



ARIZONA OPERA EDUCATION

Rigoletto

One of opera's greatest hits!

Teacher's Guide and Resource Book

Dear Educator,

Welcome to Arizona Opera! We are thrilled that you and your students are joining us for *Rigoletto*, Verdi's timeless, classic opera.

At Arizona Opera, we strive to help students find and explore their voices. We believe that providing opportunities to explore the performing arts allows students to explore the world around them.

Rigoletto is a great opera to introduce students to the world of opera. By preparing them for this opera, you are setting them up to get the most out of their experience of this important, thrilling work.

This study guide is designed to efficiently provide the information you need to prepare your students for the opera. At the end of this guide, there are a few suggestions for classroom activities that connect your students' experience at the opera to Arizona College and Career Ready Standards. These activities are designed for many different grade levels, so please feel free to customize and adapt these activities to meet the needs of your individual classrooms.

Parking for buses and vans is provided outside Symphony Hall. Buses may begin to arrive at 5:30pm and there will be a preshow lecture at 6:00pm. The performance begins at 7:00pm.

Again, we look forward to having you at the opera and please contact me at jborths@azopera.org or at (602)218-7325 with any questions.

Best,

Joshua Borths
Education Manager
Arizona Opera

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Audience Etiquette: Attending the Opera

Unlike the actors on your television, performers on the stage are aware of their audience and want very much to communicate their art to you. By the time you arrive for a scheduled performance, many people (composers, singers, musicians, technicians, costume, set and lighting designers, etc.) have worked very hard to bring you their best efforts.

In order to show respect for those efforts, every audience member must give the performance their full attention and avoid any behavior that interferes with the performance.

We have rules that help us accomplish this goal, and you should do your best to understand and follow them:

- 1) Turn off your cell phone and anything else you have that might beep, ring, buzz or make any sort of noise during the performance.
- 2) No shoving or running in the theater.
- 3) No recording of any kind allowed in the performance.
- 4) Show your appreciation by laughing, applauding, etc.
- 5) However, keep your reactions appropriate and do not disrupt the flow of the performance.
- 6) No talking or whispering during the performance.
- 7) No gum, candy, or food in the theater.
- 8) Once the performance begins, you must stay in your seat.



Production Credits

Production Team

Dean Williamson	Conductor
Fenlon Lamb	Director

***Production curtesy of Utah Opera**

Cast

Jason Slayden Anthony Kalil	Duke of Mantua
Michael Corvino Joshua Jeremiah	Rigoletto
Sarah Coburn Andrea Shokery*	Gilda
Peter Volpe	Sparafucile
Beth Lytwynec*	Maddelena
Joseph Barron	Monterone
Chris Carr*	Marullo
Andrew Penning*	Borsa
Calvin Griffin*	Ceprano
Alexis Davis Hazell	Giovanna
Sarah Tucker*	Coutess Ceprano/Page

Arizona Opera Chorus and Orchestra



Production Information

How long does it take to put on an opera?

Each season at Arizona Opera takes about a year and a half to plan. Singers are booked at least a year in advance, production teams assembled, and schedules confirmed. However, each opera only has about three weeks to rehearse and put everything together! This is possible because singers come to the first rehearsal memorized and with ideas about their characters already formed.

On the previous page why does it say, “Production courtesy of Utah Opera.” What does that mean?

Well, since operas are performed only a few times at any one company, building complete costumes and sets for only a few performances doesn't make sense. So, companies build only a few productions a year and rent it out to other companies to help share costs. This year, Arizona Opera is building new productions (new sets and costumes) for *Eugene Onegin* and *The Magic Flute*.

Why are some of the characters played by two people and some characters by only one person?

Singing operas are very difficult. Unlike Broadway musicals which are written for people to sing eight times a week, many of the leading roles in opera are written for singers to perform only a couple of times a week due to their length, range, and other vocal demands (such as singing without microphones). This means that operas either are cast with only one person per role and are not performed on consecutive nights, or have two casts that alternate performances. The roles of the Duke, Rigoletto, and Gilda are long and difficult enough that we need two of them to have performances on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. The other roles are shorter and less demanding so we have only one performer per role.

