

Although many of the works performed by the Simonsens are unfamiliar to a modern opera-goer, this is not a reflection on the quality of their repertoire but a result of changing musical fashions. We have lost the popular nineteenth-century tradition of the *opéra-comique*, with its 'juxtaposition of the spoken and sung kept delicately in balance by artists as skilled with words as they were with notes'.<sup>29</sup> The *bel canto* repertoire of Bellini and Donizetti, with which Fanny Simonsen so impressed the New Zealand public, has only been restored to favour in recent years (largely through the artistry of Joan Sutherland), after suffering many decades of neglect. The music of Daniel Auber is currently in complete eclipse, yet Auber dominated nineteenth-century opera houses in a manner scarcely equalled by any other French composer. His *La Muette de Portici* (performed in English by the Simonsens under the title *Masaniello*) is a work of high musical invention, much admired by Wagner. Regarded as the first great example of French grand opera, it represents a genre which has, at best, a tenuous hold in the modern opera house. In 1876 terms, the Simonsens offered their public—within practical limits—a cross section of the favoured operatic genres of the day. And on the whole, apart from *La Périchole's* adverse reception by certain factions in Christchurch, the quality of their repertoire met with general approval.

The leading artists were also well received. When the *New Zealand Mail* declared Carmini Morley to be 'the best tenor that has ever visited Wellington' it duplicated a sentiment expressed in other centres.<sup>30</sup> Morley's finest gifts were displayed in the Italian repertoire. Even in hard-to-please Christchurch, his Manrico in *Il Trovatore* was listened to 'with breathless excitement throughout'.<sup>31</sup> The *Evening Post* critic described him as having a 'rich, robust tenor voice of remarkable power and sweetness, which he uses like a thorough artist'.<sup>32</sup> Morley was equally pleased with New Zealand. He became the first of a number of Simonsen artists to settle and pursue a teaching career in this country.

Charles Florence also won good notices for his sweet-toned singing. Although he was a complete novice at the start of the tour, the *Dunedin Evening Star* considered that 'if he will only be at pains to acquire a knowledge of stage business and action, he is certain to command for himself a splendid position on the lyric stage'.<sup>33</sup> He proved a quick learner, winning increasing acclaim for his performances as Don Caesar de Bazan in *Maritana* and Thaddeus in *The Bohemian Girl*. Unfortunately a fondness for drink, the probable cause of one or two erratic performances during the 1876 tour, stopped him ever achieving the predicted 'splendid position'. The leading contralto, Nelly Lambert, was already well known to New Zealand audiences, who regarded her as an old friend. It is significant that many reviewers pointed out a great improvement in her acting and singing while with the Simonsens. Albert Richardson received a more mixed reaction. There were frequent