

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR
Timothy Vernon

PACIFIC
Opera
VICTORIA

Patrick Corrigan
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Music by Gaetano Donizetti
Libretto by Giuseppe Bardari
based on Andrea Maffei's translation of Friedrich von Schiller's *Maria Stuart*

First Performance December 30, 1835, Teatro La Scala, Milan

Study Guide and Student Activity Guide
for Pacific Opera Victoria's Production
April, 2012

SEASON UNDERWRITERS



SURTITLES SPONSOR



PUBLIC FUNDING



EDUCATION PROGRAMS



YOUNG ARTIST PROGRAM
Dr. Erika Kurth
BA, MA, D.Litt.
DAVID SPENCER
MEMORIAL FUND

CLUB OPERA SPONSOR



EDUCATION UNDERWRITER



OPERA IN SCHOOLS



Pacific Opera Victoria
500 – 1815 Blanshard Street
Victoria, BC V8T 5A4
Phone: 250.382.1641
Box Office: 250.385.0222
www.pov.bc.ca

Maria Stuarda

Music by Gaetano Donizetti

Libretto by Giuseppe Bardari

based on Andrea Maffei's translation of Friedrich von Schiller's *Maria Stuart*

First Performance December 30, 1835, Teatro La Scala, Milan

April 12, 14, 18 & 20 at 8 pm. Matinee April 22 at 2:30 pm

At the Royal Theatre

In Italian with English Surtitles

The performance is approximately 2 hours 40 minutes, including 1 intermission.

CAST & CREATIVE TEAM

Cast in order of vocal appearance

Elisabetta, Queen of England	Sally Dibblee
George Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury	Stephen Hegedus
Lord William Cecil, Lord Chancellor	Andrew Love
Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester	Edgar Ernesto Ramírez
Anna Kennedy, Maria's companion	Lisa DiMaria
Maria Stuarda, Queen of Scotland	Tracy Dahl

Lords, Ladies-in-waiting, Maria's attendants,
Royal Guards, pages, courtiers, huntsmen, soldiers

Conductor	Timothy Vernon
Stage Director	Maria Lamont
Set and Costume Designer	Camellia Koo
Lighting Designer	Michael Walton
Assistant Director	Marjorie Chan
Stage Manager	Sara Robb
Assistant Stage Managers	Sandy Halliday Nicole Olszewski
Chorus Master & Assistant to the Artistic Director	Giuseppe Pietrarola
Principal Coach & Répétiteur	Robert Holliston
Assistant Accompanist	Kim Cousineau

With the Victoria Symphony and the POV Chorus



Overview

Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots, former Queen of France, and claimant to the throne of England, is held prisoner by her cousin Queen Elizabeth I. Will Mary's attempts to cajole Elizabeth into a reconciliation save her from being beheaded?

Donizetti takes shameless liberties with history, but imparts a splendid operatic flair to the political and religious conflict between Mary and Elizabeth. So what if the feuding monarchs never met in real life! Donizetti brings them together anyway, concocts a love triangle, and lets the sparks fly. As the niceties of diplomacy go out the window, the confrontation erupts into some very un-royal language and the most lyrical catfight in all of opera.

Maria Stuarda brings us two indomitable heroines and a wonderfully Italian twist on British history – Shakespearian invective hurled in purest bel canto, hatred and scorn spun into silken, sinuous melody – magnificent drama and ethereal music.

Synopsis

Act 1 The Palace of Westminster

Elisabetta (Elizabeth I) is toying with the idea of marrying the King of France, although she is actually in love with Lord Leicester, Robert Dudley, a long time member of her court. Elisabetta is also full of ambivalence about her cousin, Maria Stuarda (Mary Stuart, the exiled Queen of Scotland) who is claimant to the throne of England. Maria is being held prisoner in England, and while Talbot (Earl of Shrewsbury and Mary's keeper), urges Elisabetta to be merciful, Cecil (Lord Burghley, Elisabetta's chief advisor), pushes for Maria's execution.

Elisabetta orders Leicester to deliver a ring to the French Envoy as a token that she is considering the marriage proposal. She is exasperated by Leicester's cool indifference.

Talbot privately gives Leicester a letter from Maria in which she begs him to arrange a meeting with Elisabetta. Leicester rhapsodizes over Maria's beauty, proclaiming that he would happily die for her. Clearly in love, Leicester is discovered by Elisabetta. Her suspicions aroused, Elisabetta pressures the flustered Leicester to give her the letter. Elisabetta gloats over Maria's change of fortune and the fact that her three crowns are now lost to her. Leicester begs Elisabetta to show compassion, but praises Maria's beauty a little too ardently. Furious that Maria is trying to rob her of both her crown and the man she loves, Elisabetta agrees to a meeting, but secretly pledges to punish her rival.

Act 2 Fotheringhay Castle

Imprisoned at Fotheringhay Castle, Maria enjoys a beautiful day with her companion Anna and sings nostalgically of her happy youth in France. When trumpets announce the arrival of Elisabetta's hunting party, Maria's mood abruptly changes to dread at the thought of meeting her cousin. Leicester appears and urges Maria to appear submissive. He is confident Elisabetta will be merciful – if she is not, he vows to take revenge.

