

*Virginia
Opera*

*The Daughter of
the Regiment*

*By
Gaetano Donizetti*

STUDY GUIDE

2009-2010 SEASON

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Preface

Purpose

This study guide is intended to aid you, the teacher, in increasing your students' understanding and appreciation of opera. This will not only add to knowledge about opera, but should develop awareness of other related subjects, making the performance they attend much more enjoyable.

Most Important

If you only have a limited amount of time, concentrate on the cast of characters, the plot and some of the musical and dramatic highlights of the opera. Recognition produces familiarity which in turn produces a positive experience.

The Language

THE DAUGHTER OF THE REGIMENT (La Fille du Regiment) is written in French. There is no source on which DAUGHTER OF THE REGIMENT is based. Its libretto was written specifically for the opera by Jean Francois Bayard and J.H. Vernoy de Saint-Georges. Although the composer, Gaetano Donizetti, was Italian, he spent a great deal of time in Paris, where he was a favorite at both the Opera and the Opera-Comique. DAUGHTER OF THE REGIMENT, written for the Opera-Comique, became so popular that it was considered a patriotic French opera, in spite of the composer's nationality.

The Virginia Opera will perform DAUGHTER OF THE REGIMENT in the original language, French, but an English translation will be projected on a screen above the stage. With these **Supertitles**, audiences can experience the beauty of opera in the original language, yet still understand the meaning of all that is being sung.

Objectives

1. To understand how opera, as an art form, reflects and comments on society and the world in which we live.
2. To develop an awareness of how the study of certain art forms such as opera can communicate ideas of the past and present.
3. To develop a basic understanding of what opera is. Students should be able to identify the many elements (musical, visual, and dramatic) of an opera and understand how they work together to produce a unified, exciting, and emotional work.
4. To understand the process of adapting a story for the stage; what changes need to be made and why. Incorporated in this objective is a basic understanding of what makes a good opera.
5. To know the basic plot/story line of THE DAUGHTER OF THE REGIMENT
6. To understand how music serves as a mode of communication in opera and the effect music has on characteristics and mood.
7. To develop some sense of appreciation for opera as a timeless art form that brings real characters, emotions, and situations to life.
8. To understand the working relationship between words and music in an opera. Students should understand how a composer and librettist work together to create significant, dramatic, and unified meaning.

What is Opera?

Opera is a unique type of entertainment—a play that is sung throughout. Because it combines music and theater, opera can be the most moving of all the arts, and can tell a story in a way quite unlike any other. It does so by means of words, actions, and music.

The words of an opera are called a **libretto** (the Italian word for “little book”), much like the words of a play are called a **script**. There are important differences between a libretto and a script, however. For one thing, a libretto usually contains far fewer words than a script. The reason for this is the music. It can take more time to sing a line of text than to say it; also, words are often repeated in operatic music for reasons of musical form. Therefore, there are fewer words in an opera than in a play of the same length.

While the spoken word can clearly show what people are thinking, singing is much better at showing emotions rather than thoughts. For this reason, the plot of an opera is likely to be filled with dramatic situations in which highly emotional characters perform bold actions.

The way **librettists** (the people who write the words) use words is also different. Opera librettos are commonly made up of poetry, while this is not often true of the scripts for plays. In *DON GIOVANNI* many of the musical passages can be considered a type of sung poetry, complete with meter, accents, and rhyme. If you were to say the words that the characters sing, this would become very clear.

A librettist can also do something that a playwright cannot—he or she can write an **ensemble**. An ensemble is a passage in the libretto in which more than one person sings; often, several characters sing different vocal lines simultaneously. In a play, if all the actors spoke at once, the audience could not understand the words. In an opera, the music helps the audience to sort out the thoughts and feelings of each singer. Frequently, each individual character has a distinct musical or vocal style which distinguishes him/her from the other characters. We will see this when we compare the characters in *DON GIOVANNI*.

