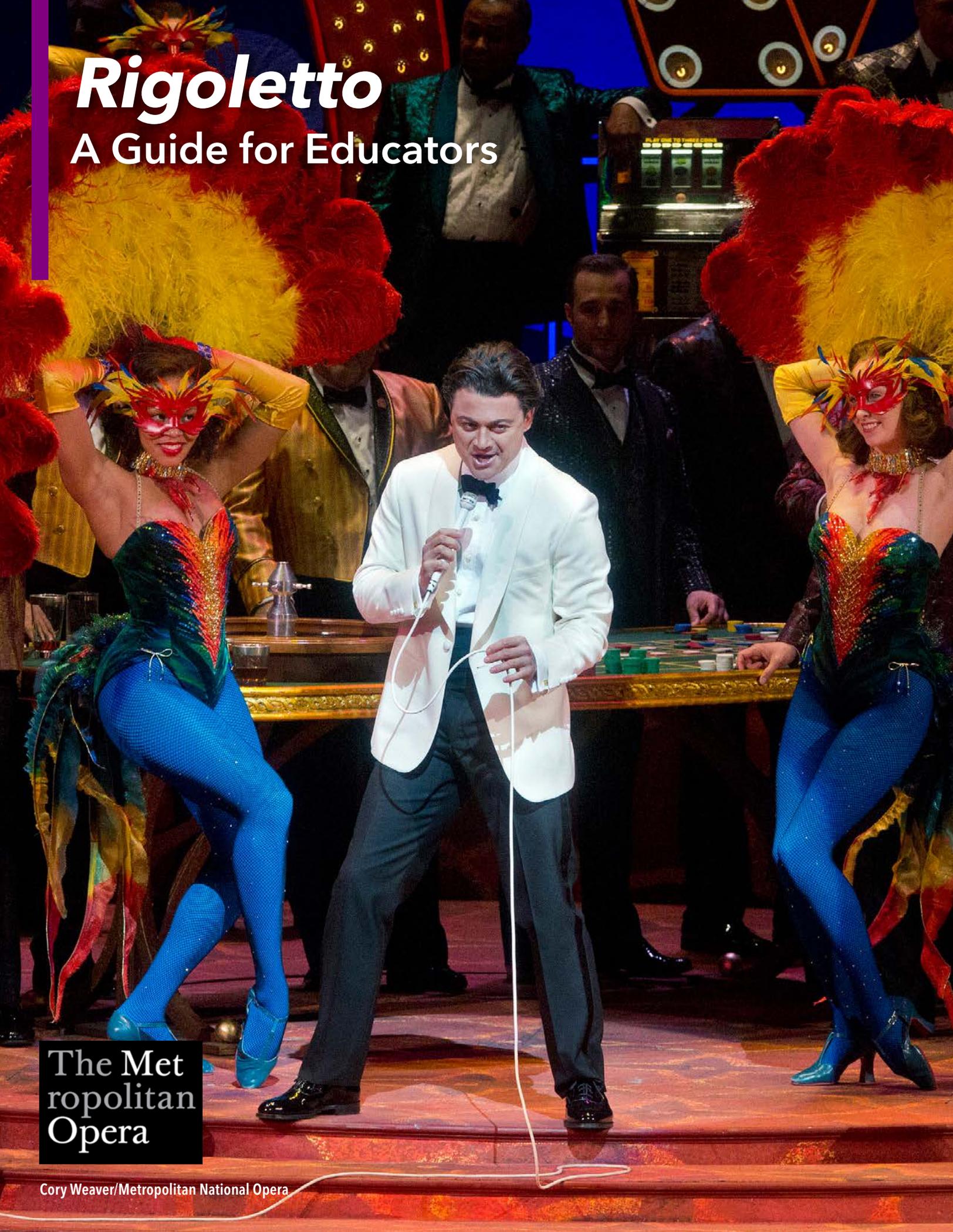


Rigoletto

A Guide for Educators

The Met
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Opera

Cory Weaver/Metropolitan National Opera



WHAT TO EXPECT FROM *RIGOLETTO*

A SPLENDID ROYAL PALACE BECOMES THE SITE OF DEBAUCHERY AND CRIME; A NOBLE DUKE

reigns as a lascivious tyrant; and a mere court comedian provides the emotional epicenter of a heartbreaking tale: Giuseppe Verdi's brilliant, blood-soaked *Rigoletto* turns the nineteenth-century social order on its head. Written during an era when revolutions roiled Europe and age-old absolute monarchies teetered on the brink of extinction, it is hardly surprising that both Verdi's opera and the play on which it is based met with official censorship and condemnation. Yet, as Verdi well knew, the very elements that so infuriated the authorities (such as a Duke's shameless savagery and a humble jester's murderous revenge) also made the story a dramatic tour-de-force. "*Rigoletto* would be one of the greatest works of modern theatre—if only the police would allow it," Verdi wrote to his librettist, Francesco Maria Piave, a year before the opera's premiere. History would soon prove Verdi right: Ever since its wildly successful opening night, *Rigoletto* has been considered one of the greatest operas of all time.

For modern audiences, both the machinations of a feudal Duke and the turbulence of nineteenth-century politics may seem archaic. Yet for Michael Mayer, the director of the Met's current production, *Rigoletto's* story of power, corruption, cruelty, and love is every bit as relevant today as when Verdi was alive. To bring the opera's world of "violence, money and glitzy decadence" (in Mayer's words) into the modern era, he has reimagined *Rigoletto* in the neon-infused Las Vegas of the 1960s, with the Duke transformed into a vulgar casino magnate and the jester Rigoletto as a stand-up comedian. Mayer's vision will also help students see how *Rigoletto's* story resonates with contemporary events and movements, thereby engaging students' creativity and critical thinking skills as they watch this remarkable opera come to life.

This guide offers an in-depth introduction to *Rigoletto's* music, history, and themes. Intended to be used before, during, and the Final Dress Rehearsal performance, the following pages include background information on Verdi's life and work, synopses designed for young readers, and activities that will help your students engage with the *Rigoletto's* music, stage design, and story. This guide is also intended to connect the opera to other classroom subjects: An overview of the political events that shaped both the opera's source—a play by Victor Hugo, as well as Verdi's opera, will help students relate *Rigoletto* to European history, while a short essay on the literary archetype of the jester or "fool" will connect the story to topics in literature and language arts. Students should come away feeling like *Rigoletto* experts, eager to offer their own opinions about this Final Dress performance at the Met.

Access Opera: Open Rehearsals for Students

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THE WORK:

RIGOLETTO

An opera in three acts, sung in Italian

Music by Giuseppe Verdi

Libretto by Francesco Maria Piave

Based on the play *Le Roi S'Amuse* by

Victor Hugo

First performed March 11, 1851

at the Teatro La Fenice, Venice, Italy

PRODUCTION

Nicola Luisotti, Conductor

Michael Mayer, Production

Christine Jones, Set Designer

Susan Hilferty, Costume Designer

Kevin Adams, Lighting Designer

Steven Hoggett, Choreographer

STARRING

Nadine Sierra

GILDA (soprano)

Ramona Zaharia

MADDALENA (contralto)

Vittorio Grigolo

THE DUKE (tenor)

Roberto Frontali

RIGOLETTO (baritone)

Štefan Kocán

SPARAFUCILE (bass)

Production a gift of the Hermione Foundation, Laura Sloate, Trustee; and Mr. and Mrs. Paul M. Montrone

ABOUT THE METROPOLITAN OPERA HOUSE



Photo: Johnathan Tichler/
Metropolitan Opera

The Metropolitan Opera is a vibrant home for the most creative and talented singers, conductors, composers, musicians, stage directors, designers, visual artists, choreographers, and dancers from around the world.

