



Don Gregorio

[Father knows best?]

Gaetano Donizetti

Last performed at Naples in 1828 - a new critical edition

commissioned by Wexford Festival Opera in co-operation with the Fondazione Donizetti .

Performance dates: 25th,27th,29th,31st,October,2nd,4th November 2006

A Neapolitan farsa in two acts to a libretto by Jacopo Ferretti after Giovanni Giraud's comic play 'L'ajo nell'imbarazzo'; first performed Naples, Teatro Nuovo, 11 June 1826. It is a revision of *L'ajo nell'imbarazzo*, Donizetti's melodramma giocoso first performed Rome, Teatro Valle, 1824.

Unperformed practically since its first run in Naples, this version of Donizetti's first big hit is a hilarious tale of jealousy, betrayal and unmentionable secrets, blended delicately together by the master of comic characterization.

Don Giulio Antiquati, for reasons known only to himself (and perhaps a handful of ladies.), insists that his two sons grow up without knowing any women. At least until the age of forty, that is, when he is confident they will be old enough to know better. Their tutor, Don Gregorio, tries hard to keep an eye on the boys, but the plan has gone somewhat awry: the younger, Pipetto, has become obsessed with the only woman he has ever seen in his life, the ageing housekeeper Leonarda, and the elder, Enrico, has gone as far as secretly marrying their young neighbour Gilda, who has borne him a son. Anxious to acknowledge his bride, Enrico tries to get Don Gregorio on his side, producing Gilda and the baby to strengthen his case. Returning home unexpectedly, Don Giulio finds himself face to face with the truth of the situation, and in his fury and sorrow decides to disinherit Enrico. Gilda joins the argument, threatening to kill herself and the baby. Moved, Don Giulio eventually relents, acknowledges Enrico's marriage and sets Pipetto free from the snarls of old Leonarda.

L'ajo nell'imbarazzo/Don Gregorio undoubtedly marked an important turning point in Donizetti's life. The success of the work not only set Donizetti off on the path to fame, but also resolved his domestic situation: in true farce style, he had been prevented from marrying his fiancée until his future in-laws were satisfied that he had started making enough money out of the business of writing opera. Thus while the original material was clearly first-rate (Giraud's original play was so popular that it enjoyed performances as far away as Moscow, in a translation by Gogol, no less), and while Jacopo Ferretti, the librettist of Rossini's *Cenerentola*, had certainly provided Donizetti with the perfect vessel for the young composer's talent for musical comedy, the composer clearly had particular sympathy with his characters—and, temporarily at least, he enjoyed the same happy ending.

(opposite) Detail of a portrait of Jacopo Ferretti in the hands of his descendants