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"Cenni biografici del maestro di musica Giuseppe Verdi" (Part 1)

Keywords

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CENNI BIOGRAFICI del maestro di musica Giuseppe Verdi (Part 1)

by Giuseppe Demaldè

translated by Mary Jane Matz and Gino Macchidani

This first biographical sketch of Giuseppe Verdi was, according to Franco Abbiati, written in first draft in 1853, at the request of Emanuele Muzio (see F. Abbiati: *Giuseppe Verdi*, Milan, Ricordi, 1959, Vol I, p. 67). The notes and elements of the biography appear, however, to date from a much earlier period, perhaps about 1841 or 1842. Demaldè wished to publish an article on the City of Busseto and the organ which Verdi had used there; he was also at work on a history of Busseto, and was researching the Pallavicini family archives for this project.

More than 50 pages of Demaldè's almost illegible holograph notes are in the archives of the Public Library of the City of Busseto, under the care of Corrado Mingardi, to whom I am indebted for assistance in this project going back into the early 1960s. At that time, the Demaldè sketches were in the archive of the Monte di Credito su Pegno (Monte di Pietà), and were preserved by Mario Peracchi and Gino Macchidani, who made the first typescript of the manuscript.



It is important to note that there were two men named Giuseppe Demaldè living in Busseto. One, the author of this sketch, was at various times the Inspector of Schools in Busseto and the Treasurer of the charitable foundation of the Monte di Pietà. He was crippled, violently anti-clerical, a prolific letter-writer, and a fanatical Verdi partisan. In later correspondence he is called *Finola*—"Smart Guy" or "Slickie" in Bussetan dialect. As we shall discover when Demaldè's notes are published at the end of the biographical sketch, he was present at Verdi's baptism, knew the family intimately, and was probably related to them by marriage, through Verdi's aunt, who married a Demaldè. The other Giuseppe Demaldè was a priest, Canon of the Collegiate Church, and a member of Busseto's anti-Verdi faction.

Naque Giuseppe Verdi in Roncole presso la Citta di Busseto il 9 Ottobre 1813 da Carlo e dalla Luigia Uttini di ristretta fortuna ma onesti albergatori.

Per infino al compiere del 2° lustro circa di sua età ebbe dal suo parroco i primi rudimenti di lettura e scrittura, ma sentendo non poco diletto nel suono i suoi genitori procuravangli ad istruttore un Organista di campagna che poche cose non di studio ma di memoria scalpitava alla bella meglio sull' organo.

Provvidegli all'uopo un antico e mal composto gravicembalo per cui imprendeva a suonare seguendo il tran tran del suo Maestro.

Nelle autunnali vacanze poi si associava al suo amico Dilettante di musica Giov. Biazzi che ivi si recava provveduto di musica per ricrearsi; egli divertivansi sul piano forte ed imprendendo a conoscere la Musica di cui l'amico coetaneo n'aveva qualche barlume.

Dalle lezioni che prendeva dal suo parroco nel leggere e nello scrivere da quelle dell' organista e delle nozioni del suo amico, non si tardò a conoscere che il nostro Giuseppe e in queste e in quelle dimostrava una connaturale disposizione.

Ma venuto a morte il Parroco, i di lui genitori vidersi costretti a doverlo mandare alla scuole di Busseto, affidandolo a poveri ma onesti artigiani.-

Nel Novembre del 1823 intraprendeva le lezioni Ginnasiali in Busseto, e contemporaneamente quelle di Musica sotto la direzione del Maestro di Cappella Sig. Ferdinando Provesi di felice e grata memoria per le sue qualità morali, vero amico dotto anzichè no, e molto adentro nelle cose di Professione, avendo a dovizia pregevoli composizioni Ecclesiastiche, colla speranza ai genitori col tempo in qualche luogo come Organista.

Ma nel breve lasso di due anni ei trasse dalle lezioni bastante profitto per impegnare gli Istruttori di farne buon conto.-

Era di natura docile, rispettoso, ma timido, e non amante al divertimento, ma conversando con la moltitudine, da li a poco si fè svegliato e capace di qualche infantile insolenza.

