



NAXOS

DONIZETTI

Il diluvio universale

Nahuel Di Pierro • Enea Scala

Giuliana Gianfaldoni • Maria Elena Pepi

Coro dell'Accademia Teatro alla Scala

Orchestra Donizetti Opera

Riccardo Frizza, Conductor



DONIZETTI OPERA



FONDAZIONE
TEATRO
DONIZETTI

Gaetano
DONIZETTI
(1797–1848)

Il diluvio universale (‘The Great Flood’)

Azione tragico-sacra in three acts (1830)

Libretto by Domenico Gilardoni (1798–1831), based on *Heaven and Earth* (pub. 1822),
a poetic drama by Lord Byron (1788–1824) and *Il diluvio* (pub. 1788),
a tragedy by Francesco Ringhieri (1721–1787)

Critical edition of the first version (Naples, 1830) by Edoardo Cavalli
© Fondazione Teatro Donizetti, Bergamo, 2022

First performance: 6 March 1830 at the Teatro di San Carlo, Naples

Noè	Nahuel Di Pierro, Bass
Jafet	Nicolò Donini, Bass
Sem	Davide Zaccherini, Tenor*
Cam	Eduardo Martínez, Baritone*
Tesbite, wife of Jafet	Sabrina Gárdez, Soprano*
Asfene, wife of Sem	Erica Artina, Soprano
Abra, wife of Cam	Sophie Burns, Mezzo-soprano
Cadmo, Chief of the Satraps of Sennáár, husband of Sela	Enea Scala, Tenor
Sela	Giuliana Gianfaldoni, Soprano
Ada, confidante of Sela	Maria Elena Pepi, Mezzo-soprano*
Artoo, Chief of the Brahmins of Atlantide	Wangmao Wang, Tenor

Coro dell’Accademia Teatro alla Scala

(Salvo Sgrò, Chorus master)

