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DONIZETTI
Chiara e Serafina

Spagnoli • Zhou • Doveri

**Coro dell'Accademia Teatro alla Scala
Orchestra Gli Originali**

Sesto Quatrini



Gaetano
DONIZETTI
(1797–1848)
Chiara e Serafina
ossia **Il pirata**

Melodramma semiserio in two acts (1822)
Libretto by Felice Romani (1788–1865) based on the melodrama *La Cisterne* by
René-Charles Guilbert de Pixérécourt (1773–1844)
First performance: 26 October 1822 at the Teatro alla Scala, Milan

Don Meschino..... Pietro Spagnoli, Baritone (buffo)
with the soloists of the Academy of Lyric Opera of the Teatro alla Scala
Don Alvaro / Don Fernando..... Matías Moncada, Bass
Serafina..... Fan Zhou, Soprano
Chiara..... Greta Doveri, Soprano
Don Ramiro..... Hyun-Seo Davide Park, Tenor
Picaro..... Sung-Hwan Damien Park, Baritone
Lisetta..... Valentina Pluzhnikova, Mezzo-soprano
Agnese..... Mara Gaudenzi, Mezzo-soprano
Spalatro..... Andrea Tanzillo, Tenor
Gennaro..... Giuseppe De Luca, Baritone

Coro dell'Accademia Teatro alla Scala (Salvo Sgrò, Chorus master)

Orchestra Gli Originali

on period instruments

Matteo Failla, Fortepiano

Sesto Quatrini, Conductor

1	Sinfonia Andante mosso – Allegro – Più allegro	5:30	
	Act I		
	No. 1. Introduzione		
2	Scene 1 L'alba in cielo appar già chiara (Chorus, Agnese, Don Meschino, Lisetta)	3:50	
3	Scene 2 Colla nassa e col cestello (Don Meschino, Lisetta, Agnese, Chorus)	6:54	
	No. 2. Cavatina di Chiara		
4	Scene 3 Grazie pietoso cielo! (Chiara, Don Alvaro)	3:33	
5	Cavatina: Queste romite sponde (Chiara, Don Alvaro)	6:37	
6	Recitative: Dove siam noi? (Don Alvaro, Chiara)	2:06	
	Scene 4 Spicciatevi buffoni... (Don Meschino, Agnese, Lisetta, Chiara, Don Alvaro)		
	No. 3. Coro		
7	Scene 5 Maledetto il temporale (Chorus)	2:46	
	No. 4. Cavatina di Picaro		
8	Cavatina: Il mestier del corseggiare (Picaro)	5:46	
9	Recitative: Da parte la morale (Picaro)	2:58	
	Scene 6 Chi è costui? (Don Fernando, Picaro)		
	No. 5. Duetto		
10	Scene 7 Duet: Come più dolce il zeffiro (Serafina, Don Ramiro)	3:37	
11	Sempre teco! (Serafina, Don Ramiro)	3:37	
12	Scene 8 Recitative: Oh evento inaspettato! (Don Fernando, Serafina, Don Ramiro, Picaro)	1:14	
13	Scene 9 Musica! Tanto meglio (Picaro, Don Fernando, Don Ramiro, Serafina, Chiara)	2:37	
	Scene 10 Siam soli (Picaro, Serafina)		
	No. 6. Duetto		
14	Duet: Per vederti, o mia figliuola (Picaro, Serafina)	4:11	
15	Deh, perdona, o caro amante (Serafina, Picaro)	5:32	
16	Scene 11 Recitative: Ebben? – Si arrese... (Don Fernando, Picaro, Chiara)	0:49	
	No. 7. Aria di Don Meschino		
17	Scene 12 Zitti, zitti... entriam bel bello... (Spalatro, Chorus)	1:48	
18	Scene 13 Ehi! Lisetta? (Don Meschino, Spalatro)	0:58	
19	Aria: Mi dicea la nonna mia (Don Meschino, Spalatro, Chorus)	5:30	
	Scene 14 Cos'è stato? Don Meschino! (Lisetta, Agnese, Don Alvaro, Don Meschino)		
20	Scene 15 Recitative: Basta, più non si badi alle sue stramberie... (Agnese, Lisetta, Don Alvaro)	0:56	
	No. 8. Finale I		
21	Il castello di Belmonte (Lisetta, Agnese, Chorus, Don Meschino, Don Alvaro)	3:56	
	Scene 16 Quanta gente! (Picaro, Serafina, Chorus, Don Alvaro)		
22	Quale Inciampo! È qui raccolto (Picaro, Don Alvaro, Serafina, Agnese, Lisetta, Don Meschino)	3:35	
23	Don Fernando il mio padrone... (Agnese, Don Meschino, Lisetta, Chorus, Picaro, Serafina, Don Alvaro)	2:57	
24	Scene 17 Eccomi alfine... oh gioia! (Chiara)	6:47	
	Scene 18 Alfin la sala è libera (Picaro, Chiara, Don Alvaro)		
25	Se ci manchi, se c'inganni (Chiara, Picaro, Don Alvaro)	6:36	
	Scene 19 Entrate... Quest'uscio ancor chiudiamo (Picaro, Chiara, Chorus, Serafina)		
	Scene 20 Padre! – Figlia! (Chiara, Don Alvaro, Don Ramiro, Chorus, Agnese, Lisetta, Don Meschino)		

