



2022-23 Hal & Jeanette Segerstrom Family Foundation Classical Series

VERDI'S RIGOLETTO

Thursday, Apr. 20 @ 8 p.m.
Saturday, Apr. 22 @ 8 p.m.
Tuesday, Apr. 25 @ 8 p.m.

Carl St.Clair, conductor
Kathleen Smith Belcher, stage director
Pacific Chorale – Robert Istad, Artistic Director

Rigoletto: Stephen Powell, baritone
Gilda: Alisa Jordheim, soprano
Duke of Mantua: Santiago Ballerini, tenor
Sparafucile: Peter Volpe, bass
Maddalena: Alissa Anderson, contralto
Giovanna: Aria Minasian, mezzo soprano
Count Ceprano: Anthony Reed, bass
Countess Ceprano: Diana Farrell, soprano
Matteo Borsa: Nicholas Nestorak, tenor
Monterone: Franco Pomponi, baritone
Marullo: John Allen Nelson, baritone
Herald: Matthew Kellaway, baritone
Page: Ayanna Delk-Lewis
Supernumeraries: Devon Crowe, Ayanna Delk-Lewis,
Juana Carrillo, Cesar Ballardo, Andi Dana,
Benjamin Cross, David Herrington, Aaron Leppke

John Iacovelli, scenic design
Mark Mendelson, scenic design assistant
Ken Smith, lighting designer
David Murakami, visual design
Katie Wilson, costume coordinator
Pam Marsden, properties coordinator
Chadwick Creative Arts, Supertitles

PROGRAM

VERDI **Rigoletto**
Act I

—INTERMISSION—

Act II

BRIEF PAUSE

Act III

Opera Sponsors:

In memory of Carlos Mollura – by Haydee Mollura
Opera Focus

Maria and Ray Francis – artist sponsors for
Stephen Powell as Rigoletto

Alisa Jordheim's appearance as Gilda was under-
written in honor of Arianna and Athena Struppa

OFFICIAL
TV STATION



OFFICIAL
HOTEL

AVENUE OF THE ARTS
COSTA MESA
—
THE RITE PORTFOLIO

OFFICIAL
RADIO STATION



**This concert is being recorded for broadcast on
July 23, 2023 on Classical KUSC.**

*Performance at the Segerstrom Center for the Arts
Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall*

Costumes Designed by Jane Greenwood
Costumes constructed by Eric Winterling, Inc.,
New York, NY; Seams Unlimited, Racine, WI;
Steppenwolf Costume Shop, Chicago, IL; and Lyric
Opera of Chicago Wardrobe Department.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS



Baritone Stephen Powell (Rigoletto) has been lauded by The Wall Street Journal for his "rich, lyric baritone, commanding presence, and thoughtful musicianship."

An alumnus of the Lyric Opera of Chicago Center for American Artists, he has sung Marcello in *La Bohème*

with that company. His Atlanta Symphony debut as Marcello in concert performances of *La Bohème* was under Robert Spano's direction. He has appeared as soloist with many of America's leading orchestras, including the Detroit Symphony, Minnesota Orchestra, Philadelphia Orchestra, and San Francisco Symphony in repertoire including Orff's *Carmina Burana*, Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, Mahler's Eighth Symphony, and Handel's *Messiah*. Recent opera credits include Enrico in *Lucia di Lammermoor* (Los Angeles Opera), Scarpia in *Tosca* (Minnesota Opera), Germont in *La Traviata* (Seattle Opera), the title in *Rigoletto* (Portland Opera and San Diego Opera), and the title role in *Sweeney Todd* with Michigan Opera Theatre.



Soprano Alisa Jordheim (Gilda) has been lauded by the San Francisco Chronicle as "vocally resplendent" and possessing "impeccable coloratura."

She has had numerous national and international opera engagements, her latest including Susanna in *Le nozze di Figaro* with Virginia Opera, Despina in *Così fan tutte* with San Diego Opera, Adele in

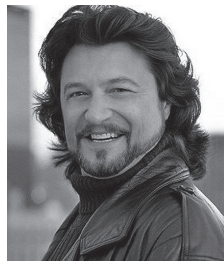
Die Fledermaus with Central City Opera, Norina in *Don Pasquale* with Boston Midsummer Opera, and Hannah in *The Merry Widow* with the New Philharmonic. Jordheim made her debut as Gilda in *Rigoletto* with San Diego Opera, reprising the role at Central City Opera. She originated the role of Lola in Aldridge's *Sister Carrie* with Florentine Opera, a commercial recording of which was released on Naxos Records. She is a former participant in San Francisco Opera's prestigious Merola Opera program.



