

Concerts of
Thursday,
May 19, 2022,
8:00pm
Friday,
May 20, 2022,
8:00pm
NICOLA LUISOTTI,
conductor
MICHELLE BRADLEY,
soprano
JASMINE HABERSHAM,
soprano
DENYCE GRAVES,
mezzo-soprano
SANTIAGO BALLERINI,
tenor
CLAY HILLEY,
tenor
REGINALD SMITH JR.,
baritone
BURAK BILGILI,
bass

These performances
were made possible by
a grant from the
Barney M. Franklin and
Hugh W. Burke
Charitable Fund.

The use of cameras or recording
devices during the concert is
strictly prohibited. Please be
kind to those around you and
silence your mobile phone and
other hand-held devices.

GIUSEPPE VERDI (1813–1901)
Rigoletto (1851) 35 MINS

Act III
Jasmine Habersham, soprano
Gilda
Denyce Graves, mezzo-soprano
Maddalena
Santiago Ballerini, tenor
Duke of Mantua
Reginald Smith, Jr., baritone
Rigoletto
Burak Bilgili, bass
Sparafucile

INTERMISSION 20 MINS

GIUSEPPE VERDI (1813–1901)
Aida (1871) 33 MINS

Act III—On the banks of the Nile,
near the Temple of Isis
Michelle Bradley, soprano
Aida
Denyce Graves, mezzo-soprano
Amneris
Clay Hilley, tenor
Radames
Reginald Smith, Jr., baritone
Amonasro
Burak Bilgili, bass
Ramfis

Rigoletto

In addition to the soloists, Act III of *Rigoletto* is scored for two flutes (one doubling piccolo), two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, four trombones, timpani, percussion and strings.

In 1832, Victor Hugo, author of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, brought a second hunchback into the literary universe, a tragic figure who works as a court jester and fights against the abuses of a licentious king. In a play called *Le roi s’amuse*, Hugo weaves a tale around a common theme in period dramas: honor. Honor was the thing that impacted a girl’s ability to marry—a girl who was otherwise denied practical means of supporting herself. In the play, Hugo turns up the heat by contrasting the decadent lifestyle of the privileged with that of the hardworking people who serve them.

Shocked by Hugo’s assessment of the ruling elite, the French government banned his play after one performance. Less than twenty years later, Giuseppe Verdi chose it as the subject of his next opera.

Never one to shy away from social commentary, Verdi found enormous inspiration in the court jester, likening him to the great anti-heroes of Shakespeare. Knowing there would be scrutiny around the depiction of royals onstage, Verdi moved Hugo’s tale to a duchy in Italy, thinking he could slip one past the censors. In fact, the Venetian police rejected the concept outright. The project was rescued by librettist Francesco Maria Piave who stepped in and carefully maneuvered around the censors’ concerns.

Synopsis

Act I

All the nobles hate the court jester Rigoletto. And he hates them. They hold privilege, power, money and good looks, while he is born to serve and to suffer (he has severe curvature of the spine). After a lifetime of rejection and scorn, Rigoletto makes it his business to savagely humiliate the people at court—all to entertain his boss, the Duke.

The Duke of Mantua is a shameless womanizer. When

by Noel Morris
Program Annotator

First ASO performance:
March 9, 1967,
Boris Goldovsky, conductor
Luisa De Sett, soprano
Patricia Rand, mezzo-soprano
Joyce Spelvin, mezzo-soprano
Rosemary Rosales, alto
Jack Horton, tenor
William McDonald, tenor
Franco Iglesias, baritone
Michael More, baritone
J. B. Davis, bass
Robert Hale, bass
Paul Kiesgen, bass



Count Monterone confronts him for having been with his daughter, Rigoletto is quick with the ridicule. Monterone continues to protest until the Duke condemns him to death, at which point, the distressed father levies a curse on both men. The curse haunts Rigoletto for the rest of the opera.

In the second half of Act I, we meet Rigoletto's daughter, Gilda, who has recently come to live with him after having been raised by nuns. Knowing the ways of the Duke, Rigoletto prohibits her from going anywhere but to church. Little does he know; his boss has already begun to woo the girl. In the closing scene, the courtiers conspire to play a practical joke on Rigoletto: they kidnap Gilda and deliver her into the arms of the Duke.

Act II

The Duke has had his way with Gilda. Rigoletto swears vengeance and hires an assassin, but Gilda begs her father for mercy—she tells him she's in love with the Duke.

