Theodore Victor Giubilei

together with brief sketches of the lives of his wife, Augustine Clara Proche and half-brother Augustus

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With new books on Pasta[1] and Rubini[2] to add to those on Malibran[3], Lablache[4], Nourrit[5], the de Mérics[6] and Mario and Grisi[7], we are gradually building up a library in English of the major Italian and French singers of *bel canto* opera in the first half of the 19th century, not to mention books on the Irish Catherine Hayes[8] and the English Clara Novello[9] and Anna Bishop[10]. However, supporting such star singers and sometimes starring in a smaller way themselves were a huge number of singers, many of whom lasted only a season or two, but some of whom carved out a creditable and durable career, even if unknown today. One such singer was the bass Theodore Victor Giubilei[11]. This article outlines his life and career touching also on that of his wife Augustine Clara Proche and half-brother Augustus.

Giubilei has often been claimed either to be English of Italian parentage[12] or Italian, as he described himself on the ship's manifest for his voyage to New York in 1839. However, his first names are hardly typically Italian because it is now clear that he was not of Italian descent. His surname was Davaux. While there were some Davauxs in England in the 18th century, none have been found that fit with his details and, given his French forenames and those of his mother Genevieve Adelaide (who actually called herself Duvaux), it seems most likely that they had recent origins in France, although quite how they ended up in Britain during the Napoleonic Wars can only be guessed at. No independent corroboration has been found of his quoted birthdate of 1801, but it fits well with his subsequent history. Nor is anything known about his father or whether Theodore was born in Britain but his apparent difficulties in singing in English, discussed later, together with his good grasp of Italian, would suggest that not all of his childhood and youth were spent here.

On May 5, 1811, his mother married Luigi Giubilei at St Mary Le Bone in London. She identified herself as a widow and made a mark rather than signing, such a lack of education seeming to indicate that she was not some displaced aristocrat. They had two sons, Michel and Augustus, and possibly a daughter but no Anglican baptismal records have been found, perhaps because the family was Roman Catholic (a Luigi Giubilei was buried at the Catholic St Mary's, Moorfields in 1833) or because some or all were born abroad. Theodore used the name Giubilei for his stage career, no doubt conscious of the advantage of an Italian name for a singer at this time. However, he used Davaux for formal documents, such as his wedding certificate, and for his children.

With the start of Theodore Giubilei's career, we move to firmer ground. The first mention of him singing publicly is at the funeral service for King João VI of Portugal held at the Portuguese Embassy in London in April, 1826[13]. His stage debut was at Drury Lane on

October 21, 1826 in Horn, Braham and Corri's *The Devil's Bridge,* first produced in 1812. He did not make a very favourable impression. *The Times* (October 23, 1826) wrote that "A Mr Giubilei made his first appearance as Florian with moderate success. His voice is a tenor-bass (baritone), powerful but coarse, and apparently not under the most efficient control". *The Morning Post* (October 23, 1826) thought that "he must study a little longer, if he is to achieve great things". Things did not improve in the following weeks with the *Theatrical Observer* (November 16, 1826) noting that "The part of Florian might be omitted to great advantage, if Mr Giubilei must be the person selected to support it". No remarks were made about his English. On March 17 of the following year, he took the name part in Rossini's *Pietro l'Eremita*, a secularised version of *Mosè in Egitto*, this time singing in Italian at the King's Theatre, so that he obviously had a command of the language. *The Times* (April 23, 1827) considered that "he has neither power of voice, nor the judgement sufficient for such a part". However, the Belgian critic and musicologist, Fétis, made what turned out to be a most perceptive comment in his 'Sketch of the State of Music in London'[14]: "His voice is agreeable and his manner at once modest and good, but nature does not seem to have done enough to render him a great, though he may become a very useful singer". Fétis went on: "He is tall in person and easy in his manner, and his acting is of the same standard as his person".