Giuseppe Verdi was born in Roncole, near the City of Busseto, on October 9, 1813, son of Carlo and Luigia Uttini, honest hotel-keepers of limited means.

Until he was about ten years old, he got the first rudiments of reading and writing from his parish priest, but because he had more than a little pleasure from music, his parents got a teacher for him, a country Organist, who in no learned way but from memory, hacked out a few pieces on the organ as best he could.

An old clavicebalo, in bad condition, was provided, so that he could learn to follow the strumming of his Maestro.

During the autumn vacation, later, he spent time together with his friend, the Dilettante Musician Giov.[anni] Biazzi, who went there [to Roncole] supplied with music to play for fun; the two of them had a good time at the piano, with [Verdi] getting to know Music, which his friend and contemporary understood, at least slightly.

From the reading and writing lessons he took from his parish priest, from those given by the organist, and from the ideas of his friend, people soon became aware that our Giuseppe showed an extraordinary gift for both [studies and music].

But when the Parish Priest died, his parents saw that they would be forced to send him to the schools in Busseto, entrusting him to poor but honest artisans.

In November 1823, he began lessons at the Ginnasio in Busseto, and at the same time began [lessons] in Music under the direction of the Maestro di Cappella Sig. Ferdinando Provesi, remembered with job and gratitude for his moral qualities, a true friend, truly learned, rather than untutored, and very active in matters concerning his Profession, having to his credit Religious compositions of merit; [Verdi's] parents hoped that in time [their son] would become an Organist somewhere.

But in the short space of two years, he profited so much from his lessons that his Teachers were obliged to take him very seriously.

By nature he was docile, respectful, but timid, and not fond of having a good time; but after being in contact with people, he soon became sharper and capable of an occasional childish insolence.

Studiava però notte e dì, ma più di tutto dedicava le ore notturne al suono e quasi intemperante e poco curante le lezioni Ginnasiali.-

Da quelle però ne traeva bastante profitto per distinguersi tra gli emoli suoi, non già per indefesso studio ma pello svegliato talento che natura largamente in lui aveva prodigalizzato.-

Ma dove egli diede maggiori prove del suo fino sentire si fu nella musica, giacchè in poche lezioni approfittando a dismisura, scoraggiò ed avilì li altri suoi emuli anche d'ingegno infino al punto di dimettersi da qualche ulteriore applicazione.-

Anche i maestri del Ginnasio e più di tutti il Professore di Grammatica latina ed eruditissimo Archeologo e Bibliotecario in sua patria l'Abbate Sig. Canonico Don Pietro Seletti, scorgendo dalla poca applicazione agli studi i giganteschi progressi che avrebbe fatto se v'avesse accaduto con alacrità, non ristavano per farselo suo, incalzandolo o di abbandonare il Ginnasio o le scuole di musica giacchè *non potes Duobus domini servire*, per cui sul timore di essere espulso dal Ginnasio astenevasi alcuna volta dalle Musicali Lezioni.

Interrogato Gius. dal Maestro Provesi da che derivasse quella alternativa alle Musicali Lezioni e freddezza alle medesime, egli se ne stava penoso alla risposta, ma la docilità ed afabilità del Provesi costrinsero bellamente il Verdi a narrargli la provenienza di questo suo nuovo sistema, non piacendo al Maestro nè punto nè poco.

All quale interrogazione timidamente il nostro Gius. rispondeva con riservatezza "che il suo maestro di Grammatica Italiana e Latina aveagli dichiarato che dimettesse tostamente la Musica per attendere alle sue lezioni, o queste lasciasse per dedicarsi esclusivamente alla Musica" a cui il Provesi dotto e in questa e in quella soggiunse "sapiate mio figliuolo che se voi aplicherete come in passato alle lezioni, voi diverrete ottimo Maestro che non potrete presagire tanto per le scienze non per mancanza d'ingegno, ma per l'amore smodato che avete alla musica. Ciò non per-

However, he studied night and day, but more than anything he dedicated the nighttime to playing, almost careless and indifferent to lessons at the Ginnasio.

