

The Ca'Dorotina

The *Contessa Rosa's* Country retreat

The Via Broseta, an ancient area documented as early as 1214, leads you west out of Piazza Pontida, the old commercial centre of Bergamo. Just before one decides to turn south to the River Adda or north to Lake Como, the road crosses the River Brembo, about 3 miles from the city, where there are now two sprawling communities, Curno and Mozzo.

Both can boast a long history but the evidence for their antiquity is now lost in industrial developments and such is the spread of modernity that even the locals are unsure where Curno stops and Mozzo starts! Little wonder then that both lay claim to the Ca'Dorotina, a grand house with a 17th century "*Cascina*" that gives every appearance of being used today as it has been for 250 years.

Originally the property of the Rota Basoni family it had been inherited by the Contessa Rosa, Donizetti's solicitous friend who, with her daughter Giovannina, cared for the maestro in his final months. The house was affectionately referred to on more than one occasion in Donizetti's correspondence; it was it seems a favorite refuge during his infrequent and brief visits to Bergamo where Mayr and other bergamasque friends would be invited to dine with him and Rosa. The enjoyment of these occasions can be gathered from Donizetti's jocular threat that he would not join Dolci, Mayr, Pontirolli and others for dinner at Dorotina if they didn't address themselves to proper preparations for the performance in Bergamo of *L'esule di Roma* (Letter 31 July, or 1 August 1840 *Zav. 340*).

The house has also been said, mistakenly, to have been in Lovere where Rosa seemingly had her second country house, too far away though for Donizetti and friends to repair for dinner after the theatre. The house at Curno, just 3 miles away, is the Ca'Dorotina, where it is still possible to realise the peace and quiet it offered; a view to the Orobii Alps is possible from the house's slightly elevated position on the western extremity of the Colle di Bergamo: a magnificent wrought iron gate and statue close the fourth side of a large garden overlooked by the portico that remains from the original construction. The main section of the house faces north with west and east wings, the latter abutting the cascina. At the south west corner a simple iron cross indicates where the chapel (said to have contained a Tiepolo) was enclosed within the main building, above which allegedly are the rooms Donizetti used.

A word of warning to anyone wishing to see the house; it is difficult to find, hardly any of the local residents knowing its name or significance, and enquiries bring unhelpful answers as a nearby industrial estate now bears the name Dorotina!

Brian Thornton