The meeting begins tensely. The two women eye one another warily, Maria full of terror and apprehension, and Elisabetta infuriated by the pride she sees in her rival. When Maria kneels to ask forgiveness, Elisabetta taunts her about her sordid past, including rumors of adultery, and her implication in the murder of her husband. Even as Leicester and Talbot urge her to hold her tongue, Maria, provoked beyond endurance, loses her temper, and insults Elisabetta by calling her impure and illegitimate. Elisabetta orders her guards to take an unrepentant Maria away, as all save the gleeful Cecil express their horror and despair.

Intermission

Act 3 Council Chambers in Westminster; Fotheringhay Castle

Elisabetta is vacillating over Maria's execution; Lord Cecil urges Elisabetta to sign and seal the warrant as England's security and future hangs in the balance. Leicester's arrival convinces her to follow through with signing the death warrant. His pleas for leniency only serve to fuel her conviction, and she orders him to witness his lover's execution.

In Fotheringhay Castle, Cecil delivers the warrant to Maria, and Talbot stays to comfort her. Denied a Catholic last confession, Maria tells Talbot she is haunted by the ghosts of her murdered secretary Riccio, as well as her husband Darnley; she is tormented with remorse over her personal past, as well as her involvement in a plot (The Babington Plot) against Elisabetta. She experiences a moment of epiphany and release, and prepares herself for death. She greets her household and gathered witnesses, and with great nobility leads a prayer to God. As cannon shots signal the imminent execution, Cecil asks Maria if she has any last wishes. She requests that Anna accompany her to the scaffold, and announces her forgiveness of Elisabetta, promising she will beseech God to bless England and its Queen.

Leicester enters, distraught and railing against the injustice of the death sentence. Maria begs him not to avenge her, but to support and comfort her as she goes to her death. She says farewell and is led to the scaffold. Cecil declares that with the death of its enemy, England's peace is now ensured.

Duelling Legacies

Elizabeth I has been called the greatest monarch in British history, her eponymous era a golden age that established English supremacy in the arts, commerce, and politics; that saw voyages of exploration and the rise of English naval power and a sense of national identity. Though by no means free of conflict, her 44-year reign provided a breather of relative tolerance, stability and peace amid centuries of turbulent see-sawing between Catholic and Protestant rulers and power struggles between Parliament and the Monarchy.

About Elizabeth's cousin Mary Stuart, who languished in prison for nearly 20 years until Elizabeth had her beheaded, there is less agreement. Mary has always evoked complicated responses, beginning with Elizabeth's own, for she famously delayed the execution, reluctant to behead another queen and knowing the political implications both at home and abroad. In fact Elizabeth described Mary as the daughter of debate, that eke discord doth sow and, despite Mary's requests, refused to ever meet her.

Was Mary a bloodthirsty harlot and an inveterate conspirator against the life of her cousin? Or a martyr and the rightful Queen of England? Or simply a victim of the convoluted Realpolitik of her times?

Certainly Donizetti comes down on the side of Mary, although his portrayal of Elizabeth does not lack complexity. To those of us who know just a little history – usually what has been written by the victors – Donizetti sheds a novel perspective, bringing the two queens together in a dramatic, if fictional, meeting. He may take egregious liberties with history, but in so doing, he invites us to get to know these characters and their legacies.

The Characters

Let's meet the historical personages behind the characters in the opera ...

Queen Elizabeth I (Elisabetta): When her father, Henry VIII, divorced his first wife, Catherine of Aragon, and married Anne Boleyn, establishing himself as Head of the Church of England, many Catholics (and the Pope himself) considered Elizabeth, the child of that union, to be illegitimate. They thought that Mary Stuart, granddaughter of Henry VIII's elder sister, was the rightful queen of England.



Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots (Maria Stuarda): Although Donizetti portrays Mary as practically a saint by the end of the opera, her lurid past is lightly alluded to when she and Elizabeth trade insults and when Mary confesses her sins to Talbot.

Over her 44 years, Mary amassed three husbands and a claim to three thrones. The daughter of King James V of Scotland, she became Queen of Scotland in 1542, at the age of 6 days. At 15 she was married off to Francis II, who died after only 18 months as King of France.



Mary returned to Scotland, now a Protestant country, and in 1565 married her cousin Henry Lord Darnley. A nasty piece of work, Darnley is believed to have had Mary's secretary David Rizzio (or Riccio) stabbed to death in front of her when she was pregnant. Darnley himself was murdered in 1567; three months afterward, Mary married the chief suspect, Lord Bothwell.

Amid accusations of adultery and murder, she fled to England, where she was taken into custody and imprisoned for the last 19 years of her life. She was convicted of treason for her apparent involvement in the Babington Plot of 1586 against Elizabeth, and was executed in 1587.



But when the childless Elizabeth died, she was succeeded by Mary's son, who became both James VI of Scotland and James I of England. Queen Elizabeth II is a descendant of Mary Queen of Scots.