Act II

No. 9. Introduzione

- 26** **Scene 1** Capitano!... Che avvenne?
(*Spalatro, Gennaro, Chorus*) 3:32
- 27** **Scene 2** Recitative: Spalatro, dal mio fianco
non ti partir
(*Gennaro, Spalatro, Don Meschino, Chorus*) 1:18
- No. 10. Duetto**
- 28** **Scene 3** Buona notte... son cotto
(*Don Meschino, Chiara*) 1:09
- 29** Duet: Ah, signora, l'abbiam fatta!
(*Don Meschino, Chiara*) 2:58
- 30** Deh, tu guida il piè smarrito
(*Chiara, Don Meschino*) 3:45
- No. 11. Recitativo e Aria di Serafina**
- 31** **Scene 4** Recitative: Dove mai mi conduci?
(*Serafina, Picaro*) 3:36
- Scene 5** Quale orrendo soggiorno!
(*Serafina*)
- 32** Aria: Fra quest'ombre, in questo orrore
(*Serafina*) 3:28
- 33** Ciel! Qual fragore ascolto?
(*Serafina, Chorus*) 2:05
- Scene 6** Recitative: Più non ci fuggirete
(*Gennaro, Serafina, Picaro, Chiara, Lisetta,
Don Meschino, Chorus*)
- 34** Io, tua preda! Oh mio dolore!
(*Serafina, Gennaro, Picaro, Spalatro, Chorus,
Chiara, Lisetta, Don Meschino*) 5:25
- 35** **Scene 7** Recitative: Picaro, allegramente,
bella preda che hai fatta!
(*Gennaro, Spalatro, Picaro, Chiara, Don Meschino*) 1:17

No. 12. Sestetto

- 36** **Scene 8** Chiara! Ebbene?
(*Don Meschino, Chiara, Picaro*) 4:09
- Scene 9** Mia sorella!
(*Chiara, Serafina, Lisetta, Don Meschino, Picaro*)
- 37** **Scene 10** Tremante, smarrito
(*Serafina, Lisetta, Chiara*) 4:01
- Scene 11** Silenzio! Alfine ei scende
(*Chiara, Lisetta, Serafina, Picaro, Don Ramiro,
Don Meschino*)
- 38** Sextet: Ah! Non credea, mia vita
(*Don Ramiro, Lisetta, Picaro, Serafina, Chiara,
Don Meschino*) 3:04
- 39** **Scene 12** Recitative: Picaro, or noi corriamo
de' Pirati sull'orme
(*Don Ramiro, Picaro*) 0:39
- No. 13. Coro**
- 40** **Scene 13** Vittoria, vittoria!
(*Chorus*) 2:53
- Scene 14** Recitative: Don Ramiro, accorrete
(*Don Meschino, Don Ramiro, Serafina, Don Alvaro*)
- Scene 15** Chiara è con voi
(*Chiara, Don Alvaro, Serafina, Don Ramiro,
Don Meschino*)
- No. 14. Finale II**
- 41** Prendi, o padre, il tuo gran nome
(*Chiara*) 2:34
- 42** O contento! – O nobil core!
(*Serafina, Don Alvaro, Don Ramiro, Chorus,
Chiara, Agnese, Lisetta, Don Meschino, Picaro*) 2:03
- 43** Non più perigli
(*Chiara, Tutti [Serafina, Agnese, Lisetta,
Don Ramiro, Picaro, Chorus, Don Meschino,
Don Alvaro]*) 3:36

