1-1-2015

Some Biographical Notes on Mauro Corticelli and a Previously Unpublished Letter to Him From Verdi

Martin Chusid
New York University

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarship.richmond.edu/vf

Part of the Musicology Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: http://scholarship.richmond.edu/vf/vol1/iss22/3

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by UR Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Verdi Forum by an authorized administrator of UR Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact scholarshiprepository@richmond.edu.
Some Biographical Notes on Mauro Corticelli and a Previously Unpublished Letter to Him From Verdi

Keywords
Giuseppe Verdi, correspondence

This article is available in Verdi Forum: http://scholarship.richmond.edu/vf/vol1/iss22/3
Mauro Corticelli, birth and death dates unknown, was a close friend of Verdi's second wife, Giuseppina Strepponi Verdi, for more than 35 years. During the last twelve of these (1867-1879), he was also what Giuseppe Verdi called his "uomo d'affari." This meant he helped administer the large agricultural estate of Sant'Agata under the composer's close supervision and assisted Verdi in a multitude of business and personal matters as well. In that capacity he lived at Sant'Agata as if a member of the family, taking his meals with the Verdis. He also seems to have had a room or an apartment at the Verdis' winter place in Genoa.

Since Corticelli was active as an adult in Bologna from 1843 to 1859, and there is a reference to him suggesting good health in a letter of Verdi to his friend Giuseppe Piroli dated October 1885, we can presume a fairly long life, at least by 19th century standards.

Certainly it was an interesting one. In the position he held before he came to Sant'Agata (1859-67), Corticelli was an administrator for the theatrical touring company of the great Italian actress Adelaide Ristori (1822-1906). In that capacity he traveled all over Europe, from Portugal and Spain in the West to Russia in the East, as well as to England, Egypt, Turkey and the Americas.

From Strepponi's letters to him, "Maurone" (Big Mauro) seems to have been a heavy, bald, good-natured man with considerable wit and intelligence. And, by the time he joined the Verdis, he also knew several languages. There is a letter from Strepponi to him in English fearing his criticism, and for a number of years the Ristori troupe was headquartered in Paris where Corticelli must have learned, or improved, his French.

He also seems to have had musical training, having organized an "abbastanza numeroso" chorus at Sant'Agata for which Verdi sought contrapuntal music from Ricordi in 1871.

The earliest known document relating to Corticelli dates from 10 April 1843 in Bologna where he had relatives and is presumed to have been born and brought up. This is an invitation to become an ispettore aggiunto ai pubblici spettacoli (Adjunct or Assistant Inspector for Public Theatrical Performances). He and the nobleman he assisted, a marchese Pizzardi, were expected to assure full compliance on the part of Bolognese theatres to the regulations, discipline and both normal and special theatrical practices on behalf of the Papal police and ultimately the Cardinal-Legate who administered Bologna for the Pope. As you may recall, during most of the 19th century the Papal States comprised much of central Italy. They extended...
I am exceedingly glad that you are putting your intelligence and probity at [Ristori's] service... May God always bless her; you and all honest hearts that resemble yours...7

When did Strepponi issue her warning? Perhaps it was during the Autumn season of 1843. Nabucco was being performed for the first time in Bologna; Giuseppina sang Abigaille as she had at the premiere in Milan the year previously, and at Parma the same year, both under the direction of Verdi.8 Ispettore Aggiunto Corticelli had complete access to all parts of the Teatro Comunale including back stage; and he certainly would not have missed attending the premiere of the extremely successful opera on 8 October, or a performance shortly thereafter.

