

RIGOLETTO

A Melodrama in three acts
By Giuseppe Verdi

Libretto by Francesco Maria Piave
after the tragedy *Le roi s'amuse* by Victor Hugo

STUDY GUIDE

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Welcome to Pacific Opera Victoria!

This Study Guide has been created primarily to assist teachers in preparing students for their visit to the opera.

It is our hope that teachers will be able to add this to the existing curriculum in order to expand students' understanding of opera, literature, history, and the fine arts.

Materials in the Study Guide may be copied and distributed to students. Some students may wish to go over the information at home if there not enough time to discuss in class. The opera experience can be made more meaningful and enjoyable when students have the opportunity to learn about the opera before they attend the performance.

Please Note: The Dress Rehearsal is the last opportunity the singers will have on stage to work with the orchestra before Opening Night. Since vocal demands are so great on opera singers, some singers choose not to sing in full voice during the Dress Rehearsal in order to preserve their vocal chords and avoid unnecessary strain.

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Opera at a Glance – Introduction

What is opera?

The word *opera* comes from the Italian, “a work”, which is in turn based on the Latin word *opera*, which is the plural of *opus*, ‘work, effort’.

An opera is a musical stage drama in which the actors sing most or all of their parts. Opera combines music and drama into an art form which includes many dimensions: the human voice, orchestral music, the visual arts (scenery, costumes and special effects), drama (tragedy or comedy), and occasionally dance.

Operas are divided into scenes and acts that contain a variety of vocal pieces for one or many singers. An aria is a vocal solo that focuses on a character’s emotions rather than actions. A recitative is sung dialogue or speech that occurs between arias and ensembles. Composers write the score or the music for the opera. The story of the opera is written as a libretto, a text that is easily set to music.

Opera originated in Florence, Italy, in the late 1500’s, with a small group of men who were members of a Camerata (Italian for society). The intellectuals, poets and musicians of the Camerata decided they wanted words to be a featured aspect of music. They used ancient Greek drama as their inspiration, including the use of a chorus to comment on the action. The first major composer to fully develop the ideas of the Camerata was Jacopo Peri (1561-1633), whose opera DAFNE premiered in 1594 and is regarded as the first opera.

Opera or Musical Theatre?

What’s the difference between an opera and a musical like LES MISERABLES?

The musical style is different in each; opera music is usually classical and complex, while musicals feature pop songs and sometimes jazz. Singers in musicals have microphones hidden in their costumes or wigs to amplify their voices, whereas the voices of opera singers are so strong that no amplification is needed – even in a large venue. Operas are almost completely sung, while the use of spoken words is more common to musicals. It is interesting to note that there are some operas with spoken words; these are called *Singspiels* (German) and *opéra comique* (French). Examples are Mozart’s THE MAGIC FLUTE and Bizet’s CARMEN, respectively.

Audience Etiquette

The following list of *Dos* and *Do Nots* will help you (and those around you) enjoy the experience of a night at the opera:

- **Do** dress in whatever you find comfortable. However, going to the opera can be an opportunity to dress in formal attire.
- **Do** be on time. Latecomers disturb the rest of the audience and the singers. They will be seated only at suitable breaks – often not until **intermission**.
- **Do** find your seat with the help of your teacher or an usher. It is also customary to remove your hat in respect to the artists and to the person sitting behind you.
- **Do** turn off cell phones, pagers, digital watch alarms and all electronic devices.
- **Do Not** take photos. The flash can be very disturbing to the artists.
- **Do Not** chew gum, eat, drink, or talk. Let the action on stage surround you. As an audience member, you are a very important part of the process taking place. Without you there is no show.
- **Do** get settled and comfortable before the performance begins. Read your programme before the performance; rustling through the programme during the show can disrupt everyone.
- **Do** clap as the lights are dimmed and the **conductor** appears and bows to the audience. Watch as the **conductor** then turns to the **orchestra** and takes up his or her **baton** to signal the beginning of the opera.
- **Do** listen to the **prelude** or **overture** before the curtain rises. This is part of the performance and an opportunity to identify common musical themes that may reoccur during the opera.
- **Do** sit still; whisper only when it is absolutely necessary, as a whisper is heard all over the theatre, and NEVER (except in an emergency) stand during the performance.
- **Do** applaud (or shout **Bravo!**) at the end of an **aria** or **chorus** piece to signify your enjoyment. The end of a piece can be identified by a pause in the music.
- **Do** laugh when something is funny.
- **Do** read the English **surtitles** projected above the stage to understand the story.
- **Do** listen for subtleties in the music. The **tempo**, volume and complexity of the music and singing often depict the feelings of a character or give a sense of the action. Notice repeated words or phrases; they are usually significant.

Finally, have fun and enjoy the show!

PACIFIC *Opera* VICTORIA

presents

RIGOLETTO

April 20, 22, 25, 27, 29, 2006, 8 pm
Royal Theatre, Victoria, BC

A Melodrama in three acts by Giuseppe Verdi
Libretto by Francesco Maria Piave
after the tragedy *Le roi s'amuse* by Victor Hugo

First Performance March 11, 1851, Teatro La Fenice, Venice
Sung in Italian with English surtitles

CAST & CREATIVE TEAM

The Duke of Mantua	Luc Robert
Matteo Borsa, a courtier	Martin Sadd
Countess Ceprano	Emmanuelle Coutu
Rigoletto, the Duke's court jester	John Avey
Marullo, a courtier	Jon-Paul Décosse
Count Ceprano	Steven De Vries
Count Monterone	Andrew Greenwood
Sparafucile, a hired assassin	Alain Coulombe
Gilda, Rigoletto's daughter	Lambroula Maria Pappas
Giovanna, Gilda's nurse	Erinn Roberts
Page	Emmanuelle Coutu
A Herald	Stephen Barradell
Maddalena, Sparafucile's sister	Jean Stilwell
Conductor	Giuseppe Pietrarroia
Director	Tom Diamond
Set and Costume Designer	Astrid Janson
Lighting Designer	Pierre Lavoie
Choreographer	Jacques Lemay
Resident Stage Manager	Jackie Adamthwaite
Assistant Stage Managers	Nicole Hannah, Steve Barker

With the Victoria Symphony and the Pacific Opera Chorus

RIGOLETTO: Synopsis of the Opera

Act I, Scene 1

At a ball in his palace, the Duke of Mantua, a serial philanderer, pursues the Countess Ceprano as his hunchbacked jester Rigoletto taunts her husband. Meanwhile the nobleman Marullo tells the astonished courtiers that Rigoletto keeps a mistress.

