

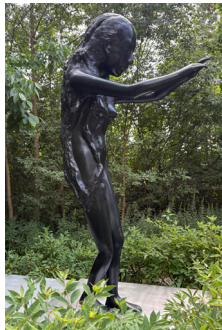
Operaphoria™

METROPOLITAN OPERA LIVE IN HD

VOLUME XIX ISSUE 1

October 18, 2025

La Sonnambula, by Bellini



Sculpture of a sleepwalker, by Kiki Smith, at Meijer Gardens

Two Bellini operas are scheduled for the 2025/2026 Live in HD season. For the premiere we will see *La Sonnambula*, and in January we will see *I Puritani*. Bellini is described as a composer of *bel canto* opera, but he might also be described as the most romantic composer in that genre. We will see evidence for that description in the intense drama of several scenes in both operas.

La Sonnambula was last seen Live in HD in 2009. In spite of its rather odd subject matter—sleepwalking—it has consistently maintained its popularity in the standard repertoire ever since its premiere in Milan almost

two hundred years ago. Set in a village in the Swiss Alps in the early nineteenth century, it explores the themes of sleep and wakefulness – dream-time and reality. Amina, the “sonnambulist,” or sleepwalker of the title role is a “ghost” who haunts the village. She is also the village sweetheart, preparing to marry Elvino. Lisa, the innkeeper is unhappy about this, as she was once engaged to Elvino.

As the wedding contract is being signed, a stranger arrives – Count Rodolfo, in disguise, and the lost heir to the local Count. He recognizes Amina as the love of his youth, and arranges to spend the evening at Lisa’s Inn, where he may

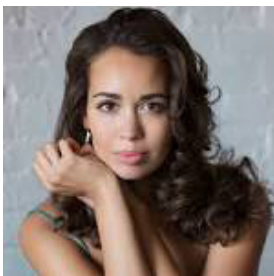
observe her. Later that evening, as Lisa and Rodolfo are flirting, the sleepwalking Amina enters. Lisa slips away, but Rodolfo watches Amina as eventually she stumbles into his room and drops into his bed. He leaves her sleeping, not taking advantage of the situation. Snooping villagers are curious about this strange Count, and peek into his room where they see Amina in his bed. Awakened

by the resulting commotion, Amina rejects her accusers and protests her innocence, to no avail. Elvino calls off the wedding, takes back his engagement ring from Amina, and thinks about marrying Lisa instead.

In the second act, the trouble-making villagers are somewhat repentant, and speak to the Count about what has happened. The

Count affirms Amina’s innocence, but Elvino is not convinced by this unlikely story coming from his “rival.” Later that evening the entire village observes Amina sleepwalking again, this time along a treacherous high ledge, until she reaches safety and is awakened. Elvino is now

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Nadine Sierra is Amina

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convinced Amina is the “ghost,” the sleepwalker, and that she is innocent of any indiscretions with the Count. Elvino puts the engagement ring back on her finger. For Amina, her dream has come true, setting up the unbridled joy of her final aria, which, alone, is worth the price of the ticket. The cabaletta, “*Ah! Non giunge uman pensiero*” (Human thought cannot conceive of the happiness that fills me...) was such an immediate success that the opening night audience at the Met premiere (1883) demanded an encore, obligingly sung by the 25-year-old Polish soprano, Marcella Sembrich. Future Sembrich audiences continued to demand she sing this aria, even when she was singing a different opera. She met the audience demands by interpolating “*Ah! Non giunge...*” into many of her subsequent performances of *Barber of Seville*.

Today’s production is not the Mary Zimmerman production we saw simulcast in 2009, in which Zimmerman rejected Bellini’s setting in an alpine village, and chose to set the opera in a contemporary opera company in New York City. In reviewing that production, the normally generous *New York Times* reviewer, Anthony Tommasini, accused Zimmerman of a “cop out” and suggested her attempt to update the opera in this manner was “...an added conceit that encumbered the entire production.”

