

DONIZETTI

# La Fille du Régiment

A Guide for Educators



The Met  
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Opera





# La Fille du Régiment

Youthful rebellion, family drama, and tender young love—*La Fille du Régiment* revels in both the hilarious mishaps and the heartfelt moments of adolescence. Set high in the Austrian Alps, this delightful rom-com tells the story of Marie, an intrepid young orphan raised by a regiment of French soldiers. When the man of her dreams turns out to be a rebel fighting against the French “family” she has always known, Marie will have to overcome war, fatherly disapproval, and even the discovery of her noble birth to make her own happily-ever-after ending come true.

By the time *La Fille du Régiment* premiered in 1840, Gaetano Donizetti was the most famous composer in Italy and a quickly rising international star. Yet there was one major operatic city he had yet to conquer: Paris. Joining forces with two French dramatists, Donizetti set about writing an opera that would make the Parisians surrender to his compositional charms. *La Fille du Régiment* was an instant triumph, and it cemented Donizetti’s position in the French capital. And the composer wasn’t the only person who enjoyed a career boost from this captivating work. Indeed, the opera’s lead roles—which demand astonishing vocal agility, impeccable comic timing, and undeniable romantic chemistry—have helped launch the careers of some of the 20th century’s most famous singers.

This guide presents *La Fille du Régiment* as both a coming-of-age comedy and a window into the turbulent politics of 19th-century Europe. In 1840, the conflicting forces that the opera’s protagonists must navigate—including competing national identities, noble versus plebeian birth, and ongoing political strife—were shaking Europe to its very core. Yet alongside these historical catalysts, the opera features a narrative theme that will be familiar to young viewers the world over: Deep down, Marie and Tonio just want to figure out where they belong. By inviting students to explore these two aspects of *La Fille du Régiment*, this guide will present the opera as a vehicle for both historical inquiry and personal discovery—as well as an enchanting comedy with some of the funniest moments ever brought to the Met stage.



YENDE



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CAMARENA



MURARO

## THE WORK

An opera in **two acts, sung in French**

Music by **Gaetano Donizetti**

Libretto by **Jules-Henri Vernoy de Saint-Georges** and **Jean-François-Alfred Bayard**

First performed **February 11, 1840**, at the **Opéra Comique, Paris**

## PRODUCTION

**Laurent Pelly**  
Production

**Chantal Thomas**  
Set Designer

**Laurent Pelly**  
Costume Designer

**Joël Adam**  
Lighting Designer

**Laura Scozzi**  
Choreographer

**Agathe Mélinand**  
Associate Director  
and Dialogue

## PERFORMANCE

*The Met: Live in HD*  
Broadcast: March 2, 2019

**Pretty Yende**  
Marie

**Stephanie Blythe**  
Marquise of Berkenfield

**Javier Camarena**  
Tonio

**Maurizio Muraro**  
Sulpice

**Paul Corona**  
Hortentius

**Kathleen Turner**  
Duchess of Krakenthorp

**Enrique Mazzola**  
Conductor

A co-production of the Metropolitan Opera; the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, London; and the Wiener Staatsoper, Vienna

Production a gift of the Annenberg Foundation

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# Opera in the Classroom

The Metropolitan Opera Educator Guides offer a creative, interdisciplinary introduction to opera. Designed to complement existing classroom curricula in music, the humanities, STEM fields, and the arts, these guides will help young viewers confidently engage with opera whether or not they have prior experience with the art form.

On the following pages, you'll find an array of materials designed to encourage critical thinking, deepen background knowledge, and empower students to engage with *La Fille du Régiment*'s story, music, and themes. These materials can be used in classrooms and/or via remote-learning platforms, and they can be mixed and matched to suit your students' individual academic needs.

Above all, this guide is intended to help students to explore *La Fille du Régiment* through their own experiences and ideas. The diverse perspectives that your students bring to opera make the art form infinitely richer, and we hope that your students will experience opera as a space where their confidence can grow and their curiosity can flourish.

