

REDISCOVERING AND RECONSTRUCTING THE SISTRUM IN ROSSINI'S *THE BARBER OF SEVILLE*

by Simone Fermani¹

The idea to find out what sort of instrument the sistrum really was, came to me firstly because of professional needs. In fact, during the 1998 opera season I was engaged by the Opéra de Marseille to conduct Rossini's *The Barber of Seville* and, as I have always tried to follow the indications of a printed score throughout my activity as a conductor, I decided to follow the usual procedure also in that occasion. Immediately, I run up against the orchestral part of the sistrum and the ensuing problem of its correct interpretation.

In order to proceed on this matter, it is necessary to preliminarily bear in mind here where exactly Rossini uses this instrument in his *Barber*. The sistrum plays a prominent role within three specified parts of the opera: in the Act I, the serenade of young Count Almaviva, "Ecco ridente in cielo"; again, in the *stretta*, at the end of the same Act, "Mi par d'esser con la testa in un'orrida fucina"; once more, in the Act II, at the end of the *quintetto* "Bricconi, birbanti!".

So I started my researches and my first purpose was to find out whether this instrument still existed. Therefore, I went asking some percussionists, both conservatory teachers and orchestral players, but in vain, as nobody was able to give me a description of the sistrum, nor could they tell me whether or not exemplars might have been somewhere available.

After that, I listened to some recordings of *The Barber of Seville*, but they were useless, for here the orchestral part of the sistrum is played by the triangle – an idiophone type of percussion instrument whose sound is of indefinite pitch – or, alternatively, by the *glockenspiel* – that is, another kind of percussion instrument whose sound is, instead, of definite pitch. At that point, I had only one solution – I carefully examined the printed score of the opera.

The 1969 critical edition of the score of *The Barber of Seville* edited by Alberto Zedda with commentary and published by Ricordi turned out to be crucial in order to resolve such a key issue. Effectively, I extracted the sections of the opera where the sistrum is used and I compared the its relevant parts: immediately, I realized that they had to be composed for an instrument which produces *an indeterminate pitch*, as in each section, the sole note given to the sistrum is always written in the same pitch during the whole time of its use; moreover, within two sections over three, the note Rossini wrote for the sistrum seemed to be independent of the main key as well as of the harmonic changes, and this first hypothesis was supported by an harmonic and tonal analysis which I made afterwards.

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For example: the note Rossini prescribed to the sistrum at the end of the *quintetto* of Act II “Bricconi, birbanti!”, is placed on the second line of the staff, corresponding to the A note; the G clef in the staff does not take any inflection; while the entire section is being organized around a tonality based upon E flat Major, marked with the flat A note then, and the harmonic development of the section is mostly composed into the sequence of the degrees of tonic and dominant of this tonality². Subsequently, had the sistrum been intended to produce a determinate pitch, this note would have been incompatible with the tonality of the section.

The same incongruity is evident in the *stretta* of the Act I *finale*: the note for the sistrum is written on the second line of the staff, which takes also here the G clef, in correspondance of the A note; the main tonality of this section is C Major and so the harmony, again, is mostly composed into a sequence of the degrees of tonic and dominant of this tonality. Likewise as before, had this sound been considered of no determinate pitch, it would have been incompatible with the key of the section³.

In the serenade of Count Almaviva, Act I,⁴ the note for the sistrum is written on the second line of the staff, in correspondance of the G note: the tonality of the section is C Major and the development of the harmony is mostly composed into a sequence of the degrees of tonic and dominant. In this case, the sound could be compatible with the harmonic development of the section. Yet, if we consider the sistrum as an instrument which produces determinate pitch, there is the fact that in the two remaining sections the notes are “out of tonality”. Then, to dispel all doubts, I determined to go to Bologna, to examine the autograph score at the Music and Bibliographical Museum.

I could not hide my emotion when the librarian showed me the autograph score of *The Barber of Seville* – a very plain book with small flowers on its cover. And it was such a great privilege for me to have the opportunity to read through the autograph manuscript of the music I had chosen to interpret, that I could not help responding with humbleness – a respectful attitude of attention. Thus, under the extremely vigilant look of the librarian, I attentively glanced through the autograph score to focus my attention on the three sections dealing with the sistrum.