What does the little asterisk (*) mean next to certain names?

The performers who have the little star (asterisk) next to their names are members of our Marion Roose Pullin Studio Program. This program provides performance opportunities for the entire season to a select group of young singers. Becoming an opera singer is hard and there are lots of stops along the way. Most singers start taking voice lessons in high school, major in voice in college, get a master's degree, and then participate in programs for young singers like the Studio at Arizona Opera. Only then are they ready for their careers to take off! Most men do not reach vocal maturity until their early 30s and most women in their late 20s.

Synopsis

ACT I — The Duke's Palace, Mantua, mid-16th century

While at a party at his palace, the Duke of Mantua expresses his desire to meet a young woman he has recently seen at church, but soon afterward he sets his romantic sights on seducing the Countess Ceprano. As the Duke and the Countess leave together, her husband is mocked and humiliated by Rigoletto, the Duke's jester. Pondering revenge on Rigoletto, Count Ceprano is interested to learn from the nobleman Marullo that Rigoletto keeps a woman in his home. The elderly nobleman Count Monterone interrupts the party to defend the honor of his daughter, who has been ravished by the Duke. Rigoletto mocks Monterone's anger, and the enraged father responds by cursing the Duke and his jester, Rigoletto.

Outside the palace later that night, the assassin Sparafucile confronts Rigoletto. Rigoletto sends him away, but compares his own biting tongue to an assassin's sword. When he arrives home, he is greeted by his daughter Gilda, whom he has kept secluded there since the death of her mother. Rigoletto leaves Gilda in the care of her maid, Giovanna. Soon afterwards, the Duke, disguised as a student, sneaks into the house and tells Gilda that he loves her. Gilda, who has noticed the disguised Duke following her home from church, returns his affections, and they bid each other farewell.

Outside, Ceprano and a group of the Duke's courtiers are gathering to abduct Gilda — whom they believe to be Rigoletto's mistress — in order to gain revenge on the jester. The courtiers blindfold Rigoletto and fool him into letting them into his own house. They depart with Gilda. Rigoletto hears her cries and removes the blindfold, but he is too late to save her, and he is left alone to remember Monterone's curse.

ACT II — The Duke's Palace

Having discovered that Gilda is missing, the Duke laments losing her. However, he soon learns that she was abducted by his own courtiers, and he excitedly leaves to see her. Rigoletto enters, searching for Gilda, but he is turned away by the unconcerned courtiers. Gilda enters and tearfully tells her father about her flirtation with the duke and her abduction. As Rigoletto consoles his daughter, he watches as Monterone is led towards his prison cell. Rigoletto swears to Monterone that the Duke's crimes against both of their daughters will be avenged.

ACT III — Sparafucile's house, by the Mincio River

Rigoletto brings Gilda to the home of the assassin Sparafucile, whom he has hired to kill the Duke. Gilda is forced to watch from the outside as the Duke, no longer disguised as her lover, seduces Maddalena, the assassin's sister. After sending Gilda away, Rigoletto finalizes his arrangements with Sparafucile; he will return at midnight to accept the body and dispose of it. Against her father's wishes, Gilda returns and listens as Maddalena begs her brother not to kill the Duke. Sparafucile initially refuses, but relents and tells his sister that he will kill whoever arrives at the inn before Rigoletto returns. Gilda decides to allow herself be killed in place of her lover, knocks on the door, and is stabbed by Sparafucile.

Rigoletto returns at midnight, and is presented with a body in a sack. As he leaves, he hears the voice of the Duke singing in the distance. He opens the bag to find the dying body of his daughter. She dies in the arms of her father, who cries that Monterone's curse has been fulfilled. (*Curtesy of Opera America*)

About the Composer

Giuseppe Verdi was born in Busseto, Italy in 1813 (we just celebrated his 200th birthday last year). As a young man growing up in rural Italy, he was not thought of as a great, musical talent. He was originally turned down by the Milan Conservatory for their music program (have you ever not succeeded at something on the first try?). However, through his father's connections, young Verdi managed to learn about music and composition from some local church musicians.



