

A Kalmus Classic Edition

Gaetano

DONIZETTI

LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR THE BRIDE OF LAMMERMOOR

an opera in three acts
for Soli, Chorus and Orchestra
with Italian and English text

VOCAL SCORE

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LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR

LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR.

A Tragic Drama in Three Acts.

FIRST PERFORMED AT THE TEATRO FONDO, NAPLES, SEPTEMBER 26, 1835. SUCCEEDING FIRST PERFORMANCES AS TO OTHER LOCALITIES INCLUDED LONDON, 1838; PARIS, 1839; NEW YORK, IN ENGLISH, AT THE PARK THEATRE, 1843, AND IN ITALIAN, 1849; ETC., ETC.

Characters of the Drama,

With the Original Cast as Presented at the First Performance.

LORD ENRICO ASHTON . . . Baritone . . . COSSELLI.
MISS LUCIA, his Sister . . . Soprano . . . TACCHINARDI-PERSIANI.
SIR EDGARDO DI RAVENSWOOD . . . Tenor . . . DUPREZ.
LORD ARTURO BUCKLAW . . . Tenor . . . GIACCHINI.
RAIMONDO BIDEBENT, tutor and
confidant of Lucia . . . Bass . . . PORTO.
ALISA, companion to Lucia . . . Mezzo-Soprano ZAPPUCCI.
NORMANNO, Captain of the Guard at
Ravenswood . . . Tenor . . . ROSSI.
Ladies and Knights related to the Ashtons; Inhabitants of Lammermoor; Pages; Soldiers;
and Domestics in the Ashton family.

The action takes place in Scotland, in part in Ravenswood Castle, in part in the ruined tower of Wolfscrag. The time is the close of the Sixteenth Century.

Lucia di Lammermoor.

A just enthusiasm for the novels of Scott was universal when Donizetti, at the height of a brilliant career (to be so tragically shortened), sat down to work into music a libretto sketched by Salvatore Cammerano on the lines of "The Bride of Lammermoor." Every Italian opera-maker of the hour—an hour highly expressive of Italy's lyric drama—burned to set a Walter Scott story to music. The hack-librettist was doing some of his fellest work. Scott was a special favorite of Donizetti's active and decidedly literary mind. He had already produced one "Scott opera" (to-day quite properly forgotten), "Il Castello di Kenilworth," written at about the same time with "Parisina" and "Anna Bolena." With maturer powers, and with the riper art of his "Lucrezia Borgia" (1833), he now began to dress the simple tale of Lucy Ashton and the Master of Ravenswood—as diluted for him by Cammerano. It was, as has been noted, a time of flimsy Italian opera-books. Composers were not fussy. But we know that Donizetti was so little suited with Cammerano's way of making a text for "Lucia," that he re-wrote parts of it, and practically supplied the words and situation for the last act, as he is said to have done for "La Favorita." Let us be kind, and believe that Donizetti improved on Cammerano, and that the French librettists who, in time, revised all the text, improved on Donizetti.

It was not the first time that Scott's touching romance had been turned into opera. But the scores by Donizetti's contemporaries—Carafa (1829), Ricci, by Mazzucato (1834), and Bredal (1832)—are long ago forgotten, with their thin contents. The story of the unhappy Bride, as transcribed by Cammerano and Donizetti himself, is a waterish and feeble report of Scott. It is so familiar that it need not be recited now in detail. We will sketch it briefly. The opera was originally written and given as a two-act work: now it is made a three-act one.

The opera opens in the sombre gardens of Ravenswood Castle, with a group of its guards, and *Normanno*, their head, excitedly talking of discovering whether some stranger is not prowling around the estate on secret mischief. *Lord Enrico Ashton* learns from *Normanno* that the intruder may be no less than *Edgaro di Ravenswood*, their dispossessed enemy. But, worse still, *Normanno* soon adds, in the hearing of the grave *Raimondo* (who, to do him justice, seems not to have guessed it), that *Lucia* is stealing interviews with a mysterious lover, who must be the hated *Edgaro*; and relates the story of *Lucia's* deliverance from a mad bull "while returning from a visit to the grave of her mother." The retainers come in, their errand successful, and describe how a stranger has dashed away from them, on his charger, at the ruined tower. *Enrico* swears vengeance, and the chorus unite in his wish.

