

Charles Gounod

Roméo et Juliette

CONDUCTOR

Plácido Domingo

PRODUCTION

Guy Joosten

SET DESIGNER

Johannes Leiacker

COSTUME DESIGNER

Jorge Jara

LIGHTING DESIGNER

David Cunningham

CHOREOGRAPHER

Sean Curran

GENERAL MANAGER

Peter Gelb

MUSIC DIRECTOR

James Levine

Opera in five acts

Libretto by Jules Barbier and Michel Carré

Saturday, December 15, 2007, 1:00–4:20pm

The production of *Roméo et Juliette* is made possible by generous gifts from the Gramma Fisher Foundation, Marshalltown, Iowa, and The Annenberg Foundation.

Additional funding for this production was provided by Mr. and Mrs. Sid R. Bass, Hermione Foundation, Karen and Kevin Kennedy, Mr. and Mrs. William R. Miller, Bill Rollnick and Nancy Ellison Rollnick, and Mr. and Mrs. Ezra K. Zilkha.

The Metropolitan Opera

2007-08 Season

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The 319th Metropolitan Opera performance of

Charles Gounod's

Roméo et Juliette

Conductor
Plácido Domingo

IN ORDER OF VOCAL APPEARANCE

Tybalt
Marc Heller

Paris
Louis Otey

Capulet
Charles Taylor

Juliette
Anna Netrebko

Mercutio
Nathan Gunn

Roméo
Roberto Alagna

Gertrude
Jane Bunnell

Grégorio
David Won

Friar Laurence
Robert Lloyd

Stéphano
Isabel Leonard

Benvolio
Tony Stevenson

The Duke of Verona
Dean Peterson

Saturday, December 15, 2007, 1:00–4:20pm



Anna Netrebko
as Juliette and
Roberto Alagna
as Roméo in
Gounod's *Roméo
et Juliette*.

Chorus Master **Donald Palumbo**
Musical Preparation **Joan Dornemann, Paul Nadler,
Denise Massé, and Lydia Brown**
Assistant Stage Directors **Valerie Kuinka and Gina Lapinski**
Fight Director **Dale Anthony Girard**
Met Titles **Cori Ellison**
Prompter **Joan Dornemann**
Assistant to the Set Designer **Michael Bachmann**
Scenery, properties, and electrical props constructed and
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Costumes executed by **Metropolitan Opera Costume
Department**
Wigs executed by **Metropolitan Opera Wig Department**
Masks by **Barneys FX Makeup, Berlin, Germany**
Arndt von Diepenbroik, Berlin, Germany

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Synopsis

Verona, 14th century

Prologue

Act I

A masked ball at the Capulet palace

Act II

Courtyard beneath Juliette's balcony

Act III

SCENE 1 Friar Laurence's cell

SCENE 2 A street in Verona

Intermission

Act IV

Juliette's bedroom

Act V

Inside the Capulets' tomb

Prologue

A chorus introduces the story of the endless feud between the Montague and Capulet families, and of the love of their children, Roméo and Juliette.

Act I

At a masked ball in the Capulet palace, Tybalt waits for his cousin Juliette and assures her suitor, Count Paris, that her beauty will overwhelm him. Capulet presents his daughter to the guests and invites them to dance. The crowd disperses and Roméo, a Montague, enters with his friends Mercutio and Benvolio. He tells them about a strange dream he has had, but Mercutio dismisses it as the work of the fairy Queen Mab ("Mab, reine des mensonges"). Roméo watches Juliette dance and is instantly entranced by her. Juliette explains to her nurse that she is not interested in marriage ("Je veux vivre"), but when Roméo approaches her, both feel that they are meant for each other. Just as they discover each other's identity, Tybalt returns. Roméo masks himself and rushes off. Tybalt identifies the intruder as Montague's son, but Capulet restrains him, ordering the party to continue.