Tenor Santiago Ballerini (Duke of Mantua), a dual citizen of Argentina and Italy, is well recognized in Latin America where he started his opera career. He has been invited to sing lead roles at the prestigious Teatro Colon in Buenos Aires, including Der Junge Graf in Zimmermann's *Die Soldaten*, The Italian Tenor in *Der Rosenkavalier*, Lindoro in Rossini's

L'italiana in Algeri, and Ernesto in Donizetti's *Don Pasquale*. In recent years, Ballerini has also sung the role of Conte Libenskoff in Rossini's *Il Viaggio a Reims* at the prestigious Teatro Bellas Artes in Mexico City and debuted at the Teatro Municipal in Chile singing Conte Almaviva in Rossini's *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*.

In 2020, Ballerini sang the role of the Duke of Mantua at San Antonio Opera, Tonio in *La Fille du Regiment* with the Norwegian Opera Company, *La Cenerentola* at Cincinnati Opera, and *L'elisir d'amore* at Opera Phoenix. In November 2017, Ballerini made his European debut with the Bordeaux National Opera singing the role of Gualtiero from Bellini's *Il Pirata*. Other notable roles in Europe include his Italian debut at the Teatro Regio di Torino as Nemorino in Donizetti's *L'elisir d'Amore*. Ballerini made his United States debut in 2015 at the Caramoor Festival in New York, as Fernand in Donizetti's *La Favorite*.



American bass Peter Volpe (Sparafucile) continually receives critical and popular acclaim across four continents for his powerful command and the rich texture of his timbre.

Of his recent portrayal of Prince Gremin in *Eugene Onegin* for the Spoleto Festival USA, *Opera News* applauded his ability "to create in his single aria and scene an impressive

dignity. His full-bodied bass and great candor of tone, together with his intelligent interpretation, won him a well-deserved ovation."

Volpe has received much acclaim for his interpretation of the evil assassin Sparafucile in *Rigoletto*, which he has performed in houses such as New York City Opera, Opera Manitoba, Edmonton Opera, Opera Lyra Ottawa, Arizona Opera, Austin Opera, and Kentucky Opera and for which he garnered handsome reviews from the *Tucson Citizen*: "Making his Arizona Opera Company debut, the production's Sparafucile, Peter Volpe, was likewise the real thing. Now this is a bass! Big, solid, and earth-shaking, the handsome assassin's voice had the ominous aura one always wishes for but too seldom finds," *The Financial Times*: "The best performances came from...Peter Volpe as a dark-toned Sparafucile."



Contralto Alissa Anderson (Maddalena) just made her debut at Hawaii Opera Theatre as Mrs. Medlock in *The Secret Garden* and will make her role and company debut at Nashville Opera as Baba in *The Medium*. She will also debut at Chicago Opera Theatre as the Deaconess in *Krol Roger* and as Florence Pike in *Albert Herring*.

Other recent roles include Mother Goose in *The Rake's Progress* with the Angers-Nantes Opera, Marcellina at Austin Opera, Dame Quickly in *Falstaff* with Berkshire Opera Festival, and Erda in *Das Rheingold* with Opera Santa Barbara. In 2020, Anderson made her debut as Mrs. Lovett at Royal Danish Opera. *Opera News* raved, "... it was left to an American Mrs. Lovett, Alissa Anderson, to show the natives how it should be done... Anderson was the best of all of them. She has a true contralto voice... her comic timing was exemplary."

ABOUT THE ARTISTS



Mezzo-soprano Aria Minasian (Giovanna) is quickly gaining recognition as a sought-after performer on the operatic stage and in concert. Minasian is a Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions Washington District Winner (2019), a MONC Northwest Region Finalist (2020), and the recipient of the MONC

Western Canada District Encouragement Award (2020). Other notable awards include 1st Place in the Friends of Opera Competition (2022), 2nd Place in the Seattle Opera Guild's Singers' Development Awards (2020), and a finalist in Eugene Opera's Vocal Competition (2019). Minasian began the 2022-23 season as a Vocal Fellow for Thomas Hampson's American Song Initiative in September. On the operatic stage, Minasian performed in Janáček's *The Cunning Little Vixen* in Czech as the Forester's Wife and *The Owl* with University of Michigan Opera.



