

Virginia  
Opera

# MASKED BALL

**“Un Ballo in Maschera”**

*ITALIAN OPERA IN THREE ACTS*

Music By Giuseppe Verdi

*TEACHER GUIDE*

Libretto by Antonio Somma,  
adapted from Eugene Scribe’s opera libretto,  
*Gustave III ou le Bal Masqué* (1833)

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## PLOT OVERVIEW

During the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, Riccardo, a Governor in the American colonies, is universally loved and respected by his subjects. Nevertheless, he is alerted by Renato, his secretary and loyal friend, that there is a small group of discontents in his court, led by Samuel and Tom, who are conspiring to assassinate him. Riccardo is embroiled in a paradoxical personal conflict: he is secretly in love with Amelia, Renato's wife.

A judge has banished the gypsy sorceress, Ulrica, for witchcraft. Riccardo decides that he will visit her cave – in the disguise of a fisherman - to ascertain if there is truth in the allegations. Amelia appears at the cave, desperately seeking a cure for her conflict; her uncontrollable passion for Riccardo that she fears will result in shame and dishonor. Ulrica prescribes an antidote to solve her dilemma; a magic herb that she can find at midnight in the execution fields. Riccardo overhears their conversation and vows to rendezvous with Amelia that night. Ulrica reads Riccardo's fortune and prophesies that the first man who shakes his hand will kill him: at that very moment, Renato arrives, ignorant of Ulrica's warning, and shakes Riccardo's hand.

At the execution fields at midnight, Riccardo confronts Amelia: both are unable to control their passions and ecstatically affirm their love for each other. When approaching footsteps are heard, Amelia veils herself: it is Renato, arriving to warn Riccardo that conspirators are about to murder him. Riccardo flees, disguised in Renato's cloak. The conspirators arrive, and when Amelia removes her veil, Renato realizes that he has been betrayed by his wife as well as his best friend.

Renato seeks revenge and joins the conspirators in their assassination plot. Lots are drawn to choose the murderer: Renato's name is selected. Amelia, witnessing their intrigue, sends an anonymous letter to Riccardo warning him that his life is in mortal danger. At the masked ball that evening, Renato fatally stabs Riccardo. Before dying, Riccardo swears to Amelia's innocence, pardons the conspirators, and promotes Renato as a diplomatic envoy.

## PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN THE OPERA

Riccardo, Governor of Boston	Tenor
Renato, Riccardo's friend and secretary	Baritone
Amelia, Renato's wife	Soprano (Dramatic or Spinto)
Ulrica, a fortune teller	Mezzo (Dramatic) or Contralto
Oscar, a page	Soprano (Lyric)
Silvano, a sailor	Baritone
Samuel, a conspirator	Bass
Tom, a conspirator	Bass

Chief Justice, deputies, officers, sailors, and conspirators.

Time: End of the 18<sup>th</sup> century

Place: Boston, American colonies

## DETAILED STORY NARRATIVE

The prelude to *A Masked Ball* introduces two main musical themes: first, the punctuated conspirators' music conveying a sinister sense of malevolence and imminent danger, and then in contrast, a second theme that evokes Riccardo's passionate secret love for Amelia.

### ***ACT I: Morning. A reception room in the Governor's palace in colonial Boston.***

Riccardo's morning audience is attended by army officers, deputies, members of the court, delegates of the people, and lurking in the background, Samuel and Tom, conspirators who await a suitable moment to assassinate the Governor.

There is a profound sense of irony conveyed by those present in the palace: officers and noblemen praise Riccardo, vowing their earnest loyalty and praying that he has sleep restfully; but at the same time, the conspirators, Samuel and Tom, whisper about their obsession for revenge against his malevolence.

Riccardo arrives and is immediately presented with petitions for his review and signature, while Oscar, a page, ceremoniously shows him the guest list for the forthcoming masked ball. In an aside, Riccardo expresses his delight that Amelia will be among the guests: Riccardo bears an uncontrollable, secret passion for Amelia, the wife of his most loyal and trusted friend, Renato, and he is indifferent to the consequences of his actions.

To himself, Riccardo admits his compulsion and yearning for Amelia, expressing his ecstasy at the opportunity to see her again.

At the conclusion of Riccardo's reverie about Amelia, ironically, Renato anxiously appears and expresses a sense of urgency: he has learned that mortal enemies are stirring, and there is imminent peril to the Governor's life. Riccardo disingenuously disproves him, refusing to believe that his life is in jeopardy, and further claiming that his popular support is now greater than ever: his loving subjects will surely protect him from any danger. Nevertheless, Renato emphatically warns him not to ignore these ominous signs: he must persevere to uncover his enemies, because his welfare is too important to his subjects.

The Chief Magistrate hands the Governor papers for his signature, one of which banishes the fortune-teller, Ulrica, believed to be a dangerous gypsy sorceress in league with the devil and suspected of thievery and murder. Oscar intervenes to refute the magistrate, begging the Governor to pardon Ulrica, and defending her as a brilliant magician and seer whose prophecies always come true.

Riccardo is in a capricious and playful mood and is intrigued by the sorceress. Pleasure becomes the order of the day as he summons his courtiers to visit Ulrica's cave with him, announcing that he will be disguised as a fisherman: he will investigate and determine himself if there is any truth to the rumors and allegations about her.

Renato protests, cautioning the Governor again that he is vulnerable and in jeopardy; his court swarms with traitors. Riccardo silences his zealous friend, again proclaiming impudently that he is protected by the love of his subjects. Simultaneously, the conspirators express their joy, whispering to each other that the Governor's adventure will finally provide them with an opportunity to carry out their assassination plans. Riccardo orders everyone to meet him at Ulrica's cave at three o' clock.

*ACT I – Scene 2: The fortune-teller Ulrica’s cave.*

A crowd fills Ulrica’s cave anticipating predictions for their future. Trancelike, Ulrica exults before a burning cauldron as she pronounces a sinister and mysterious invocation of the spirit of Lucifer, claiming that she envisions his powerful glow.

Silvano, a sailor, emerges from the crowd and asks Ulrica to tell his fortune, complaining that for 12 years he has served his Governor but has not been rewarded with a promotion. Ulrica takes his hand, studies his palm, and then forecasts that he will soon benefit from wealth and promotion.

Riccardo, disguised as a fisherman, hides in the darkness of the cave and writes on a paper. Without Silvano noticing, he places a commission and gold into his pocket. When Silvano reaches into his pocket for money to pay Ulrica for her favorable prediction, he finds the paper and reads it with excitement: the Governor has honored him and he has received a promotion; his second reward of gold duly thrills him. Overjoyed, Silvano and the crowd praise Ulrica’s powers of prophesy.

A servant knocks at the door. Riccardo becomes curious and bewildered, recognizing her as Amelia’s servant. The servant whispers to Ulrica – overheard by Riccardo - that her mistress has come to seek her wisdom on a matter of great concern, but they must meet privately. Ulrica dismisses the crowd, telling them to return later when she will offer more predictions, however, Riccardo remains and hides in the shadows of the cave.