Verdi's first opera, *Oberto*, caught the attention of a representative of Milan's La Scala (still one of the greatest opera houses in the world) and it premiered in 1839 to moderate success. Unfortunately, as Verdi's career began to take off, his wife and two children died of various illnesses. These personal losses stayed with Verdi throughout his life. This is possibly the reason why so many of Verdi's greatest operas involved father/child relationships.

As Verdi's work grew in popularity, he grew bolder with his musicality and began to demand more from his librettists (the people who wrote the words to his operas) and his singers. He also began to experiment with how far he could push the Italian musical forms and how best to utilize the orchestra to depict the drama. These experiments only became more revolutionary as his work developed.

Verdi's work as a composer can be divided into four periods (although it's important to note that these divisions are created only after Verdi's death). The first period is his early period which began with *Oberto* and ends with *Stiffelio*.

Rigoletto begins the middle period which lasted until *Un ballo in maschera*. The middle period marked an incredible shift in Verdi's work. He became much more concerned with the drama. Because of this shift in emphasis away from the static, conventional early operas, some of Verdi's middle period work is among his most famous. Works such as *La traviata* and *Il trovatore* were all from this period.

Verdi's late period includes works such as *Aida* and *Don Carlo*. Verdi took almost double the amount of time to write these works than he did his early and middle period operas, and it's probably this extra care and attention that allowed the works from this period to push Italian music further than it had ever gone before. With these operas, Verdi left the early 19th century far behind him.



After many years as a composer, politician, and national figure, Verdi retired to his farm where he lived a gentle life for 18 years. He was coaxed out of retirement by the librettist Boito and his publisher Ricordi, and Verdi wrote two final, great operas: *Otello* and *Falstaff*.

Verdi died in 1901 (that's not that long ago when you think about it!) and hundreds of thousands of people attended his funeral procession to mourn the death of one of the greatest composers of all time.

The Risorgimento

As you may have noticed, Verdi lived through most of the 19th century in Italy, and the story of Verdi is the story of Italy at this time.

It's important to realize that although the idea of Italy has been in existence for thousands of years, Italy as a united nation is only about 150 years old. Before the unification of Italy in 1861, Italy was ruled by a series of foreign powers, and was divided into different kingdoms, duchy's, states, and territories.

The *Risorgimento* is the Italian word for this transitional period when these different governments united into one nation. You can remember this because the word *Risorgimento* looks like "reorganizing" or "reordering."



At the beginning of the 19th century, large parts of Italy were under Napoleonic rule (Napoleon was the French emperor who took over France after the Revolution). However, in 1815 Napoleon was vanquished and exiled to a remote island. When he left Italy, he left a power vacuum and the Italian people decided it was time to unify the country and rule themselves.

It was *this* time of national pride, optimism, and idealism that Verdi grew up. Composers and other artists at the time became fixated on what it meant to be Italian. This is why the Italian style was so important to Verdi and his contemporaries. All of this Romantic energy became Revolution in 1848. This is right about the time that Verdi transitioned from his early period to his middle period. However, this revolution did not succeed. Everyone agreed that Italy should be unified, but no one had decided how this new nation was to be run. Was it to be a monarchy? Federation? Republic? Democracy? This caused the Revolution to quickly turn into Civil War.

In 1850, a second phase of the *Risorgimento* began. This time, however, the unification and revolution was more practical. It succeeded in 1861 with the crowning of Victor Emmanuel II as the first King of Italy. This also marked the time of transition to Verdi's late period, and it was during the years following the coronation of Victor Emmanuel II that Verdi became a representative in Italy's new government.

FUN FACT: During the *Risorgimento* people could get in trouble with different governments and authorities by giving support to Victor Emmanuel II and his allies. So, at the opera, people would chant, "Viva Verdi!" This means, "Long Live Verdi!" However, they were not talking only about the composer. They were also talking about their new king since Verdi also stood for: Victor Emmanuel **Rei Di Italia** (Victor Emmanuel King of Italy).

