

# RIGOLETTO

2022-23 Guidebook



EXPERIENCE OPERA  
WITH US!

# A LETTER TO TEACHERS

Dear Teachers,

Opera Colorado is pleased to provide engaging educational programs and performances for students across Colorado. What follows is a guide we hope you and your students find useful in exploring Opera Colorado's production of Giuseppe Verdi's *Rigoletto*.

In the spirit of exploration, we have included various lessons connecting the production with different subjects. The lessons reference the Colorado Department of Education's Academic Standards, focusing specifically on high school expectations. Please feel free to adapt Guidebook materials and use them in the manner most helpful for you and your students. We encourage you to expand, alter, and modify these lessons to best suit you and your students' needs. Following the performance, you will receive a link to a brief survey. Your feedback is much appreciated. We look forward to seeing you at the opera!

*Thank you!*

*Opera Colorado makes every effort to ensure the information provided in this Guidebook is accurate. With the exception of materials used for educational purposes, none of the contents of this Guidebook may be reprinted without the permission of Opera Colorado's Education & Community Programs department. Unless otherwise noted, the materials in this Guidebook were written and created by Bethany Wood.*



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# Table of Contents

## Story

---

- 3 Meet the Artists**
- 4 Meet the Production Team**
- 5 Meet the Music Team**
- 6 Quick Facts**
- 7 Synopsis**

## Background

---

- 12 Play vs. Opera**
- 13 Composer Biography**
- 15 Librettist Biography**
- 17 Censorship**
- 18 Writing Rigoletto: Why is the Duke so Bad?**

## Lesson Plans & Resources

---

- 19 Music: Aesthetic Valuation**
- 20 Music: Theory of Music**
- 23 Communicating: Oral Expression and Listening**
- 25 Bibliography**

# MEET THE ARTISTS

In the months before rehearsals begin, opera singers study to master the music and the drama for their roles, so they are ready to go on the first day of rehearsals. Opera Colorado's cast for *Rigoletto* includes premier artists from around the country, ready to share their incredible voices!



**STEPHEN POWELL**  
RIGOLETTO



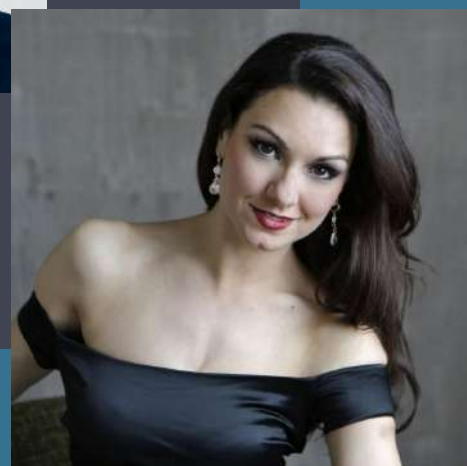
**SHARLEEN JOYNT**  
GILDA



**CHRISTIAN  
ZAREMBA**  
SPARAFUCILE



**JOSHUA DENNIS**  
DUKE OF MANTUA



**SANDRA PIQUES EDDY**  
MADDALENA



# MEET THE PRODUCTION TEAM

Opera Colorado's production of *Rigoletto* has over 200 people working behind the scenes. This includes technical staff, production staff, design staff, dressers, and stage hands.



**CHRISTOPHER  
MATTALIANO**  
DIRECTOR



**ALISON MILAN**  
COSTUME DIRECTOR



**KENDRA GREEN**  
STAGE MANAGER



**RONELL OLIVERI**  
WIG AND MAKEUP DESIGNER



**BEN KARASIK**  
PRODUCTION MANAGER

# MEET THE MUSIC TEAM

Members of Opera Colorado's music team for *Rigoletto* work with the on-stage performers as well as the fifty-seven members of the opera's orchestra.



**ARI PELTO**  
CONDUCTOR



**NATHAN SALAZAR**  
REPETITEUR



**SAHAR NOURI**  
CHORUS MASTER  
AND ASSISTANT  
CONDUCTOR



**CODY GARRISON**  
CHORUS MUSIC REHEARSAL  
ACCOMPANIST



**ANGIE DOMBROWSKI**  
ORCHESTRA MANAGER



# Quick Facts

**Composer:** Giuseppe Verdi  
**Librettist:** Francesco Maria Piave  
**Premiere:** March 11, 1851  
**Source:** Adapted from the 1832 play by Victor Hugo  
**Setting:** Mantua in the 16th century

## Monterone's Curse

The plot of *Rigoletto* revolves around the curse Monterone, the grieving father, calls down on Rigoletto and the Duke, bringing ultimate doom by the opera's end. Verdi originally planned to highlight the importance of the curse by titling the opera *La maledizione* (*The Curse*). He wrote to the librettist Piave, saying, "The whole theme [of the opera] lies in that curse." Verdi insisted on Monterone only appearing twice in the opera to say "a very, very few, strong, prophetic words" in order to give the curse dramatic emphasis.

