

DONIZETTI  
**ALFREDO**  
IL GRANDE

Siragusa • Fiume • Ravizza • Corrado

Hungarian Radio Choir  
Orchestra Donizetti Opera  
Corrado Rovaris, Conductor



Gaetano  
**DONIZETTI**

(1797–1848)

# Alfredo il Grande

*Dramma per musica* in two acts

Libretto by Andrea Leone Tottola (d. 1831)

First performance: 2 July 1823 at the Teatro di San Carlo, Naples

<b>Alfredo, King of England</b> .....	<b>Antonino Siragusa, Tenor</b>
<b>Amalia, the Queen</b> .....	<b>Gilda Fiume, Soprano</b>
<b>Eduardo, General of the English Army</b> .....	<b>Lodovico Filippo Ravizza, Baritone</b>
<b>Atkins, General of the Danish Army</b> .....	<b>Adolfo Corrado, Bass</b>
<b>Enrichetta, an English country girl</b> .....	<b>Valeria Girardello, Mezzo-soprano</b>
<b>Margherita, another country girl</b> .....	<b>Floriana Cicìo, Soprano*</b>
<b>Guglielmo, a shepherd</b> .....	<b>Antonio Garés, Tenor</b>
<b>Rivers, a Dane</b> .....	<b>Andrés Agudelo, Tenor</b>

**Hungarian Radio Choir**

(Zoltán Pad, Chorus Master)

**Orchestra Donizetti Opera**  
**Corrado Rovaris, Conductor**

*\* student of the Bottega Donizetti*

The Italian libretto and an English translation can be accessed at [www.naxos.com/libretti/660576.htm](http://www.naxos.com/libretti/660576.htm)





26	Celeste voce ascolto (Alfredo)	3:33	<b>No. 11. Coro</b> (Contrafactum from No. 1 of Cantata for the Birthday of King Francis I [1825], based on the surviving double bass part)	
27	Al campo! Alla vittoria! (Chorus, Guglielmo, Alfredo, Eduardo)	6:21		
	<b>Scene 5</b>		32 Allegro – Vivace	1:20
28	Recitative: Ti basta, o fato iniquo? (Atkins, Amalia, Enrichetta)	2:00	<b>Scene 8</b>	
			33 Viva Alfredo! Il grande! il prode! (Chorus, Margherita, Guglielmo)	2:29
			34 Recitative: Al vostro braccio, o cari (Alfredo, Amalia, Eduardo, Guglielmo, Enrichetta, Margherita)	1:50
	<b>No. 10. Quintetto</b>			
29	Traditor! D'un ferro ancora... (Amalia, Enrichetta, Atkins, Guglielmo) –	4:10		
	<b>Scene 6</b> Lo sdegno che in me sento (Atkins, Eduardo, Amalia, Enrichetta)			
30	Quintet: All'inattesa aita (Enrichetta, Amalia, Guglielmo, Eduardo, Atkins)	5:54	35 Che potrei dirti, o caro (Amalia, Chorus)	2:44
	<b>Scene 7</b>		36 Torna a gioir quest'alma (Amalia, All)	5:17
31	Recitative: Ah! chi di Atkins mi reca qualche novella? (Rivers)	1:09		

## Gaetano Donizetti (1797–1848)

### Alfredo il Grande

A native of Bergamo, Donizetti was, for nearly a decade after the early death of Bellini in 1835, the leading composer of Italian opera. He had his first success with *Zoraida di Granata* in 1822. There followed a series of nearly 60 more operas and a move to Paris, where Rossini had been induced to settle to his profit. His final illness confined him to a hospital in France for some 17 months before his return to Bergamo, where he died in 1848. Donizetti was not exclusively a composer of opera; he wrote music of all kinds – songs, chamber music, piano music and a quantity of music for the church.

#### Rossinian Donizetti – A conversation with Corrado Rovaris

**Alberto Mattioli** At the Donizetti Opera, Corrado Rovaris is remembered for conducting a revelatory production of *Anna Bolena*. In 2023 he took to the podium for the most mysterious title to be staged, *Alfredo il Grande*, written by Donizetti two centuries ago, in 1823, which returned to the stage for the first time in modern times. 'The only thing I knew about this opera was the title,' said Rovaris. Much the same as everyone else.

