

Warm up you winter blues with sizzling opera streamings from the Met in New York

 By [Daniel Dercksen](#)

21 Aug 2020

The free opera streamings in local time can be watched from midnight to midnight the following day.

Verdi can always be counted on for passion, intrigue and betrayal - and to make glorious music of it all. *Un Ballo in Maschera* (21 August), concerning a plot to murder King Gustavo III of Sweden, who also happens to be in love with his best friend and counselor'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. This atmospheric production by Piero Faggioni, conducted by James Levine, captures all the brooding power and elegance of Verdi's drama of love and politics. Luciano Pavarotti stars as Riccardo, the unlucky ruler in love with his best friend's wife, Amelia (Aprile Millo). Leo Nucci is the husband torn between loyalty and his thirst for revenge, and Florence Quivar sings Ulrica, the fortune teller who prophesies the tragic ending.

There's also a streaming of David Alden's elegant 2012 production of *Un Ballo in Maschera* (28 August) that 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 counselor, 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.

The title ruler of Verdi's *Simon Boccanegra* (22 August) is one of the repertory's most compelling characters, a 14th century Doge of Genoa, beset on all sides, juggling political adversaries bent on murder with his love for his long-lost daughter Amelia. In addition to Boccanegra's searing internal conflict between public duty and private grief, the story offers cloak-and-dagger intrigue, passionate young love and noble sacrifice - set to an unfailingly dramatic, enveloping score that only Verdi could have created. When this sumptuous production by Giancarlo del Monaco opened in 1995, legendary tenor Plácido Domingo gave a riveting performance as the fiery revolutionary Gabriele Adorno, a tenor part. In the 2010 revival, he made history by taking on the baritone title role, one of Verdi's most fascinating characters and thrilling audiences with his multifaceted and gripping portrayal. Boccanegra is beset on all sides, juggling political adversaries bent on murder with his love for his long-lost daughter Amelia (Adrienne Pieczonka). James Levine's conducting brings out all the color and surging emotion of Verdi's magnificent score.

Il Barbiere di Siviglia (23 August) one of opera's most beloved comedies, Rossini's irreverent farce about a feisty young noblewoman with a mind of her own has delighted opera goers for more than two centuries. Its setting - rustic Seville - and zany storyline call for a cast of ace performers with dazzling stage presence, sizzling comic timing and vocal agility to spare, making this the perfect playground for virtuoso singers as well as an ideal viewing experience for audiences of all ages. With its hilarious hijinks and vocal virtuosity, Rossini's madcap comedy always proves a delightful treat. For this 1988 telecast, the Met assembled a cast capable of tackling both the musical and physical challenges of this bel canto farce, seen here in a whimsical production by John Cox. From the moment he takes the stage with Figaro's iconic aria "Largo al factotum", Leo Nucci combines winning charm with a robust baritone. Soprano Kathleen Battle tosses off one glittering vocal display after another as the feisty Rosina, while tenor Rowell Blake makes for an ardent Count Almaviva. Ralf Weikert conducts the lively performance, which also includes the comic duo of Enzo Dara as Dr Bartolo and Ferruccio Furlanetto as Don Basilio.

Originally conceived as a small-scale vocal entertainment for children, Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel* (24 August) resonates with audiences of all ages and has become one of the most successful fairy-tale operas ever created. Humperdinck's adaptation of the Brothers Grimm acknowledges the darker features present in the source material yet presents them within a frame of grace and humor. The composer was a protégé of Richard Wagner, and the score is flavored with the sophisticated musical lessons that he learned from his idol while maintaining a charm and a light touch that were entirely Humperdinck's own - resulting in a work that has garnered approval from such diverse and demanding critics as children and musicologists. Director Nathaniel Merrill and designer Robert O'Hearn work operatic magic in this brilliant production of Humperdinck's cherished favorite. What Christmas is complete without this sumptuous musical retelling of the classic fairy tale, replete with guardian angels, a sandman, dew fairy and, of course, a witch and her enticing gingerbread house. This performance, sung in English, features Frederica von Stade as the loveable but mischievous Hansel and Judith

Blegen as his charming sister Gretel. Rosalind Elias is the Evil Witch.

Michael Mayer's acclaimed production of *Rigoletto* (25 August), sets the action of Verdi's masterpiece in 1960 Las Vegas - a neon-lit world ruled by money and ruthless, powerful men. Piotr Beczala is the Duke, a popular entertainer and casino owner who will stop at nothing to get what he wants. Željko Lučić sings Rigoletto, his sidekick and comedian, and Diana Damrau is Rigoletto's innocent daughter, Gilda. When she is seduced by the Duke, Rigoletto sets out on a tragic course of murderous revenge. Štefan Kocán is the assassin Sparafucile and Michele Mariotti conducts.

An extraordinary cast came together for Verdi's *Il Trovatore* (26 August). Anna Netrebko is Leonora, the young noblewoman at the center of the story, who is in love with the troubadour of the title - tenor Yonghoon Lee - but also pursued by Count di Luna, sung by the great Dmitri Hvorostovsky. Dolora Zajick completes the quartet of principals in her signature role of Azucena, the mysterious Gypsy woman who sets the dramatic events in motion. Marco Armiliato conducts David McVicar's Goya-inspired production.

Verdi's *Luisa Miller* (27 August) incorporates the youthful vitality that had made Verdi an international sensation while also looking forward to the dramaturgical discipline and sophistication of those later works. In this Live in HD performance, soprano Sonya Yoncheva takes on the riveting title role, capping off a season in which she starred in three cinema transmissions. As her father, Miller, the legendary Plácido Domingo adds another baritone role to his extensive repertoire. Tenor Piotr Beczala as Rodolfo, Alexander Vinogradov as Count Walter and Dmitry Belosselskiy as Wurm round out the

illustrious cast, and Bertrand de Billy conducts.

[Read more](#) about the live opera streamings and the full synopsis of each opera.

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Daniel Dercksen has been a contributor for Lifestyle since 2012. As the driving force behind the successful independent training initiative The Writing Studio and a published film and theatre journalist of 40 years, teaching workshops in creative writing, playwriting and screenwriting throughout South Africa and internationally the past 22 years. Visit www.writingstudio.co.za

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