



GOLDEN AGE

BY TERRENCE McNALLY



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GOLDEN AGE was originally produced in New York City
by Manhattan Theatre Club,
Lynne Meadow, Artistic Director; Barry Grove, Executive Producer

World premiere produced by Philadelphia Theatre Company
Sara Garonzik, Producing Artistic Director; Diane Claussen, Managing Director

For Jonathan Lomma

GOLDEN AGE was presented by Manhattan Theatre Club (Lynne Meadow, Artistic Director; Barry Grove, Executive Producer) in New York City, opening on December 4, 2012. It was directed by Walter Bobbie; the set design was by Santo Loquasto; the costume design was by Jane Greenwood; the lighting design was by Peter Kaczorowski; the sound design was by Ryan Rumery; the hair and wig design were by Tom Watson; and the production stage manager was James Fitzsimmons. The cast was as follows:

VINCENZO BELLINI Lee Pace
FRANCESCO FLORIMO Will Rogers
GIULIA GRISI Dierdre Friel
GIOVANNI BATTISTA RUBINI Eddie Kaye Thomas
ANTONIO TAMBURINI Lorenzo Pisoni
LUIGI LABLACHE Ethan Phillips
MARIA MALIBRAN Bebe Neuwirth
GIOACHINO ROSSINI F. Murray Abraham
PAGE Coco Monroe

CHARACTERS

BELLINI, Vincenzo, a young composer

FLORIMO, Francesco, his friend

GRISI, Giulia, a young soprano

RUBINI, Giovanni Battista, a tenor

TAMBURINI, Antonio, a baritone

LABLACHE, Luigi, a bass

MALIBRAN, Maria, another soprano

ROSSINI, Gioachino, a composer

A young page

SETTING

A large, generously appointed common room backstage at the *Théâtre-Italien* in Paris on the evening of January 24, 1835, the first performance of Vincenzo Bellini's *I puritani*. There are dressing tables, a piano, costume racks, two standing mirrors, a chaise, some chairs. It is the place where the singers can relax or prepare just before they go out onto the stage itself. There is a sense of opulence in the décor but we must never forget that we are in an active backstage area, just paces from where an actual performance is taking place.

There are indications throughout the script to where we are in the progress of the opera being performed offstage in relation to the play taking place backstage.

GOLDEN AGE

ACT ONE

House to half. House lights out. Stage lights up.

A blur of activity. It is minutes before the first performance of I puritani. The singers are in various stages of preparation: vocalizing, studying their music, making-up — all the usual activities that precede a performance.

A violent rain storm is heard raging outside the theatre. The Page enters hurriedly, carrying two enormous baskets of flowers. He is soaking wet. At the same time, Anthony Tamburini emerges from his dressing room. The other members of the cast of tonight's opera will soon follow.

TAMBURINI. Mi mi mi mi. Fa fa fa fa. I am in voice tonight. Paris, prepare to meet Anthony Tamburini. Where is everyone? Let's get this show on the road. *(To Page.)* Boy, are any of those for me?

PAGE. I don't know, sir.

TAMBURINI. Well look.

PAGE. I can't read, sir. *(The Page hurries off to retrieve more baskets of flowers. Every time the stage door opens, we will hear the storm raging outside the theatre. He will make several of these entrances and exits in the scene that follows. Tamburini examines the flowers.)*

TAMBURINI. *(Looking at the cards.)* Maestro Vincent Bellini, the Divine Vincent Bellini, the Immortal Vincent Bellini. I thought you had to be dead to be immortal.

PAGE. Yes, sir.

TAMBURINI. Don't just stand there, find my flowers. Tamburini, Anthony Tamburini.

PAGE. I can't read, sir.

TAMBURINI. Ask someone who can. (*Giulia Grisi enters. She is clutching something precious.*)

GRISI. The most important night of my life and I thought I'd lost my good luck piece. I looked everywhere. It was in my hand the whole time. At first I thought a certain soprano had been back here working her mischief.

TAMBURINI. The Malibran?

GRISI. Everyone knows she wanted my part. Then I remembered she was in Rome, butchering the Maestro's *Beatrice of Tenda*.

TAMBURINI. What is it?

