

Verdi's Operas based on Plays by Friedrich von Schiller

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Verdi's Operas based on Plays by Friedrich von Schiller Introduction

- **The German playwrights Friedrich von Schiller and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe are the pillars of the German classical period of literature.**
- **Friedrich von Schiller 1759-1805 was born into a soldier's family and educated as a physician.**
- **He eventually became Professor of History at the University of Jena.**
- **Schiller's aesthetic-philosophical education sees the human being divided between his senses (the forces of nature) and his moral spirit.**

Verdi's Operas based on the Plays by Friedrich von Schiller

- **In the beauty that art ("Kunst") gives man ("Mensch") both worlds come together and the harmony of true freedom arises.**
- **The Italian scholar Andrea Maffei translated both Schiller and Shakespeare; they became Verdi's favorite authors, he kept at his bedside.**
- **I am presenting the four Verdi Operas based on Schiller plays in chronological order when Verdi composed them, not in the order the plays were written. All of these operas deal with different aspects of the father /child conflicts.**

Giovanna D'Arco

Verdi's 7th opera, 5th premiered at la Scala 1845

- **Libretto by Temistocle Solera, based on the play of Schiller's mature period 1800 "Die Jungfrau von Orlean".**
- **Schiller's play is written in verses, dealing with the events of the 100 year war between England and France and the legendary events of the turn of the war through the powers of the maid of Orlean.**
- **The play has 27 characters and brings to life the political strife within the fractions in France and the philosophical and religious struggles of**

Giovanna D'Arco

continued

Individuals.

- **Schiller took liberties for dramatic reasons with the historical facts of the fate of Giovanna who was burned at the stake after she was captured by the British and let her die in battle.**
- **Solera compressed this epic story into the struggle of 5 characters: Giovanna, Carlo VII of France, Giacomo, Giovanna's father, who accuses her of witchcraft, Delil, Carlo's officer and Talbot, the English General. Instead of Carlo being in love with the Princess Agnes Sorel, Solera invented**

Giovanna D'Arco

continued

Carlo falling in love with Giovanna, who briefly responds and guilt ridden is silent when accused of witchcraft.

- **Solera enlarged the character of Giovanna's father who suspects his daughter to be in league with dark demons when she sits in contemplation under an old oak tree . He is mistakenly convinced that Carlo seduced his daughter and soiled his honor when he sees Giovanna urging Carlo to battle to save France.**

Giovanna D'Arco

continued

- **The role of Giovanna was written for Erminia Frizzolini, a high tessitura soprano, capable of high ornamentation. She was not a typical Verdi soprano.**

Giovanna D'Arco

The Plot

- **The prologue takes place in Dom Remy, Giovanna's village. Giovanna's father is observing Carlo and Giovanna. This is a beautiful trio**

DVD Prologue Chapter 6 "Pronta Sono"

- **Act 1 shows English forces battered by the victorious French under Giovanna's banner and Giovanna's father thinking Carlo dishonored his daughter, offering them to help beat her seducer.**
- **This is followed by a scene Carlo offering his love to Giovanna whose heart is briefly touched.**

Giovanna D'Arco

The Plot continued

- **The choruses of demons and angels represent her conflicting emotions.**
- **These choruses are having an important role, not only reflecting on the events but also driving the action forward.**
- **Carlo is crowned King in Reims, but Giacomo accuses his daughter of witchcraft and when she doesn't defend herself, she is abandoned, Giacomo delivering her to the English camp.**
- **In the third Act Giovanna is in chains. When her father observes her praying, he realizes his error**

Giovanna D'Arco

The Plot continued

**And that his daughter is pure and frees her. Joyfully
Giovanna goes back to fight for the King**

DVD Act 3, Chapter 16 "Tu che all'etto Saulo"

**This includes a beautiful duet between Giovanna
and her father ; the mortally wounded Giovanna**

**Is brought back from the battle ending with the
lament of the grieving king.**

- **The finale shows her death holding her victorious French banner in her hand.**