In the serenade of Count Almaviva, Act I, the staff of the score which Rossini gave to the sistrum takes the G clef and the note associated with the instrument is really written on the second line, in correspondance of the G note which is compatible with the tonality of the section in which the instrument is used; this might surprisingly confirm an hypothesis about a sistrum producing a determinate pitch. But what the analysis of the other two sections strongly suggested, was that the note given to the sistrum was not involved in the tonalities of the two sections – still, so, the mystery persisted.

It was only at that point, while I was considering the two conflicting perspectives emerging from my reading of the autograph score, that I finally realized what was the next step to take: suddenly, I felt that I needed to know as much as possible about that instrument. And the first questions were: what was that instrument? When and where was it used? What was its function?

² See Alberto Zedda, ed., *Gioacchino Rossini: The Barber of Seville*, Milan, Ricordi 1969, pp. 344-358.

³ “The barber of Seville” ib. pp 230-280

⁴ Ib. , pp 30-31

The researches I carried out at the Bologna Music and Bibliographical Museum as well as in more than a few libraries gave me the opportunity to answer these questions. There, in fact, I could consult such an assortment of specific texts which not only put me in a position to cautiously compare the data I obtained, but also, after a long wait, to give a precise definition of the instrument: the sistrum was an instrument whose sound was generated by shaking. The ancient sistrum had its handle attached to a horseshoe-shaped frame and could have thin wires holding multiple metal discs, or, otherwise, little horizontal bars fixed on a single handle. In both cases however, the materials by which its sound was generated – discs or bars – clearly indicated that a sistrum had to be an instrument capable of producing not determinate but, instead, only indeterminate pitch.

I discovered that the instrument had very ancient origins: it was used by the ancient Egyptians, in their religious ceremonies and especially in the worship of the goddess Hathor, later called Isis by the Greeks⁵.

Furthermore, I learned that the sistrum was used in the Middle Age as well. Interestingly, as I could read from the *Universal Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, the medieval sistrum was made by discs hung from a metal bar showing both a. Later on in the same description, Rossini's masterpiece *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* is also being mentioned, referring in particular to the serenade of Count Almaviva⁶.

What I could prove at the end of my early researches was that the sound of the sistrum

1) was produced by shaking of:

a) a number of metal discs loosely suspended on bars fixed in a sole handle;

b) transverse bars set into a horseshoe-shaped frame;

c) discs slipped into a sole metal stick within a triangular and trapezoidal frame;

2) the sounds produced by either discs or bars are indeterminate: as a result, I had to conclude that the sistrum was essentially an instrument capable of producing an indeterminate pitch.

At this point of my research, I started thinking about the role played by the sistrum in Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*. Clearly, my concern had to do above all with the tonal disagreement between the section of the serenade of Almaviva –

⁵ Descriptions of different varieties of sistra, as well as further details on their use, are available in HANS HICKMANN, *45 siècles de musique dans l'Égypte ancienne à travers la sculpture, la peinture, l'instrument*, Paris, Richard Masse Editeurs 1956, pp.15, 20-21, plates LVI, LVII, LVIII, LIX, XCIV, XCV, which explains the use of the sistrum in religious ceremonies of the Ancient Egypt connected to the cult of the goddess Hathor, from whom the instrument would derive its name; HANS HICKMANN, *Musicologie pharaonique. Etude sur l'évolution de l'art musical dans l'Égypte ancienne*, Kehl, Librairie Heits 1956, pp. 20-21 and 44, which encloses a plate of the Egyptian hieroglyphics and of the Greek and Latin words corresponding to sistrum; CURT SACHS, *History of the musical instruments*, Milan, Mondadori 1940, pp. 92 -93, here the author, in agreement with Hickmann, connects the instrument to the ceremonies linked to the cult of the goddess Hathor; particularly, Sachs reports the ceremony of the "sistrum crowd" of women who took the instrument in their hands, stressing the rhythms of the ceremonies linked to the cult of the goddess; ROGER BRAGARD – FERDINAND J. DE HEN, *Musical instruments in the art and in the story* Milan, Bramante, 1994, p.14; *Encyclopédie de la Musique*, 3rd volume, Paris, Fasquelle 1967, p. 106 word "sistrum"; *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, volume XVII, ed. by STANLEY SADE, London, Macmillan 1980, p. 354 word "Sistrum", which reports that this word comes from the Greek word "seistron (that which is shaken)", action which would give the name to the instrument itself.

