

WHAT DO YOU CALL A COMBINATION OF SIX TENORS, one scintillating soprano, a chorus of devils, and a ballet corps of nymphs, all gathered in an enchanted forest somewhere on the outskirts of Jerusalem? “A box of jewels,” is how director Mary Zimmerman describes Rossini’s rarely heard *Armida*. Discovering the opera for her was “like coming across a buried treasure under the sea.” Zimmerman’s new production marks the first time *Armida* is being performed at the Met, as a showcase for soprano Renée Fleming, who will sing the title role. For Tony Award winner Zimmerman, who previously staged Donizetti’s *Lucia di Lammermoor* and Bellini’s *La Sonnambula* at the Met, it will be her third bel canto opera with the company.

First seen in 1817, *Armida* never entered the standard operatic repertoire, in part because of the extraordinary vocal demands Rossini makes on the interpreter of the title role—a sorceress who manipulates men for personal and political motives. In addition to the technique necessary to do justice to the stunning vocal acrobatics and long melodic lines Rossini is known for, the role also requires a significant amount of emotional characterization. The success of any performance rests squarely on the shoulders of the leading lady. The opera was written for the famous soprano Isabella Colbran, later the composer’s wife. It was revived in the middle of the 20th century, when the legendary Maria Callas took on the title role in 1952. It then lay mostly dormant again until, in 1993, Fleming thrilled audiences with her impassioned, emotionally complex interpretation. Now the soprano, who starred at the Met last season as Massenet’s Thaïs and Dvořák’s Rusalka, brings her portrayal to New York—and to HD screens around the world. Opposite her, tenor Lawrence Brownlee sings the role of the lovestruck Crusader Rinaldo.

Armida brings together Rossini’s trademark musical fireworks with a romantic story full of fantasy, nature, and enchantment. In the end, however, it’s about one man and one woman. “It is a tale of feminine seduction,” Fleming says. “And that, in fact, is *Armida*’s real power, with a dark or desperate side. It takes both Armida and Rinaldo captive and away from their former selves and lives. Love does that—making one want to shut out the world.”

Rossini presented *Armida* to the theater-goers of 19th-century Naples as an evening of spectacular stagecraft. This guide will help your students appreciate the deeper value in his creation—not only as popular entertainment, but as a work of rare beauty and astonishing vocal challenges.



Renée Fleming

Lawrence Brownlee

Bruce Ford

José Manuel Zapata

Barry Banks

Kobie van Rensburg

THE WORK *ARMIDA*

Composed by Gioachino Rossini
(1792–1868)

An opera in three acts, sung in Italian

Libretto by Giovanni Schmidt (based on the epic poem *Gerusalemme Liberata* by Torquato Tasso)

First performed on
November 11, 1817 in Naples, Italy

NEW PRODUCTION

Riccardo Frizza, Conductor

Mary Zimmerman, Production

Richard Hudson, Set and Costume Designer

Brian MacDevitt, Lighting Designer

Graciela Daniele, Choreographer

Daniel Pelzig, Associate Choreographer

STARRING

Renée Fleming (*Armida*)

Lawrence Brownlee (*Rinaldo*)

Bruce Ford (*Goffredo*)

José Manuel Zapata (*Gernando*)

Barry Banks (*Carlo*)

Kobie van Rensburg (*Ubaldo*)

Production a gift of The Sybil B. Harrington Endowment Fund

The guide includes four types of activities:

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY: one full-length activity, designed to support your ongoing curriculum

MUSICAL HIGHLIGHTS: opportunities to focus on excerpts from *Armida* to cultivate familiarity with the work

PERFORMANCE ACTIVITIES: to be used during *The Met: Live in HD* transmission, calling attention to special aspects of this production

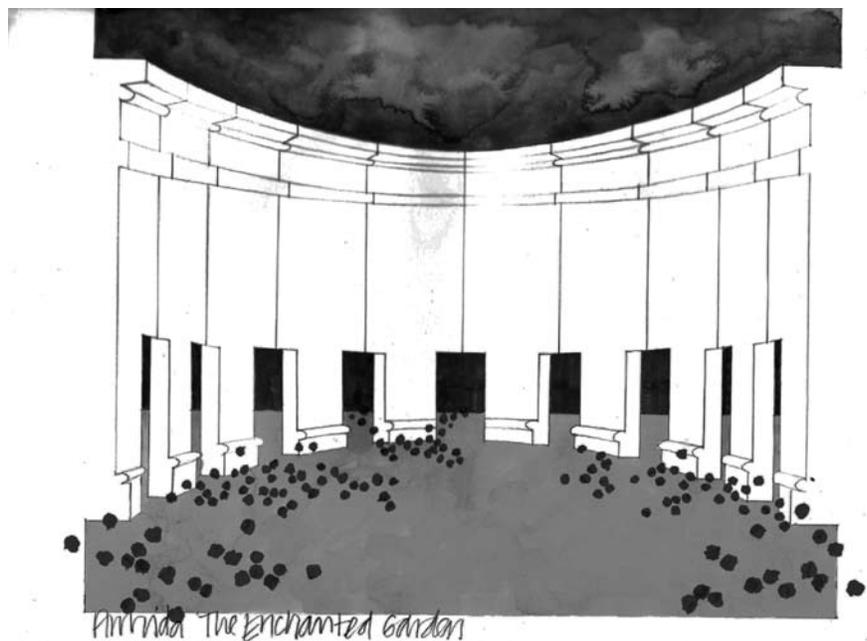
POST-SHOW DISCUSSION: a post-transmission activity, integrating the *Live in HD* experience into students' views of the performing arts and humanities

(Reproducible student resources for the activities are available at the back of this guide.)

The activities in this guide address several aspects of *Armida*:

- Rossini's adoption of a well-established genre as the framework for his opera
- The vocal challenges of the lead soprano role
- Compositional techniques employed by Rossini to convey the vicissitudes of a romantic relationship
- The underlying issue of a culturally defined masculinity
- The unique demands on casting and set design this opera makes

The guide is designed to provoke interest in *Armida*, whether or not your students have any prior acquaintance with opera. It can help you prompt them to think about opera—and the performing arts in general—as a medium of entertainment and of creative expression.



A scene sketch for the new production of *Armida* by set and costume designer Richard Hudson

Act I Outside Jerusalem, during the Crusades. Goffredo, commander of the combined Christian forces, comforts and rallies the Frankish soldiers, who are mourning the recent death of their leader. A noblewoman appears and introduces herself as the rightful ruler of Damascus. She claims that her throne has been usurped by her evil uncle Idraote and asks for help and protection. In fact she is the sorceress Armida and is in league with Idraote, who has entered with her in disguise. Their plan is to weaken the Crusaders by enslaving some of their best soldiers. The men are so dazzled by Armida's beauty that they convince Goffredo to help her. Goffredo decides that the Franks must choose a new leader, who will then pick ten soldiers to go with Armida. They elect Rinaldo, much to the jealousy of the knight Gernando ("Non soffrirò l'offesa"). Armida and Rinaldo, who is the Crusaders' best soldier, had met once before and she is secretly in love with him. She now confronts him and reminds him how she saved his life on that occasion. When she accuses him of ingratitude, he admits that he's in love with her (Duet: "Amor... possente nome!"). Gernando sees them together and insults Rinaldo as a womanizer in front of the other men. They duel and Rinaldo kills Gernando. Horrified by what he has done, he escapes with Armida before Goffredo can punish him.