Giovanna D'Arco

closing remarks

- **One of the central themes in this opera is the father daughter relationship, which is part of many of Verdi's operas.**
- **Solera and Verdi also wanted to repeat the success of Nabucco and I Lombardi with their large important Choral sections. During the Italian Risorgimento an opera dealing with people driving out foreign oppressors was very appealing to the Italian audiences.**

I Masnadieri

Premier 1847 London, her Majesty's Theatre

- **Libretto Andrea Maffei, based on Schiller's first play "The Robbers (Die Raeuber) from 1782 ,his "storm and force" period (Sturm and Drang Zeit)**
- **Maffei's libretto compressed the revolutionary plot of egoistic blind revolt from 5 Acts to 4 Acts, emphasizing the human tragedy of the four protagonists: Count Massimiliano and his two sons, the favored high spirited but not always responsible first born Carlo and his evil son Francesco, a foreshadowing of Jago in Otello, and his niece Amalia, who is loved by both sons but herself loves Carlo.**

I Masnadieri

The Plot

- **A beautiful Cello solo in the prelude sets the mood for the tragic events to come. Verdi uses the Cello to describe the mood of tragic events or moments in the life of his characters like in Don Carlo in King Phillip's sad soliloquy.**
- **Through the evil machinations of Francesco who wrote a letter falsely in their father's name telling Carlo that his father disinherited him, the despairing Carlo joins a company of wayward students as their captain in "Robin Hood Style" as bandits . He swears vengeance.**

I Masnadieri

The Plot

- **Audio Recording CD 1, Act 1, Track 5**
" Nell'argilla maladetta"

Carlo

**Let my wrath plunge these swords
Into the accursed clay!**

**I would leave slaughter behind me, spread terror
before me.**

**You furies of vengeance, linked with me in one fate,
Now you must pledge your faith on this trusty hand
of mine.**

I Masnadieri

The Plot

Coro of Bandits

On this trusty hand of yours we pledge our faith

- **Meanwhile Francesco triumphs and looks
forward he will have power and contemplates
he can hasten the death of his frail father.**

CD 1, Act 1, Track 9 "Tremate o misera"

Francesco's curse

I Masnadieri

The Plot

Francesco

Tremble you wretches, you shall see me in my true terrible aspect;

The tired hand of a weak old man you did not fear will no longer rule you.

To laughter and joy shall succeed sobs, tears, fear, suspicion; starvation, prison, disgrace, suffering shall wreak unspeakable havoc on you.

I Masnadieri

The Plot

- **Massimiliano collapses when a false messenger report's Carlo's death. Francesco buries his father alive in a dungeon.**
- **The guilt ridden messenger admits to the grief stricken Amalia that Carlo is alive.**
- **She rejoices in the cabaletta " Carlo Vive"**
- **Verdi wrote the role for Jenny Lind, a lyric soprano, who wrote her own cadenza**

CD 1, Act II, Track 19

I Masnadieri

Amalia's joy

Amalia

**Carlo vive? O sweet words, heavenly melody!
God heard my lament and was merciful to my grief.
Caro lives? Now earth and heaven are again
wreathed in smiles;
The stars and sun no longer veiled in mourning;
The world is filled with love.**

I Masnadieri

The plot continues

- **Carlo is remorseful of his treacherous life.**
- **After he rescues one of his bandits and sets Prague on fire, he returns to the forests of his homeland.**
- **He encounters Amalia who has fled from Francesco and Carlo and Amalia sing a joyous love duet.**

CD 2, Act 3, Track 4

"Lassu risplendere"

I Masnadieri

Carlo and Amalia's love duet

Amalia and Carlo

We shall see the star of our love shine above more
bright and fair.

Then above, among the spirits in heaven's bliss, we
will drink oblivion of all our sorrow.

