



**GUILLAUME  
TELL**



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**Rossini Opera Festival 2013**

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Opéra en Quatre Actes  
di **Victor-Joseph-Étienne de Jouy**  
e **Hippolyte-Louis-Florent Bis**

Musica di  
**Gioachino Rossini**

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Personnages

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**Guillaume Tell**, Suisse conjuré  
**Arnold Melcthal**, Suisse conjuré  
**Walter Furst**, Suisse conjuré  
**Melcthal**, père d'Arnold  
**Jemmy**, fils de Guillaume Tell  
**Gesler**, gouverneur des cantons de Schwitz et d'Uri  
**Rodolphe**, chef des archers de Gesler  
**Ruodi**, pêcheur  
**Leuthold**, berger  
**Mathilde**, princesse de la maison de Hapsbourg,  
destinée au gouvernement de la Suisse  
**Hedwige**, femme de Guillaume Tell  
**Un chasseur**

Trois Fiancés et leurs compagnes, Paysans et Paysannes  
des trois cantons, Chevaliers allemands, Pages,  
Dames d'honneur de la princesse, Chasseurs, Gardes  
de Gesler, Soldats autrichiens, Tyroliens et Tyroliennes

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*Prima rappresentazione*  
*Parigi, Théâtre de l'Académie Royale de Musique*  
*3 agosto 1829*

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## One in a Thousand

### **Paris and the Académie Royale de Musique**

*If we are to understand the events involved in the composing, the publishing and the subsequent success in the theatre of so symbolic an opera as Guillaume Tell, we shall have to consider the way the opera houses of France, and in particular the Académie Royale de Musique (commonly referred to as the Opéra), were managed: it was very different from the Italian system. In the countless Italian theatres of Rossini's day, which devoured unheard-of quantities of new operas, the composer was in the main answerable to the impresario alone and to the company of singers engaged for the season in which his opera was to be produced. Above and beyond this his one obligation was to respect the principles laid down by the censorship in each of the different states, and they obviously interfered only in the initial phases of submitting a draft of the libretto for approval. Once its first season of performances had come to an end, the opera, if it had been successful, was free to try its luck in other theatres and other cities, where it would be adapted to the needs and the whims of each individual company without the composer's having to bother with it, or even being able to interfere at all. It obviously happened that if the composer were in town, he might be invited to make the necessary adaptations himself: in this case he might write some new numbers, making the work more suited to the new cast. This manner of procedure, redolent of craftsmen in the strictest meaning of the word, and which*

*had been the order of the day for all musicians – Italian and otherwise – whether in writing for the theatre or in supplying sacred music for use in churches with a regular musical tradition, rarely took into consideration the possibility that anyone might want to change his music because of any second thoughts about trying to improve it from an aesthetic point of view. As a result there are very few cases in which authentic revisions made by Rossini after the first performances of any of his operas (that is, changes written out by Rossini himself) show either an explicit or even an implicit intention of improving the former version. In this very limited group of compositions we might perhaps include the Ferrara version of Tancredi, which introduced the famous tragic ending together with other changes that were certainly made at the request of the new cast, but which decidedly improve the internal architecture of the opera. Rossini was probably inspired to change to a tragic ending by his friendship with Luigi Lechi, a man of letters, but it met with scant success and was rapidly discarded. When he staged Matilde di Shabran for the first time in Naples, Rossini re-wrote those pieces that for lack of time he had asked an illustrious colleague of his, Giovanni Pacini, to compose for him for the première of the opera in Rome, and we might attribute this to a sudden flaring-up of amour propre. This was also an exception to the rule, because various other operas of Rossini's were going the rounds of the theatres including pieces that had been tacked on by anonymous collaborators, and the*

