go from the sublime to the ridiculous is very easy.

I repeat to you, when opera is not understood by the singers, the orchestra can do nothing, and no matter how well they play it's of no use. It is the greatest mistake to have in one theater a *maestro concertatore* and a *direttore d'orchestra*. If the second must be subjected to the first, nothing will be produced but the effect of a machine: it's ugly to entrust a machine with all the structure of an opera! If he is a real *direttore*, he must also direct and regulate everything, then there will be unity in the execution, in the conception, and in the interpretation; without this there is nothing but bewilderment or luck each time it is understood, if it is even possible to understand it. But that's how our fathers did it, say the imbeciles, and thus must we do until in certain antiquated theaters, antiquated artisans will exist. [. . .]

Preparations for the first performance of *Don Carlos* in Italy demonstrate the attention Mariani gave to every detail of the production. Correspondence with Ricordi about the Bologna production began in June 1867. Finding the right singers was the first order of business. By early July Mariani had reviewed the vocal score with Verdi and promised to send the publisher the corrections they found. This copy was sent in August, as the conductor began making arrangements for orchestral resources, including a contra-bassoon and a low bell on f-sharp, as well

as seeing to the proper arrangements for the sets and costumes, and filling out the smaller roles in the cast. On October 8 Mariani wrote to Tornaghi asking for extra copies of the vocal score to give to the performers, to Alessandro Antonelli, who was to score the *banda*, and, as we learn from a later letter, to Alessandro Basi, who played the piano for the keyboard rehearsals. The piano rehearsals were going well, and since the orchestra rehearsals had not yet begun, he assured Tornaghi that he kept the full score hidden away. The most pressing matter concerned his obligations in Genoa. Rehearsals were running late in Bologna and he was expected back at the Carlo Felice for their production of *Dinorah*. Since Ricordi held rights for both operas, he asked for advice from Tornaghi and help in finding a replacement for Genoa.

On October 15, Mariani wrote again, stating that the orchestra rehearsals were about to begin, and pleading for help in satisfying all his commitments.

[. . .] Solo un pensiero mi turba. Io lasciai Genova colla preghiera da parte di quel Municipio di ritornarvi il più presto possibile e che avrebbero differita l'apertura della stagione per aspettarmi. Avevo presentata la mia rinuncia a quell'impiego ma non fu accettata. Ricercasi d'accordo dunque che dopo le tre prime rappresentazione del *Don Carlo* vi sarei ritornato, e non potevo fare diversamente, che troppo furono le prove degenerate ch'io ebbe da parte di quella Giunta Municipale. Or bene: il *Don Carlo*, al più presto, potrà andare in iscena da Sabato (a otto) vale a dire il 25 cor: e vi andrà, dico, se tutto sarà perfettamente in ordine. Volendo rimanere qui le prime tre recite mi dovrei fermare per lo meno fino al giorno 30.

[. . .] Only one thought distrubs me. I left Genoa with the request on behalf of that Municipality to return as soon as possible. They would defer the opening of the season to wait for me. I had presented my renunciation of that assignment but it was not accepted. It was then agreed that after the first three performances of *Don Carlo* I would return, and I could not do otherwise, since the signs I had from that *Municipal Junta* had deteriorated. So now: *Don Carlo*, at the earliest, will be able to open on Saturday in eight days, which is to say the twenty-fifth of this month and it will, I say, only if everything is in perfect order. Wishing to remain here for the first three performances, I would have to stay until at least the thirtieth.

