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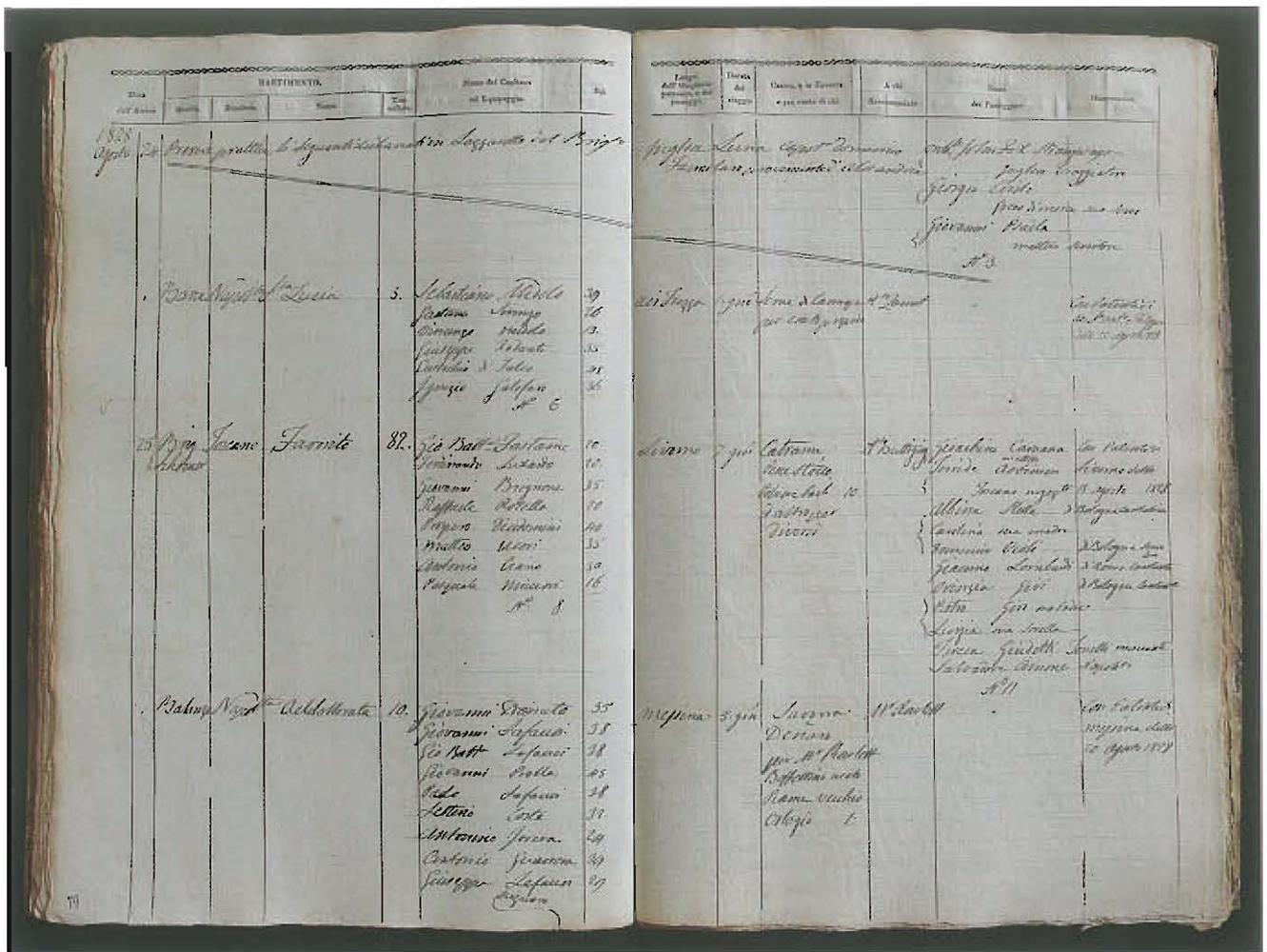
Fig. 1
The interior of the Manoel Theatre, at one time also referred to as *Teatro Reale* or *Real Teatro di Malta* (Photo: Daniel Cilia)

