Le Roi et la Ligue
ou
Le Ville Assiégée – Opéra-comique
Paris, 1815
Overture

Nicholas Charles Bochsa
Lorraine, France, 1789 – Sydney, 1856

Edited by
Richard Divall

Music Archive Monash University
Melbourne
Introduction

Nicholas Charles Bochsa had a short time in Australia before his death in Sydney in 1856. However he is one of the important nineteenth-century musicians to have visited this country and thus should be included in this series.

Robert-Nicolas-Charles Bochsa (normally named as Nicholas Charles), harp virtuoso, entrepreneur, publisher and composer was born on 9 August 1789 in Montmédy in Lorraine, France. The town, close to the borders with Belgium and Luxemburg was a garrison base, where his musician father, Karl Bochsa was a woodwind player, stationed in a French regiment. The elder Bochsa established a fine reputation for himself in Paris as a publisher and teacher. Sent to study the harp at the Paris Conservatoire, in 1813, Bochsa was appointed as a player on that instrument to the Napoleonic Court, and to the Empress Marie-Louise. He distinguished himself as a virtuoso player on the harp, possibly the finest player in the nineteenth century, but also as a composer of works that extended the repertoire, bringing new composition techniques that took advantage of the new pedal systems invented by Sebastian Erard. He was musically precocious, and his first recorded opera, *Le retour de Trajan, ou Rome triomphante* was staged in Lyons in 1805 when he was aged sixteen. As a composer he wrote several opera and *opera-comiques*, many of which were premiered in Paris, and he wrote numerous works for chamber instruments, including several sonatas for woodwinds. His output of composition for the harp was very large and his works are still part of the repertoire. Bochsa’s importance as a virtuoso performer and composer for the harp has eclipsed his real talents as an orchestral composer and as a writer for the theatre. His music contains elements of the central-European style of composition, a secure musical tradition that he inherited from his Czech born father. As a performer he was very fashionable in the late Napoleonic period in the Restoration period of Louis XVIII, where he was again appointed Harpist to the Bourbon Court.¹

Unfortunately he involved himself in speculation and publishing ventures that saw him come under a series of criminal charges in the French Courts, which led to him fleeing France for England in 1817. Restabilising a career in London he was a prominent feature in concert life in that city, and a sought-after teacher. He was one of the early teachers and participants of the Royal Academy of Music, but in 1827 was asked to leave that body when his personal and financial life came under a cloud. From 1826 to 1832 he presided over seven seasons at the Royal Italian Opera, where the new works of Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti, Giovanni Simone Mayr and Zingarelli were performed. Bochsa also composed five ballets, four of which were staged at the King’s Theatre in London.

¹ For Bochsa’s life see Michel Faul *Nicolas-Charles Bochsa harpist, compositeur, escroc* (Paris: Editions Delatour, France, 2003)
In 1839 he absconded with the soprano Anna Bishop, the wife of the influential English composer, Sir Henry Bishop, and ironically the composer of ‘Home Sweet Home’.\(^2\) There began a long series of foreign tours that took the pair from Scandinavia and Russia to Mexico and several years in the United States, that finally ended in Sydney in 1855. Bochsa and Bishop had performed over the United States, at a time when California was experiencing the great gold rush of the period. Capitalising on the Australian gold rush, both Bochsa and Bishop decided to sail from San Francisco to Sydney, a voyage that placed a great strain on Bochsa’s health. A man of great height and generous girth, he had had a prior history of heart problems.