Notwithstanding this tepid reception, Giubilei became a regular participant in concerts while, on the stage, he sang in Rossini's *Ricciardo e Zoraide*, Mayr's *Medea in Corinto* with Pasta in the title role and Giubilei sustaining the part of Creon "very respectably" (*Morning Chronicle*, June 25, 1827), Coccia's *Maria Stuart*[15], Rossini's *Semiramide* and Mercadante's *Didone*. Thus, Giubilei started to make his mark on the London music scene and, later that year, further afield visiting Dublin and being part of the "unprecedented novelty" of two nights of Italian opera at the Theatre Royal, Birmingham.

The following three years showed only spasmodic British activity with some concerts in the middle of each year and end of year tours of several cities in 1828 and 1829. However, from June 1831, he became a more regular presence. The end of 1831 brought another tour, which again included the Theatre Royal in Dublin where his appearance in Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia* led *Freeman's Journal* (December 9, 1831) to comment that he was "the cut out in appearance, and admirably fitted by his deep basso, for the part of Basilio". On his return, he signed up for the King's Theatre for the early 1832 season. A revival of *Pietro l'Eremita* in March 1832 brought a mixed reaction. *The Morning Post* (March 12, 1832) remarked that " he does not appear to have done his voice justice; for it has undoubted capabilities and yet, we discover little if any improvement in his singing" while *The Tatler* (March 12, 1832) was even less kind saying that he "growled away, like a coal-waggon". *The Times* (March 12, 1832), however, reversed its judgement of five years previously writing that he "sustained the part … with great ability; he gave the invocation to the Deity … in a pure, chaste and impressive style… His intonation was perfect". Further operas included the British première of Bellini's *La straniera* on June 23, 1832 and there was the usual round of concerts, both in London and the provinces.

On August 27, 1832, Giubilei married the dancer Augustine Clara Proche and, once again, the latter part of the year was taken up with a tour of the provinces in De Begnis's company. Hitherto, Giubilei's career had been almost exclusively singing in Italian but on March 6, 1833

at Covent Garden, in what was announced (wrongly) as his first appearance on the English stage (i.e. in English), he took part in the oratorio *The Israelites in Egypt*, a rather unlikely adaptation by Lacy from the music of Handel and Rossini. A few months later, *The Court Journal* (July 1833) noted that "he deserves the greatest encouragement for the persevering industry with which he has applied himself – and very successfully too – to master the difficulties of our language". This addition of English songs and roles would have increased his opportunities and income and might have been an implicit acknowledgement of Fétis's earlier verdict as singing opera in English, either in translated or original operas, offered less competition for leading roles. However, his membership of the committee formed to bring about George Rodwell's proposal for the establishment of a Grand National Opera[16] (in the event unsuccessful) argues a deeper interest in English opera. Concerts in the provinces were the mainstay of the latter half of 1833 and early 1834 followed by a further season at the King's Theatre over the spring and early summer and more concerts including one that also featured his half-brother, Augustus, on July 10, 1834.

Having two Giubileis singing bass roles in London at the same time makes for some difficulty in always being certain who is being talked about as the press were not always scrupulous in clearly identifying them, possibly ignorant or confused themselves[17] or assuming that readers would know to whom they were referring. Organisers, particularly in the provinces, might have been happy to fudge the issue. "Signor Giubilei (not *the* Signor Giubilei)" warned the *Bury and Norwich Post* (February 10, 1836) about an Italian opera company visiting Ipswich.

On August 16, 1834, *The Morning Post* reported that Giubilei (and his wife) had signed up for the forthcoming season of opera in English at Covent Garden and on October 14, he appeared in Lacy's adaptation of Rossini's *Cinderella*. There then followed around five years during which he switched back and forth between singing in Italian and in English but with the latter starting to predominate with roles in most of the English opera premières of the time: Rodwell's *The Spirit of the Bell* (Covent Garden, June 8, 1835) followed by Drury Lane premières of Balfe's *The Siege of Rochelle* (October 29, 1835) and *The Maid of Artois* (May 27, 1836), Barnett's *Fair Rosamund* (February 27, 1837), Balfe's *Joan of Arc* (November 30, 1837) and *Diadeste* (May 17, 1838), Loder's *Francis the First* (November 16, 1838) and Barnett's *Farinelli* (February 12, 1939). By this point, his performances were almost always well received, for example, the *Theatrical Observer* (May 3, 1837) noted of Giubilei's Figaro in Rossini's *The Barber of Seville* that "we never saw the part done better on the English stage"

