

# Giuseppe Verdi

## La Donna è Mobile



Ciao! This month **Bridget Mermikides** travels to Italy (metaphorically) where she arranges and transcribes a memorable piece from Verdi's legendary opera *Rigoletto*.

### ABILITY RATING

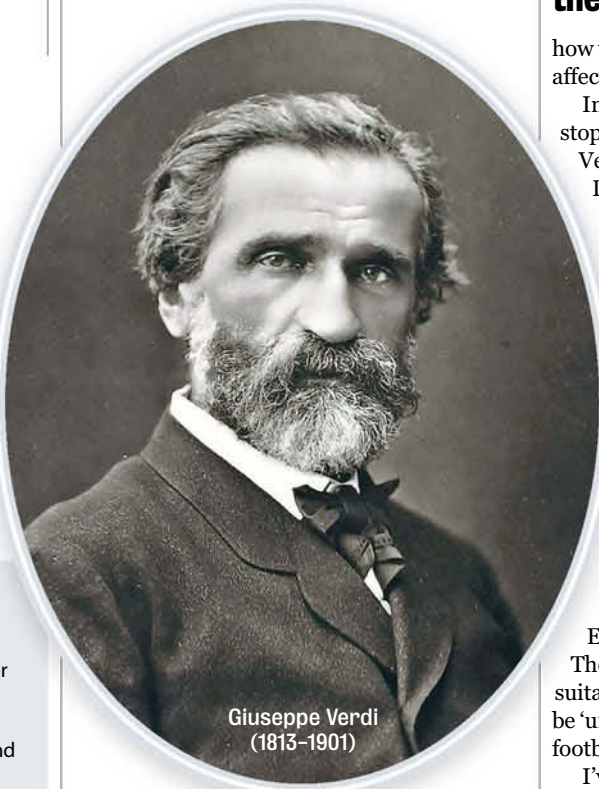
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INFO	WILL IMPROVE YOUR
<b>KEY:</b> A	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Melody and accompaniment
<b>TEMPO:</b> 123 bpm	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Operatic repertoire
<b>CD:</b> TRACKS 36-37	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Combining stroke types

THIS MONTH WE are tackling a popular piece from the repertoire of one of the absolute masters of opera, the Italian composer Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901). Among many other vocal, instrumental and sacred works, Verdi composed a staggering 30 operas through the mid to late 19th century, which are to this day widely loved and performed. Despite being – compared to his composer peers – relatively unschooled, Verdi had an incredible knack for melody and for capturing the essence of a mood or character, composing many of the iconic themes of the operatic repertoire which still

resonate in popular culture and influence contemporary film scoring.

Verdi's classic opera *Rigoletto*, completed in 1851, which tells the tragic tale of love, infidelity and ultimate sacrifice, is a



Giuseppe Verdi  
(1813-1901)

### TECHNIQUE FOCUS

#### Posture

When playing classical guitar, posture is super important in order for both hands to work efficiently. The traditional method is to sit up straight on the front edge of an upright chair and raise the left knee (right-handed players) by using a footstool. The guitar sits on the left thigh and the head of the guitar tilts upwards. For long hours of playing, many people prefer to have both feet on the floor keeping the pelvis level and good alternatives to the footstool are the Dynarette guitar cushion. The Gitano guitar rest and the ErgoPlay guitar support.


masterpiece of the Italian operatic repertoire. Here, I've arranged for solo guitar a melody from the beginning of the opera's third act (actually a specific type of song known as a *canzone*) sung by the selfish and philandering Duke of Mantua. The lyrics of this *canzone* *La Donna è Mobile* (The Lady Is Fickle) speak of

“The opera's producers sensed how popular the tune would become, so rehearsed the scene in total secrecy.”

how women are flighty, and how their affections wander like a “feather in the wind”.

In this short melody, with its capricious stops and starts and unresolved harmonies, Verdi manages to perfectly capture the Duke's practiced seduction technique and the inherent irony of the lyrical content (the Duke himself is the “inconsistent” one) in an incredibly catchy tune. Verdi himself, and the opera's producers, sensed how popular the melody would become, rehearsing this particular scene in complete secrecy before the first performance.

