A. In the Picture

We use images from Mary Zimmerman's highly pictorial Met production of the opera to tell the story and sample two of its most famous numbers.

Donizetti: *Lucia di Lammermoor* (Met 2009), Sextet and opening of the Mad Scene. (Mary Zimmerman, *director*; Marco Armiliato, *conductor*; Anna Netrebko, *Lucia*; Michaela Martens, *Alisa*; Piotr Beczala, *Edgardo*; Colin Lee, *Arturo*; Mariusz Kwiecien, *Enrico*; Ildar Abdrazakov, *Raimondo*)

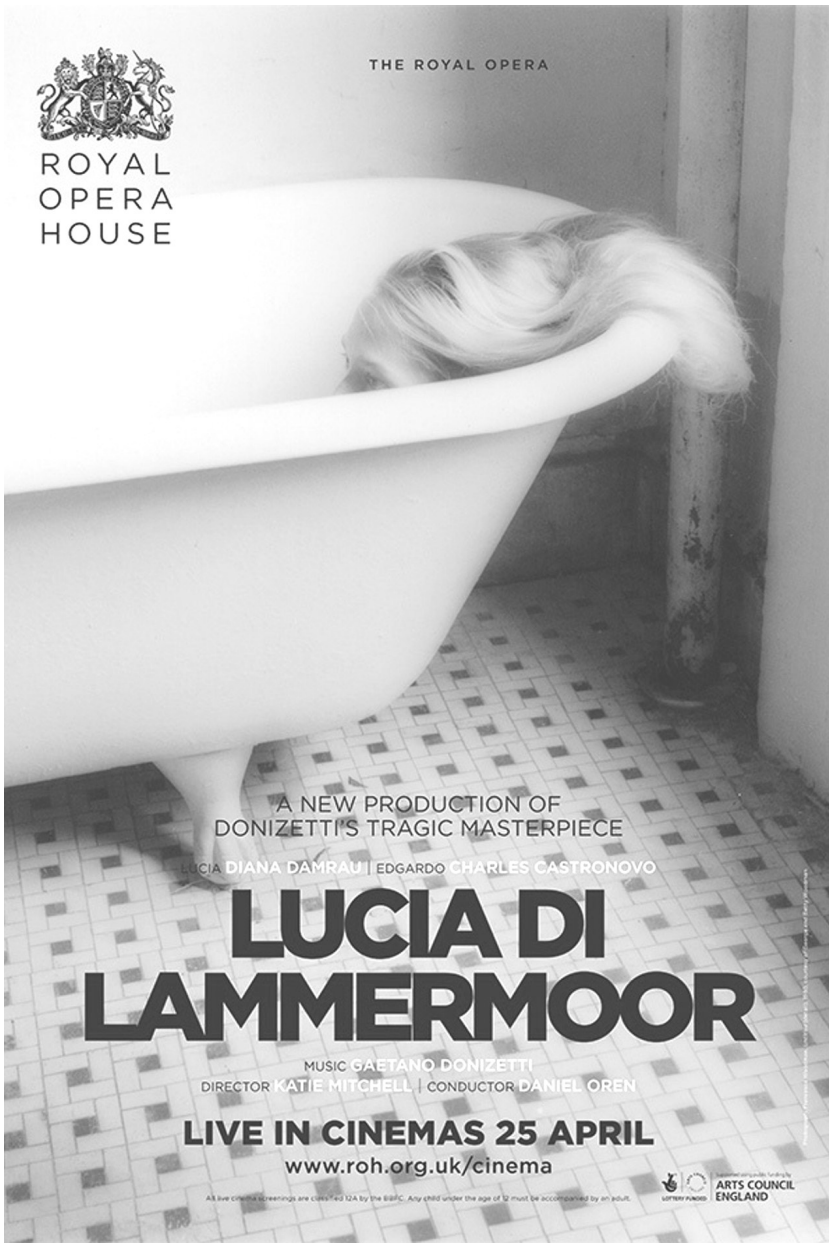
B. Beyond the Frame

For the most part, we shall avoid the opera's most celebrated numbers in sampling Katie Mitchell's London production, looking instead at those scenes in which she reveals the intimate life of her heroine, outside the frame of the regular action.

