



# ROYAL OPERA HOUSE MUSCAT ANNOUNCES 10TH ANNIVERSARY SEASON



In honour of its 10th Anniversary, the Royal Opera House Muscat is delighted to be launching the new landmark season for 2022. The launch hails a thrilling return to live performances. The stunning programme – from January to May 2022 - brings twenty productions and a total of thirty-nine performances with two operas, two ballets, three Arab stars, two gala concerts, two symphonic concerts along with jazz, world music and four stunning shows from across the globe. ROHM'S World Premiere of Giuseppe Verdi's "Rigoletto" and Franco Zeffirelli Exhibition

To launch the 2022, 10th Anniversary Season

The classical season opens with the landmark red-carpet, world premiere of ROHM's new production, in coproduction with Fondazione Arena di Verona and the Lithuanian National Opera and Ballet Theatre, of Giuseppe Verdi's *Rigoletto*, masterminded by the globally renowned director Franco Zeffirelli. This is the great man's final legacy, with Leo Nucci, the *Rigoletto* with no comparison, starring in the lead role. The Franco Zeffirelli direction is packed with his trademark vibrancy and grand vision for staging. The Orchestra and Choir of Fondazione Arena di Verona perform under the baton of Jan Latham-Koenig. (Jan 20, 21 & 22)

The launch of the season includes also an exciting, unparalleled exhibition on the life and work of the legendary theatre director, Franco Zeffirelli, to be hosted at the Royal Opera House of Musical Arts from 16th January to 20th March 2022. Through artefacts, images, and videos designed especially for the Royal Opera House Muscat, many on display for the first time, the exhibition is an artistic tour de force of Zeffirelli's vision for grand opera.

Arab star to hit the first note

A perfect start to the new season: the charismatic Saber Rebaï will perform a programme of his best loved songs, accompanied by a small orchestra in a show which is designed to stir the senses and enrich the souls of audiences of loyal and newly inspired fans. (Jan 6 & 7)

An incredible line-up of productions build an incredible season:

One of the world's most popular operettas

In *Die Lustige Witwe*, Hanna Glawari, the 'Merry Widow' of the title, fights to keep her inheritance from the state. The opera unfolds over a game of political machinations and a courtship, in a plot which aims both to amuse audiences and to reflect the gigantic and hilarious flaws in human nature. Franz Lehár's operetta is defined by quick, galloping pieces in a lighthearted, romantic tale, being both satirical and frivolous. The opera is directed by Marco Arturo Marelli with the choreography by Riccardo Zanella and performed by Volksoper Wien. (Feb 17, 18 & 19)

Pas de Deux of beautiful ballet

Performed by The National Academic Bolshoi Opera and Ballet Theatre of the Republic of Belarus, the ballet *Anastasia* is a magnificent classical work by Vyacheslav Kuznetsov



portraying the cultural history of Belarus through a legendary love story, with new choreography by Yuri Travano. (Feb 3, 4 & 5)

The Nutcracker is the most widely performed and enduringly popular ballet in the world. Everyone loves Tchaikovsky's storytelling music and the tale of the enchanted young heroine, Clara, the magical nutcracker doll that becomes a prince, the charmed Sugar Plum Fairy and the epic battle between mice and tin soldiers. Performed by The Tbilisi Opera and Ballet State Theatre, choreographed by Nina Ananiashvili and Alexey Fadeechey, conducted by Alevtina Ioffe. (March 17, 18 & 19)

Two famous Arab artists

The award-winning composer, pianist and conductor Omar Khairat bridges contemporary Egyptian and Western music. In concert with the Royal Oman Symphony Orchestra, Khairat performs his original arrangements of supreme works by Mohamed Abdel Wahab and selections from among Umm Kulthum's most popular songs. (Feb 24 & 25)

The acclaimed Lebanese singer, Melhem Zain, known as the Chief of Song, performs with a mastery inspired by the great Arab artists, and in a voice that has been described as dazzling and mountainous. (May 19 & 20)

4 Fabulous Concerts

Stellar artists perform in a gala concert of Giuseppe Verdi's Masterpieces, performing arias and duets from across the repertoire. The Orchestra and Choir of Fondazione Arena di Verona, and star artists from Rigoletto production will perform under the baton of Jan Latham-Koenig. (Jan 23)

The Armenian State Symphony Orchestra will be performing Donizetti Masterpieces. The programme will explore the range of Donizetti's most popular opera repertoire from opera buffa to opera seria. (March 10)