The Metropolitan Opera was founded in 1883, with its first opera house built on Broadway and 39th Street by a group of wealthy businessmen who wanted their own theater. In the company's early years, the management changed course several times, first performing everything in Italian (even *Carmen* and *Lohengrin*), then everything in German (even *Aida* and *Faust*), before finally settling into a policy of performing most works in their original language.

Almost from the beginning, it was clear that the opera house on 39th Street did not have adequate stage facilities. But it was not until the Met joined with other New York institutions in forming Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts that a new home became possible. The new Metropolitan Opera House, which opened at Lincoln Center in September of 1966, was equipped with the finest technical facilities of the day.

Each season the Met stages more than 200 opera performances in New York. More than 800,000 people attend the performances in the opera house during the season, and millions more experience the Met through new media distribution initiatives and state-of-the-art technology.

This guide includes several sections with a variety of background material on *Rigoletto*

- **The Source, The Story, and Who's Who in *Rigoletto***
- **A Timeline:** The historical context of the opera's story and composition
- **A Closer Look:** A brief article highlighting an important aspect of Verdi's *Rigoletto*
- **Guided Listening:** A series of musical excerpts with questions and a roadmap to possible student responses
- **Student Critique:** A performance activity, highlighting specific aspects of this production; and topics for wrap-up discussion following students' attendance
- **Further Resources:** Recommendations for additional study, both online and in print
- **Glossary:** Common musical terms found in this guide and in the concert hall

The materials in this guide will focus on several aspects of *Rigoletto*:

- The social and political context of both Verdi's opera and its source in Victor Hugo's play
- The figure of the clown (or court jester) in literature, drama, and art
- Creative choices made by the artists of the Metropolitan Opera for this production
- The opera as a unified work of art, involving the efforts of composer, librettist, and Met artists

This guide is intended to cultivate students' interest in *Rigoletto*, whether or not they have any prior acquaintance with opera. It includes materials for students with a wide range of musical backgrounds, and seeks to encourage them to think about opera – and the performing arts as a whole – as a medium of both entertainment and creative expression.



Ken Howard/
Metropolitan Opera

SUMMARY

Rigoletto, a hunchbacked comedian, works in a casino owned by the Duke of Mantua, an obscenely wealthy young man who spends most of his time chasing women. The Duke and his friends enjoy Rigoletto's jokes, but they find his disability repulsive and they treat him terribly. When one of the Duke's friends hears that Rigoletto has a girlfriend, the Duke's friends decide to kidnap her.

In fact, the woman who lives in Rigoletto's apartment is not his girlfriend. She's his daughter, Gilda, and she has recently fallen in love with a young student she met at church. When the Duke's friends kidnap Gilda and take her to the Duke, she is horrified to discover that the romantic young student she loves is actually the cruel Duke. Rigoletto begs the Duke's friends to tell him where his daughter is, but they just laugh at him. Suddenly, Gilda rushes out of the Duke's bedroom in tears; the Duke has forced himself on her, and she is deeply traumatized.

Rigoletto is desperate to avenge his daughter, so he hires a hitman named Sparafucile to kill the Duke. Passing by the club Sparafucile owns, Gilda overhears their bloody plan. Although the Duke has treated her horribly, Gilda still remembers the kind words he spoke to her at the church and decides to sacrifice herself to save him. When Rigoletto retrieves the Duke's body from Sparafucile, he lifts the hood covering the body's head—and finds Gilda, who has been fatally wounded. Gilda begs her father for forgiveness and then dies in his arms.



Ken Howard/
Metropolitan Opera

THE SOURCE: *LE ROI S'AMUSE*, A PLAY BY VICTOR HUGO

The novels, plays, and short stories of the French writer Victor Hugo are inseparable from the politics of his day. Born in 1802, Hugo lived through a dizzying series of revolutions and political upheavals in France. He would also endure a nineteen-year exile for his political views. Hugo was a staunch liberal dedicated to a secular, democratic, egalitarian France, an ideal which is readily discernible his novels *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (a tale of love and redemption set amidst the cruelties of the medieval inquisition) and *Les Misérables* (in which a cruel police inspector tenaciously pursues a reformed convict while young revolutionaries find love and death on the Parisian barricades). *Le Roi S'Amuse* is less well known than Hugo's epic novels, yet it also clearly reflects Hugo's political leanings, featuring a villainous king so deeply corrupted by his own power that he will stop at nothing to get what he wants. The play premiered in 1832, two years after the overthrow of the absolutist Bourbon monarchy and the establishment of a constitutional monarchy in France. Yet even this new and relatively liberal government found Hugo's depraved king to be an unforgivable insult to the throne, and the play was banned the morning after its premiere. Hugo fought hard to have the ban lifted, but to no avail: *Le Roi S'Amuse* would not be performed again for fifty years.

Fortunately, the ban on performances of Hugo's play did not extend to its dissemination in published form, and *Le Roi S'Amuse*—its popularity bolstered, no doubt, by its notoriety—enjoyed relatively wide distribution. One of the many readers impressed by this irresistibly gritty drama was Giuseppe Verdi, who in 1850 called it “the greatest story of modern times.” Unfortunately, the censors in Venice, where the new opera was scheduled to be performed, were less enthusiastic about Hugo's work. Citing the “disgusting immorality” of the plot, they threatened to ban Verdi's opera unless the story were rewritten to cast the Duke in a more favorable light. Verdi responded that he would rather scrap the project entirely than adopt such an illogical adaptation: Without the Duke's tyrannical absolutism and unrepentant lasciviousness, Gilda's rape and Rigoletto's ill-fated revenge would make no sense. The Venetian censors finally backed down. *Rigoletto* went forward as planned, and the result is now one of the best-loved operas of all time.



Ken Howard/
Metropolitan Opera

SYNOPSIS

Act I: Las Vegas, 1960, the Duke's casino

On the gaming floor of his lavish casino, the Duke boasts about his luck with the ladies. No woman is off-limits as far as he is concerned, and lately he has taken to flirting with the Countess Ceprano, the wife of one of his best friends. Rigoletto, the Duke's hunchbacked sidekick, teases the Countess's jilted husband mercilessly. The Duke's friends enjoy Rigoletto's jokes, but they do not think of him as a friend; instead, they laugh at him behind his back and mock his deformity. Ceprano wants to get back at Rigoletto for his insults, so he and his friends decide to kidnap the woman they've seen in Rigoletto's apartment, who they assume is Rigoletto's girlfriend. All of a sudden, Monterone, an Arab tycoon, forces his way into the crowd and accuses the Duke of seducing his daughter. When Rigoletto responds to Monterone's fury with his typical jokes, Monterone curses him, wishing Rigoletto to suffer the same pain and embarrassment that he is feeling. The Duke's men arrest Monterone and drag him away.

That night, after the party, Rigoletto sits in the empty casino thinking about Monterone's curse. A solitary figure introduces himself to Rigoletto: It is Sparafucile, a hitman, who tells Rigoletto he can "make problems disappear." Rigoletto returns home, thinking about Sparafucile's offer.

Rigoletto's apartment

In fact, the woman who lives in Rigoletto's apartment is not his girlfriend. She is his daughter, Gilda. Rigoletto is terrified that something will happen to Gilda, so he has asked her to stay in the apartment. Gilda agrees to this rule, promising that she will leave the apartment only to go to church. What Gilda doesn't tell her father is that she has recently fallen in love with a young man she has seen while praying.