composer never bothered to replace them with definitive pieces of his own writing. This manner of working easily explains why Rossini, after the first year or two in which he himself might travel round to present his operas in their first performances in important cities, showed a total lack of interest (at least so far as composing additional numbers was concerned) in his own works, which none the less continued in their triumphant career on all the leading stages of Europe. In 1826 not even Giuditta Pasta succeeded in beguiling him into writing her an extra aria to sing in the Finale of *Tancredi*, which was performed everywhere with all sorts of interpolations by all sorts of composers. It is also significant that although Rossini did not give the Diva a new aria, he did write her embellishments for the aria by Nicolini that she introduced in place of the original one. One might say that this represents a singular lack of amour propre, but it also demonstrates a lack of interest in mere commercial exploitation. In those days Italian composers enjoyed absolutely no royalties on revivals of their works, so nobody could ever have imagined the sublime effrontery of such a great "artisan" of twentieth-century music as Igor Stravinskij, who set about re-orchestrating or re-organizing all his earliest compositions when they threatened to fall into the public domain, and did not bother to conceal the fact that his sole aim was to ensure continued payments of royalties that otherwise would have dried up (obviously, this procedure could very easily yield artistic results of the highest class). This was the Italian way of doing things that Rossini left behind him on the day after the first performance of *Semiramide* in 1823, when he girded up his loins to face a new career in Paris.

The French musical market and

the situation in the French theatres, especially the Opéra, was altogether different. Here the repertoire was drawn up with a view to fulfilling an endless and bothersome list of requirements, in the hope of satisfying the wildly differing demands of important people, and also starting from the basic assumption that every new production would remain a long time in the repertoire and so pay for itself. All this, apart from the reduction in number of possible contracts and various other trials, was not to a composer's disadvantage. In fact, the composer who succeeded in lodging an opera firmly in the repertoire was awarded salary and pension calculated on the number of performances achieved. But, in Paris, who took the place of that colourful, possibly coarse but on the whole kind-hearted figure, the Italian impresario? It is impossible to define who or what took his place, or reduce it to a simple entity like "The King" or his delegate, the Minister of the Royal Household. The fact is that the theatres were governed by a shrewd and demanding policy which missed no detail, from the choice of the libretti to be set to music to the building of the scenery, the composition of the music and every tiny step in its progress towards actual performance. It operated directly, but also through working groups or committees (such as the jury de lecture which approved or rejected the poetical texts to be set to music) within which various pressure groups would in their turn make their presence felt (the local composers were not the least of these). As would happen with increasing frequency later on, equally strong pressures would be brought to bear by the press, by economic potentates and by rival clans, making it essential for the composer to be able to count on support in high places or to have himself reached a strong posi-

tion in the internal administration of the theatres. Though this situation was in an evolutionary phase when Rossini arrived in Paris (whilst he was there a new committee was set up, the comité de mise en scène which supervised the staging), it was of course nothing new, but it went back in time considerably and was a symptom of the “Royal” origins of the Académie. Given the prestige of the Opéra and its widely-recognized importance, such a manner of conducting its affairs led to endless consequences not limited to any particular epoch. In fact, everyone knows how decisive was the influence exerted by opposing factions in the famous quarrel between the admirers of Gluck and Piccinni when the eighteenth century was at its height. (Few people, however, would commit themselves by admitting that the conclusive victory of Gluck has led to the over-estimation of one composer at the expense of the other, the effects of which are still felt today. In the present writer’s opinion, a close inspection of real musical values will not substantiate the glib decision of history).

We need not be at all surprised, then, by the difficulties experienced by individual composers in their relations with the Opéra, or by the real exasperation that a composer might be goaded to. In the stormy cauldron of concessions and prohibitions, in the continual bubbling up of requests and second thoughts, masterpieces that had been worked on for years, like *Le Duc d’Albe* or *Jeanne la folle* by Donizetti, might drown or be burnt out, careers might be wrecked and all sorts of delusions might be created. Everyone knows the humiliations and worries that Wagner was subjected to over *Tannhäuser* and over the libretto to the *Flying Dutchman* (the libretto was accepted but the job of setting it to music was assigned to another com-

poser); Verdi was quite right when, in his wrath, he coined the happy term “grande boutique” to describe the Opéra. Composers like Spontini and Meyerbeer, who were cut out of the same cloth as the members of the administration (that is, for them it was natural to be constantly assailed by doubts and second thoughts), fared much better at the Opéra. Both of them succeeded in getting the theatre administration in the palm of their hands, the former by his frequently renewed and tortuous pretensions and with ceaseless corrections to the scores of *Fernand Cortez* and *Olympie*, the latter with his exasperating reluctance to authorize the first performances of his operas, sometimes years after they had been written.

