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REVIEW ESSAY

Nicholas Temperley, Edward Loder, and Retrospect Opera's *Raymond and Agnes*

Raymond and Agnes, music by Edward James Loder, libretto by Edward Fitzball,
edition by Valerie Langfield

Royal Ballet Sinfonia, Retrospect Opera Chorus, conducted by Richard Bonyngé
Mark Milhofer, ten; Majallah Cullagh, sop; Andrew Greenan, bass-bar;
Carolyn Dobbin, mezzo-sop; Quentin Hayes, bar; Alessandro Fisher, ten;
Alexander Robin Baker, bar; Timothy Langston, ten; David Horton, ten;
Phil Wilcox, bar

Retrospect Opera RO005, 2018 (2 CDs: 73 minutes, 76 minutes).

In memory of Nicholas Temperley

For more than five decades, nineteenth-century music specialist Nicholas Temperley (1932–2020) embraced an abiding belief that Edward James Loder's *Raymond and Agnes* (1855) was 'an extraordinary opera that cries out for revival'.¹ This review-essay chronicles Temperley's discovery of the obscure score and the long road to the present recording by Retrospect Opera, which navigates Loder's composition of *Raymond and Agnes* in spite of the puzzling complexities of Edward Fitzball's libretto. In April 1966, Temperley, then a fellow of Clare College and an assistant lecturer in music at Cambridge, posed the statement: 'What has prevented revival of English Romantic operas (apart from Beecham's nostalgic rehash of *The Bohemian Girl* at Liverpool and Covent Garden in 1951) is the assumption that they have nothing of value to offer'.² He had acquired the piano-vocal score for the opera in 1963, and commented that: 'If you spend much time looking through forgotten nineteenth-century music, you soon develop

¹ Nicholas Temperley, 'Reviving a Masterpiece', in *Raymond and Agnes*, Retrospect Opera, 2018, LC52095 RO005, 7. Temperley was also a proud patron of this recording and had presented excerpts from the opera in many settings, including the 2016 Biennial Conference of the North American British Music Studies Association (NABMSA) on the campus of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV).

² Nicholas Temperley, 'Raymond and Agnes', *The Musical Times* 107/1478 (April 1966): 307–10. In this essay introducing the opera, Temperley writes a fine synopsis of a complex libretto (despite the absence at the time of the original on which it was based), 309–10. Moreover, it is noteworthy to read the stark differences between the libretto of the 1966 Cambridge revival and this Retrospect Opera recording.

the ability to spot the unusual'.³ Although he admitted that not all of Loder's output rose to the level of quality depicted in *Raymond and Agnes*, after playing through the score, Temperley wrote that 'it far surpassed anything I had expected'.⁴ Temperley convinced Sir Eric Ashby, Master of Clare College, that the opera was worthy of a revival, and the college agreed. In an attempt to expand his search, he sought a copy of Edward Fitzball's libretto in a letter published in *The Musical Times* in November 1965. Temperley was intent that a revival of *Raymond and Agnes* would prove that the opera was not only valuable but would also mark a signal moment for the consequence of nineteenth-century British music that balked at the moniker of England as *Das Land ohne Musik*, or 'the land without music'.⁵ He was fortunate to locate the full score of the opera in the collection of the Library of Congress in Washington, DC, of which he arranged to receive a photocopy.⁶ Working between the full score and the piano-vocal score, Temperley was able to piece together a performance edition and a rearrangement of the extant texts into a sensible performance order. He did not, however, obtain the original libretto, and, believing it to be lost, set about to craft a sensible performance order of the music, while producer Max Miradin addressed the considerable issues with the texts. Contemporary critics of the premiere of *Raymond and Agnes* nearly all commented on the disjunct nature of the libretto, and Temperley and Miradin agreed that 'if the work was to be performed, a new libretto would have to be provided'.⁷ The production team of Temperley, Miradin and conductor David Grant determined that 'Loder's original score should remain intact, apart from the omission of a few isolated movements and short sections'.⁸ Temperley then oversaw a new publication of the piano-vocal

³ Nicholas Temperley, 'How the Opera was Unearthed', in the printed programme of *Raymond and Agnes*, May 1966, for the Arts Theatre Cambridge production (Cambridge: Polyhedron Printers, 1966): 5.