La stagione a Genova si deve aprire il 29 cor: si potrà differire tale apertuta cinque o sei giorni, ma se io per cause impreviste non potessi essere libero a quell'epoca, e che dopo aver protratta la prima rappresentazione a Genova del *Dinorah*, non vi potessi essere in quale imbarazzo non si troverebbe quella impresa e il Municipio? Quale responsabilità non incontrerei? Prevedendo tutto ciò (perchè Scalaberni chiamò troppo tardi la compagnia alla piazza) ti dirò anche, che prima di partire da Genova feci sentire, in *confidenza*, al presidente della direzione del Teatro, la possibilità che l'impegno che [ero] ad assumere avesse più tardi ad impedirmi di ritornare in tempo al mio posto, e combinammo anche che qualora avessi conosciuto che si verificasse il caso si dovesse in tempo avvertire e suggerire il modo di ripiegare il meno male possibile. Come artista ti dirò (e stia fra noi) che ritengo necessaria la mia presenza a tutte le rappresentazioni del *Don Carlo*, o per lo meno a più di tre; non so quindi come regolarli. Mi rivolgo a te come amico e come proprietario delle due opere perchè tu voglia darmi un consiglio ed aiutarmi ad uscire da una posizione che ogni giorno mi imbarazza maggiormente. [...] I-Mric.

The season in Genoa should begin on the twenty-ninth of this month. Said opening could be deferred five or six days, but if I, for unforeseen reasons, could not be free at that time, and after having protracted the first performance in Genoa of *Dinorah*, would I not be a source of embarrassment for the management and Municipality? What responsibilities would I encounter? Having foreseen all of this (because Scalaberni called the company to the piazza too late) I will also tell you, that before leaving Genoa I made known, in *confidence*, to the management of the theater the possibility that the job I was about to assume could impede me later on in returning on time to my position, and we also arranged that if I knew that this would be true, they would have to be alerted in time with a suggestion as to how to retrieve the least harm possible. As an artist I will tell you (and this just between us) that I believe my presence is necessary for all the performances of *Don Carlo*, or at least for more than three; therefore I don't know how to regulate myself. I turn to you as a friend and as the owner of both operas so that you will give me some advice and help me to escape from a position that each day embarrasses me more. [...]

From this letter it is clear that up to this time the most important facets of the role of the *maestro concertatore-direttore d'orchestra* were the interpretation, preparation, and direction of the initial performances of an opera production. In Italian houses before this time, once a company had learned their parts and proven their competence in a few performances, the presence of the primary interpreter was not necessarily required, and the direction of individual performances could be entrusted to a subordinate. It took a score as complex as *Don Carlo* to persuade Italy's most important conductor that his presence was needed for at least more than the first three performances.

This concept follows the same general pattern that ruled composer's contracts during the first part of the century. For example, virtually all of Verdi's contracts specified the date he was to arrive, that he would work with the performers, and stay to direct at least the first three performances. It is unclear exactly what directing the first three performances meant in this case, but in general it appears that the composer filled the traditional role of the *maestro-concertatore*, who would have performed most of these duties in the absence of the composer.

One of the most important persons who helped develop the role of the modern conductor of Italian opera from the side of the *maestro-concertatore* was Emanuele Muzio, Verdi's close friend and only acknowledged pupil. As the composer's associate, a local impresario could hire him to stage one of Verdi's operas and hope for a production that would be the next best thing to having the composer himself stage it.

Muzio had been with Verdi and had assisted him in the production of his operas since *I due Foscari*. When Verdi went to Florence for the first production of *Macbeth* in 1847 the season included *Attila*, for which Muzio led the rehearsals.²² At this time he began his correspondence with the Ricordi family and firm which would last until his death on November 27, 1890. This body of well over six hundred letters chronicles the life of this important figure, who conducted performances of Verdi's operas throughout Europe and North America.

One of Muzio's first assignments as a *maestro-concertatore* was in the small town of Lodi.²³ Following the success of *Macbeth* in Florence, Verdi and Muzio traveled north to Paris and London for the first performances of *Jérusalem* and *I masnadieri*. The composer found Paris to be an interesting place to linger, especially since it afforded him the opportunity of becoming reacquainted with Giuseppina Strepponi, who had championed the young Verdi while she was still an important prima donna. It seems more than coincidence that Muzio, who was inseparable from his maestro, found work in Lodi, Strepponi's home town. Of course, this job helped the young pupil to begin developing his career in a way that would take him away from Verdi, and, as we are all aware, Giuseppe and Giuseppina became the two who were inseparable.