GRISI. It's a hair from the head of St. Cecilia, the patron saint of music. She was tortured on a wheel of fire and died singing in praise of the Lord. It was given to me by the Holy Father himself. He predicted a triumph. Would you like to kiss it?

TAMBURINI. You make it sound like a crusade.

GRISI. Tonight the glory of Italian opera shall be revealed in all its splendor to the French. (*Giovanni Battista Rubini enters.*)

RUBINI. If I weren't Giovanni Battista Rubini and this weren't the world premiere of an important opera, I'd tell them to get Mario and let him try to sing this impossible role the Maestro's written for me.

TAMBURINI. Mario? Mario who?

RUBINI. Mario, the tenor who can't sing above a middle C without getting red in the face. Mario, who has the stage presence of a hippopotamus. I heard he's in Paris. Came all the way from Genoa to hear me. He'll be sorry he did.

GRISI. You underestimate Mario. He was a splendid Walter to my Imogene in *The Pirate*.

RUBINI. A Walter, maybe, but this part tonight? He wouldn't make it through the first aria. In the third act, I will be singing for the first time anywhere on any stage the F above high C, the most feared note in opera.

TAMBURINI. Not for a *castrato*.

RUBINI. You look ravishing as ever, Giulia.

GRISI. (*Playing the coquette.*) Wait till I put my costume on. (*Offering her talisman for him to kiss.*) Here.

RUBINI. Thank you, Giulia, but I can't run the risk.

GRISI. It's Saint Cecilia.

RUBINI. I don't care if it's Saint Peter. There's no telling where

that thing's been through the centuries. I feel a draft. Doesn't anyone feel a draft? (*Luigi Lablache enters.*)

LABLACHE. Tell me, friends, what is more exciting than the first performance of a new opera? Climbing the Matterhorn? Swimming the Hellespont? I don't think so. We are about to perform a work of art that has never been performed before. If we succeed, a hundred years from now people will still be listening to *The Puritans* and we will be remembered as the singers who gave it life. It beats selling hats.

GRISI. Calm as ever, *M.* Lablache.

LABLACHE. I know my part. I know yours, too, *Mlle.* Grisi. I know everyone's part, so no funny business out there tonight.

TAMBURINI. You take all this so seriously.

LABLACHE. Someone has to add a little *gravitas* to the proceedings. It might as well be the bass. I'm there, steady as a rock, while the three of you go sailing off into the stratosphere.

GRISI. We'd be lost without you, Luigi, opera isn't only the high notes.

RUBINI. Tell that to my audience. Are my eyebrows straight?

LABLACHE. You could use a little more rouge, Johnny. You don't want to look sickly.

RUBINI. We *are* playing Englishmen. All that fog and so little sun. I don't know how they manage.

LABLACHE. This wig makes me look like an old man. Once, just once, I'd like to play someone my own age. A hero, a lover. (*The Page enters through the stage door again with another bouquet.*)

TAMBURINI. I'm sure one of those is for me.

PAGE. I have a note for *Mlle.* Grisi.

GRISI. Here I am, child.

PAGE. The gentleman said no answer was necessary. (*He hurries out. Tamburini examines the flowers.*)

TAMBURINI. Bellini, Bellini, the Swan of Catania. Ah! "*Monsieur* Tamburini, the gentleman of the voluptuous thighs," that's more like it. (*He takes the flowers.*)

RUBINI. Did you get my flowers, Giulia?

GRISI. They're beautiful.

RUBINI. Roses from the south. A special post brought them all the way from Nice. They cost a fortune, not that it matters. Who's the note from?

GRISI. Some admirer.

RUBINI. You have so many.

GRISI. It's close to curtain. Has anyone seen our composer?

TAMBURINI. Vincent is the master of the late entrance. At the dinner held in his honor by the French Composers Society, he showed up during the dessert. They were livid.

LABLACHE. Not as livid as Vincent will be if he's read the article in this morning's *Figaro*. They called him "a sigh in dancing pumps" and now the expression is all over Paris.

GRISI. Vincent doesn't care what people write about him.

TAMBURINI. So he would have you believe, Giulia.

GRISI. What does it mean? "A sigh in dancing pumps"?

