

NAXOS

DONIZETTI

Songs

Amore e morte • Una lagrima • Il sospiro

Dennis O'Neill, Tenor

Ingrid Surgenor, Piano



Gaetano Donizetti (1797-1848) Songs

'I shall have to write twelve canzonette as usual, to get twenty ducats for each, something that in times past I used to do while the rice was cooking.' Thus Donizetti to his brother-in-law, Antonio Vasselli, in 1837, the year of *Pia de' Tolomei* and *Roberto Devereux*, hardly suggesting a profound commitment to the genre. Fortunately the majority of his '*Liriche da camera*' tell a different story. Whether issued in batches of six or more with fancy titles, a common practice of the time, or written individually for some professional singer or wealthy amateur, they display a freshness of melodic invention, neat craftsmanship and, above all, that inexhaustible formal resource that marks the best of his operas.

In Donizetti's day vocal chamber music, as it was called in Italy, tended to run to fixed patterns: strophic with refrain, simple ternary with central episode and reprise, minor-to-major key 'romanza' also with episode, even the cantabile-cabaletta scheme of an operatic aria with piano accompaniment that suggests an orchestral reduction. All are to be found in Donizetti's output, but always with subtle variations and extensions that carry them well outside the norm. Some of his designs are wholly original, being dictated by the nature of the text. Clearly more thought was given to their composition than Donizetti was disposed to admit.

The earliest of his salon pieces date from his years in Naples, which would remain his base of operations for a good part of his career. Indeed, in Verdi's eyes he was more of a Neapolitan than Mercadante, who claimed (falsely) to have been born in that city; and the judgement was meant as a compliment.

The present recording includes items from a *Collezione di canzonette* probably published during the 1820s and containing five solo songs, three duets and an unaccompanied quintet. *Giuro d'amore* [9], a simple heart-felt avowal of love, is remarkable in making a perfectly rounded musical statement with no element of

thematic recurrence. *Su l'onda tremola* [7], an invitation to the hesitant beloved to take a trip on the Venetian lagoon, is laid out as a rondo, each reprise varied with light touches of fioritura.

Altogether more ambitious are four songs from the set, *Un hiver à Paris*, also a Neapolitan publication reprinted in Paris in 1839. Their style approaches the operatic, with passages of recitative, inconclusive pauses in the accompaniment before the vocal entry and even final cadenzas. *La ninna-nanna* [11] opens with a recitative in a distant key before settling into a gentle, rocking refrain, its recurrences extended by haunting *melismata* on the word 'Ah!'. The other three require vocal impersonations in the manner of Schubert's *Der Erlkönig*. In *Il pescator* [16] the narration, the grief of the abandoned fisherman and the blandishments of the goddess of the lake are conveyed in a masterly blend of recitative, *arioso* and fully formed *cantabile* that illustrates every detail of Schiller's poem. *La sultana* [15] employs the traditional French 'couplet' form to tell the story of a cavalier who comes to serenade a sultan's wife despite her warnings of danger, and on the next night arrives to find only traces of her murdered body.

Le crépuscule [12] is taken from *Nuits d'été à Posillipo*, this last a resort north of Naples, famous for its hot springs [1836]. Described as a 'romanza', it is in fact an 'aubade', the twilight being that of morning. Hugo's three verses are set to different melodic ideas, each of which returns quite naturally to the same refrain for the lover who 'sings and weeps'.

Of the three 'ariette' from *Soirées d'automne à L'Infrascati* (now a Neapolitan suburb) *Amore e morte* [1] sustains an elegiac mood throughout with only the faintest hint of consolation in its major-key conclusion; *La lontananza* [13] allows cheerfulness to break in towards the end; *Amor marinaro* [5] is one of those joyous ditties in Neapolitan dialect in which Donizetti excelled - so much so that he was for a long time wrongly credited with the once popular favourite, *Te*

voglio bene assje, still occasionally heard today.

From *Inspirations viennoises* [1842] *Il sospiro* 10 bears witness to the composer's enduring capacity for long-breathed cantilena in the Italian Romantic manner; while *È morta* 6 inscribed to Zélie de Coussy (future dedicatee of Don Pasquale and thought to have been more than a mere friend) features a highly original distribution of minor and major modes. For her too Donizetti wrote, to a French text, the most poignant of all his salon pieces *La mère et l'enfant* 4 which remains centred in a minor key throughout.

