giuseppe verdi’s
RIGOLETTO
january 26 & 28, 2018
valentine theatre
THE CURSE VENGEANCE BRINGS
STUDENT NIGHT AT THE OPERA: WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 24, 2018
JAMES MEENA, CONDUCTOR
TOMER ZVULUN, DIRECTOR

Toledo Opera
student night at the opera
wednesday, january 24
7:00 PM
valentine theatre
The Story and Characters

the long story short
An intriguing story of an unrestrained Duke, his court jester, the jester’s daughter, and a curse which envelops them all in tragedy.

definition
Rigoletto - a hunchback, the Duke’s jester
Gilda - his beautiful daughter
The Duke of Mantua - a licentious nobleman
Sparafucile - the local assassin
Maddalena - his sister
Count Monterone - a courtier
Matteo Borsa - a courtier
Count Ceprano - a nobleman
Countess Ceprano - a noblewoman
Giovanna - Gilda’s nurse
Marullo - a courtier
Duchess - a noblewoman
Court Usher - a courtier

where & when
16th century Mantua

From “Rigoletto”: A Revolution in Opera
“Another way Verdi reworked the forms of Italian opera, was the way he repeatedly interrupts a scene to give the audience a foretaste of what’s to come. In the opening scene, the chorus is interrupted by Monterone’s appearance and curse, which abruptly changes the tone of the scene—thus heightening the crucial point of the drama. In the second scene, the duet between Rigoletto and Gilda is interrupted by the furtive arrival of the Duke, who, in turn, is interrupted in his wooing of Gilda by a noise outside which turns out to be the footsteps of the courtiers who have come to abduct Gilda. Her single aria is interrupted by their comments, which serve to tighten the drama. All this overlapping of scenes and characters gives a sense of urgency and propulsiveness to the storytelling.”
(Paul Thomason, August 16, 2004)
The Action

the long story, not so short

ACT I At his palace, the Duke boasts of his way with women. He flirts with the wife of Ceprano, one of his courtiers, while Rigoletto, the Duke's hunchbacked jester, mocks the enraged husband. Marullo, another one of the Duke's courtiers, bursts in with the latest court gossip: Rigoletto is keeping a young mistress at his place. Unaware of this, Rigoletto continues to taunt Ceprano, who plots with the others to punish Rigoletto for his insults. Monterone, a nobleman, forces his way into the crowd to denounce the Duke for seducing his daughter and is viciously ridiculed by Rigoletto. Monterone is arrested and places a curse on Rigoletto. Rigoletto is disturbed by Monterone's curse. He encounters Sparafucile, an assassin, who offers his services. Rigoletto reflects that his own tongue is as sharp as the murderer's knife. Arriving at home, he warmly greets his daughter, Gilda. Fearing for the girl's safety, he warns her nurse, Giovanna, not to let anyone in. When Rigoletto leaves, the Duke appears and bribes Giovanna, who lets him meet Gilda whom he's seen in church. He declares his love for her and tells her he is a poor student. After he has left, Gilda tenderly reflects on her newfound love. The Duke's entourage gathers nearby, intending to abduct Rigoletto's “mistress.” When Rigoletto arrives, surprising them, they convince him they are abducting the Countess Ceprano and enlist his aid in their scheme. Successfully deceiving Rigoletto, they kidnap Gilda. When Rigoletto discovers that his daughter has been taken, he collapses as he remembers Monterone's curse.

INTERMISSION

ACT II The Duke, having returned to Rigoletto's house expecting to complete his conquest of Gilda, has found the house deserted. Distraught, he expresses, for a moment, a tenderness for the young girl. When his entourage returns and tells him the story of how they abducted a girl from Rigoletto's apartment and left her in the Duke's bedroom, he realizes it is Gilda and hurries off to her. Rigoletto enters, looking for Gilda. The entourage is astonished to find out that she is his daughter rather than his mistress, but they prevent him from storming into the Duke's bedroom. Rigoletto violently denounces them for their cruelty, then asks for compassion. Gilda exits the Duke's room. She tells Rigoletto of the Duke's courtship, her abduction, and her deflowering by the Duke. Monterone is brought in to be killed by the Duke's men, and Rigoletto swears that both he and the nobleman will be avenged. Gilda begs her father to forgive the Duke.