Bass Anthony Reed (Count Ceprano) has been hailed for his supple phrasing and dynamic shading by San Francisco Classical Voice. He makes his Royal Opera House debut this fall as Collatinus (*The Rape of Lucretia*). Past operatic credits include Sarastro (*Die Zauberflöte*), Truffaldin (*Ariadne auf Naxos*), King of Egypt

(*Aida*), Don Basilio (*Il Barbiere di Siviglia*), Dulcamara (*L'Elisir d'Amore*), Frère Laurent (*Roméo et Juliette*), and many others. Reed is a distinguished alumnus of the Ryan Opera Center, Adler Fellowship, Merola Opera Program, Wolf Trap Opera, Curtis Institute of Music, and a member of Britten Pears Arts.



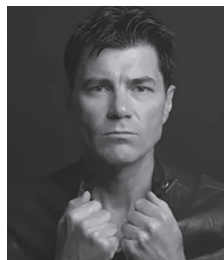
Soprano Diana Farrell (Countess Ceprano) is an American lyric spinto soprano hailed for her "golden voice." Recent performances include Tosca in Puccini's *Tosca*, Magda in Menotti's *The Consul*, Lady Macbeth in Verdi's *Lady Macbeth*, and Krystyna Zywulska in Jake Heggie's *Two Remains*. Other past roles include Rosalinda (*Die*

Fledermaus), Contessa Almaviva (*Le Nozze di Figaro*), Micaëla (*Carmen*), Anna Maurrant (*Street Scene*), Berta (*Il Barbiere di Siviglia*), Miriam (Lee Hoiby's *The Scarf*), and Ameila (*Amelia Goes to the Ball*), among others. She regularly performs with the GRAMMY®-Award winning Pacific Chorale and studies under the celebrated Jon Friedric West. Farrell has garnered attention for her insightful work as a stage director and vocal coach, lauded as an OC Visionary by the *Los Angeles Times*. She is the founding Artistic Director of Lyric Opera of Orange County (Emerging Arts Organization of the Year 2022, Arts OC).



Tenor Nicholas Nestorak (Matteo Borsa) will return to the Metropolitan Opera for Falstaff this season, having previously joined the roster covering Pang (Turandot) and Tanzmeister (Ariadne auf Naxos). Recently, in addition to performing leading regional role debuts, he has sung Pong (*Turandot*) for Opera Grand

Rapids, Brighella (*Ariadne auf Naxos*) for Lakes Area Music Festival, and Anton Scalia in Derrick Wang's *Scalia/Ginsburg*, and Monsieur Vogelsang in Mozart's *Der Schauspieldirektor* for the Princeton Festival, where he will return as Almaviva (*Il Barbiere di Siviglia*) this season. He also joins Opera San Antonio's *Pagliacci* as Beppe. Other roles included Goro (*Madama Butterfly*) with Knoxville Opera and Florida Grand Opera, Monostatos in *The Magic Flute* with Toledo Opera and Opera Grand Rapids, and *The Witch in Hansel and Gretel* with Brava! Opera.



Baritone Franco Pomponi (Count Monterone) is critically acclaimed for the rich, expressive beauty, and powerful virility of his voice, with a cultivated musical style and unmatched dramatic intensity which has brought him to many of the world's most prestigious opera houses and concert halls. His European debut came as

Hamlet at the Gran Teatro del Liceu in Barcelona and success followed worldwide. In Paris, Pomponi created a sensation as Pentheus in *The Bassarids* by Henze at the Théâtre du Châtelet and he returned to Châtelet in the title roles of *Nixon in China* and *Sweeney Todd*. He debuted at Opernhaus Zürich in a new production of *Les pêcheurs de perles* as Zurga and immediately after in Moscow in the title role of *Don Giovanni* for his debut at The Bolshoi Opera. Pomponi made his Chicago debut as Germont in Verdi's *La Traviata*. His New York debut came as Escamillo in *Carmen* at New York City Opera and the next season he joined The Metropolitan Opera. At the Met, he has been heard in *Carmen*, *La Bohème*, *Madama Butterfly*, *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, *Arabella*, *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, *Les Mamelles de Tirésias*, and *The Gambler*.