Orchestra Donizetti Opera

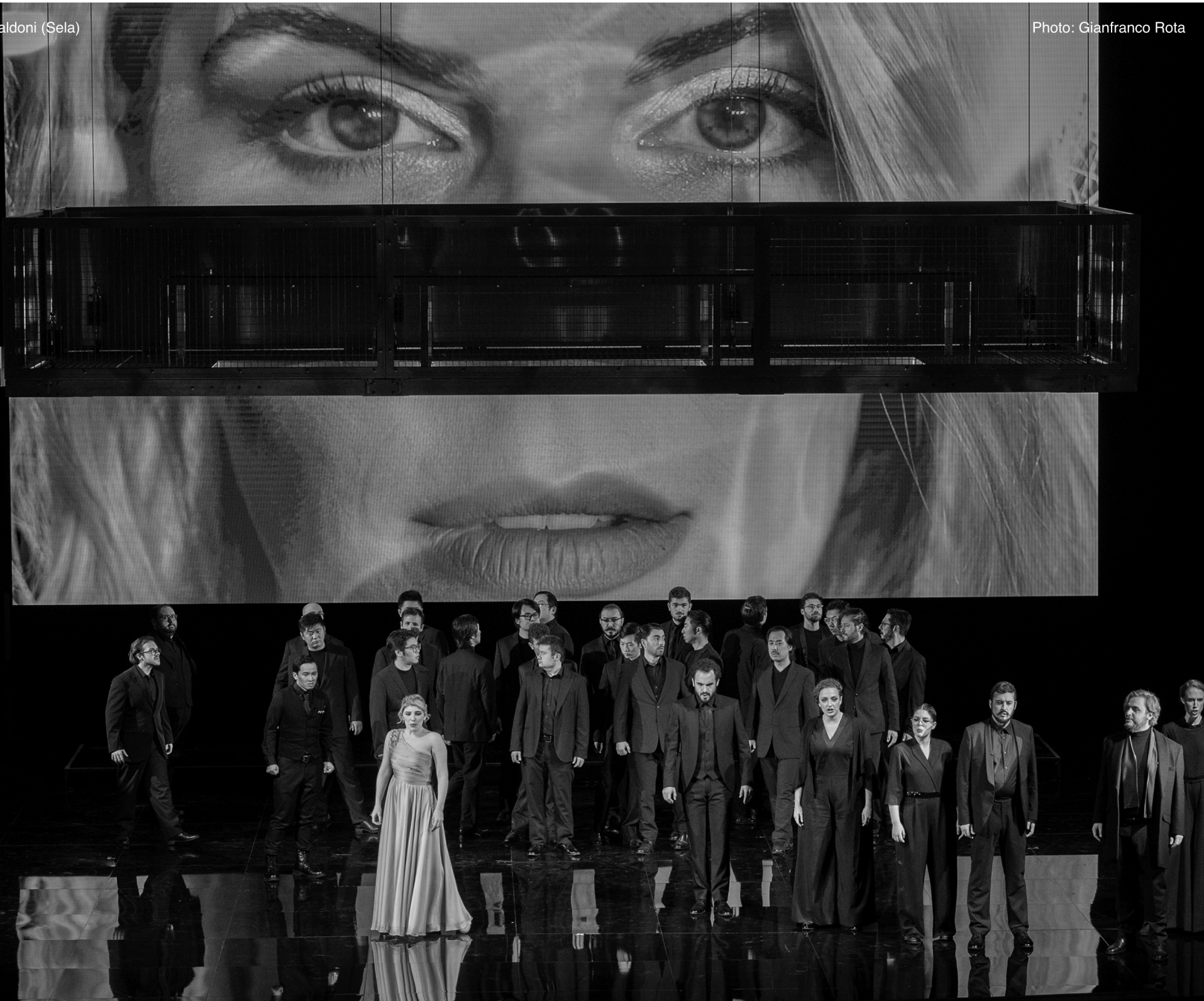
Riccardo Frizza, Conductor

*Students of the Bottega Donizetti

1 Sinfonia Larghetto – Allegro – Poco più mosso	7:35	
Act I		
No. 1. Introduzione		
2 Scene 1 Oh Dio di pietà (<i>Tesbite, Asfene, Abra, Sem, Jafet, Cam, Noè</i>)	6:08	
3 Recitative: Di Cadmo la consorte (<i>Jafet, Tesbite, Noè</i>) – Scene 2 Sela? Tu piangi... (<i>Noè, Sela</i>)	2:46	
4 Mentre in preda ei si donava (<i>Sela, Noè, Tesbite, Asfene, Abra, Sem, Cam, Jafet</i>)	3:54	
5 Perché nell'alma in questo loco (<i>Sela, Noè, Tesbite, Asfene, Abra, Sem, Jafet, Cam</i>)	3:22	
6 Scene 3 Corriam l'arca a incenerir! (<i>Artoo, Chorus, Noè, Sela, Tesbite, Asfene, Abra, Sem, Jafet, Cam</i>)	3:08	
7 Sì, quell'arca nell'ira de' venti (<i>Noè, Sela, Tesbite, Asfene, Abra, Jafet, Cam, Sem, Artoo, Chorus</i>)	3:49	
8 Recitative: Di Cadmo il cenno ognun per cor sospenda (<i>Sela, Artoo, Noè</i>)	2:27	
9 Scene 4 Recitative: Qui vederlo poss'io! (<i>Ada</i>) – Scene 5 Ov'è Cadmo? Ci addita (<i>Artoo, Chorus, Ada</i>)	1:48	
No. 2. Coro che precede la Cavatina di Cadmo		
10 Sela! Ah, tu non la vedesti (<i>Artoo, Chorus, Ada</i>) – Recitative: (Oh, gioia!) Un tanto eccesso (<i>Ada, Artoo</i>) – Scene 6 Recitative: Ada, e non altri, qui ritrovo? (<i>Cadmo, Ada</i>)	4:33	
No. 3. Scena e Cavatina di Cadmo		
11 Cavatina: Impudica! E ancor respira! (<i>Cadmo, Ada</i>)	6:16	
12 Scene 7 Recitative: Chi mai veggo! Ella stessa! (<i>Cadmo, Ada, Sela</i>)	2:57	
No. 4. Coro		
13 Scene 8 Franco inoltrate il piè (<i>Chorus</i>)	4:42	
14 Scene 9 Recitative: Taccion financo l'aure, tutto è silenzio! (<i>Sela, Noè</i>)	3:13	
No. 5. Finale I		
15 Quel che del ciel sui cardini (<i>Noè, Sela</i>)	6:54	
16 Scene 10 Padre, ah, sappi... (<i>Jafet, Sela, Noè</i>) – Scene 11 Quintet: Cadmo! Oh cielo! Ove m'a scondo? (<i>Sela, Cadmo, Noè, Ada, Jafet</i>)	4:28	
17 Scene 12 Signor, dell'empio i figli in tuo poter già caddero! (<i>Artoo, Chorus, Noè, Cadmo, Jafet, Sela, Ada</i>)	2:52	
18 Allor che sull'etra ascende (<i>Cadmo, Sela, Noè, Artoo, Jafet, Chorus, Ada</i>)	4:57	
Act II		