If not earlier, Verdi met Corticelli in the Autumn of 1850. The composer directed Macbeth at the Comunale, as well as the Bolognese premiere of Luisa Miller. Acting for the ostensibly retired Alessandro Lanari, Corticelli and Antonio Puglioli administered the theater.9 During the years following Corticelli tried to commission original operas from Verdi for the same theater on at least two occasions. The responses were friendly and of more than passing interest; but they were negative. While directing the successful first performances of Trovatore, Verdi wrote from Rome on 22 January 1853:

... What can I say about your request. At the moment I can't undertake any task. A commission frightens me. To go on stage at a [specific] time, at a fixed day, with elements that are good and not good; that isn't what I would like to do. I would like to write an opera completely at my own convenience; then having studied the [different] companies, to give it where it would be most suitable. Here dear Corticelli are my ideas.10

Less than two years later, while awaiting the return to Paris of the unpredictable soprano Sophie Cruvelli so that he could mount Les Vêpres siciliennes, Verdi wrote on 18 November 1854:

My very dear Corticelli,... For now it is impossible for me to answer Yes or No to the proposal that I write for Bologna [next] Autumn. Who knows! I can say nothing definite because I have some projects; have given some half-promises—then the librettos—then thousands and thousands of [other] things etc. etc. Finally, let's not speak of it for now and arrange your affairs as if I didn't exist...11
During the seasons of 1855 and 1856 Corticelli, in collaboration with Agostino Marchesi, mounted five operas by Verdi at the Teatro Comunale of Bologna: *Trovatore*, *Violetta* (a censored version of *Traviata*), *Luisa Miller*, *Viscardello* (the most popular of the many censored versions of *Rigoletto*) and *I due Foscari*. But the theatrical agency of Marchesi and Corticelli did poorly thereafter and was dissolved at the end of the year 1858.12

At this point Corticelli undertook a new and challenging position, manager for the traveling theatrical company of Adelaide Ristori; and it was in Russia with the Ristori troupe during the winter of 1860-61 that Corticelli played a role in the negotiations that led to the composition of *La forza del destino*. The first approach to Verdi from the Imperial Theater of St. Petersburg arrived at Sant'Agata enclosed in a letter from Corticelli.

Giuseppina responded for Verdi in a tentatively positive way, on 17 January 1861 she wrote to her friend:

... Verdi will reply direct ... in what terms I don't know, but from certain words that have escaped him it seems to me that he is no longer so averse to taking up the pen again..."13

In March, during the negotiations, she wrote again:

...The libretto will be the most serious hurdle...Verdi is not the man to set just any old thing to music, and was given a tremendous lesson in Naples by not having reached a very clear understanding beforehand with that gloomy thing known as Censorship...

She was referring to *Un ballo in maschera*. After teasing him—"When you get to Paris, goodbye virtue"—she adds:

... You know that I esteem you for your staunch character and perfect heart. I take the liberty of joking with you to prove to you that neither distance nor the many years we have known each other have cooled or altered the sincere friendship which makes me always your affectionate Giuseppina..."14

After Verdi had signed the contract with St. Petersburg in June, she commissioned Corticelli to provide the necessary provisions they would need for a long stay in Russia, plenty of pasta, cheese and wine.15

It is also of interest that Corticelli had offered to be responsible for staging *Forza* in St. Petersburg. In response Giuseppina wrote:

...Verdi told me that instead of him doing you a favor, you would be doing him the greatest one by taking over the mise-en-scene of the Petersburg opera. However, he cannot appoint you officially. He is not familiar with Petersburg and with the regulations and conventions of that Theater and of those who manage it or are employed by it ..."16

In fact the illness of the original soprano, La Grua, postponed the premiere of the opera for a year and Corticelli was no longer in St. Petersburg. Therefore, the question of his staging *Forza* or any other opera by Verdi, as far as we know, never came up again. But the lively correspondence between Strepponi and Corticelli continued during the remainder of his tour of duty with the Ristori company. Giuseppina even had her friend buy clothes or her in Paris;17 and several times during the year 1864 he was invited to stay at Sant'Agata for "non qualche ora, ma qualche giorno" (not for some hours, but for some days).18 That same year she teased him unmercifully about a projected trip to Egypt. When he began to have difficulties with the Ristori and financial problems, Strepponi could be sympathetic, and more. In a letter dated 12 April 1866 she wrote:

...You were very wrong, in your moment of need, not to send me word. I don't need very much for my toilette and (especially of late) the liberality of my protecting angel is suffi-
ciently great to permit me some small savings. I should have sent you at once that little hoard of mine, no one would have known anything about it ... I hope you never find yourself in such a tight place again, but, in any case, as far as the modest purse of your old friend will reach, draw upon it freely...\textsuperscript{19}

Several months later, while Verdi was writing Don Carlos for the Paris Opera, Giuseppina invited, apparently for the first time, Corticelli to live with them at Sant'Agata. The letter was written from a small town in the French Pyrenees and dated 20 August 1866:

... There will always be an open door... at Sant'Agata and two friends who will receive you with all their heart...\textsuperscript{20}

According to Walker a draft of the formal invitation to join the Verdis dated October 1867 may be found at Sant'Agata.\textsuperscript{21}

He also cites an amusing pair of letters from Angelo Mariani, the great orchestral conductor, to the Verdis. On October 7 Mariani complains of being awakened every morning by Corticelli and chastized for keeping late hours. The former theatrical agent is, the conductor wrote, "a proper grumbler. I have been assured that he is a woman chaser \textit{par excellence} and that Bologna is full of his former mistresses, old and young." \textsuperscript{22} A week later he changes his tune, now the "good Corticelli ... received Signor Giuseppina's letter and wept with consolation... You have rendered happy one who is the king of men of honour and the admiration of all the honest."\textsuperscript{23}

But Corticelli did not go to Sant'Agata immediately. A letter he wrote the third of November to E De Andreis, his replacement in Paris with the Ristori company, reads "Now I am in Bologna completely retired and when Verdi is in Genoa this winter I shall join him in order to remain with him."\textsuperscript{24}

Mariani's comments about Corticelli's womenizing may not have been too far off the mark. Phillips-Matz reports an entry in Giuseppina's diary for 4 January 1868 to the effect that Verdi was upset and blamed her because the new "man of affairs" was too familiar with a Maddalena. Phillips-Matz identifies the woman as Maddalena Barelli, widow of Verdi's father-in-law, Antonio Barelli who lived in Busseto. But since the events described took place in Genoa and Corticelli had just joined them there, this is highly unlikely. It is more plausible that one of the servants in the Verdi household was also named Maddalena.\textsuperscript{25}

That Giuseppina was pleased with Corticelli's presence is clear from correspondence with Cesare De Sanctis, a close friend of the Verdis' living in Naples. In the course of a letter dated 10 May 1869 she urges a visit by De Sanctis and his wife to Sant'Agata:

... If you come... you will find... an old friend of ours, the best-natured sort of a fellow who lives with us and helps Verdi with his affairs. This friend is Signor Mauro Corticelli who traveled for some time with Mme. Ristori and found that the travels in America and elsewhere were too much like perpetual motion to suit an individual of his very respectable circumference...\textsuperscript{26}

Corticelli's tasks for Verdi were quite varied. In 1869 they included traveling to Milan to expedite the publication at Ricordi of a volume of songs as a benefit for the ailing Francesco Maria Piave, librettist for Ernani, Macbeth, Stiffelio, Rigoletto, Traviata, Forza del destino and other operas. One of the songs was composed by Verdi.

One of Mauro's more interesting activities involved traveling with the composer in November of 1871 to Bologna; obtaining a box at the Teatro Comunale where the first Italian performances of an opera by Wagner (Lohengrin) were taking place; and then sitting together with Luigi Monti, an employee of Ricordi, at the front of the box in a vain attempt to have Verdi's presence at the back of the box pass unnoticed. The composer was, however, recognized...
Two days later, 24 December, Giuseppina wrote to Corticelli that Mariani had deposited 400 lire with Carlino Del Signore for his apartment. 31

The years 1871, when Corticelli organized a chorus of young people at Sant'Agata and accompanied Verdi to Bologna for the performance of Lorenzini, and 1872, when this letter was written, would appear to mark a high point in the relationship of Verdi and Corticelli. By 1875 the tone of the composer's letters to his business assistant is less friendly; and the next series of citations tells us as much about Verdi as they do about Corticelli. In a frequently cited letter of 16 February 1875 the composer complains of the high cost of postage on a letter from Corticelli:

Be well aware that I esteem those who know how to spend a thousand francs at the right time and the right place, and who know how to save the centime. This is a concept of which you are not cognizant, but you are wrong, very wrong... 32

And on 10 April of the same year he writes:

...Watch over everything. I repeat to you for the thousandth time. It is not enough "to command," as you do; but it is necessary "to command" in a way you can be understood. And then to check and be vigilant to see if your commands have been carried out. This is the only way to get things done. And this not only at Sant'Agata, but everywhere and in everything...Watch over everything. Do not allow there to be any other masters and trust no one... 33

With regard to trust, Verdi had a bitter experience the same year. He discovered that his publisher, Ricordi, had been defrauding him of a substantial portion of his royalties. A painful period ensued during which the Ricordis attempted to place the blame first on an employee which the Ricordis attempted to place the blame first on an employee and then hinted that someone in Verdis own household (Corticelli?) shared blame. Corticelli was sent to Milan to obtain copies of Verdis contracts for the composer and ultimately a financial settlement was reached. A letter cited below (9 April 1879) suggests that Corticelli played a role in the settlement.

During May of 1876 a potential disaster at Sant'Agata was averted. But it occasioned another lecture:

...Then you almost had a [bad] flood? Do you see that I was right to compel the completion of the dam? ...And do you see how much damage would have been done with your usual laxness in putting off for tomorrow what you can do today? This perpetual good nature of yours is a fault. What do you gain from it? What does others gain? Nothing...Perhaps it appeared to you that I was too severe, but now you will agree that I was right...[About] the new fattore (farm worker)? ...Don't also spoil him with your usual praises and with too much intimacy; leave him in his place and you stay in yours... 34

Even Mauro's staunch supporter, Giuseppina, noticed problems. In a letter to Teresa Stolz dating from August 1876 she remarks that "Corticelli is not always in the best of health and seems to me to have aged a lot; perhaps that's why he's not getting on very well with his new tasks." 35

Although Verdi writes to his friend Giuseppina Piroli on 7 March 1877 "Corticelli is very well; he is quite fat and always the same..." the relationship between the two men seems to be deteriorating. During 1878 Corticelli is supervising extensive reconstruction of the house at Sant'Agata. In a letter from Genoa, Verdi provides minute instructions and displays, not for the first time, his clear understanding of good management procedures.

...So, watch everything and make sure that the jobs are arranged in such a way that each [worker] does not have to wait for the other. This is the great secret to do things well and quickly. Each one in place... 36

In the Spring of 1879 Corticelli angers Verdi greatly. The composer writes on 9 April:

...To who were the Ricordi telegram and letter addressed? If they were addressed to me, why haven't you sent them to me? If they were addressed to you, I find curious the fact that they wrote to you about Don Carlos. I know you will say: "Well, they are sending them to me!..." But there is a reason: and it is because we are all somewhat out of our [usual] locations. When I sent you to Milan to settle the serious dispute [about the royalties] etc. etc. Tito then wrote me congratulating you because you had been so 'good, indulgent, compliant...' Compliant?...I would have wished that as a commendation he had said just and severe...It was the phrase that would have been appropriate in that situation. From then on there followed a correspondence between you and the Casa Ricordi...even about my musical matters! And do you know why? Because they believed from your compliant tone an authority which had the power to do and undo, a sort of alter ego, finally a support in the event of new disputes. That you do not see this, all right; but that you do not see the unseemliness to which you lend yourself, of writing to you about matters of my art,
and this led to extended bursts of applause that Verdi would not acknowledge.  