272

Opera companies worldwide will stage 272 productions of Verdi's many operas in the 2022-23 Season.

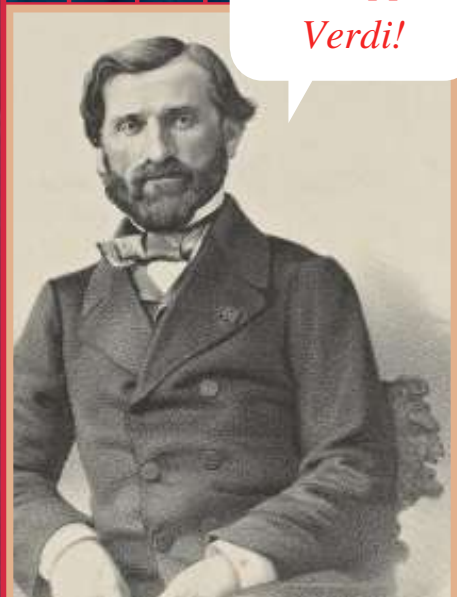
26

26 companies will produce *Rigoletto* as part of their 2022-23 Season.

7

*Rigoletto* was Verdi's seventh major opera.

*I'm  
Giuseppe  
Verdi!*





# RIGOLETTO

## BASICS

### Main Characters

**Duke of Mantua** (Maun-TU-ah) - The corrupt leader of Mantua who cares only about parties and flirting.

**Rigoletto** (ree-go-LEH-toh) - The duke's jester. His sharp tongue has made him many enemies.

**Monterone** (Mon-ta-ROH-neh) - An official who is grieving because the Duke has wronged his daughter.

**Gilda** (JEEL-dah) - Rigoletto's daughter. Her father keeps her hidden from society and only allows her to leave the house to attend church.

**Giovanna** (Gee-o-VAH-nah) - Gilda's servant and keeper.

**Sparafucile** (Spar-uh-foo-CHEE-leh) - An assassin for hire.

**Maddalena** (ma-da-LEH-nah) - Sparafucile's sister. She helps him trick his victims.

### Brief Summary

Operas portray grandiose stories about overwhelming emotions and momentous events. This way, the grandeur of the plot matches the grandeur of the staging and the music. *Rigoletto* achieves heights of emotion and horror through what one historian has described as "blood-and-thunder romantic melodrama." *Rigoletto* tells the story of a court jester, whose jokes embolden the cruelties of the Duke he serves. When the Count of Monterone seeks justice, Rigoletto mocks his pleas, and the revered man places a curse on the jester. That evening, the Duke preys on Rigoletto's daughter, Gilda. Rigoletto seeks revenge, but his plot unwittingly destroys his one source of happiness when Gilda decides to sacrifice her life to save the Duke's.





# RIGOLETTO

## PLOT SUMMARY

**act one, scene one** - *Setting: A grand room in the Duke of Mantua's palace where the duke is giving a ball*

The Duke of Mantua enters with his courtier Borsa. The Duke tells Borsa of a lovely young woman he has seen, who only leaves her house to attend services at church. The Duke has determined to woo her and plans to seek her out this very night.

While they are talking, the Duke notices the beautiful Countess Ceprano, wife of the Count of Ceprano. Before the countess can leave the ball, the Duke commands her to stay and declares his love for her. Rigoletto, the Duke's jester, laughs and urges the Duke to murder Ceprano so that the Duke can have the countess for himself. Ceprano overhears Rigoletto plotting his murder and vows revenge, promising to teach Rigoletto a lesson he will never forget!

Meanwhile, the Duke's courtiers believe they have discovered Rigoletto's secret – the jester has a mistress! The courtiers have all been targets of Rigoletto's mockery at one time or another and agree to assist Ceprano with his revenge.

Suddenly, the Count of Monterone barges into the palace in a rage. Monterone cries out for justice for his daughter, whom the Duke seduced and then abandoned. Rigoletto ridicules

Monterone and mocks his grief. Enraged, Monterone rebukes the Duke for preying on him in his old age, shames Rigoletto for deriding the tears of a father, and ends by calling down a curse of destruction on Rigoletto and the Duke. Rigoletto is shaken, but the Duke declares the curse is worthless and sentences Monterone to death.