Gaetano Donizetti (1797–1848)

Chiara e Serafina

Chiara e Serafina: The first fiasco of a ‘Maestro with good expectations’

In the summer of 1822 Gaetano Donizetti was almost 25 years old, and had already been acknowledged as one of the most promising composers of the young generation. His works had almost always been positively received, with the last ones in particular earning more than flattering reviews: his first opera in that year, *Zoraida di Granata*, staged at Rome’s Teatro Argentina on 28 January, had been a real triumph. The time was ripe, therefore, for the Bergamo-born Donizetti to test himself at the greatest theatre in Lombardy, the Teatro alla Scala, that in just a few years would become the most important opera theatre in Italy. To speak in his favour and recommend him to the Milan venue was probably his old teacher Giovanni Simone Mayr, whose works were still represented in Italy and who was at home at La Scala. Thus, on 17 April 1822, the representative of Milan’s Royal Theatres, Alberto Franchetti, wrote to those in charge of the programming at La Scala:

Given such very serious hitches, it appears even better and more advisable to have a new opera (for the autumn season) written by some Maestro with good expectations, in order to have a work that suits the Company, and therefore better performed and supported, and at least entice people with a novelty. In this regard [...] I would therefore propose to schedule, for that season, besides Mercadante’s work, an altogether new opera, instead of staging one that has already been heard, and for this purpose I would suggest the composer Signor Donizetti, a youth who distinguished himself in Rome during the past Carnival season and is now composing in Naples. He could be engaged for two-hundred sequins, or two-thousand francs at most.

The sense of Franchetti’s words was quite clear: we have at our disposal a fine and promising young composer who could write an opera tailor-made for the company of singers we have engaged for the season; for the privilege of coming and presenting his work here he will be ready to accept even a modest fee. Donizetti did not wait to be asked twice, for it was too good an opportunity, and he was still too young to discuss the fee. Unfortunately, things did not go as well as he had hoped, and the opera at La Scala was one of the greatest fiascos of his career.

To write a new opera, a composer and librettist (or ‘Poet’, as he was then called) would choose a new subject and the play from which to draw it. For that purpose, contemporary French theatre offered a nearly limitless number of ideas. It appears that it was Donizetti who suggested to the theatre’s librettist, Felice Romani, the text of a French *pièce*, *La Cisterne*, by René-Charles Guilbert de Pixérécourt (1773–1844), an experienced French playwright who specialised in works of wide popular appeal, preferably with a happy ending. Romani accepted the challenge of adapting the complex French subject, which in the operatic version would be entitled *Chiara e Serafina, ossia Il pirata*. In the anonymous *Avvertimento* that prefaces the libretto, however, it is made clear that the choice of subject had not been his: ‘The Poet, to whom this subject was offered, agreed to use it for an operatic setting because he deemed that it presented some rather uncommon situations. The difficulty consisted in keeping them, and he endeavoured to do so for what concerns the nature of his composition, and in the observance of some conventions that cannot be avoided.’