**AM** Do you regret agreeing to direct it?

**Corrado Rovaris** Not at all. For a musician it is always extremely motivating to tackle operas that were not successful and therefore never entered the repertoire. Novelty is always interesting – and this is a real novelty that comes from the past. For a festival dedicated to Donizetti to recover these operas is a must, for me to conduct them is stimulating. There are no precedents, no terms of comparison, no conventions of performance tradition: you start from scratch, and you have to dig into the score. That is why I was in constant dialogue with Edoardo Cavalli, who worked on the critical edition, and with the other musicologists of the research centre of the Donizetti Foundation.

**AM** We shall see what you found there. But in the meantime, a premise: in your opinion, why was *Alfredo il Grande* not a success on 2 July 1823 at the Teatro di San Carlo?

**CR** I think we must consider the historical context. In 1823, in Naples, the audience had just experienced the years of Rossini, *de facto* artistic director of the Teatro di San Carlo and author of an impressive series of masterpieces – *Otello*, *Ermione*, *Maometto II*, *Mosè in Egitto*, *Zelmira* and *La donna del lago*, to mention only the first that come to mind. Donizetti arrives at this particular moment – Rossini has just left, and he makes his debut with his first great *opera seria*. He is a musician in the making, full of talent but still searching for his own language. I don't mean to say that he is crushed by the comparison with Rossini, which would be unfair and is the mistake one must not make in approaching *Alfredo il Grande* today. But it was certainly not easy to express oneself in that theatre, with a librettist and a leading singer – respectively Andrea Leone Tottola and Andrea Nozzari – 'inherited' from Rossini, and above all with such a rambling libretto. The audience booed, even overlooking the objective merits that this opera does have.

**AM** After reading the score, what struck you most?

**CR** From a formal point of view, it is rather conventional. What impresses me, for example, is the finale, in which in the traditional bel canto rondo of the prima donna, Queen Amalia, Alfredo's wife, the band on stage plays a sort of 'back and forth' with the orchestra in the pit. The finale of Act I, which is always the most complex and grandiose moment of any Italian opera of the time, is also very articulate, in five parts, and very well-conceived in investigating the various types of conflicting affections of the characters. From an instrumental point of view, the intervention of the clarinet in Alfredo's second aria is very interesting. I would say that there are three predominant 'colours' in the score: the bucolic-pastoral, the martial-heroic and the sentimental. At the beginning of the opera, Donizetti makes the bucolic and the martial interact with an already 'mature' awareness.

**AM** This – and the final rondo with the band dialoguing with the orchestra and the singing of the prima donna – reminds one of *La donna del lago*, does it not?

**CR** Yes, but whereas Rossini very often used what was called the *banda sul palco* ('band on stage') at the time, for Donizetti, in those years, it was a less frequent, and therefore interesting, feature.

**AM** The same librettist of many of Rossini's *opera seria* (Tottola), the same leading singer of *Otello* (Nozzari), an overall atmosphere steeped in 'Rossinism': in which aspects does Donizetti already assert his personality, if there are any?

**CR** Rossini's influence is quite evident, especially in the first act. After all, Rossini's model was so overwhelming (and so convincing in terms of reception) that no contemporary composer could escape it. However, as the opera progresses, we begin to hear more of Donizetti, even the great Donizetti that was to be. I'm thinking, for example, of some harmonic situations in the trio. You can already sense aspects that would later become customary and personal for Donizetti. Yet I insist that we must think of *Alfredo il Grande* as a training opera.

**AM** Is there any search for originality in the orchestra?

**CR** All in all, I would not say so. Apart from the clarinet solo, I see it as the standard orchestration of an Italian opera of those years. The treatment of the band is instead very original. Among other things, unlike what other composers (including Rossini) usually did, Donizetti wrote all the music for the band *in extenso*, instead of just sketching out a few lines and leaving the rest of the work to others.

**AM** Let us move on to the vocal parts: Alfredo sounds like a typical Rossinian baritenor.

**CR** He was Andrea Nozzari, among other things, a fellow countryman of Donizetti although he was not exactly from Bergamo: he was born in Vertova. He embodied the very 'type' of the Rossinian baritenor, although almost at the end of his career, because he retired in 1825. The writing is Classical: extremely extended, but with a tessitura that is not too high; besides, Nozzari probably sang it *falsettone* in the higher register, a technique that has been completely lost today. The dotted rhythms that he sings are also very

typical, a customary way of emphasising the heroic character of the opera. Donizetti was young, only 26, when he wrote *Alfredo il Grande*, and he seems to feel a sort of reverence for the genre.

