aversion to it all, it was bad timing in 1876 to be using such characters as Wotan, Siegmund, Freia and the Valkyrie. The work was performed in the USA at least five times during the 30 years 1883–1912, but Natalie Macfarren's translation hardly helped: 'Sigambrians all, men of mighty arm, ye Chaucians and Frisians, I call on all from th'Hercynian wolds to the shores of the wide-rolling sea, the home of the storm'.

Here, the conductor Hermann Max keeps it all moving and directs a cleanly responsive, if too distantly recorded, Göttingen Symphony Orchestra, but Hans Christoph Begemann (a bass, whereas Bruch calls for a *Heldenbariton*) 'hits' notes (*sfp*) instead of singing through them, losing both texture and line; Ursula Ettlinger is a mezzo-soprano not a contralto, so her lower register lacks richness and lustre; Michael Smallwood uses his voice, more lyrical than *Heldentenor*, with care and, in his death scene, sensitivity. The Rheinische Kantorei is too refined in quality. Bruch had choruses of 500 in mind when he wrote such works, whereas, according to the CD booklet, this choir numbers between 16 and 32. This works well in the three-part ladies' chorus accompanied by strings and three horns, but elsewhere the Romans and Cherusci were a rougher bunch than this. Criticisms aside, this recording is very welcome.

Christopher Fifield
Bristol University

Rossini

La gazzetta

Cinzia Forte (Lisetta) *sop*, Bruno Praticò (Don Pomponio) *bar*, Pietro Spagnoli (Filippo) *bass*, Charles Workman (Alberto) *bar*, Agata Bienkowska (Madame La Rose) *mezzo sop*, Marisa Martins (Doralice) *mezzo*, Simón Orfila (Monsů Traversen) *bar*, Marc Canturri (Anselmo) *bar*

Orchestra Academy of the Gran Teatre del Liceu
Intermezzo Choir
Maurizio Barbacini *cond*

Opus Arte OA0953 D (2 DVDs: LPCM stereo: 155 minutes)

Sung in Italian with English, French, German, Spanish and Catalan subtitles.

Gioachino Rossini and Giuseppe Palomba's *La gazzetta* (1816) is a rollicking comedy of mistaken identities, disguises and witty wordplay. Neapolitan merchant Don Pomponio advertises his daughter Lisetta's hand in marriage in the local newspaper to find her a husband efficiently. Lisetta is already in love with the innkeeper Filippo, but Don Pomponio dismisses him as an unworthy match for his daughter. When the first suitor, Alberto, arrives, he mistakes Doralice for the advertised woman and falls for her. He then announces to Don Pomponio that he wants to marry his daughter, and comedic confusion ensues.

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Nobel Prize-winning playwright and comedic master Dario Fo was the stage director and designer for this production first created for Pesaro's Rossini Opera Festival in 2001. The performance recorded for the DVD by Opus Arte took place in 2005 at Barcelona's Gran Teatre del Liceu under the musical direction of Maurizio Barbacini (the DVD was released in 2006). Fo's celebrated work as a playwright is strongly influenced by the physical comedy tradition of *commedia dell'arte* and is politically critical. He approaches his work as a director in a similar spirit. Indeed, this project demanded a spirit of inventiveness from Fo; although the score was presumably finished for the opera's 1816 premiere in Naples, substantial portions of music and text are missing from Rossini's autograph as well as from the printed libretto. Fo and his collaborators faced the challenge of creating a complete and coherent production from an incomplete score. How does an artist balance inferring the composer and librettist's intentions with the needs of producing the work today? While this question is fundamental to the production of any artistic work, producing an incomplete work brings the challenges of this process into acute focus. Through the creation and revision of a new edition as well as through design and staging, Fo and his artistic team inventively restored *La gazzetta* and created a lively and engaging production accessible to contemporary audiences.

Much of the music that survives is familiar to Rossini aficionados. *La gazzetta* was Rossini's second opera for Naples, and – as he often did when writing for new audiences, including in his first Neapolitan opera, *Elisabetta, regina d'Inghilterra* (1815) – Rossini recycled music from his previous works.[1] Almost half of the score was derived from earlier Rossinian operas still unknown to Neapolitan audiences.[2] Many self-quotations are from his 1814 opera *Il turko in Italia,* including Lisetta's cavatina, the duet for Lisetta and Don Pomponio and the quintet. Additional derivations include the trio, which he borrowed from *La pietra del paragone* (1812), and fleeting musical and textual quotations from *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (1816).[3] Interestingly, the overture is an entirely original composition – one Rossini later reused as the overture for *La Cenerentola* (1817).[4] However, these borrowed sections in *La gazzetta* are not identical to their counterparts; Rossini carefully adapted the music to new words, re-orchestrated it and introduced new musical ideas within it.[5]

Musicologists Philip Gossett and Fabrizio Scipioni worked closely with Fo to prepare a dramatically viable edition that both reflects the authors' intent and is engaging for a twenty-first-century audience. The scholars' first impulse was to take a minimalist approach to restoring Rossini's incomplete score.[6] Prior to the festival production, Gossett and Scipioni set only one vital scene to music: a scene without which the second pair of lovers would never be introduced. For the other incomplete scenes, the editors suggest changes to compensate for the missing action, such as omitting references to the action in the missing quintet and adding stage business (for example, suggesting that one character

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1 Philip Gossett, *Divas and Scholars* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006): 369.