Robert Dudley, 1st Earl of Leicester, was such a close friend of Elizabeth that many believed – or feared – that the Queen would marry him. Oddly enough, in 1563 Elizabeth had suggested Dudley as a husband for Mary Stuart, possibly so that Elizabeth could control the Scottish queen. However, Leicester wanted no part of such a scheme. Early on he supported Mary Stuart's succession rights to the English throne, but gradually turned against her, and after the Babington plot came to light, he advocated her execution.



William Cecil, 1st Baron Burleigh, was Elizabeth's chief advisor and did indeed want Mary executed, for he believed she was a magnet for Catholic conspirators. To foil a continuous series of plots against the realm, he established a spy network under Francis Walsingham, who is often called the father of the British Secret Service. Some scholars believe that Cecil is the model for the character of Polonius in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

George Talbot, 6th Earl of Shrewsbury was Mary's jailer during much of her time in custody. It was a luxurious imprisonment; Mary lived at various of Talbot's properties, had her own court, kept horses and dogs, played billiards, and worked on embroidery. In some versions of the opera Talbot is depicted as a Catholic priest – a fiction unsupported by any historic evidence.



Anna Kennedy, Mary's companion, is not an historical character.

Adventures with Censors

Maria Stuarda was based on after Andrea Maffei's Italian translation of Friedrich von Schiller's play *Maria Stuart*.

The opera had an extremely rocky start, distinguished by a last-minute scramble for a librettist (Donizetti eventually found a 17-year-old law student-cum-poet named Giuseppe Bardari, who never wrote another libretto but instead grew up to be a judge and the Naples Prefect of Police); followed by last minute changes to pacify the censors, and a real-life row between the leading ladies.

In the end, the show did not go on. Any 19th century Italian opera worth its salt ran into turmoil with the censors, and, just before the scheduled premiere, Ferdinand II King of Naples banned *Maria Stuarda*, some said because his queen, Maria Cristina was a direct descendant of Mary Stuart (some stories say she threw a fainting fit at the dress rehearsal).

Donizetti quickly moved the setting to the perhaps less riveting conflict between the Guelphs and the Ghibellines in 13th century Florence and, reinvented as *Buondelmonte*, the opera premièred in Naples in October 1834 – and flopped.

A well-established tradition in 19th century Italian opera was to simply up and move your censored opera to another city, where the bureaucracy might be more flexible. Donizetti did exactly that, trying again, this time in Milan, where, after yet more trouble with the censor, *Maria Stuarda* was premièred in December 1835 – and was again banned, after just 6 performances. But what performances, with the headstrong diva Maria Malibran ignoring the censors' strictures against calling Elisabetta a "vil bastarda".

After this the opera disappeared until a 1958 revival in Donizetti's home town of Bergamo. In the 1970s the likes of Joan Sutherland, Montserrat Caballé, and Beverly Sills took up the title role, ensuring its future in opera houses in Italy and elsewhere.

***Bel canto* then and now**

Robert Holliston

Any discussion of Donizetti's musical characteristics must begin with *bel canto*, or "beautiful singing," a term which encompasses not only a school of Italian operatic composition but a technical approach to singing and even the delivery of Italian text.

Historically we encounter the term for the first time in mid-17th century Italy, where a highly idiomatic and technically systematic approach to vocal writing and performance had developed since the early days of the Florentine *camerata*. It didn't become widely used, however, until a century or so later, during the heyday of Handel and the international star system, those charismatic (sometimes notorious) sopranos and castrati whose mastery of vocal technique remains the stuff of legend. Thus many historians will point out that the operas of Monteverdi, Cavalli, and Piccini – to say nothing of such foreigners as Handel, Gluck, and Mozart – contain vocal writing that is *bel canto* in virtually every aspect.

The majority of opera-goers, however, identify the term *bel canto* primarily with a generation of Italian-born composers working in the first few decades of the 19th century, and specifically with the mighty triumvirate of Gioacchino Rossini (1792-1868), Vincenzo Bellini (1801-1835), and our man of the hour, Gaetano Donizetti (1797-1848) who among them produced no fewer than 116 operas.

As the eighteenth century drew to a close, Italian opera – once the predominant style in houses throughout much of Europe (always excepting France) – had become only one of several national schools, among which it was the least susceptible to the radical changes, challenges, and seductions of the Romantic movement. In Vienna, where a large community of Italian operatic artists worked and flourished, the two decades from 1790 to 1810 saw productions of Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* and Beethoven's *Fidelio*; important new works were also produced in Paris. In Italy this was a relatively stagnant period in opera – not in terms of quantity but of advanced ideas. Moreover, opera was the only important Italian musical outlet at this time outside of the church; such a situation inevitably encourages a conservative attitude.



Gaetano Donizetti c.1835

Therefore the distinction between *opera seria* and the less formal *opera buffa* prevailed in Italy until well into the new century. *Opera seria*, as defined by its guiding genius Pietro Metastasio (1698-1782), recognized only three types of solo song, beginning with *recitativo*. This is a kind of heightened speech in which the words are sung but the rhythm is meant to imitate that of spoken Italian (i.e., there is no regular, dance-like meter). There are two types of *recitativo*, depending on how the singer is accompanied: *secco* (accompanied only by chords played on the harpsichord with the bass line emphasized by a bass clef instrument such as the cello); and *accompagnato* (the vocal line is accompanied – or at least punctuated – by the orchestra). After that, the solo *aria*, during which the singer was rarely interrupted.