ACT III Rigoletto brings Gilda to a seedy pub on the outskirts of town where Sparafucile and his sister Maddalena live. The Duke appears, and Gilda and Rigoletto watch him through the window as he amuses himself with Maddalena. Rigoletto tells his distraught daughter to leave town disguised as a man and, after she leaves, pays Sparafucile to murder the Duke. Gilda returns to overhear Maddalena urge her brother to spare the Duke and kill Rigoletto instead. Sparafucile refuses but agrees to kill the next person to arrive at the pub, so that he will be able to produce a dead body for Rigoletto. Gilda decides to sacrifice herself for the Duke. Her plan succeeds and Sparafucile and Maddalena put her body in a sack. Rigoletto returns, and assuming the body is the corpse of the Duke, gloats over his revenge. But when he hears the Duke singing inside the pub, he realizes he has been duped. He quickly removes the hood covering the head of the body in the sack and is horrified to find it has been masking the identity of his dying daughter. Gilda dies asking her father's forgiveness and Rigoletto realizes Monterone's curse has been fulfilled.
The Background

In 1850, Verdi wrote to his librettist, Francesco Maria Pave, I have in mind a subject that would be one of the greatest creations of the modern theatre if only the police would allow it. ... The subject is grand, immense and there’s a character in it who is one of the greatest creations that the theatre of all countries and all times can boast. The subject is Le roi's s'amuse and the character I’m speaking about is Triboulet. ... Run about the city and find someone of influence to get us permission of do Le roi s'amuse. ...

Verdi was already anticipating the difficulties he would have with the censors. Indeed, it is a wonder Rigoletto ever made it to the stage.

Verdi chose as his subject the play Le roi s'amuse (The King Amuses Himself) by Victor Hugo, which had opened in Paris two decades previously, in 1832, played for one night, and been promptly banned as obscene and politically subversive. The play was based on the life of the French King Francis I, who had been safely dead since 1547. However, Hugo’s King Francis was a little too much like the King, Louis-Phillipe, who had survived an assassination attempt just before the play opened. The censors were not amused and shut the play down. Despite a lawsuit by the furious playwright, the ban on performances remained in place for fifty years, even though the printed version of the play was available. It was not until November 22, 188, that Le roi s’amuse could finally be seen in Paris - a quarter century after Verdi’s Rigoletto first played Paris - a fact that did not amuse Victor Hugo.

Verdi clearly knew he was asking for trouble when he selected Le roi s’amuse as the subject of an opera. Just as clearly, he was deeply attached to the subject, in particular, to his hunchbacked jester, whom he considered a creation worthy of Shakespeare!

There were so many ways in which it was sure to offend the censors. The story was politically unacceptable: it depicted a king behaving badly and the attempted assassination of that king; it was morally shocking, dealing as it did with rape, adultery, suicide, and the theme of curses and vengeance.

Verdi composed the opera, originally titled La Maledizone (The Curse), in only six weeks as a commission for the Teatro La Fenice, which was in Austrian-controlled Venice. But the opera's premiere had to be postponed while Verdi and Piave waged a battle with the censors. A libretto in Venice required approval from the theatre management, the mayor of the city, and the Austrian Department of Public Order.

When the libretto was submitted to the Department of Public Order in the fall of 1850, the response was extremely negative: His excellency the Military Governor Gorzkowski ... deplores the fact that the poet Piave and the great maestro Verdi have not been able to find any scope for their talents other than the repulsive immorality and obscene triviality of the plot of the libretto title La Maledizione ... The aforesaid Excellency has thus seen fit to ban the performance absolutely.

The censors objected to the portrayal f the king as evil; to the fact that the king’s antagonist was a lowly court jester - and a hunchbacked one at that; to the decadence of court life; to the seduction of the heroine; they even objected to the body in the sack. Verdi was prepared to negotiate, but only to a point; he instructed
Piave not to change the characters, the plot, the dramatic situation. He was adamant that the sack and the hump had to stay.

