THE YOUNG DONIZETTI

ORR 229



Booklet cover: Gaetano Donizetti

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THE YOUNG DONIZETTI

[1]	L'AJO NELL'IMBARAZZO (1824)	4'14
	Overture	
[2]	ALFREDO IL GRANDE (1823)	7'32
	Act I: Cavatina, 'Non è di morte il fulmine'	
	Bruce Ford	
[3]	PIETRO IL GRANDE, KZAR DELLE RUSSIE (1819)	3'48
	Act II: Sextet, 'Ah qual colpo, oh ciel, qual fremito'	
	Russell Smythe, Susan Bickley, Marilyn Hill Smith	
	Myrna Moreno, Kevin John, Jonathan Best	
[4]	ENRICO DI BORGOGNA (1818)	7'09
	Act I: Recitative and Cavatina, 'Elisa! Elisa! Oh! me infelice	
	Care aurette che spiegate'	
	Della Jones	
[5]	ZORAIDA DI GRANATA (1822)	8'35
	Act I: Finale, 'Qual tradimento è questo! Ah! ch'io provo	
	di smanie, d'affetti'	
	Bruce Ford, Majella Cullagh, Paul Austin Kelly,	
	Cristina Pastorello, Dominic Natoli, Matthew Hargreaves	
[6]	CHIARA E SERAFINA ossia I PIRATI (1822)	5'56
	Act II: Trio, 'Tremante, smarrito'	
	Yvonne Kenny, Lynne Davies, Della Jones	
[7]	ZORAIDA DI GRANATA (1824)	7'35
	Act I: Cavatina, 'Era mia mi amò l'amai'	
	'Che mi giovò l'alloro'	
	Diana Montague, Geoffrey Mitchell Choir	

[8]	LE NOZZE IN VILLA (1821)	6'46
	Act II: Trio, 'In lei vegg'io l'oggetto'	
	Diana Montague, Paul Nilon, Jonathan Viera	
[9]	GABRIELLA DI VERGY (1826)	8'12
	Act II: Aria, 'Perchè non chiusi al dì?'	
	Eiddwen Harrhy	
[10]	ELVIDA (1826)	5'36
	Duet, 'Se geme a' tuoi lai'	
	Jennifer Larmore, Annick Massis	
[11]	LA ZINGARA (1822)	3'51
	Act I: Cavatina, 'A te nell'appressarmi'	
	Bruce Ford	
[12]	L'EREMITAGGIO DI LIWERPOOL (1828)	8'44
	Act II: Rondò Finale, 'Confusa è l'alma mia	
	Non intende il mio contento'	
	Yvonne Kenny, Geoffrey Mitchell Choir	

Philharmonia Orchestra [1-4], [6], [8], [12] Academy of St Martin in the Fields [5], [7] Royal Philharmonic Orchestra [9], [11] London Philharmonic Orchestra [10]

Conductors – David Parry, Alun Francis [9], Antonello Allemandi [10]

THE YOUNG DONIZETTI

LIKE VERDI, Donizetti was a composer who had to live through his 'galley years' – years when, impecunious and only slowly winning recognition, he was obliged to churn out as many as four operas a year. If, moreover, he gained his entrée to the theatrical world as a pupil of Simone Mayr, he very soon became known – and more often than not disparaged, along with many of his contemporaries – as an imitator of Rossini.

There were, of course, successes even in these early years: operas like Zoraida di Granata (Rome, 1822), La zingara (Naples, 1822), L'ajo nell'imbarazzo (Rome, 1824), Otto mesi in due ore (Naples, 1827), Le convenienze ed inconvenienze teatrali (Naples, 1827) and L'esule di Roma (Naples, 1828). But it was not until Anna Bolena (Milan, 1830) that he composed an opera which won him a European-wide reputation and established him as one of the leading composers of his day.

This gradual winning of recognition can be traced in the reviews which greeted his operas at their first performances. While he may have received isolated favourable reviews in his earliest years, general recognition did not come until he composed the famous terzetto finale of Act I of *L'esule di Roma*, and even then the praise was very much confined to that single item. It was only with *Anna Bolena* that he won over musical Italy as a whole, including, for example, the influential and formidable critic Luigi Prividali, owner and editor of the Milanese journal *Il Censore Universale dei Teatri*. Up until *Anna Bolena* Prividali regarded Donizetti with withering contempt – after *Anna Bolena* with

sycophantic awe. The change in attitude could not be more complete, more sudden and more startling.