Although the greatest 18th-century *opera serie* – those by Handel and Mozart – are genuine masterpieces still produced today, the rather strict formal pattern became somewhat constraining, and as the 19th century progressed was modified by a more or less thorough intermingling, in the same scene, of several soloists and different types of solo song, more ensembles, choruses, and orchestral passages, the whole being organized on a broad musical-dramatic plan.

Recitativo secco becomes less and less prominent, although it's featured in many important *bel canto* works (eg., Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia* and Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore*). A useful and versatile construct inherited from the 18th century (eg., the three great collaborations of Mozart and Lorenzo da Ponte) was the *scena ed aria* for a single soloist, which consisted of a *recitativo accompagnato* followed by an aria. Often the aria itself was in two parts: a slow or slowish expressive section followed by a

faster, concluding section often featuring rapid passagework in the vocal line. These distinct sections are often called the *cavatina* and the *cabaletta*; this type of aria structure outlived its roots and can be found in Verdi (*La traviata*) and Stravinsky (*The Rake's Progress*).

In later life, while mourning its loss even in Italian opera, Rossini commented on the essential components of *bel canto* singing:

- a) the Instrument – the voice – the Stradivarius, if you like;
- b) technique – that is to say, the means of using the Instrument – and the intensive training necessary to sustain a long, legato, espressivo line as well as the agility demanded by faster coloratura writing;
- c) innate taste and feeling – or Style. Rossini emphasized that this really cannot be taught, but must be acquired as the novice listens to and studies great singers. “Style is Tradition.”

Although the term *legato* is frequently used by musicians to suggest an overall quality of smoothness, the word itself means “tied – or bound – together,” and in this context refers to the binding together of pure Italian vowels – so named because their pronunciation follows that of Italian pronunciation and because they are “pure” monophthongs (i.e., they are not blended together with other vowels to form diphthongs in the manner of English words such as “weight” or “how”). A strand of sustained vowels – only minimally interrupted by the consonants – is the essence of vocal line, and produces the limpid diction so characteristic of Italianate (as opposed to, say, German or English) diction.

Equally important was equality of timbre throughout the range (or registers) of the voice. *Coloratura* really just means “coloring,” although for many years the term has referred to rapid, virtuosic passagework and also to the high soprano voice type associated so frequently with florid display (this is misleading, as one encounters coloratura writing for all voice types in the *bel canto* repertoire).

Among the qualities of fine coloratura singing are the ability to maintain a single vowel throughout an elaborate run, and the absence of intrusive aspirants or “aitches.” At all times the technique of singing is rooted firmly in the two separate yet co-ordinated functions of breath and support. Vocal training was intense and thorough in Rossini’s (and Donizetti’s) day; it demanded great patience. During the first three years of study a pupil might learn only exercises or *vocalises* that imparted correct vowel placement and agility, mastery of fast ornaments, scales and arpeggios, various trills, etc., with a further three years devoted to putting all of these components together.

Unsurprisingly, then, the focus of *bel canto* opera is on the singing. First, there is considerable variety in the declamation and accompaniment of Donizetti’s recitatives, allowing the fundamental storyline to be conveyed not only succinctly and economically, but with arresting drama. But of course what reigns supreme in a *bel canto* opera is melody, and Donizetti was blessed with a seemingly inexhaustible and richly varied supply of these. Whether slow, lyrical, and expressive, or fast, dramatic, and fiery, this composer unerringly comes up with exactly the right tune for each dramatic situation, providing the singer with opportunities to display not only character, but artistry. (The early 19th-century *bel canto* composer, like his 17th- and 18th-century counterparts in the world of Italian opera, allowed and even expected his singers to “improvise” additional embellishments and ornamentation, sometimes to the extent of re-writing the vocal line entirely. Whether this practice was embraced or tolerated by the composer is a matter for conjecture, although I suspect it was more the latter than the former.)

The Italian opera orchestra, from its earliest days, functioned primarily as an accompanist, supporting and enhancing but never competing with the onstage singing and action. As the 19th century progressed, German composers in particular tended to assign to the orchestra a dramatic role equal to that of the voice; this was never the case with Italian composers, not even Verdi, not even Puccini. True, there are occasions (beginning with Monteverdi’s *Orfeo* of 1607) when the accompaniment depicts or underscores the action or text as only an orchestral instrument can; other instances in which the composer asks for a *banda*, or onstage ensemble to create the illusion of a house band in a party scene.

But these are exceptional cases, reserved only for special – and appropriate – occasions. This is not meant to imply that Italian opera accompaniments are dull or merely serviceable. Due largely to the influence and example of Johann Simon Mayr (1763-1845), a German-born composer who spent most of his life in Italy – and who was Donizetti’s teacher – Italian pit orchestras became richer in sonority and texture, using woodwind and brass instruments to an extent hitherto unheard-of, and not only in overtures and set pieces, but also in accompaniments.