Count Monterone arrives, outraged that the Duke has dishonoured his daughter. When Rigoletto mocks him and the Duke orders the Count's arrest, Monterone places a curse on them both.

Act I, Scene 2

Rigoletto encounters the assassin Sparafucile, who offers to rid Rigoletto of his rival. Rigoletto has no use for Sparafucile, but asks how to find him should the need arise. Rigoletto reflects that he and Sparafucile are two of a kind; one uses a sword as a weapon, the other his tongue.

At home Rigoletto is greeted by the one treasure in his life, his daughter Gilda, who asks about her father's family and her dead mother, who loved Rigoletto despite his deformity. Rigoletto forbids Gilda to leave home except to go to church.

Meanwhile, the Duke bribes the maid Giovanna and slips into the courtyard. He eavesdrops as Gilda tells Giovanna she is in love with a young man she has seen at church. This man is, of course, the Duke, who now professes his love to Gilda, telling her he is a poor student named Gualtier Maldè. Gilda rhapsodizes tenderly on this name.

The courtiers, weary of Rigoletto's cruel jokes, gather to abduct Gilda, whom they think is Rigoletto's mistress. When Rigoletto comes upon them, they pretend they are abducting the Countess Ceprano and dupe him into helping them.

Act II, Scene 1

In his palace, the Duke frets over Gilda's whereabouts. The courtiers delight him with the news that they have brought Rigoletto's mistress to the palace.

Rigoletto arrives and hunts desperately for Gilda, at first struggling to hide his agitation from the amused courtiers; he then tries to break into an antechamber where he is convinced she is kept, but he cannot find her. Finally he begs them to give his daughter back. When the distraught girl emerges from the room, she tells Rigoletto about her dishonour.

Monterone is taken to the dungeon, lamenting the futility of his curse. Rigoletto promises to avenge them both.

Intermission

Act III

To prove the Duke's faithlessness, Rigoletto brings Gilda to Sparafucile's house. They watch through gaps in the walls as a heartbroken Duke sings of the fickleness of women and begins to seduce the assassin's sister, Maddalena. In the opera's great quartet, Maddalena plays hard to get as the Duke expresses his passion, Gilda watches, weeping, and Rigoletto vows revenge.

Rigoletto sends Gilda home and hires Sparafucile to kill the Duke, pledging to come back at midnight to collect the body. Gilda returns, disguised in men's clothing, and listens as Maddalena asks her brother to spare the Duke and kill Rigoletto instead. Sparafucile's sense of honour won't allow this; he may kill, but he never cheats a client. He finally agrees to spare the Duke if a substitute victim shows up. Gilda knocks at the door, ready to offer up her own life.

When Rigoletto returns, Sparafucile gives him the body in a sack. As he drags it to the river, Rigoletto hears the Duke singing in the distance. Horrified, he cuts open the sack, finding Gilda, and recalls Monterone's curse.

Background of the Opera

In 1850 Verdi wrote to his librettist, Francesco Maria Piave, *I have in mind a subject that would be one of the greatest creations of the modern theatre if only the police would allow it. ... The subject is grand, immense and there's a character in it who is one of the greatest creations that the theatre of all countries and all times can boast. The subject is Le Roi s'amuse and the character I'm speaking about is Triboulet....Run about the city and find someone of influence to get us permission to do Le roi s'amuse....*

Verdi was already anticipating the difficulties he would have with the censors. Indeed, it is a wonder *Rigoletto* ever made it to the stage.

Verdi chose as his subject the play *Le roi s'amuse (The King Amuses Himself)* by Victor Hugo, which had opened in Paris two decades previously, in 1832, played for one night, and been promptly banned as obscene and politically subversive. The play was based on the life of the French King Francis I, who had been safely dead since 1547. However, Hugo's King Francis was a little too much like the current King, Louis-Phillipe, who had survived an assassination attempt just before the play opened. The censors were not amused and shut the play down. Despite a lawsuit by the furious playwright, the ban on performances remained in place for fifty years, even though the printed version of the play was available. It was not until November 22, 1882, that *Le roi s'amuse* could finally be seen again in Paris – a quarter century after Verdi's *Rigoletto* first played Paris – a fact that did not amuse Victor Hugo.

Verdi clearly knew he was asking for trouble when he selected *Le roi s'amuse* as the subject of an opera. Just as clearly, he was deeply attached to the subject, in particular, to his hunchbacked jester, whom he considered *a creation worthy of Shakespeare!*

There were so many ways in which it was sure to offend the censors. The story was politically unacceptable: it depicted a king behaving badly and the attempted assassination of that king; it was morally shocking, dealing as it did with rape, adultery, suicide, and the theme of curses and vengeance.

Verdi composed the opera, originally titled *La Maledizione (The Curse)*, in only six weeks as a commission for the Teatro La Fenice, which was in Austrian-controlled Venice. But the opera's premiere had to be postponed while Verdi and Piave waged battle with the censors. A libretto in Venice required approval from the theatre management, the mayor of the city, and the Austrian Department of Public Order.

When the libretto was submitted to the Department of Public Order in the fall of 1850, the response was extremely negative: *His excellency the Military Governor Gorzkowski ... deplors the fact that the poet Piave and the great maestro Verdi have not been able to find any scope for their talents other than the repulsive immorality and obscene triviality of the plot of the libretto titled La Maledizione ,, The aforesaid Excellency has thus seen fit to ban the performance absolutely.*

The censors objected to the portrayal of the king as evil; to the fact that the king's antagonist was a lowly court jester – and a hunchbacked one at that; to the decadence of court life; to the seduction of the heroine; they even objected to the body in the sack. Verdi was prepared to negotiate, but only to a point; he instructed Piave *not to change the characters, the plot, the dramatic situation*. He was adamant that the sack and the hump had to stay.

Of the censors' directive to remove the sack he wrote, *What difference did the sack make to the police? Are they afraid of the effect it has? ... If you take away the sack, it is unlikely that Triboulet would talk for half an hour to a corpse, without having a flash of lightning show him that it is his daughter.*

He insisted on *Rigoletto's* deformity: *"A hunchback who sings? Why not?...To me there is something really fine in representing on stage this character outwardly so ugly and ridiculous, inwardly so impassioned and full of love".*

After two rewrites and a lot of haggling, helped somewhat by Verdi's international reputation, a compromise was reached. The French King Francis I morphed into the Italian Duke of Mantua; the hunchback Triboulet became Rigoletto; the other characters' names were changed. Verdi got to keep the hump and the sack.

