

Rigoletto

An opera in 3 acts by Giuseppe Verdi
(after the drama *Le roi s'amuse* by Victor Hugo)

Act I

Scene 1

At a ball at the ducal court of Mantua, the hunchbacked jester Rigoletto mocks the courtiers cuckolded by the profligate Duke, stirring them to plans of vengeance. Count Monterone appeals to the Duke for the return of his dishonoured daughter, but is cruelly mocked by Rigoletto. Enraged, Monterone calls down a father's curse on the terrified jester.

Scene 2

Outside his house, Rigoletto encounters Sparafucile, a professional assassin, but has no need of his services. Rigoletto warns his daughter Gilda to remain concealed in their home. She does not reveal to him that she has fallen in love with a handsome young man she has encountered on her way to church. The object of her affections is the Duke, who appears as soon as Rigoletto has left, bribing Gilda's nurse to admit him and to speak well of him to Gilda. He tells her he is a poor student. After he leaves, the courtiers come to abduct Gilda, believing her to be Rigoletto's mistress. They trick Rigoletto into assisting them, assuring him that it is the Countess Ceprano they are abducting from the neighboring house. When he realizes what has happened, he is distraught. He remembers the curse.

Act II

The courtiers describe their abduction of Gilda to the Duke. He is delighted to discover that she has been brought to his palace and awaits him in his bedroom. Rigoletto now enters, feigning indifference but desperately seeking signs of the whereabouts of his daughter. When he realizes what has happened he first curses, then pleads with the courtiers for her return, but to no avail. Gilda appears *en deshabelle*, and Rigoletto swears vengeance on the Duke.

Act III

The Duke has been lured to a remote inn by Sparafucile's sister Maddalena. Rigoletto has paid Sparafucile to kill the Duke and to deliver his body in a sack so that he may himself throw it into the Mincio. Rigoletto brings Gilda with him to spy on the inn, hoping to reinforce the notion that the Duke is not a man of honour in affairs of the heart. Gilda is unimpressed. Rigoletto sends her home to change into men's clothing for their flight to Verona. Infatuated with the Duke herself, Maddalena begs her brother to spare him and to murder the jester instead. His sense of professional responsibility offended, Sparafucile refuses, but does go so far as to agree that if anyone else should happen to show up at the inn on this wild and stormy night, he will murder them instead. Gilda, returning and hearing all this, sees her chance to help the man she loves. She boldly walks up to the door of the inn, knocks, is admitted and promptly stabbed and stuffed into the sack for Rigoletto. Rigoletto is just about to throw the sack in the river when he hears the Duke still singing in the inn. Wildly he opens the sack to find his dying daughter, who with her last breath assures him that she will pray for him with her mother in heaven. Again, Rigoletto recalls Monterone's curse.

Biography of Giuseppe Verdi

Giuseppe Verdi was to opera in the Italian tradition what Beethoven was to the symphony. When he arrived on the scene some had suggested that effective opera after Rossini was not possible. Verdi, however, took the form to new heights of drama and musical expression. Partisans see him as at least the equal of Wagner, even though his style and musical persona were of an entirely different cast. In the end, both Verdi's popular vein -- as heard in the operas *Rigoletto*, *Il trovatore*, and *La traviata* -- and his deeper side -- found in *Aida*, *Otello*, and *Falstaff* -- demonstrate his mastery and far-reaching development of Italian opera.

Verdi showed talent by the age of seven and even played organ at a local church. Around this time he was given an old piano, which he quickly learned to play with proficiency. He moved to Busseto in 1823 and began study the following year with Ferdinando Provesi. By age 15 he had become an assistant church organist and had already started composing. Beginning in 1832, he studied privately with Vincenzo Lavigna in Milan, after the Conservatory there turned him away. He returned to Busseto and married Margherita Barezzi in 1836. Having achieved publication of some songs, he moved to Milan in 1839 and composed his first opera, *Oberto*. It was a success, though his next effort, *Un giorno di regno*, was an abject failure. Worse, Verdi's wife died during its composition. (Their two children had died in the previous two years.) Stunned and depressed, the composer struggled on to rebound with *Nabucco* (1842) and *I lombardi* (1843). *Macbeth*, *Luisa Miller*, and other operas came in the 1840s, most with great success. Around 1847, Verdi developed a relationship with soprano Giuseppina Strepponi and the two lived together for many years on Verdi's farm, Sant'Agata, before finally marrying in 1859.

In the period 1851-1853, the composer wrote three of his most popular operas. *Rigoletto* (1851) and *Il trovatore* (1853) were instant successes, but *La traviata* (1853) was a disappointment at its premiere, though a year later, with minor revisions, it was warmly received. After an extended excursion to Paris in 1853, Verdi returned to Busseto and turned out *Simon Boccanegra* (1857) and *Un ballo in maschera* (1859), both embroiling him in politics, an activity he was already immersed in, since he served in the local parliament and later in national parliament as senator. In St. Petersburg, Verdi's *La forza del destino* premiered in 1862 and *Don Carlos* in Paris in 1867. Having relocated to Genoa, Verdi composed *Aida* in the years 1870-1871. Its Cairo premiere in 1871 was a success, but the composer then gave up opera, at least for a time.

His String Quartet (1873) and Requiem (1874) showed his creative juices were still very much alive. His next opera, *Otello*, came finally in 1886, Verdi working slowly and getting sidetracked revising earlier operas. One more opera came from his pen, *Falstaff*, in 1893, which scored a stunning success. Critical opinion has it that his last three operas are his finest, that the elderly composer became bolder and more imaginative in his later years.

In these later years, Verdi also worked to found a hospital and, in Milan, a home for retired musicians. In 1897, Giuseppina Verdi died and the composer thereafter lived at the Grand Hotel in Milan, finding companionship with retired soprano Teresa Stolz. A year later, his *Quattro pezzi sacri* premiered in Paris. This would be the composer's last work. On January 21, 1901, Verdi suffered a stroke and died six days later. Verdi's death left all Italy in mourning. He still is revered throughout the music world as the greatest of operatic composers and, more particularly, in Italy as a patriotic hero and champion of human rights.

Casting 16 April 2010:

Conductor	<u>Marco Armiliato</u>
Duke of Mantua	<u>Giuseppe Gipali</u>
Rigoletto, his jester	<u>Dmitri Hvorostovsky</u>
Gilda, Rigoletto's daughter	<u>Patrizia Ciofi</u>

Duration:
3 hours, 2 breaks