1 Introduction – Scene 1 Recitative: Ahi, certezza fatal di mia vergogna!... (<i>Cadmo</i>) – Scene 2 Recitative: Cadmo, la tua consorte... (<i>Ada, Cadmo</i>)		4:04
No. 6. Duetto		
2 Scene 3 Non profferir parola (<i>Cadmo, Sela</i>)		4:40
3 Ebben se chiudo per sempre il ciglio (<i>Sela, Cadmo</i>)		3:41
4 E tanta crudeltade serbar nel cor potrai? (<i>Sela, Cadmo</i>)		5:08
No. 7. Preghiera		
5 Scene 4 Gli empì 'l circondano (<i>Jafet, Sem, Tesbite, Asfene, Abra, Cam</i>)		4:36
6 Recitative: Ah! – Padre? (<i>Noè, Jafet, Tesbite, Sem</i>) – Scene 5 Recitative: Per mia cagion voi tutti (<i>Sela, Noè</i>) – Scene 6 Io stesso! (<i>Cadmo, Noè, Sela, Tesbite, Asfene, Abra, Sem, Cam, Jafet, Chorus</i>)		5:24
No. 8. Finale II		
7 Dio tremendo, onnipossente (<i>Noè, Cadmo, Sela, Tesbite, Asfene, Abra, Sem, Cam, Jafet</i>)		3:34
8 Ah! L'abisso in Dio consuona... (<i>Noè, Sela, Cadmo, Tesbite, Asfene, Abra, Sem, Cam, Jafet, Artoo, Chorus</i>)		5:09
Act III		
No. 9. Coro		
9 Introduction – Scene 1 Stirpe angelica, ti bea ne' piaceri (<i>Ada, Cadmo, Artoo, Chorus</i>)		4:13
10 Recitative: Sì, popoli, gioite (<i>Cadmo, Ada, Artoo, Chorus</i>) – Scene 2 Recitative: Pietade! Aita! (<i>Sela, Cadmo</i>)		1:04
No. 10. Aria Finale		
11 Senza colpa mi scacciavi (<i>Sela</i>)		5:19
12 Non dar fede a quegli accenti (<i>Ada, Sela, Cadmo, Artoo, Chorus</i>)		4:41
13 Spirò! (<i>Ada, Cadmo, Artoo, Chorus</i>) – Scene 3 Ah! non mai viste tenebre (<i>Chorus, Ada, Cadmo, Artoo</i>) – Scene 4 [Il diluvio ('The Flood'), orchestral conclusion]		2:39

Giuliana Gianfaldoni (Sela)

Photo: Gianfranco Rota



Gaetano Donizetti (1797–1848)

Il diluvio universale

A native of Bergamo, Donizetti was, for nearly a decade after the early death of Bellini in 1835, the leading composer of Italian opera. He had his first success with *Zoraida di Granata* in 1822. There followed a series of nearly 60 more operas and a move to Paris, where Rossini had been induced to settle to his profit. His final illness confined him to a hospital in France for some 17 months before his return to Bergamo, where he died in 1848. Donizetti was not exclusively a composer of opera; he wrote music of all kinds – songs, chamber music, piano music and a quantity of music for the church.