In August 1839, Theodore and his wife, but not their two children, left for the U.S. as many others did at this time to try to tap into the rich pickings that could be had there. The *New York Mirror* (August 31, 1839) prepared its readers for their forthcoming tour with a report from London stating that "His Don Basilio is his best performance. His Baron, in *Cinderella*, however, is unapproachable; and in Figaro and Podesta (*La gazza ladra*) he is excellent; nor are his serious efforts less effective". The *Evening Star* described him as "tall, elegant … with flowing black locks … piercing eyes and classical symmetry of features, all under the constant play of a mind of high order"[18] . He sang in opera at the Park Theatre, New York, including the American première, in English, of Beethoven's *Fidelio* on September 9, 1839, as well as in opera and numerous concerts not only in New York but in several US states and parts of Canada. He also gained fame for daring to go behind the wall of water at the Niagara Falls,

"the romantic, adventurous Giubilei"[19] . He and his wife were very popular and stayed for around two years before returning to Britain with a son, Victor Henry, who had been born in New York. On Giubilei's return, his career carried on much as before with concerts and stage appearances, in English, first at Covent Garden for the 1842-43 season and then, together with Augustus, at Drury Lane for the 1843-44 season. Reception continued to be favourable. "Mr. Giubilei's singing was, as it is almost needless to say, correct and tasteful", said *The Standard* (January 7, 1843) of his Captain Ankerstroom in an English version of Auber's *Gustavus the Third*.

Thus Giubilei had built up a successful career singing at all the leading London opera houses and was in demand for concerts. He also taught, notably Elizabeth Poole, composed and published a few songs and even tried his hand, unsuccessfully, at interesting managers in William Henry Fry's *Aurelia the Vestal*[20], whose score he had brought back from the US. Even if not in the top rank, he was well respected by his colleagues and by music critics and well-liked by audiences. But it was not to last. On December 16, 1843, *The Morning Post* announced that Augustus had taken Theodore's place on account of the latter's "severe illness". He staged a recovery and was billed for two roles at Drury Lane in the latter half of December, the first ones there since mid-October, and sang at in the Sacred Harmonic Society's performance of Handel's *Coronation Anthem* on February 24, 1844. He was advertised to appear for an Easter festival in Manchester but, in March 1844, illness struck again and he had to cancel. On May 16, a successful benefit was arranged but he was too ill to sing at it and, although there was a report[21] of a recovery, he did not continue his career. In July 1845 he was reported as taking a cure in Germany, then, in September, that he was taken ill in Milan with his old complaint, the dropsy, while on the way to see his sister[22] in Naples. It was there that he died on December 4, 1845.

Theodore's death left his wife to support their four children. The dancer Augustine Clara Proche is said to have been born in France in 1810 and made her debut in London at the King's Theatre on February 5, 1831. The *Dramatic Magazine* (March 1831, p.56) described her as "a graceful dancer, with a good person" and she impressed enough to star as the lead dancer in De Begnis's provincial tour in the autumn of 1831, which also included Theodore Giubilei, whom she was to marry in 1832. She continued her career initially at the King's Theatre but then at Drury Lane until a few months before her death from consumption in June 5, 1848. Breaks to give birth to four children did not seem to have impeded her progress[23]. Although she attracted considerable praise and took the lead role in some provincial tours, at some less prestigious London venues, such as The Adelphi, and in New York, she never approached the reputation of Fanny Elssler (whom she was said to have resembled closest in style) or Maria Taglioni, although she often acted as a supporting dancer to them.

Despite her and Theodore's long and active careers, his death and probably the cost of travel and treatment ahead of it, left her in straitened circumstances, although she did receive support from the Drury Lane Theatrical Fund, which Theodore had paid into. On her death, the Fund continued to support her four orphans, who moved in with their uncle, Michel[24], while a benefit for them featured Grisi, Viardot, Mario, Tamburini, Sims Reeves and the dancer Lucile Grahn, all of whom appear to have given their services freely[25], a measure of the friendship and respect for their parents.