⁴ In the 1966 programme Temperley further clarified: 'I had been interested in Loder for a long time. For although much of his music is wholly bad, often without the slightest glimpse of and real potential for better things, he could occasionally rise to extraordinary heights when he wanted to – as, for example, in his beautiful song, "The Brooklet", which I heard Peter Pears sing on the Third Programme a few months ago', 5.

⁵ In 1914, the German critic Oscar Schmitz asserted in *Das Land ohne Musik: Englische Gesellschaftsprobleme* (Munich: G. Müller, 1914) that England was 'the only cultured nation without its own music'. Yet such an unfounded statement – even if it piqued a national nerve – held little merit when balanced with actual fact. The founding of the Royal College of Music some three decades before Schmitz's broadside did, however, affirm its nationalist intention to rival the music of the Continent. Indeed, the music of Loder and his contemporaries offers a fitting rejoinder to counter Schmitz's claim. The continued oversight of nineteenth-century British music certainly energized Temperley toward advocacy. See Bennett Zon's discussion of 'das Land ohne Musik', in his 'Introduction' to *Music and Performance Culture in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Essays in Honour of Nicholas Temperley*, ed. Zon, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012): 1–7. See also Temperley's 'Xenophilia in British Musical History', in *Nineteenth-Century British Music Studies*, ed. Jeremy Dibble and Bennett Zon (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999): 3–19.

⁶ Temperley, 'How the Opera was Unearthed', 5.

⁷ Max Miradin, 'The Libretto', in the printed programme of *Raymond and Agnes*, May 1966, for the Arts Theatre Cambridge production (Cambridge: Polyhedron Printers, 1966): 14.

⁸ Miradin, 'The Libretto', 14. Of his work on the libretto, Miradin continued: 'It was in the score that I looked for the basis of a new plot. It appeared that there were four "big moments" in the opera, all of them dramatic concerted passages for the main characters, with the chorus. I made these the cornerstones of the new libretto.'

score.⁹ After an absence from the stage of more than a century, *Raymond and Agnes* received seven consecutive performances in early May 1966 by the Arts Theatre, Cambridge, in a revival that was championed under Temperley's artistic directorship. The Arts Theatre Cambridge endeavour was proven justified by the critics in attendance.

In the following years, Temperley maintained a steady focus on seeing the work recorded – and perhaps again staged. An original copy of the published libretto was finally discovered during the period between the 2009 bicentennial celebrations of Loder's birth and the 2015 sesquicentennial commemoration of his death. Some 50 years later, there can be no more fitting reward than to hear this professional recording of *Raymond and Agnes* by the United Kingdom-based Retrospect Opera under the baton of the indefatigable conductor Richard Bonyngue.

The Retrospect Opera recording utilized Valerie Langfield's unpublished critical edition of the full score of *Raymond and Agnes*, which she based on the autograph full score held at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC¹⁰ The Langfield edition of the full score is available for rental as a whole or in excerpts through Retrospect Opera. Because she crafted this edition from the autograph full score, Langfield restored many of the cuts that had been made for expediency in the Cambridge revival – including a quartet in Act III – thus providing for the twenty-first century the most complete edition that Loder himself would likely have known based on extant sources. As to the matter of the libretto, Langfield writes of her edition:

As far as the sung text was concerned, the three sources often varied a little, and on these occasions, the manuscript generally took precedence. The libretto was the only source for the spoken dialogue, and as the language was occasionally so convoluted as to barely make sense, a few small changes have been made in the interests of comprehensibility.¹¹

Temperley saw his unwavering certainty in Loder's music realized in the publication of *Musicians of Bath and Beyond: Edward Loder (1809–1865) and His Family*, which he edited and to which he contributed.¹² In his introduction to the volume,

⁹ The newly edited score was published by E. & E. Plumridge (Cambridge: 1966). Temperley utilized the autograph full score at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC, and the original printed vocal score (published c. 1859 by Charles Jefferys in London) as sources for his new edition. For the Cambridge revival, he wrote: 'I have found it necessary to cut four complete, self-contained numbers which contributed nothing to the total effect, and to shorten several others by the omission of repeats or sections', 'Raymond and Agnes', 310.

