

## LA SONAMBULA

Bellini

"Ah, non creda mirarti si presto estinto, o fiore"  
("Ah! I did not think I'll see you die so soon, O flower")

Thus sings Amina, the somnambulist, to the flowers her beloved Elvino gave her: The flowers have withered, and his love for her has died. Years later these words would be Engraved on Bellini's monument in Catania.

Soon afterwards She regains her beloved, and the opera ends happily; and Bellini was yet very much alive and at the peak of his career when this masterpiece of his was first presented to an excited audience at La-Scala (6 March, 1831). It was an amazing success. The Singers themselves are reported to have cried during the last scene, along with the whole crowd, and the ovation's clamor shook the Opera-Hall.

There's a simplicity to the story. It presents an Ideal village, with ideal villagers, and two wonderfully ideal lovers, devoted to each other. This makes the shadow of the idea of sleepwalking even more sombre, even though there's a strange touch to it: The villagers, along with Amina, tell in the beginning of the opera that, during night, a ghost clad in white haunts the village. In this they believe, but when Count Rodolfo tells them about the existence of sleepwalkers they mock him: People who sleep and walk at the same time - who ever heard of such things? Of course, Amina, the sleepwalker, is in fact their Ghost.

Felice Romani wrote a libretto, based on a french ballet-pantomime, itself based on a vaudeville written by Eugene Scribe in 1816.

Bellini wrote music of delicate orchestration; Here there are hardly any Fortissimo thundering orchestral passages, and the accompaniment to the singing voices is always simple. It was mainly on account of this Opera that Bellini earned himself some 'black marks' in northern countries, and in his own, in the second half of the 19th century: his music is simplistic, he strums chords on the orchestra, he doesn't know how to orchestrate at all - all this was said. But in this 'simple' orchestration it is La Sonnambula who is exceptional among his operas; Simplicity is essential for the ambience of the Opera. It took almost a century for people to understand that Bellini knew exactly what he was doing - giving 'Heavy' sound when it was needed, and paring down the 'Mass' of music when the Opera needed a lighter touch. Another thing was Bellini's return to the use of Coloratura and vocal embellishments. But he breaths new life to these usually life-stifling traits.

Critics could have said what they wanted of Bellini, and his Sonnambula. The Opera-goers, and the simple music-loving world held it in the repertoire, year after year, to our days.