Amelia confronts Ulrica, tormented, agitated, and fearful, admitting that she has come to seek Ulrica’s magical assistance in order to conquer her illicit feelings of love for the Governor. She pours out her distress: “I am devoted to my husband, and against my will, I love another.” Riccardo, overhearing Amelia’s revelation, erupts into joy.

The sorceress advises Amelia that there is but one antidote that will cure her woes: she must go to the gallows at the execution fields near the city gates at midnight; there, she must pluck a magic herb whose juice will rid her of her infectious feelings of love. Ulrica’s prescription directs Amelia to the last place a well-born lady would dare set foot: in effect, she has created a test of her will-power. Riccardo watches Amelia as she shivers, trembles in fear, and prays for strength: he vows to rendezvous with her at her midnight mission; he will be her protector.

After Amelia leaves the crowd is ushered back, followed by Oscar, noblemen, officers, and the conspirators, Samuel and Tom. Riccardo, still incognito, steps forward to announce that he is a humble fisherman who wishes Ulrica to read his future.

Ulrica addresses the fisherman – the Governor – noting that he seems to be cheerful and oblivious to danger, but cautions him that sinister powers can quickly change laughter into tears. Solemnly, Ulrica examines the fisherman’s palm, concluding that they are the hands of a leader, a man experienced in the dangers of warfare. Ulrica suddenly breaks away from the fisherman, seemingly struck by terror, and refuses more prophecies. But at the urging of the crowd, she continues and prophesies doom, predicting that the fisherman will soon die by the hand of a friend: the crowd reacts with shock at her fateful prediction, but Riccardo condemns it as ludicrous.

Riccardo challenges Ulrica to reveal the name of the man who would murder him: she predicts “that it will be the first man to shake his hand today!” Riccardo defiantly extends his hand to the bystanders, but no one dares touch it.

At that very moment, Renato, anxious about his friend’s safety, enters the cave. He immediately greets the Governor with a warm handshake, prompting Riccardo to ridicule Ulrica’s prediction by telling her, “You have lied, this man is my most cherished comrade.”

Riccardo reveals his identity to Ulrica, facetiously expressing his amazement that her friend, the Devil, did not recognize the Governor; he rewards Ulrica with a purse of money and urges her to flee before she is condemned to exile. She acknowledges his generosity and warns him to be guarded, cautioning him that there are traitors in his midst.

Riccardo exposes his identity to the crowd, who immediately erupt into praise for their Governor: *Viva Riccardo*. The conspirators, Samuel and Tom, express their frustration; their assassination plans are again thwarted.

### ***ACT II – Scene 1: The gallow fields on the outskirts of Boston***

It is midnight. Amelia has pursued her mission and arrived at the fields outside the city. She is terrified yet determined to secure the magic herb prescribed by Ulrica, the antidote that will rid her of her uncontrollable passion for Riccardo: through the power of the sorcerer's mighty cure, her salvation will arrive, and her anguish and anxiety will end at last.

As the clock strikes midnight, Amelia trembles when she sees a stranger approaching: in fear and terror, she falls to her knees and prays for mercy. The stranger is Riccardo who has come to the fields to rendezvous with her after having overheard her plans while he hid in Ulrica's cave.

Amelia and Riccardo struggle against their inner conflict of passion versus reason. Amelia pleads with him to abandon his love for her: that he should consider her honor and the shame and disgrace that would overcome them if they were discovered; and that he must not betray her husband's devotion to him, the man who would sacrifice his life for him. Riccardo, tormented by conflict, admits that he is guilty of surrendering his scruples, yet he cannot control his profound yearning and desire for Amelia; similarly, Amelia prays for a miracle: divine guidance to rescue her from her weaknesses and vulnerability.

Amelia pleads with Riccardo that they abandon their love for the sake of her husband's honor. Nevertheless, Riccardo is heedless to her pleas, his passions becoming reckless: in a moment of adrenaline-filled passion, Riccardo demands that Amelia admit that she loves him; Amelia surrenders to her heart and admits, indeed, her love.

Riccardo becomes ecstatic, abandoning conscience, loyalty, and friendship: likewise, Amelia's resistance crumbles and she submits uneasily to Riccardo's seductive insistence; both, overcome by temptation and their uncontrollable, unrestrainable passions, eloquently and rapturously affirm their love for each other.

The two lovers are interrupted by the sound of footsteps; both become horrified when they recognize that Renato approaches. Renato has come to protect his friend and warn him of imminent danger to his life. He reveals that he had been cloaked in disguise and spied on the conspirators, and he is now privy to their plans to assassinate the Governor.

In the darkness, Renato does not recognize the woman – now veiled – who is with the Governor. Riccardo and Renato exchange cloaks; Renato directs him to escape and flee from his assassins. Before departing, Riccardo orders Renato to escort the veiled lady back to the city; however, he must protect her anonymity and not raise her veil nor look at her face.

The conspirators, Samuel and Tom, appear, zealously pursuing their prey and ready to assault the Governor; however, they become disappointed when they discover that it is Renato disguised in the Governor's cloak. They try to tear the veil from the trembling woman, but Renato draws his sword in defense. In order to avoid a fatal duel and bloodshed, Amelia lifts her veil and reveals herself: the conspirators, and her husband, Renato, stand frozen, dumbfounded, and shocked.

The conspirators burst into mocking laughter, sarcastically ridiculing Renato for presumably having a moonlight tryst with his own wife. Nevertheless, Renato quickly realizes that he has been betrayed: his wife's secret lover is his best friend, Riccardo. He becomes humiliated and seethes with raging jealousy, dishonor, and shame: vengeance stirs within his soul. With conviction, he invites the conspirators to call upon him the next day, and then proceeds to lead Amelia home.

**ACT III: A private study in Renato's home. In the background, a large portrait of the Governor.**

Renato's love for Amelia has quickly transformed into hate, shame, and dishonor; he is outraged with bitterness and loathing for both Amelia and his best friend, the Governor. He vows neither pardon nor contrition: he has been betrayed, and only revenge, the spilling of blood, will end his shame.

Renato tells Amelia that her guilt must be punished by death. Amelia pleads for mercy, defending herself by confirming that although she did indeed love Riccardo, she did nothing dishonorable. Amelia swears that she went to the gallow fields for Renato's sake, seeking the antidote that would help her crush her love for Riccardo. Renato bitterly castigates her, but mercifully accedes to her last wish: she may see her son before she is to die; "embrace the child, and may his innocence remind you of your guilt."

After Amelia departs, Renato vents his fury, vowing that he will not take vengeance on Amelia, but rather, on his former friend, Riccardo, who must pay for his treachery: it will be Riccardo's blood that will erase his shame.

Renato turns sorrowfully and with agitation to a portrait of Riccardo and grieves: "My best friend, you have betrayed me. You have driven peace and love from my heart for evermore." He bids farewell to Riccardo, who has destroyed a noble friendship: fellowship and esteem have become transformed into bitter, violent hatred.