All of this easily explains Rossini’s cautious approach to French opera, a career which began with cancelled projects, the withdrawal of music that had been composed and successfully performed (*Il viaggio a Reims*), continued with re-workings of earlier Italian operas and culminated in only two “definitive” works, *Le Comte Ory* and *Guillaume Tell*. It also explains Rossini’s determination to ratify his definitive contract (or, perhaps, one of his contracts), which, just as if it were an opera destined for production at the Paris Opéra, was subject to continual revision and re-negotiation, to be cast in its final form at last at the same time as, and in close connection with, the première of *Guillaume Tell*. Paradoxically, there turned out to be nothing definitive either in the score or in the contract, since the opera was subjected to further adjustments of differing nature and importance, and as for the contract, which was supposedly of lifelong duration, little over a year later it crumpled beneath the sad blow of the July Revolution. In any case it would be wrong to restrict this parallel between crea-

itive activity and contractual activity to the merely financial side of possible motivation. Rossini (who at certain moments proved capable of being tough almost to the point of blackmail) certainly felt the need to create and to maintain for himself a position of power and prestige so as to make himself strong enough to face up to any kind of pressure. He who would occasionally have to suffer from this was the man who wrote to him on behalf of the administration, that very Vicomte de La Rochefoucauld, Minister of the Royal Household since 1824, in whom Rossini found a fervent admirer and a powerful protector in difficult moments, although in no wise disposed to give up any of his own prerogatives. We know very little of the private relations between the two, but they could be a key to understanding certain aspects of his tormented last days as an opera composer and even of the reasons behind his giving it all up.

### **Avant la première**

The most recent studies and, above all, the preparation of the critical edition of *Guillaume Tell* and the new edition of Rossini's letters have, on the one hand, stripped the ups and downs of the composition of his greatest work of many a legend and inaccuracy, whilst they have also given us rather more precise information about the gestatory period of the work and the vicissitudes it suffered after its first performance. It all began with a libretto by Victor-Joseph-Étienne de Jouy (the poet who had already collaborated with Rossini on the Paris adaptation of *Mosè*) based largely on Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell*. Despite the prolixity of the treatment, the subject was highly suitable to the taste then gaining ground in the Parisian theatres of the day, the day in which grand-opéra was dawning, given the story

dealing with a people's struggle for liberty, and the opportunities it offered for scenic splendour and the re-creation of a spectacular natural setting. When Rossini decided to set it to music (we do not know exactly when, but certainly at least as early as the beginning of 1828) the libretto was already several years old and therefore in need of revision, which, as Jouy was an old man and in precarious health, Hippolyte-Louis-Florent Bis, a dramatist who had recently attracted the attention of audiences, was called upon to furnish. Expectation for the great new French opera of Rossini's ran so high that, whilst the revision of the libretto was still going on, the scenery was already being prepared and the chosen scene-designer, the famous Cicéri, was sent to Switzerland at the administration's expense to get inspiration from the landscape. Meanwhile quotations were hurriedly solicited, for it was hoped to mount the opera by the end of 1828. With regard to the music, Rossini himself must have hoped to finish it by this date, seeing that for a while he encouraged the idea of giving the first Italian performances of it in Parma in the spring of 1829. However, he would scarcely have begun to work on it before having brought out *Le Comte Ory* at the Opéra, the great success of which on 20 August 1828 must have given him the last spurt of encouragement to begin his greatest opera, upon which he started working in the quiet seclusion of Petit-Bourg, the villa he had recently acquired from his friend Aguado. But it was at this very moment that there began, on one side the vicissitudes and on the other the sales mechanism and propaganda all over a work that was very far from being finished. Elizabeth Bartlet, who has edited the critical edition, has been able to shed a great deal of light on this initial, convulsed phase of com-