Act III

The third act takes place in a wine shop owned by the assassin, Sparafucile. The Duke enters and says to him, "some wine and your sister." (Often, this line is changed to "a room and some wine," a tradition that goes back to 19th-century censors.) The assassin's sister, Maddalena, lures their victim inside—but also develops feelings for him. Outside, Rigoletto tells Gilda to peep into the wine shop and witness her lover's faithlessness. This sets up one of the great moments in opera: it's a seduction scene between the Duke and Maddalena interwoven with the despairing music of father and daughter.

Rigoletto orders Gilda to disguise herself as a man and flee to Verona. After Rigoletto leaves, she doubles back to the wine shop to rescue her man. Inside, Maddalena begs her brother to spare the Duke and murder Rigoletto instead. "What, am I a thief? A bandit?" Sparafucile protests.

Out of his own twisted sense of honor, the assassin refuses to kill his client but agrees to bag a random stranger instead—if such a person enters the shop before Rigoletto's return. Gilda resolves to be that person. She goes inside. In the final scene, Rigoletto drags the body bag to the river. He looks inside and finds Gilda, who dies in his arms. "My

Gilda! She is dead," he sings. "Ah, the curse!"

Aida

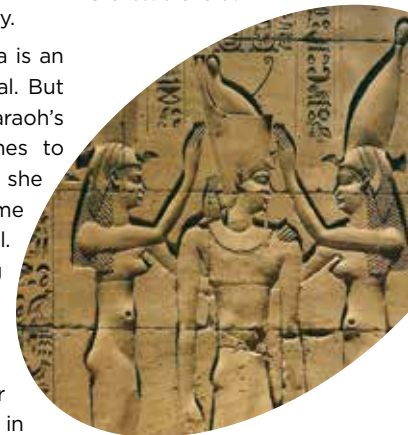
In addition to the soloists, Act III of *Aida* is scored for three flutes (one doubling piccolo), two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, four trombones, timpani, percussion and strings.

Over the years, productions of *Aida* have included horses, zebras, chariot races, camels, lions, tigers, elephants, puppets and enormous casts of humans. It is a glorious spectacle wrapped around an intimate story—and that speaks volumes about Verdi's genius. He well understood that events of global significance often begin behind closed doors in places where key players experience doubt, loneliness and vulnerability.

There are echoes of *Romeo and Juliet* in *Aida*. *Aida* is an Ethiopian princess; Radames is an Egyptian general. But it's a love triangle that powers this tale. The Pharaoh's daughter, Amneris, cannot fathom losing Radames to another woman. (If there are seven stages of grief, she experiences most of them in this opera.) At the same time, the two lovers live in their own private hell. Radames, bound by the historic events unfolding around him, cannot publicly acknowledge his love for an enemy prisoner. And *Aida*, Amneris's slave, cannot acknowledge that she's the daughter of the Ethiopian king—the same man who will face her lover on the battlefield. It is a classic human struggle set in a place that, for most Europeans, was a source of great mystery and intrigue.

Isma'il Pasha reigned over Egypt and Sudan as Khedive between 1863 and 1879. He famously said, "My country is no longer only in Africa; we are now part of Europe, too." Indeed, with the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, Egypt became the gatekeeper to one of the world's busiest trade arteries. The Khedive invested heavily in programs to modernize and industrialize his land. Part of this was the construction of an opera house to commemorate the opening of the Canal. To inaugurate the new theater, he commissioned an opera by Europe's most famous composer. It is said that Giuseppe Verdi was his first choice,

First ASO performances:
June 5–8, 2014
Robert Spano, conductor
Kearstin Piper Brown, soprano
Latonia Moore, soprano
Michelle DeYoung,
mezzo-soprano
Stuart Neill, tenor
Grant Knox, tenor
Gordon Hawkins, baritone
Burak Bilgili, bass
Evan Boyer, bass
Atlanta Symphony
Orchestra Chorus



Richard Wagner his second. According to tradition, that's exactly why Verdi took the job.

By the mid-1850s, Verdi had grown weary of the music business—the official censors, the critics and the gossips had all taken their pound of flesh. Verdi's output slowed. Gravitating toward country life, he rejected offers from various opera houses in favor of tending to his crops and horses. It had been four years since his last opera (not including the revision of *La forza del destino*). Verdi wrote *Aida* using a libretto by Antonio Ghislanzoni. It takes place “in the time of the pharaohs.” It was premiered in Cairo in 1871.