In addition to responsibilities at Sant' Agata, Corticelli was entrusted with tasks having to do with the Verdis' living quarters in Genoa. They had rented a large apartment in the Palazzo Sauli from the Marchesa Luisa Sauli Pallavicino and moved in during the Spring of 1867. Giuseppina had furnished the apartment, with the help of Mariani with whom the Verdis were close at the time. So close that the conductor moved into an upstairs portion of the apartment and became their tenant.

By the year 1872, the relationship between Mariani and Verdi had deteriorated considerably, exacerbated perhaps in part by a rivalry between Mariani and Corticelli for the friendship of the Verdis. That same year Verdi was informed that the rent on the apartment was to be increased. The composer and Giuseppina were in Naples from November for performances Verdi was directing of a partially revised Don Carlos and Aida at the Teatro San Carlo. Several letters from Verdi to Corticelli at the time deal with the composer's reactions to events at the large Neapolitan theater and of his concern for the rental in Genoa. The letter published for the first time in this article, is one of these.

The first of the series, a letter dated 15 November is printed in Abbiati, where it is misdated 15 December. Corticelli is sent to Genoa to pay the rent (3,700 lire) for the Palazzo Sauli to the Pallavicinos' manager. "Ask him also what were the conditions set and accepted by Mariani because I've never known them and as many times as I've asked him for a rental contract, I was never able to get one." Verdi then directs Corticelli to a friend of Mariani, Carlo del Signore, to arrange, in a friendly fashion if possible, for Mariani to vacate his apartment. But if a friendly agreement cannot be reached, Corticelli is to give Mariani notice in the shortest time the law will allow. He then changes the topic. "My rehearsals [for Don Carlos] would go well if I did not have three very bad basses."  

The second is dated 5 December and described in a Florentine dealer's catalogue (L. Lapiccielle, 1956). Verdi intends to give up the Genoese apartment because the rent has been raised and he gives Corticelli instructions to arrange the matter properly. He adds "Yesterday evening second performance [of Don Carlos], all the singers have gained and gained greatly in the esteem of the public."  

The new letter follows the others as far as the Genoese apartment is concerned; but there are also some interesting remarks about the progress of the season at San Carlo.

---

Napoli 22 Dic. 1872
Caro Corticelli

Questa lettera ti troverà, dunque Genova. Andrai subito da Petricioli (?) * e ti farai dare la risposta in iscritto onde io possa sapere a quivi m’en tenir riguardo alla casa.

Qualora, ma non credo, ricusasse o trovasse scuse andrai allora da un Legale a cui racconterai come sono le cose, e farai quanto Esso dirà. Ben inteso io non voglio più abitare in quella casa; voglio lasciarla in libertà, e voglio che sia accettata questa rinuncia. Il tutto in modo legale. Non perdere tempo, perché non vorrei che arrivando, troppo tardi io non avessi più la facoltà di lasciare la casa libera.

Non ti parlo qui del Teatro che è in insorgenza per mancanza di denaro. E certo che le spese prime sono state enormi, e, causa le malattie di Balderini (?), * Waldman [sic], e specialmente questa del [la] Stolz, non avendo potuto fare che sei recite la crisis era inevitabile. In questa circostanza ci voleva un mezzo millione in cassa prima di aprire il teatro.—Pare che le cose, da ieri seria, siano accomodate. Ma non lo credo, e nasceranno più tardi altri guai. Il fatto sì che Musella*** sara un briccone (lo dicono tutti) ma è altresì vero che il municipio, per personalità, sì e condotto molto male.

La Peppina dice di ritirare da Maso l’affitto anticipato della villa L120 ed avvertirlo che io non sono più padrone dell’ultimo November 1873.

Scrivici ed addio.—Ti auguro tutto quello che desideri. Addio.
G. Verdi

Naples 22 Dec. 1872
Dear Corticelli

This letter will find you in Genoa. Go immediately to Petricioli (?) * and make him give you an answer in writing so that I can know a quoi m’en tenir (where I stand) with regard to the house.

I don’t think he will, but in case he refuses or offers excuses, then go to a lawyer, explain how things are, and do as he says. It is to be clearly understood that I no longer want to occupy that house; I want to leave it vacant, and I want this renunciation to be accepted. Everything in legal fashion.