In late January, 1851, Piave wrote, *For the last five days, I have been running around like the devil from the government to the police, to the Commando di Piazza, to the Presidenza, I assure you that by the time this is over I shall be a real athlete. Two days later he was able to say, Te Deum Laudamus! Gloria in Excelsis Deo! Alleluja Alleluja! At last ... our Rigoletto returned ... safe and sound, with no broken bones and no amputation."*

The opera opened on March 11, 1851, and was a great success. By the next day the Duke's impudent aria *La donna è mobile*, was heard on the streets of Venice; it remains one of the most instantly recognizable tunes in all opera. Ironically, the censors' insistence on changing the setting from France to Italy gave the opera a local context, with which the audience could more readily identify.

The *Gazetta di Venezia* wrote, *We were almost overwhelmed by its originality; originality or rather strangeness in the choice of subject; originality in the music, in the style, even in the form of the pieces; and we did not comprehend it in its entirety ... the skill of the orchestration is stupendous, wonderful: the orchestra speaks to you, weeps for you, transfuses passion. Never was the eloquence of sound more powerful.*

Rigoletto soon travelled all over Europe and abroad, to enthusiastic audiences. It reached London in 1853, New York and Buenos Aires in 1855, Paris in 1857; it opened the new Cairo opera house in 1869, and was presented by the Metropolitan Opera in its first season in 1883.

Not all the critics were enthusiastic about the opera. The *Athenaeum* wrote: *The music . . . is puerile and queer-odd modulations being perpetually wrenched out with the vain hope of disguising the meagerness of the ideas. The Times of London called Rigoletto the most uninspired, the barest, and the most destitute of ingenious contrivance. To enter into an analysis would be a loss of time and space.*

The *Gazette Musicale de Paris* wrote: *Rigoletto is the weakest work of Verdi. It lacks melody. This opera has hardly any chance of being kept in the repertoire. Nevertheless, Parisians, who still could not see the play on which it was based, responded enthusiastically when the opera opened in Paris in 1857.*

Other Comments on *Rigoletto*

Verdi's wonderful score brings gusts of really powerful romantic passion on the operatic stage for the first time. Here we have energy and intensity such as we have never heard before. The plot, though corny, is bullet-proof, the tension of the last act terrific, the two great ensembles mind-blowing.

Sir Denis Forman

Rigoletto has been described as a brutal melodrama at worst and a rattling good melodrama at best. Actually, it is a miracle, a masterpiece. From its opening night to the present day, it has thrilled audiences all over the world. Verdi took particular care of the protagonist, not a nobleman but a court jester and buffoon, whose intense and intimate drama is the real connecting thread of the plot. In Rigoletto there is continuity, progress with respect to dramatic structure and a great effort to make the music evoke the jester's deep feelings. The opera is characterised by stupendous solos and duets, a celebrated quartet, excellent ensembles and stirring finales to act I and III. The score effectively depicts the psychology and contrasting emotions of the five protagonists.

Dr. Joseph Fragala

The Librettist: Francesco Maria Piave

Verdi first worked with the librettist Francesco Maria Piave in the 1844 opera *Ermani*, and together they collaborated on ten more operas over the next 18 years: *I due Foscari*, *Attila*, *Macbeth*, *Il corsaro*, *Stiffelio*, *Rigoletto*, *La traviata*, *Simon Boccanegra*, *Aroldo*, and *La forza del destino*.

Piave was not only a librettist, but a journalist and translator. He was resident poet and stage manager at La Fenice in Venice and later at La Scala in Milan. His expertise as a stage manager and tact as a negotiator served Verdi well over the years, although Verdi bullied him mercilessly. During the efforts to have *Rigoletto* approved by the censors, the brunt of which fell to Piave, Verdi wrote to him: *If I were the poet, I would give [this matter] a great deal of attention, all the more so in that you will be largely responsible if it happens (and let's hope to God it doesn't) that this drama is not permitted.*

Nevertheless they were friends as well as collaborators, and after Piave suffered a stroke in 1867, which left him paralyzed and unable to speak, Verdi helped to support his wife and daughter and paid for his funeral when he died nine years later.

The Composer: Giuseppe Verdi

1813 was a fine year for opera lovers as two giants of the operatic world were born: the German Richard Wagner and the Italian Giuseppe Verdi.

Giuseppe Verdi dominated Italian opera for half a century with 28 operas that include some of the best known in the repertoire, among them *Nabucco*, *Macbeth*, *Rigoletto*, *Il Trovatore*, *La Traviata*, *A Masked Ball (Un Ballo in Maschera)*, *Don Carlos*, *Aida*, *Otello*, and *Falstaff*.

Verdi was not only a very popular and successful composer, but an astute businessman and producer, an active and committed farmer, a hero of the Italian nationalist movement, a member of the first Italian Parliament, and a generous philanthropist.

Verdi's operas remain as popular today as when they first appeared and form the core of today's standard repertoire. Many of the tunes from his operas are familiar even to people who know nothing of opera.

Youth

Giuseppe Fortunino Francesco Verdi was born in October 1813 in the small village of Roncole, about 65 miles southeast of Milan in the province of Parma in Italy. At the time, Italy was made up of several small states, most ruled by foreign powers. Parma was occupied by Napoleon's army, and Verdi's original birth certificate is French, with his name registered as Joseph Fortunin François.

The area around Roncole was farming country. Verdi's parents ran a tavern and a grocery store and leased land and houses which they sublet to tenant farmers.

Young Verdi showed an early interest in music and was encouraged by his father, who bought an old spinet piano and sent him to the church organist for lessons. Soon Giuseppe was substituting as organist at the town church.

He was also an altar boy. Once when he was about seven, his attention wandered during Mass, and the priest knocked him down. The child responded by cursing the priest, "May God strike you with lightning." Eight years later, the priest was killed when lightning struck a nearby church, killing four priests, two

laymen, and two dogs. Verdi delighted in retelling this story. Perhaps it shaped his fascination with the power of Monterone's curse in *Rigoletto*, an opera that Verdi originally titled *La Maledizione (The Curse)*.