The First *Diluvio universale*: Naples, 1830

Which Diluvio?

The *Diluvio universale* that debuted at the Teatro di San Carlo in Naples on 6 March 1830 is a ‘tragic-sacred action’: it belongs to a very particular genre, that of Neapolitan Lent opera, of which Rossini’s *Mosè in Egitto* (1818) had been the most successful example. The story, drawn from the Bible only in its general lines, had been sketched by Donizetti himself, who had taken it from various literary sources, and only then given it to the librettist Gilardoni. The action goes from conflict to conflict: from the central one between Noè and his family opposed to Cadmo and his followers; to the inner one of Sela, Cadmo’s wife, repudiated for embracing the faith of Noè’s God but ultimately unable to leave him to save herself from the imminent catastrophe. The ‘title role’, however, is not entrusted to any of the characters of this sacred tragedy but to the Great Flood itself, which looms over everything and everyone from the first scene, and only breaks out into the action at the end of the opera. The composer’s intention to make it universally appealing appears clear: most of this score is collective and choral, and it is an uninterrupted flow of fine music and catchy themes, which potentially project the story into infinite other dimensions; indeed, when it became clear that *Il diluvio* would not have a *universal* circulation, Donizetti reused some of its music for other works, first and foremost *Anna Bolena*, which was premiered at the Carcano theatre in Milan on 26 December of that same 1830.

Precisely because in *Bolena* he had used some themes from *Diluvio*, when in 1834 the latter was going to be staged at the Teatro Carlo Felice in Genoa, Donizetti found it necessary to write some new music, or at least modify the existing one, as he had recycled it in the meantime. As a matter of fact, he did more than that, adapting the tragic-sacred action of 1830 to the conventions of standard serious opera: he amplified the conflict between Cadmo and his wife Sela by developing the character of Ada, Cadmo’s lover, for whom he wrote the opening aria of Act II; at the same time he simplified Cadmo’s character, whose aria with secondary characters in Act I was replaced by a duet with Ada (the new libretto also calls for a new aria for the tenor, which, however, does not seem to have been sung); moreover, he introduced a ‘Chorus of Noè’s family’, which gathers Noè’s sons and their wives, and added a *ballabile* at the beginning of Act III.

Donizetti was quite satisfied with his Genoese version of *Diluvio universale*: in 1837 he wrote to the Duke of Noia, who was then in charge of the Collegio di S. Pietro a Majella, not to allow the original autograph of *Diluvio* to be lent to anyone, because he wanted it ‘to be performed the way I modified it for Genoa, where it was very successful’. Indeed, all modern performances of this work used the second version, beginning with the 1985 performance at Genoa’s Teatro Margherita on the 150th anniversary – more or less – of the work’s Carlo Felice premiere (even though some details of the original 1830 score were salvaged, such as the Sinfonia’s *Andante* or the chorus-less structure of the ensembles of Noè’s family), to continue with the 1986 Bergamo, 2005 London, and 2010 St Gallen ones.

Despite Donizetti’s explicit wish, there are many good motives for reintroducing to the public the original version of *Il diluvio universale*, and they go beyond the obvious notion that a festival such as the Donizetti Opera has a duty to stage, at least once, all the autograph versions of the composer’s operas; in the case of *Diluvio*, the 1830 version marked a crucial stage in the development of Donizetti’s musical thought and technical resources, and it has every right to be considered among the composer’s great works, if not among his masterpieces.

