
TEATRU
MANOEL



The Manoel Theatre

in collaboration with the

Istituto Italiano di Cultura

presents the

Associazione MATTIA BATTISTINI (Roma)

in

RIGOLETTO

libretto by

Francesco Maria Piave

based on a play *Le Roi s'amuse* by

Victor Hugo

music by

GIUSEPPE VERDI

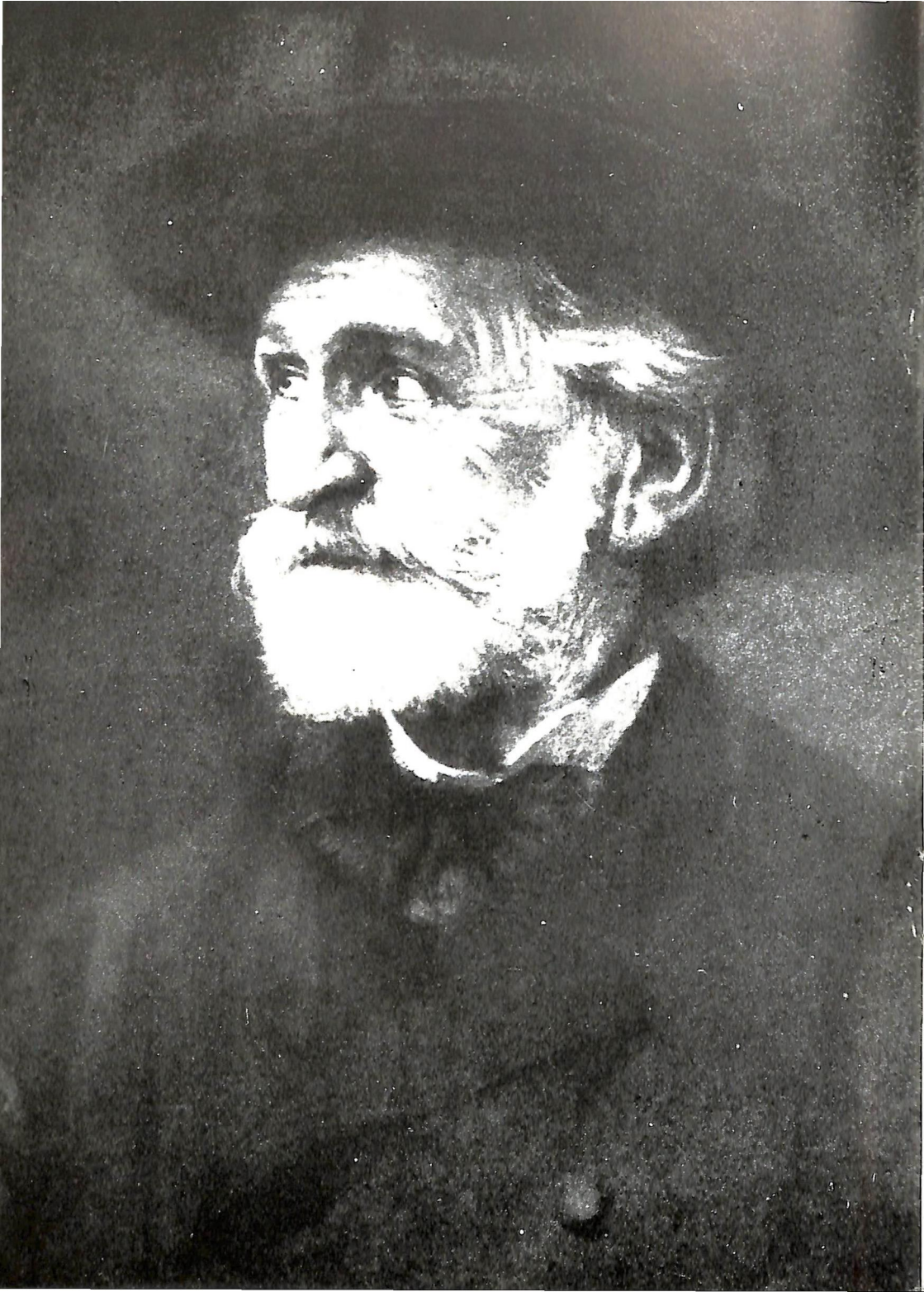
World Première:

11 March 1851, Teatro la Fenice, Venice

First performance in Malta:

8 January 1853

23, 24, 27 November 1988



How the Company was born

The MATTIA BATTISTINI Association was formed in 1980 at Rieti. Its founder members were Franca Valeri, president and resident director; Maurizio Rinaldi, musical director; Raffaele Guerra, impresario; and Luciana Della Monache, administrative secretary.