The conspirators meet with Renato who advises them that he has written proof of their conspiracy; however, he will not betray them. In fact, he himself will join them in their plot to assassinate the Governor, assuaging their doubts of his loyalty by offering his son's life in their trust. The three conspirators unite, vowing their intent and determination for vengeance.

Renato insists that he alone be chosen to carry out the deed: nevertheless, Samuel claims the right because the Governor stole his father's properties; and Tom, because the Governor killed his brother. The three conspirators decide that chance, the drawing of lots, will determine the assassin: they place their names on three cards.

At that very moment, Amelia returns to advise her husband that Oscar has arrived with invitations to the Governor's masked ball. Renato detains Amelia, forcing her to pick the assassin's name from an urn. Amelia trembles, sensing terror as she draws a card from the urn: the card bears Renato's name. Amelia panics, realizing that she has chosen her husband to be the Governor's assassin.

Renato invites the page, Oscar, to join them. Oscar announces that they are graciously invited to attend the Governor's masked ball. Amelia refuses, but Renato accepts the invitation after Oscar confirms that Riccardo will be present at the ball.

The conspirators rejoice that their moment to assassinate the Governor has finally arrived, a perfect opportunity because they will be in disguise: they will recognize each other dressed in blue and red; their password: *morte*, death.

Amelia remains in despair, pondering how she can thwart their assassination attempt and save Riccardo. She decides to write him a letter – unsigned - and warn him not to attend the masked ball; Oscar is given the letter to deliver to the Governor.

**Act III - Scene 2: Riccardo's study**

Riccardo has fallen prey to his conscience and has decided to become the master over his emotions: reluctantly, he will resist further temptation and abandon his obsession for Amelia; duty and sacred honor inevitably must keep them divided. He will name Renato as a diplomatic envoy and Amelia will join him; their love will perish, as well as shame, adultery, and infidelity. Although Riccardo becomes hesitant and reluctant, he signs the order and places it inside his coat, lamenting that fate has meddled with his heart.

As dance music is heard from the ball, Oscar delivers an anonymous letter to Riccardo: it is Amelia's letter warning him that his life is in jeopardy, and that he should not attend the masked ball. Riccardo renounces the advice, fearing that if he does not attend the ball, he will be looked upon as a coward. More importantly, his emotions again overcome reason: he will attend the ball and yield to his yearning to see Amelia one last time.

### ***Act III - Scene 3: The Masked Ball***

In a sumptuous ballroom, the masked guests fill the ambience with merriment. Renato, Samuel, Tom, and other conspirators wear azure robes with vermilion scarves. Renato, finding difficulty in locating the Governor among the disguised guests, worries that Riccardo may have become aware of their plot and is absent.

Oscar appears before Renato, jokingly telling him that his disguise does not fool him, and that he easily recognizes him. Oscar reveals that the Governor is indeed at the ball, but he refuses to betray his disguise to Renato.

Renato persuades Oscar that he must talk to the Governor, because he bears important and urgent information for him: Oscar must point him out because if something fatal would happen, Oscar would bear the responsibility. Unwittingly, Oscar is convinced and reveals to Renato that Riccardo will be wearing a black cloak with a scarlet ribbon on his chest.

Riccardo enters the ball absorbed in deep thought. Amelia recognizes him, follows him, and proceeds to warn him of the imminent danger to his life. Riccardo recognizes her voice, but is heedless to her pleas. Then he erupts into passionate vows of his love for her, sobs bitterly, and bids her farewell, advising her that he has ordered Renato overseas.

Renato recognizes Riccardo and steps between them, raises his dagger, and stabs Riccardo. Oscar immediately unmask Renato as the assembled guests explode into outrage, demand vengeance, and Renato's death.

Riccardo, breathless and despairing, intercedes, ordering that Renato's life be spared; the crime was his own fault, he precipitated it, and it is he who is guilty. Riccardo admits that he indeed loved Amelia, but she was innocent of any wrongdoing; he swears to Renato that she did not betray her husband and that her honor remains chaste.

Riccardo gives Renato a decree ordering them both overseas: "Go in peace – you shall not be punished." In his final farewell, he pardons Renato and all the conspirators.

Renato grieves over his tragic error, his obsession for blood and vengeance that overpowered his reason: likewise, the conspirators, Samuel and Tom, finally realize their misdeeds.

Riccardo dies and his grieving subjects praise his benevolence and generosity.

## MEET THE COMPOSER: GIUSEPPE VERDI

By the mid-19th century, Giuseppe Verdi was the most popular opera composer in the world: his operas were *the opera box office rage*, and some concluded that he single handedly had all of Italy - and the world – singing his music. All of Verdi’s operas were Italian to the core, dutifully preserving the great legacy and traditions of his immediate predecessors, the *bel canto* icons, Rossini, Bellini, and Donizetti: voice and melody remained the essential core of his operas.

Between the years 1839 and 1850, Verdi composed sixteen operas. His first opera, *Oberto* (1839), indicated promise for the young, twenty-six year old budding composer, but his second opera, the comedy, *Un Giorno di Regno* (1840), was not only received with indifference, but was a total failure. His third opera, *Nabucco* (1842), became a sensational triumph and catapulted him to immediate world-wide critical and popular acclaim: one success followed another; *I Lombardi* (1843); *Ernani* (1844); *I Due Foscari* (1844); *Giovanna d’Arco* (1845); *Alzira* (1845); *Attila* (1846); *Macbeth* (1847); *I Masnadieri* (1847); *Jérusalem* (1847); *Il Corsaro* (1848); *La Battaglia di Legnano* (1849); *Luisa Miller* (1849); and *Stiffelio* (1850).

Verdi’s early operas all contained an underlying subtext: his patriotic mission for the liberation of his beloved Italy from oppressive foreign rule; in particular, France and Austria. Verdi, with his operatic pen, sounded the alarm for Italy’s freedom: the underlying stories in his early operas were disguised with allegory that advocated individual liberty, freedom, and independence for Italy; the suffering and struggling heroes and heroines in those early operas were metaphorically his beloved Italian compatriots.

In *Giovanna d’Arco* (“Joan of Arc,” 1845), the French patriot Joan becomes martyred after she confronts the oppressive English, the French monarchy, and the Church: the heroine’s plight, synonymous with Italy’s struggle against oppression. In *Nabucco* (1842), the biblical story of Nebuchadnezzar, the suffering Hebrews, enslaved by the Babylonians, were allegorically the Italian people themselves, similarly in bondage by foreign oppressors.

Verdi’s Italian audience easily understood the underlying messages subtly injected between the lines of his text and nobly expressed through his passionate musical language. At *Nabucco*’s premiere, at the conclusion of the Hebrew slave chorus, *Va Pensiero*, the audience stopped the performance for fifteen minutes with wild, inspired shouts of *Viva Italia*, an explosion of nationalism that, in order to prevent riots, forced the authorities to assign extra police to later performances of the opera. The *Va Pensiero* chorus became the emotional and unofficial “Italian National Anthem,” the musical inspiration for Italy’s patriotic aspirations. Even the name V E R D I had a dual meaning: homage to the great maestro expressed as *Viva Verdi*; and the letters V E R D I that denoted Vittorio Emanuelo Re D’ Italia, the return of King Victor Emmanuel symbolizing Italian liberation and unification.