¹⁰ Edward James Loder, *Raymond and Agnes*, Full Score, Edition by Valerie Langfield, Stockport, 2015. This author is grateful to Dr Langfield for access to the full score. Langfield's critical commentary details the distinctions between the autograph full score and the new edition, ff. i–xviii (2015). Langfield notes the many inconsistencies between the autograph full score and the published 1859 vocal score, the latter of which she clarifies bear the marks of a hasty reduction that in several occurrences imprints not only numerous errors but which in other instances is not at all reliable. Her conclusions between crossed-out sections of the full autograph and revisions therein, as well as her compelling observations regarding the first imprinting of the vocal score, are especially appealing. For enquiries concerning hire of the full score and orchestral materials, or purchase of the vocal score, please e-mail Dr Valerie Langfield, rcq@valerielangfield.co.uk.

¹¹ Valerie Langfield, 'Raymond and Agnes: The Nineteenth-century Reception and Textual Sources', in *Raymond and Agnes*, Retrospect Opera, 2018, LC52095 RO005, 16.

¹² Nicholas Temperley, ed. *Musicians of Bath and Beyond: Edward Loder (1809–1865) and His Family* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2016). Even Temperley's decision to insist on the

Temperley again challenges the modern era to reassess Loder's musical period, writing that Loder was 'a composer of genius, denied the historical position he deserved because of the many disadvantages and prejudices faced by English composers of his generation'.¹³ Temperley's 'Epilogue' to the volume provides an excellent first-hand accounting of the 1966 revival of *Raymond and Agnes*. Temperley writes:

I had become convinced that however much bad music might be attributed to the late Georgian period, the reign of William IV, and the early and mid-Victorian eras, nothing could justify the almost total dismissal of the period that some leading writers had adopted. At the very least, its musical life and culture should be studied afresh, and set free from the patronising and prejudiced attitude to the 'Victorians' which had so long coloured perceptions of every art except literature.¹⁴

More than a century earlier, Edward James Loder took up the role of music director at the Theatre Royal, Manchester, in 1851.¹⁵ The local press buzzed with anticipation of a new 'Grand Opera' that was to hear its premiere there. *Raymond and Agnes* was given its first performances in August 1855. Notwithstanding 'unanimous' praise of Loder's music, the opera was not a success.¹⁶ Covent Garden refused to produce the opera because of its plot.¹⁷ When the opera finally received a London performance four years later in 1859, the composer was too ill to conduct; his younger cousin, George Loder, conducted the production. A significant reorganization of the score turned it from a four act, eight scene work into a slightly truncated three act score.

The libretto to *Raymond and Agnes* owes its origins to Matthew Gregory Lewis's late eighteenth-century Gothic novel, *The Monk: A Romance* (1795).¹⁸ Lewis's novel inspired a June 1797 dramatic production at Covent Garden titled *Raymond and Agnes, or The Bleeding Nun, A Ballet of Action*. The work was presented musically to a libretto by Lewis in Norwich (1809) and again at the Theatre Royal, Haymarket (1811). An undated publication titled *Raymond and Agnes, or The Bleeding Nun of Lindenberg*, a melodrama in two acts ascribed to H.W. Grossette was published after 1811 (in which the Norwich production is denoted as a 'dialogue drama'). In France, Lewis's novel was adapted into a French-language stage play of the same name by Auguste Anicet-Bourgeois and Julian de Mallain for a Parisian premiere in February 1835. The stage play served as the impulse for Gaetano Donizetti's *Maria de Rudenz* (1838) for Venice's Teatro La Fenice to Salvatore Cammarano's Italian-language libretto. The work even inspired Charles Gounod's *La nonne sanglante* (The Bleeding Nun) to a libretto by

composer's life dates in the title of the collection marks a savvy that ensures he is known and recognized for the era in which he lived.

¹³ Temperley, 'Introduction', in *Musicians of Bath and Beyond*, 1.

¹⁴ Nicholas Temperley, 'Epilogue: The 1966 Revival of *Raymond and Agnes*', in *Musicians of Bath and Beyond*, 289. This exceptional chapter represents Loder coming full circle in the volume and Temperley's vivid discussion brings his discovery and awakening interests with the opera into choice focus.

¹⁵ See Andrew Lamb, 'Edward James Loder (1809–1865): A Life in Music', in *Musicians of Bath and Beyond*, 125–48.

¹⁶ Temperley, 'Raymond and Agnes', 308.

¹⁷ *London Daily Telegraph*, 13 June 1859.

¹⁸ Lewis, *The Monk: A Romance*, second edition (Waterford: J. Saunders, 1996); the first edition was published anonymously.