And yet, as this recording will show, there were many moments in the operas of his apprenticeship when Donizetti showed great sensitivity and promise for the future. His first operas, in their care for instrumental colour and harmonic progression, show the highly beneficial influence of Mayr. And even if, upon reaching Naples in 1822 – where Rossini had shaped and dominated musical tastes ever since *Elisabetta regina d'Inghilterra* in 1815 – he inevitably succumbed to the influence of his slightly older contemporary, he is still able to present us with many moments of inspiration and individuality. Donizetti, Mercadante, Pacini – they all found themselves obliged to conform to the prevailing Rossinian style. Yet they all had their own potential – their own individuality awaiting the opportunity to surface – and by degrees they found ways of expressing themselves in musical styles which, while not radically rejecting the Rossinian models, nevertheless demonstrated and developed touches that were unmistakably their own.

The value of a recording such as this is that it allows us to see a young composer who, though obliged to write in the prevailing popular manner of his day, is nevertheless eager to think for himself, and who is constantly experimenting with modes of expression that will be true both to the situations he is setting to music and to his own artistic sensibilities.

LE JEUNE DONIZETTI

COMME VERDI, Donizetti est un compositeur qui a connu des années de galère. Pauvre et dans l'impossibilité de se faire rapidement un nom, il lui arrive de devoir « pondre » jusqu'à quatre opéras par an. Entré dans le monde de l'opéra comme élève de Simon Mayr, c'est en tant qu'imitateur de Rossini qu'il est bientôt connu – et le plus souvent dénigré, à l'instar de nombre de ses contemporains.

Il eut, certes, dès le début un certain succès avec des opéras comme Zoraida di Granata (Rome, 1822), La zingara (Naples, 1822), L'ajo nell'imbarazzo (Rome, 1824), Otto mesi in due ore (Naples, 1827), Le convenienze ed inconvenienze teatrali (Naples, 1827) et L'esule di Roma (Naples, 1828). Mais il faudra attendre Anna Bolena (Milan, 1830) pour qu'il soit reconnu à l'échelle européenne et qu'il rejoigne, dans l'opinion publique, les plus grands compositeurs de son temps.

La manière dont ses opéras sont accueillis dans la presse lors de leur création témoigne de cette ascension progressive. Si ses premières œuvres font parfois l'objet d'un compte-rendu favorable, il faudra attendre le célèbre terzetto du finale du premier acte de *L'esule di Roma* pour que son talent soit largement apprécié. Les louanges toutefois s'arrêtent là. C'est avec *Anna Bolena* qu'il conquiert véritablement l'Italie des mélomanes, notamment le redoutable critique milanais Luigi Prividali, propriétaire et rédacteur en chef influent du *Censore Universale dei Teatri*. Avant *Anna Bolena*, Prividali traitait Donizetti avec le plus profond mépris ; après *Anna Bolena*, il fait preuve à son égard d'un

respect démesuré et servile - revirement total, on ne peut plus soudain et étonnant.

Et pourtant, dans ses œuvres de jeunesse, Donizetti fait parfois preuve d'une grande sensibilité et d'un talent prometteur. Le présent enregistrement en témoigne : les effets de couleur instrumentale et la progression harmonique de ses premiers opéras montrent l'influence hautement bénéfique de Mayr sur son élève. Lorsque le jeune compositeur arrive à Naples en 1822, Rossini – son aîné de quelques années seulement – domine la scène musicale dont il a façonné le goût depuis *Elisabetta regina d'Inghilterra* (1815) ; si Donizetti succombe inévitablement à son influence, il est néanmoins capable de faire preuve, à maintes reprises, d'inspiration et d'originalité. Donizetti, Mercadante, Pacini se trouvent tous dans l'obligation de se conformer au style rossinien, alors dominant. Ils ne manquent toutefois pas de potentiel – leur originalité n'attend que le moment opportun pour se manifester – et peu à peu ils trouvent le moyen de s'exprimer dans des styles musicaux qui, sans rompre de manière radicale avec les modèles rossiniens, manifestent et développent ici et là des traits d'une originalité indéniable.

Ce qui fait l'intérêt et la valeur de cet enregistrement, c'est qu'il nous montre un jeune compositeur obligé de sacrifier à la mode de son temps, mais impatient de penser par lui-même et constamment en train d'expérimenter avec des modes d'expression reflétant à la fois les situations qu'il met en musique et sa propre sensibilité artistique.

