

ROBERTO DEVEREUX

Composer Biography: Gaetano Donizetti



With nearly 70 operas to his credit, **Gaetano Donizetti** (November 29, 1719 – April 8, 1848) was a leading Italian composer of the 19th century. He was born in the northern Italian city of Bergamo in 1797 to a poor family. After showing some musical talent, he was enrolled in the town's music school where he received free lessons. Donizetti continued his education at the Philharmonic Academy in Bologna. He received his first commission in 1818 from the Teatro San Luce in Venice. Soon he moved to Rome, where in 1822 he would have his first major success, *Zoraide di Grenata*. His career was just getting started. Later that year Donizetti settled in Naples and used it as a base from the next 16 years. He was able to work at the increasingly rapid pace demanded by the Italian theater industry and produced three to four operas a year for most of his life. In fact, he wrote *The Elixir of Love* in just eight days! During this period Donizetti successfully wrote both comic and tragic operas such as *The Daughter of the Regiment* (1840) and *Lucia de Lammermoor* (1835). Donizetti's success in dealing with both comic and tragic settings was due in part to his own manic-depressive personality. Well-acquainted with personal misfortune, he lost in the span of eight years his mother, his father, two infant sons, an infant daughter and Virginia Vasselli, his wife of seven years. The composer never truly recuperated after her death, refusing to utter her name ever again. After a brief stay in Paris, Donizetti turned toward the Austrian state, where he became music director of the imperial theaters. After the success of his opera *Linda of Chamounix* (1842), he was appointed Composer to the Austrian Court, a position Mozart had held a half century before. By 1845, symptoms of a lifelong illness had become incapacitating, and Donizetti was no longer able to compose. He returned to his hometown of Bergamo where he died on April 1848.