The Life and Operas of Verdi
Part I
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Greenberg has composed more than 45 works for a wide variety of instrumental and vocal ensembles. Recent performances of his works have taken place in New York, San Francisco, Chicago, Los Angeles, England, Ireland, Greece, Italy, and the Netherlands, where his Child's Play for String Quartet was performed at the Concertgebouw of Amsterdam.

Greenberg has received numerous honors, including three Nicola de Lorenzo Composition Prizes and three Meet-the-Composer Grants. Recent commissions have been received from the Koussevitzky Foundation in the Library of Congress, the Alexander String Quartet, the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players, guitarist David Tanenbaum, the Strata Ensemble, and the XTET ensemble. Greenberg is a board member and an artistic director of COMPOSERS, INC., a composers’ collective/production organization based in San Francisco. His music is published by Fallen Leaf Press and CPP/Belwin and is recorded on the Innova label.

Greenberg has performed, taught, and lectured extensively across North America and Europe. He is currently music historian-in-residence with San Francisco Performances, where he has lectured and performed since 1994. He has served on the faculties of the University of California at Berkeley, California State University at Hayward, and the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, where he chaired the Department of Music, History and Literature from 1989–2001 and served as the Director of the Adult Extension Division from 1991–1996. Greenberg has lectured for some of the most prestigious musical and arts organizations in the United States, including the San Francisco Symphony (where for 10 years, he was host and lecturer for the symphony’s nationally acclaimed “Discovery Series”), Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, the Van Cliburn Foundation, the Chautauqua Institute, and Villa Montalvo. In addition, Greenberg is a sought-after lecturer for businesses and business schools and has recently spoken for such diverse organizations as the University of Pennsylvania/Wharton School of Business, Canadian Pacific, Deutsches Bank, the University of California/Haas School of Business Executive Seminar, the University of Chicago Graduate School of Business, Harvard Business School Publishing, Kaiser-Permanente, the Strategos Institute, Quintiles Transnational, and the Commonwealth Club of San Francisco. Greenberg has been profiled in the Wall Street Journal, Inc. magazine, the Times of London, the San Francisco Chronicle, the San Jose Mercury News, and the University of California Alumni Magazine, Princeton Alumni Weekly, and Diablo Magazine.

Greenberg is the resident composer and music historian to National Public Radio’s “Weekend All Things Considered.”
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The Life and Operas of Verdi

Scope:

By the time of Verdi’s birth, opera was completely ingrained into Italian culture and was the essential form of entertainment through which Italian culture expressed itself. Verdi brought Italian opera to unequaled heights, while preserving a quintessential characteristic of Italian art—functionality married to beauty—carried out with the art of sprezzatura, or “effortless mastery.” Verdi was a great dramatist and a great melodist at the same time, whose artistic evolution never ceased across the 50-year span of his career.

Verdi was born in 1813 in Le Roncole, in the Italian duchy of Parma, which was occupied at the time by Napoleonic France. His parents kept a tavern, frequented by itinerant musicians. Verdi’s own musical talents were encouraged by his parents, who sent him to the nearby town of Busseto to study music with Ferdinando Provesi, a co-founder of the Busseto Philharmonic Society. Under Provesi, Verdi learned the art of composition by writing hundreds of pieces, which were then performed by the Busseto orchestra. The other co-founder of the society, Antonio Baretti, took the young Verdi under his wing and later financed his compositional studies under Vincenzo Lavigna in Milan, after the Milan Conservatory had rejected his application on the grounds that he was too old and showed little musical promise.

In 1836, Verdi became master of music of the city of Busseto over the objections of the local Church authorities, who did not want a “secular” directing music in their church. The Church authorities then banned Verdi and the Busseto Philharmonic from performing in Busseto’s church. That same year, Verdi married Antonio Baretti’s daughter Margherita; a daughter was born in 1837 and a son in 1838. Disaster struck in the summer of 1838, however, when their daughter died. The grieving family moved to Milan, where Verdi’s first opera, Oberto, was performed at the famous La Scala opera house in 1839. The opera was a modest success. Verdi was commissioned to write three more operas and contracted with the great publishing house of Ricordi. The publisher and Verdi would become close friends.

Domestic disaster struck again in June 1840, when Verdi’s wife, Margherita, died. Verdi collapsed. His next opera, Un giorno di regno (King for a Day), was a total flop, and Verdi never forgot the humiliation. From then on, he never had any regard for public opinion, good or bad.

After Un giorno di regno, Verdi had no desire to continue composing, but a serendipitous meeting with the director of La Scala led to the composition of Nabucco, an opera about the ancient Israelites’ struggle for freedom and national identity. Italians quickly related to the Israelites of Nabucco as they, too, in the mid-1800s, were fighting for liberation from Austrian and French domination and sought a national identity of their own. The famous chorus of the Hebrews in Nabucco—“Va pensiero” (“Fly, my thought”)—would become the unofficial anthem of the Risorgimento, the 19th-century Italian nationalist movement, and to this day, this chorus is virtually an Italian national hymn.

The soprano who sang the character of Abigaille at the premiere of Nabucco was Giuseppina Strepponi. She and Verdi would become lovers and, ultimately, Giuseppina became Verdi’s second wife. Their relationship would cause a scandal in Busseto, where they eventually settled. Verdi’s neighbors in Busseto considered Giuseppina, with her theatrical background, as little better than a prostitute, and their hostile attitude to the couple never diminished.

As a result, Verdi developed a healthy contempt for his neighbors, which did not make things any easier when dealing with the locals. In the meantime, his career took off. Between 1842 and 1851, he wrote 14 operas, traveled extensively, and with the profits earned by his operas, he paid off his debts and began to acquire real estate. He developed a reputation for being a hard-nosed businessman and a thorny personality. He began to insist on supervising the premiere productions of his operas. He craved privacy, constantly complained of bad health, and despite his enormous successes, claimed to hate his career as an opera composer.

Verdi’s first genuine masterpiece was his opera Macbeth, premiered in 1847. This opera marked a watershed in Verdi’s compositional development. In it, we begin to see Verdi depart from the traditional Italian bel canto style opera, which focused on melodic and vocal beauty, often at the expense of dramatic integrity. From Macbeth onward, Verdi would put increasing emphasis on making his music an integral part of the dramatic action—it would foster dramatic momentum and reflect and deepen the thoughts, emotions, and personalities of the characters. To that end, Verdi would gradually eliminate devices that freeze dramatic action, such as recitative, employing instead
a technique called parlante, whereby the orchestra carries the melodic line, maintaining the musical momentum, while the singers express themselves in a declamatory style similar to recitative.

Many of Verdi’s operas have social and political themes that made them controversial in their day and easy targets for the censors that ruled 19th-century Italy. But those same themes, in their underlying expression of the struggle over tyranny, helped endear Verdi to his countrymen and contributed mightily to a growing sense of Italian national identity. Many of Verdi’s operas also have melodramatic, sometimes even lurid plots, to which Verdi seemed naturally drawn and that he rightly sensed would have huge box office appeal, like Rigoletto, for example. Premiered in March 1851, the opera marks another stage in Verdi’s development of a style that fosters dramatic continuity. He was progressing toward what is called music drama, in which continuous music intensifies the dramatic action and psychological development of the characters, as if the opera were one integrated organism.

In the 1860s, Verdi began to slow down his prodigious output of operas. Between 1839 and 1859, he had composed 23 operas; between 1862 and 1893, he composed 5 operas and the Requiem.

With Aida, premiered in 1872, Verdi made changes that eventually became the norm for opera houses everywhere. He substantially increased the size of the opera orchestra, changed its layout, and moved it to a pit, from where it would not distract the audience’s attention from the action onstage. Aida is, perhaps, the most popular of all Verdi’s operas and the operatic spectacular by which all other spectaculars are judged. It made Verdi a very wealthy man, and he generously shared his wealth. Among his greatest acts of philanthropy were the funding and construction of a hospital in the local town of Villanova and a rest home for musicians in Milan, a facility that exists to this day and that he called his greatest creation.

Two years after Aida came the premiere of Verdi’s homage to the great Italian poet Alessandro Manzoni, the highly operatic Requiem Mass in Memory of Manzoni. By 1879, Verdi had become an Italian icon. He planned to retire but, instead, was convinced to write two more operas, Otello and Falstaff. The librettist for both operas was Arrigo Boito, whose partnership with Verdi remains among the greatest in the history of opera. Based on plays by Shakespeare, these two final operas are transcendental masterworks. Otello, premiered in 1887, is simply the greatest opera seria of the 19th century. Falstaff, premiered in 1893, the year of Verdi’s 80th birthday, was only the second comic opera that Verdi wrote. Verdi, characteristically, had total control over the production and, at this point in his career, was finally enjoying the process of operatic creation and production. Falstaff exceeds all Verdi’s previous operas in terms of dramatic line and musical brilliance. It is a true music drama in which a continuous flow of the musical line permits nothing to slow the breathtakingly fast dramatic momentum. It was to be Verdi’s last opera. He died from a stroke on January 27, 1901. His operatic career reflected an incredible evolution from a modest beginning, steeped in tradition, to one of extraordinary originality and groundbreaking innovation.
Lecture One

La bell’Italia

Scope: Giuseppe Verdi was born in Italy about 200 years after the birth of opera itself. Despite the changes that took place in the genre during that time and Verdi’s own far-reaching contributions to the evolution of Italian opera, Verdi’s work would come to embody two qualities of Italian opera that had remained unaltered from almost the beginning: an allegiance to its roots as a theatrical entertainment and an expression of sprezzatura, “the art of effortless mastery.” Verdi took a no-nonsense approach to his art, which was echoed in his devotion to the simple, rustic environment of his upbringing. He showed promise in music by about age eight. To their credit, his parents, illiterate innkeepers, recognized his gifts and scraped together enough money to send him away from their small village to further his education.

Outline

I. Is anywhere on earth more blessed than the Italian peninsula?
   A. From the Alps in the north to the valleys and volcanoes of Sicily in the south, Italy’s landscape is beautiful and varied. Its benign, Mediterranean-dominated climate finds its equal, perhaps, only in California.
   B. Its language is unique; as lyric, as beautiful, as expressive as any linguistic construct ever conceived.
   C. The cultural heritage Italy has bequeathed to us almost defies description. Italy’s gifts to the rest of the world are staggering, including contributions in art, architecture, design, music, literature, cuisine, exploration, philosophy, technology, and science.
   D. At the heart of Italian civilization are the dual elements of functionality and beauty, form married perfectly to function. This statement is as true for the operas of Verdi as it is for a perfectly made pair of Italian shoes.
   E. Italy is also known for the quality of sprezzatura, which might loosely be defined as “the art of effortless mastery.” Nowhere in Italian culture is the concept of sprezzatura better expressed than in Italian music, with its perfect balance of lyric beauty and structural integrity.
      1. Italian composers dominated the musical life of Europe for hundreds of years, including Monteverdi, Vivaldi, Scarlatti, Salieri, Rossini, Verdi, and many others.
      2. Of course, opera—a word that means, literally, “work,” as in “all things working together”—is the quintessential Italian musical invention. Opera combines stage drama, lyric singing, instrumental music, acting, movement, costumes, sets, and stage machinery into a singular experience that can be a perfect example of sprezzatura.
      3. Like Italian culture in general and unlike German, French, and Russian opera, Italian opera has always been more interested in beauty and elegance than in the unconscious underside of human experience and imagination—the metaphysical, symbolic, and supernatural.

II. Within a few decades of its invention, opera in Italy had become both a popular and an aristocratic entertainment, and it came to reflect the tastes and interests of a wider, more general public than opera in other nations.
   A. The 15th and 16th centuries in the Italian artistic and intellectual community emphasized the rediscovery of ancient Greek and Roman models for art, architecture, letters, scientific investigation, and so on.
   B. The ancient Greeks put music at the top of their experiential pantheon, claiming that music could heal the sick, tame wild animals, and ennoble the spirit; that music was the sonic manifestation of the order of the cosmos. The Greeks also claimed that when music was joined to words, particularly the words of a literary drama, the music deepened the meaning and emotion of the words a hundred-fold.
   C. Thus, a musical expressive revolution took place during the Renaissance, as composers sought to capture in their music—both sacred and secular—the expressive power that the ancient Greeks claimed to have captured in theirs.
   D. Although the composers and poets of the Renaissance had no idea what ancient Greek music actually sounded like, they knew what the ancient Greeks said their music felt like, and the Renaissance artists wanted their music to inspire a like reaction in the hearts of their listeners.
E. Opera, the ultimate manifestation of this ongoing expressive revolution, was invented in Florence, Italy, during the last years of the 16th century. Undoubtedly, the composers and poets who invented opera believed that they were recreating, in modern guise, the musical-dramatic art of the ancient Greeks.

1. Opera was the first “modern” musical genre to recognize and intensify the emotional and expressive primacy of the individual human voice.
2. Opera spawned, directly or indirectly, countless other seemingly unrelated musical genres—among them, the dance suite, the overture, the concerto, and the symphony.
3. Opera’s emphasis on individual emotional extravagance and exuberance initiated an expressive leap forward that we today call the Baroque.

F. In the early years of opera, works were commissioned by aristocrats for private performance. In 1637, however, two Roman singers and opera composers opened the first public opera house in Venice, called the San Cassiano.

1. This opening was one of the great entrepreneurial acts of all time. San Cassiano made opera available to anyone for the price of admission, and the popularity and influence of Venetian-style opera exploded across the Western world.
2. By 1650, there were seven full-time public opera houses in Venice, producing more than 50 new operas a year.

III. On October 10, 1813, Giuseppe Verdi was born in the northern Italian village of Roncole, about midway between the cities of Cremona and Parma, roughly 100 miles from Venice.

A. For all the genres and stylistic changes of opera that had come and gone in the 176 years since the opening of San Cassiano, Italian opera had remained true to its popular roots. For the Italians, opera was the highest manifestation of the art of song, a quintessential example of sprezzatura—lyric beauty in the service of direct expression.

B. At the time of Verdi’s birth, opera was completely ingrained in Italian life. Like mass media in modern America, opera was the lens through which the Italian culture portrayed itself.

C. Opera in Italy was also a big business, and as such, it remained generally immune to the experimentation so typical of 19th-century French and German opera.

1. Verdi’s great operatic accomplishments, which reflect a slow evolution of his craft, not a purposeful attempt to “be revolutionary,” were always in the service of directness of expression and clarity of storytelling.
2. Verdi’s operas are the embodiment of sprezzatura. The constant refinement of his art, combined with his genius as a dramatist, allowed him to bring Italian opera to a level that will likely never be equaled.

D. Verdi’s long life—marked equally by tragedy and triumph—is itself genuinely operatic in scope. We will listen to a prelude, fittingly dramatic and lyric, as we embark on the life, times, and music of Giuseppe Verdi: the prelude to the opera I due foscari of 1844. (Musical selection: Prelude to I due foscari.)

IV. Giuseppe Verdi was the one major composer who successfully retired to the life of a gentleman farmer. One of the keys to understanding Verdi—the man and the composer—is his passion for the land.

A. Verdi grew up in northern Italy’s Po River valley—flat and fertile farming country.

1. We know little about his parents, because they were illiterate and did not engage in correspondence. Verdi’s father, Carlo Verdi, came from a family of taverners: proprietors of country inns that served food and beverages, sold groceries, and acted as the local post office.
2. Carlo Verdi was born in 1785 in the hamlet of Le Roncole. In 1805, he married Luigina Uttini, a spinner by trade. Luigina was born in 1787 in Piacenza. Like the Verdi family, the Uttini family was one of taverners.
3. Giuseppe Fortunino Francesco Verdi was born in Le Roncole on October 10, 1813. Carlo and Luigina Verdi had only one other child: Giuseppa Francesca Verdi, who was born on March 20, 1816. A bout of juvenile meningitis left her severely brain-damaged, and she died in Le Roncole in August 1833, at age 17.

B. The Verdis were observant Catholics; Carlo, in particular, attended Mass every day. Giuseppe was a skeptic by nature. The events of his life would turn him into something of a pessimist, and his attitude toward “believers” (whom Verdi collectively referred to as “mad”) and his run-ins with Church authorities would become legendary.
1. What did Verdi believe in? He believed in his music, the Italian nation, his privacy, his friends and family, and the land.

2. As we delve into Verdi’s youth, life, and music, we must keep in mind this love of the land and the people who work it. Carlo Gatti, an early biographer, wrote, “[Verdi] had the pride of a peasant from Parma, and he wanted to be one of those peasants.” Further, he wanted his music to speak directly to those peasants with whom he so strongly identified.

C. Verdi’s parents had been married for eight years before he was born, and Giuseppe’s birth was greeted with great relief and joy. We are told that he was shy and introverted, that he had thick brown hair and blue-green eyes, and as a child, was small and slim.

D. Verdi’s informal musical education began virtually at birth, with his constant exposure to the nightly singing at his parents’ tavern and the itinerant musicians who would ply their trade for a few coins.
  1. He began attending the church school at six, and within a couple of years, his musical gifts had begun to make themselves apparent. He studied organ at church, and his father scraped together enough money for a small keyboard instrument called a spinet, which was Verdi’s pride and joy.
  2. When he wasn’t at home, practicing the spinet or helping at the tavern, Verdi was at the Church of San Michele Arcangelo, where he attended classes, sang in the choir, learned his catechism, served as a choirboy, and began to develop a fear of clerics.
  3. As a choirboy, Giuseppe had his first brush with the Catholic clergy. He uttered a curse to a priest who had knocked Giuseppe down when he was serving in Mass. The priest was killed by lightning several years later, and thereafter, Verdi loved to tell the story.
  4. This curse can’t help but remind us of the first scene in Rigoletto, an opera that we will examine in great detail in Lectures Eleven through Fourteen. In the excerpt we listen to now, a proud and elderly aristocrat named Monterone curses the lecherous duke of Mantua, who has kidnapped and ravished Monterone’s teenage daughter.

MONTERONE
Ch’ia gli parli.
DUCA
Non!
Il voglio!
TUTTI
Monterone!
MONTERONE
Si, Monterone.
La voce mia quell tuono vi scuotera
dovunque

[Montenore—the duke’s hunchbacked court jester—decides it’s time to earn his salary. Imitating Monterone’s voice, he sings to the duke:]

RIGOLETTO
Ch’io gli parli.
Voi congiuraste contro noi, signore
E noi clementi invero, perdonammo.
Qual vi piglia or delirio a tutte l’ore
di vostro figlio a reclamar l’onore?
Di vostro figlio a reclamar l’onore?

MONTERONE
Novello insulto! Ah si, a turbare
saro vostr’orgie...verro a gridare
fino a che vegga restarsi insulto
di mia famiglia l’atroce insulto;
e se al carnefice pur mi darete,
spettro terribile mi rivedrete,  
portante in mano il teschio mio,  
vendetta a chiedere al mondo, a Dio.

DUCA
Non piu, arrestatelo!

RIGOLETTO
E matto!

BORSA, MARULLO, CEPRANO
Quai detti!

[Monterone is seized by the guards, but he’s not quite done yet. He barks at both the duke and Rigoletto:]  
MONTERONE
Ah siete entrambi voi maledetti!

TUTTO
Ah!

[Pointing at Rigoletto, Monterone sings to the duke:]  
MONTERONE
Slanciare il cane a leon morente  
e vile, o duca.

[Monterone then turns to Rigoletto and sings:]  
RIGOLETTO
Che sento! Orrore!

TUTTO
O, tu che la festa audace hai turbato
Da ungenio d’inferno qui fasti guidato
E vano ogni detto, di qua t’allontana
Va, trema, o vegliardo, dell’ira sovrana.
Tu l’ha provocata, piu speme non v’è.
Un’ora fatale fu questa per te!

RIGOLETTO
Che orrore! Che orrore!

MONTERONE
Sii maledetto!

(Musical selection: Rigoletto, Act I, scene 1.)
Lecture Two

Beginnings

Scope: When Giuseppe turned 10, his parents sent him to the city of Busseto to continue his education. There, he became a student of Ferdinando Provesi, a music teacher and one of the organizers of the Busseto Philharmonic Society. As Provesi’s star student, Verdi wrote hundreds of pieces of music and heard most of them played by the philharmonic. Another organizer of the society was Antonio Baretti, who took Verdi in, almost as a member of his household. When Verdi was 18, Baretti arranged financing for him to attend the Milan Conservatory, but Verdi’s application was rejected. Instead, he studied privately with Vincenzo Lavigna. When Verdi was 19, his friend Provesi died, leaving open the posts of director of the Busseto Philharmonic and organist of the Church of San Barolomeo. After a good deal of controversy with the Church in Busseto, Verdi won a competition for the posts and signed a nine-year contract. Looking at what seemed to be a secure future, he proposed marriage to Margherita Baretti, Antonio’s daughter, and the two began their life together on May 4, 1836.

Outline

I. Giuseppe Verdi was a model student—diligent, respectful, and academically gifted. When he turned 10, the educational opportunities available to him in his home village came to an end. Rather than put their precocious boy out into the fields or keep him at home to work at the tavern, Verdi’s parents scraped together the money to send him to school in the small city of Busseto, roughly three miles to the northwest.

A. At the same time, Giuseppe got a job as an organist at Le Roncole’s Church of San Michele Arcangelo. According to Verdi’s friend and early biographer Giuseppe Demalde, the young Verdi was very hard-working, slept very little, and earned his living as an organist.

B. At the time Verdi moved to the city of Busseto, it was an oasis of business and culture in the otherwise rather uncultured plain of the Po River. Busseto boasted a wealthy and sophisticated aristocratic class, a major Franciscan church and monastery, two libraries, and a long tradition of cultivating the visual and musical arts.

1. Most important, Busseto had a philharmonic society—an amateur orchestra consisting of more than 70 citizens.

2. The Busseto Philharmonic Society was the brainchild of two men in particular: Ferdinando Provesi, a music teacher and organist at the Church of San Barolomeo, and his good friend Antonio Baretti, a wholesale grocer and owner of a modest distillery. Baretti mastered a number of instruments and made his home available for rehearsals and performances for the philharmonic.

3. The philharmonic was the most important musical organization in Busseto, and aside from its regular concerts, the orchestra performed in the surrounding towns, in churches, for parades and other civic celebrations, and so forth.

C. In 1825, at the age of 12, Verdi was accepted as a student by Ferdinando Provesi. He studied harmony and composition with Provesi and rapidly became his star pupil. By the time Verdi graduated in 1828, at age 15, he had decided to pursue music as a career. He remained in Busseto and continued to study with Provesi and eke out a living as a teacher in Provesi’s music school for the next three years.

II. Verdi wrote hundreds of pieces of music while studying with Ferdinando Provesi, including marches; short pieces to be played in church, in the theater, and in concerts; serenades; and cantatas. Unfortunately, he destroyed almost all of his juvenile compositions.

A. One of the early pieces Verdi mentions in his letters is a Stabat Mater, but this, too, he destroyed. We will listen to a much later setting of this same text, completed in 1897 and set for mixed choir and large orchestra.

1. The Latin-language poem “Stabat Mater Dolorosa,” which translates, “By the Cross Stood the Weeping Mother,” was, for many years, credited to a Franciscan monk named Jacopo da Todi, who died in 1306. Father Todi is no longer believed to be the author of the “Stabat Mater” poem, but the text is certainly of Franciscan origin and was written during the late 13th century.
2. It is a lengthy and dramatic poem that tells the story of Christ’s agony and death on the cross through the eyes and emotions of his mother as she stands and watches, helplessly.

3. This compelling text has been set many times by many composers since the 16th century. Verdi’s setting, composed in 1896–1897 and finished when he was nearly 84 years old, is his last completed work. Composed during the illness and death of his wife, Giuseppina, the piece had deep personal significance for Verdi. We will listen to roughly the first half of this, Verdi’s last piece of music.

Stabat Mater dolorosa, At the cross her station keeping,
juxta crucem lacrymosa, Stood the mournful mother weeping,
dum peendebat Filii. Close to Jesus to the last.

Cujus animam gementem, Through heart, His sorrow sharing,
Contristantem et dolentem, All His bitter anguish bearing,
Petransivit gladius. Now at length the sword has passed.
O quam tristis et afflicta Was the mother, highly blessed,
fuit illa benedicta of the sole-begotten One!
mater Unigeniti.

Quae moerebat et dolebat; Christ above in torment hangs;
pia Mater dum videbat she beneath beholds the pangs
nati poenas inclyti. of her dying, glorious Son.

Quis est homo qui non fleret Is there one who would not weep,
matrem Christi si videret whelmed in miseries so deep
in tanto supplicio? Christ’s dear mother to behold?

Quis non posset contristari Can the human heart refrain
Christi Matrem contemplari from partaking in her pain,
Dolentem cum Filio? in that mother’s pain untold?

Pro peccatis Suae gentis For the sins of His own nation
vidit Jesum in tormentis she saw him hang in desolation,
et flagellis subditum. all with bloody scourges rent.

Vidit suum dulcem Natum She beheld her gentle Child
Moriendo desolatum dying, forsaken, and defiled,
dum emisit spiritum. as his spirit passed away.

Eja Mater, fons amoris, Oh thou mother, fount of love,
me setire vim doloris, touch my spirit from above,
fac, ut tecum lugeam. make my heart with thine accord.

Fac ut ardeat cor meum Make me feel as thou hast felt;
in amando Christum Deum, make my soul to glow and melt
ut sibi complacem. with the love of Christ our Lord.

Sancta Mater, istud agas, Holy Mother, pierce me through;
Crucifici fige plagas in my heart each wound renew
cordi meo valide. of my Savior crucified.

(Musical selection: Quattro Pezzi Sacri [Four Sacred Pieces], “Stabat Mater.”)

4. Certainly, this Stabat Mater represents Verdi’s prodigious compositional skills at the end of his career and cannot possibly be compared to what he would have written in his youth. Nevertheless, it is marvelous to hear Verdi’s music at journey’s end, with the knowledge that he was working with the
same words, and no doubt endeavoring to create the same sort of expressive statement, from the very
beginning.

B. Verdi’s compositional workshop in these years was the Busseto Philharmonic. He studied its repertoire and
attended its rehearsals, and everything he wrote was almost immediately played, either as a reading or in
performance. Those who heard these early works of Verdi raved about them.

C. As a composer, Verdi learned the right way—by writing a great deal of music and almost immediately
hearing it played. There was no pressure on him to “succeed” at a young age, and the adults around him
considered him a treasure, the local boy who would one day make them proud.

D. The key relationship forged during Verdi’s apprentice years was the one with Antonio Barezzi. Barezzi and
his wife, Maria, did more than just take an interest in Verdi; by 1828, at the age of 15, he had become a de
facto member of the Barezzi household. The relationship between the 41-year-old Barezzi and the 15-year-
old Verdi eventually became that of a father and son.

1. Barezzi had six children of his own, and two of them are of special note for our purposes. Margherita
Barezzi, seven months younger than Verdi, was a vivacious, red-haired young woman and a singer of
great promise; she and Verdi would be married in May of 1836.

2. Barezzi’s son Giovanni was Verdi’s great friend in Busseto and would remain a rock for Verdi during
the terrible years of grief and mourning to come.

E. In 1830, by the time Verdi was 17, there was little that Ferdinando Provesi could still teach him. In
February of 1830, the Busseto Philharmonic staged a concert consisting entirely of Verdi’s music, and
special invitations were sent to the leaders of the city.

F. The concert was a huge success, and it was clear to everyone that Verdi was destined for great things—
except that his parents could not afford to send their son to the University of Parma or the Conservatory in
Milan in order for him to continue his studies.

1. Verdi was crestfallen and told Barezzi that he was going to have to return to Le Roncole to work in his
father’s tavern.

2. At Barezzi’s insistence, Verdi stayed in Busseto, teaching and composing, while Barezzi took it upon
himself to look into scholarships and work opportunities that would allow Verdi to support himself
while studying in Milan at the Conservatory.

3. Finally, in February of 1832, word came from the Minister of the Interior that a scholarship of 300 lire
a year for four years would be awarded to Verdi for study in Milan.

4. Barezzi agreed to advance one year’s worth of scholarship money immediately to expedite Verdi’s
move to Milan. Carlo Verdi, Giuseppe’s father, wrote to the Minister of the Interior of his
“inexpressible joy,” adding that his son will “never forget his generous benefactors.”

5. With the scholarship arranged, letters went out to the Conservatory in Milan to arrange for an audition
and admission.

III. When Verdi arrived in Milan during the summer of 1832, he was not quite 19 years old. His passport described
him as tall, with a high forehead, and having gray eyes and black eyebrows, chestnut brown hair, a small
mouth, a thick beard, an aquiline nose, and pale skin pitted with smallpox scars.

A. At 18, Verdi was a few months over the maximum recommended age of an entering first-year student at
the Milan Conservatory, but he requested that an exception be made to the Conservatory’s regulations in
this regard, which was not unusual.

B. Verdi’s entrance exam consisted of playing the piano, showing the committee some of his music, and
composing a fugue on a subject (theme) given to him by the committee. Such entrance exams remain the
standard to this day.

C. After the exam, Verdi returned to the house in which he was boarding and waited for word of his
admission. Finally, he went to see one of the professors who had been on the exam committee and was told
not to think any longer about attending the Conservatory; the professor recommended that Verdi seek out a
local composer and study privately.

1. Inquiries were made regarding his application and entrance examination; Verdi was told that his piano
playing had been considered “weak,” that he was too old, and that one of the professors believed he
would amount to nothing more than a mediocrity.
2. Verdi was crushed. For the rest of his life, he kept a copy of his letter of application to the Conservatory on his writing desk, as a reminder, so he later said, of the arbitrary cruelty of life.

D. Fortunately, Barezzi agreed to underwrite Verdi’s study in composition, and Verdi sought out a private teacher. He selected Vincenzo Lavigna, a wise choice.

1. Lavigna was 55 years old, and his operas and ballets were produced at Milan’s La Scala Theater to great success.
2. He welcomed Verdi with open arms, was immediately impressed with Verdi’s compositions, and stated publicly that he “found it quite unbelievable” that Verdi had been rejected by the Conservatory.

E. Lavigna was a man of the theater, who knew the operatic world as well as anyone of his time. He insisted that Verdi subscribe to the season at La Scala and attend rehearsals, and he secured library privileges for Verdi so that he might have scores to study at home.

1. When there was no performance at La Scala, Verdi often went to Lavigna’s home, where he met musicians, theatrical agents, impresarios, singers, and members of Milan’s aristocratic elite. Indeed, Verdi was probably better off studying privately with Lavigna than he would have been had he been accepted as a first-year student at the Conservatory.
2. Verdi also fell in love with the urban pleasures of Milan—its theaters, cafes, and shops. Despite the terrible disappointment of the Conservatory, Milan provided Verdi with what he needed: friends, a great opera house, lots of theater and stimulation, and a good and caring teacher who was willing to open doors for him.

F. One of the doors that Lavigna opened was that of the Philharmonic Society of Milan, a semiprofessional orchestra directed by Pietro Massini.

1. Verdi was introduced to Massini at Lavigna’s house, and a few days later, while attending a rehearsal of Haydn’s Creation, Verdi was asked to step in as rehearsal pianist and conductor for the chorus.
2. Years later, Verdi described the experience in a letter, saying that some of the musicians did not at first seem to believe that he could handle the rehearsal. In the end, however, Verdi proved himself, was entrusted with the whole concert, and received congratulations from all sides.

G. Before we move on with our rapid review of Verdi’s apprenticeship years, we should look briefly at his personality.

1. During his early 20s, Verdi was a very difficult person to get to know. He was quiet, taciturn, and reserved; he revealed little of himself and kept his own council to the point of being secretive. When he was angered, he could be truculent, argumentative, irritable, and sometimes, downright rude.
2. He wrote few letters, and his reserve precluded him from saying anything particularly quotable. We will get to know Verdi better as he ages, but we will probably never understand him as well as we understand more extroverted personalities, such as Mozart, Beethoven, Liszt, Wagner, and others.

IV. On July 26, 1833, Verdi’s old teacher and friend Ferdinando Provesi died unexpectedly in Busseto. Antonio Barezzi—Verdi’s benefactor and soon-to-be father-in-law—wanted Verdi to be offered Provesi’s positions as director of the Busseto Philharmonic Society and organist and choirmaster at the cathedral.

A. Verdi was not quite 20 years old, however, and had not yet completed his private course of study with Lavigna in Milan. Barezzi, along with the members of the Busseto Philharmonic Society and the listening public in Busseto, wanted the jobs to remain open so that Verdi might take them the following year, having completed his studies.

B. At the same time, the Church authorities in Busseto put forth their own candidate, an organist named Giovanni Ferrari, having decided that music in Busseto had suffered from the influence of “secular tastes and authorities” for too long.

C. In June of 1834, the provost of the Church of San Bartolomeo in Busseto, Don Ballarini, appointed Ferrari organist and choirmaster at the cathedral, effectively ending Verdi’s candidacy for those positions.

D. What ensued was a veritable civil war in Busseto, revealing just how powerful anticlerical feeling had become among the Italian middle and upper classes in the early 19th century.

1. The appointment of Giovanni Ferrari as organist and choirmaster at the Church of San Bartolomeo was seen as just another arbitrary dictate of a Church desperately trying to maintain its authority and power in an increasingly secular society.
2. Ultimately, the civil authorities intervened, and a competition was held in Parma, over which the respected court organist Maestro Giuseppe Alinovi presided as judge. At the conclusion of the competition, which included piano playing and the composition of a fugue on a theme by Alinovi himself, Alinovi told Verdi that he was knowledgeable enough to be a director of music in a major capital, such as Paris or London.

E. In the meantime, Verdi had completed his studies with Lavigna and was named maestro di musica of the city of Busseto on March 5, 1836. He signed a nine-year contract, which could be terminated by either party after three or six years with six months’ notice.

F. With his position in hand, the 23-year-old Verdi proposed marriage to Margherita Barezzi on April 16, 1836. Eighteen days later, on May 4, they were married. Verdi and “Ghita,” as he called her, had known each other since they were children. Verdi had been her piano teacher and accompanist; they had been in love since their mid-teens, and their eventual marriage had long been considered a fait accompli by all who knew them.

V. After a brief honeymoon in Milan, Verdi returned to Busseto to assume his duties as music master for the city. Bishop Monsignore Luigi Sanvitale, the loser in the battle of Verdi’s appointment, forbade Verdi or the Philharmonic from performing in Busseto’s collegiate church.

A. The bishop’s proscription cost Verdi a considerable amount of income that he had counted on having when he took the job. Ultimately, though, Verdi’s success and popularity were extraordinary; his music was in demand throughout Busseto, and he and his musicians were even driven to surrounding towns and cities to give concerts to enormous crowds.

B. Verdi’s music spoke directly to “the people” of Parma—aristocrats and villagers alike—and “the people” loved him for it. Almost from the beginning, Verdi’s music managed to straddle the fence between the “popular”—directness of expression and beautiful melody—and the “artful”—solid craft, well-wrought structures, imaginative harmonic usage.

C. Almost from the beginning, Verdi’s music was a manifestation of sprezzatura—that balance of form and function, the art of seemingly effortless mastery, that lies at the heart of the Italian artistic aesthetic.
Lecture Three

Oberto

Scope: During the period of controversy over his appointment as master of music in Busseto, Verdi was writing songs for voice and piano; working on an opera, Oberto; and struggling with financial difficulties. Considered too “secular” by the Church authorities, he had been banned from performing in Busseto’s church, which would have provided him with a good source of income. He and Margherita had also started a family, with the births of two children, a daughter in 1837 and a son in 1838. Sixteen months after she was born, Verdi’s daughter died, and 14 months later, he also lost his son. In the meantime, Verdi and his wife had left Busseto for Milan, where at least his professional life, if not his personal one, took a turn for the better. His opera, Oberto, was premiered at La Scala in November 1839 to modest success.

Outline

I. After three years of bitter wrangling, Verdi, with the support of the provincial government in Parma, was named maestro di musica of the city of Busseto on March 5, 1836. Bishop Monsignore Luigi Sanvitale, the “loser” of the dispute, forbade Verdi and the Busseto Philharmonic from performing in Busseto’s collegiate church.

A. While the struggle over Verdi’s hiring was going on, he was living and studying in Milan and working on an opera.
   1. Recall that in 1833, two years before he returned to Busseto to take the job of municipal music master, Verdi scored a coup when he conducted a series of rehearsals of Haydn’s Creation with the Milan Philharmonic Society. Pietro Massini, the society’s director, was both grateful and impressed.
   2. Verdi did other work for the Milan Philharmonic, and Massini told Verdi that if he wrote an opera, he, Massini, would see to its production at Milan’s Teatro (“Theater”) Filodrammatico.
   3. Thus, for the next three years, in fits and starts, Verdi wrote an opera. He likely finished it sometime during the summer of 1836, soon after assuming his duties as maestro di musica in Busseto.

B. Initially entitled Rocester, it was based on a libretto by Antonio Piazza entitled Lord Hamilton, which itself was based on a work by Sir Walter Scott about James Hamilton, the earl of Arran. In its final form, the opera was retitled Oberto, Count of San Bonifacio, the title by which we know it today.
   1. Verdi informed Pietro Massini of the opera’s completion, but it eventually became clear that Massini had seriously overestimated his influence and was unable to have the opera produced in Milan.
   2. Verdi next went to Parma in an attempt to have the opera produced there, but no one was interested. He then turned to the impresario of the Teatro Regio (the “Royal Theater”) in Turin, who told Verdi outright that there was no way he could or would risk the expense of producing an opera by an unknown composer.
   3. With the rejection letters piling up and approaching his wits’ end, Verdi turned back to Pietro Massini and, in late 1837, made a request that would ultimately change his life and the history of music. Verdi asked Massini to speak with Bartolomeo Merelli, director of the Teatro La Scala, about getting the opera produced.
   4. As he waited for a reply, Verdi continued to teach his piano students, rehearse his chorus and orchestra, and compose. Among the pieces he wrote during this period was his Sei Romanze (“Six Romances”) for voice and piano, one of his earliest published works.

C. Verdi’s songs for voice and piano were all written between 1838 and 1847, after which operatic composition dominated his time entirely. About 20 songs from this period have survived, and in terms of their use of the voice and their dramatic impact, they are more operatic in scope than “songlike.” This is especially true of the six songs known as Sei Romanze, composed in 1838. We will listen to two of the six songs.
   1. The first song of the set is entitled “Non t’accostare all’urna” (“Don’t cling to the urn”). The text is by Jacopo Vittorelli, a Venetian poet who lived from 1749–1835. The poem—and the song—is a bitter rebuke from a dead woman aimed at her former paramour, whom, she believes, should have loved her more when she was alive:
2. While we listen to Verdi’s setting, note the repetition of key lines, dramatic pauses, and changes in musical character that he uses here, all of which are much more characteristic of the opera stage than the concert stage. (Musical selection: Sei Romanze (“Six Romances”), No. 1: “Non t’accostare all’urna” (“Don’t cling to the urn”).)

3. We now turn to the third song of the set, entitled “In solitaria stanza” (“In a lonely room”). As was the case for the first song, the text is by Jacopo Vittorelli. This third song is about a young man’s pain as his girlfriend lies dying, a girl named Irene, as we find out in the last line of the poem.

II. Around the time that Verdi was composing Sei Romanze and trying to get someone to produce Oberto, he and Margherita started their family. On March 26, 1837, Margherita gave birth to their first child, a girl named Virginia. On July 11, 1838, roughly six months after the completion of the Sei Romanze, their second child was born, a boy named Icilio Romano.

A. In August of 1838, the 16-month-old Virginia died of some unknown childhood disease. Verdi and Margherita were devastated.

B. Still banned by the bishop from performing in the local churches, Verdi was not able to augment his meager teaching salary with what should have been lucrative church work; as a result, he was not making enough money to support his wife and surviving child.
C. Deeply in debt to his father-in-law and unable to lobby for his opera from the provincial distance of Busseto, Verdi became convinced that neither his life, nor his finances, nor his compositional career would improve until he could escape Busseto.

D. Just days after Virginia’s death, the Verdis were in Milan, attempting to lay the groundwork for a move to the city. Verdi had borrowed money from his father-in-law for the trip and, on arrival in Milan, his luck began to change almost immediately.

E. Verdi and Margherita arrived in Milan on September 8, 1838. Verdi immediately went to work trying to drum up a performance of Oberto. Although no performance was scheduled, Verdi apparently was so encouraged by his reception in Milan that he and Margherita decided to cancel his contract with Busseto and move the household to Milan.

1. In retrospect, we know that Verdi’s success in Milan was assured, but at the time, this move was a major risk. Verdi still had more than six years left on a nine-year contract; a secure, if low-paying, teaching job; a community that celebrated him; and musicians that would play anything he wrote. He also had debts and the responsibilities of a husband and father.

2. Nevertheless, on October 28, 1838, Verdi gave his notice, and on February 6, 1839, moved his family to Milan. Probably both Verdi and Margherita gave music lessons in Milan to get by financially at first, and soon enough, Verdi managed to see a number of his songs for voice and piano published, including the Sei Romanze.

3. Of course, the important news came in late spring of 1839, roughly three months after the Verdis had moved; that is, that Oberto would be performed at La Scala.

4. Bartolomeo Merelli, the director of La Scala, had been deeply impressed by the opera when Pietro Massini had first given him the score in 1837, but at the time, there was no opening for a new opera by an unknown composer.

5. In the late spring of 1839, however, Massini finally convinced Merelli to produce Oberto as a benefit for the Pio Instituto Filarmonico, a foundation that provided financial support to the widows and families of professional musicians and music teachers in Milan. Because the Pio Institute Filarmonico was a popular charity in Milan, both Massini and Merelli knew that the opera house would be full, whether or not the opera being performed was by a known or an unknown composer.

6. The singers Merelli cast for Oberto were among the best in Italy, including the tenor Napoleone Mariani and the baritone Giorgio Ronconi, both of whom were at the peak of their careers. The female lead was the soprano Giuseppina Strepponi, 23 years old at the time and known as an excellent musician and actor.

F. With a great venue and a great cast and after years of frustration and disappointment, would Giuseppe Verdi finally get to see his first opera produced in the spring of 1839? Unfortunately, the answer is no.

1. One by one, the singers withdrew from the performance for health or business reasons. Ultimately, Merelli was forced to cancel the performance of Oberto, and Verdi was crushed. Profoundly humiliated and near despair, he immediately prepared to move his family back to Busseto.

2. Verdi was unaware that Merelli had decided to reschedule Oberto for the much more prestigious, much more visible La Scala fall season of 1839. This decision was based largely on the complimentary comments made about the opera by the soprano, Giuseppina Strepponi.

3. The return to Busseto was indefinitely postponed, and Verdi and Margherita borrowed more money to cover their living expenses until the premiere, now scheduled for November 1839.

G. Tragically, Verdi’s private life at this time gave him not a moment’s respite. In October of 1839, even as he was preparing to go into rehearsal with Oberto, his now 15-month-old son became very sick. The doctors could do nothing, and after a three-week illness, the child died, on October 22, of bronchial pneumonia.

H. Buried in grief and debt, Verdi and Margherita struggled on. Less than a month later, on November 17, 1839, Oberto was premiered at the Teatro La Scala, the most prestigious opera theater in Italy.

1. The opera was performed 14 times that season and the whole Busseto crowd came to see it. For Verdi’s friends, family, and supporters, Oberto was a vindication of the time and money spent to establish Verdi as a composer.

2. Oberto is an achievement because it is Verdi’s first opera, because he managed to get it performed, and because it got him through the door of the Milanese operatic establishment. Oberto is not good enough, however, to enter the general repertoire.
3. Still, some moments in *Oberto* demonstrate Verdi’s extraordinary potential as a dramatist. In particular, *Oberto* demonstrates Verdi’s tendency toward brilliant emotional extremes in his music and features a female character of genuine strength and depth.

4. The best pieces of music in *Oberto* are its duets. In his duets—particularly between contrasting voice types (high female and low male)—Verdi had a built-in conflict from which he could milk a tremendous degree of expression and dramatic momentum, as exemplified by the Act I duet between Oberto and his daughter, Leonora.

5. Oberto, the count of San Bonifacio, has been defeated in battle by the evil despot Ezzelino da Romano and has taken refuge in Mantua. Oberto’s daughter, Leonora, has remained in Verona.
   a. Riccardo, a young Veronese count and an ally of Romano, seduces Leonora after promising to marry her but soon becomes engaged to Cuniza, the sister of Romano.
   b. Leonora discovers that she has been betrayed, and she decides to crash the wedding party and expose Riccardo.
   c. News of Leonora’s shameful behavior with Riccardo has reached Oberto, and he has left the safety of Mantua to find her. While on the way to the wedding at the Castle of Bassano, father and daughter, Oberto and Leonora, are reunited.
   d. The duet between father and daughter is constructed on a typical three-part template: fast, slow, fast. We will listen to the first and most interesting part of the duet.

   **LEONORA**
   Al cader della notte
   Denno le nozze incominciar! Ben sia!
   In fosca luce avvolta,
   Potrò meglio al castello
   Recarmi inosservata . . . Oh ciel! . . .
   chi vedo!

   [Just moments before Leonora’s entrance, Oberto had sung in recitative:

   **O native land, so dear and longed for, I have come to bathe you, sweet native soil, in bitter tears. Alas! Where are you, wretched daughter? Perhaps you have brought on your father’s last day!**

   With this somewhat less than affectionate attitude bouncing around in his head, Oberto hears Leonora’s voice and sings:]

   **OBERTO**
   Qual voce!…è dessa!
   Tu!…padre!
   Son io!
   In qual luogo il rivedo, eterno Iddio!
   Guardami! Sul mio ciglio
   vedi del duolo le impronte!
   sculto il terror ti sta!

   [A vicious falling scale in the orchestra depicts well Oberto’s rage. The recitative-like music ends as Oberto sings a rather more lyric passage now, supported by a standard four-square plucked (or *pizzicato*) accompaniment in the orchestra:]

   **OBERTO**
   The danger your father is in
   d’un padre sventurato . . .
   L’onore hai tu macchiato
di sua cadente età.

honor

of his declining years!

[Please note, when we listen, that Verdi has given this young woman some pretty powerful music to sing, music that imbues her with a substance and gravity that go way beyond the typical bel canto ingénue-type soprano role:]

LEONORA

Padre! Mi strazii l’anima . . .
Quel guardo mi spaventa!
O vendicata, o spenta
la figlia tua sarà.

Daddy! You are so harsh!
And don’t look at me that way!
I will either avenge my honor
or I will die!

[Like her father before her, Leonora sings a rather more lyric passage now, supported by the same standard four-square plucked (or pizzicato) accompaniment in the orchestra:]

A una tradita e misera
Taci, ti scosta, va!

Oh father, hug your betrayed and most unhappy girl!
What she sees is your shamelessness, and she’s disgusted. Silence!

LEONORA

Ten prega in ciel la madre,
vede il mio pianto e gemme!

My poor, dead mother in heaven begs you;
and she feels really badly!

OBERTO

Dal cielo
vede il tuo fallo e freme . .

From heaven she sees me weeping,
and she’s disgusted. Silence!

LEONORA

Taci, ti scosta, va!

OBERTO

La madre tua?…
Vede il tuo fallo e freme . .

Your mother?
What she sees is your shamelessness, and she’s disgusted. Silence!

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Lecture Four

Nabucco

Scope: After the premiere of Oberto, Verdi was offered a contract to write three more operas for La Scala and he signed on with the famous Ricordi house of music publishing. As he was working on the first of these new operas a few months later, Margherita became ill and died; Verdi was devastated. He returned to Busseto and resolved to give up his musical career. La Scala director Bartolomeo Merelli refused to let Verdi out of his contract, however, and he was forced to complete the opera he had been working on at the time of Margherita’s death. This work, Un giorno di regno (“King for a Day”), was a disaster and embittered Verdi’s attitude toward the public. It was followed a year later by the triumphant Nabucco, the story of the Israelites and their fight for freedom and survival, an opera with which the Italians, struggling for their own liberation, thoroughly identified.

Outline

I. The reviews of Oberto ranged from lukewarm to very good, but La Scala director Bartolomeo Merelli was so impressed with Verdi and Oberto that he offered Verdi a contract to write three new operas at eight-month intervals. Merelli also introduced Oberto to Giovanni Ricordi, head of the famous music-publishing house, who secured the rights to publish the opera.

II. During this period of relationship-building and discovery in Verdi’s early career, no relationship was more important to Verdi and none would last as long as that with Giovanni Ricordi and his publishing company.

A. Ricordi was born in 1785. A violinist by trade, he supplemented his income by working as a music copyist. In 1806, at the age of 31, Ricordi negotiated a deal with Milan’s Carcano Theater to be the exclusive copyist for any new operas presented there.

1. In 1806, when the contract was renewed, it contained a clause that changed the future of Italian music. The clause read, “…the [actual] orchestra scores copied by Signor Ricordi will be Signor Ricordi’s property when the performances are finished.”

2. On this clause was built the beginnings of the House of Ricordi’s huge music library. In 1811, Ricordi became the official publisher for the Milan Conservatory; by 1813, he owned the rights to more than 800 scores. In 1814, he became the official copyist for La Scala, and he negotiated a contract that allowed him to sell or rent the score of any new work presented there.

3. In 1825, Ricordi bought the complete musical archives of La Scala, a treasure trove of unbelievable artistic value. Along with his new and expanded retail store opposite La Scala, Ricordi opened shops in Florence and London.

4. Ricordi also earned the trust and loyalty of the composers he had under contract by fighting the plagiarism that was endemic at the time. He even asked the governor of Milan to negotiate with other nations’ governments to protect composers’ and authors’ rights.

5. The House of Ricordi became Verdi’s publisher in November 1839 and would remain his publisher and management company until his death in 1901, a relationship that spanned four generations of Ricordis.

B. By late November 1839, Verdi and his wife, each 26 years old, assumed that the bad times were over. With a three-opera, 12,000-lire contract and cash beginning to come in from publications, the Verdis could finally pay off their debts and look forward to a little financial security. They were still young, and though they grieved for their two dead children, they believed that they would have more.

C. Verdi began work on the first opera of his contract, a comedy entitled Un giorno di regno (King for a Day). Around June 12, 1840—five months after the premiere of Oberto—Margherita suddenly became ill. The illness was diagnosed as rheumatic fever; in all likelihood, it was actually encephalitis. Her father, Antonio Bareazzi, arrived on June 18, one hour before Margherita died.

1. Verdi was desperate, despondent, and near collapse.

2. After the funeral, Verdi and Bareazzi returned together to Busseto, where Verdi collapsed, overwhelmed with grief.
3. Verdi wrote Merelli to tell him that he would not be returning to Milan and he would not finish the opera. But the opera—already substantially written—had been announced and the rehearsals had been scheduled; Merelli refused to let Verdi out of his contract.

4. Verdi dragged himself back to Milan, intending to break his contract with Merelli. We do not know what was said when the two finally met, but Verdi, distraught, went back to the apartment he and Margherita had shared and finished composing this “comic opera” in a little under six weeks. We listen to the opening of its sprightly and upbeat overture, which bears more than a passing resemblance to Rossini’s famous overture to his opera William Tell. (Musical selection: Overture to Un giorno di regno [1840].)

D. Un giorno di regno was premiered on September 5, 1840, and it was an unmitigated disaster. The singers gave a half-hearted performance; although some of the numbers were applauded, others were whistled at and booed. As was customary, Verdi was in the orchestra pit during the performance, which proved to be a humiliating experience.

1. From that night to the end of his life, Verdi’s personal relationship with the public was set in his own mind; from Verdi’s point of view, it was not an affectionate relationship.

2. The morning after the premiere, Merelli called Verdi into his office. Verdi later said that he expected to receive a dressing-down, but Merelli encouraged Verdi to take heart. The remaining performances of Un giorno were canceled, but in their place, Merelli remounted Oberto, which received 17 more performances during the fall of 1840 and was cheered and applauded by the same Milanese audiences who had booed Un giorno.

III. The cheers Verdi received during the fall of 1840 for Oberto fell on deaf ears. In December of 1840, he wrote to Ricordi to say that he was through with music. A day or two later, Verdi ran into Bartolomeo Merelli on the street in Milan, and Merelli pressed upon him a libretto with which another composer had said he was unhappy.

A. According to Verdi, he took the manuscript home and threw it on a table. The first line he caught sight of was “Va pensiero sull’ali dorate” (“Fly, thought, on golden wings”), which would become the unofficial anthem of the Risorgimento, the 19th-century Italian revolt against foreign occupation and oppression.

1. In the opera, the chorus is sung by the Israelites who are being held captive in Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar (Nabucco).

2. When the opera was first performed at La Scala, then across Italy, audiences quickly figured out that the Israelites’ dream of freedom and homeland was the same as their own. Verdi’s chorus almost immediately achieved the status of a national hymn, and to this day, it might be sung by Italians at any time, in any place.