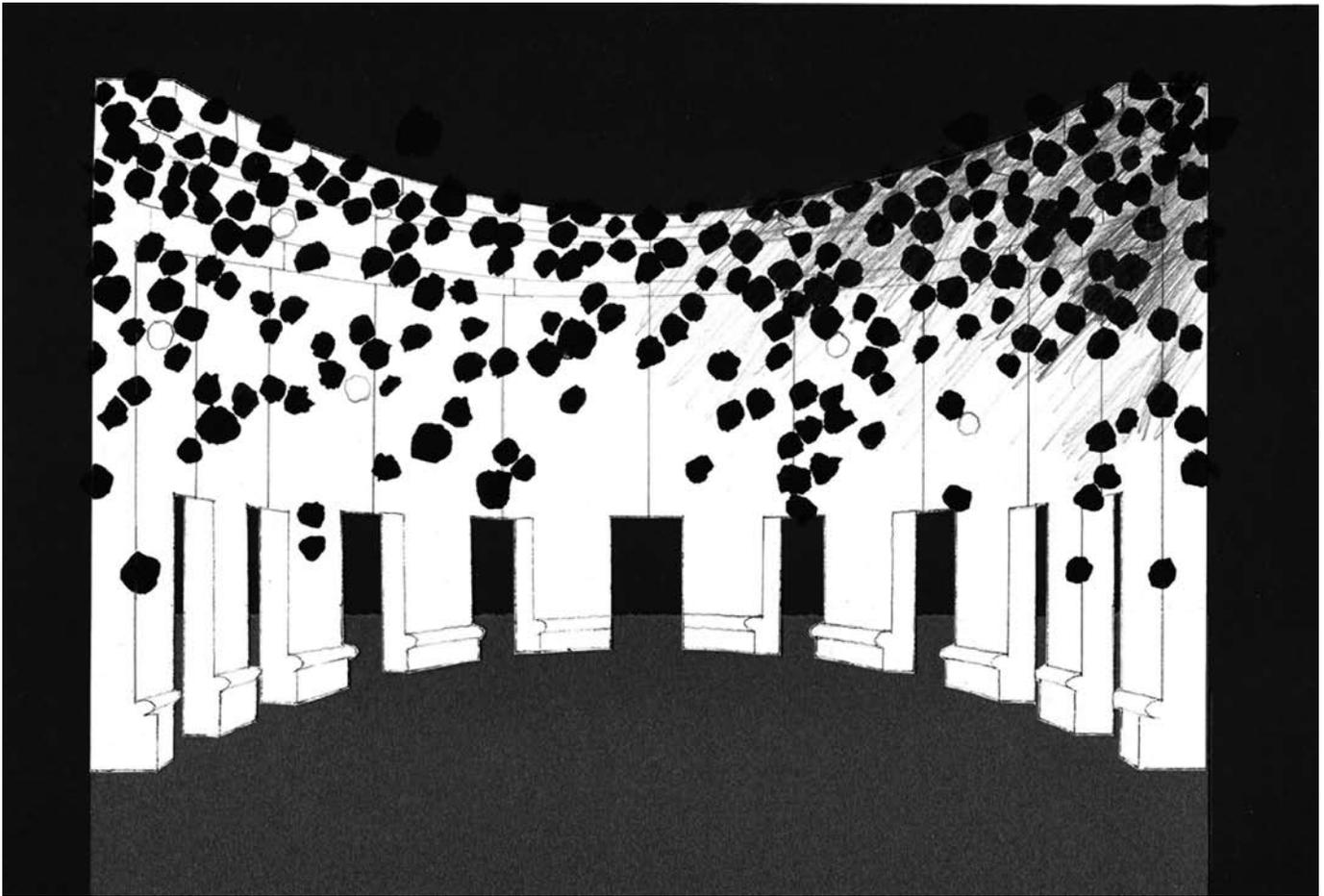
Act II Astarotte, one of the princes of hell, has led a group of demons into a forest to help Armida. She arrives there with Rinaldo, who's completely enthralled by her (Duet: "Dove son io!"). Even when she tells him about Idraote's plot, he doesn't turn against her. To Rinaldo's amazement, Armida then turns the forest into a vast pleasure palace. Armida muses on the power of love ("D'Amore al dolce impero") and offers for Rinaldo's entertainment a pantomime about a warrior being seduced by nymphs. Rinaldo, having lost all thoughts of military honor, gives himself over to Armida's enchantment.

Act III Two of Rinaldo's fellow knights, Ubaldo and Carlo, have been sent on a mission to save him. When they arrive in Armida's enchanted gardens, they are overwhelmed by their beauty, even though they know it's all an illusion. With the help of a magical golden staff, they ward off the nymphs that try to seduce them, then hide when Rinaldo and Armida appear. Rinaldo is still captivated by the sorceress, but once he is alone, Ubaldo and Carlo confront him. When they show him his reflection in a shield, he's horrified to realize that he no longer recognizes himself as the honorable warrior he once was (Trio: "In quale aspetto imbelle"). Still torn by his love for Armida, Rinaldo prays for strength, then leaves with his comrades. Armida calls upon the powers of hell to bring her lover back but it doesn't work. She rushes off in pursuit of the men.



Renée Fleming as Armida

PHOTO: DUSAN RELJIN / METROPOLITAN OPERA



Richard Hudson's sketch for Act II

Armida reaches the three soldiers before they can sail away. She begs Rinaldo not to desert her and even offers to go into battle with him. Ubaldo and Carlo restrain Rinaldo, trying to bolster his strength, and ultimately drag him away from her. Armida struggles between love and desire for revenge ("Dove son io?... Fuggi!"). She chooses revenge, destroying the pleasure palace and flying away in a rage.

What You Don't Know Might Confuse You: A Close Look at *Armida* as Popular Storytelling

Late in 1817, having premiered new works that year in both Milan and Rome, Rossini arrived in Naples where he had taken on a commission for the elaborate new Teatro San Carlo. The new opera would be an extravaganza, complete with astonishing stagecraft, fantastical sets, a grand ballet, and mesmerizing music, particularly for the singer in the title role. But the opera's story was an old one. Based on the epic poem *Gerusalemme Liberata* ("Jerusalem Delivered") by the Italian writer Torquato Tasso (1580), the tale of Armida had formed the basis for about a dozen operas and cantatas since 1621, by such composers as Monteverdi, Handel, and Haydn. In a more general sense, European audiences of the early 19th century were well acquainted with the setting and the motives of legends about the Crusades.

In this activity, 21st-century students can not only learn more about the Crusades, but also explore the broader artistic technique of building a popular entertainment around a set of commonly known symbols and story elements—a genre. They will:

- Discuss the what, when, where, and why of the Crusades
- Identify contemporary popular story genres
- Create stories using the basic plot of *Armida* and the conventions of contemporary genres

STEPS

One of the challenges of appreciating *Armida* in our day is the assumption by Rossini and his librettist that audiences would be familiar with the Crusades in general and Tasso's poem in particular. (And they may have been right in 1817: one British translation of *Jerusalem Delivered* went through eight editions between 1783 and 1802.) Today, the Crusades no longer cast so wide a shadow over our culture, while Tasso's epic is all but unknown to a wider audience. The activity therefore begins by providing a cultural context for *Armida*. Later steps explore the means an artist might employ to explore a historical situation of such universal relevance.

Step 1: Assess your students' knowledge of the Crusades.