I Masnadieri

The Plot continues

- Carlo discovers that his father is still alive near starvation and rescues him from his dungeon. The old man does not recognize him. The remorseful Carlo asks for the old man's blessing as if he was his son.

CD 2, Act 4, Track 14

" Come il bacio d'un padre amorosa"

Massimiliano (kissing him)

Take this kiss, beloved stranger, like the kiss of a
loving father; and let my thoughts imagine it the
kiss of a devoted son.

I Masnadieri

"Come il bacio d'un padre amorosa"

Carlo

All the sweetness of a father's lips passed from your lips into my heart.

A fleeting splendor of that heaven which I have lost for ever brought me bliss.

I Masnadieri

The Plot (end)

- **When the bandits storm the castle, Francesco haunted by his evil deeds, disappears. (In the play he commits suicide)**
- **Carlo in despair admits to Amalia and his father that he is the captain of a haord of bandits.**
- **The bandits remind him of his oath to them.**
- **Carlo can not drag Amalia into his vile life.**
- **Amalia begs him to kill herself and in desperation he stabs her. His father dies from shock and Carlo leaves and gives himself up to the authorities.**

Luisa Miller

Teatro San Carlo 1849

- **Libretto by Salvatore Camarano based on a play "Kabale und Liebe "(intrigue and love) by Friedrich von Schiller.**
- **This is Schiller's last play from his "storm and force period" and the last he wrote in prose. Schiller in his mature period wrote all his plays in beautiful verses.**
- **The view of society in the last part of the age of enlightenment and during and following the years of the French Revolution was changing.**

Luisa Miller

continued

- **This play and Verdi's opera are reflecting the oppressive corrupt forces of the ruling society which crushed ordinary citizens.**
- **The idealism of young Count Rudolfo and his love for innocent Luisa, daughter of an old soldier (in the play a musician) is opposed by the evil forces of Rudolfo's mighty father, the old Count Walter and his henchman, his steward Wurm.**
- **Rudolfo's, Luisa's and the old Miller's world are destroyed under the weight of the misused power of the old Count's world; but his own world also collapses at the end as well and he will face justice.**

Luisa Miller

continued

- **Verdi's sympathy with the Italian Risorgimento, the revolution of 1848 and his exposure to the liberal political atmosphere of Paris, where he set up house from 1847-49 with Giuseppina Strepponi and where he was also influenced by the operatic style of the "Grand French Opera" allowed him to favor operatic plots that dealt with political and moral philosophy.**

Luisa Miller

The Plot

- **The setting is a German Alpine Village. The sinfonia is written in a symphonic style different than any other sinfonias he composed.**
- **Rudolfo greets Luisa with tender love on her 16th Birthday while her father has doubts about the young lover.**

DVD Act 1 Chapter 6 " Tamor d'amor ches primere"

- **The steward Wurm reveals to Luisa's father Rudolfo's rank, which makes a wedding impossible in that society, and is contrary to the**

Luisa Miller

The Plot

Old Count's ambition for his son. The old soldier Miller is crushed by the news and fears for his beloved daughter's happiness.

- **Rudolfo rejects his father's choice of a bride, the Duchess Federica, whose political influence would further his son's future.**
- **Wurm and the old Count invent a powerful intrigue against the young Count. Their first use of power arresting Luisa and her father does not work, since Rudolfo threatens to reveal Wurm and Walter's secret: the murder of the Count's**

Luisa Miller

The Plot

predecessor

- **Wurm forces Luisa to write a letter renouncing her love to Rudolfo because of his rank, to save her father and made her swear not to tell that the letter was written under duress.**

DVD Act 2, Chapter 23 "Il padre tuo"

- **The intrigue works; the letter throws Rudolfo into despair over Luisa's presumed treachery.**

DVD Act 2, Chapters 31/32 "Il foglio dunque? Lo tutto giavi narrai!" " Quando le sere al placido"

