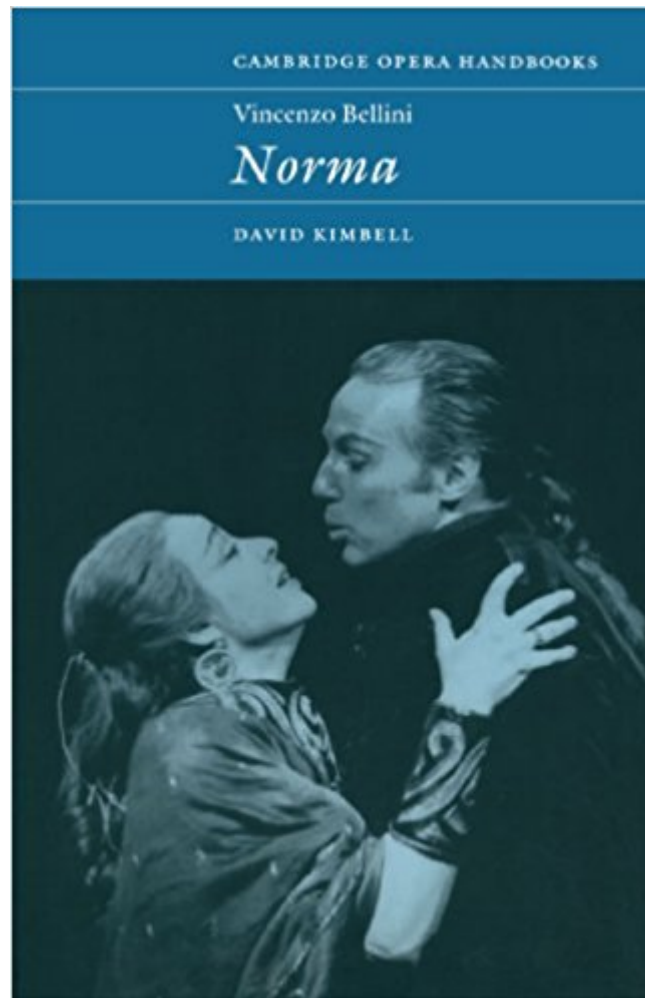




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Vincenzo Bellini: Norma (Cambridge Opera Handbooks)



Synopsis

Norma is by common consent the finest of the ten operas composed during Vincenzo Bellini's short career. Professor Kimbell provides the biographical and cultural context of the opera, examines its artistic qualities and suggests something of the impression Norma has made on our imaginations and sensibilities in the 165 years since it was first produced in Milan. He considers the great interpretations of the eponymous leading role, while also embracing Bellini's work more generally by presenting some of the critical reactions to his music.

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Customer Reviews

The excellent series of Cambridge Opera Handbooks has encompassed over 30 titles since 1981. Among them are Ian Kemp's comprehensive look at Berlioz's *Les Troyens*, Lucy Beckett's idiosyncratic and tendentious reading of Wagner's *Parsifal*, and a volume on Britten's *Billy Budd*. But Cambridge has never put together a guide to a bel canto opera until this one. As with all the volumes in the series, the longest chapter is a detailed synopsis of the plot, here with the helpful addition of some of the original stage directions translated from the libretto and brief definitions of necessary terms such as "cavatina" and "stretta." But the most helpful chapter gathers together sources for the libretto, information that is difficult to find elsewhere. (Librettist Felice Romani was a classical scholar, and the story has parallels with the Medea myth.) Also of interest is a selection of critical reactions from other composers. Mahler, we learn, was moved to tears by the work, and the

impact on Wagner is given its due. (Kimbell, however, seems unaware that Wagner went so far as to write an insertion aria for Norma.) Two of the analytical chapters concentrate almost entirely on the first scene, and more of this would have been welcome. There is no discography, a consistent lack in this series, but there is an extensive bibliography. (Peter Conrad's book, which is misidentified and would be of interest to readers, is *A Song of Love and Death: The Meaning of Opera*.) The final chapter, in a touch that would have enriched other guides in this series, briefly discusses five interpreters of the title role, including Giuditta Pasta. Mme. Pasta performed the considerable feat of creating the role for her La Scala debut. --William R. Braun

"In this excellent handbook about a key bel canto opera, Kimbell continues with the successful formula for this Cambridge series that stresses the artistic quality of the work, its sources, composition, reception and cultural context...worthwhile...Highly recommended." *The Opera Journal*

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