Alexander Malofeev, the world-famous piano virtuoso, performs with the Tatarstan National Symphony Orchestra conducted by Alexander Sladkovsky, artistic director, and chief conductor of the TNSO, the orchestra will play a stirring programme of Franz Liszt and Sergey Rachmaninoff. (May 12)

The Royal Opera House Muscat's annual Pipe Organ Concert presents talented Muscat and international organists. The programme includes a special composition dedicated to the pipe organ from Marco Tutino, The Dreaming Lion, and pieces from the sixteenth to the twentieth

centuries. The concert will feature the famous Müncher Knabenchor and the Royal Oman Symphony Orchestra. (May 14)

#### Arab Shows

Performing artists from Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Americas join Omani musicians in the Royal Opera House Muscat's spectacular annual Oman World Folk Music Festival, taking audiences around the world in two days, exploring traditional songs and musical heritage from across the globe. (Feb 11 & 12)

Following the success of Kan Ya Ma Kan and Sailing Through Time, the acclaimed Caracalla Dance Theatre returns to the Royal Opera House Muscat with FINIQIA, The Legend Lives On. Founded on myth and fable, this promises to be yet another fabulous performance with striking visuals, vibrancy, and colour. (March 24, 25 & 26)

#### Jazz, World Music and Shows

World-acclaimed jazz trumpeter and Grammy-Award winner, Chris Botti is America's best-selling American instrumental artist. Building on creative roots in jazz, Botti's music transcends genres. This concert will be a once-in-a-lifetime experience for jazz fans. (Jan 27 & 28)

Singing in the stunningly soulful Fado form originating from Portugal but now famous throughout the world, Carminho, one of the very best Fado artists globally, will perform with her band in the Royal Opera House of Musical Arts as part of her worldwide tour. (Feb 26)

Teh Dar, meaning "go in circles around a fire," is an awe-inspiring acrobatic musical show from Vietnam inspired by the exotic traditions of tribes in Vietnam's remote highlands. Fifteen acrobats and five musicians enact a dance of pure beauty. (Mar 4 & 5)

With Swan Lake, China's Guangdong Acrobatic Troupe achieves a successful union of acrobatics with classical Western ballet. Brilliantly choreographed and flawlessly performed, this phenomenal adaptation of Tchaikovsky's Swan Lake promises to be one of the most thrilling and awe-inspiring productions of the season. (May 26, 27 & 28)

#### Sacred Music for Ramadhan

Sacred Sufi Praise and Inshaad are performed by different ensembles from Oman and across the region. For Ramadhan, the Royal Opera House Muscat brings audiences the rich and diverse genre of Inshaad that is celebrated throughout the Arab world. (Apr 7 & 21)

#### From Education and Outreach

The 2022 calendar for Education and Outreach includes a full-scale presentation of an opera in Gaetano Donizetti's, L'Elisir d'Amore, or The Factory of Ideas. Teatro Sociale di Como - As.Li.Co. has cleverly created a customised production for students and families. Directed by Manuel Renga and conducted by Azzurra Steri, the Royal Opera House Muscat will present the opera for schools in addition to the public performance. (Mar 12)

The Outreach programme includes the Absolute Music chamber concert Series on stage at the Royal Opera House of Musical Arts; guided tours; Lunch Music in the Opera Galleria; Pre-Performance Talks for major productions; Coffee & Dates with star artists; special school performances, concerts and shows; and, an activity-packed family day in the Open House.

Please note that all performances will take place in adherence to the guidelines regarding Covid-19. The safety and welfare of our audiences is a top priority.





Cultural

## La prima mondiale di RIGOLETTO di Giuseppe Verdi con la regia di Franco Zeffirelli

Por **Redazione** - 15 dicembre, 2021

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La prima mondiale di  
**RIGOLETTO**  
di Giuseppe Verdi

con la regia di  
Franco Zeffirelli

**e una mostra dedicata al Maestro in occasione del 10° anniversario della Royal Opera House di Muscat**

Si terrà **giovedì 16 dicembre alle ore 11.30 presso il The Westin Excelsior di Roma** la presentazione della prima mondiale di **Rigoletto** di **Giuseppe Verdi** con la regia di **Franco Zeffirelli**.

Si tratta di una nuova produzione della **Royal Opera House Muscat** – in coproduzione con **Fondazione Arena di Verona** e con il **Lithuanian National Opera and Ballet Theatre** – che il prossimo **20 Gennaio 2022** inaugurerà la Stagione del decimo anniversario del teatro del Sultanato dell'Oman.

Nel ricordo dell'importante ruolo che il Maestro **Franco Zeffirelli** ha avuto sin dall'inizio della storia della **Royal Opera House Muscat** – ovvero dalla inaugurazione del teatro nel 2011 con la **Turandot** – questa nuova produzione di **Rigoletto** rappresenta il frutto di un pensiero portato avanti dal regista nell'arco di molti anni.

