

## DONIZETTI – INEDITI PER TENORE

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**SUMMARY.** Gaetano Donizetti is one of the most prominent figures in Italian opera, especially of the period known as the “belcanto era”. This article aims to present less known biographical data to readers, related to the life of the great Bergamo composer, carefully treating his years of study, a defining period in the formation of his character and personality. Donizetti composed countless arias for the tenor voice, either in the belcanto or romantic style. The discovery and promotion of lesser-known arias is for me one of the most important pragmatic aspects of the act of scientific research. The role of this article is to spark students’ interest in listening and start studying lesser-sung pieces from the Donizettian repertoire.

**Keywords:** Gaetano Donizetti, belcanto, tenor, arias.

### Introduction

Gaetano Donizetti is one of the world’s consecrated opera composers. Although his music is still present worldwide on the lyric stage, quantity-wise, the tendency of the repertoire that is presented lies within the repetition of the same three or four of his defining works, to the detriment of the others. Therefore, the main objective of this article is to spark the interest of the readers in a more complex audition of Donizetti creation. Due to objective reasons, the study is dedicated to enthusiasts and practitioners of the tenor repertoire, where master Donizetti had an important say over the modeling of this vocal timbre. Unfortunately, many of the opera arias for tenor voice are obscure and poorly advertised, hence why I decided to lobby his uncommon, lesser-known work. In this regard, I propose the translation and understanding of the Italian term “*inediti*”, which is used in the title of this

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work – novelty, new – and not with the meaning of unpublished, unedited. The secondary objective of this article is that of sharing the knowledge accumulated in the course of research on the young composer's education and training, while focusing on his relationship with his own singing voice, as well as other elements which I found interesting for the analysis of a personality that had also been involved with the vocal modeling of the most important opera singers of the 19th century.

### **Donizetti – education and professional development**

Domenico Gaetano Maria Donizetti was born into a modest family of weavers (tailors) on November 29, 1797, being the fifth child of the six of Andrea Donizetti and Domenica Olivia Nava. "My birth was secret because I was born underground in Borgio Canale. The rays of light that were coming down the cellar staircase were not penetrating to the end"<sup>2</sup>, Gaetano himself looks back on weighted. His hometown, Bergamo, is in northern Italy in the Lombardy Region, "the cradle of the *Commedia dell'arte*, where Harlequin and Colombina danced the grotesque peasant dance called the *bergamasca* in the moonlight"<sup>3</sup>.

He received his initial music education from a prestigious ecclesiastical institution in northern Italy, Capella musicale di Santa Maria Maggiore, institution that unpretentiously prepared chorister materials for the Church of Santa Maria Maggiore in Bergamo. Simone Mayr is the one who revived the old music school in Bergamo, known as *Lezioni caritatevoli di musica*<sup>4</sup>.

Browsing the catalogs of books from the Bucharest National University of Music, I made an interesting discovery, namely the work of the Italian poet, writer, and journalist Giuliano Donati-Petténi entitled *The Gaetano Donizetti Musical Institute. The Musical Chapel of Santa Maria Maggiore – The Donizetti Museum*, printed by the Istituto Italiano d'Arti Grafiche in Bergamo in 1928. The paper is actually a catalog of reports and letters from the teachers and directors of the institute where the young Gaetano Donizetti received his first music lessons. The documents collected by this ledger are true historical sources that include sensational and exciting stories about the initiation of the young Bergamo man in the secrets of composition, much of the information being unknown to me until that moment.

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<sup>2</sup> Donati-Petténi, Giuliano. *L'Istituto Musicale Gaetano Donizetti. La Capella Musicale di Santa Maria Maggiore – Il Museo Donizettiano (The Gaetano Donizetti Musical Institute. The Musical Chapel of Santa Maria Maggiore – The Donizetti Museum)*. Istituto Italiano d'Arti Grafiche, Bergamo, 1928, p. 210.