*(Continued on next page)*



**Illustration of the curse from *Le roi s'amuse*, 1832 Bibliothèque Nationale de France**



# RIGOLETTO

## PLOT SUMMARY

**act one, scene two** - *Setting: The courtyard of Rigoletto's house and a nearby street*

As Rigoletto walks home later that night, he worries about the father's curse Monterone called down on him. Near the courtyard of his home, Rigoletto meets a mysterious man with a sword, an assassin for hire named Sparafucile. The assassin offers his services, but Rigoletto refuses. As Sparafucile leaves, Rigoletto sings the famous aria "Pari siamo!" ("We are equals!"), declaring how he and the assassin are similar in character; Sparafucile stabs men with swords and Rigoletto stabs them with words. Rigoletto laments the vileness he spews for the amusement of those at court.

When Rigoletto enters the courtyard of his house, his daughter Gilda runs to meet him. She has recently returned home after finishing her education at a convent, where Rigoletto sent her after her mother's death. Gilda only knows Rigoletto as "father" and asks him to reveal his name. Rigoletto refuses, telling her he is hated and has many enemies. Gilda is the only person in the world who loves him.

Gilda's questions renew Rigoletto's fear that the Duke's courtiers will kidnap her to exact revenge. He calls for Gilda's guardian, Giovanna, who assures him she is always on guard. Just then, Rigoletto hears someone in the street. When he goes to check, the Duke, disguised as a commoner, sneaks into the courtyard. He tosses Giovanna a bag of money to ensure her silence.

The Duke has come to woo Gilda, the lovely woman he has seen at church. As he hides, the Duke learns that Gilda is Rigoletto's daughter! Rigoletto leaves, unaware the Duke is in the courtyard with Gilda. The Duke emerges from his hiding place and declares his love for Gilda but tells her he is a poor student named Gualtier Maldè. Unaware of his duplicitous character, Gilda pledges her love to the Duke, promising to be his forever.

Suddenly, they hear someone coming. The Duke flees, thinking it is Rigoletto, but the sound is really the Duke's courtiers, come to kidnap Gilda, whom they mistakenly believe is Rigoletto's mistress. After the Duke leaves, Gilda sings her aria "Caro nome" ("Sweet name"), ignorant that the name she praises is an alias the Duke has used to deceive her.

Outside the courtyard, Rigoletto arrives just as the courtiers are about to climb over the wall. The courtiers trick Rigoletto into joining them, saying they are playing a joke on Ceprano. They give Rigoletto a mask to wear, but, in the dark, he does not notice it is really a blindfold. While Rigoletto steadies the ladder, the courtiers kidnap Gilda. Realizing something is wrong, Rigoletto tears off his mask and sees Gilda's scarf on the ground. Monterone's curse has come true—Rigoletto has lost his daughter to his enemies!

*(Continued on next page)*





# RIGOLETTO

## PLOT SUMMARY

**act two** - *A drawing room in the Duke of Mantua's palace*

The Duke worries about Gilda's fate and vows to find who has taken her. Just then, the courtiers enter, laughing about how they have kidnapped Rigoletto's mistress and brought her to the palace. The Duke realizes that they are the ones who have taken Gilda. Delighted she has been found and, even better, brought to his palace, the Duke leaves to seduce Gilda.

Rigoletto enters and begs the courtiers to return his daughter, but they refuse. Gilda then enters, weeping because the Duke has dishonored her. As father and daughter mourn, soldiers enter, escorting Monterone to his execution. Monterone expresses sorrow that he was unable to enact revenge on the Duke. Gilda begs her father to forgive the Duke, but Rigoletto vows to kill him.



**act three** - *A dilapidated inn on the bank of the Mincio river on the outskirts of Mantua*

Rigoletto tries to convince Gilda that he should kill the Duke, but Gilda pleads with her father to forgive him. Determined to convince Gilda the Duke is false, Rigoletto takes her to a dilapidated inn on the banks of the Mincio river, where Sparafucile, the assassin, lives with his sister Maddalena. The siblings use the inn to lure wayward travelers, whom they rob and murder.

Rigoletto and Gilda see the Duke enter and flirt with Maddalena. Gilda's heart is broken as she hears the Duke promise Maddalena the same love and fidelity he once promised her.