Act II

Later that night, Roméo enters the Capulets' garden, looking for Juliette ("Ah! lève-toi, soleil!"). When she steps out onto her balcony, he comes forward and

declares his love. Servants briefly interrupt their encounter. Alone again, they vow to marry.

Act III

Roméo comes to Friar Laurence's cell at daybreak, followed by Juliette and her nurse, Gertrude. Convinced of the strength of their love, the priest agrees to marry them, hoping that the union will end the fighting between their families.

Outside Capulet's house, Roméo's page, Stéphano, sings a mocking song. This provokes a fight with several of the Capulets. Mercutio protects Stéphano and is challenged by Tybalt. Roméo appears and tries to make peace, asking Tybalt to forget about the hatred between their families, but when Tybalt kills Mercutio, Roméo stabs him. The Duke of Verona arrives, and both factions cry for justice. Roméo is banished from the city.

Act IV

Roméo and Juliette awake after their secret wedding night. She forgives him for killing one of her relatives, and after they have assured each other of their love, Roméo reluctantly leaves for exile (Duet: "Nuit d'hyménée"). Capulet enters and tells his daughter that she must marry Paris that same day. She is left alone, desperate, with Friar Laurence, who gives her a sleeping potion that will make her appear dead. He promises that she will wake with Roméo beside her. Juliette drinks the potion ("Amour, ranime mon courage"). When Capulet and the guests arrive to lead her to the chapel, she collapses.

Act V

When Roméo arrives at the Capulets' crypt and discovers Juliette, he believes her to be dead and drinks poison. At that moment, she awakens, and the lovers share a final dream of a future together. As Roméo grows weaker, Juliette takes a dagger from his belt and stabs herself. The lovers die praying for God's forgiveness.

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Charles Gounod

Roméo et Juliette

Premiere: Théâtre Lyrique, Paris, 1867

Roméo et Juliette, perhaps the most enduringly successful of the many operatic settings of the world's consummate love story, is sophisticated, intelligently wrought, and ravishingly beautiful. It is an excellent example of French Romanticism, a tradition that values subtlety, sensuality, and graceful vocal delivery over showy effects, and the music provides a powerful dramatic vehicle worthy of its Shakespearean source. In the opera there is a slight shift of focus away from the word games of the original play and a greater focus on the two lovers, who are given four irresistible duets. Some readjustment of plot was necessary to allow for this (the lovers have a brief final reunion in the tomb scene, for example, which does not appear in the original). But audiences have been well compensated for these minor infractions against Shakespeare.

The Setting

Italy, during Shakespeare's lifetime, was a land of many small city-states in constant warfare with one another. The blood feud between families that is at the core of this story, set in the ancient city of Verona, was a central feature of Italian political and social life during this time. Yet this same war-scarred land was also the cradle of the Renaissance, with its astounding explosion of art and science. The image that this mythical Verona evokes, then, is a beautiful but dangerous world where poetry or violence might erupt at any moment.

The Creators

Frenchman Charles Gounod (1818–1893) was celebrated as a composer of operas and religious music, and his two most successful operas, *Roméo et Juliette* and *Faust*, continue to seduce audiences with their sumptuous, unpretentious style, which allows singers to reveal their artistry in a direct and dazzling way. Jules Barbier (1825–1901) and Michel Carré (1821–1872) were the most highly regarded librettists of their time in France, providing the libretti for many other successful works, including *Faust* and Jacques Offenbach's *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*. The plays of William Shakespeare (1564–1616) have provided an abundance of material for such diverse opera composers as Giuseppe Verdi, Benjamin Britten, Gioachino Rossini, Samuel Barber, Thomas Adès, and even Richard Wagner (whose youthful work from 1836, *Das Liebesverbot*, is based on *Measure for Measure*).