<sup>3</sup> Marek, Dan H. *Giovanni Battista Rubini and the Bel Canto Tenors – History and Technique*. The Scarecrow Press, Lanham, 2013, p. 61.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 62.

Gaetano at the tender age of nine, after pre-examination, is described by the commission of the institute of Santa Maria Maggiore as follows: “he has a good ear for music, the voice is not special, and can be accepted for the three-month trial period”<sup>5</sup>. The report drawn up by Simone Mayr dated 13 September 1806 mentions that the young Gaetano was admitted to the music school on the 6th of May in 1806 and that he would take singing and harpsichord classes. This report also mentions the students’ evolution in the first months of study. Donizetti is described in positive terms such as: diligent, attentive, calm, in progress in the studied scores and in the study of the harpsichord. In what concerns the study of the sung voice it seems that the young Gaetano encounters several problems. The report states that he was producing the sounds in a defective way: “la voce è difettosa di gola” (the voice is defective from throat). The second year of study (1808) found Gaetano in rapid progress in music theory, counterpoint, the art of singing, declamation and harpsichord study, but with the same vocal problems: “*ma non fu possibile di correggere coll’arte il suo difetto organico*”<sup>6</sup> (it was not possible to correct his organic defect with singing lesson). Based on these problems, quite serious for a student who wanted to be trained to become an ecclesiastical singer, Gaetano Donizetti is on the verge of expulsion. He is saved by the intervention of the composer, teacher and mentor Simone Mayr, who had added violin and harpsichord classes especially for the boys who could no longer play due to the change of voice.

At the age of nineteen, Gaetano is admitted to Accademia di Belle Arti din Bologna, where he attends the conservatory of piano, organ, flute, double bass, but also expands his general knowledge of arithmetic’s, geography, history, Italian and Latin. The late vocal maturity (“his voice is not fully developed yet” – Simone Mayr, 1814), combined with the singing lessons, build in the young Gaetano “*una sufficiente voce di basso*”, voice that allows him to get a degree in music with a supporting role, on the stage of Teatro della Società from Bergamo. Simone Mayr, along with Gaetano’s father, will insist that the young musician take counterpoint courses at the Bologna School of Music, under the guidance of Father Stanislao Mattei. The letter of recommendation signed by Simone Mayr, addressed to “Alla Congregazione di Carità”, dated October 28, 1815, describes the young Gaetano in laudatory terms: “although not favored by the natural change of voice with a distinct timbre, he is nevertheless endowed with inclination, talent and genius for composition”<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Donati-Petténi, Giuliano. *Op. cit.*, p. 35.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 37.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 46

Palermo, Rome, Naples, Milan will be the main Italian cities where Donizetti will work as a composer until 1839. In Rome he strengthens his relations with the Vasselli family, a member of elite Roman society. Antonio Vasselli, his friend, became his brother-in-law in 1828 when Donizetti married Virginia Vasselli. In 1829, the first child born prematurely dies, opening the series of family suffering that will culminate in the death of his wife at only twenty-nine years old, during the birth of the third child. "Without my father, without my mother, without wife and the three kids... Why work now? Why...?" he writes bitterly to his brother-in-law and good friend Antonio Vasselli after the sudden death of his family.

He will arrive in Naples due to the intelligence and cleverness of the impresario Domenico Barbaja and will know the eager demand of the four Neapolitan theaters (Teatro San Carlo, Teatro del Fondo, Teatro Nuovo and Teatro Penelope) to enrich their repertoire. High market demand is one of the reasons for the large number of Donizetti creations. In the spirit of those mentioned above, the young Donizetti was forced to sign in 1822 on a contract that obliged him to compose twelve works within three years. He will remain in Naples for about sixteen years, a period over the course of which he will hold the position of musical director of the royal theaters. During this time, he has the opportunity to manage the flow of new musical creations himself, composing thirty-one works in just twelve years. It is noticed by the impresario Domenico Barbaja for his "ability to please an audience, his amazing gift of rapid composition, mastery of the mechanics of operatic production, and ability to withstand the pressure of meeting deadlines on time"<sup>8</sup>.