**AM** And how would you define Queen Amalia?

**CR** Another typical bel canto role, with a lot of coloratura but not light, rather *di forza*, always *appoggiata* and articulate.

**AM** Ultimately, who is the opera's protagonist?

**CR** In the end, no one. Here lies the problem with the libretto, indeed with the entire opera. The characters are not explored, there is no psychological excavation, they remain conventional masks. We are told nothing even of the story's villain, Atkins the Dane. The musical part is interesting even in the second act, and this must be acknowledged, but from the dramaturgical point of view everything has already happened at the end of the first.

**AM** A good reason to watch *Alfredo il Grande*.

**CR** I don't want to proclaim that we are witnessing a rediscovered masterpiece, because that would not be fair, and I would be hard to believe. But without these steps, there would not be the great Donizetti. So, *Alfredo il Grande* is part of a process that has led to the great masterpieces that we know, and which would never have come to light without these early works.

**AM** And which I think might help us change our perception of a musician and man of the theatre who has been belittled and slandered like few others in history.

**CR** The Bergamo festival has contributed a great deal to this change of perspective on Donizetti. Perhaps that sense of 'renaissance' that we experienced a few decades ago with regard to Rossini has not yet come to fruition, but there is no doubt that the regard of musicologists, performers and audiences towards Donizetti today is very high, certainly greater than a few decades ago. Of course, this is without diminishing the value of pioneering attempts without which the current fervour would not exist.

**AM** Even abroad?

**CR** Surely. If I may recall a personal experience, when we did *Roberto Devereux* in Toronto, where the opera had never been performed, we had to add two repeats to those scheduled because the theatre was always sold out. And it is definitely not a small theatre.

**AM** There has been a rediscovery of the great musician Donizetti, something which now seems to be a given in spite of old and rancid prejudices. Yet, the dramatist Donizetti, one of the greatest in the history of musical theatre, has yet to be discovered.

**CR** Precisely so. I believe that this is the mission for the next few years. I think the question of performances and productions is very important. You must pay a lot of attention to the productions and look for someone who is willing to look into it. Then, audiences and critics must be in the right frame of mind when confronted with little-known works like *Alfredo il Grande*. It would be wrong to regard it as a mere Rossinian imitation, just as it is wrong to read Donizetti's mature masterpieces as 'anticipations' of Verdi's great theatre. Donizetti must be contextualised within his own stylistic journey, in the laborious realisation of his idea of musical theatre. And this is how we can grasp the originality that – despite a myriad of conventional passages – that this opera also has.

**AM** If you could say anything to Donizetti, what would it be?

**CR** That, as a composer, I understand his effort and I appreciate it. And that I am very affected when I read the desolate letter he sent before the premiere to his maestro, Johann Simon Mayr: *Parlo sincero (sarà ciò che sarà, ma io non so far di più)* ('I will speak frankly: whatever will be will be, I do not know how to do more'). No, dear Gaetano, with this libretto you really could not do more.

**AM** And if you could say something to Abbot Tottola?

**CR** I would tell him that he had to work harder.

**AM** One last curiosity: Mayr had written an opera entitled *Alfredo il Grande* too, five years earlier, to a libretto by Bartolomeo Merelli: what do you think of it?

**CR** Nothing, because although it was also performed here in Bergamo, I have not had the chance to see the score. But I would be very interested.

**Alberto Mattioli**

*English translation: Michela Compagnoni  
Courtesy of the Fondazione Teatro Donizetti*