For better or for worse, the Met has decided to put that production to sleep. We will be seeing a new production, introducing the directorial skills of Rolando Villazón. Known as one of the most successful tenors in Met history, he is now into a new career as a stage director. He has set the opera once again in the Swiss Alps, and promises to explore “the emotional and psychological valleys of the mind.”

This is a sparkling introduction to our new season of Live in HD. For details of the other selections scheduled, see page 4. The two Bellini operas probably will be the most joyous. – GP

Coloraturas on Display

We have spoken frequently in these *La Sonnambula* pages about coloratura singing [employing a fake Italian word from the original German *Koloratur*] which describes highly ornamented singing, a favorite style of the 19th-century *bel canto* tradition. These decorative passages are on display in today’s opera, and for this reason famous singers of the past were particularly drawn to this otherwise light opera. From its opening in Milan in 1831, *La Sonnambula* has starred coloratura sopranos in the lead role, starting with the incomparable Giuditta Pasta, who displayed her incredible imagination and range in the role of Amina in both Milan and London, singing one in Italian the other in English. She was followed by other great coloratura sopranos such as Maria Malibran, Luisa Tetrazzini, Lily Pons, Toti dal Monte, Maria Callas, Renata Scotto, Joan Sutherland, and the Met’s last Amina, Natalie Dessay. Today’s Amina, Nadine Sierra, is no stranger to Saturday afternoon Met performances where she has conquered as Juliet, Violetta, and Lucia. Today she brings her voice to the lead role, joining the many other great coloratura sopranos in playing Amina.

Understandably, the above list is only a partial sampling of the great sopranos who thrilled audiences in this role, secure in the opera’s otherwise quaint plot and setting. And any contemporary fixation with reconceiving the opera to make it more relevant does it no service. For *La Sonnambula* presents a story well told set in a quaint Swiss village, highlighted with all its glorious music. What more can we ask for? – GD

Sleepwalking

A contemporary audience might not consider the concept of sleepwalking worthy of an opera, but early 19th century audiences were fascinated by it, and gave it a mystical significance that is no longer believable. The theme was so popular

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(Sleepwalking continued)

that at least 5 other opera composers wrote “sleepwalking operas” in the few years preceding Bellini’s effort—some to great acclaim (eg. Piccinni’s *Atys*). However, some contemporary directors, including Mary Zimmerman, reject staging *La Sonnambula* with an actual sleepwalker. Her effort at the Met may not have been a critical success, but, Tommasini aside, her instincts suggest she was on to something. In September, 2024, the National Theater of Tokyo staged *La Sonnambula*, produced by the Spanish director, Barbara Lluch. The “Japan Times” review by Kris Kosaka noted how the opera shed light on how easily communities today can be influenced and manipulated by false information—by lies. Also, he affirmed how Lluch illuminated “...how patriarchal societies thrive on polarizing views.”

Kosaka’s comments are another example of Winston Churchill’s category of reality—observations that, even if they are not true, ought to be. – GP

Bellini’s Short, Remarkable Career

Vincenzo Bellini (1801-35) is Sicily’s only famous opera composer. Born on that ill-fated island, then ruled by Spain in the guise of The Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, it was not fertile territory for creative artists. Sicilians were treated then, as they are now, with condescension by Italians living north of Naples. As a rare Sicilian blond, Bellini no doubt possessed an 11th century Norman ancestor

Sadly, at the height of his fame, not quite 34, Bellini died from amoebic dysentery in Paris. Custom has it he led a lonely, solitary life; in fact, he was well established among the Paris smart set, where he cut quite a figure. The poet Heine, who knew him there, described Bellini this way: “His clothes fitted his frail body so languorously, and he carried his little Malacca cane in such an idyllic manner, that he always reminded me of the young

shepherds in our pastoral plays. And his gait was so maidenly, so elegiac, so ethereal, he altogether looked like a sigh in dancing pumps.”