When Verdi was ten, his father sent him to the nearby city of Busseto for further musical training. He stayed in the home of Antonio Barezzi, a local merchant and music enthusiast and gave singing and piano lessons to Barezzi's daughter Margherita, whom he would later marry. He also studied composition with Ferdinando Provesi, the local organist, choirmaster, teacher at the music school, and leader of the amateur Philharmonic Society orchestra. Verdi became Provesi's protégé and assistant, playing organ, composing, arranging and copying music and conducting rehearsals.

At the age of 18, with financial support from Barezzi, Verdi went to Milan to apply to the Conservatory. Although Milan is now part of Italy, at the time, it was under Austrian occupation, and a passport was needed for travel between Busseto and Milan. Although he was rejected by the Conservatory, Verdi stayed in Milan to study counterpoint with Vincenzo Lavigna, an opera composer who had played for many years at La Scala, Milan's renowned opera house.

In 1836, having returned to Busseto, Verdi married Margherita Barezzi, accepted the position of maestro of the Busseto Philharmonic, and composed his first opera, *Roccester*, which he later renamed *Oberto, conte di San Bonifacio*

The Verdis' daughter Virginia was born in 1837, but died the following year. In 1839 Giuseppe and Margherita moved back to Milan with their little son, Icilio Romano, who died shortly after.

Verdi had tried without success to have *Oberto* performed in either Parma or Milan, but in 1839, thanks to the recommendation of the soprano Giuseppina Strepponi, Bartolomeo Merelli, the impresario at La Scala, finally agreed to present *Oberto*. The opera was successful enough to persuade Merelli to offer Verdi a contract to write more operas.

While Verdi was working on his next opera, a comedy called *Un Giorno di Regno*, his wife died. The deaths of his entire young family within such a short time left him devastated. Although he completed *Un Giorno di Regno*, it was a failure, and Verdi resolved never to compose again.

Early operas

It took two years for Merelli to persuade Verdi to compose another opera. The biblical story of the Israelites' captivity in Babylon eventually captured Verdi's imagination, and in 1842 *Nabucco* made its triumphant premiere with Giuseppina Strepponi in the lead role of Abigaille. Verdi became a celebrity overnight, not least because the Italian audience identified with the Israelites, another people who were subjugated by foreign powers. The opera's Chorus of the Hebrew Slaves, "Va pensiero" was sung in the streets of Milan and became an unofficial Italian national anthem.

Verdi was suddenly an inspirational figure in the Risorgimento, the movement toward a free, united Italy.

He was also now in demand as an opera composer and began what he called his "years as a galley slave," cranking out opera after opera, feeding the insatiable operatic appetites of theatres and audiences throughout Italy and in Paris and London.

Between 1843 and 1850 he composed and often directed productions of 13 new operas, including *Ernani*, *Macbeth*, and *Luisa Miller*. By 1850, Verdi was the leading composer of opera in Italy and one of the most successful in all of Europe. His works, tuneful, highly dramatic, often with political overtones, captivated audiences. They also brought prosperity to Verdi, to his Italian publisher Giovanni Ricordi, (and to succeeding generations of the Ricordi family, including son Tito and grandson Giulio) and to numerous impresarios and agents.

During this time Verdi had kept in touch with Giuseppina Strepponi, the soprano who had recommended Verdi's first opera and starred in his second. By 1846, ill health had forced Strepponi to retire from singing. She and Verdi began working closely together in Paris in 1847, and Strepponi, with her inside knowledge of the theatrical and musical world, became Verdi's devoted and able collaborator. Over the next 50 years, until her death in 1897, she helped him in business and musical matters and handled negotiations and disputes with agents, impresarios, censors, and colleagues.

She also became his mistress. This relationship caused a scandal among Verdi's family and friends, who were appalled by her reputation – she had several illegitimate children – and by the fact that she and Verdi lived openly together for several years before finally marrying in 1859.

The high point of Verdi's "galley years" came with his "big three" – "RigTroVTrav", the three operas that are his most popular. *Rigoletto* premiered in 1851 in Venice; *Il trovatore* was launched in Rome in 1853, followed six weeks later by *La traviata* in Venice. While both *Rigoletto* and *Il trovatore* were immediate hits, *La traviata* flopped at its premiere and achieved success only after Verdi revised it.

Despite Verdi's popularity and the rapidity with which he churned out hit after hit, writing and producing the operas was anything but a smooth process. In particular, Verdi had constant battles with censors.

Each opera was commissioned for a particular opera house, and each libretto had to be approved by the appropriate authorities, who, given Italy's fractured state, varied from city to city, and could include church authorities as well as Austrian and French officials. Opera was a popular and prominent entertainment, and censors were at pains to make sure that operas were morally and politically inoffensive. What would satisfy the censors in one city would not pass in another.

Verdi thrived on stories that the censors saw as seditious, anti-religious, and immoral. To appease them, he often had to make changes. The opening of *Rigoletto* had to be delayed while Verdi and his librettist, Francesco Maria Piave, battled with the censors.

In the case of his 1859 opera *Un ballo in maschera* (*A Masked Ball*), no compromise could be reached with the censors in Naples. The opera's plot was based on the 1789 assassination of the Swedish King Gustavus III in Stockholm. In the face of the censors' adamant refusal to allow the assassination of a king to be shown on stage, Verdi withdrew the opera and offered it to Rome. The papal censor was satisfied once Verdi had changed the setting to 17th-century Boston and transformed the King of Sweden into the Count of Warwick.

Italian Politics

Given the times and Italy's political situation, the inflexibility of the Austrian censors in Naples was understandable. There had been an attempt on the life of Napoleon III in Paris in 1858, and an opera on the assassination of a ruler might give the populace ideas. Revolt was in the air. The Risorgimento, the movement to unite Italy, was in full swing, and war between the nationalists and Austria was imminent.

Verdi himself was a popular figure among the nationalists. Not only did his operas appeal to patriots, but his very name was an acronym for the revolution. The slogan "Viva VERDI" became code for "Vittorio Emanuele, Re D'Italia" (Victor Emmanuel, King of Italy).