Un progetto iniziato, poi interrotto e ripreso poco prima della sua scomparsa, per arrivare ad un definitivo compimento grazie alla volontà del Consiglio di Amministrazione della **Royal Opera House Muscat** e del suo Direttore Generale e Artistico **Umberto Fanni**, i quali ne hanno intuito il valore e oggi ne ereditano l'onore e la responsabilità finale della messa in scena.

La produzione vedrà la straordinaria partecipazione del baritono **Leo Nucci**, nel ruolo del protagonista. L'Orchestra e Coro della **Fondazione Arena di Verona** saranno dirette dalla prestigiosa bacchetta di **Jan Latham-Koenig**.

Il lancio della stagione comprenderà anche un'emozionante mostra sulla vita e il lavoro del leggendario regista teatrale, che sarà allestita alla **Royal Opera House of Musical Arts** (il secondo teatro del polo culturale omanita) dal **16 gennaio al 20 marzo 2022**. Attraverso manufatti, immagini e video progettati appositamente per la **Royal Opera House Muscat**, molti dei quali esposti per la prima volta, la mostra è un tour de force artistico della visione di **Zeffirelli** per la grande opera.

## **ROYAL OPERA HOUSE MUSCAT**

Annoverato tra i più bei teatri del mondo, la Royal Opera House Muscat, è un complesso di straordinario fascino per la felice combinazione di gusto e stile omanita e disegno architettonico contemporaneo. Sintesi emblematica di tradizione e modernità, la stessa che contraddistingue il Paese. Acustica eccellente, caratteristiche tecniche all'avanguardia per funzionalità e tecnologie messe a disposizione delle più moderne produzioni, ne fanno una macchina teatrale perfetta.

Una realtà istituzionale dal forte valore iconico, simbolo dell'identità culturale. Un'attività multidisciplinare che evidenzia una straordinaria volontà di aprirsi al mondo ed essere fermento culturale di unione e pace tra i popoli anche grazie al linguaggio universale della musica, considerato l'ampio spettro di generi che contraddistingue la programmazione.

## Rigoletto en el Royal Opera House de muscat

👤 Rodolfo Faggioni corresponsal en Italia 🕒 02.Ene.2022 🗣️ Opinion

El decimo aniversario de la estación operística en el Royal Opera Hous de Muscat se abrirá el 20 de enero con el estreno mundial de Rigoletto, una de las obras más bellas del compositor italiano Giuseppe Verdi que lo hizo inmortal. Será una nueva edición con la participación extraordinaria de la Arena de Verona y el Teatro Nacional de la Opera y Ballet de Lituania.

La decisión de poner en escena la obra de Verdi, Rigoletto, dirigida por el mundialmente conocido Franco Zeffirelli, celebrando los diez años de este famoso Teatro situado en la ciudad de de Muscat, representa un instrumento de atracción y desarrollo en el campo cultural y turístico internacional, que reconoce cada vez más al teatro omaní, la primacía del destino cultural de excelencia, oasis de paz, cultura y encuentro en Oriente Medio.

Recordando el importante papel desempeñado por el renombrado director Franco Zeffirelli desde el comienzo de la historia de la Royal Opera House de Muscat, es decir, desde la inauguración del teatro con la ópera Turandot en el año 2011, esta nueva producción de Rigoletto representa un pensamiento llevado a cabo por el maestro Zeffirelli durante muchos años, un proyecto iniciado, luego interrumpido y reanudado poco antes de su muerte para llegar a una finalización definitiva gracias a la voluntad de la dirección de la Royal Opera House que han sentido su valor y hoy heredan el honor y la responsabilidad final de la puesta en escena.

Rigoletto es un melodrama en tres actos.. Está basado en el drama histórico de Victor Hugo (Le Roi s'amuse) centrado en la figura dramática y original de un bufón de corte, Rigoletto. Al inicio la censura austríaca se había opuesto fuertemente a la obra de Verdi siendo un argumento grosero. Igualmente tuvo una aceptación hostil tanto en Alemania como en París.

La historia está representada en la ciudad italiana de Mantua en el siglo XVI. Rigoletto un bufón jorobado tiene una hija Gilda, cuya existencia intenta mantener secreta a los cortesanos, muchos de los cuales tienen la intención de vengarse de él por su burla viciosa en la corte de Duque.

