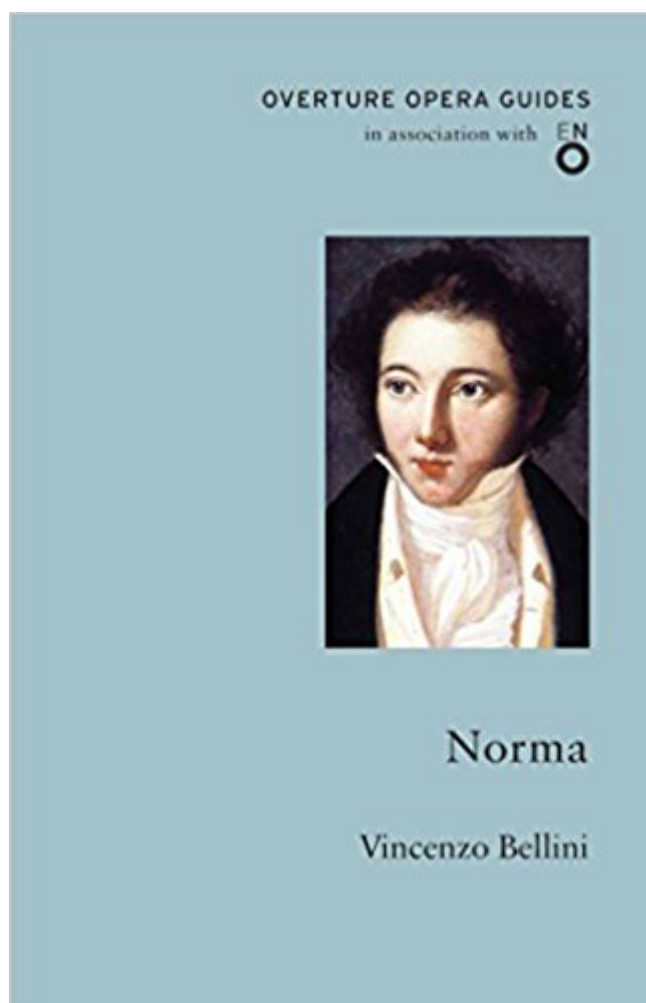


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Norma



Synopsis

Vincenzo Bellini's *Norma*, first produced at La Scala, Milan, in 1831, is widely regarded as the greatest achievement of the bel canto era. Its title role, sung at the premiere by Giuditta Pasta, has been undertaken in more recent times by Maria Callas, Joan Sutherland and Monserrat Caballé and remains one of the supremely challenging soprano parts in the operatic repertory. The opera tells of the conflicting loyalties of the High Priestess of the Druids, Norma, who is torn between her duty to her people and her love for the father of her two children, the proconsul of the occupying Roman forces in Gaul. The guide contains articles on the background to the opera and the development of bel canto, a detailed examination of its musical structure and a survey of its performance history, dealing in particular with the approaches of some of the many distinguished singers who have appeared in its principal roles. There is also a discussion of the contentious issue of which voice-types should more appropriately be singing each of the two leading female characters. The guide includes the full libretto with English translation, sixteen pages of illustrations, a musical thematic guide, a discography, a bibliography, and DVD and website guides.

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“These guides, so beautiful to have and to behold, mark a huge advance on their predecessors. I find them essential supplements, not only to ENO and Royal Opera programmes, but to recordings issued on CD which often come without scholarly documentation and a libretto. The performance histories of which I wrote one myself are especially

valuable, and not easily accessible elsewhere. – Hugh Canning of The Sunday Times – “For anyone with a keen interest in opera, whatever their level of knowledge, this series remains a benchmark of quality and clarity. The content is serious, reliable and trustworthy, handsomely put together, full of variety and scholarship but always making the practical experience of going to the opera a priority. I return to these volumes again and again and find the updated and new issues absolutely invaluable. – Fiona Maddocks of The Observer – “This uniformly excellent series is indispensable for the serious opera lover, all the more so now that almost all the CD companies have abandoned issuing a libretto with their opera releases, and have such scant background information. The English translations are on facing pages with the original texts, and in all respects the books are helpful and compact, and interestingly illustrated. – Michael Tanner of The Spectator – “I am delighted to see the return of the ENO Opera Guides, bigger and even more authoritative than before. There are authoritative new articles as well as several of the irreplaceable originals, the presentation is very handsome and a decided gain is the brilliantly chosen selection of production images, in colour as well as black and white. The Guides are an invaluable reference for opera lovers at any level. – David Nice of The Arts Desk

Vincenzo Bellini (1801 – 1835) was born in Catania, Sicily and during his short life composed some of the most exquisitely beautiful operas ever written, with long melodic lines that have rarely been equalled. Collaborating almost exclusively with the greatest librettist of his time, Felice Romani, he had enormous success throughout Europe. In addition to Norma, his operas include Il pirata, I Capuleti e i Montecchi, La sonnambula and I puritani.

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