Victor Emmanuel was the king of Piedmont and a prime candidate to be leader of a united Italy. Piedmont, which had remained independent of Austria during the 19th century, allied with France and went to war against Austria in 1859, conquering some, but not all the provinces of Italy. Over the next decade, in a series of campaigns, bits and pieces were added on to Italy, but as early as 1861, unification was sufficiently underway that the first Italian parliament was established. Verdi himself was elected to this parliament, and Victor Emmanuel was proclaimed King of Italy. In 1866, when Italian government forces allied with Prussia

against Austria to conquer the last remaining territories under Austrian control, Verdi contributed money and guns for the troops. In 1874, King Victor Emmanuel decreed him a lifetime Senator. Truth be told, Verdi was not a particularly active statesman. He showed up at the Senate to take his oath and worked on getting government subsidies for the theatre.

The Later Operas

During these intensely political times, Verdi was also intensely creative; between 1851 and 1871 he wrote some of his greatest operas, beginning with the “RigTrovTrav” big three, along with *Simon Boccanegra* (1857), *Un ballo in maschera* (1859), *La forza del destino* (1862), and *Don Carlos* (1867), and culminating with the spectacular *Aïda* (1871), the grandest of grand operas, notorious for being the Opera With Elephants.

As part of the celebrations surrounding the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, the Khedive (a Turkish Viceroy who ruled Egypt) Ismail Pasha built a new opera house in Cairo. The inaugural performance in the opera house was Verdi's *Rigoletto*. The Khedive also commissioned Verdi to write an opera with an Egyptian theme specifically for the new Cairo Opera House. This was to be *Aïda*, which premiered spectacularly in 1871 and has dazzled the world ever since.

At the premiere, there were 300 people on stage, and the audience of dignitaries and Egyptophiles included the khedive and his harem. The conductor was Giovanni Bottesini, also a composer and a double bass virtuoso. In his enthusiasm for the opera, Bottesini went beyond the call of duty and financed a menagerie of animals for the Triumphal March in the second act, including 12 elephants, 15 camels, and assorted zebras, giraffes, lions, ostriches, jackals, baboons, and rodents. Only the elephants and camels were trained well enough to perform; the other animals died of neglect, apparently because Bottesini forgot about them.

After the success of *Aïda*, Verdi decided to retire from writing operas. He was already well off, and his fee and royalties for *Aïda* made him quite wealthy. At the age of 58, he was happy to devote himself to his farm in Sant'Agata while occasionally composing or revising and producing some of his earlier works.

Verdi had bought the farm at Sant'Agata in 1848 and moved there with Strepponi in 1851. Over the years it had been a sanctuary and a workplace, not only for composing, but for farming. He remodeled the house and expanded the farm, participating actively in the farm work along with his tenant farmers.

Although Verdi is best known as an opera composer, he did write other music, most notably the monumental *Requiem* of 1874. After the death of the eminent opera composer Gioacchino Rossini in 1868, Verdi had proposed that Italian composers each contribute a section to a *Requiem Mass* in Rossini's honour. This was done, but the complete mass was not performed during Verdi's lifetime. Several years later, in 1873, Alessandro Manzoni, an Italian novelist and poet, died, and Verdi decided to use his “*Libera me*” as the starting point for a *Requiem Mass* honouring Manzoni. Verdi's complete *Requiem* was performed at the cathedral in Milan, on the first anniversary of Manzoni's death.

Some critics charged that the *Requiem* was too operatic and not sacred enough. The German conductor and composer Hans von Bülow called it “Verdi's latest opera, though in ecclesiastical robes.” But composer Johannes Brahms called it a work of genius. Certainly it is a stunningly dramatic, profoundly emotional work; in particular the section called *Dies Irae* (Day of Wrath) captures the horror and terror of Judgement Day.

Verdi's Final Years

Sixteen years after his “retirement”, the 74-year-old Verdi premiered his next opera, *Otello*, based on Shakespeare's play. Verdi had a profound admiration for Shakespeare, and his publisher Giulio Ricordi

and composer-poet Arrigo Boito, with Giuseppina Strepponi's support, were able to persuade Verdi to take on this project. It was followed by another opera inspired by Shakespeare, the comedy *Falstaff* (1893). Both were acclaimed, and many consider them Verdi's finest operas.

Verdi also worked during his so-called retirement on philanthropic projects, founding a hospital and establishing the Casa di Riposo, a home for retired musicians in Milan. Verdi purchased land for the Casa di Riposo in 1889 and began construction of the house in 1896. He saw the Casa di Riposo as a way to provide for musicians less fortunate than himself. In his will, Verdi left the building and grounds and all the royalties from his compositions to the Casa di Riposo, which still exists, serving as a home for singers, dancers, and other musicians, as well as visiting music students.

Giuseppina died in 1897. Verdi then lived at the Grand Hotel in Milan, finding companionship with retired soprano Teresa Stolz, whom he had known for some 30 years. Rumours were that they had long been lovers; Stolz had also performed much of Verdi's music and sang *Aida* in the 1872 Milan premiere.

Verdi suffered a stroke on January 21, 1901 and died six days later. He was buried in Milan at the Casa di Riposo. His funeral was a national event, and thousands lined the streets, singing "Va, pensiero," the famous chorus from *Nabucco*. Among the mourners were such great composers as Rossini, Donizetti, and Puccini.

Verdi's Operas

Opera	Place and Date of First Performance
Oberto, Conte di San Bonifacio	Milan, 17th November 1839
Un Giorno di Regno	Milan, 3rd September 1840
Nabucco	Milan, 9th March 1842
I Lombardi alla Prima Crociata	Milan, 1st February 1843
Ernani	Venice, 9th March 1844
I Due Foscari	Rome, 3rd November 1844
Giovanna d'Arco	Milan, 15th February 1845
Alzira	Naples, 12th August 1845
Attila	Venice, 17th March 1846
Macbeth	Florence, 14th March 1847
I Masnadieri	London, 22nd July 1847
Jérusalem	Paris, 22nd November 1847
Il Corsaro	Trieste, 25th October 1848
La Battaglia di Legnano	Rome, 27th January 1849
Luisa Miller	Naples, 8th December 1849
Stiffelio	Trieste, 16th October 1850
Rigoletto	Venice, 11th March 1851
Il Trovatore	Rome, 19th January 1853
La Traviata	Venice, 6th March 1853
Les Vêpres Siciliennes	Paris, 13th June 1855
Simon Boccanegra	Venice, 12th March 1857
Aroldo	Rimini, 16th August 1857
Un Ballo in Maschera	Rome, 17th February 1859
La Forza del Destino	St. Petersburg, 10th November 1862
Don Carlos	Paris, 11th March 1867
Aïda	Cairo, 24th December 1871
Otello	Milan, 5th February 1887
Falstaff	Milan, 9th February 1893

The Music of RIGOLETTO

... I conceived *Rigoletto* without arias, without finales, as a long string of duets, because this was how I wanted it.