Rigoletto sends Gilda home, telling her to disguise herself as a man and flee to Verona, where he will meet her later. He then pays Sparafucile to murder the Duke, arranging to return at midnight to throw the Duke's body into the river personally.

*(Continued on next page)*

The censors did NOT approve of acts two and three of *Rigoletto*. Learn about their reactions on page 17 of the Guidebook.



Gordon Hawkins as Rigoletto in Opera Colorado's 2014 production - photo by Matthew Staver



# RIGOLETTO

## PLOT SUMMARY

**act three** - *A dilapidated inn on the bank of the Mincio river on the outskirts of Mantua*

After the Duke falls asleep, Maddalena argues with her brother; she has fallen for the Duke's charms and does not want to kill him. Gilda, who has returned disguised as a man, overhears their conversation. She hears the siblings agree to kill any stranger who enters the inn and place the stranger's body in a sack, which they will then give to Rigoletto, telling him it is the body of the Duke. Maddalena agrees to the plan, but worries no one will come, since a violent storm is approaching. Summoning her courage, Gilda knocks on the door, determined to give her life in place of the Duke's. Maddalena opens the door, and lightning flashes as Gilda meets her death.

The storm diminishes, and Rigoletto enters to claim the Duke's corpse. Rigoletto gives Sparafucile the rest of his fee and carries the shrouded body to the river, rejoicing in his victory over the Duke. Just as he is about to heave the corpse into the river, Rigoletto hears a voice singing. It is the Duke! Tearing the sack open, Rigoletto sees Gilda, who revives long enough to reveal what has happened. Crying out in despair, Rigoletto realizes Monterone's curse has come to fruition—his actions have murdered his own daughter!



The final scene in act three of Opera Colorado's 2005 production





# Play → Opera

*Rigoletto* closely follows the plot of Victor Hugo's 1832 play *Le roi s'amuse* (*The King Amuses Himself*). Learn which parts inspired Verdi.

## Play



- Verdi argued “*Le roi s’amuse* is the greatest subject and perhaps even the greatest drama of modern times.”
  - Hugo's jester Triboulet inspired Verdi, who said: "Triboulet is a creation worthy of Shakespeare!!" and “[He is] one of the greatest creations that the theatre can boast of, in any country and in all history.”
- 
- 
- The timeline is a bit longer in the play; Triboulet waits over a month to enact his revenge, performing at court as he bides his time.
  - Hugo's Francis I (the duke character in the opera) sings:  
"A woman oft doth change,  
and mad is he who trusts her!"  
lines supposedly written by Francis I himself.

## Opera



- Verdi's opera follows Hugo's play closely, keeping much of the action and characterization.
  - Verdi's opera keeps much of Hugo's characterization for the main character Rigoletto
- 
- The opera added Gilda's understanding of her mother as a protective angel.
  - The song in Hugo's play inspired Verdi's catchiest tune, the famous "La donna è mobile."



Verdi c. 1855 - New York Public Library

# Composer Biography: Giuseppe Verdi

"I adored and I adore this art; and when I am alone and am wrestling with my notes, then my heart pounds, tears stream from my eyes, and the emotions and pleasures are beyond description."  
— *Verdi writing to Piave, 1860*

**October 10, 1813 - January 27, 1901**

Today, musicians, producers, and audiences recognize Giuseppe Verdi as one of the most influential composers in opera. Although extremely talented, Verdi experienced many disappointments on his path to becoming famous.

Born in 1813 near Busseto, Italy, Verdi was enthralled with music at a young age, fascinated alike by tunes from the passing organ grinder and music played and sung at church. Verdi's parents worked hard operating an inn and tavern, and they supported their son's interest in music, even giving him a spinet, a type of small harpsichord, which Verdi often played late into the night. He also played the organ at church, and, at the age of ten, became the part-time organist at San Michele Arcangelo.

By this time, Verdi's impressive musical talent earned him the patronage of Antonio Barezzi, a local merchant who contributed to his community by sponsoring the studies of young musicians.

In 1825, at the age of twelve, Verdi enrolled in a music school run by librettist and composer Ferdinando Provesi, who taught him piano and composition. As a teenager, Verdi composed numerous pieces in various styles, marches, church music, theatre pieces, concerti, cantatas, etc. At the age of eighteen, Verdi applied for admission to the Imperial Royal Conservatory for Music in Milan. His parents, mentors, and sponsors wrote letters of support, and Verdi performed well at his audition. Despite Verdi's hard work and talent, the men in charge of admissions felt he was too old to become a great musician, and one admissions official stated that Verdi "would turn out to be a mediocrity."