position. When, at the end of August 1828, a meeting of the comité de mise en scene was summoned to resolve various problems about the staging, Rossini had still not handed in a single page of the score. Likewise, acting merely upon the assumption that he was selling “un ouvrage de la plus grande importance” (a work of major importance), and “celui auquel il [Rossini] attache sa réputation en France” (the one which Rossini intends shall make his name in France), the publisher Troupenas, to whom the composer had granted exclusive printing rights, busied himself in September dealing with his colleague Artaria for the concession of these rights in Germany. In other words, before it had been written *Guillaume Tell* was being described as the composer’s greatest work. Rossini himself took this line when, in November, he declined an invitation to give *Bianca e Falliero* at Parma, announcing:

*No score of mine except William Tell would be worthy of shining in circumstances so bound up with my country’s glory.*

*In turning his back on all his previous works and in sounding this patriotic note, Rossini burnt his boats and beat the clairvoyants to the winning post. It is a remarkable example of prediction, even more so when you consider that there was very little of a concrete nature to go on. In fact, by the end of November Rossini had handed in the skeleton score (that is, the vocal parts only with a mere sketch of the orchestral accompaniment) of Acts One and Two only, and the Opéra copyists began to copy out parts for the singers from this. There had, in fact, been a first hold-up because the drawing-up of the libretto itself was far from complete; quite the reverse, it was having a rough passage. Bis had more or less followed Jouy’s text for*

*the first two acts, limiting his intervention to a few cuts and changes to the poetry and other details. The real problem turned out to be the third, and especially the fourth act. Throughout the whole month of December the jury de lecture and the Vicomte de La Rochefoucauld busied themselves with the problems arising from the desire to cut down the Finale and all the last part of the opera: some episodes would have to be cut and others heightened in order to give more dramatic impact to the whole. A job that naturally fell to Bis, but which went far beyond anything that he had done in Acts One and Two. Since the elderly Jouy reserved the right to withdraw hic libretto (and thus wreck the entire project) everything had to be arranged without hurting his susceptibilities. The Vicomte mediated between the parties with excellent diplomacy and succeeded in convincing Jouy. As a result Bis was given a free hand to subject everything that was left to a more thorough revision. His efforts did, in fact, change the face of the second part of Act Three and, even more, the whole of Act Four. Here, even where some lines and suggestions from the original version were left, the young collaborator’s contribution was fundamental. Many legends have grown up about these backstage vicissitudes, and various other supposed collaborators on the text have been mentioned, among them Armand Marrast and Isaac Adolphe Crémieux (two future opposers of Louis Philippe’s government) who, it is said, helped Rossini, who was unhappy about the oath-taking, to get this famous scene to his liking. As far as can be learned from surviving documents it does not seem that these two men were really involved with the opera, and perhaps the legend, supported by Michotte, was created after the event in an attempt to invent a nobly patriotic origin to this*

key scene which, truth to tell, was already there in Jouy's original text. Likewise, it does not seem that Emile Barateau really had anything to do with it, although Azevedo, among others, names him as a collaborator. On the other hand it seems highly likely, as Miss Bartlet hypothesizes, that Adolphe Nourrit, who created the role, and was not only a great singer but also an educated and cultured man, might have helped Rossini with the versification of another memorable scene, Arnold's aria at the beginning of Act Four. Truth to tell these lines were subjected to considerable modification and reworking even after Rossini had set them to music.

