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Contact: Gabrielle Kazuko Nomura Gainor, 206.676.5559, gabrielle.gainor@seattleopera.org

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***Rigoletto* offers no mercy for powerful men who abuse women**

At Seattle Opera, director Lindy Hume confronts the newsmakers of today in her reimagining of Verdi's classic

**Aug. 10-28, 2019
McCaw Hall**

SEATTLE—For years, **Lindy Hume**, stage director of Seattle Opera's August production of *Rigoletto*, has been frustrated by the way opera celebrates misogyny through its "bad boy" characters. In beloved works such as *Don Giovanni*, *Carmen*, and *Tosca*, sopranos must rehearse how to fall, how to be stabbed, brutalized, and thrown across the room, behaviors they would never accept in real life.

"In 2019, if opera aspires to be a future-focused art form, then it must evolve and be responsive to a changing society," Hume says. "This history of telling stories about women being raped, murdered, and abused in opera is right there in front of us, either to explore, or to ignore."

Hume's passion and hunger for more women's perspectives in opera inspires her contemporary *Rigoletto*, which plays Aug. 10–28 at McCaw Hall. Under the baton of **Maestro Carlo Montanaro**, the company's beloved Verdi conductor, the production will include the return of celebrated Seattle Opera artists including: **Lester Lynch** (Di Luna, *Il trovatore*; Crown, *Porgy and Bess*) in the title role,

Emily Fons (Laurene Powell Jobs, *The (R)evolution of Steve Jobs*) as Maddalena, and **Ante Jerkunica** (Sarastro, *The Magic Flute*) as Sparafucile. **Madison Leonard** (Frasquita, *Carmen* and Chrisann Brennan, *The (R)evolution of Steve Jobs*) and **Soraya Mafi** (Flora, *The Turn of the Screw*) alternate as Gilda. The performance also includes several principal debuts.

In this story, Rigoletto is court jester to the Duke of Mantua, a notorious sexual abuser. After the Duke harms a young woman, Rigoletto mocks the victim's father, Monterone, who then curses the jester for being so heartless. Later, the Duke goes after Rigoletto's own daughter Gilda and the cruel joke falls on Rigoletto, whose story ends in tragedy. Basing his opera off Victor Hugo's play *Le roi s'amuse*, Giuseppe Verdi composed *Rigoletto* as a confrontation to authority and as a means of illuminating abuse of power. Ironically, this dark tale includes one of the brightest, most beloved arias in the entire art form, "La donna è mobile," which even non-opera fans will know from "Alvin and the Chipmunks," Doritos Super Bowl commercials, or a variety of other uses in popular culture.

Unfortunately, Hume says, *Rigoletto* isn't a story of long ago and faraway. It remains eerily relevant. When the stage director created this production for New Zealand Opera in 2012, former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi was breezing through a high-profile sex trial. Back then, Hume found inspiration in the controversial billionaire and politician for the Duke of Mantua; Hume's production in fact begins at the "presidential palace" on election night. Now, presenting this piece for American audiences in Seattle, Hume acknowledges some may find a similarity between the Duke and President Donald Trump:

"[This production] is not explicitly Trump's America, or Berlusconi's Italy, but a modern, highly recognizable version of the dystopian, brutal, corrupt society Victor Hugo and Verdi imagined. As a feminist and a fan of Verdi's wonderful observation of human behavior, how could I resist bringing these worlds together in an imagined scenario where the excesses of obscene wealth, the corruption of high political power, and the moral void of the upper class, all vibrate with an

undercurrent of fear, violence, misogyny, and criminality? This is the world of Verdi's *Rigoletto*, and our own."

Seattle Opera will further explore the themes in *Rigoletto* and Hume's production at two community events. On July 23, "A Feminist Director Takes on *Rigoletto*" will include Hume in conversation with Seattle Opera Dramaturg Jonathan Dean. And on August 23, the panel discussion "Feminist Storytelling in the #MeToo Age" will include two professional theater artists, **Kathy Hsieh** and **Kelly Kitchens**, as well as **Judy Tsou**, a musicologist who focuses on the role of gender and race in opera. For more information, go to seattleopera.org/communityconversations.

Rigoletto

Music by Giuseppe Verdi

Libretto by Francesco Maria Piave

In Italian with English captions

Premiere: Venice, Teatro La Fenice, March 11, 1851

Previous Seattle Opera Performances: 1965, 1973, 1982, 1988, 1995, 2004, 2013

Marion Oliver McCaw Hall

Performances: Aug. 10, 11, 14, 17, 18, 23, 24, 25, & 28, 2019

Approximate Running Time: 2 hours, 30 minutes including one intermission

Evening performances begin at 7:30 p.m., Sunday matinees at 2:00 p.m

Cast:

Rigoletto	Lester Lynch (Aug. 10, 17, 23, 25, & 28) Giuseppe Altomare* (Aug. 11, 14, 18, & 24)
Gilda	Madison Leonard (Aug. 10, 17, 23, 25, & 28) Soraya Mafi (Aug. 11, 14, 18, & 24)
Duke of Mantua	Liparit Avetisyan* (Aug. 10, 17, 23, 25, & 28) Yongzhao Yu* (Aug. 11, 14, 18, & 24)
Sparafucile	Ante Jerkunica
Maddalena	Emily Fons
Giovanna	Nerys Jones
Count Monterone	Clayton Brainerd
Count Ceprano	Jonathan Silvia
Borsa	Bernard Holcomb
Marullo	Barry Johnson
Conductor	Carlo Montanaro
Director	Lindy Hume

Associate Stage Director	Daniel Pelzig
Production Designer	Richard Roberts*
Lighting Designer	Jason Morphett
Fight Choreographer	Geoffrey Alm
Chorusmaster	John Keene

* Company Debut

2019/20 Season Sponsor: In memory of Karyl Winn
Production Sponsor: Kreielsheimer Remainder Foundation

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