If the libretto of an opera is a special language, the score (or musical portion of an opera) is a special use of music. It is music that is meant to be sung, of course, but it has characteristics that many songs do not. **Operatic music is dramatic music, written for the theater.** For this reason, it must also be capable of describing strong feelings that invite the audience’s involvement with the story and their identification with people on stage. In addition, a good operatic composer can use music as a tool to define character and personality traits of his characters.

One way in which a **composer** (the person who writes the music) can use music is through the voices of the singers themselves. A human voice, especially when singing, can express all sorts of feelings. Composers know this and use this

knowledge to the fullest. First, they consider the personality of a character, and then choose a voice type (either high or low) that best suits this type of person. For example, younger characters are often sung by the higher voice types. There are five different voice categories (perhaps some students are familiar with these from singing in a choir):

SOPRANO: the highest female voice

MEZZO-SOPRANO: (also called ALTO) the lower female voice

TENOR: the highest male voice (like Pavarotti or Caruso)

BARITONE: the middle male voice

BASS: the lowest male voice

Each of these voice categories can be subdivided into more specialized types, such as “dramatic soprano”, “lyric soprano”, “coloratura soprano”, “basso-buffo”, depending on the specific type of music being sung. These distinctions are known as **vocal fachs**, from a German word meaning “mode”.

After a composer has chosen the characters’ voice types, he then tries to interpret the libretto in musical terms. A character may sing very high notes when agitated or excited, or low notes when depressed or calm. He or she may sing many rapid notes or a few long held notes, depending upon the mood at the time.

In an opera production, the ideas of the composer and librettist are expressed by the singers as directed by a **conductor** and **stage director**. The conductor is responsible for the musical aspects of the performance, leading the orchestra and the singers and determining the musical pace. The stage director is responsible for the dramatic movement and characterizations of the singers. He works with a **design team**—a set designer, costume designer, and a lighting designer – to determine the visual interpretation of the work. Just as the composer and librettist must work in close communion in the writing of an opera, the conductor and stage director must have a close collaboration to produce a unified interpretation of an opera. Both must collaborate with the singers and the design team (and sometimes a **choreographer**, if dancing is involved). For this reason opera is perhaps the form demanding the greatest degree of collaboration.

An opera then, is a partnership of words and music with the purpose of telling a dramatic story. While the story itself may be about everyday situations or historical figures, it usually has a moral or idea that the entire audience understands. This is one of the great features of opera—it unites a variety of people with different backgrounds by giving them a common experience to relate with.

The Operatic Voice

A true (and brief) definition of the “operatic” voice is a difficult proposition. Many believe the voice is “born,” while just as many hold to the belief that the voice is “trained.” The truth lies somewhere between the two. Voices that can sustain the demands required by the operatic repertoire do have many things in common. First and foremost is a strong physical technique that allows the singer to sustain long phrases through the control of both the inhalation and exhalation of breath. Secondly, the voice (regardless of its size) must maintain a resonance in both the head (mouth, sinuses) and chest cavities. The Italian word “*squillo*” (squeal) is used to describe the brilliant tone required to penetrate the full symphony orchestra that accompanies the singers. Finally, all voices are defined by both the actual voice “type” and the selection of repertoire for which the voice is ideally suited.

Within the five major voice types (*Soprano, Mezzo-Soprano, Tenor, Baritone, Bass*) there is a further delineation into categories (*Coloratura, Lyric, Spinto, and Dramatic*) which help to define each particular instrument. The *Coloratura* is the highest within each voice type whose extended upper range is complimented by extreme flexibility. The *Lyric* is the most common of the “types.” This instrument is recognized more for the exceptional beauty of its tone rather than its power or range. The *Spinto* is a voice which combines the beauty of a lyric with the weight and power of a *Dramatic*, which is the most “powerful” of the voices. The *Dramatic* instrument is characterized by the combination of both incredible volume and “steely” intensity.

