

Luisa Miller premièred in 1849 at Teatro San Carlo in Naples

GIUSEPPE VERDI (1813-1901)

Libretto by Salvatore Cammarano after a 'bourgeois tragedy' by Schiller

Running time: 148 minutes

Performed at the Metropolitan Opera House New York in 1979

Count Walter	<i>Bonaldo Giaiotti</i>	Bass
Rodolfo, his son	<i>Plácido Domingo</i>	Tenor
Miller, an old soldier	<i>Sherrill Milnes</i>	Baritone
Luisa, his daughter	<i>Renata Scotto</i>	Soprano
Duchess Federica, a young widow	<i>Jean Kraft</i>	Mezzo
Laura, a peasant girl	<i>Ariel Bybee</i>	Contralto
Wurm, Walter's castellan	<i>James Morris</i>	Bass
Conductor	<i>James Levine</i>	
Stage Director	<i>Nathaniel Merrill</i>	

Synopsis

This opera takes place in the Tyrol in the first half of the 17th century

{LOVE} ACT 1 SCENE 1: A characteristic village. Luisa Miller, daughter of a retired widowed soldier, is touched by birthday greetings from her neighbours, but no longer feels truly happy when separated from her beloved 'Carlo'. She assures her father that no young man is more honourable, and her happiness is completed when 'Carlo' joins the celebrations. In conversation with Wurm – another of Luisa's admirers – Miller insists that Luisa must choose her own husband, but he's disturbed to learn that 'Carlo' is actually Walter's son Rodolfo.

ACT 1 SCENE 2: A room in Count Walter's castle. Walter, musing about his tormented relationship with his son, hears of Rodolfo's love for Luisa, but insists that his planned marriage to Federica must go ahead without delay. Left alone with Federica, a friend since childhood, Rodolfo confesses his true feelings for Luisa, but Federica loves him too much to react with anything but indignation.

ACT 1 SCENE 3: Inside Miller's house. As Miller tells Luisa what he's learnt from Wurm, Rodolfo enters and swears that he'll keep faith with her. Walter himself now appears. His insults prompt Miller to draw his sword. Walter's bodyguard captures Miller and Luisa as prisoners. Rodolfo tries every means to persuade his father to release them. Before hurrying away, he finally vows to tell everyone how Walter acquired his title.

{INTRIGUE} ACT 2 SCENE 1: Inside Miller's house. While Miller is held prisoner in Walter's castle, Wurm tells Luisa that her father will die unless she does exactly as she's told. She writes a letter at his dictation, professing that she's always known who Rodolfo was, and that she's been motivated by ambition. Initially she recoils from this task, but when Wurm reminds her of the consequences, she completes the signed letter. She's then made to swear that she will publicly proclaim her love for Wurm whenever necessary.

[Interval]

ACT 2 SCENE 2: Walter's castle apartment. Walter promises Wurm that he has nothing to fear, even though Rodolfo has found out about the murder they plotted together to seize the Count's title. Federica enters, and Luisa is brought in to confirm that there are no longer any ties between herself and Rodolfo. Finally she professes to love Wurm.

ACT 2 SCENE 3: Hanging gardens in the castle. Luisa's letter has destroyed all Rodolfo's hopes of happiness. Wurm is challenged to a duel, but after discharging his pistol into the air Walter and attendants rush to the scene. Rodolfo is persuaded that marrying Federica is his best way to be revenged.

{POISON} ACT 3: Inside Miller's house. Resolved to take her own life Luisa is writing a last letter to Rodolfo, when her father enters after release from prison. She confesses what she intends to do, but relents in response to her father's despair. She agrees to join him in a life of exile.

Music sounds from the church where Rodolfo and Federica are due to be married, but a moment later Rodolfo appears brandishing Luisa's letter. As he questions her, he contrives so that they both drink poison. The ghastly truth emerges after a sequence of accusations, tears and solemn warnings.

Miller returns to the scene only to receive the embraces of his dying daughter, as well as Rodolfo's prayers for forgiveness. By now all have assembled: with one last effort Rodolfo runs his sword through Rodolfo, and then falls dead beside Luisa.



