



# **SIMON BOCCANEGRA**

**GIUSEPPE VERDI**

# WELCOME



I'm particularly excited to welcome you to Opera North's first ever performances of what for me is one of Verdi's supreme achievements. *Simon Boccanegra* has been one of my all-time favourite pieces since it was done at Glyndebourne when I was working there in 1998. The revered Abbado recording with Cappuccilli, Freni and Carreras has followed me everywhere since – including into the labour suite! There's nothing like the opening bars of the Prelude – surely one of the most beautiful introductions of any opera – to make you relax!

*Boccanegra* is a superb example of Verdi's ability to place an emotionally-charged personal story in the context of momentous political events. The central message of the opera – a plea for peace and an end to polarisation – could hardly be more apt in our troubled times.

I'm delighted to welcome a distinguished international cast to Opera North, many of whom are appearing with us for the first time, including Sara Cortolezzis (Amelia), Vazgen Gazaryan (Fiesco) and Mandla Mndebele (Paolo); as well as those returning to the Company, including Roland Wood (Simon) and Andrés Presno (Gabriele Adorno). This being one of Opera North's signature concert stagings, our fabulous full-time Chorus and Orchestra are at the heart of the event, and I can't wait to hear them tackle Verdi's magnificent score under the baton of our Principal Guest Conductor Antony Hermus.

*Simon Boccanegra* opens at St George's Hall in Bradford as part of Bradford 2025 City of Culture. It's part of a diverse range of Opera North projects throughout this special year, which also includes *Earth & Sky*, an immersive soundwalk on the moors above the Brontës' home village of Haworth; *Bassline Symphony*, a celebration of the 21st-century subculture of bassline featuring the Orchestra of Opera North with our Music Director Garry Walker; and *Sing-Dance-Leap*, in which we join forces with the Royal Ballet and Opera and Northern Ballet for a major education project in Bradford schools.

Shortly after our final performance of *Simon Boccanegra* on London's Southbank towards the end of May we'll be making our way to the Nevill Holt Estate in Leicestershire with Mozart's *Così fan tutte*, which heralds the start of a new five-year partnership with the Nevill Holt Festival. We've also recently announced our 2025-26 opera season, a mix of popular classics, 21st-century pieces and shows for families to enjoy across the generations. Please visit [operanorth.co.uk](https://operanorth.co.uk) for a flavour of the treats to come – including a not-quite opera about cookery!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laura". The script is elegant and cursive.

**Laura Canning**  
General Director, Opera North

Opposite: Bradford City Hall

# Enjoy your visit

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# SIMON BOCCANEGRA

Opera in a prologue and three acts

Music by Giuseppe Verdi

Libretto by Francesco Maria Piave, with additions by Giuseppe Montanelli

Revised (1881) by Arrigo Boito

After the play (1843) by Antonio García Gutiérrez

Sung in Italian with English titles

First performance: 24 March 1881, Teatro alla Scala, Milan

First performance by Opera North: 24 April 2025, St George's Hall, Bradford



# CHARACTERS

*in order of singing*

Paolo Albiani  
Pietro  
Simon Boccanegra  
Jacopo Fiesco  
*later known as Andrea Grimaldi*  
Maria Boccanegra  
*known as Amelia Grimaldi*  
Gabriele Adorno  
Amelia's maid  
A captain  
Soldiers, sailors, citizens,  
senators, members of the  
Doge's court, servants

Conductor  
Director  
Designer  
Lighting Designer

Assistant Conductor  
Assistant Director  
Chorus Master  
Chief Repetiteur  
Language Coach  
Stage Managers

Deputy Stage Manager (Book)  
Assistant Stage Managers

Production Manager  
Senior Costume Supervisor  
Costume Supervisor  
Assistant Costume Supervisor  
Hair and Make-up Supervisor  
Textiles  
Costumes made by  
Scenery built and painted by  
Props Buyer  
Props made by  
Banners made by  
Production Carpenter  
English Titles Supervisor

**Mandla Mndebele**  
**Richard Mosley-Evans**  
**Roland Wood**  
**Vazgen Gazaryan**

**Sara Cortolezzis**

**Andrés Presno**  
**Laura Kelly**  
**Ivan Sharpe**

**Chorus of Opera North**

**Antony Hermus**  
**PJ Harris**  
**Anna Reid**  
**Richard Moore**

**Oliver Rundell**  
**Oscar Simms**  
**Anthony Kraus**  
**Annette Saunders**  
**Valeria Racco**  
**Kate Freston-Davy**  
**Lisa Ganley**  
**Abby Jones**  
**Alison Best**  
**Rebecca Wing**  
**Ray Hain**  
**Stephen Rodwell**  
**Mary Gillibrand**  
**Gemma Newsome**  
**Jo Charlton-Wright**  
**Natalie Needham**  
**Opera North Costume Department**  
**Harrogate Set and Production Services**  
**Sarah Barry**  
**Jonny Hick, Ali Allen and Sarah Barry**  
**Flying Colours Flagmakers**  
**Jonny Hick**  
**Lydia French**

The performance lasts approximately 2 hours 40 minutes, including one interval of 20 minutes  
Members of the audience are requested to turn off all mobile devices during the performance

# SIMON BOCCANEGRA

## IN A NUTSHELL

JESSICA FITTON



## ABOUT THE STORY

Verdi's opera is based on a play, which in turn was inspired by the real-life figure of **Simon Boccanegra**, the first elected Doge (Duke) of Genoa.\*

We begin in the year 1339 with Boccanegra – a plebeian (man of the people) – about to take power. But he loves – and has secretly had a child with – Maria, the daughter of his political rival, the aristocrat **Jacopo Fiesco**. Tragically, Maria dies, and the baby disappears...

Fast-forward 25 years and Fiesco is in hiding, plotting against Boccanegra under the name of **Andrea Grimaldi**. He has since become guardian to a girl named **Amelia**, who later turns out to be his missing granddaughter. She wants to marry **Gabriele Adorno**, also an enemy of the Doge.

Boccanegra is overjoyed when he discovers that Amelia is in fact his long-lost daughter. He agrees to her marriage as long as Adorno switches his allegiance to the Doge. This is the last straw for the Doge's councillor **Paolo Albiani**, who wants Amelia himself, and in revenge arranges to kidnap her...