EBREI
Va’, pensiero, sull’ali dorate; Fly, my thought, on golden wings;
va’, ti posa sui clivi, sui colli, fly, alight upon the slopes, the hills,
ove olezzano tepide e molli of soft and warm, the sweet breezes
l’aure dolci del suolo natal! of our native land are fragrant!
Del Giordano le rive salute, Greet the banks of the Jordan
di Sionne le torri attarrate… and Zion’s destroyed towers…
Oh mia patria si bella e perduta! Oh my country, so beautiful and lost!
Oh membranza si cara e fatal! Oh memories, so dear and so doomed!
Arpa d’or dei fatidici vati, Golden harp of the prophets,
perché muta dal salice pend? why do you hang, silent, on the willow?
Le memorie nel petto raccendi, Rekindle the memories in our breasts,
ci favella del tempo che fu! and sing to us of good times past.
O simile di Sòlima ai fati And for the cruel fate of Jerusalem,
traggi un suono di crudo lamento, sing a song of bitter lamentation,
o t’ispiri il Signore un concerto and let the Lord inspire you with a
che ne infonda al patire virtù! melody that helps us bear our suffering!

HEBREWS
Fly, my thought, on golden wings;
fly, alight upon the slopes, the hills,
where, soft and warm, the sweet breezes
of our native land are fragrant!
Greet the banks of the Jordan
and Zion’s destroyed towers…
Oh my country, so beautiful and lost!
Oh memories, so dear and so doomed!
Golden harp of the prophets,
why do you hang, silent, on the willow?
Rekindle the memories in our breasts,
and sing to us of good times past.
And for the cruel fate of Jerusalem,
sing a song of bitter lamentation,
and let the Lord inspire you with a
melody that helps us bear our suffering!

(Musical selection: Nabucco, “Va pensiero” [“Fly, my thought, on golden wings”].)
B. Verdi said that he read the libretto several times that evening and found it quite beautiful but still did not want to return to composing. He tried to return the libretto to Merelli the next day, but Merelli locked the composer out of his office. Verdi appeared to have no choice.

C. Verdi finished Nabucco in early October of 1841 and Merelli scheduled its premiere on March 9, 1842. The cast featured the soprano Giuseppina Strepponi and the baritone Giorgio Ronconi, both of whom had been originally slated to sing in Oberto. Only 12 days were scheduled for rehearsals.

D. During one of the rehearsals, the carpenters building the set stopped to applaud “Va pensiero”; to Verdi, this spontaneous outburst seemed to secure his future among the common people.

E. When it was premiered on March 9, 1842, Nabucco was a triumph. Verdi was called repeatedly to the stage by the ecstatic audience. The reviews were uniformly rapturous. Truly, Verdi went to bed that night and woke up famous throughout Italy.

F. What did that opening night audience see and hear that so galvanized them? They heard music that was lyric, memorable, magnificent, and magnificently wrought, music that spoke, as Beethoven would have said, “from heart to heart.” They saw a powerful opera seria in which the story was a thinly veiled allegory for the state of the Italian nation—a proud and ancient nation, divided and largely controlled by oppressive foreigners, longing to be united and free.

IV. The action takes place during the 6th century B.C.E. Act I opens in the great Temple of Jerusalem.

A. The priests and people of Jerusalem bewail their defeat at the hands of the warrior-king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar (baritone; hereafter, “Nabucco”), and they beg their god Jehovah to save their great temple. In an aria entitled “Sperate, o figli” (“Have hope, my children”), the high priest Zaccaria (a bass) exhorts them to fight on. But alas, the news that King Nabucco is advancing on the temple throws them into a tizzy, and everyone runs out.

B. Ismaele (a tenor and “pretty boy”), who is the nephew of the king of Jerusalem, is left alone in the temple with his beloved Fenena (a soprano and ingénue), who is Nabucco’s daughter and has been enjoying the hospitality of the Hebrew nation as a hostage (a standard diplomatic procedure of the time, meant to keep the peace between rival nations, a peace that Nabucco has betrayed by invading Israel).

1. Ismaele and Fenena’s tête-à-tête is interrupted by the appearance of Fenena’s sister, Abigaille, suited in armor and at the head of a column of Babylonian soldiers. (Abigaille is a soprano and a Valkyrian/Amazonian bad girl.)

2. Abigaille threatens the lovers with death but then tells Ismaele that she loves him and that she’ll save him if he returns her love.

C. The head priest, Zaccaria, rushes in to announce that he has seen Nabucco riding toward the temple; at that moment, Babylonian troops enter the temple and Nabucco rides into it. Zaccaria is stunned by this desecration. He threatens to have the hostage Fenena, Nabucco’s daughter, killed. Nabucco is unmoved and taunts Zaccaria. When Zaccaria attempts to kill Fenena, he is stopped by Ismaele. Nabucco is annoyed by this lack of hospitality and orders the destruction of the temple.

V. The remainder of the opera, Acts II–IV, takes place in Babylon, where the Hebrew nation has been taken into captivity.

A. Nabucco, away pillaging other lands, has left Fenena as regent in his place. Abigaille is jealous of her sister; she has also discovered a terrible secret: that she is descended from slaves and, as a result, cannot possibly succeed Nabucco. She goes mad with rage.

B. Help arrives, however, from an unexpected quarter: Abigaille is informed by the high priest of Babylon (a bass) that Fenena—who has secretly converted to Judaism—intends to set all the Jewish prisoners free. The priest urges Abigaille to seize power, informing her that he has already begun spreading the rumor that Nabucco has been killed in battle!

C. Meanwhile, the Hebrews have gathered together in a room in the palace. Zaccaria asks for God’s guidance in a magnificent number entitled “Vieni, o Levita,” (“Come, o Levite”).

D. Suddenly, Abigaille marches in and demands the crown from Fenena, who is there, among the Hebrews. Most unexpectedly, Nabucco himself enters; he grabs the crown and puts it on his own head. In a fit of extraordinary egotism, Nabucco declares himself a god.
E. There is a clap of thunder, the crown is torn from his head by some supernatural force, and when things calm down, it is discovered that Nabucco has gone mad. Zaccaria proclaims that this is heaven’s punishment for Nabucco’s blasphemy. Abigaille picks up the crown from the ground and declares her intention to rule.

VI. In Act III, with the support of the priests of Baal, who demand the death of the captive Jews and Fenena, Abigaille has been installed as regent. Nabucco is led into Abigaille’s presence, and the remainder of the opening scene is a duet between the king and his “daughter.”

A. At first, he is enraged to find someone else on his throne. Abigaille, clearly in charge, taunts him into approving the death sentence of the Jews, then informs him that he is also a prisoner in her hands. Nabucco breaks down.

B. We next find ourselves on the banks of the Euphrates River. The now-condemned Hebrews sing of their lost homeland (“Va pensiero”), a piece of music that became nothing less than an anthem for the Italian Risorgimento. Zaccaria harangues his people for their defeatist attitude and attempts to inspire them by predicting the imminent fall of Babylon.

VII. Nabucco awakens in prison, where he has just dreamed of Fenena’s execution. He prays to the god of the Jews, Jehovah, and asks him to spare her life (“Dio di Giuda”). Nabucco’s lieutenant, Abdallo, appears with troops who are loyal to the king to free him. Nabucco rushes out to save Fenena, filled with a new strength of purpose and a fully functioning mind.

A. The final scene of the opera plays itself out at the “place of executions.” A funeral march is heard as Fenena and the Jews prepare for death. Nabucco arrives with his loyal troops and stops the executions before they can begin. As if by magic, an idol is thrown down and smashed on the ground, and everyone joins in a prayer of thanksgiving to Jehovah, the god of the Jews.

B. Abigaille now arrives on scene. In her remorse, she announces that she has taken poison, which kills her on the spot. As she dies, she calls on God for forgiveness. As the opera draws to its close, Zaccaria promises glory to the newly converted Nabucco.

VIII. We return, now, to Act II and Zaccaria’s magnificent prayer for guidance and deliverance entitled “Vieni, o Levita!” (“Come, o Levite!”).

A. On the surface, this is standard operatic fare, a rather static number for bass in the traditional accompanied recitative/aria format. But Verdi’s number is anything but standard. It is scored for voice and six solo ‘cellos, which imbue it with an intimacy, a gravitas, and a profundity that surpass anything we might expect.

B. In regard to the scoring, this is the first example of such a “novelty” number in a Verdi opera. In each of his subsequent operas, Verdi will include at least one such “novelty” number, which he will score for some new, unusual, and striking group of instruments. Let’s listen to just the instrumental prelude. (Musical selection: Nabucco, “Vieni, o Levita!” [“Come, o Levite!”], introduction only.)

C. This solemn and wonderful introductory music has allowed Zaccaria to enter. Behind him is a Levite carrying the commandments—the tablets of the Law. Zaccaria’s accompanied recitative begins.

**ZACCARIA**
Vieni, o Levita!
Il santo codice reca!
Di novel portento
me vuol ministro Iddio!
Me servo manda, per gloria d’Israele,
le tenebre a squarciar d’un infedele.

**ZECHARIAH**
Come, o Levite!
Bring the holy tablets of the Law!
The Lord wishes that I
be the minister of a new miracle!
He sends me as his servant for the
glory of Israel,
to tear apart the darkness of an unbeliever.
[Zaccaria is referring to Nabucco, who will become a believer before the opera is over. Here, Zaccaria’s recitative ends, and his incredibly flexible and moving aria begins, starting with the sparest possible two-part counterpoint and building to a moment of incredible harmonic richness in the line: “E di canti a te sacrati” (“And then through every temple will resound”).]

Tu sul labbro de’ veggenti
Fulminasti, o sommo Iddio!
All’Assiria in forti accenti
parla or tu col labbro mio!
E di canti a te sacrati
ogni tempio suonerà;
sovrà gl’idoli spezzati
la tua Legge sorgerà.

Thy word did explode from the lips
Of the prophets, O Almighty God!
To these Assyrians, now, loudly
speak Thou through my lips!
And then through every temple will resound
Those hymns sacred to Thee;
and over shattered idols
Thy Law shall arise.

(Musical selection: Nabucco, “Vieni, o Levita!” [“Come, o Levite!”].)
Lecture Five

Nabucco, Conclusion, and Risorgimento

Scope: In the third-act duet between Abigaille and her father, Abigaille tricks King Nabucco into signing a death warrant for the Hebrew people and his daughter Fenena. Much of Verdi’s career took place during the nationalist Italian Risorgimento ("rising up again") a period that spanned the conquests of Napoleon in 1796 to the unification of Italy in 1870. In operas such as Nabucco, powerful nationalistic themes could be driven home “from the heart of the composer to the heart of the people.” Verdi’s operas helped to generate Italian national pride and a sense of nationhood, as Italy struggled during the Risorgimento to free itself of foreign domination and to unite its several kingdoms into a single, national entity.

Outline

I. We start our examination at the beginning of Act III, with the scene that immediately precedes the duet between Abigaille and Nabucco. Remember that Abigaille has assumed her place as regent of Assyria and her father, King Nabucco, has been punished with an impaired mind for declaring himself a god at the end of Act II.

II. Act III begins in the throne room of the palace. An orchestral march sets the scene.

A. This is the same music that accompanied Nabucco’s entrance on horseback into the temple in the first act, and it is not flattering.
   1. It sounds much more like 19th-century Italian circus music than music meant to portray the glory of the ancient Assyrian Empire.
   2. Although we would like to flatter Verdi by claiming that this music makes a statement about the lack of character and substance of royalty, it is more likely that Verdi is merely falling back on the same sort of rather unrefined march music he had written for years in Busseto. (Musical selection: Nabucco, Act III, opening march.)

B. After the march, Abigaille makes herself at home on the opulent, elevated throne and is surrounded by a bevy of courtiers and armed guards who are singing her praises.

   CORO
   CHORUS
   È l’Assiria una regina,
   Assyria has a queen
   pari a Bel potente in terra;
   as powerful as Baal on earth;
   porta ovunque la ruina
   she inflicts ruin upon
   se stranier la chiama in guerra.
   anyone foolish enough to wage war on her.
Or di pace fra i contenti,
Now, among the pleasures of peace,
degno premio del valor,
the worthy reward of her valor,
scorrerà suoi di ridenti
she will spend her happy days
nella gioia e nell’amor.
in joy and love.

C. Abigaille, the slave girl, is enjoying her newfound celebrity. Her rage has been assuaged by the obsequious behavior of her courtiers. The High Priest of Baal—typically wearing wild clothes and a huge headpiece—separates himself from the throng and approaches Abigaille, filled with self-importance.

D. This entire passage—from the words of the High Priest of Baal through Abigaille’s command that she and Nabucco be left alone—is written as an orchestrally accompanied recitative. (Musical selection: Nabucco, “Eccelsa donna” [“Sublime lady, who rules our destiny”].)

   GRAN SACERDOTE
   HIGH PRIEST
   Eccelsa donna, che d’Assiria il fato
   Sublime lady, who rules our destiny,
   reggi, le preci ascolta!
   hear the prayers of your loyal
   de’ fidi tuoi! Di Giuda gli empi figli
   subjects!
   perano tutti, e pria cole’ che suora
   The wicked children of Judah
   a te nomar non osi…”
   must all die, in particular that woman
   Whom I dare not call your sister…
Essa Belo tradì!  
She has betrayed Baal!

[The High Priest presents to Abigaille a warrant for the execution of the Jews, including the convert Fenena; all she need do is sign on the dotted line. Feigning surprise, she sings:]

ABIGAILLE  
Che mi chiedete!  
That’s quite a request, Mr. Funny-hat!

Ma chi s’avanza?  
But lo, who is approaching?

[Nabucco, dressed in torn clothes and sporting a scraggly beard, wanders in. The guards stand respectfully aside. Abigaille continues:]

Qual audace infrange  
Well, well, well,  
l’alto divieto mio?…  
look what the cat dragged in!

Nelle sue stanze si tragga il veglio!  
Take the old coot back to his room!

NABUCCO  
Chi parlarne ardisce  
Who dares to speak

ov’è Nabucco?  
when the mighty Nabucco is present?

[Nabucco’s loyal sergeant Abdallo kindly and quietly sings:]

ABDALLO  
Deh! Signore, mi segui!  
My lord, please follow me out of here!

[Nabucco, in his present state, cannot take a hint. He sings:]

NABUCCO  
Ove condur mi vuoi?  
Where do you intend to take me, man?

Lasciami! Questa è del consiglio  
Leave me alone! This is my council

l’aula…  
chamber…

Sta’! Non vedi? M’attendon essi…  
I will stay! Don’t you see everyone?

Il fianco perché mi reggi?  
They’re waiting for me. Stop holding me!

Debole sono, è vero,  
I’m weak, I know,

ma guai se alcuno il sa!  
But they mustn’t know!

Vo’ che mi creda sempre forte  
They must think I’m strong!

ciascun!  

Lascia…Ben io troverò mio seggio…  
Let go of me…I can find my seat…

Nabucco—not fast on the uptake—sees Abigaille on his throne and sings:]

Chi è costei?  
Who is this woman on my throne?

Oh qual baldanza!  
What nerve!

[Abigaille stands and commands:]

ABIGAILLE  
Uscite, o fidi miei!  
Take a walk, my loyal subjects!

---

E. The following duet between Abigaille and Nabucco is the first of Verdi’s truly great duets. Typical of its time and true to tradition, it is in three large parts. Everyone exits, leaving Abigaille and Nabucco alone in the throne room.

1. Part 1 of the duet, marked Allegro, is a dialogue between Abigaille and Nabucco. Remember, at this moment, Nabucco’s mind is seriously impaired. (Musical selection: Nabucco, from “Donna, chi sei?” [“Who are you, woman?”].)

NABUCCO  
Donna, chi sei?  
Who are you, woman?

ABIGAILLE  
Custode del seggio  
I am the custodian

tuo qui venni!  
of your throne!

NABUCCO  

Tu?...del mio seggio? Oh frode! You? Of my throne? Get outta here!
Da me ne avesti cenni? Do you have orders from me to do so?
Oh frode! You are a fraud!

ABIGAILLE

Egro giacevi... Il popolo Get real, you went off the deep end!
The people
grida all’Ebreo rubello; cried out against these agitating
Hebrews.
porre il regal suggello You must set your seal
al voto suo dêi tu! to their decision!

[Please note, when we listen to this passage, the virtuosity and power of
Abigaille’s response: this is a woman in complete control, and her exuberance
would be infectious if she wasn’t about to propose mass murder. Abigaille
branishes the parchment bearing the death warrant of the Jews and sings:]
Morte qui sta pei tristi... This means death for these evil rebels!
NABUCCO
Che parli tu?... What are you talking about?
ABIGAILLE
Soscrivi! Sign it!
NABUCCO
Un rio pensier! Something about this troubles me!
ABIGAILLE
Resisti?... You refuse?
Sorgete, Ebrei giulivi! Then arise, joyful Hebrews!
levate inni di gloria Raise hymns of glory
al vostro Iddio! to your God!
NABUCCO
Che sento? What are you saying?
ABIGAILLE
Preso da vil sgomento, I’m saying that, filled with fear and
cowardice,
Nabucco non è più! the great Nabucco no longer exists!
NABUCCO
Menzogna! A morte, a morte It is a lie! Death, death,
tutto Israel sia tratto! to all of Israel!
Porgi! Give me the warrant!

[He affixes his seal to the death warrant and gives it back to Abigaille.
Abigaille, having shifted responsibility for the coming slaughter onto Nabucco’s
shoulders, is exultant; she sings to herself:]
ABIGAILLE
Oh mia lieta sorte! Am I good, or what?!
L’ultimo grado è fatto! The last step has been scaled!

[Rather belatedly, Nabucco suddenly realizes why he had been troubled about
all of this before Abigaille had egged him into signing the death warrant. He
sings:]
NABUCCO
Oh!... ma Fenena! Oh! But what about Fenena?
ABIGAILLE
Perfida! She is a traitor!
si diede al falso Dio. She surrendered herself to their false
God!

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Oh pèra! And now she will die!

[Abigaille hands the parchment bearing the death warrant to two guards, who quickly depart with it. Nabucco tries to stop her, crying:]  

NABUCCO NABUCCO  È sangue mio! But she is of my blood!  

ABIGAILLE ABIGAILLE  Niun può salvarla! No one can save her now!  

NABUCCO NABUCCO  Orror! Oh horror!  

[Abigaille sees an opening here. She puts her hand on Nabucco’s arm and gently sings:]  

ABIGAILLE ABIGAILLE  Un'altra figlia... You have another daughter…  

NABUCCO NABUCCO  Pròstrati, Kneel, slave,  
o schiava, al tuo signor! before your lord!  

ABIGAILLE ABIGAILLE  Stolto!... qui volli attenderti!... Fool! And here I would have waited  
on you like a daughter.  

Io schiava? Me, a slave? Me, a slave?  

[Nabucco thinks she doesn’t know. He searches his robe for the document that proves Abigaille’s servile origin and sings:]  

NABUCCO NABUCCO  Apprendi il ver. Learn the truth!  

[But, of course, Abigaille is way ahead of Nabucco on this one. She produces the document and tears it to pieces, all the while jubilantly singing:]  

ABIGAILLE ABIGAILLE  Tale ti rendo, o misero, So do I return to you, you wretch,  
il foglio menzogner! your lying, filthy document!  

(Musical selection: Nabucco, Act III opening chorus, “È l’Assiria una regina” [“Assyria has a queen”].)

2. Part 2 of the duet is in the form of a double soliloquy, as Nabucco and Abigaille contemplate their respective positions, which could not be more different: He is filled with grief, and she is flush with triumph.  

3. This second part of the duet begins with a gloriously lyric and deeply moving passage from Nabucco, whose knees seem to buckle at the realization that he has just signed his own daughter’s death warrant.  

NABUCCO NABUCCO  Oh di qual onta aggravasi Oh my God, my shame weighs heavy  
questo mio crin canuto! upon my white hair!  
Invan la destra gelida In vain does my icy hand reach  
corre all’acciar temuto! for my once-feared sword!  
Ahi miserando veglio! Ah! I’m just a miserable old man,  
l’ombra tu sei del re. A shadow of the king I once was!  

ABIGAILLE ABIGAILLE  Oh dell’ambita gloria Oh day of coveted glory,  
giorno tu sei venuto! you have finally come!  

NABUCCO NABUCCO  Ahi miserero! I am so miserable!  

[And to herself, Abigaille continues to celebrate:]
ABIGAILLE
Assai più vale il soglio che un genitor perduto!
Alfine cadranno i popoli di vile schiava al piè.

The throne is worth much more than a lost father!
At last the peoples of the world will to fall at the feet of a slave!

(Musical selection: Nabucco, from Nabucco’s “Oh di qual onta aggravasi” [“Oh my God, my shame weighs heavy”].)

4. The dual soliloquy is over, and the duet shifts back into real-time dialogue between Abigaille and Nabucco. Trumpets are heard to sound outside, and Nabucco inquires about them fearfully.

NABUCCO
Oh qual suono?

ABIGAILLE
Di morte è suono di vile schiava al piè.

It is the signal for the execution of the Hebrews that you, yourself, condemned!

Guardie, ola!... tradito io sono!

NABUCCO
Guardie! I am betrayed! Guards!

[Several guards enter the throne room. Abigaille laughs out loud and sings:]

ABIGAILLE
O stolto!...e ancor contrasti?
Queste guardie io le serbava per te solo, o prigionier!

You idiot! Do you still resist my will?
These guards work for me now, now that you are a prisoner!

NABUCCO
Prigionier?

ABIGAILLE
Sì!... d’una schiava che disprezza il tuo poter!

Yes! Of a slave who despises you!

NABUCCO
Prigionier?

ABIGAILLE
Sì!

NABUCCO
Prigionier?

ABIGAILLE
Sì!

(Musical selection: Nabucco, from Nabucco’s “Oh qual suono?” [“What is that sound?”].)

5. When he realizes that he has pronounced a death sentence on his daughter Fenena, and is now a prisoner in his own palace, Nabucco, the proud warrior king, enslaver of the Hebrews, destroyer of temples, crumbles. He falls to his knees and begs Abigaille to give him back Fenena.

NABUCCO
Deh perdona, deh perdona ad un padre che delira!

Oh forgive, oh pardon the delirium of a father!

NABUCCO
Deh la figlia mi ridona, non orbarne il genitor!

I beg you, give me back my daughter, do not agrieve a father!

NABUCCO
Te regina, te signora chiami pur la gente assira;

Let the Assyrian people call you their queen and their sovereign;

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questo veglio non implora
che la vita del suo cor.
ABIGAILLE
Esci! Invan mi chiedi pace,
me non move il tardo pianto;
tal non eri, o veglio audace,
nel serbarmi al disonor.
[ABIGAILLE]
[Music: Nabucco, Deh perdona, deh perdona.]
[Nabucco continues to beg and weep, and Abigaille continues to sing.]

Oh vedran se a questa schiava
mal s’addice il regio manto!
Oh vedran s’io deturpava
dell’Assiria lo splendor!

(Musical selection: Nabucco, from Nabucco’s “Deh perdona, deh perdona” [“Oh forgive, oh pardon”].)

F. Nabucco, Verdi’s third opera, immediately earned a place in the operatic repertoire, where it has remained to this day.
   1. It is an early work; it is derivative of Verdi’s models, most notably the operas of Rossini and Donizetti; and there are a number of undistinguished moments in the opera. But there are some genuinely sublime moments, too, and most everyone hearing Nabucco for the first time recognized a spectacular and dynamic new compositional voice in it.
   2. Verdi believed his artistic career began with Nabucco. It was an artistic career that would completely dominate Italian opera for the next 59 years!

III. Verdi’s youth and the bulk of his career were lived during the Italian Risorgimento (“rising up again”), a period of Italian history that saw the Italian people “rise up again” to achieve cultural renewal and, eventually, nationhood. Running from the Italian conquests of Napoleon in 1796 to the unification of Italy in 1870, the Risorgimento was, for Verdi, an essential spiritual and motivating influence in his life, particularly in the 1840s, the decade that saw the composition of Nabucco and the beginning of his amazing career.

A. Between 1800 and 1808, much of Italy had been more or less annexed by Napoleonic France, including Piedmont, Umbria, Tuscany, Latium, and Verdi’s own native region of Parma. In 1805, the regions of Lombardy, the Veneto, and much of central Italy were brought together into the so-called “Kingdom of Italy,” of which Bonaparte was declared king. In 1806, the Kingdom of Naples, in southern Italy, became a vassal state of France and was ruled, first, by Napoleon’s brother, Joseph Bonaparte, then by his brother-in-law, Marshal Murat.

B. Napoleonic Italy collapsed because of Napoleon’s losses in Russia in 1812 and the Battle of Leipzig in 1813. The Italians themselves had almost nothing to do with Napoleon’s ouster from the Italian peninsula. As a result of Napoleon’s defeat, Italy’s fate was left to the allies who had defeated France—Austria, Britain, Prussia, and Russia—who met at the Congress of Vienna in 1815.

C. The Congress chose to restore the absurd and inefficient hodgepodge of petty royalty that had existed before Napoleon had asserted some rule of order and law over most of the Italian peninsula.

D. Despite the fact that Napoleon had invaded Italy and involved its population in incredible bloodshed, there was a sense among the larger Italian population that Napoleon had at least brought order, prosperity, and a degree of personal freedom to the peninsula and that the restoration perpetrated by the victorious allies turned back the clock.

E. The various regions of Italy, which had been divided for so long, began finally to come together as a result of Italian hatred of the Austrian Empire. Although the Austrians directly controlled only Lombardy and Veneto, they had intervened in Piedmont, Naples, and the Papal States to put down popular “insurrections” in 1821 and 1831.
   1. The Austrians were perceived as the “bad guys” in this increasingly revolutionary environment, and the “heroes” were those writers and political thinkers who helped build a sense of Italian pride, nationalism, and self-awareness.
2. Such men as Massimo d’Azeglio and Alessandro Manzoni figured large at this time, but no single individual was more important than Giuseppe Mazzini, who lived from 1805–1872.

3. As a young man, Mazzini had studied literature and philosophy, and he became involved in revolutionary politics in his 20s. While in exile for those activities in Marseilles, he founded a secret society called *Giovine Italia* (“Young Italy”), which campaigned for Italian unity under a republican government.

4. Mazzini was a revolutionary propagandist. He returned to Italy in 1848, and in 1849, he was one of the leaders of the short-lived Roman Republic. When that revolution failed, he fled abroad once again and was condemned to death in absentia in Italy.

F. In 1848, revolutions broke out across Italy, as they broke out all across Europe. One of the primary revolutionary movers in Italy was the duke of Tuscany, King Charles-Albert of Piedmont, who by his extraordinary political acumen, managed to save his throne even as the Italian revolutions were put down, one after the other. Despite these defeats, Italy was a different place in 1850 than it had been in 1847.

1. The revolutions of 1848–1849 had proved that the Austrians were not invulnerable and had left the Italians with a heightened sense of nationalism and national resolve. The revolutions also left the Italian nation with two genuine leaders in their midst: Giuseppe Garibaldi and Victor-Emmanuel.

2. Garibaldi, a protégé of Mazzini, proved himself to be a military leader of genius and would go on to become the most popular of all the Italian heroes of the Risorgimento.

3. Following his defeat by the Austrians in 1849, Charles-Albert preserved his throne by abdicating in favor of his son, Victor-Emmanuel, who would go on to be the first king of a united Italy, reigning from 1861–1878.

G. In brief, these are the events that shaped the Italian world around Verdi and shaped Verdi’s own consciousness and patriotism.

1. Despite the constant attempts by censors to moderate the literature and libretti of Verdi’s time, in operas like *Nabucco*, nationalist themes could be powerfully driven home, especially if the music was direct, forceful, and memorable.

2. Verdi was not just the greatest composer of Italian-language opera of the 19th century, but his career constitutes one of those rare and wonderful confluences of artistic temper, time, and place: a great artist living in extraordinary times, whose work not only mirrors and bears witness to those times, but actively helps to shape the times, as well.

3. Verdi’s operas were as responsible for generating Italian national pride and creating a sense of Italian nationhood as were the writings of Mazzini, the military exploits of Garibaldi, and the political leadership of Victor-Emmanuel.
Lecture Six

I Lombardi

Scope: Giuseppina Strepponi was a renowned singer and actress who, ultimately, became the single most important person in Verdi’s life. Verdi met Giuseppina when she arrived in Venice in 1841 and, despite her failing health, agreed to sing the part of Abigaille in the premiere of Nabucco. After the premiere, Verdi was occupied as a member of the artistic and literary circles of Milan. His name was linked with many women and he had achieved some financial success. The director of La Scala, Bartolomeo Merelli, offered Verdi a contract to write the featured opera for the Carnival season, the product of which was I Lombardi alla prima crociata (“The Lombardi of the First Crusade”).

Outline

I. Giuseppe Verdi was a child of the Italian Risorgimento. His life and career corresponded exactly with the revolutionary gestation and birth of the Italian nation, and as discussed in Lecture Five, Verdi helped to shape the sense of Italian nationhood of his time.

A. Almost immediately after Victor-Emanuel II had been crowned the constitutional monarch of a united Italy in 1861, Verdi was convinced to run for Parliament, where he served from 1861–1865.

B. As we move into Verdi’s operatic career after Nabucco, we must keep in mind that he was not just another talented Italian composer of operas, but a patriot, a celebrity, a trendsetter, and increasingly, an icon of the Italian nation and its heart.

C. Nabucco marked the true beginning of Verdi’s career as an opera composer. Among the reasons for Nabucco’s incredible success was its original cast at La Scala, most notably the baritone Georgio Ronconi as Nabuco and the soprano Giuseppina Strepponi as Abigaille.

D. Because Giuseppina Strepponi would become the single most important person in Verdi’s life—first, as a colleague; then, as his mistress and lover; and finally, as his wife—we will briefly get to know this fascinating and remarkable lady before we go any further.

II. Clelia Maria Josepha Strepponi—known to posterity as Giuseppina—was born on September 8, 1815, in Lodi, the first of what would eventually be five children. At the time of her birth, Giuseppina’s father, Felciano Strepponi, was a student of composition at the Milan Conservatory.

A. Felciano Strepponi finished his studies in 1820, when Giuseppina was five years old, and it appeared that he would have a long and successful career as a composer. Between 1822 and 1830, his operas were performed at important venues in Turin, Milan, and Trieste.

B. In 1830, the 15-year-old Giuseppina was enrolled as a student of voice at her father’s alma mater, the Milan Conservatory. She was, by all reports, an unusually gifted young singer.

C. In January 1832, at age 35, Felciano suddenly died. Giuseppina, who was 17 at the time, managed to complete her Conservatory studies two years later, in 1834. By that time, Giuseppina’s mother, Rosa, had been forced to sell the furniture and her husband’s clothing and put one of her four other children into an orphanage to survive financially. The Strepponi family’s only hope lay with Giuseppina and her fledgling career as a singer.

D. Giuseppina made her operatic debut at age 19 in Trieste, singing the title role in Rossini’s Matilde di Shabran. Glowing reviews followed; she was offered work across Italy and Austria; and she said “yes” to every offer that came her way.

1. Giuseppina was an intelligent and attractive woman, an excellent actress and a singer of considerable gifts, and a fast learner. She also had good agents, who saw in her a fresh-faced singer with a great voice and excellent acting ability, one who looked wonderful onstage and was willing to take on any role at any time.

2. In our world, agents would take a measured and strategic approach to marketing such a top new talent, but in Italy in the 1830s, the only way for Giuseppina to be seen and heard was live, on stage.

3. As the primary breadwinner for a family of six, she was desperate for work and willing to take on almost any role at any time. For her agents, she was a cash cow, and they milked her mercilessly. And
it would seem that no one—not Giuseppina herself, her mother, or her management—was paying
attention to the strain all this singing was having on her spirit, her body, and her voice.

E. Two years into this grueling career, in 1837, Giuseppina found out that she was pregnant. The father was
one of her former agents, Camillo Cirelli, with whom she was having an affair.
1. Giuseppina gave birth to a healthy baby boy in early January of 1838. Theater managers and costume
designers had done their best to hide the fact that Giuseppina was pregnant, and she stopped
performing only a few weeks before her son’s birth.
2. She went back to work less than two months after his birth; two months later, in May of 1838, she got
into a fight with Camillo Cirelli, her boy’s father. She took another lover and, almost immediately, got
pregnant again.
3. As this pregnancy advanced, Giuseppina’s health began to fail. Among other things, she suffered from
frequent bouts of uncontrollable coughing. During performances, her coughing fits would force her to
turn her head toward the rear of the stage.
4. Giuseppina was scheduled to make her La Scala debut in April 1839, only one month after the due
date of her second child. That child, a healthy girl, was born prematurely on February 9, 1839,
immediately after a performance. Giuseppina nursed the baby for 19 days, then, on February 28, left
her in the turnstile for abandoned infants at a church and never saw her again.

F. Giuseppina moved on to Milan, where she made her La Scala debut roughly five weeks after abandoning
her child. A few weeks later, in May of 1838, she was scheduled to sing in a new opera entitled
Oberto by an unknown composer named Giuseppe Verdi, but as we know, the director of La Scala rescheduled that
performance for the following fall. Although Giuseppina was not destined to sing in the premiere of
Oberto, she was deeply impressed by the music she had seen and begun to learn.

G. Meanwhile, Giuseppina resumed her backbreaking schedule and was reunited with, then once again split
from, her old lover, Camillo Cirelli. She took another lover and became pregnant yet again. She gave birth
to a stillborn child, a girl, on March 22, 1840, and was back on stage six weeks later. It is a testament to
Giuseppina’s acting ability, good looks, and stage presence that, despite her failing voice, she remained an
audience favorite.

H. In February 1841, 11 months after having given birth to her stillborn daughter, Giuseppina got pregnant
again, for the fourth time. Almost immediately on learning this fact, Giuseppina took on another lover, a
wealthy and influential nobleman named Count Filippo Camerata dei Passionei; she almost certainly hoped
to convince him that the baby was his own and, thus, his financial responsibility.
1. Her plan came to nothing when the count dropped her after discovering that she was sleeping with the
tenor Lorenzo Salvi. He confronted Giuseppina in her dressing room just minutes before curtain time;
they had a furious, screaming fight that could be heard in the theater, and the count stalked out.
Giuseppina, in her eighth month of pregnancy, walked out on stage and performed.
2. Giuseppina gave birth to another daughter on November 4, 1841. She left this child with a working-
class couple in Trieste and never saw her again. The baby died on October 4, 1842, age 11 months to
the day.
3. Just 17 days after her most recent birth, Giuseppina arrived in Venice for some necessary rest. While
there, she again met Verdi and had the opportunity to look over the part of Abigaille from Verdi’s new
opera, Nabucco. She consented to play the part and persuaded the baritone Giorgio Ronconi to
participate in the premiere, as well.

I. At the request of La Scala’s Bartolomeo Merelli, Giuseppina underwent a complete physical six days
before the premiere of Nabucco. According to the doctors, Strepponi had been afflicted by failing health
for three years; she was plagued by respiratory and gastric disorders, and her voice was disintegrating. The
doctors stated that she should no longer perform; despite her relative youth, she had burned out both her
body and her voice and, unless she retired immediately, she would almost certainly suffer from
tuberculosis later.

J. Giuseppina could have bailed out of Nabucco at that moment, but she didn’t. Somehow, she managed to
get through the first eight performances of Nabucco at La Scala, although subsequently, she would need
more than a year to recover.

K. Giuseppina Strepponi, for all her mistakes, was, like Giuseppe Verdi, a survivor, a battler, a warrior. Both
Verdi and Strepponi were artists of tremendous talent who were forced to deal with extraordinary adversity
during their 20s. When they were drawn together, they would understand each other and fight for each other as few others ever could or would.

III. Following the successful premiere of Nabucco, the 29-year-old Verdi became a fixture among the artistic and literary circles of Milan. The most important group of people he encountered there was at the salon of the Countess Clara Maffei.

A. The countess, called “Clarina” by her friends, was born in 1814, near Bergamo. She came from a long line of distinguished dramatists and poets, and in 1832, at the age of 18, married Andrea Maffei, himself a poet, journalist, essayist, and translator. Two years after she was married, the countess opened her home as a salon. By the time Verdi became an active participant in Countess Maffei’s salon, in 1842, it was the most celebrated in all of Milan, its participants representing the cutting edge of Italian art, criticism, literature, and politics.

B. Verdi typically stopped in at Contessa Clarina’s home early in the evening. We are told that this was the time of day when Clarina’s most intimate friends got together to talk and play cards. Verdi loved cards and was apparently an excellent and hardnosed player.

C. Between 1842, the year Nabucco was premiered, and 1849, the year he moved in with Giuseppina, Verdi’s name was associated with a tremendous number of women. Unfortunately for us and his biographers, Verdi kept his private life to himself, and we have little more than gossip on which to base any speculation about his affairs.

D. During the fall season of 1842, Nabucco was restaged at La Scala with a new cast, to even greater success than in the spring. It ran for 57 consecutive performances, holding the stage until December, a record that stands to this day at La Scala. With his profits from the run, Verdi began paying back many of the people who had helped him on his way up, and he began contributing to charities, ultimately becoming one of the most generous and philanthropic men in all of Italy.

E. By the autumn of 1842, La Scala director Bartolomeo Merelli saw clearly that, in Giuseppe Verdi, he was sitting on a gold mine. After the third performance of the revival of Nabucco, Merelli called Verdi into his office and offered him a blank contract to write the featured opera for the Carnival season.

IV. The product of this commission was the opera I Lombardi alla prima crociata (“The Lombardi of the First Crusade”), a religious/patriotic opera seria about the Lombards (that is, the Milanese) of the First Crusade and their attempt to liberate Jerusalem from the Saracens.

A. Based on a poem by Milanese writer Tomassi Grossi, the libretto for I Lombardi was written by Temistocle Solera, who had also written the libretto for Nabucco. Solera referred to Verdi as a “tyrant” and left an account of Verdi locking him in a room to write.

B. We begin with Act III, scene 2: a duet between Giselda and Oronte. Giselda is the daughter of Arvino, a Milanese crusader. Giselda has accompanied her father as a pilgrim to the Holy Land and fallen in love with Oronte, the Muslim-born son of Acciano, who is the Tyrant of Antioch. In Act III, Giselda believes that her beloved Oronte has been killed in the desert. Of course, he is not really dead, and as she sings about her grief and loneliness, he suddenly turns up, frightening Giselda rather badly.

C. To set the scene: It is night in the valley of Josaphat. The Mount of Olives rises amidst the many hills. Jerusalem is visible in the distance. A grieving Giselda leaves her father’s tent and walks out into the cool night. There, alone, she sings:

GISELDA
Dove sola m’inoltro? Where can I go to be alone?
Nella paterna tenda I am suffocating
Mi mancava il respir! in my father’s tent!
D’aura m’è duopo, I need air,
D’aura libera! the air of freedom!
Tutto è qui deserto... Everything here is deserted,
Tacquero i canti... the song has gone silent,
Sol mia mente my thoughts alone cannot fly
al cielo non vola... their way to heaven
Ah l’alma mia, Oh, my soul,
Non ha pensiero, I can think of nothing else
Che d’amor non sia! but my lost love!

D. These words are set as an orchestrally accompanied recitative, yet note the extraordinary lyricism with which Verdi invests them, in particular, the last two lines, “I can think of nothing else but my lost love!”

(Musical selection: *I Lombardi*, Act III, scene 2, duet.)

E. Oronte, who has been listening to Giselda’s “recitative of sorrow,” enters.

ORONTE Giselda! GISELDA
Oh ciel!... traveggo? Jumping Josepht! A mirage!
ORONTE ORONTE
Ah no!... d’Oronte No, babe! It is Oronte
Stai fra le braccia! who takes you in his arms!

[Oronte embraces Giselda, who weeps all over him. The music darkens as she pulls away from him and sings:]

GISELDA Ah sogno egli è! It cannot be him; it is only a dream!
Ah, la fronte ch’io t’inondi But ah! On your face
Di lagrime! are my tears!
ORONTE ORONTE
Oh Giselda! Oh Giselda!
Dunque di me non ti scordasti? So you haven’t forgotten me?
GISELDA GISELDA
Come ti piansi estinto! I mourned for you as one who was dead!
ORONTE ORONTE
Dal nemico brando I was thrown from my horse
Sol fui gittato al suolo; and left for dead;
Speranza di vederti anco una volta but the hope that I might see you
Vile mi fe’... presi la fuga... errante one more time gave me strength.
Andai di terra in terra, I fled.

[With the mention of the word *fuga*, “fled,” Verdi’s setting takes on the steady beat of “traveling music,” as Oronte continues to describe his perilous journey back to Giselda’s arms:]

Veste mutai, seguendo il mio desire I fled, and have wandered from place
e Di vederti una volta, to place, longing only to see you once
e poi morire. again, and then to die.

GISELDA GISELDA
Oh non morrai! Oh, you will not die!
ORONTE ORONTE
Tutto ho perduto! amici, I have lost everything! My friends,
Parenti, patria... il soglio... my parents, my country, the throne,
Con te la vita! and any hope of life with you!
GISELDA GISELDA
No! seguirti io voglio. No! I want to follow you!
Teco io fuggo! We will flee here together!

[Again, with the mention of the word *fuggi*, “we will flee,” Verdi’s setting takes on a manic forward momentum, which continues through the next two lines. Oronte is stunned and asks:]
ORONTE
Tu?... che intendo!
You would leave everything behind?

GISELDA
Vo’ seguire il tuo destino.
I shall follow you whatever your fate.

[The “fleeing” momentum of the music stops, and in a lengthy bit of soliloquy, Oronte warns Giselda that they will not lead a particularly luxurious life. Note, in particular, Verdi’s use of a solo oboe here, a favorite device of his to lend poignancy and a sense of emptiness to a descriptive passage. Oronte sings:]

ORONTE
Infelice!... è un voto orrendo.
Unhappy woman! Yours is a terrible oath!
Maledetto è il mio cammino.
My path is cursed.
Per dirupi e per foreste
It leads through valleys and forests,
Come belva errante io movo;
through wind and storms.
Guoço ai venti e alle tempeste
My places of rest will be but caves and the dens of thieves!
Spesso albergo ho un antro, un covo!
Your nuptial bed shall be the sands of the boundless desert,
Avrai talamo l’arena
and the howls of the hyenas
Del deserto interminato,
will be your love song!
Sarà l’urlo della jena
Io, sol io sarò beato
Only I will be happy
Nell’incendio del mio cor!
with the passion of my heart!

GISELDA
Oh t’affretta!... ad ogni istante
Listen, let’s get out of here! At any moment
Ne sovrasta fier periglio!
we could be discovered!

ORONTE
Ben pensasti?
Have you thought it over? Are you sure?

GISELDA
Il core amante
A loving heart
Più non ode altro consiglio.
heeds no advice but its own.

ORONTE
Oh mia gioia! or sfido tutto
What joy!
Sulla terra, il male, il lutto!
No trouble on this earth can bother me now!

Vien!... son teco!
Come! I am with you!

[The running/escaping music resumes and the first part of the duet builds to a rousing conclusion:]

GISELDA
Ah sì! tu sei
Yes, you are now my native land,
Patria, vita e ciel per me!
my life and my heaven.

ORONTE
Ah del regno che perdei
And I have found more in you
Maggior bene o trovo in te!
than the kingdom I have lost!

F. Be aware of the tremendous dramatic flexibility Verdi shows in setting these words. Moments of recitative effortlessly give way to moments of genuine arioso; moments of stasis are interrupted by moments of great agitation and momentum. Whatever the drama demands, Verdi supplies, and this opening portion of the duet takes on a heightened sense of urgency and drive as a result of Verdi’s maturing craft as a dramatist. We listen from Oronte’s sudden and unexpected appearance as he sings, “Giselda!” (Musical selection: I Lombardi, Act III, scene 2, duet, from Oronte’s “Giselda!”)
Lecture Seven

I Lombardi, Conclusion, and Ernani

Scope: The Milanese theatergoers who attended I Lombardi immediately identified themselves with the Lombards, the heroic crusaders of the opera, and the Austrians, they identified with the Saracens, the villainous occupiers of the Holy Land. The Austrian authorities considered shutting down the production but decided that doing so would be riskier than allowing the opera to be performed. At the same time, religious authorities disapproved of a scene in the opera in which a heathen is baptized on stage, adding more fodder to Verdi’s mistrust of the Church and clergy. During the period of 1842–1851, Verdi was extremely busy, writing 14 operas, traveling extensively, and managing the business side of composition. He was assisted in maintaining his schedule and commitments by Emanuele Muzio, a young man from Busseto who became Verdi’s friend and secretary. Among the operas Verdi composed at this time were Ernani, I due foscari (“The Two Foscari”), and Giovanna d’Arco (“Joan of Arc”).

Outline

I. Among many other things, I Lombardi represented the beginning of Verdi’s ongoing relationship with the censors, both political and religious.

A. As they were expected to do, the members of the La Scala audience—the Lombards of Milan—immediately identified with the Lombards of the opera. Those “occupiers” of the Holy Land who are the villains of the opera—the Saracens, the Muslims—were immediately identified with the Austrian occupiers of Lombardy. When the tenor portraying the crusader Arvino sang “La Santa Terra oggi nostro sara” (“The Holy Land will be ours today”), the ecstatic La Scala audiences would join the chorus by shouting, “Si! Si! Guerra! Guerra!” (“Yes! Yes! To battle! To battle!”).

ARVINO
Udite or me, Lombardi!
Dissetato il labbro,
Ultimi certo non sarete voi
A risalir le abbandonate mura!
Noi prevedono gli empi....
Ecco!...le trombe squillano del Buglion!
La santa Terra oggi nostra sarà.

TUTTI
Si!... Guerra! Guerra!

(Musical selection: I Lombardi, Act IV, scene 2.)

ARVINO
Listen to me now, Lombards!
Once you have quenched your thirsts,
be sure that you are not the last
to scale the walls of Jerusalem!
Let not the vile ones consider us cowards!
Here…the battle trumpets blare!
The Holy Land will be ours today!

ALL
Yes, yes! To battle, to battle!

B. I Lombardi was well into rehearsals when the Austrian authorities finally reacted to its libretto. The police sent a notice to Verdi, the librettist Temistocle Solera, and La Scala director Bartolomeo Merelli that the opera could not be performed unless major changes were made to it. Verdi refused to make any changes.

C. To their credit, the authorities (including the chief of police, himself a great fan of Verdi’s) decided that the risk of canceling the opera just days before its premiere was greater than the risk of not canceling it. The opera went on, and the Milanese audience loved it.

D. The Church, however, seriously disapproved of a certain scene in the end of the third act, when the mortally wounded Oronte converts to Christianity just before he dies, with the help of a nameless Christian hermit and Giselda herself. The Church authorities were scandalized that a Christian maiden converts and baptizes a Saracen—a heathen—on the opera stage! The archbishop of Milan claimed that to show baptism (a sacrament) on an opera stage was blasphemous, a sacrilege.
E. Verdi’s relationship with the Church authorities in Milan immediately went downhill. The situation was like the battle of Busseto all over again. Of course, it was (and still is) just this sort of controversy that puts people in theater seats, and *I Lombardi* went on to become a huge success. But, once again, Verdi, in his own mind, had just that much more justification to distrust the Church and the clergy.

F. *I Lombardi* is rarely performed today, and many of us find it difficult to fathom the passions this early opera aroused in its audience. We have to understand such works as *Nabucco* and *I Lombardi* not just as operas but as political tracts, and we must view them in the perspective of the social context of their time. Verdi, in particular, saw constant reminders of Italy’s unhappy condition in dramatic situations or passages of poetry.

II. On March 20, 1843, Verdi left Milan to oversee a production of *Nabucco* in Vienna. He would not settle back down until the summer of 1849, when he returned to Busseto to live. Verdi came to refer to the years between 1842 and 1851—between *Nabucco* and *Rigoletto*—as “the years of the galley slave.” This was the period that saw him scale the heights of the operatic world, even as his physical and emotional health began to disintegrate.

A. Verdi composed 14 operas during those nine years—one of them, *Macbeth*, a certifiable masterwork and another, *Luisa Miller*, a near masterwork. During those same years (1842–1851), across Italy, nearly 500 other new operas were written and produced to satisfy the Italian public’s virtually insatiable appetite for new opera.

B. Opera was big business in Italy. Like its equivalents in our culture today—movies, television, music, and professional sports—opera in Italy was a stressful, often vicious industry, with singers literally owned by impresarios and composers forced to meet deadlines and deal with pressures that certainly shortened their lives.

C. Verdi survived his years as a “galley slave.” After the struggles of his early career and the losses of Margherita and his children, he was, unfortunately, accustomed to dealing with adversity. He was dogged by depression during these years, and for him, composition would seem to have been his best therapy.

D. Verdi was also interested, as anyone would be, in the money that came with his growing reputation. He had grown up poor and knew that money could buy time and land, the two things he most desperately wanted. Verdi fantasized about an early retirement and, after having paid off his considerable debts, he immediately began to buy up farmland around his native village of Le Roncole.

E. The most penetrating appraisals of Verdi’s early work came from his fellow composers. Those appraisals varied widely, of course, depending on the competence of the appraiser: The better composers, secure in their careers, could afford to be generous; lesser composers, threatened by the 30-year-old Verdi, could be devastating.

III. Verdi’s next opera—*Ernani*—marked a major step in his career. He was commissioned to write it by the Teatro La Fenice, Venice’s major opera theater. *Ernani* was Verdi’s first premiere away from the relatively friendly climes of Milan’s La Scala, and it would take place in front of the tough, jaded, and knowledgeable opera fans of Venice.

A. The commission was a coup for the 29-year-old Verdi, but his hardnosed style of doing business—a style that would characterize his long professional life—was already apparent in his negotiations with the director of La Fenice, Count Carlo Mocenigo. He rejected almost entirely the contract initially offered him and remained firm in winning his points.

B. Once negotiations were complete, it was decided that the opera would be based on Victor Hugo’s drama *Hernani*.

1. Briefly, this work is about a Spanish aristocrat (John of Aragon, the “good guy”) whose father is ordered killed by the king of Spain (Emperor Charles V of the Habsburg Empire, the “bad guy”).

2. Forced to flee into the mountains, the good John of Aragon assumes the name of “Hernani” (“Ernani,” in Italian) and becomes the leader of a band of rebels that steals from the rich and gives to the poor.

3. For reasons too complicated to explain here, the opera ends with John of Aragon killing himself in front of his grieving and despairing wife, Elvira.

C. On paper, this story looked like a great subject for an opera. Victor Hugo, a political revolutionary and Romantic author, filled his play with passion and violence. But, as you might guess, the Austrian
authorities in Venice would not take kindly to an opera that vilified a Habsburg emperor and celebrated a treasonous, revolutionary bandit.

D. A local Venetian poet, Francesco Maria Piave, who was looking for work and had connections with the administration at La Fenice was hired to write the libretto. Despite the fact that he had almost no experience writing libretti or dealing with the censors, Piave and Verdi became great friends. Indeed, they collaborated to create *I due foscari* (1844), *Macbeth* (1847), *Il corsaro* (1848), *Stiffelio* (1850), *Rigoletto* (1851), *La traviata* (1853), *Simon Boccanegra* (1857), *Aroldo* (1857), and *La forza del destino* (1862).

E. Verdi’s first exposure to the audience in Venice—even as he was composing *Ernani*—was a production of *I Lombardi*, which opened the Carnival season at La Fenice on December 26, 1843. Verdi was not happy with the way *I Lombardi* was cast in Venice, in particular, with the tenor playing Oronte, but not even in his darkest moments could Verdi have imagined how badly the performance would go—almost every number was whistled or greeted with complete silence.

F. Under these circumstances, Verdi—embittered, enraged, and deeply hurt—demanded that the tenor who had so butchered his part in *I Lombardi* be removed from the projected cast of *Ernani*; otherwise, Verdi would dissolve his contract with the Teatro La Fenice management.

1. Verdi despaired for his new opera and what was still his fledgling career. Another disaster in Venice could be fatal, and he knew it. He continued to work on *Ernani* in his Venice hotel room but with a heavy heart. A chronic throat infection and terrible weather only reinforced his gloom and foreboding.

2. The premiere of *Ernani*, on March 9, 1844, was plagued by problems with the singers, costumes, and scenery and should have been a disaster, but when the curtain opened and the prelude began, *Ernani* was a triumph. (*Musical selection: Ernani, Overture.*

3. Verdi was followed home that evening by a huge crowd of people who were singing his music and calling out his name. In the days that followed, the great palazzi of the city were opened up to him, and he instantly became the hero of an influential group of intellectuals, poets, journalists, and professionals in Venice.

G. For all the success of *Nabucco* and *I Lombardi*, *Ernani* was the key work in establishing Verdi’s international career and reputation. The musicologist and Verdi scholar Marcello Conati points out that *Ernani* was more than an operatic success; it became the fashion across three continents.

H. *Ernani* was the first of Verdi’s operas to be translated into English, and the translator (an English gentleman named Wrey Mould) wrote a fascinating—and highly critical—preface that was published with the translation, noting, “That Verdi has made free use of other people’s scores is past doubt” (Budden, volume 1, 171).

1. Mould fails to distinguish between plagiarism and the common operatic language of the time. Certainly, Verdi was no thief, and just as certainly, in his early operas, he was using the common and time-tested techniques of Italian *bel canto* opera as it existed at the time.