Germain Delavigne and Eugène Scribe for the Paris Opéra in October 1854. Enter Edward Fitzball, librettist for Loder's opera. Temperley states that: 'Edward Fitzball's story is absurdly complicated, and is told in execrable verse'.¹⁹ Valerie Langfield notes, too, that Fitzball's 'uninspiring verse' is enhanced by Loder's seeming well of 'musical imagination'.²⁰ Yet it was Fitzball who provided a much-changed libretto to Loder for *Raymond and Agnes*, combining elements from Matthew Gregory Lewis's *The Castle Spectre* (1797) and aspects of Carl Maria von Weber's *Der Freischütz*. Of the liberties in the resultant libretto Temperley writes: 'the only thing that the four surviving versions have in common is the central incident, in which Agnes effects her escape from the castle of Lindenberg by disguising herself as the ghost of the bleeding nun'.²¹

The story of the opera is convoluted and knotty at best, yet it is a rewarding journey for the reader of the libretto, reproduced in full in the handsome booklet of liner notes. David Chandler's synopsis of the opera is a welcome complement to the liner notes booklet.²² For the sake of the reader's enjoyment here, this essay frames the discussion of the music, the singers, and the recording itself in the context of Loder's setting of Fitzball's libretto. It is frequently obvious – just as Temperley and Miradin wrote in the programme for the 1966 Cambridge revival – that the sheer beauty of the opera exists in spite of the libretto and not pervasively as a result of it. However, it is by a close reading of the libretto that the listener is drawn into the world that so inspired Loder. As Miradin wrote, there are *extraordinary* moments throughout this score, but just as extraordinary is the history that brings the listener this recording today.

The overture sparkles with exuberance before subsiding into a melancholy and romantic melody that returns in the second act's dramatic climax. The lively energy building throughout the overture also depicts an intensity that punctuates moments of lightness, signifying, perhaps, the overarching darkness of the Baron's ancestry and his desire to break his suspected familial curse. Richard Bonyngé's assured conducting is perfectly at home in this score, as if he had always conducted English Romantic operas. Bonyngé leads the Royal Ballet Sinfonia with sophistication, and they respond in kind, playing with clarity, deft dynamic range and elegance. Recognized as a bel canto specialist and celebrated largely for his command of eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century Italian and French opera, one might not normally associate Richard Bonyngé with the continued revival of nineteenth-century British opera, yet the result of this recording begs to differ.²³

¹⁹ Temperley, 'Raymond and Agnes', 309.

²⁰ Valerie Langfield, 'Raymond and Agnes: Orchestration and Dramatic Characterisation', in *Musicians of Bath and Beyond*, 288. Langfield's discussion of Loder's masterful orchestration marks an engaging exploration of the score.

²¹ Temperley, 'Raymond and Agnes', 309.

²² David Chandler's synopsis is complete with track numbers accompanying the pair of discs. His essay in the liner notes, 'The Story of *Raymond and Agnes*: Background and Sources' is compulsory reading and explores the influence of Carl Maria von Weber on the composition of Loder's opera, and Fitzball's unnecessarily complex changes to the story; *Raymond and Agnes*, Retrospect Opera, 2018, LC52095 RO005.

²³ One of the great strengths that Bonyngé brings to the project is his innate sense of phrasing – and especially breaking lines of text or adjusting passages to honour the vocal line and the dramatic moment (a sure result of his specialization in the bel canto repertoire where such practice is a priori) – even if this adjustment differently syllabifies the vocal line in

By measure, Loder builds increasing chromatic and harmonic tension across the overture, interrupted here and there by languid romantic melodies. (One would be forgiven for thinking they were hearing early or middle-period Verdi.) But of this there is no doubt: Loder's orchestration was unmatched in nineteenth-century English opera of this era.

An opening dance with chorus follows the overture with an exciting and celebratory gathering of hunters, girls and peasants. The hunters take turns firing at a target – a golden wolf – while the orchestral brass evokes the hunt. A *banda turca* that foregrounds the use of triangle is especially appealing in the merriment. Raymond (tenor) sings an arioso during the Hunter's Chorus, describing the wolf, beneath which Loder's growling low strings elicit an animalistic rumble. The first spoken dialogue in the opera clarifies elements of the plot, sounding superbly balanced and natural across this recording. Madelina (mezzo-soprano) interrupts the discussion with her 'Legendary Ballad' of the ghost of Lindenberg Castle. The tale of the crimson-stained, bloody Prioress follows, heightened by Loder's increased chromaticism, with interjections from the chorus and Theodore, Francesco and Antoni. The ghost of the Prioress issued a curse: one that may only be broken when the last of the Lindenberg family line marries of the last member of the Prioress's family line. The entire scene conjures a mood evocative of the strongest scenes between Maffio Orsini – especially the 'Brindisi' – and Gennaro in Donizetti's *Lucrezia Borgia* (1833). Northern Irish mezzo-soprano Carolyn Dobbin performs the role with abandon.