Do not lose any time, because I am afraid that by [your] arriving late, I may no longer have the authority to leave the house empty.

I won’t speak to you here about the theater which is in chaos because of a lack of funds. It is certain that the early expenses have been enormous, and because of the illnesses of Balderini (?), ** Waldmann and especially that of Stolz, since they were able to do only six performances, the crisis was inevitable. Under these circumstances a half million was needed in the cash box before the theater opened.—As of last night it seems as if things are under control, but I don’t believe it, and other problems will arise later. The fact is that Musella*** may be a scoundrel (everyone says so) but it is also true that the municipality, because of personalities, has conducted itself very badly.

La Peppina [Giuseppina] says to collect the anticipated rent of 120 lire from Maso for the villa and notify him that I will no longer be landlord from the end of November 1873.

Write to us and farewell.—I wish you everything you desire. Farewell.
G. Verdi

* Probably the business agent for the marchesa Luisa Sauli Pallavicino.
** Presumably the tenor of the company. Either Verdi has the name garbled, or Balderini was replaced by F. Palmieri who sang Carlos and Radames under Verdi’s direction that season at San Carlo. See T. Kaufman, Verdi and his Major Contemporaries: A Selected Chronology of Performances with Casts (New York & London, 1990).
Two days later, 24 December, Giuseppina wrote to Corticelli that Mariani had deposited 400 lire with Carlino Del Signore for his apartment.\textsuperscript{32}

The years 1871, when Corticelli organized a chorus of young people at Sant'Agata and accompanied Verdi to Bologna for the performance of Lohengrin, and 1872, when this letter was written, would appear to mark a high point in the relationship of Verdi and Corticelli. By 1875 the tone of the composer's letters to his business assistant is less friendly; and the next series of citations tells us as much about Verdi as they do about Corticelli. In a frequently cited letter of 16 February 1875 the composer complains of the high cost of postage on a letter from Corticelli:

\begin{center}
Be well aware that I esteem those who know how to spend a thousand francs at the right time and the right place, and who know how to save the centime. This is a concept of which you are not cognizant, but you are wrong, very wrong...\textsuperscript{33}
\end{center}

And on 10 April of the same year he writes:

\begin{center}
...Watch over everything. I repeat to you for the thousandth time. It is not enough "to command," as you do; but it is necessary "to command" in a way you can be understood. And then to check and be vigilant to see if your commands have been carried out. This is the only way to get things done. And this not only at Sant'Agata, but everywhere and in everything...Watch over everything. Do not allow there to be any other masters and trust no one...\textsuperscript{34}
\end{center}

With regard to trust, Verdi had a bitter experience the same year. He discovered that his publisher, Ricordi, had been defrauding him of a substantial portion of his royalties. A painful period ensued during which the Ricordis attempted to place the blame first on an employee and then hinted that someone in Verdi's own household (Corticelli?) shared blame. Corticelli was sent to Milan to obtain copies of Verdi's contracts for the composer and ultimately a financial settlement was reached. A letter cited below (9 April 1879) suggests that Corticelli played a role in the settlement.

During May of 1876 a potential disaster at Sant'Agata was averted. But it occasioned another lecture:

\begin{center}
...Then you almost had a [bad] flood? Do you see that I was right to compel the completion of the dam? ... And do you see how much damage would have been done with your usual laxness in putting off for tomorrow what you can do today? This perpetual good nature of yours is a fault. What do you gain from it? What do others gain? Nothing... Perhaps it appeared to you that I was too severe, but now you will agree that I was right ... [About] the new fattore (farm worker)? ... Don't also spoil him with your usual praises and with too much intimacy; leave him in his place and you stay in yours...\textsuperscript{35}
\end{center}

Even Mauro's staunch supporter, Giuseppina, noticed problems. In a letter to Teresa Stolz dating from August 1876 she remarks that "Corticelli is not always in the best of health and seems to me to have aged a lot; perhaps that's why he's not getting on very well with his new tasks."\textsuperscript{36}