The Duke appears at the apartment, and Gilda instantly recognizes him as the young man from the church. He introduces himself as a poor student named Gualtier Maldè and declares his love for Gilda. Unaware that the sensitive young man is actually the cruel Duke in disguise, Gilda is overjoyed.

Meanwhile, the Duke's friends have gathered outside Rigoletto's apartment, intending to kidnap his "girlfriend." When Rigoletto arrives, they say they are abducting the Countess Ceprano and ask Rigoletto to help. Rigoletto leaves for the Cepranos' apartment and the Duke's friends kidnap Gilda. When Rigoletto discovers that his daughter has been taken, he is horrified and heartbroken—and wonders if this tragedy has anything to do with Monterone's curse.

Act II: The Duke's apartment

Alone in his penthouse, the Duke reflects on his encounter with Gilda and wonders if he might actually love her. Soon his friends arrive. They laugh as they tell him how they kidnapped Rigoletto's "girlfriend" and left her in the Duke's bedroom. The Duke realizes it is Gilda and hurries off to see her. Rigoletto enters, looking for Gilda. When he reveals that she is his daughter (and not his girlfriend), the Duke's friends are shocked. Nevertheless, they refuse to help Rigoletto find her. Soon Gilda appears, disheveled and deeply traumatized. She tells Rigoletto how the Duke wooed, kidnapped, and forced himself upon her. Monterone is brought into the apartment to be executed in front of Rigoletto, Gilda, and the Duke's friends. In the commotion, Rigoletto quietly vows to take revenge on the Duke.

Act III: A deserted riverbank on the outskirts of town

Despite everything that has happened, Gilda still loves the Duke. Rigoletto, by contrast, knows that the Duke is a scoundrel. Wanting Gilda to see what the Duke is really like, Rigoletto brings her to the seedy club where Sparafucile lives with his sister Maddalena. They watch through a window as the Duke shamelessly flirts with Maddalena. Gilda is heartbroken. Rigoletto begs his daughter to disguise herself in men's clothing and leave town, saying it is no longer safe for her to remain. After she leaves, Rigoletto hires Sparafucile to murder the Duke, and grimly looks forward to dumping the Duke's dead body in the river.

As storm clouds gather in the night sky, Gilda, worried for the Duke's safety, returns to the club. From outside, she overhears Maddalena urging her brother to spare the Duke and kill Rigoletto instead. Sparafucile refuses to kill Rigoletto, but says that if he can find another body to give Rigoletto in the Duke's place he will happily save the Duke's life. Gilda decides that she will sacrifice herself to provide the body Sparafucile needs. Disguised as a man, she knocks on the door and says she is a traveler looking for shelter from the storm. Sparafucile stabs Gilda and hides her body in the trunk of a car. When Rigoletto returns, he naturally assumes that the limp body stashed in the trunk is the Duke's. He gloats over his revenge... until he hears the Duke singing inside the club and realizes he has been duped. He removes the hood covering the body's face and finds his own daughter, fatally wounded. Gilda asks her father to forgive her, then dies in his arms. Crazy with grief, Rigoletto realizes that Monterone's curse has come true.

VOICE TYPE

Since the early 19th century, singing voices have usually been classified in six basic types, three male and three female, according to their range:

SOPRANO
the highest-pitched type of human voice, normally possessed only by women and boys

MEZZO-SOPRANO
the female voice whose range lies between the soprano and the contralto (Italian "mezzo"=middle, medium)

CONTRALTO
the lowest female voice, also called an alto

TENOR
the highest naturally occurring voice type in adult males

BARITONE
the male voice lying below the tenor and above the bass

BASS
the lowest male voice

WHO'S WHO IN RIGOLETTO

| Character | | Pronunciation Guide | Voice Type | The Lowdown |
|--------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------|--|
| Rigoletto | A comedian | ree-goh-LET-toh | baritone | Born a hunchback, Rigoletto has always been teased. Now a bitter and cynical adult, he has learned to defend himself against people's cruelty by making jokes about everyone else. His one source of joy and happiness is his daughter, Gilda. |
| Gilda | Rigoletto's daughter | JEEL-dah | soprano | Rigoletto is terrified that someone will mistreat his daughter, so he keeps Gilda locked away in a hotel room. She never leaves, except to go to church—which is where she meets and falls fatefully in love with "Gualtier Maldè" (who is really the Duke of Mantua in disguise). |
| The Duke of Mantua | | Duke of MAN-chew-ah | Tenor | Cruel and lecherous, the Duke uses women, throws them away, and never looks back. Rigoletto typically laughs at the Duke's dalliances, but when the Duke seduces Gilda, Rigoletto plans a brutal revenge. |
| Sparafucile | A hit man | spah-rah-foo-CHEEL-leh | bass | After hearing how the Duke has mistreated his daughter, Rigoletto hires Sparafucile and Maddalena to kill the Duke. Unfortunately, this plan will tragically backfire. |
| Maddalena | Sparafucile's sister | mahd-dah-LEH-nah | contralto | |
| Count Ceprano | A nobleman | Count/Countess cheh-PRAH-noh | bass | Count Ceprano is one of the Duke's friends, but that hasn't stopped the Duke from flirting with his wife, the Countess. |
| Countess Ceprano | Count Ceprano's wife | | mezzo-Soprano | |
| Monterone | A wealthy sheikh | mohn-tehr-ROHN-neh | Bass | Monterone is the father of a young woman seduced by the Duke. When Rigoletto makes fun of this grieving father's shame and embarrassment, Monterone curses the comedian. |
| Giovanna | Rigoletto's housekeeper | joe-VAHN-nuh | soprano | Although Giovanna is supposed to protect Gilda, she arranges a meeting between Gilda and the Duke. |

- **1802** Victor Hugo is born in the French city of Besançon, thirteen years after the beginning of the French Revolution and two years before Napoleon Bonaparte crowns himself Emperor of France.
- **1813** Giuseppe Verdi is born on October 9 or 10 (the exact date is uncertain) in Roncole, a tiny Italian agricultural village near Parma. Verdi's parents are innkeepers with no musical training, yet they soon recognize their son's prodigious talents. He will receive his first music lessons at the age of three.
- **1814** Following a series of bruising military defeats, Napoleon abdicates his title and the Bourbon dynasty once again ascends the French throne. Napoleon will make a brazen comeback the following year, but after his decisive loss at the Battle of Waterloo a few months later, the French government seems to be securely in Bourbon hands.
- **1822** Verdi, only nine years old, is hired to play organ at San Michele, a beautiful church across the street from his parents' inn. Yet Roncole's limited musical life falls far short of Verdi's needs, and he soon moves to the nearby city of Busseto to continue his musical studies.
- **1830** Once again, revolution breaks out in France. The Bourbon king is replaced by a constitutional monarchy.
- **1832** Verdi moves to Milan, the operatic capital of Italy. He hopes to study at the Milan Conservatory, but his application is rejected for bureaucratic reasons. (Ironically, the conservatory will officially be renamed the "Giuseppe Verdi Conservatory" after the composer's death.)

On November 22, Victor Hugo's play *Le Roi S'Amuse* premieres in Paris. Its success is short-lived: Deemed overly antagonistic to the crown, the play is banned the morning after its premiere.

- **1839** Verdi's first opera premieres at the Teatro alla Scala, Milan's most famous opera house. The opera is successful enough that Bartolomeo Merelli, the impresario in charge of La Scala, contracts Verdi to compose three more operas.



