

# How Gatti-Casazza Helped An Old Donizetti Opera Find Its Second Youth

Metropolitan's General Manager Relates the Circumstances of the Revival of "L'Elisir d'Amore" at the Scala in Milan During His Régime There in 1901—Caruso's Impassioned Singing Melted the Icy Opposition of a First-Night Audience Prejudiced Against the Work in Advance—A Much-Despised Buffo Who Vindicated Himself

By GIULIO GATTI-CASAZZA

[From the New York Times]

IN Milan at the Teatro della Cannobbiana—now the Teatro Lirico—in the spring of 1832, the customary season of opera was almost due. In those times the impresario, as you may know, not only engaged his company of singers, but also the composer, who was generally required to provide a new opera for the opening night. This year, to the great surprise and disappointment of the impresario, the composer, of whose name there is no record, either failed to appear or sent word that he could not furnish the opera promised.

It happened that Gaetano Donizetti was then in Milan and to him it was that the impresario in desperation betook himself for a remedy.

"See, here Maestro," said the poor fellow, "only fourteen days remain before the opening of the season and you alone can save me! I do not ask a new opera from you—that would be impossible—but at least something rearranged, something made over, a mélange of some sort."

"You are joking," replied Donizetti. "I could not and would not rearrange my own stuff or anybody else's. I'd rather make you a new opera in two weeks. Listen: if Romani is in town, as far as I am concerned I accept the contract."

### Proposition to Librettist

Signora Branca, widow of Felice Romani (the famous librettist, author of "Norma" and "La Sonnambula," and who was so dear a friend of Bellini) tells in her memoirs how Donizetti, in fact, came to Romani and informed him of the proposition, adding:

"I give you a week to get the libretto ready. Let's see which of us has the greater courage. To be sure, friend Romani, we have a German soprano (Heinefelder), a tenor who stutters (Genero), a buffo who has a voice like a goat (Frezolini) and a baritone who isn't much (Dabadie). However, we must do ourselves credit."

The subject of the libretto was taken from Scribe's "Le Philtre"—"The Love Potion"—and bit by bit as Romani wrote the words the maestro set them to music, while the artists studied and rehearsed. Everything was going along rapidly and harmoniously between librettist and composer—it is Signora Branca who is my authority—until almost the end of the opera. At a certain spot Donizetti wanted to introduce a romanza for the tenor, in order to make use of a page of concert music which he had in his portfolio and of which he was very fond. At first Romani objected.

"What!" he exclaimed; "a romanza in this place would spoil the situation! Why should you let this stupid fellow *Nemorino* come in here with a pathetic wail when all should be festive and gay?"

### Birth of "Una Furtiva Lagrima"

Donizetti, however, insisted until he had the verses "Una furtiva lagrima." He wanted to make use of a theme improvised some time before for a Milanese poem by Carlo Porta, a barcarolle, "Io sono ricco e tu sei bella."

At last "L'Elisir d'Amore" was completed and the impresario was able to present it on May 12, 1832, fourteen days after the order had been given to write it—truly a miracle, which makes me who recount it almost melt with envy! The new opera was triumphantly received at the Cannobbiana and was repeated thirty-two evenings. Donizetti, a great admirer of the fair sex, dedicated his work to the ladies of Milan. "Who more than they," he wrote, "know how to distill love? Who better than they, to dispense it?"

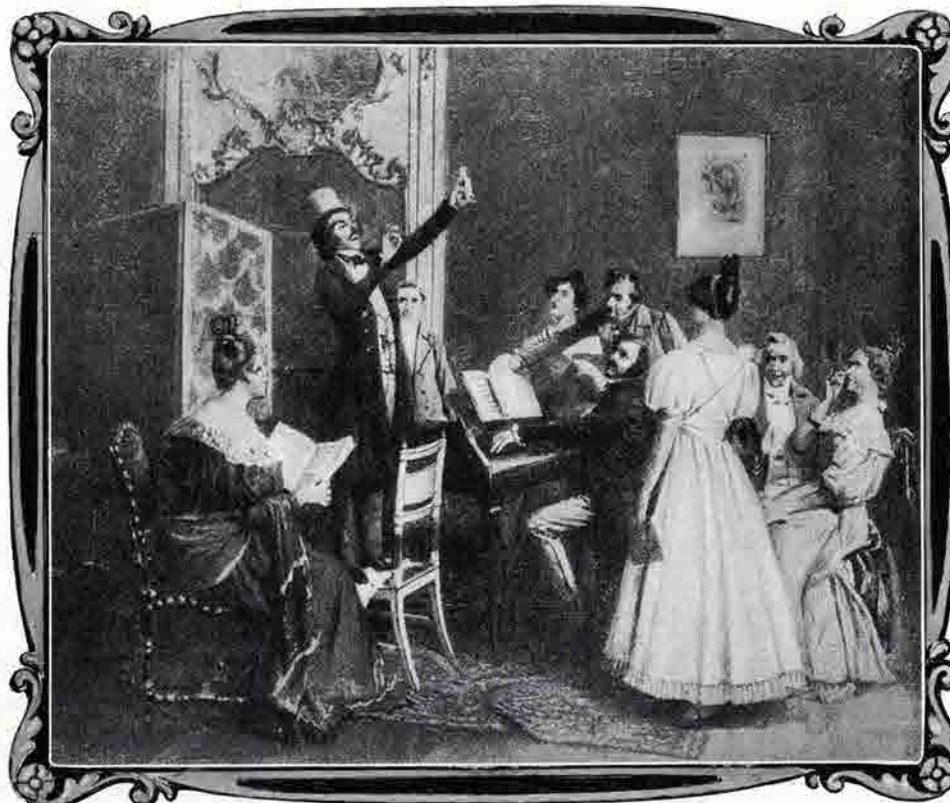
### Gatti's Childhood Impression

As a child I remember hearing the charming opera in a popular theater and can never forget the sympathetic impression it made upon me. This impression

and fortunate circumstances permitted me to help obtain for "L'Elisir d'Amore" a deserved second youth.

