

The Pescadero Opera Society presents

La Fille du Régiment

(The Daughter of the Regiment)



Music by Gaetano Donizetti
Libretto by Francesco Maria Piave

Opera in two acts

Setting: The Tyrolean mountains
Time: Early 19th century

Characters

Marie, a vivandière (coloratura soprano)..... Natalie Dessay
Tonio, a young Tyrolean (tenor)..... Juan Diego Flórez
The Marquise of Birkenfeld (contralto)..... Felicity Palmer
Sergeant Sulpice Pingot (bass)..... Alessandro Corbelli
Hortensius, a butler (bass)..... Donald Maxwell
The Duchess of Krakenthorp (spoken role)..... Dawn French
A corporal (bass)..... Bryan Secombe
A peasant (tenor)..... Luke Price
A notary (spoken role) Jean-Pierre Blanchard
French soldiers, Tyrolean people, domestic servants of the Duchess

Conducted by Bruno Campanella
The Orchestra and Chorus of the Royal Opera House

Première performance at the Salle de la Bourse in Paris, on February 11, 1840

Synopsis

Act I The Tyrolean Mountains

A lively overture introduces some of the themes from the opera, illustrating the military and light flavor of the work.



While the villagers watch and pray for safety, the forces of Napoleon are engaged in a battle in the nearby mountains.

The Marquise of Berkenfield has been traveling through the mountains, but has been stopped by the fighting. Faint with fear, she is attended to by Hortensius, her steward. She comments on the rude manners of the French people. A peasant announces that the French are retreating; the village is safe. All rejoice.

The Marquise sends Hortensius to make sure it really is safe to continue their journey and enters a nearby cottage wait for his return. When Sulpice, a sergeant of the French 21st regiment, appears, the women shriek and scatter. He assures them that they are safe, as long as they are pretty. When Marie, the daughter of the regiment, appears playing on the drums. She and Sulpice recall how she was found while still a baby on a battlefield. The whole regiment had adopted her as their daughter — all are her fathers. When she grew up she was promoted to the post of a vivandière, and she would march to battle if she had to. In the evening Marie comforts and entertains the troops with her singing. They all join in the military song, *Rataplan*.

Sulpice notes that Marie has seemed sad lately. She confesses she is in love with a local Tyrolean who had saved her life when she almost fell from a precipice. However, she must marry a soldier of the 21st regiment. They are interrupted by a group of soldiers holding a young Tyrolean who has been caught lurking near the camp. It is Tonio, the man Marie loves. When the soldiers denounce him as a traitor, she comes to his defense saying they can't kill the man who saved her life. That changes things, and they all drink a toast to him. He, in turn, toasts France, saying that he wishes to join their regiment. All sing the regimental song "*Chacun le sait*."

A drum announces that it is time for roll call, which all must obey. The soldiers depart, taking Tonio with them and leaving a sulking Marie behind. Suddenly Tonio reappears; he has escaped. He confesses he loves her and will give up his own country for her. Marie is dubious at first, but he convinces her, and she returns his love. They embrace, which is observed by Sulpice.

The Marquise and Hortensius appear to ask Sulpice for a safe-conduct so that she can return to her Chateau Berkenfield. Sulpice is taken aback — that is the name Captain Robert mentioned. In turn the Marquise reveals her now dead sister knew the Captain. In fact, she had a child by him — a daughter who was placed in the care of an elderly servant who was killed before he could bring the child to her. Sulpice reveals that her niece was saved and brought up by the regiment.

Just then Marie enters and is introduced to her aunt, who is shocked by the girl's rough manners and military vocabulary. The Marquise insists on taking her away with her. As the soldiers all appear, Marie and the Marquise leave, followed shortly by Sulpice. Tonio runs in excitedly — he is about to join the



regiment (“*Ah, mes amis*”). He asks her father’s permission to marry Marie, but he is told she can only marry a member of the 21st regiment. However, Tonio convinces them Marie loves only him and, since he is now a member of the regiment himself, they finally give permission for the marriage. He sings of his happiness, ending in a spectacular run of nine high Cs! (*Pour mon âme*) His joy is shattered when Sulpice announces that Marie must go with the Marquise to be properly educated.

Sadly they all say good-bye. Tonio wants to follow her but, ironically, he has joined the regiment to marry Marie, but now he must obey orders and remain behind.