Of the censors’ directive to remove the sack he wrote, What difference did the sack make to the police? Are they afraid of the effect it has? ... If you take away the sack, it is unlikely that Triboletto would talk for half an hour to a corpse, without having a flash of lightning show him that it is his daughter.

He insisted on Rigoletto’s deformity: “A hunchback who sings? Why not? ... To me there is something really fine in representing on stage this character outwardly so ugly and ridiculous, inwardly to impassioned and full of love.”

After two rewrites and a lot of haggling, helped somewhat by Verdi’s international reputation, a compromise was reached. The French King Francis I morphed into the Italian Duke of Mantua; the hunchback Triboulet became Rigoletto; the other characters’ names were changed. Verdi got to keep the hump and the sack.

In late January, 1851, Piave wrote, For the last five days, I have been running around like the devil from the government to the police, to the Commando di Piazza, to the Presidenza, I assure you that by the time this is over I shall be a real athlete. Two days later he was able to say, Te Deum Laudamus! Gloria in Excelsis Deo! Alleluja Alleluja! At last ... our Rigoletto returned ... safe and sound, with no broken bones and no amputation.

The opera opened on March 11, 1851, and was a great success. By the next day the Duke’s impudent aria La donna è mobile, was heard on the streets of Venice; it remains one of the most instantly recognizable tunes in all opera. Ironically, the censors’ insistence on changing the setting from France to Italy gave the opera a local context, with which the audience could more readily identify.

Rigoletto soon travelled all over Europe and abroad, to enthusiastic audiences. It reached London in 1853, New York and Buenos Aires in 1855, Paris in 1857; it opened the new Cairo opera house in 1869, and was presented by the Metropolitan Opera in its first season in 1883.
## World History

### events surrounding verdi’s world

| 1813 | Giuseppe Fortunino Francesco Verdi born |
| 1814 | Napoleon abdicates and is exiled |
| 1816 | Rossini's "Barber of Seville" premieres in Rome |
| 1817 | New York Stock Exchange is founded |
| 1822 | Charles Graham patents false teeth |
| 1824 | 1st passenger railroad in U.S. |
| 1828 | Beethoven's 9th Symphony premieres in Vienna |
| 1829 | Rossini's "William Tell" premieres in Paris |
| 1831 | Bellini's "Norma" premieres in Milan |
| 1833 | Tennessee enacts 1st prohibition law in U.S. |
| 1837 | Verdi's "Aida" premieres in Cairo |
| 1842 | "Rigoletto" premieres |
| 1847 | Charlotte Bronte's "Jane Eyre" published |
| 1851 | 1st class at U.S. Naval Academy graduates |
| 1854 | Pony express begins |
| 1857 | National Association of Baseball Players founded |
| 1863 | Battle of Gettysburg |
| 1865 | Lincoln assassinated by John Wilkes Booth |
| 1868 | Alcott's "Little Women" published in U.S. |
| 1871 | Verdi's "Aida" premieres in Cairo |
| 1875 | 1st recorded hockey game (Montreal) |
| 1878 | G&S' "HMS Pinafore" premieres in London |
| 1880 | Statue of Liberty presented to U.S. in Paris |
| 1882 | 1st World Series game |
| 1883 | Building of Panama Canal begins |
| 1884 |ellis island (nyc) opens as immigration depot |
| 1888 | Vincent van Gogh cuts off left ear |
| 1890 | Nabisco invents "cream of wheat" |
| 1893 | Ibsen's "Hedda Gabler" premieres in Oslo |
| 1897 | Queen Victoria dies |
| 1899 | Michael Owens of Toledo patents glass-blowing machine |
| 1901 | Verdi dies |
The Music

... I conceived Rigoletto without arias, without finales, as a long string of duets, because this was how I wanted it. Giuseppe Verdi

Verdi himself called Rigoletto “revolutionary” in form and style and considered it his best opera. With Rigoletto, he departed from the traditions of the 18th and 19th century Italian opera and focused on the interaction between characters, creating a continuous dramatic whole rather than a series of story-telling bits interrupted by songs that did more to show off the singer’s talents than to advance the drama.