In those, however, he did well enough to stand out among his fellow students, not really because of his indefatigable studying, but for his remarkable intelligence, which nature had lavished generously upon him.

But where he gave the most proof of his fine sensitivity was in music, since, having profited immensely from a few lessons, he discouraged and disheartened his fellow students, even those of intelligence, so that finally he reached the point of abandoning further application [to his studies].¹

Even the teachers at the Ginnasio, and most of all the Professor of Latin Grammar, the Abbot Sig. Canon Don Pietro Seletti, the most erudite Archaeologist and City Librarian, seeing from his casual dedication to his studies that he would have made gigantic progress had he attended to his lessons with more zeal, did not hesitate to tell him what they thought, urging him to give up either the Ginnasio or the music school, since *non potes Duobus domini servire*; and because of this Verdi sometimes stayed away from his Music Lessons, out of fear of being expelled from the Ginnasio.

Questioned by Maestro Provesi about why he had chosen this alternative to his Music Lessons and was so cool towards them, Gius.[seppe] found it painful to answer, but the goodness and affability of Provesi forced Verdi in a gentle way to tell where he had got the idea for his new plan of action—which did not please the Maestro one little bit.

To his questions, our Gius.[seppe] answered timidly and reticently "that his Maestro of Italian and Latin Grammar had told him that he must give up his Music at once to attend to his lessons, or that he must abandon his lessons to dedicate himself exclusively to Music," to which Provesi, gifted in both [fields], replied, "Know this, my boy, that if you apply yourself in the future as you have in the past to your lessons, you will become an excellent composer; I could not predict the same in learned studies, not because you lack intelligence but because of the extraordinary love you have for Music. Nonetheless, because of this you will not have to attend the Ginnasio course, too, in order to attain the fame I have my heart set on [for you] and about which I do not think I have deceived

¹The sentence can also be read "they" did not persist . . . in "their studies", but the paragraph which follows leads one to believe that it was Verdi who cut back on work.

tanto fa d'uopo, onde giungere alla celebrità che mi sono prefisso, e che credo di non ingannarmi, di attendere anche al corso Ginnasiale giacchè al Maestro compositore richieggonsi molti lumi, molte cognizioni in tutto lo scibile: qualora poi i vostri maestri dicessero davvero per espellermi dalle scuole, in questo caso io sarei in vece loro ogni volta mi faceste l'onore di tenermi anche in ciò capace”

Quest'atto di Provesiana umiliazione produsse nell'animo del suo adorato alunno una indicibile sensazione tanto più ch'egli sapeva che il Provesi aveva onorevolmente disimpegnato la Cattedra di Rettorica nello stesso Ginnasio per alcuni anni. Il fatto si fu che i maestri del Ginnasio, sia perchè fosse loro giunta all'orecchio l'offerta del Provesi, sia che li fosse caro l'alunno, egli continuò da poi le sue lezioni nè più se ne parlò.

Avute diverse lezioni di contrappunto e composizione ideale egli trovò in grado di poter bastamente ridurre alcuni pezzi Musicale, cosicchè non conoscendo abbastanza l'estensione e la natura degli strumenti, bellamente s'acostò al Sig. Antonio Barezzi appassionato Dilettante e capacissimo per questa bisogna, e da lui non molto lo rendè capace a questo non facile aringo.-

Giunto che fu al quattordicesimo anno di sua età trovò in grado di ridurre di comporre e di ammaestrare la gioventù.

E infatti ei componeva marci e Rondò per banda e li faceva eseguire.-

Ei poi era già grande per eseguire colla massima disinvoltura e perizia ed a primo colpo d'occhio sul pianoforte qualunque più scabra composizione si per pure fantasie, capricci, variazioni o concerti per quello Istromento in cui si fece prode campione coi soli metodi a stampa che nissuno da noi lo eguagliava.-

Nel 1828 si eseguiva nel Teatro di Busseto il Capolavoro del l'immortale Pesarese il *Barbiere di Siviglia*, il quale come tutti sanno non avendo sinfonia ed egli all'insaputa anche del Precettore ne compose una che poi offerse all'Orchestra perchè fosse soltanto sentita.-

Fu quella provata e riprovata quindi ritenuta dagli intelligenti un non impregevole lavoro, fu quindi stabilito che fosse meritamente posta innanzi all'opera di cui era stato affidato di farla sulle scene del Debutto.-

myself. True, the Maestro composer has to have many insights, much awareness in all fields of knowledge: so in case your Teachers were truly to expel you from the schools, then I would take their place whenever you did me the honor of accepting me in that capacity.”