Ella se enamoró del hijo del Duque pensando fuese un pobre estudiante y éste se introdujo furtivamente en su casa para hacerle una corte apasionada. Más tarde los cortesanos del Duque, que pretenden vengarse de Rigoletto secuestran a Gilda y la llevan al Palacio Ducal creyendo que es la amante de Rigoletto.

Rigoletto está desesperado por el destino de su hija, seducida por el duque, jura vengar la vergüenza y contrata a un sicario, pero al último momento, Gilda, siempre enamorada del hijo del Duque se sustituye a él y cae puñalada.

Para esta ocasión especial, la obra contará con la extraordinaria participación de Leo Nucci, en el papel de Rigoletto. Entre los principales intérpretes también se mencionan: Dmitry Korchak en el papel del Duque de Mantua y la jóven y talentosa Giuliana Gianfaldoni en el papel de Gilda.

La ópera será dirigida por la prestigiosa batuta de Jan Latham-Koenig con la participación de la Orquesta y Coro de la Arena de Verona. Una nota de orgullo para la Royal Opera House está representada en la participación del coro de la Guardia Real de Mascate.





Por  
Rodolfo Faggioni  
31/12/2021

El decimo aniversario de la estación operística en el Royal Opera Hous de Muscat se abrirá el 20 de enero con el estreno mundial de "Rigoletto", una de las obras más bellas del compositor italiano Giuseppe Verdi y que lo hizo inmortal. Será una nueva edición con la participación extraordinaria de la Arena de Verona y el Teatro Nacional de la Opera y Ballet de Lituania.

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## ARTS & CULTURE

# How Franco Zeffirelli's 'Rigoletto' came to Royal Opera House Muscat

► The production was overseen by the director's son and follows detailed notes left by him before his death



Italian stage and film director Franco Zeffirelli's version of Verdi's 'Rigoletto' is being staged two years after his death to mark the Royal Opera House Muscat's 10th season. All photos: Royal Opera House Muscat



**Saeed Saeed**

Jan 21, 2022



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**F**ranco Zeffirelli continues to make his presence felt more than two years after his death.

The acclaimed Italian stage and film director was working on a new version of Verdi's *Rigoletto* for the Royal Opera House Muscat when he died in 2019, aged 96.

Although Zeffirelli's condition worsened over the last decade of his life, his adopted son and collaborator Pippo describes his death as a shock.

"He hated the idea of dying because he was a man constantly thinking about the future," he tells *The National*. "It was really towards the last two months he understood his body was abandoning him and that was a psychological blow.

"He was furious with the idea of abandoning life because he had so many things he wanted to complete."





The Duke of Mantua's palace in the Royal Opera House Muscat's co-production of 'Rigoletto'. Photo: Royal Opera House Muscat

One of those projects is *Rigoletto*, made in celebration of the [Royal Opera House Muscat's](#) 10th season. A co-production with Italy's Fondazione Arena di Verona, it had its world premiere at the venue on Thursday, and will run for two further performances, on Friday and Saturday.

The production is trademark Zeffirelli: the story's traditional telling is offset by eye-popping stage design, detail and grandeur. The palace of the Duke of Mantua is lavish, with its spiral staircase and majestic horse statue, while the home of assassin Sparafucile is suitably forbidding, with its discarded rocks, grime and weathered furniture.

Baritone Ambrogio Maestri in the title role and soprano Giuliana Gianfaldoni as Gilda lead a pan-European cast in delivering kinetic performances full of vibrant movement and the occasional flinging of furniture in murderous rage.

The project was a labour of love for Zeffirelli owing to the sentiments attached. It would have marked the director's first production in Oman since his staging of Puccini's *Turandot* for the opening of the opera house in 2011.





The Royal Opera House Muscat opened its doors in 2011 with Puccini's 'Turando', directed by Franco Zeffirelli. Photo: Silvia Razgova / The National

"Zeffirelli always chose his projects carefully and that became even more important with his health declining," Pippo says. "The decision to come back to Oman was because he believed in the mission of the venue. I remember going with him to the venue while it was being built and after seeing it he understood the vision by the late Sultan Qaboos to educate his people about classical music.

"It was the same motivation with *Rigoletto* and he made the physical sacrifice of going ahead with the project."

## It's all on paper

Pippo describes the director's working process as meticulous.

A painter and trained architect, Zeffirelli designed his trademark opulent stages through hundreds of detailed sketches, including the position of the actors, the lighting design and costumes.

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### READ MORE

[Royal Opera House Muscat's 2022 season includes singer Saber Rebai and 'Swan Lake'](#)

Such a deep dive resulted in the eventual production process going relatively smoothly.

"It's a process similar to studying," he says. "He needed to have the vision of the stage in his head fully realised and to work out any possible problems beforehand.