The *Bel Canto* Era



The period of Italian music in the early 19th century is known as the *bel canto* period. *Bel canto* literally means, “beautiful singing.” The works of Rossini, Donizetti, and Bellini epitomizes this style. This period represents what is normally thought of as the “Italian style.” This style was primarily focused on beautiful melodies and vocal virtuosity. The orchestra existed only to support the singer and all of these operas were filled with conventions that the audience expected. For example, all arias had three basic sections: the slow lyric section (called a *cantabile*), some dramatic action (a messenger arrives, some news is conveyed, a discovery is made, etc.), and a fast, virtuosic section (called a *cabaletta*). The *cabaletta* is usually triggered by the dramatic action.

This style favored music over drama. For example, take the famous *Barber of Seville* overture. We think of it as being “sneaky” music that we associate with Bugs Bunny. However, it was originally written for a very serious opera about a Roman Emperor taking over Syria. With this in mind, the “sneaky” music becomes “anxious” music. There is a beauty to the *bel canto*, but it does not have the specificity of Verdi’s music. The music of the *bel canto* is more generic and therefore can be used for a variety of contrasting emotions.



Verdi took this style and pushed it as far as it could go. In *Rigoletto*, there is not a single piece of music that could be interpolated into another opera. The music is too closely tied to the drama. Without abolishing (getting rid of) the previous musical forms, Verdi pushes the Italian tradition. We still see traditional Italian conventions of the *bel canto*, but Verdi flips the emphasis from the music to the drama.

Agree or Disagree

Overview

Verdi was a great musical dramatist not because he was a great innovator who created his own form of music, but because he added specific characterization to forms that already existed. Do you agree or disagree with this assertion? Complete the activity below and see where you stand on Verdi's greatness!

Listening Part 1

Listen to the famous Lucia sextet from Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* (a famous *bel canto* opera). Look up the synopsis of this opera and familiarize yourself with each of the characters.



This ensemble happens when Edgardo enters right after his secret lover, Lucia, has been forced to sign a marriage contract to another man, Arturo.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ItN6J5wSlM>

- 1) Based on your research of the opera, what do you think each of these characters are thinking?

Lucia _____
Edgardo _____
Arturo _____
Enrico _____
Raimondo _____
Alisa _____

- 2) Do all of these characters sing different music to reflect their different emotional states?

Yes or No _____

- 3) Is the orchestra providing more than just support for the singers?

Yes or No _____

Listening Part 2

Now listen to the famous quartet from *Rigoletto*. This quartet takes place after the Duke has been lured to Sparafucile's house. The Duke is flirting with Sparafucile's sister Maddalena and Rigoletto is showing Gilda the Duke's true colors.



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w_tZxvODqTk (starts about 2 min into the video)

1) What emotions do you think these characters are going through?

Duke _____
Maddalena _____
Gilda _____
Rigoletto _____

2) Do all of these characters sing different music to reflect their different emotional states?

Yes or No _____

3) Is the orchestra providing more than just support for the singers?

Yes or No _____

Compare and Contrast

1) How are these two ensembles the same?

2) How are these different?

Conclusion

Do you agree or disagree with the assertion about Verdi continuing and perfecting the Italian tradition made at the top of the previous page? Use your answers and analysis above to support your ideas!

Rigoletto's Shakespearean Flaw

Background

Verdi turned his attention to Victor Hugo's play *Le roi s'amuse* (the play that *Rigoletto* is based on) only after his plans to turn Shakespeare's *King Lear* into an opera. In Shakespeare, all of his tragic heroes have a "tragic flaw." These are character traits within the character that cause tragedy to befall him. For example, in *Macbeth*, it is Macbeth's ambition that causes his downfall; and in *Hamlet*, it's Hamlet's inability to act that causes his death.

Take a few minutes and research Shakespeare's tragedies. Familiarize yourself with each of the main character's tragic flaws.

Overview

It was the Shakespearean nature of Victor Hugo's play that drew Verdi to it when *King Lear* was cancelled. So, like in all of Shakespeare's plays, does the character of Rigoletto have a tragic Flaw? Complete the form below and answer this question for yourself!

Critical Thinking

Look back at the synopsis and answer the following questions.