It was only when the libretto had been finally completed that Rossini could think about setting the third and fourth acts to music. This presumably happened in the early months of 1829. Other delays were caused by the preparation of the scenery and by the fact that Laure Cinti-Damoreau, for whom Rossini was writing the role of Mathilde, was now in the late stages of pregnancy. When all attempts to replace the popular favourite had failed, it was decided to await her return to the stage before mounting the opera. However, aside from all these problems relating to the preparation of the opera, the worst delays were due to the negotiations for the renewal of Rossini's contract with the Royal Household, a contract that, as we have seen above, should in theory have assured the composer an income for life. Rossini seemed capable of anything in order to get the most advantageous terms. In February, when the singers had already learned the first two acts and had just received copies of the last two and were about to get down to learning them, Rossini withdrew the parts. Rehearsals were resumed thanks to the Vicomte's interven-

tion, but the composer withdrew the parts again in April. Only after this second manoeuvre did Charles X, on 8 May, sign one of the most favourable contracts ever obtained by a composer. However, not even all this could satisfy the composer, who was determined to wring every possible advantage from his powerful position. In the month of July he succeeded in obtaining, in the face of all precedent, the pension that was awarded to composers who had had three operatic premières staged at the Opéra and which had been performed more than forty times. It had been necessary to overlook the fact that of the three operas named in the application (*Le siège de Corinthe*, *Moïse* and *Le Comte Ory*) two were revisions of works already existing.

#### **About the First Night**

Whilst the contract was being haggled over, Cinti gave birth to a son (destined to live only a few weeks), the press was trumpeting forth daily indiscretions, and rehearsals were frantically going on with, as was usual at the Opéra, an endless series of changes along the route which continued even after the first performance and which it would be worth while to give an abbreviated account of here.

Meanwhile, where *Guillaume Tell* is concerned (and one might say the same of many works written for the Opéra) it is essential to make a distinction between changes made to the words, to the vocal line and to other minor details during the course of rehearsals (at which both Rossini and *Bis* were present) and which certainly aimed at improving the effect of both words and music, and those changes which affected the construction of the opera. Changes of the first type, quite well documented from our sources (principally the autograph score and the copyists' work, but also to some extent the printed

*Troupenas score) are of interest only to the musicologist or whoever wants to trace Rossini's creative methods in his last opera, so different from those that he had been able to turn out in a few days for some Italian theatre. A lot more importance must be attached to the other kind of change, some of which aimed at reducing the excessive length of the opera, but also at increasing its dramatic tension, and which often involved cutting and transferring and even the sacrificing of whole numbers of remarkable musical value. The publication of the critical edition of the score now allows performers to restore these numbers if they feel like doing so, or even to try for as complete a performance as possible; however, this could never include all the music written for Guillaume Tell. In fact, leaving out of consideration the music Rossini subsequently added to the two three-act versions of the opera (one French, the other Italian), it would not even be possible to perform all the music composed for the first run of the opera in Paris. As we shall see later on, the project would be frustrated by the existence of alternative numbers that cannot be made to neatly overlap one another.*

*Other problems have to do with the kind of cuts practised. Of course, as we have hinted, in some cases all that was desired was to shorten the opera, but in others dramatic intentions must have prevailed. However, it is not always possible to distinguish where one or other of these intentions might have operated, and, above all, we can never know the whole intentions of the author or authors. The modern performer, therefore, is faced with alternative possibilities requiring a free choice among a mare magnum (an ocean) of music all of which, or nearly all, is of the finest quality as befits a masterpiece which, if viewed as a*

*whole, may well appear as unified as possible, and yet presents an infinite variety of facets in its detail. To guide the listener we should, perhaps, whilst still discussing the first performances in Paris and taking as our starting point an ideal Urtext including all the music written at that time, mention two fundamental mile-stones corresponding to two different scores: the one performed at the première on 3 August 1829 (already much whittled down) and the one (even more ruthlessly trimmed) that Rossini left behind him on the day before he left Paris for Italy the day after the sixth performance.*