Opera music and the Risorgimento connection: The story of Giacomo Lombardi

In this article **Simon Mercieca** refers to the work of Emiliana Renna on the Italian singer Giacomo Lombardi, and highlights the musician's association with the *Teatro Reale di Malta*

In the first half of the nineteenth century, Malta began to search for new musical expressions. While conventional music inspired by Italian opera remained, composers now had to compromise by renouncing some forms of eighteenth-century opera music, in particular the *recitativo secco* and the practice of *continuo*, in favour of new harmonic styles mostly influenced by the compositions of Giovanni Pacini, Giuseppe Saverio Mercadante, and, even more, Vincenzo Bellini and Gaetano Donizetti. Perhaps Malta is a little bit more fortunate when it comes to the study of material regarding nineteenth-century music on the Island, because the data is bountiful when compared to that available for previous centuries. Recent works, in particular those by Paul Xuereb¹ and Alfred G. Miceli,² have opened a window on the development of secular music in Malta. Moreover, new light on the local music scene is now also being shed by foreign researchers.

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The Italian opera singer and composer Giacomo Lombardi was recently the subject of a dissertation³ and a study by Emiliana Renna. This work was entitled *Giacomo Lombardi: la versatilità musicale al servizio dell'Unità*,⁴ and referred to the connection that Lombardi had with our Island. Unfortunately, the figure of Lombardi was not known in Malta and, similar to Michele Mazziotti's case (about which I have written in another article published in *Treasures of Malta* in 2010),⁵ his involvement in Malta's music scene escaped the attention of both Pietro Paolo Castagna and Giovanni Faure, who gave us a list of those singers who made a contribution locally in the nineteenth century, in which Lombardi is not included. Lombardi's name does not feature either in the records of the Manoel Theatre compiled by Joseph Bruno, or in those by Gino Muscat Azzopardi.

Giacomo Lombardi was born in Parma in 1808 and died in Naples in 1877.⁶ He studied at the *Conservatorio San Pietro a Majella* of Naples, where he was taught pianoforte by Francesco Lanza, singing by Andrea Nozzari and composition by Nicola Antonio Zingarelli and Pietro Raimondi. After completing his studies, possessing a decent voice, he took to the stage for a number of years as a tenor, before retiring and settling down in Naples to teach singing

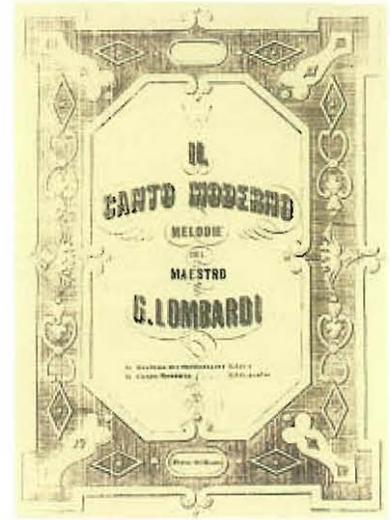
and to set up a choral group.⁷ Yet, Lombardi is also important in Italy for his political affiliations. He became a Mazzinian and a staunch supporter of the unification of Italy. This fact opens a new dimension on the study of music in Malta, which is the use of music for political purposes - a hitherto unexplored aspect.

In 1825, when still seventeen, Lombardi made his debut at the *Teatro San Carlo* in Naples. In the summer of that same year he appeared at Como and then at Bergamo, performing there during carnival. In the autumn of 1826 he was in Venice,⁸ where he sang in Giacomo Rossini's opera *Tancredi* at the *Teatro San Luca*.⁹ In 1827 he sang in Rossini's *Semiramide*, and in Sampieri's *Pompeo in Siria* at the *Teatro Comunale* of Bologna. In the summer of that same year, he sang at Ferrara.