Giuseppe Verdi

Verdi himself called *Rigoletto* "revolutionary" in form and style and considered it his best opera. With *Rigoletto* he departed from the traditions of 18th and 19th century Italian opera and focused on the interaction between characters, creating a continuous dramatic whole rather than a series of story-telling bits interrupted by songs that did more to show off the singer's talents than to advance the drama.

Rather than solo arias, Verdi wrote much of *Rigoletto* as duets, again spotlighting the relations between characters and reinforcing the tight connection between the drama and the music.

This doesn't mean there aren't a few hit songs that can be performed in recital as well as on the opera stage. Gilda's "Caro nome" is a lovely thing, in which she rhapsodizes on the beloved (though fictional) name of the man she has fallen for.

The Duke's "La donna è mobile" is also a recital favourite, an unforgettable tune that is familiar even to people who know little of opera. This flippant little ditty takes on a horrible irony within the opera, as it is the cue to *Rigoletto* that the body he is dragging triumphantly toward the river is not that of the Duke. The Russian composer Igor Stravinsky said that "La donna è mobile" contains *more substance and true invention* than all of Wagner's massive four-opera Ring Cycle.

Verdi knew he had a hit on his hands with this song, so much so that to ensure it wasn't pirated before the opera's premiere, he didn't allow tenor Raffaele Mirate, who played the Duke, to see the song until the dress rehearsal.

The other great masterpiece in the opera is the magnificent quartet, with the Duke, Maddalena, Gilda, and *Rigoletto* expressing their individual emotions of passion, amusement, grief, and rage. Victor Hugo, author of the play on which the opera was based, said of the Quartet, *This is marvellous, simply marvellous! Ah, if I only could in my play make four people talk simultaneously in a way that the public would understand the words and varying sentiments.*

Verdi, himself said: *I never expect to do better than the Quartet.* Many consider it the finest piece of ensemble writing in all of opera.

Over the course of his long career Verdi moved away from the traditional "number opera" (an opera with a lot of individual musical "numbers" such as solos, duets, and trios) to a coherent "through-composed" whole, where the dramatic texture takes precedence over show-stopping numbers. *Rigoletto* is an early step in this process; Verdi's last three operas, *Aida*, *Otello*, and *Falstaff*, are in the more modern through-composed idiom. Richard Wagner, born the same year as Verdi, followed a similar development as a composer. Through-composed operas with their tighter dramatic construction became prevalent in the 20th century in the hands of composers such as Richard Strauss and Benjamin Britten.

Selected Links

All about Verdi: <http://www.r-ds.com/opera/verdiana/>

The Libretto of *Rigoletto*, in English: http://www.impresario.ch/libretto/libverrig_e.htm

The Opera Singer

Operatic singing developed in Europe during the 17th century. The vocal demands are far greater on an opera singer than on any other singer. Opera singers rarely use microphones, and therefore must develop their voices to make a sound that will project and be heard above an orchestra and throughout a large theatre.

After years of practice and study, an opera singer learns to use his or her body as an amplification device. By controlling the muscles of the diaphragm (a muscle beneath the lungs and above the stomach) the singer can regulate the amount of breath used. By tightening the diaphragm, the singer exhales the right amount of air to make the vocal cords vibrate. The speed at which the cords vibrate determines the pitch. As sound passes through the mouth, it resonates in the upper chest cavities and the sinus cavities of the face and head. The shape of the mouth and placement of the tongue near the lips contribute to tone and sound of the words.

Many singers begin their operatic training in university. Opera students study singing, music history, composition and vocal pedagogy (voice teaching). In addition to music classes, they study diction and often study at least one foreign language. After university, singers begin to work in the professional world. Their first roles are usually small parts, but if they continue to train, they may move on to the bigger principal roles.

Professional singers develop a number of roles in their repertoire. Since the principal artists are required to have their parts memorized before rehearsals begin, singers must prepare well in advance of each contract. Singers have voice teachers who help them refine their singing techniques and many will also have an acting coach. Even a well-established singer will have a vocal coach for specific roles.

Each person's vocal tract is constructed differently. The roles a singer performs depend mostly upon his or her vocal range, but within the vocal ranges, there are many colours and weights of voice that further determine which roles he or she can sing safely. The roles a singer performs often change over the years as the singer's voice develops and matures. Vocal colour refers to the richness of the sound, and vocal weight refers to how powerful a voice sounds.

After a role has been studied intensely and the singer is hired to perform, he or she arrives at the opera company for the rehearsals. Time is spent refining the music with the conductor and staging the action with the director. Each director has a different idea of how the character should be played, and each conductor has a different idea of how the character should sound; therefore the singer must modify his or her techniques to reach the desired result.

Physical health is a major priority to a singer. Contrary to popular belief, not all opera singers are overweight. Conventional wisdom used to state that excessive weight gave added volume and richness to the voice; however, in recent years people have discovered that physical fitness can give similar benefits to a voice. In addition, the health benefits of being in shape overshadow any loss of vocal power. Most singers try to avoid such substances as tobacco, alcohol and caffeine.

The Six Basic Vocal Categories

Soprano: The highest female voice, similar to a flute in range and tone colour. Usually plays the heroine in the opera since a high, bright sound can easily suggest youth and innocence.

Mezzo-Soprano: The middle-range female voice, similar to an oboe in range and tone colour. Called an alto in choral arrangements, can play a wide variety of characters including gypsies, mothers, and even the part of a young man (trouser role).

Contralto: The lowest female voice, similar to an English horn in range and tone colour. Usually plays unique roles including fortune-tellers, witches and older women. Not very common.

Tenor: The highest male voice, similar to a trumpet in range, tone colour and acoustical “ring.” Usually plays the hero or the romantic lead in the opera.

Baritone: The middle-range male voice, similar to a French horn in tone colour. Often plays the leader of mischief in comic opera or the villain in tragic opera, sometimes even the hero.

Bass: The lowest male voice, similar to a trombone or bassoon in tone colour. Usually portrays old, wise men, or foolish, comic men.

