

Operaphoria™

METROPOLITAN OPERA LIVE IN HD

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Angel Blue
sings Magda

La Rondine, by Puccini

The curtain comes up on a sparkling set, realistically reproducing a Paris salon in the 1920s. This salon is not like the comfortably messy Gertrude Stein salon with meaningful conversations, but is an immaculate set where kept women help their wealthy old male customers live out fantasies away from their wives. This is the salon of Magda de Civry, who sells herself in exchange for living elegantly. In Magda's salon a few chosen customers are gathered around a piano, pretending to have conversations.

Magda is at the peak of her game, having hooked the wealthy banker, Rambaldo. Like Violetta, she enjoys the company of the best and brightest of customers currently popular in their social order. These are “people of the lie”, who accept their self-deception, until they can't.

In the first scene, the clever poet, Prunier, is the center of attention. He is leading a lively discussion about the relative merits of romantic love, claiming that such sentiment is becoming more “fashionable.” Lisette scoffs at the conversation. “You want me? I want you, and that's it.” However, Prunier has, in fact, written a poem about a young girl, Doretta, who succumbs to romantic love, and he has set that poem to music. Magda encourages him to play the song on the piano, which he does. Magda then makes up her own words to the music and, accompanied by Prunier, sing the lovely aria, “*Chi il bel sogno di Doretta.*” The talented Prunier also reads palms, and upon reading Magda's palm predicts she will flee to the south to escape this artificial way of life, but, like a swallow, she will return.

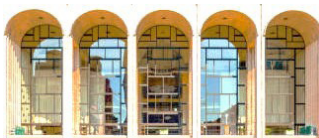


Photo: Metropolitan Opera

Rambaldo then introduces the handsome young Ruggero, the son of a childhood friend. Ruggero is new to Paris, and Rambaldo announces he will be showing Ruggero the best of Parisian night life—Bullier's, a popular cabaret. They all leave, except Magda, who, now alone, decides to disguise herself and go to Bullier's incognito, as “Paulette.” She joins Ruggero at his table, and they talk, dance, and fall in love. Seeing through her disguise, Rambaldo is not amused, and expresses his annoyance with her reckless behavior while he is paying the bills. In spite of that, Magda tells Rambaldo she is weary of her false life, and now is really in love. She plans to run off with Ruggero.

In the last act, Magda and Ruggero have been living in a cottage on the Riviera, and their money is running out. Magda faces her capacity for self-deception and remembers that the artificial life is better suited for her. She tells Ruggero she has a past he does not know about—that she had sold herself for love. Ruggero wants to be with her anyhow, but she refuses, and decides now is the

(continued...)

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(continued from front)

time to part. She leaves him weeping on the beach and, like the swallow, returns to Paris.

Puccini was not satisfied with the ending, and wrote two additional endings. All three endings have Magda returning, but they vary in their motivations. Concept directors still change the endings. In 1995 Marta Domingo directed a production in Bonn, in which Magda does not return to Paris, but drowns herself. Washington Opera staged that version in 2009, ending the opera with Magda walking into the sea.

Operettas have happy endings, and the different endings of *La Rondine* are all variably tragic, contributing to the unfair labelling of this opera as lacking an appropriate sense of identity. In

the very first scene of this opera the guests make their choice—to avoid sentiment, even though the character of Ruggero is very sentimental. The different endings are not from lack of identity. The fact of their differences tells us something important, something about uncertainty and reality. The guests at Magda's party wanted to preserve the false glitter that could temporarily distract them from facing their fears. *La Rondine* premiered at Monte Carlo, and before it was staged in Vienna the Archduke was assassinated at Sarajevo, bringing to an end the irresponsible frivolity of the Viennese. The Great War was upon them and, like this opera, nobody would know the ending. – GP

Not *La Traviata*

One of the criticisms *La Rondine* immediately faced was its resemblance to *La Traviata*. In both operas the women are successful courtesans maintained by wealthy bankers. Both women grow weary of their shallow lives, fall in love with a man from the country, and they both leave Paris. However, the similarities end there. *La Rondine*, unlike *La Traviata*, is almost devoid of serious social commentary. Magda does not have the same social pressures as Violetta. She has no illusions that true love can include marriage. For her, their months of love by the sea were a passing dream, but one she knew must end, which she eventually makes clear to Ruggero. She knows her future is to return to a Parisian life as a kept woman. By contrast, Violetta believes she and Alfredo are free to make a new life for her.

Puccini wrote a comic opera with an unhappy ending. Verdi wrote a tragic opera condemning bourgeois morality and social injustice, drawing on his own painful experiences when he and Giuseppina were temporarily ostracized from family and neighbors in Busseto.

La Rondine also has similarities to *Fledermaus*, a Viennese operetta from which it borrowed heavily. The character of Lisette in *La Rondine* looks and acts a lot like the spicy Adele, the maid in *Fledermaus*. In both operas, the maid dresses up in the clothes of her mistress and goes out to enjoy the evening as a woman with social status. – GD, GP

Production

La Rondine by Puccini

Sat, Apr 20, 2024

12:55 p.m.

One intermission



Conductor:
Speranza Scappucci

Production: **Nicholas Joël**

Magda: **Angel Blue**

Lisette: **Emily Pogorele**

Ruggero: **Jonathan Tetelman**

Prunier: **Bekhzod Davronov**

La Rondine's Origins

After Puccini's successful *La Fanciulla del West* world premiere at the Met in December 1910, he returned to Italy and was once again in the hunt for a new libretto. And while he was overseeing many of *La Fanciulla's* European premieres, he considered numerous works by celebrated European writers, but none touched his creative genius. This search lasted several years, ending in Vienna where the "operetta king" Franz Lehár befriended him and introduced him to the managers of the Karlstheater, who offered him a substantial fee for a premiere. In addition, they gave him a libretto—a romantic work called *Die Schwalbe* (The Swallow), which eventually became Puccini's lyric opera, *La Rondine*.