2. Further, although Mould notes certain aspects of originality in Verdi’s score, he does not seem to recognize something that Verdi’s live audiences, starting with *Nabucco*, did recognize: that the dramatic sweep of Verdi’s operas, even his relatively derivative, early operas, was something new and quite thrilling.

IV. Before we move on, we have one more key person to meet, a person who became Verdi’s student, friend, assistant, secretary, business manager, and conductor on and off for the rest of the composer’s life: Emanuele Muzio.

A. Eight years Verdi’s junior, Muzio, like Verdi, came from humble roots and grew up near Busseto. Like Verdi, Muzio was a precocious musician—a singer and organist—who had studied with Ferdinando Provesi. Muzio also became a protégé of Antonio Barezzi, who helped to underwrite his education and music lessons.

B. In 1844, Antonio Barezzi asked Verdi to take the 23-year-old Muzio under his wing, give him a few lessons, show him Milan, and introduce him around. Almost immediately, Muzio took over the everyday details of managing Verdi’s life and career. The relationship between the two men was almost that of an older and younger brother, and it endured until Muzio’s death in November of 1890.
Many of the first-person accounts of Verdi’s life and work habits were written by Muzio, and more than anyone or anything else, it was Emanuele Muzio who made Verdi’s otherwise insane creative schedule possible.

1. And insane it was: Between the premiere of Ernani in March of 1844 and the premiere of La Battaglia de Legnano in January of 1849, Verdi composed almost non-stop, churning out one opera after another.

2. On top of his compositional deadlines—and this is where Muzio became absolutely invaluable—Verdi had to negotiate contracts; handle endless amounts of correspondence of all kinds; deal with singers, his publisher, theater directors and impresarios, friends and enemies; and all the while, keep up his exhausting travel schedule. Verdi could not have done it without Emanuele Muzio, for which Verdi—to say nothing of posterity—was eternally grateful.

The premiere of Ernani on March 9, 1844, was followed eight months later by the premiere of I due foscari (“The Two Foscari,” Foscari being the name of an aristocratic Italian family) at the Teatro Argentina in Rome. Just three months after that, on February 15, 1845, the premiere of Verdi’s Giovanna d’Arco (“Joan of Arc”) took place at La Scala in Milan.

A. The premiere of Giovanna d’Arco did not go well. The singers were not equal to the task, and Verdi was exhausted and sick with the throat infections, bronchitis, migraine headaches, and stomach troubles that plagued him.

B. The frazzled and volatile Verdi fought with everybody, including Erminia Frezzolini, his prima donna, who, we are told, spent more time crying than singing. However, Verdi reserved his greatest wrath for his old friend, La Scala director Bartolomeo Merelli.

1. Verdi claimed that Merelli’s increasingly tight-fisted financial policies had doomed the production from the start.

2. For Verdi, the last straw came just a few weeks after the premiere of Joan of Arc, when Merelli produced Verdi’s I due foscari. For reasons entirely his own, Merelli had the opera’s third act performed before the second, and Verdi exploded.

3. Verdi swore he’d never have anything to do with La Scala again, and he was almost as good as his word; 24 years would pass before he allowed another of his operas to be played there.

C. We must not believe, however, that Verdi—by the age of 30—was completely cantankerous. Indeed, he was described by a French journalist in May of 1845 as gracious, affable, and modest.
Lecture Eight

Macbeth

Scope: Verdi’s works during his years as an “operatic galley slave” were well received by Italian audiences. He seemed to be attuned to the emotional needs of theatergoers in his explorations of the struggle for freedom against tyranny. During the spring of 1846, Verdi agreed to compose a fantasy opera for the Teatro della Pergola in Florence. The result was Macbeth, which embodied extremes of Romanticism that were more common in Germany and France than Italy. Indeed, much of Macbeth was a departure from the norms of Italian opera, driven by Verdi’s desire for the music and voices to reflect the tragedy and insanity of the characters.

Outline

I. Verdi’s life as a self-professed “operatic galley slave” went on in 1845 and 1846. On August 12, 1845, just six months after the premiere of Joan of Arc, Verdi oversaw the premiere of his next opera, Alzira, at the Teatro di San Carlo in Naples. Seven months later, on March 17, 1846, Attila was premiered at La Fenice in Venice.
   A. All these operas—The Two Foscari, Joan of Arc, Alzira, and Attila—were well received by the Italian public. And it is little wonder: They are filled with memorable melodies, stirring marches and choruses, and characters sculpted in high expressive relief.
   B. Perhaps most important, Verdi’s early operas—so often about the struggle against tyranny for freedom—were perceived as metaphors for the Italian struggle for freedom against foreign tyranny. This metaphor found willing ears and hearts in the patriotic years immediately preceding the revolutions of 1848.
   C. In terms of the libretti he chose to set, Verdi was absolutely in tune with the emotional needs of his audience. His operas of the 1840s struck a nerve that went beyond the opera house and cut directly to the soul of the Italian nation. That these operas are rarely performed today has less to do with their intrinsic worth than the fact that Verdi so eclipsed them with his masterworks of the early 1850s—Rigoletto, La traviata, and Il trovatore.
   D. By 1846, Verdi had become a national hero for an Italian “nation” desperate for visible, tangible idols and role models. The fact that he was an artist (and not, for example, a soldier) made Verdi that much more compelling a figure. He had achieved his reputation by dint of his own talent and imagination, not through power or violence; he had made the world a more beautiful place and celebrated the time-honored traditions of opera and sprezzatura.

II. Verdi was, by his mid-30s, deeply conflicted about his career as an opera composer. On the one hand, his was already tired of the pressure, the stress, the traveling, the debilitating infighting with management and performers. On the other hand, he was a composer and dramatist of almost unique gifts who enjoyed the process of writing music more than just about anything else in his life. Nevertheless, with the money coming in, Verdi made the decision to retire early from the theater. These plans for early retirement were still in the future, however, when he took on a challenge that would constitute his first great operatic masterwork.
   A. During the spring of 1846, Verdi signed a contract to compose an opera for the historic Teatro della Pergola in Florence. This new opera would be a so-called genere fantastico, a “fantasy-style opera.”
   B. To get us in the proper frame of mind for this fantasy, let’s listen to the beginning of the opening witch’s scene, Act I, scene 1, of Verdi’s Macbeth.
      1. We find ourselves in a dark and terrible forest, Shakespeare’s “blasted heath.” Amid thunder and lightning—well portrayed by the orchestral introduction—three covens of witches appear, one after the other. (Verdi requested that three groups of witches appear, rather than three individual witches, which renders nonsensical the witches’ use of the first-person singular.)

PRIME STREGHE
Che faceste? dite su!  FIRST WITCHES
What have you been doing? Tell us!
SECONDE STREGHE
Ho sgozzato un verro. E tu?  SECOND WITCHES
I slit the throat of a swine!
PRIME STREGHE
E tu?

TERZE STREGHE
M’è frullata nel pensier
La mogliera di un nocchier:
Al dimon la mi cacciò…
Ma lo sposo che salpò
Col suo legno affogherò.

PRIME STREGHE
Un rovaio ti darò...

SECONDE STREGHE
I marosi leverò...

FIRST WITCHES
And you?

THIRD WITCHES
I had an encounter
with a helmsman’s wife:
she told me to go to the devil!
But her husband who set sail—
I will drown him with his ship!

FIRST WITCHES
I’ll give you a north wind.

SECOND WITCHES
And I’ll raise stormy seas.
2. A drum is heard, signaling the approach of Macbeth. Note the explosive, storming orchestral introduction and the purposely shrill sound of the witches’ voices. (Musical selection: Macbeth, Act I, opening.)

3. This sort of supernatural operatic opening was much more popular in Germany and France, where Romantic extremes of expression flourished more freely, than in the more operatically conservative Italy. Nevertheless, Verdi and the Teatro della Pergola wanted to try their hands at such an opera, for which Shakespeare’s Macbeth seemed a perfect subject.

C. As an aside, we should note that the 19th century saw a Shakespeare revival across Europe, and 19th-century audiences were dazzled by Shakespeare’s plays.

1. The plays, however, were usually heavily edited. The translations for non-English-speaking audiences were often so inaccurate as to bear only a passing resemblance to the original.

2. For his part, Verdi did not speak or read English, and though he adored Shakespeare’s plays, like most of his contemporaries, he knew them only from translation.

D. Verdi wrote the outline for the Macbeth libretto himself, then sent it to Francesco Piave, but he was dissatisfied with Piave’s wordy draft.

1. Verdi wrote again to Piave, begging him to find a more poetic and mysterious tone and admonishing him to keep it short.

2. Ultimately, Verdi became so dissatisfied with Piave’s work that he hired the poet Andrea Maffei to revise Piave’s libretto. When Piave heard this, he was understandably upset. Verdi had, essentially, fired him, yet their friendship managed to survive.

E. Verdi began composing the music for Macbeth in October of 1846. Muzio has left us with a wonderful description of Verdi’s daily routine from this time of his career.

1. Work began promptly at 9:00 every morning, with Verdi and Muzio sitting at either end of the long wooden table in Verdi’s study. Verdi would occasionally get up and go over to the piano to play and sing a bit of melody. At noon, Verdi and Muzio would have lunch together, either at home or at a tavern.

2. Early afternoon was reserved for cards or billiards, again with Muzio; then back to the study for more work. Evenings were spent socializing, typically at the homes and salons of Contessa Clarina Maffei or Donna Giuseppina Appiani.

F. Verdi took great pains with Macbeth. Despite the problems with the libretto and the necessary cuts any stage play must suffer when adapted for opera, Verdi wanted his Macbeth to be as true to the spirit of Shakespeare’s original as possible. The result is an almost surreal opera that, despite its beauties, is dark and tragic in mood and feel.

III. Verdi changed his method of composing entirely in Macbeth. In the past—and this is typical of opera composers—Verdi wrote the recitatives first. Later, once he knew who his singers were to be, he would compose the arias, ensembles, and choruses. Only at the last moment would he combine all the elements into a single, coherent score.

A. Verdi approached Macbeth from the opposite direction. He composed entire scenes, from beginning to end, to ensure dramatic continuity. As Mozart did in the finales of his mature operas, Verdi wanted dramatic logic and momentum in Macbeth to be as unbroken as possible by the traditional constructs of “recitative,” “aria,” and “ensemble.”

B. Macbeth was the first big step along Verdi’s path toward genuine music drama, a path that would find its first great flowering in the operas of 1851–1853—Rigoletto, La traviata, and Il trovatore—and would reach a peak of perfection in his two last operas, Otello and Falstaff.

C. Of equal import is how Verdi wanted the singers to sound in Macbeth. Despite the fact that Italian opera had always been about beautiful melodies, beautiful voices, and beautiful singing (until Macbeth, Verdi himself was a member of the bel canto, or “beautiful song,” school of opera composers), Verdi did not want “beautiful” singing in Macbeth.
1. Over and over, he told his singers that he wanted their voices to serve the dramatic situations, first and foremost, to reflect the psychological turmoil and angst of the characters.

2. Indeed, in 1848, when Macbeth went into rehearsal in Paris, Verdi wrote a long letter to the director of the production, urging him to reconsider his choice of a certain singer for the role of Lady Macbeth, because her voice was too “angelic.”

D. Let us listen to the first half of a duet between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, “Fatal mia donna,” (“My killer wife”). Along with the sleepwalking scene, Verdi considered this duet to be the climax of the opera.

1. To set the scene: Macbeth has just exited King Duncan’s bedroom. Lady Macbeth waits for him expectantly. Macbeth exits, staggering and distraught, and in his hands, he is holding a bloody dagger. He looks at his wife and cries: “All is done!”

2. He then continues in the quietest possible voice as the duet begins, accompanied by agitated, twitching strings that drive the duet like an engine.

MACBETH
Fatal mia donna! un murmure,
Com’io non intendenti?
LADY MACBETH
Del gufo udii lo stridere...
Testè che mai dicesti?
MACBETH
Io?
LADY MACBETH
Dianzi udirti parvemi.
MACBETH
Mentre io scendea?
LADY MACBETH
Si!

[This tense, otherwise meaningless exchange demonstrates just how anxious Macbeth and his wife are at this moment. Macbeth asks his wife:]  

MACBETH
Di! nella stanza attigua
Chi dorme?
LADY MACBETH
Il regal figlio…
MACBETH
Mentre io scendea?
LADY MACBETH
Si!

[But Macbeth doesn’t hear her. He is staring in horror at his blood-covered hands.]  

MACBETH
O vista, o vista orribile!
LADY MACBETH
Storna da questo il ciglio…
MACBETH
O vista, o vista orribile!
Nel sonno udii che oravano
I cortigiani, e: Dio
Sempre ne assista, ei dissero;
Amen dir volli anch’io,
Ma la parola indocile
Gelò sui labibri miei.
LADY MACBETH
Follie!

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MACBETH
Perché ripetere
Quell’Amen non potei?

LADY MACBETH
Follie, follie che sperdono
I primi rai del dì.

[The agitated accompaniment slows and stops. A moment of silence ensues, and the depth of Macbeth’s terror now begins to become apparent. Note, when we listen, the bass drum that accompanies Macbeth during this passage; it is the “drum of fate,” Macbeth’s own funeral drum, from which he can run but he cannot hide! Macbeth sings:]

MACBETH
Allora questa voce m’intesi nel petto:
Avrai per guanciali sol vepri, o Macbetto!
Il sonno per sempre, Glamis, uccidesti!
Non v’è che vigilia, Caudore, per te!

[Both Glamis and Cawdor are references to Macbeth himself. Glamis is a village in east Scotland of which Macbeth was the lord, and Cawdor is the location of the castle in northeast Scotland in which, according to Shakespeare, Duncan was murdered by Macbeth in 1040. For Lady Macbeth, this is all the height of foolishness. She attempts to calm her terrified husband by shaming him:]

LADY MACBETH
Ma dimmi, altra voce non parti d’udire?
Sei vano, o Macbetto, ma privo d’ardire:
Glamis, a mezz’opra vacilli, t’arresti;
Fanciul vanitoso, Caudore, tu sei!

[Once again, Macbeth doesn’t hear his wife and, instead, in a moment of extraordinary lyricism, Macbeth envisions the “angels” that will be his destruction:]

MACBETH
Com’angeli d’ira,
Vendetta tuonarmi
Udrò di Duncano
le sante virtù.

LADY MACBETH
(Quell’animo trema,
combatte, deliria...
Chi mai lo direbbe
l’invitto che fu?)

E. Verdi has indulged here in a bit of novelty orchestration, scoring the duet for muted strings, clarinet, and English horn and, in doing so, creates a dark, hushed, and subdued orchestral environment, one that
matches well the physical environment. (**Musical selection:** *Macbeth*, Act I, duet, from Macbeth’s “*Fatal mia donna!*” [“My killer wife”].)

F. The single most famous and memorable scene in Verdi’s *Macbeth* is Lady Macbeth’s sleepwalking scene, which takes place in the fourth act, not long before the end of the opera.

1. Back in the first act, after the duet between Lady Macbeth and her husband, Lady Macbeth took charge. Macbeth was supposed to leave the bloody dagger in the room adjoining the king’s bedroom, where his grooms, who were to be framed for the murder, were sleeping. Because Macbeth was too terrified to go back in and leave the dagger, Lady Macbeth took it from him and went in herself. That is when she saw the dead, still bleeding body of King Duncan and when she, literally, got blood on her hands.

2. Since then, Lady Macbeth has been going progressively insane, which has manifested itself in bouts of sleepwalking. She has been seen by one of the women of the castle, who, on this night, has brought along a doctor to observe. We find ourselves in a darkened hall in Macbeth’s castle. It is night. The doctor sings to the lady:

   DOCTOR: We have watched and waited now for two nights in vain!

   WOMAN: Tonight she will appear.

   [The doctor asks the woman what Lady Macbeth talks of in her sleep, and frightened, the woman responds:]  

   WOMAN: I must not repeat it to a living soul!

   [At this moment, Lady Macbeth enters slowly, walking in her sleep and carrying a lantern. The woman quietly cries:]  

   Here she comes!

   DOCTOR: Her eyes are wide open!

   WOMAN: Yet she does not see.

   [Lady Macbeth puts down her lantern and rubs her hands, as if she were trying to wash something off of them. The doctor asks:]  

   DOCTOR: Why does she rub her hands?

   WOMAN: She thinks she’s washing them!

3. Now begins the sleepwalking scene proper. Verdi’s orchestration here mirrors that in the earlier duet: muted strings, clarinet, and English horn. The effect is the same: dark, hushed, and subdued. Lady Macbeth’s rubbing of her hands is suggested by a rising motive played in the strings.

   **LADY MACBETH**
   Una macchia è qui tuttora…
   Via, ti dico, o maledetta!
   Una, due, gli è questa l’ora!
   Tremi tu?…non osi entrar?
   Un guerrier così codardo?
   Oh vergogna!…orsù, t’affretta!
   Chi poteva in quel vegiardo
   Tanto sangue immaginar?

   **LADY MACBETH**
   Here’s a spot still…
   Out, I say, damned spot!
   One, two, this is the time!
   You tremble? Do you not dare go in?
   A soldier and so very afraid?
   Quickly, come, make haste!
   Who would have imagined that the old man
   had so much blood in him?

   [Be aware of how Lady Macbeth’s disconnected thoughts are set by Verdi in short, broken musical phrases that give the effect of an endless, uninterrupted, constantly changing melody. Meanwhile, the doctor sings quietly:

   **MEDICO**
   Che parlò?…
   Chi poteva in quel vegiardo
   Tanto sangue immaginar?

   **DOCTOR**
   What is she talking about?
   The Thane of Fife was he,
Sposo e padre or or non era?... but now he is neither husband nor father?
Che n’avvenne?... What became of him?
DAMA E MEDICO WOMAN AND DOCTOR
Oh terror! Oh horror!

[Lady Macbeth looks at her hands, the hands that she imagines, of course, to be covered in blood:]
E mai pulire queste mani io non saprò! And these hands will never be clean again!
E mai pulire io non saprò! I can never make them clean again!
DAMA E MEDICO WOMAN AND DOCTOR
Oh terror! Oh horror!

[Lady Macbeth hears and sees them not at all. Almost sweetly (and to a ghastly effect), she sings:]

LADY MACBETH
Di sangue umano
Sa qui sempre... Arabia intera
Rimondar si piccol mano
Co’ suoi balsami non può.
Oimè!...
MEDICO
Geme?

[Although most of Lady Macbeth’s vocal part in the sleepwalking scene lies low in her voice, her final line includes a high Db on the word pallor, which gives her exit an ethereal, slightly demented effect. If there’s such a thing as dreamy, controlled hysteria, this is it:]

LADY MACBETH
I panni indossa
Della notte... Or via, ti sbratta!...
Banco è spento, e dalla fossa
Chi morì non surse ancor.
MEDICO
Questo ancor?...

[A Musical selection: Macbeth, Act IV, scene 2 [“Sleepwalking Scene”], from Lady Macbeth’s “Una macchia è qui tuttoral” [“Here’s a spot still”].]
Timeline

1813................................................ Born Le Roncole, near Busseto, October 9
1816................................................ First musical studies
1824................................................ Sent to nearby Busseto to study at the ginnasio and begins counterpoint and composition lesson with Ferdinand Provesi
1832................................................ Application to the Milan Conservatory is rejected
1832–1835...................................... Studies composition and counterpoint in Milan with Vincenzo Lavigna
1836................................................ Verdi is appointed maestro di musica, “master of music,” of Busseto and marries Margherita Barezzi
1837................................................ Verdi and Margherita’s first child, Virginia, is born; Oberto completed
1838................................................ Verdi and Margherita’s second child, Icilio Romano, is born (July); Virginia dies (August)
1839................................................ Icilio Romano dies; Oberto produced at La Scala in November
1840................................................ Margherita dies; Un giorno di regno
1842................................................ Nabucco produced at La Scala
1843................................................ I Lombardi
1844................................................ Ernani; I due Foscari
1845................................................ Giovanna d’Arco; Alzira
1846................................................ Attila
1847................................................ Macbeth; I masnadieri; Jerusalem; relationship with Giuseppina Strepponi begins
1848................................................ Il corsaro; Verdi purchases the house and property in Sant’Agata
1849................................................ La battaglia di Legnano; Luisa Miller; Verdi and Strepponi take up house together in Busseto
1850................................................ Stiffelio
1851................................................ Rigoletto
1853................................................ Il trovatore; La traviata
1855................................................ Les Vêpres Siciliennes
1857................................................ Simon Boccanegra
1859................................................ Un ballo in maschera; Verdi and Strepponi are married
1861................................................ Verdi becomes a member of the new Italian Parliament
1862................................................ La forza del destino
1867................................................ Don Carlo
1871................................................ Aida
1872–1876..................................... The “relationship” with Teresa Stolz
1874................................................ Requiem
1879................................................ Verdi meets Arrigo Boito
1887................................................ Otello
1893 ................................................... *Falstaff*
1897 ................................................ Giuseppina dies
1898 ................................................ *Four Sacred Pieces*
1901 ................................................... Dies January 27, Milan
The Life and Operas of Verdi
Part II
Professor Robert Greenberg
Robert Greenberg was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1954, and has lived in the San Francisco Bay Area since 1978. He received a BA in music, magna cum laude, from Princeton University in 1976. His principal teachers at Princeton were Edward Cone, Daniel Werts, and Carlton Gamer in composition; Claudio Spies and Paul Lansky in analysis; and Jerry Kuderna in piano. In 1984, Greenberg received a Ph.D. in music composition, With Distinction, from the University of California, Berkeley, where his principal teachers were Andrew Imbrie and Olly Wilson in composition and Richard Felciano in analysis.

Greenberg has composed more than 45 works for a wide variety of instrumental and vocal ensembles. Recent performances of his works have taken place in New York, San Francisco, Chicago, Los Angeles, England, Ireland, Greece, Italy, and the Netherlands, where his Child's Play for String Quartet was performed at the Concertgebouw of Amsterdam.

Greenberg has received numerous honors, including three Nicola de Lorenzo Composition Prizes and three Meet-the-Composer Grants. Recent commissions have been received from the Koussevitzky Foundation in the Library of Congress, the Alexander String Quartet, the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players, guitarist David Tanenbaum, the Strata Ensemble, and the XTET ensemble. Greenberg is a board member and an artistic director of COMPOSERS, INC., a composers’ collective/production organization based in San Francisco. His music is published by Fallen Leaf Press and CPP/Belwin and is recorded on the Innova label.

Greenberg has performed, taught, and lectured extensively across North America and Europe. He is currently music historian-in-residence with San Francisco Performances, where he has lectured and performed since 1994. He has served on the faculties of the University of California at Berkeley, California State University at Hayward, and the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, where he chaired the Department of Music, History and Literature from 1989–2001 and served as the Director of the Adult Extension Division from 1991–1996. Greenberg has lectured for some of the most prestigious musical and arts organizations in the United States, including the San Francisco Symphony (where for 10 years, he was host and lecturer for the symphony’s nationally acclaimed “Discovery Series”), Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, the Van Cliburn Foundation, the Chautauqua Institute, and Villa Montalvo. In addition, Greenberg is a sought-after lecturer for businesses and business schools and has recently spoken for such diverse organizations as the University of Pennsylvania/Wharton School of Business, Canadian Pacific, Deutsches Bank, the University of California/Haas School of Business Executive Seminar, the University of Chicago Graduate School of Business, Harvard Business School Publishing, Kaiser-Permanente, the Strategos Institute, Quintiles Transnational, and the Commonwealth Club of San Francisco. Greenberg has been profiled in the Wall Street Journal, Inc. magazine, the Times of London, the San Francisco Chronicle, the San Jose Mercury News, and the University of California Alumni Magazine, Princeton Alumni Weekly, and Diablo Magazine. Greenberg is the resident composer and music historian to National Public Radio’s “Weekend All Things Considered.”
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The Life and Operas of Verdi

Scope:

By the time of Verdi’s birth, opera was completely ingrained into Italian culture and was the essential form of entertainment through which Italian culture expressed itself. Verdi brought Italian opera to unequaled heights, while preserving a quintessential characteristic of Italian art—functionality married to beauty—carried out with the art of *sprezzatura*, or “effortless mastery.” Verdi was a great dramatist and a great melodist at the same time, whose artistic evolution never ceased across the 50-year span of his career.

Verdi was born in 1813 in Le Roncole, in the Italian duchy of Parma, which was occupied at the time by Napoleonic France. His parents kept a tavern, frequented by itinerant musicians. Verdi’s own musical talents were encouraged by his parents, who sent him to the nearby town of Busseto to study music with Ferdinando Provesi, a co-founder of the Busseto Philharmonic Society. Under Provesi, Verdi learned the art of composition by writing hundreds of pieces, which were then performed by the Busseto orchestra. The other co-founder of the society, Antonio Barezzi, took the young Verdi under his wing and later financed his compositional studies under Vincenzo Lavigna in Milan, after the Milan Conservatory had rejected his application on the grounds that he was too old and showed little musical promise.

In 1836, Verdi became master of music of the city of Busseto over the objections of the local Church authorities, who did not want a “secular” directing music in their church. The Church authorities then banned Verdi and the Busseto Philharmonic from performing in Busseto’s church. That same year, Verdi married Antonio Barezzi’s daughter Margherita; a daughter was born in 1837 and a son in 1838. Disaster struck in the summer of 1838, however, when their daughter died. The grieving family moved to Milan, where Verdi’s first opera, *Oberto*, was performed at the famous La Scala opera house in 1839. The opera was a modest success. Verdi was commissioned to write three more operas and contracted with the great publishing house of Ricordi. The publisher and Verdi would become close friends.

Domestic disaster struck again in June 1840, when Verdi’s wife, Margherita, died. Verdi collapsed. His next opera, *Un giorno di regno* (King for a Day), was a total flop, and Verdi never forgot the humiliation. From then on, he never had any regard for public opinion, good or bad.

After *Un giorno di regno*, Verdi had no desire to continue composing, but a serendipitous meeting with the director of La Scala led to the composition of *Nabucco*, an opera about the ancient Israelites’ struggle for freedom and national identity. Italians quickly related to the Israelites of *Nabucco* as they, too, in the mid-1800s, were fighting for liberation from Austrian and French domination and sought a national identity of their own. The famous chorus of the Hebrews in *Nabucco*—“Va pensiero” (“Fly, my thought”)—would become the unofficial anthem of the Risorgimento, the 19th-century Italian nationalist movement, and to this day, this chorus is virtually an Italian national hymn.

The soprano who sang the character of Abigaille at the premiere of *Nabucco* was Giuseppina Strepponi. She and Verdi would become lovers and, ultimately, Giuseppina became Verdi’s second wife. Their relationship would cause a scandal in Busseto, where they eventually settled. Verdi’s neighbors in Busseto considered Giuseppina, with her theatrical background, as little better than a prostitute, and their hostile attitude to the couple never diminished. As a result, Verdi developed a healthy contempt for his neighbors, which did not make things any easier when dealing with the locals. In the meantime, his career took off. Between 1842 and 1851, he wrote 14 operas, traveled extensively, and with the profits earned by his operas, he paid off his debts and began to acquire real estate. He developed a reputation for being a hard-nosed businessman and a thorny personality. He began to insist on supervising the premiere productions of his operas. He craved privacy, constantly complained of bad health, and despite his enormous successes, claimed to hate his career as an opera composer.

Verdi’s first genuine masterpiece was his opera *Macbeth*, premiered in 1847. This opera marked a watershed in Verdi’s compositional development. In it, we begin to see Verdi depart from the traditional Italian *bel canto* style opera, which focused on melodic and vocal beauty, often at the expense of dramatic integrity. From *Macbeth* onward, Verdi would put increasing emphasis on making his music an integral part of the dramatic action—it would foster dramatic momentum and reflect and deepen the thoughts, emotions, and personalities of the characters. To that end, Verdi would gradually eliminate devices that freeze dramatic action, such as recitative, employing instead...
a technique called *parlante*, whereby the orchestra carries the melodic line, maintaining the musical momentum, while the singers express themselves in a declamatory style similar to recitative.

Many of Verdi’s operas have social and political themes that made them controversial in their day and easy targets for the censors that ruled 19th-century Italy. But those same themes, in their underlying expression of the struggle over tyranny, helped endear Verdi to his compatriots and contributed mightily to a growing sense of Italian national identity. Many of Verdi’s operas also have melodramatic, sometimes even lurid plots, to which Verdi seemed naturally drawn and that he rightly sensed would have huge box office appeal, like *Rigoletto*, for example.

Premiered in March 1851, the opera marks another stage in Verdi’s development of a style that fosters dramatic continuity. He was progressing toward what is called *music drama*, in which a continuous music intensifies the dramatic action and psychological development of the characters, as if the opera were one integrated organism.

In the 1860s, Verdi began to slow down his prodigious output of operas. Between 1839 and 1859, he had composed 23 operas; between 1862 and 1893, he composed 5 operas and the Requiem.

With *Aida*, premiered in 1872, Verdi made changes that eventually became the norm for opera houses everywhere. He substantially increased the size of the opera orchestra, changed its layout, and moved it to a pit, from where it would not distract the audience’s attention from the action onstage. *Aida* is, perhaps, the most popular of all Verdi’s operas and the operatic spectacular by which all other spectaculars are judged. It made Verdi a very wealthy man, and he generously shared his wealth. Among his greatest acts of philanthropy were the funding and construction of a hospital in the local town of Villanova and a rest home for musicians in Milan, a facility that exists to this day and that he called his greatest creation.

Two years after *Aida* came the premiere of Verdi’s homage to the great Italian poet Alessandro Manzoni, the highly operatic Requiem Mass in Memory of Manzoni. By 1879, Verdi had become an Italian icon. He planned to retire but, instead, was convinced to write two more operas, *Otello* and *Falstaff*. The librettist for both operas was Arrigo Boito, whose partnership with Verdi remains among the greatest in the history of opera. Based on plays by Shakespeare, these two final operas are transcendental masterworks. *Otello*, premiered in 1887, is simply the greatest *opera seria* of the 19th century. *Falstaff*, premiered in 1893, the year of Verdi’s 80th birthday, was only the second comic opera that Verdi wrote. Verdi, characteristically, had total control over the production and, at this point in his career, was finally enjoying the process of operatic creation and production. *Falstaff* exceeds all Verdi’s previous operas in terms of dramatic line and musical brilliance. It is a true music drama in which a continuous flow of the musical line permits nothing to slow the breathtakingly fast dramatic momentum. It was to be Verdi’s last opera. He died from a stroke on January 27, 1901. His operatic career reflected an incredible evolution from a modest beginning, steeped in tradition, to one of extraordinary originality and groundbreaking innovation.
Lecture Nine

I masnadieri

Scope: *Macbeth* was a huge success when it was premiered in Florence in 1847, although its lack of a starring tenor, its brooding plot, and its supernatural elements did not have widespread appeal for Italian audiences. Having said this, *Macbeth* was Verdi’s first genuine masterpiece. By the year of *Macbeth*’s premiere in 1847, Giuseppina Strepponi had made the transition from prima donna to master teacher, with a thriving studio in Paris. Verdi joined her there later that year, after he had spent some time in London, enjoying his popularity with English admirers, as he supervised a production of *I masnadieri*. In early 1848, revolutions broke out against autocratic regimes in Paris, Vienna, and Milan, where the occupying Austrians were routed. Elated, Verdi traveled to Milan from Paris. But Milan’s liberation was short-lived, and by 1849, the Italian revolutions were over and Austria had reoccupied Lombardy and Veneto. In July 1849, Verdi and Giuseppina left Paris for Busseto, where they were met with a very cold reception by the locals, who considered Giuseppina no better than a prostitute.

Outline

I. Verdi was not capable of any sort of compromise, either in terms of artistic integrity or in matters of professional politics—he would not, for example, court music critics or wealthy patrons.
   A. *Macbeth*, for which Verdi was paid a fee higher than any paid to Vincenzo Bellini, enjoyed a highly successful premiere in Florence on March 14, 1847. Verdi received more than 30 curtain calls.
   B. In many ways, for an Italian opera in particular, *Macbeth* was an avant-garde opera, in terms of its subject matter, Verdi’s use of the voice, and its sheer dramatic power.
   C. Because of *Macbeth*’s lack of a love interest, a starring tenor, and its gloomy, brooding story, it could not satisfy the prevailing Italian taste for pure entertainment.
   D. *Macbeth*’s supernatural elements had greater appeal for French and German audiences than for Italian audiences.
   E. Verdi dedicated *Macbeth* to his benefactor and friend Antonio Barezzi.

II. Giuseppina Strepponi suffered a nervous breakdown after the grueling opening of *Nabucco* in 1842. She performed for the last time in 1846, her voice ruined and her health poor.
   A. Giuseppina moved to Paris to teach voice, and it is generally agreed that she and Verdi began their affair in Paris in late 1847.
   B. Earlier that year, Verdi had been in London to oversee the production of *I masnadieri*, which included in its cast the famous Swedish soprano Jenny Lind. Verdi referred to her as a “perfect and profound musician.” The premiere of *I masnadieri* was on July 22, 1847. ([Musical selection: I masnadieri, Prelude.](#))
   C. Verdi left London for Paris, where he renewed his acquaintance with Giuseppina. By the end of 1847, they were openly living together.
   D. In 1848, a series of revolutions broke out in Europe.
      1. The February revolution in Paris was followed by a March revolution in Vienna, as a result of which the feared and hated Prince Clemens von Metternich fled to London.
      2. Inspired by revolutionary events elsewhere, Italians in Milan fought with their Austrian overlords in what became known as “The Five Days.” They succeeded in driving the Austrians from the city, which was free from occupation for the first time since 1815.
      3. Unfortunately, the Milanese could not agree on an equitable form of government, and the Austrians took advantage of the Italian disarray to reoccupy Milan and Parma.
      4. In 1849, Rome was occupied by the French; after a brief few months, during which the legendary patriot Giuseppe Garibaldi held off 70,000 foreign troops with his 4,000 volunteers, the Italian revolutions were over.
   E. Following the events in Rome, Verdi, still in Paris, declared himself unable to live among the French and, in late July 1849, he and Giuseppina left France and traveled to Busseto.
III. Scandal greeted Verdi and Giuseppina when they settled in Busseto.

A. Giuseppina, as an unmarried woman cohabitating with a man, was regarded as a prostitute and ostracized by the Busseto citizens. Verdi was told that he was “ungrateful” to his hometown for all that it had done for him.

B. For the most part, Verdi and Strepponi preferred being left alone.

C. In the meantime, Verdi was working on a new opera, *Luisa Miller*.

D. The opera, begun before Verdi left Paris, was written in collaboration with the librettist Salvatore Cammarano.
   1. *Luisa Miller* is based on Friedrich Schiller’s drama *Kabale und Liebe* (“Intrigue and Love”).
   2. Rightly calculating that a patriotic opera would not be accepted in the post-revolutionary political climate, Verdi chose what he considered to be an apolitical theme.
Lecture Ten

Luisa Miller and Rigoletto

Scope: Luisa Miller, begun in Paris in 1849 and premiered in Naples that December, is based on a drama by Friedrich Schiller and is, at its heart, an indictment of absolutist governments. Composionally, it marks another incremental step in Verdi’s evolution from the bel canto tradition to music drama, a sort of opera that placed dramatic continuity and expressive power above the conventions and rituals of the bel canto tradition. After the premiere of Luisa Miller, Verdi spent some time selecting plays for his next new operas, ultimately settling on Victor Hugo’s Le roi s’amuse (“The King’s Jester”) and Stifellio by Emile Souvestre and Eugène Bourgeois. Francesco Piave wrote the libretti for both operas. Stifellio is barely remembered today, but Le roi s’amuse became Rigoletto, one of the great masterworks in the operatic repertoire. It is a lurid story, so characteristic of Verdi’s taste, about evil, innocence, and a fatal curse.

Outline

I. Luisa Miller is not, in fact, an apolitical opera: Rodolfo, an aristocrat, wants to marry a commoner, but is not permitted to do so by his father and the conservative, absolutist government his father represents. Thus, the plot amounts to an indictment of absolutist governments and social class divisions that fuel absolutism.
   A. Luisa Miller is characteristic of Verdi’s operas in its social and political commentary.
   B. It takes another step in its musical structure toward the through-composed operas of Verdi’s later years—again, it marks another incremental step in the development of Verdi’s musical style from bel canto opera to music drama.
   C. Rodolfo’s recitative and aria “Quando le sere al placido (“When at evening, in the calm light”) is an example of Verdi’s subtle and developing art of dramatic momentum. It is a tour de force for a tenor, who must sing in the upper part of his range and sustain an extraordinary level of emotional pitch with only minimal help from the orchestra.
   D. Rodolfo’s lover, Luisa, has been forced to write a letter breaking off her relationship with him, a letter in which she declares that she intends to elope with Rodolfo’s rival, Wurm.

RODOLFO
O, fede negar potessi agl’occhi mie! Oh! If only I could not believe my own eyes!
Se cielo e terra, se mortali ed angeli If heaven and earth, if mortals and angels
Attestarmi volessen ch’ella non è rea, assured me that she was not guilty,
Menite! I would call them liars!
Io risponder dovrei I would have to tell them that
Tutti mentite. they all lie!
Son cifre sue! This is her writing!
Tanta perfidia! Such treachery!
Un’alma si nera! Si mendace! A soul so black and so false!
Ben la conobbe il padre! My father warned me about her!
Ma dunque i giuri, le speranze, But all the vows, the hopes,
La gioia, le lagrime, l’affanno? the joys, the tears, the suffering?
Tutto è menzogna, tradimento, inganno! All of it is a lie, betrayal, deceit!

(Musical selection: Luisa Miller, Rodolfo’s recitative from the word “Wurm.”)

E. After the rage of the recitative comes the reflective calm and sadness of the aria.

RODOLFO
Quando le sere al placido When at evening, in the calm light
Chiaro d’un ciel stellato of a sky filled with stars,
Meco figgea nell’etere together we gazed
Lo sguardo innamorata, into the heavens,
E questa mano stringermi and I felt my hand
Dalla sua man sentia … pressed by her hand …
Ah! Mi tradia! Ah! But she has betrayed me!

Allor, ch’io muto, estatico Then, when I was silent, ecstatic,
Da’ labbri suoi pendea, when I was hanging on her every word,
Ed ella in suon angelico, and she, with the voice of an angel,
“Amo te sol” dicea, said, “I love you, I love you alone,”
Tal che sembrò l’empiereo it seemed that the heavens themselves
Apirisi all’alma mia! opened up to my spirit!
In suono angelico, “T’amo” dicea With the voice of an angel she said “I love you” …
Ah! Mi tradia! Ah! But she has betrayed me!

F. This is an aria of extraordinary lyric beauty and harmonic sophistication, yet it has the directness of expression of an Italian folk song. (Musical selection: Luisa Miller, “Quando le sere al placido” [“When at evening, in the calm light”].)

II. Verdi spent the last days of 1849 and the first days of 1850 considering new projects.

A. Among the texts that Verdi considered for new operas were Shakespeare’s King Lear, Hamlet, and The Tempest; Alexander Dumas Père’s Kean; Victor Hugo’s Marion Delormë, Ruy Blas, and Le roi s’amuse (“The King’s Jester”); Byron’s Cain; Racine’s Phèdre; de la Barca’s A secreto agravia, secreta venganza; Chateaubriand’s Atala; and Alfieri’s Filippo (which eventually became Verdi’s opera Don Carlo).

B. Verdi’s opera Stifellio, with a libretto by Piave, was premiered in Trieste in November 1850. It ran afoul of the censors, who cut out whole sections of the text.

C. Four months after the Stifellio premiere, Verdi was contracted to premiere a new opera at La Fenice in Venice. He asked Piave to create a scenario based on Hugo’s play Le roi s’amuse (“The King’s Jester”).

D. Hugo’s play is about a lecherous monarch who rapes his jester’s daughter. Not surprisingly, the Venetian censors rejected the story line, but after a sustained battle, Verdi prevailed and the opera was given the go-ahead.

E. Verdi had six weeks to compose, cast, and prepare the opera, which eventually was entitled Rigoletto. He finished the score in February 1851 and arrived in Venice just three weeks before the premiere.

F. While Verdi was in Venice, Giuseppina remained in Busseto, braving the scorn of her neighbors. She was unhappy that Verdi was in Venice with Piave, who had a reputation for being a womanizer.

III. Rigoletto is Piave’s finest libretto, and the opera is among the greatest masterworks of the repertoire.

A. The opera begins with a brief but deeply moving Prelude, in which the “curse” (Italian—maledizione) and its tragic fate are anticipated by the orchestra.

1. About two-thirds of the way through the Prelude, after a huge climax, the violins and upper winds are given sobbing motives that presage the tragedy of the story.

2. The Prelude’s explosive, hammering conclusion is evocative of the “fist of fate” idea that will ultimately crush Rigoletto, and it creates a striking contrast with the banal party music that initiates the first scene. (Musical selection: Rigoletto, Act I, Prelude.)

B. The curtain rises on a party scene at the palace of the young and lecherous Duke of Mantua. A dance band is playing in the distance. The duke is confiding to one of his courtiers.

DUCA DUKE
Della mia bella incognita borghese It’s time for me to consummate my adventure
Toccare il fin dell’avventura io voglio. with that lovely little stranger in town!
BORSA BORSA
Di quella giovon che vedete al tempio? You mean the young one you see in church?
DUCA DUKE
Da tre mesi ogni festa. Yes, every Sunday for the last three months.
BORSA BORSA
La sua dimora? Where does she live?
DUCA
In un remoto calle;
Misterioso un uom v’entra ogni notte.
BORS
E sa calei chi sia
L’amante suo?
DUCA
Lo ignora.

BORS
And does she know that her great admirer
is none other than the Duke of Mantua?

DUCA
No, of course not!

[A group of ladies walk across the stage.]
BORS
Quante beltà! …Mirate.

DUCA
Le vince tutte di Ceprano la sposa.

BORS
Non v’oda il conte, O duca.

DUCA
A me che importa?

BORS
Dirlo ad altra ei potria.

DUCA
Nè sventura per me certo saria.

(Musical selection: Rigoletto, Act I, scene 1 from the beginning, and the duke’s “Della mia bella incognita borghese” [“It’s time for me to consummate my adventure”].)

C. The duke now launches into his “creed.” Verdi invests this aria with a dancing rhythm, evocative of the duke’s hedonism.

DUCA
Questa o quella per me pari sono
A quant’altr’è d’intorno mi vedi;
Del mio core l’impero non cedo
Meglio ad una che ad altra beltà.
La costoro avvenenza è qual dono
Di che il fato ne infiora la vita;
S’oggi questa mi torna gradita,
Forse un’altra doman lo sarà.
La costanza, tiranna del core,
Detestiamo qual morbo crudele,
Sol chi vuole si serbi fedele;
Non v’ha amor, se non v’è libertà.
De’ mariti il geloso furore,
Degli amanti le smanie derido;
Anco d’Argo I cent’occhi disfido
Se mi punge una qualche beltà.

DUKE
This woman or that one, they’re all the same
as any other I see around me;
and there’s not a chance I’ll surrender my
heart to one beauty or another.
Their pulchritudinous beatitude is a gift
that decorates life,
and if today one woman turns me on,
then, perhaps, tomorrow it will be another.
I detest fidelity as a tyrant, as a disease,
from which I remain immune.
You wanna be faithful, be my guest;
there is no love without freedom.
I make fun of the jealous rage of husbands,
and the ranting and raving of lovers;
I’ll defy anyone and anything
if some beauty attracts me.

D. The duke’s aria is strophic—lines 1–8 and 9–16 are set to the same music, and rhythmically, the duke’s song is more like a dance than a formal, operatic cavatina or aria. Verdi creates for the duke music that is light and ingratiating, as he lives his life of pleasure, unaware of the unfolding tragedy that he does so much to bring about. (Musical selection: Rigoletto, Act I, scene 1, the duke’s aria “Questo e quella” [“This woman or that one”].)
Lecture Eleven

Rigoletto, Act I, continued

Scope: Inspired by Mozart’s opera Don Giovanni, Verdi uses on-stage and off-stage bands in the first scene of Rigoletto. Here, we are introduced to the dissipated Duke of Mantua and his courtiers and to the character after whom the opera is named—Rigoletto, the duke’s hunchbacked and acerbic jester. Rigoletto has a daughter, Gilda, whose existence he has done his level best to keep a secret from the lascivious duke and his court. Unfortunately, the duke is already aware of Gilda, whom he believes to be Rigoletto’s mistress. Musically, the opening scene of Rigoletto is perceived as one continuous flow of music and dramatic action. In the words of historian Julius Budden: “It is constructed as a single organism from first note to last and there is no precedent for it in the whole of Italian opera.”

Outline

I. The Duke of Mantua is having an affair with the Countess of Ceprano, who now makes her entrance. They converse against the background of a dance band consisting of violins, violas, and basses, playing a minuet in the style of Mozart.
   A. According to the Italian musicologist Pierluigi Petrobelli, Verdi’s use of on- and off-stage bands was inspired by Mozart’s use of a stage band in the background in the second-act finale of his opera Don Giovanni.

   LUCA
   Partite? Cruidele!

   CONTESSA
   Seguire io sposo
   M’è forza a Ceprano.

   LUCA
   Ma dee luminoso
   In corte tal astro qual sole brillare,
   Per voi qui ciascuno dovrà palpitare.
   Per voi già possente la fiamma d’amore
   Inebria, conquide, distrugge mio core.

   CONTESSA
   Calmatevi.

   DUKE
   Leaving so soon? Cruel woman!

   COUNTRESS
   My husband insists
   that I accompany him back to Ceprano.

   DUKE
   But such a star as you much shine at my court,
   luminous and brilliant, like the sun!
   Every heart here should beat only for you!
   For you, the flame of my love, already lit,
   intoxicates, overwhelms, char-broils my heart!

   COUNTRESS
   Calm down.

   B. The duke offers the countess his arm and they exit the stage together, leaving behind the mortified Count Ceprano, the countess’s husband, and the court jester, Rigoletto.

   C. Rigoletto is a hunchback, who has developed a caustic wit to defend himself against the derision that his deformity typically provokes.
      1. His daughter, Gilda, is the one golden spot in his life. He adores her and has tried to keep her existence a secret to protect her from the duke and his court.
      2. Gilda is the young church-going sweetie-pie whom the duke mentioned to his courtier Borsa.
      3. The mysterious man who secretly visits her is, unbeknownst to the duke, Gilda’s father, Rigoletto.

   D. When the duke and the countess exit, the minuet music ends and the coarse dance music with which the scene opened now resumes. Rigoletto applies his wit to Count Ceprano’s humiliation.

   RIGOLETTO
   In testa che avete, signor di Ceprano?
   [Rigoletto is referring to the “horns” that grow out of the head of a cuckold. Mortified, the count exits. Rigoletto addresses the courtiers:]
   Ei sbuffa! Vedete?

   RIGOLETTO
   What is that growing out of your head, my Lord of Ceprano?
   Oh, he’s unhappy! Did you see?
BORSA, CORO
Che festa!
RIGOLETTO
Oh, sì.
BORSA, CORO [with knowing winks:]
Il duca qui pur si diverte!
RIGOLETTO
Così non è sempre?
Che nuove scoperte!
Il giuoco ed il vino, le feste, la danza,
Battaglia, conviti, ben tutto gli sta.
Or della contessa l’assedio egli avanza,
E intanto il marito fremendo ne va.

BORSA, CHORUS
How entertaining!
RIGOLETTO
Oh, yes.
BORSA, CHORUS
The duke is also being entertained!
RIGOLETTO
So what’s new?
BORSA, CHORUS
Isn’t he always entertaining himself?

Il duca qui pur si diverte!
The duke is also being entertained!

Che festa! How entertaining!

Oh, sì. Oh, yes.

Così non è sempre?
So what’s new?

Che nuove scoperte!
Isn’t he always entertaining himself?

Il giuoco ed il vino, le feste, la danza,
Gambling and drinking, parties and dancing,
Battaglia, conviti, ben tutto gli sta.
battles and banquets, he lives for it all.
Or della contessa l’assedio egli avanza,
And now he’s laying siege to the countess
E intanto il marito fremendo ne va.
while her husband frets and fumes!

E. Laughing derisively, Rigoletto exits. A new melody from the string band accompanies his exit. (Musical selection: Rigoletto, Act I, scene 1, from the minuet that accompanies the countess and the duke’s “Partite? Crudele!” [“Leaving so soon? Cruel woman!”].)

F. Marullo (baritone), a courtier, rushes onstage and makes an announcement to the accompaniment of the original dance band:

MARULLO
Gran nuova! Gran nuova!
Great news! Sensational news!
TUTTI
Che avvenne?
What is it? Tell us!
MARULLO
Stupir ne dovrete …
You’ll never believe it!
TUTTI
Narrate … narrate …
Yes … Yes …
MARULLO
Ah! Ah! Rigoletto …
Ha! Rigoletto …
TUTTI
Ebben?
Well?
MARULLO
Caso enorme!
It’s incredible!
TUTTI
Perduto ha la gobba?
Has he lost his hump?
Non è più difforme?
Is he no longer deformed?
MARULLO
Più strana è la cosa!
No, it’s wilder and crazier than that!
Il pazzo possiede …
The fool has …
TUTTI
Infine?
What?
MARULLO
Un’amante!
The fool has a mistress!
TUTTI
Un amante! Chi il crede?
A mistress? Who would have believed it?
MARULLO
Il gobbo in cupido or s’è trasformato.
The hunchback’s turned into cupid!
TUTTI
Quel mostro? Cupido! Cupido beato!
That monster? Some cupid!
No one knows that Rigoletto has a daughter, so they assume Gilda is his mistress. At this moment, the duke, a very angry Count Ceprano, and Rigoletto re-enter.

DUCA
Ah, più di Ceprano importuno non v’è!
La cara sua sposa è un angiol per me!

RIGOLETTO
Rapitela.

DUCA
E detto; ma il farlo?

RIGOLETTO
Sta sera.

DUCA
Non pensi tu al conte?

RIGOLETTO
Non c’è la prigione?

DUCA
Ah, no.

RIGOLETTO
Ebben …s’esilia.

DUCA
Nemmeno, buffone.

RIGOLETTO
Allora …allora la testa.

[Count Ceprano has been listening to this conversation.]

CEPRANO [to himself:] Oh, l’anima nera!

[The duke, referring to Count Ceprano, asks Rigoletto:]  

DUCA
Che di’, questa testa?

RIGOLETTO
E ben naturale!

CEPRANO
Marrano!

DUCA
Fermata!

RIGOLETTO
Da rider mi fa.

MARULLO, CORO
In furia è montato!

DUCA
Buffone, vien qua!

RIGOLETTO
Che coglier mi puote?

Di loro non temo.

Del duca il protetto nessun toccherà!

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[Meanwhile, Count Ceprano is rallying support from the courtiers, all of whom have had, at one time or another, an unpleasant encounter with Rigoletto.]

CEPRANO
Vendetta del pazzo! Revenge on that crazy bastard!
Contr’esso un rancore Which one of us doesn’t have a
di noi chi non ha? score to settle with him?
Vendetta! Revenge!
MARULLO, BORSA, CORO MARULLO, BORS A, CHORUS
Ma come? But how will we avenge ourselves?

**G.** Ceprano invites the courtiers to join him that night bearing arms. They all agree, swearing revenge.

DUCA, RIGOLETTO DUKE, RIGOLETTO
Tutto è gioia! Let’s party!

[A crowd of dancers fills the stage.]

TUTTI ALL
Tutto è festa! To party is good!
Tutto è gioia, tutto è festa; All is joy, all is feasting;
Tutto invitaci a godere! everything invites us to enjoy ourselves!
Oh, guardate, non par questra Check it out: this place
Or la reggia del placer! is the ultimate pleasure palace!

*Musical selection: Rigoletto, Act I, scene 1, from Marullo’s “Gran nuova!” [“Great news!”].*

**H.** Suddenly, an angry voice is heard offstage. Count Monterone has arrived to publicly reproach the duke for dishonoring his daughter.

MONTERONE MONTERONE
Ch’io gli parli. Let me speak to him.
DUCA DUKE
No! No!
MONTERONE MONTERONE
Il voglio. I will speak to him!
TUTTI ALL
Monterone! Monterone!

[The music that accompanies Monterone’s entrance is that of the tragic, dissonant prelude heard at the beginning of the opera. Monterone’s music bears a close resemblance to that of the statue in Mozart’s Don Giovanni. Monterone, like the statue, is a symbol of justice and revenge.]