The vocal parts overlap each other. The notes that are high for a baritone to sing are low for a tenor. The notes that are low for a baritone to sing are high for a bass. For this reason you may see a high range mezzo-soprano singing a soprano role or a low range baritone singing a bass role.

The following terms can be used to describe special characteristics in a vocal range:

Coloratura: a light, bright voice that has the ability to sing many notes quickly, usually with an extended upper range.

Lyric: A light to medium weight voice, often singing beautiful sweeping melodies; for example, Fiordiligi in COSI FAN TUTTE is a role for a lyric soprano.

Dramatic: A dark, heavy and powerful voice, capable of sustained and forceful singing.

Glossary of Opera Terms

Act- a section of the opera that is then divided into scenes.

Aria- “air” in Italian. This is a piece of music written for one singer (soloist), usually with instrumental accompaniment.

Aside- a secret comment by an actor directly to the audience that other characters can’t hear.

Basso buffo (Italian) - a bass singer who specializes in comic characters.

Basso profondo (Italian) - the most serious bass voice.

Baton- short stick that the conductor uses to lead the orchestra.

Bel Canto- Italian phrase meaning “beautiful singing.” A traditional Italian style of singing emphasizing tone, phrasing, coloratura passages, and technique. Also refers to the operas written in this style.

Blocking- directions given to the performers for movement on stage.

Bravo (Italian) - a form of appreciation shouted by audience members at the end of a particularly pleasing performance. Technically, Bravo refers to a male performer, Brava refers to a female performer and Bravi refers to many performers.

Cadenza- a passage of singing, often at the end of an aria, which shows off vocal ability.

Castrato (Italian) - a castrated male prized for his high singing voice.

Chamber Opera- An opera intended for a smaller, more intimate setting than many operas. Usually, a chamber opera is scored for small orchestra (a chamber orchestra), has a small cast, and can be performed in a smaller venue than a large-scale opera. The term chamber opera was coined in the 20th century but has also been applied to small-scale works of the 17th and 18th centuries. Benjamin Britten’s THE RAPE OF LUCRETIA is a chamber opera.

Choreographer- the person who designs the steps of a dance.

Chorus- a group of singers of all vocal ranges, singing together to support the vocal leads.

Classical- the period in music which comes after the Baroque and before the Romantic, roughly from the birth of Mozart to shortly after the death of Beethoven. It represents the greatest standardization in orchestral form and tonality.

Composer- the individual who writes all the music for both voice and instrument.

Comprimario (Italian)- a nineteenth century term referring to secondary or supporting roles such as confidantes, messengers, and matchmakers.

Conductor- the person responsible for the musical interpretation and coordination of the performance. The conductor controls the tempo, the dynamic level and the balance between singers and orchestra. You will see this person standing in the orchestra pit conducting the musicians and the singers.

Countertenor- a male singer with the highest male voice range, generally singing within the female contralto or mezzo soprano range.

Crescendo- a build in the volume or dynamic of the music

Cue- a signal to enter or exit from the stage, to move or to change lighting or scenery; or a signal given by the conductor to the musicians.

Curtain Call- the moment at the end of the performance when all the cast members and the conductor take bows. This can occur in front of the curtain or on the open stage.

Designer- a production can have two or three designers: a lighting designer, a costume designer, a set designer, or someone who is both costume and set designer. The designers work closely with the stage director to give the production a distinctive look.

Diva- literally, “goddess” in Italian. A female opera star. The masculine form is divo.

Dress Rehearsal- the final rehearsal before opening night includes costumes, lights, makeup, etc. Sometimes it is necessary to stop for adjustments, but an attempt is made to make it as much like a regular performance as possible.

Duet- music that is written for two people to sing together.

Encore- a piece that is performed after the last scheduled piece of a concert. An encore is performed when the audience wants to hear more music even though the concert is over.

Ensemble- a part of the opera written for a group of two or more singers. This may or may not include the chorus.

Falsetto- the upper part of a voice in which the vocal cords do not vibrate completely. Usually used by males to imitate a female voice.

Finale- the last musical number of an opera or an act.

Grand Opera- spectacular French opera of the Romantic period, lavishly staged, with a historically-based plot, a huge cast, an unusually large orchestra, and ballet. The term also refers to opera without spoken dialogue.

Helden- German prefix meaning “heroic”. Can also apply to other voices, but usually used in “heldentenor.”

House- the auditorium and front of the theatre excluding the stage and backstage areas.

Interlude- a short piece of instrumental music played between scenes and acts.

Intermission- a break between acts of an opera. The lights come up and the audience is free to move around.

Librettist- the writer of the opera’s text.

Libretto- Italian for “little book.” It is the text or story of the opera.

Lyric- used to describe a light to medium weight voice with an innocent quality, capable of both sustained, forceful singing and delicate effects.

Maestro- means “master” in Italian. Used as a courtesy title for the conductor.

Mark- to sing, but not at full voice. A full-length opera is very hard on a singer’s voice so most performers mark during rehearsals. During the Dress Rehearsal, singers try to sing at full voice for part if not all of the rehearsal.

Motif or Leitmotif- a recurring musical theme that identifies an emotion, person, place or object.

Opera- a dramatic presentation which is set to music. Almost all of it is sung, and the orchestra is an equal partner with the singers. Like a play, an opera is acted on stage with costumes, scenery, makeup, etc. Opera is the plural form of the Latin word opus, which means “work.”

Opera buffa (Italian) - an opera about ordinary people, usually, but not always comic. First developed in the eighteenth century.

Opera seria (Italian) - a serious opera. The usual characters are gods and goddesses, or ancient heroes.

Opera-comique (French) or **Singspiel** (German) - a form of opera which contains spoken dialogue.

Operetta- lighthearted opera with spoken dialogue, such as a musical.

Orchestra- an ensemble comprising string, woodwind, brass, and percussion instruments, and led by a conductor.

Orchestra pit- sunken area in front of the stage where the orchestra sits.

Overture- an orchestral introduction to the opera played before the curtain rises. Usually longer than a prelude; can be played as a separate piece.

Pitch- how high or low a note sounds.

Prelude- a short introduction that leads into an act without pause.

Prima Donna- literally, “first lady” in Italian. The leading woman in an opera. Because of the way some of them behaved in the past, the term often refers to someone who is acting in a superior and demanding fashion. The term for a leading man is **primo uomo**.

Principal- a major singing role or the singer who performs such a role.

Production- the combination of sets, costumes, props, and lights etc.

