

WICHITA GRAND OPERA'S NEW PRODUCTION OF VERDI'S RIGOLETTO, SEPTEMBER 3 AT CENTURY II

(WICHITA, August 2, 2016) – On **September 3rd**, Wichita Grand Opera brings one of the top ten most popular operas, **Verdi's Rigoletto** to life at **7 pm** in Century II's Concert Hall. The story of unbridled lust, misunderstanding, and revenge has captured the attention of the world since its premiere.

To make this new production of *Rigoletto* different than anything seen previously in Wichita, renowned American designer/director **Roberto Stivanello** is making his debut with the WGO with a different take on the traditional approach. Using the simplicity and aesthetics of an Italian fashion designer with a studio in Milan, Stivanello's powerful design statements on stage have garnered him praise on *ABC World News Tonight with Peter Jennings*. His productions have also been seen on PBS.

While *Rigoletto* is considered a staple in opera today, it was nearly banned before making it to the stage. The source material, Victor Hugo's play *Le Roi s'amuse*, about an immoral, womanizing French King, was performed only once before being banned. But Verdi, having a keen nose for drama, knew Hugo's play would become a hit opera. Hugo's best-known works, *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame* and *Les Misérables* are no strangers to stage and screen adaptations. In the case of *Rigoletto*, Verdi focused on the powerful story, making several twists to the plot and changing the setting from France to Mantua, Italy to appease the censors, and finally his *Rigoletto* made it to the stage.

Convinced that *Rigoletto* would be his greatest success, Verdi kept tight reins on the music, only providing the singers mere hours to learn the catchy aria "La donna è mobile." Verdi's intuition was correct, as gondoliers could be heard singing the beautiful aria all over Venice the morning following its premiere.

Wichita Grand Opera has once again brought together a star powered international cast and crew for this iconic production. Baritone **Michael Nansel** will sing the title role of *Rigoletto*. Having been groomed by the Wichita Grand Opera over the last six years, *Rigoletto* will be the pinnacle of Mr. Nansel's career to date, after singing such roles as Iago (*Otello*), Count di Luna (*Il Trovatore*) and Rodrigo (*Don Carlo*) to critical acclaim, and performing under the baton of such conductors as **Plácido Domingo**, **Steven Mercurio**, **Marin Alsop**, and **Martin Mázik**.

Making his WGO debut in the role of the Duke of Mantua is Italian-American tenor **Leonardo Capalbo**, whose striking good looks and silky vocal tones have led him to starring appearances at **Lyric Opera of Chicago**, **Berlin Staatsoper**, and **Royal Opera Covent Garden**, to name but a few.

Joining Nansel and Capalbo on stage will be a cast of great opera singers. Metropolitan Opera bass and opera superstar **Samuel Ramey** will be singing the pivotal role of Count Monterone. Ramey, three-time Grammy award winner and the most-recorded bass in history, is widely acclaimed as "a national treasure" by the *Los Angeles Times*, in addition to having performed in every major opera house across the globe.

Metropolitan Opera bass **William Powers**, well known for his portrayals of the "villains" of opera, including critical acclaim as King Phillip in last season's *Don Carlo*, returns to sing the role of another villain, the assassin Sparafucile.

Following rave reviews as Liu in last season's *Turandot* and her debut as Gilda in New York, Korean soprano **Yunnie Park** returns to the WGO to reprise the role of Gilda, *Rigoletto's* daughter. Reviews in New York City have exclaimed her performance of Gilda's iconic aria "Caro nome" was performed with "such feeling that she made us remember our first delirious crush."

American mezzo soprano **Sarah Heltzel** returns to sing the role of Maddalena, Sparafucile's sister, following her highly successful WGO debut in the role of Eboli in last season's *Don Carlo*. The *Houston Chronicle* raved "Heltzel set the stage ablaze with her vocal and dramatic pyrotechnics," as Azucena in *Il Trovatore*, while the *New York Times* called her "vocally striking and visually appealing," as Desideria in *The Saint of Bleeker Street*. WGO's Principal Guest Conductor **Martin Mázik**, one of the busiest conductors of his generation, on the podium for more than 200 performances across Europe and the U.S. annually, will lead WGO's cast, chorus, and orchestra in this new production.

Sung in Italian, WGO's new production of *Rigoletto* will have projected English supertitles above the stage. Regular Priced tickets are \$85, \$58, or \$37 with senior, student, group, and corporate discounts available. Hotel and Opera packages are also available with the Ambassador Hotel for \$199, based on double occupancy. In addition, WGO's popular **Day at the Opera** program is available for student groups, sponsored by a major grant from the **Kansas Health Foundation**. For more information, call the **WGO Box Office** at **(316) 262-8054**.

Tickets for *Rigoletto* or *La Bohème* can be purchased in person at **Century II Performing Arts Center**, by phone at the **WGO Box Office** at **(316) 262-8054**, and online at www.SelectaSeat.com.

For more information, visit www.WichitaGrandOpera.org.

This production is sponsored in part by:

**The Dwane & Velma Wallace Charitable Foundation,
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A curse takes its final revenge on Rigoletto in WGO's new production, starring Michael Nansel.