MONTERONE MONTERONE
Sì, Monterone … Yes, Monterone …
La voce mia qual tuo voic My thunderous voice
Vi scuoterà dovunque! shall assail you wherever you are!
RIGOLETTO RIGOLETTO
Chi’io gli parli. Let me speak to him.
[to Count Monterone:]
Voi congiuraste contro, noi, signore. You conspired against us, sir.
E noi elementi invero, perdonammo … And we graciously pardoned you.
Qual vi piglia or delirio a tutte l’ore And now, after all of that, you have the nerve
Di vostra figlia a reclamar l’onore? to complain night and day about your daughter’s honor?
MONTERONE MONTERONE
Novello insulto! A new insult!
Ah sì, a turbar
Yes, I've come

Sarà vostr'orgie …
to disturb your orgy,

Verrò a gridare
and I will shout

Fino a che vegga restarsi inulto
so long as I see the foul insult

Di mia famiglia l’atroce insulto:
you have perpetrated against my family unavenged;

E se al carnefice pur mi darete,
and even if you have me executed

Spettri terribili mi rivedrete,
you’ll see me again, as a terrible ghost,

Portante in mano il teschio mio,
carrying my own severed head in my hand,

Vendetta a chiedere al mondo, a Dio.
crying to the world and to God for vengeance!

DUCA

Non più, arrestatelo!
Okay, I've had it! Arrest him!

RIGOLETTO

E matto!
Aha! The old man's crazy!

BORSA, MARULLO, CEPRANO

Quai detti!
Whoa! What words!

[As Monterone is led away by guards, he turns to the duke and Rigoletto:]

MONTERONE

Ah, siate entrambi voi maledetti!
I curse you both!

TUTTI

Ah!

MONTERONE [to the duke:]

Slanciare il cane a leon morente
It's a cruel thing, Oh duke,

E vile, O duca,
to set your dog on a dying lion.

[turning to Rigoletto:]

E tu serpente,
And you, you vile snake,

Tu che d’un padre ridi al dolore,
you who laugh at a father’s grief,

Sii maledetto!
I curse you!

RIGOLETTO

Che sento! Orrore!
What have I heard? Oh, horror!

TUTTI [to Monterone:]

Oh, tu che la festa audace hai turbata
You, who have ruined our party

Da un genio d’inferno qui fosti guidato.
were brought here by a demon from hell!

E vano ogni detto, di qua t’allontana …
Get out of here, your words are in vain.

Va, trema, a vegliardo, dell’ira sovrana.
Be afraid, old man, of the duke’s wrath.

Tu l’ha provocata, più speme non v’è
You have provoked it, and you’re as good as dead!

Un’ora fatale fu questa per te.
This is your fatal hour.

(Musical selection: Rigoletto, Act I, scene 1, conclusion, from Monterone’s “Ch’io gli parli” [“Let me speak to him!”].)

II. The second scene of Act I is set in a dark alley. To the left is Rigoletto’s house. The ominous darkness of the night is reflected in Verdi’s introduction, scored for clarinets, bassoons, and low strings.

A. Rigoletto enters muttering to himself.

RIGOLETTO

Quel vecchio maledivami!
That crazy old man cursed me!

(Musical selection: Rigoletto, Act I, scene 2.)

B. Rigoletto is being followed by a dangerous-looking figure (Sparafucile), whose character is depicted by furtive-sounding music that will continue in the background throughout the ensuing duet.
SPARAFUCILE
Signor …
RIGOLETTO
Va, non ho niente.
SPARAFUCILE
Nè il chiesi … a voi presente
Un uom di spada sta.
RIGOLETTO
Un ladro?
SPARAFUCILE
Un uom che libera
Per poco da un rivale,
E voi ne avete …
RIGOLETTO
Quale?
SPARAFUCILE
La vostra donna è là.
RIGOLETTO
(Che sento!)
E quanto spendere
Per un signor dovrei?
SPARAFUCILE
Prezzo maggior vorrei.
RIGOLETTO
Com’usasi pagar?
SPARAFUCILE
Una metà s’anticipa,
Il resta si dà poi …
RIGOLETTO
(Demonio!) E come puoi
Tanto securo oprar?
SPARAFUCILE
Soglio in cittade uccidere,
Oppure nel mia tetto.
L’uomo di sera aspetto …
Una stoccata, e muor.
RIGOLETTO
(Demonio!)
E come in casa?
SPARAFUCILE
E facile ..
M’aiuta mia sorella.
Per le vie danza …è bella …
Chi voglio attira … e allor …
RIGOLETTO
Comprendo …
SPARAFUCILE
Senza strepito
E questo il mio strumento.
Vi serve?

SPARAFUCILE
Sir …
RIGOLETTO
Leave me alone, I have no money.
SPARAFUCILE
Did I ask for money? No. I am a man who lives by his sword.
RIGOLETTO
Are you a thief?
SPARAFUCILE
No. I am a man who, for a modest fee, can free you from a rival, and I happen to know that you have one …
RIGOLETTO
What?
SPARAFUCILE
I know that your woman lives here.
RIGOLETTO
(What am I hearing?)
SPARAFUCILE
Half in advance, the remainder …afterwards.
RIGOLETTO
How much would you charge for a nobleman?
SPARAFUCILE
That would be more costly.
RIGOLETTO
How are you usually paid?
SPARAFUCILE
Half in advance, the remainder …afterwards.
RIGOLETTO
And how do you go about doing your business?
SPARAFUCILE
I either kill my man in the city, or under my own roof.
RIGOLETTO
I wait for him in the darkness. One thrust, and he’s dead.
SPARAFUCILE
I either kill my man in the city, or under my own roof.
RIGOLETTO
And how do you get him to come to your house?
SPARAFUCILE
That’s easy …
RIGOLETTO
My sister helps me.
SPARAFUCILE
She dances in the streets, and she’s quite a tomato.
RIGOLETTO
She lures the one I want, and then …
SPARAFUCILE
Without any noise, and this is my sword.
RIGOLETTO
Do you have need of it?
RIGOLETTO    RIGOLETTO
Chi sa?     But who knows?
SPARAFUCILE    SPARAFUCILE
Sparafucile mi nomino.   Sparafucile is my name.
RIGOLETTO    RIGOLETTO
Straniero?    You are a foreigner?
SPARAFUCILE    SPARAFUCILE
Borgognone.    From Burgundy.
RIGOLETTO    RIGOLETTO
E dove, all’occasione?   And where can I find you, if the occasion should arise?
SPARAFUCILE    SPARAFUCILE
Qui sempre a sera.   Here, every evening.
RIGOLETTO    RIGOLETTO
Va.   Go. Go now.

C. During this passage, Verdi uses a technique called parlante: While Rigoletto and Sparafucile sing in a style similar to traditional recitative, the orchestra assumes the melodic interest, playing the memorable and insidious-sounding tune that first introduced Sparafucile.
1. This technique keeps the musical momentum going throughout the passage. As a result, Verdi minimizes the musical difference between recitative and fully-sung episodes in the opera.
2. Sparafucile and Rigoletto never join their voices, a musical device that parallels, musically, Rigoletto’s body language, as he keeps his cloak tightly wrapped around him and maintains as much distance from Sparafucile as he can.

(Musical selection: Rigoletto, Act I, scene 2, from Sparafucile’s “Signor” [“Sir”].)

D. Sparafucile disappears into the night, leaving Rigoletto alone with troubling thoughts.
Lecture Twelve

Rigoletto, Acts I, II, and III

Scope: Rigoletto has met the assassin Sparafucile, who offered to dispose of a man who has been loitering around Rigoletto’s house. Rigoletto is deeply upset by a curse directed at him by an angry courtier. As Act I evolves, we meet Rigoletto’s beautiful young daughter, Gilda, who, unbeknownst to Rigoletto, has fallen in love with the duke in disguise. She is abducted by courtiers and taken to the duke’s palace. In Act II, Rigoletto arrives at the palace looking for Gilda. He is horrified to discover that Gilda and the duke are now lovers and swears vengeance. Act III is set at Sparafucile’s inn, where the duke has come to pay court to Sparafucile’s sister, Maddalena. It is in this scene that he sings one of the most famous arias in the operatic repertoire—“La donna e mobile” (“Woman is fickle”). Rigoletto and a heartbroken Gilda witness the scene between the duke and Maddalena as they hide outside the inn.

Outline

I. Rigoletto has met the “hit man” Sparafucile, who has offered to murder Rigoletto’s “rival.” When Sparafucile leaves, Rigoletto does some soul-searching.

RIGOLETTO [to himself:]
We are the same [referring to Sparafucile]. He has his dagger and I my tongue. I’m the man that laughs and he kills. Damn it, that old man cursed me. You nature, you mankind, you made me what I am, deformed, a buffoon! I can do nothing but laugh, and the consolation of weeping and tears is denied me. That master of mine, so young, so powerful and handsome, idly says to me: “Make me laugh, fool,” and I must force myself to obey. I hate you, you sneering, slobbering courtiers! How I love to sting you and insult you! If I’m evil, it’s your fault! But here, at home, I can become another person. That old man cursed me…Why is it bothering me so much? Is it an omen? Oh, don’t be ridiculous!

A. Rigoletto unlocks his courtyard door and goes in.
B. Gilda comes out to greet him. She is about 16 years old. Her music is a world apart from the dark and sinister music associated with Sparafucile that we heard a few moments earlier.

RIGOLETTO
Figlia!

RIGOLETTO
My daughter!
GILDA
Mio padre!

RIGOLETTO
A te d'appresso
Trova sol gioia il core oppresso.

GILDA
O, quanto amore!

RIGOLETTO
Mia vita sei!
Senza te in terra qual bene avrei?

GILDA
O, quanto amore! Padre mio!

RIGOLETTO
O, figlia mia!

[Verdi’s brilliant music keeps this episode from becoming too saccharine. Rigoletto suddenly sighs.]

GILDA
Voi sospirate! …che v’ange tanto?
Lo dite a questa povera figlia.
Se v’ha mistero …per lei sia franto.
Ch’ella conosca la sua famiglia …

(Musical selection: Rigoletto, Act I, scene 2, from Rigoletto’s “Figlia!” [“My daughter!”].)

C. The music turns dark as Rigoletto ponders how to answer Gilda.
   1. It seems that Gilda never knew her mother, whom Rigoletto describes as “an angel,” who loved him “out of compassion” and who is now dead.
   2. Gilda appears not to know what her father does for a living; she does not even know his name!
   3. When she asks Rigoletto his name, he tells her to be content to call him “father.”
   4. Rigoletto lives in fear that Gilda’s presence will be discovered by the duke. He keeps her under lock and key, with the exception of church attendance and only then in the care of a housekeeper.

D. As the duet between Rigoletto and Gilda comes to an end, the Duke of Mantua appears in disguise on the street outside Rigoletto’s house.
   1. By eavesdropping on the previous scene, the duke has discovered that Gilda is, in actuality, Rigoletto’s daughter.
   2. When Rigoletto leaves, his housekeeper—who is on the duke’s payroll—lets the duke into the courtyard, where he presents himself to Gilda.

DUCA
E il sol dell’anima, la vita è amore,
Sua voce è il palpito del nostro core …
E fama e gloria, potenza e trono,
Umane, fragili qui cose sono:
Una pur avvene, sola, divina,
E amor che agli’angeli più ne avvicina!
Adunque amiamoci, donna celeste,
D’invidia agli’uomini sarò per te.

GILDA
(Ah, de’ miei vergini sogni son queste
Le voci tenere, si care a me!)
E. By having Gilda and the duke sing together in this aria-turned-duet, Verdi lets us know that Gilda is as infatuated with the duke as he appears to be with her. (Musical selection: Rigoletto, Act I, scene 2, from the Duke’s “E il sol dell’anima” [“Love is the sunshine of the soul, life itself”].)

F. The duke asks Gilda to tell him that she loves him. She does so and asks the duke to tell her his name. He tells her he is a poor student named Gaultier (“Walter”) Malde.

G. Noises in the street prompt the duke to take his leave. The noises turn out to be Count Ceprano, Borsa, Marullo, and other courtiers who have come to abduct Gilda, whom they believe to be Rigoletto’s mistress. In the meantime, Gilda sings her only aria in the opera—a twittering, love-struck ode to the duke and one of the great jewels of the operatic repertoire.

GILDA
Caro nome che il mio cor Walter! Dear name that first
Festi primo palpitar, made my heart beat fast,
Le delizie dell’amor you fill my mind with visions
Mi dèi sempre rammentar! of the delight of love!
Col pensier il mio desir My thoughts and desires
A te sempre volerà, will forever fly to you,
E fin l’ultimo sospir, and with my last breath
Caro nome, tuo sarà. I will utter that sweetest of names.
Il mio desir a te My desire will always
Ognora volerà fly to you,
Fin l’ultimo sospiro and even my last breath
Tu sarà. will be yours.

[Holding a lantern, Gilda climbs the stairs to a balcony overlooking the courtyard. As she stands there, she is seen by the courtiers in the street, who have come to kidnap her.]

BORSA E là. There she is!
CEPRANO Miratela. Look at her!
CORTIGIANI O, quanto è bella! Oh, how beautiful she is!
MARULLO Par fata ed angiol! She’s like a goddess or an angel!
CORTIGIANI L’amante è quella di Rigoletto! That’s the mistress of Rigoletto?
Ohi quanto è bella! Oh, how beautiful she is!

H. Gilda’s aria is meant to sound like the song of a beautiful bird, accompanied as it is by chirping winds and a high, solo violin. The aria demands highly skillful breath control, vocal delicacy, and a large vocal range. (Musical selection: Rigoletto, Act I, scene 1, from Gilda’s “Caro nome” [“Dear name”].)

II. Later, in the second act of Rigoletto, Gilda is abducted and handed over to the duke.

A. Rigoletto arrives at the palace looking for Gilda. He tries to behave nonchalantly, singing a banal tune to himself, while the courtiers taunt him.

MARULLO Poverta Rigoletto! Poor Rigoletto!
RIGOLETTO La rà, la rà, ;a rà, la rà … La ra, la ra, la ra, la ra …
TUTTI Ei vien! Silenzio! Here he is! Silence!
RIGOLETTO
La rà, la rà, la rà, la rà …

La ra, la ra, la ra, la ra …

TUTTI
O buon giorno, Rigoletto!
RIGOLETTO [to himself:]
(Han tutti fatto il colpo!)
CEPRANO
Ch’hai di nuovo, buffon?
RIGOLETTO
Ch’hai di nuovo, buffon?
Che dell’usato più noioso voi siete.

TUTTI
Ah! Ah! Ah!
RIGOLETTO
La rà, la rà, la rà, la rà …
(Ove l’avran nascosta?)
TUTTI
(Guardate com’è inquieto!)
RIGOLETTO [to Marullo:]
Son felice che nulla a voi nuocesse
L’aria di questa notte.
MARULLO
Questa notte!
RIGOLETTO
Sì, O fu il bel colpo!
MARULLO
S’ho dormito sempre.
RIGOLETTO
Ah, voi dormiste!
Avrò dunque sognato!
La rà, la rà, la rà, la rà …
[Rigoletto walks around the room. He picks up a handkerchief on a table and examines the initials embroidered on it.]

TUTTI
(Ve’ come tutto osserva!)
RIGOLETTO [to himself:]
(Non è il suo.)
[to the courtiers:]
Dorme il duca tuttor?
TUTTI
Si, dorme ancora.

(Musical selection: Rigoletto, Act II, scene 1, from Marullo’s “Povero Rigoletto!” [“Poor Rigoletto!”].)

B. Rigoletto eventually is reunited with Gilda and finds out that the duke has taken advantage of her. Gilda asks her father to forgive the duke, whom she claims to love. But Rigoletto vows vengeance.
1. Rigoletto plans to convince Gilda that the duke is not worthy of her love.
2. Then, he plans to hire Sparafucile to murder the duke.
III. Act III is set at Sparafucile’s inn on the banks of a river. It is night. Sparafucile is sitting inside. Gilda and Rigoletto are standing outside.

A. The duke, disguised as a cavalry officer, enters the inn, orders Sparafucile to give him a room and some wine. He then sings one of the most famous arias in the operatic repertoire.

**DUKE**

La donna è mobile  
Woman is fickle

Qual pium al vento  
like a feather in the wind

Muta d’accento  
she’ll change her words

E di pensiero.  
and her thoughts.

Sempre un amabile  
Always a lovable

Leggiadro viso,  
and pretty face,

In pianto o in riso,  
but full of deceit,

E menzognero  
whether laughing or crying.

E sempre misero  
The man who believes her

Chi a lei s’affida,  
or confides in her

Chi le confida  
is made miserable,

Mal cauto il core!  
His heart is broken!

Pur mai non sentesi  
And yet, one who never

Felice appieno  
drinks love from that breast

Chi su quel seno  
can never be

Non liba amore!  
completely happy!

(Musical selection: Rigoletto, Act III, “La donna è mobile” [“Woman is fickle”].)

B. When the parts were distributed for the first performance of Rigoletto, Verdi did not give this aria to the tenor who was to sing the role of the duke.

1. The tenor had to wait until the first full orchestral rehearsal to see the words and music for “La donna è mobile.” He was relieved to see that the piece was easy to learn and memorize.

2. He was made to swear on his honor to Verdi that he would not sing, hum, or even whistle the aria outside the theater. In fact, the whole cast and orchestra was sworn to secrecy over this aria.

3. Thus, the aria’s impact was maximized and, when the audience heard it for the first time at the premiere, they went wild over it.

C. Sparafucile’s sister Maddalena joins her brother and the duke, who tries to embrace her. Meanwhile, Rigoletto and Gilda are looking on.

**DUKE**

Un di, se ben rammentomi,  
One day, as I remember it,

O bella, t’incontrai …  
I met you, oh, beauty;

Mi piacque di te chiedere,  
I asked around,

E intesi che qui stai.  
and found out that you lived here.

Or sappi, che d’allora  
Since that moment, you should know,

Sol te quest’alma adora.  
my soul longs for you alone.

**GILDA**

Iniquo!  
Bastard!

**MADDALENA**

Ah, ah! …e vent’al‘tre appresso  
Ha, ha! Have you forgotten the twenty

Le scorda forse adesso?  
other times you’ve used that line?

Ha un’aria il signorino  
The young gentleman has the look

Da vero libertino …  
of a big liar!

**DUKE**

Si … un mostro son …  
It’s true … I’m a monster …

**GILDA**

Ah, padre mio!  
Oh, my father!
MADDALENA [pushing the duke away:] MADDALENA
Lasciatemi, stordito. Fresh! Let go of me.
DUCA DUKE
Ih, che fracasso! Quite a fuss you’re making!
MADDALENA MADDALENA
Stia saggio. Behave yourself!
DUCA DUKE
E tu sii docile, Oh, calm down
Non fare tanto chiasso. and stop making so much noise.
Ogni saggezza chiudesi Let’s put aside our restraint
Nel gaudio e nell’amore. and abandon ourselves to the pleasures of love!
[taking Maddalena’s hand:] La bella mano candida!
MADDALENA MADDALENA
Scherzate voi, signore. You have got to be kidding, right?
DUCA DUKE
No, no. No, no kidding here.
MADDALENA MADDALENA
Son brutta. I’m as ugly as sin!
DUCA DUKE
Abbracciami. Gimme a hug.
GILDA GILDA
Iniquo! Bastard!
MADDALENA MADDALENA
Ebro! You’re drunk!
DUCA DUKE
D’amor ardente. Drunk with love for you.
MADDALENA MADDALENA
Signor l’indifferente, Talk is cheap, sir.
Vi piace canzonar? Do you enjoy teasing the girls?
DUCA DUKE
No, no, ti vo’ sposar. No, no, honest, I want to marry you!
MADDALENA MADDALENA
Ne voglio la parola. Right. Okay, give me your word.
DUCA DUKE
Amabile figliuola! Sweet girl!
RIGOLETTO RIGOLETTO
E non ti basta ancor? Have you seen enough?
GILDA GILDA
Iniquo traditor! Traitorous bastard!
MADDALENA MADDALENA
Ne voglio la parola. I want your word.

D. This entire passage is written in parlante style and sets up the incredible quartet that follows, a quartet that will be discussed in the next lecture. (Musical selection: Rigoletto, Act III, from the Duke’s “Un dì, se ben rammentomi” [“One day, as I remember it”].)
Lecture Thirteen

Rigoletto, Act III, continued

Scope: Rigoletto has proved to Gilda that the duke is unfaithful to her. This episode at the inn ends with the greatest operatic ensemble written since Mozart. Gilda then exits and Rigoletto hires Sparafucile to murder the duke. A sense of impending doom is created as the orchestra evokes a distant thunderstorm, while a wordless chorus depicts a moaning wind. Inside the inn, the duke is shown to an upstairs room, where he takes a nap. After Rigoletto’s exit, Gilda appears outside the inn, where she overhears Sparafucile and Maddalena agreeing to spare the duke, if they can replace his body with that of a visitor before midnight. Verdi marked this crucial moment by stunning orchestral writing. Gilda, sacrificing herself for her duke, enters the inn and is stabbed to death by Sparafucile. Rigoletto returns to the inn and collects what he assumes is the duke’s corpse. To his horror, he hears the duke’s voice coming from the upstairs bedroom.

Outline

I. Act III of Rigoletto contains what is considered the greatest operatic ensemble composed since Mozart.
   A. Rigoletto has attempted to show his daughter, Gilda, that her love for the Duke of Mantua is misplaced. Gilda has witnessed his infidelity, as he flirts with Maddalena, the sister of Sparafucile.
   B. There now occurs an incredible quartet, as the duke flirts with Maddalena, while Gilda and Rigoletto watch them and comment from outside the inn.

DUCA
Bella figlia dell’amore,
Schiavo son de’ vezzi tuoi;
Con un detto sol tu puoi
Le mie pene consolar.

duca
Lovely daughter of pleasure
I’m enslaved by your ... charms!
With a single word
you can comfort my pain.
Come here, and feel how quickly
my heart beats for you ...

MADDALENA
Ah! Ah! Rido ben di core,
Chè tai baie costan poco,
Quanto valga il vostro gioco,
Mel credete, so apprezzar.

maddalena
Ha! I laugh with my heart,
for your compliments cost little.
Believe you me, I know exactly
how much your flattery is worth!
im familiar, Mr. Pretty Boy,
with jokers like you,
my dear sir!

GILDA
Ah! Così parlar d’amore
A me pur l’inframe ho udito!
Infelice cor tradito,
Per angoscia non scoppiar.

gilda
Ayee! I have heard the traitor say
these very words to me!
Betrayed, unhappy heart of mine,
Ah, no! do not break with pain!

RIGOLETTO
Taci, il piangere non vale.
Ch’ei mentiva sei sicura.
Taci, e mia sarà la cura
La vendetta d’affrettar.

rigotto
Hush, your tears are useless.
Now you know for sure that he is a liar.
Hush, and I will take care of
exacting our revenge.

Musical selection: Rigoletto, Act III, quartet, from the Duke’s “Un dì, se ben rammentomi” (“One day, as I remember it”).
Rigoletto tells Gilda to go home, dress in the man’s clothing that he has left for her, and depart, on horseback, for Verona. She exits, and Sparafucile meets Rigoletto outside the inn to discuss the duke’s murder.

Rigoletto: Twenty crowns, you said?
Sparafucile: Here’s ten; I’ll pay the rest once he’s dead.
Rigoletto: Is he here?
Sparafucile: He’s here.
Rigoletto: I’ll return at midnight.
Sparafucile: That won’t be necessary.
Rigoletto: No! I want to throw him in the river myself.
Sparafucile: It’s your call. Just out of curiosity, does “he” have a name?
Rigoletto: Oh, and do you want to know my name as well? Let’s just say that he is “crime,” and I am “punishment.”

As Rigoletto departs, a flute and piccolo evoke the faint glow of lightning and distant thunder is heard. The wind is depicted by a wordless chorus.

Sparafucile: There’s a storm approaching!
Rigoletto: The night is growing darker!

[Inside the inn, the duke is doing his best to seduce Maddalena.]

Duke: Maddalena! Maddalena!
Maddalena: Wait … my brother is coming!
Duke: So? What does that matter?
Maddalena: It’s beginning to thunder out there!
Sparafucile: And it’s going to be raining cats and dogs very soon.
Duke: Let it rain.
Tu dormirai in scuderia …
Tu dormirai in inferno …
E pioverà fra poco.

[ Maddalena seems to have taken a shine to the duke and wants to spare his life. But the duke does not, of course, understand why she wants him to leave.]
DUKE
Con tal tempo? You want me to leave, and go out into such weather?
SPARAFUCILE
Son venti scudi d’ora. There are twenty gold crowns for us if he stays!
Ben felice d’offrirvi una stanza, We’re happy to offer you a room
Se a voi piace, If that’s what you want;
Tosto a verderla andiamo. I’ll show it to you now.
DUKE
Ebben! Sono con te …presto …vediamo … Well, all righty then, lead on!

(Musical selection: Rigoletto, Act III, from Rigoletto’s “Venti scudi, hai tu detto?” [“Twenty crowns, you said?”].)

MADDALENA
Povera giovini grazioso tanto! Poor young guy! And so good looking!
Dio, qual notte è questa! God, what a dreadful night this is!
DUKE
Si dorme all’aria aperta? You sleep in the open air?
SPARAFUCILE
Signor, vi guardi Iddio! May heaven protect you, sir!
DUKE
Breve sonno dorrniam …stanco son io. Just a little sleep; I got tired all of a sudden!
La donna è mobile Woman is fickle
Qual piuma al vento, like a feather in the wind,
Muta d’accento e di pensiero … she changes her words and her thoughts
Muta d’accento, e di pen … her words and her …
[The duke falls asleep. Maddalena and Sparafucile talk downstairs.]

MADDALENA
È amabile invero cotal giovinotto! You know, that young guy is really adorable!
SPARAFUCILE
Oh sì, venti scudi ne dà di prodotto. Perhaps, but he’s worth twenty crowns to us dead.
MADDALENA
Sol venti? Son pochi! Only twenty? Is that all?
Valeva di più. He’s worth much more.
SPARAFUCILE
La spada, s’ei dorme, va … He’s sleeping by now. Go
Portami giù. bring me down his sword.

(Musical selection: Rigoletto, Act III, from Maddalena’s “Povero giovin! Grazioso tanto!”[“Poor young guy! And so good looking!”].)

II. Maddalena goes to the loft to get the duke’s sword. In the street below appears Gilda, dressed as a man. She approaches the inn.

GILDA
Ah più non ragiono … Ah, my reason is gone!
Amor mi trascina! My love has drawn me back to this place!
Mio padre, perdoni … Father, forgive me!
Qual notte d’orrore! What a terrible night!
Gran Dio, che accadrà! Great God, what does it portend?

[Maddalena comes back downstairs with the duke’s sword.]

MADDALENA
Fratello? Brother?
GILDA
Chi parlo?  
SPARAFUCILE
Al diavol ten va …  
MADDALENA
Somiglia un Apollo quel giovine …  
Io l’amò …ei m’ama …  
Riposi …nè più l’uccidiamo!
GILDA
O cielo!
SPARAFUCILE
Rattoppa quel sacco!
MADDALENA
Perché?
SPARAFUCILE
Entro’esso il tuo Apollo, sgozzato da me,  
Gettar dovrò al fiume …  
GILDA
L’inferno qui vedo!
MADDALENA
Eppure il danaro salvarti scommetto  
Serbandolo in vita.  
SPARAFUCILE
Difficile il credo.  
MADDALENA
M’ascolta … anzi facil ti svelo un progetto.  
De’ scudi già dieci dal gobbo ne avesti;  
Venire cogl’altri più tardi il vedrai …  
Uccidilo, e venti allora ne avrai,  
Casi tutto il prezzo goder si potrà.
GILDA
Che sento! Mio padre!
SPARAFUCILE
Uccider quel gobbo? Che diavol dicisti!  
Un ladro son forse? Son forse un bandito?  
Qual altro cliente da me fu tradito?  
Mi paga quest’uomo, fedele m’avrà.  
MADDALENA
Ah, grazia per esso.  
SPARAFUCILE
E d’uopo ch’ei muoia.  
MADDALENA
Fuggire il fa adesso!  
GILDA
O buona figliuola!

[ Sparafucile grabs Maddalena before she can climb the stairs. ]

SPARAFUCILE
Gli scudi perdiamo.  
MADDALENA

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E ver … That’s true!

SPARAFUCILE SPARAFUCILE
Lascia fare … Let it go!

MADDALENA MADDALENA
Salvarlo dobbiamo. We must save him!

SPARAFUCILE SPARAFUCILE
Se pria ch’abbia il mezzo la notte toccato If someone comes here, to the inn,
Alcuna qui giunga, per esso morrà. before midnight, he can die in his stead.

A. With Gilda standing outside the inn dressed as a man, Sparafucile’s proposition creates enormous dramatic tension. Verdi’s music for the voices is appropriately evocative of a death march, while the orchestra pounds away, as if the lightning and thunder of the storm have actually entered the inn.

MADDALENA MADDALENA
E buia la notte, il ciel troppo irato, The night is way too dark, the sky way too angry
Nessuno a quest’ora da qui passerà. for anyone to pass by here at this hour!

GILDA GILDA
O qual tentazione! Morir per l’ingrato! Oh, what a temptation, to die for the ingrate!
Morire …e mio padre! O cielo! Pietà! To die …and my father! …Heaven have mercy!

SPARAFUCILE SPARAFUCILE
Ancor c’è mezz’ora. There is still half an hour.

MADDALENA MADDALENA
Attendi, fratello. Wait, brother.

GILDA GILDA
Che! Piange tal donna! Wow. A woman like that weeping,
Nè a lui darò aita! and I do nothing to help him?
Ah, s’elgi al mio amore divenne rubello, Although he betrayed my love,
Io vo’ per la sua gettar la mia vita. I will give my life for his.

[Gilda knocks on the door of the inn.]

MADDALENA MADDALENA
Si picchia? Is someone knocking?

GILDA GILDA
Pietà d’un mendico; Have pity on a poor beggar;
Asil per la notte a lui concedete. please, grant me shelter for the night.

MADDALENA MADDALENA
Fia lunga tal notte. His night will be a long one!

B. Gilda, Sparafucile, and Maddalena repeat the words and the music of their trio, which builds up to a terrifying climax. Finally, Sparafucile opens the door.

SPARAFUCILE SPARAFUCILE
Chi è? Who’s there?

GILDA GILDA
Pietà d’un mendico; Have pity on a poor beggar;
Asil per la notte a lui concedete. please, grant me shelter for the night.

MADDALENA MADDALENA
Fia lunga tal notte. His night will be a long one!

[Sparafucile goes to get his dagger.]

Su, spicciati, presto, fa l’opra compita: Hurry up, hurry up, and do it!
Anelo una vita con altra salvar. I want to save one life with another.

SPARAFUCILE SPARAFUCILE
Ebbene …son pronto, quell’uscio dischiudi, And I want to save the money.
Più ch’altro gli scudi. Mi preme salvar.  
All right, I’m ready, open the door.

GILDA

Ah! Presso alla morte, si giovane sono!
Ah! I am so young, and yet so near to death!

O ciel, per quegl’empi ti chieggo perdono!
I beg heaven’s forgiveness for these wicked people!

Perdona tu, o padre, a quest’infelice!
And you, father, forgive your unhappy daughter!

Sia l’uomo felice ch’or vado a salvar.
May the man I save be happy.

Perdona, perdona, o padre!
Forgive me, forgive me, my father!

MADDALENA, SPARAFUCILE

Entrate …
Enter.

GILDA

Dio! Loro peronda …
God, forgive them …

C. As Gilda steps inside the inn, the orchestra explodes and only gradually does the orchestral storm recede.  
(Musical selection: Rigoletto, Act III, from Gilda’s “Ah, più non ragiano” [“Ah, my reason is gone”].)

D. Rigoletto appears on the road outside the inn.

RIGOLETTO

Della vendetta alfìn giunge l’istante!
The moment of my vengeance is at hand!

Da trenta di l’aspetto
I have waited and waited,

Di vivo sangue a lagrime piangendo,
weeping tears of blood

Sotto la larva del buffon …
under the buffoon’s mask.

Quest’uscio …è chiuso!
The door…it’s locked.

Ah, non è tempo ancor.
But it is not yet time! I’ll wait.

S’attenda.
In the heavens a tempest,

Qual notte di mistero!
Oh, how truly great I feel just now!

Una tempesta in cielo!

O come invero qui grande mi sento!

[Midnight strikes.]

Mezzanotte …

RIGOLETTO

Chi è là?
Who is there?

RIGOLETTO

Son io.
It’s me.

[ Sparafucile is dragging a large sack.]

SPARAFUCILE

E qua spento il vostr’uomo.
Your man is in here, dead.

RIGOLETTO

O gioia! Un lume!
Oh joy! Give me a lantern!

SPARAFUCILE

Un lume? No, il danaro.
A lantern? No way. Show me the money!

[ Rigoletto gives Sparafucile a bag of coins.]

SPARAFUCILE

Lesti all’onda il gettiam.
Now, quickly, let’s throw him in the river.

RIGOLETTO

No, basto io solo.
No, I’ll do it myself.

SPARAFUCILE

Come vi piace …
Do as you please. But I recommend

Quel ben atto è il sito.
you throw the body in upriver,

Più avanti è più profondo il gorgo.
where the current runs faster.

Presto, che alcun non vi sorprenda.
Do it quickly before someone sees you.
Buona notte. Have a nice day!

RIGOLETTO RIGOLETTO
Egli è là! Morto! O sì! Vorrei verderlo! There he is! Dead! Yes, dead. I’d like to see him.
Ma che importa? È ben desso! But what does it matter? I know it’s him!
Ecco I suoi sproni. Those are his spurs.
Ora mi guarda, o mondo! Look at me now, Oh world!
Quest’è un buffone, ed un potente è questo! I am a buffoon, and that was a prince!
Ei sta sotto I miei piedi! E desso! Oh, gioia! He lies beneath my feet. It’s him! Oh, joy!
E giunta alfine la tua vendetta, o duolo! At last my grief is avenged!
Sia ronda a lui sepolcro, Let the river be his grave,
Un sacco il suo lenzuolo! this sack his shroud!
All’onda! All’onda! Into the water! Into the water!

[Rigoletto is about to throw the sack into the river, when he hears the duke’s voice coming from the inn.]

DUCA DUKE
La donna è mobile Woman is fickle
Qual piuma al vento, like a feather in the wind,
Muta d’accento she changes her word
E di pensiero. and her thoughts.
RIGOLETTO RIGOLETTO
Qual voce! That voice!
Illusion notturna è questa! It’s some nighttime illusion!
No, no! Egli è desso! Maledizione! No, no! It’s him! Curses!
Olà …dimon …bandito! Demon! Bandit!

(Musical selection: Rigoletto, Act III, from Rigoletto’s “Della vendetta alfíngiunge l’istante!” [“The moment of my vengeance is at hand!”].)
Scope: *Rigoletto* comes to its explosive and heartbreaking conclusion as Rigoletto discovers that Sparafucile has killed his daughter instead of the duke. Verdi’s dramatic instincts were right about Rigoletto—he is one of the most memorable characters in all opera. During the year after the premiere of *Rigoletto* in March 1851, the hostility directed at Giuseppina by Verdi’s parents—not to mention his neighbors at Busseto—came to a head. Verdi legally separated himself from his parents, evicted them from his farm at Sant’Agata, and moved there with Giuseppina. He would live at Sant’Agata, as privately as possible, for the next 50 years. In 1852, Verdi wrote two more operas—*Il trovatore* and *La traviata*. These are not only compelling music dramas filled with memorable music, but they mark a new level of maturity in Verdi’s compositional development: Verdi gives increasing priority to dramatic continuity (using *parlante* and paying less homage to traditional musical devices that freeze dramatic action, such as arias) and he uses the orchestra as an integral part of the drama.

Outline

I. As we reach the concluding moments of the opera, Sparafucile has turned over to Rigoletto a sack, in which Rigoletto believes is the body of the Duke of Mantua.
   A. Suddenly, Rigoletto has heard the duke’s voice coming from the inn and realizes that the sack cannot contain the duke’s body.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>RIGOLETTO</th>
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<tr>
<td>Chi è mai, chi è qui in sua vece?</td>
<td>Who then is in the sack?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Io tremo …E umano corpo!</td>
<td>I tremble! …It’s a human body …</td>
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[A sudden bolt of lightning flashes across the sky, illuminating the body. Rigoletto shrieks:]

| Mia figlia! …Dio! Mia figlia! | My daughter! God! My daughter! |
| Ah no! …è impossibile! | No, it’s impossible! |
| Per Verona è in via! | She’s on her way to Verona. |
| Fu vision … | I must be seeing things! |

[Another lightning bolt illuminates the body. Rigoletto falls to his knees.]

| E dessa! | It is she! |
| O, mia Gilda! …Fanciulla .. a me rispondi! | Oh, my Gilda, my child, speak to me! |
| L’assassino mi svela … | Who did this? |
| Olà? | Who? |

[Rigoletto pounds on the door of the inn; we hear the pounding in the orchestral accompaniment; no one answers.]

| Nessuno? Nessun! | No one? No one! |
| Mia figlia …Mia Gilda …O mia figlia! | My daughter, my Gilda, Oh, my daughter! |

| GILDA | GILDA |
| Chi mi chiama? | Who calls me? |

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<th>RIGOLETTO</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ella parla! …Si move! …è viva! …O Dio!</td>
<td>She speaks! She moves! She is alive! Oh, God!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ah, mio ben solo in terra</td>
<td>My only joy on earth,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mi guarda …mi conosce …</td>
<td>look at me, it is your father …</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| GILDA | GILDA |
| Ah, padre mio! | My father! |

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qual mistero! …Che fu! …Sei tu ferita?</td>
<td>What happened? Are you hurt?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dinunci …</td>
<td>Speak to me?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| GILDA | GILDA |
| L’acciar …Qui …Qui mi piagò … | The blade …struck …here. |
RIGOLETTO  RIGOLETTO
Chi t’ha colpita?  Who struck you?

(Musical selection: Rigoletto, Act III, from Rigoletto’s “Chi è mai?” [“Who, then, is in the sack?”].)

GILDA  GILDA
V’ho ingannato …colpevole fui … I deceived you. It is my fault.
L’amai troppo …ora muovo per lui. I loved him too much, and now I’ll die for him!

RIGOLETTO  RIGOLETTO
(Dio tremendo! Ella stessa fu colta Terrible God! She was stabbed with the
Dallo stral di mia giusta vendetta! blade of my own revenge!
Angio caro …mi guarda, m’ascolta … My angel …look at me, listen to me …
Parla …parlami, figlia diletta! Speak, speak to me, my darling daughter!

[As Gilda speaks, descending strings depict her waning strength:]

GILDA  GILDA
Ah, ch’io taccia!…A me…a lui perdonate! Let me rest. Forgive me…forgive him!
Benedite…alla figlia…O mio padre… Bless…your daughter…Oh, father…

(Musical selection: Rigoletto, Act III, from Gilda’s “V’ho ingannato” [“I deceived you”].)

B. The demands of good theater must be now be met:
1. Father and daughter must have one last, parting duet.
2. The opera’s conclusion must have a note of resolution and consolation.

GILDA  GILDA
Lassù in cielo, vicina alla madre … Up in heaven, with my mother,
In eterno per voi pregherò. I will pray for you in eternity.
[From here on, Gilda’s voice will be accompanied by flute arpeggios and high strings. Since I Lombardi, this instrumentation has been used by Verdi for death scenes.]

RIGOLETTO  RIGOLETTO
Non morir …mio tesoro …pietade … Do not die …my treasure …have mercy …
Mia colomba …lasciarmi non dei … My dove …you cannot leave me…
Se t’involi, qui sol rimarrei … If you die, I’ll be alone.
Non morire, o qui teco morrò! Oh, let me die with you!

GILDA  GILDA
Non più …A lui …perdonate …mio padre. No more …forgive him …my father,
Per voi pregher… I will pray …

[Gilda dies. A moment of silence passes. Then, Rigoletto screams:]

RIGOLETTO  RIGOLETTO
Gilda! Mia Gilda! E morta! Gilda! My Gilda! She is dead!
Ah, la maledizione! The curse!

C. Accompanied by explosive closing D-flat Minor chords in the orchestra, Rigoletto falls across his
daughter’s corpse, and the curtain comes down. (Musical selection: Rigoletto, Act III, closing moments.)

II. Verdi was right to call Victor Hugo’s hunchback, Triboulet, in Le roi s’amuse, “a creation worthy of
Shakespeare.” Triboulet, who became Rigoletto in Verdi’s opera, is one of the most memorable characters in all
of opera, and Rigoletto, the opera, is one of the most memorable and popular operas in the repertoire.
A. Rigoletto was a watershed in Verdi’s operatic output: It contains greater dramatic continuity than in any of
Verdi’s earlier operas.
1. There are very few conventional arias.
2. The use of parlante does away, almost entirely, with recitative.
B. Rigoletto was a huge success, despite the fact that the reviews ranged from extremely positive to extremely
negative.
C. From *Rigoletto* on, Verdi’s art had evolved to a place occupied only by himself. *Rigoletto* became the platform on which Verdi’s international reputation was built.

D. With the completion of *Rigoletto*, Verdi had written 15 operas in nine years.

III. In January 1851, two months before the premiere of *Rigoletto* and while Verdi was completing that opera, the hostility of Verdi’s neighbors and his parents towards Giuseppina came to a head.

A. Verdi’s parents objected to Giuseppina because she had illegitimate children and earned a living in the theater, an occupation they regarded as degrading and shameful.

B. Verdi hired a lawyer and obtained a legal separation from his parents. He evicted them from the farm at nearby Sant’Agata that they were managing for him. Then, he and Giuseppina moved into Sant’Agata and would live there for the rest of their lives.

C. Verdi’s neighbors saw his treatment of his parents as yet another example of the curse that they felt Giuseppina had brought to Busseto.

D. Verdi made things worse by refusing to say whether he and Giuseppina were married.

E. Verdi’s friend and champion Antonio Baretti accepted Verdi’s silence on the matter and remained, along with Francesco Piave and Emanuele Muzio, among Verdi’s closest friends and one of the very few people who were welcome in his house.

IV. In 1852, Verdi composed *Il trovatore* and *La traviata*, compelling music dramas, replete with memorable music and fascinating characters.

A. Both operas are important because, along with *Luisa Miller* and *Rigoletto*, they represent a new plateau in Verdi’s compositional maturity, one that forever put him beyond his contemporaries in the field.

B. As always, Verdi was striving for increased dramatic momentum and musical expressivity.

C. His creation of parlante was expressly to help keep the dramatic action moving ahead.

D. His use of the orchestra as an integral part of the drama was also for the same purpose.

E. One more element at the heart of Verdi’s maturing style was his approach to Italian poetry. In Verdi’s day, most Italian librettists were setting words written in traditional rhyme schemes that dated back centuries.

1. Verdi rebelled against the “strait jacket” of traditional poetry in his opera librettos.

2. He demanded prose-like texts and less rigid rhyme schemes.

3. He composed irregular phrase structures that helped to create a more fluid and continuous musical line.

4. He could deliver memorable tunes, as well as expressive, dramatic content.

5. *Il trovatore*, Act II, scene 1, illustrates this.

F. The scene is set in a gypsy encampment. To evoke this scene, Verdi uses exotic-sounding music that depicts the blacksmithing that preoccupies the gypsies.

G. Verdi sets these words with great clarity and verve, without being straightjacketed by the text’s rhyme schemes. He drives the action forward with music that is flexible and lacking in predictability. (Musical selection: *Il trovatore*, Act II, introduction and opening chorus.)
H. Many consider the plot of *Il trovatore* to be the most bizarre in the operatic repertoire. It is another example of Verdi’s preference for extreme story lines—stories filled with the most powerful emotions, highly charged dramatic situations, and characters full of flaws and passions that drive the drama forward. *Il trovatore* is a quintessential Romantic drama that plumbs the darkest recesses of the human mind and soul and, in that respect, is characteristic of most of Verdi’s operas.

I. Verdi’s librettist for *Il trovatore* was Salvatore Cammarano. The libretto is based on *El trovador* by the Spanish playwright Antonio García Gutiérrez (1813–1884).

J. Cammarano died before finishing the libretto. Verdi sent his widow full payment for it and engaged the Neapolitan writer Emanuele Bardare to complete it.
Lecture Fifteen

Il trovatore, Conclusion, and La traviata

Scope: Il trovatore has a somewhat bizarre plot of jealousy and revenge but was well received at its premiere in 1853. In it, Verdi reveals himself as a quintessential Romantic artist, focused, as he was, on the conflict of highly charged emotions. Coming on the heels of Il trovatore, the premiere of Verdi’s next opera, La traviata, was destined to be a fiasco from the start. Later, when La traviata was re-staged, audiences came to appreciate it.

Outline

I. Il trovatore takes place in 15th-century Spain and opens in the palace of the hateful Count di Luna.
   A. An old Captain of the Guard named Ferrando tells his men about the terrible events of 20 years ago, when Count di Luna’s father burned an old gypsy woman at the stake for witchcraft. In revenge, the gypsy’s daughter, Azucena, kidnapped the present Count di Luna’s brother, a baby boy, and burned him at the same stake.
   B. Ferrando recounts this version of the story, but later, we discover that the situation was, in reality, much more complicated. In her grief and passion for revenge, Azucena, the daughter of the burned gypsy, made a mistake: Instead of burning the baby she had kidnapped from the count, she accidentally killed her own son. Azucena then raised the kidnapped baby—who, in reality, is the present count’s brother—as her own. She named this baby Manrico.
   C. Early in Act I we meet Leonora, a beautiful young noblewoman and lady-in-waiting to the Princess of Aragon. Leonora is in love with an unknown “troubadour” (Italian—trovatore) who serenades her nightly. The audience figures out pretty quickly that this mysterious knight is Manrico, the stolen baby, now grown up and believing himself to be the son of the gypsy Azucena.
   D. Of course, the present Count di Luna (Manrico’s brother) is also in love with Leonora. Ultimately, Manrico and his “mother,” the gypsy Azucena, are captured by Count di Luna. Leonora offers to marry the count in exchange for the life of her beloved Manrico. The count accepts her proposal. Secretly, Leonora takes poison, stating that the count’s only reward will be her lifeless corpse.
   E. Act IV takes place in the dungeon. Manrico attempts to comfort his foster-mother, who is near death. Leonora enters, tells Manrico that he is free, then collapses in his arms. The count enters just as Leonora tells Manrico that she has killed herself rather than live with the count. She dies.
   F. The count is upset, understandably; he decides that his deal with Leonora was only good while she was alive, and he orders the immediate execution of Manrico. As the blade falls across Manrico’s neck, Azucena, with her dying words, screams that the count has just executed his own brother; she says, “My mother, you are finally avenged!” She dies, and the curtain comes down.

II. The public went wild over Il trovatore. At its premiere, on January 19, 1853, Verdi was presented with a crown of laurel leaves wound through with embroidered red ribbons, the traditional Greek symbol for victory and the Roman symbol for divinity. Despite the public’s reaction, some critics declared that Il trovatore was vulgar.
   A. We will begin listening with the famous “miserere” scene that occurs near the beginning of the fourth act. It is night. Manrico is being held in a room high in the prison tower. The mood on stage is one of sinister darkness and gloom. Leonora appears at the foot of the tower and sings a glorious aria, “D’amor sull’ali roseee.”

LEONORA
On the rosy wings of love
fly, my anguished sigh,
and comfort the weary soul
of the unhappy prisoner.
Like a breath of hope,
fly up to his cell,
and awken him to the memories,
to the dreams of love!
But oh, do not be improvident; do not
tell him what sorrow I feel in my heart!

B. The exquisite beauty of this aria is crushed by the tolling of a funeral bell. A distant and invisible chorus of
monks prays for the souls of those who are about to die.

VOCI INTERNE
Miserere d’un’alma già vicina
Alla partenza che non ha ritomo!
Miserere di lei, bontà divina,
Preda non sia dell’infernal soggiorno!

[Leonora, at stage center, reacts with something approaching panic; even as the funeral bell continues to chime
every second bar, she sings:]

LEONORA
Quel suon, quelle preci solenni, funeste,
Empiron quest’aere di cupo terror!
Contende l’ambascia, che tutta m’investe,
Al labbro il respiro, i palpiti al cor!

[Even as Leonora’s voice descends in gasping, weeping motives, we hear, in the middle distance, from the tower,
the voice of Manrico. Unaware of Leonora’s presence and to the accompaniment of a harp (we know where
Manrico is going to be in a couple of hours!), he sings:]

MANRICO
Ah, che la morte ognora
È tarda nel venir
A chi desia morir!...
Addio, Leonora!

[Leonora hears Manrico, and even before he can finish his love song, she blurts out:]

LEONORA
Oh ciel!... sento mancarmi!

[VOCI INTERNE again distantly chant their miserere:]

VOCI INTERNE
Miserere d’un’alma già vicina, etc.

C. During the incredible climax to this scene, the three very different musical/dramatic elements that have, up
to now, been presented in succession—the monks, Leonora’s impassioned cries, Manrico’s song of love—
begin to squeeze together (in a process called alla stredda, “to tighten together”) until they are finally heard
simultaneously. Verdi didn’t invent this device, but he brings it here to a height of perfection.

LEONORA
Sull’orrida torre, ah! par che la morte
Con ali di tenebre librando si va!
Ahi! forse dischiuse gli fian queste porte
Sol quando cadaver già freddo sarà!

VOCI INTERNE
Miserere d’un’alma già vicina, etc.

MANRICO
Sconto col sangue mio
L’amor che posi in te!...
Non ti scordar di me!
Leonora, addio!

LEONORA
Standing above me is the horrible tower,
Ayee! It is as if death itself hovers there!
Ayee! These terrible gates will be opened
only when his corpse is already cold!

CHOIR
Lord, have mercy on his soul, etc.

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Di te, di te scordarmi!!... Forget you, ever forget you?
Sento mancarmi! I feel as if I’m dying!

(Musical selection: *Il trovatore*, Act IV, scene 1, from the tolling of the funeral bell and the chanting of the monks: “Miserere” [*Lord, have mercy on his soul*].)

D. We, the audience, witness this scene from Leonora’s point of view. She is the only character on stage that is aware of the others; in the background are the monks and the funeral bell, and in the middle ground is Manrico. Her reactions to the terribly mixed messages bombarding her—death and love—become our reactions, as well. Her pain becomes ours.

III. Verdi was in Rome for a month before the premiere of *Il trovatore*. Even as he oversaw its production, he began work on his next opera, *La traviata*, scheduled to premiere at the Teatro La Fenice in Venice on March 6, 1853, just 46 days after the premiere of *Il trovatore*.

A. Based on a play by Alexander Dumas fils, *La traviata* (“The Lost Woman”) is about a high-priced prostitute who falls in love with a good and pure man even as she wastes away and dies of tuberculosis. The libretto—written again by Francesco Piave—gives the name of the courtesan as Violetta Valery and her boyfriend as Alfredo Germant.

B. Shortly after the Roman premiere of *Il trovatore*, Verdi returned to Venice to oversee the production of *La traviata*. It seems that he had finally overcommitted himself. He was exhausted and sick and had found it difficult to work on *La traviata* while he’d been in Rome.
   1. He arrived in Venice on February 21, 1853; the premiere was scheduled for March 6—exactly two weeks later. Rehearsals had begun a week before Verdi’s arrival, but the production had the look of a disaster from the beginning.
   2. The first problem was that Verdi had not had time to orchestrate a single note of *La traviata* before his arrival in Venice; rehearsals were being conducted from a piano/vocal score.
   3. Further, the La Fenice season, which began on December 26 and was to end with *La traviata*, had been, increasingly, a disaster, with one opera booed off the stage and Verdi’s own *Ernani* received very coolly.
   4. Finally, the prima donna contracted to sing Violetta—a character described as “a flower of youth, wasted away with consumption”—was Fanny Salvini-Donatelli, a significantly overweight, unattractive, 38-year-old singer about whom Verdi had not been told beforehand.

C. The premiere began well enough—the prelude/overture was so well received that Verdi was called out for bows—but the performance soon became a fiasco. (Musical selection: *La traviata*, prelude-in-progress.)

D. On the strength of the overture, the first of the three acts was greeted with polite enthusiasm. But with the second act, things began to unravel. Every time the chubby, unattractive, and rather aged soprano coughed—thereby signaling her imminent demise from consumption—the audience roared with laughter. The laughter then turned to hissing and whistling, and Verdi had a genuine disaster on his hands.

E. Verdi returned to his hotel room and began writing his friends, telling them that the opera was “a fiasco” but proclaiming that he was “not upset.” Despite this statement, Verdi was furious about the reception of *La traviata*, and for a year, he forbade Ricordi to publish the score or even to show it to anyone.
   1. Then, a group of Venetians approached Verdi and asked if they could stage the opera in Venice once again, but this time, in the smaller Teatro San Benedetto.
   2. They assured Verdi that it would be cast properly, that there would be ample rehearsal time, and that Francesco Piave would be in charge of the production. After some initial hemming and hawing, Verdi gave his permission for the production to take place.
   3. The new production opened on May 6, 1854, and this time, the Venetians received it with wild enthusiasm.