The founding of the MATTIA BATTISTINI (named after the celebrated baritone) was the result of a life-long desire harboured by Professor Ettore Saletti, the mayor of Rieti who played an active part in the artistic activities of the Comune.

The primary aim of the Association is to promote an outlet for the young and promising lyrical singers by means of a National Festival organised for the purpose and reserved for participants who have not yet reached thirty-six years of age.

The Festival is held at the Flavia Vespasiano Theatre (which was re-opened in 1959 after its refurbishing). Every year, from Thursday to Sunday, on the first week of June, a group of hopeful young singers compete for the top positions with arias from three pre-selected operas. The eventual winners of the Festival are then engaged to appear in the full version of the particular operas which are produced during the month of September. The successful winners are eligible to compete in this lyrical voice contest for three consecutive years.

The strong collaboration with the Comune, particularly with San Remo, has helped in no small measure to ensure that the ASSOCIAZIONE MATTIA BATTISTINI broadens and enhances its repertoire during its relatively short theatrical life.



Maurizio Rinaldi, Ettore Saletti, Franca Valeri and Loris Scopigno announce the birth of the company at a press conference held at the Town's Hall in Rieti on the 14 February 1980.

Where Verdi went wrong! — or did he?

Rigoletto was the first opera in Verdi's extraordinarily productive second period. With its procession of unforgettable arias and its wonderful quartet it is still regarded as Italian opera *in excelsis*.

Yet in this opera Verdi's prime concern was to subordinate the set numbers to dramatic interest. He did not want to glorify the voice nor to spin wondrous melodies half so much as to catch in his music the nuances and echoes of his characters and plot. However, it has transpired that ensemble numbers like the quartet, and arias like *Caro Nome*, *Quest' o quella*, *La donna è mobile* and *Pari siamo* seem to indicate that Verdi's artistic aim fell short of its target — so prominently are these pieces heard out of context i.e. apart from the opera as a whole!

Although Verdi placed greater stress on dramatic rather than on the melodic or lyrical values he had sound theatrical instincts, a great respect for the box office and an eye on his audience. He certainly knew it when he had a good melody which lent itself to popular appeal. Suffice it to say that in *Rigoletto's La donna è mobile*, he was so certain of the impact upon the audience that he became fearful that the tune might become famous before the opera was heard! He therefore refused to turn the music over to the tenor up to the time of the dress rehearsal. "It is so easy to remember," he warned his singer, "that anybody could steal it from your lips; and then goodbye — they would be singing it all over the streets of Venice before the performance."

And the genius was right in not overestimating the contagious effect of his song. At the première, the audience went wild over it. On the following day, 12 March 1851, it seemed that everybody in Venice was either singing or whistling it.

But *La donna è mobile* was only one of the many things that the audience and critics raved about in this opera. "An opera like this," reported the *Gazzetta di Venezia*, "cannot be judged after one evening. Yesterday we were, so to say, overwhelmed by the novelty of it all.... novelty in the style, in the music, in the very form of the numbers.... The opera had a most complete success and the composer was acclaimed, applauded, and called after almost every number, two of which had to be repeated."

It seems that the Master had got it right — and wrong — at the same time!