**Find out more on pages 6-7**

## ABOUT THE CHARACTERS

### SIMON BOCCANEGRA

first Doge of Genoa (baritone)

**PLEBEIAN**

### JACOPO FIESCO

aristocrat and enemy of Boccanegra; later takes the name of Andrea Grimaldi (bass)

**PATRICIAN**

### AMELIA GRIMALDI

ward of Fiesco in his guise of Andrea Grimaldi, but biologically his granddaughter. She is also Boccanegra's daughter (soprano)

**PLEBEIAN & PATRICIAN HERITAGE**

### GABRIELE ADORNO

in love with Amelia, enemy of Boccanegra (tenor)

**PATRICIAN**

### PAOLO ALBIANI

the Doge's councillor; later his enemy (bass)

**PLEBEIAN**

### PIETRO

associate of Paolo Albiani

**PLEBEIAN**

The Chorus also plays a hugely important role in the opera as senators, citizens and more.

\* The 'Doge' was the Republic of Genoa's Head of State from 1339-1797 (long before the reunification of Italy). This city-state was a major commercial power, and locked in an intense rivalry with Venice.

## ABOUT THE MUSIC

Verdi's music for *Simon Boccanegra* is Italian opera at some of its most powerful.

Highlights include the Act One duet in which Boccanegra is reunited with his long-lost daughter. Verdi uses silences to create tension and a melody that rises by a semitone each time to generate expectation; then, as both realise who the other is, the whole orchestra erupts with emotion, allowing the audience to feel everything the characters feel.

Listen out too for Gabriele Adorno's impassioned 'Sento avvampar nell'anima' (I feel a burning in my soul) sung in Act Two when he mistakenly believes Amelia is the Doge's mistress – it's one of Verdi's most famous tenor arias.

But 'arguably the best scene in the opera' (Director PJ Harris) is the Council Chamber scene at the close of Act One. A raging mob calling for blood bursts into the Doge's chambers while in session and a massive brawl ensues, until Amelia, the opera's peacekeeper, stops the fight with a vocal line that soars above the melee. It's a huge, hair-raising ensemble moment.

*Find out more on pages 8-10*

## ABOUT THIS PRODUCTION

This new staging for concert halls by **PJ Harris** sees the orchestra on stage, fully visible to the audience and at the heart of this thrilling drama.

The designs by **Anna Reid** take inspiration from civic spaces that are familiar to all of us: the corridors and chambers of town halls and local government. The principal cast are fully costumed, wearing rosettes or sashes in their faction's colours: red/yellow for the working Plebeian side, purple/blue for the aristocratic Patricians. The banners of the two factions hang over the left and right of the stage – a continual reminder of deep division.

The action is played within and around a three-part structure at the front of the stage, which becomes different spaces within the story. Across the top is a line from the opera's libretto which quotes the poet Petrarch: 'I' vo gridando: Pace, pace, pace' – I cry for peace.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Verdi was a great admirer of Shakespeare and wrote several operas based on Shakespeare's plays (*Macbeth*, *Otello*, *Falstaff* – and almost a *King Lear*!). *Simon Boccanegra* isn't one of them, yet it is strikingly Shakespearian. In the character of Boccanegra, we see the conflict between the public and private man, the inner struggles of someone who has achieved everything and yet is deeply troubled: 'Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown' (*Henry IV*, Part Two).

A daughter lost and found is also reminiscent of Perdita in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*. The relationship between fathers and daughters is a theme that runs through Verdi's work – it was a deeply emotional subject for him, having lost both his own children very young.

# SYNOPSIS

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## PROLOGUE

Genoa is a city riven by factionalism, between patricians (the nobility) and plebeians (the common people).

The plebeians Paolo and Pietro discuss the election of the city's next leader. Paolo suggests the corsair Simon Boccanegra, who has protected Genoese waters against its enemies. Paolo promises Pietro wealth and influence if he will persuade the people to elect Simon as Doge.

Simon is in love with Maria, daughter of Jacopo Fiesco. The Fieschi are a leading patrician family and enemies of Boccanegra. Maria is confined to the Fieschi palace because she had an illegitimate child with Simon. Paolo tries to persuade Simon that it would be difficult for the Fieschi to deny his union with Maria if he were Doge. Simon reluctantly agrees to Paolo's suggestion. Pietro and Paolo persuade the people to back Simon in the election.

Fiesco emerges from the palace, grieving Maria's death and blaming Simon for what happened to her. He doesn't tell Simon that Maria has died and rejects his appeals for conciliation. Fiesco says they can only make peace if Simon gives him the child he had with Maria. Simon explains he cannot. The child was raised in secret by another woman who died, after which the child disappeared.

Simon enters the palace and discovers Maria's body. Moments later voices are heard acclaiming him Doge. Simon is distraught at Maria's death; Fiesco is outraged that his enemy, a plebeian, now has power.

## ACT ONE

25 years later

### SCENE 1

Simon continues to rule Genoa as Doge. His and Maria's daughter was taken in by the noble Grimaldi family, who named her Amelia. Fiesco is now living in exile with the Grimaldis. He has taken the name Andrea Grimaldi and is Amelia's guardian. Neither he nor Amelia knows that she is in fact his granddaughter and Simon's daughter.

Amelia is in love with Gabriele Adorno, a nobleman whose father was killed by Doge Boccanegra. Gabriele asks for Fiesco's permission to marry Amelia and is undeterred when Fiesco tells him that she is an orphan and not of noble blood.

Attended by Paolo, now his henchman, the Doge pays Amelia a visit. He brings with him a pardon for members of the Grimaldi family he has exiled. Amelia confesses that she is in love with Gabriele and tells the Doge the story of her childhood. He realises that she is his long-lost daughter and the pair celebrate their reunion.

Paolo also desires Amelia. When the Doge tells him to give up all hope of her, Paolo instructs Pietro to arrange her abduction.

## SCENE 2

The Doge presides over a council divided between patricians and plebeians. He reads a letter from Petrarch urging peace with Venice, but the idea is strongly rejected by the council.

Unrest outside is heard. As tensions rise inside the chamber, there are calls for the Doge's death from the crowd outside. He orders the doors be opened, and the mob storms in with Fiesco and Gabriele. Gabriele says he has killed Lorenzo, who kidnapped Amelia and claimed that he was forced to by a powerful man. Gabriele suspects the Doge and tries to attack him, but Amelia intervenes and pleads for peace.