Very little is known of Augustus Giubilei's early life and the first mention of him is at a concert in Dublin on March 19, 1833[26] followed, on July 10, by a concert, which also included Theodore, in London. There followed a rather patchy career often singing the same repertoire as Theodore and occasionally replacing him but never approaching his level of achievement. To begin with he had some success, appearing at the King's Theatre in the first half of both 1835 and 1836. He also found time to marry Ann Panormo, daughter of Louis Panormo the leading London guitar maker, on March 27, 1836. However, by 1837, his career had taken a step back with appearances at the less prestigious St James's Theatre and the Colosseum in English roles.

In 1838 he made his first appearance in Bellini's *La sonnambula* at Drury Lane, where the *Theatrical Observer* (November 21, 1838) found his singing more agreeable than his acting. He was hired for the 1839 Italian opera season[27] as a *secondo basso* and he continued there in minor Italian roles for the rest of his British career, including the première of Verdi's *Nabucco* on March 3, 1846. He also sang for Alfred Bunn at Drury Lane supposedly as a tenor, in the 1843-44 season (*The Times*, September 22, 1843) and, in fact, sang Arturo in Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* at Her Majesty's Theatre on several occasions, presumably falsetto unless the part had been transposed down. However, his first role for Bunn was the bass role of the head forester with Theodore as Caspar in the English version of Weber's *Der Freischutz* in October, 1843. While he did get an occasional admiring notice such as that from *The Bradford Observer* (November 7, 1844), "a vocalist of a high order; he is gifted with an organ of considerable richness, and executes his part with fine taste and expression", and he was sufficiently acceptable to take over from Lablache as Oroe in Rossini's *Semiramide* when the latter became ill, overall, his performances did not generate much notice or enthusiasm and, even after Theodore's death, he made little headway. While John Cox's reliability has to be in question[28], his description of Augustus as "being without question one of the ugliest men that ever lived" and having "the misfortune rarely to be placed in any position in which he could thoroughly do himself justice" would provide some reasons for his mediocre success.

In August 1847, he went to the US, where he made his first appearance at the Park Theatre on October 4, 1847 in an English version of Donizetti's *La Favorite*. Although he was seen in some quarters as "a nonentity trading on his brother's lustrous name"[29], he continued his American career eventually joining Max Maretzek's Italian Opera Company in 1849 until his death of consumption in New York on December 6, 1851. Rather sadly, he was said to have been buried at other people's expense with no compatriots or colleagues present[30].

Two other Giubileis had minor stage careers. A Theodore Giubilei started to offer his services as a professor of singing in 1854 and did appear in a several provincial concerts in the late 1850's. This was very likely Theodore Maine Giubilei, the eldest son of Theodore Victor's half brother Michel. He claimed an association with Her Majesty's Theatre and the San Carlo in Naples but there are no notices including him at the former although he did appear on a subscription list of members of Her Majesty's Theatre in 1860[31] so that he might well have been in the chorus. A Mademoiselle E. Giubilei, a pupil of Julius Benedict and so probably English despite the title, was well received at her debut in a concert on January 9, 1861[32]. She may well have been Emilie (or Emily), one of Michel's daughters, but there is no further mention of her. And so the Giubileis left the stage.

[1] Kenneth Stern, *Guiditta Pasta: A life on the Lyric Stage.* (Self published, 2013) see http://giudittapasta.com/

[2] Dan H. Marek, *Giovanni Battista Rubini and the Bel Canto Tenors: History and Technique*. (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2013).

[3] Howard Bushnell, *Maria Malibran: A Biography of the Singer.* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1979), April Fitzlyon, *Maria Malibran, Diva of the Romantic Age*. (London, Souvenir Press, 1987)

[4] Clarissa Lablache Cheer, *The Great Lablache: Nineteenth Century Operatic Superstar His Life and His Times*. (Self-published: Xlibris Corp., 2009)

[5] Henry Pleasants, *The Great Tenor Tragedy* (Portland: Amadeus Press, 1995). Two recent Ph.D. theses by Jason Vest and Michael Lee Smith contrasting Nourrit and Duprez can be found at http://uknowledge.uky.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1708&context=gradschool_diss and http://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2281&context=thesesdissertations .