The Music

Gounod infuses this classic drama with an elegant musical aura that reflects the soaring poetry of the original. A solo flute sets a fragile and painfully beautiful mood in the prelude to the bedroom scene in Act IV. When Gounod explores the darker and more violent side of the story, his music creates drama without resorting to bombast. A reserved melancholy creates all the necessary tension. This is apparent in the striking opening chorus and especially in the arresting ensemble “Ce jour de deuil” in Act III, when the various characters’ destinies intersect in a tragic instant. For the story’s more lighthearted moments, Gounod supplied the sort of buoyant melodies that made his *Faust* a huge hit with audiences. The baritone sets an eerie and frivolous mood with his song about Queen Mab and her fairy world of dreams, “Mab, reine des mensonges,” early in Act I. Shortly after, the heroine takes the stage with the giddy coloratura gem “Je veux vivre.” Moments such as these add musical and dramatic texture to the tragedy, admired for its contrast of light and dark. The focus of the story, however, remains the two lovers.

Roméo et Juliette at the Met

Roméo et Juliette (or rather, *Romeo e Giulietta*) received a single performance in the Met’s first season (1883–84), sung in Italian. The brothers Jean and Edouard de Reszke and the American soprano Emma Eames performed the work in 1891, which was the first performance of a French opera given in French at the Met. It proved so popular that the work opened the Met season six times between 1891 and 1906. Eames shared performances with the Australian soprano Dame Nellie Melba, who sang the role 33 times between 1894 and 1901. Swedish tenor Jussi Björling and Brazilian soprano Bidú Sayão teamed up for only two performances of this opera, yet a recording of the 1947 broadcast continues to impress listeners today as one of the most memorable performances in this repertory at the Met. A new production in 1967 featured the full-blooded passion of Franco Corelli and Mirella Freni as the young lovers. Roméos in later seasons included Nicolai Gedda, Plácido Domingo (who conducts the opera this season), Neil Shicoff, Alfredo Kraus, and Roberto Alagna opposite such Juliettes as Anna Moffo, Judith Blegen, Catherine Malfitano, Ruth Ann Swenson, and Angela Gheorghiu. The current production, by Guy Joosten, had its premiere during the 2005–06 season with Bertrand de Billy conducting, Ramón Vargas as Roméo, and Natalie Dessay and Maureen O’Flynn appearing as Juliette during the season.

LIVE BROADCASTS

Monday, November 26

7:30PM

Bellini: *Norma*

Tuesday, November 27

8:00PM

Gluck: *Iphigénie en Tauride*

Wednesday, November 28

8:00PM

Mozart: *Le Nozze di Figaro*

Friday, November 30

8:00PM

Bellini: *Norma*

Tuesday, December 4

8:00PM

Bellini: *Norma*

Wednesday, December 5

8:00PM

Gluck: *Iphigénie en Tauride*

Saturday, December 8

1:30PM

Gluck: *Iphigénie en Tauride*

Monday, December 10

7:30PM

Prokofiev: *War and Peace*

Tuesday, December 11

8:00PM

Gluck: *Iphigénie en Tauride*

Wednesday, December 12

8:00PM

Gounod: *Roméo et Juliette*

Saturday, December 15

1:00PM

Gounod: *Roméo et Juliette*

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Program Note

The title page of the 1597 First Quarto edition of William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* reports that the tragedy had "been often (with great applause) plaid publicquely." Three further editions appeared before the First Folio in 1623, a sign of the play's continued popularity. Since the end of the Puritan Revolution, during which London's theaters were closed, Shakespeare's tragedy has remained more or less constantly before the public—if often in bowdlerized versions, some of them with happy endings.

The first operatic setting of the story based on Shakespeare's version may have been that of Georg Benda. It was produced in Gotha in 1776 and played successfully on other German and Austrian stages for the following decades. During much of the 19th century the most celebrated libretto on the subject was that by Felice Romani, initially written for Nicola Vaccai's *Giulietta e Romeo*, which was first performed in Milan in 1825. Five years later this text was reworked for the Venice premiere of Bellini's take on the story, *I Capuleti e i Montecchi*. Based on previous Italian works, operatic and theatrical, Romani's version has little in common with Shakespeare.

