



La battaglia di Legnano

POETRY BY SALVADORE CAMMARANO

Sung in Italian

New production created by Sarasota Opera

Giuseppe Verdi

A Lyric Tragedy in Four Acts

Cast

CONDUCTOR

Victor DeRenzi

STAGE DIRECTOR

Martha Collins

SCENIC DESIGNER

Jeffrey W. Dean

COSTUME DESIGNER

Howard Tsvi Kaplan

LIGHTING DESIGNER

Ken Yunker

HAIR & MAKE-UP DESIGNER

Joanne Middleton Weaver

CHORUS MASTER

Roger L. Bingaman

ASSISTANT CONDUCTORS

John F. Spencer IV

Kevin Miller

SURTITLE SUPPLIER

Words for Music

SURTITLE TRANSLATOR

Victor DeRenzi

FEDERICO BARBAROSSA	Young Bok Kim
THE FIRST CONSUL OF MILAN	Eric Lindsey*
THE SECOND CONSUL OF MILAN	William Roberts*
THE PODESTÀ OF COMO	Costas Tsourakis*
ROLANDO, leader of the Milanese troops	Todd Thomas
LIDA, his wife	Jennifer Black
ARRIGO, a Veronese warrior	Martín Nusspaumer
MARCOVALDO, a German prisoner	Harold Wilson
IMELDA, Lida's handmaid	Tara Curtis*
A HERALD	Lucas Levy**

* Studio Artist

**Apprentice Artist

Sarasota Opera Orchestra

Chorus: Sarasota Opera Apprentice & Studio Artists





Feb. 27

Mar. 3, 6m, 8, 12m, 16, 18

ACT I

"He Is Alive"

Scene I

Part of rebuilt Milan, near the city walls

The citizens of Milan greet the soldiers of the Lombard League who are about to fight the German troops led by Federico Barbarossa. A Veronese warrior, Arrigo, thinks about his injury in battle and the woman whom he loves. Rolando, a leader of the Milanese troops, arrives and recognizes his close friend Arrigo whom he thought dead. With the citizens of the city and the troops, they swear to defend Milan.

Scene II

A shady spot amid trees near the water-filled moat that surrounds the city walls

Lida, Rolando's wife, wishes for death and regrets that as a mother she must live for her son's sake. Marcovaldo, a German prisoner who is given freedom of movement, desires Lida but she spurns him. When her handmaiden tells Lida that her husband approaches with Arrigo, Marcovaldo observes that she betrays her true amorous feelings for the Veronese warrior. After welcoming Arrigo to his home, Rolando quickly leaves when a messenger announces that Barbarossa is again gathering his troops.

Alone with Lida, Arrigo condemns her for breaking their betrothal vow. She explains she thought him dead and that her father arranged the marriage to Rolando. Lida pleads for Arrigo to kill her for her betrayal, but he repulses her.

ACT II

"Barbarossa"

A magnificent room in the town hall of Como

The magistrates of Como discuss Milan's taking up arms against Barbarossa. Rolando and Arrigo arrive announcing that Barbarossa is gathering his soldiers and that the Italians must come together in the defense of their common native land. They speak harshly to the people of Como about their lack of support for the cause. Suddenly Federico Barbarossa appears and predicts the destruction of Italy.

INTERMISSION

ACT III

"Infamy"

Scene I

The subterranean vaults in the basilica of St. Ambrogio in Milan

Arrigo joins the Company of Death, taking their vow to fight to victory or to die in the upcoming battle of Legnano.

Scene II

Apartments in Rolando's castle

Having written a letter to Arrigo, Lida entrusts it to her handmaiden who promises to have it delivered. Because he is soon going to battle, Rolando visits his wife and son. He instructs Lida that in the event he is killed, she is to teach the boy virtue, love of God, and the love of his homeland.

After Lida and her son leave, Arrigo enters. Rolando confesses he is filled with terror at the thought of death now that he is a husband and father. He makes Arrigo swear he will care for his family.

Left alone, Rolando is approached by Marcovaldo. Seeking revenge for Lida's rejection of him, the German prisoner has intercepted her letter to Arrigo. Rolando reads it and vows to punish his wife and friend.

Scene III

A room high up in the tower

Lida confesses to Arrigo that she loves him but because of their circumstances they must not act on their feelings. They are interrupted by Rolando. He rejects his wife and threatens Arrigo with death but decides to bring dishonor to Arrigo by locking him in the room so he is unable to go to battle. Prevented from joining his comrades, Arrigo is horrified that his absence from the fight will brand him a coward. Desperate, he hurls himself from the room's high balcony.