Amelia explains how she escaped and says the man behind her abduction is present in the chamber. Accusations fly between patricians and plebeians. The Doge restores order with a call for peace, then forces Paolo to curse whoever was responsible. Paolo, himself the guilty one, is trapped and must obey.

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## INTERVAL

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## ACT TWO

Fiesco and Gabriele have been imprisoned for their part in the rebellion. Paolo, seeking revenge against the Doge, poisons his drinking water and attempts to persuade both Fiesco and Gabriele to assassinate him. Fiesco refuses, but Paolo fuels Gabriele's jealousy by insinuating that Amelia is the Doge's mistress.

Gabriele confronts Amelia, who asserts her innocence but doesn't disclose her true relationship with the Doge. She hides Gabriele as the Doge enters with a list of conspirators, including Gabriele. Amelia pleads for her lover to be pardoned, and the Doge agrees. After dismissing Amelia, the Doge drinks the poisoned water and falls asleep.

Gabriele emerges, intent on killing him, but Amelia intervenes. On waking, the Doge reveals he is Amelia's father, prompting Gabriele to beg for forgiveness.

Sounds of a patrician revolt are heard. The Doge spares Gabriele and sends him out with an offer of clemency. Gabriele vows to fight alongside the Doge if the offer of peace is rejected.

## ACT THREE

The revolt has been defeated. Fiesco has been granted his freedom and Paolo condemned to death. He admits to Fiesco that he has poisoned the Doge and was behind Amelia's abduction. To the distant sound of Amelia and Gabriele's wedding ceremony Paolo is led away to his execution.

The poison has taken effect. Fiesco approaches Simon, who at last is able to tell him that the child who was lost has been found. At this the two men are reconciled. Amelia and Gabriele arrive and, with his dying breath, Simon blesses the couple and names Gabriele his successor. Fiesco proclaims Gabriele Doge.



# ***SIMON BOCCANEGRA***

## **A TALE OF TWO OPERAS**

**SOPHIE RASHBROOK**

A lot can happen in two decades. In the 25 years that elapse between the Prologue and Act One of Verdi's opera *Simon Boccanegra* the crowds that hailed the new leader of Genoa with cries of 'Viva Simon' are now calling for his death. Simon has exiled his old enemy, Fiesco, to the countryside, where he now lives under a false name (Andrea Grimaldi) and is plotting his revenge against the Doge. Grimaldi's adopted daughter, Amelia, has grown up and fallen in love with a Genoese nobleman, Gabriele. And so, the stage is set for a series of momentous revelations, the consequences of which will ripple out across personal and political fault-lines, drawing fathers and daughters, lovers and rivals, and heroes and villains into their orbit.

A near-identical gap of 24 years exists between the two versions of *Simon Boccanegra*, the first of which had its premiere in 1857. In early 1856, the 42-year-old Verdi had enjoyed a string of recent operatic triumphs, including *Rigoletto* (1851), *La traviata* and *Il trovatore* (both 1853). It is likely, the Verdi scholar Julian Budden suggests, that *Simon Boccanegra* came to the composer's attention via his long-term partner, the soprano Giuseppina Streponi. Streponi had also suggested (and translated from the original Spanish) Antonio García Gutiérrez's more famous play *El trovador*, which became the basis of *Il trovatore*. Perhaps Streponi felt she had found a winning formula. Perhaps she felt that by suggesting the Spanish playwright's second most famous work, *Simón Bocanegra*, Verdi would likewise enjoy a second triumph with Gutiérrez's material. Sadly, it wasn't to be – or at least, not for over 20 years – for a variety of reasons.

The original commission for *Simon Boccanegra* came in Spring 1856. Verdi didn't take much persuasion: he had recently purchased a new property and needed the income to settle his debts. The premiere was to be given at Venice's Teatro la Fenice during carnival season the following year. But instead of spending the summer of '56 finessing the score and collaborating closely with librettist Francesco Maria Piave (the wordsmith behind *Rigoletto* and *La traviata*, and resident stage director at La Fenice), Verdi's time was taken up with other affairs. These included modifications to a new, French-language edition of *Il trovatore* (*Le trouvère*) for Paris Opéra, as well as work on *Aroldo*, a new version of his 1850 opera *Stiffelio*. Alongside this, Verdi became embroiled in a legal battle with Toribio Calzado, the director of the Parisian Théâtre des Italiens, who had used pirated editions of his scores. Verdi lost the case. While stuck in Paris, he turned to local writer (and exiled Tuscan patriot) Giuseppe Montanelli, to assist him with the final adjustments to the text. Verdi sent the completed score to Piave at La Fenice, with the rather blunt inscription: 'You can put your name to it or not as you like. If you're sorry about this I am sorry too... but I can only repeat, "It had to be".'

The Venetian premiere, on 12 March 1857, was not a success. Some sources blame the complex, intrigue-laden libretto; others the experimental nature of the music; and others the malicious influence of a theatre mob, paid by an embittered musical rival to disrupt proceedings. Mob or no mob, however, later that year *Simon Boccanegra* was laughed off the stage in Florence, and a further, disastrous performance in Milan in 1859 drew the rueful reflection from Verdi: 'I accept [the public's] hisses on condition that I'm not asked to be grateful for its applause.'

So what prompted Verdi to pick up the opera again, some two decades later? The seeds of a late-blooming operatic collaboration with the poet and composer Arrigo Boito (born nearly 30 years after Verdi, in 1842), were sown not long after the first *Simon*, in 1862. That year, Verdi set the young Boito's words in a cantata, *Inno delle nazioni* (The Hymn of Nations) in a commission for the Great London Exhibition of 1862. Boito subsequently became a leading figure (and political firebrand) in Milanese cultural circles. The two men did not always see eye to eye, but with the mellowing of years, Boito's public avowals of respect for Verdi's work, and nearly 20 years of political upheaval behind them, a chance encounter at a charity concert in 1879 resulted in Boito's pitching an opera based on William Shakespeare's *Othello* to Verdi.