Luisa Miller

The Plot

- **Rudolfo confronts Luisa in a heart rendering duet and puts poison into a lemonade from which they both drink.**
- **When Luisa realizes she will die, she feels released from her oath and reveals the evil plot to Rudolfo.**

DVD Act 3, Chapter 41 "Piangi, piangi, il tuo dolore"

- **With his last strength Rudolfo runs his sword through Wurm before he dies besides his beloved.**

Luisa Miller

The Plot, the end

- **The old count lost his son and faces justice for his crime.**
- **In Verdi's Luisa Miller, Schiller's view of an ideal society, not oppressed by corruption of the powerful is expressed. This ideal society was not yet possible in Luisa's world. We are still striving for this ideal society still today.**

Don Carlo

Libretto by Joseph Mery and Camille du Locle based on the dramatic play in Verse by Friedrich von Schiller

- **The Italian translation is by Achille de Lauzieres and Angelo Zanandieri.**
- **There are more than 40 versions of this opera starting with the French premiere at the Paris Opera 1867.**
- **Over the next 17 years Verdi made many revisions. The Italian translation was premiered 1884 at La Scala. Modern productions use different versions, from which they can choose, cut and/or replace disregarded music depending on the director's interpretation and the length preferred.**

Don Carlo

continued

- **In Placido Domingo's opinion this is Verdi's masterwork along with Otello.**
- **First a few words about Schiller's dramatic poem written just after "Kabale und Liebe" (Verdi's Luisa Miller) in 1788 just before the French revolution and almost 10 years after the American Revolution.**
- **In the character of Rodrigo, Marchis of Posa, Schiller set a poetic monument to his own emerging view of an ideal world in which mankind can live with freedom of thought**

Don Carlo

continued

Governed by just leaders.

- **Schiller's play has such large political and philosophical scope, depicting the oppressive Spanish government with many sub plots, in fear of the bloody Inquisition of the Catholic Church (represented by the Grand Inquisitor), that even royal beings are destroyed by its force.**
- **Only a fraction of this great philosophical drama could be taken into the libretto and music of the opera; even then the length of the opera has always been a problem.**

Don Carlo

continued

- **In 1867 Verdi was very experienced with the Paris Opera and its spectacle and he was now a mature orchestrator; much of the musical expression foreshadows the late works particularly Otello.**
- **In my part II lecture of the Grand French Opera I presented you with the musical highlights of the friendship duet between of Don Carlo and Rodrigo, the soliloquy of King Philip lamenting that his young wife never loved him and the dramatic confrontations between Philip and the Grand Inquisitor, which determined Carlo's and Rodrigo's fate.**
- **In this Italian translation I want to outline more in detail the characters of Don Carlo and Rodrigo and the confrontation of their world with King Philip.**

Don Carlo

The Plot

- **The Opera starts in the forest of Fontainebleau in France 1560. Don Carlo unbeknownst to his father accompanies the Spanish delegation to the French King Henry II who negotiate a peace after a bloody war between the two countries. He sings a passionate love duet.**
- **DVD 1 Act 1 (Fontainebleau prologue) Scene 1, Chapter 5 "Fontainebleau!.. Io la vidi"**

Don Carlo

The Plot

- **The happiness is short lived. The Spanish delegation announces that King Henry is giving his daughter to Don Carlo's father, King Philip and Elisabetta reluctantly gives in to end the suffering of her people. The political machinery crushes both Carlo and Elisabetta. Elisabetta carries her fate with dignity and suffers silently.**
- **Carlo, a passionate young man is broken in spirit and body.**
- **Rodrigo, his childhood friend, who had traveled outside of Spain finds him in despair.**

Don Carlo

The Plot

- **In the previously mentioned friendship duet he tries to lift Carlo's spirit and tries to focus his thoughts on the plight of the oppressed Flemish people.**
- **The severity of the court of Philip II is shown in the scenes that follow. The King is driven by jealousy, he is lonely, surrounded by intrigues of his ministers and is without a friend.**
- **Both Carlo in his grief and the King in his loneliness are drawn to Rodrigo, the brilliant young man, who is the only proud and honest**

Don Carlo

The Plot

person at court.