IV. We begin our examination of *La traviata* with a synopsis of the action.

A. A beautiful call girl—*La traviata* (“the lost or strayed woman”) named Violetta Valery—is throwing a party at her Paris apartment.
1. Among the many guests are her “protector,” the Baron Douphol; Gaston, the Viscount de Letorieres; and Gaston’s friend, a young man named Alfredo Germont, who has loved Violetta from afar and has longed to meet her.
2. They meet; Alfredo professes his love for Violetta. She coughs, revealing that she is quite ill, and sends him away, but invites him to return the following day.
3. After his departure, she ponders his words and reminds herself that her life can be one of only fleeting pleasures.

B. In Act II, we find that Violetta and Alfredo have been living together, happy and content in the country for the last few months.
1. Alfredo’s father, Monsieur Giorgio Germont, shows up and persuades Violetta to give up Alfredo, whose behavior—cohabiting with a known courtesan—is compromising the family name.
2. Violetta, filled with shame, runs off, leaving behind a letter that explains that she has returned to her former life. Alfredo comes home to find Violetta gone; he reads the letter, then returns to Paris in search of her.
3. He finds her; insults her; gets into a dual with her old “protector,” the Baron Douphol; and ruins his life and reputation in the process.

C. In Act III, Violetta is destitute, abandoned, and near death. Giorgio Germont—Alfredo’s well-meaning but utterly useless father—has revealed Violetta’s sacrifice to his son, and Alfredo rushes to Violetta’s side. She dies in his arms.

D. We have time to listen to only a couple of brief excerpts from La traviata, one sung by Alfredo and one by Violetta. (For an in-depth examination of the opening scene of La traviata, see The Teaching Company’s course How to Listen to and Understand Great Opera.)
1. From Act I, scene 1, we hear the famous “Brindisi,” or “Drinking Song,” sung by a young and romantically besotted Alfredo as he offers a toast to life, to pleasure, and most of all, to Violetta.

ALFREDO
Libiam ne’ lieti calici Let us drink from festive cups
Che la bellezza infiora, that are embellished with beauty,
E la fuggevol ora and let our fleeting time
S’inebri a voluttà. be intoxicated with pleasure.
Libiam ne’ dolci fremiti Let us drink with the sweet excitement
Che suscita l’amore, aroused by love,
Poiché quell’occhio al core since love’s all-powerful glance
Omnipotente va. goes directly to the heart.
Libiamo, amor fra i calici Let us drink, for within the cups
Più caldi baci avrà. lie the warm kisses of love.

2. It is a toast that is so melodically ingratiating, so joyful and reckless, that we probably do not notice that its melody is an entirely irregular phrase structure 10 measures in length. This sort of subtle irregularity helps to imbue Verdi’s music with a sense of spontaneity and ongoing development and, conversely, avoids any sense of squareness and predictability that might result from the metric regularity of Italian-language poetry. (Musical selection: La traviata, “Libiam,” [“Let us drink from festive cups”].)

3. We turn now to Violetta’s magnificent third-movement aria, “Addio, del passato bei sogni ridenti,” (“Farewell, lovely, happy dreams of the past”). She sings the aria near the beginning of the third act, as she lies dying and immediately before Alfredo returns to her to beg her forgiveness.

VIOLETTA
Addio, del passato bei sogni ridenti, Farewell, lovely, happy dreams of the past,
Le rose del volto già son pallenti; the roses in my cheeks are fading;
L’amore d’Alfredo purfino mi manca, and not even Alfredo’s love remains
Conforto, sostegno dell’anima stanca. to comfort my weary soul.
Ah, della traviata sorridi al desio; Ah, grant this lost woman one last

A lei, deh, perdona; tu accoglila, o Dio, forgive her and receive her, o God,
Or tutto finì. all is ended.

4. It is a song of exquisite sadness, in which Verdi’s understanding of Violetta’s emotions and character and his treatment of the voice create a musical/emotional environment that is almost surreal. (Musical selection: La traviata, “Addio, del passato bei sogni ridenti” [“Farewell, lovely, happy dreams of the past”).

E. La traviata has everything. It is marvelous to listen to; it is a love story but one filled with scandal; it has a heroine who is a sinner, who suffers and is punished for her sins; it’s beautiful to look at, with great costumes and ballroom scenes and magnificent sets filled with the “beautiful people” of Paris; and it has a tragic lover, the tenor Alfredo.

V. We might think that Giuseppina Strepponi would have been at Verdi’s side for his triumphant premieres, but Verdi forbade her from attending.

A. Was Verdi afraid of the scandal that might result if Giuseppina appeared at his side? This is unlikely. Verdi had fought off the entire city of Busseto and disinherited his parents because of their words and actions toward Giuseppina. There was little he was afraid of.

B. The reason Verdi went alone to various cities to oversee his premieres was that he saw these as extremely intense and usually unpleasant business trips, where he wanted neither the distraction of Giuseppina’s presence nor the possibility that she would witness a disaster.

1. One wonders if it occurred to Verdi that Giuseppina’s presence at his successful premieres—which outnumbered the fiascos by 10 to 1—might give her pleasure, or might help her to validate their solitary life and the difficulties of their relationship, or that her attendance would publicly acknowledge her important role in making these operas possible.

2. If any of this did occur to Verdi, he never wrote about it, or at least, we don’t have any evidence that he wrote about it.

3. By mutual agreement, Verdi and Strepponi destroyed almost all of the correspondence between them. Although a number of letters from Giuseppina to Giuseppe survive, only a few telegrams and the fragments of two letters from Giuseppe to Giuseppina still exist.

4. That the correspondence must have been extensive and very personal is testified to by the length and content of Giuseppina’s surviving letters. Few that they are, they shed extraordinary light on the couple’s life and relationship, along with her character and personality, including the fact that she hated being left at home!
In 1853, Verdi was approached about cooperating on a biography. Predictably, the project went sour, revealing Verdi as a contentious, foul-mouthed, and fearless personality. He would have been content to pursue his interests on his estate, farming and breeding animals, but new acquisitions of land and the need for maintenance and improvements prompted him to return to composing. The years 1855–1857 saw the premieres of three operas, *The Sicilian Vespers*, *Simon Boccanegra*, and *Aroldo*, all of which were forgettable, but these were followed by *Un ballo in maschera*, an opera worth waiting for after a battle with the Neapolitan censors.

**Outline**

I. In early 1853, an event occurred that sheds light on Verdi’s extremely thorny personality. In March of 1853, Francesco Piave approached Verdi with the request that an old friend from Busseto, Giuseppe DeMalde, be allowed to write Verdi’s biography. The biography would be published by a company owned by Luigi Luzzati, a future prime minister of Italy.

   A. Verdi was flattered but suspicious and decided to go ahead with the project only after he was assured that the truth would be written and that he would have editorial control over the final manuscript.

   B. In April of 1853, after having read a draft version of the biography, Verdi wrote a letter to Francesco Piave, peppered with offensive and extremely creative obscenities. As an aside, we must note that Verdi had a foul temper and a foul mouth. He was a blunt, often inelegant, amazingly forthright, ribald, and direct individual, with zero tolerance for aristocrats, frauds, and poseurs.

   C. Soon, the biography project went sour. Verdi found out that the publisher wanted to make further changes in the text that Verdi had already approved. Predictably, Verdi was furious. He tried to cancel the entire project, but the publisher then threatened to sue him for damages. He was advised by his friends to calm down.

   D. Ultimately, the publisher gave up on the project, having finally decided that dealing with Verdi was more trouble than it was worth. Giuseppe DeMalde went forward with what had been the original, Verdi-approved biography and added additional material that could only have been supplied by Verdi himself. This “authorized” version of Verdi’s life became the foundation for much of the biographical literature that followed.

II. At Sant’Agata, Verdi continued to pursue his great loves: building and running his estate, farming, and breeding animals. The garden he built around the manor house was a special passion. He became an expert on varieties of plants, flowers, and trees, and he marked the progression of his operatic career by planting different trees to commemorate his operas.

   A. October 1853 saw Verdi back in Paris, where he had contracted to write an opera for his least favorite opera house, the Paris Opera. Perhaps more important than the opera he would eventually compose and have produced in Paris (which did not premiere until June 13, 1855) was the fact that Verdi arrived arm-in-arm with his live-in girlfriend, Giuseppina Strepponi. Giuseppina loved Paris, and the two lived openly there as an unmarried couple. He was 40 and beginning to gray around the temples; she was 38 and as beautiful as ever.

   B. Verdi hated being away from home; hated the libretti that were being offered him; hated having to write an opera in French; and hated the Paris Opera company, which had butchered both *Luisa Miller* and the French version of *I Lombardi*. Why, then, was Verdi in Paris, and why would he stay there for close to two years? Because the Paris Opera was the foremost opera theater in the world, and Verdi knew it.

   C. The Parisians loved spectacular opera productions, and the libretto that Verdi eventually chose and set to music for the Parisians lived up to their expectations. Entitled *Les Vêpres Siciliennes*, (“The Sicilian Vespers”), the opera was about a religious massacre that took place in Palermo, Sicily, on March 30, 1282.
1. With a libretto by Augustin Scribe, a well-known French writer, *The Sicilian Vespers* is, indeed, a spectacle, consisting of five acts, boasting huge choruses, requiring incredible stage effects, and featuring a long ballet episode.

2. During the course of his stay in Paris, Verdi managed to alienate everyone involved in the opera, from the director of the Paris Opera itself to the stagehands and wardrobe mistresses.

3. Verdi’s crankiness affected his creativity; he composed with almost glacial slowness. He was depressed; he was suffering from chronic sore-throat and stomach problems; and of course, he didn’t like the libretto and didn’t like being away from home.

4. After numerous intrigues, arguments, and nasty scenes, *Les Vêpres Siciliennes* was premiered on June 13, 1855, during the Universal Exposition in Paris. After all that had transpired, Verdi hadn’t a clue as to what to expect from the audience and critics. He need not have worried; the opera was a complete success.

5. We listen to a portion of the overture, one of the finest Verdi ever wrote, from *The Sicilian Vespers*.  
   (Musical selection: *Les Vêpres Siciliennes*, overture.)

D. Finally, in late December 1855, Verdi returned home to Sant’Agata. He had been away for more than two years; he wrote to a friend that he spent time walking in his fields, attempting to recover from the stomach trouble caused by “cursed operas!”

E. On returning home, Verdi also paid a fair amount of money, 300,000 francs, to purchase a huge tract of land north of Sant’Agata called “Piantadoro,” an estate that comprised eight separate farms. The question of whether or not he wanted to write any more operas was rendered moot by the purchase.

F. The new opera was to be *Simon Boccanegra*, to be written for La Fenice in Venice, with a libretto by Francesco Piave and production scheduled for the Carnival season of 1856–1857.

1. Based on a play written by Verdi’s favorite Spanish playwright, Antonio Garcia Gutierrez, *Simon Boccanegra* tells the tale of a former pirate who becomes the Doge of Genoa.

2. As a play to be adapted into a libretto, *Simon Boccanegra* stretched Francesco Piave way past his abilities. The libretto was (and is) a mess, almost entirely lacking in the “aria opportunities” that Italian audiences craved. The opera, when it premiered in Venice on March 12, 1857, bombed.

3. *Simon Boccanegra* was not a total disaster; it played well in other cities and towns, though it has not proved to be as lasting as *Rigoletto*, *La traviata*, and *Il trovatore*.

G. Verdi’s next project, initiated by Francesco Piave, was a rewrite of the already disastrous *Stifellio*, in which the German evangelical minister was transformed into a 13th-century crusader named Aroldo. The opera (renamed *Aroldo*) was produced in Rimini and, despite its successful premiere, is entirely forgotten today.

H. Verdi knew that his last three operas—*The Sicilian Vespers*, *Simon Boccanegra*, and *Aroldo*—were forgettable, especially when compared to the glories of *Rigoletto*, *La traviata*, and *Il trovatore*. Had he lost his touch? Had farming and animal husbandry replaced opera as Verdi’s essential creative outlet? Certainly, many of Verdi’s contemporaries began to think so, but reports of Verdi’s artistic demise turned out to be extremely premature.

III. On May 2, 1856, Verdi signed a contract with the Teatro San Carlo in Naples to compose a “grand opera of not less than three acts,” to be produced in January 1858. Verdi’s contract also specified, as did all such contracts at the time, that he would have to submit the libretto to the censor of Naples before the opera could be produced.

A. As a result of other projects and his farm, Verdi didn’t even start thinking about a possible libretto until September of 1857, four months before the projected premiere of this “new” opera. Squeezed for time as he was, Verdi had to settle for a playwright and a play that he claimed not to have really wanted.

1. The playwright was the Frenchman Augustin Scribe, with whom Verdi had unhappily collaborated on *The Sicilian Vespers* in Paris.

2. The play was Scribe’s *Gustave III, or The Masked Ball*, a story that was based on fact: the assassination of King Gustavus III of Sweden at a masked ball in Stockholm’s opera house in 1792.

3. Although he was dissatisfied with the play, Verdi had no time to find another subject. He wrote the Venetian librettist Antonio Somma, asking him to prepare an Italian-language libretto from Scribe’s play. At the same time, Verdi composed a substantial amount of the music. The completed libretto was then submitted to the Neapolitan censor for approval.
B. Verdi assumed that by changing the setting and a couple of names, the libretto would be approved, but he should have known better, especially given current events.
   1. On January 14, 1858, virtually the day Verdi arrived in Naples to finish the opera and oversee its production, an Italian revolutionary named Felice Orsini threw a bomb at the carriage in which the Emperor Napoleon III and the Empress Eugenie were riding. Napoleon III and Eugenie were unhurt, but a number of bystanders were killed.
   2. That spelled the end for Verdi’s libretto. The censor in Naples had no intention of approving a libretto that depicted the assassination of a king onstage!

C. Within a couple of days of Verdi’s arrival in Naples, the censor indicated that the protagonist of his opera could not be a king but would have to become an ordinary person. Further, there must be no masked ball and absolutely no murder. Obviously, Verdi was livid.

D. Verdi declared that he would not make the changes, and there would be no opera. He knew that he would be sued, but he was one of the most ferociously independent, fearless, and cantankerous men in Italy, and no one was going to tell him what to do!
   1. At first, Verdi suggested to Luigi Alberti, the manager of the Teatro San Carlo, that their contract simply be dissolved, without assigning damages to anyone.
   2. But Verdi was not freed from his contract or even “free” to leave Naples. The president of the Royal Theater, Filippo Cirelli, who also happened to be one of the censors, insisted on suing Verdi and ordered his arrest.
   3. Verdi was not arrested, just detained, but that angered him and he hired a lawyer to countersue on two counts. First, Verdi sued the Teatro San Carlo for breach of contract; second, he sued the censor, claiming that the changes the censor demanded “damaged” his music! The trial would drag out all winter and into the spring.
   4. Verdi denounced the theater and the censors for attempting to destroy his work. At his own expense, Verdi had printed his original libretto side-by-side with the censored version and noted that the censored libretto did not retain the original title, librettist, historical period, setting, characters, or dramatic situations as the original.
   5. The Neapolitan public loved the trial and the scandal it caused; it was the subject of intense interest and gossip for months. Needless to say, they were almost unanimous in their support for Verdi and his fight against the hated, foreign-run censors.
   6. For the court, the case was a lose-lose situation. If they declared for Verdi, they would be, in essence, declaring against the censors, which would be seen as a seditious, anti-government act. If they declared for the censors, they would be seen as lackeys of a foreign power.
   7. The court declared that the censors’ changes did indeed constitute damage to Verdi’s music, and they demanded that the parties reach an out-of-court settlement, which would save face for everyone and avoid having to find for one or the other of the parties.
   8. The settlement reached between Verdi and the Teatro San Carlo was entirely in Verdi’s favor. Verdi was allowed to leave Naples with the score of his opera as his sole property, to have produced wherever he wanted. In return, Verdi had to promise to return to San Carlo in the fall to produce Simon Boccanegra.

E. Following the legal settlement, Verdi was finally free to leave Naples, and he immediately headed home to Sant’Agata. What became of the opera that caused the uproar in Naples, entitled, by the fall of 1858, Un ballo in maschera, or The Masked Ball?
   1. Verdi received news that the Teatro Apollo in Rome would be happy to produce the opera. The Roman censors were much easier on the opera than the Neapolitans, and the only major changes necessitated were those of the names of the characters and the locale of the story.
   2. Verdi and the librettist moved the location of the opera from 18th-century Stockholm to 17th-century Boston. King Gustav III of Sweden became Riccardo, Il Conte di Warwick, “Richard, the Count of Warwick,” the colonial governor of Massachusetts. The Swedish aristocrats who plotted the assassination became, simply, Sam and Tom, and the character of Count Anckerstrom was turned into that of Renato the Creole.
   3. The location of the opera continued to change over the years. In 1952, at a performance at London’s Covent Garden, the action of the opera was finally returned to Sweden and the characters were given their original names.
F. *Un ballo in maschera* received its belated premiere on February 17, 1859, at the Teatro Apollo in Rome. Despite the strange Bostonian locale and the sets that looked decidedly out of place in what was supposed to be Puritan New England, the production was a huge success, and Verdi was called out repeatedly for bows.

G. We will hear what is probably the most famous single scene in *Un ballo in maschera*, the “drawing of the lots” scene, which occurs during the third and final act.

1. Riccardo, the Count of Warwick, Royal Governor of the colony of Massachusetts, is beloved of all, except for two extremely hostile courtiers named Samuel and Tom, who want to see him dead. Riccardo’s most trusted advisor—who fears a plot against the governor’s life—is Renato, who has a wife named Amelia.

2. Amelia and Riccardo are in love with each other. Renato, the trusted Creole advisor, finds out about the mutual affection between his wife and his boss, becomes enraged, and swears revenge.

3. Renato joins the conspirators—Samuel and Tom—and the trio plots the assassination of Riccardo. Together, accompanied by a strumming harp, the march-like tramp of pizzicato double basses, and blaring, militant, fanfarish brass, the three conspirators sing.

4. Thus, the alliance among Samuel, Tom, and Renato is forged. In a surprisingly lighthearted bit of *parlante*, each of the men claims the right to deliver the deathblow. Renato sings first.

RENATO, SAMUEL, TOM

**Dunque l’onta di tutti sol una,**

The dishonor of each of us unites us all,

**Uno il cor, la vendetta sarà,**

as one; our hearts are bent on vendetta—revenge!

**Che tremenda, repente, digiuna**

Terrible, swift, and without mercy,

**Su quel capo esecrato cadrà!**

it shall fall on that accursed head.

*(Musical selection: *Un ballo in maschera*, Act III.)*

[Each of the men has his own reasons for wanting to see Riccardo, Count of Warwick and Governor of Massachusetts, dead, and each wants to be the one to dice Riccardo’s giblets on his dagger. Samuel shakes his head in refusal of Renato’s request and sings:]  

**No, Renato. He took my father’s castle**

from me. The first thrust shall be mine!

[Renato answers:]  

**Che sia dato d’ucciderlo a me.**

That I alone may kill him!

[Samuel replies:]  

**E quale?**

What is your request?

[Samuel shakes his head in refusal of Renato’s request and sings:]  

**No, Renato. He took my father’s castle**

from me. The first thrust shall be mine!

[Renato overweight to the men with his request for the deathblow:]  

**D’una grazia vi supplico.**

I have one request for you both.

[Each of the men has his own reasons for wanting to see Riccardo, Count of Warwick and Governor of Massachusetts, dead, and each wants to be the one to dice Riccardo’s giblets on his dagger. Samuel shakes his head in refusal of Renato’s request and sings:]  

**No, Renato. He took my father’s castle**

from me. The first thrust shall be mine!

[Samuel shakes his head in refusal of Renato’s request and sings:]  

**A me tolse, e tal dritto a me spetta.**

I, who have waited ten long years without rest

I, who have waited ten long years without rest

for my revenge?! What part would you have me play?

[Renato takes a vase off the fireplace mantle and places it on a table. As he does so he sings:]  

**Chetatevi, solo**

Let’s all just calm down.
Qui la sorte decidere de’. We must leave it to fate to decide.

[Samuel understands immediately. As he writes their three names on three scraps of paper and tosses them into the vase, the tone of the music changes completely. A solo trumpet quietly outlines a call to battle. Alternating with the trumpet are sweeping scales in the strings and the roll of funeral drums portrayed in the bassoons and trombones. Three times the trumpet call is heard, each time a semi-tone higher than the last. The tension builds. Suddenly, a noise is heard, and Renato sings:]

E chi viene? Who is coming?

(Musical selection: *Un ballo in maschera*, Act III, from Renato’s “D’una grazia vi supplico” [“I have one request for you both”].)
Glossary

Aria: The operatic equivalent to a soliloquy, during which “real time” stops and a character can express his or her deepest feelings. In an aria, it is the music—melody and harmony—that must play the primary role of describing the expressive content of the moment.

Atonality: The absence of an established tonality, or identifiable key.

Bel canto: A style of Italian opera that flourished between approximately 1810 and 1850 that celebrated, above all, beautiful singing and beautiful vocal melody.

Cadenza: Virtuoso music designed to show off a singer’s or an instrumental soloist’s technical ability.

Classical musical style: Designation given to works of the later 18th century, characterized by clear melodic lines, balanced form, and emotional restraint. The style is brilliantly exemplified by the music of Franz Joseph Haydn.

Coloratura: An ornate and virtuosic vocal line. While any voice can sing a coloratura line, such melodies are most often assigned to the soprano.

Concerto: Musical composition for orchestra and soloist(s), typically in three movements.

Consonance: Two or more notes sounded together that do not require resolution.

Crescendo: Gradually increasing volume.

Dissonance: Two or more notes sounded together that require resolution.

Exposition: Opening section of a fugue or sonata-form movement in which the main theme(s) are introduced.

Movement: Independent, self-standing piece of music within a larger work.

Music drama: A musical stage work in which the music is continuous, without any distinction made between aria, recitative, and ensemble.

Musical form: Overall formulaic structure of a composition, such as sonata form; also the smaller divisions of the overall structure, such as the development section.

Overture: Music that precedes an opera or play, often played as an independent concert piece.

Parlante: A technique by which the orchestra maintains melodic interest while the voices sing recitative-like lines.

Pedal note: Pitch sustained for a long period of time against which other changing material is played. A pedal harmony is a sustained chord serving the same purpose.

Polyrhythm: The simultaneous use of contrasting rhythms.

Polytonality: The simultaneous use of two or more different keys (major and/or minor) or modes.

Prima donna: The “first lady,” or female lead, in an opera.

Recitative: The half-sung/half-spoken operatic equivalent to dialogue and narration.

Requiem: Mass for the dead, traditionally in nine specific sections.

Rhythmic asymmetry: Rhythms that do not use regular accents.

Short score: Two- or three-staff score that can be played on the piano and serves as the basis for a full orchestral score.

Sonata: Piece of music typically in three or four movements, composed for a piano (piano sonata) or a piano plus one instrument (violin sonata, for example).

Sonata form: Structural formula characterized by thematic development; usually used for the first movement of a sonata, symphony, or concerto.

String quartet: (1) Ensemble of four stringed instruments: two violins, viola, and cello; (2) composition for such an ensemble.
**Symphony:** Large-scale instrumental composition for orchestra, containing several movements. The Viennese classical symphony typically had four movements.

**Voice:** A range or register, commonly used to refer to the four melodic ranges: soprano, alto, tenor, and bass.

**Voice types:**
- Coloratura Soprano
- Lyric Soprano
- Spinto
- Dramatic Soprano
- Mezzo Soprano
- Alto
- Contralto
- Lyric Tenor
- Spinto
- Dramatic Tenor
- Baritone
- Bass
- Basso Buffo
- Basso Profundo
The Life and Operas of Verdi
Part III
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Greenberg has composed more than 45 works for a wide variety of instrumental and vocal ensembles. Recent performances of his works have taken place in New York, San Francisco, Chicago, Los Angeles, England, Ireland, Greece, Italy, and the Netherlands, where his Child's Play for String Quartet was performed at the Concertgebouw of Amsterdam.

Greenberg has received numerous honors, including three Nicola de Lorenzo Composition Prizes and three Meet-the-Composer Grants. Recent commissions have been received from the Koussevitzky Foundation in the Library of Congress, the Alexander String Quartet, the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players, guitarist David Tanenbaum, the Strata Ensemble, and the XTET ensemble. Greenberg is a board member and an artistic director of COMPOSERS, INC., a composers’ collective/production organization based in San Francisco. His music is published by Fallen Leaf Press and CPP/Belwin and is recorded on the Innova label.

Greenberg has performed, taught, and lectured extensively across North America and Europe. He is currently music historian-in-residence with San Francisco Performances, where he has lectured and performed since 1994. He has served on the faculties of the University of California at Berkeley, California State University at Hayward, and the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, where he chaired the Department of Music, History and Literature from 1989–2001 and served as the Director of the Adult Extension Division from 1991–1996. Greenberg has lectured for some of the most prestigious musical and arts organizations in the United States, including the San Francisco Symphony (where for 10 years, he was host and lecturer for the symphony’s nationally acclaimed “Discovery Series”), Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, the Van Cliburn Foundation, the Chautauqua Institute, and Villa Montalvo. In addition, Greenberg is a sought-after lecturer for businesses and business schools and has recently spoken for such diverse organizations as the University of Pennsylvania/Wharton School of Business, Canadian Pacific, Deutsches Bank, the University of California/Haas School of Business Executive Seminar, the University of Chicago Graduate School of Business, Harvard Business School Publishing, Kaiser-Permanente, the Strategos Institute, Quintiles Transnational, and the Commonwealth Club of San Francisco. Greenberg has been profiled in the Wall Street Journal, Inc. magazine, the Times of London, the San Francisco Chronicle, the San Jose Mercury News, and the University of California Alumni Magazine, Princeton Alumni Weekly, and Diablo Magazine.

Greenberg is the resident composer and music historian to National Public Radio’s “Weekend All Things Considered.”
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The Life and Operas of Verdi

Scope:

By the time of Verdi’s birth, opera was completely ingrained into Italian culture and was the essential form of entertainment through which Italian culture expressed itself. Verdi brought Italian opera to unequaled heights, while preserving a quintessential characteristic of Italian art—functionality married to beauty—carried out with the art of *sprezzatura*, or “effortless mastery.” Verdi was a great dramatist and a great melodist at the same time, whose artistic evolution never ceased across the 50-year span of his career.

Verdi was born in 1813 in Le Roncole, in the Italian duchy of Parma, which was occupied at the time by Napoleonic France. His parents kept a tavern, frequented by itinerant musicians. Verdi’s own musical talents were encouraged by his parents, who sent him to the nearby town of Busseto to study music with Ferdinando Provesi, a co-founder of the Busseto Philharmonic Society. Under Provesi, Verdi learned the art of composition by writing hundreds of pieces, which were then performed by the Busseto orchestra. The other co-founder of the society, Antonio Barezzi, took the young Verdi under his wing and later financed his compositional studies under Vincenzo Lavigna in Milan, after the Milan Conservatory had rejected his application on the grounds that he was too old and showed little musical promise.

In 1836, Verdi became master of music of the city of Busseto over the objections of the local Church authorities, who did not want a “secular” directing music in their church. The Church authorities then banned Verdi and the Busseto Philharmonic from performing in Busseto’s church. That same year, Verdi married Antonio Barezzi’s daughter Margherita; a daughter was born in 1837 and a son in 1838. Disaster struck in the summer of 1838, however, when their daughter died. The grieving family moved to Milan, where Verdi’s first opera, *Oberto*, was performed at the famous La Scala opera house in 1839. The opera was a modest success. Verdi was commissioned to write three more operas and contracted with the great publishing house of Ricordi. The publisher and Verdi would become close friends.

Domestic disaster struck again in June 1840, when Verdi’s wife, Margherita, died. Verdi collapsed. His next opera, *Un giorno di regno* (*King for a Day*), was a total flop, and Verdi never forgot the humiliation. From then on, he never had any regard for public opinion, good or bad.

After *Un giorno di regno*, Verdi had no desire to continue composing, but a serendipitous meeting with the director of La Scala led to the composition of *Nabucco*, an opera about the ancient Israelites’ struggle for freedom and national identity. Italians quickly related to the Israelites of *Nabucco* as they, too, in the mid-1800s, were fighting for liberation from Austrian and French domination and sought a national identity of their own. The famous chorus of the Hebrews in *Nabucco*—“Va pensiero” (“Fly, my thought”)—would become the unofficial anthem of the *Risorgimento*, the 19th-century Italian nationalist movement, and to this day, this chorus is virtually an Italian national hymn.

The soprano who sang the character of Abigaille at the premiere of *Nabucco* was Giuseppina Strepponi. She and Verdi would become lovers and, ultimately, Giuseppina became Verdi’s second wife. Their relationship would cause a scandal in Busseto, where they eventually settled. Verdi’s neighbors in Busseto considered Giuseppina, with her theatrical background, as little better than a prostitute, and their hostile attitude to the couple never diminished. As a result, Verdi developed a healthy contempt for his neighbors, which did not make things any easier when dealing with the locals. In the meantime, his career took off. Between 1842 and 1851, he wrote 14 operas, traveled extensively, and with the profits earned by his operas, he paid off his debts and began to acquire real estate. He developed a reputation for being a hard-nosed businessman and a thorny personality. He began to insist on supervising the premiere productions of his operas. He craved privacy, constantly complained of bad health, and despite his enormous successes, claimed to hate his career as an opera composer.

Verdi’s first genuine masterpiece was his opera *Macbeth*, premiered in 1847. This opera marked a watershed in Verdi’s compositional development. In it, we begin to see Verdi depart from the traditional Italian *bel canto* style opera, which focused on melodic and vocal beauty, often at the expense of dramatic integrity. From *Macbeth* onward, Verdi would put increasing emphasis on making his music an integral part of the dramatic action—it would foster dramatic momentum and reflect and deepen the thoughts, emotions, and personalities of the characters. To that end, Verdi would gradually eliminate devices that freeze dramatic action, such as recitatives, employing instead
a technique called **parlante**, whereby the orchestra carries the melodic line, maintaining the musical momentum, while the singers express themselves in a declamatory style similar to recitative.

Many of Verdi’s operas have social and political themes that made them controversial in their day and easy targets for the censors that ruled 19th-century Italy. But those same themes, in their underlying expression of the struggle over tyranny, helped endear Verdi to his countrymen and contributed mightily to a growing sense of Italian national identity. Many of Verdi’s operas also have melodramatic, sometimes even lurid plots, to which Verdi seemed naturally drawn and that he rightly sensed would have huge box office appeal, like _Rigoletto_, for example. Premiered in March 1851, the opera marks another stage in Verdi’s development of a style that fosters dramatic continuity. He was progressing toward what is called **music drama**, in which a continuous music intensifies the dramatic action and psychological development of the characters, as if the opera were one integrated organism.

In the 1860s, Verdi began to slow down his prodigious output of operas. Between 1839 and 1859, he had composed 23 operas; between 1862 and 1893, he composed 5 operas and the Requiem.

With _Aida_, premiered in 1872, Verdi made changes that eventually became the norm for opera houses everywhere. He substantially increased the size of the opera orchestra, changed its layout, and moved it to a pit, from where it would not distract the audience’s attention from the action onstage. _Aida_ is, perhaps, the most popular of all Verdi’s operas and the operatic spectacular by which all other spectaculars are judged. It made Verdi a very wealthy man, and he generously shared his wealth. Among his greatest acts of philanthropy were the funding and construction of a hospital in the local town of Villanova and a rest home for musicians in Milan, a facility that exists to this day and that he called his greatest creation.

Two years after _Aida_ came the premiere of Verdi’s homage to the great Italian poet Alessandro Manzoni, the highly operatic Requiem Mass in Memory of Manzoni. By 1879, Verdi had become an Italian icon. He planned to retire but, instead, was convinced to write two more operas, _Otello_ and _Falstaff_. The librettist for both operas was Arrigo Boito, whose partnership with Verdi remains among the greatest in the history of opera. Based on plays by Shakespeare, these two final operas are transcendental masterworks. _Otello_, premiered in 1887, is simply the greatest _opera seria_ of the 19th century. _Falstaff_, premiered in 1893, the year of Verdi’s 80th birthday, was only the second comic opera that Verdi wrote. Verdi, characteristically, had total control over the production and, at this point in his career, was finally enjoying the process of operatic creation and production. _Falstaff_ exceeds all Verdi’s previous operas in terms of dramatic line and musical brilliance. It is a true music drama in which a continuous flow of the musical line permits nothing to slow the breathtakingly fast dramatic momentum. It was to be Verdi’s last opera. He died from a stroke on January 27, 1901. His operatic career reflected an incredible evolution from a modest beginning, steeped in tradition, to one of extraordinary originality and groundbreaking innovation.
Lecture Seventeen

Un ballo in maschera, Conclusion

Scope: In the third act of Un ballo in maschera (“A Masked Ball”), the three conspirators draw lots to see which of them will be allowed to murder Riccardo, royal governor of the colony of Massachusetts. During this episode, Verdi uses every stock-in-trade melodramatic device in his repertoire, yet because of his dramatic genius, the scene works brilliantly. The years between 1848 and 1858 saw the increase of political unrest across Italy, the result, especially, of the occupation of much of the country by the Austrians. The legendary statesman Camillo Cavour eventually won the independence of Italy as a nation united under a single constitutional monarchy. Verdi became a (reluctant) member of Cavour’s new parliament but retired from active politics after Cavour’s death in 1861. Verdi was also intent on retiring as a composer of operas but only succeeded in writing operas less prolifically.

Outline

I. We return to the “drawing of lots” scene in Act III of Un ballo in maschera. The three conspirators (Renato, Samuel, and Tom) are drawing lots to see which of them will have the dubious honor of assassinating Riccardo, Count of Warwick and royal governor of the colony of Massachusetts.

   A. Samuel wants the count dead because the count stole his ancestral castle from him—or so he claims. Tom wants the count dead because the count was responsible for the death of Tom’s brother. Renato—once the count’s most trusted advisor—wants the count dead because the count and his—Renato’s—wife, Amelia, are in love with each other.

   B. The men have just put slips of paper bearing their names in a vase, when Amelia unexpectedly enters the room.

   RENATO
   Tu? …
   You …
   [Amelia, clearly uncomfortable to be in the room with these three very grim-looking men, announces that a visitor has arrived at the house: Count Riccardo’s page, Oscar.]

   AMELIA
   V’è Oscarre che porta an invitation from the count.
   Oscar is here and he brings with him
   Un invito del conto. an invitation from the count.
   [The invitation is to a masked ball to be held at the count’s mansion.]

   RENATO
   Di lui! … An invitation from him!
   Che m’aspetti. Let the page wait.
   [Turning to Amelia, Renato continues:]
   E tu resto, lo dèi. You stay here.
   Poi che parmi che il cielo t’ha scorta. You were sent here by heaven.
   [Renato has decided that Amelia will draw the lots. Amelia does not know exactly what Renato has in mind, but she suspects something bad is about to happen:]

   AMELIA
   Qual tristezza m’assale, qual pena! I feel a terrible sadness, a terrible pain!
   Qual terribile lampo balena! What a terrible foreboding I suddenly feel!
   [Renato sings to Samuel and Tom:]

   RENATO
   Nulla sa: non temete. Don’t worry about her—she doesn’t know anything.
   Esser debbe anzi l’auspice lieto. Let’s let her draw the lots.
   [Renato leads Amelia over to the table on which sits the vase. A sudden harmonic shift upward from E-flat major to E major puts Renato’s next words in razor-sharp relief. His words interspersed with pounding timpani, he tells her:]

   V’ha tre nomi in quell’urna. There are three names in this vase.
Un ne tragga l’innocente tua mano. You will draw one of them with your innocent hand.
AMELIA AMELIA
E perche? And why should I do this?
RENATO RENATO
Obbedisci; non chieder di piu Do what you’re told and don’t ask questions.
AMELIA AMELIA [to herself:]
Non è dubbio; il feroce decreto Without a doubt, his harsh command
Mi vuol parte ad un’opra di sangue! involves me in a bloody deed!

C. Verdi’s stage instructions here are quite explicit: “Slowly and trembling Amelia approaches the table on which the vase stands; Renato continues to blast her with the lightning of his gaze. Finally, on the orchestral pianissimo, Amelia, with her hand shaking, draws out a piece of paper which her husband passes to Samuel.”

D. To mark the insidious darkness of the moment, Verdi uses stock-in-trade, 19th-century, Romantic melodramatic orchestral devices, including funereal melodic motives, low chords in the brass, tremolo strings, consecutive harmonic dissonances (diminished seventh chords), and solitary drum rolls.

E. Renato asks Samuel:

RENATO RENATO
Qual è dunque l’eletto? Whose name did she draw?

SAMUEL SAMUEL
Renato. Renato.

[The brass and bassoons explode—fortissimo!—giving an appropriate exclamation point to the name of the executioner. Renato pumps his fist in a savage celebration:]

RENATO RENATO
Il mio nome! O giustizia del fato; My name! Yes! Oh, fate is just!
La vendetta mi deleghi tu! Revenge shall be mine!

AMELIA AMELIA
Ah! Del conte la morte si vuole! Ah, they want the count dead!
Non celâ le crudeli parole! That much is clear from their cruel words!
Su quel capo smudati dall’ira, Above the count’s head, honed by their rage,
I lor ferri scintillano già. I see their daggers flashing!

[Meanwhile, the men reprise the music that opened this scene (see Lecture Sixteen):]

RENATO, SAMUEL, TOM RENATO, SAMUEL, TOM
Sconterà dell’America il pianto The scoundrel who has made America weep
Lo sleal che ne fece suo vanto. will now pay with his life!
Se traffisse, soccomba trafitto, He will die stabbed and cut
Tal mercede pagata gli va! as his reward for his actions!

(Musical selection: *Un ballo in maschera*, Act III, from Renato’s “Tu” [“You”] to end of scene.)

II. On August 29, 1859, Verdi and Giuseppina were quietly married in Collonges-sous-Salève, a village that was then in Savoy and is now in France.

III. The years 1848–1858 saw growing political unrest in Parma over Austrian rule. (The Austrian Habsburgs ruled Lombardy, Venetia, Tuscany, and Modena.) The only independent Italian monarchy was that of King Victor Emanuel II of the House of Savoy, who ruled Piedmont.

A. The driving political force behind Victor Emanuel II was Camillo Cavour (b. 1810).
   1. Cavour was a man of extraordinary intelligence and great vision; he was what Joseph Wechsburg called “a realistic idealist.”
3. The liberal and extremely popular editorial policy of the paper helped prod King Charles Albert, father of Victor Emanuel, into going to war with Austria in 1848–1849 in support of revolutionary movements in Lombardy and Venetia.

4. Although King Charles Albert was defeated by the Austrians in 1849, Cavour remained an essential player in the kingdom of Piedmont; Charles Albert abdicated in favor of his son, Victor Emanuel, and in 1852, Cavour became prime minister of the kingdom of Piedmont.

5. Cavour embarked on a wide-reaching program of reform, reorganizing the government, military, financial and legal systems, and industry; in doing so, Cavour made Piedmont the leading Italian state.

6. In 1858, Cavour secured an agreement with Napoleon III of France that Napoleon would ally himself with Piedmont should Piedmont go to war with Austria.

7. A year later, Cavour mobilized the Piedmontese army, provoking the Austrians to invade Piedmont.

8. When Cavour heard of the Austrian invasion, the story goes that he rushed to the window of his office in Turin, threw it open, and sang the opening lines of “De quella pira” (“The terrible flames”), Manrico’s call to arms from Act III of Verdi’s Il trovatore. (Musical selection: Il trovatore, “Di quella pira,” second half.)

   B. Within two weeks of the Austrian invasion, Napoleon III and his army intervened and routed the Austrians.

   C. Verdi started a fund drive to raise money for the wounded.

   D. Napoleon III then, independently, signed a peace treaty with Austria that turned Lombardy over to the French and allowed Venetia to remain Austrian. (Venetia would not join Italy until 1866, five years after the creation of the nation of Italy.)

   E. In 1860, Cavour negotiated with France to cede Nice and Savoy to France in exchange for Lombardy and Rome. In a short space of time, Cavour succeeded in uniting Italy under the kingdom of Piedmont.

   F. Cavour created a new national parliament and convinced a reluctant Verdi to run for office in it in January 1861. Verdi defeated his opponent by 339 votes to 206.

      1. As the representative for Busseto, Verdi initially attended parliament regularly.

      2. He always voted with Cavour; that way, he explained, he would be “absolutely certain of not making a mistake.”

   G. In June 1861, shortly after the kingdom of Italy was proclaimed under King Victor Emanuel II, Cavour died.

   H. Verdi was devastated by Cavour’s death and, after that, rarely again appeared in parliament. He continued, however, to be politically aware and prescient, predicting “a European war” that would ultimately arrive with World War I and its “aftermath,” World War II.

IV. By 1861, Verdi’s desire to retire from the life of an opera composer was in the forefront of his mind.

   A. He did not retire, but the nature of his career did change.

      1. Increasingly, he would no longer compose operas for the theaters, but rather, for publication.

      2. Between 1839 and 1859, Verdi composed 23 operas; between 1862 and 1893, he composed 5 operas and the Requiem.

   B. He spent more time on his estate at St. Agata, gardening, hunting, and remodeling his house, the Villa Verdi. By the 1860s, the Verdis employed a substantial household and estate staff. Visitors were limited to a select few, and locals were usually unwelcome.
Lecture Eighteen

La forza del destino

Scope: In 1860, Verdi received an offer to write an opera for the Imperial Theater in St. Petersburg. The opera Verdi wrote for premiere in the winter of 1862 was La forza del destino. With a libretto by Francesco Piave, the opera tells the story of two young lovers for whom everything goes disastrously awry. The opera was a huge success in Russia, and Verdi thoroughly enjoyed the time he spent there, despite the Russian winter. After La forza, Verdi spent a great deal of time conducting and directing his own operas across Europe. He would not begin to compose another opera until 1865.

Outline

I. In a letter to her husband written on December 5, 1860, Giuseppina outlined Verdi’s qualities: indulgence of others’ mistakes, charitableness, modesty, reserve, proud independence, childlike simplicity, and an ability to “maintain a primitive virginity in thought and sentiment in the midst of the sewer of humanity.”
   A. Verdi was a sublime artist with the soul of a common man—a “primitive,” as his wife put it.
   B. His use of lyric beauty in the service of direct expression exists side by side with a dramatic sensibility and a harmonic, melodic, and formal craft of great complexity.
   C. Although Verdi’s music is, technically, extremely sophisticated, he could never wear his sophistication on his sleeve; he would perceive such musical elitism as a betrayal of everything he stood for.
   D. Compositionally, the result was an operatic language and style of extraordinary dramatic power, lyric beauty, directness of expression, and profundity of construction—very special stuff.

II. In 1860, Verdi had agreed to serve in the new Italian parliament, had begun an epic home remodeling project, and had decided—finally—to retire from his career as a composer, a career that he had openly and loudly derided for 15 years as hateful: “my accursed career in the theater.” But his self-imposed retirement was not to last long.
   A. In December of 1860, Verdi received a proposal to write an opera for the Imperial Theater in St. Petersburg; he accepted.
   B. Verdi’s first choice of libretto was Victor Hugo’s revolutionary play Ruy Blas, but after it had been rejected for political reasons by the Imperial Theater, Verdi decided on a drama by the contemporary Spanish playwright Angel de Saavedra Ramirez de Banquedanor. This material became the basis for Verdi’s opera La forza del destino, “The Force of Destiny.”
   C. Verdi signed the contract in July 1861, and the opera was scheduled for performance during the winter of 1862.
   D. Verdi hired Francesco Piave to write the libretto, which concerns the misfortunes that befall a pair of young lovers who accidentally cause the death of the girl’s father.
   E. When Piave suggested to Verdi that he might find some inspiration in a collection of Spanish folk songs, Verdi’s response was striking.
      1. He claimed that he did not study music or keep any music scores in his house.
      2. Although Verdi certainly studied the music of others in his youth, it seems that by the age of 48, he had reached a point in his career where he felt that he could learn nothing new from anyone else.
   F. Along with the overture, some of the most effective music in La forza is its religious music.
   G. The overture opens with three musical ideas of vastly different meaning and import.
      1. First, we hear two sets of three blaring brass and bassoon fanfares, representing the inexorable hand of fate.
      2. Next, we hear an agitated theme in A minor—Verdi’s so-called “destiny theme.”
      3. This is followed by a lyric theme, later to be identified with Leonora as she calls on God and the Virgin not to abandon her in her time of need. (Musical selection: La forza del destino, overture.)
   H. Among the most striking of the opera’s religious numbers is Leonora’s aria “Pace, pace, mio Dio!” (“Peace, oh God, give me peace”) in Act III. Leonora has taken refuge in a cave and prays for peace from
her tormented memories of a lost love and her father’s untimely death. (Musical selection: “Pace, pace mio Dio” from La forza del destino.)

I. Leonora’s aria “Pace, pace” has the lilt and grace of an Ave Maria. She emerges from the cave, and the music darkens as she recounts her misfortune.

LEONORE                     LEONORA
Cruda sventura              Cruel misfortune
M’astringe, ahimé, a languir. has brought me to my knees.
Come il di primo             I suffer still
Da tant’anni dura            as much as I did
Profondo il mio soffrir.     when I began these long years of hardship.
Pace, pace, mio Dio          Peace, oh God, give me peace!
L’amai, gli è ver!            Yes, I loved him, it is true!
Ma di beltà e valore         And heaven gave him such beauty and courage
Cotanto Iddio l’ornò.         that I love him still,
Che l’amo ancor.             and find it impossible
Né toglier mi dal core        to purge his image
L’immagin sua saprò           from my heart.
Fatalità! Fatalità! Fatalità! Fate, fate, fate!
Un delitto disgiunti n’ha quaggiù That a fatal accident should have done this to us!
Alvaro, io t’amo.            Alvaro, I love you,
E su nel cielo è scritto:      but heaven has decreed
Non ti vedrò mai più          that I never see you again!

[The aria reaches its climax as the “destiny” theme is heard in the orchestra, punctuating and accompanying Leonora’s words:]
Oh Dio, Dio, fa ch’io muoia;    Oh God, Father everlasting, let me die,
Che la calma può darmi morte sol. for only death can bring me peace.
In vano des mio soul seek rest.
In preda a tanto due!          Rather, it is prey to long and bitter woe!

J. Structurally, this aria is more German than Italian, in that it exhibits a level of freedom of design, flexibility of phrase structure, and an ongoing melodic development and harmonic detail that goes beyond even Verdi’s own often asymmetrical phrase structures. Verdi is verging on a new sort of compositional language—an ongoing developmental technique more characteristic of German composers than Italian—that will, by the end of his career, become the rule rather than the exception. (Musical selection: La forza del destino, “Pace, pace, mio Dio!” [“Peace, oh God, give me peace!”].)

K. The premiere of La forza del destino, which was delayed until November 10, 1862, was enthusiastically received by the tsar and his court, but less well received by the critics, who complained about the opera’s plot, its length (four hours), and the consequent strain on the singers’ voices.

L. The Verdis were treated like royalty in Russia, and Verdi enjoyed himself so much that he uncharacteristically agreed to play the piano while visiting various salons in St. Petersburg.

III. Following the St. Petersburg premiere of La forza, Verdi return to his self-imposed retirement as a composer. His next opera, Don Carlo, would not see its premiere until 1867. However, Verdi did not retire as a conductor of his own operas, and he remained aware of developments in the musical community.

A. Verdi’s demands for authorial privilege began with the premiere of Macbeth in 1847 and helped to change the nature of the opera industry across Europe.

B. Verdi’s demands on management and performers placed the composer as the essential authority in any performance or premiere. Verdi and Wagner, in Germany, became the prototypes for the artistically idealistic conductorial autocracies of which Arturo Toscanini and Gustav Mahler were, respectively, their immediate descendents.

C. Verdi claimed that—at least when he was not directing them himself—his operas were often badly performed and that he had seen “almost all” of his operas “massacred” at La Scala in Milan.
Verdi was also active in following musical trends and took an interest in the careers of younger composers. He believed, for example, that the younger Italian composers Franco Faccio and Arrigo Boito should not try to imitate Wagner. “Wagner has been done, and it is useless for anyone else to do him again… He [Wagner] is a man of great gifts who prefers to take the roughest roads, because he does not know how to find the easy and straightest ones.”
Lecture Nineteen

Don Carlo

Scope: In the 1860s, Verdi’s relations with his Busseto neighbors worsened, as Verdi tried to lead an intensely private life at Sant’Agata, away from local gossip mongering. He did nothing to endear himself to his neighbors when—as a parliamentary representative—he made himself unavailable to his own constituents! In 1865, he became embroiled in a misunderstanding with the Busseto city fathers over the new opera house that was to be opened there; it was resolved when he agreed to pledge funds and allow the theater to be named after him. That same year, Verdi began work on his opera Don Carlo, based on the drama of the same name by Friedrich von Schiller, for the Paris Opera House. Don Carlo, which took Verdi almost a year to compose, is a story about a struggle against tyranny set in 16th-century Spain. The main protagonists are King Philip II of Spain and his son, Don Carlo.

Outline

I. By the 1860s, the hostile silence that had greeted Verdi and Giuseppina when they moved in together in Busseto in 1849 had evolved into a loud, prying nastiness. In addition, the citizens of Busseto—rightfully—believed that they deserved access to their elected representative. The prying of his neighbors infuriated Verdi, who even made himself unavailable to the citizens he represented in parliament.
   A. By the mid-1860s, the citizens of Busseto turned on Verdi, as they believed he had turned against them. They were even hostile to his guests.
   B. Although Verdi hated Busseto, he loved his life at Sant’Agata.
   C. Giuseppina, however, increasingly found Sant’Agata too isolated and lonely.
   D. Verdi’s unfortunate relationship with the citizens of Busseto came to a head in 1865, when the city had almost finished building an opera house.
      1. Claiming that they had “made” Verdi because his early music studies had been partially financed by their city, the Busseto city fathers believed they had a right to certain favors from Verdi: that he should permit them to name their opera house after him, that he should donate 10,000 francs, and that he should use his influence to secure some famous singers for the gala opening.
      2. They claimed that Verdi had promised to compose (gratis) an opera for the new opera house several years earlier.
      3. Verdi did not see things that way; he and the city of Busseto exchanged a heated barrage of accusations and threats throughout the summer of 1865. He even accused his old champion, Antonio Barelli, of siding with “the enemy.”
      4. Finally, Angiolo Carrara, Verdi’s lawyer and friend, brokered a deal between Verdi and Busseto: The city would leave Verdi alone in exchange for Verdi’s pledge of 10,000 francs and the right to name the theater after him.
      5. Verdi swore never to set foot in the opera house, a vow he kept to his dying day.
      6. When the opera house opened in 1868, Verdi and Giuseppina were out of town for the gala performance and remained out of town until the first modest opera season had ended a month later.

II. March 1867 saw the Paris premiere of Verdi’s Don Carlo, based on a drama by Friedrich Schiller.
   A. During the summer of 1864, Verdi was contacted by Emile Perrin about writing another opera for the Paris Opera.
      1. Perrin dispatched Verdi’s Parisian friend, the publisher Leon Escudier, to Sant’Agata to secure Verdi’s commitment and decide on a libretto subject—Schiller’s drama Don Carlos.
      2. Verdi returned to Paris in December 1866 to direct the rehearsals for the March premiere.
   B. Don Carlo is a genuine music drama in that almost no distinction is made between aria and recitative and the orchestra is an equal partner to the voices. Verdi treats the orchestra as another character in the opera, often giving it the principal melodic material, while the voices sing around it.
1. Like Wagner, Verdi aimed for constant dramatic momentum, dramatic development, and psychological insight into the nature and impulses of his characters, unhindered by traditional operatic conventions.

2. But Verdi and Wagner arrived at their particular places from different directions: Wagner, as a result of purposeful innovation; Verdi, as a result of the incremental refinement of his dramatic craft.

C. Verdi set the original version of *Don Carlo* in French, although the Italian version is more often performed today.

D. To satisfy the tastes of the Parisian audience, extensive ballet episodes were required. Spectacle was required, not just as a decorative element, but also as an intrinsic element in the dramatic action. Moreover, Parisians expected their operas to be long—the original version of *Don Carlo* is in five acts—but Verdi later prepared a shortened, four-act version.

E. Like so many of Verdi’s opera plots, *Don Carlo* is about the struggle against tyranny. Set in the 16th century, the plot revolves around two romantic idealists.

1. One is Don Carlo (the son of the brutal King Philip II of Spain), who seeks freedom from Spanish domination for the people of Flanders. (Any resemblance between the historical Don Carlos and the operatic character is purely coincidental.)

2. The other idealist is Don Carlo’s friend Rodrigo, marquis of Posa, who has appealed to King Philip to loosen his grip on Flanders.

3. Early in the opera, a political marriage has been arranged for Don Carlo and the Princess Elizabeth de Valois, daughter of the king of France. As it so happens, the two fall in love, but before their marriage can take place, Don Carlo’s father, Philip II of Spain, decides to marry Elizabeth himself.

4. Don Carlo, heartbroken, finds refuge in a monastery, where he meets his old friend Rodrigo. The two decide to devote themselves to the cause of liberating Flanders.

