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The Worlds of Rigoletto Verdi's Development of the Title Role in Rigoletto

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THE WORLDS OF RIGOLETTO

VERDI'S DEVELOPMENT OF THE TITLE ROLE IN RIGOLETTO

By

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I would like to dedicate this treatise to my parents, Dennis and Ruth Ann Walters, who have continually supported me throughout my academic and performing careers.
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this treatise will be to explore Verdi’s development of the title role of his opera Rigoletto. The historical timeline will be followed from Verdi’s first documented interest in Victor Hugo’s Le roi s’amuse as a libretto to the critical reaction of the first performances of Rigoletto. The main body of this paper will focus on musical examples that demonstrate how the composer delineated the dual nature of Rigoletto’s character: the deformed, bitter, court jester and the impassioned, loving father. Every aspect of Verdi’s compositional technique—melody, rhythm, harmony, dynamics, articulation, orchestration, and form—will be explored to discover how he gave full range to Rigoletto’s emotional expression and the dramatic development of his character.
THE WORLDS OF RIGOLETTO
VERDI'S DEVELOPMENT OF THE TITLE ROLE IN RIGOLETTO

CHAPTER 1: HISTORY

“I find particularly beautiful the representation of the character, externally deformed and ridiculous and internally impassioned and full of love.” Verdi – December 14, 1850.

Purpose

This paper will explore Verdi’s development of the title character in his opera Rigoletto. First, a historical time line will be presented starting with the first documented evidence of Verdi’s interest in the subject for his libretto, Victor Hugo’s Le roi s’amuse, to the initial performances of Rigoletto and the critical reaction to them. Second, the main body of this paper will focus on musical examples from the opera that demonstrate the compositional techniques Verdi used to reveal the dual nature and reinforce the dramatic and emotional characteristics of Rigoletto.

From Le roi s’amuse to Rigoletto

On April 28, 1850 Giuseppe Verdi wrote excitedly to Francesco Maria Piave, “The subject is grand, immense and there’s a character in it who is one of the greatest creations that the theatre of all countries and all time can boast. The subject is Le roi s’amuse (The King’s Amusement) and the character I’m speaking about is Triboulet.” Verdi had a commission in place for a new opera with the Teatro La Fenice in Venice and the distraught hunchback, Triboulet, had captured his imagination.

Verdi was well aware of the work of the influential Romantic playwright Victor Hugo (1802-1885). He had based his earlier successful opera Ernani, which had premiered at the Teatro La Fenice on March 9, 1844, on the Hugo play Hernani (1830). The same year as the premiere of Ernani, Verdi had also shown interest in another Hugo play, Le roi s’amuse (1832), and had included it on a list of possible operatic subjects in his Copialettere, notebooks of business correspondence.

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1 William Weaver, Verdi: A Documentary Study (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977), 182.
2 Ibid., 179.
4 Ibid., 10.
Verdi had first suggested *Le roi s’amuse* as a possible subject for an opera to the Teatro San Carlo in Naples, where Salvatore Cammarano was the resident librettist, on September 7, 1849. Salvatore Cammarano (1801-1852) had previously been Verdi’s librettist for *Alzira* (1845) and *Luisa Miller* (1849) for the Teatro San Carlo, and *La battaglia di Legnano* (1849) for the Teatro Argentina in Rome.

It is now time to consider seriously the libretto of the opera to be produced on the day after Easter. Because in order to do things properly, Cammarano should have the sketches ready and give me the first numbers by the end of October, when *Eloïsa [Luisa Miller]* will have been produced. I shall leave Naples for a while then, and would like to take the text with me to compose. As a subject, suggest Victor Hugo’s *Le roi s’amuse* to Cammarano.5

Yet within several months, Verdi had changed his mind about taking the commission and had managed to be released from his obligation to the Teatro San Carlo. The exact reasons and details of this event are not documented, but it is known that Cammarano was concerned about the censorship issues involved with the subject and Verdi had similarly been advised by friend Cesare De Sanctis that it would be impossible to perform an opera based on that subject in Naples.6 It is clear that Verdi was relieved at being freed from his obligation, as he stated in a letter to his publisher Tito Ricordi, on January 31, 1850.

As for the other opera I was to write for Naples, I luckily found a way to free myself, disgusted by the infamous behavior of that Management and Direction; nevertheless, since the subject has already been settled with Cammarano, I will write it all the same and, I hope, it will be finished in four or five months. I will give this score willingly to you, leaving you the charge of having it staged by the end of the month of November of this year of 1850, in one of the major theaters of Italy.7

Although the proceeding letter expresses Verdi’s wish to continue his work with Cammarano on *Le roi s’amuse*, by February 28, 1850 the two men had stopped corresponding on that subject and in its place they had already drafted a lengthy synopsis of Shakespeare’s *King Lear*.8 Verdi did not wait long to pursue *Le roi s’amuse* again and on April 28, 1850, with a new commission offered from the Teatro La Fenice, he began discussing the play with librettist Francesco Maria Piave.

7 Weaver, *Verdi: Documentary*, 178.
8 Ibid.
When Francesco Maria Piave (1810-1876) first met Verdi, he was experienced as a publisher’s proof-reader and in his spare time he had written some poetry, but he had never written professionally for the theater. He had, however, been working privately on a libretto of Victor Hugo’s play *Cromwell* (1827) and in 1843 Guglielmo Brenno, secretary of the Teatro La Fenice, asked Verdi to consider it as a possible project for an opera.

On July 26, 1843 Verdi responded, “…*Cromwell*, from what I know of it historically, is certainly a fine subject; but everything depends on how it is handled. I do not know Signor Piave, but if you assure me he is a good poet familiar with the theatrical effects and musical forms, I beg you give him the enclosed letter.”

Piave and Verdi did work together for the Teatro La Fenice, but the original libretto of *Cromwell* was replaced by another Hugo play, *Hernani*. Their effort, *Ernani*, was the first of ten collaborations and it was in the midst of their sixth opera, *Stiffelio* (1850) that the subject of *Le roi s’amuse* resurfaced.

Hugo’s *Le roi s’amuse* had been banned the morning after its initial performance on November 22, 1832 at the Comédie Française for depicting “Francis I of France as a debauched, lecherous figure whose jester, Triboulet, aids and abets him in his philandering.”

So it was not surprising that Verdi was concerned about censorship when he wrote to Piave on April 28, 1950 suggesting the infamous subject. In that same letter, Verdi ordered Piave to obtain permission from the censors to use Hugo’s play as a libretto. “As soon as you receive this letter, start moving: run throughout the city, and find an influential person who can obtain permission to do *Le roi s’amuse*. Don’t sleep. Stir yourself. Hurry.” Again on May 8, 1850 he urged Piave, “So then, arouse the interest of the Presidenza, turn Venice upside down, and make the censorship allow this subject.”

Verdi received assurances from Piave that the subject would be approved, but on August 24, 1850 Verdi was still apprehensive about the problems in obtaining permission for Hugo’s play.

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10 Weaver, *Verdi*, 158.
12 Weaver, *Verdi: Documentary*, 179.
13 Ibid.
The suspicion that *Le roi s’amuse* may be forbidden creates serious embarrassment for me. I was assured by Piave that there was no obstacle to this subject, and trusting his word, I set myself to study it and ponder it profoundly, and the idea, the musical color had been found in my mind. I could say that the main, most toilsome part of the job was done. If I were now obliged to think about another subject, I would lack the time for such study, and I could not write an opera that would satisfy my conscience.¹⁴

As he waited for authorization of *Le roi s’amuse*, Verdi continued composing and warned Piave,

…do not let yourself be induced to make modifications that would lead to alterations of the characters, the subject, the situations. If it’s a matter of words, you can agree […] But be sure you leave intact the scene where Francesco [the Duke] goes to the house of Saltabadil [Sparafucile]. Without this, the drama no longer exists. You must also leave in the business of the sack [with Gilda’s body]. This cannot matter to the Police, for it’s not their job to think about the dramatic effect.¹⁵

When Verdi received news on December 1, 1850 that *Le roi s’amuse*, now retitled as *La maledizione* (*The Curse*),¹⁶ had been prohibited, he was distraught and blamed Piave. “The decree refusing it plunges me into despair, because now it is too late to choose another libretto, which it would be impossible, quite impossible for me to set for the winter.”¹⁷

Piave attempted to resolve the issue by changing the title to the less offensive *Il Duca de Vendôme* (*The Duke of Vendôme*) and by removing objectionable items from the play. Among the objectionable items removed were the hunch from the jester and the sack from the final scene.¹⁸ Verdi’s response to these changes on December 14, 1850 was terse, “I have had very little time to examine the new libretto: I have seen enough, however, to understand that, reduced in this way, it lacks character and importance, and the situations, finally, have become very cold.”