## WHAT'S IN THIS GUIDE:

**Philosophical Chairs:** A series of questions that will introduce students to the opera's main themes while sparking their creativity and encouraging debate

**Who's Who in *La Fille du Régiment*:** An introduction to the opera's main characters and their roles in the plot

**Synopsis:** A complete opera synopsis for young readers

**The Source:** Information about the literary sources and/or historical events that inspired the opera

**Timelines:** One or more timelines connecting the opera to events in world history

**Deep Dives:** In-depth looks at various topics relating to the opera

**Active Exploration:** Interdisciplinary activities connecting the opera to topics in music, the humanities, STEM, and the arts

## THROUGHOUT THE GUIDE, YOU'LL ALSO FIND:

**Critical Inquiries:** Questions and thought experiments designed to foster careful thinking

**Fun Facts:** Entertaining tidbits about *La Fille du Régiment*



### FUN FACT

Donizetti was known for composing extremely quickly, and his contemporaries marveled at his ability to write in a wide variety of genres. In fact, a caricature published during his lifetime (above) depicts Donizetti writing two operas at once—a comic opera with his right hand, a serious opera with his left.

## CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS

This guide invites students to explore the opera through:

Music  
History  
Visual Arts and Design  
English Language Arts  
French Language and Literature  
Critical Thinking  
Speech and Communication  
Social-Emotional Learning  
Creative Writing  
Gender Studies  
World Studies  
Geography  
Drama  
Textiles

# Philosophical Chairs

Philosophical Chairs is an activity designed to foster critical thinking, active inquiry, and respectful dialogue among students. To play a game of Philosophical Chairs, participants agree or disagree with a series of statements, but the game doesn't end there. The most crucial element of the game is what happens next: Participants discuss their points of view and can switch sides if their opinions change during the discussion. (For more tips on using Philosophical Chairs in a classroom or via a remote-learning platform, see the activity description in your Google Classroom.)

Each topic statement is deliberately open-ended yet ties into a number of the themes present in *La Fille du Régiment*—including love and who deserves it, loyalty to a group or nation, and the challenges of growing up and finding our place in the world. As you and your students explore *La Fille du Régiment*, you can return to these statements: What do they have to do with the opera's story? How might these questions help us explore the opera's story, history, and themes?

## THE STATEMENTS

- Your parents should have a say in whom you marry.
- You should look and act like your gender.  
(Variation for older students: Gender roles are a social construct.)
- War is inevitable.
- You should have an allegiance to your country.
- You must obey your parents.
- Your parents know what is best for you.
- Your family consists of those biologically related to you.
- Money is the key to life's happiness.
- You can't help whom you love.
- Potatoes are the best vegetables around.
- Secrets don't hurt anyone.
- Social status is important.
- Everyone has a soulmate.
- Love knows no bounds.



Keep in mind that the process of this activity is just as important as the statements themselves. Imagine a world in which everyone actively listens to one another and engages in respectful dialogue, honoring others and showing respect for the wide array of diverse ideas and opinions that others hold. Philosophical Chairs fosters exactly this kind of space, encouraging students to take what they've learned and change the global landscape for generations to come.



# Who's Who in *La Fille du Régiment*

CHARACTER	PRONUNCIATION	VOICE TYPE	THE LOWDOWN
<b>Marie</b> An abandoned child raised by a regiment of French soldiers	mah-REE	soprano	The “daughter of the regiment” of the opera’s title, Marie is actually the child of the Marquise of Berkenfield. Marie loves the villager Tonio, but the Marquise wants her to marry a wealthy nobleman instead.
<b>Tonio</b> A Tyrolean villager	toe-NYOH	tenor	As a proud Tyrolean patriot, Tonio hates the French soldiers who have invaded his homeland. But when he realizes the only way to be with Marie is to join the French regiment, he readily chooses love over politics.
<b>Sulpice</b> A French sergeant	sool-PEES	bass	Sulpice is the leader of the regiment that raised Marie. A gruff but good-natured soldier, he loves Marie and wants nothing but the best for his adopted child.
<b>Marquise of Berkenfield</b> A wealthy Tyrolean noblewoman, Marie’s mother	mar-KEEZ of BEAR-ken-field	mezzo-soprano	As a young, unmarried woman, the Marquise was forced to give up her baby, Marie. She is thrilled to find her long-lost daughter, but—afraid to admit she had a child out of wedlock—she claims that Marie is her niece.
<b>Hortensius</b> The Marquise’s butler	oar-tahn-see-OOS	bass	Although merely a servant, Hortensius is the Marquise’s most trusted friend and helper.
<b>Duchess of Krakenthorp</b> An even wealthier noblewoman, Marie’s intended mother-in-law	Duchess of CRACK-en-torp	spoken	The aunt of the man the Marquise wants Marie to marry, the Duchess is an arrogant snob who cares for nothing but social status.



