

A FESTIVE WEEKEND: DONIZETTI IN BERGAMO

WEDNESDAY 18 – SUNDAY 22 NOVEMBER 2020 (5 DAYS)

LECTURER: TOM DUNCAN

£2275

- Weekend based in Bergamo, one of Italy's loveliest cities, for the Donizetti Festival
- Three of his operas included at Bergamo's newly restored Teatro Donizetti, one a concert version with Plácido Domingo, two fully staged
- Visits to private palaces & Bergamo's excellent picture gallery
- Private recital on historic keyboards at a villa north of Milan
- Comfortable 4* hotel close to the Teatro Donizetti in Lower Bergamo



Bergamo Alto

OVERVIEW

Bergamo, though small, is a most handsome city, divided into two districts, one set on a plain, the other perched on a hilltop eminence, *Basso* and *Alto*. Situated at the eastern border of Lombardy, history has placed it at the centre of significant events, given it sits between rivals Milan and Venice, the Po and the Alps.

Each November Bergamo hosts an annual celebration of the operas of Gaetano Donizetti (1797 – 1848), one of Italy's most engaging and prolific operatic composers and a Bergamo native. He was a leading exponent of the *Bel Canto* tradition, as we shall discover during three exciting evenings at Bergamo's newly restored Teatro Donizetti. To mark the theatre's reopening, the festival will be inaugurated with a concert performance of *Belisario*, with Plácido Domingo in the title role, while the two featured operas will be productions of *Marino Faliero* and *Le Nozze in Villa*. To concur with COVID-19 regulations, two of the operas will be staged in the stalls area with the orchestra on the stage, and the public will be seated in the surrounding boxes.

There is much to see in Bergamo, its wealth made possible by its position on the trade routes criss-crossing the north Italian peninsula, long-established since Roman times. It was also one of the most important early medieval Lombard 'duchies' and hosted a glittering court. Subsequent periods of civic independence and wider political allegiances are reflected in some lovely late medieval and renaissance churches, chapels and secular buildings, scattered throughout both the upper and lower parts of the city. Bergamo's independent status did not last forever.

In addition to the wonderful buildings, one of the more significant, smaller art galleries in Italy is the city's Accademia Carrara, rich in Venetian and Lombard paintings and sculptures. The highly regarded works of the Venetian painter Lorenzo Lotto can be seen throughout Bergamo, while his near contemporary, the local artist Giovanni Battista Moroni, is one of Italy's greatest sixteenth century portraitists, many of whose works we shall see. We also visit privately a number of impressive palaces still owned by some of Bergamo's great merchant and noble families. An apt finale to this five-day tour will be a private recital on historic keyboards.

We shall stay in the well-located 4* Excelsior San Marco in Lower Bergamo, a short walk to Teatro Donizetti, the principal shopping district and the funicular to Bergamo Alto's historic centre.

ITINERARY OUTLINE

Day 1: Wednesday 18 November – We fly from Heathrow to **Milan Linate**, arriving mid-afternoon. We transfer to Bergamo and the 4* **Excelsior San Marco** for four nights. Later in the evening we have dinner in our hotel – water, wine and coffee are included with all group lunches and dinners.

Day 2: Thursday 19 November – The city's old historic medieval centre sits on a hill (**Bergamo Alto**) joined to its lower, newer counterpart (**Bergamo Basso**) via a panoramic funicular which we shall use frequently. Our day begins with the handsome buildings in and around **Piazza Vecchia** - the **Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore** is a

very fine Romanesque church whose many highlights include intarsia panels designed by Lorenzo Lotto, set into the choir screen. The adjoining **Cappella Colleoni**, named after the fifteenth century *condottiero*, is a renaissance addition to this marvellous architectural composition. After coffee and a visit to the **Duomo**, we end our morning with the first of a number of private visits to some of Bergamo's noble and mercantile palaces. **Palazzo Terzi** was extended from its original sixteenth century nucleus into one of the city's finest eighteenth century palaces. Its gilded and frescoed reception rooms give an indication of the ambition of Bergamo's 'great and good'. Following a group lunch, we continue to **Palazzo Scotti** for a private visit to this fine example of neo-classical architecture. We return to our hotel where the remainder of the afternoon and early evening will be free. The festival begins with a 'Gala' concert performance of *Belisario*, a work of the mid 1830s. It tells the story of the famous Byzantine general with Plácido Domingo in the title role, under musical director Riccardo Frizza.

Day 3: Friday 20 November – This morning we visit two sites in **Lower Bergamo**. We walk to the newly arranged picture collection at the **Accademia Carrara**. Rich in Venetian and Lombard pictures we shall see a surprisingly good group of paintings and sculptures. After coffee, we continue to **Palazzo Agliardi** for a private visit where a member of the owning family will show us this fine eighteenth house, rich in baroque and rococo decoration and a charming terraced garden. Lunch is not included today and the remainder of the afternoon and early evening will be free. Our second performance at the nearby **Teatro Donizetti** will be a new production of *Marino Faliero*, a three-act tragic opera based on a work by Lord Byron which tells the story of the eponymous fourteenth century Venetian Doge.

Day 4: Saturday 21 November – We have a leisurely start and begin at the nearby **Church of SS Bartolomeo e Stefano**, a Baroque church containing one of Lorenzo Lotto's finest altar paintings. We return to **Bergamo Alto** via the convenient funicular and visit the restored **Church of San Michele al Pozzo Bianco**. Retaining its medieval plan, fine fresco cycles from the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries include important works by Lotto. After coffee we continue to the small, yet informative **Museo Donizettiano** which outlines the work, life and personality of the composer through scores, letters, portraits and personal objects. After a group lunch, the remainder of the afternoon will be free. Our third and final opera at **Teatro Donizetti** will be *Le Nozze in Villa*, a rare and early work thought to have been first performed in Treviso in 1820 and described as a 'bubbly' *opera buffa*!

Day 5: Sunday 22 November – This morning we drive north of Milan to the Lombard village of **Briosco** for a splendid day at **Villa Medici-Giulini**. Built in 1643, the private estate has had many owners including the Medici of Marignano. Signora Fernanda Giulini and her family restored the villa in the twentieth century and here she displays part of her extraordinary collection of historic keyboard instruments, many of which will be played for us. After a group lunch in the villa we end with a private recital of works by Donizetti, arranged for flute and piano, in the estate's charming theatre – an apt finale to the musical pleasures enjoyed during our week. We continue to Milan's Linate airport and our return flight.

Whilst every effort will be made to adhere to the itinerary above, changes to both the content and order of these visits may be necessary due to circumstances, including COVID-19 restrictions, over which we have no control.

PRACTICALITIES

Price £2275 **Price without flights** £2165 **Deposit** £325

Single Supplement £95 (Single Superior with French bed); £255 (Deluxe Double for Sole Use)

Hotel 4 nights with breakfast at 4* Hotel Excelsior San Marco, Bergamo.
Couples and those sharing will be allocated a Deluxe Room.

Flights British Airways

Outward: **BA562** Depart London Heathrow (Terminal 5) **1140** arrive Milan Linate **1445**

Return: **BA569** Milan Linate **1855** arrive London Heathrow (Terminal 5) **2000**

Flight Upgrades Club Class supplement from £95

Price includes 1 dinner and 3 lunches with wine, water & coffee, stall seats for 3 operas, all local transfers, entry fees & gratuities, City tax, services of Tom Duncan & our local tour manager, James Hill

Not included Travel to/from Heathrow, 3 dinners & 1 lunch



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