- 1) What tragedy befalls Rigoletto? _____
- 2) What causes this tragedy to occur? _____
- 3) Who does Monterone curse? _____
- 4) Does it seem to affect the Duke? _____
- 5) If not, than is the curse real or perceived? _____
- 6) Is there anything that Rigoletto does that causes the Duke to act a certain way? _____
- 7) Is there anything that Rigoletto does that causes Gilda to act a certain way?

- 8) Looking at your answers to these questions, brainstorm a list of words that these answers make you think of. For *Macbeth*, words might be "hubris," "murderer," "climber," etc.

- 9) Looking at these words, do you find a tragic flaw in the character of Rigoletto? Why or why not?

Opera Review

Background/Objective

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

Send your classes reviews to jborths@azopera.org by November 1st and have excerpts posted on the Arizona Opera website!

Questions

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

1 2 3 4 5
←Not very good... Really great!→

- 2) What surprised you about the opera?

- 3) What did you like?

- 4) What didn't you like?

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

- 6) What did you think of the singers?

- 7) Do you think *Rigoletto* should be called one of the "greatest operas of all time?"

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

Appendix A: Opera Dictionary

What is opera?

An **opera** is a musical drama or comedy where the actors sing rather than speak their lines. The word “opera” derives from the Latin word *opus*, which literally means “a work of art.” Like a play, an opera is performed on a stage with singing-actors, scenery, make-up and lighting.

Opera is truly a **multi-disciplinary** art, which means it is a combination of many art forms (singing, orchestral music, theater, visual arts, dance, etc.) and subject areas (history, mythology, literature, etc.). Opera combines these disciplines in a very powerful way to tell a story. Opera can be funny, sad, scary, dramatic, mysterious, fantastical, or any combination of feelings and moods.



The **libretto** (meaning “little book” in Italian) contains all of the words of an opera. A libretto is usually shorter than the script for a play because it takes longer to sing lines than to say them, and because music is also a very important part of telling the story of an opera. The person who writes the words for an opera is often a poet or playwright and is called a **librettist**.

The **composer** writes the music for the opera. All of the music, both vocal (for singers) and orchestral (for instrumentalists) is written in the **score** which separates lines for each instrument and each singer’s vocal part. The score, as a piece of music, reflects the mood, events and emotions of the characters in the story.

Characters are the people in the story. Singers perform the parts of the characters, also called **roles**.

The Performers

Soprano- The highest female voice. She is often the heroine of the opera and often in love with the tenor. A star soprano is often referred to as the “Prima Donna.”

Mezzo-Soprano- The lower female voice. The mezzo sound is typically darker and warmer than the soprano. The mezzo usually plays the older female character (like the mother), the bad guy (the witch), a seductress, or a boy. When the mezzo plays a male character, it is called a **pants** role.

Tenor- The highest male voice. He usually plays the hero of the opera and is often in love with the soprano.



Baritone- The lower (or middle) male voice. The baritone is often the villain, but can also be the hero who sacrifices himself for the tenor or soprano. In comedies, the baritone is often a prankster. He is usually in love with the soprano but loses her to the tenor.

Bass- The lowest male voice. He often plays the wise man or comic buffoon.

Orchestra- The group of instrumentalists who accompany the singers. They play under the stage in the orchestra pit where they are less likely to overpower the singers and distract from the action on the stage. However, though they are often not seen, the orchestra is an equal partner in the action of an opera.

Chorus- The group of singers who function as a unit onstage. Choruses are usually featured in crowd scenes where they represent the townspeople, partiers, soldiers, etc.

Dancers- Dance is often included in opera. They are usually part of big crowd scenes, but can also be featured as soloists in some pieces. Many operas contain short ballet sequences.

Production Team

Conductor- The person in charge of the musical interpretation of the opera. He also guides the orchestra through the opera from the first rehearsal to final performance.

Director- Responsible for the overall look or concept of the production. The director determines how the opera will be interpreted and tells everyone on stage when, where and how to move. Finally, he or she guides the performers on how characters are best presented.

Choreographer- Designs and sets the movement of the dancers.