Synopsis

Act I

Radames enters an empty hall in the palace at Memphis and dreams of leading the Egyptian army against the Ethiopians. In his head, a military victory would buy him the political clout to marry Aida and ascend the throne in Ethiopia. Pharaoh's daughter, Amneris, enters and notices the fire in his eyes. She wonders if it burns for someone else. When Radames glances at her slave, Aida, Amneris becomes suspicious. The Pharaoh enters and receives intelligence that the Ethiopian army is marching on Thebes. He appoints Radames as his commander. Aida frets over her father, her brothers, and Radames—all of whom are about to meet in battle. “For whom do I weep? For whom do I pray?”

Act II

Amneris informs Aida that Radames has died—just to see her reaction. In fact, Radames is alive. Through cunning and deceit, Amneris confirms the identity of her rival.

A tremendous victory parade gets underway (this is the famous Triumphant March). Aida recognizes her father, Amonasro, among the prisoners of war. She conceals his true identity while Radames prevents their execution. As a sign of his gratitude, the Pharaoh gives Radames his daughter's hand in marriage. (This is a fantastic moment in the opera when the celebratory music belies the crushing disappointment of the young lovers.)

Act III

Amneris prays in the Temple of Isis ahead of her wedding. Amonasro finds Aida outside and coerces her into spying for him. When Radames arrives, he and Aida conspire to run away together. But she asks him a fatal question: “Tell me, how can we avoid the Egyptian legions?” Radames tells her that his army will take the pass at Napata. Amonasro steps out of the shadows; he's heard everything. When Radames learns the man's true identity, he realizes he's betrayed Egypt; he is devastated. Amneris emerges from the temple and discovers Radames with the Ethiopian king. The Egyptians arrest Radames and condemn him as a traitor.

Act IV

Aida has escaped the Egyptians. Amneris goes to Radames and begs him to marry her, renounce Aida, and save himself. He refuses. The guards seal him inside a tomb. He finds Aida waiting for him there. They fall into one another's arms and await their deaths. Above ground, Amneris is left with her guilt and her anguish.



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NICOLA LUISOTTI, CONDUCTOR

Principal Guest Conductor of Madrid's Teatro Real, Maestro Luisotti served as Music Director of San Francisco Opera from 2009 to 2018, conducting over 40 operas and concerts since his Company debut in 2005. In 2018, he was awarded the San Francisco Opera Medal for artistic excellence.

He has received critical acclaim from press and public alike for his performances at the Vienna State Opera, Teatro alla Scala, Genoa's Teatro Carlo Felice, Venice's La Fenice, Bologna's Teatro Comunale, Turin's Teatro Regio, Munich's Bavarian State Opera, Frankfurt, Stuttgart, Dresden, Hamburg, Valencia, Los Angeles Opera, Seattle Opera, Toronto's Canadian Opera Company and Tokyo's Suntory Hall. Maestro Luisotti was awarded the 39th Premio Puccini Award in conjunction with the historic 100th anniversary of *La Fanciulla del West* at the Metropolitan Opera, which he conducted there in 2010.

Further engagements in the 2020/21 season will include *Tosca* at Teatro Real, *La Traviata* at the Suntory Hall, as well as concerts with Orchestra del Teatro alla Scala and Orquesta Sinfónica de Madrid.

Maestro Luisotti has also conducted several productions captured on DVD including the Metropolitan Opera's *La bohème* and *La Fanciulla del West*, the Royal Opera Covent Garden productions of *Don Giovanni* and *Nabucco*, and San Francisco Opera's *Mefistofele*.

MICHELLE BRADLEY, SOPRANO

Michelle Bradley is beginning to garner great acclaim as one of today's most promising Verdi sopranos.

This season, Michelle Bradley makes her debut with the Lyric Opera of Chicago as the title role in *Tosca* and returns to the Metropolitan Opera as Liù in *Turandot*. In concert, she will debut with the San Francisco Symphony as the soprano soloist in Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 and with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra as the title role in act III of Verdi's *Aida*. She will also be heard in a pair of solo recitals for the San Diego Opera with Brian Zeger at the piano. Future projects include a debut with then San Francisco

Opera and returns to the Metropolitan Opera and the Lyric Opera of Chicago, all in leading roles.

Last season, Bradley made debuts with the Prague State Opera as the title role in *Aida* and in recital with the Houston Grand Opera and the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society. She also appeared in concert with the Dallas Symphony in a program of gospel and in a gala concert with the San Diego Opera.