MARIE



TONIO



SULPICE



MARQUISE OF BERKENFIELD



HORTENSIUS



DUCHESS OF KRAKENTHORP

# Synopsis

**ACT I** *Tyrol*, a small yet patriotic region in the Austrian Alps. As a French regiment marches on a small Tyrolean town, the terrified villagers pray to the Virgin Mary for protection. Armed only with pitchforks and hoes, they fear their humble defenses will be no match for the French army. Joining the villagers in prayer is the Marquise of Berkenfield, a noblewoman traveling to her country estate. Although the Marquise is frightened by the battle, she is more concerned about the inconvenient delay the war has caused her. When news arrives that the French have halted their attack, the villagers are surprised but relieved. The Marquise orders her butler, Hortensius, to scout a safe passage for their journey onward. Leaving the village, Hortensius runs into Sulpice, the friendly sergeant of the 21st French regiment, which is camped in a field nearby.

Meanwhile, in the soldiers' camp, a young woman cleans a huge pile of laundry. It is Marie, the "daughter of the regiment." Abandoned on a battlefield as a baby, she was found and raised by the soldiers of the 21st. She proudly thinks of herself as a soldier like her "fathers," but her allegiance to the French regiment has not kept her from striking up a friendship with a young Tyrolean named Tonio. Sulpice has heard rumors about Marie's budding romance. He sternly reminds her the French are at war with Tyrol—and thus any Tyrolean is an enemy. When some of the soldiers find Tonio lurking near their camp and accuse him of being a spy, Marie rushes to his defense. She says that Tonio saved her from falling off a cliff while she was picking flowers one day. The good-natured soldiers agree that anyone who saved Marie's life must be a friend after all, and they invite Tonio to drink a toast to France. Tonio is torn: As a proud Tyrolean, he hates the French invaders. On the other hand, being friendly with the regiment means he can visit Marie whenever he likes. When Marie sings the regiment's theme song, Tonio happily joins in.

Later that evening, Marie sits by herself peeling potatoes. Tonio enters and tells Marie he loves her. Marie says she loves him, too. Sulpice, however, is furious when he discovers Marie kissing the Tyrolean villager. He reminds Marie that she promised to marry one of the regiment's soldiers. Marie declares she'd rather remain single forever. Tonio says he will simply ask one of Marie's "other fathers" for permission to marry her, and Sulpice threatens to have Tonio shot for treason. Their argument is interrupted by the arrival of the Marquise, who asks Sulpice to escort her to Château Berkenfield, her country estate. When Sulpice hears the name, he recognizes it from a letter he found with the infant Marie, signed by a "Robert Berkenfield." The Marquise is overjoyed. She declares that Robert was her sister's husband and Marie is her





long-lost niece. Tonio enters, dressed in a French army uniform. He has joined the regiment, and Marie can now marry him without breaking her promise to marry one of the soldiers. But when the Marquise announces that she is taking Marie to her new home at Château Berkenfield, Marie must bid a tearful farewell to both the man she loves and the only family she has ever known.

**ACT II** *Château Berkenfield, the day of Marie's wedding.* Meanwhile, the Marquise has a secret: Marie is not her niece. In fact, the Marquise never had a sister at all, and the “Robert” who signed the letter found with Marie was the Marquise’s boyfriend. In other words, Marie is the Marquise’s own daughter. Forced to abandon the baby, the Marquise never lost hope that they would one day be reunited. Unfortunately, since Marie was born out of wedlock, she has no right to the Berkenfield fortune. Thus, the Marquise has arranged for her to marry the nephew of the phenomenally wealthy Duchess of Krakenthorp. She knows Marie does not love the young Duke, but the marriage will ensure Marie’s wealth and social standing.