Although Verdi writes to his friend Giuseppina Piroli on 7 March 1877 "Corticelli is very well; he is quite fat and always the same..."\textsuperscript{37} the relationship between the two men seems to be deteriorating. During 1878 Corticelli is supervising extensive reconstruction of the house at Sant'Agata. In a letter from Genoa, Verdi provides minute instructions and displays, not for the first time, his clear understanding of good management procedures.

\begin{center}
...So, watch everything and make sure that the jobs are arranged in such a way that each [worker] does not have to wait for the other. This is the great secret to do things well and quickly. Each one in place...\textsuperscript{38}
\end{center}

In the Spring of 1879 Corticelli angers Verdi greatly. The composer writes on 9 April:

\begin{center}
...To who were the Ricordi telegram and letter addressed? If they were addressed to me, why haven't you sent them to me? If they were addressed to you, I find curious the fact that they wrote to you about Don Carlos. I know you will say: "Well, they are sending them to me..." But there is a reason: and it is because we are all somewhat out of our usual locations. When I sent you to Milan to settle the serious dispute [about the royalties] etc. etc. Tito then wrote me congratulating you because you had been so good, indulgent, compliant ... 'Compliant...' I would have wished that as a commendation he had said just and severe ... It was the phrase that would have been appropriate in that situation. From there on there followed a correspondence between you and the Casa Ricordi ... even about my musical matters! And do you know why? Because they believed from your compliant tone an authority which had the power to do and undo, a sort of alter ego, finally a support in the event of new disputes. That you do not see this, all right; but that you do not see the unseemliness to which you lend yourself, of writing to you about matters of my art,
is something that goes beyond limits. Let us conclude then and let's put things in order. You will write to Ricordi that you are not charged with receiving news and congratulations about my opera; and that the telegram and last letter were as if not written; and that, in the event, it will be better to give such news directly [to me]. In this way we'll avoid misunderstandings that later on could produce problems and serious confusion. I repeat again: let us put things in order and farewell..."

Clearly Corticelli's days with the Verdis were numbered. The last straw was near the end of the same year. Verdi learned that Corticelli "had been misusing the savings of the cook and another person of the entourage at Sant'Agata, with whom he had apparently been having a love affair. This 'Maddalena', mentioned in some of Verdi's letters to Piroli, may have been another servant, or may have been Baretti's widow." The composer compelled his manager to make restitution and fired him, but not without some concern for his future. To his old friend Giuseppe Piroli, Verdi wrote on 24 December that Corticelli was supposed to have left Sant'Agata the preceding day. "But where will he go? ... what will he do?"

After his departure, Corticelli first went to live with a cousin in Bologna. He then moved on to Milan. There, without a position, he accumulated a substantial debt at his hotel and, approximately six months after leaving Verdi's employ, he attempted suicide in the Milan canal. He was rescued by passersby and Giuseppina responded to the news by paying his hotel bill. "You see human events! The circumstances draw me to help someone who has completely lost my esteem! But what to do? A pension? A sum for one time? He would eat this up in a few months; a pension would obligate me too much! What would you do in my situation? Write to me..."

Did Verdi do anything? The biographical literature, even the most recent, doesn't consider the question. But the answer is to be found in the first published volume of the Carteggio Verdi-Ricordi (1880-1881) published by the Istituto nazionale di studi verdi (Parma, 1988). On 5 August 1880 Verdi directed Tito Ricordi "On the first day of each month, please pay Sig. Mauro Corticelli the sum of 100 lire from my account..." And on 6 September he followed with another letter, this time to Giulio Ricordi, asking if the pension has been paid. A letter from Eugenio Tomaghi assures Verdi that the payment was and would continue to be made.