The second scene introduces *Lucia*, with *Alisa*, awaiting *Edgaro* in the lonely park, by the haunted spring. *Lucia* has scarcely finished telling its legend of ill-omen, and her own dark dreams of a wretched ending to their secret love-affair, when *Edgaro* enters. He announces that this is a parting; he must leave Scotland that night, on a political errand to France. They discuss—in operatic fashion—their dangers and plans; pledge their mutual faithfulness, and separate in anguish.

With the third tableau, a lapse of some months is supposed to have occurred. The tyrannical *Enrico* has arranged to give *Lucia's* hand to *Arturo Bucklaw*. *Lucia* has not heard from *Edgaro*, the cruel brother having suppressed the lover's letters. She already half-doubts. In a harsh interview, *Enrico* now enjoins the marriage with *Bucklaw*. He produces the usual operatic and dramatic convenience, a forged letter, that makes *Edgaro* faithless to *Lucia*. The unhappy girl is overcome. The guests for the betrothal are already come. A jubilant ceremony begins. The contract is signed by the half-swooning *Lucia*, when *Edgaro* enters. In a tempest of misunderstanding and wounded pride, he denounces *Lucia*; insults her brother and the guests, and quits the apartment with life only through *Raimondo's* good offices in the turbulent scene.

The third act finds *Edgaro* gloomily reflecting, while a storm is crashing around his lonely chamber in the Wolfscrag Tower. But even here *Enrico Ashton* seeks him out with a challenge, and a meeting is arranged. The act's second scene is the wedding of *Lucia* and *Bucklaw*. The festive choruses are broken by *Raimondo's* sudden entrance with the news that *Lucia* is a maniac-bride, and that she has taken her new-made husband's life. The distracted girl comes into the room as *Raimondo* ends his story. She raves—melodiously—and even her brother's anger cannot calm her. As *Lucia* is led away, *Raimondo* rebukes *Normanno* as the tale-teller who has brought all this misery on the Ashtons.

The opera's final scene presents *Edgardo* among the graves of his race. Grief and despair have broken his heart. He is resolved to take his own life. With his last reflections, the sad-hearted Lammermoor folk and some of the Castle guests approach, singing a doleful chant; and a passing-bell is heard. *Raimondo* appears and discloses the fact that *Lucia's* madness has ended in her own death. *Edgardo* apostrophizes her pure spirit, declares that he and she will not long be parted, and stabs himself—dying as the chorus about him piously pray that Heaven may pardon such human errors.

Such is Scott's novel as utilized by Donizetti, in a way amusingly unjust to its own episodes and characters. This operatic *Lucia* has none of that queer mixture of levity, caprice and pride possessing Lucy Ashton, along with all her sentimentality. The *Edgardo* in this libretto is merely a regulation betrayed-lover of the stage, with no touch of Ravenswood's morbid dignity, except where we just catch it in Donizetti's last scene. Our operatic *Ariuro Ashton* has few traces of the original Sholto Ashton. And as for the strongest types in "The Bride of Lammermoor," Lord Ashton, the Keeper, Lady Ashton, the impressive figure of Blind Alice (not even caricatured by Cammerano's *Alisa*), old Balderstone the garrulous, and the swaggering Craigengelt—alas, they are left out altogether! We have paper-doll personages, compared with those in the tale. But still there is a general if far-away consonance with it. And it is only fair to remark, in reviewing this typical libretto of the Donizettian, Bellinian, and early-Verdian epoch, that Scott himself slighted opportunities in his book. Donizetti's warbling young lady in her bridal frock does not hint at Scott's poor Lucy Ashton, shuddering in the chimney, raving mad, and hissing out: "So, you've ta'en up your bonny bridegroom!" But Scott failed to make *his* characters act out the bloody tragedy of Lucy's wedding; he merely described it. Perhaps, faithfulness to it, in any way save by a conventional "madness" for *Lucia*, seemed to Donizetti too brutal for the public. It is interesting to speculate what some of the librettists and composer-librettists of our day—Boito, du Locle, Illica—would make of "The Bride of Lammermoor." I suspect that Donizetti's method of disposing of *Edgardo* by a public decease, amid his ancestral tombs, with *Lucia's* funeral train at hand (in which "situation" Donizetti and Wagner's "Tannhäuser" are curiously brought together), would never be encouraged nowadays. We should have *Edgardo* struggling in the "Kelpie" quicksand behind blue gauzes, with a frantic *aria parlante* and very stormy orchestration. I expect, too, that we would begin the opera with the novel's wild bull, and the deliverance of the heroine and Sir Henry. We can hardly keep the bulls out of "Carmen." But, seriously, there is eternally good stuff for a tragic opera in Scott's novel. Be it commended to Puccini or Leoncavallo or Smareglia.