Baritone John Allen Nelson (Marullo) is known for his "deliciously hearty sound" with "uniformity from top to bottom" paired with his clean musicality. His "full body approach" to acting always makes him an audience favorite. The 2023 season has Nelson returning to the Spoleto Festival as Nicholas in Barber's

Vanessa, revisiting one of his signature roles—Escamillo—in *The Tragedy of Carmen* with Seaglass Theater Company, and

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

debuting with Partners for the Arts in a Rogers and Hammerstein musical revue in partnership with Trinity Chamber Orchestra. Last season, Nelson made his company debuts with Opera Ithaca as Count Almaviva in *Le Nozze di Figaro* and with the Spoleto Festival as Alcindoro in *La Bohème*. He returned to Boston to sing Claudius in a highlight concert of Joseph Summer's *Hamlet* in partnership with Boston Lyric Opera and to the Bar Harbor Music Festival and Schaubard in *La Bohème*.



Baritone Matthew Kellaway (Herald) is known for his stylistic versatility, having substantial experience in opera, musical theater, vocal ensemble, oratorio, barbershop, and popular music. He has performed in Europe in conjunction with choral and solo competitions and domestically with the John Alexander Singers,

Disney's Voices of Liberty, and the Los Angeles Master Chorale. He can most frequently be heard as a featured soloist with the GRAMMY®-Award winning Pacific Chorale at Segerstrom Center for the Arts and on television broadcasts of the *Hour of Power*. Kellaway is director of the Biola Men's Chorus and teaches conducting at Biola University.



Soprano Ayanna Delk-Lewis (Page) is a recent graduate of California State University, Fullerton where she studied Choral Music Education. Ayanna has sung in the Cal State Fullerton University Singers, a college choir ranked among the nation's premier collegiate ensembles, at Carnegie Hall, the Hollywood Bowl, in

Australia, and with John Williams and Andrea Bocelli. Delk-Lewis is a member of the GRAMMY®-Award winning Pacific Chorale and has been seen in opera performances in California and Germany. Recent performances include Amy in *Little Women*, Zerlina in *Don Giovanni*, and Marcellina in the *Marriage of Figaro*, and she will perform in *La Traviata* with Lyric Opera OC this season.



Stage director Kathleen Smith Belcher is currently engaged in her 21st year as a member of the directing staff at the Metropolitan Opera. Among others, she has worked extensively with the San Francisco Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Houston Grand Opera, Los Angeles Opera and the San Diego Opera. Belcher assisted

Peter Sellars on the world premiere of John Adams' *Dr. Atomic* in San Francisco and helped to remount the production for The Netherlands Opera (Amsterdam), and the Lyric Opera of Chicago.

Woody Allen, Michael Mayer, Bartlett Sher, Susan Stroman and Julie Taymor are just a few of the directors with whom she has collaborated. As a member of the Metropolitan Opera directing staff, she has collaborated on numerous "Live in HD" broadcasts, including the EMMY®-winning production of *Don Pasquale*.



Robert Istad, a GRAMMY® Award-winning conductor who "fashions fluent and sumptuous readings" (*Voice of OC*) with his "phenomenal" artistry (*Los Angeles Times*), was appointed Pacific Chorale's Artistic Director in 2017. Under his leadership, the chorus continues to expand its reputation for excellence for

delivering fresh, thought-provoking interpretations of beloved masterworks, rarely performed gems, and newly commissioned pieces. His artistic impact can be heard on two recent recordings featuring Pacific Chorale, including the 2020 GRAMMY® Award-winning *Mahler's Eighth Symphony* with the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Gustavo Dudamel on Deutsche Grammophon (2021), for which he prepared the chorus. It won Best Choral Performance and also garnered a GRAMMY® nomination for Best Engineered Album, Classical. Additionally, Istad conducted the Pacific Chorale's recording *All Things Common: The Music of Tarik O'Regan* released on Yarlung Records (2020).