Marie enters the parlor for her singing lesson. She is surly and frustrated by the Marquise’s constant demand that she “act like a lady,” and the desperate Marquise has called Sulpice to the castle in the hope that he can convince Marie to behave. When Marie sees Sulpice, however, she can’t resist saucily peppering the elegant French love song she is supposed to be singing with melodies from the regiment’s theme. Frustrated by the constant interruptions, the Marquise storms out.

Left alone, Marie recalls her happy childhood. She would gladly give up her new wealth and jewels to return to her life as a soldier. Hearing the regiment’s theme song in the distance, Marie realizes that her “fathers” and Tonio have come to see her. She is overjoyed. The Marquise, however, is annoyed by the unwelcome visitors and outraged when she sees Marie with Tonio. Tonio explains that he loves Marie with all his heart, yet the Marquise cannot believe that a poor soldier is worthy of Marie’s love. When the guests arrive for Marie’s wedding to the Duke, they are scandalized by the grubby soldiers’ presence. The Marquise, realizing that her daughter’s happiness is more important than money, finally relents. The curtain falls as the guests celebrate Marie’s marriage to Tonio.

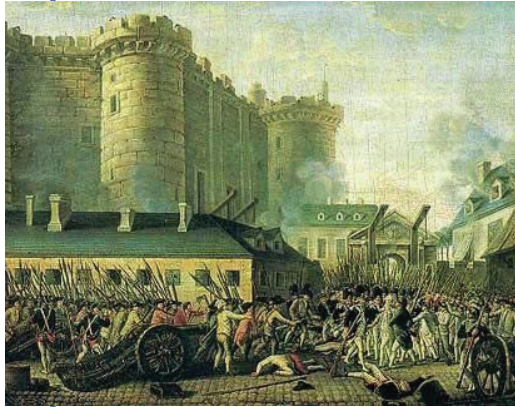


#### FUN FACT

Today, the main creative talents behind *La Fille du Régiment* are still remembered in the city of Paris, where a visitor can stroll along the Rue Donizetti, Rue St. Georges, and Rue Bayard.

# Timeline

## A CHEAT SHEET FOR 19TH-CENTURY FRENCH MILITARY HISTORY



### 1789 .....

The French Revolution begins. On July 14, Parisian citizens storm **THE BASTILLE**, a prison that had long stood as a symbol of the French monarchy's absolutism and abuse.

### 1792

The monarchy is officially abolished, and the **FIRST FRENCH REPUBLIC** is established.

### 1793–94 .....

The **REIGN OF TERROR**, during which King Louis XVI and his wife Marie Antoinette are executed, along with thousands of other perceived enemies of the republic.



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### 1796–99 .....

#### NAPOLEON BONAPARTE

launches his first military campaign, in Italy and Egypt.

### 1799

Napoleon seizes control of France, essentially turning the country into a military dictatorship.

### 1803–15

The period commonly known as the **NAPOLEONIC WARS**.

Napoleon meets the Austrian, British, and Russian armies in battle and incrementally takes over much of Europe.

### 1804 .....

**NAPOLEON CROWNS HIMSELF EMPEROR OF FRANCE.**



### 1812

#### NAPOLEON INVADES RUSSIA

and suffers his first major military defeat.







## 1814 .....

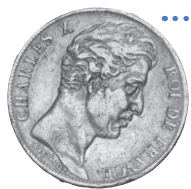
Napoleon abdicates his position as emperor and is exiled to the island of Elba. The royal family (the Bourbon dynasty) is reinstated on the French throne, launching the period known as the **BOURBON RESTORATION**.

## 1815

Napoleon escapes from Elba. He returns to Paris in March, overthrows King Louis XVIII, and once again takes control of the French military. In June, he meets the British army at the **BATTLE OF WATERLOO**, where he is swiftly defeated. Napoleon is exiled to the island of St. Helena, where he will die in 1821. The French monarchs once again ascend the throne.