DER JUNGE DONIZETTI

WIE VERDI MUSSTE auch Donizetti seine "Galeerenjahre" bestehen – Jahre, in denen er sich aus Geldmangel und fehlender Anerkennung gezwungen sah, bis zu vier Opern pro Jahr zu produzieren. Sein Lehrer Simone Mayr verschaffte ihm Zutritt zur Welt des Theaters, und sehr bald stand er im Ruf, ein Nachahmer Rossinis zu sein – wofür er, wie viele seiner Zeitgenossen, gemeinhin mit Verachtung gestraft wurde.

Doch natürlich gab es auch in diesen frühen Jahren einige Erfolge: Opern wie Zoraida di Granata (Rom, 1822), La zingara (Neapel, 1822), L'ajo nell'imbarazzo (Rom, 1824), Otto mesi in due ore (Neapel, 1827), Le convenienze ed inconvenienze teatrali (Neapel, 1827) und L'esule di Roma (Neapel, 1828). Doch erst mit Anna Bolena (Mailand, 1830) komponierte er eine Oper, die ihm europaweit zum Durchbruch verhalf und ihn als einen der führenden Komponisten seiner Zeit auswies.

Sein allmählicher Aufstieg lässt sich an den Kritiken ablesen, die nach einer jeden Uraufführung erschienen. In den frühesten Jahren erhielt er zwar hier und da eine wohlwollende Rezension, doch allgemeine Anerkennung fand er erst mit dem berühmten Terzett-Finale des 1. Akts von *L'esule di Roma*, und selbst da beschränkte sich das Lob vorwiegend auf diese eine Nummer. Mit *Anna Bolena* konnte er schließlich die ganze Musikwelt Italiens für sich gewinnen, darunter auch den einflussreichen und gefürchteten Kritiker Luigi Prividali, Eigentümer und Herausgeber der Mailänder Zeitschrift *Il Censore Universale dei Teatri*. Bis *Anna Bolena* war Prividali dem jungen Donizetti mit unverhohlener Verachtung begegnet – nach *Anna Bolena* mit schmeichlerischer

Ehrfurcht. Plötzlicher, vollständiger und überraschender konnte eine Kehrtwendung kaum ausfallen.

Doch wie diese Einspielung bezeugt, gibt es auch in den Opern aus Donizettis Lehriahren zahlreiche Momente, in denen er viel Einfühlungsvermögen an den Tag legt und Großes für die Zukunft erwarten lässt. In der Aufmerksamkeit gegenüber instrumentalen Klangfarben und in der harmonischen Entwicklung zeigen seine ersten Werke den positiven Einfluss Mayrs. Und auch wenn Donizetti nach seiner Ankunft in Neapel 1822 – wo Rossini 1815 mit Elisabetta regina d'Inghilterra den Musikgeschmack geprägt und seitdem bestimmt hatte – unvermeidlich dem Einfluss seines etwas älteren Zeitgenossen erlag, besticht er doch immer wieder mit Momenten der Inspiration und Individualität. Donizetti, Mercadante, Pacini – sie alle sahen sich gezwungen, sich dem gängigen Rossini-Stil anzupassen, und doch besaßen sie alle ein sehr eigenes Potenzial, das nur auf den geeigneten Augenblick wartete, sich entfalten zu können. Früher oder später fanden sie auch Möglichkeiten, sich in einem Musikstil auszudrücken, der das Rossinische Vorbild zwar nicht radikal verkehrte, aber doch Nuancen enthielt, die unverkennbar persönlich waren.

Der Wert einer Aufnahme wie der vorliegenden besteht darin, dass sie uns den Eindruck eines jungen Komponisten vermittelt, der zwar notgedrungen im maßgeblichen Stil seiner Zeit schrieb, aber darauf brannte, eigene Gedanken zu entwickeln, und der beständig mit Mitteln des Ausdrucks experimentierte, die sowohl den vertonten Situationen entsprachen als auch seinem eigenen musikalischen Empfinden.

IL GIOVANE DONIZETTI

COME VERDI, anche Donizetti fu costretto a vivere "anni di galera" durante i quali, per sbarcare il lunario in attesa di una fama che sarebbe giunta molto lentamente, si trovò a dover sfornare anche quattro opere l'anno. Inoltre se conquistò il suo ingresso nel mondo teatrale come allievo di Simone Mayr, ben presto si fece notare – e il più delle volte disprezzare, insieme con molti suoi contemporanei – come imitatore di Rossini.

