



José Álvarez Cubero
(Priego de Cordoba 1768 – 1827 Madrid)

Bust of Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868)

Rome, ca. 1819-1827

White marble on circular marble base

Height: 68 cm

Provenance:

Commissioned by the 14th Duke of Alba, Carlos Miguel Fitz-James Stuart and
delivered before 1828

Likely to have been given to Rossini on his visit to Madrid in 1831

Private Collection Germany, acquired in the 1980s

Art Loss Register: S00148478

This exquisite neo-classical bust in white marble by the celebrated Spanish sculptor José Álvarez Cubero (1768-1827) represents the greatest and most influential of the Italian Romantic composers of the nineteenth century, Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868). The illustrious composer is depicted as an attractive young man, bare-chested, with soft facial traits and a prominent forehead. His abundant curly locks extend along his cheeks to form lush sideburns that form a frame around his gentle face.

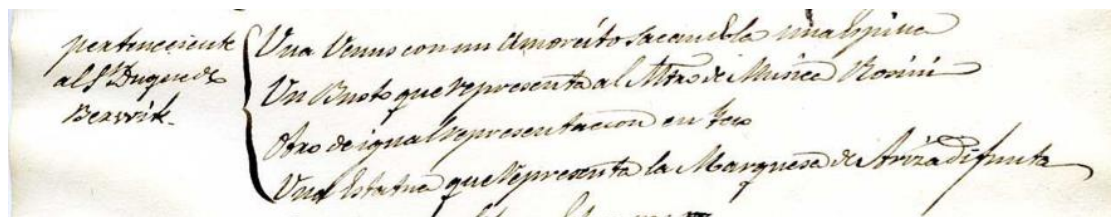
Circa 1819 Álvarez Cubero sculpted his first bust of Rossini for the Infante Sebastián Gabriel de Borbón y Braganza (1811-1875). This bust, now in the Museo del Prado (fig. 1), carries the name of the sitter at the back, together with the signature of the sculptor, a very unusual feat for Álvarez Cubero.

The present and hence second bust was known to exist (Sanchez 2011, 172-173; Azcue 2011, 331 ff.), but has only recently been rediscovered in a private collection in Germany. It is almost identical to the one at the Prado Museum and was executed by Álvarez Cubero for his Maecenas, Carlos Miguel Fitz-James Stuart y Silva, the 14th Duke of Alba (1794-1835, cf. Sanchez 2011, 172 ff.).



Fig. 1 J. Álvarez Cubero (1768-1827)
Bust of Gioachino Rossini, ca. 1819,
White marble
Museo del Prado (inv. E000808)

After the sudden death of Álvarez Cubero some of his works made for the Duke of Alba were brought from his studio in Rome to Spain. A document dated 6th August 1828 in the archives of the Duke mentions a marble bust of Rossini together with a corresponding plaster: *“pertenecientes al S.^r Duque de Berwick: Una Venus con un amorcito sacandola una Espina; Un Busto que representa al Maestro de Musica Rossini; Otro de igual representacion en Yeso; Una Estatua que representa la Marquesa de Ariza difunta”*¹



¹ Translation: *“belonging to the Duke of Berwick: A Venus with an angel removing a thorn; A Bust that represents the Master of Music Rossini; Another one of equal representation in gesso; A Statue representing the deceased Marquise of Ariza”*. See Azcue 2011, 331 ff.

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Fig. 3 J.A. Cubero
Bust of Gioachino Rossini,
Plaster,
Real Academia de Bellas Artes de
San Fernando (inv. E456)

However, when the 14th Duke died in 1835, the inventory and catalogue of the works acquired by him fail to mention a marble bust and only refer to the plaster bust of Rossini. A subsequent inventory from 1870 also only mentions the plaster version. This plaster is most probably the one currently held at the Museo de la Real Academia de San Fernando (fig. 3).²

Thus, somewhere between 1828 and 1835 the marble bust of Rossini made by Álvarez Cubero for the Duke of Alba's collection must have changed hands. One plausible possibility is that this marble portrait was actually handed over by the Duke in 1831 to Rossini.

The Duke was a fond admirer of the illustrious composer from Pesaro and they became close friends after having met each other on several occasions, as shown in the Duke's diaries. They met for the first time in 1814 when Rossini and his future wife, the Madrilenian mezzo-soprano Isabel Angela Colbrán (1784-1845), were presented to the Duke at a party at the Bolognese salon of Madame Martinetti. They met again for a second time in 1816 in Naples, where Colbrán had meanwhile become the diva of the San Carlo Theatre and Rossini its leading composer. In 1821 the Duke even stayed for certain while at the residence of Colbrán in Bologna on his way to Paris (Sanchez 2011, 172-173).