If he entered Naples with the help of an impresario, the conquest of Paris is due to the composer Gioachino Rossini. After 1839, he left Italy to assert himself internationally, managing to win the sympathy of the French and the adoration of the Viennese. Donizetti's genius was recognized at the highest level, as evidenced by the many distinctions and titles received throughout his life: the title of Knight of the Pontifical Order of Pope Saint Sylvester; The Order of Glory (Turkish: *Nichan-Iftikhar*); member of the Viennese Society Musikfreunde; Kapellmeister and composer of the court of Vienna (functions also held by Mozart); foreign correspondent member of Académie des Beaux-Arts of France.

In 1844 he suffered a paralytic attack that shook his health. The disappearance of loved ones, the nomadic life that involved countless long and tiring journeys are just some of the factors that favored the loss of mental faculties in the case of the composer. Around 1847, some of Donizetti's personal letters reveal his precarious health, following contact with an STI,

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<sup>8</sup> Marek, Dan H. *Op. cit.*, p. 151.

most likely syphilis<sup>9</sup>. After a period of hospitalization at an asylum near Paris, he returned to Bergamo, housed in the palace of the Basoni family, close to the cathedral of Santa Maria Maggiore, the place of his childhood and first music lessons. One of Donizetti's friends, who took care of him in the last period of his life, tells how the famous tenor Rubini, who came to visit, proposes to him to sing the duet *Verranno a te sull'aure* from *Lucia* to see what effect it had on Gaetano, who was paralyzed in bed at the time. "Donizetti was very attentive but made no move"<sup>10</sup>. On April 8, 1848, he died at the age of 50, after living immobilized in bed for a period, due to general paralysis. In 1875 his bones were moved to the Cathedral of Santa Maria Maggiore in Bergamo.

Important biographical data about Gaetano's life, personality, studies, and composer activity are transmitted to us thanks to the biographies made by musicologists Gabriele Rosa, Marco Bonesi, Teodoro Ghezzi, Francesco Regli, Federico Alborghetti, Michelangelo Galli, Giuliano Donati-Petténi, William Ashbrook, Grigore Constantinescu, but also because of the huge number of letters that Donizetti wrote during his lifetime. Museo Donizettiano of Bergamo, located near the Church of Santa Maria Maggiore, houses together most of the personal objects, scores, letters, autographs and paintings of the composer.

### ***Inediti per tenore***

Lost pieces of music, some unfinished, others readapted to meet the demands of the best opera singers, make it difficult to establish an exact number of works composed by Gaetano Donizetti in his twenty-seven years of creation. The minimum total number of works from which the calculation starts is sixty-six pieces of opera<sup>11</sup>. The dictionary entitled *Opera: Composers, Works, Performers* mentions over seventy works in the genre, of which two thirds belong to that of series or semi-series<sup>12</sup>. The complexity of Donizetti's creation is not limited to opera. Gaetano composed music for several instrumental genres (string quartet, trios or sonatas), vocal-chamber music (about 300 lied, some grouped in collections) and vocal-instrumental (over a hundred sacred pieces: motets, requiems, mises, cantatas).

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<sup>9</sup> Cosma, Mihai. *Celelalte 13 (The other 13)*. Ed. National University of Music from Bucharest, 2009, p. 58.

<sup>10</sup> Donati-Petténi, Giuliano. *Op. cit.*, p. 204.

<sup>11</sup> Cosma, Mihai. *Op. cit.*, p. 57.

<sup>12</sup> Batta, András and Neef, Sigrid. *Opera: Composers, Works, Performers*. Ed. Könnemann, Köln, 2000, p. 119.

Donizetti was a composer who loved and constantly encouraged high male voices, composing for them a whole collection of arias, some of which became hits. Although Donizetti is a fairly well-sung composer, his created genre remains largely unexplored and underexploited. In this sense, during my scientific research I set out to discover as many unique Donizetti scores for the tenor voice as possible.