Naturalmente anche questi primi anni videro dei successi: opere come Zoraida di Granata (Roma, 1822), La zingara (Napoli, 1822), L'ajo nell'imbarazzo (Roma, 1824), Otto mesi in due ore (Napoli, 1827), Le convenienze ed inconvenienze teatrali (Napoli, 1827), e L'esule di Roma (Napoli, 1828). Ma il compositore dovette attendere fino all'Anna Bolena (Milano, 1830) prima di ottenere una reputazione a livello europeo e affermarsi tra i principali nomi del suo tempo.

È possibile ripercorrere questa graduale conquista della fama attraverso le recensioni che accolsero le prime opere. Nonostante alcuni isolati commenti favorevoli nei primissimi anni, l'apprezzamento generale giunse solo con il famoso terzetto del finale dell'Atto I nell'Esule di Roma, e anche allora gli elogi furono elargiti per lo più esclusivamente a questo brano. Solo con Anna Bolena Donizetti conquistò interamente l'Italia della musica, compreso, per esempio, il formidabile Luigi Prividali, critico influente, proprietario ed editore del giornale milanese Il Censore Universale dei Teatri. Prividali, che in precedenza aveva considerato il compositore con gelido disprezzo, dopo Anna Bolena gli

manifestò un rispetto reverenziale e servile. Il cambiamento di atteggiamento non poteva essere più completo, più improvviso e più sorprendente.

Eppure, come dimostra questa registrazione, Donizetti si dimostra un compositore promettente di notevole sensibilità in molti momenti del suo apprendistato. Nella loro cura per il colore strumentale e la progressione armonica, le sue prime opere risentono dell'influenza altamente benefica di Mayr. E anche se, quando il compositore raggiunse Napoli nel 1822, dove fin dal 1815, anno dell'Elisabetta regina d'Inghilterra, i gusti musicali erano stati formati e dominati da Rossini, gli fu inevitabile soccombere all'influenza del suo più maturo contemporaneo, non mancano molti momenti originali di ispirazione. Donizetti, Mercadante, Pacini, furono tutti obbligati a conformarsi allo stile rossiniano prevalente. Eppure tutti avevano il proprio potenziale – una propria individualità che attendeva la possibilità di risalire a galla – e gradualmente trovarono diversi modi di esprimersi in stili musicali che, pur non respingendo radicalmente i modelli rossiniani, dimostrarono e svilupparono sfumature inequivocabilmente originali.

Il merito di una registrazione come la nostra è quello di consentirci di vedere un giovane compositore che, sebbene obbligato a scrivere nella maniera popolare prevalente ai suoi tempi, è tuttavia desideroso di pensare con la propria testa e sperimenta costantemente modalità di espressione che saranno fedeli sia alle situazioni da lui messe musica sia alle proprie sensibilità artistiche.

[1] L'AJO NELL'IMBARAZZO

Melodramma giocoso in two acts Libretto by Jacopo Ferretti First performance 4 February 1824 Teatro Valle, Rome

Taken from Donizetti - Scenes and Overtures (ORR207)

IT WOULD BE difficult to find a more apt item with which to open this recital than the overture to *L'ajo nell'imbarazzo* ('The Tutor embarrassed'). It is sprightly, effective and short; it is eminently suitable for a comic opera; and it is also, as we should expect from 'the young Donizetti', very Rossinian.

L'ajo nell'imbarazzo, Donizetti's first opera to be seen widely round Italy (and to receive a number of productions abroad), was composed for Rome two years after he had scored the first real success of his career in the same city with Zoraida di Granata. L'ajo remained one of his favourite works, with the result that on several occasions he made changes to the text, discarding old items and substituting new ones. Even at the very end of his career, in 1845 when he was descending into his black night of mental alienation, his final attempt at composition – an attempt he was forced to abandon when his doctors became alarmed at his 'over-excitation' – was a revision for a proposed production in Paris.



Based on a popular comedy of the day by Count Giovanni Giraud, the opera is a light-hearted illustration of the dangers of subjecting children to a severe education while keeping them secluded from contact with society and in total ignorance of the facts of life. Nature, the action tells us, will outwit such a misguided and defensive system and will inevitably find her own way of communicating her lessons...

As originally composed, the opera began with a short prelude, but at some point – as one of the numerous changes he made to the score – Donizetti gave the opening greater éclat by adding this overture.