But before agreeing to the contract, Puccini insisted it would be a comic opera, not an operetta. He wanted "through composition," with no spoken dialogue. Nor would he provide the endless dance numbers so typical of operettas—the pop-up waltz, polka or czardas. The Karlstheater management was quick to agree, determined to have the next Puccini world premiere. However, the assassinations of Archduke Ferdinand and his wife at Sarajevo were followed by hasty and unwise diplomatic decisions, resulting in four years of World War I. This shocking world cataclysm, compounded with some of Puccini's marital problems, too numerous to detail, turned his life upside-down, and the score was not completed until April, 1916. By then, a Vienna premiere was impossible, so neutral Monte Carlo was selected for the event, which took place with an all-star cast on March 27, 1917.

Though the public and the press greeted *La Rondine* with enthusiasm, over time it remained one of Puccini's least performed operas. Its faded glory has also been attributed to Puccini's finally adhering too closely to the Viennese

operetta formula, even though he had insisted it be performed without spoken dialogue—a rule that has always been respected. But some critics found the opera's sentimentality too pervasive, though at the same time they faulted Puccini for not including a melancholy duet of resignation when Magda returns.

Worse yet, there was no clearly agreed upon final version for the piece. Puccini's dissatisfaction led him to three revisions, resulting in two different endings. Then, Puccini's untimely death in 1924 left it there. Artistically, Puccini had created a heroine who was the complete opposite of his celebrated "little girls," as he called them—Mimi, Butterfly, Liù, and Suor Angelica—all victims who suffer for their love and devotion. By contrast, Magda is as independent at the close of the opera as she was at the beginning, and she asks for no pity as she says goodbye to this idyllic, but brief love affair. – GD



Photo: Metropolitan Opera

Puccini

Met Opera Live in HD

Don't miss the final simulcast of this season

Madama Butterfly, by Puccini

May 11, 2024 12:55 pm

A revival of the Anthony Minghella production, with mesmerizing puppetry and sets. Asmik Grigorian will sing her long-awaited Met role debut as Butterfly, and Jonathan Tetelman is Pinkerton, the insensitive American. Elizabeth De Shong is in the supportive role of Suzuki. Maestro Xian Zhang conducts, bringing to the opera the sensitivities of a Chinese-American woman.

The Met: Live in HD 2024-25 Schedule

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October 5, 2024

***Les Contes d'Hoffmann*, by Offenbach**

Offenbach's only opera, fantastical and gloriously musical. The three heroines will be sung by Erin Morley, Pretty Yende, and Clémentine Margaine, with Benjamin Bernheim (last season's Romeo) as Hoffmann and Christian Van Horn as the Four Villains. The Bartlett Sher production, with Marco Armiliato conducting.

October 19, 2024

***Grounded*, by Jeanine Tesori** **A Met Premiere**

Emily D'Angelo stars as a hot-shot fighter pilot in an opera that takes on the psychological and emotional issues of modern warmaking. A powerful new opera addressing an important contemporary issue. A Michael Mayer production, conducted by Yannick Nézet-Séguin.

November 23, 2024

***Tosca*, by Puccini**

The phenomenal Lise Davidsen stars as the passionate diva in the revival of David McVicar's production. Freddie De Tommaso makes his eagerly anticipated company debut as Tosca's revolutionary lover, Cavaradossi. Quinn Kelsy is the sadistic chief of police, Scarpia. Maestro Xian Zhang conducts.

January 25, 2025

***Aida*, by Verdi**

This is a new production by Michael Mayer, conducted by Yannick Nézet-Séguin. American soprano Angel Blue sings the Ethiopian princess torn between love and country, with mezzo Judit Kutasi as her rival, Amneris. Dramatic tenor Piotr Beczala is the conflicted lover Radames, who opens the heavens with his "*Celeste Aida*."

March 15, 2025

***Fidelio*, by Beethoven**

Lise Davidsen returns to the Met, this time as Leonore, the faithful wife who risks everything to save her husband from the clutches of tyranny. David Butt Philip is the political prisoner Florestan, and Tomasz Konieczny is the villainous Don Pizarro. The classic veteran German bass, René Pape sings the jailer, Rocco. Susanna Mälkki conducts this simulcast.

April 26, 2025

***Le Nozze di Figaro*, by Mozart**

A revival of the Richard Eyre Production. Conductor Joana Mallwitz makes her Met debut of this timeless comedy with a sparkling cast. Michael Samuel is the clever Figaro who will marry his beloved Susanna (Olga Kulchynska) if he can handle the contrary intentions of Count Almaviva (Joshua Hopkins). It all works out, of course, and everybody is happy at the end.

May 17, 2025

***Salome*, by Richard Strauss**

Yannick Nézet-Séguin conducts A new production that promises to shed new light on the biblical story dramatized by Oscar Wilde. Elza van den Heever is Salome and Gerhard Siegel is Herod. Michelle DeYoung sings Herodias, and Peter Mattei is the victimized prophet Jochanaan.

May 31, 2025

***Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, by Rossini**

A revival of the Bartlett Sher production completes the other half of the Figaro story, this one conducted by Giacomo Sagripanti. Andrey Zhilikhovsky is Figaro. Rosina is sung by Aigul Akhmetshina, who recently sang a run of Carmen at the Met. Jack Swanson is Count Almaviva.