[6] Dudley Cheke, *Joséphine and Emilie*. (Oxford: Jon Carpenter, 1993).

[7] Elizabeth Forbes, *Mario and Grisi*. (London:Victor Gollancz, 1985).

[8] Basil Walsh. *The Hibernian Prima Donna*, (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2000).

[9] Avril Mackenzie-Grieve, *Clara Novello*. (London: Geoffrey Bles Ltd., 1955).

[10] Richard Davis, *Anna Bishop: The Adventures Of An Intrepid Prima Donna*. (Sydney: Currency Press, 1997).

[11] Other spellings are common including Guibilei, Giubelei and Guibelei.

[12] E.g. Vera Lawrence, *Strong on Music*. Volume 1. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p.60

[13] *The Annual Register*, April 1826, p. 652

[14] *The Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review*, Volume 9, 1827, p. 53

[15] Alexander Weatherson's article "Queen of dissent: Mary Stuart and the opera in her honour by Carlo Coccia" at http://www.donizettisociety.com/Articles/articlemarystuart.htm includes more on opera and the performance

[16] G. Herbert Rodwell, *A Letter to the Musicians of Great Britain, Containing a Prospectus of Proposed Plans for the Better Encouragement of Native Musical Talent, and for the Erection and Management of a Grand National Opera in London*. (London: James Fraser, 1833).

[17] For example, John E. Cox, *Musical Recollections of the last half century*, Volume 1. (London: Tinsley Brothers , 1872), pp. 285-286 muddles the two of them into a single person and thus is of doubtful use.

[18] Quoted in Vera Lawrence, *Op.Cit.*, p.60.

[19] *The New York Herald* (August 17, 1840), quoted in the *Theatrical Observer*, September 23, 1840.

[20] William Treat Upton, *William Henry Fry*. (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1954), p.306.

[21] *The Anglo American* (September 7, 1844). Volume 3, p.476 wrote that he had "just recovered from a severe illness the result of bursting a blood vessel whilst singing at a concert one evening". Either it was a spurious report or perhaps there was confusion with Augustus. There do not seem to be any other reports of it.

[22] There does not seem to be any other evidence of a sister so it may have been a different female relative.

[23] In particular, the birth of her fourth child, her daughter Celestine, on January 7, 1843, seems to have proved no impediment for she was advertised as starring in the ballet, *Alma*, at the Adelphi, on December 23, 1842, less than 3 weeks before and continued there on February 4, 1843, less than a month after. In fact, *The Standard* (January 17, 1843) reported that she had danced in Rodwell's melodrama *Pride of Place* the previous evening but it may have made a mistaken assumption about one of the dancers. Her keenness was probably to ensure that she retained her place at the Adelphi as Giubilei was in full employment at this time and she does not seem to have behaved the same in her first two pregnancies.

[24] Private communication from Jennie Walton, Drury Lane Theatrical Fund.

[25] In advertising the benefit, *The Morning Chronicle*, (August 5, 1848) wrote that thanks to "the great liberality of the most eminent artistes the following grand entertainment will be given". According to *The Era* (August 20, 1848) the receipts were over £500, although notices in the *Morning Chronicle* (November 7, 1848) and *Morning Post* (November 16, 1848) claimed that no money from it had actually been passed to the family at that time.

[26] R.M Levey and J O'Rorke, *The Annals of the Theatre Royal, Dublin*. (Dublin: Joseph Dollard, 1880).

[27] Anonymous, *The Italian Opera in 1839*. (London: J Alfred Novello, 1840), p.4.

[28] John E. Cox, *Loc. Cit.* Although he muddles the two Giubileis in his account, these particular descriptions could only apply to Augustus, as Theodore was noted both as good looking and as an impressive actor.

[29] Vera Lawrence, *Op.Cit.*, p.473

[30] Vera Lawrence, *Strong on Music*. Volume 2. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988, p.219.

[31] The *Morning Post* (June 9, 1860) published a subscription list in aid of Sicilians under Garibaldi struggling for independence. Giubilei subscribed a £1, around the average contribution.

[32] The *Morning Post* (January 10, 1861) spoke of her as "a welcome addition to the concert-room".