Vincenzo Bellini

I Puritani

Opera in three acts
Libretto by Carlo Pepoli

Saturday, May 03, 2014, 1:00–4:25 pm

The production of I Puritani was made possible by a generous gift from Mr. and Mrs. Bruce Crawford
The Metropolitan Opera
2013–14 Season

The 55th Metropolitan Opera performance of

Vincenzo Bellini’s

I Puritani

Conductor
Michele Mariotti

IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE

Sir Bruno Robertson
Eduardo Valdes
Riccardo (Sir Richard Forth)
Mariusz Kwiecień*
Elvira
Olga Peretyatko
Giorgio (Sir George Walton)
Michele Pertusi
Arturo (Lord Arthur Talbot)
Lawrence Brownlee
Gualtiero (Lord Walton)
David Crawford
Enrichetta (Queen Henrietta)
Elizabeth Bishop

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live on Metropolitan
Opera Radio on
SiriusXM channel 74.

Saturday, May 3, 2014, 1:00–4:25 pm
* Graduate of the Lindemann Young Artist Development Program

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Lawrence Brownlee as Arturo and Olga Peretyatko as Elvira in Bellini's *I Puritani*

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Chorus Master  Donald Palumbo  
Musical Preparation  Jane Klaviter, Steven Eldredge, Gareth Morrell, and Carol Isaac  
Assistant Stage Director  Jonathon Loy  
Stage Band Conductor  Jeffrey Goldberg  
Prompter  Jane Klaviter  
Met Titles  Sonya Haddad  
Italian Coach  Loretta Di Franco  
Scenery, properties, and electrical props constructed and painted in Metropolitan Opera Shops  
Costumes executed by Metropolitan Opera Costume Department  
Millinery by Gary Brouwer  
Wigs and Makeup executed by Metropolitan Opera Wig and Makeup Department  

This performance is made possible in part by public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts.

Before the performance begins, please switch off cell phones and other electronic devices.

**This production uses lightning effects.**

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**Met Titles**

To activate, press the red button to the right of the screen in front of your seat and follow the instructions provided. To turn off the display, press the red button once again. If you have questions please ask an usher at intermission.
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Act I

A Puritan stronghold, is threatened by siege from the Royalist troops. Distant voices herald the wedding day of Elvira, daughter of Gualtiero, the fortress’s commander. Riccardo enters lamenting that his promised bride, Elvira, loves another man—a Stuart partisan. Her father will not force her to marry against her will, it seems, so Riccardo’s friend Sir Bruno urges him to devote his life to leading the parliamentary forces.

Elvira tells her uncle, Giorgio, that she would rather die than marry Riccardo. Her uncle reassures her that he has persuaded her father to let her marry her lover, Arturo. Although Arturo is a Royalist, he is heralded as he approaches the castle. Everyone gathers for the wedding celebration and Arturo greets his bride. He learns that King Charles’s widow, Queen Enrichetta, is a prisoner in the castle and soon to be taken to trial in London. Alone with the queen, Arturo offers to save her even if it means his death. Elvira returns with the bridal veil and capriciously places it over Enrichetta’s head. When he is alone again with the queen, Arturo explains that the veil will provide the perfect disguise for escape from the castle. As they are about to leave, Riccardo stops them, determined to kill his rival. Enrichetta separates them and reveals her identity. Riccardo lets them get away, knowing this will ruin Arturo. The others return for the wedding, and Riccardo tells of Arturo’s escape with Enrichetta. Soldiers rush off in pursuit. Elvira, believing herself betrayed, is overcome by madness.
Act II
The townsfolk mourn Elvira’s mental breakdown. Giorgio explains that she continues to long for Arturo. Riccardo arrives to announce that Arturo has been condemned to death by Parliament. The Puritans depart.

Elvira wanders in, reliving her happy past. In her madness, she mistakes Riccardo for Arturo and dreams of her wedding. When she leaves, Giorgio tries to convince Riccardo to save Arturo. At first indignant, Riccardo is finally moved to help Elvira, and the two men unite in patriotism: if Arturo returns as a friend, he shall live—if as an armed enemy, he shall die.

