

This week's free opera streams from the Met Opera

 By [Daniel Derksen](#)

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This weekend of free opera streams from the Met Opera celebrates Verdi with performances of his most beloved works. Unquestionably one of the giants of opera, Giuseppe Verdi contributed more masterpieces to the standard repertory of the world's opera houses than any other composer. At the Met alone, his works have graced the stage some 5,700 times, the most in company history.

Primarily, of course, his pride of place in the operatic pantheon stems from the brilliance and beauty of his music. His scores overflow with unforgettable arias that both elicit a powerful emotional response and provide a perfect showcase for virtuosic voices and blend seamlessly together with soaring duets, masterfully intricate ensemble numbers, and pulse-quickenning orchestral and choral writing.

Verdi can always be counted on for passion, intrigue, and betrayal - and to make glorious music of it all. *Un Ballo in Maschera* (28 August), concerning a plot to murder King Gustavo III of Sweden, who also happens to be in love with his best friend and counsellor's wife, is no exception. With a principal cast featuring a powerful and dignified leading lady, a character role for soprano as young man, an otherworldly mezzo-soprano fortune-teller, a heroic tenor, and a suave and conflicted baritone, it's Italian opera at its finest. David Alden's elegant 2012 production moves Verdi's thrilling drama to a timeless setting inspired by film noir. Marcelo Álvarez is Gustavo III, the Swedish king in love with Amelia (Sondra Radvanovsky), the wife of his best friend and counsellor, Count Anckarström (Dmitri Hvorostovsky). When Anckarström joins a conspiracy to murder the king, tragedy ensues. Stephanie Blythe is the fortune-teller Madame Ulrica Arvidsson and Kathleen Kim sings the page, Oscar. Met Principal Conductor Fabio Luisi is on the podium.

Few operatic figures are as beloved as Violetta, the dignified, selfless and sickly heroine of Verdi's classic tragedy *La Traviata* (29 August). An elegant courtesan with a heart of gold, she chooses true love over the amusements and riches of her glamorous Parisian life, then sacrifices everything for the sake of a young man she's never even met. All of this - the glitter of her earlier wealth, the heat of her passion with the ardent young Alfredo, the pain of their separation, and her tragic end - lands with devastating weight thanks to Verdi, whose score stands as one of music's greatest depictions of love and loss. As Violetta, the consumptive heroine fighting to find true happiness, soprano Diana Damrau delivers yet another compelling portrayal on the Met stage. Tenor Juan Diego Flórez sings his first Verdi role with the company, as Violetta's ardent yet impetuous lover, Alfredo, and baritone Quinn Kelsey rounds out the principal cast as Giorgio Germont, Alfredo's implacable father.

With its inexhaustible bounty of arias, duets, quartets, and even a prison riot, the historical masterwork *Don Carlo* (30 August) dramatises the heir-apparent of King Philip II of Spain and shows the composer at his thrilling, imaginative best. The six singers at the helm must be steely and intrepid, capable of delivering high notes, steroidal emotions and the narrative twists and turns of this titanic score. Director Nicholas Hytner, who made his Met debut with this production, brings out all the passionate intensity that is at the heart of Verdi's monumental drama. Don Carlo (Roberto Alagna), the Spanish crown prince, and Elizabeth of Valois (Marina Poplavskaya), daughter of the King of France, fall in love, only to be torn apart by international politics when Carlo's father, King Philip II (Ferruccio Furlanetto), decides to marry Elizabeth himself. Carlo's friend, Rodrigo (Simon Keenlyside), plays a dangerous game, balancing his political aims with the trust of his monarch. And when the beautiful Princess Eboli (Anna Smirnova) discovers her love for Don Carlo is not returned, her revenge terribly backfires. Yannick Nézet-Séguin conducts the Met orchestra and chorus.

Verdi finished his sublime final opera *Falstaff* (31 August) when he was almost 80 years old, capping a fruitful career with a bawdy adaptation of scenes from Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Henry IV*. His classic operatic farce charts a knight's gold-digging efforts to seduce two married women, leading to belly-flopping failure on both counts. The score, meanwhile, is a complete tour de force, demonstrating the old master's still-youthful panache, as well as his profound insight into human nature. Music Director James Levine conducts his first new Met production after a two-year absence: Robert Carsen's hit staging of Verdi's great human comedy. Ambrogio Maestri is an ideal Falstaff, leading an extraordinary ensemble cast of veteran and up-and-coming Met stars, including Angela Meade (Alice), Stephanie Blythe (Mistress Quickly), Franco Vasallo (Ford), and Jennifer Johnson Cano (Meg). Lisette Oropesa and Paolo Fanale are the young lovers, Nannetta and Fenton.

[Read more](#) about the Met Opera streamings and full synopsis.

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