



■ Lotti's 'Polidoro' revived: Danilo Pastore (Deifilo), Federico Fiorio (Polidoro) and Anna Bessi (Iliona)

SS Giovanni e Paolo during the Carnival season of 1714. The libretto by Piovene is a somewhat garbled version of post-Trojan War events, centring on the efforts of Priam's daughter Iliona, now married to the Thracian king Polymnestor (Polinestore), to prevent the Greeks from wiping out remnants of the Trojan line. So when murder to this end is done by Pyrrhus (Pirro), the son of Achilles, it is not Polydorus, Iliona's brother, who is the victim, but Deifilus (Deifilo), the son of Polinestore. It is a scenario that allows for the expression of a wide variety of emotional states, always the prime objective of *dramma per musica*. The opera turned out to be something of a revelation, many of the arias being of high quality, their prevailing mood one of a lyrical eloquence that sets the opera clearly apart from those of Lotti's dynamic Venetian contemporary, Vivaldi.

Examination of the score reveals that the Vicenza revival cut nine arias, along with a considerable amount of plain recitative. The cast assembled was an unusually youthful one, apparently arrived at after extensive auditions. In general terms it acquitted itself well, revealing promising voices that demonstrate how far early music performance in Italy has come in the last decade. As elsewhere in Europe, though, it was disappointing to find young singers who had obviously not been taught to sing trills, while cadential decoration and ornamentation was often rudimentary or unstylish. The three countertenors, Federico Fiorio (Polidoro), Danilo Pastore (Deifilo) and Luca Parolin (Pirro), all displayed a good if not as yet fully formed technique and rather weak projection, leaving the more sensitive arias as the most successful. Thus some exquisite *mezza voce* singing from Fiorio left Polidoro's grief-filled Act 4 'Ombra cara' as perhaps the highlight of the night. The soprano Anna Bessi, too, produced much sensitive singing as Iliona, as did the mezzo Maria Elena Pepi in the more dramatic role of Andromache, widow of Hector but now in love with the young Deifilo. Another highlight was their delicate Act 1 duo. Both basses, Davide Giangregorio (Polinestore) and Patrizio La Placa (Darete) had relatively modest roles, but the latter in particular is the possessor of a rich, velvety voice of exceptional promise. The orchestra under Francesco Erle played with accomplished style and spirit, though the continuo lutenist might at times have been reminded he was not playing a concerto.

Special praise is merited for the sumptuous 18th-century costumes of Giampaolo Tirelli, which sadly served to emphasize the shortcomings of a production in which the cast had obviously received little or no instruction as to deportment, movement or gesture appropriate to the period. Pyrrhus is one of Virgil's nastiest characters, but here his constant manhandling of other characters, including shoving and throwing women to the floor, was a distraction totally out of keeping with both visual and musical elements.