Act III
In Elvira’s garden, Arturo reveals that love for her has brought him back to Plymouth. He overhears her sing their old love song and is torn between his affection and his loyalty to the Stuarts. Elvira herself appears and Arturo reassures her that she is his only love. Soldiers rush in to arrest Arturo. Just then, a diplomat arrives with the news of the Royalists’ final defeat and a general amnesty for all the offenders. The shock of this news restores Elvira’s senses, and all rejoice in the peace as Elvira and Arturo embrace their new happiness.
In Focus

Vincenzo Bellini

I Puritani

Premiere: Théâtre Italien, Paris, 1835
The gorgeous and vocally challenging I Puritani was the final work from Vincenzo Bellini, the great Sicilian exponent of the bel canto style of opera. Its depiction of madness—both in individuals and in communities—is extraordinary: the opera suggests that the veneer of sanity can slip away at any moment, that madness can plunge a person into a destructive abyss. I Puritani was written specifically for the talents of four of the best singers of its day, and the opera’s success depends almost entirely on the vocal abilities (and artistic sensibilities) of the performers. From time to time great artists rediscover the dramatic and musical power of Bellini’s music: Maria Callas, for example, was catapulted to international stardom by a series of performances in I Puritani in 1949 at Venice’s La Fenice, days after singing Brünnhilde in Wagner’s Die Walküre.

The Creators
Vincenzo Bellini (1801–1835) was a Sicilian composer who possessed an extraordinary gift for melody and a thorough understanding of the human voice. His premature death—just as he was achieving international success and expanding in new musical directions—is one of the most unfortunate in the history of music. The librettist, Count Carlo Pepoli (1796–1881), was an Italian political exile living among the seething expatriate circles of Paris. Perhaps not the most inspired poet, he nevertheless understood the standard stage techniques of his era and how to make them pay off for audiences. The libretto was based on a French play, Têtes Rondes et Cavaliers, which had its own rather arcane source, a novel by Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832), Old Mortality.

The Setting
The opera is set in the English Civil War of Puritans (“Roundheads”) versus Royalists (“Cavaliers”). Many English critics have been amused at Bellini’s rollicking depiction of the austere Roundheads, but of course the opera was never intended as a history lesson. Its background of civil strife, however, was a universal idea and very familiar to Italians in Bellini’s time. The bel canto composers explored with powerful results the relationship of civil war and individual madness: Donizetti’s Lucia di Lammermoor works with a similar, if slightly less explicit, format.

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The Music
Too often, bel canto (literally, “beautiful singing”) is explained as a succession of vocal gymnastics. On the contrary, operas written in this style center on long lyric lines of melody, such as in the tenor’s Act I solo, which develops into the celebrated quartet “A te o cara.” The soprano’s ravishing Act II aria, “Qui la voce,” works the same way and depends entirely on the singer’s ability to spin forth an elegant vocal line. The occasional outbursts of vocal prowess (such as the soprano’s subsequent “Vien diletto” and the Act III duet and ensemble with high notes galore) have an enormous impact if the less showy aspects of the score have also been given careful attention. And no one can deny Bellini’s unique mastery of melody, as in the rousing martial duet “Suoni la tromba” in Act II and the bass’s gorgeous showpiece in Act II, “Cinta di fiori.”

I Puritani at the Met
I Puritani had a single performance in the inaugural 1883–84 season as a vehicle for the star soprano Marcella Sembrich. It wasn’t revived until 1918, when it showcased the talents of Maria Barrientos. After seven performances, I Puritani disappeared again until the current production by Sandro Sequi was unveiled in 1976, featuring a remarkable cast led by Joan Sutherland, Luciano Pavarotti, Sherrill Milnes, and James Morris, with Richard Bonynge conducting. Ten years later Sutherland celebrated her 25th anniversary with the company in performances as Elvira. Subsequent revivals have starred Edita Gruberova and Chris Merritt (1991), Ruth Ann Swenson, Stuart Neill, and Thomas Hampson (1997), and Anna Netrebko opposite tenors Gregory Kunde and Eric Cutler (2006).
In a letter to his uncle, Bellini told how his last opera came to be written:

I will relate my actions since leaving Italy [in 1833] and why I am now in Paris. Under contract to London, I went there and directed several operas. On my way through Paris, the director of the Opéra asked me to write an opera for him, and I said I would willingly do so. Five months later I took up the subject, but we could come to no agreement. The impresario of the Théâtre Italien made offers to me, which it suited me to accept, because: the payment was better—though not much—than I have had in Italy; the company was magnificent [soprano Giulia Grisi, tenor Rubini, baritone Tamburini, and bass Lablache; a quartet unparalleled, and all of them singers for whom Bellini had written before]; and, lastly, so that I could stay on in Paris at others’ expense.