Five years later Corticelli appears, as far as we know for the last time, in the Verdi correspondence. Piroli had met Corticelli in Milan and the former theatrical agent-administrator was as ebullient as ever. He wrote to Verdi of the meeting and the composer responded 9 October 1885:

"...I was stunned (literally: I remained with my mouth open) reading of your encounter with Corticelli! Poor devil! But what toupet (impudence or cheek)..."

Fifteen years as a theatrical agent in Bologna, the second most important city of the Papal States; eight years as an administrator for Adelaide Ristori, perhaps the most significant European actress of her age; and twelve years in a managerial position for the greatest Italian operatic composer of all time. Giovanni Azzaroni and Paola Bignami describe Maurone as a "piccola rotella dell'ingranaggio dell'impresa teatrale (a small cog in the big machine of theatrical enterprise), an intermediary, a secretary, a loser..." Perhaps. But I think he played a more significant role in the lives of the Verdis (and the Ristoris?) than that remark implies. He was an important window on the world for Giuseppina Strepponi for many of the years she spent isolated at Sant'Agata, a vital link to her successful, if brief, professional career; and he must have been extremely entertaining at table. When his side of the extensive Verdi-Corticelli correspondence is published, I think we'll meet a lively and perceptive observer of the theatrical world. With regard to Verdi, I wonder how many men or women of his time could measure up to the high managerial standards of the composer, and at the same time be willing to devote so much of his or her life to the task? The letters Verdi wrote to Corticelli and his predecessor managing Sant'Agata, Paolo Marenghi, suggest very few indeed.
NOTEs

1. See letter dating from early January of 1871 in which Verdi invites Giulio Ricordi to visit Genoa. "...There is a modest room near Corticelli at your disposal..." Franco Abbiati, Verdi (New York, A.A. Knopf, 1962) p. 245. "...I beg your pardon, for every error that I am sure, you shall find in my letter. Be indulgent..."

4. See Verdi’s letter to Giulio Ricordi of mid-January 1871 cited in Abbiati, vol. III, p. 432. "...I want to see some Fugues that ought to be useful for Corticelli’s young [male and female] students at Sant’Agata..."

5. See Giovanni Azzaroni and Paola Bignami, Corticelli Mauro Impresario (Bologna, Nuova Alfa Editoriale, 1990) p. 80. I am deeply indebted to Marisa Di Gregorio Casati, Staff Member and Editor at the Istituto nazionale di studi verdiani who brought this book to my attention and then gave me her copy.


13. See Giovanni Azzaroni and Paola Bignami, Giovanna d’Arco e la verdianna al Teatro alla Scala ( Milan, 1929) p. 36.


17. See letters of 29 Apr. and 6 May 1862, Walker, pp. 245, 246.


Photocopies consulted at the Istituto nazionale di studi verdiani.


20. See Azzaroni and Bignami, p. 136.


22. Ibid. p. 338.

23. Ibid. p. 338.

24. See Azzaroni and Bignami, p. 136.


28. Ibid. pp. 504-506 including a letter from Mariani to Carlino Del Signore about Verdi’s presence in the theater.


31. Copy of the catalogue entry consulted at the Istituto nazionale di studi verdiani.

32. See Walker, p. 387.


34. See Op. cit. p. 550; also in Oberdorfer p. 236.


36. See Walker, p. 434.

37. See CV vol. III, p. 123.

38. See Azzaroni and Bignami, p. 168.


40. Cited from Walker, p. 444. Walker bases his remarks on Verdi’s letters to Pirola, some of which, according to Luzio are missing. See CV, vol. III, pp. 141-143. If this is the same Maddalena mentioned by Giuseppina almost 12 years earlier, it would appear to be a servant rather than Maddalena Barezzi.


42. See letter cited next.


44. Ibid. p. 148.

45. It is surprising, for example, that Phillips-Matz in her recent biography mentions neither the well-known suicide attempt nor the generosity of Giuseppina and Verdi on hearing about it.


47. Ibid. p. 58.

48. Ibid. p. 61.


50. See Azzaroni and Bignami, p. 183.

51. Four letters from Verdi to Marenghi are published in Oberdorfer, pp. 233-235.