While the definition presented in the preceding paragraph may seem clearly outlined, many voices combine qualities from each category, thus carving a unique niche in operatic history. Just as each person is different from the next, so is each voice. Throughout her career Maria Callas defied categorization as she performed and recorded roles associated with each category in the soprano voice type. Joan Sutherland as well can be heard in recordings of soprano roles as diverse as the coloratura Gilda in *Rigoletto* to the dramatic Turandot in *Turandot*. Below is a very brief outline of voice types and categories with roles usually associated with the individual voice type.

	<i>Coloratura</i>	<i>Lyric</i>	<i>Spinto</i>	<i>Dramatic</i>
<i>SOPRAN</i>	Norina (Don Pasquale) Gilda (Rigoletto) Lucia (Lucia di Lammermoor)	Liu (Turandot) Mimi (La Bohème) Pamina (Magic Flute)	Tosca (Tosca) Amelia (A Masked Ball) Leonora (Il Trovatore)	Turandot (Turandot) Norma (Norma) Elektra (Elektra)
<i>Mezzo-Soprano</i>	Rosina (Barber of Seville) Angelina (La Cenerentola) Dorabella (Cosi fan tutte)	Carmen (Carmen) Charlotte (Werther) Giulietta (Hoffmann)	Santuzza (Cavalleria) Adalgisa (Norma) The Composer (Ariadne auf Naxos)	Azucena (Il Trovatore) Ulrica (A Masked Ball) Herodias (Salome)
<i>Tenor</i>	Count Almaviva (Barber of Seville) Don Ottavio (Don Giovanni) Ferrando (Cosi fan tutte)	Alfredo (La Traviata) Rodolfo (La Bohème) Tamino (Magic Flute)	Calaf (Turandot) Pollione (Norma) Cavaradossi (Tosca)	Dick Johnson (Fanciulla) Don Jose (Carmen) Otello (Otello)
<i>Baritone</i>	Figaro (Barber of Seville) Count Almavira (Marriage of Figaro) Dr. Malatesta (Don Pasquale)	Marcello (La Bohème) Don Giovanni (Don Giovanni) Sharpless (Madama Butterfly)	<i>Verdi Baritone</i> Germont (La Traviata) Di Luna (Il Trovatore) Rigoletto (Rigoletto)	Scarpia (Tosca) Jochanaan (Salome) Jack Rance (Fanciulla)
<i>Bass</i>	Bartolo (Barber of Seville) Don Magnifico (Cenerentola) Dr. Dulcamara (Elixir of Love)	Leporello (Don Giovanni) Colline (La Bohème) Figaro (Marriage of Figaro)	<i>Buffo Bass</i> Don Pasquale (Don Pasquale) Don Alfonso (Cosi fan tutte)	<i>Basso Cantate</i> Oroveso (Norma) Timur (Turandot) Sarastro (Magic Flute)

Opera Production

Opera is created by the combination of myriad art forms. First and foremost are the actors who portray characters by revealing their thoughts and emotions through the singing voice. The next very important component is a full symphony orchestra that accompanies the singing actors and actresses, helping them to portray the full range of emotions possible in the operatic format. The orchestra performs in an area in front of the singers called the orchestra pit while the singers perform on the open area called the stage. Wigs, costumes, sets and specialized lighting further enhance these performances, all of which are designed, created, and executed by a team of highly trained artisans.

The creation of an opera begins with a dramatic scenario crafted by a playwright or dramaturg who alone or with a librettist fashions the script or libretto that contains the words the artists will sing. Working in tandem, the composer and librettist team up to create a cohesive musical drama in which the music and words work together to express the emotions revealed in the story. Following the completion of their work, the composer and librettist entrust their new work to a conductor who with a team of assistants (repetiteurs) assumes responsibility for the musical preparation of the work. The conductor collaborates with a stage director (responsible for the visual component) in order to bring a performance of the new piece to life on the stage. The stage director and conductor form the creative spearhead for the new composition while assembling a design team which will take charge of the actual physical production.