\[^2\] Anna Bishop’s long life is recounted in Richard Davis *Anna Bishop The Adventures of an Intrepid Prima Donna* (Sydney: Currency Press, 1997).
On arrival in Sydney, Bochsa was greeted by two pupils and an old musical acquaintance. Both the composers, Stephen Hale Marsh, and Charles Packer had been taught by him in London. Also in Sydney was the composer Isaac Nathan who knew Bochsa from his time in the British capital. Bochsa arranged concerts with Anna Bishop to be given by the Sydney entrepreneur Andrew Tarning, who was impresario in two Sydney theatres. Rehearsals also commenced for a season of Bellini's Norma to be conducted by Bochsa, with Bishop in the title role. However after four concerts accompanying Bishop on the piano, Bochsa had a relapse of an earlier heart condition and died at the Royal Hotel in George Street on 6 January 1856. His funeral was the occasion of a large attendance, and a Kyrie eleison possibly from his earlier Requiem, and arranged by W H Paling was sung by a quartet of singers, including Bishop. Bochsa was buried at St Stephen's Cemetery in Camperdown, and an elegant funeral monument was erected by Bishop with the assistance of a generous public subscription. Anna Bishop continued to have a long performing career, and leaving Sydney travelled to Melbourne where the entrepreneur George Coppin arranged a series of concerts for her at the Theatre Royal. She remarried in 1858 and sang in South America before returning to London. Further tours and adventures followed her, including being wrecked in the Spanish Marianas Islands in the Pacific. She gave an extended series of concerts in The Philippines, British India and the United States, when George Coppin enticed her to return to Australia and New Zealand in 1868 for a season of operas, including Bellini's Norma and Donizetti's Lucrezia Borgia. She died in New York on either 18 or 19 March, 1884.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the support of Monash University and assistance from the Marshall–Hall Trust and my fellow Trustees, Sir James Gobbo AC, Lady Primrose Potter AC, Professor John Poynter AO OBE and Associate Professor Thérèse Radic. I express my deep appreciation to Allan and Maria Myers AO, to the Rector and Provost of Newman College, The University of Melbourne. And especially to Professor Ed Byrne AC, the President and Vice-Chancellor of Monash University, to Professor John Griffiths and the Head of the Sir Zelman Cowen School of Music, Associate Professor Rob Burke for their support and assistance of this project. I greatly appreciate the assistance of our Editorial Coordinator Mitchell Mollison.

Richard Divall
July 2014

3 Charles Packer, also termed 'of the Royal Academy', where he had been a fellow pupil of Anna Bishop, was the first of a trio of Packer composers who lived in Australia, two of whom worked and published in Tasmania. Packer had been convicted of forgery in London in 1839 and sent to New South Wales. He was pardoned in 1850 and subsequently made a good contribution to music in Hobart, Sydney and Melbourne. He was the first family member in Australia of the Packer publishing dynasty. The author has a fine collection of copies of compositions by the Packer family that came from their family holdings.
Contemporary print of the memorial grave of Bochsa at St Stephen’s Church Cemetery, Camperdown, Sydney – New York Public Library, Performing Arts Research Center
Photograph of Anna Bishop – possibly taken in New York after 1870
CRITICAL NOTES

The full score of Le Roi et la Ligue was published by Chez Bochsa, Père, then based in the Rue Vivienne 19 in Paris. The work was premiered at the Théâtre Royal de L'Opéra Comique on 22 August 1815, and appropriately for the changing times, the score was dedicated to The Duke de Berri, the son of the Count of Artois, later King Charles X of France. Apart from some confusing placement of bass and bassoon lines on the score and some editorial hairpins and dynamics, the publication of the overture is very accurate and there are no notes.

The Editor
Frà Professor Richard Divall AO OBE is a Vice-Chancellor’s Professorial Fellow at Monash University, an Honorary Principal Fellow in Music at The University of Melbourne, and Visiting Professor at The University of Malta. He is Chairman of the Marshall-Hall Trust and is a Knight of Malta in Solemn Religious Profession. He was awarded a D.Lett. (Hon Causa) in 1992 by Monash University, and a Doc. Univ. (Hon Causa) by the Australian Catholic University in 2004. He holds a PhD in Theology from the University of Divinity on eighteenth-century sacred music on Malta that includes an edition of the complete sacred works of Nicolò Isouard (1773-1818), and is an Honorary Research Fellow at the same university. Richard Divall has edited early Australian music since 1967.
Le Roi et la Ligue
ou La Ville assiégée
Opéra en deux Actes
Théâtre Royal de l'Opéra Comique Paris 22 August 1815

Nicholas Charles Bochsa 1789-1856 Sydney
Edited by Richard Divall