Rather than solo arias, Verdi wrote much of Rigoletto as duets, again spotlighting the relations between character and reinforcing the tight connection between the drama and the music.

This doesn’t mean there aren’t a few hit songs that can be performed in recital as well as on the opera stage. Gilda’s “Caro nome” is a lovely thing, in which she rhapsodizes on the beloved (though fictional) name of the man she has fallen for.

The Duke’s “La donna è mobile” is also a recital favorite, an unforgettable tune that is familiar even to people who know little of opera. This flippant little ditty takes on a horrible irony within the opera, as it is the cue to Rigoletto that the body he is dragging triumphantly toward the river is not that of the Duke. The Russian composer Igor Stravinsky said that “La donna è mobile” contains more substance and true invention than all of Wagner’s massive four-opera Ring Cycle.

The other great masterpiece in the opera is the magnificent quartet, with the Duke, Maddalena, Gilda, and Rigoletto expressing their individual emotions of passion, amusement, grief, and rage. Victor Hugo, author of the play on which the opera was based, said of the quartet, This is marvellous, simply marvellous! Ah, if I only could in my play make four people talk simultaneously in a way the public would understand the words and varying sentiments.

Verdi himself said: I never expect to do better than the quartet. Many consider it the finest piece of ensemble writing in all of opera.

Over the course of his long career Verdi moved away from the traditional “number opera” (an opera with a lot of individual musical “numbers” such as solos, duets, and trios) to a coherent “through-composed” whole, where the dramatic texture takes precedence over show-stopping numbers. Rigoletto is an early step in this process; Verdi’s last three operas, Aida, Otello, and Falstaff, are in the more modern through-composed idiom. Richard Wagner, born the same year as Verdi, followed a similar development as a composer. Through-composed operas with their tighter dramatic construction became prevalent in the 20th century in the hands of composers such as Richard Strauss and Benjamin Britten.

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Completing a Plot Relationships Chart helps you identify the major parts of the opera’s story and develop an understanding of the relationships among characters, goals, problems, and outcomes. In *Rigoletto*, Verdi “focused on the interaction between characters, creating a continuous dramatic whole...” Explore the two tragic characters in *Rigoletto* by completing a chart for Rigoletto and one for his daughter, Gilda.

**Plot Relationships Chart**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Somebody</th>
<th>Wanted (Goal)</th>
<th>But (Problem)</th>
<th>So (Outcome)</th>
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**I Have a Story to Tell**

Verdi was passionately committed to creating an opera telling the story of Victor Hugo’s play, *Le roi s’amuse*. What story, current event or situation would you be passionate about telling? What art form would you choose to express the story? What obstacles might you face?

**The Story I Want to Tell**

**The Art Form I Would Use to Express the Story**

(For example: painting or sculpture; video/movie; play or opera performed live).

Why have I chosen ________________ as my preferred art form for the story?

**Obstacles to the Success of My Creation**

In 1850 Verdi had to worry about the Austrian censors who had the power to ban his work or stop it from being produced in Venice which was then ruled by Austria. Today, what would you worry about when creating your artistic work? What could stop it from being produced or shown? What obstacles might you face?
An Activity

opera review

Background/Objective
After seeing the opera Rigoletto, take time to reflect on your experience. Use this sheet as a template to gather your thoughts and structure your review.

Send your classes’ reviews to laldlinger@toledoopera.org by February 9 and have excerpts posted on the Toledo Opera website!

Questions
1) How would you rate your experience at the opera?

Not very good . . . 4  5

   Really great!

2) What surprised you about the opera?

3) What did you like and why?

4) What didn't you like and why?

5) How would you describe the production to someone who did not see it?

6) What did you think of the singers?

7) Do you think Rigoletto should be called one of the “greatest operas of all time”?

With these ideas in mind, craft a 500 word, balanced review of the opera. Include both the good and the bad through constructive criticism. Give your review a perspective. Reviews are more personal than essays. By the end of a successful review, the reader should be able to understand your experience and point of view. The reader should be able to discern if he or she would like to go to the opera. Turn in your review to your teacher and have him or her send it in to be published on the Toledo Opera website.