Raymond's first recitative and aria, 'Now is the hour ... Angels roam abroad', is beautifully performed by English tenor Mark Milhofer, whose pliant lyric tenor offers to the singing of Raymond an elegant legato, warmth, and easy access to the frequently high tessitura of the role. Scene two introduces Agnes (soprano) in prayer before the statue of her namesake in a small chapel within the convent. Irish soprano Majella Cullagh's interpretation of Agnes reveals a voice at home in the *bel canto* repertoire, which shines in this role. Disguised as a verger, Raymond enters the chapel, unrecognized by Agnes. Their Act I, scene two duet, 'Oh, Agnes, can'st thou now forget', hears both singers in fine form in a duet that could easily stand alongside Verdi – emphasizing that Loder was on equal footing with his Continental contemporaries. The duet hears Agnes and Raymond singing in parallel octaves at its start, expanding into unhurried 9/8 phrases before concluding the first section in a simple canon. However, this seeming accord is short lived, and tension gives way to autonomous vocal lines that ultimately trade octaves in a realization that they cannot – at least then – be together. In the opera's title roles, Cullagh and Milhofer are perfectly matched, and their instruments blend magically across Loder's increasingly dramatic score.

the score or affects the text-setting. His intuition and training always serve the voices, which thus enhance and serve the music all the more. While this is the 'first complete recording' of the opera, Bonyngé also borrows from another tradition of the *bel canto* repertoire he has so famously conducted and recorded around the world: cuts. This is only a minor quibble – one that by no means diminishes the work and which, without a score before them, one might never know. Yet it does lessen the singers' opportunities to offer greater nuance, ornamentation, and vocal development of their roles upon the pervasively cut repetitions in various scenes throughout the opera. In an opera house this offers an altogether more pragmatic solution: it permits voices to remain fresh during an entire performance. But in a recording – notably the first, and particularly with such a uniformly talented cast and orchestra – one might have hoped to hear the totality of the artistry that each of the singers more-than-capably bring to their roles.

The Baron of Lindenberg (bass-baritone) enters the now deserted chapel, lost in his own thoughts. The Anglo-French bass Andrew Greenan handsomely sings of the weighty horrors of his family's curse, portraying a troubled conscience for own misdeeds. The terzetto of the Act I finale brings together Lindenberg, Agnes and Raymond. Loder dramatically and musically interweaves themes from each of the characters into a finale that rivals those of Rossini, Bellini and Donizetti, and indeed Verdi.

Act II opens to reveal Agnes guiding Raymond through the 'halls of ancient grandeur' in the Lindenberg Castle. Cullagh's and Milhofer's skilled singing is especially on display in this too-brief tableau. Theodore (tenor) enters, informing Raymond that the Baron wants to speak to him – *alone*. Within the cast, tenor Allesandro Fisher's voice stands out for its beauty, even in the smaller role of Theodore. The exchanges between Theodore and Francesco, sung by baritone Alexander Robin Baker, offer lighter moments of almost-levity in the opera. Phil Wilcox and David Horton sing the roles of Roberto and Martini admirably. Even moments of the smallest transition are painstakingly rendered by Loder to reveal the new change of characters' moods. Remembering his crime, the Baron bemoans the 'memory of guilt and pain!'. In a moment of great self-awareness, the Baron admits that not even a future traveller will pass his grave without crossing themselves with fear. 'Gone forever hope of bliss while this life shall last'. Loder masterfully transforms the Baron's opening E minor passage into E major, which, if seemingly hopeful is paired with a realization that not even his wealth and privilege can redeem his past.