Edoardo Cavalli



Donizetti as a Forerunner

A conversation with Riccardo Frizza

Alberto Mattioli: In the 2023 edition of the Donizetti Opera, the festival music director Riccardo Frizza took to the podium to conduct *Il diluvio universale*. The opera was first performed at the Teatro di San Carlo in Naples in 1830, but Donizetti revised it for the Teatro Carlo Felice in Genoa four years later. In Bergamo, we decided to stage the original version of the opera. Maestro Frizza, you are conducting *Il diluvio universale* for the first time. What was your first impression of this opera?

Riccardo Frizza: It seems to me to be truly extraordinary music, and I would also say it is surprising music because this is certainly not a popular or frequently performed title. There are some remarkable pages. The first one that comes to mind is the opening page, with the presentation of Noè's family and his followers: a really powerful chorale, with very refined harmonies that will come back throughout the rest of the opera. I would say that in *Il diluvio* nothing is predictable or obvious. Of course, the model is '*opera quaresimale*', the 'secular' oratorio that was codified by Rossini with his *Mosè*. However, if the model is Rossini, Donizetti develops it and takes it further. And so, one inevitably finds anticipations of *Nabucco*: here too, a biblical subject, a strong choral component, a private tragedy inserted into a public one. As often happens, Donizetti starts from Rossini's model, which in 1830 could not be escaped, and foreshadows Verdi's theatre that was to come. Though always remaining Donizetti: *Il diluvio* is, if I may call it that, first class Donizetti indeed.

AM A clarification: when you speak of *Mosè*, do you mean the Neapolitan one, *Mosè in Egitto* of 1818, or its Parisian remake, the 1827 *Moïse et Pharaon*?

RF Donizetti knew them both. I believe, however, that in the Neapolitan environment where Donizetti worked on *Il diluvio*, the reference was to the first version of *Mosè*.

AM You rightly identify one of the characteristics of *Il diluvio universale* in the interweaving of a private dimension, with the Sela-Cadmo-Ada love triangle, and a – shall we say – public one, with Noè's preaching and the flood. In the end, which one prevails?

RF I think the two components are balanced. And after all, we know that this is a characteristic of all European opera of the time, typical, for example, of the Parisian *grand opéra* that came to the fore in the 1830s, and was to be a constant for a long time. In this, too, Donizetti is a forerunner of dramaturgical and musical trends which will become common to many opera singers. And which will last for a long time. At the moment I'm conducting *Aida* in Budapest [the interview was made before rehearsals began in Bergamo, ed.] and, at the end of the day, even Verdi's masterpiece is based on the same interweaving of public and private, of feelings and politics.

AM How does *Il diluvio universale* fit into the evolution of Gaetano Donizetti's theatre?

RF One could answer by listing the musical pieces that Donizetti would reuse in later works, confirming how strongly he believed in the worth of this opera. A chorus will be reprised in *Gianni di Parigi*, the hymn sung by Noè will curiously become the march of *La Fille du régiment*, the slow section of the *Sinfonia* will flow into that of *Anna Bolena*. However, if we leave self-borrowings aside, *Il diluvio* is very important because it already displays the maturity that, just ten months later (in between there had also been the Neapolitan creation of *Imelda de' Lambertazzi*, another title to be rediscovered), would lead to the triumph of *Anna Bolena* in Milan, and so to the ultimate consecration of Donizetti. At the time, *Il diluvio universale* was not really understood and accordingly little appreciated. Surely, its failure was also due to the inevitable comparison with *Mosè* and, as always in the case of 19th-century Italian opera, contingent circumstances, such as the sensational mistake of the prima donna, Luigia Boccabadati, who at the premiere entered so much in advance in a concertato that it was a disaster (which aroused the anger of Donizetti, who no longer wanted to collaborate with her). But I believe the real reason was another: the experimental, formally innovative nature of this opera. A feature of which Donizetti was perfectly aware: he wrote to his father that *Il diluvio* was not an opera meant for cabalettas. So, in this opera Donizetti consciously attempted to go beyond the so-called '*solita forma*' of recitativo-cantabile and cabaletta.