Verdi ultimately conceded that the location and the character names could be changed, so long as the ruler remained absolute in his power. Without this condition the bold defiance of the old man’s curse “so awesome and sublime” in the original would lose its importance and driving force. The ruler must also “absolutely be a libertine” or there would be no justification for Triboulet [Rigoletto] to hide his daughter from him. Verdi also wanted to retain the ruler’s

¹⁴ Ibid., 180.
¹⁵ Ibid.
¹⁶ Ibid., 179.
¹⁷ Ibid., 181.
¹⁸ Ibid.
amorous rendezvous at the tavern and insisted that Triboulet’s dying daughter needed to be hidden in the sack.\textsuperscript{19}

Finally I note that they have avoided making Triboulet ugly and hunchbacked!! For what reason? A hunchback who sings, some will say! And why not?... Will it be effective?... I don’t know, but if I don’t know, then I repeat, he who proposed this change does not know. I find it, in fact, very beautiful to portray this character externally deformed and ridiculous, and internally passionate and full of love. I chose this subject precisely for all these qualities and if all these original features are removed, I cannot set it to music any longer.\textsuperscript{20}

In order to salvage the project Piave took Brenna to Busseto to meet with Verdi. Together the three men drafted an agreement, which they hoped would be approved by the censors. The agreement stipulated that the action would be moved from the Court of France to an independent Duchy of Burgundy or another suitable location. The original aspects of the characters of Hugo’s \textit{Le roi s’amuse} would be retained, although the names and the period could be changed. The scene in which Francesco [the Duke] uses the key to enter the room of the abducted Bianca [Gilda] would be replaced. The scene where Francesco is invited to an amorous meeting at the tavern by Triboulet would remain as would the sack in the final scene.\textsuperscript{21}

On January 26, 1851 Piave was finally able to report to Verdi, “\textit{Te Deum laudamus! Gloria in excelsis Deo! Alleluja, Alleluja!} At last yesterday at three in the afternoon our \textit{Rigoletto} reached the directors safe and sound, with no broken bones and no amputations.”\textsuperscript{22} Verdi had finally received confirmation that the deformed jester, loving father character, that had originally drawn him to \textit{Le roi s’amuse}, would reach the stage.

\textbf{Critical Reaction to Rigoletto}

“Rehearsals had already begun when Verdi arrived in Venice on February 19, 1851 with only a few bars of the duetto-finale to complete. The premiere followed three weeks later. As far the public was concerned \textit{Rigoletto} was an immediate success.”\textsuperscript{23}

The reviews of the opening night performance were mixed. Although there was general agreement that Verdi’s orchestration was something new and profound, the worthiness of the subject matter and the lack of ensemble scenes were debated.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 182. \\
\textsuperscript{22} Phillips-Matz, 277. \\
\textsuperscript{23} Budden, 482-3.
An opera like this is not judged in a single evening. Yesterday we were as if overwhelmed by the novelty: novelty, or rather oddities, in the subject; novelty in the music, in the style, in the very form of the numbers; and we could not form a general idea of it. Nevertheless, the opera had the most complete success, and the Maestro was fêted after almost every number, called out, acclaimed; and two had to be repeated. And what is true, admirable, stupendous is the work of instrumentation: the orchestra speaks for you, weeps, conveys passion to you. Never was eloquence of sounds more powerful.

Less splendid, or so it seemed to us at a first hearing, is the vocal part. It is removed from the style used until now, because it lacks great ensembles, and you barely notice a quartet and a trio in the last part, of which all the musical thought was not perfectly grasped.

All in all, it is Victor Hugo’s Le roi s’amuse, pure and simple, with all its sins. The composer, or the poet, seized with a late-blooming love for the satanic, which is now out of style and passé, are [sic] looking for ideal beauty in deformity, in horror: They are looking for effects, not in the usual areas of pity and terror, but in the soul’s torment and in destruction. We cannot, in good conscience, praise such taste.

[The music was] of a truly new kind. It is an unbroken fabric of instrumentation, easy, flowing, spontaneous, which either speaks softly to your soul, or awakens you to pity, or horrifies you, according to the development of the drama.

“Although the work has had continuous success from the day of its premiere through the present, until the unification of Italy in 1860 censors frequently maltreated the libretto, often damaging the music as well. It was not so much the political aspect – the plot to murder a ruler – that bothered the censors, as the unhappy fate of Gilda.”

The subject matter proved to be a major problem during the second production six months later at the Teatro Riccardi in Bergamo. The second performance was brought to an end at the beginning of second act by protests from the audience and all the remaining performances were cancelled.

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24 Weaver, Verdi: Documentary, 182.
26 Ibid.
27 Giuseppe Verdi, Rigoletto: Melodrama in tre atti, Vocal/Piano Score, ed. Martin Chusid (Chicago: Chicago University, 1983), LV.
28 Verdi, Rigoletto, ed. Chusid, LV.
Changes were made occasionally in order to appease censors and audiences. Verdi’s disgusted reaction to one of these altered performances in Rome can be seen in a letter written to Vincenzo Luccardi on December 1, 1851.

These impresarios just aren’t intelligent enough to understand that, if operas cannot be performed exactly as their composers intended, then it’s better not to perform them. They don’t realize that the transposition of a scene, or even of one number, almost always leads to a non-success. Imagine what happens when they change the plot!! It’s surprising that I haven’t yet made a public declaration to the effect that, as given in Rome, Stiffelio and Rigoletto are simply not my music. It’s as though someone had placed a black band across the nose of one of your beautiful statues.59

Some of the changes that regularly took place included: Giovanna accompanying Gilda to the palace with the courtiers and even coming out of the Duke’s chambers with her, Ceprano’s wife being presented as his unmarried sister, Rigoletto not being a hunchback, and having Gilda live at the end of the production. Ricordi even published some of these alternate versions under the names of Viscardello, Lionello and Clara di Perth. The latter came with the option of various endings and locations.30

Victor Hugo had not been pleased with Piave’s and Verdi’s earlier handling of his Hernani. In fact he was so displeased at the “crude treatment” of his play, that he insisted that the title be changed from Ernani, named after his own play, to Il Proscitto (The Outlaw) for the 1846 Paris performance.31

Consequently, he was initially opposed to the performance of Rigoletto in Paris. When he was finally persuaded to see it, however, he did approve.32 Hugo even admitted that the Act I Rigoletto/Sparafucile duet and the Act III quartet were improvements on his original play.33

On September 8, 1852, Verdi received a request to compose an additional aria for a soprano singing the role of Gilda. During the first ten years of his career Verdi had been known to accommodate similar requests,34 but Rigoletto had been written in a new style and its sections could not be added or subtracted without damage to the overall structure. Verdi’s response to this request shows his refusal to change the opera in any way.

30 Verdi, Rigoletto, V/P, ed. Chusid, LV.
32 Doyle, 152.
33 Francis Toye, Giuseppe Verdi: His Life and Works (New York: Knopf, 1946), 309.
If you could be persuaded that my talent was so limited I did not know how to do better than I have done in Rigoletto, you would not have requested of me an aria for this opera. Miserable talent, you may say… and I agree; but there it is. Then, if this Rigoletto can stand as it is, a new aria would be superfluous. And where would one put it? Verses and notes can be provided, but unless they are at the right time and in the right place, they will never make any effect. We may know of a place, but God forbid! We should be flayed alive. Is there any need to show Gilda with the Duke in his bedroom? Do you understand me? Whatever one did, it would have to be a duet. A magnificent duet!! But the priests, the monks and the hypocrites would all cry scandal […] let me add that I conceived Rigoletto without arias, without finales, as a long string of duets, because this was how I wanted it. If anyone adds: ‘But one could do this here, and that there’ etc. etc., I reply: ‘That would be fine, but I did not know how to do any better.’

In a letter to Antonio Somma on April 22, 1853, Verdi again reiterated the faith in his own efforts and in the quality of the drama in Rigoletto.

My long experience has confirmed me in the beliefs I’ve always held concerning dramatic effect, though in my youth I didn’t have the courage to put them wholly into practice. (For instance, ten years ago I wouldn’t have risked composing Rigoletto) […] As far as dramatic effectiveness is concerned, it seems to me the best material I have yet put to music (I’m not speaking of literary or poetic worth) is Rigoletto. It has the most powerful dramatic situations, it has variety, vitality, pathos; all the dramatic developments result from the frivolous, licentious character of the Duke. Hence Rigoletto’s fears, Gilda’s passion, etc., which give rise to many dramatic situations, including the scene of the quartet which, so far as effect is concerned, will always be one of the finest our theater can boast.

Verdi’s belief in the excellence of Rigoletto proved to be accurate and by 1855 the opera was part of the standard repertoire and had played throughout Italy. It had also received performances in Austria, Germany, Russia, Portugal, Spain, England, Poland, Greece, and had even been seen in New York and San Francesco. Within ten years of the premiere, it had been performed at more than 250 opera houses throughout the world.

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35 Osborne, Letters, 87-8.
36 Werfel and Stefan, 175.
37 Phillips-Matz, 286.
38 Verdi, Rigoletto, V/P, ed. Chusid, LV.
CHAPTER 2: MUSICAL EXAMPLES

Unless otherwise indicated, all musical examples will be taken from the critical edition piano/vocal score of *Rigoletto* from *The Complete Works of Verdi*, edited by Martin Chusid, which was published in a joint effort by The University of Chicago Press and Casa Ricordi in 1983. This score is derived principally from Verdi’s autographed copy as he had prepared it for the premiere performance of *Rigoletto* at the Teatro La Fenice, Venice, Italy on March 11, 1851.

**Act I**

Although Piave narrowed the focus of Hugo’s original play by removing many of the social and political elements, he maintained the attention paid to the character’s psychological and emotional development. “Ultimately, however, the libretto can only provide a dramatic framework for the composer’s musical characterizations, and it is the power and insight of Verdi’s portrayals that give *Rigoletto* an emotional resonance which surpasses Hugo’s play.”

In a letter to Piave on June 3, 1950, Verdi clearly stated his thoughts about the motivation for the opera.