Previously Michelle Bradley made debuts with the Vienna State Opera as Leonora in *Il Trovatore* (a role debut), the San Diego Opera as the title role in *Aida* and returned to the Metropolitan Opera for their New Year's Eve Gala as Liù in Act II of *Turandot*. She appeared in solo recital at the Kennedy Center and performed Barber's *Knoxville, Summer of 1915* with the New World Symphony.

DENYCE GRAVES, MEZZO-SOPRANO

Recognized worldwide as one of today's most exciting vocal stars, Denyce Graves continues to garner unparalleled popular and critical acclaim in performances at the world's great opera houses and concert halls. Graves has become particularly well-known to operatic audiences for her portrayals of the title roles in *Carmen* and *Samson et Dalila*.

In the 2020/21 season, Graves makes her debut at the Glimmerglass Festival as the title role in the world premiere of *The Passion of Mary Caldwell Dawson*, with music by Carlos Simon set to text by Sandra Seaton. She also performs in a program hosted by Tulsa Opera, entitled *Greenwood Overcomes*, honoring the centennial of the Tulsa Race Massacre. Additionally, she participates in a program hosted by the Trust of the National Mall, as well as a special presented by PBS entitled "United in Song: Celebrating the Resilience of America."

Graves is a native of Washington, D.C., where she attended the Duke Ellington School for the Performing Arts. She continued her education at Oberlin College Conservatory of Music and the New England Conservatory. Graves is the recipient of many awards, including the Grand Prix du Concours International de Chant de Paris, the Eleanor Steber Music Award in the Opera Columbus Vocal



Competition, a Jacobson Study Grant from the Richard Tucker Music Foundation and more. Graves' dedication to the singers of the next generation continues to be an important part of her career; she is a member of the voice faculty at the Peabody Institute, and recently became a distinguished visiting faculty member at The Juilliard School.

JASMINE HABERSHAM, SOPRANO

American soprano, Jasmine Habersham is a versatile and dynamic performing artist. Jasmine's 2020/21 season includes making her Seattle Opera debut as Zerlina in *Don Giovanni*, Nannetta in *Falstaff* (Berkshires Opera Festival) as well as joining the The Atlanta Opera Company Players debuting the roles of Bubikopf (Girl) in *Der Kaiser von Atlantis* and Micaëla in *The Threepenny Carmen* (The Atlanta Opera).

An avid performer of new works, Jasmine has premiered the role of Mariola in Jake Heggie/Gene Scheer's *Out of Darkness: Two Remain* (Atlanta Opera). She has also appeared as Pip in *Moby Dick* (Utah Opera), Pamina in *The Magic Flute* (Opera Theater St. Louis: Opera on the Go) Papagena in *Die Zauberflöte* (Cincinnati Opera and Glimmerglass Festival), Yum Yum in the *The Mikado* (Kentucky Opera), Esther in *Intimate Apparel* (Cincinnati Opera Fusion) and Clara in *Porgy and Bess* (Utah Festival Opera).

She has won numerous awards including the Silver Medal for the 2020 American Traditions Competition, Special Award winner for the Lotte Lenya Competition, second place (2018 Southeast Regional Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions), The Strauss Award (National Orpheus Competition), John Alexander Memorial Award (CCM), and the Young Artist Guild Award (Central City Opera). Jasmine received her bachelor's degree in Vocal Performance at Shorter College and her Master's and Artist Diploma from the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music

SANTIAGO BALLERINI, TENOR

Santiago Ballerini is recognized in the Americas as one of the leading tenors of the Bel Canto repertoire and is a celebrated performer in opera houses around the world. In January of 2020, Ballerini made his debut with

the Canadian Opera Company in Toronto singing *Barbiere di Siviglia*. In late 2019, he was the tenor soloist with the National Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Maestro Giannandrea Nosedà singing *Carmina Burana* at The Kennedy Center.

Ballerini, a dual citizen of Argentina and Italy, is well recognized in Latin America where he started his opera career. He has been invited to sing lead roles for the last four seasons at the prestigious El Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires to include jünger Graf in Zimmermann's *Die Soldaten*; Tenor italiano in *Der Rosenkavalier*, Mozart's Requiem under the baton of Maestro Evelino Pidó, Lindoro in Rossini's *L'Italiana in Algeri* and Ernesto in Donizetti's *Don Pasquale*.

In 2014, Ballerini was awarded "Upcoming Opera Singer" in Argentina by the Congress of Argentina and the Argentine Association of Critics. He was also a featured soloist at the 50th Met Anniversary Gala honoring acclaimed baritone Sherrill Milnes, and was scholarship recipient to study with Mr. Milnes. Before his singing career, Ballerini was a pianist for 9 years and a certified Music Therapist.