Verdi was deeply disappointed, but he did not give up. Instead of returning home, he requested funds from his sponsors and stayed in Milan.

*(Continued on next page)*





Illustration of Verdi and his operas - New York Public Library

# Composer Biography: Giuseppe Verdi (Continued)

While in Milan, Verdi decided to take private music lessons with Vincenzo Lavigna, who had served as maestro al cembalo (master of the harpsichord, the opera's conductor) at the Teatro alla Scala, the most famous opera house in Italy.

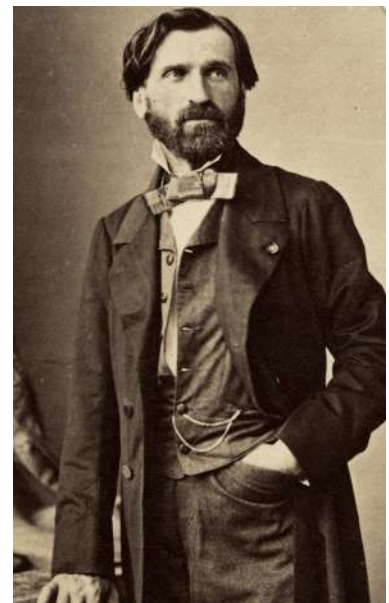
Verdi left his studies abruptly to return home to Busseto, where he expected to receive an appointment as maestro di cappella and organist for the vestry of San Bartolomeo, a prestigious and well-paid job. The church, however, had other plans, and Verdi was once again disappointed. Ever resilient, Verdi found work conducting the local Philharmonic.

In 1836, Verdi married Margherita Barezzi, his patron's daughter. The couple soon moved to Milan, where they hoped a theatre would produce Verdi's newly-finished opera. When no one in Milan seemed interested, Verdi tried to sell the idea to theatre managers in Parma, but to no avail. Finally, the manager of La Scala accepted *Oberto* for production, and, in 1839,

Verdi's first opera received a prestigious debut. His next opera, *Nabucco*, premiered at La Scala in 1842 and established Verdi as the foremost composer of Italian opera in his day. Numerous operas followed, including *Ernani* (1844), based on a play by Victor Hugo and written with the librettist Francesco Piave. Verdi's most famous works include *Rigoletto* (1851), *La traviata* (1853), *Aida* (1871), *Otello* (1887), and *Falstaff* (1893).

Worldwide, the 2022-23 opera season will see 272 productions of Verdi's works, bringing his music to audiences across the globe in over 1,900 performances.

Verdi - Stiftung  
Stadtmuseum, Berlin





Piave - portrait by G. Favretto

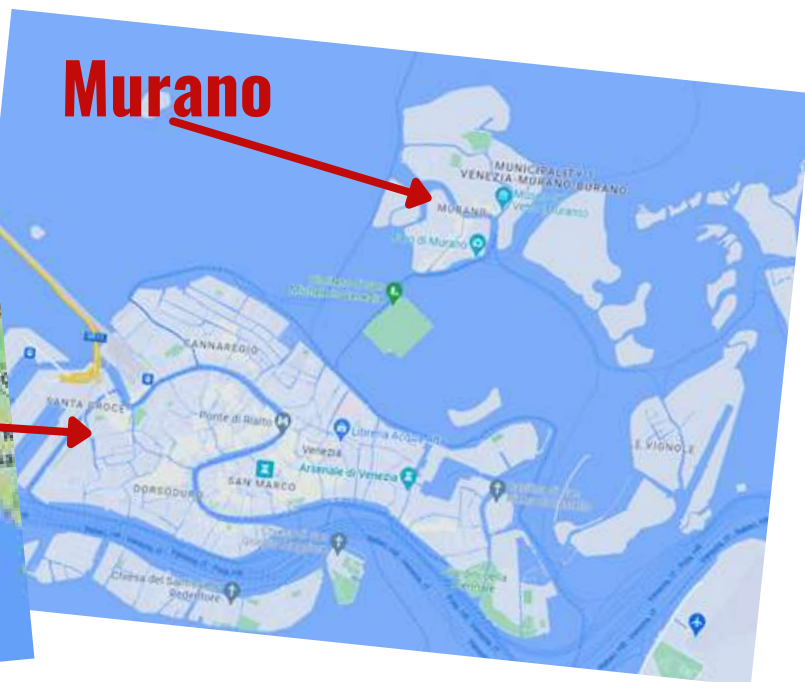
## Librettist Biography: Francesco Maria Piave

May 18, 1810 - March 5, 1876

Francesco Maria Piave was born in Murano, a series of islands just one mile north of Venice. Murano was famous for the art of glass making, and Piave's father owned a glass factory. When their family fell on hard times, Piave and his father moved to Rome in order to find work. Piave, who had studied at the seminary in Venice, found jobs writing and translating and became friends with poets and literati in Rome.