> As for the title, if we cannot keep *Le roi s’amuse*, which would be beautiful…the title must necessarily be *La maledizione di Vallier*, or to be shorter *La maledizione*. The whole subject lives in the curse, which also becomes [the] moral. An unhappy father who bemoans his daughter’s stolen honor, mocked by a jester whom the father curses, and this curse affects the jester in a frightful way, seems to me moral and great to the highest degree […] I repeat: the whole subject lies in that curse.

Accordingly, Verdi establishes the musical idea that represents *la maledizione*, the curse, in the first three full measures of the opera. This ominous moment is developed with sharply repeated octave C’s played by a solo trumpet and solo trombone, which *crescendo* and are joined by the rest of the brass, timpani and bassoons playing an A-flat German 6 chord. The whole ensemble immediately *diminuendos* and resolves to C minor, the key of Prelude. (Ex. 1) The curse motif is then repeated and developed numerous times in the short, 35 bar Prelude, which concludes with the entire orchestra climaxing on two unison C chords.

---

40 Weaver, *Verdi: Documentary*, 179.
Ex. 1  

The opening scene takes place in the Duke’s palace at a decadent party, as an offstage banda launches into a lively tune, *Allegro con brio*, in the Introduction. Near the beginning of the scene, the Duke expresses his insensitive philosophy of women in his first aria, ‘*Questa o quella*/One is the same as another.’ Shortly afterwards Rigoletto makes his first vocal entrance at the end of a minuet, during which the Duke has been flirting with the Countess Ceprano. As the Duke gives her his arm and leads the Countess away, Rigoletto immediately seizes the opportunity to insult her husband, Count Ceprano.

Rigoletto taunts Ceprano by implying that the horns of a cuckold are sprouting on his head. ‘*In testa che avete, signor di Ceprano?*/What do you have on you head, Signor Ceprano?’ As Rigoletto chases Ceprano away, the banda reprises its opening tune and Rigoletto launches into a tirade of commentary to the courtiers about the Duke’s party habits.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Il giuoco ed il vino, le feste, la danza,} \\
\text{battaglia, conviti, ben tutto gli sta!} \\
\text{Or della Contessa l’assedio egli avanza,} \\
\text{e intanto il marito fremendo ne va.}
\end{align*}
\]

The gambling and the wine, the parties, the dancing, the battles, the invitations, they are all well suited to him! Now the siege of the Countess is advancing and meanwhile the husband is fuming.

Verdi leaves the last four measures of this outburst unaccompanied, allowing Rigoletto the rhythmic freedom to enjoy his own banter as the jester. Verdi also adds the instruction ‘*ridendo*/laughing’ over the last line of Rigoletto’s text, making it clear that Rigoletto enjoys Ceprano’s humiliation. (Ex. 2)
During Rigoletto’s next entrance, he continues in conversational interjections and relentlessly tortures Ceprano over the banda music as it restates its initial Allegro con brio theme. When Ceprano threatens revenge for this abuse, Verdi musically separates Rigoletto’s and the Duke’s vocal lines from the rest of the ensemble, having them pass a melody back and forth that is set to an eighth note, eighth rest rhythmic pattern that clearly imitates laughter. (Ex. 3) The Duke chastises Rigoletto during this moment for always taking the joke too far, but Rigoletto is not worried because he believes he is safe under the Duke’s protection.

Duke: Ah sempre tu spingi lo scherzo all’estremo.
Rigoletto: Che coglier me puote? Di loro non temo.

[Duke: Ah, you always force the jest to extremes. Rigoletto: Who can touch me? I am not afraid.]

The orchestra joins the banda at this point and the Duke’s vocal line is played in union with the crisp bright sound of the first violins, piccolo and first oboe. Rigoletto’s vocal line is played in unison with the flute, first clarinet and first bassoon giving it a darker reedy quality.

As the rest of the ensemble joins the scene, Verdi highlights Rigoletto’s vocal line in several ways. First, he gives Rigoletto a vocal line of disjunct leaping thirds and fourths with a repeated staccato marking. (Ex. 4) This allows Rigoletto another variety of mocking laughter, different from the eighth-note pattern shown earlier in Ex. 3. Second, Verdi colors Rigoletto’s line darker this time by scoring the cellos and first bassoon to play in unison with him. Third, Verdi allows Rigoletto’s line to stand out by indicating that the remainder of the ensemble should sing sotto voce, and by giving them a different rhythmic pattern that allows Rigoletto to be heard during their rests. Finally, Rigoletto’s straight forward, strong quarter-note rhythm shows that he continues to think he is untouchable because of the Duke’s protection. However,
the Duke’s own syncopated and accented line shows that he is not like minded with Rigoletto.

(Ex. 4)

I Tempo ($J = 112$)

Ex. 3     Act I, Scene IV, mm. 359-367

Ex. 4     Act I, Scene V, mm. 375-378

12
Near the end of this scene, Rigoletto’s vocal line joins with the rest of the ensemble for the first time and brings the scene to a climax as everyone proclaims ‘Tutto è gioia/All is joy.’ (Ex. 5)

Ex. 5     Act I, Scene V, mm. 419-422

The festivities abruptly halt as Monterone enters to protest the dishonor of his daughter by the Duke. Rigoletto tells the Duke that he will speak to Monterone and handle the matter himself. “Rigoletto’s arioso, mocking the outraged father, is accompanied and punctuated by orchestral figures which vividly illustrate the evil, destructive side of the hunchback’s nature.”

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41 Osborn, Rigoletto, 53.
In the middle of Rigoletto’s confrontation with Monterone, Verdi has written a four 32\textsuperscript{nd}note figure that drops an octave to an eight note, harmonically moving from D-sharp diminished 7 to C major. (Ex. 6, m. 472) This grouping happens three times, with a different woodwind playing the 32\textsuperscript{nd}-note octave dropping figure each time. It is first played by the piccolo, then by the flute and finally by the first clarinet. This scene contains the first instances in the score where Verdi has used the orchestra to described Rigoletto’s deformed awkward movements. Verdi also reveals the depths of Rigoletto’s evil by having each woodwind enter an octave lower and with a darker timber than the one before.

Rigoletto’s only trills also occur in this section. Verdi could be using these trills to describe Rigoletto’s movements. It is possible that Rigoletto could be shaking his jester’s stick in Monterone’s face at this point. It is certainly true that the trills add to the tension and insulting quality of the moment. Verdi also has the violins trilling with Rigoletto and further heightens the tension with the rest of the string section filling out an E diminished 7 chord. (Ex. 6, m. 474) This tension is finally resolved to F minor, the key of the next section, where Monterone explodes at the insults he has endured.
The Duke arrests Monterone, who responds with a curse on both the Duke and Rigoletto. Monterone then calls the Duke a ‘vile/coward’ and Rigoletto a ‘serpente/snake,’ and continues with his focus entirely on Rigoletto, ‘tu che d’un padre ridi al dolore, sii maledetto!/you who laugh at the grief of a father, be cursed!’ Rigoletto responds in an aside, ‘Che sento! Orrore!/What do I hear! Oh horror!’

“The malediction is responsible for a blinding moment of self-knowledge, as Rigoletto suddenly realizes the horrors in which he is implicated. It is the man and the father, not the court jester, who gasps [in horror].”

Just before Monterone unleashes his curse, Verdi has heightened the tension in the scene with a G diminished 7 chord accompanied by a diminuendo in orchestra and then he completely silences the orchestra with a fermata over their rests. (Ex. 7, mm. 518-519) Verdi leaves Monterone’s rising vocal line unaccompanied until it climaxes on F4 of a D-flat major chord. (Ex. 7, m. 520) The expected harmony at this point would have moved from the G diminished chord to an A-flat major chord and then to D-flat major, vii dim 7/V-V-I, but Verdi calls musical attention to the shock and importance of the curse by skipping the dominant and making an unprepared shift to a new key, D-flat major, right on Monterone’s high note.

Since Verdi has apparently moved to the key of D-flat major, it is no surprise that Rigoletto’s reaction is placed over an A-flat major chord, the dominant of key. The real revelation of the scene comes with resolution into the new key on Rigoletto’s ‘colpito/stricken’ response, ‘orrore/horror!’ The dominant A-flat major chord does not resolve to the anticipated D-flat major, I 6/4-V-I, but to D-flat minor, I 6/4-V-i.

Verdi uses this unexpected shift to the parallel minor, a sudden drop of the dynamic level, an increase of tempo to Vivace, and the restriction of the orchestral forces to the string section and the first bassoon, to show that Rigoletto is overwhelmed by the situation. (Ex. 7, m. 522)

The third scene begins as Rigoletto returns home, contemplating Monterone’s curse. Rigoletto’s recollection of the curse, ‘Quel vecchio maledivami/That old man cursed me,’ appeared in Verdi’s first sketches (Ex. 8) in a similar musical shape to Monterone’s original statement of the curse, with an upward thrust to a F4. (Ex. 7, mm. 519-520)

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42 Edwards and Edwards, 64.
In Verdi’s final version, (Ex. 9) the recollection is less an outburst and more a pensive contemplation of the curse. Verdi presents this phrase in a similar form three more times before the end of the act to show that Rigoletto is constantly thinking about and consumed by the curse.

The curse phrase is sung by Rigoletto on a repeated C4, the common tone between the two accompanying chords in the orchestra, as the harmony moves from an A-flat 7 to C major. Verdi orchestrates this moment with clarinets, bassoons and strings, with all the instruments restricted to their lower registers.