⁶ See "Sistrum" in Alberto Basso, ed., *Dizionario Enciclopedico Universale della Musica e dei Musicisti (Universal Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Music and Musicians)*, Vol. IV *The Lexicon*, Turin, UTET 1984, pp. 309-310.

where the note of the sistrum, in tune with the tonality of the section, would lead us to think to a sistrum whose sound might be of indeterminate pitch – and the two remaining sections – where, instead, the note of the sistrum is not in tune with the tonality of the sections themselves.

These clarifications inevitably point to a few considerations. Firstly, one cannot assert that in the serenade of Almoviva the sound is of determinate pitch, being the sistrum an instrument capable of producing an indeterminate pitch.

Subsequently, one has to focus on the musical notation, i.e. the way Rossini writes his notes for the sistrum. Actually, in each of the three sections mentioned above, Rossini's written score shows single notes, while shaking, which is the peculiar sound of this instrument, seems apparently absent.

In addition, Rossini's notation would show single strokes, which is typical of percussion instruments. This, indeed, reflected a common procedure in Rossini's age, which consisted in writing the note on the staff always at the same pitch with the G clef, later changed into an atonal clef – a *modus operandi* still in use today for some percussion instruments of indeterminate pitch, like basses, drums, cymbals, and so on. Furthermore, this very note shows not only the single stroke but also its indeterminate sound, for the note itself is completely independent of the tonality and the harmony of the section in which the instrument is being used.

Again, the mystery of Rossini's sistrum had to remain unsolved. I only had a few elements, i.e., I knew that the sistrum was an instrument sounded by being shaken and producing sounds of indeterminate pitch. Yet, I still had to know how it was really made – a problem not so easy to solve – and, mostly, I still had to understand the true connection between Rossini's notation and the sound of that instrument. All I had was the written score of the opera – and it was right through the score that the sistrum's secrets slowly became known to me.

First of all I understood that, in order to discover the original form of the instrument, I should have been linking the notation to the production of the sound. Initially, I tried to match Rossini's notation of the three sections with the simple shaking, but in vain, as each of the three sections seemingly showed single sounds or strokes.

Yet, one has to consider that while a percussion instrument, whose sound is of indefinite pitch, can contribute either to rhythm or to orchestral colour, it will certainly never define harmony. By examining the score more closely, I discovered that within two sections above the three mentioned – i.e., the *stretta* of the end of Act I and the end of the *quintetto* of Act II – rhythm was of the greatest importance for a good result. On the one hand, in the *stretta*, for example, it was essential to the link between triplets of violins, piccolos and clarinets and the binary notation of the rest of the orchestra, the singers and the chorus⁷. On the other hand, at the end of the above mentioned *quintetto*, it was likewise crucial to link without errors the very fast doubled sextuplets of violins, and later on, the whole strings with the isorhythmical notation of the rest of the orchestra and of its four singers⁸. The logical conclusion is that in both sections Rossini's notation could be interpreted in the sense of single strokes, as a shaking would have otherwise produced a multiplicity of sounds with harmful effect on the rhythmic precision which is required for the right performance of these sections of the opera.

⁷ *The Barber of Seville*, op. cit., pp. 236-242, 259-266.

⁸ *Ibidem* pp. 347-349, 352-353, 354-355, 356.

Nonetheless, I returned once again to the point from which I departed, that the sistrum was an instrument sounded by being shaken, which means that the musical notation of these two sections was incompatible with the instrument itself for, as it has been demonstrated, the sistrum shows single strokes.

Could it not be – I asked myself – that we have to be open to the chance that a sistrum might be capable of producing not only shaken sounds but also single strokes? And the first glimmerings of an answer to this question came to my mind when I started taking into account Rossini's great stratagems of fantasy, not to talk of his wish for particular orchestral colours whose aim was to better characterize the performance within the sections where the instrument was being used. Yes, Rossini could have sought after a sistrum capable of producing not only shaken sounds but also single strokes.

But how to obtain single strokes by a shaking instrument? In truth, none of the instruments covered by my surveys had such a peculiarity. So the first solution I thought was to fix a bar to the handle of the sistrum to get a single stroke and, in this context, the medieval sistrum appeared to be a more logical option, being not so distant from Rossini's age.

