

Gaetano Donizetti

Italian Opera Buffa

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Gaetano Donizetti 1797- 1848

- Donizetti was born in Bergamo, Italy to parents who lived with their 6 children in extreme poverty.
- He was mentored by Johannes Simon Mayr, maestro di capella at S. Maria Maggiore, who was a distinguished opera composer. Mayr persuaded a local charitable institution to open a free music school. In 1806 Donizetti was in the first group of scholars to be enrolled and attended until 1814. Mayr championed Donizetti throughout his career and Donizetti considered him his musical father.
- Donizetti started composing operas early but initially had little success to have them produced.

Gaetano Donizetti continued

- Gaetano's first success, starting his career as an opera composer, occurred in Rome. Mayr had turned his contract over to his pupil.
- From then on he composed operas in rapid succession, conducted his operas and prepared and conducted other composer's operas in many Italian cities, but his primary contract was in Naples.
- He had composed 29 operas by the time he had his first real triumph in 1830 with his opera *Anna Bolena* at the Carcano Theatre in Milan. It became his first work to be given in Paris and London.
- In 1832 he broke his contract to free himself for other theatres.

Gaetano Donizetti continued

- 1832 brought him fame with his first successful Opera Buffa: *L'Elisir d'Amore*, one of the three comic operas still in the repertory.
- In 1835 Donizetti went to Paris at Rossini's invitation. Here he was exposed to the "grand opera" as practiced by Meyerbeer and Halevy.
- In Paris at the Opera-Comique and the Theatre-Italien he found a level of musical excellence and remuneration that surpassed those then prevailing in Italy. The Italian composers Rossini to Bellini, Donizetti and Verdi came to Paris for the same reason, so did Wagner.

Gaetano Donizetti continued

- Lucia di Lammermoor was the most successful of the tragic operas that Donizetti composed in the period from 1830 to 1840 and it is still in the repertory both in the Italian and French version.
- The last 10 years from 1838-1848 were tragic. Donizetti lost his beloved wife to a cholera epidemic and their three children had preceded her in infancy.
- In spite of this, he had operas performed at all four Parisian Theatres at the same time, so that Berlioz complained.
- In 1840 his lyric opera buffa La Fille du Regiment, the second one still performed today, was produced by the Opera-Comique. It was composed in the style of the Opera-Comique with some spoken dialogue and in French.

Gaetano Donizetti continued

- Donizetti's health declined from 1840 on. He developed cerebral spinal degeneration. In his dark hours he continued to compose with an obsessive intensity and composed in 1843 his third successful Opera Buffa Don Pasquale, for which he largely wrote the libretto himself. Don Pasquale is considered his comic master piece. Gaetano laughed in the face of death.
- After 1844 he lost his ability to concentrate. His behavior became erratic. Friends and family members finally brought him back to Bergamo, Italy, his home town, where he died from tertiary Syphilis in 1848.
- He was buried in the Valtese cemetery and in 1875 his remains were moved to S. Maria Maggiore.
- Donizetti is both known for his serious as well his three Opera Buffa, still in the repertory, which we will discuss today.

Donizetti's Opera Buffa

- 1832 L'Elisir d'Amore
- 1840 La Fille du Regiment
- 1843 Don Pasquale
- Donizetti continued the Italian Opera Buffa tradition of Rossini. His Buffo Bases Dulcamara and Don Pasquale show the typical characteristics of the Buffo roles:
- Rapid pattern song
- Socially exaggerated positions
- In Don Pasquale's case trying to obstruct a young man's love such as Bartolo in Rossini's Il Barbiere di Siviglia
- His Buffa Operas have wonderful lyric coloratura arias and comic ensembles rivaling Rossini's operas

L'Elisir d'Amore Teatro Canobbiana Milan 1832

- The production from which we will be viewing clips is set by the Opera National Lyon in the 1920.
- Nemorino, a young villager, complains about his unrequited love to Adina, a wealthy beauty.
- Adina is clever and learned and reads to the peasants chorus about Tristan and Isolde and the love potion.
- The braggart Sergeant Belcore enters with his soldiers courting Adina and pompously proposing marriage to her amusement.
- This is a comic performance by the baritone, insisting that he is irresistible to all ladies and Adina can not but yield to him, while the despairing Nemorino helplessly watches.
- DVD clips # 5,6 and 7

L'Elisir d'Amore continued

- The quack doctor Dulcamara, the primo buffo bass role in this opera, makes a grand entrance in this production in a golden car. He declares in a hilariously funny aria all the marvelous remedies with which he heals all the imaginable illnesses of this world.
- DVD clips # 9
- Nemorino asks him if he has the Elixir of Love that helped Tristan and Isolde to fall in love. Dulcamara is ecstatic to find another victim of his ruses and gives him a bottle of Bordeaux wine and takes Nemorino's last money.
- Adina is annoyed at the tipsy Nemorino and when the pompous Sergeant Belcore comes back and demands they marry the same day since he is recalled to another garrison, she gives in to Nemorino's despair and invites the villagers to the wedding feast the same evening.