But Rossini, my keenest enemy, conceived the idea of having Donizetti engaged, too, so that in competition with me, and supported by Rossini’s colossal influence, he would obliterate me. I took courage and thought how I might thwart these diabolical intrigues. I resolved to take particular care over my new score, even more than usual; and also to pay court to Rossini and win him over by making known how much I admired his immense talent, etc.; and also to approach his lady-friend [Olympe Pelissier] and put myself on such intimate terms with them that they would become my protectors, not my persecutors. And this needed no special effort, since I have always adored Rossini. I succeeded most happily.

A Paris success was the glittering prize at which most 19th-century opera composers aimed. It is curious to speculate on what kind of French opera Bellini might have written had he, like Gluck, Rossini, Donizetti, Verdi, and many others, been engaged to compose for the Opéra. But at the Théâtre Italien, where the 1833 autumn season had included two Bellini pieces, Il Pirata and I Capuleti e i Montecchi, both well liked, there was no reason for him to master a new vein and essay loftier, more massive effects. I Puritani is Bellini’s most characteristically “Bellinian” opera, the special flower of his individual gifts and ideas. The pastoral La Sonnambula and the opera seria Norma are both more shapely and coherent dramas; I Puritani is a romantic opera in ways adumbrated by I Capuleti and Beatrice di Tenda. To the librettist of the piece Bellini declared: “Grave on your mind in adamantine letters: A musical drama must make people weep, shudder, and die through the singing.”
That librettist was Count Carlo Pepoli, a minor poet and an Italian patriot and liberal who had been imprisoned in Venice’s notorious carceria, where his sight had been afflicted. He now lived in exile in Paris. I possess an early draft of the Puritani synopsis written in Bellini’s hand and bearing a later annotation by Pepoli: “I dictated it to our dear Bellini when the infirmity of my poor eyes quite prevented me from writing.” That draft, a slightly later draft now in the New York Public Library, and the progress reports that the composer sent to his friends show Bellini shifting the numbers around so as to bring forward each singer with maximum effectiveness. The librettist of his seven previous operas had been the very experienced professional Felice Romani. In Pepoli, the composer had less confidence, telling him: “Don’t forget to bring the draft with you, so that we can settle the first act—which, provided you come armed with an ample dose of moral patience, will turn out to be interesting, magnificent, worthy poetry for music, in spite of you and your absurd rules, which are fine talking-points but will never convince a living soul who understands the difficult art of moving people to tears by the singing.”

Pepoli recalled, “Sometimes he called me an angel, a brother, a savior; and sometimes, when he had altered a melody for the third or fourth time, on my remarking on the difficulty or impossibility of changing the layout of the drama or altering the verses, he flew into a passion and called me a man without a heart, without friendship or feeling.”

The plot was borrowed from a brand-new play, Roundheads and Cavaliers by François Ancelot and Xavier Santine, which appeared at the Vaudeville in September of 1833. The setting is in and near the citadel of Plymouth (the only town in the west of England that, during the Civil War, did not fall into Royalist hands). But with geographical insouciance, the opera was renamed I Puritani di Scozia; Scotland has nothing to do with it, but a familiar title was always welcome, and Walter Scott’s novel Old Mortality was known in translations as Les Puritans de l’Ecosse.

The patriot Pepoli included in his first scene a “Hymn to Liberty”; and Bellini remarked that “in Paris they like ideas of liberty. For Italy, Pepoli will change it, and the word liberty will not be mentioned.” (It was similarly removed from the Italian translation of Verdi’s Les Vêpres Siciliennes.) Bellini composed, more or less simultaneously, two versions of his opera: one for Paris and the soprano heroine Giulia Grisi; the other for Naples and the mezzo-soprano heroine Maria Malibran. (The Naples performance did not materialize; the mezzo score is in the library of Bellini’s native town, Catania; it is surprising that, in days when brilliant mezzos abound, it had to wait until 1986 for its first staging—in Bari.) Malibran, who had captivated Bellini by her performance in La Sonnambula, was the real inspiration of I Puritani; and one of the hit numbers in the score,
the polacca “Son vergin vezzosa,” was composed specifically for her talents: “a piece so curious and brilliant that she will be hugely pleased with it—just the kind of thing she likes best.”