It proved to be an ambitious project. When discussions about the Shakespeare stalled, Verdi suggested Boito turn his talents to something more manageable: a reworking of *Simon Boccanegra*. Boito was unimpressed by Piave's 1857 libretto, referring to the text as a 'rickety table', and his changes are dotted through the opera. They include: the removal of a showy cabaletta for Amelia at the end of her reunion with Gabriele in Act One; the rewriting of the cabaletta between Amelia and Simon later in that Act, including the addition of the Doge's poignant exclamation, 'Figlia!' ('Daughter!'); and the transformation of Paolo's Act Two soliloquy into a chilling (some might say dastardly) meditation on revenge as he prepares his vial of poison for Simon.

Yet the most seismic alteration was undoubtedly the replacement of Act One, Scene 10 with the now-famous Council Chamber scene. In the 1857 version, this scene portrays a monarch seemingly at the peak of his powers and popularity. The chorus leads a bustling outdoor celebration commemorating the anniversary of Simon's coronation, complete with rousing fanfares, fluttering flutes, cries of 'Viva Simon!' and, as at any self-respecting party, a ballet of prisoners. The jollity is ruptured when Gabriele arrives with the explosive (and false) accusation that the Doge has conspired to abduct Amelia. Moments later, the escaped Amelia intervenes, and after recounting the tale of her abduction, the Doge is left holding a fragile peace of sorts, as the chorus cries for the 'Giustizia tremenda' ('Pitiless justice') of heaven on the traitor.

In the 1881 version, the setting could not be more different. Instead of an exuberant crowd scene, Boito situates the action in a sombre Council Chamber. In response, Verdi unleashes a storm of jagged, staccato strings, and an answering chorus of thunderous brass. Inspired by a letter from the poet Petrarch, Simon – like a prophet of Italian unity – urges his warring councillors to peace. The proceedings are interrupted by the sound of a furious crowd of rebels demanding 'Morte ai patrizi!' ('Death to the nobles!') and 'Morte al Doge'. They are silenced by an offstage trumpet herald, *Deus ex machina*-style, before the mob bursts in, led by Gabriele. The Doge's powerful address to the people of Genoa ('Plebe! Patrizi! Popolo!') is one of the high points of the new scene, and the closest thing the role of Simon gets to a standalone aria. The 1881 version of the Act concludes with Simon forcing the traitor Paolo to curse the architect of Amelia's failed abduction (and in so doing, to curse himself). Verdi summons a hellscape of tremolo strings, with fatalistic trombones, a nightmarish chorus, and a maelstrom of woodwinds and timpani.

As with every Verdi opera, *Simon Boccanegra* has its own unique *tinta* – a sort of musical 'local colour' – that creates a distinctive atmosphere. In those dread-inducing musical effects, we hear what Budden describes as the 'blood and iron' of Verdi's imaginary 14th-century Genoa. There is a nod to Simon Boccanegra's nautical origins in the lilting, shanty-like rhythms in the opera's early scenes. Verdi also sought a kind of dramatic immediacy through a particularly syllabic (that is, unadorned) setting of the text. Yet what defines the work is a visceral sound-world of rough edges, bottled-up emotions and, further accentuated in the 1881 version, a swirling soundscape of darkness and turmoil.

The premiere of the second version of the opera, on 24 March 1881, was a success, but not perhaps the resounding triumph Verdi had anticipated – although in more recent times, the opera has come to be appreciated as a masterpiece. Yet in both 1857 and 1881, the unchanged, sunlit ending of the opera was a portent of great things to come. After the first version, Italian unity was just around the corner, and following the second *Simon*, Verdi's collaboration with Boito would produce his great, late, operas, *Otello* and *Falstaff*. More poignantly, it would also create a lasting friendship. When, two decades later, Verdi died at the age of 87, Arrigo Boito was at his bedside.

PATRIZI





# PLEBE

# 'AND I CRY "PEACE!"'

## POLITICS, HISTORY AND *SIMON BOCCANEGRA*

STUART LEEDS

Verdi's professional career spanned more than half a century, from the late 1830s to the early 1890s. It was a time of profound change in his homeland. At the beginning of this period a unified Italy did not exist – the peninsula consisted of individual states, largely under foreign control. It wasn't until three years after the original version of *Simon Boccanegra* was written that the kingdom of Italy came into existence, following the defeat of the Austro-Hungarian empire in the Second Italian War of Independence in 1859. The new kingdom was ruled by Vittorio Emanuele II, who had been King of Sardinia since 1849. Even then it did not include the Veneto (under Austrian control until 1866) or Rome; only when Rome was made capital of all Italy in 1871 was the process of unification complete.

Verdi was intensely engaged with politics as both citizen and artist. He had strong opinions and took a definite position on political matters – which is not to say that he didn't adapt his position as circumstances changed. His second wife, Giuseppina Strepponi, reported him saying that he was 'a liberal to the utmost degree, without being a Red'. His liberalism went hand in hand with his patriotism and his passionate belief in a unified Italy free from foreign oppression. This is the underlying theme of several of his operas of the 1840s, beginning with his first great success, *Nabucco*, in 1842.

When revolutionary fervour swept across Europe in 1848, Verdi supported the republican cause. Hearing news of an uprising in Milan while in Paris early that year, he wrote to Francesco Piave (later to draft the first version of the libretto of *Simon Boccanegra*): 'You can imagine whether I wanted to remain in Paris, after hearing there was a revolution in Milan. I left the moment I heard the news [...] Honour to these heroes! Honour to all Italy, which in this moment is truly great! The hour of her liberation has sounded.' But his excitement turned to despondency the following year after the revolution failed: 'Force still rules the world' he lamented. 'And justice? What good is it against bayonets!!'

As hopes of an Italian republic faded the subjects of his next few operas, such as *Rigoletto* (1851) and *La traviata* (1853), became more societal than political. Like other leading figures of the Risorgimento inclined to republicanism, Verdi eventually came to believe that the best hope for unification lay in constitutional monarchy. Indeed, Verdi's very name became bound up with the campaign to create a united kingdom of Italy with Vittorio Emanuele II at its head, 'VIVA VERDI' becoming the acronym 'VIVA Vittorio Emanuele, Re d'Italia'.

By the later 1850s politics were back on the agenda in the first version of *Simon Boccanegra*, and only intensified in the 1881 revision. Given that the opera is based – however loosely – on the life of a figure from Italian history, it may seem surprising that Verdi accessed the story through a Spanish play, by Antonio García Gutiérrez. But another play by Gutiérrez, *El trovador*, had been the source for *Il trovatore* (1853), one of the biggest successes of Verdi's career to date.