Istad has prepared choruses for such renowned conductors as Esa-Pekka Salonen, John Williams, John Mauceri, Keith Lockhart, Nicholas McGegan, Vasily Sinaisky, Sir Andrew Davis, Bramwell Tovey, Carl St.Clair, Eugene Kohn, Giancarlo Guerrero, Marin Alsop, George Fenton, and Robert Moody. He regularly conducts and collaborates with Pacific Symphony, Musica Angelica Baroque Orchestra, Sony Classical Records, Yarlung Records, Berkshire Choral International, and Long Beach Symphony Orchestra. An esteemed educator, Istad is Professor of Music and Director of Choral Studies at California State University, Fullerton (CSUF), where he was recognized as CSUF's 2016 Outstanding Professor of the Year. He conducts the University Singers and manages a large graduate conducting program in addition to teaching courses on conducting and performance practice. Istad, who is on the Executive Board of Directors of Chorus America and serves as Dean of Chorus America's Conducting Academy, is in demand as guest conductor, lecturer, and clinician.

ABOUT PACIFIC CHORALE

The GRAMMY® Award-winning Pacific Chorale, an Orange County "treasure" with a "fresh viewpoint" that "can sing anything you put in front of it, with polish, poise and tonal splendor" (*Orange County Register*) has "risen to national prominence" (*Los Angeles Times*) since its inception in 1968. Hailed for delivering "thrilling entertainment" (*Voice of OC*), the resident choir at Segerstrom Center for the Arts is noted for its artistic innovation and

ABOUT PACIFIC CHORALE

commitment to expanding the choral repertoire. It has given the world, U.S., and West Coast premieres of more than 35 works, including numerous commissions, by such lauded composers as John Adams, Jake Heggie, James Hopkins, David Lang, Morten Lauridsen, Tarik O'Regan, Karen Thomas, Frank Ticheli, Andrés Gábor Virágh, and Eric Whitacre. Among other artistic highlights, Pacific Chorale's *The Wayfaring Project*, a stunning original concert film conceived and conducted by Robert Istad and produced during the pandemic, was picked up by PBS SoCal and KCET and will be streamed through December 1, 2024 on pbsocal.org, kcet.org and the PBS app, reaching audiences across the Southland and around the globe.

In addition to presenting its own concert series each season, Pacific Chorale enjoys a long-standing partnership with Pacific Symphony, with whom the choir made its highly anticipated Carnegie Hall debut in 2018. The chorus also regularly appears with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, with which it won the 2022 GRAMMY® Award for Best Choral Performance as well as a GRAMMY® nomination for Best Engineered Album, Classical, for its contribution to the live classical recording of *Mahler: Symphony No. 8, 'Symphony of A Thousand,'* conducted by Gustavo Dudamel, featuring Leah Crocetto, Mihoko Fujimura, Ryan McKinny, Erin Morley, Tamara Mumford, Simon O'Neill, Morris Robinson, and Tamara Wilson; Los Angeles Philharmonic; Los Angeles Children's Chorus, Los Angeles Master Chorale, National Children's Chorus, and Pacific Chorale. The choir has performed with such leading orchestras as the Boston Symphony, National Symphony, Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra, San Diego Symphony, and Musica Angelica, among others.

Pacific Chorale has garnered international acclaim as well, having toured extensively to more than 19 countries in Europe, South America, and Asia, and through collaborations with the London Symphony, Munich Symphony, L'Orchestre Lamoureux, and L'Orchestre de St-Louis-en-Île de Paris, National Orchestra of Belgium, China National Symphony, Hong Kong Sinfonietta, Estonian National Symphony, and Orquesta Sinfonica Nacional of Argentina, among others.

Deeply committed to making choral music accessible to people of all ages, the organization, which has a discography

of 14 self-produced recordings and an extensive collection of exceptional free digital offerings, places a significant emphasis on choral music education, providing after-school vocal programs for elementary school students, a choral summer camp for high school students, and an annual community-wide singing event at Segerstrom Center for the Arts. PacificChorale.org

Robert Istad • Artistic Director & Conductor

Phillip N. and Mary A. Lyons

Artistic Director Chair

Kibsaim Escarcega • Assistant Conductor

Aram Barsamian, Diction Coach

Andrew Brown • President & CEO

TENOR

Nicholas Preston

Section Leader, Roger W.

