

# “*Esulta Britannia*”

## Pucitta in London

Alexander Weatherson

The gigantic operatic caravanserai *His Majesty's Theatre in the Haymarket* was blazing with light on the night of 29<sup>th</sup> April 1814 and full to capacity. Popular and amusing, the celebrated opera eroi-comica in tre atti *La caccia di Enrico IV* of Vincenzo Pucitta - full of catchy tunes and in its third generation of performances since a momentous début in 1809 - was coming to its culminating moments with a “*Viva Enrico*” when, to the surprise and delight of the spectators, the curtain solemnly descended, there was a roll of drums, the orchestra played a tremendous chord, the footlights shot into unparalleled brilliance and a bust of none other than the Duke of Wellington was trundled on to the stage, garlanded and bedizened, followed by the entire cast of the opera and the management of the theatre who surged like a tidal wave to the footlights to sing a gloriously over-the-top paean of praise: *ESULTA BRITTANNIA*, proclaimed by the *primo tenore* Diomiro Tramezzani and augmented chorus behind him with a fervour and intensity that dispatched its accolade of glory and praise up to the painted ceiling and nearly brought it down.

It was the very moment of relief and delivery everyone had dreamed-of for years. The news that the menace across the channel had been eclipsed completely once-and-for-all had arrived while they were sleeping. The unpremeditated appearance of the Iron Duke - albeit in mere marble but appropriately enthroned before their very eyes - was so cathartic that the entire complement of house and retainers in unison rose cheering and stamping. The ladies swooning or waving their handkerchiefs.

In the Royal Box, ensconced in his bevy of Beauties sobbing with emotion, the Prince Regent got to his feet and bowed gravely to the stage and the composer standing below.

A gift to the capital of his predilection this was no less than Pucitta's English apogee. Composed by candle light, copied and distributed at dawn and rehearsed that afternoon with the maestro at the piano, the orchestra played at a gallop Waterloo-wise with parts handwritten on scraps of paper propped-up on their desks.

ESULTA BRITTANNIA, a hymn in triple-tempo was perhaps an odd choice but maybe the maestro had been told of the Duchess of Richmond's Ball in Brussels on the eve of the battle after which so many officer participants would never dance again!

Born at Civitavecchia near Rome the composer had been in London since the beginning of the century where his deference to the great soprano Angelica Catalani had brought him both fame and malicious disparagement. His votive offering of some 500 bars, *Maestoso*, with passionate repeats, brought him the royal acknowledgement he had sought in vain. Exactly who supplied the text is not known but battling to and fro between coro and soloist more like Wimbledon than Waterloo, it points a finger at no one other than the composer in person....

1<sup>st</sup> Verse                      *ESULTA BRITTANNIA*  
                                         *di WELLINGTON*  
                                         *Madre che primò le squadre nemiche donò.*

*WELLINGTON prode*  
*si canti la gloria,*  
*fu seco VITTORIA l'orgoglio atterò.*

*EVVIVA BRITTANNIA*  
*Evviva*

2<sup>nd</sup> Verse                      *L'Ibero difese*  
                                         *Salvo IL LUSITANO,*  
                                         *è opporsegli invano l'orgoglio tentò.*

Che il fiero nemico invito  
Non era mostrò, TALAVERA sull'EBRO mostrò.  
ESULTA BRITTANNIA  
Evviva

Il GIGLIO umilato,  
risorge e s'infiora di PACE, L'aurora felice spuntò..  
LUIGI ritorna d'ENRICO sul soglio,  
BRITTANNIA trionfò

EVVIVA BRITTANNIA  
Evviva

*Esulta Britannia!*

The much admired new  
**Hymn.**  
Composed by Pucitta.  
As introduced in his Opera of  
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On the 19<sup>th</sup> of April 1814.  
Sixth piece in N<sup>o</sup> 34. of his new periodical Work. Price 3s!

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**Maestoso.**

PIANO FORTI.

E - sul - ta BRIT -  
- TAN - NIA di WEL - LING - TON Madre che primo le squadre ne - mi - che do -

NB. It may be sung by a single voice with Chorus.