Giuseppe Verdi

- **1840** In contrast to the successes of 1839, 1840 is one of the worst years of Verdi's life. His wife dies on June 18, and his second opera, *Un Giorno di Regno*, is a total flop.
- **1842** On March 9, La Scala hosts the premiere of Verdi's third opera, *Nabucco*. It is an extraordinary success. Singing the powerhouse role of the anti-heroine Abigaille is Giuseppina Strepponi, a riveting young soprano who will become the love of Verdi's life. The success of *Nabucco* launches a period of extraordinary productivity and success for Verdi; between 1844 and 1849, he will compose no fewer than eleven operas.
- **1847** Verdi moves to Paris and begins living with Giuseppina Strepponi.
- **1848** Revolutions break out across Europe, sweeping through Germany, Denmark, Belgium, Ireland, and the sprawling Austro-Hungarian Empire. In France, the constitutional monarchy is overthrown and a new republic is established. In northern Italy, uprisings in Milan and Venice drive out the ruling Austrian army; when the Austrians retake the cities a few months later, however, they institute a brutal crackdown on free speech and politically-motivated art.
- **1849** Verdi returns to Busseto, bringing Giuseppina Strepponi with him. In September, he expresses interest in writing an opera based on *Le Roi S'Amuse*.
- **1850** Verdi hopes to stage the new opera, which he has named *Rigoletto*, in Venice. Unfortunately, the city is once again under the control of the absolutist Austrian monarchy and the conservative censors find Hugo's story "obscene" and "immoral." Verdi must fight tooth and nail to bring the opera to the stage.
- **1851** *Rigoletto* finally premieres at Venice's Teatro La Fenice on March 11. It is a phenomenal success.

Back in Paris, the President of the French Republic seizes power in a bloody coup d'état. As an outspoken critic of the regime, Victor Hugo must flee the country. He remains in exile, first in Belgium and then in the Channel Islands, until 1870.
- **1858** For centuries, the region now known as Italy has been a political patchwork of tiny city states, principalities, and duchies. Yet citizens and political thinkers across the peninsula have begun to imagine a unified Italy free from foreign domination. Victor Emmanuel II, King of Sardinia, is tapped as a potential leader of the prospective country, and Verdi's name is employed as a handy acrostic for the hopeful phrase "Vittorio Emanuele, Re d'Italia" (Victor Emmanuel, King of Italy).
- **1861** Italy is finally unified. At the behest of the new prime minister Camillo Cavour, Verdi enters the Italian parliament; he will serve until 1865.
- **1901** Verdi dies on January 27. The funeral is small, in accordance with the composer's wishes, but a public memorial procession through the streets of Milan is attended by thousands. Verdi is mourned as a national hero: a figure who embodied the political aspirations and artistic pride of an entire country.

CLOWNING AROUND: *RIGOLETTO* AND THE “FOOL” AS LITERARY ARCHETYPE

Jester, clown, comedian: Rigoletto’s title is mutable. Yet no matter how his job is described, Verdi’s hero always embodies the literary archetype of the “fool,” a catch-all term for characters who provide comic relief for other people in the story—and who are typically anything but foolish. The fool has been a staple of literature and drama for centuries, and understanding this complex literary figure will deepen our appreciation of both Verdi’s opera and the deeply tragic “fool” at the story’s heart.

In a royal court, the jester held an oddly privileged position. As someone who rubbed shoulders with the court’s most powerful people, the jester was a court “insider” with access to all the juiciest gossip. At the same time, the jester was clearly an outsider. With their colorful costumes, jesters were easy to differentiate from everyone else at court. More subtly, the way the jester spoke—with poems, puns, and even songs—made it clear that they thought and conversed on a different level than the “normal” people around them.

The content of the jester’s speech was also unusual. Since anything a jester said could be dismissed as merely the nonsensical ramblings of a fool, jesters could speak truth to power with remarkable liberty. As long as their remarks were couched in the clothing of “comedy,” jesters could (at least in theory) say anything they wanted without fearing punishment. In fact, we still see this idea today at events such as the White House Correspondents’ Association dinner, when comedians are invited to insult Presidential cabinet members to their face. Even in less formal political settings, comedians are often granted the right to say things that would otherwise be considered intolerably insulting; Don Rickles, a real-life comedian on whom Michael Mayer based the Rigoletto in this production, is often called an “insult comic.”

It might seem that jesters enjoyed a plum position: Hired to make people laugh, they might have lived a life of gaiety and contentment free from the usual stressors of life in an absolutist regime. Yet the jester’s job had a decidedly darker aspect. Perpetually viewed as “different,” jesters were frequently subject to ridicule and spite. This was especially true if they had a deformity or disability. For instance, Rigoletto’s hunched back makes him a lightning rod for not only casual contempt from the Duke’s friends (such as jeers and insults), but also the unimaginably cruel “joke” of Gilda’s kidnapping.

Rigoletto, then, is a comedian, but his life is anything but comic. Both Verdi and Victor Hugo realized that this ironic juxtaposition of happiness and sorrow would make their story of love, hatred, and revenge all the more powerful. Verdi was right when he observed that Hugo’s play was one of the greatest dramas of the modern age. For when the clown onstage removes a smiling mask to reveal his own bitter tears, the whole audience will likely weep along with him.



Jester with a Lute by Franz Hals (ca. 1623)

The Guided Listening Activities are designed to introduce students to a selection of memorable moments from the opera. They include information on what is happening dramatically, a description of the musical style, and a roadmap of musical features to listen for. Guided Listening Activities can be used by students and teachers of varying levels of musical experience.

IN PREPARATION

For this activity, teachers will need access to a recording of *Rigoletto* and the libretto.

"GUALTIER MALDÈ! ... CARO NOME CHE IL MIO COR"

Gilda has seen a handsome young man during her frequent visits to church. She can't stop thinking about him, but she has no idea who he is or where he is from. Imagine her surprise, then, when this same young man appears at her window one night and introduces himself as "Gualtier Maldè," an impoverished student. Maldè tells Gilda that he loves her. When he leaves, she reflects on the happiness she has found, never suspecting that the gentle young Maldè is actually the cruel Duke in disguise.

What to listen for:

- How Verdi uses music to depict the sighs, breathlessness, and rapid heart-beats that Gilda describes
- Three different types of virtuosic ornamentation (trills, melismas, and high notes)

- (00:00) Gilda stands alone after Maldè's departure, thinking about what has just happened. Listen to the solo flute (the high, breathy instrument). Throughout this aria, different solo instruments will accompany and punctuate Gilda's singing.
- (00:10) Gilda softly says the name of the man she just met. This introductory section of the aria is very simple and introspective.
- (00:50) Two flutes introduce the aria's main melody.
- (01:19) Gilda repeats the melody the flutes just played as she recites the aria's first line: "That sweet name makes my heart beat faster." Listen to how she pauses briefly between each syllable, as though she is out of breath. Singers rely on very careful control of their breath to produce the music you hear onstage. Try singing this line: Does it make you get out of breath? Do you feel like you're sighing?
- (02:05) Listen to how Gilda oscillates rapidly between two notes. This is a type of ornamentation called a "trill," and it is a hallmark of virtuosic arias.
- (02:49) The orchestra drops out, and Gilda sings a soaring melody all on her own. Listen carefully and you'll notice that Gilda's numerous notes all accompany a single syllable of text. This is a compositional technique called a "melisma," and is another major element of operatic virtuosity.
- (03:44) Gilda sings an enormous melisma that cascades from a very high to a very low note. Since sopranos have the highest voices of any opera singer, super high notes are a crucial element of their virtuosic toolbox. Listen to how Gilda mixes melismas and high notes in this section.
- (05:08) This solo is the climax of the entire aria, with tons of trills, melismas and high notes. Are you impressed?
- (06:10) The orchestra plays a syncopated variation of Gilda's opening melody but Gilda does not sing along with them. Instead, she simply repeats the name Gualtier Maldè over and over.
- (06:38) Gilda sings the opening melody one last time as she brings the aria to a close. In the background, you will hear the Duke's henchmen commenting on her appearance as they prepare to kidnap her.