*As it became obvious during the July rehearsal period that the opera was too long, several important numbers had already been cut out before the dress rehearsal (put off more than once and then finally held on 1 August), including an aria for Jemmy inserted into the apple scene in the Finale to Act Three, immediately before William Tell's celebrated recitative and aria "Sois immobile". Another cut sacrificing a magnificent piece of music but helping to make the Finale of the opera more concise was that of a recitative and prayer for Hedwige with chorus inserted in the very heart of the Act Four Finale. Besides these, many other numbers in the opera were modified and shortened. The ballet, which gave Rossini an enormous amount of trouble, a favourite with the Parisians but the cross borne by every unhappy composer, merits separate mention. The choreographic diversissements, although made up of music of the finest quality, were seen at once to be too many in number, and were subjected to endless re-thinkings, cuts and modifications; some dances were even switched from one act to another (traditionally grand-opéra was establishing the custom of having a ballet in*

the first act and a longer one in the third). To effect these modifications Rossini went on composing linking passages, such as the chorus that ends the *pas de trois* (which was just that piece transferred from Act Three to Act One). He went on having second thoughts even in the two days between the dress rehearsal and the first night, and he decided to cut the *pas de six* out of the Act One *divertissement*. Further details about these and later changes are listed in Elizabeth Bartlet's summing up, taken from the Preface to the critical edition and reprinted at the foot of the Italian version of this article. After all these modifications the opera finally reached its First Night on 3 August, a gala evening to which all Paris flocked and which was a personal triumph for Rossini. Despite the admiration lavished on the music, however, there was no lack of criticism where the libretto was concerned, and the opera was generally considered to be too long; it was thought that revision was needed to adjust and correct some defects, such as the weakness of the last two acts in comparison with the first two (a fact pointed out by several critics). And so they set to work upon a further series of modifications which were effected in three stages: after the First Night, after the second and after the sixth. These mainly concerned the ballet: the *pas de trois* was moved back to Act Three and a *pas de deux* was cut out of Act One. This served to shorten the first act. Apparently, too much so (one had to consider the vanity of the leading dancers, male and female!) seeing that Rossini decided, in place of the two dances that he had omitted, to re-insert the *pas de six* that had been excised after the dress rehearsal. Later a trio for women's voices was cut out of the fourth act: one of the reasons for this cut was that the figure of Mathilde had been judged weak and inconsis-

ent. In consequence she was cut out of the Act Four finale, with the result that the unhappy princess disappeared altogether from the last act, sparing herself the scarcely credible transformation from aristocrat into republican. Having made these last cuts and having received the Legion of Honour from the King, Rossini, leaving for Bologna at the end of August, was able to leave behind him a score notably whittled-down (about four hours of music) which might in some ways be thought to represent his last word on the subject and which may certainly represent the most readily accessible basis for a modern performance. This did not prevent other cuts being made in his absence even during the remaining performances in the 1829-30 season, not to mention what happened later. Meanwhile, starting off a parallel saga that would have an enormous influence upon the later history of Guillaume Tell outside Paris, the publisher Troupenas had hurried to get the opera into print. The vocal score was on sale a few days after the première. This hurry, spurred on by commercial rather than by musical impulses, ended in the printed score's not corresponding at all in many places to the authors' final decisions. As Elizabeth Bartlet has written, we shall not find this score to be a consistent version of Guillaume Tell; it does not correspond either to the original text, nor that used on the First Night, nor the one that became current later on, after the numerous revisions. The many misprints do not help. And yet fate decreed that performances of Guillaume Tell outside Paris would be based on this flawed edition (with sporadic and partial exceptions) and one of the main merits of the critical edition is in offering us a basis for finally getting rid of the pestilential influence of the old Troupenas score.