LABLACHE. I don't know but it doesn't sound good.

TAMBURINI. Grounds for a duel, I'd say.

GRISI. Nothing is grounds for a duel.

LABLACHE. *Don Pasquale* may turn out to be. Vincent still doesn't know Donizetti has written an opera for us.

GRISI. And none of us is going to tell him.

TAMBURINI. He's going to find out, Giulia.

GRISI. Not tonight he isn't and not from any of us. Swear! (*She holds out her talisman.*)

RUBINI. I saw him from my carriage on the way to the theatre walking along the Seine, not a care in the world. No hat, no umbrella.

GRISI. In this weather? As if rehearsing in a freezing theatre all month weren't enough?

RUBINI. I offered him a ride but he said he preferred to walk. "I always walk to my premieres, Rubini, it keeps me humble by reminding me of my origins. There were very few carriages in Catania, certainly none for the likes of me. I never want to forget who I am. I'll see you in the green room."

TAMBURINI. The only thing humble about Vincent Bellini is his origins. They took the man out of Sicily and Sicily out of the man. He's become more French dandy than any Parisian.

GRISI. That's not what the women he's taken to bed with him say.

RUBINI. I hope you're not speaking from personal experience, Giulia.

TAMBURINI. Bellini likes men.

GRISI. Except when they're women.

LABLACHE. Bellini likes everyone. (*Bellini enters, oblivious to his waterlogged appearance.*)

BELLINI. If bad weather is good luck, *The Puritans* is already a triumph. I haven't seen a storm like this since the premiere of *Norma* and *Norma* turned out all right.

RUBINI. I thought Donizetti wrote *Norma*.

BELLINI. The day Gaetano Donizetti writes anything approaching *Norma* is the day I grow another head. (*They hug.*) I didn't want to give you my cold. That's why I didn't want to get into your carriage.

LABLACHE. Whoever said "The best composer is a dead composer" never worked with you, Maestro.

BELLINI. How many operas together is this, Lablache? (*They hug.*)

TAMBURINI. I said it, Lablache, and it was because I *had*.

BELLINI. Come here, you ugly bastard. (*They hug.*)

GRISI. I told the press you were my favorite composer, Vincent.

BELLINI. The divine Grisi! My first Adalgisa, my only Adalgisa. (*They hug.*)

GRISI. And tonight your first Elvira. (*The five of them are in something of a group hug.*)

BELLINI. Where is Florimo? Where are my blood oranges? The entire third act of *The Puritans* for my blood oranges from Sicily! They are my talisman.

GRISI. He'll be here with them. Another warm embrace from your first lady will have to do in the meantime.

BELLINI. It's madness outside the theatre, Giulia. Carriages crashing into one another, coachmen calling one another names. People in evening clothes stepping into puddles, everyone clamoring for tickets.

LABLACHE. I couldn't get places for my friends.

RUBINI. Am I the only one who feels a draft?

TAMBURINI. We're the talk of Paris.

BELLINI. Every composer in Europe is out there: Meyerbeer, Halévy, Spontini. I asked one gentleman in my perfectly acceptable French: "Excuse me, *monsieur*, but what's going on in there?" He said, "The new opera by Bellini, where have you been, you dumb wop?" I told him I was the dumb wop who had composed *The Puritans* and gave him my deepest respects. (*He makes a familiar gesture with one hand in the crook of the other elbow.*) That's from this "sigh in dancing pumps, *monsieur!*"

TAMBURINI. Is he still out there? I'll do something useful with this sword for once.

BELLINI. There's no need, Tony. We remind the French tonight that we invented the art form they are seeking to make their own.

GOLDEN AGE

by Terrence McNally

7M, 2W

It's opening night of Vincenzo Bellini's new opera *I puritani* in Paris, and the Italian composer is determined to win the adulation of not only his audience, but his colleagues and rivals as well. When the curtain falls, will a thunderous ovation cement his prominence? Or has Bellini unwittingly composed his own swan song? Blending 21st-century language with the timeless beauty of 19th-century *bel canto* opera, GOLDEN AGE portrays the final act of an artist whose desire for greatness has eclipsed all else.

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