## **Synopsis**

### **Act I**

Athelney Island, 9th-century England, during the Danish invasion. Queen Amalia, accompanied by General Eduardo and disguised as a peasant girl, is in desperate search of her husband, King Alfredo, for he has gone into hiding in the countryside to escape the invaders, who are hunting him [2]–[4]. The King has found shelter thanks to a peasant, Guglielmo, who now offers refuge also to Amalia and Eduardo, unaware that the two are being closely followed by the Danish General, Atkins [5]–[9]. In Guglielmo's humble hut, Amalia and Alfredo are finally reunited, but their happiness does not last long [10]–[11]. Having located the King, Atkins shows up under false pretences, disguised as an Englishman wanting to warn Alfredo that the Danes have discovered his hiding place. Surprised to discover he has been giving shelter to the King, Guglielmo helps his guests flee through a secret passage, which they traverse on all fours [12], but back in the open countryside, Alfredo and Amalia are ambushed, and captured by Atkins and some Danes. In the meantime, however, Eduardo has rallied the English troops, while Guglielmo has joined them with a band of armed shepherds and peasants. Caught by surprise and clearly outnumbered, the invaders must accept defeat [13]–[14]. Alfredo is freed [15]. Yet, unwilling to take advantage of his superiority, he generously releases Atkins and offers to meet him and his men on the battlefield. A huge English army has gathered for the decisive battle [16].

### **Act II**

In Guglielmo's hut, Alfredo incites him and Amalia to be heroic. Enrichetta and Margherita, two peasant girls, also anticipate the coming victory and the peace that will follow [17]–[25]. The battle is fought and won [26], but Alfredo's problems are not over: fleeing after the defeat of the disbanded Danish army, Atkins and his men run into Queen Amalia accompanied by Enrichetta, and take them prisoner [27]. Bravely, Amalia refuses to follow her captor; she is about to stab herself with a dagger when Eduardo, sent by Alfredo with Guglielmo and some men to find his wife, rushes onto the scene [28]. The English hurl themselves at the Danes, overpower them, free Amalia, and take Atkins prisoner [29]–[31]. Alfredo and Amalia are reunited, the Danish invaders are repelled, and all hail the King, who has freed the country [33]–[36].

**Daniela Pilarz**

The Donizetti Opera Festival in Bergamo continues to present early works by Donizetti that have been unjustly neglected for decades. *Alfredo il Grande*, a love story that explores the defeat of the invading Danish army by the victorious Britons, was first performed in 1823 and was revived in this production two centuries later. Skilfully orchestrated, it features memorable arias for the hero Alfredo, and includes a superb concluding rondo for the heroine Amalia, as well as a radiant quintet. The opera is heard here in Edoardo Cavalli's 2021 critical edition. *Gramophone* called it 'a vocally accomplished performance' and 'a fine revival'.



Gaetano  
**DONIZETTI**  
(1797–1848)

**DONIZETTI OPERA**

# Alfredo il Grande

*Dramma per musica in two acts (1823)*

Libretto by Andrea Leone Tottola (d. 1831)

Critical edition by Edoardo Cavalli © Fondazione Teatro Donizetti, Bergamo, 2021

Alfredo, King of England ..... Antonino Siragusa, Tenor  
 Amalia, the Queen ..... Gilda Fiume, Soprano  
 Eduardo, General of the English Army ..... Lodovico Filippo Ravizza, Baritone  
 Atkins, General of the Danish Army ..... Adolfo Corrado, Bass  
 Enrichetta, an English country girl ..... Valeria Girardello, Mezzo-soprano  
 Margherita, another country girl ..... Floriana Cicò, Soprano  
 Guglielmo, a shepherd ..... Antonio Garés, Tenor  
 Rivers, a Dane ..... Andrés Agudelo, Tenor

**WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING**

**Hungarian Radio Choir (Zoltán Pad, Chorus master)**  
**Orchestra Donizetti Opera**  
**Corrado Rovaris, Conductor**

<b>1</b>	Sinfonia	<b>1:14</b>	<b>17–36</b> Act II	<b>64:03</b>
<b>2–16</b>	Act I	<b>61:43</b>	Playing Time	<b>2:07:00</b>

A detailed track list can be found inside the booklet

The Italian libretto and an English translation can be accessed at [www.naxos.com/libretti/660576.htm](http://www.naxos.com/libretti/660576.htm)

Recorded live: 19 and 24 November 2023 during the Donizetti Opera Festival at the Teatro Donizetti, Bergamo, Italy

Producer: Alberto Dellepiane • Engineers: Rino Trasi, Michele de Rossi • Editor: Rino Trasi

Booklet notes: Alberto Mattioli, Courtesy of the Fondazione Teatro Donizetti • Cover Photo: © Gianfranco Rota

© 2024 & © 2025 Naxos Rights (Europe) Ltd • [www.naxos.com](http://www.naxos.com)