Despite this “precious” description, Bellini’s artistic legacy is secure, his operas the pinnacle of the *bel canto* tradition, most famously displayed in *Norma*’s Act I “*Casta diva*.” Here, as well as in his eight other operas, we hear the “Bellini long line,” a slow melody perfectly expressing the text’s poetry. Verdi described it as “Long, long, long melodies such as no one had done before him.”

But Bellini was also in tune with the unfolding Romanticism that would dominate the 19th century. We see this in his advice to his *I Puritani* librettist: “Opera must make people weep, feel horrified, die through singing.” And that’s exactly what makes *La Sonnambula* so moving. Unlike his *Norma*, *I Capuleti e I Montecchi* [aka, *Romeo and Juliet*], and *I Puritani*, the plot of today’s opera is slight, earth shaking only for the betrothed lovers. But in their plight the music is all Bellini, the slightest concern bringing forth ravishing arias, so much so that star coloratura sopranos since Giuditta Pasta, who sang the first Amina as well as Norma, have taken their place in an opera one would hardly expect them in. – GD

Production

La Sonnambula
by Bellini

Sat., October 18, 2025, 1:00 ET
Run Time: 3Hrs 15Min, 1 Intermission

Production: **Rolando Villazón**
Conductor: **Riccardo Frizza**
Amina: **Nadine Sierra**
Lisa: **Sydney Mancasola**
Elvino: **Xabier Anduaga**
Rodolfo: **Alexander Vinogradov**

Metropolitan Opera Live in HD: Coming attractions

All productions start at 1:00 p.m., except for The Wagner, which starts at noon.

November 8, 2025

La Bohème, by Puccini

A revival of the Zeffirelli production which remains an audience favorite. Juliana Grigoryan is Mimi, and Freddie De Tommaso is the dramatic and passionate poet Rodolfo who struggles with the joy and pain of the undisciplined bohemian life—quite often unsuccessfully, until the final scene. Conducted by Keri-Lynn Wilson.

November 22, 2025

Arabella, by Richard Strauss

An elegant collaboration between Strauss and his librettist, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, who also gave us *Rosenkavalier*. This is a revival of the gorgeous production of Otto Schenk. Conducted by Nicholas Carter, and featuring Rachel Willis-Sorensen as the heroine in the title role. Louise Alder is her sister, and Tomasz Konieczny is the dashing count who sweeps Arabella off her feet.

December 13, 2025

Andrea Chenier, by Giordano

Chenier is sung by Piotr Beczala, another passionate poet, this one set in the French revolution. At a party he meets the aristocratic Maddalena (Sonya Yoncheva), who initially makes fun of poetry, but Chenier is genuine in his poetry and in life. Maddalena later comes to rely on him when her aristocracy no longer has value in the revolution. Their love grows and prevails as the state collapses. A revival of the Nicolas Joel production, with Daniele Rustioni conducting.

January 10, 2026

I Puritani, by Bellini

A new production directed by Charles Edwards, featuring some of the most spectacular and virtuoso *bel canto* vocal fireworks, sung by the dazzling Lisette Oropesa in the role of Elvira. She and Arturo (Lawrence Brownlee) are the lovers being torn apart by political problems. Artur Rucinski is Riccardo, Elvira's betrothed, against her will. Christian Van Horn is her sympathetic Uncle Giorgio. The second of two Bellini operas this season, conducted by Marco Armiliato.

March 21, 2026, Early start time: 12:00 noon

Tristan und Isolde, by Wagner

In her second major role in this Met season, dramatic soprano Lise Davidsen makes an important role debut as Isolde, one of the most challenging roles in the repertoire. Mezzo Ekaterina Gubanova reprises her portrayal of Brangäne, and Tomasz Konieczny is Kurwenal. Ryan Speedo Green makes his role debut as King Marke. This production is the first of five Wagner operas to be directed by Yuval Sharon, the first American to direct an opera at the Wagner Festival in Bayreuth. Conducted by Yannick Nézet-Séguin

May 2, 2026

Eugene Onegin, by Tchaikovsky

May 30, 2026

El Último Sueño de Frida y Diego, *The Last Dream of Frida and Diego*, by Gabriela Lena Frank