The 19th century brought musical treatments in other genres as well, of which Berlioz's "dramatic symphony" (1839) and Tchaikovsky's overture-fantasia (1880) have proved the most durable. More recently we have had Prokofiev's ballet (1938), Leonard Bernstein's musical-theater adaptation *West Side Story* (1957), and a variety of cinematic versions.

Berlioz's *Roméo et Juliette* was surely familiar to Charles Gounod (1818–1893) when, following the 1864 premiere of his latest stage work, *Mireille*, he undertook an operatic setting of Shakespeare's play for the Théâtre Lyrique in Paris. Gounod's librettists, the prolific team of Jules Barbier and Michel Carré, who had earlier adapted Goethe's *Faust* to produce the composer's greatest success, probably followed David Garrick's version of the play's ending, which had also served Berlioz: Romeo is still alive when Juliet awakens from Friar Laurence's potion. Another element likely inspired by the precedent of Berlioz is Gounod's harp-accompanied treatment of Shakespeare's choral prologue.

Each transformation of Shakespeare's play works out its own ordering of priorities among the various ingredients of revelry, passion, combat, piety, and sentimentality. And Gounod, surely aware of his particular strengths and weaknesses, chose to play down the elements of violence (whereas Prokofiev, among others, emphasized them, for both musical and choreographic reasons). Several of Shakespeare's characters vanish altogether—even old Montague himself, not to mention the wives of the two feuding noblemen. The story, as Gounod tells it, is so strongly focused on the lovers that even Juliet's fiancé, Paris, shrinks to little more than a walk-on. Benvolio retains so little identity that the role was usually cut altogether in Paris after 1916 (and occasionally at the Met). His few necessary lines were assigned to the page Stéphano, the only new character introduced by Barbier and Carré.

Gounod first composed *Roméo et Juliette*, as he had *Faust*, in the form of an "opéra dialogué"—that is, with spoken dialogue rather than recitative:

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"The audience's *musical attention* should not be tired by the sound of chatter and padding; the audience should be afforded rests and pauses, except where the pathos of the work is at stake." By the time of the premiere at the Théâtre Lyrique on April 27, 1867, however, he had been persuaded to provide recitatives. Despite the opera's immediate success (a total of 89 performances in the first season, no doubt due in part to the Universal Exposition in Paris that year), the process of turning *Roméo* into a grand opera would continue over some two decades. Georges Bizet had a hand in the modifications for the move to the Opéra Comique in January 1873, as Gounod was in London at the time. When, after 291 performances at the Comique, *Roméo* was again transferred, this time to the Opéra, Gounod made still further changes, notably the addition of a wedding ballet and a big ensemble. The cast for this gala occasion, on November 28, 1888, included Adelina Patti (Juliette), Jean de Reszke (*Roméo*), Leon Melchissédec (*Mercutio*), and Edouard de Reszke (*Friar Laurence*), with the composer on the podium.

Later performances, including those at the Met in the 1920s and 1930s, tended to trim this elaborate form of the work, restoring the original focus on the four love duets. The first, "Ange adorable," keeps the formality and content, if not the precise sonnet form, of the lovers' first encounter in Shakespeare. It is followed by the tender Balcony Scene, the scene in Juliet's bedchamber—initially solemn ("Nuit d'hymenée") and then passionate ("Non, ce n'est pas le jour!")—and the tragic tomb scene.

While Gounod avoids anything resembling a motivic scheme, the cello melody at the end of the prologue functions as a "star-crossed love" theme, repeated after *Roméo* departs for exile. Fragments and variations of it crop up at crucial points in the score: the choral phrase "Ah! Qu'elle est belle" on Juliette's first entrance is echoed by *Roméo* after his first sight of her, and by a minor-mode version preceding his "Salut, tombeau" in the final scene. Indeed, much of the tomb scene is devoted to reminiscences of earlier passion and happiness.