Moreover, while we may smile over the libretto of "Lucia di Lammermoor," it is unfair in these days of Wagnerian and French influences on Italian opera, to treat Donizetti's work with contempt, and to regard it as does one critic of note, who calls it "a sham tragedy"—an "obsolete prima-donna opera." "Lucia di Lammermoor" is sentimental; it is wide of the Gluck and Mozart and Beethoven and pre-Wagnerian model, to a fault. But it has musical beauty in lavish measure, and

constant throbs of true dramatic feeling. Its best pages do just what they should do—express the sentimental course of a slight, sad, old-fashioned love-story with a background of romance. There is no hint of local color in its music, but there is not much of that in Scott. There is a poignant sweetness, every now and then, to haunt the ear. Now it is a cavatina like “Regnava nel silenzio,” or the grave little introductions to certain scenes, or the passionate sextet “Chi mi frena,” or *Edgar*’s “Tu che a Dio” scena, that attests how the composer expressed the spirit of a story as melancholy as the soul of Shakespeare’s Jacques. The jiggling choruses and thin instrumentation grieve our ears, but there is less conventionality in the latter business, at least, than Donizetti often shows. Wagner writes in 1841, of “La Favorita,” that that work of Donizetti, “besides the acknowledged merits of the Italian school,” possessed “superior refinement and dignity.” The same comment applies to “Lucia”; borrowed from the pen of a master least apt to praise music of such a flavor. The slight, fluent partition is Italian in its casual elegance.

And as to its popularity, “Lucia” seems to be perennial so long as singers really sing. Every leading *soprano di coloratura* studies it and keeps *Lucia* a part in repertory. Every tenor must have *Edgar*’s rôle at command, and his black cloak in wardrobe. To sing *Lucia* perfectly is to be a consummate vocalist. As to deeper qualities, why, if singers will not think of anything but their scales and their shakes, then probably they will not realize with what effect Donizetti’s simple recitatives may be delivered. Any such part is a lesson in pure diction.

Indeed, “Lucia di Lammermoor” illustrates Donizetti when serious—not laughing, as when he composes the “Elisire” or “La Figlia del Reggimento,” or the equally inimitable “Don Pasquale”—perhaps better than any of his works. It has always divided supremacy with the firmer “La Favorita.” It fuses, as does not even “La Favorita,” his florid and his dramatic manners. Of all his long list of works—some sixty-seven operas, grave and gay—few survive: really no more than the three humorous masterpieces named and “La Favorita,” “Lucia,” “Lucrezia Borgia,” and “Linda.” But they are enough to represent firmly a genius surpassing Bellini, and influencing the early Verdian scores, more directly than generally is understood, and Ponchielli, to say nothing of others. And it is interesting to notice that out of all the endless list of “Walter Scott operas” by composers of almost every nationality to “books” in as many tongues, only “Lucia di Lammermoor” can be considered as keeping the stage, in real repertory to-day; with the exception of Marschner’s fine “Templer und Jüdin” (based on “Ivanhoe”), still a favorite in German and Austrian opera-houses. The rival “Lucias” noted above, Carafa’s “Prison d’Edimbourg” (on “The Heart of Midlothian”), Bizet’s “Jolie Fille de Perth,” Balfe’s “Il Talismano,” and dozens more, are all mute to-day. Sir Arthur Sullivan’s recent “Ivanhoe” has not made its way with much vigor or probability of life.

“Lucia” was no heroic score. But it was the outcome of a musical fecundity that we may believe would have achieved higher fruits, but for the cloud of madness—a strange coincidence in the case of a composer who wrote so many “mad-scenes”—coming to Donizetti in Paris, in 1845, and imprisoning him in an asylum until his merciful death in 1848.

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