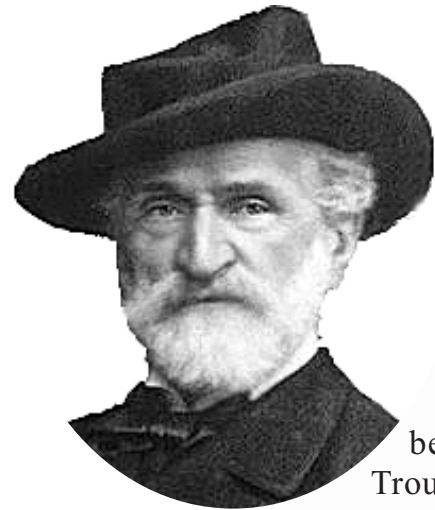


GIUSEPPE VERDI



Giuseppe Verdi, a foremost composer of Italian romantic opera, was born in the village of Le Roncole near Parma on October 10, 1813. He died January 27, 1901 in Milan. A series of personal tragedies, the death of his wife and both his children within 22 months, interrupted Verdi's career. In 1842 he was induced by his Milan producer to write Nabucco, the opera that brought him his first great success. He produced eighteen operas in fifteen years, culminating in three of his best-known works -- Rigoletto (1851), Il Trovatore (The Troubadour, 1853), and La Traviata (The Lost One, 1853).

By early 1850s, Verdi became an important international figure and began fulfilling commissions for theaters outside Italy - Les Vepres Siciliennes (Sicilian Vespers, 1855), Don Carlos (1867), a revision (1865) of his earlier Macbeth. For Paris -- La Forza del Destino (The Force of Destiny, 1862), Aida (1871). The only other major work of the 1870s was a Requiem Mass (1874) in memory of the Novelist Alessandro Manzoni. Verdi was the most important figure in the succession of 19th century composers of Italian opera, which began with Gioacchino Rossini and ended with Giacomo Puccini.

GIACOMO PUCCINI



Giacomo Puccini, the composer of some of the world's best loved operas, was born into the fifth generation of a family of musicians in Lucca, Italy, on December 22, 1858. As a child Puccini showed unusual musical aptitude, so his mother, deciding that he should continue in the family tradition, sent him to the Istituto Musicale. The young composer's first two endeavors failed to win any prizes but commanded public acclaim. With his third and fourth operas, Manon Lescaut (1893) and La Boheme (1896), both first presented in Turin, Puccini won fame and fortune. His next two operas were, Tosca (1900) and Madam Butterfly (1904). La Fanciulla del West (the Girl of the Golden West), was written for the Metropolitan Opera and first presented there in 1910. Followed by La Rondine (1917), Il Trittico (three one-act operas: Il Tabarro, Suor Angelica, and Gianni Schicchi, 1918) and, finally, Turandot.

Puccini's gifts were primarily theatrical. He had a great feeling for the stage and the sound of instrumental colors, combined with a well-developed melodic sense. His work, along with that of Verdi, continues to define Italian opera for audiences around the world.

GIOACHINO ROSSINI



Gioachino Antonio Rossini born February 29, 1792, died November 13, 1868, was one of the most significant and influential composers of opera in the 19th century. His first opera, the one-act comedy La Cambiale di Matrimonio (The Bill of Marriage), was performed publicly in 1810. Between 1811 and 1814, twelve new operas were produced in Venice, Milan, Rome and Bologna. The most popular of these were La Pietra del Paragone (The Touchstone - Milan, 1812), Tancredi (Venice, 1813), and L'Italiana in Algeri (The Italian Girl in Algiers). In 1816, he composed his best-known opera, Il Barbiere di Siviglia (The Barber of Seville, Rome). Other significant operas were Otello (Naples, 1816), La Cenerentola (Cinderella, Rome, 1817), La Gazza Ladra (The Thieving Magpie, Milan, 1817), and La Donna del Lago (The Lady of the Lake, Naples, 1819). The last opera he composed for Italy was Semiramide (Venice, 1823).

In 1824, Rossini assumed the directorship of the Theatre Italien in Paris. He went on to produce a sparkling opera comique, Le Comte Ory (Count Ory, 1828) and the grand opera GuiUaume Tell (William Tell, 1829), a landmark in the history of romantic opera. He produced two religious works, the Stabat Mater (1842) and the Petite Messe solennelle (Short Solemn Mass, 1864).

GAETANO DONIZETTI



Gaetano Donizetti, born November 29, 1797, died April 8, 1848, was one of the great masters of 19th century Italian opera. He pursued his musical studies in Bergamo under Johann Simon Mayr and in Bologna under Padre Stanislao Mattel. He completed his first opera, Il Pigmaliione, in 1816. In 1822, he enjoyed a tremendous success with the production of Zoraide di Granata in Rome. His first enduring opera, however, was Anna Bolena, which had its premier in Milan (1830). In 1845, at the height of his career, he developed a brain tumor that led to depression, paralysis, and periods of insanity. After spending some time in an asylum outside Paris, he was brought to his native Bergamo, where he died.

Donizetti was a brilliant composer of both tragic and comic opera. He often used historical subjects for his operas, as in Anna Bolena (1830), Lucrezia Borgia (1833), Maria Stuarda (1843), Belisario (1836), and Caterina Cornaro (1843). He also drew heavily from the writings of Sir Walter Scott, as in his most popular opera, Lucia di Lammermoor (1835). His masterpieces of comic opera are L'Elisir d'Amore (the Love Potion, 1832) and Don Pasquale (1842).