"LA DONNE È MOBILE"

The Duke has come to Sparafucile's club to dance and flirt. Dead drunk, he lounges on a couch and sings an upbeat song about the fickleness of women—a deeply ironic sentiment, given the Duke's own behavior. This song will be crucial later in the opera, when Rigoletto hears the supposedly-dead Duke singing it and realizes that Sparafucile has killed someone else instead. It is also one of the most famous tunes ever written.

What to listen for:

- The structure of the aria, which alternates between "verses" (featuring the same music but different texts) and "refrains" (in which both music and text are repeated)
- The "triple meter" rhythm (explained below)

- (00:00) Listen to tune played by the orchestra and observe how easy it is to count a steady "one-two-three" with the music. When we can easily group musical pulses into sets of three, we say that the piece is in "triple meter." This meter is often associated with dances (like the waltz) because it is lively and easy to follow.
- (00:12) The Duke begins singing the aria's main melody. Pay attention to the lyrics, so you can see if/when they return: "A woman is a fickle thing, flitting around like a feather in the breeze."
- (00:23) The melody repeats, but now the words are different. The Duke says that no matter how a woman looks, she is always lying.
- (00:34) The melody changes, climbing upward before finally falling back down to bring the phrase to a close. Yet the lyrics are the same as at (00:12).
- (00:51) The Duke ends this portion of the aria with a flourish: repeating the last few notes of the verse, then tossing off a dazzling high note.
- (01:12) The music from the beginning of the aria repeats, but now the lyrics are different: "If you trust her, you'll be miserable. Tell her your secrets and she'll break your heart." Since the music repeats but the lyrics have changed, this is the "verse" of the song.
- (01:34) The music from (00:34) returns - and so do the lyrics. Thus, this is the "refrain" of the song, which always features identical music and text.
- (02:00) Instead of simply repeating the flourish from (00:51), the Duke sings a giant melisma, then leaps up to a soaring high note—two virtuosic techniques guaranteed to win him applause from the audience!

"AH PIU NON RAGIONO"

A terrible storm is brewing as Gilda comes to Sparafucile and Maddalena's inn. Although her father has begged her to leave Las Vegas as quickly as possible, she has a terrible premonition that something will happen to the Duke. As Gilda stands outside the inn, she overhears Sparafucile and Maddalena talking about the planned murder. Gilda makes a fateful decision as lightning and thunder split the sky.

What to listen for:

- How Verdi uses music to depict a violent thunderstorm
- The interaction between Sparafucile and Maddalena's conversation (inside the inn) and Gilda's monologue (as she stands outside)

- (00:00) At the end of Act II, Rigoletto swore to strike the Duke "like a lightning bolt." As the storm blows in at the beginning of Act III, however, Rigoletto's metaphor seems to be taking on a very literal form. In the opening seconds of this excerpt, listen to how Verdi uses the orchestra to create flashing lightning, grumbling thunder, and rushing wind.
- (00:06) To approximate the sound of wind, Verdi uses an unusual technique: a chorus standing offstage hums a seven-note melody that rises and falls like a fearsome gust.
- (00:28) Maddalena begs her brother not to kill the Duke. As she does, the orchestra begins playing an ominous, repeating rhythm.
- (00:44) Listen again to the lightning, thunder, and wind created by the orchestra and offstage chorus. The lightning seems to occur just as Sparafucile explains his evil plan. Why do you think Verdi did this?
- (01:27) The wind and thunder in the orchestra are every bit as sinister as Maddalena's plan.
- (01:53) For the first time in this scene, the onstage characters have the same melody as the orchestra. Ask your students what is happening in the storm at this moment. Why do they think so?
- (02:02) Sparafucile and Maddalena, who are standing inside the club and talking to each other, both sing the same jagged tune. By contrast Gilda, who stands outside listening through a window, sings a different tune. Why might Verdi have chosen to group the voices this way?
- (02:07) Now all three characters sing the same melody. What effect does this have on the drama of the scene?
- (02:22) The storm music pauses just long enough for us to hear the tolling of a bell in the distance. The time has come to kill the Duke. Soon, however, the winds return, now more insistent than ever.
- (02:46) Gilda announces that she wants to die for the Duke. As though illustrating her fateful decision, a bolt of lightning strikes. Between thunderclaps, we can hear her knocking on the door.
- (03:07) The music from (01:53) returns.
- (04:07) The storm bursts around Gilda as she stumbles into the inn. Sparafucile grabs a knife, stabs her, and drags her body outside into the rain.

IN PREPARATION

For this activity, students will need the *My Highs & Lows* reproducible handout found in the back of this guide.

COMMON CORE STANDARDS AND *RIGOLETTO*

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-12.1
Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-12.1d
Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.

ENCOURAGING STUDENT RESPONSE IN ATTENDING THE FINAL DRESS REHEARSAL

Watching and listening to a performance is a unique experience that takes students beyond the printed page to an immersion in images, sound, interpretation, technology, drama, skill, and craft. Performance activities help students analyze different aspects of the experience and engage critically with the performance. They will consider the creative choices that have been made for the particular production they are watching and examine different aspects of the performance.

The Student Critique activity incorporates a reproducible sheet. Students should bring this activity sheet to the final dress rehearsal and fill it out during intermission and/or after the final curtain. The activity directs attention to details of the production that might otherwise go unnoticed.

The activity sheet is called *My Highs & Lows*. It serves to guide students toward a consistent set of objective observations, as well as to help them articulate their own opinions. It is designed to enrich the students' understanding of the art form as a whole. The ratings system encourages students to express their critique: use these ratings to spark discussions that require careful, critical thinking.

The *My Highs & Lows* handout can be found at the back of this guide.

FOLLOW-UP DISCUSSION

Start the class with an open discussion of the Met performance. What did students like? What didn't they? Did anything surprise them? What would they like to see or hear again? What would they have done differently? The discussion offers an opportunity to apply the notes on students' *My Highs & Lows* sheet, as well as their thoughts about the visual design of the Met production—in short, to see themselves as *Rigoletto* experts.

Next, ask your students to focus on *Rigoletto's* characters. Who was their favorite character? Who was their least favorite character? Which character was the most memorable, and why? Invite them to consider how the many elements of the Final Dress performance—music, poetry, acting, singing, costumes, stage sets, wigs, makeup, etc.—worked together to bring each character to life. Then begin a more general discussion of *Rigoletto's* plot; the following questions may facilitate your discussion:

- Why do you think Rigoletto is a comedian? Did he take the job because he loved it, or because he felt he had no other options?
- When Rigoletto meets Sparafucile (in Act I), he observes, "Sparafucile and I are basically the same: I wound with words, he wounds with a knife." What do you think this means? Has Rigoletto himself ever been hurt by words?
- Why do you think the Duke pretended to be a poor student when he first introduces himself to Gilda?
- Do you think Gilda loves the Duke? Do you think the Duke loves Gilda? Why or why not?
- Throughout the opera, Rigoletto is terrified by "the old man's curse." Where does this idea come from? Do you think he is really cursed? What other explanation might there be for this tragic story?

Rigoletto is a tragedy of human error. Unlike, say, *Romeo and Juliet*, in which the tragic ending is due to an unfortunate coincidence (the letter telling Romeo about Juliet's potion doesn't reach him in time), *Rigoletto's* finale is the result of individual characters' actions, assumptions, flaws, and mistakes. Invite your students to consider what each character might have done differently to create a happier ending. For instance, the Duke could treat women with respect, his friends could decide not to kidnap Gilda, Rigoletto could refrain from hiring a murderer to dispatch with the Duke, etc.

