

An Unknown Authentic Portrait of Gioachino Rossini

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This article presents an unknown aquarelle portrait of the composer Gioachino Rossini (1792–1868) deposited in the National Museum in Prague under inventory number H2-61 001/28. The artist is identified as Antonio d'Aquino, duca di Casarano, a Neapolitan nobleman and friend of the composer. It was most likely in Naples in 1839 that d'Aquino painted this amateurish portrait, which was reproduced soon thereafter as a copper engraving.

Gioachino Rossini – Antonio d'Aquino, duca di Casarano – Leopold II, Grand Duke of Tuscany – iconography – Naples – nineteenth century Italian painting – National Museum in Prague

Thanks to his extraordinary gift and his abilities as an entrepreneur in the field of opera, Gioachino¹ Rossini (born 29 February 1792 in Pesaro, died 13 November 1868 in Paris) became one of the best-known composers in all of music history already during his lifetime. His devotees in his native Italy, in his hospitable adopted homeland of France, and in other countries of Europe as well as America adored him, and his famous rivals could only envy his enormous popularity. To this day many are baffled by how a composer who wrote his most successful opera, *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, during only two weeks and composed almost forty operas at breakneck speed could hang up his composer's hat at the age of thirty-seven, and during the same number of years remaining in his life mostly write only small-scale works for special occasions. The reason, however, was clear: as a result of overwork he suffered from neurasthenia. Today we would call it depression following after 'burnout'.²

Whereas Rossini's most famous operas are timeless, a bequest that still lives today, recollections of his appearance and of his complicated personality (sometimes irresistibly social, sometimes biting and sarcastic, occasionally – in private – despondent and close to suicide), of his distinctive manner of behaviour, of curious stories from his life, of his habits, his luxurious life style, and his fondness for good food constitute antiquarian but

1) Recent scholarly studies devoted to Rossini have used the simplified spelling of his given name, Gioachino, in place of the form used earlier, Gioacchino. He himself often used the simplified form when signing his name.

2) An excellent aid in gaining orientation in the very large Rossini literature is GALLO, Denise P.: *Gioachino Rossini: A Research and Information Guide*, New York 2010.