"That way, once the show moved to the production process, it was done efficiently and with no time wasted."



Those detailed notes became the blueprint Stefano Trespidi followed in his official role as "director collaborator".

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Pippo took on the delicate role of adviser, drawing on his intimate knowledge of Zeffirelli's sensibilities to provide insight to the production's creative team when needed.

When *The National* attended a dress rehearsal on Tuesday, Pippo sat alone in the theatre and took detailed notes. Only at the end of the session did he approach Trespidi in the control booth to share his thoughts.

Pippo admits it's a role requiring a deft balance.

"Everyone, involved is doing a great job and assistant director Trespidi is very good," he says. "Occasionally, when I am in rehearsals, I will give small indications here and there but, at the same time, I don't want to invade or interfere with his work."

## Keeping the legacy alive

*Rigoletto* is set to begin touring internationally later in the year, with dates to be announced soon, but the production is not the last opportunity fans will get to experience Zeffirelli's work.

Pippo confirms more operas are in the works based on the copious notes, sketches and visual documents left behind. Many of these can be seen at Florence's Fondazione Zeffirelli, home to the Library of Fine and Performing Arts, which contains more than 300 original sketches and 10,000 documents and books from the director's personal library.

"I am very happy that students and people from different walks of life have been visiting the foundation," Pippo says. "Because the message here transcends art. Even into his advanced years, Zeffirelli was also studying and researching and ultimately trying to update himself.

"That applies to anyone who wants to have a successful life."

With such a legacy, Pippo says he is able to remember his adopted father at his peak rather than the final moments.

"I know I am already blessed to have a privileged life being with this great man for over 50 years," he says. "My mission now is to continue fulfilling his vision and there are still so many things left to do."

*Rigoletto* runs at the Royal Opera House Muscat on Friday and Saturday, January 21 and 22. Tickets start at Omani rials (\$39). More information is available at [rohmuscat.org.om](http://rohmuscat.org.om)

NOV 3, 2021

# Royal Opera House Muscat Announces 2022 Season

*By Francisco Salazar*

The Royal Opera House Muscat has announced its tenth anniversary season.

The season opens with Verdi's **"Rigoletto"** in production by Franco Zeffirelli. The new production is the final piece of work that Zeffirelli left behind. The production will star Leo Nucci in the title role, Dmitry Korchak (Duke of Mantua), Giuliana Gianfaldoni (Gilda) and Ricardo Zanellato (Sparafucile). The orchestra and choir of Fondazione Arena di Verona perform along with the Omani Opera Choir Group under the baton of Jan Latham-Koenig.

**Performance Dates:** Jan. 20-22, 2021

Jan Latham-Koenig conducts **Verdi Masterpieces** which will feature soloists from "Rigoletto."

**Performance Date:** Jan. 23, 2022

Marco Arturo Marelli conducts the Orchestra and Chorus from Volksoper Wien in a production of Lehár's beloved **"The Merry Widow."**

**Performance Dates:** Feb. 17-19, 2022

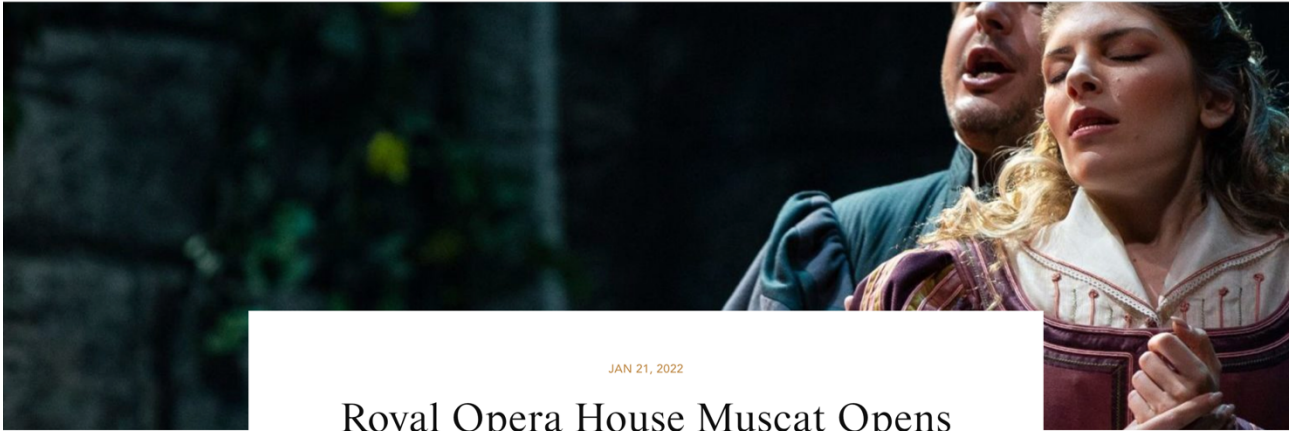
The Armenian State Symphony Orchestra will be performing the Donizetti Masterpieces concert alongside a host of talented artists. The program will explore his most popular opera composition from opera buffa to opera seria.