- A series of religious wars between 1095 and 1291, initiated by European Christians
- The initial goal was the conquest of Jerusalem and the "Holy Land," then under Muslim Turkish rule
- Troops were sent from the regions we now know as France, Italy, Germany and England, among other European countries
- The term "Crusade" comes from the Latin *crux*, or cross, referring to the Christian symbol

IN PREPARATION

For this activity, each student will need the reproducible resources available at the back of this guide.

You will also need the audio selections from *Armida*, available online and on the accompanying CD.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Language Arts, Cultural Studies, and History

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- To identify *Armida*'s setting in time and place
- To recognize the patterns of content and characterization found in popular genres of storytelling
- To create, compare, and contrast genre-driven stories
- To spur interest in *The Met: Live in HD* production of *Armida*



Maria Callas as Armida, Florence, 1952

PHOTO: CARLO A. SCHIAVI

It's not hard to understand how a series of wars carried out over two centuries resulted in deep public awareness and inspired much in the way of literature and music. By Rossini's time, the symbols and legends of the Crusades were ubiquitous in European culture. There was nothing inherently surprising about setting a story in a Crusader camp.

(If you have time, you may want your students to research the Crusades either online or in a library. A good starting place is the "Internet Medieval Sourcebook" at www.fordham.edu/halsall/sbook1k.html.)

Step 2: What would it have been like to hear a story about the Crusades in 1817? Just as stories about vampires, cowboys, and aliens are common in our culture today, so the Crusades and Crusader imagery were commonly known in 1817.

Track 1 provides an example. Here, Goffredo, the captain of this Crusader band, is explaining why he must wait before offering Armida the military help she has requested.

<p>GOFFREDO: Reina, senti. In servizio del cielo, Sangue e sudor da noi si spande. Rieda in libertà Sionne; su quel monte Di nostra fede ondeggi Il venerato segno, E poi si pensi al tuo perduto regno.</p>	<p>Princess, listen. In the service of heaven, we give Our blood and sweat. When Zion is free, when the symbol Of our faith waves on that ancient Hill, then we will be able to think of The kingdom you have lost.</p>
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At this point, about 15 minutes into the opera, Goffredo is the first character to allude specifically to the Crusades: By "Zion" he means the city of Jerusalem, the Crusaders' military objective. Plainly, librettist Giovanni Schmidt expects audiences to know what Goffredo is talking about. It's as if a cowboy in a movie today mentioned Texas.

Such references are elements of a specific storytelling convention, or genre. A genre is a category of story that includes certain consistent features—types of behavior, characters, clothing, weaponry, locations, and so forth. The kinds of stories mentioned above—vampire stories, westerns, science fiction—are all genres familiar to us today.

One interesting aspect of a genre is that, while it dictates many details of a story's framework, it doesn't necessarily dictate the plot. *Armida* is an excellent example. It's set during the Crusades. The main male characters are all Crusaders, men on a Christian mission. The location is said to be just outside Jerusalem, where this army believes it is on the verge of victory. But almost no element of the opera's actual plot is connected to the historical events of the Crusades. There is not even a direct mention of Christianity—the "faith" Goffredo refers to in Track 1.

To strengthen your students' understanding of story genres, invite them to name others. They might mention, for example:

- mystery stories
- action-adventure stories
- horror stories
- superhero stories
- romance stories

Step 3: Divide the class into small groups. Each group will take one of the story genres on the list composed at the end of Step 2 and brainstorm details that characterize that genre. The characteristics might include settings, apparel, relationships, characters' special features—anything that a contemporary observer would use to identify the genre.

Step 4: Once the groups have composed their lists, they can try out a creative process like that of Rossini and his librettist, by recasting the story of *Armida* in the genre they have chosen.

Armida can be broken down into a number of plot points, listed on the reproducible. Students should consider each plot point and determine how to transform it into their group's genre.

Step 5: Share the new-genre *Armida* stories. You may want students to choose a representative to tell the story, or they might prefer to act it out. The goal is to be faithful both to each group's genre and to *Armida*'s plot.

FOLLOW-UP: There are several ways to follow up this genre translation activity. For homework, students might enjoy choosing a different genre and recasting *Armida* yet again. Alternatively, they might choose a familiar genre tale like *Star Trek* or *Twilight* and imagine how Rossini could have taken the basic plot and character relationships and created a story about the Crusades to please his 19th-century audience.

The Soprano Sorceress: Listening Closely to a Demanding Role

MUSICAL HIGHLIGHTS ARE BRIEF OPPORTUNITIES TO:

- Help students understand opera
- Whet their interest in upcoming transmissions of *The Met: Live in HD*

Each focuses on audio selections from *Armida*, available online at www.metopera.org/education or on the accompanying CD. All five activities use reproducibles found at the back of this guide.

These “mini-lessons” will in practice take up no more than a few minutes of class time. They’re designed to help you bring opera into your classroom while minimizing interruption of your ongoing curricular sequence. Feel free to use as many as you like.

In Puccini’s *Tosca*, the opera singer Floria Tosca is part of a triangle of main characters. Bizet’s *Carmen* revolves around the title character’s on-again off-again relationship with Don José. But *Armida* is almost entirely about Armida—the woman, her influence, her acts, her undoing. Not only that, but Rossini wrote the part specifically for a famous soprano, Isabella Colbran. (He may have tried to please her with a showpiece, considering that the two were married a few years later.) The role of Armida is an exciting, even daunting, part to sing; it requires both the technical skill of bel canto—the early-19th-century operatic style characterized by long melody lines, virtuoso trills and runs, and elaborate vocal ornamentation—and an emotional range rarely encountered in this type of opera. Through comparative listening to five of Armida’s “greatest hits” (as performed here by Renée Fleming), your students will be able to better appreciate the role’s technical demands as well as its artistic opportunities. Each selection has been divided into short segments to facilitate a detailed analysis.

Selection A: Tracks 2 through 5 find Armida making her case for military aid to the Crusader captain Goffredo. Although he has told her that he can’t help until Jerusalem has been conquered (see Track 1 in the Classroom Activity), she is persistent. At this point, an audience familiar with the story would have realized that every word she says is a lie: the powerful sorceress needs neither pity nor help. The words, music, and performance are jam-packed with simultaneous contradiction.

This selection begins with **Track 2**, a piece of music that sounds like a cry of pain. Then in **Track 3**, the instrumentation turns almost merry, even though Armida is singing about her life being worse than death. When she reaches the word “più” (“more”) her voice grows more powerful, then instantly recedes. The musical result is the impression of a woman apparently at her wits’ end, but in fact fully in control of herself. This effect is reiterated as the word “omai” (“from now on”) is run swiftly up and down a scale. In **Track 4**, the entire sentiment is repeated—first in sadness, then with what seems pure, emotionless, technical beauty. This quality continues in **Track 5**, as Armida reaches and remains on a high note, then performs another downward sweep—until the slightest crack in her voice at the words “per me” (“for me”) instantly re-establishes her ruse of sadness.

Selection B: Armida’s genuine feelings become apparent in Tracks 6 through 9. Just as Goffredo has resisted her pleas, so has Rinaldo, in the preceding section. Not only did he reiterate that Zion is the Crusaders’ first priority, but he also acknowledged, hesitatingly, that he’d met Armida before. Here, Armida’s response is one of pain and anger, both as a former lover of Rinaldo’s and as a royal.

As Armida begins her response, in **Track 6**, her voice carries a note of disdain. With **Track 7**, singing “what did I get for it?” self-pity slips in, but she promptly dismisses it with the contemptuous “un marcato disprezzo” (a phrase whose general sense is “total devaluation”). Again, libretto and music work together to present a complex picture: Armida’s words describe the way she thinks that Rinaldo has treated her; her melody conveys her feelings for him.