## 1830 .....

A revolution overthrows the Bourbon king Charles X and establishes a **CONSTITUTIONAL MONARCHY** under Louis Philippe, Duke of Orléans.



## 1840

**LA FILLE DU RÉGIMENT** premieres in Paris.



## 1848

Revolutions break out across Europe. In France, the monarchy is once again toppled, and the so-called **SECOND REPUBLIC** is established. Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte, Napoleon's nephew, is made president. Donizetti dies in Italy.

## 1851 .....

Louis-Napoleon crowns himself emperor, initiating the period known as the **SECOND EMPIRE**.



## 1870

After a disastrous defeat in the Franco-Prussian war, Louis-Napoleon is exiled. Once again, a representative government is instated in France. This **THIRD REPUBLIC** endures until the Nazis invade France during World War II.

### CRITICAL INQUIRY

What's an event that happened in your own country during this time?

## CRITICAL INQUIRY

Depending on whom you ask, Andreas Hofer was either a loyal hero or a treasonous villain. Why might some people view him as heroic while others view him as villainous? How might these competing perspectives affect how he has gone down in history?

## Deep Dive

### ANDREAS HOFER: A REAL-LIFE TYROLEAN REBEL

The story of *La Fille du Régiment* is entirely fictional—but the political backdrop to the plot is steeped in history, including an actual Tyrolean rebellion during the Napoleonic wars. In 1805, Napoleon defeated the Austrian army at the Battle of Austerlitz; in the ensuing peace treaty, large portions of Austria were ceded to the French government and Napoleon's satellite states in Central Europe. Among the regions newly under Napoleonic control was Tyrol, a mountainous area that spans parts of modern-day Austria and Italy. The Tyroleans, however, were not happy about being used as pawns in this game of geopolitical chess. The region had been part of Austria since the 14th century, and Tyroleans were proud Austrian patriots. In April 1809, an uprising broke out in Tyrol against the French invaders. The leader of this rebellion was an innkeeper and

horse trader named Andreas Hofer.

The Tyrolean rebels were vastly outnumbered by the French and their allies. Yet they were far better equipped than the French soldiers to handle the steep, mountainous terrain of the Alps. For instance, the French had never before seen snowshoes and were thus amazed by the Tyroleans' ability to walk on top of deep snow! Moreover, French soldiers were used to fighting on a battlefield, and the Tyroleans' guerrilla tactics—which included burying enemies under man-made avalanches—took the French completely by surprise. Within a week, Hofer's forces had driven the French out of the region and reinstated the Austrians as the leaders of Tyrol.

Initially, Napoleon took little interest in what he viewed as a meaningless skirmish in a minor region. But the efficiency with

which Hofer's forces expelled the French troops made Napoleon take the Tyrolean insurrection seriously. He sent more troops into Tyrol, instructing his generals not only to squash the rebellion but to do so with such brutality as to make an example of Hofer and his followers. By the beginning of August, the Austrians had been expelled from Tyrol; by November, the insurrection had been quelled definitively. In January, Hofer was arrested, and on February 20, 1810, he was executed by firing squad. Yet Hofer has never been forgotten. Today, the official anthem of the Austrian state of Tyrol is the "Andreas Hofer Song."





# The Source

## AN ORIGINAL LIBRETTO BY JULES-HENRI VERNY DE SAINT-GEORGES AND JEAN-FRANÇOIS-ALFRED BAYARD

Unlike most operas, which are based on pre-existing literary or historical sources, *La Fille du Régiment* features an original story developed by the librettists Jules-Henri Vernoy de Saint-Georges and Jean-François-Alfred Bayard. The opera has all the elements of a great romantic comedy: a slightly absurd premise (a young girl raised by an entire regiment of soldiers); warring factions (the French and the Tyroleans); a pair of young lovers who must overcome this rivalry to be together; and a happily-ever-after ending. Saint-Georges and Bayard also added a significant dash of French patriotism to the story, a choice likely intended to guarantee the opera's commercial success. In 1840, when *La Fille du Régiment* premiered, France had been mired in political upheaval and bloodshed for half a century. Thus, the opera's upbeat ending, with its cries of "Long live France," was sure to lift local spirits—and, hopefully, inspire the Parisian public to buy tickets.