**Performance Dates:** March 10, 2022

Manuel Renga directs Donizetti's **"L'Elisir d'Amore-The Factory of Ideas."**

**Performance Dates:** March 12, 2022





JAN 21, 2022

## Royal Opera House Muscat Opens with Historical Production by Franco Zeffirelli

*By Francisco Salazar*

To celebrate its 10th anniversary, the Royal Opera House Muscat recently opened its 2022 season with a historical production of "Rigoletto."

The version of the Verdi opera marks the final production that legendary director Franco Zeffirelli created for the opera stage before his death in 2019. It's also a historical occasion because it marks the first time that audiences in Muscat are seeing the opera.

"The people had not heard 'Rigoletto' before. It was the first time and it was fantastic," noted soprano Giuliana Gianfaldoni who is singing the role of Gilda in the production, while making her house debut. "I can be myself as Gilda and they said that the audience from the premiere is not always the most generous. But I think we had success and they appreciated it. To sing Gilda, this a very big role, I was very concentrated and since they don't know the opera, I thought about what I could give to them. I tried to be in my character and I think that is why the public reacted."

"I am happy that we can perform for the public that does not know the history of this music. We are happy to show them what is our culture and it is important for us," added Dmitry Korchak, who is singing the Duke of Mantua.

For Omani audiences, it will also be a unique occasion to see the opera in its original time period and in traditional costumes. As opera shifts away from the traditional to new more modern productions, this new staging by Zeffirelli brings audiences back to the grandiosity of live opera.

"For me, it's an honor to be part of the final production by Zeffirelli. I have followed the project for many years and I also participated in the press conference in Rome. I have become emotionally attached to this production and during the press conference, there was a moment when the tears started coming down because I was thinking of all the amazing theater Zeffirelli gave to us. He was a great director and he respected the music," said Gianfaldoni.

"This is a Zefirelli production. At the Bolshoi Theatre, we love these types of productions and if you see 'Boris Godunov,' it should have big churches and the Kremlin. This production (Rigoletto) is completely Zefirelli and I love it. I am not against Regietheater. I prefer that the stage director can read the music and understand the music and the voices. I also want them to understand that opera is not cinema or theater. It is different and a different type of direction. It is important to respect the music. I love traditional theater and I love modern. It does not matter. If I see the story and I can sing and the orchestra can play, then I am happy," noted Korchak.

Gianfaldoni added that when singing it is important to have a director who understands singers because "our voice is an instrument and is connected to our body. It is difficult to sing in many positions. Opera is a spectacle to see but it is also one that is heard. It is the first thing that we do. We hear opera and that is why it is hard to make it cinematographic."

Omani audiences are also returning to the opera after the pandemic which shuttered the theater for almost two years. However, under strict regulations, the theater is only permitting 50 percent of audiences creating an interesting environment for the singers.

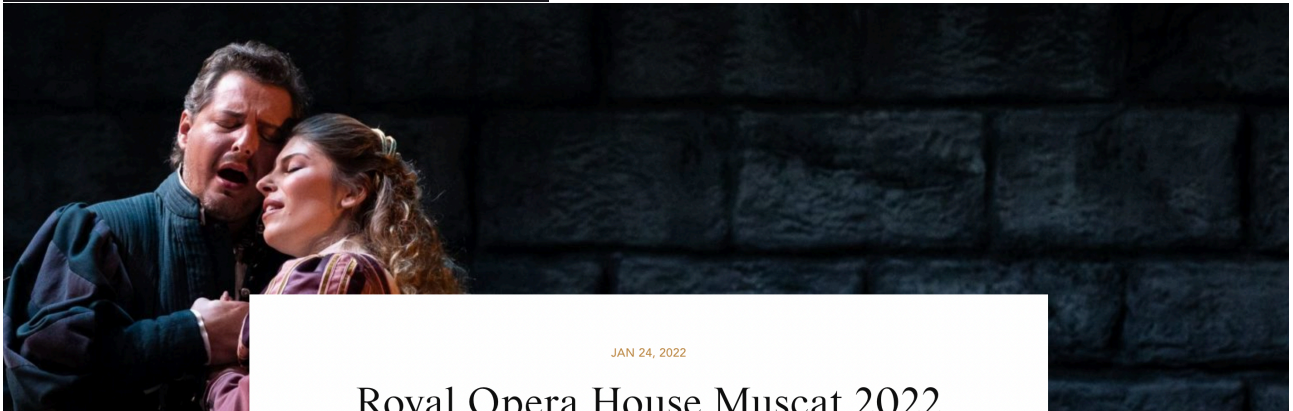
"It's strange because the theater was not full due to COVID-19. I sang many productions during COVID for streaming and it was horrible. I would not want to do it again because we live for the public. If we don't feel the public, it is really sad and it is not complete. We cannot give a lot. And for opening it was strange," the soprano added.