Bach is easily recognized as one of the sources of Gounod's style—not only in the churchly fugue that introduces *Friar Laurence*, but in the more vigorous one in the "Overture-Prologue" representing the feuding families. The powerful confrontation following *Tybal's* death is one of Gounod's greatest scenes, with a solemn chorus recalling Mozart's *Idomeneo*. The opening of the interlude known as "Juliette's Slumber" looks very like a conservative gloss on the notorious first phrases of Wagner's *Tristan*. But the opera's central language is Gounod's own blend of lyricism and passion. In the solos and duets of the two principals, and in the elegantly fanciful setting of *Mercutio's* "Queen Mab" speech, it has served to keep the opera fresh for 140 years. —*David Hamilton*

The Cast



Plácido Domingo

TENOR AND CONDUCTOR

BIRTHPLACE Madrid, Spain

THIS SEASON Sings Oreste in *Iphigénie en Tauride* and title role of *The First Emperor* at the Met; title role of *Cyrano de Bergerac* at La Scala; Bejazet in *Tamerlano* in Madrid and with Washington National Opera; Siegmund in *Die Walküre* at Covent Garden and Barcelona; and Luisa Fernanda in Vienna. He conducts *Roméo et Juliette* at the Met; the Verdi Requiem, *Tosca*, and *La Bohème* at Los Angeles Opera; *Don Giovanni* at Washington National Opera; and the world premiere of Howard Shaw's *The Fly* at Paris's Châtelet.

MET APPEARANCES Of his 124 sung roles, he has performed 45 at the Met since his debut as Maurizio in *Adriana Lecouvreur* in 1968. Has sung almost all of the Met's Verdi and Puccini repertoire, most of the Met's lyric-spinto parts in the French and Italian verismo repertoire, and such Wagner roles as Lohengrin, Parsifal, and Siegmund.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS Being chosen as general manager of the Washington National Opera and Los Angeles Opera; singing Wagner at Bayreuth; Verdi's *Otello* at La Scala; opening the Met season a record 21 times; conducting the Berlin Philharmonic and Chicago Symphony Orchestra; and creating five world premieres.



Isabel Leonard

MEZZO-SOPRANO

BIRTHPLACE New York, New York

THIS SEASON Stéphanie in *Roméo et Juliette* for her Met debut, Zerlina in *Don Giovanni* with Chicago Opera Theatre, Mozart's Mass in C Minor for her debut with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, and recitals in Atlanta, Washington, D.C., San Francisco, Fort Worth, and in New York at Carnegie Hall.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS Last season she made her debut with the New York Philharmonic in Ravel's *L'Enfant et les Sortilèges* and her United States operatic debut with Atlanta Opera as Stéphanie. In the summer of 2006 she sang Zerlina for her European debut in Bordeaux and appeared at Tanglewood with the Boston Symphony Orchestra in *The Three-Cornered Hat*. She is a graduate of The Juilliard School.



Anna Netrebko

SOPRANO

BIRTHPLACE Krasnodar, Russia

THIS SEASON Juliette at the Met, Violetta in *La Traviata* at Covent Garden and for her debut with the Deutsche Oper Berlin, Bellini's *Giulietta* for her Paris Opera debut, and Manon with the Vienna State Opera.

MET APPEARANCES Natasha in *War and Peace* (debut, 2002), Zerlina in *Don Giovanni*, Musetta

in *La Bohème*, Gilda in *Rigoletto*, Norina in *Don Pasquale*, Mimì in *La Bohème*, and Elvira in *I Puritani*.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS Violetta at the Salzburg Festival, 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; Lucia and Juliette with Los Angeles Opera; and many leading roles with St. Petersburg's Mariinsky Theatre since her debut with that company in 1994.