Set designers, lighting designers, costume designers, wig and makeup designers and even choreographers must all be brought “on board” to participate in the creation of the new production. The set designer combines the skills of both an artist and an architect using “blueprint” plans to design the actual physical set which will reside on the stage, recreating the physical setting required by the storyline. These blueprints are turned over to a team of carpenters who are specially trained in the art of stage carpentry. Following the actual building of the set, painters following instructions from the set designers’ original plans paint the set. As the set is assembled on the stage, the lighting designer works with a team of electricians to throw light onto both the stage and the set in an atmospheric as well as practical way. Using specialized lighting instruments, colored gels and a state of the art computer, the designer along with the stage director create a “lighting plot” by writing “lighting cues” which are stored in the computer and used during the actual performance of the opera.

During this production period, the costume designer in consultation with the stage director has designed appropriate clothing for the singing actors and actresses to wear. These designs are fashioned into patterns and crafted by a team of highly skilled artisans called cutters, stitchers, and sewers. Each costume is specially made for each singer using his/her individual measurements. The wig and makeup designer, working with the costume designer, designs and creates wigs which will complement both the costume and the singer as well as represent historically accurate “period” fashions.

As the actual performance date approaches, rehearsals are held on the newly crafted set, combined with costumes, lights, and orchestra in order to ensure a cohesive performance that will be both dramatically and musically satisfying to the assembled audience.



About the Composer: Gaetano Donizetti

Gaetano Donizetti was born in Bergamo, Italy, on November 29, 1797. He came from a poor family and was fortunate to have his talent discovered at an early age. He studied in both Bergamo and Bologna and received excellent music training from Simon Mayr and Padre Mattei. Donizetti developed into one of the most prolific composers of the *bel canto* period. In addition to his seventy operas he composed twelve string quartets, seven masses, and a multitude of songs, piano music, cantatas, motets, and psalms.

The opera composers of the *bel canto* period were travelers, moving from one opera house to another, composing and staging their work. Donizetti was no exception. He accepted every commission proffered in order to support himself financially, sometimes producing as many as four operas in a single year. He toured all of Italy producing new operas, many of which were great successes. By the time he had composed *Anna Bolena* in 1830, this congenial and outgoing man was famous throughout Italy.

Bel canto composers were a prolific lot because of their reliance on a formulaic process. This suited audiences of the period well because they seemed to enjoy and encourage opera as pure entertainment without a great deal of complication. They were very content with music crafted for singers, and singing that required no deep thought or involvement to enjoy. During this period Hector Berlioz was very critical of Italian audiences stating that to Italians music was like a bowl of macaroni, to be consumed and enjoyed on the spot, like a sexual pleasure, not a worthy expression of the mind. Donizetti, like other composers of his day, knew what audiences wanted, and he turned out operas with astonishing rapidity.

The speed with which he completed his work has led some to believe that he abused his talent by not taking more time with it. He seemed to be challenged by the conditions under which he composed. The circumstances surrounding his opera, *L'elisir d'amore*, clearly demonstrates how exhilarated he was by short deadlines. In 1832, Donizetti was contacted by the manager of a theater in Milan who needed an opera for an opening which was scheduled in two weeks. The manager suggested rearranging something old and producing it as new, but Donizetti would have none of it. A new work it would be! He told the librettist, Felice Romani, that he had one week to provide a libretto and he himself would compose the music in the remaining week. All work was completed on schedule and the opera was a success at its opening, remaining so to this day.

In Naples in 1835, he produced the opera that would become one of the most popular of the nineteenth century, *Lucia di Lammermoor*. When it was composed it was considered the epitome of the Romantic ideal. Mad scenes were very popular with *bel canto* audiences, and Donizetti's were particularly admired. The Mad Scene from *Lucia* is considered to be the opera world's most famous.