5. Don Carlo draws his sword against his father, the king, and is thrown into prison.

6. Philip has Rodrigo assassinated, prompting Don Carlo to reject his father completely.

7. Philip orders his son to be tortured and killed, but Don Carlo is rescued by a mysterious monk—possibly Don Carlo’s grandfather, the Emperor Charles V. (In Schiller’s play, Don Carlo is not rescued.)

III. Verdi’s *Don Carlo* is typical of grand operas in five acts, in that its fourth act shifts the emphasis from the “public” to the private sphere. As in the slow movement of a symphony, emotions are explored, the ramifications of the first three acts are examined, and the way is prepared for the explosive, often violent denouements of the fifth and final act.

A. We begin by examining three episodes at the beginning of Act IV:

1. The orchestral prelude.

2. King Philip’s subsequent aria “Ella giammai m’amò!” (“No, she never loved me!”).

3. The opening section of Philip’s interview/duet with the Grand Inquisitor.

B. Throughout these three episodes, we should be aware of Verdi’s incredibly fluid handling of dramatic line and poetry and the relationship and interchange between voices and orchestra.

C. The scene is Philip’s private study. Verdi’s orchestral prelude paints a bleak and sorrowful mood. In his *The Operas of Verdi* (see bibliography), Julian Budden notes, “the heavy sobs in the horns, bassoons and strings that convey that iron grief which lies at the heart of not only Philip, but of the opera as a whole; with the solo ‘cello [the instrumental voice of Philip] conveying a weariness as eloquently [as anything in the repertoire].” *(Musical selection: Don Carlo, Act IV, Prelude.)*

D. Philip is deep in thought. His opening lines are to be sung, according to Verdi’s instructions, “as if in a dream.”

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**FILIPPO**

Ella giammai m’amò! …

Quel core chiuso è a me,

Amor per me non ha!

**PHILIP**

She never loved me!

No, her heart is closed to me,

she feels no love for me!

[The grieving, masculine-sounding ‘cello of the prelude returns as the orchestra offers a brief and quiet interlude. Philip continues:]
Io la rivedo ancor    I can still see her, the day
Contemplar trista in volto     she arrived from France,
Il mio crin bianco il dì che     grief-stricken as she
Qui di Francia venne.    stared at my white hair.

[Quivering strings accompany the climactic moment of this first part of the aria, as Philip emphatically sings:]
No, amor per me non ha     No, she feels no love for me!
Amor per me non ha!    She feels no love for me!

(Musical selection: Don Carlo, Act IV, first part of Philip’s aria, from “Ella giammai m’amò” [“She never loved me!”].)

[Philip shakes himself out of his trance and asks:]  
Ove son?    Where am I?
Quei doppi presso a finir! The candles are almost completely melted!
L’autorimbianca il mio veron.    My balcony whitens with dawn.
Già spunta il dì!    Day is already breaking!

[The realization that he has sat in his study all night stuns Philip. The dark, anguished, yet incredibly lyric tone of the next few lines marks them with infinite longing and melancholy. Philip sings:]  
Passar veggo i miei giorni lenti! My days are passing … passing!
Il sonno, Oh Dio,    Oh, God, sleep
Sparì dagli occhi miei languenti! no longer visits my drooping eyelids!

(Musical selection: Don Carlo, Act IV, Philip’s aria, from “Ove son?” [“Where am I?”].)

[Philip’s melancholy grows as he contemplates his abject loneliness and his inability to control his own destiny:]  
Dormirò sol nel manto mio rega! I will sleep alone in my royal clothes
Quando la mia giornata è giunta a sera when the evening of my days arrives.
Dormirò sol sotto la vòlta nera I will sleep alone beneath the black vault,
Là, nell’avello dell’Escuriàl.    there, in a tomb in the Escurial.
Se il serto regal a me desse il poter If only my crown could give me the power
Di leggere nei cor,    to read human hearts,
Che Dio può sol, puo sol veder! that only God can see!
Se dorme il prence, veglia il traditor. While the king sleeps, the traitor waits.
Il serto perde il Re, il console l’onor. Then the king loses his crown, the husband his honor.

[The aria reaches its incredible, gut-busting, heartbreaking climax with a varied reprise of the opening lines:]  
Ella giammai m’amò!    She never loved me.
No, quel cor chiuso m’e.    No, her heart is closed to me.
Amor per me non ha!    She feels no love for me.

E. This aria is generally considered Verdi’s greatest aria for bass and is among the handful of the greatest numbers ever written for the bass voice. (Musical selection: Don Carlo, Act IV, conclusion of Philip’s aria, from “Dormirò sol nel manto mio regale” [“I will sleep alone in my royal clothes”].)
Lecture Twenty

*Don Carlo, Conclusion*

**Scope:** In Act IV of *Don Carlo*, a lonely, embittered, and saddened King Philip II of Spain asks the Grand Inquisitor for consolation and guidance. Philip explains that his son, Don Carlo, is rebelling against him, and he feels that he has no choice but to have his son executed. King Philip wants the Inquisitor to absolve him from the guilt he feels, but he gets no satisfaction from the Inquisitor. At the end of Act IV, Princess Eboli’s aria—“O don fatal” (“Oh, fatal gift”)—constitutes one of the greatest arias ever written for mezzo-soprano. In 1867, the year of *Don Carlo*’s premiere, Verdi lost both his father and his “second” father, Antonio Barezzi. In December of that year, *Don Carlo* was produced with great success in Bologna. That production featured the soprano Teresa Stolz, a singer with whom Verdi would develop a close relationship.

**Outline**

I. After Philip has finished his great aria “She never loved me,” he receives a visit from the Grand Inquisitor, from whom Philip desires solace and advice.

   A. The Grand Inquisitor is ancient and blind. His entrance is marked by a ponderous, ominous introduction in the low brass, low strings, bassoons, timpani, and bass drum. This introductory music will continue in the background as the framework for the *parlante*-dominated duet that follows. The Grand Inquisitor’s arrival is announced by the count of Lerma:

   LERMA
   Il Grande Inquisitor!
   INQUISITOR
   Son io dinanti al Re?
   FILIPPO
   Si; vi feci chiamar, mio padre!
   In dubbio son.


   [Now follows the duet between the two basses, a uniquely varied piece of writing.]
Carlo mi colma il cor d’una tristezza amara; my son Carlo has filled me with bitter sadness; 
L’infante è a me ribelle, he has taken up arms against his father, the king.  
Armossi contro il padre. 
L’INQUISITORE 
Qual mezzo per punir scegli tu? 
FILIPPO 
Mezzo estremo. Extreme measures. 
L’INQUISITORE 
Noto mi sia! What measures? Let me know them! 
FILIPPO 
Che fugga o che la scure … I either allow him to escape, or I let the axe … 
L’INQUISITORE 
Ebben? Well? 
FILIPPO 
Se il figlio a morte invio will I be absolved by your hand? 
M’assolve la tua mano? 
L’INQUISITORE 
La pace dell’impero is worth the life of a rebel. 
I di val d’un ribelle. 
FILIPPO 
Posso il figlio immolar al mondo, to sacrifice my own son? 
Io cristiano? 
L’INQUISITORE 
Per riscattarci Èddeo 
Il suo sacrificò. 
FILIPPO 
Ma tu puoi dar vigor to do such a terrible thing? 
A legge si severa? 
L’INQUISITORE 
Ovunque avrà vigor Such a thing can be done 
Se sul Calvario l’ebbe. 
FILIPPO 
La natura, l’amor But how can I silence the 
Tacer potranno in me? love I feel in my heart? 
L’INQUISITORE 
Tutto tacer dovrà Everything must be silenced 
Per esaltar la fè. in order to exalt the faith. 
FILIPPO 
Sta ben! 
L’INQUISITORE 
Non vuol il Re su d’altro interrogarmi? 
FILIPPO 
No.  
(B. At the end of Act IV, Verdi writes a brilliant aria for the Princess Eboli. She is in love with Don Carlo and is jealous of his love for Elizabeth. She initiates an affair with King Philip and contrives to make Philip
aware of Don Carlo and Elizabeth’s love for each. Later, consumed with guilt and self-loathing for what she has done, she confesses to Elizabeth. Elizabeth tells her to leave the court and choose between exile and life in a convent. Eboli then sings her glorious aria, which is in three parts. The first part is a brass-dominated passage that brilliantly portrays Eboli’s rage and self-loathing.

EBOLI
Ah, più non vedrà
Ah, I shall never see
Ah, più mai non vedrò la regina!
no, I’ll never see the queen again!
O don fatal, o don crude!
Oh, fatal gift, cruel gift,
Che in suo furor mi fece il cielo!
which heaven bestowed on me in its rage!
Tu che ci fai si vane e altere,
You that makes us so vain and haughty,
Ti maledico, o mia beltà.
I curse you, I curse you, my beauty.
Versar, versar sol posso il pianto,
All that’s left me are my tears.
Speme non ho – soffrir dovrò!
There’s no hope, only pain.
Il mio delitto è orribil tanto
My crime is so terrible
Che cancellar mai non potrò!
that I can never wipe it out!
Ti maledico, ti maledico, O mia beltà
I curse you, I curse you, my beauty.

[In part 2 of the aria, the music quiets as Eboli contemplates her crime:]
O mia regina, io t’immolai
Oh, my beloved queen, I sacrificed
Al folle errore di questo cor,
you to my heart’s perverse vanity.
Solo in un chiostro al mondo ormai
Only in a convent will I
Dovrà celar il mio dolor!
henceforth hide my sadness!
Ohime, ohime, O mia regina,
Alas! Alas! Oh, my queen,
Solo in un chiostro …
only in a convent …

[In the third and final part of her aria, Eboli seeks redemption by saving Don Carlo, who is to be executed the next day.]
O ciel! E Carlo! A morte domani
Oh, heavens! And Carlo! To die tomorrow,
Gran Dio! A morte andar vedrà
my God, I will watch him go to his death!
Ah! Un di mi resta,
Oh, but one day remains,
La speme m’arride
Hope smiles on me,
Sia benedetto il cie!
heaven be blessed!
Lo salverò! Un di mi resta
I shall save him! One more day,
O sia benedetto il cie!
Ah, heaven be blessed!
Si, lo salverò!
Yes, I will save him.

C. This third and final part of the aria constitutes one of the greatest single passages for mezzo soprano in the entire operatic repertoire! (Musical selection: Don Carlo, Act IV, from Eboli’s “Ah, più non vedrò” (“Ah, I shall never see, no, I’ll never see the queen again!”).

D. Verdi did not consider Don Carlo a success, despite the opera’s initial run of 43 consecutive performances in Paris and despite the overwhelmingly positive reviews it received.

E. Perceptive critics recognized that Don Carlo represented a major step forward in Verdi’s personal and compositional evolution. At a time when many regarded Italian opera and its conventions obsolete, such positive reviews of Don Carlo were very encouraging.

II. The year 1867 was, in Verdi’s own words, “an accursed year.”

A. In January 1867, Verdi’s father, Carlo, died, and four months later, Carlo’s sister (Verdi’s aunt) died. They left behind a young relative they had been fostering, Filomena Verdi, whom Verdi and Giuseppina would later adopt.

B. In July 1867, Antonio Barezzi, Verdi’s “second father” died. Verdi was beside himself with grief.

C. In December of that year, Verdi’s friend and librettist Francesco Piave suffered a massive stroke, from which he never recovered. He lingered on for another eight years, unable to move or speak. Verdi could not bear to visit him, but he established a generous trust fund for Piave’s daughter.
III. A bright spot in 1867 was a highly successful production of *Don Carlo* in Bologna, conducted by Verdi’s friend and disciple Angelo Mariani. Part of the production’s success was attributable to the soprano Teresa Stolz, who sang the role of Elizabeth.

A. Teresa Stolz, known as “la Stolz,” would become the *femme fatale* of Verdi’s life.

B. In February 1869, Stolz sang the soprano lead in a production of *La forza del destino*, conducted by Verdi at La Scala opera house in Milan. Verdi called her performance “sublime.”
Aida

Scope: Verdi’s opera *Aida* is about treason and a tragic love triangle: The Ethiopian princess Aida has been captured in a war between Egypt and Ethiopia and is a slave to the Egyptian pharaoh’s daughter Amneris. Both women love Radames, the Egyptian general who returns to Egypt in triumph after defeating the Ethiopians. Aida is forced to trick Radames into betraying a crucial military secret. He is condemned to death for treason and entombed in a crypt in which Aida has hidden herself, there to die with her beloved. Teresa Stolz sang the role of Aida for the Milan premiere. Stolz was the fiancée of Angelo Mariani, a young conductor who was devoted to Verdi. Verdi did not treat Mariani well, eventually breaking off their relationship completely, for reasons that do not appear to be Mariani’s fault. Stolz also broke with Mariani and, in his place, developed an intense relationship of a still unknown nature with Verdi.

Outline

I. In 1869, the Cairo Opera House was inaugurated with a performance of Verdi’s *Rigoletto*, conducted by Verdi’s friend and protégé Emanuele Muzio.
   A. Muzio and Giulio Ricordi persuaded Verdi to write an opera for the new opera house in Cairo.
   B. The libretto was based on a scenario suggested by the khedive of Egypt, himself a great opera lover.
   C. Verdi characteristically laid out the terms of his contract:
      1. He would decide who would produce and conduct the opera.
      2. He would retain rights to the libretto and the music everywhere except in Egypt.
      3. He was to be paid 150,000 gold francs—four times the amount he received for *Don Carlo*—to be deposited in the Rothschild Bank in Paris.
   D. The khedive and the directors of the Cairo Opera House accepted Verdi’s terms without quibble.
   E. Verdi wrote a large part of the libretto himself.

II. Verdi composed the conclusion of Act II of his new opera—*Aida*—in September 1870, while in despair over the news of the French defeat at Sedan in the Franco-Prussian War. He was able to write celebratory music that stood in complete contrast to his somber personal feelings.
   A. The final minutes of Act II of *Aida* see the triumphal entrance into Thebes of the Egyptian warrior Radames, who has defeated the Ethiopian nation.

POPULO  PEOPLE
Gloria all’Egitto, ad Iside  Glory to Egypt, to Isis
Che il sacro suol protegge!  who protects our sacred land!
Al re che il delta regge  To the king who rules our delta
Inni festosi alziam!  we raise our song of celebration!
Gloria! Gloria! Gloria!  Glory! Glory! Glory!
Gloria al re!  Glory to the king!

[Now the women of Thebes add a less militant verse:]

DONNE  WOMEN
S’intrecci il loto al lauro  Let the lotus be entwined with laurel
Sul crin dei vincitori!  upon the victor’s brows!
Nembo gentil di fiori  Let a sweet shower of flowers
Stenda sull’armi un vel.  veil the weapons of war.
Danziam, fanciulle egizie  Let us dance, Egyptian maidens,
Le mistiche carole,  our mystic dances,
Come d’intorno al sole  as the stars in the sky
Danzano gli astri in ciel!  dance around the sun!

[Now the priests, with their head priest Ramfis, remind everyone to give thanks where thanks is due:]

RAMFIS, SACERDOTI  RAMFIS, PRIESTS
Della vittoria agl’arbitri
Supremi il guardo ergete
Grazie agli dei rendete
Nei fortunata dì.

Lift up your eyes to the supreme
gods who have delivered our victory!
Give thanks to the gods
on this day of rejoicing!

(Musical selection: Aida, Act II, chorus.)

B. As the victorious troops march onto the stage, each column is headed by three trumpets playing one of the most memorable marches in the repertoire and, perhaps, the single most well-known instrumental tune that Verdi ever composed. (Musical selection: Aida, Act II, march.)

C. Now follows a lengthy ballet, as the stage continues to fill up with dancers, soldiers, chariots, trophies, and even animals.
   1. Verdi considered the music for this ballet the best dance music he ever wrote for an opera.
   2. Originally quite brief, Verdi expanded it for an 1880 production of Aida in Paris and instructed his publisher, Ricordi, that all subsequent editions of the score be printed with the full-sized Parisian version of the ballet. (Musical selection: Aida, Act II, ballet music.)

D. Finally, the climactic chorus of celebration is sung:

POPOLO
Vieni, O guerriero vindice
Vieni a gioir con noi
Sul passo degli eroi
Gloria al guerrier, gloria!
Gloria all’egitto, gloria!
RAMFIS, SACERDOTI
Agli arbitri supremi
Il guardo ergete;
Grazie agli dei rendete
Nel fortunato dì.

PEOPLE
Come, avenging warrior,
come and rejoice with us;
in the path of the heroes
Glory to the warrior, glory!
Glory to Egypt, glory!
RAMFIS, PRIESTS
To the supreme gods
lift up your eyes;
give thanks to the gods
on this day of rejoicing!

(Musical selection: Aida, Act II, chorus.)

E. Aida is a fascinating dichotomy of “public” and “private” moments—public, politicized ritual displays of communal joy and religious enthusiasm and private moments of love, anguish, and grief.

III. In January 1871, the Franco-Prussian War came to an end. France agreed to pay Germany an indemnity, the equivalent of $1 billion, and ceded the province of Alsace and most of Lorraine to Germany. Napoleon III was deposed. Many, including Verdi, expressed their sympathy for France and their fear and loathing of Germany.

A. The Franco-Prussian War delayed the Cairo and Milan premieres of Aida a full year.

B. The time was needed, as it turned out, for Verdi to secure the soprano Teresa Stolz for the role of Aida in the Milan production.
   1. Verdi’s publisher, Giulio Ricordi, initiated negotiations with Stolz, whose terms and conditions were ridiculously demanding.
   2. Ricordi accused Stolz’s fiancé, Angelo Mariani, of dictating the terms.

C. Mariani was a violinist and conductor.
   1. He worshipped Verdi and championed his music. Verdi, in return, helped Mariani become one of Italy’s most celebrated conductors.
   2. Mariani was engaged to Teresa Stolz, whose career he actively promoted.
   3. He was suffering from cancer, which Verdi, somehow, failed to recognize as such, claiming that Mariani was a hypochondriac.
   4. When Gioacchino Rossini died in Paris on November 13, 1868, Verdi decided to honor Rossini with a requiem mass, various parts of which would be composed by leading Italian composers. The mass would be performed only once, on the first anniversary of Rossini’s death.
   5. Verdi asked Mariani to conduct the mass.
6. The mass, however, was never composed, and Verdi blamed Mariani for the failure of the project.
7. Verdi’s and Giuseppina’s hostility toward Mariani grew. Verdi was unwittingly falling in love with Teresa Stolz and began to hate Mariani for his influence over her.
8. When Emanuele Muzio was unable to conduct the rescheduled Cairo premiere of *Aida*, Verdi asked Mariani to conduct it. But Mariani was unable to oblige because of a prior commitment.
9. Verdi became furious, accusing Mariani of letting him down. His fury became even worse when he learned that Mariani’s commitment was to conduct a production of Wagner’s *Lohengrin* in Bologna.

D. In the early fall of 1871, Teresa Stolz went to stay with the Verdis at Sant’Agata to begin learning the role of Aida. When she returned to Florence, she broke off her engagement to Mariani.

E. Stolz became a constant visitor at Sant’Agata and wrote Verdi numerous letters.
   1. On the surface, the relationship between Giuseppina and Teresa seemed surprisingly cordial.
   2. There is no evidence that Verdi and Teresa Stolz were having an affair.
Lecture Twenty-Two

Aida, Conclusion

Scope: Verdi believed the February 1872 premiere of Aida at La Scala Opera House in Milan to be the most important of his career. For Aida, he made significant changes in the way that La Scala produced and performed operas, changes that would eventually become the rule for opera houses everywhere. These included changes to the layout of the opera orchestra, its removal from stage level to an orchestra pit, and substantial increases in its size. The La Scala premiere, featuring Teresa Stolz as Aida, was a triumph, and Aida remains the most popular of all Verdi’s operas. It is an operatic spectacular by which all other such spectacles are measured. Yet, for all of its monumental physical and dramatic proportions, it is, at its heart, a story about three people, entangled in personal tragedies.

Outline

I. The Cairo premiere of Aida, rescheduled to take place on December 24, 1871, was a great success. The khedive of Egypt awarded Verdi the Order of Commendatore of the Ottoman Empire. The Milan premiere of Aida was scheduled for February 8, 1872, and it was on that production that Verdi had been focusing all his attention.
   A. Verdi believed the Milan premiere of Aida to be the most important of his life. He reorganized the orchestra and chorus at the La Scala opera house; they were, henceforth, permanently increased in size.
   B. He demanded some profound changes in the way that La Scala would stage and perform Aida, and these changes were adopted, not just for that premiere, but would become the rule for Italian opera houses after that. They included a new physical layout of the orchestra and placement of it in a deep pit so that it became invisible to the audience—an innovation that Verdi admired and adopted from Wagner.
   C. He was angry with Ricordi for publicizing the Aida premiere.
   D. He ordered that the rehearsals be closed to the public, and the cast was sworn to secrecy.
      1. The competition for tickets was so intense that they became an item of speculation on the Milan stock exchange.
      2. Verdi received 32 curtain calls at the premiere, and to this day, Aida remains his most popular opera.

II. Aida concerns a love triangle among two women and one man: the Ethiopian slave girl Aida, the Egyptian Princess Amneris, and General Radames.
   A. Radames is loved by the pharaoh’s daughter, Amneris, but he is in love with Aida, a captured Ethiopian princess, who is now the slave of Amneris.
   B. Radames’s reward for defeating the Ethiopians is to be married to Amneris.
   C. One of Radames’s prisoners is Amonasro, king of Ethiopia and father of Aida. Amonasro bullies Aida into persuading Radames to reveal an important military secret.
   D. Amneris discovers Radames’s act of treason, and her testimony condemns him to be buried alive in a tomb.
   E. Aida hides in the tomb before it is sealed, and she and Radames die together.

F. Aida is the ultimate spectacle by which all other operatic spectacles are measured; yet, it is, at its heart, an intimate story about the private, troubled emotions of three people. One of the most profound of those private moments is Aida’s third-act aria “O patria mia” (“My homeland”).
   1. This aria takes place on a starlit night on the bank of the Nile. Radames has asked Aida to meet him there. Aida is in despair at the thought that she will never see her homeland again, and she is afraid that Radames intends to end their relationship.
   2. Aida’s sense of isolation is aptly depicted by the wandering, vaguely “oriental” sounding oboe introduction that paves the way for her quiet, infinitely lyric aria.

AIDA

AIDA
O patria mia, mai piu ti revedro
O cieli azzurri, o dolci aure native,
Dove sereno il nio mattin brillò,
O verdi colli, o profumate rive,

Oh, my homeland, I shall never see you again!
Oh, blue skies, oh soft, native breezes,
where the light of my youth shone so serenely,
Oh, green hills and perfumed shores,
O patria mia, mai più ti vedrà!  Oh, my homeland, I shall never see you again!
No … No … ami più, mai più!  No, no, never again!
O fresche valli, o queto asil beato,  Oh, cool valleys, oh blessed, happy refuge,
Che un di promesso dall’amor mu fu;  that love once promised me,
Or che d’amore il sogno è dileguato,  now that the dream of love has vanished,
O patria mia, non ti vedrà mai più!  Oh, my country, I shall never see you again!

3. Verdi sets Aida’s aria with incredible flexibility. Despite the fact that ten lines of the text are written as five rhyming couplets, there is no sense of predictability regarding the melodic or harmonic phrase structure. What we are aware of is the emotional richness of Aida’s inner life: her longing, her melancholy, her deep sadness. (Musical selection: Aida, Act III, Aida’s “O patria mia” [“My homeland”].)

G. Aida’s father, Amonasro, suddenly appears on the scene, and now begins what is, perhaps, Verdi’s greatest father/daughter duet:

AIDA
Ciel! Mio padre!
AMONASRO
In pater di lei! No! …
Se lo brami
La possente rival tu vincerai
E patria, e trono, e amore,
Tutto tu avrai.
Rivedrai le foreste imbalsamate,
Le fresche valli, i nostri templi d’or.

AIDA
E in suo potere io sta!
Io, d’Amonasro figlia!
AMONASRO
In pater di lei! No! …
Se lo brami
La possente rival tu vincerai
E patria, e trono, e amore,
Tutto tu avrai.

AIDA
Rivedrò le foreste imbalsamate
Le fresche valli, i nostri templi d’or.

AMONASRO
Sposa felice a lui che amasti tanto
Tripudii imensi ivi porai gioir.
AIDA
Un giorno solo di so dolce incanto,
Un’ora, un’ora di tal gioia
E poi morir!

(Musical selection: Aida, from Aida’s “Ciel! Mio padre!” [“Heavens! My father!”].)
I templi, e l’are profanò,
Trasse in ceppi le vergini rapite;
Madri, vecchi, fanciulli ei trucidò.

AIDA
Ah! Ben rammento
Quegl’infausti giorni!
Rammento i luttì che il
Mio cor soffrì.
Dei! Fate, O Numi, che per soi ritorni
L’alba invocata de’sereni di.

AMONASRO
Rammenta …
Non fia che tardi.
In armi ora si desta
Il popol nostro, tutto è pronto già.
Vittoria avrem …
Solo a saper mi resta.
Qual sentier il nemico seguirà.

AIDA
Chi scopriro potria? Chi mai?
Tu stessa!
AMONASRO
Radames so che qui attendi
Ei t’ama …
Ei conduce gli Egizi…
Intendi?
AIDA
Orrore!
Che mi consigli tu?

AMONASRO
Su, dunque! Sorgete,
Egizie coorti!
Col fuoco struggete
Le nostre città.
Spargete il terrore.
Le stragi, la morte
Al vostro fuore
Più freno non v’ha.

AIDA
Ah, padre! Padre!

(Musical selection: Aida, from Amonasro’s “Pur rammenti” [“But remember”].)

H. Amonasro is furious with his daughter’s refusal. He explodes in what is the pivotal moment of the duet. Accompanied by blaring brass, sweeping strings, trilling flutes and piccolos, Amonasro reveals himself to be a warrior king of great and terrible power.
Ti chiami!  my daughter!
AIDA
Pietà! Pietà! Pietà!  Have pity on me!
AMONASRO
Flutti di sangue scorrono  Rivers of blood flow
Sulle città dei vinti.  over our defeated cities.
Vedi? Dai negri vortici  Do you see? And from black whirlpools
Si levano gli estinti.  our dead arise.
Ti additan essi e gridano:  They are pointing at you and crying:
Per te la patria muor!  “because of you, our homeland dies!”
AIDA
Pietà, Pietà, padre, pietà!  Pity, ah, father, have pity!
Pietà! Pietà!  Have mercy, have pity!
Non maledirmi …non imprecarmi;  Do not curse me! Do not reject me!
Ancor tua figlia potrai chiamarmi,  I will still be your daughter,
Della mia patria degna sarò.  I shall be worthy of my country.
AMONASRO
Pensa che un popolo  Think, think that a people
Vinta, straziata  conquered and tormented
Per te soltanto risorger può!  can rise again through you alone!

I. In the words of Julian Budden: “So ends a duet from which all convention has been purged in the interests of direct dramatic expression” (Budden, vol. 3, p. 240). (Musical selection: Aida, from Aida’s “Pietà, pietà” [“Have mercy, have pity!”].)

III. Nowhere is the intimacy and emotional punch of Aida more apparent than at its very end.

A. The stage is divided into two floors: The upper floor represents the interior of the Temple of Vulcan; the lower floor represents the temple’s dungeon, where Aida has hidden herself in anticipation of Radames’s entombment. As they are sealed inside the crypt, the two lovers discover each other and envision an afterlife together. Then, accompanied by shimmering strings and harp, they sing:

AIDA, RADAMES  O terra, addio; addio, valle di pianti.  Farewell to earth, farewell, vale of tears.
Sogno di gudio che in dolor svanì.  Farewell, dream of joy that has vanished in grief.
A voi si schiude il ciel  Heaven is opening to us,
E l’alme erranti volano  and our wandering spirits fly
Al raggio dell’interno dì.  to the light of eternal day.

[Aida and Radames sing to one another:]

AIDA, RADAMES  O patria! O patria!  Oh, my country, my country!
Quanto mi costi!  What you have cost me!

AMONASRO  Coraggia! Ei giunge …  Have courage! Radames is coming.
Là tutto udrò.  I will hide where I can hear everything!

AMNERIS  Pace t’imploro …  Peace, I beg you …
…salma adorata; my beloved corpse.
Isi placata ti schiuda il ciel! May Isis open heaven to you!

[Aida, dying, falls into the arms of Radames; Amneris brings the opera to its conclusion, even as she continues to moan:]

AMNERIS AMNERIS
Pace t’imploro, pace, pace! Peace, I beg you, peace, peace!

(Musical selection: Aida, tomb scene, from Aida and Radames’s “O terra, addio” [“Farewell to earth”].)

B. The conclusion of Aida is about three people and their emotions; we weep for three lives magnified, intensified, and laid bare by Verdi’s incredibly beautiful, incredibly intimate music.

C. At the premiere of Aida, a grateful city of Milan awarded Verdi with a gold and ivory scepter. Most critics were enthusiastic; some accused Verdi of imitating Wagner. Verdi dismissed all criticism, both negative and positive, as of no consequence. Aida made Verdi, already well off, a very rich man.
Lecture Twenty-Three

The Requiem

Scope: *Aida* made Verdi a wealthy man, and his health was much improved during this period. His relationship with Teresa Stolz, however, was causing public scandal, scurrilous press articles, and marital strife, and continued to do so until Stolz retired from the stage in 1877. By 1878, her relationship with Verdi had become much less intense, although they remained good friends until Verdi’s death. Meanwhile, in 1873, the great Italian novelist and poet, Alessandro Manzoni died, prompting Verdi to write a requiem mass in his honor. The Requiem turned out to be a great success, despite criticism from some quarters, including the Catholic Church, that it was too theatrical and, therefore, unsuitable for performance in a church. Verdi’s Requiem is a prayer for the living, rather than a prayer for the dead; his musical interpretation of the requiem text is quite operatic, quite humanistic.

Outline

I. The year following the La Scala premiere of *Aida* in February 1872 was most satisfying, professionally, for Verdi.
   A. Verdi was at the height of his career, performances of *Aida* were bringing him fabulous sums of money, and his health was excellent (for a change).
   B. Verdi and Teresa Stolz saw a great deal of each other (although whether they were actually lovers has never been proved). Their relationship generated a great deal of gossip, scandal, and press commentary, which ran to the scurrilous.
      1. Giuseppina’s humiliation and anger grew to the point where she considered separation from her husband.
      2. Stolz retired from the stage in March 1877 and sang for the last time in public in a performance of Verdi’s Requiem in 1879.
      3. Stolz’s relationship with Verdi had cooled by 1878, although they remained friends until the end of Verdi’s life, and Stolz remained a welcome guest at the Villa Verdi.

II. On May 22, 1873, the Italian poet and novelist Alessandro Manzoni died in Milan at the age of 88.
   A. Manzoni was the only artist in Italy who was as popular and beloved as Verdi himself.
      1. He did more than any other person to popularize a single ideal way of writing and speaking Italian, based on the Tuscan dialect.
      2. At a time when Italian patriotism and nationalism sought unification and a national identity, Manzoni’s work offered a universally comprehensible Italian language.
      3. As a result, he was perceived not only as a great Italian writer but also a great Italian patriot.
      4. His most famous work is a novel entitled *I promessi sposi* (“The Betrothed”).
   B. Verdi, who was one of Manzoni’s greatest admirers, decided to write a requiem mass for him, although Verdi himself was not a religious man.
   C. Verdi’s score for the Requiem caused the Milanese Church considerable consternation.
      1. Verdi wrote his Requiem for four vocal soloists, mixed chorus, and full orchestra at a time when the Milanese Church authorities were against allowing women to sing in church.
      2. Verdi insisted that his Requiem be sung in church as a fitting memorial to Manzoni on the first anniversary of his death.
      3. The Requiem’s premiere took place at the Church of San Marco on May 22, 1874. The vocal soloists included Teresa Stolz; Verdi conducted.
      4. Although some critics found the Requiem “too operatic,” most critics and audience members immediately embraced the work for the masterpiece that it is.

III. Verdi’s Requiem uses the traditional requiem text, but in Verdi’s hands, this Requiem is a prayer for the living, rather than for the dead.
   A. Verdi approaches the text as if it were an opera libretto.
B. The Requiem opens with an exquisite *Requiem aeternum* and *Kyrie* written for the chorus, with muted ‘cellos providing the initial accompaniment. (*Musical selection: Requiem, Requiem and Kyrie, opening.*)

C. The *Dies irae* section that follows marks a violent contrast; this is a terrifying description of “Judgment Day”—“The Day of Wrath.” The words of the *Dies irae* were written during the 13th century by Thomas of Celano.

1. Four shattering G-minor chords in the orchestra tear the musical fabric to shreds as the chorus intones the first verse:

```
CHORUS           CHORUS
Dies irae, dies illa The Day of Wrath, that dreadful day
Solvet saeculum in favilla shall the whole world in ashes lay
Teste David cum Sibylla. as David and the Sibyls say.
```

2. Wildly swirling and trembling strings; barking brass and woodwinds; and violent, off-the-beat explosions in the bass drum create the most terrifying pictures of the Last Judgment in the repertoire. Eventually, the chorus quietly sings the second verse:

```
CHORUS           CHORUS
Quantus tremor est futures Oh, what fear shall it engender
Quando judex est venturus when the judge shall come in splendor,
Cuncta stricte discussurus. strict to mark and just to render!
```

(*Musical selection: Requiem, Dies irae, verses 1 and 2.*)

3. The chorus and orchestra become hushed. Four trumpets onstage and four trumpets offstage (representing “the last trump”) begin to converse with one another, their dialogue becoming louder and more dramatic as it progresses. Then, the chorus sings:

```
CHORUS           CHORUS
Tuba mirum spargens sonum The last loud trumpet’s wondrous sound
Per sepulchra regionem, shall through the rending tombs rebound
Coget omnes ante thronum. and wake the nations underground.
```

(*Musical selection: Requiem, Dies irae, verse 3.*)

4. A slow, plodding death march emerges in the low strings and bass drum. The bass soloist sings:

```
Mors stupebit et natura All aghast then death shall shiver
Cum resurget creatura and great nature’s frame shall quiver,
Judicanti responsura. when the graves their dead deliver.
```

5. Verdi’s slow, low, and ominous setting of this verse creates a greater sense of foreboding and terror than a loud, more melodramatic setting could do. (*Musical selection: Requiem, Dies irae, verse 4.*)

6. The next two verses are sung by the solo mezzo-soprano, who passionately describes the coming judgment, while the chorus punctuates her verses by whispering the words *Dies irae.*

```
SOPRANO, CHORUS SOPRANO, CHORUS
Liber scriptus proferetur Then shall, with universal dread,
In quo totum continetur the sacred mystic book be read,
Unde mundus judicetur. to try the living and the dead.

[As the mezzo-soprano solo draws to its conclusion, the chorus’s whispers of *Dies irae* trigger a blistering return to the opening verse:]
```

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Dies irae, dies illa  The Day of Wrath, that dreadful day
Solvet saeclum in favilla  shall the whole world in ashes lay,
Teste David cum Sibylla.  as David and the Sibyls say.

(Musical selection: Requiem, Dies irae, verses 5 and 6.)

SOPRANO, MEZZO-SOPRANO, TENOR AND CHORUS (verse 7)
Quid sum miser tune dicturus  Wretched man, how can I plead?
Quem patronum rogaturus,  Whom can I ask to intercede,
Cum vix Justus sit securus? when even the just His mercy need?

[We conclude with one of the most stunning passages in the Requiem, set for solo quartet—soprano, mezzo-soprano, tenor, and bass—and chorus, Dies irae, verse 7:]
Rex tremendae majestatis  Dreadful King, all power possessing,
Qui salvandos salvas gratis  save freely those confessing,
Salva me, fons pietatis.  save thou me, Oh, fount of blessing!

7. The verse begins with a majestic and terrifying evocation of the “Rex tremendae” (“Dreadful King”) named in the opening line. When the soloists take over, the verse becomes a soaring and magnificent prayer with the words “Salva me” (“Save thou me”). (Musical selection: Requiem, Dies irae, verse 8.)
Lecture Twenty-Four
The Requiem, Conclusion

Scope: Verdi’s seven-movement Requiem expresses a gamut of emotions, from horror to heavenly serenity, and includes a massive Dies irae section, full of fire and brimstone, and a final verse that uses the traditional technique of fugue. Along with Beethoven’s Missa solemnis and Brahms’s German Requiem, Verdi’s Requiem is considered the most brilliant and important piece of religious music written during the 19th century. Brahms regarded it as the work of a “genius.” After the Requiem’s premiere in 1874, it was a decade before the next premiere of a major work by Verdi. During this period, his attention centered on his huge estate. He and Giuseppina shared their wealth generously with those in need.

Outline

I. We continue with our discussion of the Dies irae, the second movement of Verdi’s seven-movement Requiem Mass for Alessandro Manzoni, with verses 16 and 17, for solo bass and chorus.

A. Verdi’s setting of these verses is as operatic as it was for the previous verses. The soloist sounds like a biblical prophet as he sings one of the noblest tunes Verdi ever wrote for bass.

B. At the end of the bass solo, the orchestra takes a sudden harmonic leap from E minor to G minor and initiates a furious recapitulation of the first verse of the Dies irae:

1. Verdi’s return to this first verse of the Dies irae, with its furious and elemental music, is a structural necessity.

2. The Dies irae movement is massive—longer than any four-movement symphony by Mozart or Haydn. Without the dramatic impetus of opera to provide perspective, it is necessary for Verdi to provide us with this recapitulatory statement and, with it, a sense of arrival and closure. (Musical selection: Requiem, Dies irae, verses 16 and 17; recapitulation of verse 1, beginning with solo bass’s “Confutatis maledictis” [“When the wicked are confounded”].)

C. The final verses, 18 and 19, of the Dies irae, are sung, first by the mezzo-soprano, then by the other three soloists and the chorus.

SOPRANO, MEZZO-SOPRANO, TENOR, BASS AND CHORUS

Lacrimosa dies illa! That day of tears and mourning!
Qua resurget ex favilla from the dust of earth returning,
judicandus homo reus man for judgment must be prepared.
Huic ergo parce, Deus, Spare, oh God of mercy, spare him,
pie Jesu Domine: Lord, all pitying Jesus blest,
dona eis requiem. Amen. grant them Thine eternal rest.

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1. The grieving mood is expressed in the music, and two-note motives evoke the “tears” referred to in the text. (Musical selection: Requiem, Dies irae, verse 18.)

2. Verdi maintains a mournful mood until the very last moment of the Dies irae. Then, after a long, very quiet tremolo in the strings, the voices sing “Amen” in G major. (Musical selection: Requiem, Dies irae, verse 19.)

D. After the relatively ecclesiastical-sounding movements III, IV, V, and VI (Offertory, Sanctus, Agnus dei, and Lux aeterna), the Libera me (“Deliver me”) movement returns the Requiem to the dramatic and humanistic world previously represented by the Dies irae.

1. The movement begins without introduction. In the style of a Bible-thumping preacher, the soprano urgently, and almost in a monotone, sings the opening three lines:

   SOPRANO
   Libera me, Domine,
   di morte aeterna,
   in die illa tremenda,
   quando coeli movendi
   sunt et terra.

   [The chorus, as if awed and frightened, repeats the soprano’s words in monotone, without any instrumental accompaniment:]

   CHORUS
   Libera me, Domine,
   di morte aeterna,
   in die illa tremenda,
   quando coeli movendi
   sunt et terra.

   SOPRANO
   Dum veneris judicare saeculum per ignem.

   (Musical selection: Requiem, Libera me [“Deliver me”], verse 1.)

2. Quiet orchestral winds pave the way for the soprano’s next lines. At first agitated, the soprano becomes more contemplative as she considers the terrible meaning of her words:

   SOPRANO
   Tremens factus sum ego, ed timeo,
   dum discussio venerit
   atque ventura ira,
   quando coeli movendi
   sunt et terra.

   (Musical selection: Requiem, Libera me, verse 1, conclusion.)

3. The chorus breaks into a full-blown reprise of the Dies irae.

   CHORUS
   Dies irae, dies illa
   calamitatis et miseriae,
   dies magna et amara valde.

   [The soprano sings in counterpoint to the chorus:]

   SOPRANO
   Dum veneris judicare saeculum per ignem. When Thou shalt come to judge the world by fire.

   (Musical selection: Requiem, Libera me, verse 2.)
4. To counterbalance this frightening vision of the Day of Judgment, the opening moments of the first movement (*Requiem aeternam*) return, in an extended passage:

**SOPRANO, CHORUS**

*Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine,*

*Et lux perpetua luceat eis.*

9.

5. This is the third verse of the *Libera me*, and it is led by the soprano, who rises to a high B flat at the very end of the section. Verdi has it marked as *pppp* (pianississimo)—one of the most exquisite moments in the Requiem. (*Musical selection: Requiem, Libera me, verse 3.*)

6. The fourth and final verse of the *Libera me* is a reprise of the first. Verdi sets it as a huge and dramatic fugue, which becomes a metaphor for the voices of humanity, joining in, one voice part at a time, until all are united. The soprano sings above the throng in a series of sensual solos. The ending is also noteworthy, with the soprano and chorus left repeating their words in a pleading whisper—"Libera me." (*Musical selection: Requiem, Libera me, verse 4.*)

E. Verdi’s Requiem was a great success everywhere it was performed. Verdi toured Europe with it, conducting it at London’s Royal Albert Hall (with a complement of 1,600 singers), in Paris, and in Vienna at the newly opened Court Opera House.

F. Pope Pius X issued an encyclical in 1903, two years after Verdi’s death, rejecting his Requiem as Catholic religious music. Music, in the pope’s view, should be the “humble handmaid” of Church liturgy, something to which, he believed, Verdi’s music was diametrically opposed.

II. By the 1870s, Verdi owned a large amount of real estate in and around Sant’Agata. Hundreds of people worked for him, including farmhands, stablehands, stewards, gardeners, house servants, construction workers, and others.

A. Verdi loved to work on the estate, side by side with his workers.

B. The Verdis were extremely philanthropic toward those who worked for them and to their neighbors. Constantly asked for money, they invariably responded generously. They also made donations to help musicians and those who worked in the performing arts, usually making anonymous contributions.

C. Verdi continued to be aware of contemporary music trends, composers, and musicians. He despised pedantry, by which he meant the theorizing of music and art. He criticized Wagner’s *Lohengrin* for its long-held notes, which he felt made it “heavy,” and of Giacomo Puccini, favored by some as Verdi’s successor, he had virtually nothing to say.
Biographical Notes

Barezzi, Antonio (1777–1867). Verdi’s essential benefactor. Virtually a second father to Verdi, Barezzi sponsored Verdi’s education as a young man and stood by him his entire life.

Barezzi-Verdi, Margherita (1814–1840). Verdi’s first wife. A singer and musician of talent, she was the daughter of Verdi’s essential patron, Antonio Barezzi. They were married in 1836, and she died tragically in 1840 after having lost both of her children to disease.

Boito, Arrigo (1842–1918). Composer and librettist. A composer of talent and a librettist of genius, Boito wrote the libretti for Verdi’s two last operas, the masterworks Otello (1887) and Falstaff (1893).

Escudier, Leon (1821–1881). Paris-based publisher. Escudier was a close friend of Verdi’s and served both as his French publisher and as his representative in Paris.

Faccio, Franco (1840–1891). Italian conductor and composer and a good friend of Verdi’s. As a conductor, Faccio championed Verdi’s operas.

Lavigna, Vincenzo (1776–1836). Verdi’s composition teacher in Milan. Verdi studied with Lavigna for three years (1832–1835) following his rejection from the Milan Conservatory.

Maffei, Contessa Clara (1814–1887). Friend and benefactor of Verdi. It was through “Clarina” Maffei’s famous Milan-based salon that Verdi came to know many of the movers and shakers of Italian art and music. Lifelong friends, their correspondence remains among the most important in the Verdi literature.

Mariani, Angelo (1821–1873). Italian conductor. Mariani was the most famous and influential Italian conductor and music director of his time. He was a great friend to Verdi and an even greater champion of Verdi’s operas, although they had a falling out when Mariani refused to conduct the Cairo premiere of Aida because of illness. Mariani’s mistress and fiancée, the soprano Tersa Stolz, went on to have a controversial relationship with Verdi after her break with Mariani.

Merelli, Bartolomeo (1794–1879). Librettist and impresario. It was as director of La Scala in Milan that Merelli “discovered” Verdi. He produced Verdi’s first opera, Oberto, in 1839 and stood by after the disastrous Un giorno di regno premiere in 1840. Merelli was rewarded for his efforts by the success of Nabucco in 1842.

Muzio, Emanuele (1825–1890). Musician from Busseto. Muzio, also a protégé of Antonio Barezzi, studied privately with Verdi in the 1840s and became Verdi’s assistant and indispensable “Man Friday.” He went on to a successful career as a conductor, in which capacity he was a champion of Verdi’s operas.

Piave, Francesco (1810–1876). Italian librettist. Verdi’s friend and lifelong collaborator, Piave wrote the libretti for nine of Verdi’s operas, including Macbeth, Rigoletto, La traviata, and Simon Boccanegra.

Provesi, Ferdinando (1779?–1833). Verdi’s first composition teacher in Busseto. Provesi ran a well-known school of music at which Verdi was a student and, later, a member of the faculty.

Stolz, Teresa (1834–1902). Bohemian-born soprano. Stolz was the first Italian Aida and made her fame as a “Verdi” singer. After having left her fiancé, the conductor Angelo Mariani, she became an intimate friend of Verdi’s, although to this day, no one is sure just how intimate they became.

Strepponi-Verdi, Giuseppina (1815–1897). Verdi’s second wife. A soprano of great vocal and physical gifts, Strepponi ruined her voice through over-performing. She became Verdi’s lover in 1847 and his wife in 1859.

Verdi, Filomena Maria (1859–?). Verdi’s adopted daughter and heir.

Verdi, Icilio Romano (1838–1839). Verdi’s second child. He died at 16 months of age.

Verdi, Virginia (1837–1838). Verdi’s first child. She died at 17 months of age.
Bibliography

Budden, Julian. *The Operas of Verdi*, 3 vols. London: Cassell, 1973. Budden’s three-volume set is the authoritative source on the gestation and musical substance of Verdi’s operas, as well as Verdi’s ongoing compositional development. Detailed, technical, and comprehensive, Budden’s superb set is probably not the ideal source for the casual listener.

Osborne, Charles. *The Complete Operas of Verdi*. New York: Knopf, 1979. For those seeking a shorter, less detailed, and less technical account of Verdi’s operas than the Budden (above), this is it.

Phillips-Matz, Mary Jane. *Verdi: A Biography*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1993. This biography is a monumental achievement: comprehensive, brilliantly researched, and beautifully written. It stands as one of the best composer biographies available. This is the one Verdi book no opera fan can afford to be without.

**Internet Resources**


The Life and Operas of Verdi
Part IV
Professor Robert Greenberg
Robert Greenberg, Ph.D.
San Francisco Performances

Robert Greenberg was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1954, and has lived in the San Francisco Bay Area since 1978. He received a BA in music, magna cum laude, from Princeton University in 1976. His principal teachers at Princeton were Edward Cone, Daniel Werts, and Carlton Gamer in composition; Claudio Spies and Paul Lansky in analysis; and Jerry Kuderna in piano. In 1984, Greenberg received a Ph.D. in music composition, With Distinction, from the University of California, Berkeley, where his principal teachers were Andrew Imbrie and Olly Wilson in composition and Richard Felciano in analysis.

Greenberg has composed more than 45 works for a wide variety of instrumental and vocal ensembles. Recent performances of his works have taken place in New York, San Francisco, Chicago, Los Angeles, England, Ireland, Greece, Italy, and the Netherlands, where his Child's Play for String Quartet was performed at the Concertgebouw of Amsterdam.

Greenberg has received numerous honors, including three Nicola de Lorenzo Composition Prizes and three Meet-the-Composer Grants. Recent commissions have been received from the Koussevitzky Foundation in the Library of Congress, the Alexander String Quartet, the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players, guitarist David Tanenbaum, the Strata Ensemble, and the XTET ensemble. Greenberg is a board member and an artistic director of COMPOSERS, INC., a composers’ collective/production organization based in San Francisco. His music is published by Fallen Leaf Press and CPP/Belwin and is recorded on the Innova label.

Greenberg has performed, taught, and lectured extensively across North America and Europe. He is currently music historian-in-residence with San Francisco Performances, where he has lectured and performed since 1994. He has served on the faculties of the University of California at Berkeley, California State University at Hayward, and the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, where he chaired the Department of Music, History and Literature from 1989–2001 and served as the Director of the Adult Extension Division from 1991–1996. Greenberg has lectured for some of the most prestigious musical and arts organizations in the United States, including the San Francisco Symphony (where for 10 years, he was host and lecturer for the symphony’s nationally acclaimed “Discovery Series”), Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, the Van Cliburn Foundation, the Chautauqua Institute, and Villa Montalvo. In addition, Greenberg is a sought-after lecturer for businesses and business schools and has recently spoken for such diverse organizations as the University of Pennsylvania/Wharton School of Business, Canadian Pacific, Deutsches Bank, the University of California/Haas School of Business Executive Seminar, the University of Chicago Graduate School of Business, Harvard Business School Publishing, Kaiser-Permanente, the Strategos Institute, Quintiles Transnational, and the Commonwealth Club of San Francisco. Greenberg has been profiled in the Wall Street Journal, Inc. magazine, the Times of London, the San Francisco Chronicle, the San Jose Mercury News, and the University of California Alumni Magazine, Princeton Alumni Weekly, and Diablo Magazine. Greenberg is the resident composer and music historian to National Public Radio’s “Weekend All Things Considered.”
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Please refer to Part I for the timeline, Part II for the glossary, and Part III for the biographical notes, and bibliography.
The Life and Operas of Verdi

Scope:

By the time of Verdi’s birth, opera was completely ingrained into Italian culture and was the essential form of entertainment through which Italian culture expressed itself. Verdi brought Italian opera to unequaled heights, while preserving a quintessential characteristic of Italian art—functionality married to beauty—carried out with the art of *sprezzatura*, or “effortless mastery.” Verdi was a great dramatist and a great melodist at the same time, whose artistic evolution never ceased across the 50-year span of his career.

Verdi was born in 1813 in Le Roncole, in the Italian duchy of Parma, which was occupied at the time by Napoleonic France. His parents kept a tavern, frequented by itinerant musicians. Verdi’s own musical talents were encouraged by his parents, who sent him to the nearby town of Busseto to study music with Ferdinando Provesi, a co-founder of the Busseto Philharmonic Society. Under Provesi, Verdi learned the art of composition by writing hundreds of pieces, which were then performed by the Busseto orchestra. The other co-founder of the society, Antonio Barezzi, took the young Verdi under his wing and later financed his compositional studies under Vincenzo Lavigna in Milan, after the Milan Conservatory had rejected his application on the grounds that he was too old and showed little musical promise.

In 1836, Verdi became master of music of the city of Busseto over the objections of the local Church authorities, who did not want a “secular” directing music in their church. The Church authorities then banned Verdi and the Busseto Philharmonic from performing in Busseto’s church. That same year, Verdi married Antonio Barezzi’s daughter Margherita; a daughter was born in 1837 and a son in 1838. Disaster struck in the summer of 1838, however, when their daughter died. The grieving family moved to Milan, where Verdi’s first opera, *Oberto*, was performed at the famous La Scala opera house in 1839. The opera was a modest success. Verdi was commissioned to write three more operas and contracted with the great publishing house of Ricordi. The publisher and Verdi would become close friends.

Domestic disaster struck again in June 1840, when Verdi’s wife, Margherita, died. Verdi collapsed. His next opera, *Un giorno di regno* (King for a Day), was a total flop, and Verdi never forgot the humiliation. From then on, he never had any regard for public opinion, good or bad.

After *Un giorno di regno*, Verdi had no desire to continue composing, but a serendipitous meeting with the director of La Scala led to the composition of *Nabucco*, an opera about the ancient Israelites’ struggle for freedom and national identity. Italians quickly related to the Israelites of *Nabucco* as they, too, in the mid-1800s, were fighting for liberation from Austrian and French domination and sought a national identity of their own. The famous chorus of the Hebrews in *Nabucco*—“Va pensiero”—would become the unofficial anthem of the Risorgimento, the 19th-century Italian nationalist movement, and to this day, this chorus is virtually an Italian national hymn.

The soprano who sang the character of Abigaille at the premiere of *Nabucco* was Giuseppina Strepponi. She and Verdi would become lovers and, ultimately, Giuseppina became Verdi’s second wife. Their relationship would cause a scandal in Busseto, where they eventually settled. Verdi’s neighbors in Busseto considered Giuseppina, with her theatrical background, as little better than a prostitute, and their hostile attitude to the couple never diminished. As a result, Verdi developed a healthy contempt for his neighbors, which did not make things any easier when dealing with the locals. In the meantime, his career took off. Between 1842 and 1851, he wrote 14 operas, traveled extensively, and with the profits earned by his operas, he paid off his debts and began to acquire real estate. He developed a reputation for being a hard-nosed businessman and a thorny personality. He began to insist on supervising the premiere productions of his operas. He craved privacy, constantly complained of bad health, and despite his enormous successes, claimed to hate his career as an opera composer.