Historical accuracy is at a premium in Gutiérrez's play – though to no greater extent than in many a drama of the Romantic era. There is no record of a love affair between the historical Simon Boccanegra and Maria Fiesco for example, nor of an infant daughter who disappears, nor even that Boccanegra was a buccaneer; more likely he was a merchant. However, the factional conflict of patricians and plebeians is grounded in historical truth, and the dark *tinta* of much of Verdi's music in the opera seems apt for 14th-century Genoa, which was, according to the historian D S Chambers, 'a political bedlam' in comparison to its much more well-ordered rival Venice. 'Genoa', writes Chambers, '... was an almost ungovernable city, in the hands of rival clans of rich families, some labelled noble and subscribing to collective slogans, either Ghibelline or Guelph, but all ruthlessly pursuing their self-interest. It was a dark, towering, cramped city of precipitous, lethal passageways and no-go areas, where the ideology of the common good, professed in other Italian cities, had been remarkably absent.'

The election of Simon Boccanegra as the first Doge of Genoa did actually happen, in September 1339, but the circumstances were not quite those portrayed in the opera. Simon was first invited to be 'abbot of the people' but he demurred. Only when the offer was upgraded to the higher status of Doge did he accept, suggesting his ambitions were lofty from the start. In the opera, he remains as Doge for the entirety of the 25 years that elapse between his election at the end of the Prologue and Act One. In reality, faced with mounting opposition, he resigned in December 1344 and retired to Pisa for the next 12 years, before returning to Genoa for a second term in 1358. His policies at home and on the seas were aggressive: members of aristocratic families who posed a threat to his authority were exiled or executed, and war was waged – at vast expense – to protect Genoese trading interests. As in the opera, the historical Simon met his end by poisoning – though not by Paolo Albiani, who is fictional – and he was succeeded as Doge by the patrician Gabriele Adorno. The Adornos may well have been responsible for the assassination; and the real Gabriele Adorno – no youthful lover of Simon's daughter – condemned the Boccanegra family to exile.

The political themes of Verdi's opera are the factional conflict of *patrizi* and *plebe* – patricians and plebeians, nobility and commoners – and, especially in the 1881 revision, a plea for national unity. In the shape of the heavily fictionalised Simon Boccanegra it also presents the model of an ideal ruler. The difference between history and fiction is especially significant here: in the opera, far from angling for the office of Doge, Simon is only persuaded to accept when the plebeian Paolo convinces him that it could pave the way for the acceptance of his marriage to Maria Fiesco by her aristocratic family.



The implication is surely that Simon will make for a wise and compassionate ruler precisely because he doesn't seek power for its own sake. Verdi revels in the rich dramatic irony at the end of the Prologue when Simon is acclaimed as Doge by the crowd moments after he has discovered the dead body of the woman he loves. In presenting Simon as an ideal ruler, a man who heals division and, at his death, resolves a feud that has lasted a generation or more, Verdi achieves a Shakespearean melding of the personal and the political. Factionalism and its human cost is personified in the fatal feud between the plebeian Boccanegra and the patrician Jacopo Fiesco who are bound together by the strongest of personal ties: they are, respectively, father and grandfather of the same woman.

By the time he was actively contemplating the revision of *Simon Boccanegra* Verdi had grown disillusioned with the political situation in Italy. Factionalism and corruption were eroding the idealism that had accompanied the creation of a united Italy. It was Verdi who had the idea of repurposing words from a letter by the 14th-century poet Petrarch and giving them to the Doge at a pivotal moment in the Council Chamber scene at the climax of Act One. Simon's plea is for an end to conflict and division within and between Italy's city states in the cause of national unity and the greater good of all people, patrician and plebeian, Ligurian and Venetian. It's surely a message that's as urgently relevant in the world now as it was in Italy a century and a half ago.



## POLITICS INTO DRAMA

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### **VERDI TO HIS PUBLISHER GIULIO RICORDI:**

The score as it stands will not do. It is too sad, too desolate. There is no need to touch the first act [ie the Prologue], nor the last, nor even the third, apart from a few bars here and there. But I shall have to rewrite the entire second act [ie Act One] and give it more contrast, variety, life. From a musical point of view, we could keep the prima donna's cavatina, the duet with the tenor, and the other duet between father and daughter, despite the cabalettas!...

But let's turn to the second act. Who could do it? How can we find someone? I've already said that what this act basically needs is something to bring variety and a little liveliness to a drama that is too gloomy. How? With a hunt for instance? It wouldn't be theatrical. A festival? Too ordinary. A battle with African pirates? Not very entertaining. Preparations for war with Pisa or Venice? In this connection I recall two superb letters of Petrarch's, one to Doge Boccanegra, the other to the Doge of Venice, informing them that they were about to embark on a fratricidal war, that both were sons of the same mother, Italy, etc etc. How sublime, this feeling in those far-off days for an Italian fatherland! All this is politics, not drama; but a resourceful writer could easily fashion drama from it. Boccanegra, for example, struck by this thought, wishes to follow the poet's advice; he convokes the Senate or a Privy Council... Horror on all sides, speeches, fury, even to the point of accusing the Doge of treason etc etc. The quarrel is interrupted by the abduction of Amelia. I'm talking just for the sake of it. Whatever. If you find a way of adjusting and smoothing over the difficulties I've mentioned, I am prepared to rewrite this act.

Simon Boccanegra  
Act One, Scene Two

Plebeians! Patricians! People  
with a ferocious history,  
inheritors only of the hatred  
of the Spinolas and Dorians;  
while the vast kingdom of the seas  
calls to you,  
you tear each other's hearts apart  
in your fraternal home.

I weep for you, for the tranquil  
sunlight on your hillsides,  
where the branches of the olive trees  
bloom in vain.  
I weep at the deceptive  
gaiety of your flowers,  
And I cry 'Peace!'  
And I cry 'Love!'

## FURTHER READING

Mary Jane Phillips-Matz discovered much new material on Verdi and charted his long career with sympathy in her vast biography of the composer (Oxford University Press).

The best life-and-works is that by Julian Budden in the Master Musicians series (OUP): Budden was also the author of a superb account of Verdi's theatrical output in *The Operas of Verdi* (also OUP): the second of the three volumes includes a detailed study of *Simon Boccanegra*.