As the 1850s unfolded, Verdi’s creative genius had arrived at a turning point in terms of artistic inspiration, evolution, and maturity. He felt satisfied that his objective for Italian independence was soon to be fulfilled, the forthcoming *Risorgimento* (1861) would make Italian nationhood a *fait accompli*. Verdi now decided to abandon the heroic pathos and nationalistic themes of his early operas and began to seek more profound operatic subjects: subjects that would be bold to the extreme; subjects with greater dramatic and psychological depth; subjects that accented spiritual values, intimate humanity, and tender emotions. He became ceaseless in his goal to express the human soul on the operatic stage more profoundly than it had ever before been realized.

The year 1851 inaugurated Verdi’s “middle period,” that defining moment in his career in which his operas started to contain hitherto unknown dramatic qualities, a profound characterization of humanity, and an exceptional lyricism. Verdi’s creative art began to flower into a new maturity with operas that would eventually become some of the best loved works composed for the lyric theater: *Rigoletto* (1851); *Il Trovatore* (1853); *La Traviata* (1853); *I Vespri Siciliani* (1855); *Simon Boccanegra* (1857); *Aroldo*

(1857); *Un Ballo in Maschera*, “A Masked Ball” (1859); *La Forza del Destino* (1862); *Don Carlos* (1867); *Aida* (1871).

As Verdi approached the twilight of his prolific operatic career, he was supposed to be relishing his “golden years”: a time when the fires of ambition were supposed to become extinguished, and a time when most people become spectators in the show of life rather than its stars. However, the great opera composer defied the natural order and epitomized the words of Robert Browning’s Rabbi Ben Ezra: “Grow old along with me. The best is yet to be.”

Consequently, Verdi overturned the equation and transformed his old age into a glory: “the best is yet to be” became his last two operatic masterpieces, *Otello* (1887), and *Falstaff* (1893), both composed respectively at the ages of 74 and 80. These operas are unprecedented in their integration between text and music and in their internal, organic musical architecture, considered by many the greatest Italian music dramas and *tour de forces* in the entire canon. Verdi eventually composed twenty-eight operas during his illustrious career, dying in 1901 at the age of eighty-eight.

## VERDI AND THE CENSORSHIP AUTHORITIES

In 1857, Teatro San Carlo in Naples commissioned Verdi for a new opera to celebrate the Carnival season. In seeking a subject, Verdi's first inspiration was to bring Shakespeare's *King Lear* to the opera stage, an idea that had germinated for almost 20 years. Antonio Somma, the poet-playwright-lawyer turned librettist, whom Verdi admired for his literary gifts as well as his patriotic sentiments, had been entrusted with the *Lear* project ever since his original choice, Salvatore Cammarano, died four years earlier. Nevertheless, Verdi canceled the project – not for the first time - presumably because San Carlo did not have the quality of singers he had envisioned for the opera.

Somma suggested the idea of reworking *Gustave III ou Le Bal Masqué*, a drama about Gustav III of Sweden that the French composer, Daniel François Auber, brought to the opera stage in 1833: the opera's libretto was written by the renowned Eugène Scribe, the French dramatist whose 400 theatrical works dominated the Parisian stage at the time. Later, in 1843, it served as a model for Saverio Mercadante's opera, *Il Reggente*, "The Regent."

The Scribe-Auber opera dealt with the final episode in the life of the Swedish King, Gustav III, the victim of an assassination by enemies that was attributed to his espousal of liberal reforms: the King was assassinated during a masked ball in 1792, the same year that the Reign of Terror was exploding in revolutionary France.

*A Masked Ball's* story about regicide plunged Verdi again into yet another battle with the censorship authorities. While the opera was in rehearsal, the political climate was revolutionary: Naples's King Ferdinand had just barely escaped assassination, and simultaneously, in Paris, an Italian revolutionary attempted to assassinate Napoleon III during which eight people died and 150 were injured. Even librettist Antonio Somma was under police surveillance for his alleged participation in uprisings against the Austrians in Venice; fearing for his life, Somma ultimately wrote the libretto for *A Masked Ball* under a pseudonym.

Europe's mid-nineteenth century was a time of revolution and unrest. Napoleon's earlier defeat and the political alliances evolving from the Congress of Vienna (1813-1815) had given Europe's ruling monarchies a renewed urgency to protect the status quo of their autocracies. The Enlightenment had awakened humanity to democracy and individual liberty and precipitated the French Revolution; Napoleon subsequently arose from the chaos and was determined to destroy the monarchies. In the aftermath of Napoleon's defeat, the monarchies felt threatened by ethnic nationalism as well as new ideological and social forces evolving from the transformations caused by the Industrial Revolution, colonialism, materialism, and socialism. More importantly, dreams of democracy propelled stormy winds of change: the 1830 and 1848 uprisings were in truth revolutions threatening Europe's autocracies and the status quo; social and political reform was continually in tension and conflict with revolution as Europe became convulsed by wars, rebellions, insurrections, and conspiracies.

Fear of popular unrest provoked the ruling authoritarian monarchies to invoke censorship in order to dominate and regulate the arts. If a work was deemed subversive, or if its ideas were perceived as a threat to the existing social and political fabric of their society, the work was rejected, prevented from performance, and/or changes were enforced. With 21<sup>st</sup> century hindsight and retrospect, it may be hard to understand the apparent paranoia, irrational fear, and pathological suspicions of heads of state, ministers, governments, and the Church. Nevertheless, censorship was their means to protect perceived "truths," that truth, a coefficient of their power; those cherished American freedoms of speech and press were virtually nonexistent in Verdi's 19<sup>th</sup> century European world.

Verdi had many earlier encounters with censorship that he considered interfered with his artistic freedom. In 1851, he composed *Rigoletto*, a story adapted from Victor Hugo's *Le Roi s'amuse*, "The King has a good time." His opera's original title was *La Maledizione*, "The Curse," the story's main

theme concerning Count Monterone's curse on Rigoletto, the curse on a father that haunts Rigoletto throughout the opera, and the *cause celebre* that Rigoletto blames for the tragic disaster that eventually overcomes him. Verdi and his librettist, Piave, fought profusely with the censors who deemed its curse theme antithetical and blasphemous: Verdi acceded to the censors and *softened* the title: *La Maledizione* was changed to the opera's title character, *Rigoletto*.

*Rigoletto* portrayed France's King François as a crude, cruel, obscene, and despicable character. Even though the plot bore historical truth, it was politically incorrect to represent the nobility in such negative light and disadvantage: a portrayal of a royal who was manipulated by a crippled and deformed court jester, and was the object of an assassination attempt. In addition, censors considered Sparafucile's Inn as sleazy, having the "aura" of a house of prostitution; and finally, it was considered repulsive when Gilda was "packed" in a sack in the opera's final moments.