The remembrance of the curse wells up inside Rigoletto, with the peak emotional moment being placed at the height of the crescendo in his vocal line and with the restrained colors of the orchestra playing an A-flat German 6 chord. (Ex. 9, m. 12) The G-flat in the chord

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Ex. 7  
**Act I, Scene VI, mm. 513-524**

Rigoletto

Quel vecchio male di vami.

Ex. 8  
**Original Verdi Sketch**

In Verdi’s final version, (Ex. 9) the recollection is less an outburst and more a pensive contemplation of the curse. Verdi presents this phrase in a similar form three more times before the end of the act to show that Rigoletto is constantly thinking about and consumed by the curse.

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43 Budden, 486.
represents enharmonically a F#, which is how the opening orchestral entrance with the first presentation of the curse phrase is written. (Ex. 1, m. 2) As Rigoletto represses the disturbing thought, Verdi writes a diminuendo for his vocal line and the orchestra resolves to C major and ‘morendo/dies away.’ (Ex. 9, m. 13) The final tension of the moment is not ultimately released until beginning of the next duet, where the C major chord functions as the dominant and resolves to F major, Ger6-V-I.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Andante mosso} & \quad (d = 66) \\
\text{Rigoletto}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\text{Quel vecchio male divava mi!!}
\]

Ex. 9 Act I, Scene VII, mm. 10-13

Verdi spent over a year in Paris shortly before writing Rigoletto and in a letter on September 6, 1847, he stated that he has just seen the mélodrame Le Chevalier de Maison-Rouge by Alexandre Dumas at the Théâtre Historique.\(^{44}\) He would have had ample opportunity to see more mélodrame in the Parisian theater at this time and it is possible that these performances influenced the Rigoletto/Sparafucile duet in the third scene. “The musical texture is all in the orchestra, the voices are restricted to pure dialogue, with only essential questions and answers, never singing together, creating the effect of a mélodrame.”\(^{45}\)

The melody in this section is presented in unison by a muted solo cello and a similarly muted solo double bass and accompanied by light pizzicato chords in the strings and staccato chords in the woodwinds. Over this instrumentation, Sparafucile introduces himself to Rigoletto in a conversational or parlante style. (Ex. 10)


\(^{45}\) Sala and Smart, 205.
The melody in the muted low strings gives a dangerous, illicit quality to the entire conversation. The rising and falling of the melody over four bar phrases reflects the smooth, oily quality of Sparafucile as he offers his services as an assassin. Most of Rigoletto’s responses are clipped interjections, demonstrating his surprise and possible fear at finding Sparafucile outside his home.

Sparafucile: Signor?
Rigoletto: Va...non ho niente.
Sparafucile: Nè il chiesi...a voi presente un uom di spada sta.
Rigoletto: Un ladro?

[Sparafucile: Sir?
Rigoletto: Go away...I have nothing.
Sparafucile: Nor did I ask...in your presence stands a man who bears a sword.
Rigoletto: A thief?]
Although Rigoletto turns down Sparafucile’s services as an assassin for the moment, he does inquire about the extra cost required for assassinating a gentleman, where it would take place and where Sparafucile could be contacted. “Rigoletto is not driven to act at this time because he still believes that he can keep the two spheres of his existence separate, but the collapse of this dichotomy has already begun.”

Rigoletto’s following scene, ‘Pari siamo,’ does not fit the traditional expectations of a recitative or an aria. “It is, rather, the operatic equivalent, in form and in stature, of a great Shakespearian monologue.” Presenting many emotions in short period of time, Verdi uses this scene to give insight into Rigoletto’s tortured mind.

The scene begins with a sparsely accompanied recitative in the same key that has just ended the preceding duet, F major. Rigoletto muses on how he and Sparafucile are alike, in that they both attack men. He attacks with his jests and Sparafucile attacks with a knife. Rigoletto’s line saying that ‘l’uomo son io che ride/I am a man who laughs’ is set by Verdi in a high tessitura with a laughing rhythm. His next line referring to Sparafucile, ‘ei quel che spegne!/he the one who kills!’, is written an octave lower and with a more sedate rhythm in order to bring out the darker, menacing timbres in that register of the baritone voice.

The strings then play a sequence of four five-note figures, alternately descending and ascending with rests in between that prolong the suspense of the moment and lead Rigoletto’s thoughts back to the moment of Monterone’s curse. (Ex. 11)

Verdi treats this second recollection of the curse exactly as he did the first, (Ex. 9) except now the violins have been removed from the orchestration, creating a more dismal color.

In the following Allegro section, Rigoletto vents his hatred of the world and blames it for what he has become. Instead of resolving from C major to F major as after the first recollection,
Verdi composes a false resolution to flat-VI, D-flat major in the key of F, and so surprises us harmonically as well as texturally with a *tremolo* in the strings.

Then in a dynamic rhythmically driven figure, rising chromatically in pitch as it progresses through three repetitions, the orchestra pushes Rigoletto to the point of ‘rabbia/rage’ over his fate of being ‘*difforme/deformed*’ and a ‘*buffone/buffoon*!’ (Ex. 12, mm. 19, 21, 23)

![Ex. 12](image)

Rigoletto continues in a rant against the Duke and the courtiers in a declamatory section, blaming them for causing his wickedness, when he is suddenly interrupted by a flute presenting an arching melody. (Ex. 13, mm. 52-55) This is the first time Verdi has scored the flute with a solo line. This happens in only two more scenes in the opera and they are both associated with Rigoletto’s daughter, Gilda. The next time a solo flute is featured so prominently is during the introduction of Gilda’s main aria ‘*Caro nome*’ and then again as she is dying in the final scene. Here the flute is foreshadowing Gilda’s character and the hidden world that she represents.

Leading into this moment, Rigoletto has been caught up in his hatred of the outside world and his own wickedness. He blames everyone else for what he had become, ‘*per cagion vostra è solo*/for [the] reason is yours alone.’ Verdi directs Rigoletto to sing this concluding line of the section (Ex. 13, mm. 49-51) with ‘*tutta forza/all his strength*’ and then calls upon the full forces of the orchestra to begin what appears to be a I 6/4-V-I cadence. The E major I 6/4 chord is
delivered in three fortissimo quarter notes (Ex. 13, m. 51), but instead of the fully orchestrated B major chord that is expected to follow, Verdi allows only the dominant root, B natural, to be played ‘dolce/sweetly’ by the solo flute.

Verdi uses this moment to show the dual nature of Rigoletto’s personality. Rigoletto’s jester world occupied by curses, courtiers and the Duke is suddenly replaced with comforting thoughts of his daughter represented by the flute. Verdi also gives Rigoletto his first lyric melody at this point, echoing the flute line, as he about to enter his courtyard. This dual nature is reflected specifically in Rigoletto’s text, ‘Ma in altr’uomo qui me cangio/But here into another man I change myself.’ (Ex. 13, mm. 55-57)

The harmonies under the flute solo never complete their cadence, but alternate between I 6/4 and V7. Rigoletto echoes the flute line with the same chord progression and Verdi ornaments his line with suspension tones that bring out a weeping quality. Instead of Rigoletto’s line ending on an anticipated G sharp and concluding the cadence in the key of the E major, the line goes awry and drops an extra half step to a G natural in a C7 chord. (Ex. 13, m. 57) The recollection of the curse is repeated a third time and orchestrated exactly as the second, (Ex. 9) but instead of an eighth-note, dotted quarter-note rhythm, Verdi gives Rigoletto a sixteenth-note, double dotted quarter-note rhythm.

This unexpected harmonic shift to C7 and the rhythm of the recollection becoming more exaggerated suggest that Rigoletto’s struggle with the curse is intensifying. Placed at this moment dramatically, with the foreshadowing of Gilda in the flute solo, it could also indicate that Rigoletto’s biggest fear is that the curse could involve his daughter.

Verdi abandons the resolution to E major at this point as Rigoletto struggles to free himself from these thoughts. Rigoletto eventually does free himself and proclaims ‘è follia!/it is folly!’ This is written on an E4, but the stressed syllable of follia is traditionally sung on an interpolated G4. With this Verdi moves out of the unresolved tonal section with a clear cadence, I 6/4-V7-I, into the bright key of C major.

Rigoletto is finally able to leave the outside world behind and greets his daughter in the sanctuary of their courtyard. Gilda’s young, innocent, energetic entrance into the opera is set by Verdi with an Allegro brilliante tempo, syncopated rhythms throughout the orchestra and trills in the strings and woodwinds. (Ex. 14, mm. 69-72)
Ex. 13     Act I, Scene VIII, mm. 52-57

During this joyous reunion, Rigoletto embraces his daughter, stating that she is his entire life and without her on earth he would have no one. Gilda attempts to comfort her father and then inquires about her relatives. Verdi interrupts the duet at this point with a series of accented diminished chords and the former joyous orchestral melody with the syncopated rhythms and trills is unexpectedly cut off. (Ex. 15, m. 113)

Rigoletto’s response is abrupt, ‘Tu non ne hai/You have none.’ In this brief, connective section Gilda reveals that she knows nothing of her family background, not even her father’s name. In an attempt to shield Gilda from the outside world, Rigoletto refuses to answer her questions and instead asks her ‘A te che importa?/Why is it important to you?’