Hans Busch edited and translated the correspondence and other documents relating to *Otello* and *Simon Boccanegra* in a two-volume collection published by Clarendon Press.

Edited by Gary Kahn, the volume on *Simon Boccanegra* in the Overture Opera Guide series includes articles by Rodolfo Celletti, James Hepokoski, Desmond Shawe-Taylor and the present writer; there's also a full libretto and translation, including of the scenes from the first, 1857 version of the piece that were discarded in the 1881 revision; a thematic guide, plus a select discography, videography and bibliography, together with material from the production manual for the opera issued by Verdi's publisher Ricordi in 1883.

*Simon Boccanegra* is an opera that describes Verdi's notion of an ideal leader. Political elements in opera are dealt with in Anthony Arblaster's *Viva la libertà!* (Verso Books, 1997).

## RECORDINGS

One recording dominates the discography of the opera in its 1881 version: a studio account with La Scala forces that followed a hugely admired production at Italy's premier opera house by the eminent Italian director Giorgio Strehler.

First seen in 1971, it was conducted by Claudio Abbado. Six years later a recording (DG The Originals) was made with same conductor and a cast consisting of Piero Cappuccilli (as Boccanegra, Doge of Genoa), Mirella Freni (as his long-lost daughter Amelia, alias Maria), Nicolai Ghiaurov (as Boccanegra's arch-enemy Fiesco), José Carreras (as his would-be-assassin turned son-in-law and chosen successor Gabriele Adorno) and José van Dam (as Boccanegra's former adjutant turned nemesis, Paolo). With similar casts, this famous production was also seen at Covent Garden, the Paris Opéra, in Tokyo, at the Vienna State Opera and in Washington, DC.

Further back, and again something of a classic, is the recording originally made by EMI in Rome in 1957 and now available on Naxos or Regis: here the leads are Tito Gobbi, Victoria de los Ángeles, Boris Christoff, Giuseppe Campora and Walter Monachesi. Gabriele Santini conducts the chorus and orchestra of the Rome Opera.

A warmly received version has recently arrived from Opera Rara of the 1857 edition of the opera – as opposed to the revision of 1881 now standard in the world's opera houses. Leading Verdian interpreter Sir Mark Elder conducts a cast led by Germán Enrique Alcántara, Eri Nakamura, William Thomas, Iván Ayón-Rivas and Sergio Vitale; the orchestra is the Hallé, with the Chorus of Opera North supplemented by the Royal Northern College of Music Opera Chorus.

On DVD, there's a more than presentable version from the Royal Opera House (Warner Classics, 2011) that stars Plácido Domingo singing in his later baritone register in the title-role, Marina Poplavskaya, Ferruccio Furlanetto, Joseph Calleja returning as Gabriele Adorno, and Jonathan Summers as Paolo; the Royal Opera House forces are led by Sir Antonio Pappano in Elijah Moshinsky's traditional production.

A grainy RAI filming of the 1978 La Scala revival can be found on [www.operaonvideo.com](http://www.operaonvideo.com) but doesn't seem to be otherwise available currently.

## THE OPERA'S LITERARY BACKGROUND

Verdi's opera was based on the play *Simón Bocanegra* by the Spanish playwright and later librettist Antonio García Gutiérrez (1813-84), an important member of the Spanish Romantic movement. The play was staged in Madrid in 1843.

He had first come to wide attention as the author of the *El trovador* (The Troubadour), first performed in Madrid in 1836. In 1853 Verdi and his librettist Salvatore Cammarano would turn it into *Il trovatore* – one of the composer's most characteristic and durable works of his so-called 'middle period'. Following Cammarano's sudden death, Leone Emanuele Bardare completed the text.

Later on Gutiérrez would address the particularly Spanish form of *zarzuela* – in the 19th and 20th centuries a kind of local equivalent of operetta that has rarely travelled much outside Spanish-speaking lands. Among his contributions to the genre as librettist was *El grumete* (1853).

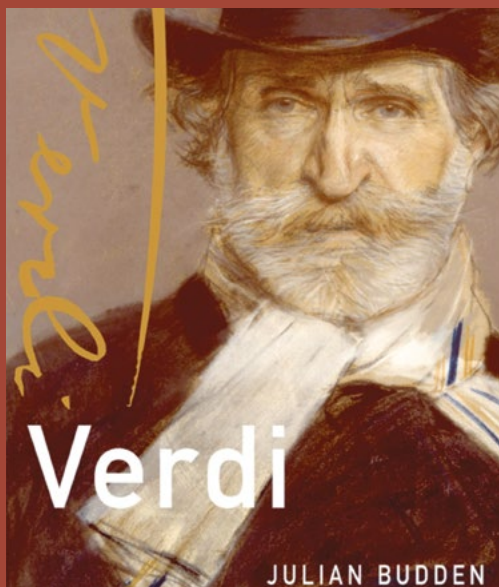
His later dramas included *La venganza catalana* (1864) and *Juan Lorenzo* (1865). Hard to find, but available on Archive.org, is a study of his work as *The Romantic Dramas of García Gutiérrez* by Nicholson B. Adams, published in 1922.

Verdi's librettists tend to be overlooked in any discussion of his works, but they were vital to his creativity and without them there would be no operas. *Boccanegra* is unusual in having three librettists, partly due to its two versions coming into existence with a gap of nearly a quarter of a century in between.

Version 1 (1857) was the work of Francesco Piave (1810-76) who supplied Verdi with the libretti of no fewer than ten of his 26 operas. Verdi also (without Piave's knowledge) co-opted the assistance of the author Giuseppe Montanelli (1813-62).

Piave died before the revision was contemplated. The commission for the 1881 version went to the composer and librettist Arrigo Boito (1842-1918), who would go on to provide the texts for Verdi's final two operas, *Otello* (1887) and *Falstaff* (1893); he also wrote libretti for other composers – notably, under the pseudonym Tobia Gorrio, for Ponchielli's *La Gioconda* (1876).

In his own right as a composer he wrote *Mefistofele* (1868) and *Nerone*, the former still part of the Italian operatic repertoire, the latter completed by other hands and posthumously produced in 1924.