Verdi's Luisa Miller

The idea of an opera based on Schiller's *Kabale und Liebe* originated when Verdi convalesced in 1846, and spent much time with Andrea Maffei (who was Schiller's Italian translator). Although he initially envisaged an opera closely modelled on the play, his librettist Cammarano reminded him that they needed to persuade Neapolitan censors who were the most old-fashioned in Italy. Some episodes had to be eliminated, and some characters had to be elevated 'to a nobler plane'. Verdi particularly regretted the substitution of a respectable widow Federica in place of Walter's mistress. Cammarano also observed that no leading singer in Naples would agree to portray Schiller's more controversial alternative.

After *Macbeth* and several French-inspired operas, Verdi returned to the mainstream of Italian melodrama but with reinforced sophistication and expressiveness. The music is more consistently inventive, and purely conventional elements are either pared away or given expressive meaning. The structure of arias and ensembles become more varied and flexible. The duets in Act 3 particularly illustrate Verdi's habit of fashioning musical forms to suit their dramatic purpose.

This opera owes much to the simple eloquence of its choruses (potentially recalling Bellini's *La sonnambula*). Its full-length overture is one of Verdi's finest. Although the opera was warmly received at its première and has always been admired, it has never quite gained the central place in the repertoire that most Verdians feel it deserves.

Verdi's Operas

<i>Title</i>	<i>Libretto</i>	<i>Composition</i>	<i>Première</i>	<i>Age</i>
OBERTO, UN GIORNO DI REGNO				
Nabucco	Temistocle Solera	1841-1842	La Scala 1842	28
I LOMBARDI, ERNANI, I DUE FOSCARI, GIOVANNA D'ARCO, ALZIRA, ATTLILA				
Macbeth	F.Piave after Shakespeare	1846-1847	Florence 1847	33
I MASNADIERI, IL CORSARO, LA BATTAGLIA DI LEGNANO				
Luisa Miller	S.Cammarano after Schiller	1849	Naples 1849	36
Stiffelio	F.Piave after an 1849 play <i>Le Pasteur</i>	1850	Trieste 1850	37
Rigoletto	F.Piave after Victor Hugo	1850-1851	Venice 1851	37
Il trovatore	S.Cammarano and L.Bardare	1851-1853	Rome 1853	39
La traviata	F.Piave after A.Dumas <i>fils</i>	1853	Venice 1853	39
Les vêpres siciliennes	A.Scribe and C.Duveyrier	1854-1855	Paris 1855	41
Simon Boccanegra	Francesco Maria Piave	1856-1857	Venice 1857	43
Un ballo in maschera	A.Somma after E.Scribe	1857-1858	Rome 1859	45
La forza del destino	Francesco Maria Piave, partly after Schiller	1861-1862	St Petersburg 1862	49
Don Carlos	J.Méry and C.du Locle after Schiller	1866-1867	Paris 1867	53
Aida	Antonio Ghislanzoni	1870-1871	Cairo 1871	58
MESSA DA REQUIEM	MISSA PRO DEFUNCTIS (IN LATIN)	1873-1874	MILAN 1874	60
Otello	A.Boito after Shakespeare	1884-1887	La Scala 1887	73
Falstaff	A.Boito after Shakespeare	1889-1893	La Scala 1893	79

OTHER VERDI OPERA PREMIÈRES:- Jérusalem [in French, from *I lombardi*] 1847; Aroldo [from *Stiffelio*] 1857; Macbeth [revised French version] 1865; La forza del destino [revised version] 1869; Simon Boccanegra [revised version] 1881; Don Carlo [revised Italian version] 1884.

Several features are apparent in the above table ...

- ❖ Verdi's longevity – and productivity – as an opera composer.
- ❖ Frequent inspiration from great writers in his choice of subject, eg Schiller – see below – Shakespeare (three times) and Victor Hugo (two including *Ernani*). This coincides with a wider Italian discovery of Shakespeare. Generally – apart from *Stiffelio* and *La Traviata* – Verdi selected from more established sources. He considered *King Lear* more than once.
- ❖ Verdi's international reputation, with five premières in cities outside Italy: Paris (twice), London, St Petersburg and Cairo.

- ❖ *Un giorno di regno* and *Falstaff* are comedies: during the 53 intervening years all his well-known operas end with a death scene!

As indicated in the table above, Verdi's works can be partitioned into four consecutive eras. Before 1854 he composed at a prodigious rate to establish himself, and also to secure his financial position. Originally he wrote in a 'grandiose' style – with late Rossini as a dominant influence – but he then gradually progressed towards a more 'personal' style.