The Baron offers Raymond his thanks: 'Pray ask something of me, the Baron of Lindenberg, which I may worthily bestow'. Raymond jumps at the opportunity and exclaims: 'The hand of your ward, the Lady Agnes!' Temperley writes: 'The [nearly twelve-minute] scene that follows covers a wider range of feeling between the two men than any single movement I can think of in the history of opera'.²⁴ And it is this scene that especially exposes the influence of Weber so dramatically. Indeed, throughout this scene, Milhofer sings with world-class passion and lyricism, youthful and filled with purposeful dramatic intensity. Matching him, Greenan sings with a desperation and clarity that hears him at his best. In the ensuing scene, Raymond realizes who the Baron is: the murderer of his father many years before. As the two men fight, the Baron, too, cries 'Murderer!' and the chorus rushes in, accompanied by Madelina and Francesco. The chorus recalls a primary theme from the overture. Both men cry for the other to be taken to the dungeon – but the chorus understands Raymond to have attacked their master, rather than the awful truth of the Baron's murderous past. Raymond is seized and rushed to the dungeon. The choral finale – scene two – finds the ensemble filled with dread. Madelina conspires with Agnes for her freedom and asserts that she sees the 'Spectre-Nun' descending the stairs. Loder employs a harp beneath Madelina's observation, implying a heavenly sight, freezing the servants in their steps.

One of the truly magnificent moments in the opera follows with the quintet, 'Lost, and in a dream', ushered in by woodwinds, gradually expanding to include strings and then the full orchestra. This quintet for Raymond, Agnes, Madelina, the Baron and Francesco represents the fullness of Loder's genius – and as Temperley asserted elsewhere, would rival any quintet in opera. It is never entirely apparent if the Baron slowly awakens or remains a somnambulist, yet kneeling before the

²⁴ Nicholas Temperley, 'Reviving a Masterpiece', 8.

portrait to the sainted Prioress, which – as the Baron sings the words ‘Saint, whose shrine I have insulted, hear! Ah, hear my contrite prayer’ – is now an empty canvas. ‘Ah! Rejected! Oh, anguish! O, despair!’ he wails, seeing the figure of the Nun standing in a beam of moonlight. The onlooking quartet hear his cries and perceive his suffering; unknowing, though, whom he sees. ‘Ah! I’ll make atonement!’ he proclaims, ‘Francesco! Ope the castle door, quick, take the key!’ This, he gives *not* to Francesco, but unwittingly, to Raymond. In so doing, the spectre seen only by the Baron vanishes. The bell from the clock strikes twelve times beneath the continuation of the now-restored quintet, singing very different texts:

Quartet: While the midnight clock is sounding,
 Guide us safely thro’ this night.
 While true hearts with love are bounding,
 Aid, oh, aid us in our flight!
 Saint, we bless thee, near us still be,
 Thro’ the wood our footsteps light,

Baron: While the midnight clock is sounding,
 Thro’ these chilling halls tonight,
 And the shrieks of spirits yelling,
 Freeze the heart’s blood with affright!
 Still I see thee gliding past me,
 Ghastly spectre, pale and white.

Raymond and Agnes make their escape. The Baron cries out for revenge.

Act III opens to a raucous chorus in a robbers’ cave, where Antoni’s sons Martini (tenor) and Roberto (baritone) play a game of dice that turns aggressive. The long-mute Ravella, too, is in the cave and relieves the brothers of their daggers, hiding them under a wolfskin rug. Antoni enters, soaked from a storm and receives a cup of wine, aware that ‘deaf as she is’, Ravella ‘always seems to know more than she ought’. He pulls his sons aside and states that the carriage they set upon the night before carried – ‘The Baron of Lindenberg!’ interrupts Roberto – ‘Yes!’ Antoni concedes. ‘Who happens to be our old captain of banditti at Andalusia’. Roberto exclaims: ‘What! The great Baron of Lindenberg is Inigo, our old Captain!’ Ravella – not deaf in the least – drops her distaff, but the action is merely dismissed as dreaming in her sleep. A knock at the makeshift door to the cave sends the assembly into a quick and practised hurry, creating a ‘rude altar’ out of a table. Antoni dons a hermit’s robes and a long white beard, and pretending to kneel in prayer, motions to Ravella to answer the door. Before her stands Raymond carrying Agnes, followed by Theodore. For a moment she pauses – with perhaps a glint of some recognition – but then she returns to where she’d been seated. Antoni recognizes Raymond as the Cavalier who defended the Baron the previous night, commenting as such to his sons. Theodore offers quasi-comedic relief, commenting in a sort of patter how kind the old hermit is to offer them water, and how much more he enjoys sitting in front of a fire than walking in the forest. Raymond sings briefly of heaven restoring Agnes to him while Antoni feigns ‘crystal from a sacred spring, in holy chalice, lo, I bring’, presenting it to Raymond for Agnes. As these three lines interplay, Ravella lifts the wolfskin, revealing the daggers beneath it. Loder provides a fermata to support the series of necessary dramatic actions that an audience must see before Theodore returns again to his descending, somewhat silly melody.

