

Scribe and Charles Duveyrier from their work *Le duc d'Albe*, which was written in 1838 and offered to Halévy and Donizetti before Verdi agreed to set it to music in 1854.

The story is loosely based on a historical event, the Sicilian Vespers of 1282, using material drawn from the medieval Sicilian tract *Lu rebellamentu di Sichilia*.

Linda di Chamounix is an operatic melodramma semiserio in three acts by Gaetano Donizetti. The Italian libretto was written by Gaetano Rossi. It premiered in Vienna, at the Kärntnertheater, on 19 May 1842.

I puritani (The Puritans) is an 1835 opera by Vincenzo Bellini. It was originally written in two acts and later changed to three acts on the advice of Gioachino Rossini, with whom the young composer had become friends. The music was set to a libretto by Count Carlo Pepoli, an Italian émigré poet whom Bellini had met at a salon run by the exile Princess Belgiojoso, which became a meeting place for many Italian revolutionaries.

Aida is an opera in four acts by Giuseppe Verdi to an Italian libretto by Antonio Ghislanzoni. Set in the Old Kingdom of Egypt, it was commissioned by Cairo's Khedivial Opera House and had its première there on 24 December 1871, in a performance conducted by Giovanni Bottesini. Today the work holds a central place in the operatic canon, receiving performances every year around the world; at New York's Metropolitan Opera alone, *Aida* has been sung more than 1,100 times since 1886. Ghislanzoni's scheme follows a scenario often attributed to the French Egyptologist Auguste Mariette, but Verdi biographer Mary Jane Phillips-Matz argues that the source is actually Temistocle Solera.

Monte Carlo Opera Gala

LOUIS FRÉMAUX

Monte Carlo National Opera Orchestra



William Tell is a French-language opera in four acts by Italian composer Gioachino Rossini to a libretto by Victor-Joseph Étienne de Jouy and L. F. Bis, based on Friedrich Schiller's play William Tell, which, in turn, drew on the William Tell legend. The opera was Rossini's last, although he lived for nearly 40 more years. Fabio Luisi said that Rossini planned for William Tell to be his last opera even as he composed it. The often-performed overture in four sections features a depiction of a storm and a vivacious finale, the "March of the Swiss Soldiers".

Paris Opéra archivist Charles Malherbe discovered the original orchestral score of the opera at a secondhand book seller's shop, resulting in its being acquired by the Paris Conservatoire.

Norma is a tragedia lirica or opera in two acts by Vincenzo Bellini with libretto by Felice Romani after the play *Norma, ou L'infanticide* (Norma, or The Infanticide) by Alexandre Soumet. It was first produced at La Scala in Milan on 26 December 1831.

The opera is regarded as a leading example of the *bel canto* genre, and the soprano prayer "Casta diva" in act 1 is a famous piece. Probably the most important Norma of the first half of the 20th century was Rosa Ponselle who triumphed in the role both in New York and in London.

In his introduction to Darius Milhaud's autobiography *A Happy Life*, Christopher Palmer finds the composer's meticulously crafted yet irrepressibly sunny style deeply rooted in his native environs. Milhaud was born in southern France and, according to Palmer, "the outline of the strong, rugged Provençal hills was engraved on his subconscious...Aix, in one form or another, is rarely absent from [his] music." *Carnaval d'Aix*, from 1926, is one of a handful of works in which the composer makes this connection explicit. Despite the title, however, the work was inspired not only by memories of Provence, but by the composer's wanderings

abroad as well. Built as a continuous string of scenes drawn from his ballet *Salade* from 1924, the piece imagines a group of traditional *Commedia dell'Arte* characters from the Italian theater. However, having previously taken in the sights and sounds of Brazil during a time of diplomatic service there, Milhaud imagines the troupe costumed as if for Carnival, but somehow transported across the Atlantic to the composer's homeland of Aix-en-Provence. Although artfully crafted, *Carnaval d'Aix* is not one of Milhaud's most imposing works, even given his generally lighthearted musical disposition. During the time of its composition, Milhaud was receiving increasing attention abroad and had begun to receive offers for engagements to play his own music with various prominent orchestras (he premiered the *Carnaval* with the New York Philharmonic, under the baton of Willem Mengelberg). Though a competent pianist, he did not consider concert performance his forte. And while Milhaud surely exaggerated somewhat on the side of self-deprecation, he was self-conscious enough about his pianistic abilities for such concerns to have informed his *Ballade* for piano and orchestra, Op. 61, which he also performed during his tours abroad. Likewise, of the *Carnaval d'Aix* Milhaud wryly explained that "As I was no virtuoso, I had to compose for myself an easy work which would give the audience the impression that it was difficult." The hallmarks of Milhaud's style are present: the curious chromatic diversions, subtle but poignant use of dissonance within tonal contexts, polytonal complexes, and especially, vibrant rhythms inspired by jazz and South American music. Of course, Milhaud puts virtuosity to the purposes of expressive nuance rather than sheer pyrotechnics even in his most challenging works. Accordingly, what the *Carnaval d'Aix* lacks in technical complexity on the part of the soloist, it makes up for in energy and charm.

I vespri siciliani (The Sicilian Vespers) is a five-act Italian opera originally written in French for the Paris Opéra by the Italian romantic composer Giuseppe Verdi and translated into Italian shortly after its premiere in June 1855.

Under its original title, *Les vêpres siciliennes*, the libretto was prepared by Eugène

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- 1. Rossini - Guglielmo Tell 5:23**
- 2. Bellini - Overture De La Norma 5:46**
- 3. Milhaud - La carnival d Air
Fantasie for Piano and Orchestra 17:25**
- 4. Verdi - Overture I Vespri Siciliani 8:49**
- 5. Donizetti - Linda Di Chamounix 6:31**
- 6. Bellini - I Puritani 4:12**
- 7. Verdi - Aida 6:58**

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Engineer - Harald Baudis Producer - Hans Weber



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