- **When Rodrigo recognizes that the King wants his opinion, he boldly tells him about his far fetching vision of freedom and the nobility of mankind and a just government.**
- **In this duet are expressed ideas which in reality were not possible in the Spain of 1560 but were visions of Schiller at the end of the 18th century, visions that for the first time became reality in the American Constitution.**

DVD 1, Act 1, Scene 3, Chapter 24 "O Signor, di Fiandra arrivo"

Rodrigo discusses with Philip the philosophy of life and the ideal way to govern.

Don Carlo

The Plot

- **The King is touched by Rodrigo's honesty.**
- **The unrequited love of Princess Eboli for Don Carlo and the bloody force of the Inquisition finally crush Carlo, Rodrigo, Princess Eboli, the innocent and noble Queen and emotionally King Philip.**
- **The might of the Catholic Church is shown in the spectacle of the auto-da-fé, a scene which is not part of the original play. Here Carlo's rash confrontation with his father leads to his imprisonment. Rodrigo sacrifices himself for Carlo**

Don Carlo

The Plot

DVD 2, Act 3, Scene 2, Chapter 17 and 18

"Per me giunta e il supremo"

"O Carlo ascolta"

- **At the end King Philip lost both his son and Rodrigo.**
- **Depending on the version of the opera used, in some the Ghost of Carlo V, King Philip's father and Carlo's grandfather pulls Carlo into his tomb before the Inquisition can cease him.**

Don Carlo

closing remarks

- **The greatness of Schiller's vision of a just world is shown in Rodrigo.**
- **I made a short English synopsis of Schiller's interpretation of the characters of Rodrigo, Carlo and King Philip from Schiller's letters about his play and I also made a short English translation of Schiller's view of aesthetic education which feeds into the character of Rodrigo.**
- **These are part of your handouts.**

Thank You.

Two Translations of the Writings of Friedrich von Schiller

By Agneta D. Borgstedt, MD

- 1. Partial English Translation of Friedrich von Schiller's letters to a friend regarding the interpretation of the characters of his play Don Carlo;**
- 2. Schiller's aesthetic-philosophical writings (Abstract).**

Agneta D. Borgstedt MD

Partial English Translation of Friedrich von Schiller's letters to a friend regarding the interpretation of the characters of his play Don Carlo

Rodrigo, Marquis of Posa

- In the 16th Century of King Phillip II of Spain no human being could live and think like Rodrigo.
- He stands and is isolated between darkness and light.
- When his mind and spirit was formed, it reflected the foaming (churning) of thought, the fight against political oppression, the beginning of the search for truth, the ideas of freedom and nobility of all humankind, it was a the birth of a great mind and man.
- Rodrigo's moral believes and feeling of love and friendship turn itself around Republican political ideas.
- The dream of human rights and freedom of human conscience and religious believes just started in the Reformation.** See my comments at the end of this abstract.
- In Rodrigo Schiller poured out his ideas of humanity and how a just government should be, even though such a noble soul and character did not have a chance to fully develop along these philosophical line of thought in the 16th Century of Spain.
- (The play was written in 1787/88 just before the French Revolution and after the American Revolution.)

Don Carlo

- Don Carlo is a much weaker character, who gains strength in his passionate friendship with Rodrigo. He gives himself without restrained to his love for Elisabetta. This love is all consuming and self-centered.
- Rodrigo tries to strengthen Carlo's character and lead him as a man by turning his love back to the ideals they both shared in their youth and to focus his strength to help the oppressed Flemish people who serve here as the catalyst to focus Don Carlo's thoughts from himself to the world at large and the needs of others.
- In contrast to Carlo, Rodrigo is a "Weltbuerger", a man who lives and thinks ahead of his time in the realm of a greater world. Carlo's world is much narrower and only Rodrigo's high flying thoughts lift him up briefly into a less self-centered existence.
- In Carlo, Rodrigo hopes to realize his idea of a free happy human Society.