There must be many reasons why *bel canto* opera fell out of favor in the latter part of the 19th century. It was an inevitable casualty of the Romantic era’s loudly-proclaimed search for “truth” in art – and perhaps after Rossini, Bellini, and Donizetti there was no more, stylistically, to be said in this idiom. Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901) inherited much from these three composers, and without ever entirely abandoning their principles, expanded on them to an extent unimaginable in the century’s early decades. New music in a wide variety of genres was being produced in more countries than ever before (Italy continued to produce her most notable masterworks in the sacred and operatic fields alone) and by the end of the 19th century, due in great part to the stupendous innovations of Richard Wagner (1813-1883), the Germanic-Viennese school of composition was almost universally regarded as the apex of accomplishment. Finally: if, as Rossini insisted, the qualities of vocalism we associate with *bel canto* were an intrinsic part of “tradition,” we must acknowledge that, as younger artists in pursuit of the new come to the fore, traditions must be set to one side, albeit temporarily.

Now, in the 21st century, the term *bel canto* is usually uttered with more than a hint of nostalgia for a long past “Golden Age” of singing, a past dimly recalled, scratchily recorded, and (perhaps) idealized. Certainly when I think of the paradigms of *bel canto* singing, the names that come to mind are few and from a previous era: Rosa Ponselle, Maria Callas, Joan Sutherland, Montserrat Caballé, Marilyn Horne. All of these singers sang other repertoire, but to me they were at their greatest in Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti, Verdi (keeping in mind that I know them all only through recordings).

The mid-20th-century resurgence of interest in *bel canto* traditions owes an incalculable debt to Mme. Callas (although the diva’s more rabid fans should be reminded that she did not accomplish this feat single-handedly; her allies include that maestro of maestri, Tullio Serafin). However, without the contributions of the other great artists on my list (and many ... well, several) others, the interest might have been short-lived.

In any case, it wasn’t a truly exhaustive revival: Gaetano Donizetti was the most prolific of *bel canto* composers, completing some 66 works, and most of these continue to languish in obscurity. But unquestionably – despite all the vicissitudes that have plagued our beloved, recalcitrant, obstreperous, impossible art form since the first public opera house opened in 1637 – the works in our permanent repertoire include *L’elisir d’amore*, *Don Pasquale*, *La fille du régiment*, and *Lucia di Lammermoor*, operas by Donizetti that will be performed as long as some people want to sing them and others want to listen. It looks as if *Maria Stuarda* is well on her way to joining them, and all of us involved in Pacific Opera Victoria’s first ever production of this masterwork will do whatever we can to help!

Donizetti's British Invasion

A prolific composer of some 66 operas, Gaetano Donizetti (1797 – 1848) is best known for just a handful: *L'elisir d'amore* (1832), *Lucia di Lammermoor* (1835), *Don Pasquale* (1843), and *La fille du régiment* (1840). But in the last half century there has been a Donizetti renaissance of sorts as more and more of his works – and their coloratura delights – are revived.

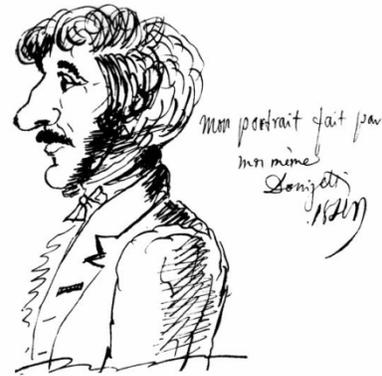
The romantic exoticism of British stories and locales found its way into nine of Donizetti's operas. The most famous of course is *Lucia di Lammermoor* (1835), based on Walter Scott's gothic romance, *The Bride of Lammermoor*. But Donizetti was intrigued with British history and literature as a starting point for opera as early as 1823 with *Alfredo il grande* (*Alfred the Great*) – a spectacular failure that flopped after a single performance.

By 1830, Donizetti's international reputation was established with the Milan première of *Anna Bolena*, the first of his "Three Queens" trilogy; it tells of the last days of Anne Boleyn (second wife of Henry VIII, mother of Elizabeth I, and heroine of one of Donizetti's many mad scenes). The second in this Tudor mini-series is *Maria Stuarda*, with its riveting, though fictional, meeting between Queen Elizabeth I and Mary, Queen of Scots. Finally, *Roberto Devereux* (1837) is a May-December romance between Elizabeth I and Robert Devereux, the Earl of Essex. All three operas (spoiler alert!) end with the execution of the title character; none can be relied on for sober historical accuracy – in fact *Roberto Devereux* ends with Queen Elizabeth going mad and abdicating.

Donizetti's mashups of British history also included *Il castello di Kenilworth*, another Walter Scott vehicle and yet another Elizabeth - Leicester love triangle; *L'assedio di Calais*, a fictionalization of the 1346 siege of *Calais*; and *Rosmonda d'Inghilterra*, a murderous royal triangle about Henry II, his queen, Eleanor of Aquitaine, and the Other Woman, Fair Rosamund – also erring on the side of the libellous, as, contrary to Donizetti's opera and persistent legends, there is no historical evidence that Eleanor killed her rival; in fact Rosamund eventually retired to a nunnery.