AM Let us talk about the characters in the opera, starting of course with Noè.

RF This part was conceived for a great 'basso cantante', and it features solemn declamations but also widespread '*cantabilità*'. It was conceived for Luigi Lablache, from Naples despite his French surname, one of the most charismatic artists of the whole 19th century, for whom Rossini and Verdi also wrote. Noè's vocal language is imposing, hieratic, solemn as befits a prophet and a visionary. And yet, even in moments of greatest transport, it always retains a great underlying nobility. Even in the most dramatic parts of the opera, Noè is clearly always required to sing in a round and elegant way.

AM Then we have Cadmo, a tenor who, in the role of the villain, seems to draw on a remote vocal type.

RF The Rossinian model also applies here, especially that of the serious operas. The writing is very similar in terms of agility and extension, because Cadmo is often required to soar in the high notes. Perhaps, in terms of vocal writing, the Rossinian character most reminiscent of him is Idreno, from *Semiramide*. It is the early 1830s, but the Rossini reference is still undeniably there.

AM The role of Sela, the prima donna, a soprano, is perhaps the most dramatically interesting one.

RF It is clearly designed for what today we would call a soprano *drammatico d'agilità*, on a fairly central tessitura that requires a great legato in the cantabile sections but also the ability to master very difficult coloratura singing. Perhaps, of all the vocal parts of *Il diluvio universale*, Sela's is also the most variedly written. And not only from the musical point of view, but also dramatically. Torn between her loyalty to her husband and to Noè's God, devoted to the son she had by Cadmo and betrayed by Ada, the friend and confidante who is actually in love with Cadmo, Sela is the main true tragic character of the opera, who ultimately becomes guilty beyond her will. Alone against all the others, she is abandoned by everybody. She is the opera's true defeated character.

AM *Il diluvio universale* also requires a quite unusual number of second leads.

RF I think perhaps this is also one of the reasons why the opera has dropped out of the repertoire. After all, Noè's family is very large, and so is the cast. Ada, on the other hand, is not a second lead, the traditional role of the prima donna's rival, like Giovanna Seymour from *Anna Bolena*. On the contrary, I believe that it was in *Il diluvio* that Donizetti began to experiment with confrontation between two women, which he would later develop in such great masterpieces as *Anna Bolena*, *Maria Stuarda* and *Roberto Devereux*. From a vocal point of view, however, Ada is not an 'other soprano' part or a mezzo-soprano *tout court* – a figure that was actually absent from early 19th-century opera. Ada is more reminiscent of contralto parts such as certain Donizetti characters '*en travesti*', for example Maffio Orsini in *Lucrezia Borgia*, or Rossini characters. For instance, there are remarkable similarities between Ada's and Tancredi's entrances.

AM And the chorus is extremely active, as is always the case with these oratorio operas or operatic oratorios.

RF True. And yet compared to the Genoa version of the opera, its role is more limited, because when Noè's large family (three sons and three daughters-in-law) sings, it turns into a small chorus in themselves. The proper part of the chorus would be expanded by Donizetti in Genoa. Interestingly, in the *Introduzione* of the Neapolitan version, Noè's family members form a sort of initial chorus, then the satraps enter who are the actual chorus. So, among Donizetti's various experimentations, in *Il diluvio* there is also a truly unusual conception of the chorus component.

AM Why did you choose to conduct the first version of the opera, the one from 1830?

RF Because it is the lesser-known one and it is part of the festival's mission to explore Donizetti's lesser-known works. Of the 1834 second version there is also a recording, made in Genoa for the 1985 revival: there you can hear the differences, although I'm afraid there was not much philological study for the occasion.

AM One last aspect: the orchestration. How is the writing?