[2] ALFREDO IL GRANDE

Dramma [opera seria] in two acts
Libretto by Andrea Leone Tottola
First performance 2 July 1823
Teatro S. Carlo, Naples
Act I: Cavatina, 'Non è di morte il fulmine'
Alfredo....Bruce Ford
Taken from *Bruce Ford Romantic Heroes* (ORR202)

FEW OF DONIZETTI'S early operas had less success than this one, the first of his seven works dealing with English history, for it achieved only a single documented performance. In one of the original reviews, however, the critic speaks of having heard the music 'only twice', which

would suggest that it was also performed on at least one other unrecorded occasion.

Fiasco though it may have been, it was composed for Andrea Nozzari, the celebrated Bergamasc 'baritonal' tenor for whom Rossini, in the previous decade, had written a series of remarkable roles in his operas composed for Naples. And this in itself would lead us to expect – as is indeed the case – that the score contains noteworthy and rewarding moments only awaiting rediscovery.

The present aria marks King Alfred's first appearance, when, pursued by the invading Danes, he is taking refuge in a shepherd's cottage and has adopted the disguise of a shepherd. The writing, right from the arresting opening declamatory phrase, exploits to good effect Nozzari's wide range and strength at either extremity; and we may also note a born composer's ability to create both vocal line in general and melody in particular from the accent and intonation of the spoken words presented to him in the libretto.

[3] PIETRO IL GRANDE, KZAR DELLE RUSSIE

Melodramma burlesco in two acts Libretto by the Marchese Gherardo Bevilacqua-Aldovrandini First performance 26 December 1819 Teatro S. Samuele, Venice

Act II: Sextet, 'Ah qual colpo, oh ciel, qual fremito'
Pietro il Grande....Russell Smythe Caterina....Susan Bickley
Madama Fritz....Marilyn Hill Smith Carlo Scavronski....Kevin John
Annetta Mazeppa....Myrna Moreno Ser Cuccupis....Jonathan Best
Taken from A Hundred Years of Italian Opera 1810-1820 (ORCH103)

WITH THIS OPERA, his fourth to be produced, Donizetti gained his first taste of success, for following its first production in Venice it was seen in at least four other cities, as well as enjoying a second Venetian production. Also known as *Il falegname di Livonia*, it is set in Russia in the reign of Peter the Great.

Madama Fritz, an innkeeper, has befriended a young man of unknown origin, a carpenter called Carlo Scavronski. A foundling, he was discovered with documents claiming that he was of noble birth. When Czar Peter and his czarina Caterina arrive incognito in the district, searching for Caterina's long-lost brother, it goes almost without saying that Carlo turns out to be the man they seek. An extra twist follows from the fact that Carlo is in love with Annetta, ostensibly a peasant-girl who helps Madama Fritz in the inn. She is really,



however, the daughter of Mazeppa, the Polish nobleman who betrayed Russia and fought for the Swedes at the Battle of Pultowa in 1709. At Carlo's urging, she reveals her identity. The Czar is momentarily incensed, but decides not to visit the sins of the father upon the daughter. He gives the young couple his blessing, and all ends happily.

This sextet occurs in the penultimate scene and conveys the reaction of the characters as Annetta reveals that she is Mazeppa's daughter. One feels that a young composer is here stretching his wits to the limit, for the item is rich and complex in its writing, making use of considerable modulation and chromatic movement as the characters throw florid demi-semi-quaver running lines from one to another.

[4] ENRICO DI BORGOGNA

Melodramma in two acts Libretto by Bartolomeo Merelli First performance 14 November 1818 Teatro S. Luca. Venice

Act I: Recitative and Cavatina, 'Elisa! Elisa! Oh! me infelice...

Care aurette che spiegate' Enrico....Della Jones

Taken from A Hundred Years of Italian Opera 1810-1820 (ORCH103)

IT SEEMS EXTRAORDINARY that today, when nearly all Donizetti's operas have been revived, his very first produced work

should still await exhumation. The one surviving score, in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, is incomplete, lacking a duet, but with this one *lacuna* the opera is otherwise performable.

Enrico di Borgogna had a fraught baptism, for the prima donna, Adelaide Catalani (not to be confused with the much more famous Angelica Catalani) was making her stage debut, and was so overcome by nerves that she fainted at the end of Act I, was forced to omit an aria and two duets in Act II, and had to be replaced, in the final scene of all, by a seconda donna. Though the opera was given complete some nights later, only three performances were ever announced in the press.