L'Elisir d'Amore continued

- Nemorino is desperate; the Elixir of Love is not working. Dulcamara refuses to sell him more, since Nemorino has no more money.
- Belcore tells Nemorino that he can enlist into the army and will get an enlistment bonus. Nemorino buys more Elixir from Dulcamara, this time two bottles. The wine makes him very tipsy.
- Gianetta, one of the village girls, brings the news that Nemorino's rich uncle died and left him all his fortune. Suddenly the drunken Nemorino is the center of attention and all the girls woo him.

L'Elisir d'Amore continued

- Nemorino is overjoyed, the Elixir is finally working. Adina put the wedding off with Sergeant Belcore in the hope he will come and she can make him jealous. When Nemorino appears and pays no attention to her, she starts to feel love sick for him.
- Dulcamara assures her he has just the right Elixir for her to win Nemorino back. She tells him, she has enough charm to do without it.
- Nemorino comes back and discovers a pensive Adina. He has discovered a tear in her eye which gives him hope she is now falling in love with him. He sings his famous aria "Una furtiva lacrima"
- DVD clip # 22

L'Elisir d'Amore continued

- Adina has bought back his army commission and wins Nemorino over with her female charm. The happy couple rejoice in their love.
- Sergeant Belcore leaves but brags that there are many women waiting for him in the other towns.
- Doctor Dulcamara leaves quickly before he is discovered as a quack but sells more bottles of the magic Elixir before he exits.

La Fille du Regiment

Opera-Comique 1840

- **This is Donizetti's first Opera Buffa, staged at the Opera-Comique, which had the tradition to have some spoken dialogue. In that sense it has characteristics of the Viennese Operetta. It is composed in French and has French charm.**
- **At the time Donizetti's operas were so popular in France that his operas were performed in all four theatres in Paris at the same time.**
- **Critics like Berlioz got upset and accused Donizetti that he had inserted disregarded music from previous productions in Italy into this opera.**
- **Donizetti rebutted that all new music was composed for this opera. La Fille du Regiment quickly gained popularity.**

La Fille du Regiment continued

- **The Opera needs a superb Belcanto Tenor who can hit the nine high C's in Tonio's double aria "Ah! Mes Amis" and a great coloratura singing actress, who can hit the many trills in Marie's arias and ensemble music.**
- **The Opera is set in Tyrol during the Napoleonic wars.**
- **Marie is brought up since childhood by Sergeant Sulpice (a buffo role) and his regiment.**
- **She falls in love with Tonio, a Tyrolean mountaineer, who once saved her life..**
- **Tonio enlists in the regiment to be near his beloved Marie.**
- **He sings a jubilant double aria "Ah! Mes Amis!" with the chorus of the regiment where he hits nine high C's and gains their consent to marry Marie.**
- **CD Track 12 and 13**

La Fille du Regiment

Tonio's aria "Ah mes amis" with the Regiment

Ah, my friends what an exciting day! I am about to join your ranks.

Ah, my friends etc. Love, which made me delirious, is now make me a hero. Ah, what happiness, indeed my friends.

I am about to join your ranks! She who is all my life has deigned to look kindly upon me, and given me such hopes for happiness that my head and my heart are in turmoil.

Ah, my friends, what an exciting day, etc.

Corporal

Our comrade's in love (laugh)

Tonio

And my hopes all depend on you.

La Fille du Regiment

Tonio's aria with the soldiers continued

Corporal and Soldiers

What? You're after our daughter!

Tonio

Listen to me, listen to me! I beg you sirs, her father, to hear what I have to say, for I know that it all depends on your permission for me to marry her.

Corporal and Soldiers

Our beloved daughter can never marry one of the enemy. No! She deserves a better match: her father has spoken.

Tonio

You refuse?

La Fille du Regiment

Tonio's aria with the Soldiers continued

Corporal and Soldiers

Completely, besides, she has been promised.. To our regiment!

Tonio

But I am one of you, because a moment ago I enlisted with
that alone in mind.

Corporal

That's your hard luck!

Tonio and the regiment together

Her father, sirs, her father sirs, listen to me

That is your hard luck! Etc.

La Fille du Regiment

Tonio and the Regiment continued

Tonio

But your daughter is in love with me!

Corporal and Soldiers (surprised)

How could she? What! Our daughter?

Tonio

I tell you, she is in love with me

I swear it!

Corporal and Soldiers

Well.. Well.. Our Marie..