*La Fille du Régiment* is an example of "opéra comique," a genre that features spoken text between individual songs. Unlike recitative (the accompanied, declamatory style of singing which is often used for dialogue in opera), this spoken text is entirely unpitched and unaccompanied. Thus, individual productions can modify the dialogue to suit the director's vision; in the Met's current production, which is set during World War I, the dialogue features humorous references to cars, tanks, and even the Olympic bobsled team.

### CRITICAL INQUIRY

Politics and political events have long been used as the inspiration for operas, musicals, and other kinds of art. Can you think of any works of art inspired by recent political events? Can you think of any recent works of art inspired by political events from history?



Above (top to bottom): Librettists Jules-Henri Vernoy de Saint-Georges and Jean-François-Alfred Bayard, and composer Gaetano Donizetti



## CRITICAL INQUIRY

Is there a theater or opera house in your hometown? Have you ever been there? Do a little research to find out more about this building: When was it built? What kinds of shows has it hosted? Has it ever been renovated? Does the history of this building tell you anything about the city or town where you live?

# Deep Dive

## PARISIAN OPERA HOUSES IN THE AGE OF DONIZETTI

During the 19th century, Paris was known as the cultural capital of Europe, due in large part to the dozens of opera houses and theaters that dotted its cityscape. Of these, four became Donizetti's Parisian stomping grounds:

**The Opéra:** Paris's premiere opera house during the 18th and 19th centuries. The Opéra was founded in 1669, during the reign of Louis XIV. It specialized in grand opéra, a genre defined by extreme length (usually five acts), ballets between individual acts, extraordinary scenic effects, and plots drawn from ancient mythology and history. Throughout its history, the Opéra was supported and run by the French government. As such, it often produced works with a clear propagandistic bent. For instance, during the 17th and 18th centuries, operas about ancient Greek and Roman emperors and heroes represented the grandeur of the monarchy, while after the French Revolution, stories about senatorial Rome represented the new French Republic.

**Opéra Comique:** As its name suggests, the Opéra Comique specialized in the genre of opéra comique. In contrast to grand opéra, "comic opera" stories focus on lower-class characters and often use the interaction between nobility and peasants as fodder for comic situations. The genre of opéra comique also includes portions of spoken dialogue, whereas grand opéra is entirely sung. The Opéra Comique, which grew out of

a pre-existing theater company, was founded in 1715.

**Théâtre Italien:** Most of the opera houses in Paris produced French-language opera, either original works by French composers or operas from other countries translated into French. The Théâtre Italien, by contrast, presented Italian operas in their original language. The first performances of Donizetti's operas were at the Théâtre Italien.

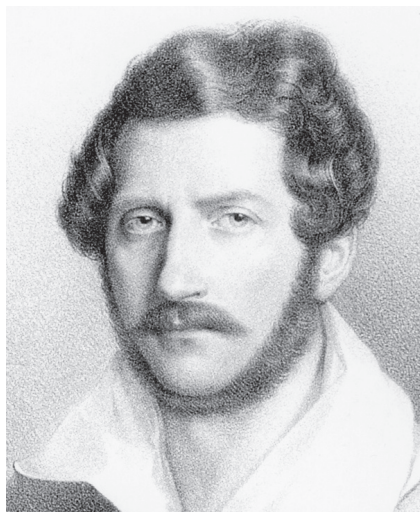
**Théâtre de la Renaissance:** Founded by the novelists Victor Hugo and Alexandre Dumas, the Théâtre de la Renaissance opened its doors in 1838. In 1839, it performed a French translation of Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* that sparked the meteoric rise of Donizetti's fame among Parisian opera fans. Unfortunately, the Théâtre de la Renaissance was unable to compete with its more famous and profitable peers and closed in 1841. In 1872, however, the name "Théâtre de la Renaissance" was given to a newly constructed auditorium, where theatergoers may still enjoy performances to this day.