Maria Pia Ionata



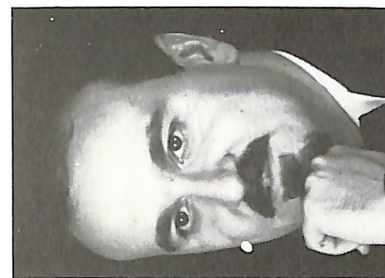
Filippo Pina



Stefania Bonfadelli



Marcello Giordano



Riccardo Ristori



Gian Luca Ricci



Giancarlo Deri



Raffaella Arzani

Rigoletto

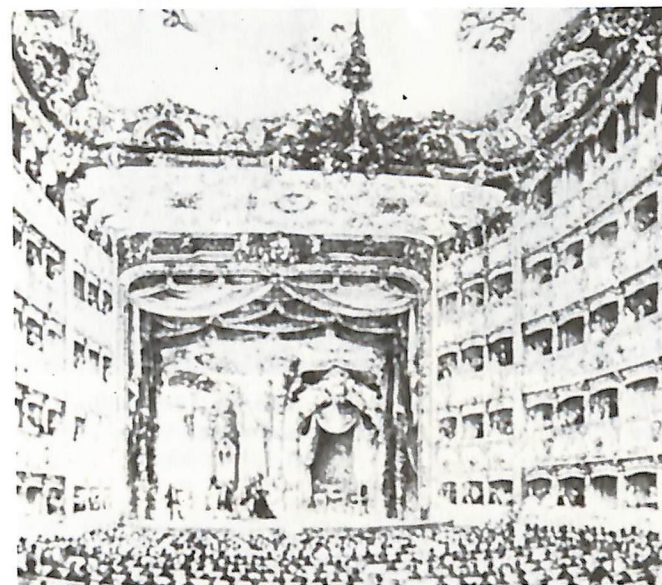
Characters in order of appearance

<i>The Duke of Mantua</i>	Giancarlo Deri
<i>Rigoletto</i>	Marcello Giordano
<i>his Court Jester, a hunchback</i>	
<i>Gilda</i>	Stefania Bonfadelli
<i>Rigoletto's daughter</i>	
<i>Sparafucile</i>	Riccardo Ristori
<i>a hired assassin</i>	
<i>Maddalena</i>	Gisella Pasino, Maria
<i>his sister</i>	Pia Ionata
<i>Giovanna</i>	Cristina Cattabiani
<i>Gilda's maid</i>	
<i>Count Monterone</i>	Gian Luca Ricci
<i>Marullo</i>	Giuseppe Milli
<i>courtier</i>	
<i>Borsa</i>	Filippo Pina
<i>courtier</i>	
<i>Count Ceprano</i>	Tino Rametta
<i>Countess Ceprano</i>	Raffaella Argani
<i>Court Usher</i>	Tino Rametta
<i>Page</i>	Cristina Cattabiani
<i>to the Duchess of Mantua</i>	

The Manoel Theatre Orchestra

Conducted by	Maurizio Rinaldi
	Joseph Sammut
Leader	George Spiteri
Chorus	AR.P.A. Chorus (Roma)
Conducted by	Emanuela di Pietro
Director	Franca Valeri
Scenery	Francesco Zito
Costumes	Giancarlo Colis
Lighting	Vanni Laus
Stage carpenters	Emanuel Dalli
	Francis Mifsud
Booking Clerk	Michelle Muscat

Pictorial Notes



Teatro la Fenice, Venice, where the world premiere of Rigoletto took place.



Frontispiece of the first edition of Victor Hugo's, La Roi s'amuse, Paris, 1832.



*Raffaele Mirate (1815-1885),
the first Duke of Mantua*



*Felice Varesi (1813-1889),
the first Rigoletto.*



*Francesco Maria Piave (1810-1876),
librettist for Rigoletto, in 1860*



*Victor Hugo (1802-1885), author of
the play *Le Roi s'amuse*, on which
Rigoletto is based.*



*Teresa Brambilla (1813-1895)
the first Gilda*



*Costume designs for the premiere of Rigoletto, 1851. From left to right: Count Ceperano,
Countess Ceperano and the Page to the Duchess.*



*Costume designs for Rigoletto and, extreme right, for Count Monterone, for the premiere
of Rigoletto.*

Set designs for the premiere of *Rigoletto* by Pietro Bertoja.



Act III



Act I, scene 2.



Enrico Caruso (1873-1921) as the Duke of Mantua.



Self-caricature of Caruso as the Duke of Mantua, 1911

Synopsis

The action takes place in Mantua and its neighbourhood. The period is the sixteenth century.

ACT I

The Duke of Mantua's Palace.

After a short prelude of tragic character, based on the *Father's Curse* motive, the curtain rises on a scene of dancing and gaiety. The Duke, a man of many *amours*, tells Borsa of his interest in a girl of humble origin, whom he has seen in church and followed to her home. He does not know that she is Rigoletto's daughter, Gilda. The Countess Ceprano, whom he is pursuing at the same time, enters, and the Duke dances a minuet with her. Rigoletto, observing them, mocks the Countess's husband, to the sycophantic applause of the courtiers, who fear Rigoletto's influence with the Duke, though they hate him for his sharp tongue, and are already plotting with Ceprano to avenge themselves on him. They too know of Gilda's existence, but suppose her to be Rigoletto's mistress.