The library of the Palacio de Liria, the Madrid residence of the Dukes of Alba, holds several autographs of Rossini's works and printed works complete with friendly dedications to the Duke. Their relationship was so close that in 1820, through his wife, Rossini even lent an enormous amount of money to the Duke, who was constantly spending huge sums on innumerable works of art for his extraordinary collection. In the archives of the Liria Palace there's a letter in immaculate Spanish, dated 17th February 1831, in which the composer friendly reminds the Duke of his outstanding debt of 16,000 ducats together with all due interests.³

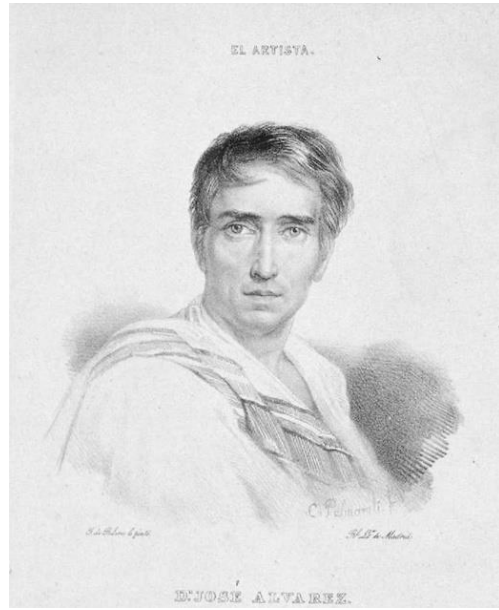
Later in 1831 Rossini visited the Duke in Madrid mainly in order to settle the outstanding debt. According to a very plausible hypothesis by Leticia Azcue Brea, head curator of sculpture of the Museo del Prado, the bust was given to Rossini as a compensatory gift on that occasion. In the 20th century, it resurfaced in a private collection in Germany.

² Azcue 2011, p. 333

³ "V.E., please do not forget that on September 2, 1820, Mrs. Isabel Colbrán, my wife, made a loan to [you, the] V. E., of 16,000 ducats of Naples at the interest [rate] of that kingdom and in the manner and form that the laws there prescribe. This capital, the fruit of our efforts, was entrusted to you [...] for the particular friendship and affection that you have always showed me..." , cf. Barreiro Lastra, H., *Presencia de Rossini en Madrid: febrero de 1831. Antecedentes y derivaciones*, unpubl. doctoral thesis, Madrid 2006.

José Álvarez Cubero (1768-1827)

José Álvarez de Pereira y Cubero was the most important and most celebrated of all the Spanish neoclassical sculptors and the only one to achieve renown throughout Europe in his lifetime. Today a large number of his works are held at the Prado Museum. His expressive capacity combined with the most refined form of neoclassical style inspired by Greek and Roman models, he is often dubbed the “Spanish Canova” after his friend and illustrious master, the virtuoso neoclassical Italian sculptor Antonio Canova, who had a considerable influence on Álvarez Cubero’s work.



*Etching of José Álvarez Cubero (1768-1827),
by C. Palmaroli, 1835,
After drawing by Juan Antonio de Ribera y Fernández*

José Álvarez Cubero was born in Priego de Córdoba as the son of a stonemason. He started his training first with his father and subsequently with his godfather, the retable sculptor Francisco Javier Pedrajas, with whom he collaborated on several projects such as the decoration of the chapel of the church in Priego. Dating from this early period is also a statue of a Lion Fighting a Snake, which he made for the famous King’s fountain.

Around 1791 Álvarez Cubero moved to Córdoba, where with the aid of the local bishop, he studied neoclassical sculpture at the Escuela de Bellas Artes. After this he moved to Madrid to study at the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando and won the Academia’s first prize in 1799. This entitled him to a generous grant from Charles IV allowing him to carry on his training first in Paris and subsequently in Rome.

In Paris he completed his famous statue of Ganymede in 1804, which won him a gold medal and 500 francs. A year later he moved to Rome, where he met Bertel Thorvaldsen and befriended Antonio Canova, the unequalled virtuoso of neoclassical sculpture. Already in 1806, Canova had put Álvarez in charge of a royal commission from King Charles IV for a group of statues that were to embellish the Casa del Labrador at Aranjuez.

