

## September 10, 2020 – Gaetano Donizetti's *La Favorite*

On this week's Thursday Night Opera House I'll be presenting Gaetano Donizetti's fifty-seventh stage work, *La Favorite*. First performed on December 2, 1840 in French for the Paris Opéra, it's perhaps better known in its final 1843 Italian form as *La Favorita*. A love triangle involving a king, his mistress and her lover, the story unfolds in the fourteenth century against the background of the Moorish invasions of Spain and the power struggles between church and state. *La Favorite* borrowed heavily from Donizetti's unperformed scores of *L'Ange de Nisida* and *Adelaide*. In addition, two episodes from the original score of *Maria Stuarda* wound up in *Favorite*. When the opera was first performed in Italy, it was called *Leonora di Guzman*.

The opera takes place in the Kingdom of Castile in 1340. Léonor de Guzman (mezzo-soprano **Vesselina Kasarova**) returns the love of the religious novice Fernand (tenor **Ramon Vargas**), but conceals her identity because she is the mistress of King Alphonse XI (baritone **Anthony Michaels-Moore**). Balthazar (bass **Carlo Colombara**), the monastery's superior, is disappointed that Fernand wants to leave. Léonor uses her influence to secure a military commission for Fernand, and he saves the King's life in battle. As his reward, Fernand asks the King for Léonor's hand in marriage. Under threat of excommunication because of his adulterous relationship with her, Alphonse agrees. Skeptical of her good fortune, Léonor sends a note to Fernand, warning him of her past, but Don Gasparo (tenor **Francesco Piccoli**) arrests Inez (soprano **Abbie Furmanky**) before she can deliver the message. The lovers are married and Fernand is ennobled. Realizing that the wedding is really a ploy to fend off the church, the courtiers spurn Fernand. When Balthazar tells the young man the truth about Léonor, Fernand renounces his titles and returns to the monastery. Before taking his final vows, Léonor begs Fernand's forgiveness. His passion for her is reawakened but she collapses and dies in his arms.

**Marcello Viotti** conducts the Chorus and Orchestra of the Bavarian Radio in this 2000 RCA recording.

**Elīna Garanča** sings Léonor's great third act aria "O mon Fernand":  
<https://youtu.be/riGRz-2shw0>.

As a bonus we'll hear soprano **Christine Weidinger** sing the aria "Piangeti voi" from Donizetti's *Anna Bolena*.

Please join us next Thursday, September 17th, for an encore broadcast of Giuseppe Verdi's *Simon Boccanegra*, hosted by the late **Al Ruocchio**, with **Piero Cappuccilli** singing the title role, **Mirella Freni** as Amelia, **José Carreras** as Gabriele Adorno, **José Van Dam** as Paolo, and **Nicolai Ghiaurov** as Jacopo Fiesco. **Claudio Abbado** conducts this 1977 Deutsche Grammophon recording.

The Thursday Night Opera House is heard at 7:00 p.m. Eastern on 89.7 FM in central North Carolina. We're also streamed online worldwide, and you can listen as well on WCPE's Android or iPhone apps.

*Bob Chapman*

**W. Robert Chapman, Host of the Thursday Night Opera House**