Finally, there is the opera that was rescued from utter obscurity by proud Liverpudlians. This is *Emilia di Liverpool*, set improbably in an alpine hermitage a short distance from London. It premiered in Naples in 1824, with only modest success. Donizetti had great hopes for it and after some revision, it re-emerged in 1828 as *L'Eremitaggio Di Liverpool [sic]*. Alas, it continued to languish, receiving brief revivals in Naples in 1838 and 1871 ... and then nothing for nearly a century, until June 1957 when Fritz Spiegl principal flautist of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and founder of the Liverpool Music Group, rediscovered the opera and came up with the bright idea of presenting a concert performance of *Emilia di Liverpool* to celebrate Liverpool's 750th birthday. Three months later, a shortened version was broadcast by the BBC, this time with a young Joan Sutherland in the title role. The opera popped up yet again in 2008 to mark Liverpool's status as European Capital of Culture.

– And yes, you can hear it on Youtube! (See the links later in this study guide.)



Gaetano Donizetti :
Caricature of himself c.1843

POV's Production: Framing the Drama

Say what you will about Donizetti's embellishments of the story of Mary Stuart, they do bring his characters to life in a quite wonderful way. It is through art – music, literature, painting, tapestry, architecture – that we experience much of the past. It is through art that history is both transformed and enriched, and that the legacies of lives lived long ago can touch us here today.

Director Maria Lamont and designer Camellia Koo have chosen to frame this production of *Maria Stuarda* through the legacy of art, to capture the complexity of an historic time through the lens of modern sensibility.



In this production of *Maria Stuarda*, the setting of the opera takes place in a

Tudor mansion that has been transformed into a present-day museum. The staff and workers of the museum are preparing an exhibition of the lives of the two Queens, Elizabeth I and Mary Queen of Scots. As they assemble artifacts, portraits and relics, they relive the final months of Mary Stuart's life.



Here are some of the historic artworks being depicted in the production.

Top: The Coronation Portrait of Queen Elizabeth I in her coronation robes, patterned with Tudor roses and trimmed with ermine. Painted by an unknown artist about 1600, it is probably a copy of a lost original, c. 1559, also by an unknown artist. National Portrait Gallery, London.

Centre: Mary, Queen of Scots in Captivity, c. 1610. This is one of a number of portraits of Mary that are known as Sheffield portraits. Painted after Mary's death, it was inspired by an original by Nicholas Hilliard c. 1578, when Mary was a prisoner at Sheffield House, one of Talbot's many large houses. National Portrait Gallery, London.

Bottom: The Unicorn in Captivity 1495-1505. Among the most beautiful and complex works of art from the late Middle Ages, this is one of seven hangings known as The Unicorn Tapestries. Woven in fine wool and silk with silver and gilded threads, the tapestries depict scenes from a hunt for the elusive, magical unicorn, here finally captured, fenced in, and tethered to a pomegranate tree. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



Musical Excerpts

Follow the links below to hear the excerpts on Youtube, or visit POV's web pages on Maria Stuarda to listen to these excerpts. <http://www.pov.bc.ca/mariastuarda.html>

Cavatina *Oh nube! che lieve per l'aria ti aggiri* and Cabaletta *Nella pace del mesto riposo.*

http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=bVa_vYerx24

Mariella Devia: Maria Stuarda.

Paola Gardina: Anna

La Scala Chorus and Orchestra, Antonino Fogliani, conductor.

Pier Luigi Pizzi, stage director, set design, costumes.

Teatro alla Scala, Milan, 2008

Imprisoned at Fotheringhay Castle, Maria Stuarda rejoices in being out under the open sky and sings nostalgically of her happy youth in France.

O nube! che lieve per l'aria ti aggiri

Oh cloud! Lightly drifting in the sky, bear my affection, carry my sighs

To the blessed land that once nurtured me.

*Ah! come down, please, take me up upon your wings, Take me to that land,
take me away from my suffering!*

Trumpets announce the arrival of Queen Elisabetta's hunting party, and Maria's mood abruptly changes to dread at the thought of meeting her cousin.

Nella pace del mesto riposo

In the peace of my sad seclusion She will strike me with a new terror.

I asked her, yet dare not see her, I cannot find such courage in my soul!

Let her stay on her throne and be adored, as long as her gaze is far from me,

Too sorely am I despised; In everyone's heart pity for me remains silent

The double aria (*Cavatina - Cabaletta*) forms the traditional solo scene in the Bel Canto operas of the early and mid 19th century. The first part, the Cavatina, is a slow, contemplative aria, designed to express the character's feelings and show off the singer's breath control, soft singing, and long vocal line. Then something happens on stage to change the situation and trigger a contrasting Cabaletta, a faster, more vigorous aria that shows off the singer's virtuosity and expresses different, more intense emotions.

The two queens meet for the first time.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=Eh4uYM6jsM4

This is an opulent 1982 English language production by the English National Opera. Although there is debate about presenting operas in translation, this production is exceptional for its dramatic impact and a strong cast led by the mesmerizing Janet Baker.