During this exchange, Verdi has given the orchestra rests on the downbeats of the measure, de-stabilizing the rhythmic foundation of the music and then he writes a full bar with no orchestral accompaniment with a fermata over the rest. (Ex. 15, m. 116) This silence after the unresolved diminished chords could indicate that Gilda is unsure how to respond her father’s question.
When she does continue, Verdi changes the tempo to *Adagio* and accompanies her with half-note chords in the horns. Verdi uses this elongated pulse and the tonal quality of the horns to show Gild’s tentativeness. After the uncertainty of the previous diminished chords, Verdi attempts to reestablish C major with Gilda’s entrance and also the happiness associated with that key from the first part of the duet.

Rigoletto interrupts Gilda’s melody again with another outburst, ‘*Non uscir mai* / Don’t ever go out.’ This outburst leads out of C major to the tonality of E-flat. Gilda supplicates to her father and her line also follows into the key of E-flat major. Along with this outburst showing that Rigoletto is not listening to what Gilda has said, Verdi also gives the following stage directions to Rigoletto, ‘*assorto ne’ suoi pensieri interrompendola* / engrossed in his own thoughts, interrupting her.’ (Ex. 15, mm. 117-118)

Gilda persists with questions of her mother and Rigoletto finally relents. ‘Rigoletto’s solo in which he speaks of the ‘angel’ who took pity on his deformity is like an aria movement in miniature - a compressed equivalent of Macbeth’s ‘*Pietà, rispetto, amore*’ which it resembles to
the extent of having a similar modulation to E major (‘Ah...moria’) just where a reprise would be expected."48

Ex. 15     Act I, Scene IX, mm. 112-120

Leading up this modulation in the aria, Rigoletto gives a short description of his life before meeting Gilda’s mother, ‘Solo, difforme, povero/Alone, deformed, poor.’ This description is set with interrupted, brief, declamatory spurts as he struggles to speak about his past. The next phrase, ‘per compassion mi amò/out of compassion she loved me,’ is marked as a smooth, legato phrase, as he vividly remembers the moments of their love. (Ex. 16, mm. 133-135)

Harmonically, Verdi begins these measures in A-flat major, the initial key of the aria and then moves to the parallel minor. Here he uses the melancholy feel of the temporary minor key

48 Budden, 494.
to highlight Rigoletto’s text ‘mi amò/she loved me’ and also indicates that it be sung ‘dolce/sweetly.’ He finishes the phrase with a half cadence on an E-flat major chord. All this combines to arouse the memory of the death of Gilda’s mother.

The development of this memory is a prime example of Verdi’s ability to portray a complex emotional inner life through his music. (Ex. 16, mm. 135-136) First, he brings the preceding phrase to a halt on a half cadence, creating harmonic tension. Second, he increases this tension by delaying the entrance of next phrase with rests and a fermata in the orchestra. Third, the next phrase begins in F-flat major, a false resolution of the previous dominant chord, and it then takes several measures before the cadence is finally completed to A-flat major. (Ex. 16, m. 138) Fourth, the text itself is provocative, ‘Ah moria!..Ah, she died!’ Finally, he places the vocal line relatively high in Rigoletto’s voice and marks it to be sung ‘con dolore/with pain.’

Ex. 16

The next section of the duet starts as Gilda, ‘con agitazione/with agitation,’ interrupts her father and tries to calm him. Verdi sets Rigoletto’s response in a halting, desperate manner as he pleads with her, ‘Tu sola, sola resti al misero/You remain alone to the wretched one.’ This gives way to some of Rigoletto’s most challenging vocal passages in the opera, with the highest
tessitura and some of the most difficult musical patterns. Rigoletto’s desperation is reflected in these staccato passages (Ex. 17, mm. 156-157) and the chromatically rising legato sections show his anxiety about protecting the one remaining love in his life. (Ex. 17, mm. 158-160)

The two voices come together later in this section separated by the interval of a third on descending 16th-notes. These 16th-notes are tied together in a repeated two note slurring pattern. (Ex. 17) In Rigoletto’s text, ‘Dio, sii ringraziato!/God be thanked!,’ the musical pattern indicates his supplication to God and in Gilda’s text, ‘mi lacera, padre tal visa.../I’m torn, father, by such a sight…,’ this pattern represents the concern she feels for her father.

Ex. 17 Act I, Scene IX, 153-162

In the next connecting Allegro section, Gilda continues to ask Rigoletto about his name, his homeland and his family. He responds that it would be dangerous for her to know and that she alone is his entire universe.

Rigoletto has been overprotective of his daughter during the last three months that they have lived in this new town and has only allowed her outside to attend church. Gilda is now sixteen and yearns to see more of the city, but Rigoletto warns her never to go out and to be careful of strangers. Then in an aside he predicts the dire consequences if anyone were to follow Gilda home from church. (Ex. 18)

Ben te ne guarda!
(Potrian seguirla, repirla anchors)
Qui d’un buffone si disonora la figlia,
e se ne ride!
Orror!)

Watch carefully!
(They could follow her, abduct her even!
Here they would dishonor the daughter of a buffoon,
and they would laugh about it!
Oh, horror!)
The possible threats and fear found in Rigoletto’s aside are intensified by the chromatically rising pattern in his vocal line. The low strings also follow this chromatically rising progression as they *tremolandi* in unison. While Rigoletto’s line ascends, Verdi also incorporates a *crescendo* and with no chords to define the harmonic progression of the scene, the key and foundation of the music are lost. The last definable chord heard leading into this moment was a C#7. (E. 18, m. 222) If this chord was functioning as the dominant of the key it would be expected to eventually resolve to F# or possibly a false resolution to D or D-flat, but the next chord heard is a crashing B major chord after ‘*Orror!*’ (Ex. 18, m. 228, spelled enharmonically as C-flat major)

Once again, Verdi has set up a cadence and dramatic situation leading to the expectation one thing and surprised us with something totally unprepared. In this case the unexpected resolution to B major illustrates Rigoletto horror of the scenario he has just envisioned.

Ex. 18     Act I, Scene IX, mm. 221-228

At this point Giovanna, Gilda’s nurse, comes out of the house. Rigoletto asks Giovanna if she has seen any strangers near the house and warns her to keep the gate to the garden locked.
This leads into the final section of the duet, beginning with Rigoletto’s simple melody, in which he asks Giovanna to watch over ‘questo fiore/this flower.’ Gilda tries to comfort Rigoletto, with same melody in the subdominant key, by assuring him that the angel who loved him is now watching over her.\(^{49}\) In Rigoletto’s second statement of this theme, he is distracted by a noise and abruptly ends his vocal line.

While Rigoletto is investigating the sound, the Duke slips past him and hides in the courtyard. Rigoletto is unaware that his worst fears have been realized and that the two worlds he has tried to keep separate have now collided. He continues his farewell again with the main melody of the scene and Gilda joins the duet with a simple loving descant above Rigoletto’s line. (Ex. 19)

![Ex. 19](image)

\[\text{Ex. 19} \quad \text{Act I, Scene IX, mm. 302-310}\]

Rigoletto leaves and during his brief absence, Gilda meets and falls in love with the Duke under the assumed disguise of a poor student. Rigoletto returns after the Duke’s departure, reflecting a final time on Monterone’s curse. He is then confronted by the courtiers, who convince him to help them in their plot to abduct Ceprano’s wife. Rigoletto is blindfolded and unwittingly helps them abduct his own daughter.

After a frantic search for Gilda, he realizes that he has fallen prey the courtiers’ revenge and that he is responsible for his own daughter’s abduction. Rigoletto now understands that he

\(^{49}\) Budden, 495.
has reaped the consequences of his actions. With a final cry, he calls out ‘la maledizione/the curse’ and faints.

Act II

Act II takes place in the drawing room of the Duke’s palace. The Duke has just returned from a second trip to Rigoletto’s home and is lamenting that the one woman whom he could love has been stolen from him. The courtiers then enter celebrating their victory over Rigoletto and tell their abduction story to the Duke. The Duke rejoices at the news and hurries to meet Gilda in his chambers.

Rigoletto enters the scene singing a jester tune on the nonsense syllables ‘la ra la ra.’ This entrance is marked in the score with Verdi’s stage directions as ‘affectando indifferenza/affecting indifference.’ (Ex. 20) “Having Rigoletto pretend nonchalance by singing meaningless syllables, cantarellando, an especially powerful dramatic stroke, may have been a late thought of Verdi, for in the [original] sketch the part is assigned only to the orchestra.”

Ex. 20     Act II, Scene III, mm. 5-9

Rigoletto continues in the scene, mocking Ceprano by declaring him ‘more tiresome than usual’ as he secretly searches for signs of his daughter. Eventually Rigoletto uncovers that Gilda is with the Duke. At the same moment in which Rigoletto realizes that Gilda is in the Duke’s chambers, the tempo changes as does the orchestral texture with the upper strings ceasing to play

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50 Verdi, Rigoletto, V/P, ed. Chusid, LXXIII.
and the lower strings changing from a consistent eighth-note *staccato* accompaniment to a 16th-note *tremolo* pattern. The low strings’ music is also written as a rising chromatic line, which doubles Rigoletto’s vocal line.

The courtiers have assumed that Gilda is Rigoletto’s mistress, but they are shocked when he reveals that she is his daughter. This unexpected revelation occurs with an unprepared harmonic shift to E-flat major. Rigoletto asks them why they aren’t laughing now. This question is written in the lower range of Rigoletto’s voice to bring out the menacing timbre available there, while strings play at a *pianissimo* level. The harmony also moves back and forth between tonic and Neapolitan chords, emphasizing the scornful quality of Rigoletto’s question.