2 Ibid., 246.

3 Richard Osborne, *Rossini: His Life and Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007): 227. For examples of quotations from *Il barbiere di Siviglia,* see Gioachino Rossini, *La gazzetta*, ed. Philip Gossett and Fabrizio Scipioni (Pesaro: Fondazione Rossini, 2002): XXXIII.

4 Osborne, *Rossini*, 228.

5 Gossett, *Divas*, 246.

6 Ibid., 520.

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silently overhears others' conversations to explain knowledge of the described information and events later). However, Fo rejected these suggestions as dated and theatrically ineffective and insisted that the missing pieces be set to music.[7] An example is the 'Turkish' quintet, the text for which is identical to that of the quintet in *Il turko in Italia*.[8] Although there is a final stanza printed for Don Geronio in *Il turko in Italia,* Don Pomponio's final stanza is missing in both the libretto for the first performance as well as in Rossini's autograph. Gossett and Scipioni, with the help of Neapolitan native Sergio Ragni, borrowed Don Geronio's final stanza and rewrote it in Neapolitan dialect.[9] Further changes to the edition in response to the production's needs include substantially cutting the recitative, although no cuts were made in the set pieces.[10] The team of artists and scholars restored Rossini's opera so that it was sufficiently complete to perform; nonetheless, the traces of editorial work are perceptible and the opera retains a fragmented and unfinished quality.

Inspired by the Parisian *vaudeville* of the nineteenth century, Fo's design turns the fragmentary condition of *La gazzetta* into a theatrical opportunity. The *pièces en vaudevilles* that frequented the stages of Parisian fairs as well as the Opèra-Comique were light, comic plays that were interspersed with songs. These songs were often based on well-known tunes and even parodied the highbrow productions on the larger stages of Paris. Such pieces bear a loose structural similarity to *La gazzetta*, which consists of lengthy passages of *secco recitative* interspersed with set pieces, many of which are based on music from Rossini's better-known operas. Fo's conceptual approach embraces the opera's lack of dramaturgical cohesion and employs it to heighten the opera's theatricality.

Fo's approach is on the whole an insightful one; nonetheless, his concept at times obscures the nuances and complexities of the opera's story rather than expresses them. In Alberto's Act II aria, for example, Charles Workman performs the virtuosic aria with precision and panache and his minimal blocking aptly brings into focus the intricacies of Rossini's score. Upstage of him is a colourful group of female dancers, who perform a dance reminiscent of the variety acts of the period. Later, male dancers enter, and together they pantomime an orchestra that accompanies and interacts with Alberto. These references to popular performance effectively situate the production in Parisian mass culture of the period but obscure the ideas Albert expresses in his aria. Fo's staging completely severs the aria from the action of the opera, portraying it as a musical diversion unrelated to the story of *La gazzetta*. While often the action of an opera is indeed suspended during arias and set pieces, such contemplative numbers are not bereft of dramatic function; rather, they may explore the nuances of a character's reaction to an event or might articulate what up until the moment of the piece remained unsaid. Alberto's aria in this production is a missed opportunity; the staging merely re-emphasizes Fo's already clear concept and avoids discovering fresh insights into the character.

Fo's staging is inspired by *commedia dell'arte*: a tradition of Italian popular comedy based on improvisation, stock characters and set physical routines that flourished between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. Fo responds to the influence of *commedia* on Goldoni's 1763 play on which the opera is based,

7 Ibid.
8 Ibid., 369.
9 Ibid., 370.
10 Ibid., 247.

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Il matrimonio per concorso.[11] Along with other artists of the *riforma*, Goldoni rebelled against the heightened devices of earlier dramaturgies – such as exaggerated heroism and the stale, empty tricks of *commedia* – in favour of realism.[12] Goldoni worked within *commedia* to at once breathe life into the old dramatic tradition and innovate a new one by creating real characters that reflect everyday problems within the *commedia* archetypes.[13] Employing this theatrical tradition complements the production's setting in nineteenth-century Parisian mass culture: not only did *commedia* acts frequently appear on Paris' popular stages, but both *commedia* and Parisian *vaudeville* used performance to criticize the culture that surrounded them. Fo's intent is to examine how press and the media disrupt and shape society, and borrowing from these socially critical performance traditions is an insightful and powerful choice.