An opera semiseria, it tells a story of a dynastic struggle for power in mediaeval Burgundy. In accordance with common practice of the time, the part of the young hero, Enrico, was written for a mezzo-soprano. Though in reality the true heir to the dukedom of Burgundy, he has been brought up in the belief that he is a peasant, and makes his first entry, to an urgent prelude, descending from the mountains with a fisherman's net in his hand. His mind is on the maiden with whom he is in love, Elisa, whom he – erroneously – believes to be far above him in rank. The following aria, *larghetto*, is tender in character. An introduction for solo horn gives it an almost alpine flavour.



[5] ZORAIDA DI GRANATA

Melodramma eroico in two acts Libretto by Bartolomeo Merelli First performance 28 January 1822 Teatro Argentina, Rome

Act I: Finale, 'Qual tradimento è questo!... Ah! ch'io provo di smanie, d'affetti'

Almuzir....Bruce Ford Zoraida....Majella Cullagh Abenamet....Paul Austin Kelly Ines....Cristina Pastorello Almanzor....Dominic Natoli Ali....Matthew Hargreaves Taken from *Zoraida di Granata* (ORC17)

THE ORIGINAL VERSION of *Zoraida di Granata* was almost certainly not heard in full as Donizetti wrote it, since one of the two tenors for whom it was composed burst a blood-vessel during rehearsals and died soon after. He was replaced by a mezzo-soprano, with the greater part of the music for the part reduced to recitative. Despite these vicissitudes, the opera was well received and provided Donizetti with the first major success of his career.

It tells the story of Boabdil, the last Moorish king of Granada, although his name is here changed to Almuzir. An unscrupulous and corrupt monarch, he has fallen in love with Zoraida, the fiancée of his general Abenamet, and deliberately plots to destroy Abenamet in order to win Zoraida for himself. Abenamet leads his troops to repulse the

attacking Spanish army, but in the battle the standard of Granada is lost, and the penalty for allowing it to be captured is death. Despite the pleas of Zoraida, Almuzir has Abenamet dragged away to face trial for treason. We may add that Almuzir's treachery is eventually revealed: he had deliberately had his confidant, Alì, pass the standard to the enemy.

The finale to Act I is particularly interesting since it shows, even at this very early stage of Donizetti's career, his ability to handle a broad, swelling *concertato*, an extended *tempo di mezzo* which is filled with advancing action, and a final fast-moving and thrilling *stretta*.

[6] CHIARA E SERAFINA ossia I PIRATI

Melodramma semiserio in two acts
Libretto by Felice Romani
First performance 26 October 1822
Teatro alla Scala, Milan
Act II: Trio, 'Tremante, smarrito'
Serafina....Yvonne Kenny Chiara....Lynne Davies
Lisetta....Della Jones
Taken from A Hundred Years of Italian Opera 1820-1830 (ORCH104)

IF DONIZETTI FARED well with the first operas he wrote for Rome and Naples, fortune turned against him with *Chiara e Serafina*, his first opera composed for Milan. It failed – and failed so miserably that

eight years were to pass before he was invited back, and succeeded in re-establishing his reputation with *Anna Bolena*.

The plot is set in Spain. We meet a dastardly villain, Don Fernando, who is out to blacken the name of a fellow-nobleman, Don Alvaro, and to secure his fortune by marrying the younger of his two daughters, Chiara and Serafina. Both young women, together with a peasant girl, Lisetta, find themselves prisoners in Fernando's castle, where they fall into the hands of Picaro, a former servant now turned pirate, who uses a disused cistern beneath the castle as a hideout. There the sisters are incarcerated, and there they would doubtless perish, were it not that, in a moment of repentance, Picaro decides to switch sides. The present trio takes place as he mounts a staircase to try to force open a door which allows them to escape to the upper world. The three women are left in the dark, alone and trembling.

A loose canon in form, the trio is an essay in sustained lyricism, with the three voices now alternating, now interweaving, now joining in thirds. Halfway through, Picaro is heard trying to batter open the door overhead, and then, in a manner that is musically beautiful even if realistically absurd, the trio resumes and pursues its melodious way as if nothing has happened. Convincing as drama? No, but deliciously self-indulgent in terms of bel canto delight!