Her words upset Rinaldo and he interrupts her, “Cessa!” (“Stop”). In **Track 8**, he tries to explain himself—but all he’s really doing is setting himself up for Armida’s sweet, mellifluous, and irresistible final blow (**Track 9**): “It was war that pulled you away from me?” she asks. “Well, it was love that brought me here!” A moment later, Rinaldo will give in, admitting his love for her.

Selection C: In **Track 10**, from later in Act I, Rinaldo’s love is confirmed: “t’amerò costante” (“I’ll love you faithfully”). At last Armida expresses what seems to be sincere feeling without manipulative intent—first in her words of “unexpected joy,” then, musically, in an extended run, from the high register through two swift drops to a low note, all in the course of a single word.

Selection D: The opera’s three acts follow a clear structure. Act I brings Armida and Rinaldo together. Act II is an idyll of love. Act III pulls the two apart. Tracks 11–14 depict that separation in a microcosm. Armida has just heard of Rinaldo’s plan to leave, and her first reaction, in **Track 11**, is pure fury. Note in particular the thrust inherent in the setting of the word “abbandonarmi” (“leaving me”). Within seconds, however, Armida’s deeper feeling of love peeks out from beneath her anger about a man who has denied her charms. Armida doesn’t sound quite so tough as she sings, “And does glory betray love and faith?” Rinaldo attempts to console her in **Track 12**, but she has turned inward, accepting the change. With a sound that’s almost breathless she tells him to leave her alone with her sorrow.

At this point, the Crusaders Carlo and Ubaldo chime in, concerned that Rinaldo’s love will overcome his sense of honor—**Track 13**. Their intrusion seems to bring Armida back to herself. **Track 14** overflows with honest feeling until, in the same tones that earlier expressed her imperiousness, Armida offers to debase herself and become a mere camp follower, just to stay with Rinaldo. A long, winding, complicated phrase carries the word “vigor” (“strength”), as if Armida were trying to prove her mettle. She is decisive in declaring that she will be a faithful follower. Then, poignantly, almost innocently, she offers to renounce physical love.

Selection E: **Track 15** finds Armida alone with her thoughts. The three Crusaders have returned to their camp. She begins her aria with the exact same words Rinaldo spoke when he first arrived in her enchanted forest, “Dove son io?”—“Where am I?”

(See the Musical Highlight: Closer and Closer). Now, however, the question is existential, not geographic. Armida's feelings veer from anger to resignation in the short space it takes to repeat a single word, "Fuggi!" As she continues in **Track 16**, taking in the enormity of the situation, all music stops for a moment. This is a new reality, one that seems almost intolerable. In **Track 17**, with mounting feeling, Armida decides to act, but which of her emotions should she follow—vengeance or love? Each of the words is set in a tiny bit of melody suffused with that particular feeling. Then, in **Track 18**, an even more human emotion overtakes Armida—a deep sense of injustice, a feeling of powerlessness so unfamiliar that it first bursts forth like a tantrum, then repeats, in **Track 19**, like a child's plea.

Armida has not reached the end of her resources. Before the curtain falls, she will have destroyed her own magical world and set off to seek revenge, accompanied by a flock of demons. But for now she is alone—and only human. These five selections indicate the scope of that humanity, not to mention the skill a soprano needs to convey all of Rossini and Schmidt's dramatic subtleties. Armida is mercurial, fiery, capable of experiencing pain, but powerful enough to transform that pain into aggression. The role demands a performer as formidable as the character herself.

The Nature of Love: A Close Look at Bel Canto Variations

If Act I of *Armida* is an action-adventure and Act III a romantic tragedy, Act II is, to quote the protagonists, “the pleasure center.” As Armida entertains Rinaldo in her enchanted glade, Rossini entertains the audience with classic bel canto, followed by an extended ballet. At the center of the act is Armida’s aria, “D’amor al dolce impero” (“The sweet rule of love”). The kind of piece that might be transplanted to any other love story, it provides a fine opportunity for your students to listen more for the overall shape and sound of a musical number than for the effects of its finer details.

The aria begins in **Track 20** with a relatively straightforward presentation of the theme: love is a good thing. Musically, it might be a real showstopper, varied in dynamics, impulsive in rhythm, and amply ornamented with vocal tricks and trills. A chorus of nymphs agrees: you have to appreciate love.

But **Track 21** raises the ante. Barely a note of the melody is left unadorned. The melody rises and falls precipitously, takes prodigious leaps from low to high and loud to soft, and twists and turns in a manner that’s literally breathtaking. Again the chorus sings their agreement. This, together with a brief instrumental break, allows the soprano a chance to prepare for even more daring vocal feats.

The main musical theme occurs a third time in **Track 22**, more varied in pace and so elaborate that melody nearly disappears, jazz-like, into the variations. At the end of the track the chorus repeats Armida’s last four lines, lulling listeners into the sense that things are wrapping up. But wait! **Track 23** brings one last wordless phrase of unbridled soprano virtuosity.

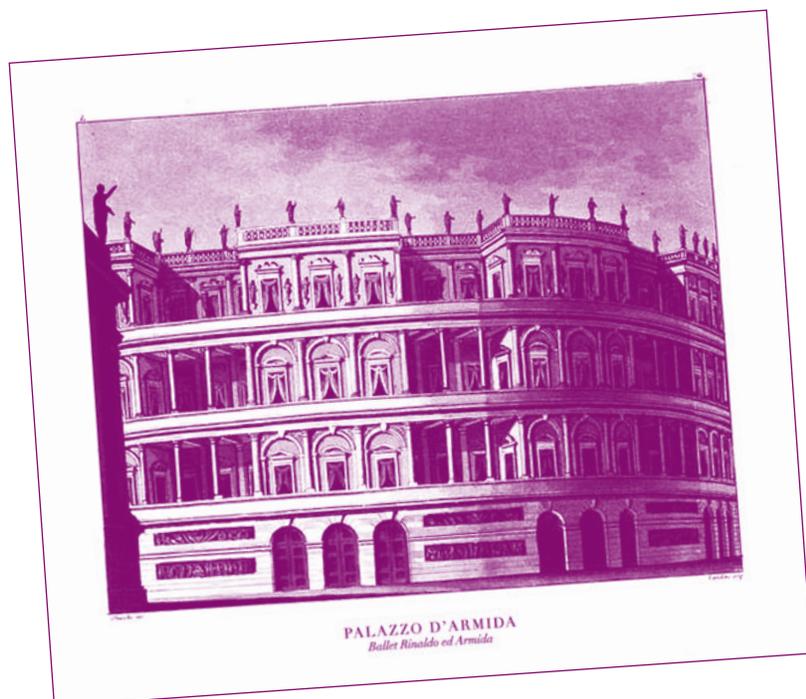
Nothing in “D’amor al dolce impero” advances the plot. Nothing informs us about the inner life of a character. No new idea is presented. This aria is about sheer operatic thrills—and the prodigious talents of a performer courageous enough to take the song out for a spin.

Be a Man! A Close Look at the Tenor Trio in Act III

Armida is notorious for its six tenor roles. Though all six never sing at the same time (enabling performers to do double duty in some productions), Carlo, Ubaldo, and Rinaldo do share the stage for some serious moments in the middle of Act III. Carlo and Ubaldo have been sent to bring Rinaldo back to the Crusader camp. To do so, they must break Armida's spell. They must return Rinaldo to his warrior self. They must defeat what they describe as "folle amore"—crazy love. After eavesdropping on Armida and Rinaldo's third love duet (see the Musical Highlight: Closer and Closer), they confront their colleague, using a magic mirror to expose what Schmidt's libretto calls his degradation and his "mollezza"—softness or femininity.