Although the Opéra and Théâtre Italien have since closed, the Opéra Comique and the new Théâtre de la Renaissance can still be visited. The two most important opera houses in today's Paris, the Palais Garnier and the Opéra Bastille, were both constructed after Donizetti's death.



# Timeline

## THE COMPOSITION OF *LA FILLE DU RÉGIMENT*



Gaetano Donizetti



The Teatro San Carlo in Naples in 1830



Gioachino Rossini  
ACCADEMIA NAZIONALE DI SANTA CECILIA

### 1797

Gaetano Donizetti is born in Bergamo, a city in northern Italy. His family is poor; with six children to support, there is no money for music lessons. When the music director at Bergamo's cathedral recognizes Donizetti's talent, however, he arranges for the boy to study singing, piano, and composition at the cathedral school on a full scholarship.

### 1811

The cathedral's music students stage an original play, and Donizetti is cast in the lead role. The musical is titled *Il piccolo compositore di musica* ("The Little Music Composer"), and Donizetti's part includes the lines "I have a vast mind, a quick talent, and ready imagination—I am a thunderbolt at composing."

### 1815

Donizetti travels to Bologna to continue his studies at the Accademia Filarmonica, one of the top music schools in northern Italy. He will return to Bergamo two years later.

### 1822

Donizetti, not quite 25 years old, is invited by the impresario Domenico Barbaja to Naples. Barbaja is one of the most important producers of opera in Italy, and Naples is the operatic capital of the southern part of the country. (In northern Italy, the preeminent city for opera is Milan.) Donizetti will live in Naples for the next 16 years.

### 1828

Donizetti is appointed director of the royal theaters of Naples. Although the new position is a full-time job, Donizetti continues to write four operas per year for Barbaja's Neapolitan theaters and takes commissions from major opera houses across Italy, as well.



The Théâtre de l'Opéra-Comique (also known as the Salle Favart) in Paris  
MBZT / WIKICOMMONS



Luisa Tetrazzini in the title role of *Lucia di Lammermoor* in 1911 at the Met  
MET OPERA ARCHIVES

## 1835

Gioachino Rossini, the world's most famous opera composer and an Italian expatriate living in France, hires Donizetti to write an opera for Paris's Théâtre Italien. This is Donizetti's first commission for an opera house outside of Italy, and it marks a turning point in his career.

## 1835–37

Despite his successful career in Naples, Donizetti is frustrated by the city's draconian censors and bureaucratic hassles. Encouraged by Rossini's commission, he contemplates moving to Paris. He arranges for the Théâtre Italien to perform four of his operas over the next two years. Unfortunately, none of them is successful enough to convince Donizetti's agents that a move to Paris will be profitable—none, that is, until 1837, when a performance of his *Lucia di Lammermoor* sparks an absolute Donizetti craze in the French capital.

## 1838

In October, Donizetti officially moves to Paris. He is welcomed as a celebrity. A month after his arrival, he admits to a friend that he is desperate to return to Italy, since the constant attention he receives from the Parisian public has left him overwhelmed and exhausted.

## 1840

On February 11, *La Fille du Régiment*, Donizetti's first French-language opera, premieres at Paris's Opéra Comique. With its dazzling music and charming plot, the new opera is an immediate hit. The French musical establishment, however, is infuriated by the foreigner Donizetti's success on their home turf. A few days after *Fille's* premiere, composer Hector Berlioz observes in a Parisian newspaper that Donizetti has no fewer than seven operas being performed or rehearsed at the most important opera houses in the city. "Donizetti seems to treat us like a conquered country," he complains. "One can no longer speak of the opera houses of Paris, but only the opera houses of Mr. Donizetti."





Marcella Sembrich as Marie in *La Fille du Régiment* in 1902 at the Met  
MET OPERA ARCHIVES



Bergamo, Italy  
BVLACEHKO/WIKICOMMONS

## 1842

Donizetti is offered a position as music director at the court of Vienna. He is thrilled by the offer, which is wildly prestigious, comes with an enormous salary, and involves (as Donizetti himself will boast) “doing nothing.” Yet Donizetti is far from idle. He splits his time between Vienna and Paris, makes regular voyages to Italy, and continues composing operas at a tremendous rate.