Fortunately for Verdi, the Austrian censor in Venice – a man named Martello - was an avid opera lover who venerated him with a passion. Martello was adequately satisfied with the opera story's relocation from the Paris court of François I to the city of Mantua, and its substitution of the Duke of Mantua for the historic king that endowed him with the anonymity of an insignificant Mantuan aristocrat. And with the opera renamed *Rigoletto* rather than *La Maledizione*, other demands were dropped: that Rigoletto's daughter Gilda be replaced by his sister; that Sparafucile's Inn be modified; and finally, that they eliminate the sack in which Gilda is "packed" in the final act. From the point of view of both Verdi and Piave, *Rigoletto* had returned from the censors safely, and without severe fractures.

Indeed, two years later, for *La Traviata*, the censors fought Verdi viciously, considering the mere portrayal of a courtesan on the stage as anathema. In addition, the *Libiamo*, the famous drinking toast in Act I was deemed too licentious. But it was Alfredo's outpouring of love for Violetta in Act I that prompted outrage and condemnations of blasphemy: Alfredo's words, *Croce e delizia*, meaning "tormented delight," had another connotation and bore too much similarity to *croce*, meaning "crucifix." Verdi was urged to change *croce e delizia* to *pena e delizia*, "pained delight."

But Verdi won in the end because the Venetian censor was again none other than his passionate admirer, Martello, the savior of *Rigoletto*. *La Traviata* returned from the censors, like *Rigoletto*, without severe amputation, and with inconsequential changes that were far less than those he had experienced with *Rigoletto*.

Verdi's battles with censors continued in earnest in 1859 during the composition of *A Masked Ball*. The Neapolitan censors demanded considerable plot alterations to which Verdi was agreeable: change the status of the King Gustav III to a duke, and set the story to an earlier historical period. But afterwards, the censors made more stringent demands; that Amelia become a sister rather than a wife; that the conspirators would not draw lots; and that the murder occur offstage. Verdi fumed and exploded, his vehement rage leading to threats of fine and even arrest. The censors' demands to revise *A Masked Ball* made Verdi again feel degraded in terms of his artistic freedom; nevertheless, rather than fit his music to a new libretto that would virtually be "written" by the censors, he refused to make concessions and withdrew the opera from Naples.

Verdi brought *A Masked Ball* to Rome's Teatro Apollo, where he felt the censors would be far more conciliatory and less demanding than those in Naples. Nevertheless, the Roman censors emulated the Neapolitans, similarly demanding that the title character, the King of Sweden, be transformed into a lesser aristocrat in order to remove his aura of sovereignty. To save his opera, Verdi had no other choice than to accede to the Roman censors.

The censors also demanded a change in venue: any place outside of Europe. Thus, the setting was changed to 18<sup>th</sup> century colonial North America, a presumed pre-Christian age in which witchcraft and black magic arts were prevalent. With its story transplanted to North America, the king became

Riccardo, Count of Warwick, a colonial governor for the English Crown: in the anxiety of the moment, no one searched for historical truth; the Crown never did have a governor in the colonies.

The plot focus was altered so that the conspirator's hatred for the king, now a Count, had an hereditary basis; there were not to be firearms on stage; and the assassination was to take place offstage.

The final accommodation to censorship was to change the names of certain characters to avoid aristocratic and blasphemous associations: Count Anckarström, the king's best friend and aide became Renato; the sailor Christian became Silvano; and the conspirators, Counts de Horn and Ribbing became Sam and Tom respectively. Amelia, Ulrica, and Oscar, remained, since their names were considered inconsequential from a political point of view.

## POLITICS IN A *MASKED BALL*

King Gustav III (1746-1792), the original model for the central character in *A Masked Ball*, succeeded to the Swedish throne in 1771, a time when political discontent and social injustices were poised for one of the greatest transitions in Western history: the French Revolution.

The new king began his reign by introducing a multitude of reforms that were inspired by the Enlightenment: he abolished torture as an instrument for legal investigation, granted freedom of the press, amended the poor laws, and extended religious toleration. In addition, he was successful in promoting free trade, strengthening his navy, and instituting extensive currency reforms. Nevertheless, the nobility controlled the Riksdag, or parliament, and expressed their fears and dissatisfaction by rejecting most of the king's reforms. His efforts to mediate between contending factions of the Riksdag proved futile, and in response, he was forced to impose a new constitution that increased the crown's power at the expense of the Riksdag.

Even so, Gustav became frustrated, unable to control domestic affairs and pursue his enlightened agenda. Consequently, in 1788, he turned to an aggressive foreign policy and declared war on Russia, militarily vulnerable because of its involvement in a war with Turkey. However, treasonous activities by Swedish officers, as well as Denmark's entry into the war alongside Russia, reversed the king's fortunes; ultimately, he ended the war with a brilliant naval victory and a skillfully manipulated peace treaty.

Gustav's military successes enhanced his popularity among his people: to counter the antagonistic nobility, he strongly appealed to the ever-increasing lower estates in the Riksdag - the clergy, burghers, and peasants - and used his a new constitution to severely augment his royal power. In 1791, in a concession to the Swedish aristocracy who feared and opposed the developing French Revolution and its implied reforms, he tried to form a league of European monarchs but was unsuccessful.

Gustav III's advocacy of liberalism was destined to create enemies and turn some subjects against him, particularly the nobility who were in dreaded fear of losing their wealth and status. He was aware that plots were brewing against him, and occasionally visited a local seer named Madame Arvidson - the fortune teller Ulrica in the opera - not because he thought that she was a genuine clairvoyant, but more importantly, because she could provide him with a conduit to court gossip.

Nevertheless, the Swedish nobility remained implacably opposed to him. A conspiracy of aristocrats was hatched by two noblemen, Counts Ribbing and de Horn (Sam and Tom), both seeking revenge against the king because he had abrogated their privileges, appropriated land, and even was believed to have been responsible for the death of one of their brothers. They succeeded in winning to their cause a disaffected and disgruntled friend of the king, Captain Jacob Anckarström (Renato), the man who ultimately fatally shot the king while he was attending the Stockholm opera house in March 1792: Gustav III died 2 weeks later. Anckarström's status as cuckold was invented for the opera story.

Gustav was a charming and imaginative aristocratic ruler who was immensely loved by the majority of his people: an extraordinary reverence during that volatile transitional period of European history. Nevertheless, his great legacy remains his cultural achievements rather than his political advancements: he was a devoted patron of the arts who greatly encouraged the theater in Sweden, wrote plays, and even collaborated on the opera, *Gustaf Wasa*. His court, famous for its culture and scholarship, founded the original Swedish Academy (1786), which, since 1901, has awarded the Nobel prize for literature.

Swedish history lovingly endows Gustav's reign with the sobriquet, the "Swedish Enlightenment." Unquestionably, Gustav was a rare aristocrat during an era of great turmoil and transition: a benevolent and sympathetic man of ideals who was sincerely dedicated to liberalism and human progress.

Verdi, consumed by humane idealism, adored the noble aspects of Gustav's character and relished the opportunity to score Somma's righteous prose: in particular, the king's greeting to his audience at

the very beginning of Act I; *Bello il poter non è che de'soggetti le lacrime non terge, e ad incorrotta gloria non mira*, "Power is nothing if it cannot dry the tears of my subjects, and provide them with the glory of my protection."