Felice Romani (1788–1865), a scholar with a vast and refined culture, had debuted as a librettist at the Sant’Agostino theatre in Genoa in 1813 with *La rosa bianca e la rosa rossa*, written for Donizetti’s teacher Giovanni Simone Mayr. In his career, he would produce some 90 librettos for the most renowned contemporary composers, particularly Vincenzo Bellini, with whom he would form a lasting and successful partnership. Romani was not only known for his fine and elegant verses but also for his haughty and touchy character, as well as for working very slowly, something that would get worse over the years and lead him to disregard his deadlines. At the beginning of August 1822, Donizetti, who had met with good success on 29 June at Naples’s Teatro del Fondo with the one-act opera *La lettera anonima*, moved to Milan, where, according to his contract, by 20 September

Romani should have delivered him his libretto, for the premiere had been scheduled for 22 October. The days went by, however, without Romani giving anything to the young composer, whom he obviously did not know and whose great talent he probably ignored.

Donizetti only received the first part of the text at the beginning of October. Composing at a breakneck pace, the musician managed to deliver a fairly complete score around the 15th of that month, which meant that he had written the opera in approximately twelve days: an exceptionally short time even for the day's standards, worthy of Rossini's greatest feats. Romani's delay inevitably also affected the work's premiere, which, to allow for a minimum of rehearsals, had to be postponed to 26 October.

Things went badly right from the beginning, as we gather from this letter Donizetti wrote to Mayr on 16 October:

It was with infinite pleasure that I received news from you and Banderali's greetings; thank you for everything, and I must inform you that unfortunately it will be on the 26th, for it was only yesterday that there was the first small rehearsal. However, I hope that, if not at the premiere, I will have the pleasure of seeing you at the third performance. I urge you to bring at least a Requiem, because I will be murdered, so there will be my funeral...The women are grumbling, the *buffi* dislike the music, the second parts are complaining. Only Fabbrica is left to me; she is the best, therefore let's cheer up...I will say no more, not to tire you, and because I need to finish setting to music a racket of a sextet.

In its conciseness, the letter to Mayr tells us a lot, revealing that some singers were not happy with their parts and that only the debutant Isabella Fabbrica, from Milan, who sang the role of Chiara, seemed satisfied with hers; not so, evidently, the mezzo Rosa Morandi (Serafina), an experienced and popular singer, and young Antonio Tamburini (Picaro), destined for a bright career but already known for his difficult and temperamental character. The letter also informs us that one of the central moments of the opera, the remarkable sextet that ends Act II, had not yet been completely arranged by 16 October – further proof of the permanently precarious work conditions that were the norm in the Italian operatic world of the day, something, indeed, documented by plenty of anecdotes. To make things worse, Isabella Fabbrica fell ill during rehearsals, although she managed to recover in time for the premiere.

Unfortunately for Donizetti, there was no miracle, as sometimes happens, to subvert the fate of a work that seemed doomed from the beginning. On 26 October 1822 *Chiara e Serafina* fell miserably, never to rise again. The audience not only showed their disapproval, but literally deserted the theatre. According to Annalisa Bini and Jeremy Commons in their valuable book *Le prime rappresentazioni delle opere di Donizetti nella stampa coeva*, the spectators who attended the first four performances were 579, 266, 366 and 359 respectively, subscribers excluded. It was a resounding flop, considering that La Scala could hold about 3,800 people.

After the Milan performances of 1822, *Chiara e Serafina* never went on stage again. For Donizetti it was a very bitter setback. He went to seek his fortunes elsewhere, and it did not take him long before he showed the Italian audiences his worth. In the years that followed, some of the operas he had written for other theatres were staged in Milan, but his first work composed explicitly for that city would be, in 1830, one of his greatest masterpieces: *Anna Bolena*, premiered at the Teatro Carcano (which at the time was still rivalling La Scala). To see one of his works premiered at La Scala again, Milanese audiences would have to wait until 26 December 1833, with the successful *Lucrezia Borgia*. Donizetti was by then a composer on the crest of the wave, and nobody would have dreamed of patronising him, not even the haughty Felice Romani, who had once again, ironically, been his librettist.

Thanks to the Bergamo Donizetti Festival, after exactly two hundred years *Chiara e Serafina* has returned to the stage with a fine production that did not incur the drawbacks which contributed to the fiasco of that unfortunate La Scala premiere. Now it will be up to the public, in addition to critics and musicologists, to say whether the Milanese, two hundred years ago, were hasty and unfair in their judgement, and if this opera deserves to be fully reinserted in the repertoire.