King Phillip II of Spain

- King Philip is a lonely, torn man, tortured by jealousy, which is exploited by his courtiers. He was brought up in the oppressive atmosphere and the narrow thoughts and fears of the Spanish Catholic Church, driven by the bloody Inquisition, surrounded by courtiers and ministers who work to their own advantage, intrigue; no honest man among them.

- He suddenly meets in Rodrigo a young man with honesty and ideas larger than life, who dares to enthusiastically tell him about his vision of an ideal world and holds a mirror up to him of his own oppressed existence of human beings living in the atmosphere of a cemetery.
- He is drawn to this far thinking young man just as his son Carlo is drawn to Rodrigo's passionate brilliant mind.
- Phillip sees in Rodrigo the son that Carlo can never be to him.
- Nevertheless he cannot jump over his own shadow; the crushing force of the Spanish Catholic Church, represented in the Grand Inquisitor, stops any free thought in the king and he loses both his son and Rodrigo.

**My comments:

- It took another 200 and more years and bloody wars and revolutions that during the age of enlightenment in the second part of the 18th Century when Schiller lived, playwrights and philosophers and poets could write about these ideas without ending to be burned at the stake. Rodrigo is a man of the ideas of the age of enlightenment.
- Schiller was subsequently after writing this play and after the French Revolution which ended in a bloodbath, deeply disappointed about the events of his time and in his subsequent philosophical writings concentrated on the "aesthetic education" in which he taught that the Kuenstler (artist) like himself had the responsibility to lead people in their works to help them to realize the nobility and freedom of mankind.

Agneta D. Borgstedt MD
Schiller's aesthetic-philosophical writings
English translation (abstract)

- **Tragedy represents suffering and the pain leads to freedom**
- **Man and his/her world are divided in 2 souls: the realm of the senses (material, nature) and the moral spirit. In the world of the senses man's fate is suffering, but his/her moral-spiritual drive puts order into the world.**
- **Between the drive of the senses and moral obligations there is rarely peace**
- **But if sensual nature and spirit, suffering and drive to self-improvement come together in human beings then the ideal of Schiller's mankind has been reached.**
- **In Schiller's teaching (Lehre) about the existence of Beauty (des Schoenem) the divided soul of mankind can be taught "Beauty" through Art (Kunst). In his /her aesthetic behavior both souls of mankind melt together; out of this comes harmony and freedom. Man gains control over the world of senses and morally gains his spiritual freedom.**
- **This is an extension of Kant's philosophy.**
- **Schiller does not consider the moral teaching of the Kunst (art) as a replacement of religion. The artist and particularly the poet and playwright teaches the drive to "Beauty" which allows him/her to put spiritual order into the world and represents Schiller's Idealism what mankind should be striving for to improve his/her world.**
- **Schiller's philosophical prose brings him close to Pindar, the Edda, Hoelderlin (German Poet); his dramatic art can be compared with Aischylos, Sophokles, Calderon and Shakespeare (his realistic style of the "world is a stage"); the tragedy of "Tristan" and "Parsifal" stands on the same level.**
- **Kleist (German poet) philosophied on how to melt the style of the Antique poets with the style of Shakespeare. Schiller accomplished this task in his plays.**
- **Reinhold Netolitzky in his introduction to the publication of Schiller's complete works 150 years after Schiller's death states that after the second world war in Germany's most difficult years after the war, Schiller's high Ideas of the strength of a free man ,gave the women who were left behind strength and consolation.**

Translated in the summer of 2009 in preparation of the lecture on Verdi's Operas based on the plays by Schiller.

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