Rigoletto then shouts at the courtiers to give her back. This is accompanied by a shift from E-flat major to the relative minor of C with the full orchestra reaching top volume on the dominant of C minor, a G7 chord. (Ex. 21, m.71) The strings then rush furiously forward for three jagged measures of activity expanding to a G9 chord. All of the momentum gathered since Rigoletto’s entrance into the scene is now brought to a sudden stop, marked by *gran pausa*. (Ex. 21, m. 76)

Verdi uses this extended silence as a pivotal moment in the opera. Up to this point Rigoletto has put all of his energy into keeping his two worlds of existence separate. Although he had verbally abused the courtiers in the past, he felt that he had been safe under the Duke’s protection. He also felt that he had securely hidden his daughter away from the evil of the outside world. Now Rigoletto realizes that everything he has worked for is gone, but he has not surrendered. His daughter is in the midst of the world he hates and Rigoletto finds strength in his role as father as he prepares to defy the courtiers and the Duke.

Verdi releases the pent up tension of the *gran pausa* and resolves the G9 fully into the key of C minor as Rigoletto’s launches into his tirade against the courtiers. (Ex. 21, mm. 76-77)

In Rigoletto’s aria ‘*Cortigiani,*’ Verdi allows the libretto to dictate the dramatic and emotional progress of the characters and determine the form of the music. As a result the aria can be divided into three distinct sections.

The first section, marked *Andante mosso agitato*, (Ex. 21, mm. 77-78) is a direct attack against the courtiers with Rigoletto calling them a ‘*vil razza dannata* / damned cowardly race’ and threatening them with bloodshed if they do not open the door to the Duke’s chambers. Piave has
streamlined the original text here, eliminating the extended attacks that Hugo’s Triboulet unleashes against the courtiers.  

Ex. 21     Act II, Scene IV, mm. 71-78

The vocal line is declamatory throughout this section, delivered in short one or two word outbursts separated by rests. The predominant orchestral feature of this section is in the strings, a sextuplet made up of a two-note slur followed by four *staccato* notes. This figure provides forward thrust and emotional turmoil, while Rigoletto shouts over the top of it. The vocal climax of the section happens as Rigoletto says that ‘a man fears nothing on earth when he is defending his children.’ Verdi scores the last syllable of *defender/defending* on an accented E-flat⁴, which is traditionally sung on an interpolated G⁴.

The next part of the first section incorporates a *staccato* sextuplet rhythm in the strings. These sextuplet figures are written as descending, *staccato arpeggios* alternating between tonic and subdominant chords, C minor and F minor in the key of C minor. This sextuplet rhythm is alternated with a triplet rhythm, which is scored for the entire orchestra with accents on the last two notes of the triplet. These accents represent Rigoletto frantically beating on the door of the Duke’s chambers.

Rigoletto is now exhausted from his enraged verbal attack and from physically attempting to enter the Duke’s chambers. Verdi shows this exhaustion by bringing the dynamic level of the entire ensemble down to *piano*. This allows Rigoletto’s lines to be delivered less

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51 Edwards and Edwards, 71.
forcefully and Verdi scores longer intervals of rest in between them. Near the end of this section, Verdi also makes a strong musical statement by writing *appoggiaturas* in Rigoletto’s line on beats one and three of the measure, showing that even in his weakened state he is still struggling to fight. (Ex. 22, m. 101) In this same moment, Verdi shows Rigoletto’s unsteadiness by writing a series of rising parallel 6th intervals in the strings, creating an unstable harmony. The final chord of this series is an E diminished 7 with the root omitted. By omitting the root and writing Rigoletto’s accented ‘Ah!’ on the 7th of the diminished chord over silence in the orchestra, Verdi places Rigoletto in a precarious place harmonically and emotionally. (Ex. 22, m. 102)

This E diminished 7 chord resolves to the new key of F minor, vii dim7-i, leading into the second section of the aria, *Meno mosso*. With a slower tempo and in minor key, Rigoletto changes tactics and makes an emotional plea to Marullo.

*Ebben, piango… Marullo…*
*Signore, tu ch’hai l’alma gentil come il core,*
*dimmi tu ove l’hanno nascota?..*

Very well, I weep… Marullo…
Sir, you who have a kind soul in your heart,
Tell me where they have hidden her?..

Verdi supports Rigoletto’s plea with a descending sextuplet figure, a 16th-note rest on the beat and a staccato 16th-note followed by a pair of two 16th-note slurs. This figure is played in octaves by the first violins and violas echoing Rigoletto’s line. Verdi also introduces for the first time the *cor anglais*, English horn, playing quarter-notes in octaves with the first bassoon on the second and fourth beats of the measure. The unique quality of their combined timbres adds pathos to Rigoletto’s line. (Ex. 22, mm. 103-106)

Verdi has turned the expected dramatic aria form of a slow section transitioning into a fast cabaletta, upside down in ‘Cortigiani’ and written an aria that goes from a fast and declamatory section transitioning into a slow and intimate section. The shift to slow and intimate is apparent in Rigoletto’s line starting with the pickup to measure 105. (Ex. 22) The vocal line is fully melodic with indicated dynamic nuances, *crescendo* and *diminuendo*, clearly showing that Rigoletto has gone from attacking and hurling insults to a completely different emotional facet.
Ex. 22     Act II, Scene IV, mm. 101-106

Rigoletto’s appeals to Marullo remain unanswered and Verdi’s stage directions call upon Rigoletto to weep leading into the final section of the aria. Verdi scores the first violins and violas in octaves with a 16th-note figure, to transition into this last section. The figure starts after a 16th-rest on C, moving down a half-step to B natural and then moving back to C, the strings gradually widen the downward interval until they outline of an A-flat 7 chord. Rigoletto’s vocal
line leads the resolution from the A-flat 7 chord functioning as a dominant chord into D-flat major.

This final section comes closest to the traditional form of an aria, in that it starts off with conventional four measure phrases and begins and ends in the same key. Rigoletto has never before appeared in front of the courtiers reduced to such a vulnerable position, as Verdi has only shown him in public on the attack. Now Rigoletto has no choice, but to plead for forgiveness for his past deeds. Begging the courtiers for pity, he states that his daughter is his entire world.

At this point, the orchestra is also reduced to an intimate chamber feel and Rigoletto’s line is accompanied lightly by an obbligato pattern in the solo cello and pizzicato chords in the strings. Verdi also makes full use the English horn’s unique timbre in this small ensemble by having it double the voice line a sixth above. Verdi could have used the oboe in this place or a bassoon (as he had done previously having the bassoon play in unison with Rigoletto’s lyric melody in the Act I Gilda duet), but here the English horn lends a more vulnerable and plaintive quality to the moment than the other woodwinds would have been able to offer.

This is an excellent example of what Verdi meant when he wrote to Piave, “I set myself to study it [Le roi s’amuse] and ponder if profoundly, and the idea, the musical color had been found in my mind.”

Rigoletto’s pleas are passionate, “His final ‘pietà,’ however, is met only with silence in the extended rest that concludes the aria; and the brief moment of joy when Gilda rushes to his arms is crushed by the realization of his daughter’s defilement.” Piave and Verdi did not make clear whether Gilda was the victim of rape or seduction while in the Duke’s chambers, but it is certainly clear that her chastity had been violated. “Historically, the chastity of a woman ‘belonged’ to the man in authority over her; thus its loss was commonly viewed as a transgression not against a woman, but against her male authority figure – in Gilda’s case, her father.” Thus when Rigoletto discovers that Gilda has been violated, it is also another violation against him.

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52 Weaver, Verdi: Documentary, 180.
53 Edwards and Edwards, 73.
Ex. 23     Act II, Scene IV, mm. 114-115

At the same moment that Rigoletto discovers his daughter’s shame, Gilda sees her father for the first time dressed as a jester and learns of his humiliating profession. The two worlds that Rigoletto has striven to keep separate have now come face to face. Before attempting to console his daughter, Rigoletto warns the courtiers to move away and to keep the Duke away also. Verdi sets Rigoletto’s warning on repeated C4s, the same pitch as the recollection of Monterone’s curse, accompanied by a unison tremolo in the violins. The intense feeling of menace this creates conveys the seriousness of Rigoletto’s passion and the courtiers depart comparing Rigoletto with madmen and children, ‘it is often helpful to let them have their way.’

Finally they are alone and after a short recitative, Gilda begins a duet by confessing everything that has led up to this point. She had seen a young man in church, who came to her yesterday and presented himself as a poor student. He confessed his love for her and she told him that she loved him also. After he departed, she was abducted and brought to this place.

