

Verdi and 19th-Century Italian Opera

Required Purchases

Verdi, Il trovatore [Ricordi Opera Vocal Score Series].

Verdi, Un ballo in maschera [G. Schirmer Opera Score Editions].

[Photocopy]: "Marked Libretto" for Il trovatore. (Italian only)

[Photocopy]: "Marked Libretto" for Un ballo in maschera. (Italian only)

If you do not read Italian you may wish to purchase:

William Weaver, Seven Verdi Librettos [the best "literal" translation of Trovatore and Ballo--although the poetic layout of the Italian text is completely unreliable]

The following book was going to be a required purchase, but it is temporarily out of stock. It is now on reserve in the library. You will be expected to read and know the information in the chapters on Trovatore and Ballo (pp. 57-112; 359-424), as well as two other chapters (pp. 1-32; 33-56):

Julian Budden, The Operas of Verdi 2: From Il trovatore to La forza del destino (Oxford, 1979).

The Premises and Procedures of this Course

The principal aim of this class is to provide an introduction to the basic structures of Verdian opera and, by extension, to confront the problems involved in understanding the structural dynamics of ottocento opera in general. By the end of the course, you should "know what to look for" (or what to listen for) in this important repertory, and you should be able to apply these methods on your own. In addition, the course will expect you to become familiar with a few of the basic tools and results of Verdi research--especially those that can impact most on current performance issues (for example, critical editions, staging manuals, old recordings, and so on).

The classroom sessions will be primarily concerned with problems in musical genre, analysis, and structure. What are the issues that Verdi faced as a mid-nineteenth-century composer of operas, and what do his strategies tell us about the way in which we might try to understand the music?

Principle No. 1: No analysis for the sake of analysis only (as an abstraction, or a mere demonstration of one's analytical technique).

[Related] Principle No. 2: All analysis should be undertaken in pursuit of a larger point "beyond mere technique." Normally, in Verdi, this would be to demonstrate how the chosen structure serves to produce or amplify musical or dramatic "content"--how structures and generic interactions and deformations yield expressive "meaning."

Please Note: On a session-by-session basis, the course will proceed at its own pace, not according to that of a pre-ordained grid. After an introductory session or two we shall spend most of our class-time discussing as a group the structures of Il trovatore and Un ballo in maschera. You will be preparing for these discussions by outside listening, reading, and your own analytical work: you will be expected to participate in class discussion on the basis of this outside work, and you will be expected to produce structural "diagrams" of some of these pieces. **The course presupposes a graduate-level ability in musical analysis.**

Class may be cancelled on Thursday, 10 October and will be cancelled on Thursday, 7 November. During these cancelled class sessions you will be given reading/library assignments in basic Verdiana--for example, becoming familiar with the Critical Edition Project.

Office hours: 11:05-12:30 Tuesday (after class) 158 Ferguson--or by appt. (office tel. 624-0385)

LISTENING ASSIGNMENTS

The following is the list of works that will be assigned during the quarter. We shall move through the list as the quarter progresses.

1. Paradigmatic examples of structures and genres (supplementary listening to clarify the structural and generic models): excerpts from other operas, other composers.

NB: to be assigned, as needed, in class.

2. Il trovatore (complete)

- 3 from Les Vêpres siciliennes:

Opening of Act II (includes Procida's "Et toi, Palerme")

From Act III: Montfort's "Au sein de la puissance"

Opening of Act V (includes opening chorus, then two "couplets"--Hélène's Sicilienne, "Merci, jeunes amis" and Henri's "La brise souffle au loin")

- 4 Un ballo in maschera (complete)

5. (As time permits): selections from other Verdi operas.

READING ASSIGNMENTS

(Slight modifications may occur as the quarter proceeds)

In addition to reading the items below, as assigned in class, all students are expected to prepare for each upcoming "analytical" session by familiarizing themselves thoroughly with the piece (or "number") in question and by assessing in a preliminary way its basic structures. Students will be called upon in class to demonstrate what they have prepared by way of analysis. Attendance is mandatory and expected, but if you have not prepared, do not come to class.

1. Julian Budden, The Operas of Verdi 2: From Il trovatore to La forza del destino. (Note: the 3 volumes of Budden are the best sources for general information about the operas--especially about their genesis and history. As a point of accuracy: In your own work with Verdi do not rely--ever--on any other one-volume book-discussions about the operas [Toye, Osborne, Hughes, etc.]: most of these other books are poor, inaccurate, and outdated.)
 - a) pp. 57-112 (Il trovatore)
 - b) pp. 1-32 ("The Collapse of a Tradition")
 - c) pp. 33-56 ("Formation of the Mature Style")
 - d) pp. 359-424 (Un ballo in maschera)
 - e) other (brief) excerpts that shed light on the assigned listening.
2. Andrew Porter's entry on "Giuseppe Verdi" in The New Grove Dictionary.
3. Librettos for Trovatore and Ballo (in translation if necessary: William Weaver's translations are the best: DO NOT RELY ON THE TRANSLATIONS IN THE VOCAL SCORES!!!)
4. Martin Chusid, A Catalog of Verdi's Operas:
 - a) pp. 160-63 (Il trovatore)
 - b) pp. 28-33 (Un ballo in maschera)

- 5) James Hepokoski, "Genre and Content in Mid-Century Verdi: 'Addio, del passato' (La traviata, Act III)," Cambridge Opera Journal 1 (1989), 249-76.
- 6) The Critical Editions and Critical Commentary for Rigoletto, Ernani, Nabucodonosor, and the Requiem (published jointly by the University of Chicago Press and G. Ricordi & C.)--and assorted readings, including:
 - a) a quick scan through the general introductions to these volumes.
 - b) Three articles on the critical edition, from Nuove prospettive nella ricerca verdiana (1983)
 - 1) Philip Gossett, "'The Works of Giuseppe Verdi,'" pp. 3-9.
 - 2) David Lawton, "Critical performers and critical editions," pp. 10-19.
 - 3) Martin Chusid, "Editing 'Rigoletto,'" pp. 49-56.
5. You will also be expected to have at least looked at (with some care):
 - a) The Disposizione scenica for Un ballo in maschera (photocopy on reserve)
 - b) Hans Busch's [abridged] translations of the disposizioni sceniche for Aida and Otello.
 - c) the 'real' disposizione scenica (in Italian) for Otello.
 - d) Franco Abbiati, Verdi, 4 vols.