After the death of his father, Piave returned to Venice in September 1838, where he worked as a proofreader and editor for a publisher named Guiseppe Antonelli. Piave also wrote about the arts for the *Gazzetta privilegiata di Venezia*, a magazine for privileged Venetians.

*(Continued on next page)*





## Librettist Biography: Francesco Maria Piave (Continued)

Photograph of Piave

In 1841, Piave turned his writing efforts to writing a libretto for composer Samuel Levi, an adaptation of Carlo Goldoni's *La bottega del caffè* (*The Coffee House*). The work was never performed, but the exercise gave Piave his first experience writing for opera. Piave completed a second libretto, for composer Giovanni Pacini, and, in 1843, agreed to write a libretto for an opera to be performed at Venice's famed Teatro La Fenice—the composer for this opera was Giuseppe Verdi.

Piave and Verdi had not met, but the two corresponded by letter to collaborate on the libretto for *Ernani*, an adaptation of Victor Hugo's play *Hernani*. Piave completed the libretto in less than two months, but Verdi feared the writer's inexperience with staging an opera had led him to overload the libretto with verbose passages that would tax singers and audiences alike. Traveling to Venice, Verdi met Piave for the first time. Piave and Verdi became close friends, often traveling so that they could work together in person and corresponding regularly when collaborating across distances. Verdi was

sometimes domineering, as when the production of *Rigoletto* was in jeopardy, but Piave remained loyal. Piave once described their friendship as “a faith, a religion, a cult.”

On December 5, 1867, Piave suffered a debilitating stroke, which robbed him of his ability to speak and move. Verdi, along with others in the music community, helped support the librettist and his family during his illness. During his lifetime, Piave wrote approximately seventy librettos, but today, he is primarily remembered for the ten he wrote for Verdi's operas, including *Macbeth* (1847), *Rigoletto* (1851), and *La traviata* (1853).



Illustration showing Piave  
as a jack of all theatrical  
trades





# CENSORSHIP

Before opening, Verdi's opera had a run-in with the police. Not surprising, given the history of its source.

## NOVEMBER 22, 1832 LE ROI S'AMUSE - DEBUT

Victor Hugo's play debuts at the Theatre Francais in Paris.

## NOVEMBER 23, 1832 LE ROI - BANNED

The day after Hugo's play premiered, the theatre received a order prohibiting performances because "public morality is outraged in numerous passages of the drama."

## NOVEMBER 10, 1850

### LIBRETTO DEMANDED

The Venetian police demand a complete libretto for *Rigoletto*.

## NOVEMBER 17, 1850

### LIBRETTO PROVIDED

Verdi provides the Venetian police with a copy of the libretto.

## NOVEMBER 28, 1850

### RIGOLETTO - BANNED

The Austrian Military Governor of Venice forbids the production, saying the story is "disgustingly immoral and obscenely trivial."

## JANUARY 24, 1851

### LIBRETTO APPROVED

The Venetian police approve the revised libretto.

## MARCH 11, 1851

### RIGOLETTO - DEBUT

The opera audiences and critics praise the music, although several express misgivings about the morality of the content.

## 1882

### LE ROI - SECOND PERFORMANCE

Fifty years after its debut, *Le roi s'amuse* receives its second performance.

Read about the adaptation on the next page



## Writing Rigoletto: Why is the Duke so Bad?

When Verdi suggested Victor Hugo's *Le roi s'amuse* as a source text for his next opera, the composer knew he would encounter opposition from censors charged with preventing lewd and provocative material from reaching the stage. In 1832, French censors had banned the play the day after its debut, in large part, because of its depictions of the king as a grossly immoral man preying on women.

Verdi, however, saw tremendous dramatic potential in *Le roi*, particularly in the central character, the jester Triboulet. In a letter to Piave, Verdi exclaimed, "*Le roi s'amuse* is the greatest subject and perhaps even the greatest drama of modern times. Triboulet is a creation worthy of Shakespeare!!" Verdi feared censors might prohibit the depictions of vice central to the plot and urged Piave to "turn Venice upside down and make the censors allow this subject."

