



AMERICAN FOUNDATION  
OF SAVOY ORDERS

REPORT  
2015 SAVOY HISTORY  
LECTURE SERIES

October 6, 2015  
Knickerbocker Club



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THE AMERICAN FOUNDATION OF SAVOY ORDERS

**THIRTEENTH ANNUAL SAVOY HISTORY  
LECTURE, RECEPTION AND DINNER**

Savoy Lecture Series Chairman, Gr. Uff. Marco Grassi



*Giuseppe Verdi by Giovanni Boldini (1842-1931)*

*"Exploring Giuseppe Verdi's Enduring Legacy:  
Italy's Risorgimento, Unification under the  
House of Savoy, and Beyond"*

by  
**August Ventura**







## AMERICAN FOUNDATION OF SAVOY ORDERS

**Thirteenth Annual Savoy History  
Lecture, Reception and Dinner  
October 6, 2015**

*Exploring Giuseppe's Verdi's Enduring  
Legacy: Italy's Risorgimento,  
Unification under the House of Savoy,  
and Beyond"*

On Tuesday, October 6, 2015, the American Foundation of Savoy Orders sponsored its 13th edition of the "Savoy History Lecture Series," at the elegantly old world Knickerbocker Club in New York City. Over the years, History Series Chairman, Savoy Foundation President Gr. Uff. Marco Grassi has brought to the podium a wide range of speakers and topics, in a variety of different venues, dealing with the history of the Savoy Dynasty and its pivotal role in Italian culture, the military and politics. This year's topic was the extraordinary influence of one of Italy's greatest cultural figures, whose operatic themes and inspiring music, before the age of mass telecommunications, were able to rouse and sustain the fervor of the populace and foster the political movement that eventually led to unification of the entire Italian peninsula, in spite of the often strict censorship of his work imposed by the disparate rule of smaller states.

The evening's lecture entitled "Exploring Giuseppe's Verdi's Enduring Legacy: Italy's Risorgimento, Unification under the House of Savoy, and Beyond" was delivered by Verdi scholar August Ventura, a notable writer and film-maker who has devoted himself to Verdi's "enduring legacy" in printed word and through the medium of documentary film. His current project, entitled "27", explores the still-vibrant opera culture in Parma, Italy, whose residents venerate not only the Maestro's artistic output of 27 operas but also the political engagement and humanitarian acts that distinguished Verdi's extraordinary life.







## Lecture

The audience enjoyed a mixed media presentation of the lecture accompanied by visual, intellectual, musical and gastronomic elements. A wealth of fascinating details emerged, illustrated by film excerpts and slide projections, orchestrated by Mr. Ventura who interspersed selections from Verdi operas superlatively performed by soprano Victoria Cannizzo. She was accompanied by maestro Giovanni Reggioli on the piano. Uff. Avv. Richard Miller, Jr., himself an operatic tenor and President of the Metropolitan Opera Guild, sponsored the performing artists who enhanced the Lecture program with aria selections from several of Verdi's politically accented operas.

Mr. Ventura pointed out that today's opera audiences do not seem interested in contemporary political issues. Whereas some 19<sup>th</sup> century Italians lived under highly resented Austrian occupation oblivious to the bond of their shared Italian culture and language. Censorship had been part of opera since almost the very beginnings of the art form. Political and personal agendas of government leaders or theater owners were often brought to bear on composers and librettists, who risked imposition of extremely punitive measures. Opera houses were the equivalent of modern social network communications centers, spreading political Ideas and messages through the music and drama. People heard music in the opera house, then sang it at home and in the streets. Opera was a most effective catalyst for popularizing ideas that were anathema to the anti-unification powers which maintained tight control of the press.

For most of Verdi's long life, Italy's greatest composer and an ardent patriot was skillful in slipping messages past government censors, used his operas to press for the expulsion of foreign occupiers (especially the Austrians). He fervently supported the unification of the various duchies and other regions into the Kingdom of Italy. His actions



Irked the Austrians who ruled over Milan and Venice, cities where Verdi's first seven premieres took place.

The famous chorus "*Va pensiero*" from his 3<sup>rd</sup> opera, *Nabucco* (1842), in which the Hebrew slaves yearn for freedom from their Babylonian captors, is an iconic "*cri de coeur*" for all oppressed people, and resonates as the quintessential anthem of the *Risorgimento*. Occasionally a potent phrase would slip past the censors, such as that of Ezio, the Roman general in *Attila* (1846), who says "*Avrai tu l'universo, resti l'Italia a me*" ("You may keep the universe, let Italy be mine.") Similar evidence can be found in his other operas, such as *Macbeth* into which Verdi inserted a chorus of politically oppressed folk, a scene not found in the Shakespeare play.

*Aida*, as we learned from Mr. Ventura, was commissioned for the opening of the new opera house in Cairo, but also had a veiled message for Verdi's homeland, as do many of his operas. Ms. Cannizzo sang "*O, patria mia*", the heroine's aria of despair over never seeing her homeland again. Another selection, "*Mercè, dilette amiche*" from *I Vespri Siciliani*, an opera Verdi constructed around the 1282 revolt of Sicilian patriots against occupying French forces was heavily censored at the time, forcing Verdi to change the locale of the opera to the country of Portugal.

Following the Lecture, a convivial cocktail reception was followed by a sumptuous gourmet dinner created by the Knickerbocker Club chefs in conjunction with Mr. August Ventura and Uff. Avv. Richard Miller, Jr. that was ostensibly selected from cookbooks of Verdi's time. See page 7.





## LECTURE RECEPTION













## POST LECTURE DINNER

Mr. August Ventura and Uff. Avv. Richard Miller, Esq. worked with the able staff of the Knickerbocker Club, with special mention to David Paulstitch, whose admirable initiative to create a suitably "Verdian" menu resulted in a superb and utterly memorable meal, based on cookbooks from 19<sup>th</sup> century Italy.

Giuseppe Verdi was humble when it came to his music, but not so when the subject was cooking. In Ira Braus' book, *Classical Cooks*, a letter from Verdi's wife is included regarding a possible Iron Chef-style cook off between Verdi and an actress by the name of Ristori. This recipe is said to be one he created for the challenge: "By the way, if la Ristori believes she will hold supremacy in the matter of tagliatelli, Verdi counts on eclipsing her with risotto, which truly he makes in divine fashion."



*Risotto Giuseppe Verdi*



**Risotto Giuseppe Verdi**  
*Asparagus, Prosciutto, Grated Parmigiano Reggiano*  
*Pinot Grigio*  
*Della Venezia, Zenato, 2014*  
\*\*\*

**Pavoncella Tartufata**  
*Free Range Breast of Chicken Stuffed with Truffle*  
*Patate al Lardo & Broccolini*  
*Barillo*  
*Principe Corsini, 2010*  
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**Coppa Desdemona**  
*Pistachio Ice Cream, Vanilla Whipped Cream & Chocolate Shavings*  
*Café*

*Tuesday, October 6<sup>th</sup>, 2015*











*We are pleased that the following members and friends attended or contributed to the Savoy Foundation's 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Savoy Lecture.*



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possible:*

### **Benefactor**

Uff. Avv. Richard J. Miller, Jr.

### **Savoy Lecture Series Chairman**

Gr. Uff. Marco Grassi



*By Dama di Comm. Larissa Van Duser  
Photography by Daphne Youree*

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