Johnson Memorial Chair

Jephte Acosta

Dongwhi Baek

Sheridan Ball

Michael Ben-Yehuda

Chris Buttars

Jason Francisco

Alan Garcia

Dan Haub

Craig S. Kistler

Jin Ming Liao

David López Alemán

Ricardo Martinez

Jesse Newby

Carl Porter

Singers Memorial Chair

Sammy Salvador

Jeff Wang

Yngwie Slassh Zamarippa

BASS

Ryan Thomas Antal

Section Leader, Ron Gray

Legacy Chair

Kyle Boshardy

James Brown

Alex Cardenas

Michael Fagerstedt

Louis Ferland

Randall Gremillion

Jared Hughes

Matthew Kellaway

Jonathan Krauss

Elliot Z. Levine

Martin Minnich

Emmanuel Miranda

Ron Mitchell

Kenneth Moore

Jason Pano

Seth Peelle

Raphael Poon

Adrian Rangel-Sanchez

George Reiss

Malek Sammour

Michael Segura

Joshua P. Stansfield

Nathan Villamor

RIGOLETTO SYNOPSIS

Rigoletto

An Opera in Three Acts

Music by Giuseppe Verdi (1813 – 1901)

Libretto by Francesco Maria Piave (1810 – 1876)

Based upon the play *Le roi s'amuse* by Victor Hugo

ACT I—A dark atmosphere of forced gaiety prevails at a party in the court of the Duke of Mantua, a heedless libertine. The court jester Rigoletto, described in the libretto as a hunchback, flits among the guests; it's his task to keep the courtiers laughing and flatter the duke's ego. In a jaunty aria like an anthem of lechery, the duke boasts about his sexual prowess: This woman or that

one, it really doesn't matter. He dances with the Countess Ceprano as Rigoletto taunts her enraged husband, who feels helpless to defy his patron, the duke. The courtier Marullo enters, gleeful with juicy gossip: It seems that the pathetic Rigoletto has a young mistress at home! We know what the gossipers don't: This young woman is actually the jester's daughter, whose existence he's kept secret from the court. But Rigoletto, unaware that he's suddenly become the goat of the latest gossip, continues to taunt Ceprano, who plots with the others to punish him.

Monterone, an elderly nobleman, forces his way into the party, angrily denouncing the duke for seducing his daughter. As he is arrested and ridiculed by Rigoletto,

RIGOLETTO SYNOPSIS (CONT'D)

Monterone angrily denounces the partyers and Rigoletto, fatefully cursing them to know a father's agony like his own. This is the jester's deepest fear, and as he rushes home, he broods over Monterone's words. In his secluded neighborhood he encounters Sparafucile, an assassin and maker of mayhem-for-hire, who offers his services. Though Rigoletto resists, his refusal is less than absolute. He enters his house and warmly greets his daughter, Gilda. Afraid for her safety, he warns her nurse, Giovanna, not to let anyone into the house.

When Rigoletto leaves, the duke appears and bribes Giovanna, who admits him to the garden of Rigoletto's house. Having heard Gilda secretly admiring him at church—but expressing the wish that he were poor—he tells her he is a humble student. After he leaves, she tenderly reflects on her newfound love in an aria of naïve simplicity, dreamily repeating the “dearest name to her heart”—the false name he has given her. Soon, courtiers gather outside the garden intending to abduct Rigoletto's “mistress.” Coming upon the jester, they cleverly improvise, admitting them into their gang, blindfolding him as part of his supposed disguise, and even tricking him into holding a ladder against his own garden wall so they can abduct Gilda from her bedchamber. Once they are gone, Rigoletto rushes into the house and collapses in despair, remembering Monterone's curse.

ACT II—Though nothing about the plan to abduct Gilda was particularly unusual, the duke is disturbed about it. But when the courtiers return and tell him the story of how they took the girl from Rigoletto's house and left her in the duke's chamber, the duke delightedly hurries off to take advantage. Soon, Rigoletto enters to search for her. The plotters are astonished to find out that Gilda is Rigoletto's daughter rather than his mistress, but still prevent him from storming into the duke's chamber. The jester ragefully accuses them of cruelty, but his anger abruptly ebbs away and he almost collapses in grief as he begs them for compassion. Still in her bedclothes, Gilda appears and runs in shame to her father, who orders the others to leave. Alone with Rigoletto, Gilda tells him of the duke's courtship, then of her abduction. When Monterone passes by on his way to execution, the jester swears that both he and the old man will be avenged. Gilda begs her father to forgive the duke.