The first discovery I made is represented by the aria of the character Lord Riccardo Percy: *Vivi tu, te ne scongiuro*, from the opera *Anna Bolena*, aria sung for the very first time by the tenor Giovanni Battista Rubini in 1830.

## Picture 1

| <u>PERSONAGGI.</u>  | <u>INDICE</u>   |
|---|---|
| ENRICO VIII, Re d'Inghilterra,<br><i>Sig.<sup>r</sup> GALLI FILIPPO.</i>  | SINFONIA . . . . . Pag. <sup>a</sup> 1.   |
| ANNA BOLENA, sua moglie,<br><i>Sig.<sup>na</sup> PASTA GIUDITTA</i><br><i>Prima Cantatrice di S.M.I.R.A. etc.</i> | INTRODUZIONE dell'Atto 1 <sup>mo</sup> . . . . . 10.                            |
| GIOVANNA SEYMOUR, damigella di Anna,<br><i>Sig.<sup>na</sup> ORLANDI ELISA.</i>                                   | SCENA, ROMANZA e CAV <sup>na</sup> <i>Comè, innocente giovane</i> . . . . . 16. |
| LORD ROCHEFORT, fratello di Anna,<br><i>Sig.<sup>r</sup> BIONDI LORENZO.</i>                                      | SCENA e DUETTO <i>Fama! Si, l'avrete</i> . . . . . 32.                          |
| LORD RICARDO PERCY,<br><i>Sig.<sup>r</sup> RUBINI GIO. BATTISTA</i><br><i>Cantante di Camera di S.M.I.R.A.</i>    | SCENA e CAVATINA <i>Da quel dì che lei perduta</i> . . . . . 52.                |
| SMETON, paggio e musico della Regina,<br><i>Sig.<sup>na</sup> LAROCHE ENRICHETTA.</i>                             | SCENA e QUINTETTO <i>Voi, Regina!</i> . . . . . 65.                             |
| SIR HERVEY, Ufficiale del Re,<br><i>Sig.<sup>r</sup> CRIPPA ANTONIO.</i>  | SCENA e CAVATINA <i>Ahi pareo che per incanto</i> . . . . . 88.                 |
| Cori e Comparse   | SCENA e DUETTO <i>S'ei l'abborreo, l'amo ancora</i> . . . . . 106.              |
| Cortigiani—Uffiziali—Lordi—Cacciatori—Soldati .   | FINALE dell'Atto 1 <sup>mo</sup> . . . . . 117.                                 |
| L'azione è in Inghilterra: Il 1 <sup>mo</sup> Atto a Windsor, il 2 <sup>do</sup> a Londra.                        | INTRODUZIONE dell'Atto 2 <sup>do</sup> . . . . . 151.                           |
| L'epoca è del 1556.   | SCENA e DUETTO <i>Sul suo capo aggravi un Dio</i> . . . . . 159.                |
| <i>Le Scene sono nuove, d'invenzione e d'esecuzione del Sig.<sup>r</sup> Aless.<sup>o</sup> Sanguirico</i>        | CORO <i>Ebben? dinanzi ai giudici</i> . . . . . 177.                            |
| <i>Esse trovandì vendibili nel Negozio dell'Editore Gio. Ricordi.</i>   | SCENA e TERZETTO <i>Ambo morrete, o perfidi</i> . . . . . 185.                  |
|   | SCENA, CORO ed ARIA <i>Per questa fiamma indomita</i> . . . . . 212.            |
|   | SCENA ed ARIA <i>Vivi tu, te ne scongiuro</i> . . . . . 250.                    |
|   | CORO <i>Chi può vederla a ciglio asciutto</i> . . . . . 240.                    |
|   | SCENA ed ARIA FINALE <i>Al dolce guidami</i> . . . . . 245.                     |

### **Anna Bolena original vocal score. List of characters. Original cast**

With the musical writing of the role of Lord Riccardo Percy, Donizetti initiates the trend of robust male timbres, that of the heroic bel canto tenor. The metamorphosis of the tenor voice, encouraged by Gaetano, does nothing more than pave the way for Verdi's vocality, a path that will culminate in the four-act opera *Otello* (1887).