Maria Stuarda (Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots): Janet Baker

Elisabetta, Queen of England: Rosalind Plowright

Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, favourite of Elizabeth, in love with Mary: David Rendall

George Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury, friend of Maria: John Tomlinson

Sir William Cecil, Lord Chancellor, enemy of Maria: Alan Opie

Anna Kennedy, Maria's companion: Angela Bostock

Charles Mackerras, conductor

Chorus & Orchestra of the English National Opera

Producer (Director): John Copley

Designer: Desmond Heeley

A meeting has been arranged between Elisabetta and Maria, using a royal hunt as a pretext. The hunters arrive at Fotheringhay where Maria is imprisoned. Introductory passages of recitative establish that both women are jittery about the meeting, and that Elisabetta is jealous of Leicester's fondness for Maria. The tense sextet, *È sempre la stessa*, begins two and a half minutes into the recording as the two queens eye one another warily and all the characters, united in unease, express their separate emotions. When Maria humbles herself by kneeling before Elisabetta to ask forgiveness, Elisabetta provokes Maria, reminding her of her sordid past, accusing her of adultery and the murder of her husband.

Confrontation Scene

Watch a baker's dozen of performances featuring the climactic moment when the gloves come off between the two queens.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=ntwH2dRwess

The Singers

Edita Gruberova, Sonia Ganassi	Montserrat Caballé, Bianca Berini
Elena Mosuc, Stefania Kaluza	Ashley Putnam, Marisa Galvany
Edita Gruberova, Agnes Baltsa	Elena Mosuc, Katarina Karnéus
Katia Ricciarelli, Glenys Linos	Mariella Devia, Laura Polverelli
Daniela Dessi, Agnes Baltsa	Christiane Weidinger (Monte Carlo 1993)
Patrizia Ciofi, Marianna Pizzolato	Mariella Devia, Anna Caterina Antonacci
Joan Sutherland, Huguette Tourangeau	

Finally provoked beyond endurance by Elisabetta's taunts, Maria loses her head and flings at her cousin the worst possible invective. Her venomous insults carry a pointed reminder that many still believe Elisabetta's claim to the throne to be illegitimate. Elizabeth calls the guards to take Maria away.

*Figlia impura di Bolena, Parli tu di disonore?
Meretrice indegna, oscena, In te cada il mio rossore.
Profanato è il soglio inglese, Vil bastarda, dal tuo piè!*

*Impure daughter of Boleyn, Can you speak of dishonour?
Obscene, unworthy whore, My shame falls upon you,
The throne of England is defiled, Vile bastard, by your foot!*

Prayer: Deh! Tu di un'umile preghiera il suono Odi

http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=Xas_7xGcUQU

Beverly Sills as Maria Stuarda
John Alldis Choir, London Philharmonic, conducted by Aldo Ceccato, 1971.

Awaiting her execution, Maria and her supporters pray to God for forgiveness. Beverly Sills, one of the greatest interpreters of the role, sings the glorious Preghiera (prayer) in this transcendent scene. The Preghiera is famous for an extremely long high G sustained over seven measures and rising in a crescendo to high B flat (beginning at 2'35" in this recording; Ms. Sills holds the soaring high note for some 20 seconds).

*Deh! Tu di un'umile preghiera il suono
Ah! You hear the sound
Of a humble prayer, oh kindly God of mercy.
Receive me in the shadow of your pardon
For my heart has no other shelter.
Freed from suffering,
Freed from torment,
Bountiful heaven has forgiven you.*

Preghiera: Ten performances of the soaring high G in Maria's final prayer

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SZW5stryk-E4&feature=player_embedded

The Singers

Montserrat Caballé	Joan Sutherland
Tiziana Fabbricini	Patrizia Ciofi
Mariella Devia 2008	Elena Mosuc
Janet Baker	Katia Ricciarelli
Edita Gruberova	Mariella Devia 2009

Awaiting her execution, Maria and her supporters pray to God for forgiveness. Above is a selection of ten different performances of the spine-tingling portion of the Preghiera in which Maria sustains a long high note over the chorus.

*Tolta al dolore, Tolta agli affanni,
Benigno il cielo ti perdonò.
Freed from suffering, Freed from torment,
Bountiful heaven has forgiven you.*

Joan Sutherland in a sizzling concert performance of the Cabaletta Nella pace del mesto riposo with Margreta Elkins

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aw6PrpTBgr8&feature=player_embedded

Conductor Richard Bonyngé, Covent Garden, 1975

Links

Maria Stuarda and Donizetti

http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=GCG4zJ-BJlw

Introduction to Maria Stuarda from San Diego Opera Talk: Nick Reveles explores the historical background and music of the opera.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=9cOB0pDO9Js

The Plot of Maria Stuarda in one minute with Brenda Harris and Judith Howarth (Minnesota Opera)

http://www.dynamic.it/maria_stuarda.pdf

Libretto (pdf): CD Booklet from the Dynamic recording of a production by Teatro Donizetti di Bergamo, including notes and the libretto in four languages.

<http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/6791>

Mary Stuart by Friedrich Schiller . Download an English translation of the German play on which Donizetti's opera is based.

<http://www.operanews.com/operanews/issue/article.aspx?id=1953&issueID=83&archive=true>

I'll Never Stop Saying Maria: An enjoyable, in-depth article from Opera News by Ira Siff, exploring Maria Stuarda, the Three Queens Trilogy, and the bel canto revival.