ACT III—Rigoletto arrives with Gilda at the inn where the sinister Sparafucile lives with his sister, the alluring Maddalena, who serves as bait for his entrapments. As the duke sits inside laughing at the fickleness of women and amusing himself with Maddalena, Gilda and Rigoletto watch from outside. The jester sends Gilda off to Verona disguised as a boy and pays Sparafucile to murder the duke, but Gilda returns and overhears Maddalena urging her brother to spare the handsome stranger and kill the hunchback instead. Sparafucile refuses to murder Rigoletto, but agrees to kill the next stranger who comes to the inn so that he will be able to produce a dead body; Gilda decides to sacrifice

herself for the duke. She knocks at the door and is stabbed. Rigoletto returns to claim the duke's body; as he gloats over the sack Sparafucile has given him, he hears his supposed victim reprising his signature aria, “La donna e mobile,” in the distance. Frantically tearing open the sack, he finds his daughter, who dies asking his forgiveness. Rigoletto collapses in grief with Monterone's curse on his lips.

PROGRAM NOTES

Giuseppe Verdi

Rigoletto

Born: Oct. 10, 1813, Le Roncole, Italy

Died: Jan. 27, 1901, Milan, Italy

Composed: 1851

Premiered: March 11, 1851, Teatro La Fenice, Venice, Italy

Most recent Pacific Symphony

performance: This is a Pacific Symphony premiere

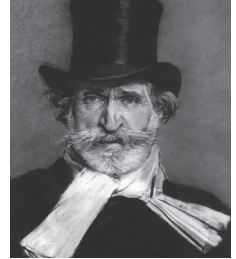
Instrumentation: two flutes including piccolo, two oboes including English horn, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, one tuba, timpani, percussion, and strings

Estimated duration: Approx. 2 hours and 45 minutes

Verdi's *Rigoletto*: Political Corruption from the Top Down

Every so often, history gives us cultural figures who are also major players on the political stage. For example, Ignaz Paderewski, the legendary Polish pianist, fought for Polish independence and served as the Prime Minister of Poland, signing the treaty that ended World War I. Then there's Václav Havel, the major 20th-Century playwright who became the first President of the Czech Republic after the “Velvet Revolution” of 1989—just after former movie actor Ronald Reagan's second term as U.S. President. In our own time, a former standup comic, Volodymyr Zelensky, has shown inspiring leadership in serving as President of Ukraine since 2019. But none of these remarkable individuals dominated both realms as Giuseppe Verdi did in Italy during the 19th Century.

An activist for the cause of Italian unification during the Risorgimento, Verdi was also by far the most important cultural figure in Italy during his lifetime. His highly political opera *Rigoletto* dates from 1850, when he was 37, and is arguably the opera that announced him as the dominant musical genius in Italy during the 19th Century. Daringly innovative, *Rigoletto* departs from the bel canto operatic traditions that informed Verdi's earlier operas, such as *Ernani* and *Nabucco*. And it is so full of gorgeous music—thrilling solo arias, glorious ensembles, and compelling orchestral passages—that it's tempting to sit back and simply lose ourselves in beautiful sound. If that seems appealing, here's a word of advice: *Don't*. Instead, enjoy *Rigoletto* as you would a great movie: Look and think as you listen.



PROGRAM NOTES

Verdi was, first and foremost, a man of the theater. His bold decision to set Victor Hugo's shocking play *Le roi s'amuse* as an opera resulted in a musical drama as timely as this morning's Twitter feed. It remains relevant to anyone who has ever worked for a corrupt boss or felt frustrated by apparent immorality in government. As we experience the drama unfolding onstage, the beauty of the music intensifies the pathos, horror, and revulsion engendered by a very dark story couched in the moral hazards that you and I face every day.

With its forthright treatment of salacious material, its intentionally suggestive title, and its implied critique of a French monarch (François I), Hugo's *Le roi s'amuse* was shut down in Paris after just one performance. When Verdi chose it as the subject for a commission for an 1851 carnival production at La Fenice, the principal Venetian opera house, he knew that he might also have trouble with censors—in this case, those working for the Austrian occupation of the city—but he was not to be discouraged. An ardent admirer of Shakespeare's dramas, he described the jester Triboulet in Hugo's play as "a creation worthy of Shakespeare," the highest praise he could give.