The trio section begins in earnest with Rinaldo's "In quale aspetto imbello" ("what a weakling"), a solo whose lyrics, at least, are filled with self-loathing—**Track 24**. Rinaldo oscillates between honor and his love for Armida for several minutes, repeating his self-scorn through **Track 25**, as Carlo and Ubaldo look on, praying for divine intervention. **Track 26** sounds like a breakthrough: "I'm still Rinaldo." But no, he still longs for Armida. Carlo and Ubaldo have had quite enough. In **Track 27**, they announce, "From here on in, the voice of honor scolds you." Rinaldo calls upon virtue and valor to conquer the love in his heart. He has yet another revelation, described as a ray of light shining upon his soul, which Carlo and Ubaldo proclaim as divine forgiveness. They call him away to war, but not before embroidering their dialogue into a cavalcade of tenor harmonies. At last, Carlo and Ubaldo whisk Rinaldo away. The Crusaders have defeated Armida, reclaiming the conquest she valued most—by helping Rinaldo reclaim his manly character.

The story of Armida has inspired adaptations in various genres. The set for a 19th-century Italian ballet version is seen here.



Closer and Closer: A Comparison of Three Duets

On the surface, nothing could be more straightforward than the relationship between Rinaldo and Armida. Following the briefest of hesitations in Act I, he falls hard for her. They go off to her magical love nest, and only the intervention of his army buddies can break them apart. Yet a close comparison of their three duets reveals a more slowly evolving relationship, evoked more vividly in the music than in the text.

Rinaldo and Armida share their first duet late in Act I: “Amor... possente nome!” (“Love... what a powerful word!”). Broken up here into five tracks, it’s virtually a portrait of falling in love. Rinaldo sings first, in **Track 28**. He is flabbergasted by Armida’s use of the word “love” (see Track 9 in the Musical Highlight: The Soprano Sorceress). Armida responds in **Track 29**, contrasting the refinement of her love with Rinaldo’s raw nature. Then, in **Track 30**, they begin to alternate lines. It’s the serious flirtation of two soon-to-be lovers. The situation changes slightly in **Track 31**. Now they actually sing together, but almost accidentally—overlapping each other’s parts, which are almost identical. The key difference is that Rinaldo is afraid to lose his freedom, while Armida is hopeful that he’s falling for her. (Schmidt elegantly pivots the two sentiments around a single word, “speranza,” or hope). In **Track 32**, at last, they sing as one, in musical, if not yet lyrical harmony.

The next love duet comes in Act II, upon their arrival in Armida’s magic garden. Following an extended cello solo (**Track 33**), Rinaldo asks “Where am I?” **Track 34** finds the lovers trading endearments right from the start, this time reaching harmonic culmination with precisely the same thought: they will defy fate. The cello returns in **Track 35** to accompany them through a reprise, then to provide a finishing flourish.

Rinaldo and Armida sing a third duet in Act III, with Carlo and Ubaldo listening in. Again, an instrumental passage opens the piece—this time, a violin (**Track 36**). Then the duet, “Soavi catene” (“Gentle chains”) begins (**Track 37**). Here, no time is spent in alternation, whether flirtatious teasing or exchanging pet names. Rinaldo and Armida sing together from the start, accompanied by the violin, of being bound eternally, and Rossini provides the musical analogue. Having started the two out with distinct, separate parts, he has, over the course of the opera, moved them closer and closer together until they express themselves as one. What better way to heighten the drama of the next incident—Carlo and Ubaldo tearing the couple asunder. By carefully arranging the lovers’ parts in these three duets, Rossini demonstrates how musical composition alone can convey the arc of a relationship.



Lawrence Brownlee, seen here as Don Ramiro in Rossini’s *La Cenerentola*, sings Rinaldo in *Armida*.

PHOTO: KEN HOWARD / METROPOLITAN OPERA

Duel to the Death: A Close Look at the Combat Between Rinaldo and Gernando

Rossini and Schmidt needed a way to drive Rinaldo into Armida's arms. In Tasso's original poem, Armida leaves the camp with the ten men she requested, but without Rinaldo. She does not seduce him until much later, long after Rinaldo has gone into exile for killing Gernando. The opera conflates these incidents: in escaping trial for Gernando's death, Rinaldo goes off with Armida. The killing of Gernando indirectly becomes the cause of their love affair.

What provokes the dispute between Rinaldo and Gernando? Nothing but jealousy: Gernando, displeased that Rinaldo has been appointed to succeed the late Dudon, has insulted the new leader. Words turn to action in **Track 38**, as Rinaldo challenges Gernando. Gernando responds in kind in **Track 39**. The sound of swords clanging can already be heard. A sword fight begins in earnest in **Track 40**. The crowd tries to stop it. Armida calls out, fearful that Rinaldo will be hurt. Hot-headed, he responds, "I don't need advice!" In **Track 41**, Gernando and Rinaldo both brag about their anger. They're so similar in spirit that they use the same words and music. Their fight continues, in the orchestra and the clashing of swords, but by **Track 42**, they have moved offstage. Rossini's music alone provides a clear picture of the slashing, thrusting, and cutting—until Rinaldo calls out, "Die!" The crowd and Armida are shocked. Rinaldo insists that he has only delivered just punishment.

With this scene, as noted, Rossini sets the stage for Rinaldo's exile with Armida. But the scene accomplishes something more. Rossini is preparing the audience for the scene in Act III where Carlo and Ubaldo will restore Rinaldo as a warrior. (See the Musical Highlight: Be a Man!) This duel to the death adds old-fashioned action to the spectacle, but more importantly, it establishes the "true" Rinaldo as no lovesick puppy, but an impulsive, formidable man of action.

Supporting Students during the *Live in HD* Transmission

Thanks to print and audio recording, much about opera can be enjoyed long before a performance. But performance itself remains an incomparable embarrassment of riches—sound and images, pageantry and technology, drama, skill, and craft. Performance Activities are designed to help students look at different aspects of the experience, consider creative choices that have been made, and sharpen their own critical faculties.

Each Performance Activity incorporates a reproducible activity sheet. You should go over the sheets with students before the transmission, so they'll know what to look for during the opera. Students should bring the activity sheets to the transmission for filling out during intermission or after the final curtain, based on what they've seen and heard.

The basic activity sheet is called My Highs & Lows. It includes a ratings matrix with which students can express their critiques, a time-tested prompt for careful thinking. It is intended not only to help students articulate and express their opinions, but to support comparison and contrast, enriching understanding of the art form as a whole.

For *Armida*, the other activity sheet (Everything Is Beautiful at the Ballet) calls attention to the ballet that comprises a major part of Act II.

The Performance Activities can be found on pages 27 and 28. Either activity can provide the basis for class discussion after the transmission. On the next page, you'll find an activity created specifically for follow-up after the transmission.

Making Magic: A Discussion of Stagecraft

IN PREPARATION

This activity requires no preparation other than attendance at *The Met: Live in HD* transmission of *Armida*.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Social Studies (Technology, Psychology) and Performing Arts

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- To discuss and reflect upon students' experience watching the Met's *Live in HD* transmission of *Armida*
- To apply their imaginations to the possibilities of stagecraft
- To stimulate critical thinking about perception and reality

Students will enjoy starting the class with an open discussion of the Met performance. What did they like? What didn't they? Did anything surprise them? What would they like to see or hear again? What would they have done differently? This discussion will offer students an opportunity to review the notes on their My Highs and Lows sheet, as well as their thoughts about the set design and staging of this Met production—in short, to see themselves as *Armida* experts.