From then on, he would regularly obtain important commissions, most notably from the Spanish King Charles IV and later from his son Ferdinand VII. In 1808, Álvarez Cubero was briefly imprisoned and stripped of his Spanish grant as he refused to recognize Joseph Bonaparte as the new King of Spain.

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Thanks to Canova's intervention Álvarez Cubero was eventually released on the condition that he would make reliefs depicting various scenes from Antiquity for the Emperor's bedroom in the Quirinal Palace in Rome. Álvarez Cubero finished the reliefs but they were never installed at the Quirinal and are currently housed at the Vatican Museum.

In 1816 Álvarez Cubero joined the ranks of Spanish court artists, and he was made Escultor de Cámara. In this period, he executed several important works, including three seated figures depicting Maria Louisa de Parma (Museo del Prado), Queen María Isabel of Braganza (Museo del Prado) and the Marquesa de Ariza (Fundacion Casa de Alba). The latter was commissioned by Carlos Miguel Fitz-James Stuart, 14th Duque de Alba, from whom Álvarez Cubero would receive several other important commissions.



*Fig. 4. J. Álvarez Cubero,
The Defence of Zaragoza, 1818-1825
Carrara marble,
Museo del Prado, Madrid (inv. E000789)*

His most celebrated work is the Defence of Zaragoza (Museo del Prado, fig. 4). Finished in 1823, it was eventually brought to Madrid in 1826 after Álvarez Cubero rejected offers made by Francis II, the Emperor of Austria, and his minister Metternich to take it to Vienna. It became the most famous of all Spanish neoclassical works. Its subject-matter was heroic and contemporary, yet in formal terms it related to Classical antiquity.

The many institutions of which he was a member included the Accademia di San Luca in Rome, the academies of Carrara, Naples, Antwerp and the Institut de France in Paris as well as the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando in Madrid. In 1823 Álvarez Cubero was made Primer Escultor de Cámara at the Spanish court and, although still working in Rome, was eventually appointed director of the Cámara. In 1826 he returned to Madrid and died soon afterwards.

**Carlos Miguel Fitz-James Stuart y Silva,
14th Duke of Alba (1794 – 1835)**

Carlos Miguel Fitz-James Stuart y Silva, 14th Duke of Alba, 7th Duke of Berwick and 12th Duke of Huescar, was an avid collector who invested vast sums of money in fine works of art. Inheriting a great love of art from his mother, the Marquésa di Ariza, he would become the most important collector of the Alba family since the 17th century and is now considered to have been one of the greatest collectors and patrons of the arts in 19th-century Spain.

In 1814 the Duke began travelling extensively through Europe and acquired large quantities of paintings and sculptures in the process. In 1819 he departed for Italy, where he would remain until 1823. There he befriended many celebrated artists among whom many painters, but he also made regular visits to the studios of the sculptors Antonio Canova and Bertel Thorvaldsen.

His diaries from this period describe negotiations for the purchase of works from artists including Lorenzo Bartolini, Antonio Solá (1787- 1861) and the great José Álvarez Cubero (1768-1827). In addition, he also awarded numerous stipends to Spanish artists coming to Rome to study.

He imported approximately 70 crates of works of art into Spain and in 1824 tried, but failed, to create a prestigious art gallery, open to the public, which would house his vast exquisite collection. In fact, a number of works he had acquired, never reached Spain, or were later sold due to the Duke's precarious financial situation brought about by his excessive expenses and the interests he was subsequently forced to pay on loans (Azcue 2011b, 97-98).



*Unfinished Portrait of Carlos Miguel Fitz-James
Stuart, 14th Duke of Alba, 1814-15,
Oil on canvas, by François-Xavier Fabre,
Montpellier, Musée Fabre*

Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868)

No composer in the first half of the 19th century enjoyed the same amount of popularity and prestige, or exerted comparable artistic influence as Rossini did. He was recognized by his contemporaries as the greatest Italian composer of his time. His achievements cast into oblivion the operatic world of his predecessors, creating new standards against which other composers were to be judged. His contemporaries Bellini and Donizetti were condemned to work under Rossini's shadow, and their artistic personalities emerged in confrontation with his operas. Only with the rise of Verdi was Rossini eventually replaced as the central figure of Italian operatic life.