<http://www.mnopera.org/files/performances/1945/1.6a%20-%20Maria%20Stuarda%20background6.pdf>

Background Notes from Minnesota Opera (pdf): An in-depth look at the genesis of the opera, the historical background, and a Tudor-Stuart family tree.

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=90891928>

Quarreling Queens: Donizetti's 'Maria Stuarda': An amusing NPR segment exploring the connection between the Dixie Chicks and Maria Stuarda. Music and politics are a volatile mix, especially with chicks who aren't ready to make nice. Read the article or listen to the segment, complete with music from both the Dixie Chicks and Maria Stuarda

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaetano_Donizetti

Gaetano Donizetti: Wikipedia Biography of Gaetano Donizetti

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giuseppe_Bardari

Giuseppe Bardari: Biography of the librettist of Maria Stuarda – who never wrote another opera!

http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=90gyxHWr7Rk

Emilia di Liverpool : Here's a sample of Joan Sutherland's 1957 performance of Emilia's rondo finale, "Confusa è l'alma mia", from *Emilia di Liverpool*. Make sure to listen through to the end; the second part is a tour de force of vocal pyrotechnics.

http://www.classicalshop.net/download_booklet.aspx?file=OP%200008.pdf

Emilia di Liverpool and L'Eremitaggio Di Liwerpool (pdf): Can't get enough Donizetti? Peruse the CD Booklet from an Opera Rara recording of both versions of Donizetti's Liverpoolian opus, with copious notes, photos, and both libretti.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EfFTMNRH6qc&feature=player_embedded

Music from Emilia di Liverpool (L'Eremitaggio Di Liwerpool): If you'd like to savour the charming music from this early work of Donizetti, you can listen to most of the historic 1957 Liverpool broadcast on Youtube. If you decide to follow along with the libretto, be warned that although this performance was billed as Emilia di Liverpool, it was actually the 1828 revision, L'eremitaggio di Liwerpool; the libretto begins on page 204 of the CD booklet.

Emilia di Liverpool: Joan Sutherland
Conte Asdrubale: Hervey Alan
Candida: April Cantelo
Conductor - Jonh Pritchard
Singers of Liverpool Music Group

Colonello Tompson: William McAlpine
Claudio: Denis Dowling
Bettina: April Cantelo
Orchestra - Royal Liverpool Philharmonic

History

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Queen_Elizabeth_I

Queen Elizabeth I: The Wikipedia article on Elizabeth I of England provides an excellent overview of Elizabeth's life and times, along with many links for further reading

<http://englishhistory.net/tudor/monarchs/eliz1.html>

Queen Elizabeth I: Another overview of Elizabeth and her times, with links for further reading

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary,_Queen_of_Scots

Mary, Queen of Scots: Wikipedia biography of Mary Stuart, with many links.

<http://englishhistory.net/tudor/relative/maryqosbiography.html>

Mary, Queen of Scots: Another introduction to Mary Stuart and her times

<http://www.royal.gov.uk/HistoryoftheMonarchy/HistoryoftheMonarchy.aspx>

History of the Monarchy: Official website of the British Monarchy: Explore in greater depth the kings and queens of Britain.

<http://etudesecossaises.revues.org/index146.html>

The Reputations of Mary Queen of Scots: A scholarly article published in Études écossaises. Jayne Lewis of the University of California, Irvine examines wildly differing perspectives on Mary Queen of Scots. For every Protestant who saw Mary as a bloodthirsty harlot there was thus a Catholic to see her as a pious martyr. For every Scottish person who had heard she was a Frenchified interloper, there was a French one who understood her to be the rightful unifier of the thrones of England, Scotland, and France. For every man who loathed and repudiated her as a Jezebel, there was a woman to love her as a composite of the biblical Marys who participated in Christ's passion.

<http://etudesecossaises.revues.org/index146.html>

George Talbot, 6th Earl of Shrewsbury: Biography of the historical character of Talbot

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Cecil,_1st_Baron_Burghley

William Cecil, 1st Baron Burghley: Biography of the historical character of William Cecil

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Dudley,_1st_Earl_of_Leicester

Robert Dudley, 1st Earl of Leicester: Biography of the historical character of Leicester

http://is.muni.cz/th/215574/ff_b/bachelor_thesis-elizabethan_secret_service.txt

The Elizabethan Secret Service: Learn about the first stirrings of the British Secret Service during the time of Elizabeth I. Discover the espionage techniques and the plots and counterplots (including details of the Babington Plot, which led to the execution of Mary Stuart). The officers controlling the secret service included Sir Francis Walsingham and two of the characters in the opera, William Cecil, Baron of Burghley; and Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester. A Bachelor's Diploma Thesis by Michaela Macková of Masaryk University in the Czech Republic

Additional information, including biographies of the singers, conductor, director, and designer of this production of Maria Stuarda, is available at Pacific Opera's website. As well, all the above links may also be accessed from POV's website: <http://www.pov.bc.ca/mariastuarda.html>

Bel Canto, Then and Now by Robert Holliston

Other materials by Maureen Woodall