It is also important to note that *Rigoletto* includes some very disturbing events, such as Gilda's rape and her eventual murder. If your students need to talk through these elements of the plot, make your classroom a safe space for them to do so. Does *Rigoletto's* story remind them of anything happening in current events, such as the #MeToo movement? Can *Rigoletto* teach us anything about these events? Can current events teach us anything about *Rigoletto*?

Finally, remember that opera is a multimedia art form: any and all aspects of the performance your students have just seen—including the act of seeing it live—are important factors contributing to the overall experience. Ask them for any final thoughts and impressions. What did they find most memorable?

IN PRINT

Berger, William. *Verdi with a Vengeance: An Energetic Guide to the Life and Complete Works of the King of Opera*. New York: Vintage Books, 2000.

An excellent and accessible introduction to Verdi, with a good overview of the composer's life and insightful commentary on each of Verdi's operas.

Hugo, Victor. *The Essential Victor Hugo*. New translations with an introduction and notes by E.H. and A.M. Blackmore. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

A well-curated selection of Hugo's writings, this volume is also notable for its excellent introduction and a chronology that contextualizes Hugo's life and work.

ONLINE

Hirsch, Russel F. "Jester & Fool Books, Parts 1 & 2." From the blog *Storythreads: Unraveling great storytelling in books for children and young adults*. <https://russellhirsch.wordpress.com/2017/04/01/jester-fool-books-part-1/> and <https://russellhirsch.wordpress.com/2017/04/19/jester-fool-books-part-2/>

After discussing the archetype of the fool, your students may enjoy reading about some other literary clowns. Russel F. Hirsch's blog posts offer an excellent annotated bibliography of books about jesters; "Part 1" features picture books for younger readers, while "Part 2" features historical fiction for young adults.

Lazyan, Merrin and Jeff Spurgeon. "Rigoletto: Verdi's Tragic Jester." From *He Sang/She Sang*, a podcast from Classical New York WQXR, January 30, 2017. <https://www.wqxr.org/story/rigoletto-verdis-tragic-jester/>

"He Sang/She Sang," from New York's own WQXR radio station, delves into performances and productions at the Met. This episode features interviews with Rigoletto director Michael Mayer and soprano Olga Peretyatko, who played Gilda at the Met during the 2016–17 season.

The Metropolitan Opera. "Rigoletto in Rehearsal." From the Metropolitan Opera's YouTube channel, recorded January 5, 2013, and published January 8, 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u5m83Xqtuf0>

This video takes you into one of the underground rehearsal rooms at the Met, where *Rigoletto's* star singers and director work together to bring Verdi's opera to the stage. The video includes interviews with director Michael Mayer, tenor Piotr Beczala (the Duke), and Željko Lučić (Rigoletto).

Parker, Roger. "Verdi the revolutionary? Let's separate fact from fiction." <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2013/oct/07/verdi-the-revolutionary-separate-fact-from-fiction>.

Verdi has long been associated with the "Risorgimento," the nineteenth-century movement to unify Italy. In this short article, scholar Roger Parker examines Verdi's biography and documentary evidence to craft a more nuanced view of the composer's political agenda.

act/scene

Acts and scenes are ways of categorizing sections of operas. An act is a large-scale division of an opera, and each opera will typically include from two to five acts. Acts can be subdivided into scenes, which are often differentiated by a change in setting or characters.

adagio

Literally “at ease,” adagio is a tempo marking that indicates a slow speed. An adagio tempo marking indicates that the performer should play in a slow and leisurely style.

allegro

Italian for “cheerful” or “joyful,” Allegro is the most common tempo marking in Western music, indicating a moderately fast to quick speed.

aria

A song for solo voice accompanied by orchestra. In opera, arias mostly appear during a pause in dramatic action when a character is reflecting musically on his or her emotions. Most arias are lyrical, with a tune that can be hummed, and many arias include musical repetition. For example, the earliest arias in opera consist of music sung with different stanzas of text (strophic arias). Another type of aria, da capo arias, became common by the eighteenth century and feature the return of the opening music and text after a contrasting middle section. Nineteenth-century Italian arias often feature a two-part form that showcases an intensification of emotion from the first section (the cantabile) to the second section (the cabaletta).

articulation

The smoothness or hardness with which a note is begun and ended. Articulation is a way of indicating the degree to which each note connects to the next, and can be seen while watching the bow of a stringed instrument player. A note can be attacked sharply and made short, or it can flow smoothly into the next note.

baritone

Literally “deep sounding,” a baritone is what a typical male voice sounds like—the term refers to a male singer with a low but not extremely low vocal range. A baritone will sing notes that are higher than those sung by a bass and lower than those sung by a tenor. Uncommon until the nineteenth century, baritone roles have grown in popularity in opera since the works of Verdi, who often reserved the voice type for villains.

baroque

A period of music history lasting from approximately 1600 to 1750. The beginning of the Baroque period coincides with the invention of opera as a genre, and its end coincides with the death of the composer Johann Sebastian Bach. The Baroque period saw the rise of modern tonality, an expansion of performing forces, and increased ornamentation. The term “baroque” means bizarre or exaggerated, and was used by critics in the Eighteenth century critics who preferred a simpler and less-ornamented style.

bass

The lowest sounding line in music. Bass also refers to the lowest singing range for the male voice. Opera composers often choose a bass voice to sing one of two opposite types of roles: comic characters or dramatic and serious characters. For example, Mozart and Rossini wrote comic parts for bass voice, using musical repetition and low register for comic effect. Wagner and Mozart wrote serious parts for bass voice, focusing on the gravity that a low register can contribute to the overall musical texture.

bel canto

Referring to the Italian vocal style of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, bel canto singing emphasizes lyricism and ornamentation in order to showcase the beauty of the singer's voice. Its focus on lyrical embellishment directly contrasts with a contemporary Germanic focus on a weighty, dramatic style. Bel canto singing is most closely associated with the music of Gioachino Rossini, Vincenzo Bellini, and Gaetano Donizetti.

cadenza

An ornamented musical elaboration played in a free style by a soloist to display his or her virtuosity. Cadenzas are typically improvised—that is, created by a performer on the spot—though they can also be written out in advance. They most frequently occur near the end of a piece, at a point of harmonic tension when the piece is about to conclude.

chorus

A section of an opera in which a large group of singers performs together, typically with orchestral accompaniment. Most choruses include at least four different vocal lines, in registers from low to high, with multiple singers per part. The singers are typically from a particular group of people who play a certain role on stage—soldiers, peasants, prisoners, and so on. Choruses may offer a moral or commentary on the plot, or participate in the dramatic action.

