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Patric Schmid

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# Maddalena's Aria

## **Keywords**

Verdi, Rigoletto, opera

# Maddalena's Aria

by Patric Schmid

Did Verdi compose an aria for Maddalena to sing in Act 3 or 4 of *Rigoletto*? It is a question musicologists have asked since the beginning of the century. The conductor Felix Mottl asked it in a letter to Ricordi in August 1903: 'I have been told that Maestro Verdi has composed for the last act of *Rigoletto* an arietta for the role of Maddalena. Is it true? And if so, how would it be possible to obtain the music of the piece?' The words of such an aria were known. They appeared in the French libretto of *Rigoletto* ('paroles Édouard Duprez') and they are still there in the current edition. They run:

Prends pitié de sa jeunesse;  
Il vint libre et sans secours . . .  
O mon frère! il m'intéresse;  
N'attente pas à ses jours.  
Le sommeil clôt sa paupière,  
Calme, heureux, sans crainte il dort;  
Cède enfin à ma prière . . .  
Ou je vais sauver son sort.  
Une soeur ou bien sa mère  
Doit l'attendre en ce moment;  
Songe à sa douleur amère,  
À ses larmes, son tourment.  
Vois, je pleure et je t'implore;  
Sois sensible et sans rigueur.  
Ah! par grâce, laisse encore  
Vivre, hélas! un si beau coeur.

This appears between Sparafucile's 'Apprête mon épée. Il dort, et le temps fuit' (corresponding to 'La spada, s'ei dorme, va . . . portami giù') and Gilda's return to the scene, in male attire.

Maddalena's aria does indeed exist. As noted by Cecil Hopkinson (*A Bibliography of the Works of Giuseppe Verdi*, 1, 61-2), it appears in a French edition of the vocal score published by Escudier in Paris some time between late 1857 and early 1858. I happened across it while examining the private collection of Jean-Marie Martin at Hologne-aux-Pierres in Belgium; M. Martin had also

drawn Hopkinson's attention to the piece. This Escudier score (plate number L.E. 1764) lists the arietta quite openly in the thematic index of the title page, as No. 11. It is not a complete score but contains only the major pieces from the opera. Maddalena's aria bears on its first page the legend 'Mélodie. G. Verdi. Mezzo-soprano'. The aria, however, is not found in the Escudier French-language vocal score of the *whole* opera (plate number L.E. 1761). The music is that of Verdi's song *Il poveretto*, published in 1847 by Lucca and, with French text, *Le Pauvre*, by Escudier. It has been transposed from F to E.

Maddalena's aria is no plotless interpolation but represents an expansion of her character, pleading with her brother on behalf of the young man 'who interests me' and who at that moment sleeps 'calm, happy, and without fear'. Moreover, its presence does allow Gilda a little more time to get home, change into male attire, and then return to the osteria.

But what of its origins? For a French performance but, from the dating of the Escudier plate numbers, certainly not for the first French-language Paris performance, which did not take place until December 1863, at the Théâtre-Lyrique, five years after publication. Perhaps, then, for the opera's first production in French, in Brussels on 22 November 1858—although the Maddalena of those performances, Mme Elmire, would hardly seem notable enough to merit the addition of an extra aria. Someone must study the *Rigoletto* French-language parts that were available from Escudier in the 19th century, and perhaps seek further information in the Brussels Conservatorium.

Maddalena's aria was performed for the first time this century by the mezzo-soprano Janet Hughes in a production of *Rigoletto* by the Northern Ireland Opera Trust, in Belfast, on April 25, 27, and 29, 1977; and by the mezzo-sopranos Susanne Marsee (April 24, 28) and Jan Curtis (April 26, 30) in the Opera Company of Boston's production. Both productions were in Italian; the French text of the aria was translated by Michael Rose and William Weaver.

<sup>1</sup>Letter in the collection of Richard Macnutt, Tunbridge Wells, England.

# MÉLODIE.

G. VERDI.

Mezzo-Soprano

Andante.

PIANO.

con semplicità.

Prends pi - tié de sa jeu - nes - se, Il vient

libre et sans se - cours; O mon frè - re il m'in - té -

- res - se; N'at - tentez pas, n'attendez pas a ses jours.

rall.

Le som - meil clôt sa ' pau - pié - re, Cal - me, heu.

- reux, sans crainte il dort. Cè - de en - fin à ma pri -

- c - re... Ou je vais, ——— ja vais sauver son sort. U - ne

*dim. mezza voce.*

*p legato.*

sœur, ou bien sa mè - re Dait l'at - tendre en se mo -



*con farsa* *dim. morendo*

ment... Songe à sa dou - leur a - mè - re, A ses larmes, son tour.

*p*

ment... Vois, je pleure et je t'im - plo - re.. Sois sen - sible et sans ri -

- gueur; Ah! par grâ - ce, lais - se en - co - re Vi - vre hélas un si beau

*morendo.*

coeur. Ah! grâ - ce! ah! grâ - ce!

*p dim.*