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Giuseppe Deligia and Monica De Rosa perform *Rigoletto*. Photo by Giuseppe Tuccillo

The opera that cemented the Italian composer Giuseppe Verdi's position as one of the leading operatic maestros, *Rigoletto*, is coming to Dubai and Abu Dhabi. Presented by the Italian embassy to the UAE and the Italian Industry and Commerce Office, *Rigoletto* marks the start of Italian Culture Week. Here's what two of its stars had to say about the show.

### Once upon a time

Based on Victor Hugo's play *Le Roi s'Amuse*, *Rigoletto* was first performed in 1851 in Venice and is a story promising melodic richness and dramatic power. In a dark fairy tale kingdom, Rigoletto, played by Giuseppe Deligia, is a jester at the court of Mantua and possesses two gifts. The first is his wit, which he wields like a weapon. The second is his beautiful daughter Gilda, played by Monica De Rosa McKay, whom he keeps hidden from the world. But Rigoletto's weakness for viciousness could lead to the destruction of those he holds dear. The story, says McKay, highlights the social tensions and inferior conditions for women in a way that the 18th-century public easily related to. The performance features a total of 10 Italian singers and musicians. Verdi followed *Rigoletto* with two additional masterpieces: // *Trovatore* and *La Traviata*, which are known as the «three pillars» or Verdi's «popular trilogy», she says, for their «courageous, dramatic and musical innovation. Contrasting intense dramatic passion, subsequent betrayal, love, vengeance [...] but above all it is an opera about solitude. In my opinion, Rigoletto experiences an internal severance, a sort of schizophrenic condition», says McKay. «On one side, he suffers the extreme consequences of a corrupt court, and on the other, Gilda suffers from the devouring and egotistical love of her father».

## A man of many facets

One of the main reasons why Verdi's music has stood the test of time is because he is able to effectively characterise individuals, without distinctions of time or countries, believes McKay. «There are no limits to this art», she says. «These characters have found a place in our hearts with their humanity, which is much like ours. It is this humanity which makes these characters people we can relate to even today». Verdi was also more than a composer and artist. He was a family man who held a high cultural status. It is believed at the time of his death in 1901, at least 300,000 people paid him their respects. «The funeral was elaborate and attended by dignitaries from every corner of Europe», says McKay. In his will, however, he had requested a modest service. «Without a doubt this shows what kind of person Verdi was, someone who was and still is able to provoke strong feelings within everyone with his work, and at the same time he was a very humble man, adding greatness to his work during his career», she says.

## Duty and temptation

Gilda is a victim of the perverse power exercised by her father, who unwittingly kills her. «Gilda dies twice, killed by love and egoism», says McKay. «Her solitude is a result of her being victimised twice. She is the victim of a swindle that makes her - as young and as in love as she is - an offended and hurt woman». She is a character who goes beyond the angelic and childlike connotations; a girl who fluctuates between duty and temptation, McKay says. «I always look to coincide my emotional experiences with my interpretation of a character, in order to enhance my performance with modesty and serenity», she says.

## The greatest

According to Deligia, the composer once said Rigoletto was «perhaps the greatest drama of modern times, he [Rigoletto] is a man whose harsh life is warmed only by the unconditional love of his daughter - a young woman eventually destroyed as an inadvertent result of Rigoletto's own anger and bitterness», says Deligia. It is easy to wonder, he says, whether actual events in the lives of great composers are directly reflected in their music. In the case of Verdi, he believes this to be a reality. Just as he was on the verge of a solid career, Verdi experienced great tragedy. «Verdi had endured the death of his young son. By the spring of 1840, he had also lost both his wife and his second child, an infant daughter. Later that year, his next opera was a flop. Verdi's personal life and career were in tatters and he considered giving up composing altogether», says Deligia. Yet he made a successful comeback with his third opera, Nabucco. As a singer, he says, it is important to understand the intentions of the composer and the emotions he felt at the time of composition. «We know that Verdi was suffering for the loss of his family along with his career problems, so we can only imagine what he must have felt», he says. «To interpret such a role, it is imperative to completely make it real in your mind, marrying the stagecraft and singing at the same time». The audience will then relate to the type of love shared among family and the difficulty of loss.