Act II

The drawing room at the Chateau Berkenfield, several months later



The marriage contract between Marie and the Duke of Krakenthorp has just been drawn up. He is one of the most illustrious nobles of Bavaria. The Marquise has sent for Sulpice to ask his help in persuading Marie to sign the contract that evening. The girl has consented but is still reluctant. The Marquise thinks Marie’s military manners and speech have almost been erased, and she is anxious to show off her niece. She will sing a French art song to demonstrate her new persona. Sulpice mutters to himself about the slow showy music; it is not as stimulating as their regimental song which he starts to sing. Distracted, Marie picks up his beat, but is brought back by the Marquise. Finally Sulpice wins and Marie joins him in his more exuberant music. The Marquise gives up and exits, followed by Sulpice, leaving Marie to meditate on her fate and hide her sadness in the midst of luxury.

Suddenly she hears military music, the soldiers have arrived. Among them is Tonio, who has now become an officer! He, Marie and Sulpice sing of their happy reunion and fond memories. Tonio and Marie beg Sulpice to intervene with the Marquise on their behalf so they can marry. He tries to get them to listen to him, but they are interrupted by the arrival of the Marquise to whom Tonio pleads his case, telling her how he joined the army to be close to Marie. However, she cannot help because Marie is promised to the Duke, and Tonio must leave. Left alone, the Marquise confesses to Sulpice that she is Marie’s mother, not her aunt, and begs him to help her convince Marie to marry the Duke. Moved, he reluctantly agrees.

The noble guests begin to assemble, among them the Duchess of Krackenthorp. Marie appears, ready to sign the contract. Sulpice has told her of her true parentage and she embraces her mother. Suddenly the soldiers rush, determined to rescue Marie. She is the daughter of the regiment and belongs with Tonio. Marie starts to sign the contract but she is stopped by the Marquise who reveals the truth. Her daughter shall have the husband of her choice. All join in a final “*Salute to France.*”

Domenico Gaetano Maria Donizetti

Born November 29, 1797 in Bergamo, Cisalpine Republic
Died April 8, 1848 in Bergamo, Lombardy, Austrian Empire



Donizetti was an Italian composer. Along with Vincenzo Bellini and Gioacchino Rossini, he was considered a leading composer of *bel canto*¹ opera. His most famous work is *Lucia di Lammermoor* (1835).

The youngest of three sons, Donizetti was born in 1797 in Bergamo's Borgo Canale quarter, located just outside the city walls. His family was very poor with no tradition of music, his father being the caretaker of the town pawnshop. Nevertheless, Donizetti received some musical instruction from Johann Simon Mayr, a priest at Bergamo's principal church (and also himself a composer of successful operas).

Donizetti was not especially successful as a choirboy, but in 1806 he was one of the first pupils to be enrolled at the Lezioni Caritatevoli School, founded by Johann Simon Mayr, in Bergamo, through a full scholarship. He received detailed training in the arts of fugue and counterpoint, and it was here that he launched his operatic career.

After some minor compositions under the commission of Paolo Zanca, Donizetti wrote his fourth opera, *Zoraïda di Granata*. This work impressed Domenico Barbaia, a prominent theatre manager, and Donizetti was offered a contract to compose in Naples. Writing in Rome and Milan, in addition to Naples, Donizetti achieved some success. His 75 operas were written in the space of just twelve years and were usually popular successes, but the critics were often unimpressed.

Donizetti was not well-known internationally until 1830, when his opera, *Anna Bolena*, was premiered in Milan. He almost instantly became famous throughout Europe. *L'elisir d'amore*, a comedy produced in 1832, came soon after, and is deemed one of the masterpieces of the comic opera, as is his *Don Pasquale*, written in 1843. Shortly after *L'elisir d'amore*, Donizetti composed *Lucia di Lammermoor*, based on the Sir Walter Scott novel *The Bride of Lammermoor*. It became his most famous opera, and one of the high points of the *bel canto* tradition, reaching stature similar to Bellini's *Norma*.

After the success of *Lucrezia Borgia* (1833) consolidated his reputation, Donizetti followed the paths of both Rossini and Bellini by visiting Paris. His opera, *Marino Faliero*, suffered by comparison with Bellini's *I puritani*, and he returned to Naples to produce *Lucia di Lammermoor*.

As Donizetti's fame grew, so did his engagements, as he was further hired to write in both France and Italy. In 1838, he moved to Paris after the Italian censor objected to the production of *Poliuto* (on the grounds that such a sacred subject was inappropriate for the stage). There he wrote *La fille du régiment*, which became another success.

Donizetti's wife, Virginia Vasselli, gave birth to three children, none of whom survived. Within a year of his parents' deaths, she died from cholera. By 1843, Donizetti exhibited symptoms of syphilis.