Throughout the libretto and score of *Armida*, Rossini wrote stage directions for spectacular effects that could be performed with the special equipment available in the new theater in Naples. These include:

- A chariot that descends from the clouds and turns into a throne of flowers
- A pair of disappearing dragons
- A forest that turns into a magnificent throne room
- Evil monsters that disappear at the wave of a wand
- An army of torch-wielding demons who turn an enchanted garden into a place of desolation

In his history of stage illusions, *Hiding the Elephant* (Da Capo, 2004), Jim Steinmeyer documents how physics and psychology work together with technology to create illusions—devices that trick our minds into believing we've seen something we know to be impossible. While movies and TV use sophisticated computer graphics to create illusions, old-fashioned mechanical and electrical tools are still common in the theater. Craftsmen like Steinmeyer, Walter Blaney, and Douglas Tilford have made fascinating careers out of designing such stage effects. Students may enjoy researching these devices and their inventors at websites such as:

- www.jimsteinmeyer.com/profile
- www.walterblaney.com/illusions
- www.tilfordillusions.com/illusions.html

Dover Publications (store.doverpublications.com) provides even more detailed information about the creation of stage illusions in a number of affordable books, including:

- *Magic and Showmanship: A Handbook for Conjurers*
- *Houdini on Magic*
- *Maskelyne's Book of Magic*
- *Scarne's Magic Tricks*

Much stagecraft depends on tricks of optical perception—a field of study where theater magic meets psychology. When looking at things, our brains tend to assume similarity, proximity, continuity, and closure of objects—under the right

circumstances of illusion, we imagine seeing things that aren't there. The principle is explored briefly at www.keele.ac.uk/depts/aa/widening/uniworld/webclub/rs/optical.htm.

A more detailed explanation can be found at allpsych.com/psychology101/perception.html. Information is also available at www.scientificpsychic.com/graphics.

Equipped with a bit of knowledge of the craft and psychology of illusion building, students may enjoy trying to analyse the work of the artists of the Metropolitan Opera: what kind of technical devices did they employ? How did they play with the audience's perceptual expectations to achieve the effects seen in this production of *Armida*? Students can share their hypotheses in drawings or posters. Even better, they may enjoy designing and building their own illusions. Teacher resources are available from the International Technology Education Association at iteaconnect.org.

Here you'll find reproducibles of the texts and worksheets for each *Armida* activity. Feel free to make hard copies of these and distribute them to your students.

My Highs & Lows and Everything Is Beautiful at the Ballet are activity sheets to be used during *The Met: Live in HD* transmission. The latter is designed to focus student attention during the transmission and to support your post-screening classroom work.

ARMIDA

ACTIVITY SHEET FOR CLASSROOM ACTIVITY
 What You Don't Know Might Confuse You

A CRUSADER'S CLUE (TRACK 1)

GOFFREDO: Princess, listen.
 In the service of heaven,
 We give our blood and sweat.
 When Zion is free, when the symbol
 Of our faith waves on that ancient hill,
 Then we will be able to think
 Of the kingdom you have lost.

Reina, senti.
 In servizio del cielo,
 Sangue e sudor da noi si spande.
 Rieda in libertà Sionne; su quel monte
 Di nostra fede ondeggi
 Il venerato segno,
 E poi si pensi al tuo perduto regno.

PLOT POINT	HOW IT WOULD LOOK IN A _____ STORY...
Act 1: Dudon, the Crusader leader, has died (before the opera begins).	
Armida and her uncle arrive in the Crusader camp, lying about why they have come.	
Many Crusaders fall in love with Armida.	
Goffredo announces that they can't help Armida until after they conquer Jerusalem ("Zion").	
Rinaldo is chosen to replace Dudon.	
Gernando ridicules Rinaldo.	
Rinaldo and Gernando fight; Gernando is killed.	
Goffredo says Rinaldo must stand trial.	
Rinaldo runs off with Armida.	
Act II: Rinaldo and Armida enjoy the enchanted forest.	
Act III: Carlo and Ubaldo arrive to bring Rinaldo back to the Crusader camp.	
Rinaldo decides to go back.	
Armida, furious, destroys the enchanted palace and vows revenge.	

ARMIDA

RESOURCE PAGE FOR MUSICAL HIGHLIGHT

The Soprano Sorceress

SELECTION A: TRACKS 2–5

ARMIDA: I'm wretched! What is left for me
If I can't find pity in you.
From now on, life is worse
Than death for me.

Sventurata! or che mi resta
Se pietà non trovo in te?
Della morte, più funesta
È la vita omai per me.

SELECTION B: TRACK 6

ARMIDA: But you've completely forgotten
About my love—
Yes, the love of Armida, which in
Her weakness she revealed to you.

Ma in cupo obbligo
Riponesti però l'affetto mio.
Sì, d'Armida l'affetto,
Che la sua debolezza ti fe' palese.

TRACK 7

ARMIDA: And what did I get for it? Total devaluation.
Cruel abandonment.

RINALDO: Stop, oh! stop...

E qual mai frutto ottenni?
Un marcato disprezzo, un crudele abandon.
Cessa, deh! cessa

TRACK 8

RINALDO: ...torturing me, Armida.
If I slipped away from you, the trumpets of war
Called me back to camp;
The heat of war, the desire for glory.

Di trafiggermi, Armida.
Se da te volsi il piè, bellica tromba
Al campo m'invitò,
Bellico ardore, desio di gloria.

TRACK 9

ARMIDA: And love led me here.

E me qui trasse amore.

SELECTION C: TRACK 10

RINALDO: Ah! I can't resist. Yes, I'll love you faithfully.

ARMIDA: Oh, unexpected joy! What a moment of good fortune!

RINALDO: Yes, I'll love you.

ARMIDA: What a moment!

Ah! non poss'io resistere... Sì, t'amerò costante.

Oh inaspettato giubilo! Oh fortunato istante!

Sì, t'amerò.

Oh istante!

SELECTION D: TRACK 11

ARMIDA: Is it true—you are leaving me? Cruel man!

RINALDO: Destiny demands that I leave you.

Glory calls me to the camp of honor.

ARMIDA: And does glory betray love and faith?

Ed è pur vero?... e abbandonarmi vuoi? Crudel!

Vuole il destino ch'io da te volga il piè.

Gloria m'invita al campo dell'onore.

E gloria fia tradir l'amor, la fé?

ARMIDA

TRACK 12

RINALDO: (*leaving*) You will always be a sweet memory for me.
Stay here in peace... (Oh, my heart is breaking!)

ARMIDA: (*holding him back*) Peace! Can my sorrow find peace?

Dolce memoria per me sempre sarai...
Rimanti in pace...(Ah! mi si spezza il core.)

Pace? E pace trovar può il mio dolore?

TRACK 13

UBALDO: Don't give in!

CARLO: Hide your sadness from her.

Resisti.

A lei nascondi l'affanno, il duol.

TRACK 14

ARMIDA: Go, if that's what you want.
I only ask to follow in your footsteps. I will do what you want.
If it pleases you, your humble handmaiden will
Chop off the tresses you despise and
Slavishly follow wherever your warrior's passion burns hottest.
Listen: I have strength enough to lead your horses
And carry your weapons.
You will have me as a faithful
Follower and not a lover.