While in Lodi, the young *maestro-concertatore* agreed with the impresario of Mantua to go to that city to stage a production of *Macbeth*.

22. *Macbeth Sourcebook*, pp. 43-44.

23. See Muzio's letter to Tito Ricordi, 22 October 1847, I-Mric.

Apparently, however, Muzio did not immediately command the respect of the local musicians. He wrote to Ricordi from Mantua on January 23, 1848:

[...] Ho dovuto anche perdere tempo con questi Maestri qui del paese, perchè non volevano lasciarmi dirigere l'opera, e quando son venuti alla prima prova non erano capaci d'andare avanti, ed allora se ne sono andati e non li ho più visti. [...] I-Mric.

[...] I also had to lose time with these maestri here in the country, because they didn't want to let me direct the opera, and when they came to the first rehearsal they weren't capable of moving forward [with their ideas], and then they left and I haven't seen them since. [...]

Muzio continued to make a living by preparing reductions of Verdi's music for Ricordi and traveling to various cities to stage Verdi's operas. In 1850 he went to Brussels to stage Italian operas. He was able to promote himself as a composer and staged his own *Giovanna la pazza*. On June 10, 1850 Muzio wrote to Ricordi about the success of his work:

[...] non v'hanno gentilezze che non mi siano usate dal publico e dai professori di musica. Sono stato richiamato più volte alla scena, e quando dovevo negli *entre acte* lasciare l'orchestra non sapeva in qual maniera potermene allontanare.

[...] There were no kindnesses that were not exercised toward me by the public and by the members of the orchestra. I was called many times to the stage, and when I had to leave the orchestra during the *entracte*, I didn't know how to distance myself.

L'orchestra riunita m'ha usato una gentilezza la più squisita e la più delicata che si potesse fare. L'hanno regalato una magnifica *bacchetta* in argento per dirigere sormontata dal busto in argento del mio Maestro Verdi, lavorato molto bene e con molta arte. [...] I-Mric.

The whole orchestra showed me the most exquisite and the most tender kindness that is possible. They gave me a magnificent silver *baton* for directing surmounted by a silver bust of my maestro Verdi, wrought very well and with much skill. [...]

Muzio returned to Italy, and even though he never achieved this kind of success with his own operas, his career as an important conductor of Verdi's operas flourished. Exactly how he directed performances in Italy may not be explicitly stated, but it is clear from this letter that he was accustomed to the habits of the north and was acquainted with the *baton*, a symbol of authority especially for someone who did not lead with a violin.

As a conductor, Muzio traveled extensively throughout north America staging many first performances of Italian operas, especially Verdi's, in American cities. These included the first production of *Aida* in New York in 1874. During the 1870s Muzio had worked in many cities, but seemed most settled in Paris even though he did not conduct as frequently in France as he did elsewhere. He did however conduct at the Théâtre-Italien in 1876 when Escudier, Verdi's most important Parisian publisher, controlled the house.

Aida was taking the rest of the musical world by storm, but negotiations for a production at the *Opéra* in Paris had bogged down, perhaps because of Verdi's reluctance to return to the house where he had experienced so many problems with *Don Carlos*. In 1876 with Escudier as impresario and Muzio conducting, Verdi agreed to the production at the Théâtre-Italien. Correspondence with Ricordi shows that the long Italian tradition of the part for the *violino principale* was not completely dead. Muzio wrote on April 26, 1876:

Non ti scrissi dopo il successo d'*Aida* che non ha precedenti perchè Escudier ti telegrafò. Ora sarei a farti una preghiera di mandarmi una parte di *Violino principale* del *Aida* se l'hai poichè il violino di spalla Mr. Portheau mi tormenta ogni giorno per averlo; anzi lo chiese anche a Verdi il quale mi disse di scriverti. Mr. Portheau teme o che Verdi od io si ammaliamo (nessuno dei due ne ha voglia) e che essendo obbligato a dirigere non lo potrebbe sulla partitura d'orchestra. I-Mric.