Piave and the management of La Fenice, Venice's opera house, endeavored to do as Verdi asked, but, once authorities reviewed the libretto, the verdict was immediate: the Austrian Military Governor of Venice forbade the opera, calling the story "disgustingly immoral and obscenely trivial."

While *Rigoletto*'s attempt to assassinate a noble did not sit well with the authorities, their

main objection was the duke's licentiousness, particularly his conduct towards Gilda.

The managers of La Fenice received permission to proceed with the opera if Verdi would reform the duke's treatment of women. Verdi refused, explaining to Piave that "all the dramatic developments result from the frivolous, licentious character of the Duke." The duke had to be an evil character in order for the plot to make sense. Verdi argued, "The Duke absolutely must be a libertine; without that, Triboulet's [*Rigoletto*'s] fear that his daughter will emerge from her hiding place isn't justified, the drama is impossible . . . on the conscience of an artist I cannot set this libretto to music."

Ultimately, the censors agreed to allow Verdi's opera, as long as the composer changed the location and implications of some of the action, so as not to impugn any powerful noble families who might interpret the wickedness of the Duke as a slight on their own families.

Accordingly, the Duke in *Rigoletto* remains one of opera's most despicable characters. Forman describes him as a "chauvinist, womanizer and cad," and in the 1920s, women at the the Met turned their backs to the stage during Gilda's entrance in act two in order to protest his behavior.

# MUSIC

## Aesthetic Valuation of Music I

Hear songs from  
the show!

Grade Level: High School (adaptable for other grades)

Time: 30-45 minutes

Overview: Students use "La donna è mobile" to explore how specific musical works influence popular culture.

Materials:

- Paper and writing utensils
- Computer with internet connection and speakers to play audio and video links embedded in lesson

### COLORADO ACADEMIC STANDARD

#### Standard

4. Aesthetic Valuation of Music

#### GLE (Accomplished)

2. Describe and analyze the influence of music on popular culture

### **Aesthetic Valuation (30-45 minutes)**

**Description:** Students analyze uses of "La donna è mobile" in popular culture.

#### **Detailed Steps:**

1. Context: "La donna è mobile," from Verdi's *Rigoletto*, is one of the catchiest tunes in opera. Verdi reportedly hid the music before the premier so no one would be able to copy his masterful composition, which is now a staple in popular culture.
2. Let students know they are about to hear "La donna è mobile." Ask them to make notes or sketch as they listen, considering the following questions: How does the music make you feel? What is the mood of this song? What does it make you think of?
3. Play "La donna è mobile" (audio only). Have students share their notes in small groups and then with the class.
4. The feelings this song inspires make it a popular choice with marketers. Show an example from the list below. Ask students how they think the ad is using the music to influence viewers. Do they think it is effective? Why or why not? Examples: Pillsbury Breadsticks, Tomato Paste, Doritos, Doritos (again), and Ristoronte Pizza.
5. Ask students to write their own words to "La donna è mobile" for a campaign promoting the product of their choice. Have students present their ad, either to another group or to the class and explain how they think the song will influence consumers in relation to this particular product.





# MUSIC

## *Aesthetic Valuation of Music II*

Hear songs from  
the show!

Grade Level: High School (adaptable for other grades)

Time: 45-60 minutes

Overview: Students use "La donna è mobile" to explore how specific musical works influence individual and group identity. (Evidence Outcome a).

Materials:

- Pages 18 and 22 of this Guidebook
- White board
- Computer with internet connection and speakers to play audio and video links embedded in lesson

### COLORADO ACADEMIC STANDARD

#### Standard

4. Aesthetic Valuation of Music

#### GLE (Advanced)

2. Describe and analyze the impact of music on individual and group/social identity

### **Aesthetic Valuation (45-60 minutes)**

**Description:** Students use "La donna è mobile," the famous canzone (ballad) from *Rigoletto*, to explore how music conveys identity.

#### **Detailed Steps:**

1. Context: In opera, music is crafted to tell the audience about the characters in the story. Usually, a song tells the audience something about the character(s) singing the song, something about their identity.
2. If students have not yet seen *Rigoletto*, consider having students read the synopsis and circle passages that describe the Duke's actions (Guidebook pages 8-11).
3. Have students read through "Writing *Rigoletto*: Why is the Duke so Bad?" (Guidebook pg. 18), and circle adjectives that describe the Duke. Then, have students describe the Duke to another classmate: What is his individual identity, and what is his group identity (the roles he has and/or takes on in different social situations)?
4. Share the lyrics of "La donna è mobile," (page 22) and explain that this ballad is sung by the Duke. Ask students to explain how the lyrics convey the Duke's identity. What might the audience understand about the Duke's identity after he sings this ballad?

