

Strenna Teatrale Europea

Francesco Regli (Milan, 1802–Turin, 1866) belongs to a small group of professional journalists which gave a decisive impetus to theatrical journalism at the beginning of the 1830s and which established some of its fundamental characteristics. In the journalistic trade of the period Regli emerges not simply as a critic but rather as a chronicler or “historian” of contemporary theatrical events. His numerous biographies in the *Strenna Teatrale Europea* about even the minor characters of the time clearly demonstrate this. Regli began his journalistic activities founding in Pavia in 1829 *La Minerva ticinese: giornale di scienze, lettere, arti, teatri e notizie*, which moved to Milan with a shortened title, *La Minerva*, and which abruptly ceased publication in 1831 at the beginning of its third year. He contributed to the *Corriere delle Dame* and assisted in editing the periodical *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*. In July 1835 he struck out on his own founding the biweekly periodical *Il Pirata*, in competition with other Milanese theatrical journals of the period such as *Il Figaro* (the continuation of *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*) and *Il Censore universale dei teatri*. *Il Pirata* was destined to last for about forty years, outliving its founder and director.

The *Strenna Teatrale Europea* began publication in Milan in 1838 as a supplement to *Il Pirata* and was issued without interruption in annual volumes until 1848, the year in which the social and political crisis provoked by the revolution caused both its demise and the relocation of *Il Pirata* to Turin. The *Strenna Teatrale Europea* covers a decade that is perhaps the most concentrated with events in the history of nineteenth-century Italian musical theater, for it coincides with the production of the major works of Donizetti and of Mercadante, with the growing popularity of a composer forgotten today, Luigi Ricci, and with the rapid ascent of a composer destined to dominate the Italian scene for the rest of the century, Giuseppe Verdi. These years also saw the definitive establishment of the new direction in dance, characterized by the *danse aérienne* and by the virtuosity of dancing on point introduced by Salvatore Taglioni. This direction was enriched by the new talents that emerged from Carlo Blasis’ school of La Scala, and was developed by a comparatively small circle of leading proponents of the history of this art, namely Maria Taglioni, Fanny Elssler, Lucille Grahn, Fanny Cerrito. This decade also coincides with a new phase of operatic singing which came at the time to be known as the “rivoluzione del do di petto,” a legendary period in the history of singing known for its richness of talent. The names that emerged from the new generation which include Giorgio Ronconi, Erminia Frezzolini, Antonio Poggi, Giuseppina Strepponi, Gaetano Fraschini, Eugenia Tadolini, Felice Varesi, Ignazio Marini, Carlo Guasco, Sofia Loewe, were destined to fill the theater chronicles for decades to come.

The pages of the *Strenna Teatrale Europea* speak of these personalities and of the events in which they are the protagonists, even in those chapters that—as is

customary in publications with the character of a *strenna* (offering)—are reserved for topics of a literary nature. The most interesting aspect of this periodical however is not found so much in its reviews of theatrical productions (opera, dance, spoken drama)—where ample space is reserved for comment on activities in the theaters of Milan, and in particular at La Scala—but rather in its biographical sketches edited by Regli. For the most part these sketches, which on occasion appear also within a review, still constitute an irreplaceable font of knowledge about numerous personalities of this period (composers, singers, choreographers, dancers, actors), for only a small number of these biographies appear, in a much reduced version, in the *Dizionario biografico dei più celebri poeti e artisti melodrammatici che fiorirono in Italia dal 1800 al 1860 . . .* (Turin, 1860) which is linked primarily to Regli's name.

The typographical style of the *Strenna*, enriched with decorations and with finely-crafted lithographs, reveals that the journal was addressed to the highest social class of the time, a fact that in turn reflects the active interest of high society for musical and theatrical activities (as the pages of the *Strenna* document). The publication appears in the dimension of a volume in sextodecimo, divided into parts by topic, each topic in turn being subdivided into chapters. For cataloguing purposes the titles of the individual parts are presented in the catalogue in bold print without the assignment of a RIPM number, elevating the chapters to principle units of which each part is composed. The richest part of the publication with respect to the quantity of dates and information is the one containing the theater chronicles, variously titled *Teatri*, *Rivista teatrale europea*, *Album teatrale*, etc. These were edited entirely by Regli.