RF It is the classic Romantic orchestra of the Italian opera of the 1830s, the one from *Anna Bolena* or *Maria Stuarda*, with the woodwinds in couple, four horns, three trombones and the ophicleide. Some of Donizetti's orchestral solutions here are very interesting, for example, in the scene that introduces Ada with a long clarinet solo: of course, this not the first clarinet solo in Italian opera; but still, it is very well written. Otherwise, this opera has the typical ensemble and orchestration of Italian *melodramma* of the time.

AM To conclude: while studying *Il diluvio universale*, what struck you most?

RF Perhaps the fact that I understood where *Nabucco* really came from. Every time I discover an opera by Donizetti that I did not know – at least those of the mature Donizetti as *Il diluvio* certainly is – I seem to understand even better where Verdi sought elements to develop his own language. Each time Donizetti's central role in the development of 19th-century Italian *melodramma* emerges more clearly.

Alberto Mattioli

Synopsis

Act I

Noè and his family, knowing that God is about to send the flood, prepare the ark just outside the city of Sennáár, doomed to be destroyed together with its sinful inhabitants [2]. Noè has converted Sela, the wife of Cadmo, the leader of the city. Sela confesses to Noè that her husband despises her for her faith and has publicly offended God and defied him to punish him [3–5]. Cadmo's mercenaries arrive and want to burn the ark [6], Noè tries to stop them, and Sela decides to return to her husband to persuade him to desist [7–8]. At this point, Ada, Sela's confidante who is secretly in love with Cadmo, enters the scene [9]. Ada makes Cadmo believe that Sela is close to Noè not for religious reasons but because she is in love with the prophet's eldest son, Jafet [10]. Much to Ada's satisfaction, Cadmo repudiates his wife and sentences to death Noè, his sons, and also Sela, who has found refuge with them [11–14]. Noè warns Cadmo not to defy divine wrath and foretells him that a flood is coming, while Nature unleashes thunder and lightning. Cadmo reaches the ark intending to destroy it, while Noè, Jafet and Sela are arrested [15–18].

Act II

Cadmo promises Ada that he will marry her after his wife's death sentence is carried out [19]. In a dramatic confrontation between Cadmo and Sela, she refuses to confess a betrayal she did not commit but accepts the punishment, only asking to be allowed to embrace her son one last time. Cadmo denies her and even claims that he will reveal to her son his mother's guilt and marry Ada. Betrayed by her friend, repudiated by her husband, and cursed by her son, Sela pleads for divine mercy [20–22]. Meanwhile, Noè is imprisoned in the ark. Sela arrives to bring him the news that Cadmo has decided to kill them all. Noè then predicts that the flood is imminent [23–27].

Act III

As Cadmo and his court celebrate the upcoming wedding, Sela arrives [28–29]. Cadmo is willing to take her back as long as she recants Noè's God and curses him. To get her son back, Sela agrees to do it but, as she pronounces her abjuration, she is struck by lightning and falls to the ground [30]. The Flood is suddenly and violently unleashed, as everyone flees in chaos. When the storm subsides, the few survivors gather on the mountaintops, while Noè's ark floats undamaged on the land that has been submerged by water [31].

*English Translation: Michela Compagnoni
Courtesy of the Fondazione Teatro Donizetti*



Il diluvio universale ('The Great Flood') was premiered in Naples in 1830 but is better known in the much-revised version performed four years later in Genoa and Paris. The story, loosely drawn from the Bible, concerns Noah and his family, their conflicts, and the impending catastrophe of the flood. The opera offers a stream of attractive music, powerful choruses and refined harmonies, and represents a crucial stage in Donizetti's musical thought. This acclaimed 2023 Donizetti Festival performance, conducted by Riccardo Frizza, employs the original 1830 edition.



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DONIZETTI
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Il diluvio universale

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A detailed track list and recording details can be found inside the booklet.

The Italian libretto and an English translation can be accessed at www.naxos.com/libretti/660580.htm

Booklet notes: Alberto Mattioli, Edoardo Cavalli, Courtesy of Fondazione Teatro Donizetti • Cover photo: Gianfranco Rota

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