This humble act on Provesi's part produced an undescrivable emotion in the soul of his adored student, all the more because he knew that Provesi had held the Chair of Rhetoric in the same Ginnasio for several years. In fact, the teachers at the Ginnasio let him go on with his lessons from that time onward, and nothing more was said about it, perhaps because they had heard about Provesi's offer, perhaps because their student was dear to them.

After various lessons in counterpoint and free composition, he found that he could adequately adapt some pieces of Music; so, because he did not know enough about the extension and nature of instruments, he courteously approached Sig. Antonio Barezzi, enthusiastic Dilettante and perfectly capable of filling [Verdi's] needs, and shortly he trained him to carry out this far from easy task.

Thus it came about that in his fourteenth year he was in a position to adapt musical pieces, compose [original works] and teach the young.

And in fact he was composing marches and Rondos for the band and had them performed.

At that time, he was already expert at sight-reading with the greatest possible ease and skill any composition for the piano, even the hardest—whether fantasies, capricios, variations, or concertos for that instrument, on which he became a valiant champion, so that none among us could match him, [even though he studied] solely from printed manuals.

In 1828, the Masterpiece *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* of the immortal Man of Pesaro was performed in the Theatre of Busseto; as everyone knows, it has no overture; and [Verdi]—without even informing his Teacher—composed one and offered it to the Orchestra just so that it could be heard.

It was rehearsed again and again, then judged a work of some worth by intelligent persons; then it was decided that it deserved to be performed before the opera by the person responsible for putting it on, in the theatre [where Verdi made his] début.

Le ovazioni ch'ebbe dal pubblico per quel primo parto furono tante e tante clamorose.-

Questa prima vittoria in Patria diede una spinta sì gagliarda al suo ingegno che da lì a poco si faceva innanzi con altre sinfonie, arie, duetti, concerti per pianoforte, variazioni sopra temi propri o di accreditato Maestri per diversi Istrumenti.

Andava ancora più innanzi: colle parole del ————— vestiva di note i deliri Saul a sola voce di Baritono.

Quella composizione è un vero gioello una pietra preziosa, un non so ch'è di grande che qualunque accreditato maestro non isdegnerebbe di porvi il suo nome. Anche questo parto fu eseguito in diverse accademie in Patria riportando l'ammirazione dei Cittadini e d'è forestieri accorsi per sentirlo i quali non mancarono di tributargli sperticati elogi.-

Anche al giorno d'oggi sonovi intelligenti i quali con ragione asseriscono che difficilmente lo stesso Autore potrà oltre superrare tre pezzi in particolare ch'esso spartito racchiude.-

Negli anni 1829 e 1830 il nostro Verdi non fece che studiare e comporre comporre e studiare i classici Autori.-

The ovations which he got from the public for this first score were absolutely tumultuous.

This first victory in his Native City gave such a powerful push to his inspiration that shortly afterward he came forward with other overtures, arias, duets, concertos for piano, variations on his own themes or those of famous Maestros for many Instruments.

He pushed even further ahead: he set to music the madness of Saul, with words by [Alfieri], for solo baritone.

That composition is a true jewel, a precious stone, something truly grand, to which any established composer would not be ashamed to set his name. This score was also performed in various Accademie in our Native City, to the admiration of our Citizens and of persons from other places who had come to hear it, who did not fail to lavish extraordinary praise on it.

Even today there are intelligent persons who rightly claim that it would be hard for the Composer to surpass three pieces, especially, contained in this score.

In the years 1829 and 1830 our Verdi did nothing but study and compose, compose and study the classical Composers. (*to be continued*)