

*Abstract*

Composed in 1839, *L'ange de Nisida* was among the first concrete results of Donizetti's efforts to work in Paris at the end of the 1830s and to benefit from its relatively liberal theatrical and censorial system. The director of the new-born Théâtre de la Renaissance, Anténor Joly, had commissioned the opera in the wake of the triumph of *Lucie de Lammermoor* (the French adaptation of *Lucia di Lammermoor*) at the same theatre in August 1839. The ensuing contract stated in no uncertain terms that the rehearsals for *L'ange de Nisida* were to begin the following February, with a clear (albeit undeclared) intention of staging it immediately thereafter. *L'ange de Nisida* was virtually complete on 27 December 1839 (as annotated on the last page of its autograph score), and incorporated some "rather old music" from *Adelaide*, an Italian opera Donizetti had drafted around 1834—presumably for Naples—but left incomplete. Even though the deadlines set down in the contract were respected, and the production process had advanced to the point of starting work on its *mise-en-scène*, the date of the premiere was repeatedly postponed. In May 1840, the Théâtre de la Renaissance went bankrupt, thus denying *L'ange de Nisida* the opportunity to reach the stage as the composer had conceived it. As it is well-known, Donizetti would subsequently use substantial portions of the score for the composition of his second *grand opéra*, *La favorite* (1840). In doing so, he inserted a fair number of its pages into his new score, making significant changes to the poetry, the vocal lines, and the orchestration of the pieces in question, and, in some cases, altering their structure and adapting them to different dramatic contexts.

The lack of nineteenth-century or contemporary editions of *L'ange de Nisida* has hitherto limited the scholarly focus to its role in the creation of *La favorite*, to examine its literary sources and libretto, or to speculate on the feasibility and worth of a reconstruction of its score. After years of scepticism, the process of reconstructing and editing *L'ange de Nisida* got underway at the University of Southampton in 2008, and led to the opera's first-ever edition (Opera Rara) and to its world premiere (London, Royal Opera House, 18 July 2018). Based on a thorough examination of all extant sources, and benefitting from the work behind the opera's reconstruction, this article sheds light onto Donizetti's creative process for *L'ange de Nisida*. A preliminary discussion will focus on the genesis of *L'ange de Nisida*, clarifying and, in some instances, rectifying known information concerning Donizetti's *Adelaide*. The central part of the article will offer a detailed description of the opera's sources, presenting a reconstruction of the autograph score as it appeared before Donizetti dismembered it for the composition of *La favorite*. The closing section will retrace the different phases of the opera's creative process, characterised by a close collaboration between Donizetti and his librettists.