[7] ZORAIDA DI GRANATA

Melodramma eroico in two acts
Revised version first performed 7 January 1824
Teatro Argentina, Rome
Act I: Cavatina, 'Era mia... mi amò... l'amai'
'Che mi giovò l'alloro'
Abenamet....Diana Montague
Chorus of soldiers....Geoffrey Mitchell Choir
Taken from Zoraida di Granata (ORC17)

FOLLOWING THE SUCCESS of this opera in 1822 – even though it had to be performed in incomplete form – Donizetti was persuaded to revise it for a new production in the carnival of 1824. This time the role of Abenamet, written in 1822 for tenor but necessarily recast for a mezzo-soprano, was completely rewritten for one of the great mezzo-sopranos of the day, Rosmunda Pisaroni.

When first he appears in the opera, Abenamet is under house arrest, and fears that he has lost Zoraida for ever, wrested from him by the tyrant Almuzir. The introductory slow section of his aria is thus a lament, as he remembers past happiness and muses upon what might have been. His cabaletta is more impassioned. Of what avail, he asks, were laurels and trophies, if he was doomed to lose Zoraida in this way?

As we would expect of music written for a virtuoso singer, the aria is extremely florid. It is, nevertheless, still firmly rooted in declamation and an appreciation of the rhythms and intonations of the spoken word.

[8] LE NOZZE IN VILLA

Dramma buffo in two acts
Libretto by Bartolomeo Merelli
First performance probably in the Carnival of 1818-1819
Teatro Vecchio, Mantua
Act II: Trio, 'In lei vegg'io l'oggetto'
Sabina....Diana Montague Don Petronio....Jonathan Viera
Claudio....Paul Nilon
Taken from A Hundred Years of Italian Opera 1820-1830 (ORCH104)

LIKE ENRICO DI BORGOGNA, Donizetti's third produced opera, Le nozze in villa, survives in a single score preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. And, yet another similarity with Enrico di Borgogna, that sole surviving score is incomplete, in this instance lacking an important quintet in Act II. The original production, in Mantua, was not a success, tradition assigning the blame to the caprices of Fanny Eckerlin, the mezzo-soprano who created the part of Sabina.

Sabina is in love with a landowner called Claudio, but her father, Don Petronio, the local mayor, intends that she should marry an



eccentric schoolmaster, Trifoglio. In this trio Claudio asks Petronio for Sabina's hand, while Sabina herself tries to assure her father that they are deeply and sincerely in love. Confusion reigns, however, since Petronio believes that Claudio is speaking on behalf of Trifoglio, and that it is Trifoglio Sabina is referring to, not Claudio. Clarification brings a blustering outburst of opposition on Petronio's part, for he is determined that Trifoglio shall be his son-in-law.

Cast in the standard three-section form of the period, the trio begins with an introductory allegro, which is followed by a slower, more expansive central movement. A *tempo di mezzo* or bridge passage then leads into a vigorous final section. From start to finish the music trips along in high spirits, rhythmically alert, melodically attractive, and tasteful if simple in its orchestration.

[9] GABRIELLA DI VERGY

Azione tragica in two acts Libretto by Andrea Leone Tottola Composed in 1826, but never performed Act II: Aria, 'Perchè non chiusi al dì?' Gabriella....Eiddwen Harrhy Taken from *Gabriella di Vergy* (ORC3)

DONIZETTI'S FIRST TRAGIC opera was composed, as he wrote to Mayr, 'for my own diversion'. Whether he ever finished it remains open

to doubt, for the one surviving score is seriously incomplete. Nor do we know whether he had plans in mind for an actual production: certainly the opera remained unperformed.

For this 'experiment' he resorted to an earlier libretto, already the basis of a successful opera by Carafa. A particularly gory story tells of the 'revenge' taken by Fayel, Count of Vergy, upon his wife Gabriella, when her former lover, Raoul de Coucy, whom he himself has secretly incarcerated, escapes and reappears in her life. He consigns her to a dungeon, kills Raoul in a duel, and then appears before his wife carrying a covered urn. When Gabriella removes the covering, she discovers the still steaming heart of her lover, and not surprisingly expires in convulsions.

The aria recorded here is Gabriella's lament at the beginning of the last scene. She languishes in prison, wondering what has been the outcome of the quarrel between her husband and her lover. Measured and dignified, the music is also most expressive and moving.



[10] ELVIDA

Dramma in one act
Libretto by Giovanni Schmidt
First performance 6 July 1826
Teatro S. Carlo, Naples
Duet, 'Se geme a' tuoi lai'
Elvida....Annick Massis Zeidar....Jennifer Larmore
Taken from Elvida (ORC29)

THIS OPERA WAS written for a gala occasion, the birthday of Maria Isabella of Spain, the wife of Francesco I of Naples. Yet Donizetti did not show great enthusiasm for the commission. Mentioning the opera in a letter to his teacher, Simone Mayr, he wrote: 'It is of no great note, to tell the truth... It goes without saying, on gala evenings no one pays much attention.' Like all these operas of the composer's youth, *Elvida* does, nevertheless, contain much music that we are glad to rediscover.

