

# Rigoletto

melodramma in Three Acts

libretto by Francesco Maria Piave  
music by **Giuseppe Verdi**

premiere:

Venezia, Teatro La Fenice, 11 marzo 1851

**ACT ONE** *Mantua – XVIth century.* Great feast in the ducal palace. Having boasted of his own conquests to the courtier Borsa, the Duke reveals that he desires a young lady whom he sees every Sunday in church where he goes in disguise to make conquests among the young women of Mantua. In the meantime he courts the lovely wife of the Count of Ceprano. The hunchback court jester, Rigoletto, makes fun of the Count of Ceprano; though amused, the courtiers present meditate to take their revenge upon him; they have discovered a secret: Rigoletto keeps a woman hidden, whom they assume is his lover. The dances begin, but the spectacle is interrupted by the Count of Monterone, come to defend the honor of his daughter who has been seduced by the Duke. Rigoletto does not hold his tongue even before him. Monterone, dragged out of the room, yells a curse at the Duke and especially at Rigoletto, who falls silent.

A blind alley. At night. Rigoletto, wrapped in his own cloak, thinks of Monterone's curse; with him is Sparafucile, who offers his services as an assassin. Rigoletto asks for his name and address; when he is left alone, he unburdens the tragedy of his life: deformed, unlucky, jeered at, he is forced to make others laugh; Sparafucile seems to him to be a way to achieve justice for all the wrongs he has suffered. At home awaits the only loved one left to him after the death of his wife: his daughter. He is afraid that this secret of his will be discovered, especially by the courtiers. While, immersed in his suspicions, he leaves the courtyard of his house, the Duke secretly enters it, dressed as commoner. To Gilda he pretends to be Gualtier Maldè, a poor student. He is the young man who had approached her in church and who now declares his love to her. The moment is interrupted by sudden noises coming from outside: the Duke disappears, assisted by Giovanna, whom Rigoletto has charged with looking out for his daughter, and whom the Duke had earlier won over with a bag of money. Gilda goes up to her room still transported by the encounter with the student. Outside, Marullo, Borsa and the other masked and armed courtiers attract Rigoletto attention: they make him believe they want to kidnap Ceprano's wife. Ceprano, in fact, is with them; the designated victim of the kidnapping is Gilda. Rigoletto joins them: masked and hooded, he holds the ladder which allows them to climb over the wall. Gilda is kidnapped and loses a scarf. Rigoletto sees the scarf, runs home, and realizing what tragedy has just befallen him, remembers the curse.

**ACT TWO** *The great Hall in the ducal palace.* The Duke is deeply disturbed: upon his return to Gilda's house, he found it deserted; he swears revenge and fondly remembers her. Marullo, Ceprano, Borsa and the other courtiers arrive and recount their night of adventure: the Duke thus discovers that the girl is in the palace: he leaves quickly, to everyone's surprise. Rigoletto enters, trying to hide the pain and the worry that grip him; restlessly, he looks around. A page comes looking for the Duke by order of the Duchess, the courtiers



hint at what he is up to, understanding that the object of the Duke's occupation is Gilda, Rigoletto loses control: infuriated, he throws himself against the door, ranting and raving, but in the end implores the courtiers to give him back his daughter. Gilda herself comes out to her father, confessing that she has lost her honor; then she tells how she has met Gualtier Maldè, that is the Duke. Rigoletto plans his revenge.

### **ACT THREE**

*The right bank of the Mincio.* A dilapidated tavern. In the background, Mantua. At night. Gilda and Rigoletto are on the road. The father asks his daughter if she is still in love with the Duke: Gilda says that she is... Rigoletto invites her to look into the tavern, where her admirer, dressed as an officer of the cavalry, asks for a room and some wine, and sings a love song; Maddalena whom the Duke is wooing, comes down the stairs. A quick conversation between Rigoletto and Sparafucile hints at the agreement which binds them to eliminate the Duke. Rigoletto consoles his daughter, upset by the Duke's behaviour with Maddalena and promises her a rapid revenge, she in the meantime will go to Verona where her father will meet her the next day. Gilda walks away, Rigoletto gives ten golden scudi to Sparafucile; another ten will come when the body is delivered. A storm is approaching. The Duke goes to sleep, Maddalena tries to convince Sparafucile to save the young man. Gilda comes back in dressed in the men's clothes that she was to use for her escape to Verona, and listens to the conversation unseen. Maddalena tells her brother to kill the hunchback: the Duke is too handsome and she is in love with him. Sparafucile refuses, but says he is willing to substitute the designated victim with some other young man, as long as he comes to the tavern before midnight, the hour he has agreed upon with Rigoletto. Gilda begs forgiveness from God and from her father; she wishes well to the man that she loves and whom she will save, knocks on the door and is killed by Sparafucile. The storm abates. At midnight, Rigoletto pays his debt to Sparafucile and takes the bag with the corpse, to throw into the river. In the night the voice of the Duke is heard humming his song as he leaves. Rigoletto is taken by panic: he cuts the bag open and recognized Gilda by lamplight. Gilda, still alive, tells him what has happened and dies with words of forgiveness: in Heaven, next to her mother, she will pray for him. Rigoletto, almost in prey to madness, falls on the corpse of his daughter and recognizes the terrible effect of the curse in what has happened.

