

### ***Die drei Pintos* at University College Opera**

The University College Opera (UCO) in London is a semi-professional company, where students get on stage with professional singers performing lead roles. Despite not having a Music Department, University College London has managed to find enough talent to put together a small orchestra, chorus and some supporting roles.

UCO gained its place in London's operatic scene by specializing in rarely performed operas, on few occasions even staging UK and world premieres. To mark their sixtieth anniversary, and in occasion of Mahler's centenary, UCO chose to stage *Die drei Pintos* in March 2011 (first performance on 21 March). This comic opera, first sketched by Weber, was completed by Mahler in the late 1880s. Weber began working on it while completing *Der Freischütz* (around 1821), having received the libretto by Theodor Hell. This was based on a contemporary *Novelle* set in late 17<sup>th</sup> century Spain with typically farcical elements of faked and mistaken identity. The sudden opportunity of working on *Euryanthe*, however, induced Weber to set *Pintos* aside, though occasionally returning on the sketches to improve the overall plan and some numbers.

Weber's premature death prevented him from finishing the work, but his family and close friends tried in more than one occasion to find a way to complete it. Eventually, Weber's grandson Capt. Carl von Weber met Mahler in Leipzig and entrusted him with the sketches, his own new version of the libretto and, unknowingly, his wife. Mahler accepted to complete the opera, previously having the opportunity of conducting Weber's works and of showing his understanding and appreciation of the composer's works. He completed the sketches, trying to keep an attitude of reconstruction rather than composition; to fill in the several missing numbers, he resorted to adapt some minor vocal works by Weber. The composer kept as close as possible to the plan sketched by Weber, which indicated keys and duration of most unwritten numbers. Although this approach might have had the unwanted consequence of creating an unstable patchwork, in most cases the result is flawless; for example No. 4 (Romanze) is based on a guitar song that Weber composed on an original Spanish theme. A more peculiar choice is possibly No. 15 (Terzettino), where Mahler repurposed a short canon that Weber wrote in his youth to convey the competing points of view of the three characters involved.

Mahler also introduces two compositions of his own: an *Entr'Act* and the first part of the third finale. The former, composed on themes from the sketches, sports an orchestration and colouring closer to Mahler's times.

The opera opens with Don Gaston Viratos (Robin Bailey) and his servant Ambrosio (Edward Davison) celebrating Don Gaston's graduation in Salamanca. After a small quarrel with the Innkeeper (Ross Ramgobin) over the bill – promptly calmed by the arrival of his charming daughter Inez (Scarlett Diamond), Don Pinto de Fonseca (Nick Goodman) joins the celebration. Don Pinto is a coarse man stopping in town on his way to Madrid, where he shall marry a rich heiress who he has never met before. His clumsiness and clear inexperience with courtship encourages Don Gaston to take advantage of him. After much food and wine, Don Pinto falls asleep and Don Gaston steals his letter of introduction.

In Madrid, Don Pantaleone de Pacheco (Thomas Faulkner) announces to his servants the arranged marriage of his daughter Donna Clarissa (Lara Martins) with Don Pinto. She, however, is in love with Don Gomez de Freiros (Alistair Digges) and struggles to hide her misery. Her maid Laura (Larissa Blackshaw) tries to console her by letting Don Gomez in the palace. The couple express their love to each other, but Don Gomez is soon forced to leave.

On the day of the wedding, Don Gaston and Ambrosio arrive to the palace, where they meet Laura, who believes Don Gaston to be Don Pinto. Ambrosio tries to woo her, but is rejected. Don Gomez then arrives and asks Don Gaston to give up Donna Clarissa to him because of their true love. After some persuasion, Don Gaston gives the letter of presentation to Don Gomez and suggests that he introduces himself as Don Pinto. The wedding starts, but is interrupted by the real Don Pinto who clumsily claims his bride and accuses Don Gaston. Confronted with a blade, Don Pinto is removed by Don Pantaleone amidst much confusion. Don Gomez eventually decides to reveal his identity, but after Don Pinto's pitiful scene, Don Pantaleone is happy to give Donna Clarissa to him.

UCO's production was sung in English (translation by Rodney Blumer from a 1962 premiere in London) and a few adjustments made the opera very entertaining. By moving the setting of *Pintos* from the late 17<sup>th</sup> century to the early 1960s, they brought on stage vintage clothes and hairstyles like Wilma and Betty's for Clarissa and Laura. The portrait of student carefree living in the first act was emphasised with risqué moves and fart jokes enjoyed by both

actors and members of the audience. Likewise, the strong pronunciation of „Rs“ and dancing moves borrowed directly from the Spanish europop hit *Asereje* contributed to a funny depiction of Spanish character. The change of setting is also visibly reflected in the dialogues between musical numbers, which have been duly adapted and follow the libretto only approximately. Somewhat puzzling is the fact that the mood is way too lighthearted for a time when Franco was in power.

Producing *Pintos* is not as demanding as with other operas by Weber and John Ramster's (director) staging was simple but effective. Small comic situations were added in the background to support the less crowded numbers and dialogues; some extras stood out with humorous roles, like Clarissa's flamboyant hairdresser, but never overshadowed main action.

Student singers, though their voices were not as polished as their professional colleagues, did a remarkable job on stage, especially Edward Davison (Ambrosio). Amongst the professional singers stood out Lara Martins (Donna Clarissa), who sang with expressivity her love for Don Gomez in No. 10 (Rezitativ und Arie) and Robin Bailey (Don Gaston), who fit the role perfectly.

The student orchestra conducted by Charles Peebles played enthusiastically; the brasses may have unnecessarily overpowered the strings on occasion, but the piece was well performed overall.

UCO made an excellent choice for their sixtieth anniversary. *Die drei Pintos* is rarely performed – at least in the UK – despite its hilarious atmosphere and excellent music. Perhaps, the problem of authorship is partly to blame here: it is rather difficult to distinguish what is Weber's and what is Mahler's. The thematic material is all Weber's, but it is diminishing to think of Mahler simply as an arranger and it is surprising to find *Pintos* being largely underperformed during this year's centenary of Mahler's death.

Raffaele Viglianti

### ***Le Freischütz in Paris***

Die Pariser Opéra Comique wagte sich an die französische Fassung von Webers Hauptwerk (Premiere: 7. April 2011), Grund genug für eine Reise in die französische Metropole. Eigentlich gehört diese Version nicht an das Haus, handelt es sich doch dabei um eine Grand Opéra, aber derartige Überlegungen bestimmen den Spielplan des Hauses auch ansonsten nicht.