

Vincenzo Bellini

I Puritani

CONDUCTOR

Patrick Summers

PRODUCTION

Sandro Sequi

SET DESIGNER

Ming Cho Lee

COSTUME DESIGNER

Peter J. Hall

STAGE DIRECTOR

Sharon Thomas

GENERAL MANAGER

Peter Gelb

MUSIC DIRECTOR

James Levine

Opera in three acts

Libretto by Carlo Pepoli

Saturday, January 6, 2007, 1:30–4:55pm

The production of *I Puritani* is made possible by generous gifts from the Metropolitan Opera Board of Directors, Members of the Association and Patrons, with special support from Subscribers, the Metropolitan Opera Guild, National Council, Opera Club, and Mr. and Mrs. Bruce Crawford.

The revival of this production is made possible by a generous gift from Siemens Corporation.

The Metropolitan Opera

2006-07 Season

The 46th Metropolitan Opera performance of

Vincenzo Bellini's

I Puritani

Conductor
Patrick Summers

IN ORDER OF VOCAL APPEARANCE

Sir Bruno Robertson
Eduardo Valdes

Riccardo (Sir Richard Forth)
Franco Vassallo

Elvira
Anna Netrebko

Giorgio (Sir George Walton)
John Relyea

Arturo (Lord Arthur Talbot)
Eric Cutler

Gualtiero (Lord Walton)
Valerian Ruminski

Enrichetta (Queen Henrietta)
Maria Zifchak

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Saturday January 6, 2007 1:30–4:55pm



Anna Netrebko as Elvira
in Bellini's *I Puritani*.

Chorus Master **Raymond Hughes**
Musical Preparation **Joan Dornemann, Steven Eldredge,
Lucy Arner, and Steven Crawford**
Assistant Stage Directors **Stephen Pickover and
Paula Williams**
Prompter **Joan Dornemann**
Met Titles **Sonya Haddad**
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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. Naysayers love to point out how unlikely the plot is, but, then, the art of bel canto does not necessarily require well-constructed and logical narrative. *I Puritani*'s 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) achieved success in Naples and Milan with melodically inventive and exciting operas such as *Il Pirata* (1827) and *Norma* (1831). *I Puritani* was his first venture outside of Italy. 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. The opera's 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.

The Music

Too often, *bel canto* (literally, “beautiful singing”) is explained as a succession of vocal gymnastics. On the contrary, these operas center on long lyric lines of melody, such as in the tenor’s Act I solo, which develops into the opera’s 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 soprano Maria Barrientos. After six performances, *I Puritani* disappeared until it was brought back for a series of remarkable performances with Joan Sutherland, Luciano Pavarotti, Sherrill Milnes, and James Morris in 1976, with Richard Bonyngé conducting. Ten years later Sutherland celebrated her 25th anniversary with the company in performances as Elvira. Edita Gruberová and Stanford Olsen starred in a revival of the work in 1991, as did Ruth Ann Swenson and Stuart Neill in 1997.

Synopsis

A Puritan castle near Plymouth, England, about 1650

Act I

SCENE 1 A terrace

SCENE 2 Giorgio's room

SCENE 3 A courtyard

Intermission

Act II

A hall

Intermission

Act III

A terrace

Act I, Scene 1

Plymouth, a Puritan stronghold, is threatened by siege from the Royalist troops. Distant voices herald the wedding day of Elvira, daughter of Gualtiero (Lord Walton), the fortress's commander. Riccardo (Sir Richard Forth) enters lamenting that his promised bride, Elvira, loves another man—a Stuart partisan ("Ah, per sempre, io ti perdei"). 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.

Scene 2

Elvira tells her uncle, Giorgio (Sir George Walton), that she would rather die than marry Riccardo ("Sai come arde"). Her uncle reassures her that he has persuaded her father to let her marry her lover, Arturo (Lord Arthur Talbot). Although Arturo is a Royalist, he is heralded as he approaches the castle ("A quel suono").

Scene 3

Everyone gathers for the wedding celebration and Arturo greets his bride ("A te, o cara"). He learns that King Charles's widow, Queen Enrichetta (Henrietta), 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 ("Son vergin vezzosa"); she capriciously places the veil 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 flee, knowing this will ruin Arturo. The others return for the wedding, and Riccardo tells of

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Act I

Manon (Massenet)
Saint Sulpice Scene

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Act II

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Arturo's escape with Enrichetta. Soldiers rush off in pursuit. Elvira, believing herself betrayed, is beset by madness.