ACT IV

"To Die For The Homeland"

A square in Milan

News of the Italians' victory at the battle of Legnano spreads throughout the city. Arrigo is proclaimed a hero. Mortally wounded, Arrigo is escorted in. Rolando is reconciled to both his wife and friend before Arrigo dies.

World Premiere: **TEATRO ARGENTINA, ROME, ITALY, JANUARY 27, 1849**

Among Verdi's "early" operas, the sixteen that preceded *Rigoletto*, the fourteenth, *La battaglia di Legnano*, is of exceptional interest for reasons both musical and historical.

Verdi composed it in Paris, starting in July of 1848, when he was much in the city, both to associate with a lady whom he later married and also to recompose his fourth opera, *I Lombardi alla prima crociata*, in grander style for the Paris Opera, *Jérusalem*. Paris then was the musical capital of Europe, with the best orchestras, singers, composers, and in stagecraft, the grandest operas. Verdi listened, saw, and learned. He was not a child genius, like Mozart, but a talent who matured.

But if musically the opera marks a step forward in skill, that step is still one of a process, whereas historically among Verdi's "early" operas *La battaglia* is unique. Its opening words, sung with the orchestra silent, and later heard frequently, are "Viva Italia!" — a political cry that in 1847-48 was banned in all the Italian states. In 1848 in the eight Italian-speaking states, three kingdoms, four duchies, and one papal State, the people rebelled, some (including Verdi) hoping to establish a united Italian republic, some a united kingdom under the House of Savoy, and a few a federation of states with the Pope as president. But whichever the plan, the first necessity was to drive the Austrian armies of the Hapsburg dukes and viceroys out of Milan, Venice, Tuscany, Modena, and Lucca, and prevent the Pope from calling in either France or Austria to maintain papal independence. For a time republics were established, chiefly in Milan, Venice, Florence, and at Rome, where, after the Pope fled in November 1848, republicans for seven months controlled the city, and there was no censorship. In the second of these months, on 27 January 1849, at the Teatro Argentina, Verdi and his librettist, Salvatore Cammarano presented *La battaglia di Legnano*.

The opera tells of a German invasion of Lombardy, in northern Italy, in the twelfth century. The Germans, led by the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick I, "Barbarossa," sought to put down a revolt in the Po valley led chiefly by Milan and Verona united briefly as the Lombard League. The towns were protesting Frederick's efforts to assert imperial authority and appoint ruling officials. And for once, the towns of Lombardy, notorious for their municipal rivalries, were victorious at a battle fought at Legnano, slightly northwest of Milan.

The story had obvious relevance to events in 1848-49 when the Italian cities and their republican majorities were seeking to join forces against Austrian armies trying to reinstate ousted Hapsburg officials. But Verdi and Cammarano, didn't simply tell a story of times past, they spun it anachronistically toward contemporary aims. In the opera the people of Milan and Verona do not shout "Viva Milano," and "Viva Verona," as they most certainly did in 1176, but "Viva Italia." And the propaganda throughout is laid on thick. In the final act a few words, over a memorable tune, sum the opera's message: "Chi muore per



Giuseppe Verdi

la patria, alma si rea non ha!" "Who dies for his country cannot have a guilty soul."

The excitement of the premiere with Verdi overseeing the production, began the night before when at the dress rehearsal the public forced open the theatre doors and filled every seat. The premiere was a *furor* of "Viva Italia!" and the opera was repeated as quickly as the singers voices allowed, and often with the short, last act repeated entire. Before the year was out, however, the French had restored the Pope to Rome, and the Austrians had retaken all the northern cities, and so the "patriotic" opera was banned everywhere until 1859-60 when the Italian people successfully created the Kingdom of Italy under the House of Savoy. Thereafter in Italy the opera had a spotty record, revived often in times of patriotic fervor, but otherwise superseded by Verdi's later works, such as *Rigoletto*, *Il trovatore*, *La traviata*, and *Aida*.

The U. S. premiere of *La battaglia di Legnano* came only in 1976, and at first the opera had few revivals. One likely reason is that for most Americans its title has no connotation. A battle? At Legnano? Something about Italian revolts in 1176, or even in 1849.

Sarasota Opera's pairing it with *Aida* in the company's final season of its twenty-eight-year Verdi Cycle is a happy notion, for audiences thus can compare a Verdi "march" and "grand" opera in his "early" and "late" styles. Spectacle and intensity of feeling are common to both. And, early or late: "Viva Verdi!"

George Martin has published four books on Verdi, of which the most recent is "Verdi in America, Oberto through Rigoletto" (2011). It relates the varying reception in the United States of Verdi's "early" operas, including *La battaglia di Legnano*, and recounts their subsequent record, often with comments on the reasons therefor.