The other hit number in early performances was the baritone/bass duet “Suoni la tromba,” which ends Act II. This is the Hymn to Liberty, which was tried out in various places and achieved its present position when, on Rossini’s advice, the original second act was divided into two. It does not make much dramatic sense there, but it does provide a rousing close to the act. Bellini declared that a good drama for operatic setting was one “that had no good sense in it.” It is perhaps in this spirit that one should approach and enjoy the delicately wrought, extended, and very beautiful musical inventions of _I Puritani_: in determining the progress of the plot, “musical dramaturgy” is paramount.

_I Puritani_, first performed on January 24, 1835, eclipsed the rival work by Donizetti, _Marino Faliero_. The same thing happened in London a few months later when, with the same principals, both operas were given at Her Majesty’s. In the words of the critic Chorley, “On such occasions there is always a success and a failure: the public will not endure two favorites. _Marino Faliero_ languished; on the other hand, from first to last note _I Puritani_ was found enchanting.” In London, it held the stage into the 1880s and then disappeared until it was revived for Joan Sutherland at Glyndebourne in 1960 and at Covent Garden four years later. In Italy, it has been played regularly. The American premiere took place in Philadelphia’s Chestnut Street Theater in 1843.

—Andrew Porter
ON STAGE NOW

Four returning favorites!

ROSSINI
La Cenerentola
APR 28 MAY 2, 6, 10mat
Three peerless Rossini virtuosos star in La Cenerentola—a vocal tour de force for mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato, singing her first Met performances of the Cinderella title role, and tenors Juan Diego Flórez and Javier Camarena, who share the role of her Prince Charming.

BELLINI
I Puritani
APR 29 MAY 3mat, 7, 10
Olga Peretyatko makes her highly anticipated Met debut in Bellini’s vocal showcase, featuring one of opera’s greatest mad scenes. Also starring Lawrence Brownlee, Mariusz Kwiecien, and Michele Pertusi.

MOZART
Cosi fan tutte
APR 30 MAY 3, 8
Music Director James Levine conducts Mozart’s beloved opera about testing the ties of love, starring Susanna Phillips and Isabel Leonard as the sisters at the center of the story, Matthew Polenzani and Rodion Pogossov as their lovers, and Danielle de Niese as the scheming Despina.

PUCCINI
Madama Butterfly
MAY 1, 5, 9
Anthony Minghella’s breathtakingly beautiful and powerfully dramatic production returns, with Hui He as the tragic Cio-Cio-San, opposite tenor Gwyn Hughes Jones.

Visit metopera.org for full casting information and ticket availability.
Michele Mariotti
CONDUCTOR (PESARO, ITALY)

**THIS SEASON**  *I Puritani* at the Met and for his debut with the Paris Opera, *Nabucco* and *Cosi fan tutte* in Bologna, Leoncavallo’s *Zingari* at the Montpellier Festival, and *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* for his debut at the Paris Opera.

**MET APPEARANCES**  *Carmen* (debut, 2012) and *Rigoletto*.

**CAREER HIGHLIGHTS**  Recent performances include *La Traviata* at Naples’s Teatro San Carlo, *La Donna del Lago* at Covent Garden, *La Traviata* and *Le Nozze di Figaro* in Bologna, *Norma* at Turin’s Teatro Regio, and *Matilde di Shabran* at Pesaro’s Rossini Opera Festival. He made his operatic conducting debut in 2005 leading *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* at Salerno’s Teatro Verdi and has since led *Simon Boccanegra*, *I Puritani*, Rossini’s *La Gazza Ladra*, and Donizetti’s *Don Gregorio* in Bologna, *Rigoletto* in Lima, *Nabucco* in Reggio Emilia, and numerous concerts with the Toscanini Orchestra, Orchestra Filarmonica Marchigiana, Orchestra of the Maggio Musicale, and the National Orchestra of the Ukraine. He was appointed principal conductor of Bologna’s Teatro Comunale in 2007.

Olga Peretyatko
SOPRANO (ST. PETERSBURG, RUSSIA)

**THIS SEASON**  Debuts at the Met as Elvira in *I Puritani*, La Scala as Marfa in *The Tsar’s Bride*, and the Zurich Opera as Gilda in *Rigoletto*. She also sings Zerbinetta in *Ariadne auf Naxos* in Hamburg, Fiorilla in *Il Turco in Italia* at the Aix-en-Provence Festival, and Marfa with the Deutsche Oper Berlin.