Donizetti: *Lucia di Lammermoor* (London 2016), selections from the Act I opening, love duet, Act II opening, and all three scenes of Act III. (Katie Mitchell, *director*; Daniel Oren, *conductor*; Diana Damrau, *Lucia*; Rachael Lloyd, *Alisa*; Charles Castronovo, *Edgardo*; Taylor Stayton, *Arturo*; Ludovic Tézier, *Enrico*; Kwangchul Youn, *Raimondo*)

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Opera Production



6. A Private Lucia

October 20, 2026

6. A Private Lucia

"Lucia" belongs in the "Familiar" section of this course by virtue of being a repertoire standard. And to tell its story and introduce two of its most famous numbers, we shall indeed turn to a production that the composer himself would have understood, although he would have been overawed by its budget and pictorial magnificence: the 2009 staging by **Mary Zimmerman** at the Met.

Most of our examples, though, will be taken from the 2016 staging by **Katie Mitchell** at the Royal Opera House in London—and this is a very special case indeed. Starting from the fact that, large as her role is, Lucia is presented entirely through the eyes of the men who manipulate and use her, is largely absent for the second half of the opera, and presents herself in solo arias only when she is hallucinating or mad, Mitchell looks to discover the woman hiding backstage in the scenes where she does *not* normally appear. It is an unusual production that begins somewhat sensationally but settles into a logic that is both believable and sympathetic. *rb.*

About the Opera

Lucia di Lammermoor (1835) was the 48th of the 69 operas by **Gaetano Donizetti** (1797–1848) and remains one of his most often performed. Its popularity in the past half-century has coincided with the resurgence of dramatic coloratura sopranos able to master its considerable demands, especially the 18-minute Mad Scene which has become the gold standard by which such artists are judged. The opera is based on the 1819 novel, *The Bride of Lammermoor,* by **Sir Walter Scott** (1771–1832), who sets the tragic story of the deceived heroine against a factual historical background flavored with the Romantic wildness of the Scottish landscape.

Scott's novel imagines two rival families living on large estates on the Scottish moors, the **Ashtons** and the **Ravenswoods**. In Act I scene 1, set on the Ashton estate, it is revealed that a stranger has been seen on the lands of **Lord Henry Ashton** (*Enrico*). His retainers report that this is his mortal enemy **Edgar of Ravenswood** (*Edgardo*) whom they suspect of meeting Enrico's younger sister **Lucy** (*Lucia*). In Act I scene 2, elsewhere on the estate, Lucia meets Edgardo in secret. He says he must go abroad for a while. The couple exchange rings, considering that tantamount to an actual rite of marriage.

Act II opens in the Ashton house. Enrico, concerned that financial losses and recent political changes threaten his family's ruin, has arranged Lucia's marriage to a wealthy bridegroom, **Arthur Bucklaw** (*Arturo*). He manipulates his sister into compliance with a forged letter implying Edgardo's infidelity.

We move immediately to the betrothal ceremony in a reception room in the house, attended by all the family retainers. Lucia has just signed the wedding contract when Edgardo storms into the room. After a stand-off that is the occasion for the famous *Sextet*, Edgardo denounces Lucia and is driven out of the house.

The opening scene of Act III (traditionally omitted in older productions) takes place at the splendidly-named **Wolfscrag**, the Ravenswood house. Enrico visits Edgardo during a storm, and challenges him to a duel the next day at his family's graveyard.

The second scene of Act III opes with Enrico Ashton's guests celebrating Lucia's wedding to Arturo, after the couple have retired upstairs. **Raymond Bide-the-Bent**, the family chaplain (*Raimondo*), interrupts the festivities to say that Lucia has murdered her husband. When she appears, covered in blood, it is clear that she has gone mad and believes she is celebrating her wedding to Edgardo.

The final scene takes place at the Ashton graveyard, where Edgardo comes for the duel, fully expecting to die. He is told first that Lucia is calling for him on her deathbed, and then that she has died. He kills himself to be with her.