

GIUSEPPE VERDI



Boldini's portrait of [Giuseppe Verdi](#), 1886, [National Gallery of Modern Art, Rome](#)

Between 1830 and 1840 Italian melodrama was deeply influenced by the struggle for the assertion of freedom rights that were rousing the conscience of Italian people.

The age of loving opera and gentle heroines, put on by Gaetano Donizetti and Vincenzo Bellini, was fading. The audience asked something different to music and in particular, to melodrama: strong ideals, spirit of sacrifice for the cause, manlike heroism.

It was asked, essentially, to interpret a new spirit and to speak no longer to the single man but to an entity that was the forming Italian nation.

Giuseppe Verdi was able to meet those requirements in his powerful and essential dramaturgy, in his characters standing out with the courage of their ideals against an oppressing power, representing Italian people that corresponded with their political passions. *Oberto, conte di San Bonifacio* (1839), *Nabucco* (1842), *I Lombardi alla Prima Crociata* (1843) are his works that better express his ideal ardour during the first phase of his production without forgetting the psychological analysis, as in *Macbeth* (1847) and *Luisa Miller* (1849).

After Donizetti's death, Verdi became the most important figure of Italian opera production and, in search of a perfection of his dramatic style, gave life to his great masterpieces: *Rigoletto* (1851), *Trovatore* (1853) and *Traviata* (1853). Verdi reached the top of his artistic career! Courageously, he decided to change, to follow new ways, approaching a new kind of melodrama able to design complex characters. *I Vespri Siciliani* (1855), *Simon*

Boccanegra (1857), Un Ballo in Maschera (1859), La Forza del Destino (1862), Don Carlos (1867) are all works in which Verdi pursued an expressive strength capable to merge human passions with natural landscapes. Aida (1871) marked the highest point of that season in his production, followed by the trilogy Messa da Requiem, Otello, Falstaff, that projected the great composer into the modern trends of Italian music.

Despite the growth and the progress in the style of his composition, the ability to interpret the changing conditions of Italian political and social matters and to understand the new expectations of the audience, Giuseppe Verdi still remains an earnest supporter of tradition.

Apart from the declared positions, his extraordinary inspiration and his unique musical sensibility led him to melodramatic intuitions that, at a distance of one hundred years from his death, keep on conquering the audience of the whole world.

Othello: the dark side of Verdi

Between 1860 and 1870, Verdi, against his will, was involved in the debate about the renewal of Italian music.

During that period the musical vanguards denied the Italian opera tradition from which Verdi came and which he tried to renew.

Among the most fervent animators of the debate there were two young artists Arrigo Boito and Franco Faccio, frequenters of the artistic-literary movement of "Scapigliatura", enthusiastic lovers of German instrumental music and, with some reservations, Wagner. At the end of 1870 Boito and Faccio, renouncing the previous positions, became the most faithful Verdi's collaborators.

Slowly Othello grew (the phases of elaboration are present in a wide collection of letters between Verdi and Boito) and, contrary to the usual relation of subjection on his librettists, the mutual understanding between Verdi and Boito would have been perfect.