Verdi’s first genuine masterpiece was his opera *Macbeth*, premiered in 1847. This opera marked a watershed in Verdi’s compositional development. In it, we begin to see Verdi depart from the traditional Italian *bel canto* style opera, which focused on melodic and vocal beauty, often at the expense of dramatic integrity. From *Macbeth* onward, Verdi would put increasing emphasis on making his music an integral part of the dramatic action—it would foster dramatic momentum and reflect and deepen the thoughts, emotions, and personalities of the characters. To that end, Verdi would gradually eliminate devices that freeze dramatic action, such as recitative, employing instead...
a technique called parlante, whereby the orchestra carries the melodic line, maintaining the musical momentum, while the singers express themselves in a declamatory style similar to recitative.

Many of Verdi’s operas have social and political themes that made them controversial in their day and easy targets for the censors that ruled 19th-century Italy. But those same themes, in their underlying expression of the struggle over tyranny, helped endear Verdi to his countrymen and contributed mightily to a growing sense of Italian national identity. Many of Verdi’s operas also have melodramatic, sometimes even lurid plots, to which Verdi seemed naturally drawn and that he rightly sensed would have huge box office appeal, like Rigoletto, for example. Premiered in March 1851, the opera marks another stage in Verdi’s development of a style that fosters dramatic continuity. He was progressing toward what is called music drama, in which a continuous music intensifies the dramatic action and psychological development of the characters, as if the opera were one integrated organism.

In the 1860s, Verdi began to slow down his prodigious output of operas. Between 1839 and 1859, he had composed 23 operas; between 1862 and 1893, he composed 5 operas and the Requiem.

With Aida, premiered in 1872, Verdi made changes that eventually became the norm for opera houses everywhere. He substantially increased the size of the opera orchestra, changed its layout, and moved it to a pit, from where it would not distract the audience’s attention from the action onstage. Aida is, perhaps, the most popular of all Verdi’s operas and the operatic spectacular by which all other spectaculars are judged. It made Verdi a very wealthy man, and he generously shared his wealth. Among his greatest acts of philanthropy were the funding and construction of a hospital in the local town of Villanova and a rest home for musicians in Milan, a facility that exists to this day and that he called his greatest creation.

Two years after Aida came the premiere of Verdi’s homage to the great Italian poet Alessandro Manzoni, the highly operatic Requiem Mass in Memory of Manzoni. By 1879, Verdi had become an Italian icon. He planned to retire but, instead, was convinced to write two more operas, Otello and Falstaff. The librettist for both operas was Arrigo Boito, whose partnership with Verdi remains among the greatest in the history of opera. Based on plays by Shakespeare, these two final operas are transcendental masterworks. Otello, premiered in 1887, is simply the greatest opera seria of the 19th century. Falstaff, premiered in 1893, the year of Verdi’s 80th birthday, was only the second comic opera that Verdi wrote. Verdi, characteristically, had total control over the production and, at this point in his career, was finally enjoying the process of operatic creation and production. Falstaff exceeds all Verdi’s previous operas in terms of dramatic line and musical brilliance. It is a true music drama in which a continuous flow of the musical line permits nothing to slow the breathtakingly fast dramatic momentum. It was to be Verdi’s last opera. He died from a stroke on January 27, 1901. His operatic career reflected an incredible evolution from a modest beginning, steeped in tradition, to one of extraordinary originality and groundbreaking innovation.
Lecture Twenty-Five

Otello

Scope: By 1879, Verdi was the most revered and beloved living Italian. He had planned to retire from opera composing, but this was not to be. He was inspired by the composer and librettist Arrigo Boito to write his greatest serious opera, Otello, based on Shakespeare’s play. It took Verdi and Boito eight years to create. Verdi’s partnership with Arrigo Boito, the opera’s librettist, was one of the great duos of music history. Otello, along with Falstaff, for which Boito also wrote the libretto, are transcendental masterworks. Verdi was fascinated by the character of Iago, whose “Credo” is one of the most brilliant operatic passages ever created.

Outline

I. Although, as a student, Verdi owed a debt to several composers, he rarely, if ever, studied the music of others once his own compositional skills had developed. He did, however, possess the scores of the string quartets by Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven, whom he revered.

II. In the summer of 1879, Verdi’s friend, the publisher Giulio Ricordi, persuaded Verdi to meet with the Italian writer and composer Arrigo Boito.
   A. Boito later showed Verdi the draft of a libretto that he was writing, based on Shakespeare’s play Othello. Verdi had no intention of becoming the composer for this future opera, but eight years later, Verdi’s opera Otello was premiered.
   B. Verdi’s last two operas, Otello and Falstaff were both based on plays by Shakespeare, and Boito wrote the libretti for both of them. Like that of Mozart and Da Ponte, this collaboration was an operatic marriage made in heaven.
   C. Boito started out in his musical life as a composer. In 1868, when he was 26, he conducted the premiere performance of his six-hour opera Mefistofele. It was, perhaps, the greatest single operatic fiasco in the history of La Scala. In order to make a living, Boito turned to writing poetry and prose.
   D. Unfortunately, Boito’s writing skills also got him into trouble. As a young, hot-headed member of a group of cultural revolutionaries called the Scapigliatura (“Disheveled Artists”), he published a “toast” that revealed his disdain for the older generation of artists, including Verdi. This was an act that Boito would come to regret, when years later, the idea of writing a libretto for Verdi came up.
   E. After Boito met with Verdi to discuss his idea for a libretto based on Othello, he wrote a letter to Ricordi expressing his admiration for the older composer, which Ricordi passed on to Verdi. The letter helped to dissipate the anger that Verdi still harbored against Boito.
   F. Verdi did not immediately agree to compose a score for an opera based on Boito’s libretto. Years passed while he asked Boito to make change after change to his libretto.
   G. Verdi began serious work on the score in 1885, inspired by Boito’s text for Iago’s “Credo.”

III. Iago’s “Credo” (“Creed”) is a blasphemous parody of the text of the Christian Creed.
   A. Iago’s “Credo” begins with a brass fanfare in F minor, a musical indication that we have entered the gates of hell. To a shivering and quivering orchestral accompaniment, Iago barks out the first of his four essential articles of faith:

   IAGO
   Credo in un Dio crudel, I believe in a cruel God,
   Che m’ha creato smile a sè who has created me in His own image
   E che nell’ira io nomo. and whom, in hate, I name.

   [A devilish dance in the orchestra, along with the introductory fanfare, will carry the structural burden of the “Credo” while the voice, in parlante style, follows the articulations of the bloodcurdling words:]
   Dalla viltà d’un germ e d’un atòmo From some vile germ or atom
   Vile son nato. vile am I born.
Son scellerato
Perché son uomo;
E sento il fango originario in me.
Si! Questa è la mia fe’!

Credo con fermo cuor,
Siccome crede la vedovella
Al tempio, che il mal
Ch’io penso e che da me procede
Per il mio destino adempio.

Credo che il giusto
E un istrion beffardo,
Che tutto è lui bugiardo:
Lagrima, bacio, sguardo,
Sacrificio ed onor.
E credo l’uom gioco d’iniqua sorte
Dal germe della culla
Al verme dell’avel.
Vien dopo tanta irrision la Morte.
E poi? E poi? La Morte è il Nulla.

E vecchia fola il Ciel.

I am evil
because I am a man;
and I feel the primeval slime in me.
Yes! This is what I believe!

I believe with a firm heart,
as ever does the young widow
praying before the altar,
that whatever evil I think or do
was decreed for me by fate.

I believe that the “honest man”
is but a poor actor,
and that everything about him is a lie:
tears, kisses, appearances,
sacrifices and honor.
And I believe man to be the sport of an unjust fate,
from the germ of the cradle
to the worm of the grave.
After all this mockery comes Death.
And then? And then? Death is nothingness!

And heaven is an old wives’ tale.

(Musical selection: Otello, Act II, scene 2, Iago’s “Credo.”)

B. Verdi was fascinated by the character of Iago—the original working title for his opera was Iago. He envisioned him as an evil, anti-Christ-like individual, who appears to the casual observer to be just an ordinary guy. Nowhere in the operatic repertoire is the banality of evil better expressed than by the Iago of Boito and Verdi.
Lecture Twenty-Six

Otello, Conclusion, and Falstaff

Scope: *Otello* was premiered at La Scala in Milan on February 5, 1887. Verdi had absolute control over the premiere production, which became an artistic event of national importance. Many thought *Otello* would be Verdi’s last opera; even Verdi felt he had come to the end of his career as a composer. In this lecture, we take a look at Desdemona’s “farewell” scene. After the premiere of *Otello*, Verdi was busy overseeing performances of the opera across Europe and was preoccupied with the underwriting and construction of the Villanova Hospital, among other charitable ventures. In 1889, when Verdi was almost 76 years old, he began another opera with Boito—*Falstaff*, based on plays by Shakespeare and only his second comic opera.

Outline

I. Once word got out that Verdi was writing a new opera, he was besieged by requests from impresarios, producers, singers, and publishers to be involved in the new work

   A. Verdi finished *Otello* in 1886, and La Scala was selected to premiere it. Verdi was guaranteed absolute control over every aspect of the production, from the selection of the singers to the design of the poster. (Verdi insisted that the poster bear both his name and Boito’s name but would not announce the date for the premiere.)

   B. *Otello’s* premiere—February 5, 1887—was considered a national, patriotic event, and it turned out to be one of the most important productions in the history of opera. (Just a week earlier, Verdi had been decorated by King Umberto I with the Great Cross of the Order of Saints Maurizio and Lazzaro.)

   C. Verdi was mobbed by ecstatic fans the night of *Otello’s* premiere. Many, including Verdi, believed *Otello* would be his last opera.

II. In Act IV of *Otello*, Desdemona has been told by her husband, Otello, to make her peace with God. Otello believes Desdemona is guilty of adultery, thanks to the machinations of Iago. Desdemona believes that only her death can restore her husband’s sanity.

   A. As she waits for Otello to come to her bedroom, she sings a song of lost love and death—the “Willow” song. Sitting before her dressing-table mirror, Desdemona, in a weary monotone, tells her maid Emelia about a poor maid whose lover abandoned her. The heartbroken maid used to sing a song: “The Willow” song.

   B. A brief woodwind introduction sets a quiet, melancholy, and somewhat rustic mood. Verdi’s lyric art is evident in the very first verse. The quiet, forlorn accompaniment reinforces the intensely intimate and introspective character of her words and feelings.

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**DESDEMONA**

Piangea cantando
Nell’erma landa,
Piangea la mesta ...
O salce! Salce! Salce!
Sdea chinando,
Sul sen la testa!
Salce! Salce! Salce!
Cantiamo! Cantiamo! Il salce funebre
Sarà la mia ghirlanda.

[Desdenoma turns to her maid, Emelia, who is brushing her hair, and sings:]

Affrettati; fra poco giunge Otello.

---

**DESDEMONA**

Singing, she wept
on the lonely heath
the poor soul wept ...
Oh, willow, willow, willow!
She sat,
her head bent down on her breast!
Willow, willow, willow!
Come sing! Come sing! The weeping willow
shall be my funeral garland.

---

[Rushing strings illustrate the brook and the “bitter wave of tears” evoked in the text.]
III. Verdi was busy in the years following Otello’s premiere: He worked on his farm, wrote letters to friends, and underwrote and oversaw the construction of the Villanova Hospital. Plans were also in the works for Verdi to build a rest home for sick and disabled musicians. Moreover, the Verdis continued to make generous charitable donations to the poor, to flood and fire victims, whenever the need arose. Yet Verdi was depressed and angrier than ever at any news that one of his operas had been badly produced.

IV. This situation changed during the summer of 1889, when Verdi suggested to Boito that Shakespeare’s Merry Wives of Windsor would make a good comic opera.

A. Boito delivered a scenario entitled Falstaff that immediately excited Verdi. Apparently having determined to write another opera, his depression lifted instantly.

B. After swearing Boito to secrecy about the new opera, the two men began work on the project. There were times when Verdi felt he would not be able to finish the opera, which would ultimately take four years to complete.
Lecture Twenty-Seven

*Falstaff, Act I, Scene 1*

**Scope:** *Falstaff* was scheduled to premiere in February 1893. Verdi, characteristically, demanded and received total control over the production. At this stage in his life, it would seem that Verdi was finally enjoying the process of creating and producing an opera. *Falstaff* is not simply the summation of Verdi’s life’s work, but an opera that goes beyond anything he had written before it, in terms of dramatic and musical continuity, characterization, and expressive concision. In this lecture, we will examine and listen to the opening scene of the first act, which introduces us to Sir John Falstaff, the portly and roguish knight, who is a character archetype, a virtual warehouse of human weaknesses and foibles.

**Outline**

I. The premiere of *Falstaff* was scheduled for February 9, 1893, at La Scala. Verdi was 79 years old and, typically, had control over virtually every aspect of the production.

   A. *Falstaff* is the summation of Verdi’s life’s work and goes beyond anything he had previously written. It is a true and complete “music drama” in the sense of dramatic and musical continuity.

   B. The opera opens, like *Otello*, without an orchestral overture. We are immediately introduced to Sir John Falstaff and one of his “victims”—Dr. Caius—who enters suddenly, in a rage:

   **DR. CAJUS**
   Falstaff!
   [Falstaff ignores the enraged doctor and calls instead to the bartender.]

   **FALSTAFF**
   Olà! My good man!
   **DR. CAJUS**
   Sir John Falstaff!

   [Dr. Caius is a character archetype—an arrogant, middle-aged dupe. His shouting has attracted the attention of one of Falstaff’s “assistants,” Bardolph:]

   **BARDOLFO**
   O che vi piglia? Yo. What’s your problem?
   **DR. CAJUS**
   Sir John Falstaff!

   [Dr. Caius ignores Bardolph and screams at Falstaff:]

   **DR. CAJUS**
   Hai battuto I miei servi! You’ve beaten all my servants!

   [Sir John acts as if the doctor were not there:]

   **FALSTAFF**
   Oste! Un’altra bottiglia di Xeres. Bartender! Another bottle of sherry.

   **DR. CAJUS**
   Hai fiaccata la mia giumenta baia, and you’ve broken into my house!

   [The music now slows and Falstaff pretends to look at Dr. Caius for the first time:]

   **FALSTAFF**
   Ma non la tua massaia. But I’ve not broken into your housekeeper.

   **DR. CAJUS**
   Troppa grazia! Oh, thank you so much!

   **UNA VECCHIA CISPOSA**
   She’s a bleary-eyed old hag!

   **AMPIO MESSERE**
   Large sir,

   **SE FOSTI VENTI VOLTE**
   even if you were twenty times

   **JOHN FALSTAFF CAVALIERE**
   larger than you are, I would still

   **VI FORZERÒ A RISPERDERMI.**
   insist that you answer for your crimes!
FALSTAFF FALSTAFF
Ecco la mia risposta: Okay, here’s my answer:
“Ho fatto ciò ch’hai detto.” “I’ve done everything you’ve said.”

[As Falstaff replies to Dr. Caius, the orchestra rises three octaves, evoking Sir John’s massive bulk.]

DR. CAIUS DR. CAIUS
E poi? Yes? And now?
FALSTAFF FALSTAFF
L’ha fatto apposta. I did it on purpose. And I’d do it again!
DR. CAIUS DR. CAIUS
M’appellerò al Consiglio Real. I’ll appeal to the Royal Council!
FALSTAFF FALSTAFF
Vatti con Dio. Sta zitto Go with God. But quiet down;
O avrai le beffe; otherwise, you’re liable to become the
Quest’è il consiglio mio. laughingstock of Windsor. This is my advice.
DR. CAIUS DR. CAIUS
Non è finita! This is not finished.
FALSTAFF FALSTAFF
Al diavolo! Go to the devil!

C. Falstaff is different from Verdi’s previous operas in that there are virtually no breaks in the dramatic action of any sort.
   1. The music is through-composed to maintain constant momentum.
   2. Verdi’s commitment to Boito’s ingenious libretto is so complete and his comic timing is so unerring that the music flies by at an incredible, non-stop pace virtually throughout the opera. (Musical selection: Falstaff, Act I, scene 1, to Falstaff’s “Al diavolo!” “[Go to the devil!”].)

D. The words of the libretto are sung at the relatively fast pace of actual speech. In this respect, Falstaff can be seen as a throwback to the earliest court opera in the first decades of the 1600s, when the word was all-important and most of the music consisted of elevated recitative.

E. Dr. Caius does not leave; he has new bones to pick:

DR. CAIUS DR. CAIUS
Bardolfo! Bardolph!
BARDOLFO BARDOLPH
Ser Dottore! Sir Doctor!
DR CAIUS DR. CAIUS
Tu, ier, m’hai fatto bere. You made me a drink yesterday.
BARDOLFO BARDOLPH
Pur troppo! E che dolore. Yes, unfortunately! And now I’m suffering.

[Bardolph has Dr. Caius check his pulse:]
Sto mal. D’un tuo pronostico I’m sick. Please, tell me
M’assisti. what’s wrong with me.
Ho l’intestino guasto. My intestines are shot!
Malanno agl’osti. Oh, a curse on barkeeps
Che dan la calce al vino! who put quicklime in their wine!

[Bardolph points to his own, enormous, red nose:]
Vedi questa meteora? Do you see this planet?
DR. CAIUS DR. CAIUS
La veda. I see it.
BARDOLFO BARDOLPH
Essa si corca rossa così Every night it goes to bed
Ogni notte.    red, just like this.

DR. CAJUS    DR. CAIUS
Pronostico di forca!    My diagnosis for you—to the gallows!
M’hai fatto ber, furfante.    You made me drink that drink, you lowlife!

[Dr. Caius points to Falstaff’s other henchman, Pistol, who has been lurking in the shadows:]

Con lui,    You made me drink with him,
Narrando frasche;    telling me stupid stories
Poi, quando fui ben ciùschero,    until, once I was good and snookered,
M’hai vuotate le tasche.    you emptied my pockets!

[As Dr. Caius’s accusation takes shape, his vocal line develops into one of the many “near” themes that populate this subtle score. It is not a true tune and certainly not an aria—there are no true arias in this opera. Verdi invests his words with just enough melodic profile to give them emphasis and a degree of memorability. Note, also, the buzzing figure in the accompaniment, which reinforces and redoubles the doctor’s abject irritation. As the argument continues, Bardolph denies having picked Dr. Caius’s pockets:]

BARDOLPH
Non io.    It ’twas not I.
DR. CAJUS    DR. CAIUS
Chi fu?    And who was it then?

[As Falstaff intervenes, the orchestra plays a rising accompaniment evocative of Falstaff’s enormous bulk:]

FALSTAFF    FALSTAFF
Pistola!    Pistol!
PISTOLA    PISTOL
Padrone    Master.
FALSTAFF    FALSTAFF
Hai tu vuotate le tasche a quell Messere?    Did you empty the pockets of that gentleman?
DR. CAJUS    DR. CAIUS
Certa fu lui. Guardate    Of course it was him!
Come s’atteggia al niego    Look at his liar’s face
Quel ceffò da bugiardo!    As he tries to deny it!

[Pointing to one of his pockets, Dr. Caius continues:]

Qui c’eran due scellini    In here there were two shillings
Del regno d’Edoardo    from the reign of Edward,
E sei mezze-corone.    and six half-crowns.
Non ne riman più segno.    Now there is nothing!

[Pistol picks up a broom and asks Falstaff, as he brandishes the broom like a sword:]

PISTOLA    PISTOL
Padron, chiedo di battermi.    Master, I ask your permission to duel
Con quest’arma di legno.    with this wooden weapon!

[Pistol turns to Dr. Caius:]

Vi smentisco!    Are you calling me a liar?
DR. CAJUS    DR. CAIUS
Bifolco! Tu parli    You boor! You’re talking
A un gentiluomo!    to a gentleman!
PISTOLA    PISTOL
Gonzo!    Dolt!
DR. CAJUS    DR. CAIUS
Pezzente!    Beggar!
PISTOLA    PISTOL
Bestia!    Animal!
DR. CAJUS
Can!
PISTOLA
Vil!
DR. CAJUS
Spauracchio!
PISTOLA
Gnomo!
DR. CAJUS
Germoglio di mandràgora!
PISTOLA
Chi?
DR. CAJUS
Tu.
PISTOLA
Ripeti!
DR. CAJUS
Sì.
PISTOLA
Saette!

FALSTAFF
Ehi là Pistola!
Non scaricarti qui.
Bardolfo! Chi ha vuotate
Le tasche a quel Messere?
DR. CAJUS
Fu l’un dei due.

BARDOLFO
Costui beve, poi pel gran bere
Perde i suoi cinque sensi,
Poiti narra una favola
Ch’egli ha sognato
Mentre dormi sotto la tavola.

FALSTAFF
L’odi? Se ti capaciti,
Del ver tu sei sicuro.
I fatti son negati.
Vattene in pace.

DR. CAJUS
Giuro che se mai
M’ubriaco ancora all’osteria
Sarà fra gente onesta,
BARDOLFO, PISTOL
Amen!

FALSTAFF
Cessi l’anifona
La urlate in contratempo.

(Musical selection: Falstaff, Act I, scene 1, from Dr. Caius’ “Bardolfo!” [“Bardolph”].)
L’arte sta in questa massima:  “Rubar con garbo e a tempo.”
Siete dei rozzi artisti.

“A …”

FALSTAFF
Ssss.

“6 polli; 6 scellini, 30 giarre di Xeres: 2 lire.
3 tacchini …”
Fruga nella mia borsa.
“2 fagioani. Un’acciuga.”

FALSTAFF
Fruga.

BARDOLFO
Un mark, un mark, un penny.

FALSTAFF
Fruga.

BARDOLFO
Ho frugato.

FALSTAFF
Fruga.

[Bardolph throws Falstaff’s empty purse on the table, and ominous music rises from the orchestra; this lack of adequate monetary resources is going to be a problem:]

BARDOLFO
Qui non c’è più uno spicciolo.

FALSTAFF
Sei la mia distruzione!

BARDOLFO
Un mark, one mark, one penny.

FALSTAFF
Fruga.

BARDOLFO
Look again.

FALSTAFF
Well, look again.

[At this point, Bardolph throws Falstaff’s empty purse on the table, and ominous music rises from the orchestra; this lack of adequate monetary resources is going to be a problem:]

BARDOLFO
qui non c’è più uno spicciolo.  Look yourself, it’s empty.

FALSTAFF
Sei la mia distruzione!

BARDOLFO
One mark, one mark, one penny.

FALSTAFF
Fruga.

BARDOLFO
I looked.

FALSTAFF
Well, look again.

[Falstaff turns to Pistol and shouts:]
E tu pure.

OSTE! Un’altra bottiglia.

[Falstaff turns to Pistol and shouts:]
Mi struggete la carni.

[Falstaff turns to Pistol and shouts:]
Se Falstaff s’assottiglia

[In the accompaniment, a piccolo and 'cello, playing four octaves apart, illustrate the possibility of a slim Falstaff!]

Non è più lui.  He will no longer be himself.

Nessun più l’ama; in quest’addome  No one will love him; in this paunch

C’è un migliaio di lingue  there are a thousand tongues

Che annunciano il mio nome!  that announce my name!
[Pistol and Bardolph raise their hands above their heads and bow down to Falstaff; their solemnly proclaimed words are accompanied by blazing brass—a little touch of *Aida* here, with the priests praising “Immense Ptah.”]

PISTOLA
Falstaff immenso!

BARDOLFO
Enorme Falstaff!

FALSTAFF
Quest’è il mio regno.
Lo ingrandirò.

BARDOLFO
Immenso Falstaff!

PISTOLA
Enorme Falstaff!

(Musical selection: *Falstaff*, Act I, scene 1, from Falstaff’s “L’arte sta in questa massima” [“Art lies in this rule”].)

**II.** Falstaff is an archetype—fat, vain, and self-delusional, an amalgamation of all our worst habits, a character who allows us to laugh at ourselves through him. Certainly, Verdi enjoyed setting *Falstaff* to music, especially with Boito’s brilliant libretto, which in Verdi’s own words, is “quite unlike any other.”
Scope: Speed and timing are crucial to comedy, and Falstaff has both by the truckful. Verdi does not let conventional arias slow down the comic momentum, so musical lines are very fluid; melodies do not take the time to become full-size, memorable tunes. Instead, melodic lines are instantly transformed and developed and spin off in entirely new directions. Verdi achieves a compositional tour-de-force with Falstaff, the likes of which he had never done before. In this lecture, we follow Falstaff as he plans to steal money and the wives of two neighbors. We are introduced to the “Merry Wives of Windsor” who hatch a plot of their own in revenge.

Outline

I. In comedy, speed and timing are everything. In his pursuit of momentum, Verdi does not develop complete, memorable, aria-like melodies. His melodic lines are constantly transformed and spin off into new directions, making Falstaff a compositional tour-de-force, the capstone of a long career dedicated to increasing dramatic thrust and momentum on the operatic stage.

A. In the first scene of the opera, Falstaff and his henchmen have discovered that they have no money. Falstaff has a plan.

FASTAFF
Ma è tempo d’assottigliar l’ingegno. It’s time to sharpen our wits …

BARDOLFO, PISTOLA
Assottigliiamo. Let us sharpen.

FASTAFF
V’è noto un tal, qui del paese Ch’h nome Ford? Do you guys know a man in town by the name of Ford?

PISTOLA
Si. Yes.

FASTAFF
Quell’uom è un gran borghese … That man is a wealthy citizen.

PISTOLA
Piu’ liberal d’un Creso! And more generous than Croesus!

BARDOLFO
E un lord! He’s a lord.

FASTAFF
Sua moglie è bella. And his wife is gorgeous!

PISTOLA
E tien lo scrigno. And she keeps the moneybox.

[Falstaff now sings an ode to Alice Ford, which is not an aria, though melodically much more than merely recitative. Verdi’s musical setting is harmonically rich and sensual:]

FASTAFF
E quella! That’s her!
O amor! Sguardo di stella! Oh, love! Oh, gaze of a star!
Collo di cigno! The neck of a swan!
E il labbro? Un fior! Her lips? Like a flower!
Un fior che ride. A flower that laughs!
Alice è il nome, e un giorno Her name is Alice, and one day
Come passar mi vide when she saw me pass by
Ne’ suoi paraggi, rise. she laughed.
M’ardea l’estro amatorio nel cor. Love burned in my heart.
La dea vibrava raggi This goddess cast
Di specchio ustorio burning rays on me,
Su me, su me, sul fianco baldo, on me, on my bold flank,
Sul gran torace, on my great chest,
Sul maschio pie’, on my manly feet,
Sul fusto saldo, on my grand torso,
Eerto, capace, I became erect;
E il suo desir in lei fulgea and her desire was so strong
Si al mio congiunto and so joined to mine,
Che parea dir: that she seemed to say:

[Verdi indulges in the time-honored opera buffa device of having a male sing in falsetto voice the words that would have been uttered by a woman:]

“Io son di Sir John Falstaff.”

BARDOLFO BARDOLPH
Punto. Period.

(Musical selection: Falstaff, Act I, scene 1, from Falstaff’s “Ma è tempo d’assottigliar l’ingeno” [“It’s time to sharpen our wits”].)

FALSTAFF
E a capo. Un’altro… And paragraph. And there’s another woman …
BARDOLFO BARDOLPH
Un’altra! Another!
PISTOLA PISTOL
Un’altra! Another!
FALSTAFF FALSTAFF
E questa ha nome: Margherita And this one is named Margaret.
PISTOLA PISTOL
La chiaman Meg. They call her Meg.
FALSTAFF FALSTAFF
E anch’essa de’ miei pregi invaghita. She is also charmed by my magnificence.
E anch’essa tien le chiavi. And she also keeps the keys …
FALSTAFF, BARDOLFO, PISTOLA FALSTAFF, BARDOLPH, PISTOL
Dello scrigno. To the moneybox!
FALSTAFF FALSTAFF
Costoro saran le mie Golconde. They will be my Golcondas.

[Golconda, in India, is famous for its diamonds.]

E le mie Coste d’Oro! They will be my Gold Coast.

Guardate. Io sono ancora Check me out. I am still
Una piacente estate as attractive as a summer
Di San Martino. A voi in St. Martin. As for you two:
Due lettere infuocate. you will deliver these two inflamed letters.

[Falstaff hands a letter to Bardolph:]
Tu porta questa a Meg; You take this one to Meg;
Tentiam la sua virtù. we will test her virtue.
Già vedo che il tuo naso Oh, I see that your great nose is already
Arde di zelo. glowing with zeal.

[Falstaff takes the second letter and hands it to Pistol:]
E tu porta questa ad Alice. And you take this one to Alice.

PISTOLA PISTOL
Porto una spada al fianco. I carry a sword at my side.
Non sono un Messer Pandarus. I am not a Mister Pandarus [panderer, pimp].
Ricuso. I refuse the letter.

[Growling trombones punctuate Pistol’s refusal.]

FALSTAFF
Saltimbanco.
BARDOLFO
Sir John, in quest’intrigo
Non posso accondiscendervi.
Lo vieta …
FALSTAFF
Chi?
BARDOLFO
L’onore!

[A page named Robin enters the tavern.]

FALSTAFF
Ehi! Paggio!
BARDOLFO
L’onore! B y honor!

[Rapidly scurrying strings depict Robin’s youth and his agility. Falstaff turns to Bardolph and Pistol:]

Andate a impendervi,
Ma non più a me!

[Falstaff hands the two letters to Robin:]

Due lettere, prendi
Per due signore.
Consegna tosto, corri,
Via, lesto, va! Lesto!
Va, va, va, va, va!

(Musical selection: Falstaff, Act I, scene 1, from Falstaff’s “E a capo. Un’altra” [“And there’s another woman”].)

B. Turning his attention to his former henchmen, Falstaff delivers his “creed.” Boito drew the text from three different Shakespearean sources: The Merry Wives of Windsor, Act I, scene 3, and Act II, scene ii; and King Henry IV, Part I, Act V, scene 1. The opening of this creed is almost in the manner of an accompanied recitative, a traditional device reserved for royal and heroic personages. Here it is used to address, as Falstaff puts it, “sewers of disgrace!”

FALSTAFF
Onore! Ladri!
Voi state ligi
All’onor vostro, voi!
Cloache d’ignominia, quando,
Non sempre, noi
Possiam star ligi al nostro.
Io stesso, sì, io, io
Devo talor da un lato
Porre il timor di Dio
E, per necessità
Sviar l’onore, usare
Stratagemmi ed equivoci,
Destreggiar, bordeggiare.

FALSTAFF
Honor! Thieves!
You stand upon your honor,
you?
You sewers of disgrace, you!
Honor is a virtue we cannot
always be true to.
Even I, yes, even I myself
must sometimes put aside
the fear of God
and, out of necessity,
sidestep honor, and use
maneuver and rationalization.

1. The last two lines (“Stratagemmi ed ... bordeggiare”) are set to a twisting and turning vocal line that evades a sense of arrival; it lacks a cadence.
2. The second part of this monologue would, in the traditional opera of Verdi’s day, have been set as an aria. Here, the melodic material does not cohere into a memorable tune. Verdi is sublimating his skill as a melodist in favor of expressing, with perfect clarity, the words of the text. The music grows quieter and the texture thins as Falstaff inquires:

FALSTAFF
Può l’onore riempirvi la pancia?
No. Può l’onor rimetterti
Uno stinco? Non può
Nè un piede? No,
L’onor non è chirurgo.
Che è dunque? Una parola?
Che c’è in questa parola?
C’è dell’aria che vola.
Bel costrutto! L’onore
Lo può sentir chi è morto?
No. Vive sol coi vivi?
Neppure: perchè a torto
La gonfian le lusinghe,
Lo corrompe l’orgoglio,
L’ammorban le calunnie;
E per me non ne voglio!
No! Non ne voglio, no, no, no!
Ma, per tornare a voi, furfanti,
Ho atteso troppo,
E vi discaccio.

[At this moment, Falstaff grabs the broom and chases Bardolph and Pistol around the table, yelling:]
Olà! Lesti! Lesti! Al galoppo!
Al galoppo! Il capestro
Assai bene vi sta!
Lesti, lesti, lesti!
Al galoppo, al galoppo!
Ladri! Ladri! I ladri! Ladri!
Via di qua, via di qua,
Via di qua!

3. Bardolph and Pistol escape, with Falstaff chasing after them. (Musical selection: Falstaff, Act I, scene 1, Falstaff’s “Credo,” part 2.)

II. In Act I, scene 2, we meet the so-called “Merry Wives of Windsor.”

A. The scene is set in a garden. To the left is Ford’s house. In the center is a group of trees. As the scene opens, Meg and the local gossip, Mrs. Quickly, enter from the right. They walk toward Ford’s house and meet Alice and her daughter, Anne.
1. A sprightly Mendelssohn-like introduction in the high woodwinds and horns accompanies the entrance of the women.

2. The opening of this scene is entirely theatric, not operatic. In traditional opera, the principal soprano enters by herself, even if such a solo entry was not entirely appropriate to the dramatic action. Verdi dispenses with tradition in favor of dramatic clarity. Here, all four female leads enter together, because that is what the story line demands.

MEG
Alice.
ALICE
Meg.
MEG
Nannetta.
ALICE [to Meg:]
Escivo appunto
Per ridere con te.
[to Mrs. Quickly:]
Buon di, comare.
QUICKLY
Dio vi doni allegria.
[Cupping Anne’s cheek, the elderly Mrs. Quickly sings:]
Botton di rosa!

(Musical selection: Falstaff, Act I, scene 2, opening.)

ALICE [to Meg:]
Giungi in buon punto.
M’accade un fatto
Da trasecolare.
MEG
Anche a me.
QUICKLY
Che?
NANNETTA
Che cosa?
ALICE
Promessa di non ciarlare.
MEG
Ti pare!
QUICKLY
Obió! Vi pare?
ALICE
Dunque: se m’acconciassi
A entrar nei rei
Propositi del diavolo, sarei
Di cavalleressa!
MEG
Anch’io!
ALICE
Mottegi!

ALICE
Alice.
ALICE
Meg.
ALICE
Anne.
ALICE
I was just heading out
to have a laugh with you.
Good day, godmother.
And may God grant you happiness.
Rosebud!

You’ve arrived at a great time.
Something quite surprising
has happened to me.
And something startling has happened to me as well.

What? What, what, what?
What’s happened?
Promise not to gossip!
Can you believe the nerve of that man!
What? Who? The nerve?
Well, if I were prepared
to go to bed with the devil,
I would be promoted,
to the rank of a fat knight’s lady.
Me too!
You’re joking!
MEG  
Non più parole.  
Ché qui sciupiamo  
La luce del sole.  
Ho una lettera.  
ALICE  
Anch’io.  
NANETTA, QUICKLY  
Oh!

Meg and Alice exchange letters. Meg begins to read Alice’s letter aloud, with an English horn adding a mock-romantic accompaniment:

MEG  
“Fulgida Alice! Amor t’offro…”  
[Meg breaks off, furious:]  
Ma come? Che cosa dice?  
Salvo che il nome  
La frase è uguale.  
ALICE [reading from Meg’s letter:]  
“Fulgida Meg! Amor t’offro…”  
[Meg finishes the line, reading from Alice’s letter:]  
“…amor bramo.”  
ALICE  
Qua Meg, là Alice.  
MEG  
E tal è quale.  
“Non domandar perché,  
Ma dimmi …”  
[Alice now finishes the line for Meg:]  
ALICE  
“…t’amo.”  
Pur non gli offersi cagion.  
MEG  
Il nostro caso è pur strano.  
QUICKLY [The four women gather round the two letters, comparing them. Finally, Mrs. Quickly suggests:]  
Guardiam con flemma.  
MEG  
Gli stessi versi.  
ALICE  
Lo stesso inchiostro.  
QUICKLY  
La stessa mano.  
NANETTA

B. This entire exchange is characterized by astonishing lightness and deftness. The spry dancing rhythms (in 6/8 meter) of the ladies’ introductory music continue throughout this passage, as do the predominate timbres of the high wind instruments, expressing the women’s quick wit and lively personalities. (Musical selection: Falstaff, Act I, scene 2, from Alice’s “Giungi in buon punto” [“You’ve arrived at a great time.”].)
Lo stesso stemma. The same coat of arms.

ALICE, MEG
“…sei la gaia comare, “…you are the merry wife
Il compar gaio and I am the merry groom.
Son io, e fra noi due Between you and me
Facciamo il paio.” let us make a couple.”

ALICE
Già.

NANNETTA
Lui, lei, te. He, she, you. Some couple.
QUICKLY
Un paio in tre. A couple in three.

ALICE
“Facciamo il paio “Let us make a couple
In un amor ridente in a joyous love, the love
Di donna bella of a beautiful woman
E d’uom appariscente.” and a man who is …striking.”

NANNETTA, MEG, QUICKLY
“…appariscente.” “…striking.”

[Alice continues; Verdi sets her words with cloying lyricism, betraying her sarcasm at the end with a playful trill on the word “immensità” (“immense”).]

ALICE
“E il viso tua “And your countenance
Su me risplenderà will shine upon me
Come una stella, come una stella like a star, like a star
Sull’immensità.” upon the immense firmament.”

[At the word “immense” the women break into gales of laughter.]}

ALICE
“Rispondi al tuo scudiere, “Reply to your squire,
John Falstaff Cavaliere.” John Falstaff, Knight.”

(Musical selection: Falstaff, Act I, scene 2, from Meg’s “Fulgida Alice!” [“Radiant Alice!”].)

QUICKLY
Mostro! Monster!
MEG
Mostro! Monster!
NANNETTA
Mostro! Monster!
ALICE
Mostro! Monster!

NANNETTA, MEG, QUICKLY
Mostro! Monster!

[Each iteration of the word “monster” is followed by an explosive brass exclamation. The women proceed to discuss an appropriate plan of action.]

ALICE
Dobbiam gabbarlo. We must humiliate him!

NANNETTA
E farne chiasso. And make a big fuss about it!

ALICE
E metterlo in burletta. And expose him to ridicule!
NANNETTA    ANNE
Oh! Oh! Che spasso! Oh! Oh! What fun!
QUICKLY    QUICKLY
Che allegria! What merriment!

[In Shakespeare’s play, Meg is outraged. Here, she is merely annoyed. She speaks for all the women:]
MEG    MEG
Che vendetta! What vengeance!

D. Now comes an extraordinary vocal ensemble, in which we hear all the vocal lines simultaneously before we hear them sung independently—the opposite of what Mozart would have done. The miracle that Verdi achieves is that we can clearly hear what each woman is singing. He does this in three ways:
1. He allows certain parts to be heard by themselves for just long enough to be understood.
2. He allows two voices to sing certain lines simultaneously, which has the effect of momentarily placing that particular line in high relief.
3. He uses the dancing 6/8 meter that has characterized almost all of the women’s music since their entrance to rhythmically unite the otherwise disparate melody lines.

ALICE    ALICE
Quell’otre! Quel tino! That wineskin! That fat tub!
Quel re delle pancie, that king of bellies
Ci ha ancora le ciance still talks the talk
Del bel vagheggiino. of a handsome young swain.
E l’olio gli sgocciola and meanwhile oil fairly drips
Dell’adipe unticcia from his greasy corpulence,
E ancora ei ne snaccia and he has the nerve
La strofa e il bisticcio! to write me that letter!
Lasciam ch’ei le pronte We’ll allow him to spout
Sue ciarle ne spifferi, his useless chatter,
Farà come I pifferi he’ll be like the pipers
Che sceser dal monte. who in vain scale the mountain.
Vedrai che se abbindolo I’ll trick that
Quel grosso compar, fat gentleman.
Più lesto d’un guindolo, I’ll make him spin
Lo faccio girar. faster than a top!

MEG [simultaneously]    MEG
Un flutto in tempesta A huge wave in a storm
Gittò sulla rena threw onto the beach
Di Windsor codesta of Windsor this
Vorace balena, voracious whale.
Quell’uom è un cannone, That man is disgusting.
Se scoppia, ci spaccia, colui. if he explodes, he’ll kill us.
Se l’abbraccia, He would crush Juno
Ti schiaccia Giunone. just by embracing her.
Ma certo si spappola. But without any doubt, we’ll
Quel mostro a un tuo cenno. reduce that monster to pulp.
E corre all trappola He’ll be caught in our trap
E perde il suo senso, and lose all his senses.
Potenza d’un fragil Oh, the power behind a
Sorriso di donna! woman’s gentle smile!
Scienza d’un agile Oh, the art of a
Movenza di gonna! clever shake of a skirt
Se il vischio l’impegola when we catch him out,
Lo udremo strillar. we’ll hear him yell!

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E allor la sua fregola, And then his passion
La sua fregola, his passion
Vedremo, vedremo svampar. we’ll see, will cool off.

NANNETTA
Se ordisci una burla, If you’re planning a jest,
Vo’ anch’io la mia parte. Then I want to be part of it.
Conviene conduda It’s best to conduct it
Con senno, con arte. with wisdom and skill.
L’agguuto ov’ei sdrucciola It will be best if he never sees
Convien ch’ei non scema. the ambush coming.
Già prese una lucciola. He’s already deceived himself
Per una lanterna. so our deception should be easy.
Che il gioco riesca I’ve no doubt
Perciò più non dubito; that our game will succeed;
Per coglielo subito; but to set a fine trap
Bisogna offrir l’esca. we’ll need some good bait.
E se I scilinguagnoli and if we’re clever,
Supremo adoprar, very clever,
Vedremo a rigagnoli, we’ll see rivers of sweat,
Quell’orco sudar. as that ogre perspires.

QUICKLY
Un flutto in tempesta Some huge wave in a storm
Gittà sulla rena threw onto the beach
Di Windsor codesta of Windsor this
Vorace balena. voracious whale.
Ma qui non ha spazio But I don’t think he’ll be able
Di farsi più pingue; to get any fatter;
Ne fecer già strazio as your tongues have already
Le vostre lingue. torn him to pieces!
Tre lingue più allegre Your three tongues, merrier
D’un trillo di nacchere, than the trill of castanets
Che spargon più chiacchiere that chatter more loudly
Di sei cingallegre. than six great birds.
Tal sempre s’esilari May your fine twittering
Quel bel cinguettar. always be joyful,
Comari ciarlar. and thus do the

E. The four women exit, as Mr. Ford, Dr. Caius, Bardolph, Pistol, and Fenton enter.

DR. CAJUS
E un ribaldo, un furbo, un ladro He’s a rascal, he’s sly, he’s a thief,
Un furfante, un turco, un vandal; he’s a rogue, a Turk, a vandal;
L’altro dì mandò a soqquadro just the other day, he trashed my house
La mia casa e fu uno scandalo. causing a scandal.
Se un precesso oggi gl’intavolo If I took him to court
Sconterà le sue rapine. I could make him pay for his sins.
Ma la sua più degna fine But the best thing that could happen
Sia dandare in man del diavolo. is that he would go to the devil.

[Dr. Ford and Bardolph have changed sides:]

BARDOLFO
Falstaff, sì, ripeto, giuro, Falstaff, yea, I repeat, I swear it.
Si, ripeto, giuro,
(Per mia bocca il ciel v’illumina) By heaven, you hear the truth from my mouth.

DR. CAIUS
He’s a rascal, he’s sly, he’s a thief,
he’s a rogue, a Turk, a vandal;
just the other day, he trashed my house
causing a scandal.
If I took him to court
I could make him pay for his sins.
But the best thing that could happen
is that he would go to the devil.
Contro voi, John Falstaff rumina  
John Falstaff is plotting against you
Un progetto alquanto impura.  
a very impure plan!
Messer Ford, l’uom avvisato  
Master Ford, a man warned
Non è salvo, che a metà.  
is only half saved.
Tocca a voi d’ordir l’agguato  
It’s up to you to plan the trap
Che l’agguato stornèra.  
that will destroy his trap.

PISTOLA  

Sir John Falstaff già v’appresta,  
Sir John Falstaff has you in his sights.
Messer Ford, un gran pericolo.  
Master Ford, you’re in a great danger.
Già vi pende sulla testa  
Already something “perpendicular”
Qualche cosa e perpendicoloo.  
is hanging over your head.
State all’erta! All’erta! All’erta!  
Be on your guard! On guard! On guard!

FORD  

Il cerèbro un ebro allucina  
Delerium, confusion, and fear
Turbamento di paura;  
are filling my head!
Ciò che intorno a me si buccina  
What you’re all telling me
E un susurro di congiura.  
has the hum of conspiracy.
Parlan quattro ed uno ascolta;  
But all four of you are talking at the same time!
Qual dei quattro ascolterò?  
Who should I listen to?
Se parlaste uno alla volta,  
If only you’d speak one at a time,
Forse allor v’intenderò.  
maybe then I could understand what you’re all talking about.

1. Verdi effects an ingenious overlapping transition between the entrance of the men and the departure of the women.
2. Note how the dancing 6/8 meter representing the women gives way to the heavier 4/4 meter of the men. ([Musical selection: Falstaff, Act I, scene 2 from the women’s “Mostro!” [“Monster!”].] )
Lecture Twenty-Nine

Falstaff, Act I, Scene 2, Conclusion; Act II, Scene 1

Scope: Falstaff’s henchmen, Bardolph and Pistol, inform Ford that Falstaff is planning to rob him and seduce his wife, Alice. Unbeknownst to Ford, Alice is formulating her own plan of revenge. In the second scene of Act I, Verdi creates a remarkable group-sing that combines men’s and women’s ensembles, each singing in a different meter. Equally noteworthy is Verdi’s use of thematic development in Act II, scene 1, where much of the melodic material for the scene is developed from the explosive orchestral opening. Another highlight of this opening scene of Act II is the brilliant way in which Verdi weaves the dialogue between Falstaff and Mrs. Quickly, as the first words of one character’s line complete the musical phrase left unfinished by the other.

Outline

I. Pistol tells Mr. Ford that Sir John Falstaff is planning to seduce Ford’s wife, Alice, and to rob Ford’s strong box.
   A. Operatic tradition decrees that French horns represent a cuckold. (In Italian, the word for “cuckold” is the same as the word for horn—corno.) Verdi uses this time-honored musical device almost every time Ford speaks.
   B. In Act I, scene 2, Alice comes up with her plan of revenge:

- ALICE Falstaff m’ha canzonata. Falstaff has made fun of me.
- MEG Merita un gran castigo. Yes, and he deserves to be punished.
- ALICE Se gli scrivessi un rigo? What if I were to write him a line or two?
- NANNETTA Val meglio un’ambasciata. I think sending a message to him is better.
- ALICE Da quel brigante tu andrai … You will go to that brigand
- LO adeschi all’offa and you’ll trap him with the promise
- D’un ritrovo galante con me. of a roll in the hay with me!
- QUICKLY Quest’è gaglioffa! What a saucy idea!
- NANNETTA Che bella burla! What a beautiful trick!
- ALICE Prima, per attirarlo a noi First, to reel him in
- Lo lusinghiamo. we’ll flatter him.
- NANNETTA E poi? And then?
- ALICE E poi And then
- E gliel’cantiamo in rima. we nail the fat sucker!
- QUICKLY Non merita riguardo. He’s got what’s coming to him!
- ALICE E un bove. He’s an ox.
- MEG
E un uomo senza fede. He’s a faithless pig.
ALICE
E un monte di lardo. He’s a pile of lard.
MEG
Non merita clemenza. He deserves no mercy.
ALICE
E un ghioton che scialacqua. He’s a glutton who spends all his money on his cook!
NANNETTA
Lo tufferem nell’acqua. We’ll dunk him in water!
ALICE
Lo arrostiremo al fuoco. We’ll roast him on a spit!
NANNETTA
Che gioia! What fun!
ALICE
Che allegria! What merriment!
TUTTE
Che gioia, che gioia, che gioia! What fun, what fun, what fun!

C. Note the “motoric” instrumental prelude that accompanies the re-entry of the women onto the stage. It perfectly expresses the “head of steam” that the women are about to gather as they plot Falstaff’s downfall. (Musical selection: Falstaff, Act I, scene 2, from Alice’s “Falstaff m’ha canzonata” [“Falstaff has made fun of me”].)

D. Alice, Meg, and Mrs. Quickly exit. Anne remains to sing a love duet with Fenton. The men re-enter the stage and Fenton joins them, while Anne exits.
1. The men have decided on their own plan of action against Falstaff: Ford is to go to see Falstaff at the Garter Inn, in disguise and under an assumed name.
2. Meanwhile, the women re-enter the stage; neither group is aware of the other.
3. A remarkable group-sing now ensues. The writing is a tour-de-force, as the women sing in their sprightly, dancing 6/8 meter and the men sing in their plodding 4/4 meter:

DR. CAJUS
Del tuo barbaro diagnostica I think your diagnosis of this situation
Forse il male è assai men barbaro. is not as bad as you think.
Così avvien col sapor ostico So it is with the really nasty taste
Del ginepro o del rabarbaro; of juniper and rhubarb,
Il benessere rinnova their bitterness nevertheless
L’amassissimo bicchier. restores one’s health.

[Barking horns (the symbol of the cuckold) accompany Bardolph’s warning:]

BARDOLFO
Messer Ford, un infortunio Master Ford, a marital disaster
Marital in voi s’incorpora. is being prepared for you.
Se non siete astuto e cauto If you aren’t astute and cautious
Quel paffuto plenilunio that fat full moon
Che il color del vino imporpora that is purple from wine
Troverebbe un pasto lauto would make a lavish meal
Nella voscrà ingenuità. of your innocence.

PISTOLA
Voi dovete empirgli il calice You must fill his wine glass
Tratto, tratto interrogandolo gradually, and question him.
Come all’acqua inclina il salice as the willows bend to water

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Così al vin quel cavalier. so the fat knight bends to wine.
FORD
Tu vedrai se bene adopera You’ll see: I’ll use all
L’arte mia con quell’infame. my skills with that scoundrel.

[The men exit, leaving the women to bring this first act to its conclusion.]

ALICE 
Qui più non si vagoli … Let’s put this show on the road!

[Anne turns to Mrs. Quickly, who will tell Falstaff that Alice will meet him.]

NANNETTA
Tu corri all’ufficio tuo. It’s time for you to go.

ALICE [to Mrs. Quickly]
Vo’ ch’egli miagoli I want him mewing like a kitten
D’amore come un micio. with love for me.
E intesa? You got it?
QUICKLY
Si. I’m all over this!

ALICE
Vedrai che quell’epa You’ll see that terrible
Terribile e tronfia and pompous belly
Si gonfia, si gonfia, si gonfia. swell, swell, swell.

ALICE, NANNETTA, MEG, QUICKLY
E poi crepa. Until it bursts!

[A long, slow crescendo in the orchestra builds to a huge climax, which ends with an explosive downward chromatic scale for four trombones and bassoons.]

ALICE
Ma il viso mio And my countenance
Su lui risplenderà … will shine upon him …
Come una stella. like a star!

TUTTE
Come una stella Like a star
Sull’immensità! upon his immense firmament!
Ah! Ah! Ah! Ha! Ha! Ho! Ho! Yuckity-yuck!

[Musical selection: Falstaff, Act I, scene 2, conclusion, from Dr. Caius’ “Del tuo barbaro diagnostico” [“I think you’re diagnosis of this situation”].]

II. Act II opens, as did Act I, inside the Garter Inn. Falstaff is in his usual place, drinking sherry in a huge armchair. Verdi begins with what historian Julian Budden describes as “An Italianate ‘call to action’: rapid [scurrying strings], preemptory crashes from the full orchestra and sudden silences: Rossini de-conventionalized.” (Musical selection: Falstaff, Act II, opening.)

A. The both skittering and explosive orchestral opening will supply much of the melodic material for the scene to come.

B. Bardolph and Pistol must regain Falstaff’s confidence in order to play their part in the conspiracy against him. They strike their chests with their fists in time to the music and tell Falstaff:

BARDOLFO, PISTOLA Siam pentiti e contriti. We’re sorry boss; we’re penitent and contrite.
FALSTAFF L’uomo ritorna al vizio What a surprise,
La gatta al lardo … like flies to …
E noi torniamo al tuo servizio. And we want to return to your service.

Padron, là c’è una donna che alla vostra presenza chiede d’esser ammessa.

(Musical selection: Falstaff, Act II, scene 1, from Bardolph’s and Pistol’s re-entry and their words: “Siam pentiti e contriti” [“We’re sorry boss”].)

C. Bardolph brings in Mrs. Quickly. The music slows and Mrs. Quickly enters, accompanied by a stately, old-fashioned, minuet-like tune with a curtsy built directly into it.

QUICKLY
Reverenza!
[Falstaff does not bother to get out of his chair to greet Mrs. Quickly.]

FALSTAFF
Buon giorno, buona donna.
QUICKLY
Reverenza!
[in a conspiratorial tone, glancing back at Bardolph and Pistol:] Se Vostra Grazia vuole, vorrei, segretamente, dirle quattro parole.

FALSTAFF
T’accordio udienza.
[To Bardolph and Pistol:] Escite!
QUICKLY
Reverenza!