Suddenly Count Monterone enters to demand the return of his daughter, another of the Duke's victims. He lays a solemn curse upon the Duke and upon Rigoletto, whose mockery is abruptly changed into terror.

ACT II

Outside Rigoletto's house

Rigoletto, returning home haunted by the curse, is approached by Sparafucile, who offers his services as a professional assassin whenever needed. Left alone, Rigoletto reflects bitterly upon his life as a jester, but is cheered by the appearance of his daughter, his only remaining joy in life. He tells her of the mother she never knew, expresses his fears for her safety, and orders the nurse Giovanna to admit no one to the house. Meanwhile the Duke has entered the courtyard and, hiding, overhears the conversation. He realises who Gilda is.

Rigoletto leaves, the Duke emerges, bribes Giovanna to disappear, and makes love to Gilda, telling her he is only a poor student. After he has gone, Gilda sings of her love for him. Outside the courtyard, Ceprano and his friends are arriving to carry off the jester's supposed mistress. Rigoletto returns, but Marullo, aided by the darkness, makes him think that the courtiers are there to abduct Ceprano's wife; then blindfolds and persuades him to hold the ladder while they climb into the house and kidnap Gilda, leaving Rigoletto alone in the darkness. Discovering what has happened, he realises that the curse has begun its work.

ACT III

In the Duke of Mantua's Palace

The Duke, who had returned to Gilda's house and found her gone, laments his loss. The courtiers, in a hilarious chorus, describe to him their abduction of the jester's "mistress", whom they have brought to the palace, and the delighted Duke hurries off to meet her.

Rigoletto enters with a pathetic attempt at buffoonery. Mocked by the courtiers, he seeks vainly for a clue to Gilda's fate. When a page enters to see the Duke, the cynical remarks of the courtiers tell Rigoletto the dreadful truth, but the courtiers bar the way to rescue. Rigoletto reveals that Gilda is his daughter, and thunders forth an impassioned denunciation; then, in tears, appeals for pity. At this moment Gilda rushes in; Rigoletto drives the courtiers out of the room, and hears Gilda confess the whole story. Monterone passes on his way to execution, and Rigoletto swears to revenge them both.

Sparafucile, hired by Rigoletto to murder the Duke, has lured him to the inn, using his sister Maddalena as a decoy.

Gilda, still loving the Duke, begs her father to relent, but after seeing (from outside the inn) the Duke making love to Maddalena, she is

persuaded by her father to give him up and to be ready to escape from the country disguised as a man.

Rigoletto tells Sparafucile to bring him the Duke's corpse so that he himself may throw it into the river.

The Duke retires to his room in the inn, and Maddalena, who thinks him charming and has already tried to warn him against staying, begs her brother to spare him. Sparafucile agrees to kill instead the next young man who visits the house. As the night grows darker with approaching storm, Gilda, who had regretted her earlier decision, returns dressed as a young man, overhears Sparafucile, and decides to sacrifice herself for the man she loves. At the height of the storm she knocks at the inn door, is admitted by Sparafucile, and is fatally stabbed.

The midnight bell tolls as Rigoletto returns to claim his victim. Sparafucile brings him the body in a sack and leaves him. The jester, triumphant over his supposed vengeance on his master, is about to drag the body to the river when suddenly he hears the Duke's voice singing from the inn. To his horror on opening the sack he finds his dying daughter, Gilda. Begging his forgiveness and blessing, she dies in his arms.

The curse is fulfilled.

Some Maltese-Rigoletto Connections

Oreste . . .

Mro Luigi Cantoni came to Malta to audition local talent to supplement the Italian artists contracted for the 1948 opera season. Amongst the three chosen singers was the tenor Oreste Kirkop.

Half-way through the season the three Maltese singers were still waiting their chance to make their first appearance with the Italian opera company. Verdi's *Rigoletto* was scheduled for the 23 December 1948 and being one of the operas in Oreste's repertoire, he made it a point not to miss the evening show. Minutes before the raising of the curtain, having attended a normal day's work as one of the employees of the Telephone Exchange, Oreste was already seated in the theatre. In the second act the Italian tenor singing the Duke's role was finding himself in troubled waters and at the end of the act it became apparent that the tenor was feeling ill. The *Impresa* was still resisting suggestions to abandon the performance when someone reminded Mro Cantoni that the Maltese tenor Kirkop was in the theatre. Oreste was asked to take over the Duke's role there and then. It was not an easy decision to take but Oreste was prepared to accept the challenge provided the *Impresa* bound itself to engage him in all the

remaining number of performances of *Rigoletto* and *Madame Butterfly* promised to him earlier.