Korchak added, "I think we are musicians who are working for one or two people in the theater. It doesn't matter how many people are in the theater. But at the same time, people thought we got used to performing for half the audience. We do not sing for the public, but without the public, it is impossible. There is an energy we need and this connection between the public and artists is very important. During COVID, in Russia, they put recordings of opera and theater on TV. I started watching but after ten minutes, I had to shut it off. There is no energy. Maybe you find good camera angles but the real voice and energy are not there."

Despite the restrictions, Korchak and Gianfaldoni are excited to be back on stage for a live audience.

"I know that performing live, I will remember the moment or the phrase or the bar or the movement. I cannot find that on TV. Our work is not only working with the voice and character but to finding solutions when you work with the conductor or other singers. It is important to work with your colleagues and you can find different colors depending on who you work with. That is why we love live performances," Korchak concluded.





JAN 24, 2022

## Royal Opera House Muscat 2022 Review: Rigoletto

Giuliana Gianfaldoni & Dmitry Korchak Show Promise in New Zeffirelli Production

*By Francisco Salazar*

On Jan. 22, the Royal Opera House Muscat presented its final performance of “Rigoletto.”

On this evening, the opening cast returned in Franco Zeffirelli’s final production. The result was a performance filled with excellent singing that sometimes lacked drama and felt disconnected from the [glorious](#) production.

### A Return to Old Times

Ambrogio Maestri led the cast singing the title role. Maestri is one of those old-fashioned singers who stands and sings with emotion. He was most effective when he did just that, stood in the middle of the stage and sang with his authoritative power. However, when he had to throw a chair or sit down on a seat or the floor, every movement looked planned and overly calculated. He also sometimes lacked a real interaction with his colleagues which made it hard to connect with the circumstances of the story. For example, the relationship with Gilda was a bit distant especially during the duets and the moments where the character is asked to caress his daughter in distress. Vocally he also seemed to never blend with Giuliana Gianfaldoni’s Gilda as he constantly overpowered her with his grand voice. And as a result, it was hard to really believe the tragedy of this character.

Nevertheless, Maestri sang with such vulnerability throughout, especially in his two solo showcases. His “*pari siamo*” was sung with intimacy and allowed audiences to see great confusion in the character. He displayed a mix of booming sound and pianissimos. He also emoted some of his lines emphasizing the text with precision.

In his aria “*Cortigianni vil razza*” his voice obtained a grainy and dry sound that was effective for the moment. Throughout the aria, there were a lot of breathy moments that created a more raw approach as well to the dramatic moment. His final “*pieta*” was exceptional as he crescendoed from a piano to a gritty forte.

I admire the technique in Maestri’s voice as he is able to scoop up to his higher register with ease and he demonstrated booming sound especially in his recitatives. His “*Si Vendetta*” which while not the most effective dramatically was filled with energy and passion.



## Innocent & Beautiful

Giuliana Gianfaldoni performed the role of Gilda with crisp accuracy and a gorgeous tone. From the moment she entered the stage her round *leggera* voice sounded precise and connected. She used beautiful *pianissimo* dynamics in her opening duet with Rigoletto, displaying an ingenue in every sense of the word. Her phrases which were clean and sung with beauty were also soft, emphasizing Gilda's purity. When her father left, the soprano's expressions were those of guilt. But that soon turned to a lovely dream-like expression as she sang "Signor né principe io lo vorrei." In her ensuing duet, she was completely transfixed and seduced by the Duke and that was all the more present in her "Caro nome," which she sang with great care. As she went up to her higher tessitura she floated the notes to create an ethereal sound that slowly dissipated into the auditorium. The coloratura lines were also notably sung with flexibility. This was a Gilda entranced by love at first sight.