( Musical selection: Falstaff, Act II, opening, from Mrs. Quickly’s entrance and “Reverenza!” [“Reverence”].)

[Delicate, hesitating strings portray Mrs. Quickly’s reticence.]

QUICKLY
Madonna Alice Ford…

FALSTAFF
Ebben?
QUICKLY

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Dalle due alle tre. From two until three.
Le dirai che impaziente
Aspetto quell’ora.
Al mio dover non mancherò.
QUICKLY
Ben detto.

QUICKLY
Ma c’è un’altra ambasciata.
Per Vostra Grazia.
FALSTAFF
Parla.
QUICKLY
La bella Meg (un angelo)
Che innamora a guardarla
Anch’essa vi saluta
Molto amorosamente,
Dice che suo marito
E assai di rado assente …
Povera donna!
Un giglio di candore e di fè!
Voi le stregate tutte.
FALSTAFF
Stregoneria non c’è.
Ma un certo qual mio.
Fascino personal …
Dimmi: l’altra sa
Di quest’altra?
QUICKLY
Oibó! La donna nasce scaltra,
Non temete.

[Falstaff makes a show of searching his purse:]
FALSTAFF
Or ti vo’ remunerar …
QUICKLY
Chi semina grazie,
Raccoglie amor.

[Falstaff hands a coin to Mrs. Quickly:]
FALSTAFF
Predni, Mercurio-femina.
Saluta le due dame.
QUICKLY
M’inchino.

D. This dialogue ends with isolated strings playing the “dalle due alle tre” (“from two until three”) melody. Verdi weaves together the dialogue between Falstaff and Mrs. Quickly. For example, when Falstaff sings “dalle due alle tre” and when Mrs. Quickly sings “ben detto” (“nicely said”)—as often as not, the first words of one person’s line complete the melodic line and musical phrase begun and left unfinished by the other. (Musical selection: Falstaff, Act II, scene 1, from Mrs. Quickly’s “Madonna Alice Ford.”)
E. Mrs. Quickly exits to the minuet-like music of her introduction. (Musical selection: Falstaff, Act II, scene 1, from Mrs. Quickly’s “Ma c’è un’altra ambasciata” [“But, I have yet another message”].)

F. An explosive, blaring orchestral interlude conveys Falstaff’s joy. He now sings a sort of mini-aria, full of conceit. Verdi gives his words a heavy, lumbering orchestral accompaniment:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FALSTAFF</th>
<th>FALSTAFF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Va, vecchio John,</td>
<td>Go, old John,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Va, va per la tua via.</td>
<td>you’re on your way!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questa tua vecchia carne</td>
<td>This old carcass of yours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ancora spreme</td>
<td>can still squeeze out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualche dolcezza a te.</td>
<td>some sweetness when it has to!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutte le donne ammunitate</td>
<td>The women do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insieme si dannano per me!</td>
<td>go wild over me!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buon corpo di Sir John,</td>
<td>Good body of Sir John,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ch’io nutro e sazio,</td>
<td>a body that I feed and sate,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Va, ti ringrazio.</td>
<td>I thank you.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[The blaring introductory music resumes, but before Falstaff can begin another verse, Bardolph enters:]  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BARDOLPH</th>
<th>BARDOLPH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Padron, di la c’e Master, another visitor,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Un certo Mastro Fontana a certain Master Fountain,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Che anela di conoscervi would like to speak to you.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offre una damigiana He’s brought a really big</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Di cipro per l’asciolvere bottle of wine, with which</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Di vostra signoria he suggests you break your fast.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FALSTAFF FALSTAFF</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Il suo nome è Fontana? His name is Fountain?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BARDOLPH</td>
<td>BARDOLPH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sì. Yes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Musical selection: Falstaff, Act II, scene 1, from Falstaff’s “Alice è mia! [“Alice is mine!”].)

G. Ford, disguised, enters, preceded by Bardolph and followed by Pistol, who is holding a demijohn. Bardolph and Pistol retire to the end of the room. Ford is holding a little sack. He bows deeply to Falstaff and sings:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FORD</th>
<th>FORD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Signore, v’assista il cielo!</td>
<td>Sir, may heaven help you!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FALSTAFF</td>
<td>FALSTAFF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assista voi pur, signore.</td>
<td>Yes, it may help you as well, good sir.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FORD</td>
<td>FORD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Io sono, davver, indiscreto I am, without a doubt, unbelievably indiscreet,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E vi chiedo perdono, and I beg your pardon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Se, senza cerimonie, for coming here uninvited,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qui vengo e sprovveduto and without any</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Di più lunghi preamboli. long-winded preambles.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FALSTAFF FALSTAFF</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voi siete il benvenuto. You are excused.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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In me vedete un uomo
Chi ha un’abbondanza grande
Degli agi della vita.
Un uomo che spende e spande
Come più gli talenta
Pur … pur di passar mattana.
Io mi chiamo Fontana!

Caro signor Fontana!
Voglio fare con voi
Più ampia conoscenza.

Caro Sir John, desidero
Parlavì in confidenza.

Attento!
Zitto!
Guarda! Scommetto!
Egli va dritto nel trabocchetto.
Ford se lo intrappola.

Che fate là?
V’ascolto.

Sir John, m’infonde ardire
Un ben noto proverbio popolare.
Si suo dire
Che l’oro apre ogni porta,
Che l’oro è un talismano,
Che l’oro vince tutto.

Che fate là?
What are you doing back there? Get out!

Sir John, I was hoping that you might

Ebbene …
Ho un acco di monete
Qua, che mi pesa assai.
Sir John, se voi volete

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Aiutarmi a portarlo. help me to carry it.

[Falstaff weighs the sack in his hand. The winds and triangle depict the jingling coins as Falstaff bounces the sack in his hand.]

FALSTAFF FALSTAFF
Con gran piacer … It would be my pleasure to share its weight
Non so, davver, Although, frankly, I do not know
Per qual mio merito, Messere … what you expect me do, Sir …

FORD FORD
Ve lo dirò. I will tell you what I want you to do.

H. This dialogue between Ford and Falstaff is the last of Verdi’s great duets and occupies a central point in this opera.

1. Unlike most duets, there is no contrast in vocal range here. Both Falstaff and Ford are baritones.

2. Also, unlike most operatic duets, instead of baring their souls to one another, these two protagonists are hiding the truth. Only when Falstaff exits momentarily near the end of the scene will Ford be permitted to express his true feelings about Falstaff.

3. The continuity of this duet is ingenious; Verdi has created a continuously developing melodic line, each voice part tapping into that line for a while, until the other takes over, in one long, smooth flow. (Musical selection: Falstaff, Act II, scene 1, from Ford’s entrance and his opening words: “Signore, v’assista il cielo!” [“Sir, may heaven help you!”].)
Lecture Thirty
Falstaff, Act II, Scene 1, Conclusion; Scene 2

Scope: Ford’s plan of revenge on Falstaff is to disguise himself as a “Mr. Fountain” and bribe the fat knight into attempting to seduce Alice. Ford is shocked to discover that Falstaff already has arranged a tryst with Alice, who in the meantime, is busily planning Falstaff’s downfall through a plot of her own. Verdi’s and Boito’s combined comic genius is abundantly evident everywhere in this scene. Also memorable is the way Verdi uses the orchestra to express the dramatic action and personalities of the characters, for example, the sprightly music that portrays the quick-witted “Merry Wives of Windsor.”

Outline

I. Ford, disguised as “Mr. Fountain,” tells Falstaff what he wants him to do:

FORD
C’è a Windsor una dama,
Bella e leggiadra molto,
Si chiama Alice; è moglie
D’un certo Ford …
FALSTAFF
V’ascolto.

I love her but, she doesn’t love me;
I write to her, but she doesn’t answer;
I look at her, but she doesn’t look at me.
I have squandered treasures on her,
I’ve given her gift after gift.
Trembling, I’ve plotted and contrived to make her love me,
but, alas, it’s all been in vain!
I’ve been left out in the cold,
unloved and empty-handed,
singing a madrigal.

A. Ford’s “singing a madrigal” means “singing the blues.” Verdi extends the word “madrigal” to turn it into a moan of grief and frustration. Ford and Falstaff proceed to sing an impromptu madrigal about unrequited love:

FALSTAFF, FORD
L’amor! L’amor!
Che non ci dà mai tregue,
Finché la vita strugge.
E come l’ombra
Che chi fugge,
E chi l’insegue,
Fugge.
L’amor!
FORD
E questo madrigale
L’ho appreso a prezzo d’or.

FARSTAFF, FORD
L’amor! Love! Love!
That never gives us an even break,
Until life is gone, gone.
It’s like the shadow
that pursues a fleeing man,
and when a man pursues it,
it flees from him!
Love, love, love, love!

FORD
And this madrigal
I have learned at the cost of gold.
FALSTAFF
Quest’è il destin fatale
Del misero amator.

FORD
L’amor, l’amor
Che non ci dà mai tregue …

FALSTAFF
Essa non vi diè
Mai luogo a lusinghe?

FORD
No.

FALSTAFF
Ma infin,
Perch’è v’aprite a me?

B. Ford makes laudatory comments to Falstaff, who quietly affirms them, here and there, verbally (“yes, yes”) and with gestures of false humility:

FORD
Ve lo dirò:
Voi siete un gentiluomo
Prode, arguto, facondo,
Voi siete un uom di guerra,
Voi siete un uom di mondo …
Non v’adulo, e quello
Fe un sacco di monete:
Spendete! Spendete!
Si, spendete e spandete
Tutto il mio patrimonio!

FALSTAFF
Strana ingiunzion!

FORD
Quella crudel beltà
Sempre è vissuta
In grande fede di castità.
La sua virtù importuna
M’abbarbagliava gl’occhi,
La bella inespugnabile
Dicea: Guai se mi tocchi!

FALSTAFF
Ma in contraccambio, chiedo
Che conquistiate Alice!
Strana ingiunzion!

FORD
Mi spiego:
Quella crudel beltà
Sempre è vissuta
In grande fede di castità.
La sua virtù importuna
M’abbarbagliava gl’occhi,
La bella inespugnabile
Dicea: Guai se mi tocchi!

FORD
Siate ricco e felice!

[Verdi’s music reaches a climax.]
[Ford’s accompaniment features chirping winds:]

FALSTAFF
Ma se voi l’espugnate,
Poi, posso anch’io sperar;
Da fallo nasce fallo

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E allor …che ve ne par?    and then …what do you think?
FALSTAFF    FALSTAFF
Prima di tutto,    First of all,
Senza complimenti, Messere,    without reservations, Sir,
Accetto il sacco. E poi    I accept your little sack. And then,
Fedè di cavalier; Qua la mano!    with a knight’s honor, here’s my hand.
Faro le vostre brame sazie.    I shall see that you get what you want.
Voi, la moglie di Ford possederete!    You shall possess Mr. Ford’s wife!
FORD     FORD
Grazie!    Thanks!
FALSTAFF    FALSTAFF
Io son già    I’m already well on my way
Molto innanzi;    to accomplishing the mission;
Non cè ragion ch’io taccia.    There’s no reason why I shouldn’t tell you.
Con voi fra una mezz’ora    within half an hour
Sarà nelle mie braccia.    she will be in my arms!

[Ford knows nothing of the women’s plans, so this comes as a rude shock.]}

FORD     FORD
Chi?    Who?
FALSTAFF    FALSTAFF
Alice, essa mandò dianzi    Alice, earlier today, she sent
Una …confidente    a …confidant
Per dirmi che quel tanghero    to tell me that her boor
Di suo merito è assente    of a husband is gone from the house
Dalle due alle tre.    from two until three.
FORD     FORD
Dalle due alle tre    From two until three …
Lo conoscete?    Do you know this Ford?
FALSTAFF    FALSTAFF
Il diavolo se lo porti    May the devil take him
All’inferno con Menelao suo avolo!    to hell!
Quel tanghero, quel tanghero!    That boor! That boor!
Vedrai, vedrai, vedrai,    You’ll see, you’ll see, you’ll see,
Te lo confidò netto, netto!    I’ll cuckold him neatly, neatly!
Se mi frastorna,    And if he should disturb me,
Gli sparò una girandola    I’ll club him on the
Di botte sulle corna!    horns on his head!
Quel Messer Ford è un bue,    Mr. Ford? He’s an ox,
Un bue, vedrai, ecc.    just an ox, you’ll see.
Ma è tardi.    Goodness, but it’s getting late.
Aspettami qua.    Wait for me here.
Vado a farmi bello.    I must make myself beautiful.

[Falstaff grabs the sack of gold pieces and exits, leaving Ford onstage, alone and fuming. Musical selection: Falstaff, Act II, scene 1, from Ford’s “Ve lo dirò,” “I’ll tell you why I’m telling you this”.

C. With Falstaff out of the room, Ford sings to himself, as if in a daze:

FORD     FORD
E sogno? O realtà?    Am I dreaming? Or is this real?
Due rami enormi    Two enormous antlers
Crescon sulla mia testa.    are growing out of my skull.
E un sogno? Am I dreaming?
Svegliati! Sul …ti desta! Wake up! Wake up! Hurry!
Tua moglie sgarra Your wife is about to stray.
E mette in mal’assetto And in doing so, dishonor
L’onore tuo, la tua casa you, your house, and worst of all,
Ed il tuo letto. your bed!

[As Ford ponders the enormity of the crime about to be committed against him, a chorus of horns breaks forth in the orchestra and continues in the background.]
L’ora è fissata; They’ve set the time,
Tramato l’inganno, they’ve planned their liaisons,
Sei gabbato e truffato! and you are mocked and tricked!
E poi diranno And then everyone will say
Che un marito geloso that there’s no greater fool
E un insensato! than a jealous husband!
Già dietro a me Oh yes, already, behind my back,
Nomi d’infame conio they’re whistling at me,
Fischion passando; calling me names,
Mormora lo scherno. murmuring their contempt!
O matrimonio; inferno! Oh, marriage; an inferno!
Donna: demonia! Oh, woman: the devil!
Nella lor moglie Only idiots could possibly
Abbian fede I babbei! have faith in their wives!

[Ford develops his concept in a series of insulting stereotypes:]
Affiderei I would sooner entrust
La mia birra a un Tedesco, my beer to a German,
Tutto il mio desco all of my food
A un Olandese lurco, to a glutinous Dutchman,
La mia bottiglia d’acquavite a un Turco, my bottle of brandy to a Turk,
Non mia moglie a se stessa. than entrust my wife to herself.
O laida sorte! Quella brutta parola Oh, evil fate! That terrible word
In cor mi torna: Le corna! keeps coming back to me: horns!
Bue! Capron! La fusa torte! Ox! Billy goat! I am betrayed!
Ah! Le corna! Le corna! Ahi! Horns! Horns!
Ma non mi sfuggirai! You …Falstaff …you shall not escape me!
No! Sozzo! Reo! No! You filthy man! You guilty bastard!
Dannato epicureo! You damned epicure!
Prima li accoppio First, I’ll let them couple, couple, couple, couple,
E poi li colgo. Then I’ll catch them in the act.
Io scoppio! I’m exploding!
Vendicherò l’affronto! I’ll avenge this insult!
Laudata sempre sia And from the bottom of my heart
La gelosia. my jealousy.

D. Ford’s “aria” ends with a blazing orchestral postlude—Verdi at his raucous, dramatic best. Then, a long, descending horn line suddenly pokes fun at Ford and dissipates the energy, and a gentle, almost skipping string theme ensues, as Falstaff enters, looking quite dapper.

**FALSTAFF**
Eccomi qua. Son pronto. Here I am, all ready to go.
M’accompagnate un tratto? Will you accompany me on my way?
**FORD**
Vi metto sulla via. I’ll put you on your way!
**FALSTAFF**
Prima voi. You first.
FORD FORD
Prima voi. You first.
FALSTAFF FALSTAFF
FORD FORD
Prego. Please.
FALSTAFF FALSTAFF
E tardì. It’s getting late, L’appuntamento preme. and I do have a pressing appointment.
FORD FORD
Non fate complimenti. Don’t stand on ceremony on my account!
FALSTAFF FALSTAFF
Passate! Pass!
FORD FORD
Prego! Please!
FALSTAFF FALSTAFF
Ebben… All right… Passiamo insieme! Let’s walk out together!
FORD FORD
Passiamo insieme! Let’s walk out together!

*Musical selection: Falstaff, Act II, scene 1, from Ford’s “E sogno? O realtà?” [“Am I dreaming? Or is this real?”].*

II. The second scene of Act II is set in Ford’s house. The room has four exits and a wide window. A folded screen is propped against the left wall, next to a huge fireplace. On the other side of the room, a wardrobe is set against the right wall.

A. The scene opens with a quiet, chipper, bouncing string melody in the orchestra. The strings capture the spirit of the women who are about to enter—quick-witted, light on their feet, and in high spirits.

ALICE ALICE
Presenteremo un bill Let us present a bill Per una tassa in Parliament Al parlamento, for a special tax Sulla gente grassa. on fat people!
QUICKLY QUICKLY
Comari! Big talker!
ALICE ALICE
Ebben? How did it go?
MEG MEG
Che c’è? What happened?
QUICKLY QUICKLY
Sarà sconfitto! We’ve got him!
ALICE ALICE
Brava! Good for you!
B. That last line descends to the lower range of both singer and orchestra. Mrs. Quickly has to sing an E six notes below middle C, the lowest note most women can comfortably sing. (Musical selection: Falstaff, Act II, scene 2, from Alice’s “Presenteremo un bill” [“Let us present a bill in Parliament”].)
Portate qui la cesta del bucato. Bring the laundry hamper up here.
QUICKLY QUICKLY
Sarà un affare gaio! Oh, this will be a merry business!
ALICE ALICE
Nannetta, e tu non ridi? Anne, why aren’t you laughing?
Che cos’hai? What’s wrong?
Tu piangi? Che cos’hai? You’re crying? What’s happened?
Dillo a tua madre. Tell your mother!

NANNETTA ANNE
Mio padre … My father …
ALICE ALICE
Ebben? Yes? Uh-huh?

NANNETTA ANNE
Mio padre … My father …
ALICE ALICE
Ebben? Yes dear?

NANNETTA ANNE
Mio padre … vuole ch’io mi mariti My father … wants me to marry
Al Dottor Cajo! that awful Dr. Caius!
ALICE ALICE
A quel pedante? To that old fogey?
QUICKLY QUICKLY
Oibò! Oy vey!
MEG MEG
A quel gonzo? To that dolt?
ALICE ALICE
A quel grullo? To that fool?

NANNETTA ANNE
A quel bisavolo! To that ancestor!
TUTTE ALL
No! No! No! No! No! No! No! No! No!
NANNETTA ANNE
Piuttosto paidata viva … I’d rather be stoned alive …
ALICE ALICE
Da una mitraglia di torsi di cavolo! By a volley of cabbage stalks!
NANNETTA ANNE
Evviva! Col Dottor Cajo To life! I don’t have
Non mi sposerò! to marry Dr. Caius!

D. Alice stages this little domestic crisis at this point to allow time for the servants, Ned and Will, to carry in a
huge hamper filled with laundry.

ALICE ALICE
Mette là. Put it there near the window.
Poi, quando avrò chiamato, Now, remember, when I call you,
Vuoterete la cesta you’ll come back in and empty the
Nel fossato. hamper out the window and into
the ditch under the window.

NANNETTA ANNE
Bum! Kersplash!
ALICE ALICE
Alice puts a lute on the table and gives directions to Anne and Meg, who open the screen, placing it between the laundry hamper and the fireplace. Then Alice gives one of the greatest pre-game pep talks in the operatic repertoire.

ALICE
Bravissime! Così.
Più aperto ancora.
Fra poco s’incomincia la commedia.
Gaie comari di Windsor! È l’ora!
L’ora di alzar la risata sonora!
L’alta risata che scoppia,
Che scherza, che sfoglia, armata
Di dardi e di sferza!
Gaie comari, festosa brigata!
Sul lieto viso
Spunti il sorriso,
Splenda del riso, l’acuto fulgor!
Favilla incendiaria
Di gioia nell’aria,
Di gioia nel cor.

ALICE
Very good! Just like that!
Open it a little more…perfect!
The comedy will begin in just a few minutes!
The hour to laugh ourselves hoarse!
The sort of laughter that explodes, that ridicules, that flashes, that is armed with arrows and the lash!
Merry wives! Festive company!
Let smiles blossom
on our faces, and let the brilliant
light of our laughter shine!
Let our laughter be the spark
that lights our joy in the air and joy in our hearts.

F. Mrs. Quickly offers to stand guard. Suddenly, she tells the other women that Falstaff is coming, and Alice sends everyone to their places. The lightning speed and comic timing of this episode has to be seen to be appreciated. Verdi’s inner eye for stage movement was almost as extraordinary as his ear for music.
Scope: At Alice Ford’s house, Alice nimbly thwarts Falstaff’s heavy-handed attempts to catch her. Again, Verdi deftly portrays characters in musical terms. Falstaff’s “love song,” for example, has an old-fashioned, “dated” melody, doubled by two bassoons playing staccato to create a highly comic effect. Another brilliant highlight of this scene is Falstaff’s reminiscence of his youth. The slapstick momentum gathers speed, with the sudden arrival of a furious Ford and several others, all looking for Falstaff, whom the women hide in a laundry hamper. Verdi’s skill in manipulating fast-moving, overlapping vocal lines reaches its apex as the dramatic action of this scene achieves breathtaking complexity.

Outline

I. Falstaff has arrived at Alice’s house. Alice, alone onstage, sits by a table, strumming on her lute. Falstaff is in high spirits and starts warbling along with Alice’s lute.

FALSTAFF
“Alfin t’ho colto, raggiante fior, T’ho colto!” Ed or potrò morir felice. Avrò vissuto molto Dopo quest’ora di beato amor.

ALICE
O soave Sir John!

FALSTAFF
Mia bella Alice! Non so far lo svenevole, Frase fiorita, Ma dirò tosto Un mio pensier colpevole.

ALICE
Cioè?

FALSTAFF
Cioè: vorrei che Mastro Ford Passasse a miglior vita …

ALICE
Perché?

FALSTAFF
Perché? Lo chiedi? Saresti mia Lady E Falstaff il tuo Lord!

ALICE
Povera Lady inver!

FALSTAFF
Degna d’un re. T’immagino Fregiata del mio stemma, Mostrar fra gemma e gemma La pompa del tuo sen …

ALICE
Povera Lady inver!

FALSTAFF
Degna d’un re. T’immagino Fregiata del mio stemma, Mostrar fra gemma e gemma La pompa del tuo sen …

ALICE
Povera Lady inver!
Cerchio d’un guardinfante  the sway of your skirt,
Risplenderai più fulgida  you will shine more radiantly
D’un ampio arcobaleno.  than even a wide rainbow.

A. Falstaff’s stiff and vaguely military old-style melody here is doubled by two bassoons playing staccato (in short notes). The effect is slapstick. (Musical selection: Falstaff, Act II, scene 2, from Falstaff’s entrance: “Affin’ t’ho colto raggiante fior” [“At last I’ve picked you, radiant flower”].)

B. Falstaff tries to embrace Alice, but she is too quick for him. Falstaff expresses his love for her and she pretends to be shocked. She remarks on his size, which inspires him to reminisce on his youth.

FALSTAFF
Quand’ero paggio  You know, when I was the page
Del Duca di Norfolk  of the Duke of Norfolk,
Ero sottile, sottile, sottile  I was skinny, skinny, skinny,
Ero un miraggio  I was a runt,
Vago, leggiero,  lovely and light,
Gentile, gentile, gentile  I was tender meat, tender meat, tender meat.
Quello era il tempo  That was the time
Del mio verde Aprile.  of my green April.
Quello era il tempo  That was the time
Del mio lieto Maggio.  Of my happy May.
Tant’era smilzo,  I was so slender,
Flessibile e svelto  flexible and thin
Che sarei guizzato  that I could have
Attraverso un anello.  slipped through a ring.

C. Verdi’s setting of these words is brilliant. In an earlier time, this would have been called a patter-style aria, and it goes by in a flash, expressing the slim, young Falstaff. (Musical selection: Falstaff, Act II, scene 2, from Falstaff’s “Quando’ero paggio” [“You know, when I was the page”].)

ALICE
Voi mi celiate.  You are making fun of me.
Io temo i vostri inganni.  I’m afraid you’re trying to fool me.
Temo che amiate …  I’m afraid you’re really in love with …
FALSTAFF
Chi?  Whom?
ALICE
Meg.
FALSTAFF
Coei?  Meg?
ALICE
M’è in uggis la sua faccia.  Why I don’t find her attractive at all!
FALSTAFF
Non traditemi John …  Don’t lie to me, John.
ALICE
Mi par mill’anni  I’ve wanted to have you in my arms
D’avveri fra le braccia  for what seems to have been a thousand years.
T’amo.  I love you …

[alice is doing her best to fend off falstaff.]

ALICE
Per carità!  For heaven’s sake!
FALSTAFF
Vieni!  Come!
[Mrs. Quickly interrupts:]
QUICKLY
Signora Alice!
FALSTAFF
Chi Va là?
QUICKLY
Che c’è?
QUICKLY
Mia signora! C’è
E vuoi parlarva, sbuffa,
Srepetta, s’abbaruffà …
FALSTAFF
Alla malora!
QUICKLY
E vuol passare
E la trattengo a stento …
FALSTAFF
Dove m’ascondo?
ALICE
Dietro il paravento.

[Falstaff hides behind the screen. Mrs. Quickly signals to Meg to enter the room.]
MEG
Alice! Che spavento!
Che chiasso! Che discordia!
Non perdere un momento.
Fuggi …
ALICE
Misericordia!
Che avvenne?
MEG
Il tuo consorte vien
Gridando: “accorr’uomo!”
Dice …
ALICE [in a low voice:]
Parla più forte.
MEG
Che vuoi scannare un uomo!

[Meg is shaking with laughter, and Alice hisses “Don’t laugh” at her, although she herself is having too much fun at Falstaff’s expense.]
La vuole ad ogni costo and that he’ll find him
Scoprir … at all costs …

[Meg and Alice are thoroughly enjoying the success of their plan to this point, when suddenly, Mrs. Quickly bursts into the room:]

QUICKLY
Signora Alice! Mistress Alice!
Vien Mastro Ford! Master Ford is coming!
Salvatevi! Save yourself!
E come una tempesta! He’s like some great tempest.
Strepa, tuona, fulmina, He’s raging, storming, cursing.
Si dà dei pugni in testa, He’s striking his head with his fists.
Scoppia in minacce He’s exploding with threats.
Ed urla … He’s shouting …

[Mrs. Quickly’s lines, accompanied by barking French horns, are not part of the women’s plan. Alice asks Mrs. Quickly in a quiet voice:]

ALICE
Dassenno oppur da burla? Is this for real, or is it part of our joke?
QUICKLY
Dassenno. No joke.
Egli scavalca He’s climbing over the
Le siepi del giardino .. hedges in the garden …
Lo segue una gran calca A huge crowd of people is
Di gente …è già vicino … following him …
Metr’io vi parlo ei valca Even now he’s entering
L’ingresso … the house …
FORD [off stage:] FORD [off stage:]
Malandrino! Thief!
FALSTAFF FALSTAFF
Il diavolo cavalca The devil rides
Sull’arco d’un violino! on a violin’s bow.

D. Falstaff’s last lines (“The devil rides on a violin’s bow”) are Boito’s creation—an inside dig at violinists. The music in this episode is unlike anything else Verdi wrote—the speed at which the singers sing and events happen is dazzling, and Verdi does not use any musical device that would slow down the dramatic action. (Musical selection: Falstaff, Act II, scene 2, from Alice’s “Voi mi celiate” [“You’re making fun of me”].)

[Ford bursts into the room:]

FORD
Chiudete le porte! Lock the doors!
Sbratate le scale! Block the stairs!
Seguitemi a caccia! Follow me on my hunt!
Scoviamo il cignale! We’ll spear the boar!

[Dr. Caius and Fenton run in. Ford sings to Caius:]
Correte sull’orme! Find his tracks!
Sull’osta. Follow his scent!

[to Fenton:]
Tu fruga negli anditi. You search the corridors.

[Bardolph and Pistol run in, carrying clubs and shouting:]
BARDOLFO, PISTOLA BARDOLPH, PISTOL
A caccia! To the hunt!

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FORD [pointing to the bedroom at right:]
Sventate la fuga!
Cercate là dentro!
ALICE
Sei disennato?
Che fai?
FORD
Che c’è dentro quel cesto?
ALICE
Il bucato.

[A violent burst in the orchestra puts an exclamation mark on Alice’s words “the laundry!”]

FORD
Mi lavi! Rea moglie!

[Ford hands Dr. Caius a huge keyring and tells him:]
Tu, piglia le chiavi.
Rovista le casse!

[Another violent burst in the orchestra puts an exclamation mark on Ford’s command to Dr. Caius, who runs out of the room. Ford turns back to Alice, furiously:]
Ben tu mi lavi!

[He kicks the hamper, obviously convinced that Falstaff is inside:]
Al diavolo i cenci!

[He shouts out the door:]
Sprangatemi l’uscio del parco!

[Ford turns back to the hamper, which he opens and searches, throwing the contents out, shouting:]
Camicie ..gonelle …
Or ti sguscio, briccon!
Stronfinacci! Via! Via! …
Cuffie rotte! Ti sguscio …
Lenzuola …Berretti da notte …
Non c’è …

[Ford overturns the hamper, while Alice, Meg, and Mrs. Quickly survey the mess:]
ALICE, MEG, QUICKLY
Che uragano!
Che uragano!

[Ford runs screaming from the room, momentarily leaving Alice, Meg, and Mrs. Quickly alone, with the quaking Falstaff still hiding behind the screen. At Meg’s suggestion, Falstaff now squeezes into the hamper, and the women pile the laundry on top of him. At this point, Anne and Fenton sneak into the room. The two lovers hide behind the screen, oblivious to all that is going on around them. Their love duet is shattered when Dr. Caius, Ford, Bardolph, and Pistol are heard from outside the room:]

CAJUS
Al ladro!

FORD
Al pagliardo!

(Musical selection: Falstaff, Act II, scene 2, from Ford’s entrance and “Chiudete le porte! [“Lock the doors!”].)
CAJUS [running into the room:] CAIUS
Squartatelo! Cut him into quarters!

[Ford, Bardolph, and Pistol run into the room, followed by a crowd of people, curious to see Falstaff finally get his
due. Meg and Mrs. Quickly stay next to the hamper.]

FORD FORD
Al ladro! After the thief!
C’è? Is he there?

PISTOLA PISTOL
No. No.

FORD [to Bardolph:] FORD
C’è? Is he there?

BARDOLFO BARDOLPH
Non c’è, no. He’s not there, no.

FORD FORD
Vada a soqquadro la casa. Then let the house be turned upside down.

CAJUS CAIUS
Non trovo nessuno. I can’t find anyone.

FORD FORD
Eppur giuro And yet I would swear
Che l’uomo è qua dentro. that he is here, somewhere.
Ne sono sicuro, I’m sure of it, sure of it,
Sicuro, sicuro! absolutely sure!

CAJUS CAIUS
Sir John! Sarò gaio Sir John! I’ll be the happiest guy in town
Quel dì che ti veda on the day that sees you swinging by your neck,
Dar calci a rovaio! kicking at the air!

FORD [looking at the wardrobe:] FORD
Vien fuora, furfante! Come out, you scoundrel!
O bombardo le mura! Or I’ll blow this thing up!

CAJUS CAIUS
T’arrendi! Surrender!

FORD FORD
Vien fuora! Codardo! Come out, you coward!
Sugliardo! You repulsive beast!

[Finally, the wardrobe opens.]

Non c’è! He’s not there!

CAJUS CAIUS [rummaging through a chest:]
Vien fuora! Come out!
Non c’è! He’s not here, either!
Pappalardo! Beòn! Glutton! Drunkard!
Bada a te! I’ll find you!

[Ford opens the tiny drawer on the table and searches through it screaming:]

FORD FORD
Scagnardo! Falsardo! Barking dog! Liar!

[At the mention of “barking dog” the horns bark forth.]

CAJUS, FORD CAIUS, FORD
Scagnardo! Falsardo! Rogue!
Dr. Caius and Ford sing their lines overlapping with each other, as the violins play a furious and rapid four-note phrase, against which the low strings play an overlapping phrase. The effect of all this overlapping is one of incredible musical compression. Meanwhile, Anne and Fenton kiss each other loudly behind the screen. Ford and Dr. Caius freeze at the sound of the smooch and sing:

CAJUS  
C’è.  He’s there.

CAIUS  
C’è.  He’s there.

(Musical selection: Falstaff, Act II, scene 2, from Dr. Caius’s “Al ladro! [“After the thief!”].)

[Slowly creeping toward the screen, behind which they believe are Falstaff and Alice, Ford and Dr. Caius quietly sing:]

FORD  
Se t’agguanto!  If I catch you!
CAJUS  
Se t’acceffo!  If I snap you up!
FORD  
Ti sconquasso!  I’ll shatter you!
CAJUS  
T’arronciglio!  I’ll hook you like a dog!
FORD  
Ti rompo il ceffo!  I’ll smash your face!
CAJUS  
Guai a te!  Woe to you! Woe!
FORD  
Prega il tuo santo!  Pray to your saint!

(Bardolph and Pistol and various neighbors re-enter.)

BARDOLFO  
Non si trova.  He’s nowhere to be found.
PISTOLA  
Non si coglie.  He can’t be caught.
FORD  
Psss … qua tutti.  Shhh, all of you.
L’ho trovato.  I’ve found him.

(Musical selection: Falstaff, Act II, scene 2, from Ford’s “Se t’agguanto!” [“If I catch you!”].)

FORD  
Là c’è Falstaff, Falstaff is back there, 
Con mia moglie. with my wife!
BARDOLFO  
Sozzo can vituperato! Filthy, disgraceful dog!
CAIUS, PISTOLA  
Zitto! Zip it!
FORD  
Zitto! Shaddup!
Urlerai dopo! Hush! Hush!

[Suddenly, on the other side of the room, Falstaff’s head pops out of the hamper:]

FALSTAFF  
Affogo! I’m suffocating!
QUICKLY  

Sta sotto, sta sotto!  
FORD  
Là s’è udito  
Il suon di un bacio.  

[Again Falstaff’s head pops up from the hamper:]  

FALSTAFF  
Affogo!  
MEG  
Or questi s’ensorge.  
QUICKLY  
Se l’altro ti scorge  
Sei morto.  

FALSTAFF [from inside the hamper:]  
Son cotto!  
BARDOLFO  
Noi dobbiamo pigliare il topo  
Mentre sta rodendo il cacio.  

FORD  
Ragoniam.  
FENTON [from behind the screen:]  
Bella! Ridente!  
O come pieghi  
Doenescamente!  
Come ti vidi  
M’innamorai,  
E tu sorridi  
Perché lo sai.  

NANNETTA  
Mentre quei vecchi  
Corron la giostra,  
Noi di sottocchi  
Corriam la nostra.  
L’amor non ode  
Tuon né bufere.  
Vola all sfere  
Beate e gode.  

FORD  
Colpo non vibro  
Senz’un piano di battaglia.  
BARDOLFO, PISTOLA, GENTE  
Bravo!  
CAIUS  
Un uom di quel calibro  
Con un soffio ci sbalaglia!  
FORD  
La mia tattica maestra:  
Le sue mosse pria registra.  
[to Pistol and two others:]  
Voi sarete l’ala destra.
[to Bardolph and Dr. Caius:]
Voi sarem l’ala sinistra.   You will be my left flank.
[to everyone else in the room:]
E costor con pie’ gagliardo And the rest of you, with vigorous foot,
Sfonderanno il baluardo. will kick down the ramparts.
TUTTE   ALL
Bravo, bravo, generale! Bravo, bravo, general!
CAIUS   CAIUS
Aspettiam un tuo segnale. We await your signal.
FENTON   FENTON
Già un sogno bello Already, a beautiful dream
D’imene albeggia. is dawning.
NANNETTA   ANNE
Lo spiritello The little sprite
D’amor volteggia. of love is flitting.
[Falstaff’s head pops up out of the hamper again:]
FALSTAFF   FALSTAFF
Che caldo! It’s so hot!
MEG   MEG
Sta sotto! Stay down!
FALSTAFF   FALSTAFF
Mi squaglio! I’m melting!
QUICKLY   QUICKLY
Sta sotto! Get down!
MEG   MEG
Il ribaldo vorrebbe That scoundrel would like
Un ventaglio. A ventilation fan!
FALSTAFF   FALSTAFF
Un breve spiraglio A little air hole,
Non chiedo di più. that’s all I’m asking for.
QUICKLY   QUICKLY
Ti metto il bavaglio If you continue to talk
Se parli. I’m going to put a gag on you!
MEG, QUICKLY   MEG, QUICKLY
Giù! Giù! Giù! Down! Down! Down!

II. The scene now reaches its climax.
A. The segment flies by at astonishing speed.

NANNETTA [to Fenton:]   ANNE
Tutto delira, Everything is delirious,
Sospirò e riso, I sigh and I laugh,
Sorrisi il viso my face smiles and
E’ il cor sospira. my heart smiles.
Dolci richiami d’amor. These are the sweet calls of love.
Sì, t’amò, t’amò, t’amò. Yes, I love you, I love you, I love you.
FENTON [to Anne:]   FENTON
Fra quelle ciglia Through your lashes
Veggo due fari I see two beacons,
A meraviglia wonderfully
Sereni e chiari. peaceful and bright.
Dimmi se m’ami? You love me?
T’amò! T’amò! I love you! I love you!
FORD
Senti! Listen!
Accosta un po’ l’orecchio! Put your ear a little closer!
CAIUS
Sento, sento. Yes, yes, I hear them, I hear them!
PISTOLA
Ma fra poco il lieto giuoco But in just a moment his happy play
Turberà dura lezion. will be disturbed by a rather severe lesson!
Egli canta, ma fra poco He’s singing, but soon
Muterà la sua canzon. he’ll have to change his song!
GENTE DEL VICINATO NEIGHBORS
S’egli cade più non scappa, He can’t escape,
Nessun più lo può salvare. and no one can save him!
Nel tuo diavolo t’incappa He’s about to meet his devil,
Che tu possa stramazzar! and the fat man will fall!
BARDOLFO BARDOLPH
E la voce della donna I hear a woman’s voice
Che risponde al cavalier. answering the knight.
MEG [referring to Falstaff:] MEG
Guardando il Messer Look at him
Che brontola e cuoce grumbling and stewing
Nel nostro panier, in our basket!
QUICKLY QUICKLY
Costui s’è infardato di tanta viltà. He is filthy with wickedness!
FORD
Che patetici lamenti! Pathetic! Little do they
Su quel nido d’usignuoli know that thunder is about
Scoppierà fra poco il tuon. to burst over their little nest.
CAIUS CAIUS
Sento, intendo I hear, I understand
E vedo chiaro and I am witness
Delle femmine, to the deceit
Delle femmine gl’inganni. of women!
FORD FORD
Zitto! Quiet! This is the moment.

[Falstaff pops up from the hamper again:]
FALSTAFF FALSTAFF
Ouff! Cesto molesto! Uff! Irksome basket!

[Alice re-enters the room and walks over to the hamper. No one notices her because their attention is riveted on the screen.]
ALICE ALICE
Silenzio! Silence!
FORD FORD
Quest’è il momento. This is the moment!
Zitto! Attenti! Quiet! Pay attention!
FALSTAFF [popping up again:] FALSTAFF
Protesto! I protest this treatment!
MEG, QUICKLY MEG, QUICKLY
[pushing Falstaff’s head back down:]
Che bestia restia. What a restless beast!
FORD FORD
Attenti a me. Now pay attention to me!
FALSTAFF [popping up again:] FALSTAFF
Portatemi via! Get me out of here!
CAIUS CAIUS
Dà il signal. Ford’s giving the signal.
MEG, QUICKLY MEG, QUICKLY
E matto furibondo! He’s stark raving mad!

[As Ford begins his countdown, Falstaff cries from the hamper:]

FALSTAFF FALSTAFF
Aiuto! Help!
FORD FORD
Uno … One …
FALSTAFF FALSTAFF
Aiuto! Help!
FORD FORD
Due … Two …
FALSTAFF FALSTAFF
Aiuto! Help!
FORD FORD
Tre. Three.

B. This fantastic intertwining and balancing of different voice parts, and stage action is unique in the repertoire. (Musical selection: Falstaff, Act II, scene 2, from Ford’s “Là c’è Falstaff con mia moglie” [“Falstaff is back there with my wife!”].)
Lecture Thirty-Two

_Falstaff, Act II, Conclusion; Act III_

**Scope:** Falstaff meets his downfall, literally, as Alice Ford’s servants toss him, still hidden in the laundry hamper, out of the window and into the river below. Falstaff’s neighbors take one more opportunity to mock him, then conclude their entertainment with a double wedding, which holds some surprises. The closing ensemble of the opera is a fugue, which Verdi, with characteristic genius, has used to supply material for earlier passages in the opera. After the premiere of _Falstaff_, Verdi focused on building a rest home for musicians, tending to his estate, entertaining visitors, spending time with his grandchildren, and working on various musical ventures, including supervising performances of his operas across Europe. _Falstaff_ was Verdi’s last opera. Giuseppina died in 1897, and Verdi died from a stroke on January 27, 1901.

**Outline**

I. Ford and friends have just charged the screen, expecting to find Falstaff there with Ford’s wife, Alice.

   A. To their surprise, they find Ford’s daughter, Anne, and her boyfriend, Fenton.

   CAJUS
   Non è lui!
   ALICE, MEG, QUICKLY
   E il finimondo!
   TUTTE
   Sbalordimento!
   NANNETTA, FENTON, CAJUS
   Ah!
   FORD
   Ancora nuove rivolte!
   [to Fenton:]
   Tu va pe’ fatti tuo!
   L’ho detto mille volte:
   Costei non fa per voi.

   [Anne runs from the room in tears and Fenton sullenly creeps away. Suddenly, blaring brass fanfares accompany Bardolph who shouts:]

   BARDOLFO
   E là! Ferma!
   FORD
   Dove?
   PISTOLA
   Là! Sulle scale.
   FORD
   Squartatelo!
   TUTTE
   A caccia!

   B. All the men run to the stairwell at the rear of the stage and exit.

   QUICKLY
   Che caccia infernale!
   [Alice calls her manservants, who enter along with Anne and a page.]
ALICE
Rovesciate quel cesto
Dalla finestra nell’acqua del fosso …
La! Presso alle giuncaie
Davanti al crocchio
Delle lavandaie.
NANNETTA, MEG, QUICKLY
Si, si, si, si!
NANNETTA
C’è dentro un pezzo grosso.
[With this line, Boito indulged in a pun. The phrase “pezzo grosso” not only means “heavy piece” but also is Italian slang for an important person, a “heavy weight.”]
ALICE [to the page:]
Tu chiama mio marito.
[to Meg:]
Oli narreremo
Il nostro caso pazzo.
Solo al vedere
Il cavaliere nel guazzo,
D’ogni gelosa ubbiada
Sarà guarito.
[Meanwhile, Mrs. Quickly and Anne are monitoring the progress of the servants who have managed to get the hamper off the ground. The heaviness of the hamper is reflected in the ponderous, almost staggering orchestral music.]
QUICKLY
Pesa!
[And Alice and Meg encourage the men who are staggering under the load.]
ALICE, MEG
Corragio!
NANNETTA
Il fonda ha fatto crac!
[The hamper nears the edge of the window; the music quiets down to almost nothing as the hamper tips over the ledge.]
TUTTE
Trionfo!
[The hamper disappears out the window. The women rush over and look out, exclaiming “What a splash!” Ford and the other men re-enter the room, and Alice leads her husband to the window. Everyone follows and looks out. What they see provokes great amusement. (Musical selection: Falstaff, Act II, scene 2, from Dr. Caius’s “Non è lui” [“It’s not him!”].)]

C. The hamper disappears out the window. The women rush over and look out, exclaiming “What a splash!” Ford and the other men re-enter the room, and Alice leads her husband to the window. Everyone follows and looks out. What they see provokes great amusement. (Musical selection: Falstaff, Act II, scene 2, from Dr. Caius’s “Non è lui” [“It’s not him!”].)

II. Act III opens with Falstaff back at the Garter Inn, where he is cursing the world and still laboring under the illusion that he is a “bold and skillful knight” who did not deserve the humiliations heaped upon him by the Merry Wives of Windsor.

A. Falstaff, ultimately, is a good man, whose life spirit is as big as his body.

B. Mrs. Quickly comes back to the Garter Inn and claims that Falstaff’s dunking was perpetrated by servants and that Alice is weeping with grief. Falstaff again falls for Mrs. Quickly’s ruse and agrees to go to the Royal Park at midnight disguised as a Black Huntsman. There, he is again made to look a fool as he is
terrified by children disguised as fairies. A crowd of neighbors calls him names and finally reveals that Mr. Fountain was, in fact, Mr. Ford in disguise.

C. Falstaff finally agrees that he “behaved like an ass.” It is here, near the opera’s conclusion, that Falstaff makes the observation that raises him above the level of a knave and clown, an observation that gives him a measure of dignity:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FALSTAFF</th>
<th>FALSTAFF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ogni sorta di gente dozzinale</td>
<td>Every sort of common person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mi beffa e se ne gloria;</td>
<td>taunts me and insults me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pur, senza me costar</td>
<td>and boasts about it;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Con tanta boria</td>
<td>and yet, despite all their vanity and conceit,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non avrebbero</td>
<td>without me, they’d have</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Un briciolo di sale</td>
<td>little interest in their lives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son io, son io, son io</td>
<td>It is I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Che vi fa scaltri.</td>
<td>who makes you clever.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L’arguzia mia crea</td>
<td>It is my cleverness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L’arguzia degli altri.</td>
<td>that creates cleverness in others.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

D. Verdi sets Falstaff’s monologue in a very free, half-lyric, half-declamatory style. It is replete with wonderful little inflections, to which the orchestra supplies the barest of punctuation. (Musical selection: Falstaff, Act III, scene 2, Falstaff’s monologue, from “Ogni sorta di gente dozzinale” [“Every sort of common person”].)

E. The crowd gathered around Falstaff acknowledges his words:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TUTTI</th>
<th>ALL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ma bravo!</td>
<td>Why, good for you!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FORD</td>
<td>FORD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per gli dei!</td>
<td>By the gods!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Se non ridessi</td>
<td>if I weren’t laughing so much</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ti sconquasserei!</td>
<td>I’d stomp on you!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ma basta. Ed or</td>
<td>But enough.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vo’ che m’ascolti.</td>
<td>Everyone listen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coronarем la mascherata bella</td>
<td>We’ll crown this beautiful masquerade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cogli sponsali</td>
<td>with the wedding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Della regina della fate.</td>
<td>of the queen of the fairies.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

F. Now it is time for Ford to suffer his fall. He has arranged for his daughter, Anne, to marry Dr. Caius (against her will). Earlier, he had ordered that Anne be dressed as the Queen of the Fairies. Unbeknownst to Ford or Dr. Caius, it is Bardolph who is dressed as the Queen of the Fairies, with a veil hiding his face. The orchestra strikes up a rustic three-step.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FORD</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Già s’avanza la coppia degli sposi.</td>
<td>The procession has already begun!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attenti!</td>
<td>Attention!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FALSTAFF, CORO</td>
<td>FALSTAFF, CHORUS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attenti!</td>
<td>Attention!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FORD</td>
<td>FORD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eccola in bianca vesta</td>
<td>Here she is, dressed in white,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Col velo e il serto delle rose in testa</td>
<td>with rosy cheeks,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E il fidanzato sua ch’io le disponi</td>
<td>and the garland of the virgin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circondatela, O ninfe!</td>
<td>surrounds her, oh, nymphs!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Dr. Caius and Bardolph, disguised as the Queen of the Fairies, stand at center stage. Children dressed as fairies surround them. Alice presents to Ford two more people: One is a woman completely covered in a veil; the other is a
man wearing a mask and cloak. Of course, they are Anne and Fenton. Alice knows this and the audience knows it, but Ford and Dr. Caius do not.

ALICE

Un'altra coppia
D'amanti deslosi
Chiede d'essere ammessa
Agli augurosi
Connub!

FORD
E sia.
Farem la festa doppia!
Avvicinate i lumi.
Il ciel v'accompia.

[The ceremony ends and the couples are united.]

FORD
Giù le maschere e i vegli!
Apoteòsi!

TUTTI
Ah! Ah! Ah! Ah!

CAIUS
Spavento!

FORD
Fenton con mia figlia!

CAIUS
Ho sposato Bardolfo!

TUTTI
Ah! Ah!

CAIUS
Spavento! Spavento!

TUTTI
Vittoria! Evviva! Evviva!

FORD
Oh! Meraviglia!

ALICE
L'uom cade spesso
Nelle reti ordite
Dalle malizie sue.

[Falstaff approaches Ford and bows.]

FALSTAFF
Caro buon Messer Ford
Ed ora, dice,
Lo scornato chi è?

FORD [pointing at Dr. Caius:]

CAIUS [pointing at Ford:]

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FORD     FORD
No.     No.
CAJUS     CAIUS
Sì!     Yes! Yes! You! You! You!
BARDOLFO    BARDOLPH
Voi!     Both of you!
FENTON    FENTON
Lor!     Both of them!
CAJUS     CAIUS
Noi!     Okay, both of us!
FALSTAFF    FALSTAFF
Tutti e due!     Both!
ALICE     ALICE
No! Tutti e tre!     No! All three of you!
[Pointing to Anne and Fenton, Alice sings to her husband:]
Volgiti e mira     Take a look
Quell’ansie leggiadre.     at these wonderful kids.
They’re so in love.

NANNETTA    ANNE
Perdonateci, O padre.     Forgive us, father!
FORD     FORD
Chi schivare non può     The father who cannot
La propria noia     control his own children
L’accetti di buon grado.     must accept their wishes.

(Musical selection: Falstaff, Act III, scene 2, from the crowd’s “Ma bravo!” [“Why, good for you!”].)

G. The opera comes to its end with reconciliations and good spirits.

FORD     FORD
Facciamo il parentado     Let us be a family and may
E che il ciel vi dia gioia.     heaven bless you and give you joy.
TUTTI     ALL
Evvvia!     Right on!
FALSTAFF    FALSTAFF
Un coro e terminiam la scena.     One last chorus and we’ll end this scene.
FORD     FORD
Poi con Sir John Falstaff     After which, Sir John Falstaff,
Tutti, andiamo a cena.     we’ll all go to dinner.
TUTTI     ALL
Evviva!     Food!
FALSTAFF, poi TUTTI     FALSTAFF, then ALL
Tutto nel mondo è burla.     Everything in the world is a jest.
L’uom è nato burlone,     Man is born to be made a fool of.
Nel suo cervello ciurla     In his mind, reason
Sempre la sua ragione,     is always wavering,
Tutti gabbati!     everything is a joke!
Irride     We make each other
crazy, all of us.
Ma ride ben,     But he who laughs well,
Ride ben chi ride     he who laughs well
La risata final.     has the last laugh.
H. This fantastic closing ensemble, composed as fugue, was one of the first parts of *Falstaff* that Verdi composed.
   1. The thematic elements from which the fugue is constructed first appeared in Act I of the opera.
   2. Verdi appropriated various thematic elements of the fugue and used them in earlier parts of the opera. Thus, the opera was seeded with material that would achieve its own apotheosis in the final moments! *(Musical selection: *Falstaff*, Act III, scene 2, from Ford’s “Facciamo il parentado” [“Let us be a family”].)*

III. After the premiere of *Falstaff*, Verdi donated funds and approved the architectural plans for the *Casa di Riposa per Musicisti*—the “House of Rest for Musicians”—which he referred to as his greatest creation.
   A. Since it opened in 1902, there has never been an empty room at the Casa di Riposa. Thousands of men and women have spent their last years there. Verdi requested that musicians be admitted according to the following priorities: first composers, then singers, conductors, chorus masters, and orchestra players, in that order. Verdi bequeathed a portion of his royalties to the Casa in perpetuity.
   B. Verdi retired to his estate at Sant’Agata but continued to be busy with new editions and translations of his operas, overseeing performances of his operas, doting on his grandchildren (those of his adopted daughter, Filomena Maria), coping with an endless stream of visitors, and maintaining his estate.
   C. Giuseppina Verdi died in November 1897.
   D. Verdi suffered a stroke on January 21, 1901, in Milan’s Grand Hotel. The hotel was closed to all incoming guests, and the traffic outside was rerouted during the days following the stroke. The entire nation kept vigil.
   E. Verdi died on January 27, 1901. The city of Milan went into mourning.
   F. The funeral itself was modest, although an estimated 200,000 people silently lined the streets of Milan as the funeral procession passed by. Verdi was buried at the Cimitero Monumentale, then moved, with Giuseppina, to the Casa di Riposo.
   G. Verdi’s wealth at his death was estimated to be about $24 million in today’s values. In his will, he provided for almost everybody and every educational and medical institution in the duchy of Parma.