**SARA CORTOLEZZIS** Maria Boccanegra (Amelia Grimaldi) is an Italian soprano. She won the 1st prize in Carlo Bergonzi award and the special Renata Tebaldi award for best female voice at the 58th Voci Verdiane Competition in Busseto (2022). She has also won several other competitions, including the Concorso Città di Vigevano (2019) and the 75th Teatro Lirico Sperimentale competition in Spoleto (2021). In 2020, she was a finalist at the Viñas Competition. This season, she sings Lauretta *Gianni Schicchi* in Trieste and at the Fondazione Haydn di Bolzano e Trento. She also sings Mimì *La bohème* at the Tiroler Festspiele Erl.

Recent highlights include notable debuts as Leonora *Il trovatore* (Teatro Coccia Novara); Elena / *vespri Siciliani* (Teatro Comunale di Bologna); and Desdemona *Otello* (Teatro Petruzzelli Bari). In the 2023/24 season, she made her debut in the title role of *Anna Bolena* (Teatro Verdi Trieste); Lucietta in Wolf-Ferrari's *Il campiello* (Teatro Filarmonico Verona); and Musetta *La bohème* at the Puccini Festival in Torre del Lago. She made her stage debut as Violetta *La traviata* (2018) at Teatro Barbarigo Padova, followed by Cio-Cio-San *Madama Butterfly* in Spoleto and Perugia. In 2022, she made her debut as Lesbina in Sellitto's *La franchezza delle donne* and as Donna Anna *Don Giovanni* in Spoleto. This is her Opera North debut.



**VAZGEN GAZARYAN** Jacopo Fiesco is an Armenian-German bass. Recent and current engagements include: Padre Guardiano *La forza del destino* (Opéra national de Montpellier and Opéra de Toulon); Don Basilio *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (Opéra de Lille); Phorbos/Le Veilleur in Enescu's *Œdipe* (Bregenz Festival); Daland *Der fliegende Holländer* (Opéra di Tenerife); and Zaccaria *Nabucco* (Savonlinna Opera Festival). Previous projects include: Oroveso *Norma* (Metropolitan Opera New York); Vodník *Rusalka* (Opéra de Nice and Opéra di Tenerife); Daland and title role *Don Pasquale* (Teatro Municipal de Santiago Chile);

Arkel *Pelléas et Mélisande* (Enescu Festival Bucharest); Le Grand Prêtre *Oedipe* (Komische Oper Berlin); Philip II *Don Carlos* (Konzerttheater Bern); Grand Inquisitor *Don Carlos* (Theater Basel); and Tsar Dodon *The Golden Cockerel* (Theater Magdeburg). As a member of Badisches Staatstheater Karlsruhe his roles included: Mephistopheles *Faust*, Commendatore *Don Giovanni*, Fiesco *Simon Boccanegra*, Sarastro *Die Zauberflöte* and Arkel. He has been a guest at Teatro Carlo Felice Genoa, Teatro Nacional de São Carlos Lisbon, Barbican Hall, Michailowski Theatre St Petersburg, Nationaltheater Mannheim, Theater Würzburg and with the Russian National Orchestra in Moscow. He studied singing and percussion at the Yerevan State Conservatory, and started his career at Yerevan Opera Studio. This is his Opera North debut.



**MANDLA MNDEBELE** Paolo Albani is an ensemble member of Theater Dortmund, where he opened the 2024/25 season as Germont *La traviata*, followed by Wotan/Wanderer/Gunther in *Der Ring an einem Abend*. This season he also sings Paul Devon in Mazzoli's *The Listeners* (Aalto Musiktheater Essen). Recent performances include: Sharpless *Madama Butterfly*, Scarpia *Tosca* (both in concert with Belgrade Philharmonic); and Marcello *La bohème* (Aalto Musiktheater). Recent engagements in Dortmund include: Marcello, Speaker *Die Zauberflöte*, Aslar in Augusta Holmès' *La Montagne noire*,

Quyobo in Pierangelo Valtinoni's *Viaggio sul Pianeta 9*, Ruggiero *La juive*, Hlppéric *Frédégonde*, Joe Coltello in Bernhard Lang's *Der Hetzer*, Sharpless, Scarpia, Pietro in Auber's *La muette de Portici*, Montézuma in Spontini's *Fernand Cortez oder Die Eroberung von Mexiko* and Telramund *Neverland*. Previous engagements include: Escamillo *Carmen* (DomStufen Festspiele Erfurt); Amonasro *Aida*, Haremhab *Akhnaten* (Theater Dortmund); Crown *Porgy and Bess* (Barcelona, Madrid, Buenos Aires); Mandela 3 in the musical tribute *Mandela Trilogy*, Germont and title role *Don Giovanni*, among others in South Africa. He graduated from Tshwane University of Technology Pretoria and was a member of the Black Tie chorus ensemble. He became a member of the Opera Studio in Cape Town and later joined the ensemble there. Mandla won 3rd Prize and audience prize in the International Hans Gabor Competition 2017 and was 1st Prize winner at the 2018 Voices of South Africa Trust international competition. This is his Opera North debut.



### **RICHARD MOSLEY-EVANS** Pietro

was born in Wales. He studied Engineering and worked in the steel industry before studying at the RWCMD in Cardiff. Opera includes: *Dulcamara L'elisir d'amore*, *Bosun Billy Budd*, *Doctor/Herald/Servant Macbeth*, *Shepherd Pelléas et Mélisande*, *Amantio di Nicolao Gianni Schicchi*, *Dancaire Carmen*, *Fifth Servant Capriccio*, *Steersman Tristan und Isolde*, *Servant Lulu*, *Innkeeper/Naval Captain Manon Lescaut*, *Zaretsky Eugene Onegin* (Glyndebourne); *Don Pasquale*, *Frank Die Fledermaus*, *Benoît/Alcindoro La bohème*, *Doctor Grenvil La traviata*, *Stagehand The Makropulos Case* (Glyndebourne on Tour); *Dr Gravid The Virtues of Things* (Linbury ROH); *Foreman/Mayor Jenùfa* (Opéra de Lille); *Don Alfonso Così fan tutte*, *Kaiser Der Kaiser von Atlantis*, *Arthur The Lighthouse*, *Gianni Schicchi* (ETO); *Sacristan Tosca*, *Imperial Commissioner Madama Butterfly* (Raymond Gubbay/RAH); *Marcello La bohème* (Opera Box); *Father Hänsel und Gretel*, *Sharpless Madama Butterfly*, *Germont La traviata* (Henfield Opera Project). He is a member of the Chorus of Opera North, and his roles for the Company include: *Talpa Il tabarro*, *Second Mate Billy Budd* (Aldeburgh), *Usher Trial by Jury*, *Cristiano Un ballo in maschera*, *First Soldier Salome*, *Berlin to Broadway* (co-production with West Yorkshire Playhouse), *Sciarrone Tosca*, *Speaker The Magic Flute* (schools' performances), *Guccio Gianni Schicchi*, *Kostandis The Greek Passion*, *George Jones Street Scene*, *Grail Knight Parsifal*, *Superintendent Budd Albert Herring*, *Alfred Doolittle My Fair Lady* (co-production with Leeds Playhouse), *Bottom A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Second Armed Man The Magic Flute*.