January, 1901, was an hour of mourning for Art. In that month died at Milan

seven different opera houses, came to grief irreparably at the Scala in spite of a most admirable execution. The longer I thought the further away seemed a convenient and practical substitute.



On the Left: Donizetti at a Rehearsal of "L'Elisir d'Amore." The Composer Is Seen at the Harpsichord and Standing on the Chair Is the Basso, Carbonetti, Who Sang the Rôle Taken at the Metropolitan by Mr. Didur. On the Right: Gaetano Donizetti, from a Lithograph of the Period of 1825

Giuseppe Verdi. The sorrow, especially in Milan, was very great. During the protracted final illness of the Master the Teatro alla Scala which I was directing remained closed and no one here can imagine the profound sadness of all of us who were obliged to live in a world in which everyone was recalling the glory of the giant whose life was gradually



Photo by Bain News Service

Giulio Gatti-Casazza, the Distinguished General Manager of the Metropolitan Opera Company

being extinguished at so short a distance from us!

During this painful period I had to do some hard thinking as to how to repair a serious failure which had upset the orderly progress of our season. "Le Maschere," a comedy in three acts, music by Mascagni, produced simultaneously in

Something out of the common must be had—something, indeed, that would hold its own in the same field in which the last battle had been fought—in a word, something of a comic nature.

### An Inspiration

On one of these evenings, while the Scala was closed, I went in company with Arturo Toscanini to the neighboring Café Cova. We both were preoccupied and from time to time one or the other remarked: "Ah! if we could only prepare such an opera—or such another; if there were some way of mounting an old opera buffa," and then we would lapse with silence for a while. "Suppose," said I presently, "we try to put together 'L'Elisir d'Amore,' an opera always fresh, although forgotten."

"I would be most delighted," replied Toscanini; "but—the company? Let's see now. We have Caruso and he would do admirably; even Magini Coletti, baritone, would suit; we have no *Adina*, though it wouldn't be impossible to find one; but, my dear Gatti, what we have not and what I do not believe we can find suitable for the Scala is a *Dulcamara*. It is a difficult rôle and buffos of good style and real worth are no longer to be found. Too bad we could not realize such an attractive idea!"

The conversation ended and we went home to sleep.

### Puzzle: Finding the Buffo

But the next day after a rehearsal, I resumed the conversation. Toscanini—whom I seem to see seated at the piano pointing to the music of the duet of *Adina* and the buffo—Toscanini continued to reply mechanically, glancing up at the ceiling; "and the *Dulcamara*? Where can we find a *Dulcamara*? There are none."

Maestro Sormani, co-répétiteur, who was listening, just then asked: "Why don't you take the buffo Carbonetti?"

"Carbonetti!" exclaimed Toscanini; "but the voice!"

"The voice," quietly replied Sormani, "is the voice of a buffo and as I heard him last year I can assure you that his voice is no worse than many voices I

have since heard, even at the Scala. I am sure that the public, in consideration of his artistic qualities, will accept him with pleasure."

"All right," concluded Toscanini, "get Carbonetti and let us try 'L'Elisir d'Amore.'"

So "L'Elisir d'Amore" was decided upon.

For the rôle of *Adina* I engaged Regina Pinkert, a most excellent and gracious artist. As for *Nemorino*, I spoke of the part the same evening at the opera house between the acts of "La Bohème" to Enrico Caruso.

### Caruso's Wise Guess

"I know only the romanza 'Una furtiva lagrima,'" said Caruso; "but if it is necessary to sing the opera, I will begin to-morrow to study it and you can rely upon me."

The great artist was always most obliging and ever ready to render cheerful service in any and all circumstances.



The report that the Scala was to revive "L'Elisir d'Amore" was not well received. Indeed, the director received some letters in which he was plainly told that he knew nothing, that he was turning the Scala into a provincial *teatrino* and that, furthermore, he soon would be well punished with a fiasco even more decisive than that of the recent "Maschere." The director, whose skin had grown tough with experience, was not alarmed nor even disturbed and directed that the rehearsals begin.

The painters went to work on the three scenes and my much loved President of the Board of Directors of the Scala, the Duca Guido Visconti di Modrone, a man of superior quality in every respect (who died untimely, to the regret of all, in 1903), did me the honor to make a personal search among the carriage makers of Milan for a "berlin" which he himself had adapted to the use of *Doctor Dulcamara*. The same *Dulcamara* in the person of Federico Carbonetti arrived duly from the provinces, where he had been passing a wretched existence, and presented himself to me in the heart of winter without an overcoat and carrying a little canvas valise tied up with a piece of string.

### A Hardy Veteran

"They say," said he to me, "they say that I am growing old! It is a calumny! Growing old, indeed! I defy all the

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RICHARD

## EPSTEIN

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**OSSIP GABRILOWITSCH SAYS:**

"I have made a study of his technical ideas and finding them excellent have endeavored to apply them in my own playing."