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Before she can continue with the details of what happened when she was alone with the Duke, Rigoletto interrupts her story with an anguished moan. (Ex. 24, m. 119)

Gilda’s interrupted confession cadences in the orchestra in C major, I 6/4-V7-I, with her solo cadenza ending on C5. Rigoletto’s moan likewise enters on C an octave lower, the common tone as the string section moves from C major down a third to the key of A-flat major, in the Piu mosso. Verdi then uses the same rhythm in the strings that he used in the first section of ‘Cortigiani,’ a sextuplet made up of a two-note slur followed by four staccato notes, to drive Rigoletto forward. Only this time instead of Rigoletto cursing the courtiers, he is desperately questioning God. (Ex. 24, mm. 119-120)

Solo per me l’infamia a te chiedeva, o Dio!
Ch’ella potesse ascendere quanto caduto er’io…

I asked that this disgrace be given to me alone, oh God!
so that she could rise up as far as I have fallen…

Rigoletto then turns his attention to comforting his daughter as the duet proper starts at the Più lento. Rigoletto offers long arching phrases of comfort to Gilda, asking her to cry her flowing tears over his heart. Gilda in turn takes comfort from her father, ornamenting lightly over his line and calling him her consoling angel. This section ends with father and daughter comforting each other, moving in thirds in a softly articulated syncopated rhythm.

Monterone interrupts the scene on his way to prison and bemoans the fact that the Duke is still alive and happy, and that his curse on the Duke has been ineffective. After Monterone has passed though the stage, Rigoletto declares that the old man is wrong and that vengeance will indeed be taken upon the Duke.

This is the end of the act in the Hugo drama. Verdi and Piave conceived an additional section to the scene, but struggled to find the appropriate text and dramatic setting. On January 20, 1851, Verdi wrote to Piave to let him know that the second act was almost finished.

I say almost because the stretta of the last duet was ineffective because of Gilda’s aside. I realize that two actors who tell their business, one in one direction, the other in the other direction, are ineffective, particularly in the fast sections. I have therefore decided to redo this stretta, but I need your help […] Write to me soon and send me the verses at once so that we can finish.

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56 Budden, 502.
“Verdi then outlined the entire duet between Gilda and Rigoletto with the text ‘Si, vendetta,’ [Yes, vengeance] which later became one of the most dramatic moments in the opera.”

Ex. 24     Act II, Scene VI, mm. 117-121

The end of the act in its final form has Rigoletto proclaiming vengeance against the Duke. Rigoletto’s melody, stated in the tonic key, is propelled forward by the triplet placed on the final beat of the first three measures of his line. (Ex. 25) Gilda enters in the subdominant key with the same melody and rhythm, pleading for mercy for the man that she still loves. (Ex. 26) In this final version the two characters are not divided by asides, but even here “There is no reconciliation of Rigoletto’s vengeance and Gilda’s pleas for mercy; hence, even in the final stretta the vocal lines do not join in standard unison declamation.”

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58 Ibid.
59 Edwards and Edwards, 75.
Act III takes place on a divided stage. As in the Hugo play, there is a decaying two-story inn situated on a deserted bank of the Mincio River. This divided stage allows up to three separate scenes to take place at the same time, one on each floor inside of the inn and one outside. Verdi wished to keep the setting the same as in the original play and in a letter on June 3, 1850 told Piave, “There is no problem about the division of the stage or for the sack [with the censors]. Just follow the French and you can’t go wrong.”

During his recent stay in Paris, Verdi had probably seen or at least heard of the convention of the divided stage as used in mélodrame productions. New importance was being placed on scenic design in the Parisian theatre at that time and the stage space was expected to function “not merely as décor, as mere scenic background for the action, but rather tends to interact with the characters and to play a part in the dramatic discourse.”

Verdi did indeed expect the stage space to function as an extension of the drama. As dictated in the score, the dilapidated inn has a hole in a wall large enough to allow people to view the action on the inside, while remaining unobserved on the outside. The seediness of the inn allows the audience to believe that prostitution and murder might take place there. The darkness and remoteness of the outside area aids in the disposal of bodies and the sudden flashes of lighting reveal unexpected surprises.

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60 Weaver, *Verdi: Documentary*, 179.
61 Sala and Smart, 198-9.
The act begins with a murky introduction in the low strings and that is then passed to the violins. Rigoletto enters with Gilda and asks her if she is cured of her love for the Duke. In the sparsely accompanied recitative that follows, Gilda reveals that she still loves the Duke and believes that he adores her. Rigoletto vows revenge for his misguided daughter and as the Duke approaches the inn, he orders her to watch the Duke’s actions.

Upon entering the inn, the Duke immediately requests two items from Sparafucile, ‘Tua sorella e del vino/Your sister and some wine.’ The word sorella/sister is found in Verdi’s original autographed score from the first performance, it is also present in his original sketches and in Hugo’s play. However, before the critical edition Ricordi score was available, the commonly used Schirmer edition has a word change here; sorella/sister is replaced with stanza/room. This change can be traced back to a copy of Verdi’s autographed score made “shortly after the premiere and deposited by special agreement in the archives of the Teatro La Fenice.” Replacing sorella with stanza avoids making it clear that the Duke pays for prostitutes and that Sparafucile is prostituting his own sister. “The change was undoubtedly made to mollify the censors.”

After the Duke ironically reflects about the fickleness of women in the famous tenor aria ‘La donna è mobile,’ Sparafucile retrieves his sister for the Duke and steps outside. Rigoletto and Sparafucile have a brief conversation presented by Verdi in mélodrame style, similar to their first meeting. (Ex. 10) Only this time as they discuss the arrangement of the Duke’s death, the underlying melody in the orchestra is that of the Duke’s last aria. Sparafucile then departs the stage. Verdi uses ‘La donna è mobile’ as the underlying melody in this section to juxtapose the Duke’s pursuit of pleasure, verses Rigoletto’s pursuit of revenge.

The next scene is actually two scenes taking place at the same time on the divided stage. The Duke and Sparafucile’s sister, Maddalena, are together inside the inn. Rigoletto and Gilda are outside in the street. Rigoletto’s worlds are now separated in a physical sense, with the Duke and his excesses located inside the walls of the decrepit inn and Gilda isolated outside in the darkness.

Verdi took full advantage of this scene by differentiating, emotionally and vocally, all four characters in the quartet ‘Bella figlia dell’amore.’ In this quartet, “The Duke is

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62 Verdi, Rigoletto, VIP, ed. Chusid, LVII.
63 Ibid., LXXVI.
characterized by soaring phrases [as he attempts to seduce Maddalena], Maddalena by *staccato* semiquavers [as she laughingly rebuffs his advances], Gilda by *legato* semiquavers with rests like sobs or by a drooping line like a wail as in her duet ‘*Piangi, piangi, fanciulla*’ [as she recognizes the Duke’s betrayal]; Rigoletto’s part is more neutral, but at times his grimness is reflected in a static slow-moving line such as Verdi writes more usually for his basses rather than his baritones [as he pressures Gilda to acknowledge the Duke’s womanizing ways]. All this is expressed simultaneously within the most *pellucid* [translucent] lyrical writing imaginable.”

(Ex. 27)

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64 Budden, 505.
After seeing the opera Hugo himself acknowledged, “If I could only make four characters in my plays speak at the same time, and have the audience grasp the words and sentiments, I would obtain the very same effect.”

Following the quartet Rigoletto gives instructions to Gilda to return home, gather money, men’s clothes, and a horse and depart for Verona. Verdi leaves this recitative completely unaccompanied to create a sense of anticipation. It is literally and figuratively the calm before the storm.

Rigoletto quickly meets with Sparafucile to give him a deposit of ten scudi. Verdi keeps this exchange succinct, asking the performers to declaim the dialogue without the usual appoggiatures. This brief exchange ends when Sparafucile asks the intended victim’s name and Rigoletto replies dryly that ‘Egì è Delitto, Punizion son io/He is Crime, I am Punishment.’ (Ex. 28)

During the ensuing storm scene the Duke lies down to sleep, while Maddalena bargains with Sparafucile and convinces him to choose a different victim. At the same time, Gilda returns in male attire and resolves to sacrifice herself for the Duke’s sake.

Gilda enters the inn, where she is cornered by Sparafucile and receives a fatal blow at the height of the storm. In order to intensify this moment, Verdi requests the use of an onstage thunder machine at this point in the score. Verdi also achieves another unique effect during this storm scene by using the men’s chorus to create “wind noises” from offstage.

Rigoletto returns as the storm is waning and declares that his moment of vengeance has come at last. Verdi’s thunder and lightening flashes are still heard in the background, represented by figures in the lower strings, and the flute and piccolo that appeared throughout the previous trio. Verdi also places explicit cues for flashes of lightening (Lampo) in the score. (Ex. 29)

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At the stroke of midnight, Rigoletto knocks on the inn’s door to retrieve the Duke’s body. His request for light to see the victim is denied by Sparafucile, who then directs Rigoletto to a deep section of the river to deposit the body. Now in custody of the body, Rigoletto’s short, excited mutterings rise in pitch.

_Egli è là! morto!_  
_Oh sì! vorrei vederlo!_

His is there! dead!  
Oh yes! I want to see him!

These mutterings progress to full phrases, sung in the upper-middle of his range, as Rigoletto declares,

_Ora me guarda, o mondo!_  
_Quest’è un buffone, ed un petente è questo!_  
_Ei sta sotto i miei piede!_

Now look at me, oh world!  
This is a buffoon, and a powerful man is this!  
He is under my feet!

