

A sleeping beauty: the collection of libretti in the Royal Conservatoire of Brussels.

Alfred Wotquenne, librarian of the Brussels Conservatoire 1894-1918, was one of the first musicologists who recognized the importance of libretti for musicological research. His conviction led to two interesting realisations: the building up of a large libretti collection in the conservatoire library at one side and the publication in 1901 of his catalogue on Italian libretti of the 17th century at the other. But when Wotquenne left the conservatoire in 1918, his successors were not interested in those "ephemera" and the libretti collection fell in a long, long sleep.

The libretti collection contains about 6.000 items but as the local catalogue entry is limited to the title and the composer's name (if known), the real importance and value could hardly be recognized. As a result of the research of the collection development, it was not only stated that more than the half had Italian and one third French text, that especially the 18th and 19th century were mostly represented, but also that this libretti collection with several unique copies is the most important one in Belgium.

An electronic database with well detailed title descriptions is an essential need in making accessible this less known collection, and thanks to a local digitization project we had the opportunity to combine the cataloguing with the digitization of the libretti themselves. But as it concerns a low budget project, efficiency is essential. Therefore it was decided to limit the cataloguing as much as possible because the full content of the digital libretto will be available on the internet.

The digitization of the libretti started with the Donizetti collection as a pilot project. It is our aim to continue and to speed up this process, but to wake up the beauty of 6.000 libretti a powerful and preferably rich prince is wanted.