According to Alessandro Loreto,¹⁰ Lombardi was in Malta between 1828 and 1829, working as a tenor.¹¹ His presence is also mentioned in another published Italian source,¹² but this information can also be confirmed by the local customs registers conserved at the National Archives in Rabat. In fact, these registers give the exact date of Lombardi's arrival: he came to Malta on the 25th August 1828 on a brig schooner that had originally left from Leghorn. The brig

opposite: Fig. 2
Local customs register listing
Giacomo Lombardi as arriving in
Malta on the 25th August 1828
(Courtesy of the National Archives
of Malta, Rabat)

right: Fig. 3
Frontispiece of *Il Canto Moderno*
(*Conservatorio di Musica San Pietro
a Majella, Naples*)



transported, among other things, *catrame* (tar), *baccala'* (dried codfish), 10 barrels of gunpowder and one barrel of wine. There were other passengers, two coming from Leghorn; Giocchino Caruana was described as Maltese and Terride Robinson as a businessman from Tuscany. Their names were followed by a list of musicians and singers: Albina Stella from Bologna, listed as a singer travelling to Malta with her mother Carolina. Also from Bologna came Domenico Violi, described as *scholar* (school boy). Giacomo Lombardi was described as a singer from Rome (*di Roma cantante*). He was accompanied by Orinzia Givi, described as being from Bologna, who was also a singer. With her came her father, Pietro Givi, and her sister Lucrezia. On the same boat were Teresa Giudorti Tonelli and Salvatore Amore, described as a Neapolitan musician (*musicante Napoliti*).¹³

Among all these persons, the best-known individual in Malta is Salvatore Amore, who by that date had already produced a number of operas in Malta. The earliest reference goes back to the opera season of 1821-22.¹⁴ It is highly likely that this group of singers was brought over from Italy to Malta by Amore himself. In fact, he had won the tender for the running of the Manoel Theatre for the seasons of 1828-29 and 1829-30. Most of the operas produced in 1828-29 were works by Rossini, which was a repertoire that would eventually prove the making of one of these singers, who became famous for her singing of Rossini's roles. This was the soprano Albina Stella, who belonged to the *Accademia Filarmonica* of Bologna. During this particular year (1828-29), the following operas of Rossini were produced at the Manoel Theatre: *Aureliano in Palmira*, *L'Italiana in Algeri*, *Tancredi*, *La Cenerentola* and *Corradino*.¹⁵ At the time, Stella was considered a very good soprano to the extent that eventually she would cross the Atlantic to sing in America. She is recorded to have participated in Rossini's opera *La Cenerentola*, singing the title role, when it was produced in New York at the Richmond Hill Theatre in 1832.¹⁶ Despite a negative review in the *New York Mirror: A Weekly Journal*,

Devoted to Literature and the Fine Arts,¹⁷ the performance was a great success and the Italian company producing this work succeeded in attracting the best of New York's society, to the extent that this performance was staged 32 times.¹⁸ Albina Stella continued her career in America where, according to Giovanni Ermenegildo Schiavo, she taught music at the Cincinnati College of Music in New York (1834).¹⁹ In 1835, she is recorded performing at the Niblo's Old Theatre, where she was acclaimed as one of the leading female opera singers on Broadway.²⁰

Giacomo Lombardi left Malta at the end of the opera season, proceeding to Syracuse, where he is recorded singing in the role of 'first tenor' at the *Teatro Santa Lucia* for the season of 1829-30.²¹ However, in the following years, Lombardi was to abandon his singing career in favour of dedicating himself to composition. During the music season of 1838-39, he is again found in Malta, working at the *Teatro Reale* (the Manoel Theatre) in his new role of composer and producer of operas. At least the existing biographies recount that his stay was related to his new position as composer and director of opera; in 1838 he premiered in Malta his opera *Il Capitano ed il tutore*.²² This work was followed by another opera, *Il primo navigatore*, also premiered in Malta in 1839.²³ Besides these two works, Lombardi is known to have written over twenty-three masses, some of which were for orchestra. He also wrote manuals entitled *Elementi di linguaggio musicale*, *Metodo per apprendere la giusta durata delle figure*, *Il Canto moderno* and *L'amico dei principianti*.

Thanks to research conducted by the musicologist Luisa Cosi,²⁴ we know that the production of these operas earned Lombardi the reputation of being the Director of *Teatro di Malta*. This title poses a tricky question. In the 1830s the Manoel Theatre was hired out to impresarios for a year or two at a time, but his name does not appear among those running the theatre. Most probably his role was that of '*direttore di palcoscenico*', a nomenclature used at the time to refer to producers of operas and other musical representations.