Classical

A period of music history lasting from approximately 1750 to 1830, bordered by the earlier Baroque period and the later Romantic period. Contrasting with the ornamentation common to the preceding Baroque period, Classical music is characterized by simple and elegant melodies, regular harmonic accompaniment, and contrasts between melodic themes. The composers most closely associated with the Classical period include Joseph Haydn, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, and Ludwig van Beethoven.

coloratura

A rapid and elaborate ornamentation by a solo singer, particularly common in operas of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Requiring vocal agility and a wide and high range, coloratura showcases the virtuosity of a singer by featuring repeating melodic figures, rapid scales, trills, and other embellishments.

conductor

The person who directs the orchestra, setting the tempo, giving interpretive directions to the musicians, and generally holding all the musical elements of a performance together. In orchestra performance, the conductor typically stands on a podium in front of the players and uses a baton to communicate the meter and tempo, and his or her non-baton hand to indicate dynamics, phrasing, and articulation to the musicians. The gestures of a conductor can be likened to a non-verbal language that the musicians understand.

contralto

A deep female voice, with a vocal range that extends lower than that of a mezzo-soprano. Contraltos are known for having a very wide range and for the power and depth of sound with which they can sing. As is the case for roles for basses, many of the earliest roles in opera for contraltos are comic roles, though nineteenth-century composers also wrote dramatic roles for female singers with a lower range.

crescendo

A gradual raising of volume in music achieved by increasing the dynamic level. When music crescendos, the performers begin at a softer dynamic level and become incrementally louder. One of the most famous types of crescendos in opera, the Rossini crescendo, includes an increase in volume together with repeating melodic and rhythmic phrases, higher instrumental registers, and the gradual addition of instruments in order to create a particularly dramatic effect.

diminuendo

A gradual lowering of volume in music achieved by decreasing the dynamic level. During a diminuendo, the performers begin at a louder dynamic level and become incrementally softer.

dynamics

A musical trait pertaining to loudness and softness. During the eighteenth century, composers began indicating their desired intensity of volume in music by writing words such as piano (soft) and forte (loud) into the musical score. Dynamics encompass a spectrum from pianissimo (very soft) to piano (soft) to mezzo piano (moderately soft), all the way up to fortissimo (very loud). Music can shift to another dynamic level either suddenly or gradually, through a crescendo or diminuendo.

ensemble

A musical piece for two or more soloists, accompanied by orchestra. Types of ensembles include duets (for two soloists), trios (for three soloists), and quartets (for four soloists). Sometimes singers will respond directly to one another during an ensemble. At other times, singers will each sing to themselves as if the other singers were not on stage. In ensembles, multiple characters may simultaneously express very different emotions from one another.

finale

The last portion of an act, a finale consists of several musical sections that accompany an escalating dramatic tension. Finales frequently consist of multiple ensembles with different numbers of characters. When it occurs at the end of an early act in the opera, a finale may create a messy situation—and the resolution of this situation will only happen in subsequent acts. One type of finale common in comic operas, a chain finale, features characters entering or exiting from the stage to create unexpected combinations of characters, in turn increasing the opera's dramatic tension.

forte

Meaning "loud" or "strong" in Italian, forte is a dynamic level in music that indicates a loud volume. Adding the suffix "-issimo" to a word serves as an intensifier—since forte means "loud," fortissimo means "very loud."

harmony

The simultaneous sounding of pitches to produce chords, and the relationship between different chords as they succeed one another. Throughout much of Western music, systems of rules govern these progressions to help create our sense of musical tension, expectation, and conclusion. Tonal harmony is based on progressions of chords in relationship to a tonic (or home) key. In the 19th century, as composers sought novel sounds to reflect the originality of their invention, they began to employ chords and progressions of greater dissonance and greater distance from the home key. As such dissonances moved beyond mere sound effects into the musical structure itself, the traditional theory of tonal harmony began to become insufficient as a way to understand and describe musical structure.

intermission

A break between acts of an opera. At the beginning of an intermission, the curtain will fall (that is, close) on stage, and the lights in the auditorium, called the house lights, will become brighter. Intermissions provide audiences with a chance to walk around, talk with one another, and reflect on what they have seen and what could happen next. The break in the performance may also correspond with a change of time or scene in the story of the opera—the next act may take place hours or months later, or be set in a different location. Usually lights will dim and a bell may sound to indicate that the intermission is drawing to a close and the opera is about to resume.

legato

A type of articulation in which a melody is played with smooth connection between the notes. A legato passage does not include any pauses between notes or any accents at the beginnings of notes, as the notes blend into one another without a break. In contrast, a passage that is played staccato features notes played in a separated manner.

Leitmotif

From the German for “leading motive,” a leitmotif is a recurring musical idea, or motive, that represents a particular person, object, idea, emotion, or place. This musical idea is usually a few seconds in length and can occur in the music’s melody, harmony, rhythm, or a combination of the three. Leitmotifs are most closely associated with the operas of Richard Wagner, where they are used repeatedly throughout the opera to provide unity; they also less frequently appear in operas of other composers, including Giuseppe Verdi and Richard Strauss.

libretto

The text of an opera, including all the words that are said or sung by performers. Until the early eighteenth century, a composer would frequently set music to a pre-existing libretto, and any given libretto could thus be set to music multiple times by different composers. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, collaboration between the author of the libretto, known as the librettist, and the composer became more frequent. Some opera composers, most notably Richard Wagner, are known for writing their own text.

maestro

A title of respect used to address a conductor. The term is often applied to conductors with several decades of experience. However, performers often use this honorific when addressing the conductor.

melody

A succession of pitches that form an understandable unit. The melody of a piece consists of the tune that a listener can hum or sing. During arias, the singer will usually sing the main melody, though other instruments may play parts of the melody. Sometimes, such as during ensembles, multiple melodies can occur simultaneously.

mezzo-soprano

A female voice with a range between that of a contralto and soprano. A mezzo-soprano's voice is slightly deeper than that of a soprano, so mezzo-sopranos are often cast in supporting roles as older women, including nurses, confidantes, or maids.

opera buffa

A term applied to Italian comic operas from the mid-eighteenth through mid-nineteenth centuries. The plot of an opera buffa often features scenes and characters from everyday life and addresses a light or sentimental subject, concluding with a happy ending.

opera seria

An eighteenth- or nineteenth-century Italian opera employing a noble and serious style. The plot of an opera seria often upholds morality by presenting conflicting emotions such as love versus duty, or by modeling enlightened rulers.

operetta

Featuring spoken dialogue, songs, and dances, an operetta is a short theatrical piece. Shorter in duration than operas, operettas typically feature a light subject matter, incorporate melodies composed in a popular style, and feature spoken dialogue. Most popular from the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, the genre is the precursor of the American musical.

ornamentation

An embellishment to the melody, rhythm, or harmony of music, intended to make a melody more expressive or ornate. Ornamentation can be either indicated through symbols written into the music or improvised by the performer.

overture

An instrumental piece that occurs before the first act as an introduction to an opera. After the conductor enters the orchestra pit and takes a bow, the music for the overture begins. Most overtures are a few minutes in duration, and set the mood for the opera—even featuring musical themes that will occur later in the opera.

piano

Abbreviated *p* in a musical score, piano indicates a soft dynamic level. Musicians may achieve a piano sound by using less bow, less air, or less force. In opera, soft music will often correspond with emotions of sadness or moments in the plot when a character is reflecting on a course of action or emotional state. Pianissimo is “very soft,” and can be so quiet that an audience may need to listen carefully in order to discern its melody and harmony.

pitch

The quality of a musical sound corresponding to its perceived highness or lowness. Scientifically, pitch can be measured as the number of vibrations (or repetitions) of a sound wave per second, which is called its frequency. A sound with a low frequency, like a bass drum, will sound low and have a low pitch, while a sound with a high frequency, like a siren, will sound high.

prima donna

Meaning “first lady” in Italian, the prima donna is the leading female role in an opera. The term may apply to the role or to the singer herself, who usually sings in the soprano register and is the star of the show. Since the nineteenth century, the term has also been applied to a singer of any gender with a self-centered and demanding personality.

recitative

A type of vocal writing between speech and song that imitates the accents and inflections of natural speech. Composers often employ recitative for passages of text that involve quick dialogue and the advancement of plot, since the style allows singers to move rapidly through a large amount of text. Recitative may be accompanied either by keyboard or by the whole orchestra.

rhythm

Rhythm refers to the way music unfolds over time; it is a series of durations in a range from long to short. Along with pitch, it is a basic and indispensable parameter of music. Rhythm is perceived in relation to an underlying beat and within the context of a meter. Western musical notation indicates to the performer the exact duration of each note or rest.