After being institutionalized in 1845, he was sent to Paris, where he could be cared for. After visits from friends, including Giuseppe Verdi, Donizetti was sent back to Bergamo, his hometown. After several years in the grip of insanity, he died in 1848 in the house of the noble family, Scotti. After his death Donizetti was buried in the cemetery of Valtesse, but in the late 19th century his body was transferred to Bergamo's Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, near the grave of his teacher, Johann Simon Mayr.

¹[Italian: bel, bello, beautiful + canto, singing.] A style of operatic singing characterized by full, even tones and a brilliant display of vocal technique.

La Fille du Régiment

La fille du régiment is an opéra comique in two acts by Gaetano Donizetti. It was written while the composer was living in Paris, with a French libretto by Jules-Henri Vernoy de Saint-Georges and Jean-François Bayard. A slightly different Italian-language version (translated by Callisto Bassi) was adapted to suit the tastes of the Italian public.

La fille du régiment was first performed on February 11, 1840, by the Paris Opéra-Comique at the Salle de la Bourse, then at La Scala, Milan, on October 30, 1840. It was presented in English at the Surrey Theatre in London on December 21, 1847, and was repeated in the same season in Italian with Jenny Lind. New Orleans saw the first American performance on March 7, 1843. It was frequently performed in New York, the role of Marie being a favorite with Jenny Lind, Henriette Sontag, Pauline Lucca, and Adelina Patti. It was presented at the Metropolitan Opera with Marcella Sembrich, and Charles Gilibert (Sulpice) in 1902/03. It was then at the Manhattan Opera House in 1909 with Luisa Tetrazzini, John McCormack, and Charles Gilibert, and again with Frieda Hempel and Antonio Scotti in the same roles at the Met on December 17, 1917. W. S. Gilbert wrote a burlesque adaptation of the opera, *La Vivandière*, in 1867.

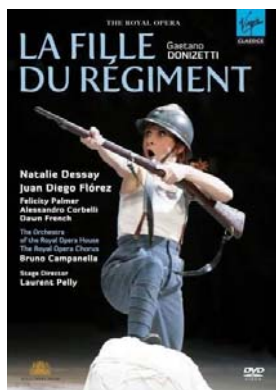
In the original, the soldiers are Austrians, but on the stage they have been portrayed as Frenchmen. The Italian version is set in Switzerland instead of Tyrol.



This opera is famous for the aria “Ah! mes amis, quel jour de fête!” (sometimes referred to as “Pour mon âme”), which has been called the “Mount Everest” for tenors. It features nine high Cs and comes comparatively early in the opera, giving the singer less time to warm up his voice. Luciano Pavarotti’s stardom is reckoned from a performance alongside Joan Sutherland at the Met, when he “leapt over the ‘Becher’s Brook’ of the string of high Cs with an aplomb that left everyone gasping.”

More recently, Juan Diego Flórez performed “Ah! mes amis” at La Scala, and then, on popular demand, repeated it, breaking a 74-year embargo on encores at the legendary Milanese opera house. He repeated this feat on April 21, 2008, the opening night of the 2007 London production at the Met, with Natalie Dessay as Marie.

The Daughter of Regiment: The Video (2008) Starring Natalie Dessay and Juan Diego Flórez



In January 2007, superstar soprano Natalie Dessay, joined on stage by acclaimed tenor Juan Diego Flórez, dazzled British audiences in Laurent Pelly’s new production of Donizetti’s *La Fille du Regiment*. The perfectly staged and cast production became the operatic event of the year, receiving rave press reviews and rapturous audience ovations. This Met production was broadcast in high definition video to movie theaters worldwide on April 26, 2008.

La Fille du Regiment may not be Donizetti’s best work, but given a top-notch production with world-class singing actors, it brings vocal thrills and an abundance of laughs — a combination that’s hard to beat.

The stars are Juan Diego Flórez and Natalie Dessay, both unbeatable in bel canto roles, and both in top form here. Flórez’s mellifluous tenor is flexible enough to make child’s play of the terrifying (to other tenors) nine high C’s in “Ah! mes amis,” and supple enough to make his tender love arias moving. Dessay is equally comfortable in the stratospheric coloratura passages and poignant in such heart-tugging set-pieces as her farewell to her regimental “fathers” and her misery as the victim of the Marquise’s well-meaning attempts to teach her to be an aristocratic lady. She’s also a terrific comic actress. This DVD is a can’t-miss for opera fans.