**CAREER HIGHLIGHTS**  She has recently sung Gilda at the Vienna State Opera and for her debut at the Arena di Verona and Giunia in *Lucio Silla* at the Salzburg Festival. Additional engagements include Giulietta in *I Capuleti e i Montecchi* in Lyon and Paris, the title role of Handel’s *Alcina* in Lausanne, Fiorilla in Amsterdam, and the title role of *Lucia di Lammermoor* for her 2011 debut at the Deutsche Oper Berlin. She has also appeared at Pesaro’s Rossini Opera Festival, Venice’s La Fenice, Palermo’s Teatro Massimo, and at Munich’s Bavarian State Opera.
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Lawrence Brownlee
TENOR (YOUNGSTOWN, OHIO)

This Season  Arturo in I Puritani at the Met, Tonio in La Fille du Régiment with the Seattle Opera, Tamino in Die Zauberflöte for his debut with the Los Angeles Opera, Nemorino in L’Elisir d’Amore at the Vienna State Opera, and Don Narciso in Il Turco in Italia and Don Ramiro in La Cenerentola at Munich’s Bavarian State Opera.

Met Appearances  Tonio, Don Ramiro, Rinaldo in Armida, and Count Almaviva in Il Barbiere di Siviglia (debut, 2007).

Career Highlights  Recent performances include Uberto in La Donna del Lago at the Santa Fe Opera, Lindoro in L’Italiana in Algeri with Houston Grand Opera, and the title role of Le Comte Ory at Vienna’s Theater an der Wien. He has also sung Count Almaviva at the Vienna State Opera, Deutsche Oper Berlin, La Scala, and in Seattle and Baden-Baden, Elvino in La Sonnambula at the Vienna State Opera, Lindoro with the Paris Opera; Giannetto in Rossini’s La Gazza Ladra in Bologna, and Don Ramiro in Philadelphia, Houston, Dresden, and Trieste.

Mariusz Kwiecien
BARITONE (KRAKÓW, POLAND)

This Season  The title role of Eugene Onegin and Riccardo in I Puritani at the Met, Riccardo with the Paris Opera, Don Giovanni at Covent Garden, and Eugene Onegin at the Vienna State Opera and Warsaw Opera.

Met Appearances  Belcore in L’Elisir d’Amore, Don Giovanni, Dr. Malatesta in Don Pasquale, Enrico in Lucia di Lammermoor, Guglielmo in Così fan tutte, Escamillo in Carmen, Kuligin in Kát’a Kabanová (debut, 1999), Silvio in Pagliacci, Haly in L’Italiana in Algeri, and Count Almaviva in Le Nozze di Figaro.

Career Highlights  Zurga in Les Pêcheurs de Perles in Madrid; Rodrigo in Don Carlo at Covent Garden; Don Giovanni at the Vienna State Opera, Covent Garden, Bavarian State Opera, San Francisco Opera, Seattle Opera, and Santa Fe Opera; Eugene Onegin with Munich’s Bavarian State Opera, Bolshoi Theatre, Lyric Opera of Chicago, and in Warsaw; Count Almaviva at Covent Garden, the Bavarian State Opera, Glyndebourne Opera, and in Chicago and Madrid; and title role of Szymanowski’s King Roger with the Paris Opera, Santa Fe Opera, and in Madrid and Bilbao.
**This Season** Rodolfo in *La Sonnambula* and Giorgio in *I Puritani* at the Met, the title role of *Attila* in Liège, Jacopo Fiesco in *Simon Boccanegra* in Turin, Giorgio at the Paris Opera, Rodolfo in Barcelona, and Don Alfonso in *Cosi fan tutte* at La Scala.

**Met Appearances** The Tutor in *Le Comte Ory*, Count Almaviva (debut, 1997) and Figaro in *Le Nozze di Figaro*, Leporello in *Don Giovanni*, Don Alfonso, Raimondo in *Lucia di Lammermoor*, and Alidoro in *La Cenerentola*.

**Career Highlights** Recent engagements include Don Basilio in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, Rodolfo, Alfonso in *Lucrezia Borgia*, and Mustafà in *L’Italiana in Algeri* at the Vienna State Opera, Oroveso in *Norma* at the Salzburg Festival, the title role of *Guillaume Tell* and Faraone in *Mosè in Egitto* in Zurich, and Mustafà in Madrid. He has also sung Rodolfo at the Paris Opera, Dulcamara in *L’Elisir d’Amore* and the title role of *Don Pasquale* at Bologna’s Teatro Comunale, Walter in *Luisa Miller* at Munich’s Bavarian State Opera, and Méphistophélès in *Faust* in Parma. Since 1997 he has appeared regularly at Pesaro’s Rossini Opera Festival.