After shaking off the initial nerves he gained confidence and there was great excitement in the stalls. By the beginning of the last act Oreste was in such fine fettle that he completely stole the show by his rendering of *La donna è mobile*, ending on a beautifully sustained, ringing top note that brought the house down with shouts of *encore* as the audience stamped their feet bringing the performance to a temporary halt! Verdi's *Rigoletto* was brought to an exciting conclusion and the crowd left the Manoel Theatre elated at the evening's unexpected performance.

It is significant that the first ripples of success agitated by Oreste's portayal of the dashing Duke at the Manoel Theatre in 1948 continued to widen later in his career well beyond our shores as far as the United Kingdom and the United States of America. It was as the Duke in *Rigoletto* that Oreste made his successful debut at Covent Garden six years later and again in 1958, the year of his debut with NBC Opera Company's television production of the same opera which was beamed throughout the American continent live from New York!

Paul . . .

Quite an extraordinary incident involving the Maltese tenor Paul Asciak happened on 6 May 1959 during the production of *Rigoletto* by the Welsh Opera Company at the New Theatre in Cardiff. The eminent critic Kenneth Loveland writing in the South Wales Argus of the following day described it as follows:

"Last night, at the New Theatre in Cardiff, Paul Asciak the Welsh National Opera Company's Maltese tenor singing his first Duke in *Rigoletto*, threw caution to the winds, broke into Italian for *La donna è mobile* and gave us a sound that seemed much more like the genuine operatic article than anything else that happened all the evening...."

Mr Loveland did not only sympathise with the tenor's crossing of the language bridges but went on to rave about Asciak's performance that evening. "The Duke's role immediately won our sympathies because it was intelligently thought out and sincerely sung.... He frequently gave us a rich, ringing tenor which was eminently satisfying. There was a suggestion of musical taste and character that made the Duke's music highly attractive."

Rigoletto's Premières

Other premières, besides those listed on page one, were on the 14 May 1853 at London's Covent Garden; in the U.S.A. it was first performed at the Academy of Music in New York on February 19 1855. (Enrico Caruso made his American debut at the Metropolitan Opera House on 23 November 1903 in this opera).

Giuseppe . . .

When the Impresa Farrugia was preparing for the 1933-34 opera season it was literally besieged by letters invoking the name of Giuseppe Satariano. This was expected because the Maltese baritone was receiving excellent reviews all over Italy and his compatriots naturally desired to hear him perform on the local boards.

Cardenio Botti, the artistic director (who later married the late Michael Kissaun's daughter) sent for Satariano and offered him the minor part of *Schaunard* in *La Bohème*. The baritone refused saying that in Italy he was regularly appearing in the principal roles and that it was highly unfair to appear in front of his "home" audience in a secondary part. Signor Botti told him: "So what would you prefer? The *Rigoletto* perhaps...?" And Satariano thundered back like a cannonball, "Precisely. Now you're talking sense!"

The Maltese baritone proved to be one of the highlights of the 33-34 opera season with his portrayals of *De Sirieux* in *Fedora*, *Marcello* in *La Bohème* and in *Rigoletto* — in the title role, obviously!

Miriam.....

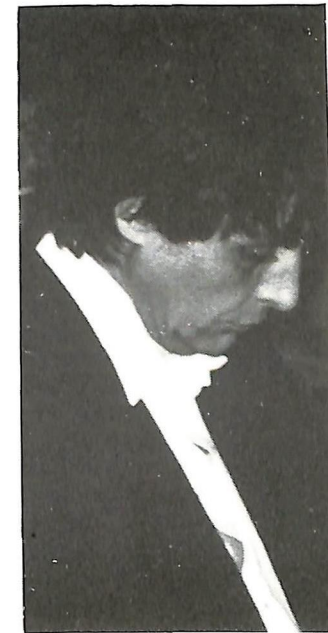
The much admired soprano Miriam Gauci made her Manoel debut on the 13 November 1982 in the role of *Gilda* with the National Academic Theatre for Opera and Ballet of Sofia. Her training at the Centro di perfezionamento per i artisti lirici del Teatro alla Scala led by Mro Luciani Silvestrini and Giuletta Simoniato paid rich dividends as the local girl gave a splendid performance which was highly acclaimed by critics and audiences. As a result she was contracted by the Opera Italiana di Milano for a tournee covering forty-three performances of *Rigoletto* all over Germany, Holland and Austria with Leon Ucci and Gorgio Zancanaro in the title roles. An unfortunate incident occurred during a performance at the Briegens State Opera House when *Sparafucile* accidentally dropped the dagger from some height skimming Miriam's left thigh and drawing blood. Miriam did not even wince until the curtain came down on the final act when she was treated by the theatre's physician. No wonder that Ms Gauci, who resides in Milan, where she is making an attractive career performing in the important theatres in Europe and the U.S.A., casts an attentive look at all the stage daggers that cross her path!