Props- objects carried or used on stage by the performers.

Proscenium- the front opening of the stage, which frames the action.

Quartet- four singers or the music that is written for four singers. Also quintet, sextet, etc.

Raked Stage- a stage that slants downwards towards the audience.

Recitative- lines of dialogue that are sung, usually with no recognizable melody. A recitative is used to advance the plot.

Rehearsal- a working session in which the singers prepare for public performance.

Score- the written music of an opera or other musical work.

Serenade- a piece of music honouring someone or something, an extension of the traditional performance of a lover beneath the window of his mistress.

Soubrette (French) - pert young female character with a light soprano voice.

Spinto (Italian) - a lyric voice that has the power and incisiveness for dramatic climaxes.

Stage Director- the person in charge of the action on stage. He or she shows the singers, chorus and cast where and when to move and helps them create their characters. The stage director develops a concept for how the entire performance should look and feel. He or she works closely with the stage managers, lighting designer, set designers, costume designer and wig and make-up artists to make his or her vision into reality.

Stage Manager- the person who coordinates and manages elements of the performance.

Supernumeraries (Supers) - performers who appear on stage in costume in non-singing and usually, non-speaking roles.

Supertitles- the English translations of the opera’s language, which are projected above the stage during a performance to help the audience follow the story.

Synopsis- a short summary of the story of the opera.

Tableau- a moment at the end of a scene or act, when all singers on stage freeze in position and remain that way until the curtain closes. It’s as if that moment has been captured in a photograph.

Tempo- speed of the music.

Trill- very quick alternation between two adjacent notes.

Trio- an ensemble of three singers or the music that is written for three singers.

Trouser role-the role of an adolescent boy or young man, written for and sung by a woman, often a mezzo-soprano. Also known as a **pants role**.

Verismo- a realistic style of opera that started in Italy at the end of the 19th century.

Workshop #1 – Exploring Plot and Character

Objectives:

- Students will be able to express their knowledge of character by writing a character sketch.
- Student will be able to express their knowledge of the storyline of RIGOLETTO through verbal and written expression.

Activity #1: The Story

- Have students read a version of RIGOLETTO. You can use the synopsis found in the Study Guide. You can choose to read it aloud to the students or have them read it silently. Stop to discuss.

Activity #2: Sharing with a group

- After viewing the Dress Rehearsal, have the students discuss what they saw. To help focus conversations, students can create a list of qualities that they feel are key to understanding the story and its characters.

Activity #3: Character sketch

- Students will create (on their own or in a group) a character sketch for one of the main characters (for example, Rigoletto, Gilda).
- Have students fill out the “Character Profile” sheet in detail, asking these questions:

What can be assumed about this person?

What is the character’s relationship with the other characters?

Why does the character make the choices he or she does?

- Remind students to include evidence from the opera to support their claim.
- Remind students of the music sung by their character. Do the emotions conveyed through the music fit the character sketches?

Activity #4: Creating a journal from point of view of a character

- Students will pick a point of conflict for the character they have chosen in the last activity and write a journal of those events from the character’s point of view.
- Explain that they are to take on the persona of that character and should refer to the character in the first person. Students are to express only information that their character would know; they may use the character profile for assistance.

Character Profile

Character's Name : _____

Physical Characteristics (style and physical attributes): _____

Psychological Characteristics (mental aspects of character, how does he/she think?)

Emotional Characteristics (is he/she generally cheerful, sad, snobbish, "off-balance" etc.?)

Family: _____

Career/Income (if applicable): _____

Interests and Hobbies: _____

Other interesting facts

Workshop #2 – Writing a Review of RIGOLETTO

Objectives:

- Students will be able to write clear and well-supported expository essays.
- Students will use observation and critical thinking skills based on real-life, real-time experiences.
- Students can submit their writing for publication (school newspaper) or you can send the reviews to Pacific Opera. We would love to hear what the students thought!

Activity #1: Sharing thoughts with the group

Individually students will write, in point form, the answers to the following questions:

What did you like about the opera? What did you dislike?

What did you think about the sets, props and costumes?

Would you have done something differently? Why?

What were you expecting? Did it live up to your expectations?

What did you think of the singers' portrayal of their characters?

Break the students into groups to discuss their feelings and reactions to the production. Encourage the students to go beyond the questions posed.

Activity #2: Outlining your review

Go over the essential aspects of a review including:

a clearly stated purpose

a coherent comparison/contrast organizational pattern

a summary paragraph

capturing the interest of the reader

precise nouns

revision for consistency of ideas

You might give your students a few examples of reviews for fine arts events from the newspaper. Have the students fill out the “Review Outline” worksheet. Once this has been completed, students may write their rough draft.

Activity #3: Peer Conferencing

Students will exchange reviews to critique and edit. Encourage the students to focus on effective coordination of ideas in sentences and the correct use of grammar and punctuation.

Activity #4: Creating the final draft

Have students make the appropriate adjustments to their reviews. You could also have the students type the pieces and organize them into a newspaper.

Review Outline

Purpose (why are you writing this and who is your audience?)

Plot Synopsis (including who sang what role, etc.)

Paragraph #1 (compare and contrast, things you liked or didn't like)

Paragraph #2 (compare and contrast, things you liked or didn't like)

Paragraph #3 (compare and contrast, things you liked or didn't like)

Summary/Closing Paragraph

Teacher's Comments

Your comments and suggestions are greatly appreciated. Please take a few minutes to fill out this questionnaire and return it to the address below. Thank you for your comments and suggestions.

Name: _____ School: _____

Address: _____

Phone Number: _____ Fax: _____ Grade(s) you teach: _____

Email: _____ Subjects: _____

Have you attended other arts events with your students in the past year? Yes No

If yes, what were they? _____

Were you able to use the Teacher's Study Guide in your classroom activities before attending the opera?
Yes No

If not, please elaborate: _____

If so, which sections of the Study Guide did you find most useful?

How appropriate was the information provided in the Study Guide? _____

What would you add/delete?

Did you spend classroom time discussing the performance after your students attended the opera?
 Yes No

Do you have any comments about the performance itself?

Would you like to receive information on our future Student Dress Rehearsals? Yes No

How would you like to receive information? Fax Email Letters Other _____

Further comments and suggestions _____

Please return this form to:

Pacific Opera, 1815 Blanshard Street, Suite 500, Victoria, BC V8T 5A4 Fax: 250.382.4944