## 1843

*La Fille du Régiment* is performed for the first time in the United States, in New Orleans. It will soon prove to be one of the 19th century’s most popular comic operas, and by the mid-1850s it has been performed all over the world

## 1846

Suffering from the illness that will ultimately end his life, Donizetti is confined to a hospital outside of Paris. The following year, his doctors grant his request to return to Bergamo.

## 1848

Donizetti dies in Bergamo on April 8. Although he is Italy’s most popular composer, the news of his death is overshadowed by a political uprising against the Austrians who rule the northern part of the peninsula. He is buried in a local cemetery; in 1875, his remains are moved to Bergamo’s cathedral, where his tomb may still be visited today.



### FUN FACT

Since the Duchess of Krakenthorp’s role is only spoken, she doesn’t have to be played by a trained opera singer. For this reason, directors often hire celebrities to perform the role; in a 2016 production at Washington National Opera, for instance, the Duchess was played by Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. A lifelong opera fan, Justice Ginsburg was an ardent supporter of the art form and a beloved audience member at the Met.

French native Lily Pons sang the French national anthem at a wartime performance of *Fille*.  
MET OPERA ARCHIVES



## Deep Dive

### POLITICAL SONGS IN DONIZETTI'S FRENCH OPERA

*La Fille du Régiment* is unabashedly patriotic, and since its premiere, it has often been used for political ends. During the 19th century, the opera was regularly performed on France's national holiday, July 14. During France's "Second Empire," the opera's final chorus was sung as an unofficial national anthem. At a performance at the Metropolitan

Opera following Armistice Day at the end of World War I, the soprano Frieda Hempel wove the patriotic song "Keep the Home Fires Burning" into Marie's singing lesson. And during World War II, the soprano Lily Pons proudly sang the French national anthem, "La Marseillaise," during the opera's finale, also at the Met.

### CRITICAL INQUIRY

Why might *La Fille du Régiment* have been an exceptionally good opera for expressing French patriotism? How do you think Austrian audiences would feel about including the songs mentioned above in a performance of this work?



# Active Exploration

The following activities will help familiarize your students with the plot of *La Fille du Régiment*, forge connections between a variety of classroom subjects, and encourage creative responses to the opera. They are designed to be accessible to a wide array of ages and experience levels.

## ANALYZING “AH! MES AMIS ... POUR MON ÂME”

Ask your students to follow along with a musical score as they listen to Tonio’s famous aria. As they listen, ask them to color-code elements of the score: tempo indications, dynamics, articulation, things related to key, etc.

## MILITARY CADENCE

Invite students to compose their own celebratory anthem for Marie’s regiment—or for something (or someone) else they love.

## OPERA-LYMPICS

Have students listen to “Au bruit de la guerre” and “Ah! Mes amis ... Pour mon âme.” As they listen, ask them to rank each singer’s execution of various vocal techniques, such as melismas, high notes, and trills. Which singer “wins” in this operatic version of the Olympics?

## “I AM FROM” POEM

Use the “I Am From” poetry prompt to help students explore their own surroundings and those of the characters in the opera. As students respond to the prompt, the poem will become a vehicle for both in-depth character study and self-examination.

## LEDERHOSEN

Study the history of Lederhosen, the Austrian overalls that Tonio wears in *La Fille du Régiment*. Then invite students to create their own Lederhosen and put on a fashion show.

## CREATIVE CARTOGRAPHY

Invite students to design a map with the various locations featured in *La Fille du Régiment*, including the regiment’s camp, Tonio’s village, Château Berkenfield, and the cliff where Marie and Tonio first met. Take this opportunity to speak with your students more broadly about reading and drawing maps.

## TOILET-PAPER TIMELINE

Use a roll of toilet paper to create a timeline with events germane to *La Fille du Régiment*’s story; each square of paper will be one year. You may wish to use the two timelines in this guide as a starting point.



## COMMON CORE CONNECTIONS

**These activities directly support the following ELA-Literacy Common Core Strands:**

### CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.8.3

Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.

### CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.6–8.1

Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 6–8 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.

### CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH. 6–8.7

Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.