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From the Director's Desk

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In late September 1992 I was privileged to visit Belfast, Northern Ireland, where I met with the planning committee for the forthcoming Belfast International Verdi Congress (3-7 March 1993). The committee was chaired by Mr. Roy Johnston of that city, a long time member of the American Institute for Verdi Studies. I also conferred with Mr. Randall Shannon, Managing Director, and Mr. Kenneth Montgomery, Artistic Director and principal conductor for Opera Northern Ireland, as well as Dr. Anthony Carver, head of the School of Music at the Queens University of Belfast where the Congress will take place.

During the visit I was fortunate to attend extraordinarily successful performances by Opera Northern Ireland, of Gounod's *Faust* and Verdi's *Rigoletto* at the Grand Opera House of Belfast, a Victorian gem of a theater, designed by Frank Matcham, architect for "over 150 sumptuous theaters" including London's Coliseum, between 1879 and 1912. The Opera House, restored and reopened in 1980, has been called one of the two jewels in the artistic crown of Northern Ireland, the other being the opera company itself.

Lest my enthusiasm for the performances, the theater, and the company appear to be puffery to promote the Belfast Congress, I should mention meeting and chatting with music critics representing Germany's leading opera magazine, *Orpheus* of Berlin, and *The Sunday Times* of London after the performance of *Rigoletto*. Both had also attended *Faust* the previous evening and their reactions were equally positive. Had Verdi been there his judgement of the outcome would have derived in no small measure from the audience and the box office. Both evenings the theater was packed, and the audiences enthusiastic.

Mr. Montgomery conducted an exciting and sensitive *Rigoletto* from the new edition; and I have never heard the oft-omitted cabaletta for the Duke, "Possente amor", performed so successfully. His shaping of the third act, with its overwhelming climax at the peak of the storm and the stabbing of Gilda, was literally breathtaking. I was delighted to hear that he will conduct *Il trovatore* at the Congress, again using the new edition. I have a strong suspicion the performance will be a memorable one.

At the Congress itself leading Verdi scholars from the United States, the United Kingdom, Italy and France will deliver papers relating to the topic "Verdi's Middle Period: The Operas from *Luisa Miller* to *Un ballo in maschera*". A round-table discussion entitled "Verdi Visualized: Staging in His Day and Ours", on Friday afternoon, Mar. 5, promises to be a highpoint of the event with probable participants including Julian Budden, Andrew Porter, Pierluigi Petrobelli, Director of the *Istituto nazionale di studi verdiani* of Parma, David Lawton, secretary-treasurer of the AIVS and editor of *Il trovatore* and *Trouvère* for the new edition, Kenneth Montgomery and others.

The setting for the Congress, the Queens University of Belfast, is in an exceptionally lovely area of Belfast adjoining the Botanical Gardens and Ulster Museum where I spent some enjoyable hours during my all-too-brief visit. The magnificent Belfast City Hall, a few blocks from the Opera House, and other notable locations in and near Belfast have been promised for the social events that will provide a relaxing counterpoint to the scholarly activities.

For information about registration, tickets for *Il trovatore* and lodging, contact BIVC, Opera Northern Ireland, 181a Stranmillis Rd, Belfast BT9 5DU, United Kingdom (fax number from the US, 011-44-232-682-709). Transportation should be arranged with your own travel agent.

I hope you will be able to join us.