Fig. 4
First page of *Scherzo per pianoforte*
sull'opera *L'Africana* di Mayerbeer
(Conservatorio di Musica San Pietro
a Majella, Naples)

Lombardi's presence in Malta during this period is recorded in at least three Italian specialized music dictionaries. The entries refer to Giacomo Lombardi working at the *Teatro Reale* around 1838-39, which means that he must have been attached in some way or other to the Manoel Theatre, then known as the *Teatro Reale*.²⁵ The Royal Opera House was inaugurated much later in 1866. Unfortunately, this second stay in Malta cannot be confirmed by customs registers, as the one covering the last months of 1838 is missing, and his name does not feature in the other two surviving registers for this particular year.

It is highly probable that Lombardi's second visit to Malta was linked to the Italian Risorgimento. Malta had a number of Italian political exiles during this period, and the presence of patriotic musicians in Malta cannot be excluded. It is quite possible that Giacomo Lombardi was escaping political persecution, since he was known to be in favour of *l'unita' d'Italia*. Whatever the case, once he left Malta Lombardi is reputed to have been a Mazzinian patriot and a member of *Giovane Italia*. At least these pro-Risorgimento leanings became overt after 1848.²⁶

The 1848 constitution in Italy was short-lived, but these events happened under the direct influence of Giuseppe Mazzini. Lombardi hailed the new constitution by composing the hymn *La pubblica esultanza*, written by the staunch Mazzinian, Bonaventura Forleo. This and other songs, including a duet for two sopranos and pianoforte entitled *L'Esiliato*, were performed at the *Teatro Mancarella* (known also as *Il Teatro Nuovo*) of Lecce during the festivities celebrating the revolution. Lombardi's name continued to be linked to the city of Lecce, where in 1853²⁷ he composed the opera *Elfrida di Salerno* based on the libretto of Beniamino Rossi, which he staged and directed without any problems with the authorities of the *Teatro Nuovo*. Moreover, the composer was often found engaged in conducting orchestras that played an important role in diffusing the ideals of the Risorgimento.

Giacomo Lombardi returned to Naples in 1855, dedicating himself exclusively to the teaching of singing, and in 1865 he founded a choral society known as *Corale Sebezia*, whose name shows particular similarity to that of the Masonic Lodge *Sebezia*, founded in Naples that same year. For the rest, the Mazzinian spirit of the composer finally 'sang' freely on the evening of the 6th September 1861. On this day, Lombardi, together with other choir-masters, directed the patriotic cantata entitled *Dall'Etna al Vesuvio*, with the lyrics of Giovanni Florenzano and music by Giorgio Miceli, Enrico Bevignani and Pasquale Traverso. This celebrated Garibaldi's victories from the landing at Marsala to his entrance in Naples, which had taken place on the 7th September 1860.²⁸

This Mazzinian affiliation helps explain the lack of information about the musical activities of Lombardi in Malta. Malta abounds with information about the music that was being played in our churches, as the Church has preserved its rich musical heritage. The same cannot be said for the State. Malta lacked a coherent policy towards its 'secular' music, with the result that most of the information in this field seems to have been lost. Few scores of secular music from this period have survived, and those that have are mostly through bequests made by private individuals or families to the different Church archives. Even historical information, such as theatre records for this period, is a rarity. This explains why the work that is now being conducted by foreign scholars is extremely important for the history of secular music in Malta.