I didn't write to you after the success of *Aida*, which is without precedent, because Escudier will send you a telegram. Now I would like to ask you a favor, to send me a part for *violino principale* for *Aida* if you have it, because the *violino di spalla* Mr. Portheau torments me every day in order to have it; he even also asked Verdi, who told me to write to you. Mr. Portheau fears that both Verdi and I will become ill and, being required to direct, he couldn't from the orchestral score.

Four days later Muzio wrote to Ricordi again to request a part for the *violino principale*. This letter also explains at least part of the role Verdi had in the preparation of this production and the state of Muzio's health which probably prompted the first violinist's fears.

Ho ricevuto la tua car.ma lettera e mi duole che tu sia ammalato; anch'io lo fui, e gravemente, e per quindici giorni fui obbligato al letto; e Verdi quando arrivò mi trovò infermo, fortunatamente ebbi un buon medico il quale colle sue cure mi preservò dal tuffo [*sic*]. Quando lasciai la stanza per la prima volta, la mia prima visita fu per Verdi; Madame Stolz era presente, e quando mi vide così scarmo e pallido si mise a piangere; e la prima volta che fui sui *boulevards* i miei amici non mi conobbero tant'era cambiato. Ho avuta una convalescenza corta, e poi feci le prove d'orchestra d'*Aida* sino all'antiprova generale della quale Verdi assunse la direzione. Ieri sera poi cominciai a dirigere e Verdi fu contento e lo esprime in publico sulla scena presente quasi tutto il personale del teatro. Questo per *te solo*, non per la Gazzetta. [. . .]

Ti prego di far fare il *Violino Principale* e appena pronto me lo spedirai caricandone la spesa a Mr. L. Escudier. Il primo Violino, come mi diceva anche Verdi, non sarebbe mai capace di dirigere l'*Aida*, ma che vuoi per ogni eventualità nel *inverno prossimo* amo di accontentarlo. [. . .] I-Mric.

I recieved your kindest letter and it pains me that you are ill; I was too, and gravely, for fifteen days I was restricted to bed; when Verdi arrived he found me infirm. Fortunately I had a good doctor who, with his treatments, kept me from the plunge. When I left my room for the first time, my first visit was to Verdi; Madame Stolz was present, and when she saw me so thin and pale she started to cry. The first time I was on the *boulevards* my friends didn't know me I was so changed. I had a short convalescence, and then I led the orchestra rehearsals for *Aida* up to the first dress rehearsal (*antiprova generale*), for which Verdi assumed the direction. Then last evening I began to direct, and Verdi was content and expressed it in public on the stage with almost all of the theater personnel present. This for *you alone*, not for the *Gazzetta*. [. . .]

I beg you to have the *violino principale* part made and as soon as it's ready you will send it to me, assigning the cost to Mr. L. Escudier. The first violin, as Verdi also said to me, could never direct *Aida*, but what do you want, for every eventuality, for *next winter*, I would like to satisfy him. [. . .]

The modern conductor for Italian opera developed in many stages. The unique practice of placing the conductor between the orchestra and the audience distinguished in part the Italian theaters from the rest of the western world. This custom, now universally accepted as the most logical placement for the direction of nineteenth-century opera, can be seen as an Italian contribution to modern conducting. The reorganization of the division of labor in Italian theaters with the concentration of authority in one person represents an important step forward in the development of the conductor. This developed in the smaller houses and flourished because talented leaders demonstrated its effectiveness. Composers, especially Verdi, came to demand it in the large houses in order to have

their operas performed. The technique of conducting probably remained highly individual until relatively late in the century, with the possibility of violin conducting and baton conducting existing side by side for a period of time. With the growing complexity of the scores and the subsequent need to have all parts in front of the leader, those who led with the violin in hand probably found it expedient to pick up the baton as soon as they undertook the responsibility of performing these scores.