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## IL PIRATA in Zürich

by OPERA GAZET ([HTTPS://OPERAGAZET.COM/AUTHOR/OPERA-GAZET/](https://operagazet.com/author/operagazet/))

### IL PIRATA in Zürich

*Il Pirata* by Vincenzo Bellini. Melodramma in two acts. 1827. Libretto by Felice Romani, after Isidore J.S. Taylor's play *Bertram, ou Le Pirate* (Bertram, or The Pirate), itself based on the play *Bertram, or The Castle of St Aldobrando* by Charles Maturin. First performance at the Teatro alla Scala, Milan, on 27th October 1827.

Attended performance (semi staged): Opernhaus Zürich, 1 June 2022. Reviewers: Marco Aranowicz and Olivier Keegel.

Musical direction: **Iván López-Reynoso**

Szenische Einrichtung: **Natascha Ursuliak**

Ernesto: **Konstantin Shushakov**

Imogene: **Irina Lungu**

Gualtiero: **Andrew Owens**

Itulbo: **Luis Magallanes**

Goffredo: **Stanislav Vorobyov**

Adele: **Irène Friedli**

**Philharmonia Zürich**

**Chor der Oper Zürich**

**Musik: 4\*\*\*\*\***

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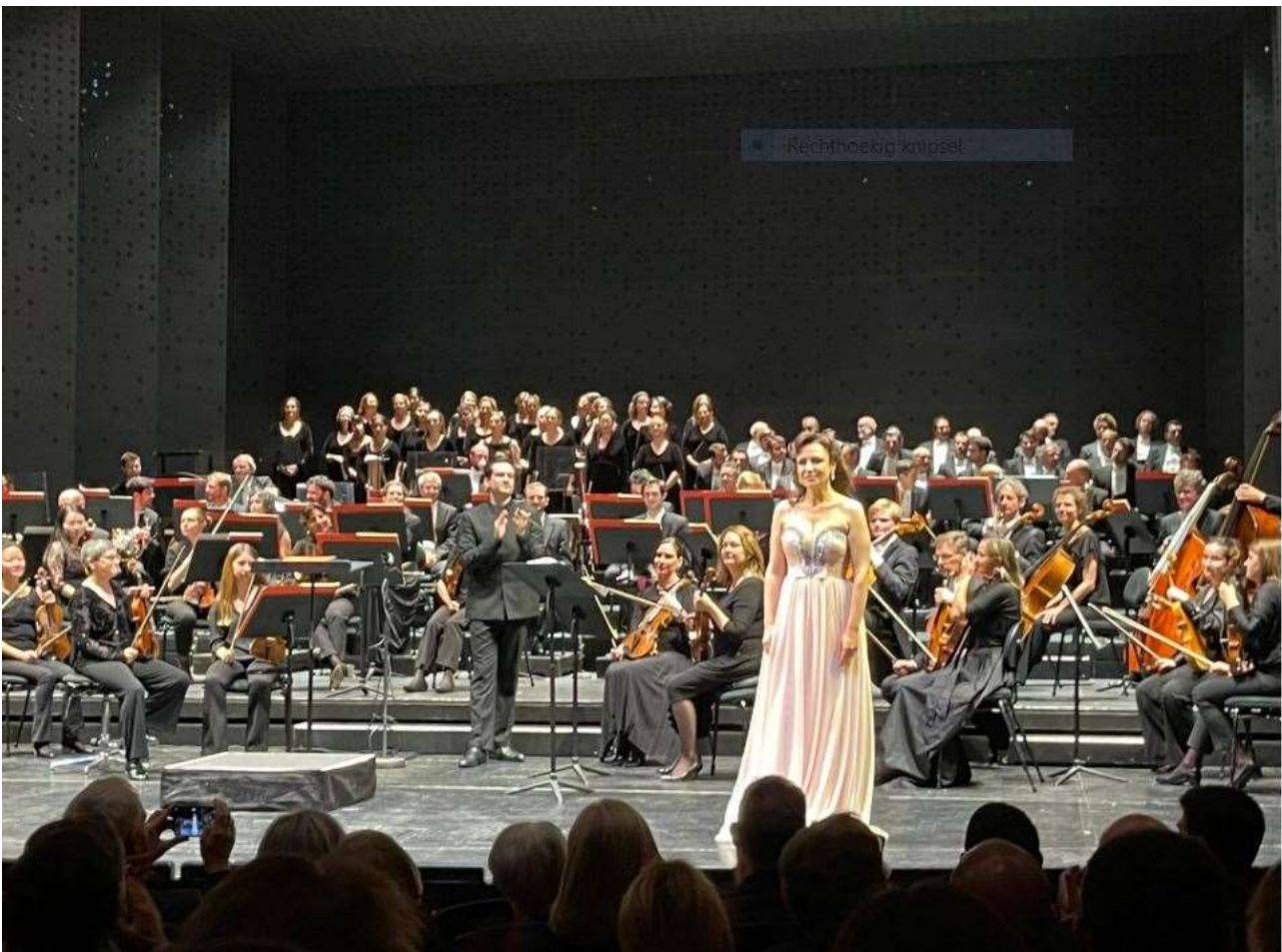


Bellini lived to be 33, a favorable age for a composer to die. Pergolesi exaggerated it, becoming 28; Schumann missed the boat [Übersetzen](#) e 46. And we haven't even mentioned Haydn, Rossini e *tutti quanti* who remained a burden to society ad infinitum.