In his second period, from *Luisa Miller* to *La Traviata*, characters express themselves with greater delicacy and individuality (using a style that's closer to Donizetti). This coincides with a new concern for 'ordinary' people in interesting predicaments.

Between 1853 and 1858 he alternated between Paris and Italy; and produced three new operas with lofty subject matter that are brought to life by his characteristic Italian warmth.

From 1859 Verdi cultivated his Italian estates, but returned to the theatre to fulfil three handsome commissions from abroad: *Aida*, while *Otello* and *Falstaff* provide a fitting conclusion to this final period.

Salvatore Cammarano (1801-1852) was a librettist and playwright who supplied the text of *Lucia di Lammermoor* for Donizetti, for whom he also contributed seven other libretti including Roberto Devereux. His *Trovatore* libretto for Verdi was posthumously completed by L.E. Bardare. Cammarano also began to produce a *Re Lear* [*King Lear*] libretto for Verdi, which was completed by Antonio Somma (who was Verdi's librettist for *ballo in maschera*). Verdi returned to this subject frequently and sketched much music for it, but his aspiration was never fulfilled.

Operas inspired by Schiller's Plays

Four composers in this list confirm how popular Schiller's plays were amongst Italians during the first half of the nineteenth century:



<i>Opera</i>	<i>Composer</i>	<i>Première</i>
William Tell	Rossini	1829 Paris
Maria Stuarda	Donizetti	1834 Naples
I briganti	Mercadante	1836 Paris
Giovanna d'Arco	Verdi	1845 Milan
I masnadieri	Verdi	1847 London
Luisa Miller	Verdi	1849 Naples
[La forza del destino]	Verdi	1862 St Petersburg
Don Carlos	Verdi	1867 Paris
The Maid of Orleans	Tchaikovsky	1881 St Petersburg
Dimitrij	Dvořák	1882 Prague

Selected Musical Biography

RODOLFO: PLÀCIDO DOMINGO (born 1941) grew up working in his parents' Zarzuela company in Mexico, and has since regularly promoted these Spanish operettas. He's recorded more than one hundred complete operas, and performed over 150 roles in more than five different languages. From 1990, he performed as one of *The Three Tenors* with Luciano Pavarotti and José Carreras (and recorded the best-selling classical album of all time). In the early 2010s, he completed a transition from tenor repertoire to baritone parts (such as *Simon Boccanegra*). Increasingly he also conducts operas and concerts.

MILLER: SHERRILL MILNES is an American dramatic baritone most famous for his Verdi roles. He was born in 1935 into an Illinois farming family. As a youngster he spent many hours singing to his father's cows! He made his Met début in 1965, but a 1968 performance as Miller in *Luisa Miller* catapulted him to international fame. After appearing as one of the world's prominent Verdi baritones of the 1970s and 1980s, he made his final Met appearance as Amonasro in a 1997 production of *Aida*.

WURM: JAMES MORRIS (born 1947) is an American bass-baritone opera singer who studied with Rosa Ponselle, and then went on to perform a repertoire ranging from Mozart to Britten. He's renowned for his interpretation of the role of Wotan in Richard Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. Scarpia in Puccini's *Tosca* is another characteristic role, eg alongside Deborah Voigt at the Metropolitan Opera.

LUISA MILLER: Renata Scotto (1934–2023) was an Italian soprano, opera director, and voice teacher. Scotto is considered to have been one of the pre-eminent opera singers of her generation. She performed for more than 40 years first in Italy, then at the New York Met, and she's remembered for singing title roles in *La Traviata*, *Madama Butterfly*, and *Lucia di Lammermoor*. She appeared in the first telecast from the Met as Mimi in *La bohème* in 1977.

CONDUCTOR: JAMES LEVINE (1943–2021) was an American conductor and pianist. Levine held leadership positions including the Munich Philharmonic, and the Boston Symphony Orchestra. He made his Metropolitan Opera debut just before he turned 28 in 1971, and was named its principal conductor in February 1972. Following a series of injuries in his seventies, Levine's health problems led to fewer Metropolitan Opera engagements, and he stepped down from his position as music director at the end of the 2015–16 season.



Rosa Ponselle (1897-1981) the soprano who first brought Luisa Miller to the Met half a century earlier watched the live TV broadcast of this DVD performance in her Baltimore home.