

Remains of a Potpourri *all'improvviso*
on Themes from Bellini's *Norma*

This autograph was before 1994 in the hands of the composer's great-grandnephew, Francis Loring (Sir Francis Loring Gwynne-Evans), of Wadhurst, UK.

Some thirty years ago Mr. Loring kindly provided me a photocopy of his own handwritten inventory of a body of papers he had inherited, this containing most of Carl Filtsch's extant musical autographs and several first editions of works by Filtsch and Chopin. The inventory bears these entries:

- 24/. Introduction--variations on a theme from *Norma* [Bellini] Published copy op 2 9 pp
25/. Same on a theme from *Il Pirata* 9 pp

Subsequently I received from Mr. Loring a microfilm of the manuscripts and printed editions in question. Lacking on the film was the published copy of an introduction and variations on a theme from *Norma* (for which material might have been gleaned from the present draft). Perhaps the exemplars of Filtsch's variations on themes from *Norma* and *Il pirata* had virtually the same title page, leading the microfilmer not to include both. I have however been searching for variations on *Norma* by Filtsch for some years without success, and now am inclined to believe the *Il pirata* variations were released in a first issue with an erroneous title page. Only one set of variations by Filtsch, this on a theme from *Norma*, is entered in Hofmeister (www.hofmeister.rhul.ac.uk/2008/content/monatshefte/1842_08.html). Like Filtsch's *Il pirata* variations, the piece listed is in A and dedicated to Thalberg.

Whether Filtsch had ever seen a score or heard a performance, in whole or in part, of Bellini's *Norma*, is not known. Neither is it known if he was acquainted with any of the *fantaisies* on *Norma* in circulation (particularly Thalberg's of 1834). Liszt, incidentally, was still preoccupied with his *Norma Réminiscences* when he taught Carl in Chopin's absence during the summer of 1842.

Chopin was on intimate terms with Bellini, whose work he revered. "[Ferdinand] Hiller relates that he rarely saw him [Chopin] so deeply moved as at a performance of *Norma*, which they attended together [in 1835?], and that in the finale of the second act, in which Rubini seemed to sing tears [the music is quoted in Filtsch's draft], Chopin had tears in his eyes" (Frederick Niecks, *Frederick Chopin as a Man and Musician*, 3rd ed. [London, 1902], I, 439). Chopin, too, transcribed for piano the orchestral accompaniment of the cavatina "Casta diva."

Chopin's mastery of improvisation was legend and Carl Filtsch often witnessed his master in this role. Might the music written in the present manuscript represent, in the main at least, what he heard Chopin play extempore? Given Filtsch's prodigious memory, such a scenario cannot be ruled out.

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