But, at the same time as I was carefully examining the notation for the sistrum part in the *stretta* and in the *finale* of the *quintetto*, I immediately noticed a new remarkable detail: in his written score, Rossini would alternate the stems of the note, placing one up and one down. Why? Such alternation, I pondered, had to be a clear indication of a specific effect he wanted to achieve through the sistrum. It would be unwise to consider it either an error or inattention due to Rossini's characteristic haste, given the little time he had to compose *The Barber of Seville* and given the fact that so many pages of his autograph score contained the mere indication of "see before" or "see above".

Thus, a confrontation was needed with the autograph score of *The Barber of Seville* in order to confirm the very hypothesis I made earlier. It was for that reason that I decided to come back to the Music and Bibliographical Museum in Bologna and look carefully at the preserved *spartitino* – i.e. a separated manuscript score section which includes all the instrument parts that cannot be included within the main score due to the lack of space. Effectively, I could see that both in the *stretta* of the *finale*, Act I, as well as in the *finale* of the *quintetto*, Act II, Rossini's written score for the sistrum really showed alternated notes, one up and one down.

What was his intent, I kept on asking myself while I was getting home later that night? Nothing could distract my thoughts from that unreadable mystery. Surely, the direction of the stems might have something to do with the type of note to which they would relate. Yet, those notes – chosen to represent a certain indeterminate pitch – were written on the same line of the staff, which meant that the pitch of the sound was equal for all the notes. Maybe, I supposed, it would have been most illuminating to examine the music from my point of view – what would I have done if I had to indicate a noticeable variation in the sound spectrum for a note of indeterminate pitch? Most likely, I should have used an appropriate notation. Then I realized: while the visual note was indicating a sound of indeterminate pitch, the alternated stems would display that the pitch should have followed the tonality according to the stem: hence, a high sound for each note with the stem going up and, vice versa, a low sound for each note with the stem going down. But, once more, what was the purpose of such an alternation of sounds?

I considered that Rossini might have arguably wished to represent in music a situation on stage by unusual sound effect. For that reason, an accurate re-reading of the libretto – i.e., the text of the opera – was essential, as well as special attention had to be paid to the sections where the notes were being alternated.

The first thing that stroke me when I looked carefully at the several reiterated sung conversations in the *stretta* was the real correspondence between words and music. Let's take, for instance, "Alternando questo e quello / pesantissimo martello (alternating back and forth / like a huge hammer)". Here effectively, not only the word "alternando (alternating)" sets up a precise correspondence with the alternation of the stems, but what's more, the choral piece the other characters are singing in the meanwhile, "Mi par d'esser con la testa / in un'orrida fucina (My head seems like it's being pounded / in a dreadful smithy)", actually reflects old Dr. Bartolo's state of mind.

Similarly, it soon became clear to me that through the notation of the stem facing up and down along with two sounds of indeterminate pitch produced by single strokes Rossini could have actually wish to employ a sort of musical metaphor to suggest the hammer and anvil sounds "in a dreadful smithy", so to portray with precision the psychological confusion of his characters on the stage.

A more precise indication is found in the *finale* of the *quintetto*, Act II, which is another case in point. Again, within the two choral pieces – "l'amico delira, l'amico delira" (the man is delirious, the man is delirious)", as well as "di rabbia, di sdegno, di rabbia, di sdegno (because of my anger and scorn, because of my anger and scorn)" – the repeated alternation of the stems of the notes Rossini wrote for the sistrum together with the sharp violin notes and descending scales are a further example of music associated with drama. The steady repetition of a single short phrase carried forward by the rising and falling notation and gradually rising in pitch as well, creates the overall effect of increasing tension and utterly conveys a precise connotation of the the feelings of the characteres and the tumult of their emotions – i.e., Dr. Bartolo's mounting suspicion of Rosina and Count Almaviva and then his rage, when he realizes that he has been tricked; Almaviva and Rosina's plan to escape together at midnight, after having expressed their love for one other; the variety of intrigues and disguises invented by Figaro to help the young lovers, Rosina and Count Almaviva, in order to fend off her unwanted suitor and guardian, Dr. Bartolo.

I knew that if I wanted to produce those particular sounds, I had to mount two metal bars, instead of one, to the handle of the sistrum – two metal bars that had to be struck by means of a pair of metal sticks to generate *two indeterminate sounds of different pitch*, one high, the other low. And basically, what I did was this.

The most logical conclusion, however, was that the part could not have been scored for the triangle, for it produces only one sound, though of indeterminate pitch. The same is valid for the *glockenspiel*, which produces determinate sounds even in its version made of thin metal plates which Alfredo Casella and Virgilio Mortari improperly call sistrum in their well-known treatise on orchestration⁹.