Danilo Prefumo

English translation: Daniela Pilarz

Synopsis

The action takes place on the island of Majorca, at the times of the expedition of Charles V against the Algerians.

Prior Events

During the war against the Algerians, the sea captain Don Alvaro took to the waves with his first-born daughter Chiara, but they were captured and imprisoned. The powerful Don Fernando, a secret enemy of Don Alvaro, convinced the court of his treason and obtained the custody of Don Alvaro's second daughter Serafina, wanting to marry her and get his hands on her rich estate. The young woman, however, is in love with Don Ramiro, who has asked for her hand in marriage.

Act I

On a beach in Majorca, a fishing expedition is launched for the marriage of Serafina and Don Ramiro; meanwhile, Lisetta and Don Meschino quarrel because she keeps rejecting his advances. Suddenly, a storm breaks out and all run for shelter [2]–[4]. After it has abated, two shipwrecked figures appear: they are Don Alvaro and Chiara, who have finally been freed after ten years in prison. They are rescued, unrecognised, by the suspicious Don Meschino, Lisetta, and her mother Agnese, keeper of the abandoned castle of Belmonte where the cold and exhausted Don Alvaro is taken [5]–[6]. Shortly afterwards, some pirates also land on the beach. Among them is the wily Picaro, a former servant of Don Fernando, who now engages him for a plan that will prevent Serafina's marriage: pretending to be her father, he shall take her with him to Madrid with the excuse of asking for the King's forgiveness [7]–[13]. The scheme, however, is discovered by Chiara, disguised as a dumb beggar [14]–[16]. At Belmonte, where all are headed, the pirates arrive first through a passage connected to the castle's cistern, which is their secret den [17]–[20]. Lisetta sings of the heroic feats of Don Alvaro, whose commemorative statue stands in a corner of the hall [21]. Picaro also arrives at the castle; he is accompanied by Serafina, who is shrouded in a veil to hide her identity [22]–[24]. At night Picaro searches for the secret passage that leads to the cistern, but, aware that Chiara and Don Alvaro are spying on him, feigns repentance, before deceiving Chiara and locking her into a room. The pirate then drags the unaware Serafina into the cistern, while all rush in drawn by Chiara's cries for help [25].

Act II

In the cistern's dark environment, the pirates feel trapped, because the exit towards the beach is guarded [26]–[27]. One after the other, some of the protagonists arrive, chasing each other and losing their bearings in the dark tunnels [28]–[32]. When Chiara finally finds her sister, she informs her of Picaro's deceit [33]. Against all expectations, Picaro decides to change sides and help the two young women, who, left alone with Lisetta, wonder whether they should trust the pirate [34]–[36]. But Picaro is sincere; he returns with Don Ramiro's men and some Alguaciles [37]–[39]. A fight ensues and the pirates are defeated. [40] All gather on the beach to rejoice in the victory. Only Chiara is missing: she has gone back into the cistern with Picaro to retrieve the documents that prove the innocence of Don Alvaro, who can thus, finally, be cleared [41]–[43].

Courtesy of the Fondazione Teatro Donizetti

English translation: Daniela Pilarz

Also available



8.660549-51



8.660538-39



8.660534-35



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In 1822, the young Donizetti was engaged by La Scala to compose an opera. *Chiara e Serafina* was the outcome and the librettist was Felice Romani, a refined scholar but a notoriously slow and touchy worker. Consequently, Donizetti had barely twelve days to compose the whole work. Because of the incoherent plot, which concerns Don Meschino and his daughter Chiara who are kidnapped by Algerians, and the villainous Don Fernando who schemes to marry the nobleman's younger daughter Serafina, the result was a fiasco. Donizetti's music, however, is characterful and profuse with delightful duets, trios and ensembles.



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1	Sinfonia	5:30	26–43 Act II	51:35
2–25	Act I	1:29:15	Playing Time	2:26:30

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/660552.htm

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