Now Rigoletto prepares to take his final revenge and twice exclaims on D#4, ‘All’onda!/Into the water!’ His second exclamation is traditionally sung with the D#4, of the stressed syllable of _onda_, replaced with an interpolated F4#. At this moment of highest triumph, Rigoletto is suddenly interrupted by the Duke’s voice in a final reprise of ‘La donna è mobile.’ (Ex. 30)

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Ex. 30     Act III, Scene IX, mm. 74-80

Shaken, Rigoletto opens the sack to discover ‘È umano corpo/It is a human body,’ at the same instant lightning flashes to reveal that it is his daughter. Verdi moves through the entire range of the baritone voice here, from the trepidation of finding a body on B2, to the grief ridden cry to ‘Dio/God’ on F4. (Ex. 31)

Not believing his eyes, it takes another flash of lighting to confirm his worse fears.
Rigoletto runs to the inn and bangs on the door, his knocking punctuated in the orchestra with fortissimo B naturals.
Verdi originally conceived the opera as a series of duets and it is fitting that the final scene is a duet between father and daughter. In the first section of this duet, Rigoletto hears Gilda’s voice and realizes that she is not dead. When she, ‘indicando il core/indicating her heart,’ tells him that she has been stabbed, ‘qui mi piagò/here I’m wounded,’ (Ex. 32, mm. 172-174) Rigoletto demands in a declamatory outburst, set on E-flat, to know who had struck her. His declamation is accompanied by a sudden, fortissimo full-orchestra outburst on a dissonant 3rd inversion D-flat diminished7 chord, which progresses to a first inversion A-flat major chord and resolves to the tonic chord of D-flat minor at the Largo, ii7-V-I . (Ex. 32, mm. 175-176)

Verdi once again builds to a loud, dramatic climax that ends in the middle of a cadence, followed by a long silence in the orchestra, which in turn is followed by the surprise of a soft resolution and change of tempo. This had been seen earlier at the transition into ‘Cortigiani’ (Ex. 21, mm. 75-77) and in the middle of the Act II duet before “Si, vendetta.” A similar moment can also be found at the original declamation of the curse. (Ex. 7, mm. 518-522)

67 Osborne, Letters, 87.
Moments later, Rigoletto realizes that she was stuck by the ‘strale/arrow’ of his own revenge. Gilda is content with her choice to sacrifice herself for the Duke and tells Rigoletto that ‘Lassù… in cielo, vicina alla madre…/Up there… in heaven, close to my mother,’ she will pray for him. Her floating lines are accompanied by a serene flute obbligato. (Ex. 33)

Rigoletto’s response ‘non morire/do not die,’ is marked pianissimo for the orchestra, but his desperation is revealed through the colors of the woodwinds (flute, clarinet and oboe) playing in unison to his vocal line and the outlining of the pulse by the brass and string basses. (Ex. 34)

Gilda dies peacefully and Rigoletto is left alone onstage. At this point, Hugo’s play and Piave’s libretto differ significantly. Hugo has Triboulet seek help by running and ringing a ferry bell. A curious crowd gathers on stage as Triboulet desperately tries to convince everyone,
including himself, that his daughter is still alive. When a doctor pronounces her dead, Triboulet cries out ‘J’ai tué mon enfant!/I have killed my child!’ and falls lifeless to the ground.  

Ex. 34     Act III, Final Scene, mm. 197-199

Piave has eliminated this unnecessary crowd scene. After Gilda dies, Rigoletto cries out, ‘Ah! la maledizione!/Ah! the curse!,’ on F-flat4 and collapses over her corpse. (Ex. 35) This high pitched cry, written on the very unstable 7th of a dissonant G diminished 7 chord, represents the most extreme emotion possible.

To broaden this moment of highest emotion, Verdi also avoids the common final cadence formula, vii dim7/V-V-i (G diminished 7 to A-flat major resolving to D-flat minor), and extends the tension with a longer more dissonant cadence, vii dim7/V-i6/4-vii dim7-i (G diminished 7 to D-flat minor 6/4 to C diminished 7 [over a dominant pedal point of A-flat] and finally resolving to D-flat minor). (Ex. 35)

This F-flat4 is the highest note that Verdi wrote for any of Rigoletto’s recollections of the curse, even so in performance the stressed syllable of ‘maledizione’ is generally sung on an interpolated A-flat4. (Ex. 35, mm. 220-221) Although Monterone’s original statement of the curse climaxed on a higher pitch, F4, (Ex.7, m. 519) Verdi was probably aware that Rigoletto’s F-flat4 or enharmonically E-natural is one the highest notes that the baritone voice can sustain in a wide-open or chest-voice sound. The effect can be stunning, more so than Monterone’s F4 and possibly even more than an interpolated A-flat4.

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At the end of Hugo’s play, Triboulet finds some relief in his own death, however Piave and Verdi have not allowed Rigoletto this reprieve and he is forced to remain alive in a loveless world.

Ex. 35     Act III, Final Scene, mm. 219-222
CHAPTER 3: SUMMARY

As demonstrated through the musical examples discussed in the body of this paper, Verdi succeeded brilliantly in delineating the dual nature of Rigoletto’s character: the deformed, bitter, court jester and the impassioned, loving father. Every aspect of Verdi’s compositional technique—melody, rhythm, harmony, dynamics, articulation, orchestration, and form—was carefully employed to give full range to Rigoletto’s emotional expression and the dramatic development of his character.

From the first moment of the Prelude as the curse motif is played in the brass section, Verdi is already foreshadowing the tragic end that awaits Rigoletto. In the opening scene that follows, Rigoletto’s own depravity and physical characteristics are represented through the use of the text and descriptive orchestral passages as he encourages the Duke’s debauchery, taunts Ceprano mercilessly and attacks Monterone. The horror that Rigoletto feels after being cursed by Monterone is revealed by unexpected changes of key, dynamic level and tempo.

Verdi’s possible influence by French mélodrame is demonstrated in the conversational duet between Sparafucile and Rigoletto as Rigoletto considers violence and immoral methods of dealing with the Duke. The boiling rage Rigoletto feels towards mankind in ‘Pari siamo’ is marked by chromatically rising and rhythmically driven figures in the strings. Syncopation and trills are used to display the joy and exuberance that Rigoletto feels as he reunites with his beloved daughter in their Act I duet and his first developed melody reveals the tender memories of Gilda's mother.

In Act II, Rigoletto’s nonsense jester’s song disguises his search for his daughter. Rigoletto’s fury when he becomes aware of her abduction is shown by Verdi through dramatic harmonic shifts, which lead into Rigoletto’s musically diverse aria ‘Cortigiani.’ This aria begins with Rigoletto overcoming his fear and openly attacking the courtiers in a declamatory section driven by a sextuplet figure in the strings. Verdi shows Rigoletto’s exhaustion from the attack with a dramatic harmonic shift into a slower tempo and lengthens his vocal lines. The final section, showing Rigoletto in his most vulnerable position, is presented in a traditional aria form and accompanied by an English horn, whose color Verdi had saved for this special occasion.
In Act III, Verdi is able to develop each character at the same time in the famous quartet ‘Bella figlia dell’amore’ by bringing out their individual rhythmic and melodic characteristics. In the final scene, Verdi reveals Rigoletto’s misery and self-recrimination upon learning that he has brought about his daughter’s murder by his own actions. This is done through specific orchestral choices in the woodwinds and judicious edits of Hugo’s *Le roi s’amuse*.

Verdi’s intense interest in *Le roi s’amuse* can be seen in his battles with the censors as he fought to retain the critical dramatic elements of the play. His willingness to follow the structure of the original drama by modifying or abandoning traditional musical forms and his refusal to make any changes in the opera once it had been published, show the faith he had developed in his own abilities.

Verdi’s belief that he had reached a milestone in his confidence and in the development of his abilities calls for comparative studies of the rest of his operatic repertoire. This could be done by studying operas that concentrate on the development of one main character as in Rigoletto. These operas should come from both before and after the time period of Rigoletto in order to determine the development of Verdi’s dramatic and compositional skills. Some operas that immediately come to mind that focus on the development of baritone characters, as in Rigoletto, are Nabucco, Macbeth, Simon Boccanegra and Otello.

*Rigoletto* has long been viewed as one of Verdi’s greatest operas. It also held special significance to the composer, of all the operas that he had written to that point in time he considered it, “my best opera.” Verdi’s *Rigoletto* rightfully represents one of the outstanding examples of drama and characterization through music in all of the operatic literature.

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70 Verdi, *Rigoletto*, V/P, ed. Chusid, XLIX.
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Mark Walters was born on December 7, 1964 in Bettendorf, Iowa. He received a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Northern Iowa, where he studied French horn, voice and conducting. After completing a Master of Music in Vocal Performance at the Cleveland Institute of Music, he was involved in over 500 outreach performances in Young Artist positions with Cleveland Opera, Lyric Opera Cleveland and Dayton Opera.

He has served in adjunct teaching positions at the University of Tennessee, Georgia Southwestern State University and Roane State Community College. He is a member of Pi Kappa Lambda National Music Honor Society and has been a member of the National Association of Teachers of Singing. He has received a Boris Goldovsky Stage Directing Internship with the Harrower Opera Workshop and was the first recipient of the Hannah J. Beaulieu Career Development Award at Florida State University.

Hailed as an exceptional singing actor, Walters is rapidly gaining international attention with a repertoire of over 50 roles for the lyric stage and 20 oratorio works. He debuted at Carnegie Hall in Orff’s Carmina Burana and the Fauré Requiem conducted by John Rutter. In competition, he was a District Winner of the Metropolitan Opera Competition and twice a finalist in the MacAllister Awards. He is in demand as a recitalist and was recently invited to give a solo recital at the NATS Southern Regional Conference. Walters is currently coaching through the Verdi repertoire with the distinguished American baritone Sherrill Milnes.