The story, Giovanni Schmidt assures us in his preface, is entirely fictional, an imaginary incident set in Spain during the Moorish occupation of Granada. Elvida, a noble Castilian, has been taken prisoner by Amur, the head of a tribe of Moors. Amur's son, Zeidar, falls in love with her, but since she is already betrothed to a Spanish prince, she steadfastly rejects all pressures that she should marry her new suitor. A vindictive Amur would gladly put her to death, but

Zeidar proves more sympathetic, and in this duet pleads with her to be conciliatory, for her own sake if not for his.

An opening slow section, closely based on the rhythm, intonation and accent of the spoken words, moves imperceptibly into a *tempo di mezzo* or bridge passage, which in turn is followed by a final fast section, with the two voices singing homophonically together.

[11] LA ZINGARA

Dramma [opera semiseria] in two acts
Libretto by Andrea Leone Tottola
First performance 12 May 1822
Teatro Nuovo, Naples
Act I: Cavatina, 'A te nell'appressarmi'
Fernando....Bruce Ford
Taken from A Hundred Years of Italian Opera 1820-1830 (ORCH104)

WHEN DONIZETTI FIRST reached Naples, in 1822 at the age of 24, he was preceded by reports of the success he had just carried off in Rome with *Zoraida di Granata*. And he fulfilled the resulting expectations with his very first Neapolitan opera, *La zingara* ('The Gypsy'), for it achieved 52 performances before the end of the year and continued to be revived well into the 1840s.

An extremely complicated and melodramatic plot, in which the ambitions and intended crimes of a scheming Spanish nobleman, Don Ranuccio Zappador, are thwarted by a well-intentioned gypsy, Argilla, need not detain us in detail. Suffice it to say that Ines, the innocent daughter of Ranuccio, succeeds in marrying the man she loves, Fernando, and that Argilla, far from being a gypsy, turns out to be the long-lost daughter of a nobleman whom Ranuccio has been holding prisoner in the dungeons beneath his castle.

The aria recorded here comes in the first act, and is sung by Fernando as he arrives beneath the castle walls, hoping to catch a glimpse of his beloved Ines. It is a bravura piece, requiring a well-focused and flexible tenor voice, and suggests that Fernando is no lovesick swain, but a determined and vigorous young man who will stop at nothing to win and wed the woman he loves. Its varied timbres and textures, changing rhythmic patterns and frequent use of syncopation also make it a very good example of Donizetti's youthful inventiveness and exuberance.



[12] L'EREMITAGGIO DI LIWERPOOL

Melodramma semiserio in two acts Libretto by Giuseppe Checcherini First performance 8 March 1828 Teatro Nuovo, Naples

Act II: Rondò Finale, 'Confusa è l'alma mia.... Non intende il mio contento'
Emilia....Yvonne Kenny
Chorus of mountaineers....Geoffrey Mitchell Choir

Chorus of mountaineers....Geoffrey Mitchell Choir Taken from *Emilia di Liverpool* (ORC8)

THIS IS AN opera with a complicated textual history. Its first version, composed to an anonymous libretto, was given on 28 July 1824 at the Teatro Nuovo under the title *Emilia di Liverpool*. Four years later, when it was wished to revive it, it was decided to rewrite it and give it as *L'eremitaggio di Liwerpool*. A minor character was suppressed; the order of some of the scenes was changed; and a number of items were deleted and new ones introduced. Among these latter was the present *rondò finale*, originally composed for another opera, *Alahor in Granata* (Palermo, 1826), but now introduced here to replace a less spectacular *vaudeville* finaletto.

Emilia, the heroine, has years earlier been seduced and then abandoned by a dastardly Colonel Villars, who now reappears under the name of Tomson. Brought to repentance at the end of a distinctly Gothic plot, he gives Emilia his hand, and all ends happily. Emilia expresses her bewilderment at the change that has taken place in her fortunes in a dreamily legato first movement, then her happiness in a joyous final section that takes the form of an air and variations. Ever more elaborate, it eventually has the voice running up and down the scale in exuberant and irresistibly catchy pyrotechnics.

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