

October 21, 2021 – Giuseppe Verdi's *Rigoletto*

On this week's Thursday Night Opera House we're presenting an encore broadcast of Giuseppe Verdi's *Rigoletto*, hosted by the late **Al Ruocchio** (1937-2007). Verdi based *Rigoletto* on a play by Victor Hugo called *Le roi s'amuse*. The composer once said it was "perhaps the greatest drama of modern times," and went on to describe its main character as "a creation worthy of Shakespeare." That character, Triboulet in Hugo's play, became the title character in Verdi's opera. He's a man whose harsh life is warmed only by the unconditional love of his daughter — a young woman who is eventually destroyed as an inadvertent result of Rigoletto's own anger and bitterness. The opera had a triumphant premiere at Venice's La Fenice on March 11, 1851.

The story takes place in sixteenth-century Mantua. The hunch-backed court jester Rigoletto (baritone **Sherrill Milnes**) laughs at the grief and rage of the aged Count Monterone (bass **Clifford Grant**), whose daughter has been seduced by the libertine Duke of Mantua (tenor **Luciano Pavarotti**), and Monterone lays a father's curse on him. The courtiers, who hate Rigoletto, discover that he has a young woman hidden away. Unaware that she is his adored daughter Gilda (soprano **Joan Sutherland**), whom he has raised in convent-like seclusion, they assume her to be his mistress and abduct her for the Duke's enjoyment, even tricking Rigoletto into helping them.

Meanwhile, the Duke is already aware of Gilda: he visits her disguised as a poor student and she falls in love with him. The courtiers show no pity towards Rigoletto even when they discover who Gilda is, and he vows vengeance on the Duke for having dishonored her. He hires the assassin Sparafucile (bass **Martti Talvela**) to murder the Duke, who is lured to a lonely inn by Sparafucile's sister Maddalena (mezzo-soprano **Huguette Tourangeau**). Despite her dishonor, Gilda still loves the Duke and when she realizes what is to happen, she maneuvers herself into taking his place, and is fatally stabbed. Rigoletto gloats over the sack delivered to him, containing what he believes to be the Duke's body, only to find it is that of the dying Gilda. As she dies, Rigoletto recalls Monterone's curse and collapses in anguish.

Richard Bonynge conducts the London Symphony Orchestra and the Ambrosian Opera Chorus in this 1971 Decca/London recording, CD 414269.

From a 1961 Rome performance, **Joan Sutherland** (Gilda) is joined by **Renato Cioni** (Duke), **Cornell McNeill** (Rigoletto) and **Stefania Malagu** (Maddalena) in the famous Act IV quartet, "Bella figlia dell'amore": <http://youtu.be/P-laCd1HilY>.