While complex, the ensuing scene's dramatic pulse is as fascinating as it is revelatory. Catching Antoni's attention, the 'hermit' pretends to have some interest in Theodore – in a chorale-like melody. To his credit, the young Theodore recognizes something, too (although he remains naïve throughout much of the action before hiding altogether). 'I've heard that voice before', he suggests, before snatching the fake white beard from Antoni's face. Here, too, is a display of Loder's captivating and creative musical imagination: a quartettino ensues with Theodore returning to his melody, to which Antoni, unmasked before them all, responds in clipped anger; Raymond and Agnes – now restored – sing together in unison. The pizzicato strings evoke a sort of gallop, as if in the forest the night before. Agnes and Raymond respond in a romantic duet passage, each seeking to calm and assure the other; Theodore and Antoni sing in contrary motion, Antoni to Theodore's descending theme, before all four voices join together. Milhofer's and Cullagh's passionate singing represents romantic opera at its finest. At its conclusion, Antoni blows a whistle, calling in all of the banditti, who appear with weapons drawn. Agnes rushes directly to the cross at the altar. The banditti trap Raymond with their knives. Agnes interrupts the brawl, singing an arioso – 'Ah! Men, who with relentless hearts, ev'ry law of honour break' – exceptionally interpreted by Cullagh's soprano, and the banditti are held in her thrall. As she appeals to some deeper sensibility in them, a beautifully fashioned and elegantly performed male chorus sings: 'Ah! What tremor o'er us steals as a voice came thro' the air – a solemn knell that sadly peals to us despair'. As thunder rolls outside the cave, the robbers fall to their knees. Ravella finds a miniature portrait that Raymond had dropped in the midst of his fighting and – although thought to be mute – screams, recognizing the face of her husband, Don Fernando. Ravella delivers the portrait to Antoni, who is immediately taken aback with shock: 'Fernando! Can it be? He – the son of – release him!' Raymond runs to Agnes's side and loud knocking is heard as the Baron arrives with a host of soldiers. Ravella is otherwise lost in her memories of Fernando while staring at the miniature painting, but on seeing the Baron, also escapes down through the abyss. The Baron enters and revels in again capturing Raymond. In a rousing final trio to Act III, scene two, that expands to include Theodore and the male chorus, the Baron delights in the knowledge that he will kill Raymond and marry Agnes, who prayerfully ask for protection from 'Holy Powers'. They all decamp to the Castle of Lindenberg. As in the overture, the triangle contributes to the ever-increasing orchestral texture; Temperley notes a direct reference to the final movement of the *Guillaume Tell* overture, one of only a small number of such borrowings in the opera.

Act III, scene three opens with Antoni disguised as a monk gaining entrance into the castle. Raymond is held by guards inside the castle, where he sings the two-verse strophic ballad 'Farewell, the forest and the plain', before being escorted out. Milhofer arrestingly sings this moment of solitary vulnerability with great beauty. The Baron solemnly wallows in what he sees as his imminent victory and is greeted by Antoni, who maintains his concealment. The ruse does not last long before Antoni reveals himself, ultimately to the Baron's devious pleasure. Antoni divulges that years earlier he kidnapped Ravella after Fernando's murder, and that her beauty faded like a flower and she was now a mute – and worse: gone mad. The Baron bribes Antoni to assassinate the man who in a half-hour's time will leave the castle with 'a female on his arm'. Antoni, whose only allegiance is to himself, knows that the very Raymond whom he'd only recently released was to be his victim.

The act is anchored by Agnes's scena – 'In vain I wander ... My fairy dream of earth' – as she grieves the life she'd hoped to have with Raymond. Cullagh is in marvellous voice at this climax of the role. Loder employs tremolo strings in a melodrama as Agnes faints, calling out to the Mother of Heaven. Most unusually, the strings give way to a dream sequence accompanied by organ and a female chorus of Spectre-Nuns in a striking contrast to the balance of the opera:

Female Chorus: Agnes, Agnes, bliss attend thee.
Peace of mind and sweet repose;
Ev'ry joy of life befriend thee,
Sooth thy heart and calm thy woes.