Initial signs augured well: Verdi's librettist Francesco Maria Piave, consulting his own political sources, assured him that the subject matter would be permitted, and the project went forward with the title *La maledizione* ("The Curse") in June of 1850. But within a few months, the president of the opera company raised doubts about the production. In December of 1850, a scant three months before the scheduled premiere, news came that the opera would be barred from performance because of "repulsive immorality and obscene triviality of the plot."

Although Austrian authorities stipulated that this decision was final and that the military governor wanted no further discussion, Piave had a backup plan. He produced a bowdlerized libretto for Verdi's music entitled *Duc de Vendome*, but Verdi refused even to consider this toothless version. Instead, based on a meeting at Verdi's home in Busseto, he and Piave drew up a six-point memorandum addressing the objections to the libretto and offering concessions.

In his strategy to appease the authorities, Verdi had to weigh the elements he deemed most crucial to the drama against those he considered expendable. Religious censors in particular objected to the title *La maledizione* ("The Curse"), which seemed to hold the power of superstition above that of the church. The opera was retitled with the name *Rigoletto* after its central character—a coinage that suggests the French verb *rigoler*, to guffaw. Nonetheless, Verdi felt that the curse uttered by the courtier Monterone, whose daughter is publicly deflowered by the Duke, was vital to the plot—especially since *Rigoletto*, too, has a daughter of his own and is desperate to protect her innocence. By joining in the mockery of Monterone and his daughter, *Rigoletto* fatefully places himself and Gilda among the accursed.

Verdi succeeded not only in preserving this essential plot element, but in making *Rigoletto's* anguished outcry "la maledizione!" the last word of Piave's libretto.

In this altered version, François I morphs into a fictitious 16th-Century Duke of Mantua. The action remains the same, but a sexually explicit scene—in which Gilda ran from the duke, unwittingly locking herself in what turned out to be his bedroom—was excised. Now, as the helpless victim of mistaken identity and an abduction, her innocence becomes a foil emphasizing the depravity of her victimizer, the pathos of her sacrifice, and the corruption of the Mantuan court. With these plot changes and the altered names of the characters (as in Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera*, which absurdly relocates the king of Sweden to a "royal" court in Boston), the grossly fictional setting makes the story more universal.

Though *Rigoletto's* premiere in March 1851 was an unqualified success with the public, the critical reception was mixed; one aggrieved reviewer went so far as to accuse Verdi of taking a backward step toward Mozart. What perplexed the Italian operatic orthodoxy was Verdi's rejection of the recitative-aria-cabaletta tradition of his earlier operas, which had continued along the bel canto trails blazed by Rossini, Bellini, and Donizetti. This opera signaled Verdi's readiness to adapt musical forms more freely to serve his dramatic ends by composing with greater freedom and less vocal ornament. Writing for the Santa Fe Opera, the noted analyst Ira Siff declares that "with *Rigoletto*, Verdi turned the entire structure of Italian opera on its ear." For example, *Rigoletto's* first solo, "Pari siamo" ("We are alike"), takes the form of a brooding soliloquy rather than a traditional aria. In Act II, his great *scena* begins with an outwardly spontaneous exchange with the courtiers as he covertly searches for signs that the duke has entrapped his daughter, pretending to joke until he can no longer bear the pretense. The result, first an angry explosion and then a slow, tender plea for her return, upends the accustomed sequence of aria-cabaletta (dramatically slow principal air followed by up-tempo summation). "No recitative?" writes Siff. "The cabaletta before the aria? And all of it linked without a pause? Unheard of!"

To the late musicologist Piero Weiss, an authority on *Rigoletto*, these and other innovations establish the opera as the gateway to Verdi's middle period—the most significant breakthrough among the "big three" (with *Il Trovatore* and *La traviata*). With *Rigoletto*, he asserts, Verdi launched Italian opera from evolution to revolution. Even more remarkably, Verdi accomplished this transformation in 1851 with a drama that remains irreducibly modern today.

Michael Clive is a cultural reporter living in the Litchfield Hills of Connecticut. He is program annotator for Pacific Symphony and Louisiana Philharmonic, and editor-in-chief for The Santa Fe Opera.