Fo's inventive *lazzi* – recognizable physical comedy routines in the tradition of *commedia dell'arte* – bring the comedy to life. An example is Don Pomponio's cavatina, brilliantly performed by Bruno Praticò. Don Pomponio enters in a brightly coloured period automobile. His incompetent servant Tommasino opens the car door, which breaks off; Tommasino discreetly hides it. As Don Pomponio exits the car, the steering wheel breaks off; Don Pomponio shrugs and hands it to Tommasino. In the spirit of *commedia,* the detached steering wheel transforms into a new object later in the cavatina: when Don Pomponio stands on a pedestal touting his own virtues, Tommasino holds the steering wheel behind Don Pomponio's head, providing him with a halo irreverently reminiscent of that of a saint from an Italian Renaissance painting. Fo's *commedia*-inspired action throughout the production engages with the opera's source material to render the comedy both entertaining and clear. Nonetheless, Fo's inspiration is not uncommon; the physical comedy of *commedia dell'arte* is a style frequently used by contemporary directors in both opera and theatre, in part because of the wide influence of the tradition on later dramatic texts but also because the physicality of the style creates a heightened theatrical energy that renders the comedy – particularly a comedy that is historically remote – immediate and accessible to today's audiences.

Although in his DVD liner notes Juan Carlos Olivares writes that Fo's productions are 'spectacles in constant motion' that reflect 'an aversion to empty space', Fo's use of *lazzi* is sparse and his blocking is often surprisingly still. Lisetta and Don Pomponio's Act I duet is predominantly static and takes place on a virtually empty stage. While Fo's intent may have been to focus the audience's attention on Rossini's soaring melodic lines, Rossini needs no assistance here. Although the plot does not progress substantially during this set piece, the presence of some stage action to express the nuances of the story being told in the duet would not have undercut or detracted from Rossini's score. Undoubtedly, stillness can be one of the most powerful tools at a director's disposal, but Fo's use of stillness in this duet does not clarify the story but rather avoids telling it.

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[11] The title of the first version of Goldoni's play is *Les deux italiennes*. Rossini was most likely familiar with the 1763 Venetian edition, which enjoyed great success at its premiere at Venice's Teatro San Luca and was performed widely in theatres throughout Venice and Italy (Rossini, *La gazzetta*, XXIV).

[12] Gabriele Baldini, 'A Note on Goldoni and His Comedies', in *Goldoni: Three Comedies*, ed. Gabriele Baldini (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961): xii.

[13] Ibid., xiii.

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Despite minor shortcomings, this DVD of *La gazzetta* would make a worthy addition to an academic or personal library. In addition to the production, the DVD also includes an interview with Fo, and the menu background displays Fo's colourful design sketches. While this is not a widely produced opera, Fo's staging is an example of how an interesting production can make opera accessible to diverse audiences. Engaging and clear, the production would be an excellent addition to an undergraduate-level syllabus; insightful and dramaturgically informed, it would similarly stimulate graduate-level seminar discussions. It is also of interest to artists working in the opera profession, not only because of the high musical and dramatic standards it reflects but also because it is a thought-provoking example of how to approach producing an incomplete work.

Jennifer Williams
Cornell University

Rossini

La pietra del paragone

Laura Brioli (Aspasia) *sop*, Marie-Ange Todorovich (Clarice) *mezzo*,
Raúl Giménez (Giocondo) *ten*, Marco Vinco (Asdrubale) *bass*,
Paolo Bordogna (Pacuvio) *bar*, Pietro Spagnoli (Macrobio) *bass*,
Patrizia Biccirè (Fulvia) *sop*, Tomeu Bibiloni (Fabrizio) *ten*

Chorus and Orchestra of the Teatro Real, Madrid
Alberto Zedda *cond*

Pier Luigi Pizzi *Stage Director*

Opus Arte OA 0987 D (2 DVDs: LPCM stereo: 187 minutes)

Sung in Italian with subtitles in English, French, German and Spanish.

On 29 February 1812, Gioachino Rossini turned 20. For an up-and-coming young composer, his achievements were nothing short of impressive. His one-act *farse*, *La cambiale di matrimonio* and *La scala di seta* had been performed successfully at the Teatro San Moisé, and his *dramma giocoso*, *L'equivoco stravagante*, had been produced in Bologna. Soon after that important birthday, however, his compositional activity was to become far more intense. Before his 21st birthday, six more operas by Rossini hit the stage, including three additional *farse* for the San Moisé, *Ciro in Babilonia* for Ferrara, and the *opera seria Tancredi*, which triumphed at Venice's La Fenice on 6 February 1813.[1] Amidst this feverish activity, the young Rossini had to find the time to fulfil his first commission for La Scala – *La pietra del paragone*, a *melodramma giocoso* in two acts to a libretto by Luigi Romanelli, premiered to great acclaim on 26 September 1812.

[1] To these one might add *Demetrio e Polibio*, composed in 1809 but premiered at the Teatro Valle in Rome in May 1812.

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