Temperamentally, Verdi was a true son of the Enlightenment, a man possessed by his noble conception of humanity. He abominated political absolutism and deified human freedom and liberty, the ideals that ultimately became the leitmotif of his lifelong crusade against every form of tyranny; personal, social, political, or ecclesiastical. Certainly, each and every one of his early operas was a musico-dramatic manifesto for freedom and liberty. In particular, two of his later operas, *Don Carlos* (1867) and *Aida* (1872), if anything, resound with thunderous declarations of social and political idealism; in their subtext, they condemn the corruption of power, and the commensurate impotence its abuse inflicts on humanity.

The historical Gustav III, an enlightened, sympathetic, and benevolent 18<sup>th</sup> century ruler, possessed noble aspirations for humanity; in many respects, he was Verdi's alter ego. Coincidentally, Verdi composed *A Masked Ball* in 1859, the year in which Italy's liberation from Austria was imminent: Verdi was exploding with joy and relished another opportunity to express his patriotic ardor. In Ulrica's cave, in the finale of the first act of *A Masked Ball*, the crowd acknowledges their king with a passionate and broad-sweeping patriotic anthem: *O figlio della patria, amor di questa terra*, "Long live the father of our land, cherished by his nation." Like Verdi's earlier *Va pensiero* chorus from *Nabucco*, the anthem represented another celebration of nationalism and freedom.

## THE MUSIC AND STYLE OF A *MASKED BALL*

*A Masked Ball* is a tragic music drama that encompasses an entire geometry of human passions: love, duty, honor, infidelity, betrayal, revenge, and murder, its tragedy ultimately redeemed by forgiveness, contrition, and reconciliation.

The uniqueness of the opera is that textually it is a tragicomedy, a Shakespearean-style blend of tragedy and comedy; a synthesis of serious human conflict that is lightened by ingeniously contrived comic elements. There are moments when its severe tension interacts with capricious, lighthearted playfulness, providing a subtle blend of light and dark, or laughter with tears: a theatrical chiaroscuro. Verdi, the musical dramatist and narrator of the story, provides a musical language that is at times ebullient, and at times grave: as such, his musical chiaroscuro melodically unifies the interplay of sudden mood changes and temperament.

Gustav's characterization (Riccardo), textually and musically epitomizes that chiaroscuro: he represents ambivalent humanity; his soul continually alternates between his light and dark side, and ever struggles between the forces of good and evil; he represents flawed humanity. He is multifaceted and wears different masks: an ambivalent personality who appears in each act of the opera bearing a different persona, his various masks, or disguises, becoming the sum total of *A Masked Ball's* story.

Verdi introduces Riccardo as a bright and mercurial ruler possessed by democratic ideals: a leader who is enlightened, profoundly humanistic, a resourceful populist, and a man of the people; that is the light, or good side of Riccardo, certainly an archetypal Verdian hero. Nevertheless, on his dark side, he struggles with grave conflicts: his court is saturated with political intrigue, and he is heedless to warning and fails to address danger. But he becomes possessed by his tragic flaw; his passionate love for Amelia, the wife of his most trusted and loyal friend, an illicit love that has unwittingly overpowered him, and one which most assuredly will lead to shame and dishonor. *A Masked Ball's* primary dramatic themes represent a tension between love and politics: Riccardo cannot reconcile the conflict within his soul and has become powerless, surrendering his sense of duty; reason dictates that he must control his passions, but emotions have propelled him beyond reason.

In the first act, the venerated Governor appears wearing his heroic mask: he is benevolent, strong in his convictions, and profoundly loved by his subjects: his protection against lurking conspiratorial dangers. Suddenly, his light and carefree mood become somber after Oscar shows him the guest list for the masked ball: he notices Amelia's name, which provokes him to erupt into ecstatic rapture at the thought of seeing his secret love again; *La rivedrà nell'estasi*, "To see her again, I will be in ecstasy." His dark side has come to the fore; the mention of Amelia evokes his uncontrollable passion for her, affirming that he is the victim of emotions that have surrendered to reason.

And suddenly, the mood changes dramatically when he becomes the embodiment of justice and conscience, seeking truth and proof about the sorceress Ulrica, whom the magistrate has condemned to exile. Oscar provides the contrast, or chiaroscuro, defending the sorceress with lighthearted and almost comic verve as he explains that Ulrica is far from wicked and a magician with wondrous powers: *Volta la terrea*, "She turns her gaze to the stars."

Riccardo's decision to seek out Ulrica in disguise confirms his belief that there is no problem that cannot be solved without the proper application of wit and daring, perhaps an incarnation of an earlier operatic hero: Figaro. The first act of *A Masked Ball* concludes with a collision of its light and dark elements: Riccardo celebrates his forthcoming adventure by praising the pleasures of life, but he is oblivious to the undercurrents of fatal murmurs from the conspirators: *Ogni cura si doni al diletto*, "Let's all prepare for joy, gaiety, and pleasure."

The fortune-teller, Ulrica, is an austere, foreboding character in the story; her trancelike call for Satan is a sinister evocation of the powers of darkness: *Re dell'abisso, affrettati*, "King of the Abyss, fly

through the air.” But very quickly, Riccardo lightens the tension, rewarding the disgruntled sailor, Christian, by surreptitiously placing a commission and gold in his pocket.

Amelia arrives at Ulrica’s cave in torment and panic, seeking the sorceress’s help to alleviate her uncontrollable yearnings and desires, all of which she expects will lead to doom and dishonor. Ulrica dutifully prescribes the antidote as Amelia prays for strength; Riccardo joins them and vows that to comfort Amelia he would gladly cede his power.

The somber mood quickly changes when the incognito Governor receives Ulrica’s fatal prediction, but immediately relieves the tension by laughing away her prophesy: *È scherzo od è follia*. “Your prophesy is ludicrous, it is folly and a joke.”

In Act II, Riccardo meets Amelia at the ominous execution fields outside Boston where she has gone to find the curative herb. At first, Riccardo protests his love for Amelia, *Non sai tu che se l’anima mia*, “If you are not my love, I will be torn by remorse.” Amelia, agitated and unable to control herself, surrenders, confessing that she indeed loves the king; it is a magical, sensual moment in the score in which the cello poignantly underscores the lovers’ passion by adding transcendence to their words: (Amelia) *Ebben, sì, t’amo!*, Yes, I love you!; (Riccardo) *M’ami, Amelia!*, “Amelia, you love me!” The lovers explode into ecstatic rapture: *O qual soave brivido*, “Oh, this brief and sublime moment of joy!” Riccardo and Amelia have become victims of their uncontrollable yearnings and desires; both admit that they are acting with moral weakness; both fail to control their passions; and both defy conscience and reason.