In Act two Gianfaldoni held on to the innocence as she sang "Tutte le feste al tempio." The soprano used her soft sound to express guilt and pain and never went beyond a *mezzo forte*. That contrasted with Maestri's more forceful voice. It was quite astonishing to hear the control the soprano had of each dynamic and phrase and to hear how it flowed into the auditorium with ease. The end of the "Si, Vendetta" was the first time that the soprano really unleashed the full volume of her voice as she delivered a powerful "E flat."

In Act three, Gianfaldoni's voice blossomed as it gained strength in the quartet and trio. While it never lost the initial precision or delicacy, the voice carried over the ensembles with roundness. "Lassu in ciel" was angelic as Gianfaldoni returned to the floated sustained notes and the pianos. Her final line however was emotive to emphasize Gilda's death. That was perhaps the least beautiful singing from the soprano but it was also effective.

Gianfaldoni is a rising star whose voice is sure to grow and gain more colors and after this technical display, there is no doubt in my mind that she is one to look out for.



## The Duke

As the Duke of Mantua Dmitry Korchak was impressive as he portrayed a frivolous and playful Duke. He sang with ardent passion and a gleaming timbre and it was hard to look away from him when he on stage. His "Quest o quella" was a display of virtuosic singing that mixed a full voice with more suave and sensual phrasing. His duet with the Countess Ceprano was also filled with that same passionate intensity and it was hard not to fall for the Duke's lies.

In his scene with Gilda, Korchak started the "T'amo! T'amo; ripetilo sì caro accento" with vigor. That led to a seductive "È il sol dell'anima, la vita è amore" which Korchak caressed with a smooth sound that radiated throughout. As he continued the line, his singing grew more passionate and his voice obtained a fuller sound. Once Gianfaldoni joined in the duet, the two were irresistible, singing with connectedness and impeccable sound. It was truly transcendent moment.

In Act two, Korchak's passion climaxed in "Ella mi fu Rapita," which he delivered with vigor; one actually got the sense that the shallow character might truly be in love with Gilda. The "Parmi veder le lagrime" was pure passion and Korchak displayed the bel canto line he is well-known for. It was exciting to hear the tone so evenly balanced and how he could go from a forte to a piano without forcing the sound. However, during the cabaletta "Possente amor mi chiama" which is a display of the Duke's pompous attitude, Korchak struggled to get a pure sound and sometimes sounded a bit strained. Nonetheless, one could commend the flexibility in the line and the display of some impeccable coloratura.

Act three was the weakest for the tenor as he seemed to struggle a bit with "La donna è mobile," his sound labored at times. His phrasing was still filled with suaveness and the final coloratura cadenza was marvelous and virtuosic. His opening lines of the quartet, "Bella figlia dell'amore" were filled with desire but as he reached the higher tessitura the voice started to obtain an unpleasant timbre that became somewhat nasal and uneasy. Perhaps it was due to all the physicality in the production as Korchak was committed to seducing this Maddalena. But that came at a cost as he continued to increase the volume of his voice and on the repeat of the phrase "consolar," the voice was a bit unsteady and weary.

This is only the third production that Korchak sings the Duke in and based on his display, he will only get better as the role settles into his lyric voice.





## Dynamic Siblings

Yulia Mazurova and Riccardo Zanellato portrayed the roles of Maddalena and Sparafucile to great success. Unlike most productions who seem to show the siblings as the same age, in this cast, there was a clear distinction of age and that created an interesting dynamic. Mazurova gave Maddalena the usual seductive and playful attitude that bit at the text during the quartet. But during the trio, she revealed innocence that resembled that of Gilda. She almost seemed like the Duke's next victim as she desperately convinced her brother to save Mantua. That was emphasized of course by the singer's more lyrical mezzo as opposed to the hefty voices that are sometimes used for the role. Meanwhile, Zanellato who had a low and gritty bass that resonated with power, was overbearing and protective. He was violent toward his sister, which created a tense dynamic and a great counterpart to the toxicity of the male characters in this opera. One seemed to pity Maddalena at the end as she was stuck in between two violent men.

In the pit, Jan-Latham-Koenig returned with mixed results. The conductor has a knack for powerful crescendos and fortes which are effective for this dramatic work. There is also precision with the rhythms. However, sometimes there was a bit of sloppiness, especially with the violin solos. During "Caro nome," the violinist was harsh in his / her phrasing. The sound clashed with Gianfaldoni's refined voice and distracted from her beautiful phrases. The same could be said of the violins in the Act two duet which once again featured an overly brash sound. However, the cello solo in Rigoletto's aria was smooth and lush and followed Maestri's tempi to perfection. Additionally, it blended well with the baritone's yearning voice. The wind section was also outstanding and well-balanced with Gilda's line. Many times it sounded as if both the flute solo and soprano were singing a duet.