



## The Verdi-Boito Correspondence

By Giuseppe Verdi, Arrigo Boito

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These 301 letters between Giuseppe Verdi and his last, most gifted librettist, Arrigo Boito, document an extraordinary chapter in musical history. Now available for the first time in English, this correspondence records both a unique friendship and its creative legacy.

This new edition of the landmark *Carteggio Verdi/Boito* is at once a valuable resource for all students, teachers, and scholars of opera and a fascinating glimpse of the daily life of European art and artists during the fertile last decades of the 19th century.

Embarking on a 20-year collaboration, Verdi and Boito produced a successful revision of *Simon Boccanegra*, and two new operas, *Otello* and *Falstaff*. They created what many consider to be Verdi's greatest operas, thanks both to Boito's poetry and to his handling of the composer. Here are the day-to-day tasks of creation: poet and composer debating problems of dramatic structure, words, phrases, and meters; altering dialogue as, at the same time, they converse about the wider worlds of art and music. The give and take of artistic creation is rendered fascinatingly.

This edition features a new introduction by Marcello Conati, improvements and updatings to the original edition, and an appendix of undated correspondence. William Weaver's translation is characteristically pitch-perfect; he also provides a short closing sketch of Boito's life after the death of his beloved maestro. Explanatory "linking texts" between the letters create a narrative.

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### Editorial Review

#### From Publishers Weekly

Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901) had reason to dislike librettist-composer Arrigo Boito (1842-1918), who had scoffed at him in print. But when Verdi's librettist Francesco Maria Piave died in 1876 and a replacement was needed, Verdi's publisher lobbied hard to bring about a rapprochement between them. And as their correspondence shows, working together on Verdi's last two operas, *Otello* and *Falstaff*, as well as revising *Simon Boccanegra*, forged a bond between them that ended only with Verdi's death. Verdi, who virtually wrote his own librettos, allowed his librettists to function basically as versifiers, yet on reading Boito's final third of *Otello*, he pronounced it "divinely good." When Boito's own opera *Mefistofele* was revived successfully, Verdi was delighted; responding to Boito's enthusiasm for the *Falstaff* project, Verdi sensitively urged him to complete his opera *Nerone* first (Boito never did). Opera lovers will be pleased that their correspondence, edited by Verdi scholars Conti and Medici and published in Italy in 1978, is now available in Weaver's (*Verdi, A Documentary Study*) smooth translation and with his commentary. This collection of 301 letters is an important supplement to Mary Jane Phillips-Matz's biography *Verdi*.

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#### From Library Journal

Gifted Italian poet/composer Boito was the librettist for Verdi's last and perhaps greatest operas, *Otello* and *Falstaff*. He shared a deep artistic sympathy with Verdi in their finely matched duet, and his delicate tuning adjustments to Verdi's work are evident throughout this vivid translation of their 20-year correspondence. Weaver deftly condenses notes from the original edition (published in Italy as *Carteggio Verdi/Boito* in 1978) and creates helpful explanations connecting the letters. Even if many other books document Verdi's operas, few of his letters are available in English. This collection is important for its size (301 letters) and themes, not the least of which is the greatness possible (in art and friendship) when two talented men collaborate with mutual loving respect. For most serious music collections.

*Bonnie Jo Dopp, formerly with Dist. of Columbia P.L.*

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#### From Kirkus Reviews

Twenty years (1880-1900) of indispensable letters between Italy's greatest opera composer and his last, most accomplished librettist. In a lengthy, fully annotated, and excellent introduction to this first English edition of the correspondence between the internationally celebrated Verdi and his much younger collaborator Arrigo Boito (himself a composer of note), Conati, an Italian Verdi scholar, lays out the peculiar geography of their professional relationship and ultimate friendship. The meeting of two fiercely independent spirits began badly in 1863, when Verdi took offense at remarks Boito and his friends had aimed at the "old guard," of whom Verdi was the most prominent figure. Fortunately for the world's music lovers, things went uphill from there, helped along by the publisher Giulio Ricordi, who knew a match made in heaven when he saw it. Verdi, who had previously considered librettists good only for translating into verse dramatic outlines he had already created, learned to work with an equal; Boito was a superb poet, passionately devoted to the renewal of the musical theater, who had to be treated as a peer, not a subordinate. The letters, stuffed with fascinating detail, catch the two titans in the process of creating the revised *Simon Boccanegra*, then *Otello* and *Falstaff*; sections of text, structural and musical ideas, even production concepts fly back and forth between Milan and Sant'Agata. Before the premiere of *Falstaff*, Boito writes, "In the costumes of our characters we must avoid the too beautiful, because too beautiful is so rarely associated with the picturesque." Verdi, who knew that his wordsmith was a real man of letters rather than a hack, shows warmth and respect; Boito's tone increasingly approaches veneration mixed with delight. The letters are linked by editorial passages to create

an intelligible historical narrative. A must-have for every music lover's shelf. -- *Copyright ©1994, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.*

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