In 1837, Donizetti lost his beloved wife in a cholera epidemic and never truly recovered from the shock. He moved to Paris the following year seeking greater prestige, fees and artistic freedom, and also traveled to Vienna in 1842 to accept a musical appointment to the Hapsburg court. He split his time between the two cities for three years but periods of poor health followed and in 1845 he suffered a stroke, which resulted in a continuous deterioration of his mind. Three years later he died on April 7, 1848, in Bergamo, where he was being nursed by friends.

DAUGHTER OF THE REGIMENT
By Gaetano Donizetti

Libretto by:
Jean Francois Bayard and J.H. Vernoy de Georges

English Version by:
Ruth and Thomas Martin

CAST OF CHARACTERS

THE MARGUISE OF BERKENFIELD	Mezzo-Soprano
MARIE, the young vivandiere	Soprano
THE DUCHESS OF KRACKENTHORP	Speaking role
SULPICE, a sergeant	Bass
TONIO, a young peasant	Tenor
HORTENSIUS, the steward of the Marquise	Bass
A CORPORAL	Baritone
French soldiers, Tyrolean peasants, ladies and gentleman, and the servants of the Marquise.	

ACT I An Army camp site in the Tyrol
ACT II Large drawing room in the Chateau Berkenfield

Plot Synopsis

The action takes place in the Tyrolean Alps, Switzerland, about 1805

Act I

At an army camp site near a Tyrolean village, a group of Tyrolean soldiers prepares to fight a French regiment. A crowd of village women has gathered to pray for the soldiers; among them is the Marquise of Berkenfield, whose carriage has brought her to this area by mistake. Terrified by the prospect of being near a battleground, she laments the bad effect of wartime on her elegant social life and fears the uncouth behavior of the French soldiers. Her servant, Hortensius, tries to comfort her and, finally, she goes off with the villagers, who have just been told by a messenger that the beaten French are retreating.

Sulpice, a sergeant in the French Army, enters chuckling over the hysterical retreat of the Tyrolean soldiers—the messenger got his news backwards—and is joined in a moment by Marie, a lovely and spirited young woman who has been raised as a foundling by the 21st French Regiment. As the “vivandiere”, or daughter of the regiment, she is as fine and patriotic a soldier as any of them. Other soldiers of the regiment bring in a young Tyrolean peasant; Tonio, whom they have captured as a spy in the vicinity. Marie comes to his defense, explaining that he recently saved her life when she was about to fall off a precipice. The two have fallen in love, and they renew their ardent pledges in a duet. They depart as Sulpice comes back.

The Marquise returns and meets Sulpice, who assures her that the French regiment intends only to protect the Tyroleans, no do battle against them. She confides that her late sister knew the 21st regiment well, having married one Captain Robert and borne his daughter. But upon the death of both the captain and his wife, the child, entrusted to an aged servant, disappeared. Sulpice is delighted to tell her that the lost child is none other than Marie, daughter of the regiment. Marie is brought in and told the news. With proper obedience but not much enthusiasm, she agrees to go to Berkenfield with the Marquise to receive a proper upbringing as a member of the noble family. Tonio, meanwhile, has been made a member of the 21st regiment. He convinces the soldiers to let him marry Marie and then sings joyously of his good fortune. But his joys are dashed by the announcement of Marie’s imminent departure. As the act ends, the daughter of the regiment, in tears, goes off with her new “aunt”.

Act II A salon in the Castle of Berkenfield.

The Marquise has received Sergeant Sulpice as a guest and is telling him that she has arranged a splendid marriage for Marie, to the young Duke of Krackenthorp. Marie is far from enthusiastic about the match, and the Marquise hopes that Sulpice will try to convince her that it is a good idea. Marie enters to rehearse a little song which the Marquise has chosen for her to perform that evening at the reception following the