Donizetti uses in *Vivi tu, te ne scongiuro* the fixed formula of the double aria, specific to the Italian opera of the 19th century, in two parts: *cavatina* and *cabaletta*. Whilst for the first part of the aria the composer uses the expressiveness of the *cantabile* melody in which the legato expression of the musical phrases predominates, for the *cabaletta* part, he resorts to a moderato tempo, combined with staccato or accented passages of notes, creating a dynamic character which is preserved until the very end. The contrast between the two parts of the double aria, used equally by Vincenzo Bellini and eventually taken over by Giuseppe Verdi, reminds us of the confrontation between the two stylistic borderline musical periods: bel canto and romanticism, each present on the battlefield with their own tastes, patterns and musical means.

Faithful to the key of G major and the measure of four fourths, Donizetti manages to create a musical world that is simple to decipher, submissive and pleading in the cantilena, but full of intrepidity and heroism in the *cabaletta*, like the courage of one who chooses death over living a life full of guilt. Imprisoned in the Tower of London, awaiting his execution, Lord Percy finds out about the royal clemency granted to him and to Anne Boleyn's brother Lord Rochefort. Accused of adultery, Anna does not receive the royal mercy and Lord Percy decides to follow her fate. In the aria proposed for audition, Percy begs Anne's brother not to follow his example and instead live in search of a less sad place where he can mourn in secret the sacrifice of the two heroes who loved each other in their youth, a long time ago, when the royal marriage took place.

The virtuosic vocal line intensifies at the end of the *cabaletta*, a part often cut in modern operatic production due to the vocal difficulty imposed by the vocal line up to C5, followed by a descent agility scale, a pattern repeated in combination with octave jumps in the high register.

The image shows a musical score for a vocal piece. It consists of two systems of music. The first system has a vocal line on a treble clef staff and a piano accompaniment on a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The vocal line includes the lyrics: "- sir, chè nes-sun quaggiù la-scia-mo nè ti-mo-re, nè de-". The piano accompaniment features dynamic markings like *p*, *f*, and *sf*. The second system continues the vocal line with lyrics: "- sir, nè..... ti-mo-re, nè ti-mo-re, nè de-sir, chè nes-". A box with the number "180" is placed above the vocal line in the second system, highlighting a specific high note. The piano accompaniment continues with similar dynamic markings.

**Gaetano Donizetti, *Anna Bolena*, musical passage from *cabaletta*  
*Nel veder la tua costanza***

Among the recordings provided by Youtube, I highly recommend listening to the aria performed by tenors Gregory Kunde, Chris Merritt or Rockwell Blake. Sung in bel canto style, their stylistic interpretation proposes the introduction of the high-note note on the dominant *D5*, performed in *falsesttone* technique, at the end of the aria. This technique implies the amplification of *falsestto* sounds using the same mechanisms used in the normal emission register by exerting an additional force in the union of the intermembrane portions of the vocal cords<sup>13</sup>. The exciting but also bizarre high sound evokes in the listener's ears and imagination a phonetical image of other times, those of the closure of the bel canto era, when most generations of tenors were still influenced by the style of *i castrati*.

<sup>13</sup> Iftene, Liviu. *Despre tenori și virtuozitate în epoca belcanto (About tenors and virtuosity in the bel canto era)*. Ed. Muzicală, Bucharest, 2020, p. 46.



The image shows a musical score for a tenor part. It consists of two systems of staves. The first system has a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment (grand staff). The vocal line contains the lyrics: "mo - re, nè de - sir, nè ti - mo - re,". The piano accompaniment has a complex rhythmic pattern in the right hand and a steady eighth-note bass line in the left hand. The second system also has a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line contains the lyrics: "nè..... de - sir." and is marked "(partono fra Soldati)". The piano accompaniment continues with a similar rhythmic pattern. A "200" is written below the piano part.

