

Doña Flor / Vocal Score

Composer: Niccolò van Westerhout



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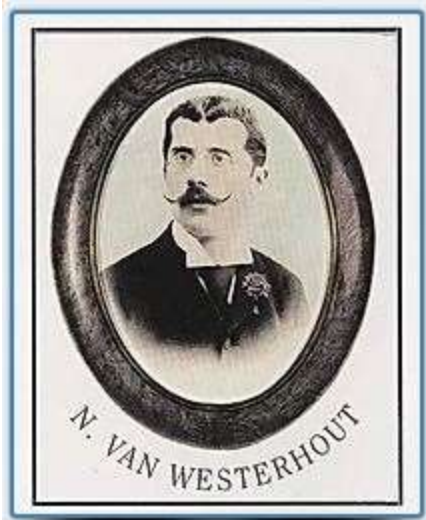
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Doña Flor is a lyrical drama in one act with music by Niccolò van Westerhout and libretto by Arturo Colautti. Composed for the theater of Mola di Bari, already named after van Westerhout, Doña Flor was performed for the first time on April 18, 1896. This one-act opera was conceived keeping in mind its dimensions, insufficient to contain large vocal and instrumental ensemble, or to allow dazzling scenic changes. The scene is only one, singers and orchestra members were reduced to the minimum necessary: three protagonists, a gondolier's chorus out of scene, and a forty-three elements orchestra, as requested by the composer. Doña Flor is one of the most beautiful and outstanding Nineteenth century's Italian operas; a one-act that would do well when placed amongst others whose fate was less transient and whose creators more lucky.

For more information: EditoreUSA@gmail.com

To order from us: IdeaPress33@gmail.com

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Niccolò van Westerhout

Niccolò van Westerhout was born in Mola, a township located in the province of Bari, Italy, on December 17, 1857. Of Dutch-Flemish origin, the van Westerhout family had migrated to Southern Italy in the sixteen hundreds. They settled first in Bari, later in Monopoli. Niccolò's grandfather, Nicola van Westerhout, decided to move to Mola, where he sired Onofrio Agostino, the composer's father. At thirteen years of age, Niccolò composed incidental music for Shakespeare's Julius Caesar, showing a remarkable musical talent. The Township administration deliberated to help him achieve his full potential and funded his studies at the prestigious San Pietro a Majella Conservatory in Naples. There he perfected his composition technique working with Maestros Nicola De Gioiosa, Nicola D'Arienzi e Lauro Rossi. During his short life, Niccolò van Westerhout composed a few operas:

- The never performed TILDE;
- CIMBELINO, premiered at the Teatro Argentina in Rome, in 1892;
- FORTUNIO, initially set to perform at the world renowned Teatro alla Scala, was presented instead at the Teatro Lirico in Milan, as a result of a series of unfortunate events;
- DOÑA FLOR, commissioned by the Township of Mola, and staged in the local Opera Theatre in 1896;
- COLOMBA, represented posthumously, in 1925, at Teatro San Carlo in Naples.

Niccolò van Westerhout also composed piano concerts and some symphonies. Eminent musicologists wrote: "It is quite difficult to place his style within the landscape of the appreciation of Italian instrumental music prevailing at the end of the Nineteenth century. The Insonni [literally, the Insomniacs] - a collection of eleven pieces, supposedly composed at nighttime between 1891 and 1893, and published posthumously in 1915 by Ricordi - stand out for their excellence and uniqueness. They do not echo at all the Brahms model, tested by van Westerhout in his monumental Sonata in fa minore nor the generic, glittering, drawing-room like, Biedermaier-inspired academicism that infused most musical society of the era. The

composer revealed by these short, thought-out and intense pages appears worthy of other inspired stimuli: from the most sophisticated Tchaikovsky to the enigmatic and visionary last Liszt, as well as Fauré and the future Debussy”.

Niccolò van Westerhout died in Naples on August 21, 1898. He was only forty-one years old. The Township of Mola has named a theatre and a street after him. A memorial marble plate was placed on the wall of the house where he was born, and a statue was erected to represent his opera, DOÑA FLOR. In April 2010 the opera Doña Flor was performed in New York after over 100 years thanks to the efforts of Leonardo Campanile and a group tied to L'Idea Magazine.