The activities in the study guide are designed to be used in collaboration with the synopsis found in *Rigoletto*: Start Here and can be either individually or together to support attendance at the opera and reflection after the performance. For more information about Rigoletto and the art form of opera, please see *Rigoletto: Go Further*.

Opera is extravagant and multilayered, which makes it a fantastic interdisciplinary learning experience, but can also make it hard to get one's head around initially. For this reason, we divide opera into five categories: Music, Theatre, Story, Spectacle, and Collaboration.

*Rigoletto* was created at a time when its composer, Giuseppe Verdi, was at the height of his career and encapsulates all of what makes Italian opera, well, opera! It is a moving story full of emotion with a score that adds depth and meaning to the libretto. In exploring *Rigoletto*, the music needs to form the base from which all further understanding is rooted. This study guide will focus on the music found in *Rigoletto* which will in turn lead to an exploration of the art form of opera.

The activities in this study guide will prepare students for the performance by becoming familiar with three of the most famous pieces of music from the opera. Each activity encourages active listening and illustrates why the operas of Verdi are some of the most frequently performed. According to the web site Operabase, there have been 511 performances of *Rigoletto* in 95 cities in 2014. That is more than one performance of *Rigoletto* a day!

All of the video excerpts included in the study guide are available on Youtube and are excerpts from the 1982 film version of *Rigoletto*.

- Duke of Mantua – Lucianno Pavarotti (Tenor)
- Gilda – Edita Gurberova (Soprano)
- Rigoletto – Ingvar Wixell (Baritone)
- Victoria Vergara – Maddalena (Mezzo-soprano)
1. **Rigoletto** is very popular because the music is accessible and easy to listen to.

One of the most well known arias from **Rigoletto** is “La donna è mobile”. As this aria opens, the audience is already familiar with the Duke’s conniving nature and the negative way he treats women. This aria illustrates how little he thinks of women and secures his reputation as a cad. The Duke has professed his love to Gilda, daughter of Rigoletto, but this aria comes just before he attempts to seduce Maddalena in her home.

Repetition within a song or piece of music helps the audience to remember it. The more “catchy” a melody is, the easier it is to listen to. The opening melody from “La donna è mobile” is repeated throughout the aria in both the orchestra and the vocal part. This melody can be heard from the very beginning in the orchestra. It is then repeated twice with lyrics. Listen through the entire aria and put up your hand whenever you hear the melody. How many times do you hear it? How many times does the orchestra play it? What meter is it in – two or three?

Have a look at the translation of the lyrics below. How does the feeling of the music add to the lyrics? What do you think about the character of the Duke based on this aria? Compare this aria to anything by Taylor Swift (or any current favourites). What is similar about the way the songs are constructed?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xCFEk6Y8TmM

2. The story of **Rigoletto** comes from the heart.

Gilda, sung by a soprano, is a very sheltered young woman. Her father, Rigoletto, wants to do everything he can to protect her from men like The Duke. In spite of his efforts, Gilda meets The Duke and falls in love with him not knowing who he is. She thinks he is a poor student! In the aria “Caro nome”, Gilda is describing what it feels like to love him.

Create a T-chart. Label one side “Just Music”, the other “Full Performance”. Listen to the aria first without the lyrics. This link is the great Maria Callas singing the aria.  
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WT92QqyRft0  
On the “Just Music” side, write down your thoughts about how the music expresses Gilda’s feelings. Now watch a performance of the aria from the film of **Rigoletto**. On the other side of the T-chart, write down how the singer uses acting to support the musical message.

3. **Rigoletto** allows singers to show what they are capable of.

In this quartet, we hear from all four characters. Rigoletto and Gilda are listening from outside the house as The Duke attempts to seduce Maddalena. Rigoletto is desperate to show Gilda what kind of man The Duke is while Gilda doesn’t want to believe what she is hearing. This quartet is a starring role for all four singers as they must work together musically while at the same time telling the story of their individual characters.

Watch the performance of “Bella Figlia Dell’amore”. Using the handout, identify what each character is expressing through the lyrics and music. (start at 3:50)  
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oMhB_jticKE
English Translation of "La donna e mobile"

Woman is flighty
Like a feather in the wind,
She changes her voice — and her mind.
Always sweet,
Pretty face,
In tears or in laughter, — she is always lying.
Always miserable
Is he who trusts her,
He who confides in her — his unwary heart!
Yet one never feels
Fully happy
Who on that bosom — does not drink love!

talk like that is cheap enough.
Believe me, I know exactly
what such play acting is worth!
I, my fine sir, am quite accustomed
to foolish jokes like this.

GILDA
Ah, these are the loving words
the scoundrel spoke once to me!
O wretched heart betrayed
do not break for sorrow.

RIGOLETTO
to Gilda
Hush weeping can do no good...
You are now convinced he was lying.
Hush, and leave it up to me
to hasten our revenge.
It will be quick, it will be deadly,
I know how to deal with him.

Listen to me, go home.
Take some money and a horse,
Put on the men's clothes I provided,
then leave at once for Verona.
I shall meet you there tomorrow.

GILDA
Come with me now.

RIGOLETTO
It's impossible.

GILDA
I'm afraid.

RIGOLETTO
Go.

English Translation of "Caro Nome"

Sweet name, you who made my heart
throb for the first time,
you must always remind me
the pleasures of love!
My desire will fly to you
on the wings of thought
and my last breath
will be yours, my beloved.

English Translation of "Bella Figlia Dell'Amore"

DUKE
Fairest daughter of love,
I am a slave to your charms;
with but a single word you could
relieve my every pain.
Come, touch my breast and feel
how my heart is racing.

MADDALENA
Ah! Ah! That really makes me laugh;

**Rigoletto Study Guide: In Depth**

“Bella Figlia Dell’Amore”

For each character:

1. Summarize what they are saying during the quartet

2. Identify their motivation – why are they saying what they are saying?

**The Duke of Mantua**

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__________________________________________________________________________________________________,

**Maddalena**

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__________________________________________________________________________________________________

**Rigoletto**

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**Gilda**

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How does the music help to tell each individual story while having it all happen at the same time?

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