CLAY HILLEY, TENOR

Heldentenor Clay Hilley has appeared on many international stages in the most demanding operatic repertoire. At age 39 he sang the title role of Wagner's *Siegfried* in Stefan Herheim's new Ring Cycle at Deutsche Oper Berlin, under the baton of Sir Donald Runnicles, and he returned to the theatre in November 2021 and January 2022 for revival performances.

The 2021/22 season sees the tenor in two prominent debuts: with Dutch National Opera as the title role of Zemlinsky's *Der Zwerg* in a new production by Nanouk Leopold, which heralds the arrival of the company's new Music Director, Lorenzo Viotti; and at the Tiroler Festspiele Erl as Siegmund in a new production of *Die Walküre* directed by KS Brigitte Fassbaender. He sings the title role of *Samson et Dalila* in a fully staged presentation at Bob Jones University and a vibrant concert schedule includes Beethoven's *Missa solemnis* with John DeMain and the Madison Symphony Orchestra, and *Siegfried* Act III with the Bilbao Symphony Orchestra led by Chief Conductor Erik Nielsen.



JEFF ROFFMAN



GUILLERMO ADAMI



SUZANNE VINNIK

The tenor received his Bachelor of Music degree in Music Education at the University of Georgia, a Master of Music degree in Vocal Performance from Georgia State University, a Professional Studies Certificate from the Manhattan School of Music, and a Performer's Certificate from the Opera Institute at Boston University.

REGINALD SMITH JR., BARITONE

Baritone Reginald Smith, Jr., this year's U.S. representative at the BBC Cardiff Singer of the World Competition, will debut this season with the Lyric Opera of Chicago as Uncle Paul in Terrence Blanchard's *Fire Shut Up in My Bones*, with the San Diego Opera as Don Alfonso in *Così fan tutte* and with Charleston's Holy City Arts and Lyric Opera as Germont in *La Traviata*. In concert he will return to the Dallas Symphony for *holiday concerts*, debut with the Oregon Symphony in Beethoven's Symphony No. 9, sing Amonasro in *Act 3 of Aida* with the Atlanta Symphony and perform *Messiah* with the Nashville Symphony. Mr. Smith will also appear in solo recital at Kennesaw State University. Future engagements include a debut with the Santa Fe Opera and a return to the Lyric Opera of Chicago, both in leading roles.

Reginald Smith, Jr.'s last season included returns to the Atlanta Opera as Tonio in *I Pagliacci* (a role debut), the Cincinnati Opera as Don Bartolo in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* and to the Dallas Symphony in a concert honoring the victims of racial violence and injustice. He also sang Jake in concerts of *Porgy and Bess* scenes with the New Orleans Opera.

BURAK BILGILI, BASS

Burak Bilgili is a Turkish operatic bass-baritone who was born in Akşehir, a town in the Konya Province of Turkey. Since his professional operatic debut at the Teatro alla Scala in 2002 as Don Alfonso in *Lucrezia Borgia*, he has sung in leading opera houses all around the world and has enjoyed a busy international career. Bilgili made his Metropolitan Opera debut in 2004, and he returned to the Metropolitan Opera in 2009 as Ferrando in *Il Trovatore*. Bilgili is still the only Turkish artist in history to perform a major role in Metropolitan Opera in New York City.

A recipient of numerous awards, the Turkish bass garnered First Prizes in the International Hans Gabor Belvedere Singing Competition 2002 in Vienna, the International Alfredo Kraus Competition 2002 in Las Palmas, the Neue Stimmen International Opera Competition in 2001, the Mario Lanza Opera Competition, and the J. Parkinson Italian Opera Competition. He was also a winner of the Loren Zachary Opera Competition, the Licia Albanese-Puccini Foundation International Voice Competition, and was First Place winner in both the Giargiari Bel Canto Voice Competition and 1998 Siemens Opera Competition in Turkey. In 2003, Bilgili became Turkey's first-ever representative at the BBC Cardiff Singer of the World competition.

Bilgili initially studied at Mimar Sinan University in Istanbul as a student of Guzin Gurel. After his graduation, he studied at the prestigious Academy of Vocal Arts in Philadelphia with the support of Sedat Gurel - Guzin Gurel Arts and Science Foundation. With Zehra Yildiz Culture and Arts Foundation's support, he studied with Katia Ricciarelli in Italy.