*(Continued on next page)*

# MUSIC

## *Aesthetic Valuation of Music II (Continued)*

5. Next, ask students to imagine what kind of music might best fit these lyrics, might best convey the Duke's identity as Verdi imagined. Have them write a brief description of what they expect. (Remind them to reference the description of the Duke from page 18).

6. Prepare students to listen to "La donna è mobile." Ask them to listen to see if the music meets their expectations. Have them make notes or sketch their impressions.

7. Play, "La donna è mobile," (if time allows, play the song multiple times). Then, have students share their responses. Did the music meet their expectations? Why or why not? (the teacher should note students' impressions of the song on the board).

8. Using students' impressions of the song, highlight the fact that the opera's happiest, catchiest tune is sung by the story's most reprehensible character. Ask students to consider why Verdi portrayed the worst character in the opera as happy. What does the song (music and lyrics) tell us about the Duke's individual and group identity?

9. If time, ask students to give examples of songs where the music contrasts with the lyrics. Have students consider what these songs reveal about the character/subject of the song.

10. If time, have students compose a simple song in which the melody contrasts with the content.

Nursery songs often have happy tunes, which contrast with the dark content of the lyrics:

- "Rock-A-Bye-Baby" has a soothing melody and lyrics about a baby falling from a tree.
- "London Bridge is Falling Down" tells of destruction and imprisonment in its catchy tune.



# MUSIC

## *La donna è mobile*

### Lyrics to "La donna è mobile"

Woman is changeable,  
False as the weather,  
Woman's a feather  
Born by the breezes.

She loves variety,  
One day she'll kiss you,  
Then she'll dismiss you,  
Change as she pleases.

Woman is wayward,  
False as the weather,  
Woman's a feather borne by the  
breeze.

And if we trust in her  
She will deceive us,  
Heartlessly leave us,  
Laugh in our faces!

But she is loveable,  
So we pursue her,  
Tenderly woo her,  
Seek her embraces!

Woman is wayward,  
False as the weather,  
Woman's a feather borne by the  
breeze.

**La donna è mobile**  
*from Rigoletto*

Giuseppe Verdi (1813–1901)

Allegretto (♩ = 138)  
8

*con brio*

18

*pp*



# READING, WRITING, AND COMMUNICATING

*Eleventh/Twelfth Grade Band, Oral Expression and Listening*

Grade Level: High School (adaptable for other grades)

Time: 45-60 minutes

Overview: Students use the Duke in *Rigoletto* to discuss a full range of positions and evaluate responses

Materials:

- Pages 18 & 24 of this Guidebook
- Writing utensils

## COLORADO ACADEMIC STANDARD

GLE

Standard

1.Oral Expression and Listening

1. Follow collaborative guidelines to ensure a hearing of a full range of positions on a topic or issue, and evaluate responses

### **Aesthetic Valuation (45-60 minutes)**

**Description:** Students discuss the function of the Duke as the villain in *Rigoletto* as a way of learning to listen to a range of views and evaluate responses.

#### **Detailed Steps:**

1. Place students in groups of 3-4.
- 2.If students have not yet seen *Rigoletto*, consider having students read the synopsis and circle passages that describe the duke’s actions (Guidebook pages 8-11).
- 3.Have students read through “Writing *Rigoletto*: Why is the Duke so Bad?” (Guidebook pg. 18) and summarize Verdi's argument for why the duke needs to be a despicable character for the plot to work.
4. Assign half of the groups (Team Verdi) to support Verdi's view and half of the groups (Team Duke) to oppose Verdi's view.
5. Instruct students on Team Verdi to complete the left-hand side of the worksheet (page 24) and students on Team Duke to complete the right-hand side. Approximately 10 minutes.
6. Once students have finished, have them exchange worksheets with a group on the opposing side and complete the alternate side of the worksheet.



# Bad Duke vs. Good Duke



Verdi claimed the story of *Rigoletto* would not work unless the Duke was portrayed as a terrible person, but censors claimed this characterization ruined the opera. In the left-hand column, list reasons why the Duke works best in the story as an immoral character. In the right-hand column, list ways in which a moral Duke would benefit the plot.

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Gordon Hawkins as Rigoletto in Opera Colorado's 2014 production - photo by Matthew Staver