Parti, se vuoi; sol chiedo i tuoi passi seguir...
Qual più ti piace di me dispor potrai;
Se pur ti è grato, ancella umil raccorcerò la chioma,
Or che a te fatta è vile.
In aspetto servile ti seguirò dove
L'ardor guerriero fia che più ferva.
Sento: per condurti i destrieri
E portar l'armi in me vigor bastante;
Mi avrai fedel seguace e non amante.

SELECTION E: TRACK 15

ARMIDA: Where am I? He has fled!

Dove son io? Fuggì!

TRACK 16

ARMIDA: Alas, leave me? Oh! Can he be so ungrateful?

Lasciarmi, ohimè, così poté l'ingrato?

TRACK 17

ARMIDA: Am I still alive? Does my desolate heart
Continue to beat? What to do? Vengeance... Love...
Which of you should I listen to?

E vivo ancora?... e palpiti mio desolato core?...
Che fo?... Vendetta... Amore...
Di voi chi udir dovrò?...

TRACK 18-19

ARMIDA: Can there be a worse state than the
One in which I find myself?

Del mio trovar si può più atroce stato!

ARMIDA

RESOURCE PAGE FOR MUSICAL HIGHLIGHT

The Nature of Love

TRACK 20

ARMIDA: Nature always gives in
To the sweet rule of love.
Where is that audacious soul
Who doesn't appreciate love?
The miserable being who doesn't
Feel its potent flame
Has a heart that has turned to stone,
Or never had a heart at all.

CHORUS: Where is that audacious soul
Who doesn't appreciate love?

D'amore al dolce impero
Natura ognor soggiace.
Dov'è quell'alma audace
Che non apprezzi Amor?
Chi, misero, non sente
La fiamma sua possente,
Di smalto ha il core in petto,
O mai non ebbe un cor.

Dov'è quell'alma audace
Che non apprezzi Amor?

TRACK 21

Moving from branch to branch,
Birds sing of love.
The creatures of the deep
Silent sea also love.
The beasts of the wild love
There in the Hyrcanian forests.
For love's sake
Even plants bear fruit.

CHORUS: Where is that audacious soul
Who doesn't appreciate love?

Gli augei tra fronde e fronde
Spiegano amor col canto;
Aman perfin dell'onde
I muti abitator.
Aman le crude belve
Là tra le ircane selve,
Son per amor feconde
Le stesse piante ancor.

Dov'è quell'alma audace
Che non apprezzi Amor?

TRACK 22

Youth is fleeting and
Beauty vanishes.
Voracious time
Swallows them both.
So lovers, enjoy
The moments
While the flower
Of youth shines on you.

La fresca età sen fugge,
È la beltade un lampo,
Ché l'una e l'altra strugge
Il tempo vorator.
Dunque godete amanti
De' vostri liet'istanti,
Or che vi ride in volto
Di giovinezza il fior.

ARMIDA

RESOURCE PAGE FOR MUSICAL HIGHLIGHT

Be a Man!

TRACK 24

RINALDO: What a weakling
I see in myself!
What a cowardly thing!
Oh, my shame is gigantic!

In quale aspetto imbel-
le lo mi ravviso, oh stelle!...
Qual di viltade oggetto!...
Oh immenso mio rossor!

TRACK 25

CARLO: (He is sighing, he is fainting, he is moaning.
He feels stirrings of honor
Oh, God! Look with favor
Upon our wishes.)

(Sospira, langue, geme.
D'onor già sente i moti.
O Nume! i nostri voti
Secondi il tuo favor.)

RINALDO: What a weakling
I see in myself!
What a cowardly thing!
Oh, my shame is gigantic!

In quale aspetto imbel-
le lo mi ravviso, oh stelle!
Qual di viltade oggetto!
Oh immenso mio rossor!

UBALDO AND CARLO: (He is sighing, he is fainting, he is moaning.
He feels stirrings of honor
Oh, God! Look with favor
Upon our wishes.)

(Sospira, langue, geme.
D'onor già sente i moti.
O Nume! i nostri voti
Secondi il tuo favor.)

TRACK 26

RINALDO: Stop! Oh, stop! What barbaric torment.
Am I coward? No—I remember that I'm still Rinaldo.

Cessate... oimè! cessate...che barbaro tormento!
Io vile?...No: rammento che son Rinaldo ancor.

TRACK 27

UBALDO AND CARLO: From here on in,
The voice of honor scolds you.

Severa omai ti sgrida
La voce dell'onor.

RINALDO: Virtue, valor, come
Together inside me
To conquer love—
Which gives me such pain.

Unitevi a gara
Virtude, valore,
Per vincere amore
Che affanno mi dà.

But an unexpected ray
Lights up my soul...
Ah, yes, I see you again,
Heavenly goodness!

Ma un raggio improvviso
Quest'alma rischiara...
Ah! sì, ti ravviso
Celeste bontà.

UBALDO AND CARLO: Splendid hero,
Come with us.
Heaven has declared
Your forgiveness.

Splendor degli eroi,
T'invola con noi;
Del ciel si dichiara
Per te la pietà.

ARMIDA

RESOURCE PAGE FOR MUSICAL HIGHLIGHT

Closer and Closer

TRACK 28

RINALDO: Love—what a powerful word!
How its sound on
Those soft lips goes
Straight to my sad heart.

Amor... Possente nome!
Come risuoni, oh come
Su quel soave labbro,
Nel mio dolente cor.

TRACK 29

ARMIDA: Yes, love. Since nature
Gave you a valiant soul,
Give me death and destroy
The love within me.

Sì, amor... Se un' alma fiera
Ti diè natura in sorte,
Recami pur la morte,
E in me fia spento amor.

TRACK 30

RINALDO: Armida... (Oh heaven!)

ARMIDA: What do you want?

RINALDO: Destiny requires...

ARMIDA: What?

RINALDO: That I turn away from your splendor.
Duty commands me.

ARMIDA: Turn away from me! Yet heroes
Have often been hurt by love.

Armida... (Oh ciel!)

Che vuoi?

Chiede il destin...

Che mai?

Ch'io fugga i tuoi bei rai:
Dover mel comandò.

Fuggirmi!... Eppur gli eroi
Sovente amor piagò.

TRACKS 31, 32

RINALDO: Hearing these words,
I lose my resolve.
Miserable me!
I have no more hope of freedom.

ARMIDA: Hearing these words,
He's losing his resolve.
I have still not lost
My sweet hope.

Vacillo a quegli accenti,
Manca la mia costanza.
Misero! più speranza
Di libertà non ho.

Vacilla a questi accenti,
Manca la sua costanza.
La dolce mia speranza
Perduta ancor non ho.

ARMIDA

TRACKS 34, 35

RINALDO: Where am I?

ARMIDA: At my side.

RINALDO: I'm so happy!

ARMIDA: My beautiful treasure!

RINALDO: If you call me yours...

ARMIDA: Darling, if you love me...

ARMIDA AND RINALDO: I will defy all the cruelty of fate.

Dove son io!...

Al fianco mio.

Oh me beato!

Mio bel tesor!

Se tuo mi chiami...

Caro, se m'ami,

Sfido del fato tutto il rigor.

TRACK 37

ARMIDA AND RINALDO: Gentle chains,

If love forged you,

Then forever bind me thus

To my one and only.

Soavi catene,

Se amore v'ordi,

Per sempre al mio bene

Mi unite così.

ARMIDA

RESOURCE PAGE FOR MUSICAL HIGHLIGHT

Duel to the Death

TRACK 38

RINALDO: If your spirit is
As bold as your words,
Then get ready
To draw swords, liar.