So, as I was not able to find a score written for a shaking instrument, how could I prove that Rossini did really employ the sistrum in his *Barber*?

⁹ALFREDO CASELLA – VIRGILIO MORTARI, *La tecnica dell'orchestra contemporanea*, Milan, Ricordi, 1950, pp. 123-124

I deliberately devoted my attention to focusing on the only one section I had not yet examined, the serenade of Almaviva, and more precisely I concentrated on its related orchestral overture score written for the sistrum.

In this very introductory movement, Count Almaviva and his servant Fiorello are on stage together with a group of musicians generously paid to offer with their instruments a joint serenade to Rosina under her balcony. Like in a real street orchestra, all musicians tune their different instruments to accompany the Count in his serenade and thus, for the most part, the primary effect they are likely to cause is that of a mingling of discordant sounds.

It is worth considering, that Rossini's notation for the sistrum in the overture consists in a sextuplet of demisemiquavers – or a thirty-second note –, its tempo being 2/4 and marked as *largo*. The sextuplet ends on a sole semiquaver along with its equivalent sixteenth-rest; finally, both the the sextuplet and the semiquaver along with its equivalent sixteenth-rest, are being repeated in the two subsequent accents – strong and light – within the same measure.

If we take a look at the following measure, we can see that Rossini's notation presents four semiquavers which are being repeated on strong accents and associated, instead, to their sixteenth-rest on light accents. While such pattern remains unchanged throughout the next three measures, a significant variation occurs instead in the fourth measure, where the written score for the sistrum is being showing a strong-light-strong accent sequence which ultimately concludes with a quaver having its corresponding eighth rest on the last strong accent¹⁰.

Apparently, this is still a notation showing single strokes. Yet, bearing in mind the overall characteristics of the orchestral overture, the sextuplet with its fast and irregular rhythm, might well exemplify the right quantity of notes to indicate a shaken sound, which is actually better required here, particularly if one takes into account the effervescent and even noisy tumult of emotions – and therefore that somewhat exploding crescendo musical effect – Rossini wanted to convey through the serenade. Nonetheless, I truly still had to prove how to interpret such a notation as a shaken sound. As a matter of fact, the single strokes Rossini wrote might have been just rhythmic indication as it occurs in the previous two sections, instead of showing the pitch of the sound – otherwise, shaken sound should have been following the rhythm assigned to the sistrum in the score.

Once more, I paid further attention to the medieval triangular sistrum with its loosen discs. In such a case, I realized, the sound could have been shaken indeed, but not regarded as by a regular pulse – which means not in time. Hence, what was the speed of the rhythm assigned to the sistrum?

It has to be said that it works very much like fractions. In 2/4 *tempo* in effect, each measure has the time duration of one fourth of the time duration of a whole note ($1/4 + 1/4 = 2/4$). In terms of mensural notation, the 2/4 *tempo* is being indicating by the crotchet which is also equivalent to two quavers; likewise, each quaver equals two semiquavers while, similarly, each semiquaver is worth two demisemiquavers, and so on. This way of breaking up a larger metrical pattern into smaller parts where each note can be divided into two notes of half duration is called binary subdivision.

¹⁰ “*The barber of Seville*” op.cit., pp. 30-31.

In a binary subdivision, a group of notes consisting of more than two elements are called *irregular group*, and the triplet — meaning a group of three equal notes fitted into the time normally taken by two — is such an example, for it is necessary to introduce three notes into two subdivisions to perform them in time.

In a binary tempo like 2/4 a sextuplet is also being considered an *irregular group*, as six notes has to be introduced into two subdivisions. In this case, six notes of equal length are to be performed in the duration of four notes of the same kind. Following this reasoning, each quaver can obviously be subdivided also into a triplet of three semiquavers, as well as each semiquaver can be subdivided also into a triplet of three semidemiquavers, and so on. Then, finally, we can get sextuplet simply by joining together the two triolets of its two subsequent subdivisions ($3 \times 2 = 6$).

Furthermore, it can also occur that two irregular groups — one showing notes of longer duration, whilst the other showing notes of shorter duration, for example a sextuplet of demisemiquavers combined with a triolet of semiquavers — do match. In such cases, two notes of the sextuplet equal each note of the triolet, as it can be detected, for instance, right from the written score for the sistrum and the guitars¹¹ in the serenade, where three notes of smaller value are being introduced into each binary subdivision.