### ***The three-act version of Tell***

Once the opera had entered into the regular repertoire of the Académie Royale, it was the singers who began to make further changes in the score. Already from January 1830 it had become usual in the Parisian opera house to cut Mathilde's aria (N. 13) from the beginning of Act Three. Arnold's great air at the beginning of the fourth act became even more a victim to singers' caprices. Nourrit did not always sing all of the terribly difficult music assigned to him here, but it was only much later that other tenors went so far (not always, it must be confessed) as to eliminate N. 18 completely, thus sacrificing one of the most superb pieces in the entire operatic repertoire. These particular problems had to do with individual singers and their greater or lesser vocal prowess, but other problems arose from, as always, the inordinate length of the opera. The four hours of music in *Guillaume Tell* obviously constituted a serious obstacle if, on the same evening, following the current fad, a separate ballet were to be performed. For this reason the directors of the theatre were already proposing, in the spring of 1830, an edition of the opera in only three acts, and Rossini and Bis sat down to write this in the spring of 1831. In this version only Act Two remained intact. On the other hand large cuts were once again made in the diversissements, other numbers were eliminated or cut down in length, others were moved: Arnold's great aria, for example, was transferred to the beginning of Act Three. This version, first produced on 1 June 1831, ended with the original *Finale* to Act Three but re-worked, with the addition of an ending based on the *pas redoublé* of the *Overture*. An effective ending, certainly, but in no way justifying the sacrifice of the original *Finale* of the opera which breathes cosmic air.

If, in the last resort, Rossini himself was responsible for these changes, undoubtedly preferring to do the work himself rather than leave it to be done by less expert hands, other modifications were made in later years when the opera enjoyed a real resurrection thanks to Duprez's taking over the role of Arnold. The great tenor (who had created the role in Italy at the first performances in Lucca in 1831), from the time of his triumphant assumption of the role at the Opéra in 1837, not only introduced changes in the vocal style of the music that caused a revolution (like the famous "chest high C"), but also other tamperings, some of them scarcely acceptable. The Duprez version, however, had the merit of keeping the opera in the repertoire even when, with Nourrit and other members of the original cast no longer in the company, its survival would have become precarious.

Rossini made his last important alteration to his own "definitive" opera in Bologna in 1840. In Italy, too, the opera had always seemed too long and, furthermore, had suffered ruthless mangling from the censors, and so, after having been introduced in Lucca under its original title, it had subsequently been turned into *Vallace* (Milan, 1836) or, rather more often, *Rodolfo di Sterlinga*. The Bolognese public were able to admire the opera under this guise on 3 October 1840, the evening also including a ballet in six acts entitled *I Veneziani in Costantinopoli*! The opera was successful, the ballet too, but the whole thing was obviously too long, and as nobody seems to have contemplated cutting *I Veneziani*, Rossini, after all a local resident, was persuaded to take pen in hand to reduce his opera once more to a three-act version. Probably Rossini's readiness to comply was due to the fact that the Arnold in Bologna was Nicola Ivanoff, a protégé of Rossini's

and for whom the composer did not disdain to act as agent in the full meaning of the term. Since there was not enough time to rehearse the Parisian finale from the earlier three-act version or get the chorus to learn it, the composer wrote a new one, even shorter, which closed the opera snappily and with the required festive air. This was the only addition to *Tell* that Rossini wrote with Italian words. In this version Rodolfo enters and in a few bars announces that the tyrant is dead. The chorus immediately burst into rejoicing, and this version, too, uses the theme of the *pas redoublé* of the Overture. It seems that the Bolognese were perfectly satisfied with this.

### **God and genius**

It is not easy to imagine what Rossini thought, and how sensitive he may have been, about these frequent tamperings with his masterpiece, with the very opera to which he had wanted to entrust his eternal fame as an opera composer, at the end of his career. We know that he fretted a long time over the Italian translation and that he ordered one from Luigi Balocchi, which however was heard in Dresden and not in Italy, where Calisto Bassi's translation gained ground; this changed the original text rather more, though purging it (not always, as we have seen) enough to pass muster with the local censorship. It was used for versions "in disguise", too, like Rodolfo di Sterlinga. When the composer had stopped writing for the theatre he had the satisfaction of seeing Guillaume Tell still included in the repertoire of theatres all over the world and especially at the Opéra, where it was continually being resurrected in one form or another. We have already mentioned Duprez's version. Another was given on 20 August 1856 when, after many repeated and useless requests (from Berlioz among oth-