signing of the marriage contract. As the unhappy young girl rehearses the dramatic and rather pretentious piece, Sulpice goads her on mischievously in asides to insert some of the marching songs of the 21st regiment. The Marquise, upset but still reasonable, goes off with Sulpice, leaving Marie to bemoan her unhappy fate. Suddenly, the soldiers of the 21st enter with Tonio, who enjoys a brief and melodic reunion with Marie. But the Marquise hurries in to disperse the soldiers and advises Tonio abruptly that her niece is about to sign an important marriage contract. Left alone again with Sulpice, the Marquise decides to take him into her confidence about a very serious matter; she is not in fact Marie's aunt but her mother. It was the Marquise herself who had a clandestine affair with the French Captain Robert. She had followed him to Geneva, where she would have married him had he not perished in the war. In an effort to conceal the birth of her illegitimate daughter, she left the child behind and returned to her castle to uphold the Berkenfield name. Sulpice is moved by the Marquise's maternal eagerness to keep Marie near her and he consents to persuade the girl to marry the Duke of Krackenthorp, and to convince the unhappy regiment and Tonio that the plans must go through.

At this, guests begin to arrive for the ceremony of the signing of the marriage contract. The Duchess of Krackenthorp is appalled that Marie herself is not present to greet her and the Marquise makes embarrassed apologies. Suddenly, Marie rushes in to embrace the Marquise, calling her "Mother". She is followed by Tonio and the soldiers who, despite Sulpice's pleas, intend to capture Marie and take her back to the regiment. The Marquise, moved by her daughter's fierce devotion to the regiment and their insistence on having her back, decides she cannot make her child miserable. She consents to give Marie the love of her choice, and to forsake social pride and admit that she herself is the girl's mother. There is general rejoicing –except by the Krackenthorp clan – and everyone sings to the glory of France.

The Music

Marie, the heroine of DAUGHTER OF THE REGIMENT, is a soprano. She is, in fact, a special kind of soprano, a **coloratura** soprano, which means she sings both higher and faster than most singers. Her music, although it is often martial in character, referring to her upbringing as the adopted daughter of a regiment of soldiers, also includes many sections that go very high (up to the E flat two octaves above middle C), or that have many fast notes. Thus the music shows her flighty, joyful character. Tonio, Marie's lover, is a tenor, and, as befits his passion and devotion, his music is usually ardent and impassioned. The Marquise is a mezzo-soprano. The lowness of her voice helping to show her greater age; but the flamboyance of much of her music tells us that she must have been somewhat wilder when she was younger. Sulpice, the sergeant of the regiment, is a baritone, and his music is gruff and military, as befits someone who has been military for much of his life. The minor roles of Hortensius, (the Marquise's servant), and the Corporal are written for bass or baritone, but are often sung by tenors as well. The Duchess of Krackenthorp is a non-singing role.

Donizetti fills DAUGHTER OF THE REGIMENT with music appropriate to its military nature. Over and over, we hear music of a martial nature, (Marie's "Regimental Song"), singers imitating the sound of the drums—the "rataplans" of the chorus from Act I and the Singing Lesson from Act II. The music captures the soldiers' free and easy spirit. An excellent example of this is the duet of Marie and Sulpice in the first Act. The spirited melody that, although is in a compound triple meter, nevertheless has a march-like quality. The complex cadenzas (a **cadenza** is an improvisatory section for a singer or instrumental soloist) and variation are used to show the flighty, vivacious nature of Marie's character.

One of the funniest ensembles in opera is the singing lesson scene from Act II, during which the Marquise attempts to instruct her niece, Marie, in the graceful art of singing. Although Marie tries gallantly, she and Sulpice, who watches the lesson, much prefer the military music that stirs their hearts without fail. They keep slipping into marches and patriotic airs, much to the chagrin of the Marquise, who keeps trying to bring her pupil's attention back to the delicate song she is learning. Finally, Marie can stand it no longer, and with a shriek, she tears up her music, and joyously sings the regimental gallop, joined by Sulpice.

The chorus of soldiers who play Marie's fathers are naturally very important in DAUGHTER OF THE REGIMENT. They sing several numbers of a martial or patriotic nature. An excellent example is the regimental gallop at the end of Act I where they hear and imitate the sound of the drum.