Formal innovation marks *Una lagrima* 3 from 'Matinée Musicale' [1841], a *preghiera* whose bland surface is disturbed by moments of desperation. *L'amor*

mio 14 from the same collection has a text by Felice Romani, Donizetti's collaborator on several of his operas, notably *L'elisir d'amore*. *Ah, rammenta, o bella Irene* 2 is unashamedly operatic: a two-movement aria on the plan of Arsace's *Ah, quel giorno* from Rossini's *Semiramide*. But if the style is Rossinian *canto fiorito*, the voice is Donizetti's. *L'amor funesto* 8 was intended for Napoleone Moriani, who had starred in the Viennese première of *Linda di Chamounix*. Known as 'the tenor of the beautiful death', he was uniquely qualified to do justice to this poetic, spaciously conceived apostrophe of a lover to the *femme fatale* who had ruined his life.

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Dennis O'Neill

Born in Wales of Irish and Welsh parents, Dennis O'Neill is one of the world's leading tenors, appearing frequently at Covent Garden, the Metropolitan Opera New York, the State Operas of Vienna, Munich, Berlin, and Hamburg, and other international opera houses throughout Europe and North America. His long association with the Royal Opera House has included a huge repertoire centred on all the great Verdi tenor rôles. He has appeared regularly on television in his own BBC series and has recorded extensively. His film credits include a television film on the life of Caruso. Recent recordings include *Aida*, *Il Trovatore*, *La Bohème*, *Turandot*, *Tosca*, and *Cavalleria rusticana* and *Pagliacci* (all on Chandos). He has appeared in concert and recital throughout Europe, North America and Australia with most of the world's celebrated conductors. He was awarded the CBE in the 2000 New Year's Honours list.

Ingrid Surgenor

Ingrid Surgenor is one of Britain's busiest and most successful pianists and is internationally renowned for her work as official accompanist for the BBC Singer of the World Competition in Cardiff. Following study at the Royal Academy of Music in London and with the legendary accompanist Gerald Moore, she began her career at the Glyndebourne Festival. In addition to a long association with Welsh National Opera she has worked at the Vienna, Passau, Taormina, Buxton, Hong Kong and Bayreuth Festivals. She has travelled widely to accompany many international singers and has enjoyed a long working relationship with the tenor Dennis O'Neill, performing with him on record, in televised recitals at the Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast festivals and at opera houses in Brussels, Munich, Oslo, Marseille and the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden. Her television performances have included documentaries, song recitals, quiz and discussion programmes and even a cookery feature with a celebrity chef. Ingrid Surgenor is also principal opera coach and Fellow of the Royal Academy of Music and has been awarded Honorary Fellowships by the University of Wales and the Royal Welsh College of Drama. In June 2000 she was awarded an MBE for services to music.



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Playing Time
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While better known as a composer of opera, Gaetano Donizetti also paid considerable attention to his songs, of which he wrote a very large number. These are settings of a wide variety of texts, including popular Neapolitan songs, and verses by Metastasio, Schiller, Victor Hugo and other French writers. In some of the songs there is an overt dramatic element, as in *Il pescatore* and *La sultana* where Donizetti is alive to every nuance of the texts. Others, such as *Ah, rammenta, o bella Irene*, are unashamedly operatic.

Gaetano
DONIZETTI
 (1797-1848)

BBC RADIO 3
 90-93FM

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|----|-----------------------------|------|
| 1 | Amore e morte | 2:28 |
| 2 | Ah, rammenta, o bella Irene | 4:34 |
| 3 | Una lagrima | 3:52 |
| 4 | La mère et l'enfant | 5:14 |
| 5 | Amor marinaro | 2:03 |
| 6 | È morta | 5:26 |
| 7 | Su l'onda tremola | 2:58 |
| 8 | L'amor funesto | 4:56 |
| 9 | Giuro d'amore | 2:44 |
| 10 | Il sospiro | 3:14 |
| 11 | La ninna-nanna | 7:34 |
| 12 | Le crépuscule | 2:57 |
| 13 | La lontananza | 2:00 |
| 14 | L'amor mio | 2:37 |
| 15 | La sultana | 5:54 |
| 16 | Il pescatore | 8:33 |

Dennis O'Neill, Tenor • Ingrid Surgenor, Piano

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