Let's turn now again to the medieval sistrum. I could make sure that when I rhythmically shook its handle turning the instrument up and down according to the written score of the opera, a rich mixture of happy colours and noisy tones resulted, for its loosen discs went to and through the triangle frame.

It was the rhythmic precision of the sextuplet to suggest me that I could have placed the metal discs in two fixed points of the sistrum frame, so as to be exactly half way between the triangle vertex and its base for instance. Then I obviously concentrated on Rossini's notation and I considered that if I had multiplied a triolet by two subdivisions I would have got a sextuplet; likewise, if I had divided the sextuplet of demisemiquavers in the serenade into the number of its subdivisions (two semiquavers) I would have had a triolet of semiquavers.

How to achieve a shaken sound in time, I kept on asking myself? Maybe, I thought, the right solution might be to place two devices having the same dimension and form right half way between the triangle vertex and its base. And what could have happened then, if I had held the handle of instrument vertically and then shaken it regularly three times, without interruption? I should valuably have obtained six rhythmically shaken sounds, that is the triolet originated by the subdivision of the sextuplet and derived from the ascendent and descendent movements of the discs within the sistrum frame.

Ultimately, I decided to make first try. I directly positioned two devices having the same dimension and form right half way between the triangle vertex and its base; then, shaking the instrument three times, I movingly started singing the serenade tune, and what I effectively could be hearing were its discs jingling in time, as the score and written part for the sistrum had been showing for more than one century. I had really brought to light a musical instrument that had disappeared from use — and I was the only person in the world to possess it.

Thus, interestingly, the sistrum gave Rossini the chance to make simultaneously heard in his opera combined effects of both rhythmic regularity —

¹¹*Ibidem*, measures 9-13.

generated by rattling shake in time – and scenic drama – resulting from the increasing, vibrant and noisy outgrowth on the stage.

Then I tried to perform both the *ouverture* and, within the same section, its remaining notations. What I understood was that, in addition, the double movement of the discs could prolong the sound duration to the length of time Rossini effectively prescribed for the *sistrum* – again, a multiplicity of elements which outstandingly conveyed great richness and variety of sounds.

In this sense, if compared to common *sistra*, Rossini's instrument is a *unicum*, as it simultaneously offers more possibilities to obtain sounds, playing it either by shaking or by percussion – in this last case, it also originates sounds of different pitch. Almost certainly, Rossini had invented this innovative type of musical instrument. As far as my intensive research concerns in facts, it has never been used neither before nor after Rossini. On the contrary, it just seems to have disappeared right after the first performances of the *Barber of Seville* which took place at the Teatro Argentina, in Rome, in February 1816.

To finish, I wanted to construct the prototype using a kind of metal which could have existed also at the time of the performed opera so to produce the most similar sound. Helped by both the Italian Association of Metallurgy and the Department of Metal Science at Turin Polytechnic University, I could identify such kind of metal so that a significant part of my work could be devoted to the faithful reconstruction of the whole physical features given by welding and finishing process.

Hence, a craftsman fully heat-treated a single metal stick from which he soon after forged two bars and the discs along with their devices; bars and devices had been then heat-treated to joint and the same method was applied in order to obtain the percussion sticks; finally, traditional hand finishing and polishing skills are employed to give the instrument its final appearance.

Lastly, I patented my discovery, consisting in the instrument – currently, there is one model in the world – its design and manufacturing process, while the last thing to be designed was its case.

On first hearing my *sistrum* playing I moved to tears. And I was even more touched when I had to conduct *The Barber of Seville* both at the Opéra Marseille¹² and at the Teatro Regio of Parma – the only two performances the opera has had so far. In both occasions in fact, I could personally see how really essential the *sistrum* was in Rossini's plan for the spectacular success of both the orchestra and the scenes.

The last thing I want to say is that I bowed down to Rossini's genius with awe, marvelling at how powerfully he had been able to create a masterpiece out of another, simply with “*peu de science, un peu de coeur*” – “little science, a bit of heart”, as he truly acknowledged in the dedication addressed to *Bon Dieu*, in his 1863 sacred composition entitled *Petite Messe solennelle*.

¹²The Opéra Theatre of Marseille made a live audio-video recording of this production, later transferred on DVD, where it is possible to listen to the *sistrum*.