Roberto Alagna

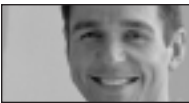
TENOR

BIRTHPLACE Clichy-sous-Bois, France

THIS SEASON Pinkerton in *Madama Butterfly* and Roméo in *Roméo et Juliette* at the Met, Orfeo in Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice* in Montpellier and Bologna, the title role of *Cyrano de Bergerac* in Monte Carlo, Radamès in *Aida* in Barcelona, and Marius in *Marius et Fanny* in Marseilles.

MET APPEARANCES Rodolfo in *La Bohème* (debut, 1996), Faust, Nemorino in *L'Elisir d'Amore*, the Duke in *Rigoletto*, Don José in *Carmen*, and Werther.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS Cavaradossi in *Tosca* at Munich's Bavarian State Opera, Rodolfo and Werther at Turin's Teatro Regio, Manrico in *Il Trovatore* and Des Grieux in *Manon* in Paris, Canio in *Pagliacci* and Don José in Verona, and Ruggero in *La Rondine* and Faust at Covent Garden. Other notable engagements include Rodolfo at La Scala, Gabriele Adorno in *Simon Boccanegra* in Salzburg, Roméo at Lyric Opera of Chicago, the title role of *Don Carlo* in Paris and London, and Edgar in Donizetti's *Lucie de Lammermoor* in Lyon.



Nathan Gunn

BARITONE

BIRTHPLACE South Bend, Indiana

THIS SEASON Mercutio in *Roméo et Juliette* at the Met, Figaro in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* with Lyric Opera of Chicago, the title role in *Billy Budd* in concert with the London Symphony Orchestra, and in three appearances at Carnegie Hall: in Stern Auditorium with the Atlanta Symphony and the Orchestra of St. Luke's and for his recital debut in Zankel Hall.

MET APPEARANCES Papageno in *Die Zauberflöte*, Clyde Griffiths in the world premiere of *An American Tragedy*, Harlequin in *Ariadne auf Naxos*, Demetrius in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Schaunard in *La Bohème*, and in the Ensemble of *The Ghosts of Versailles* (debut, 1995).

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS Has appeared in many of the world's opera houses including Seattle Opera, Houston Grand Opera, Dallas Opera, Covent Garden, Paris Opera, and Munich's Bavarian State Opera. Also performed with the New York Philharmonic and symphony orchestras of London, Chicago, Atlanta, San Francisco, Dresden, and Rotterdam. Graduate of the Met's Lindemann Young Artist Development Program and a winner of the 1994 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions.



Robert Lloyd

BASS

BIRTHPLACE Essex, England

THIS SEASON Friar Laurence in *Roméo et Juliette* at the Met.

MET APPEARANCES Nearly 200 performances, including Don Basilio in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* (debut, 1988), Pope Clément VII in the company premiere of *Benvenuto Cellini*, Ramfis in *Aida*, Méphistophélès in *Faust*, Oroveso in *Norma*, Arkel in *Pelléas et Mélisande*, the Speaker in *Die Zauberflöte*, Gurnemanz and Titurel in *Parsifal*, Narbal in *Les Troyens*, and Timur in *Turandot*.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS Built his career as principal bass at Covent Garden, where he has sung more than 60 roles. Best known for Seneca in *L'Incoronazione di Poppea* (Glyndebourne, San Francisco, Amsterdam, Paris, and Covent Garden), Boris Godunov (Covent Garden, Vienna State Opera, Kirov Opera, and in the Netherlands and Florence), Gurnemanz (Covent Garden, Bavarian State Opera, and La Scala), King Philip in *Don Carlo* (Covent Garden, San Francisco Opera, and Paris Opera), and Sarastro in *Die Zauberflöte* (which he has sung in theaters worldwide).

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Sutherland and Pavarotti in *La Fille du Régiment*, Netrebko and Flórez in *Don Pasquale*.

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During the season, the Met also presents free live streams of performances on our website, metopera.org, with support from RealNetworks. Visit rhapsody.com/metropolitanopera to experience the catalogue. —Charles Sheek