Joseph Sammut



Franca Valeri



Maurizio Rinaldi

Historical Note

It was on 9 March 1850 that Verdi signed a contract with the Teatro La Fenice, Venice, to write an *opera seria* for production during Lent 1851, for which he was to receive 6,000 Austrian Lire. Verdi's contract included clauses whereby he himself would choose the singers, have a full dress and lighting rehearsal and pay for the libretto. At the time he signed the contract, he instructed his librettist, Francesco Maria Piave, to look for a Spanish play, *El Trovador*, which he himself could not trace. Failing this, he had in mind a play by Dumas the elder, entitled *Kean*. His choice eventually fell on Victor Hugo's play which had been produced in Paris about 20 years previously.

The Teatro accepted this play with some reservations for, following the Paris premiere on 22 November 1831, it had been banned by the censor, not on grounds of the immorality of the theme but, according to Hugo, because of its political implications.

Similar trouble was to face Verdi and Piave. The libretto was completed under the title of *La maledizione* and on 10 November 1850 Verdi, who was in Trieste for the production of *Stiffelio*, was asked to send a copy of the libretto to the Venetian censor. On 1 December the military governor of Venice announced his ban on the opera, taking Verdi and Piave to task for '*not having chosen a more worthy field for their talents than a plot so revoltingly immoral and so obscenely trivial*'.

It must be remembered that the Revolution of 1848 was scarcely two years behind and the idea that a King of France, Francis, could be represented on the stage as a worthless libertine was as horrifying in the eyes of the authorities

as the idea of a court jester upbraiding him.

The management tried to persuade Verdi to find another subject but Verdi refused, saying '*It is one of the best libretti I have ever had!*'. Finally help came from a quite unexpected quarter: the chief of Austrian police in Venice, Martello, approached Piave with the suggestion that the plot could remain unaltered but that changes should be made to the names of the characters, the venue and the title *La maledizione*, which the authorities regarded as blasphemous. Thus Francis I became the Duke of Mantua, his jester Triboulet was renamed Rigoletto, his daughter Blanche became Gilda, the assassin Saltabadil was renamed Sparafucile and his sister Maguelonne became Maddalena. The title of the opera was to be *Rigoletto*. Piave agreed and within 24 hours had made the necessary alterations in the libretto and sent it to Verdi, who left for Busseto and completed the score in 40 days. There are, of course, some reminders of the original French setting in *Rigoletto*: the dance in the first scene is a *Périgourdine*, a French country dance, and Sparafucile tells Rigoletto that he comes from Burgundy. More amusing is the fact that the Duke of Mantua was a title held by the Holy Roman Emperor and, although the last holder of this title had abdicated in 1806, he had only died some 15 years before the premiere of *Rigoletto*. And his name had been Francis I!

Even after the successful Venice premiere on 11 March 1851, there were further censorship troubles in Italy and the opera's title was changed to *Viscardello* for its Rome premiere, *Clara di Perth* for Naples in 1853, and *Lionello* for Naples again in 1858.

The Manoel Theatre Management Committee wishes to thank the following concerns for their kind co-operation.

ALITALIA
ANDREWS FEEDS (MALTA) LTD
AUSTRIAN AIRLINES
AUTO SALES LTD. (KIND'S)
B.P.C. INTERNATIONAL LIMITED
FESTA LIMITED
HOLIDAY INN, TIGNE
LOMBARD BANK (MALTA) LTD.
MID-MED BANK LIMITED
NSTS STUDENTS & YOUTH TRAVEL
PLUS ADVERTISING
SIMONDS FARSONS CISK LTD.
SUNCREST HOTEL, QAWRA

