



Director's Notes

by Carmelo Rifici

The beauty of this opera, that is to say what has fascinated and seduced me in this *Anna Bolena*, lies in its dramatic power and elevation. Felice Romani's libretto is not only a great support for Donizetti's masterful music, but, for the first time, together with the music, it successfully created an all-round tragic character: Anna, the true dramatic fulcrum of the whole opera, with an expressive strength that had never previously been achieved by Romani. And that's not all: the psychological truth of the characters, the dramatic power of the duets, the introspection, so well timed along the path that leads Anna to her death, thanks to the surprising *cabaletta*, make this opera almost unique. Quite definitely a point of arrival for Donizetti himself. For a director, this opera is a really interesting challenge. Not included among the works that are so-called "well-known" to the general public, due to the absence of famous arias, Anna's *via crucis* unfolds before our eyes in all its "objective dramatic coherence". In this opera, *bel canto* and interpretation are magically combined.

Listening to the opera, it was impossible for me not to conceive a dynamic image of the performance.

The music itself seems to transport one into a world where everything moves, unceasingly. Despite the long duets, indeed thanks precisely to the length of the sections of the score, the director has the possibility to penetrate the mental and spiritual labyrinths of the characters. The inner plot and the narrative move together. The sensation that lingers on with every listening is precisely this: the drama moves threateningly towards Anna. The factual reality of the opera is what avoids making it just the story of a victim, or a martyr. From the beginning, Anna shows herself to be aware of her ambitions and the tragic conclusion that a blind ambition, which suffocates desires and loves, is destined to suffer. Anna knows that getting too close to that crazy, pathological mind of Henry VIII is not only dangerous, but also inescapably catastrophic. But ambition stops at nothing. Ambition moves forward boldly, held back only in a few passages where love appears. But this is an attempt that is too fragile to stem the raging sea of blind lust for power and desire.

This eternal movement, this unstoppable force, so subtly amplified by a tragic chorus that sentimentally accompanies the tragedy to its nefarious consequences, made me imagine a threatening and tumultuous stage space. I imagined a space that prevents the characters from finding protection or comfort: a space in unstable equilibrium. I want to transmit to the audience that same unstoppable sensation that I also felt while studying the opera. The space is not reassuring, but rather iridescent and labyrinthine. It takes the characters to perdition and bewilderment. At the same time, it is not a realistic space, but rather a dwelling place of the soul. The rooms that the characters cross are interior spaces, and they open the doors to their fears, to their most brutal impulses. That is why I avoided details that were too realistic and preferred, on the contrary, to imagine symbolic and artistic objects and furnishings, capable of containing the brutal force of the drama, but also of bringing to life the sentimental needs of the characters, their need for love. There is something charismatic about the royal families of England, which still move us today. The history of England, whether it is told in an Elizabethan drama, reported in the media or, as in this case, sublimated into Donizetti's music, never ceases to pose questions for us. It opens up in us the moral question of ambition, power, and violence. Although I had no intention of creating a present-day version, in order to amplify this fascination, I did not want to present the opera in a form that was too classical, too distant from us, so I preferred to imagine costumes that were not those of the 16th Century.

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Like the scenery, the costumes must also reverberate with that dramatic force which emanates from the characters. The costumes of this opera are not "decorative" but "structural", with their bright colors, the strength of their materials, and their contemporary cut. Their task is to create in the audience a universal imagination that is still capable of speaking to us and of making us feel responsibility for a human story.

We live in a time in which personal ambition is still with us. On the contrary, contemporary history shows us to what extent power is still hungry for injustice and feeds on cruelty. The strength of this *Anna Bolena*, which transforms its protagonist's story into a warning that is too human to leave us cold and detached, lies precisely in its creator's ability to empathize. Donizetti's music and Romani's text are so intrinsically linked, so dramatically real in their unfolding, that they could not fail to be supported by the work of the director. I therefore hope that the spectators will abandon themselves to that dark and passionate "journey", to that tragic movement of the protagonist, who underlines, today more than yesterday, how Hubris is always in due time destined to be punished by the Gods.