Notes

- 1 Paul Xuereb, *The Manoel Theatre: a short history* (Malta: Friends of the Manoel Theatre, 1994).
- 2 Alfred G. Miceli, *L-Astaxja ta' l-Opera F'Malta* (1631-1866), (Malta: Pin, 1999).
- 3 Emiliana Renna, *Collezione di dodici "Mater e Communitarie" del M° Giacomo Lombardi ad uso dei salotti leccesi di primo Ottocento* (Dissertation, Università del Salento, Lecce, 2008-2009).
- 4 Emiliana Renna, *Giacomo Lombardi: la versatilità musicale al servizio dell'Unità*, atti del Convegno sul Mezzogiorno e costruzione dello Stato unitario - I linguaggi risorgimentali per la Nazione (Cavallino [LE], 2011).
- 5 Simon Mercieca, 'Italian Opera Singers in Malta in the middle of the eighteenth century', *Treasures of Malta*, Vol. XVII, No. 1 (Christmas 2010), 73-80.
- 6 Renna, op. cit. (2011).
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Gaspare Nello Vetro, *Dizionario della musica e dei musicisti dei territori del ducato di Parma e Piacenza dalle origini al 1950*, (Roma-Milano: Editrice Bibliografica - Addenda, 1998), under the name Giacomo Lombardi.
- 9 Emilia Zanetti, *Enciclopedia dello Spettacolo*, Vol. 1 (Roma: Le Maschere, 1954), under the name Giacomo Lombardi.
- 10 Alessandro Loreto, *Musica e Musicisti a Siracusa nel XIX secolo*, Collana "Sicilia nuova e antica" (Palermo: Istituto Siciliano Studi Politici ed Economici, 1998), 124.
- 11 *Conni storici intorno alle lettere, invenzioni, arti, commercio e spettacoli teatrali per l'anno 1828 al 1829*, tomo IX (Bologna, Sassi), 203.
- 12 Eadem.
- 13 National Archives of Malta, Rabat, CUP 18. Doc. No. 27, ff. 79v-80r.
- 14 Miceli, op. cit., 27.
- 15 Ibid., 34-35.
- 16 Digitised copy of the theatre programme accessed via Google Books on 14th November 2011.
- 17 Digitised copy accessed via Google Books on 14th November 2011.
- 18 http://www.archive.org/stream/memorialhistoryo04wilsuoft/memorialhistoryo04wilsuoft_djvu.txt (accessed on 14th November 2011).
- 19 Giovanni Ermenegildo Schiavo, *Italian-American History* (New York: Arno Press, 1975).
- 20 <http://wirednewyork.com/forum/showthread.php?v=7266> (accessed on 14th November 2011).
- 21 Loreto, op. cit., 124. The opera season was in the hands of Gioacchino Andreani. Lombardi sang in *Gabriella di Vergy* (libretto by Leone Andrea Tottola, and the music of Michele Carafa), *Misanthropia e pentimento* (music by Carlo Conti), *Otto mesi in due ore, ossia gli esiliati in Siberia* (libretto of Domenico Gilardoni, music of Gaetano Donizetti), *Il Pirata* (Felice Romani-Vincenzo Bellini), *Paolo e Virginia* (Giuseppe Maria Diodati-Pietro Carlo Guglielmi) and *La gelosia corvetta, ossia Mariti aprite gli occhi* (Tottola-Carafa).
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Luisa Così, *Giardini stellati e cieli fioriti. Tradizione sacra e produzione musicale a Gallipoli dal XVI al XIX secolo* (Lecce: Conte, 1993), 'Il progresso dell'inciviltimento ovvero la banda della Guardia Urbana di Lecce (1835-1860) nella tradizione bandistica di Terra d'Otranto', in *L'Idomeno*, I/1998, 351-389. 'La costruzione del virtuoso: Pedagogia e "industrie musicali"', in *L'infanzia e le sue storie in Terra d'Otranto*, a cura di A. Semeraro (Lecce: Conte, 1999), 89-102. 'La musica nella piccola Napoli in Storia di Lecce. Dagli Spagnoli all'Unità', a cura di B. Pellegrino (Bari: Laterza, 1996), 'Sorelle musica. I "sacri concerti" di S. Chiara di Nardò nella tradizione musicale delle clarisse di Terra d'Otranto', in *Miscellanea Francescana Salentina*, 10-11/1994-1995.
- 25 *Dizionario enciclopedico universale della musica e dei musicisti diretto da Alberto Bassi* (Torino: UTET, 1986), le biografie, Vol. IV, 485-486 and Nello Vetro, op. cit.
- 26 Nicola Bernardini, Lecce nel 1848 - *Figure, documenti ed episodi della rivoluzione* (Lecce: Carlo Luigi Bortone, 1913), 24-28, and Saverio La Sorsa, *Gli avvenimenti del 1848 in Terra D'Otranto: Narrazione storico-critica* (Milano: Dante Alighieri, 1911), 92.
- 27 Carlo Schmidl, *Dizionario universale dei musicisti* (Milano: Casa Editrice Gonzogno, 1938).
- 28 http://linguaggiarisorgimentali.unisalento.it/documenti/cat_view/35-specifiche-abstract (accessed on 14th November 2011)