Costume Designer- Designs and creates the clothes singers wear to reflect aspects of the character played by the singer. Costumes should reveal a lot about a character. How old they are, what kind of person they are, what time period he or she lives in, etc.



Scenic Designer- Creates the visual background and set pieces for the opera. He or she creates small models and detailed blueprints which serve as the “instructions” for building the set.

Lighting Designer- Creates the lighting plan that emphasizes the drama of the moment and allows the audience to focus on the action. Lighting design is an important visual element that contributes to the ambience of the stage setting and affects the appearance of people, costumes and props onstage.

Stage Manager- Coordinates all of the elements of the show during rehearsal and performance. He or she is responsible for calling cues, scene changes, and organizing the backstage area so that the show runs smoothly and consistently.

Crew- This group of professionals is responsible for setting up and running all of the equipment for a performance, including changing the scenery, costumes, and props. They also open and close the curtain, operate trapdoors, run sound effects, and run quick costume changes.

What makes an opera?

Opera is a **musical** form. The **orchestra** provides the overriding musical texture, while the **singers** sing and act on the stage.

An **overture** is the piece of music played by the orchestra at the beginning of an opera. It usually, but not always, contains some of the musical themes from the opera and sets the mood for what the audience is about to experience.

Recitative (re-chi-ta-TEEV)- Is sung dialogue that propels the action forward. The singing is generally faster and is composed to sound more like speech.

Aria- An extended musical passage sung as a solo. It often explores emotions as a character absorbs, reflects, and makes decisions in the drama.

Duet- An extended musical passage for two singers. A **trio** is for three singers and a **quartet** is a piece for four singers.

Ensemble- An extended musical passage for more than four voices. Often each character is singing different words at the same time, and ensembles tend to occur at the most pivotal point in the drama or the end of an act.

Supertitles- Since operas are most often performed in the language in which they were composed, most opera productions have translations above the stage (or on the seat in front of you) where a translation is projected for the audience to understand and better follow the story.



Other opera terms to know!

Bel canto- Literally meaning “beautiful singing,” this term describes the specific style of vocal production that opera utilizes. It requires great breath control and ease.

Bravo- Literally, “brave” or “courageous,” this Italian word is a form of high praise that is shouted at times when applause is appropriate. **Bravo** is shouted when a man has sung thrillingly, and **brava** when a woman has done the same.

Cadenza- A brilliant passage in an aria—often improvised by the singer—that showcases the specific skills and strengths of that singer. **Cadenzas** are most often sung by women, although men can perform them as well.

Diva- Literally, “goddess,” refers to an important female opera star. The masculine form is **divo**.

Motif or Leitmotif (light-mo-teef)- While “leitmotif” is usually used to refer to the musical themes of Wagner, a *motif* is a recurring musical idea that reveals or recalls an earlier plot point, character, emotion, or idea in an opera. Keep an eye out for music that sounds familiar! It probably means something important!

Tempo- This refers to the speed at which music is performed. The conductor is in charge of setting the **tempo** or timing of an opera.

Cover/understudy- This is the person who learns a role, music and staging just in case the lead cannot perform due to sickness or injury... as we say in the theater, “The show must go on!”



Opera Term Matching Activity

Match the term on the left with the correct definition on the right...

- | | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| 1) Soprano _____ | A) The group of instrumentalists who accompany the singers. |
| 2) Tenor _____ | B) The lower male voice. |
| 3) Choreographer _____ | C) Sung dialogue that propels the action forward. |
| 4) Orchestra _____ | D) The music that the composer wrote. |
| 5) Recitative _____ | E) A piece of music with two singers. |
| 6) Aria _____ | F) The highest male voice. |
| 7) Overture _____ | G) The person who creates the vision of the production, sets staging, and guides designers and singers. |
| 8) Score _____ | H) The lower female voice. |
| 9) Baritone _____ | I) The words that a composer sets to music. |
| 10) Mezzo-Soprano _____ | J) The highest female voice. |
| 11) Duet _____ | K) The people who work backstage. |
| 12) Director _____ | L) An extended musical solo. |
| 13) Libretto _____ | M) Music at the beginning of an opera. |
| 14) Crew _____ | N) Designs the dancers' movement. |