The explosive moment of the opera occurs when Renato arrives and discovers that his best friend’s secret lover is none other than his wife: his transformation in which love quickly turns to hate. Renato entered the drama on the side of light; a good and loyal man who was undaunted in his deep friendship and devotion to Riccardo when he expressed his deep concern for his safety: *Alla vita che t’arride*, “Your welfare brings us glory and hope.” But Renato becomes transformed by uncontrollable events that awaken him to menace and danger, a betrayal that casts a dark shadow over his life: he becomes a vindictive and vengeful man, his love for both wife and best friend now transformed into hate and retribution.

Verdi exploits Renato’s anguish in one of the most dramatic moments in the opera: his Act III aria, *Eri tu*, “It is you who have stained my soul,” Renato’s crossover into darkness. Renato, bewildered and tormented, is overcome by passions that compel him toward mortal revenge against his former friend: he explodes into deadly passions with outbursts expressing the dark side of hatred, while at the same time, he looks back nostalgically towards the light of a loving friendship.

In the final act of *A Masked Ball*, Riccardo finally realizes that he must surrender to reason and his higher duty, placing responsibility before personal happiness and selfishness, and recognizing that a continuation of his obsession with Amelia can only lead to dishonor and shame. Remorsefully, he finally acknowledges that he must surrender his love for Amelia: *Ma se m’è forza perderti*, “I have lost my shining light forever.” Reluctant and with obvious hesitation, he signs the paper sending Renato and Amelia abroad as diplomatic envoys.

At the masked ball, there is a dramatic moment of unmasking. Amelia finds Riccardo and admits to him that she wrote the anonymous letter that tried to persuade him that his life was in jeopardy, and that he should not attend the ball. Riccardo recognizes her voice and explodes into delight: *Invan ti celi, Amelia: quell’angelo tu seli!*, “You cannot hide, Amelia, I knew that you were near me!” At that moment, both Riccardo and Amelia remove their masks; Riccardo passionately tells her that “You are my life, my only desire. I fear not death, since love for you is stronger.”

Heartbroken, Riccardo tells her that he has ordered them abroad, and then bids Amelia farewell: *Anco una volta addio, l’ultima volta addio*, “Again one last time farewell, the last farewell,” and then both intone their last *Addio*. As he turns to leave, Renato approaches unobserved, comes between them, and stabs Riccardo: *E tu ricevi il mio!*, “This is your final farewell!”

The guests scream in horror: *Ah, morte, infamia*, “Ah, death and infamy.” The dying Riccardo dissuades them from their thirst for vengeance. He urges Renato near him, and assures him before God of Amelia’s fidelity, admitting that he loved her, but never stained her name; he presents Renato with his promotion as envoy and pardons him and all the conspirators. All praise Riccardo’s benevolence: *Core grande e generoso*, “A grand and generous heart,” and as Riccardo dies, they are overcome with horror, *Notte, notte d’orrore, notte d’orrore!* “Dreadful night, dreadful night.”

During this final moment of *A Masked Ball*, Riccardo assumed his final disguise, but the tragic hero of the drama was finally unmasked: he revealed his inner soul; a paradoxical man torn between love and duty, and a leader who found it easier to control potentially dangerous political situations than to control his own instinctive desires.

Riccardo was a victim of a political assassination, but he ultimately rose to true nobility by condemning himself as the perpetrator of the crime, and blaming his own misdeeds for his murder. As death approached, he became enlightened to truth and finally confronted his ambivalence and faults; he had grown to awareness and conscience and forgave and pardoned those who killed him.

Riccardo’s tragic flaw was that he became the victim of his adulterous passion for Amelia: at the same time, he betrayed a noble friendship. Renato’s misguided patriotism nearly brought ruin; nevertheless, Riccardo’s sublime act of forgiveness redeemed himself as well as his enemies through reconciliation. Ultimately, all grieved for the man they deeply loved. “Preserve for us, O merciful God, Such a great and generous heart.”

In death, Riccardo became the tragic victim of the drama, but the real victim was love: the noble love of friendship, and the glory of marital love. Both became the casualties of passions overpowering reason.

## A SHORT HISTORY OF OPERA

The word *opera* is the plural form of the Latin word *opus* which translates quite literally as *work*. The use of the plural form alludes to the plurality of art forms that combine to create an operatic performance. Today we accept the word *opera* as a reference to a theatrically based musical art form in which the drama is propelled by the sung declamation of text accompanied by a full symphony orchestra.

Opera as an art form can claim its origin with the inclusion of incidental music that was performed during the tragedies and comedies popular during ancient Greek times. The tradition of including music as an integral part of theatrical activities expanded in Roman times and continued throughout the Middle Ages. Surviving examples of liturgical dramas and vernacular plays from Medieval times show the use of music as an “insignificant” part of the action as do the vast mystery and morality plays of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. Traditional view holds that the first completely sung musical drama (or opera) developed as a result of discussions held in Florence in the 1570s by an informal academy known as the *Camerata* which led to the musical setting of Rinuccini’s drama, *Dafne*, by composer, Jacopo Peri in 1597.

The work of such early Italian masters as Giulio Caccini and Claudio Monteverdi led to the development of a through-composed musical entertainment comprised of *recitative* sections (*secco* and *accompagnato*) which revealed the plot of the drama; followed by *da capo arias* which provided the soloist an opportunity for personal reflection. The function of the *chorus* in these early works mirrored that of the character of the same name found in Greek drama. The new “form” was greeted favorably by the public and quickly became a popular entertainment.

Opera has flourished throughout the world as a vehicle for the expression of the full range of human emotions. Italians claim the art form as their own, retaining dominance in the field through the death of Giacomo Puccini in 1924. Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti, Verdi, and Leoncavallo developed the art form through clearly defined periods of development which produced *opera buffa*, *opera seria*, *bel canto*, and *verismo*. The Austrian Mozart championed the *singspiel* (sing play), which combined the spoken word with music, a form also used by Beethoven in his only opera, *Fidelio*. Bizet (*Carmen*), Offenbach (*Hoffmann*), Gounod (*Faust*), and Meyerbeer (*Huguenots*) led the adaption by the French which ranged from *the opera comique* to the grand full scale *tragedie lyrique*. The Germans von Weber (*Freischutz*), Richard Strauss (*Ariadne auf Naxos*), and Wagner (*Der Ring des Nibelungen*) developed diverse forms such as *singspiel* to through-composed tone poems. The English (*ballad opera*), Spanish (*zarzuela*) and Viennese (*operetta*) helped to establish opera as a form of entertainment which continues to enjoy great popularity throughout the world.

With the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, composers in America diverged from European traditions in order to focus on their own roots while exploring and developing the vast body of the country’s folk music and legends. Composers such as Aaron Copland, Douglas Moore, Samuel Barber, Howard Hanson, and Robert Ward have all crafted operas which have been presented throughout the world to great success. Today, composers John Adams, Philip Glass, and John Corigliano enjoy success both at home and abroad and are credited with the infusion of new life into an art form which continues to evolve even as it approaches its fifth century.