Tonio

She loves me, I swear it!

La Fille du Regiment Tonio and the Regiment continued

Corporal and Soldiers

What can we say! What can we do! If he has won her heart,
we as caring fathers, should give our consent.

All the same, its infuriating.. What a great pity it is..to marry
her off..to such a greenhorn! Etc.

Tonio

So?

Corporal and Soldiers

If you are telling the truth, then her father, as of now gives his
consent, Yes we give it.

La Fille du Regiment Conclusion of Tonio and the Regiment

Tonio

What a prospect lies before me! Her heart is mine and so is her hand!
O happy day! Here I am enlisted and a husband to be! Enlisted and
engaged! Ah, what a prospect , etc.

Corporal and Soldiers

But does she really love you

Tonio

I swear it!

Corporal and Soldiers

Are you telling the truce?

Tonio

What a prospect lies before me! Her heart is mine and so is her hand!
Oh, happy day, here I am enlisted and engaged

La Fille du Regiment continued

- This was a recording with Pavarotti in top voice from 1968. He set the standard for this aria to the present time. None after him so far has sung this aria better. Since the 2 DVD's available have inferior tenors to him, I chose his recording instead, to have you enjoy it.
- It is discovered that Marie is the niece of the Marquise of Birkenfeld and the Marquise requests that Marie takes up residence in her Chateau and is educated to become a proper lady.
- Here follows a hilariously funny music lesson for Marie. You will see a DVD clip from a summer festival production of Wolf Trap 1974 with the incomparable singing actress Beverly Sill as Marie in full force with her "father" Sergeant Sulpice and her aunt Marquise de Birkenfeld.

La Fille du Regiment continued

- This production is in English, so there are no subtitles. It was shown on T.V. and Beverly Sills recorded a great success.
- DVD clip # 12
- Marie is homesick for her regiment. Sulpice learns from the Marquise that Marie is really her daughter and passes that information on to Marie.
- Marie is torn between her love for Tonio and that her mother wants her to marry a noble man.
- Finally the Marquise is touched by Marie's misery and consents to the marriage of Marie and Tonio. All ends well.
- La Fille du Regiment is a delightful example of authentic French opera-comique style opera bouffe.

Don Pasquale

Theatre-Italien Paris 1843

- Don Pasquale's nephew Ernesto refuses to marry his rich uncle's choice of a bride. He loves the young widow Norina.
- To teach his nephew a lesson, Don Pasquale disinherits Ernesto and decides to marry himself.
- Dottor Malatesta, Ernesto's friend and Don Pasquale's doctor, invents a ruse to change the old man's mind.
- He sells Don Pasquale the idea to marry Norina, who he has never seen, under the disguise of his timid lovable sister Sofronia. The old bachelor becomes very excited about the prospect of a beautiful young bride.
- DVD clips # 4 and 5.

Don Pasquale continued

- Don Pasquale throws Ernesto out of the house and tells him he will marry himself.
- Ernesto is crestfallen. As a poor man he can not marry himself and has to give up Norina and leave town. He expresses his feelings in the lyric aria "Povere Ernesto"
- He writes her a farewell letter.
- Norina receives the letter just as Malatesta arrives at the house and tells her to cheer up; he devised a plot to save both Ernesto and Norina. He teaches Norina how he wants her to behave as his timid sister Sofronia.
- Norina arrives veiled with Malatesta at Don Pasquale's home. The old Don is so enamored with her that he marries her on the spot, unbeknownst to him by a false notary

Don Pasquale continued

- As soon as Norina is the mistress of the house, she turns on her husband: spends all his money, redecorates the house, gets expensive jewelry, new servants and finally sends him to bed while she goes to the theatre alone, dropping coyly a letter during her exit.
- DVD clips # 28, 29 and 30
- Don Pasquale retrieves the letter and finds out that she is asking her lover to meet her in the garden.
- The Don is enraged, calling for Dottor Malatesta ,for revenge and divorce. Malatesta persuades him that they will surprise the couple both to avoid a scandal.
- Ernesto serenades his beloved Norina and they both sing an ecstatic love duet. Ernesto escapes just in time when Don Pasquale comes charging at the couple.

Don Pasquale continued

- In the finale Malatesta persuades the exasperated Don Pasquale to give his consent to Ernesto and Norina to marry and when he discovers that Sofronia is Norina in disguise, he capitulates and is happy he finally is rid of her and all ends well.
- The ensemble sings about the lesson to be learned when an old man is marrying a young woman.
- Don Pasquale is a comic opera with charm and satire, the characters are further developed than in Rossini's opera buffa. There are non like it in the Italian opera buffa repertoire that follow this masterpiece.
- DVD clips # 38,39,40 and 41.