Gaetano Donizetti, *Anna Bolena*, musical passage from *cabaletta*  
*Nel veder la tua costanza* with added high D5

Virtuosity and hedonism made a good home for the needs of baroque society so that it is normal to find traces of these elements from time to time until early romanticism. Giuseppe Verdi, for example, raises the high register to *F5* in Jacopo's *cabaletta* from the opera *I due Foscari*, as we can see from the following musical example, challenging the tenor Giovanni Matteo Mario de Candia's *falsette* register.



role of Fernando in the opera *Marino Faliero*. He was an artist with remarkable acting abilities, since the Italian biographer Francesco Regli states that whoever saw him play “must have proclaimed him a supreme actor and no less an incomparable singer. The Spaniards called him the tenor of the beautiful deaths (*il tenore della bella morte*)”<sup>15</sup>. Vocally, from the descriptions attributed to his voice, we deduce a pattern of the voice of a tenore lirico-spinto. Able to produce lyrical sounds, sweet and bright, his vocal technique allows him to impress with dramatic accents of force when the dramatic construction of the score requires it.

I also point out: Alamiro’s aria from the second act of the opera *Belisario*, entitled *Trema Bisanzio!*, aria that anticipates the Verdi patriotic style, by using the same type of accompaniment used by Giuseppe Verdi in *stretta Di quella pira (Il Trovatore)*, the aria of Ghino, *Non può dirti la parola* from the opera *Pia de’ Tolomei*, aria *Ed ancor la tremanda porta... Io ti diro’* from the opera *Roberto Devereux*, specially designed for the voice of Neapolitan tenor Giovanni Basadonna, Poliuto’s aria from the opera of the same name, entitled *Veleno è l’aura... Sfolgorò divino raggio* or the aria *Oui, j’irai dans le temple* from the third act of the French adaptation *Les martyrs*, Marcello’s romance, *Angelo casto e bel*, from the opera *Le Duc d’Albe*, and, last but not least, scena di follia for the tenor voice, composed for the character Don Ruiz from the opera *Maria Padilla*, entitled *Quale, dopo tant’anni*.

### Instead of conclusion

If I were to associate Donizetti with one of the hundreds of characters outlined by his own music, Dulcamara would remain the main choice. The name of this charming charlatan *medico ambulante*, is inspired by the name of a poisonous plant, *Solanum dulcamara*, plant which has a bitter taste at first, and then it becomes sweet. The essence of this game of diametrically opposite states is found best prefaced in the sounds of hit aria *Una furtiva lagrima* from *L’elisir d’amore*. Although the whole opera reputation is due to this romanza, as Donizetti himself defines it as a true European success in the incipient phase, the librettist Felice Romani believed this solo moment should be omitted because it tends to interrupt the stage action<sup>16</sup>. The

<sup>15</sup> Regli, Francesco. *Dizionario biografico dei più celebri poeti ed artisti melodrammatici, tragici e comici, maestri, concertisti, coreografi, mimi, ballerini, scenografi, giornalisti, impresarii, Ecc. ecc. che fiorirono in Italia dal 1800 al 1860. (Biographical dictionary of the most famous melodramatic, tragic and comic poets and artists, masters, concert performers, choreographers, mimes, dancers, set designers, journalists, impresarios, etc. etc. who flourished in Italy from 1800 to 1860)*. Coi Tipi di Enrico Dalmazzo, Torino, 1860, p. 349.

<sup>16</sup> Constantinescu, Grigore. *Op.cit.*, p. 80.

process of the bittersweet game is resumed cyclically in Donizetti's opera *buffa*. Nevertheless, we can find it, more discreetly, in the series opera too. In my opinion, this is the great imprint of Donizetti's music stenciled in the hearts of those who listen to it. Unlike the dozens of miraculous liquors for the body of the merchant Dulcamara, Gaetano, the true heart doctor, left us dozens of musical elixirs for the soul, many of them dedicated to the fascinating tenor voice. I believe I have piqued your interest to discover as many of them as possible.

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