



LA FAVORITE

Gaetano Donizetti

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Logos for this production: **Rising Alternative + Bayerische Staatsoper + CMajor + Unitel**

Libretto by Alphonse Royer and Gustave Vaëz, based on the play *Le comte de Comminges* by Baculard d'Arnaud

Opera in 4 acts

Sung in French

Recorded 2016

From Bayerische Staatsoper, Munich

Approximately 2h37

CREATIVE TEAM

Conductor	Karel Mark Chichon
Director	Amélie Niermeyer
Sets	Alexander Müller-Elmau
Costumes	Kirsten Dephoff
Lighting	Michael Bauer
Choreography	Ramses Sigl
Dramaturgy	Rainer Karlitschek
Chorus Master	Sören Eckhoff

ARTISTIC TEAM

Léonor de Guzman	Elīna Garanča
Fernand	Matthew Polenzani
Alphonse XI	Mariusz Kwiecień
Balthazar	Mika Kares
Don Gaspard	Joshua Owen Mills
Inès	Elsa Benoit

Bayerisches Staatsorchester
Chorus of the Bayerische Staatsoper

PRESENTATION

Donizetti's *La Favorite* at the Bayerische Staatsoper presents a cast of outstanding *bel canto* singers: star mezzo-soprano Elīna Garanča as the seductive Léonor de Guzman, Matthew Polenzani as her desperate lover Fernand, and Mariusz Kwiecień as King Alphonse.

Numerous myths surround the historical figure of Léonore de Guzman, mistress of King Alfons XI of Castile, who becomes embroiled within an intrigue-laced political power play. Léonore, whose love for the King is revealed to be a farce, flings herself upon the young Fernand, who, for her sake, has eschewed the life of a monk in Santiago de Compostela. Yet, he is unaware of her status as a mistress, thus allowing the pair to become victims of a conspiratorial trial of strength between church and state, which in the end denies the couple even the hope of a joint future after death.

Amélie Niermeyer transforms the tragedy of the female role torn between spiritual and secular values into “a concentrated and intense drama [...] with high acting quality” (*Münchner Merkur*). This contrast is highlighted by enormous architectural box structures that continually transport the characters between the convent and the royal palace, emphasizing the influence each party has on the current scene.

The “fabulous Elīna Garanča [...] sings beautifully and emotionally restrained, leaving the audience deeply moved during her dying scene”, while Matthew Polenzani, in his debut as Fernand, scores with superb singing and acting, “reaching high tones with ease” (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*). Mariusz Kwiecień “convinces with the proper dandified arrogance and impressive acting”, while conductor Karel Mark Chichon completes the musically fantastic performance by “getting the most out of the Bayerisches Staatsorchester, impressively bringing out the dark, viscous sounds of the score and following the soloists with great intuition” (*BR Klassik*).

SYNOPSIS

ACT I

Scene 1: In the Monastery of St James, the monks are making their way to worship. Superior Balthazar, father of the Queen of Castile, enters with Fernand. Balthazar knows that Fernand is preoccupied by something. Fernand confesses that he has fallen in love with a beautiful, but as yet unknown, lady. His faith in God remains, but he wishes to leave the monastery in search of her. Balthazar angrily sends Fernand out of the monastery, warning him of the dangers of the outside world. He predicts that Fernand will one day return to the cloisters, a disappointed if wiser man.

Scene 2: Fernand has found his lady, Léonor, declared his love and received it in return, but he is still unaware of her real identity. She has arranged to meet him on the island of Leon, to which he is brought blindfolded by boat. He is met by Inès, her companion, who impresses upon him the need for secrecy. Léonor enters. She tells him that they can never marry and that they must not meet again, but nevertheless hands him a document to help him in his future. Shortly afterwards, the arrival of the King is announced and Léonor leaves. Fernand is left to speculate about her elevated social position. Reading the document she has left him, he finds a commission in the army — an opportunity for advancement.

ACT II

Alfonse has defeated the Moors and taken Alcazar. In conversation with the courtier Don Gaspar, the King expresses his pleasure at Fernand's bravery. Alone, the King expresses his love for Léonor and his desire to divorce the Queen and marry her. He realizes that this will provoke the opposition of his powerful father-in-law Balthazar who is ultimately backed by the Pope. Léonor enters and expresses her anguish at remaining his mistress rather than his Queen. The King suspects that he is losing her affection. Don Gaspar enters with news that a letter has been discovered revealing that Léonor has a lover. She makes no denial, but at that moment Balthazar enters intent on forcing the King to abandon his plans for the royal divorce.

ACT III

Alfonse is to honor Fernand for his role in the war. He asks Fernand what reward he would like and Fernand asks to marry the woman who has inspired him in his bravery. Alfonse asks who she is and Fernand points to Léonor. The King is astonished to learn that Fernand is his successful rival. In an abrupt change of mind, he orders Fernand and Léonor to marry within one hour. Léonor is left with

mixed feelings of apprehension and delight. She decides that Fernand must be informed about her past and sends Inès to him. However, unknown to Léonor, Inès is arrested before she can see him. Fernand only learns the truth after the wedding ceremony. Considering himself dishonored by the King he breaks his sword, leaves Léonor and entrusts himself to Balthazar.

ACT IV

Balthazar's daughter, the Queen, has died of jealousy and grief, and her body has been sent to him at the Monastery of St James. Prayers are being said for her repose. Fernand is preparing to enter his new religious life. Léonor enters in a state of exhaustion and faints before the cross. At first Fernand rejects her, but eventually moved by her love and sincerity, he is willing to give himself to her again, but it is too late, Léonor collapses once more and dies in his arms.