

Julian Budden

BBC producer and Verdi scholar

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Julian Medforth Budden, musicologist, radio producer and writer: born Hoylake, Cheshire 9 April 1924; staff, BBC Music Department 1951-83, Music Producer 1956-70, Chief Producer, Opera (Radio) 1970-76, External Services Music Organiser 1976-83; FBA 1987; OBE 1991; died Florence 28 February 2007.

As a musicologist Julian Budden was best known for his monumental work *The Operas of Verdi*, published in three volumes between 1973 and 1985. He worked for the BBC for more than 30 years, as a music producer, chief radio producer of opera and external music organiser. His opera productions on Radio 3 included many Verdi operas, but also such works as Massenet's *Cendrillon* and Vaughan Williams's *Hugh the Drover*.

Budden was born in Hoylake, Cheshire, in 1924. He read Classics at Queen's College, Oxford, then studied at the Royal Academy of Music, taking the BMus in 1955. He had already joined the BBC in 1951 and became a music producer in 1956.

His *penchant* for Italian opera was most unusual for an English musicologist at that time, when the establishment was generally pro-German and specifically pro-Wagnerian. Though Verdi was very popular in London's opera houses, only his three middle-period works, *Rigoletto*, *Il trovatore* and *La traviata*, together with his last three, *Aida*, *Otello* and *Falstaff*, were in the regular repertory.

That has now changed and a large proportion of Verdi's operas are frequently staged, for which Budden is more than a little responsible. His championship of some of the more 'difficult' works in the canon – *Les Vêpres siciliennes*, for instance – and of operas with two versions, such as *Simon Boccanegra* and *La forza del destino*, have led to a much greater understanding of these flawed masterpieces, while he has also illuminated several of the early operas. He dealt with the unique character of *La battaglia di Legnano* at the third International Congress of Verdi Studies at Milan in 1972, while *Ernani* came under scrutiny in *Il linguaggio musicale di «Ernani»* (*The Musical Language of «Ernani»*, 1987, published in the bulletin of the Istituto di Studi Verdiani).

From 1970 to 1976 Budden was chief radio producer of opera for the BBC. He was already at work on *The Operas of Verdi* and the first volume, published in 1973, covers 19 operas, from *Oberto* to *Rigoletto*, but contains a vast quantity more than just the dramatic and musical character of each of them. A huge canvas of the operatic life and practices in Milan and various other Italian cities from 1839 to 1851 is unfolded as a vivid background to the individual compositions.

Already several familiar themes emerge, among them Verdi's perennial trouble with his librettists and his great love of Shakespeare (the chapter on *Macbeth* is particularly good). Jerusalem, his adaptation of *I Lombardi alla prima crociata*, chronicles his first, not very happy, experience of the Paris Opéra.

Volume 2, published in 1978, contains seven operas, from *Il trovatore* to *La forza del destino*. There is further trouble with the Paris Opéra with *Les Vêpres siciliennes* and its librettist, Eugène Scribe. The chapter on *Simon Boccanegra* deals with both versions, the original at Venice in 1857 and the revised version at La Scala in 1881, which is the one usually performed today.

This opera was much on Budden's mind in the 1970s; *The Musical and Dramatic Character of Jacopo Fiesco* (a character in the opera) was the subject of his paper at the fourth International Congress of Verdi Studies at Chicago in 1974, while on 1 January 1976 there was a performance of the original version of *Simon Boccanegra* on Radio 3, produced by Budden, with Sesto Bruscantini in the title role, that proved its great interest and dramatic merit.

La forza del destino, which also has two versions, the first premiered in St Peterburg, the second at la Scala, brings Volume 2 to a fascinating close. Volume 3, published in 1981, contains only four operas, *Don Carlos*, *Aida*, *Otello* and *Falstaff*. *Don Carlos*, cut before it even reached the stage of the Paris Opéra, cut even further when translated into Italian, makes the longest and most interesting chapter in the entire work; it illustrates Verdi's dislike of the Church (as does *Aida*), his mistrust of the Paris Opéra and his trouble with librettists. The chapters on the two last operas are altogether happier. Verdi was united with his beloved Shakespeare, he had finally, in Arrigo Boito, found a librettist he liked, while both *Otello* and *Falstaff* are received with the triumph they deserve.

Budden became external music organiser at the BBC in 1976, retiring from the organisation in 1983. He continued working on articles for various publications; he was on the editorial board for a critical edition of Verdi's operas undertaken jointly by the house of Ricordi and the Chicago University Press. He wrote *Verdi* for the series of Master Musicians (1985); becoming interested in Puccini, he published *Puccini: his life and work* in 2002. He lived in Florence, a city of which he was particularly fond, during his «retirement».

Elizabeth Forbes