Possible timeline for the creation of Wallace's Lurline

Russell Burdekin, February 2026

William Vincent Wallace's opera *Lurline* began in 1847 as a dialogue and song work but over time it evolved into a fully through-composed opera. By the time of its first performance on 23 February 1860, all the dialogue had been replaced by recitative. What follows is a tentative timeline outlining this transition.

The original 1847 version already included some recitative. An example is the opening "All is silent", dated by Wallace 13 July 1847. Such passages were incorporated into the original numbering of the autograph score sections, where this item appears as No. 1. In total, the work was divided into 32 numbered items plus the overture[1].

A second layer of recitative appears to have been added after the initial laying out of the opera. These included Rhineberg's "Suspicion haunts my mind" and Lurline's "Dearest! I give thee wealth" in Act 2, Scene 3. In the autograph score these are numbered 20½ and 21½, though in both editions of the vocal score they are absorbed into Nos. 20 and 21. These additions may have been made during revisions for the planned 1848 production. It was at this stage that the manuscript libretto, intended to be sent to the Examiner, was created.

The final phase consists of the remaining dialogue conversions, visible as alterations to the manuscript libretto and discussed in *Dialogue and Recitative in Wallace's Lurline*. With one exception, No. 9 where new recitative was simply appended to existing material, all of these additions are numbered with a ½ in the autograph score. In Acts 1 and 2 the autograph score page numbers run sequentially and include some of these new recitatives; however, items 5½, 6½, 15½, 17½, and 18½ do not fit this sequence, indicating that they were added later. These, along with Nos. 23½, 24½, and 25½ from Act 3, were omitted from the first edition of the vocal score[2] but included in the second[3].

Alongside these structural changes, Wallace also revised existing musical material. For example, the autograph score of Lurline's opening number, later "Flow on, oh silver Rhine" (No. 3), contains little more than a melodic line, accompanied by the note "Put words - A M", presumably referring to Alfred Mellon, conductor of the 1860 production. This suggests that the text was added quite late in the opera's development.

George Biddlecombe[4] noted that two Act 2 numbers, "Troubadour enchanting" (No. 18, Scene 2) and "The nectar cup may yield delight" (No. 20, Scene 3), were composed in 1859-1860. In the first case, however, an earlier version of the ballad exists in the autograph score, marked "wait for new words from Fitzball", indicating that the later composition replaced an earlier setting. In the second case, the revision appears to involve a resetting of existing text, possibly prompted by broader changes to Rhineberg's role after Wallace heard Charles Santley sing it[5]. Elsewhere, in Rudolph's Act 1, Scene 3 Romanza, "Our barque in moonlight beaming" (No. 10), Wallace noted "Fitz to change words". In practice the textual revisions here were minimal.

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[1] The final number, No. 32, has September 23, 1848, written on it.

[2] W.V.Wallace, *Lurline.* 1st ed. (London: Cramer , Beale and Chappell, 1859). Although dated 1859 by the British Library, it was only made available after the first performance, *The Examiner* (Feb. 11, 1860).

[3] W.V.Wallace, *Lurline.* 2nd ed. (London: Cramer, Beale and Chappell, 1860). Dated 1860 by the British Library. The extra pages were added into the first edition with an A, B,etc added to their page number

[4] George Biddlecombe*, English opera from 1834 to 1864 with particular reference to the works of Michael Balfe.* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1994), pp. 134-136.

[5] Sir Charles Santley, *The Art of Singing and Vocal Declamation* (London: Macmillan, 1908), pp. 17- 18, claimed that Wallace reworked his part as Rhineberg in the final act "expressly for me" (so in 1859-1860) after he had heard him sing.