Romantic

A period of music history lasting from approximately 1830 to 1900. Beginning in literature and later adopted by composers, romanticism reflected a newfound focus on individuality, nature, and emotional extremes. Music from the Romantic period often explores music’s redemptive power, focusing on the sublimity of nature, love, and the mysterious. Composers began to experiment with shortening and lengthening the standard forms and durations of musical works, and also added more expressive harmonies to convey the originality of their musical vision.

score

The complete musical notation for a piece, the score includes notated lines for all of the different instrumental and vocal parts that unite to constitute a musical composition. In an opera orchestra, the conductor follows the score during rehearsals and performances, while each performer follows his or her individual part.

Singspiel

Literally “sung play,” a Singspiel is an opera with spoken dialogue. Singspiels are typically in German and are from the Classical or early Romantic eras. The plot of a Singspiel is usually comic in nature, and its music may include songs, choruses, and instrumental numbers that are separated by spoken dialogue.

solo

A piece, musical passage, or line for a lone singer or other performer, with or without instrumental accompaniment. The most common type of solo in opera is the aria, which is composed for a single voice with orchestral accompaniment.

soprano

The highest singing range for the female voice. Roles composed for soprano singers are typically among the leading roles in the opera and require soprano singers to show off their virtuosic flexibility and range.

tempo

Literally “time” in Italian, tempo refers to the speed of a piece of music. Tempo is indicated in a score by a variety of conventional (often Italian) words—such as *allegro*, *adagio*, *vivace*, *moderato*, *grave*, and many more—that not only provide direction on the composer’s desired rate of speed, but also carry associations of gesture and character. For instance, *vivace* indicates not only a brisk speed but also a lively spirit. Additional tempo markings may indicate when a composer asks for a section of music to be sped up (such as “*accelerando*”) or slowed down (such as “*rallentando*”).

tenor

The highest natural male vocal range. By the nineteenth century, the tenor had become the most common vocal range for male leading roles in operas. Tenor roles often feature high-pitched notes for male voice in order to showcase the singer’s range and power. A related voice type is the countertenor, with a range above that of a tenor and similar to that of a contralto.

theme/motive

Themes are the melodic ideas that are musical building blocks for a piece. A theme is often recognizable as a distinct tune and may reappear in its original form or in altered form throughout the piece. A motif (or motive) is a brief musical idea that recurs throughout a musical work. Motives can be based on a melodic, rhythmic, or harmonic component, and their repetition makes them recognizable to the listener. In opera, musical motives are often symbolically associated with specific characters or dramatic ideas.

timbre

Pronounced TAM-bruh, a French word that means “sound color.” It refers to the complex combination of characteristics that give each instrument or voice its unique sound. Just as we can recognize each other by the differences in our speaking voices, operatic singing voices are distinguishable by their unique timbres. Listeners can also identify orchestral instruments by their timbre without being able to see them. The creative combination of different instrumental timbres is one of the artistic aspects of orchestration.

trill

A rapid alternation between two pitches that are adjacent to one another. Trills are a type of ornamentation, serving to embellish the melodic line, and appear regularly within coloratura passages. Trills also may appear near the end of a piece in order to prolong the musical tension before the music concludes.

verismo

A movement in Italian theater and opera in the late 19th century that embraced realism and explored areas of society previously ignored on the stage: the poor, the lower-class, and the criminal. Its characters are driven by passion to defy reason, morality, and the law. In order to reflect these emotional extremes, composers of verismo opera developed a musical style that communicates raw and unfiltered passions. Musically, verismo operas react against the forced ornamentation of the *bel canto* style and instead emphasize a more natural setting of the text to music. Before its exploration on the operatic stage, the verismo aesthetic first developed within the realm of literature.

RIGOLETTO: MY HIGHS & LOWS

February 8, 2019

Conducted by Nicola Luisotti

Reviewed by _____

| THE STARS: | STAR POWER | MY COMMENTS |
|-------------------------------|------------|-------------|
| Roberto Frontali as Rigoletto | ***** | |
| Nadine Sierra as Gilda | ***** | |
| Vittorio Grigolo as the Duke | ***** | |
| Štefan Kocán as Sparafucile | ***** | |
| Ramona Zaharia as Maddalena | ***** | |

| THE SHOW, SCENE BY SCENE | ACTION | MUSIC | SET DESIGN/STAGING |
|--|-----------|-----------|--------------------|
| The Duke sings about women | | | |
| My opinion of this scene: | 1-2-3-4-5 | 1-2-3-4-5 | 1-2-3-4-5 |
| Rigoletto teases Count Ceprano | | | |
| My opinion of this scene: | 1-2-3-4-5 | 1-2-3-4-5 | 1-2-3-4-5 |
| Monterone curses Rigoletto | | | |
| My opinion of this scene: | 1-2-3-4-5 | 1-2-3-4-5 | 1-2-3-4-5 |
| Rigoletto meets Sparafucile | | | |
| My opinion of this scene: | 1-2-3-4-5 | 1-2-3-4-5 | 1-2-3-4-5 |
| Rigoletto speaks to Gilda | | | |
| My opinion of this scene: | 1-2-3-4-5 | 1-2-3-4-5 | 1-2-3-4-5 |
| The Duke introduces himself to Gilda as "Gualtier Maldè" | | | |
| My opinion of this scene: | 1-2-3-4-5 | 1-2-3-4-5 | 1-2-3-4-5 |
| Gilda thinks about Maldè | | | |
| My opinion of this scene: | 1-2-3-4-5 | 1-2-3-4-5 | 1-2-3-4-5 |

| THE SHOW, SCENE BY SCENE | ACTION | MUSIC | SET DESIGN/STAGING |
|---|-----------|-----------|--------------------|
| The Duke thinks about Gilda | | | |
| My opinion of this scene | 1-2-3-4-5 | 1-2-3-4-5 | 1-2-3-4-5 |
| Rigoletto arrives at the Duke's apartment | | | |
| My opinion of this scene: | 1-2-3-4-5 | 1-2-3-4-5 | 1-2-3-4-5 |
| Gilda tells her father what happened | | | |
| My opinion of this scene: | 1-2-3-4-5 | 1-2-3-4-5 | 1-2-3-4-5 |
| Rigoletto vows to get revenge | | | |
| My opinion of this scene: | 1-2-3-4-5 | 1-2-3-4-5 | 1-2-3-4-5 |
| Rigoletto vows to get revenge | | | |
| My opinion of this scene: | 1-2-3-4-5 | 1-2-3-4-5 | 1-2-3-4-5 |
| Rigoletto and Gilda go to Sparafucile's inn | | | |
| My opinion of this scene: | 1-2-3-4-5 | 1-2-3-4-5 | 1-2-3-4-5 |
| The Duke sings about women | | | |
| My opinion of this scene: | 1-2-3-4-5 | 1-2-3-4-5 | 1-2-3-4-5 |
| Rigoletto makes a deal with Sparafucile | | | |
| My opinion of this scene: | 1-2-3-4-5 | 1-2-3-4-5 | 1-2-3-4-5 |
| A storm | | | |
| My opinion of this scene: | 1-2-3-4-5 | 1-2-3-4-5 | 1-2-3-4-5 |
| Rigoletto collects the body | | | |
| My opinion of this scene: | 1-2-3-4-5 | 1-2-3-4-5 | 1-2-3-4-5 |
| Gilda's death | | | |
| My opinion of this scene: | 1-2-3-4-5 | 1-2-3-4-5 | 1-2-3-4-5 |