Se pari agli accenti
Hai l'anima audace,
T'accingi, mendace,
Quel brando a impugnar.

TRACK 39

GERNANDO: I should fear your wrath?
You wretch—you're mistaken.
My arm and my blade are
Ready to send you to hell.

Ch'io tema il tuo sdegno?
Indegno, t'inganni.
Son pronti a' tuoi danni
La destra e l'acciar.

TRACK 40

CHORUS: Stop!

RINALDO: Get back!

ARMIDA: Rinaldo's in danger!

ARMIDA AND CHORUS: Warriors, stop!

RINALDO: I don't need advice.

Fermate!

Sgombrate!

Rinaldo in periglio!

Ah! prodi, cessate...

Non odo consiglio.

TRACK 41

RINALDO AND GERNANDO: You try to hold back
My anger in vain.

Invan l'ira mia
Si tenta frenar.

TRACK 42

RINALDO: Die!

CHORUS: What a thrust!

ARMIDA: What have you done?

RINALDO: I've punished the scoundrel.

Muori...

Oh colpo!

Che facesti!

Quell'indegno è già punito.

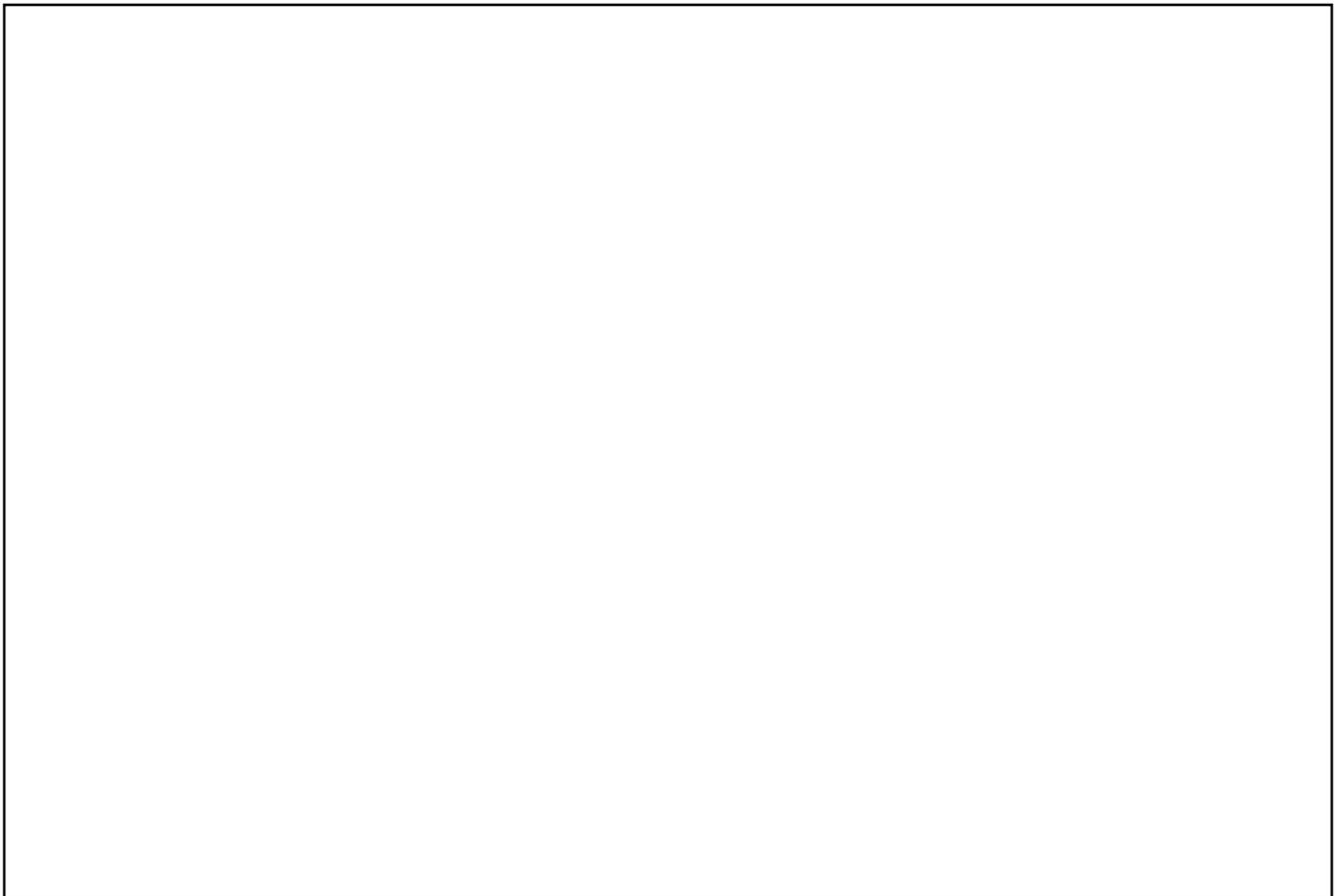
Performance Activity: Everything Is Beautiful at the Ballet

Name _____ Class _____ Teacher _____

Rossini created *Armida* as a vehicle for a star soprano, today performed by Renée Fleming, but also as a grand spectacle to open a new theater in Naples. Music, magic, drama, and dance would all be part of the extravaganza. This included an Act II ballet, described this way in the libretto:

Armida, hoping to extinguish all desire for glory in Rinaldo's heart and to arouse instead desire for love, conjures up the image of a young warrior, surrounded by lovely nymphs who compete with each other to seduce him. He tries to avoid them, but little by little, he is possessed by lust, until they finally remove his warrior's insignia and replace them with a crown and a garden of flowers.

Sketch your own impressions of the ballet here:



Armida: My Highs & Lows

MAY 1, 2010

CONDUCTED BY RICCARDO FRIZZA

REVIEWED BY _____

THE STARS	STAR POWER	MY COMMENTS
RENÉE FLEMING AS ARMIDA	*****	
LAWRENCE BROWNLEE AS RINALDO	*****	
JOSÉ MANUEL ZAPATA AS GERNANDO	*****	
BARRY BANKS AS CARLO	*****	
KOBIE VAN RENSBURG AS UBALDO	*****	

THE SHOW, SCENE BY SCENE	ACTION	MUSIC	SET DESIGN/STAGING
ARMIDA AND HER UNCLE ARRIVE IN THE CRUSADER CAMP MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
GOFFREDO ANNOUNCES THAT THEY CAN'T HELP ARMIDA UNTIL AFTER THEY CONQUER JERUSALEM ("ZION") MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
ARMIDA TRIES TO SEDUCE RINALDO MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
GERNANDO CHALLENGES RINALDO'S NEW AUTHORITY MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
RINALDO AND GERNANDO FIGHT; GERNANDO IS KILLED MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
RINALDO RUNS OFF WITH ARMIDA MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
THE DEMONS GATHER IN THE FOREST MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
ARMIDA TRANSFORMS HER CHARIOT INTO A THRONE MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
RINALDO REACTS TO THE ENCHANTED FOREST MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
ARMIDA TRANSFORMS THE FOREST INTO A PALACE MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
BALLET: THE STORY OF THE WARRIOR AND THE NYMPHS MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
UBALDO AND CARLO ARRIVE AT THE ENCHANTED GARDEN MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
UBANDO AND CARLO CONFRONT RINALDO MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
ARMIDA DISCOVERS RINALDO IS GONE MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
ARMIDA DESTROYS THE ENCHANTED PALACE AND VOWS REVENGE MY OPINION	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5