Vincenzo Salvatore Carmelo Francesco Bellini (November 3, 1801, Catania, Italy – September 23, 1835, Puteaux, France) came from a musical family, composing and publishing his first works while still studying at the Conservatory of Naples. Bellini was fortunate to come into contact with an important impresario; the success of the first opera, *Bianca e Fernando*, left audience wanting more. *Il pirata* (1827) established his [ebook.com/share.php?book=operagazet.com/i/](#) and marked another stage in the development of Romantic opera. Bellini was fortunate to work with the best Italian librettist of the day, whom Bellini immediately secured for his next six operas. (For those who began their opera hobby after 1970: a librettist [er.com/intent/tweet?text=operagazet&url=https://operagazet.com/i/](#))

[\(mailto:?\)](#) [IL PIRATA? 20in%20%20Z%20%20G3%20Grich%20https://operagazet.com/i/](#) often. Of the “big houses”, only Moscow, Naples (click [HERE](#) [https://operagazet.com/il-pirata-a-not-so-fierce-pirate/](#)) for review) and Palermo come to mind as far as 2021 is concerned. [eragazet.com/it/](#)

It is a spirited, rather hybrid work: the impulsive rapturous tenor sometimes seems to contrast rather violently with the alluring and graceful passages. As was not uncommon at the time, the opera was composed by Bellini with certain singers in mind. In this case, it was Bellini's favorite tenor Giovanni Battista Rubini and the soprano Henriette Méric-Lalande. Both soloists had played the lead in *Bianca e Fernando*. Der *Dritte im Bunde* was Antonio Tamburini, a famous bass-baritone of the time. Things weren't going particularly well during the rehearsals. Bellini still thought tenor Rubini sang beautifully, but according to the composer, he lacked expressiveness. Bellini gave him good advice, about on par with the platitudes in the tsunami of masterclasses currently plaguing us. “Throw yourself into your character with heart and soul”, “Act not only with your body but also with your voice”. Well, you know the drill. (“In the mask! In the mask!”) Surprisingly, the clichés were successful; after the premiere audience and press were very enthusiastic.



The story is simple, which is no reason not to respect it; it is an integral, inseparable substantial part of the opera:

Imogene must marry Ernesto to save her father. But Imogene is fonder of Gualtiero (this situation occurs more often in operas). Gualtiero's pirate ship sinks off the coast of Caldora, where Imogene meets him again and explains what happened. Gualtiero seeks revenge on Ernesto. During a hearty scuffle, Ernesto exchanges the finite for infinity †. There are unpleasant consequences for Gualtiero: he is sentenced to death. Imogene falls prey to severe weak-headedness; the “mad scene” with the famous aria “Col sorriso d'innocenza” (With the smile of innocence), in which Imogene, now completely out of control, hopes that her son can persuade Duke Ernesto, meanwhile dead and no longer receptive to requests, to forgive Gualtiero.

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In Zurich, the opera house had continued its popular tradition of presenting bel canto operas with a select cast in concert with *Il Pirata*. Javier Camerena was also to sing Gualtiero at the Limmat but cancelled a week before the planned premiere due to illness. As director Natascha Ursuliak reported in her witty speech before the start, it was extremely difficult to find a substitute. Finally ensemble member Andrew Owens was asked, who after brief consideration decided to rehearse the role of the pirate in a few days. In addition, the singers for the roles of Itulbo and Adele dropped out within a few days. With so many last-minute changes, it was no wonder that the Philharmonia Zurich, playing with passion under the courageous direction of Iván López-Reynoso, needed some time to master Bellini's differentiated rhythms with its usual elegance. However, as soon as the orchestra had settled in, it succeeded in giving a rousing and spirited interpretation of this wonderful romantic opera. Andrew Owens was also clearly nervous initially. Even if the sound of some notes were still a bit pale, the singer clearly improved in the course of the evening. His technically flawless lean tenor was inspired during the course of the performance with his soulful and passionate singing. **Konstantin Shushakov** ([https://www.bolshoirussia.com/company/opera/baritone/Konstantin\\_Shushakov/](https://www.bolshoirussia.com/company/opera/baritone/Konstantin_Shushakov/)) as Ernesto thrilled throughout. This was truly a baritone at work, who left nothing to be desired in terms of stylistic confidence and elegance, as well as with a clean Belcantesque tone. In appearance, **Irina Lungu** (<https://www.irinalungu.com/>) as Imogene was slightly reminiscent of Maria Callas. With her darkly timbered, vibrato-rich soprano, she was convincing in this difficult role, especially in the heartfelt ensemble scenes, while the coloratura at the beginning still caused difficulties. Nevertheless, Lungu succeeded in delivering a **superb** and shattering finale with the famous final cabaletta "Oh Sole ti vela". At a high level, the young Luis Magallanes as Itulbo from the opera studio, as well as opera house veteran Irene Friedli in the role of Adele, both last-minute fill-ins, completed the top-class ensemble.



On the stage of the opera house, the singers performed the scenic arrangements by Natascha Ursuliak with great passion and enthusiasm. *Despite the lack of staging, it was not difficult to follow the emotional plot, to imagine the stormy sea off the coast of Sicily, as well as the medieval castle of Ernesto. The festively dressed audience at this concert premiere obviously saw it the same way and gave enthusiastic, long-lasting applause.*

**Marco Aranowicz** (<https://operagazet.com/author/marco-aranowicz/?lang=de>) and **Olivier Keegel** (<https://operagazet.com/author/operagazet/>)

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