Portrait of Gioachino Rossini, c. 1820

Oil on canvas,

by Marie Françoise Costance Mayer (1774-1821)

Casa Rossini, Pesaro, Italy

Born in Pesaro to parents who were both musicians, Rossini started composing by the age of 12 and in 1806 he entered the Liceo Musicale in Bologna, where he followed courses in singing, cello, piano and composition. His operatic career began in 1810 when he received a commission for an opera from the Teatro S Moisè of Venice. It would be the first of a series of operas Rossini would compose for the theatre and commissions from other theatres would follow rapidly. Soon after he would win international acclaim with his opera Tancredi (1813) and L'italiana in Algeri (1813). From Venice he moved to Milan, mounting and revising for the Teatro Re his two Venetian successes, and composing for La Scala two new operas. 1815 marks the beginning of his Neapolitan period and almost exclusive involvement with opera seria. By then the demand for his music was already so high and widespread, that he also took on several commissions to produce major works for other cities.

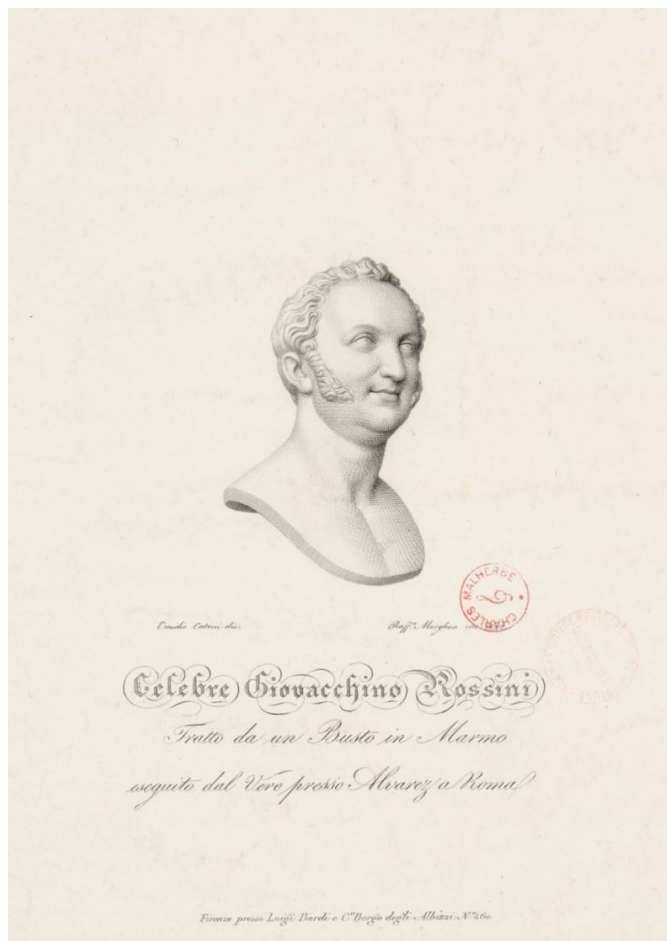
Altogether, during the period of 1810 until 1823, he wrote 34 operas for the Italian stage that were performed in Venice, Milan, Ferrara, Naples and elsewhere. His innovative works not only brought the tradition of the comic opera buffa to a climax, most notably with his *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, but he also made considerable contributions to the genre of the opera seria with works such as *Otello*, *Tancredi* and *Semiramide*.

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In 1824 he was invited by the Opéra in Paris, for which he produced an opera to celebrate the coronation of Charles X, *Il viaggio a Reims*, as well as French revisions of some of his Italian operas. In 1829 he produced his final opera, *Guillaume Tell*. In the early 1830s he left Paris for Bologna and produced only very little.

Rossini's withdrawal from opera for the last 40 years of his life remains a mystery. His ill-health, amassed wealth, and the rise of spectacular Grand Opera might have contributed to his retirement. In 1855 he returned to Paris, where he became renowned for his musical salons on Saturdays, attended by artists and musicians including Franz Liszt, Giuseppe Verdi, Meyerbeer and Joseph Joachim. His last major composition was his *Petite messe solennelle* (1863). He died in Paris in 1868. Until today his music continues to enjoy great popularity and several of his operas have become annual fixtures at many of the most prestigious opera houses around the world.



Etching of G. Rossini by R. Morghen, 1822
After the marble Bust by J. Alvarez. Cubero (1768-1827)

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Comparison of the Stucco Rossini bust (Left), our bust (middle) and the version in the Prado (right).





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