

COMPOSER BIOGRAPHY



Gaetano Donizetti 1797-1848

Gaetano Donizetti was born in Bergamo, Italy on November 29, 1797, and died there on April 1, 1848. He was the son of a pawnshop caretaker and a seamstress. At age nine, he entered Lezioni Caritatevoli Di Musica, a charity institution serving as a training school for the Choir of St. Maria Maggiore. There he came under the influence of J.S. Mayr who encouraged him to enroll in Liceo Filarmonico at Bologna in 1815, where he was able to study singing as well as harpsichord, **harmony**, and counterpoint.

Donizetti was a prolific **composer** who wrote 65 **operas** and two operettas, plus two masses, cantatas, songs, church music, and 12 string **quartets**, orchestral works and piano pieces. He often overworked himself to keep pace with the demands from various **opera** houses and other commissions. He wrote very rapidly, composing one opera, *Il Campanello di Notte*, in nine days, and most of the last act of *La Favorita* in a few hours. Donizetti was also professor of counterpoint and Director of Real College Di Musica at Naples from 1835-1839.

To the older style of singing, known as *bel canto*, he added a dramatic urgency, especially in dialogue, that paved the way for Verdi and *verismo*—**opera** based on the “realities” of daily life. Out of his admiration for classical masters such as Haydn and Mozart, he developed a sharp ear for “sensitive orchestration.” His construction of scenes relies on formula, but they have an inner life that often makes the characters believable.

His subject matter was often historical, as in the cases of *Anna Bolena*, *Maria Stuarda*, and *Roberto Devereux*, all of whom were English rulers. His other works include *Lucrezia Borgia*, which is set in Italy, and *La Favorita*, which is set in Spain. In *Lucia de Lammermoor*, he fictionalized a person who actually lived. Another of his comic **operas**, *L’Elisir d’Amore*, shows his versatility in style.

The delightful **opera** *Don Pasquale* was one of the last written by Donizetti and was his last real success. It has the double advantage of a sparkling **score** and a clever **libretto**, which Donizetti collaborated on with Giovanni Ruffini.

In the final years of Donizetti’s life, honors were heaped upon him, and he was appointed “Kappellmeister” to the Austrian emperor. From 1843 on, recurrent bouts of fever slowed his work; his condition deteriorated until he finally collapsed into paralysis and insanity. His last two years were spent in a coma.