## THE OPERATIC VOICE

A true (and brief) definition of the “operatic” voice is a difficult proposition. Many believe the voice is “born,” while just as many hold to the belief that the voice is “trained.” The truth lies somewhere between the two. Voices which can sustain the demands required by the operatic repertoire do have many things in common. First and foremost is a strong physical technique which allows the singer to sustain long phrases through the control of both the inhalation and exhalation of breath. Secondly, the voice (regardless of its size) must maintain a resonance in both the head (mouth, sinuses) and chest cavities. The Italian word “*squillo*” (squeal) is used to describe the brilliant tone required to penetrate the full symphony orchestra which accompanies the singers. Finally, all voices are defined by both the actual voice “type” and the selection of repertoire for which the voice is ideally suited.

Within the five major voice types (*Soprano, Mezzo Soprano, Tenor, Baritone, Bass*) there is a further delineation into categories (*Coloratura, Lyric, Spinto, Dramatic*) which help to define each particular instrument. The *Coloratura* is the highest within each voice type whose extended upper range is complimented by extreme flexibility. The *Lyric* is the most common of the “types.” This instrument is recognized more for the exceptional beauty of its tone rather than its power or range. The *Spinto* is a voice which combines the beauty of a lyric with the weight and power of a *Dramatic*, which is the most “powerful” of the voices. The *Dramatic* instrument is characterized by the combination of both incredible volume and “steely” intensity.

While the definition presented in the preceding paragraph may seem clearly outlined, many voices combine qualities from each category, thus carving an unique niche in operatic history. Just as each person is different from the next, so is each voice. Throughout her career Maria Callas defied categorization as she performed and recorded roles associated with each category in the soprano voice type. Joan Sutherland as well can be heard in recordings of roles as diverse as Gilda in *Rigoletto* to *Turandot*. Below is a very brief outline of voice types and categories with roles usually associated with the individual voice type.

	<i>Coloratura</i>	<i>Lyric</i>	<i>Spinto</i>	<i>Dramatic</i>
<b>SOPRANO</b>	Norina (Pasquale) Gilda (Rigoletto) Lucia (di Lammermoor)	Liu (Turandot) Mimi (Boheme) Pamina (Magic Flute)	Tosca Amelia (Ballo) Leonora (Trovatore)	Turandot Norma Donna Anna
<b>Mezzo Soprano</b>	Rosina (Barber) Don Ottavio (Giovanni) Ferrando (Cosi)	Carmen Charlotte (Werther) Giulietta (Hoffmann)	Santuzza (Cavalleria) Adalgisa (Norma) The Composer (Ariadne)	Azucena (Trovatore) Ulrica (Ballo) Herodias (Salome)
<b>Tenor</b>	Count Almaviva (Barber) Don Ottavio (Giovanni) Ferrando (Cosi)	Pang (Turandot) Rodolfo (Boheme) Tamino (Magic Flute)	Calaf (Turandot) Pollione (Norma) Cavaradossi (Tosca)	Dick Johnson (Fanciulla) Don Jose (Carmen) Otello
<b>Baritone</b>	Figaro (Barber) Count Almavira (Marriage of Figaro) Dr. Malatesta (Pasquale)	Ping (Turandot) Don Giovanni Sharpless (Butterfly)	<u>VERDI BARITONE</u> Germont (Traviata) Di Luna (Trovatore) Rigoletto	Scarpia (Tosca) Jochanaan (Salome) Jack Rance (Fanciulla)
<b>Bass</b>	Bartolo (Barber) Don Magnifico (Cenerentola) Dr. Dulcamara (Elixir)	Leporello (Giovanni) Colline (Boheme) Figaro (Marriage of Figaro)	<u>BUFFO BASS</u> Don Pasquale Don Alfonso (Cosi) Sacristan (Tosca)	<u>BASSO CANTATE</u> Oroveso (Norma) Timur (Turandot) Sarastro (Magic Flute)

# OPERA PRODUCTION

Opera is created by the combination of a myriad of art forms. First and foremost are the actors who portray characters by revealing their thoughts and emotions through the singing voice. The next very important component is a full symphony orchestra which accompanies the singing actors and actresses, helping them to portray the full range of emotions possible in the operatic format. The orchestra performs in an area in front of the singers called the orchestra pit while the singers perform on the open area called the stage. These performances are further enhanced by wigs, costumes, sets, and specialized lighting all of which are designed, created, and executed by a team of highly trained artisans.

The creation of an opera begins with a dramatic scenario crafted by a playwright or dramaturg who alone or with a librettist fashions the script or libretto which contains the words the artists will sing. Working in tandem, the composer and librettist team up to create a cohesive musical drama in which the music and words work together to express the emotions revealed in the story. Following the completion of their work, the Composer and Librettist entrust their new work to a Conductor who with a team of assistants (repetiteurs) assume responsibility for the musical preparation of the work. The Conductor collaborates with a Stage Director (responsible for the visual component) in order to bring a performance of the new piece to life on the stage. The Stage Director and Conductor form the creative spearhead for the new composition while assembling a Design Team which will take charge of the actual physical production.

Set Designers, Lighting Designers, Costume Designers, Wig and Makeup Designers and even Choreographers must all be brought “on board” to participate in the creation of the new production. The Set Designer combines the skills of both an artist and an architect using “blueprint” plans in order to design the actual physical set which will reside on the stage, recreating the physical setting required by the storyline. These blueprints are turned over to a team of carpenters who are specially trained in the art of stage carpentry. Following the actual building of the set, painters following instructions from the Set Designers’ original plans paint the set. As the set is assembled on the stage the Lighting Designer works with a team of electricians in order to throw light onto both the stage and the set in an atmospheric as well as practical way. Using specialized lighting instruments, colored gels and a state of the art computer, the Designer along with the Stage Director create a “lighting plot” by writing “lighting cues” which are stored in the computer and used during the actual performance of the opera.

During this production period, the Costume Designer in consultation with the Stage Director has designed appropriate clothing for the singing actors and actresses to wear. These designs are fashioned into patterns and crafted by a team of highly skilled artisans called cutters, stitchers, and sewers. Each costume is specially made for each singer using his/her individual measurements. The Wig and Makeup Designer working with the Costume Designer designs and creates wigs which will complement both the costume and the singer as well as represent historically accurate “period” fashions.

As the actual performance date approaches, rehearsals are held on the newly crafted set, combined with costumes, lights, and orchestra in order to ensure a cohesive performance, which will be both dramatically and musically satisfying to the assembled audience.

## ***A MASKED BALL* ESSAY QUESTIONS**

### History

1. Due to political reasons Verdi set *A Masked Ball* in colonial Boston. What are some of the reasons for setting it in this location?
2. List and discuss some of the reasons Verdi had trouble with the Censorship Authorities.
3. The action of *A Masked Ball* takes place in a very historic location (Colonial Boston). Research 1) Historic landmarks, 2) The importance of these landmarks, 3) Current condition of these landmarks.

### Science

4. Many great scientific discoveries took place during the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century when *A Masked Ball* is set. What are some of those discoveries and how did they benefit society then and today.

### English

5. *A Masked Ball* is a satire on Sweden's political and social climate. What is satire? What makes something satire? What other literature, film and plays are satires?