Portending a blessed outcome, the nuns kneel around a shimmering altar, before which Raymond and Agnes are joined together in holy marriage. The figure of the Sainted Prioress bends over Agnes in her dream-state and blesses her. As the tableau fades away, Madelina calls to Agnes, quickly informing her foster-sister that the Baron has had a change of heart: 'Don Raymond is to leave the castle – and you are to leave the castle along with him', adding that she was going to leave the castle with Theodore. Raymond and Theodore join Agnes and Madelina and sing a gemlike quartettino – originally cut from Temperley's 1966 revival – 'Where the pearly dewdrop falleth'. (Curiously, Temperley still did not see the point of the quartettino and felt it should again be cut from the current recording.) The encapsulated instant shines as a recognition of the now-two couples and their hope for their love, evoking simplicity, and pure, unassuming joy.

The finale of the opera begins mysteriously, with the Baron welcoming the silence and the darkness, and extolling the moonlight. It feels an altogether unusual way to begin a finale – and Loder expertly plays with the audience's expectations in a bit of quiet daring. Ensuring that Antoni has retrieved his payment of gold ducats, it entirely escapes his attention that Ravella has slipped into the portico near him. Antoni's appearance and discovery of the gold injects a unique sort of disorienting merriment into the scene with a musical motif that draws the Baron into an almost-giddy duet of bloodlust. The Baron dismisses him to his task with curt instructions: 'Silence! No alarm! Away! Strike him that quits yon portal, a female on his arm!' Loder slowly paces this finale, layering on tension with patience. The Baron is quite suddenly startled, realizing he is not alone: 'A spy!' he cries out. The Baron reaches out for the hidden emissary and grabs hold of Ravella, holding a lamp to her face. Antoni, repeating to himself: 'A female on his arm! His fate I seal!' pulls the trigger of his rifle, shooting the Baron. The cymbals crash. Raymond and Agnes run to the scene, to find the Baron on the ground, bleeding, not fully comprehending what has happened.

'Fatal mischance!' the Baron calls out. 'Caught in my own snare', he gasps. 'For thee intended' – the Baron gestures to Raymond – 'all reproaches spare'. In what seems like a final benediction, Raymond responds: 'Heav'n is just to those who in its mercies trust!' The Baron refers to Ravella and offers merely: 'Twas she who sav'd thee!' Raymond demands: 'Who art thou?' Ravella, finally finding her voice again – recorded by Valerie Langfield – reveals herself to Raymond: 'Thy long lost, wretched mother!' There are shouts of exclamation and Raymond, too, cries: 'My mother!' After a long silence, the Baron's eyes lock onto Agnes: 'Again this fearful vision!' His dying words recall the recitative

preceding his Act I finale aria – ‘Memory, oh, memory of guilt and pain!’ – and he seeks some measure of redemption: ‘O mercy! Forgiveness! Mercy! I –’ The entire cast cries out for the same ‘Mercy!’ for the Baron and the scene ends on a fortissimo E minor at his death.

Returning in a triumphant E major rondo, Raymond and Agnes celebrate their future, joined by Madelina and Theodore, and the entire chorus:

Tutti: Onward speeds our happy bark,
When Providence is o’er us,
Tho’ lightning flash and clouds look dark,
And waves run high before us.

Quartet: And one kind star is ever lent,
Tho’ Hope’s pale smile be past,
To light and guide the innocent,
To happiness at last.

The chorus repeats the primary rondo and Loder’s opera concludes with a celebratory joy that confirms what Temperley knew instinctively in the 1960s:

As I went through one score after another, I became accustomed to the procession of ballads, concerted pieces, choruses, and occasional recitatives, all strung together with spoken dialogue, often an artificial character remote from everyday speech. There was plenty of attractive music, but not much that partook of the dramatic power of the great operas of the time.

Then I came upon *Raymond and Agnes*. This was different. To my amazement I was confronted with a real opera. Scene after scene built character and dramatic tension by musical means, often bringing Verdi to mind.²⁵

This offering by Retrospect Opera stands as a tribute to Temperley’s prescience – and his persistence. And it is not always so easy to see – or hear – in a composer and their work a sum total that qualifies for the invocation of either *genius* or *master-piece*. Here, we have both. It is a fitting testament to Temperley’s determination that in championing Loder, and in continuing to examine the wealth of Victorian opera, we have thus been presented through this recording with the richness of *Raymond and Agnes*.

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²⁵ Nicholas Temperley, ‘Epilogue: The 1966 Revival of *Raymond and Agnes*’, 291.