Their suspicions have been proved correct. *La Donna è Mobile* is an ever popular showcase piece for the male tenor, and the melody has been used countless times in films (for example *The Entertainer* and *Quartet*), TV shows including *Futurama* and *My Name Is Earl* and even video games such as *Grand Theft Auto 3*. The melody is even used (with suitably adapted lyrics – perhaps that should be ‘unsuitably’ adapted lyrics) in several football chants.

I've transposed the tune from its original key of B major down a tone to A major and this works well on the guitar. I recommend using the tab captions to secure the technical challenges, particularly regarding the use of rest and free strokes. However once the techniques are in place, aim to perform this with the mischievous and romantic character that Giuseppe Verdi intended. 



**TRACK RECORD** Pavarotti is undoubtedly the best known performer of this piece, so get the three-CD set *Pavarotti Sings Verdi* (Decca, 2013) for this and other masterpieces sung by the legendary tenor. However, opera critics also cite the classic recordings by Enrico Caruso: *The Voice & The Legend* (Hoogan Records, 2013) and Jussi Björling: *Jussi At Grona Lung* (Bluebell, 2012) as exemplary.

## PLAYING TIPS

## CD TRACK 37

**[General]** To make the melody sound crisp and rhythmic try the following technical tips. The first two bars are easy and I have indicated the fingering that I use. In bar 3 I play the first two melody notes using rest stroke, so that after the D note the second finger is resting on the second string so it's ready to pluck the G in the next chord without re-adjusting the finger. The aim is to make the rest-stroke single note, and the following free-stroke chord into one movement for the plucking hand. It's a very neat move when mastered properly and occurs many times throughout the piece.

In bar 5 there is a little jump onto the second beat using a half-barre A major chord – the secret to a good shift here is to create the shape of the chord above the strings, before moving it very quickly into place at the last moment. In bar 20 a 1st fret full barre is needed and a 2nd fret full barre comes along in bar 21. The trickiest place is bar 28, where we go from the triplet to the second chord; the first finger really has to move fast and stretch back slightly for the bass note of E. It's always worth breaking things down, so practise this slowly at first to get the movement accurate.

**A**

$\text{♩} = 123$

Measures 1-4 of the piece. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#), and a 3/4 time signature. The tempo is marked as 123. The guitar part is shown on a six-string staff with fret numbers indicated below the notes. Measure 1 starts with a pickup of the A major chord (A, C#, E) and continues with a melody of D, E, F#, G, A. Measure 2 continues the melody with B, C, D, E, F#. Measure 3 shows a rest stroke on the D note followed by a free-stroke chord. Measure 4 continues the melody with G, A, B, C, D.

**A/E**

Measures 5-8 of the piece. Measure 5 starts with a half-barre A major chord (A, C#, E) and continues with a melody of D, E, F#, G, A. Measure 6 continues the melody with B, C, D, E, F#. Measure 7 shows a jump to the second beat using a half-barre A major chord. Measure 8 continues the melody with G, A, B, C, D.

**A**

Measures 9-12 of the piece. Measure 9 starts with a pickup of the A major chord (A, C#, E) and continues with a melody of D, E, F#, G, A. Measure 10 continues the melody with B, C, D, E, F#. Measure 11 shows a jump to the second beat using a half-barre A major chord. Measure 12 continues the melody with G, A, B, C, D.

13

A/E E

17

A B7/D# E C#E#

21

F#m E7/G# A6 Bm/D 3 A/E E7

Chords: A, E, A, Bm/D, A/E, E

Staff 1 (Treble Clef):

Staff 2 (Bass Clef):

25

Chords: A, E7, A

Staff 1 (Treble Clef):

Staff 2 (Bass Clef):

29

Chords: E7, A/C#, Bm/D, E7, A

Staff 1 (Treble Clef):

Staff 2 (Bass Clef):

32