

HEAD: Brooklyn Chamber Orchestra to perform lost Verdi in Brooklyn Heights

DECK: Brooklyn to be the U.S. premiere for the composition heard only twice in 175 years

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BROOKLYN HEIGHTS — Verdi's long lost "Divertissement for Nabucco" was resurrected four years ago, and the Brooklyn Chamber Orchestra will be the ones to premiere it in New York.

Giuseppe Verdi composed a ballet in 1848 for a French production of "Nabucco" at Brussels's Théâtre de la Monnaie. It was known that Verdi composed the piece, but it was considered lost until 2021, when the piece was recovered from the basement of Verdi's home, Villa Verdi, in Sant'Agata. The piece still eluded the public for the most part. Other than a [performance](#) by the Orchestra del Teatro Comunale di Bologna in September 2021 at the Festival Verdi in Parma, the piece hasn't been heard in 175 years. Brooklyn Chamber Orchestra Artistic Director and Conductor Philip Nuzzo will be only the fourth ever to conduct the work on April 5.

"Throughout my conducting, I've always looked for pieces that were rarely performed [to] give a balance between standard repertoire and something different," Nuzzo said.

As Nuzzo considered the orchestra's upcoming concert, he felt that something was missing from the collection tributing Shakespeare. Nuzzo recalled the "Nabucco" performance in Brussels and set out on the chase to find the music. After a string of inquiries to an Italian musicologist, the University of Chicago's Verdi archives, Cambridge University and Boosey and Hawkes headquarters in London, the piece was on its way to Nuzzo.

As “Nabucco” made its way to Brooklyn, Nuzzo sought out to discover if the upcoming concert would be the U.S. premiere of Verdi’s lost work. On Tuesday morning, Nuzzo received an email from Boosey and Hawkes saying the piece had never been ordered from the U.S.

“It was their way of telling me it’s never been done before,” Nuzzo said. “And the scream that I emitted — It was very emotional.”

Nuzzo’s disbelief was curbed when another musician claimed that the piece was performed by the Sarasota Opera in Florida in March 2022. After two days of disappointment, further research revealed that the source was incorrect, and this performance will mark the U.S. premiere of Verdi’s unearthed work.

“Ballet and the Bard: Verdi’s lost Score and the Sounds of Shakespeare” will feature Verdi’s “Nabucco,” selections from William Walton’s score to “Henry V: A Shakespeare Scenario,” monologues from Jose Epinosa and the voices of the New York Choral Society and Grace Chorale of Brooklyn.

In the heart of New York City, there are a plethora of venues and orchestras that could have had the privilege of premiering the piece, and yet it fell to the Brooklyn Chamber Orchestra — a relatively young organization formed in 2002 with the mission of reacquainting the borough with classical music.

Nuzzo said he’s excited to have the opportunity to perform such an important piece in Brooklyn with the Brooklyn Chamber Orchestra, which he founded. “It’s not being performed in Manhattan, it’s being performed in Brooklyn. Why the hell shouldn’t we do it in Brooklyn?” he said.

Nuzzo added, “It raises the bar for the Orchestra and adds to its already growing reputation as a destination for classical music in Brooklyn.”

For the four days that Nuzzo was set to premier Nuzzo’s lost work in the U.S., he was pinching himself. He described the feeling as waiting to wake

up as a kid with his mom throwing pants at him, telling Nuzzo he's late for school.

"I'm waiting for the alarm clock to ring," Nuzzo said. "I keep thinking this must be a dream."

Despite the rumor of the prior U.S. premiere, Nuzzo still hasn't woken up. Now, the reality of premiering the work in the U.S. — and in its [third largest city](#) — is starting to settle in.

"As excited as I am, I am in some ways humbled by the fact that by circumstance, this has fallen on me, and it is a humbling experience," Nuzzo said.

Nuzzo is currently preparing for the monumental task. The orchestra has taken on the project with a distinctly "Brooklyn attitude," Nuzzo said, promising to give it their all. The orchestra is going to "rehearse the hell" out of the piece, but Nuzzo knows it will be gratifying once it's over. As for the evening of April 5, Nuzzo said he'll be found backstage clutching his rosary, praying the orchestra does the iconic composer — and 175 year old work — justice.