Act II

The townsfolk mourn Elvira's mental breakdown. Her uncle, 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 ("Qui la voce"). In her madness, she mistakes Riccardo for Arturo and dreams of her wedding ("Vien, diletto"). 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 ("Suoni la tromba").

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 ("A una fonte afflitto") and is torn between his love and his loyalty to the Stuarts. Elvira herself appears and Arturo reassures her that she is his only love ("Vieni fra questa braccia"). 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 ("Sento, o mio bell'angelo"), and all rejoice in the peace as Elvira and Arturo embrace in their new happiness.

Notes on I Puritani

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*,

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Levine; Bayrakdarian, Götz, Strehl, Pogossow, Lloyd, Pape

Tuesday, January 2, 8:00PM

Tan Dun: *The First Emperor*

Tan Dun; Futral, DeYoung, Domingo, Groves, Tian, Wu Hsing-Kuo

Thursday, January 4, 1:00PM

Mozart: *The Magic Flute*

Bachmann; Huang, Miklósa, Polenzani, Gunn, Robinson

Saturday, January 6, 1:30PM

Bellini: *I Puritani*

Summers; Nettekbo, Cutler, Vassallo, Relyea

Monday, January 8, 8:00PM

Mozart: *Die Zauberflöte*

Bergeson; Milne, Miklósa, Polenzani, Pogossow, Schulte, Pape

Wednesday, January 10, 8:00PM

Verdi: *La Traviata*

Rizzi; Hong, Kim, Taylor

Thursday, January 11, 7:30PM

Bellini: *I Puritani*

Summers; Nettekbo, Cutler, Vassallo, Relyea

Saturday, January 13, 1:30PM

Tan Dun: *The First Emperor*

Tan Dun; Futral, DeYoung, Domingo, Groves, Tian, Wu Hsing-Kuo

Wednesday, January 24, 7:30PM

Puccini: *La Bohème*

Rizzi; Gallardo-Domàs, Arteta, Giordani, Croft, Nicholson, Relyea, Plishka

Thursday, January 25, 8:00PM

Tan Dun: *The First Emperor*

Tan Dun; Coburn, Liang, Domingo, Heller, Tian, Wu Hsing-Ku

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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.

I Puritani, with Marcella Sembrich as its heroine, was the fourth opera heard during the Met’s opening season in 1883, but it disappeared after a single performance. Four performances were given in 1918, and then the opera disappeared again until the current production had its premiere in 1976 (with Joan Sutherland, Luciano Pavarotti, Sherrill Milnes, and James Morris; Richard Bonyngé conducted). Meanwhile, however, there were performances by touring companies at the Metropolitan Opera House (1906, with Regina Pinkert; 1909, with Tetrazzini), in Chicago (1895, Clara Louise Kellogg; 1955, Maria Callas), in Carnegie Hall (1963, Sutherland), in San Francisco (1966, Sutherland), and at New York City Opera (1973, Beverly Sills).

—Andrew Porter

The Cast



Patrick Summers
CONDUCTOR

BIRTHPLACE Washington, Indiana

THIS SEASON *I Puritani* at the Met, *Simon Boccanegra*, *Don Giovanni*, and *The Cunning Little Vixen* with Houston Grand Opera, and *Iphigénie en Tauride* with San Francisco Opera.

PREVIOUS MET APPEARANCES *Die Fledermaus* (debut, 1998), *Così fan tutte*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *Rodelinda*, and *La Traviata*.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS Currently music director of the Houston Grand Opera, where he has conducted more than 20 productions, including the world premieres of Heggie's *The End of the Affair*, Machover's *Resurrection*, Floyd's *Cold Sassy Tree*, and Portman's *The Little Prince*. Has also conducted Previn's *A Streetcar Named Desire* at San Francisco Opera and at Strasbourg's Opéra National du Rhin and Floyd's *Of Mice and Men* with the Vienna Symphony at the Bregenz Festival. Formerly principal guest conductor of the San Francisco Opera, he has conducted numerous performances there including Monteverdi's *L'Incoronazione di Poppea* and the world premiere of Heggie's *Dead Man Walking*.