ers), the four-act version was finally revived. The cast included only one singer left over from the 1829 *First Night*, Prévost, who again sang his old part of Leuthold. The revival of all four acts was not, however, painless, as it involved a whole new series of cuts. However, it served to renew the success of a score that had always been admired, even after so many of Rossini's serious operas had been dropped from the repertoire. The rest of the world followed suit, even though in Italy the opera was admired more than it was performed. Even during the last years of Rossini's life the opera was still given, though with the modifications that we have referred to. In 1860 the Opéra engaged Carlotta Marchisio to sing the role of Mathilde, which led to a head-on collision between the Paris tradition and the performing tradition based on the Troupenas score. The singer wanted to revive the third act aria that had not been sung in Paris since 1830 and the theatre supplied the parts used by Cinti-Damoreau in the original performances. But Marchisio was familiar with the version performed in Italy and the Opéra had to bow to her will. The composer was then passing his extraordinary old age in Paris and, as usual, avoided going to the Opéra. However, the newspapers reported that the cadenzas introduced into the two arias by the singer had been "rehearsed" chez Rossini. This could have been true, but perhaps it was just an attempt to give a semblance of authenticity to the performance. Rossini had one last direct contact with his interpreters, if not with his opera, on 10 February 1868 when the Opéra celebrated the 500th performance of the work. When the performance was over, in the freezing Paris night, the baritone Faure, the conductor, the chorus and some orchestral players went over to the *Chaussée d'Antin*

to play a serenade under the old composer's windows (he would die a few months later). Rossini was able to appear briefly at his window, whilst it was Olympe's duty to go down to the street to thank the musicians and invite them to come upstairs. Here, in the name of all the staff of the Opéra, a laurel wreath was presented to the composer as a memorial of the evening. A few days later – it was leap year – Rossini's last birthday was celebrated with an avalanche of messages from everywhere in the world, testifying to the glory to which Guillaume Tell had contributed so much and so worthily. When all is said and done, the tamperings, though many and complex, were nothing more or less than the result, or one of the results, of that glory: the only thing you cannot tamper with is inert matter. The work's enormous vitality allowed of its being subjected to changes and accretions, which the critical edition has engaged to put in order, giving performers the necessary guidelines. Alongside interpolations that can be firmly thrown out there remains a wide range of possible alternatives, but including some things which must remain firmly fixed. As often happens with Rossini, one possible reaction in the face of so many vicissitudes in performance is mirrored in an anecdote, we do not know how authentic, related by Radiciotti:

*One day, whilst he was in Paris for his well-known lawsuit, Rossini met the Director of the Opéra in the street, who said to him: "Maestro, I hope you won't complain of my treatment of you now; this evening we are performing the second act of William Tell". "Really?" – answered the Maestro – "All of it?".*

*Whether this witticism be true or false, the fact remains that the second act of this opera-of-so-many-versions had always remained practically intact and had even (quite*

*rightly in our view) demonstrated a superior vitality, being frequently performed on its own. Not only had it resisted attacks from the pruning shears and from singers' whims, but it had taken on a higher meaning directly connected with the solemn declaration of liberty and also of the Godhead. It is no accident that when someone asked Donizetti's opinion about Guillaume Tell, he is supposed to have exclaimed: "The first and third acts were written by Rossini, the second by God!" (he obviously knew the three-act version). If we want to draw a lesson from this supremacy and hierarchy within the higher spheres themselves, we must draw the conclusion that only God's works are unchangeable, whilst the works of genius demand a perpetual living contact with those who perform them and those they benefit. Today's listeners will be able to establish this contact in a more knowing way. Not only do we know the composer's intention, or rather, the composer's intentions much better now that we have the critical edition, but Guillaume Tell is no longer, as it was in the second half of the last century, an honourable and applauded residue from a large number of important and forgotten works allowed to languish unstudied and even despised. Our knowledge, gained through the study and the revival of the other serious operas of Rossini and the great masterpieces that he had composed before Guillaume Tell ought, paradoxical though it might seem, to infuse new vitality and a different vitality into that one opera out of all the long line of works that had been thought to have a vitality of its own.*

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