Anna Netrebko
SOPRANO

BIRTHPLACE Krasnodar, Russia

THIS SEASON "Anna & Rolando Celebrate the Met" (a gala tribute to the Met's 40th anniversary at Lincoln Center), Mimì in *La Bohème*, and Elvira in *I Puritani* at the Met; the title role of *Manon* with Los Angeles Opera, the Vienna State Opera, and for her debut with the Berlin State Opera; Amina in *La Sonnambula* with the Vienna State Opera; Mimì with Munich's Bavarian State Opera; and Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni* at Covent Garden.

PREVIOUS MET APPEARANCES Natasha in *War and Peace* (debut, 2002), Zerlina in *Don Giovanni*, Musetta in *La Bohème*, Gilda in *Rigoletto*, and Norina in *Don Pasquale*.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS Violetta in *La Traviata* at the Salzburg Festival, the Vienna State Opera, and Bavarian State Opera; Susanna in *Le Nozze di Figaro* at the Salzburg Festival; Ilia in *Idomeneo*, Susanna, and Gilda with Washington National Opera; the title role of *Lucia di Lammermoor* and Juliette in *Roméo et Juliette* with Los Angeles Opera; and many leading roles with St. Petersburg's Mariinsky Theatre since her debut with that company in 1994.

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Eric Cutler

TENOR

BIRTHPLACE Adel, Iowa

THIS SEASON Arturo in *I Puritani* at the Met, Iopas in *Les Troyens* with the Paris Opera, and his debut with Lyric Opera of Chicago as Ferrando in *Così fan tutte*.

PREVIOUS MET APPEARANCES Andres in *Wozzeck*, Tamino in *Die Zauberflöte*, Léopold in *La Juive*, Scaramuccio in *Ariadne auf Naxos*, Vogelgesang in *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, and the First Prisoner in *Fidelio* (debut, 2000).

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS Debuts last summer at Covent Garden as Ernesto in *Don Pasquale* and at the Edinburgh Festival as Tamino. Recently sang Belmonte in *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* at Madrid's Teatro Real, Leicester in *Maria Stuarda* at Antwerp's Vlaamse Opera, and Roméo in *Roméo et Juliette* with Opera Australia. A graduate of the Met's Lindemann Young Artist Development Program.



John Relyea

BASS-BARITONE

BIRTHPLACE Toronto, Canada

THIS SEASON Colline in *La Bohème*, Giorgio Walton in *I Puritani*, the Night Watchman in *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, and Don Basilio in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* at the Met, the Four Villains in *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* and Escamillo in *Carmen* at the Vienna State Opera, Figaro in *Le Nozze di Figaro* in Munich, and Méphistophélès in *Faust* at Covent Garden. Concert engagements include appearances with the London Symphony Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, and San Francisco Symphony.

PREVIOUS MET APPEARANCES Alidoro in *La Cenerentola* (debut, 2000), Raimondo in *Lucia di Lammermoor*, Figaro in *Le Nozze di Figaro*, Garibaldo in *Rodelinda*, and Masetto in *Don Giovanni*.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS The Four Villains with the Seattle Opera, Escamillo at Paris's Bastille Opera, and Cadmus/Somnus in *Semele*, Colline, and Raimondo at Covent Garden and with the San Francisco Opera.



Franco Vassallo
BARITONE

BIRTHPLACE Milan, Italy

THIS SEASON Riccardo in *I Puritani* at the Met, Enrico in *Lucia di Lammermoor* with the Deutsche Oper Berlin, and Germont in *La Traviata*, Figaro in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, and Sharpless in *Madama Butterfly* with Munich's Bavarian State Opera.

PREVIOUS MET APPEARANCES Figaro (debut, 2005).

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS Riccardo with the Vienna State Opera, Figaro at La Scala and in Vienna and Florence, Germont with the Deutsche Oper Berlin and Philadelphia Opera Company, Enrico in Vienna and Los Angeles, Rodrigo in *Don Carlo* and the title role of Salieri's *Axur, Re d'Ormus* with the Zurich Opera, and Sharpless at Arena di Verona.