### **ANDRÉS PRESNO** Gabriele Adorno

is a Uruguayan tenor. He studied at the Escuela Departamental de Canto Lírico with Rina Baffa, at Escuela Nacional de Arte Lírico del SODRE under Raquel Pierotti and with Yvonne Kenny at Guildhall School of Music and Drama, where he was a scholar and was supported by the Centro Cultural de Música Uruguay. He is a Samling Artist. He was a member of the Jette Parker Young Artists Programme at the Royal Opera House Covent Garden from 2019/20 to 2021/22 where his roles included: *First Armed Man Die Zauberflöte*, *Roderigo Otello*, *Gastone La traviata*, *First Elder Susanna*, cover *Rodolfo La bohème*, cover *Duke Rigoletto*, *Abdallo/covers Ismaele Nabucco*, *Gastone/covers Alfredo La traviata*, *Roderigo/covers Cassio Otello*. Other opera includes: *Remendado Carmen*, *Cassio, Giuseppini in Caballero's El dúo de la Africana*, *Ricardo in Sorozábal's La del manajo de rosas*, *Pinkerton Madama Butterfly* (SODRE); *Dr Caius Falstaff*, *Edmondo Manon Lescaut* (Teatro Solis Montevideo). Recent and current engagements include: *Messenger Aida*, *Arturo Lucia di Lammermoor* (ROH); *Malcolm/covers Macduff Macbeth*, *Cavaradossi Tosca* (The Grange Festival); *Des Grieux Manon*, *Don José Carmen* (Teatro Municipal Santiago), *Luigi Il tabarro* (Welsh National Opera). For Opera North: *Cavaradossi*, *Turiddù Cavalleria rusticana*, *Lover Aleko*.



### **ROLAND WOOD** Simon Boccanegra

has sung major roles at all the major UK companies and overseas. Highlights include: *Ford Falstaff*, *Roucher Andrea Chénier* (Royal Opera House Covent Garden); *Count Almaviva The Marriage of Figaro*, *Paolo Simon Boccanegra*, *Zurga The Pearl Fishers*, *Bunyan/Pilgrim The Pilgrim's Progress*, *Marcello La bohème* (English National Opera); *Golaud Pelléas et Mélisande*, *Scarpia Tosca*, *Count di Luna Il trovatore*, *Escamillo Carmen*, *Robert Storch Intermezzo* (Scottish Opera); *Nick Shadow The Rake's Progress* (Glyndebourne Festival); *Renato Un ballo in maschera*, *Nottingham Roberto Devereux* (Welsh National Opera); *Scarpia and Renato* (Grange Park Opera). Appearances in North America include: *Renato*, title role *Rigoletto* (Canadian Opera Company); title role *Macbeth* (Opera Theatre of St Louis); *Rigoletto* (Michigan Opera Theatre); and *Giorgio Germont La traviata* (Opera Santa Fe). Further appearances include: *Scarpia and Rigoletto* (Staatsoper Stuttgart); title role *Falstaff*, title role *Gianni Schicchi*, *Michele Il tabarro*, title role *Don Giovanni*, *Marx Marx in London* (Scottish Opera); *Gianni Schicchi*, *Scarpia*, title role *Nabucco* (Canadian Opera Company); *Scarpia* (ENO); *Ford* (Santa Fe); *Forester The Cunning Little Vixen* (Concertgebouw Amsterdam); *Michele*, *Gianni Schicchi* (WNO). Engagements this season include: *Jaroslav Prus The Makropulos Affair*, *Marcello* (Scottish Opera); *Forester* (Des Moines Metro Opera). For Opera North: *Giorgio Germont*.



## **LAURA KELLY** Amelia's maid

is a member of the Chorus of Opera North. Her recent appearances with the Company include: Second Novice *Suor Angelica*, Kosinská *Osud*, *Berlin to Broadway*, Madeleine Audebert *Silent Night*, Glasha *Katya Kabanova*, Jenny Hildebrand *Street Scene*, Hansel *Hansel and Gretel* (Whistle Stop Opera), Trio *Trouble in Tahiti*, Dryad *Ariadne auf Naxos*, Suzy *La rondine*. She gained a BMus Hons (I) from the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama and completed her studies with a postgraduate diploma in opera from the Royal Academy of Music. She is an alumna of the Britten-Pears School and ENO's Baylis Programme. Opera includes: Rosina *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (Diva Opera); Third Boy, Second Lady (cover) *The Magic Flute* (ETO); Olga *Eugene Onegin* (Stanley Hall Opera); Alisa *Lucia di Lammermoor* (Opera Bohemia); Hansel (Open Door Opera). Concert highlights include: Vivaldi's *Gloria* (Brandenburg Sinfonia at St Martin-in-the-Fields); Leighton's *Columba mea* (White Hall Choir at St John's Smith Square); Vaughan Williams' *Serenade to Music* (Queen Elizabeth Hall for the Concordia Foundation); and Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 (Canterbury Cathedral). With the Classical Opera Company she has performed recitals at London's Caledonian Club. Laura is a founding member of the Scots quartet evermair.



## **IVAN SHARPE** A captain

has enjoyed a richly varied singing life from his early days as a boy chorister at Winchester Cathedral and then as a freelance tenor soloist, singing with WNO, Scottish Opera, ENO, Flanders Opera, La Monnaie, Hong Kong Festival Opera, Wexford Festival, Holland Park and City of Birmingham Touring Opera. He spent four years as the principal tenor for Carl Rosa Opera, then toured the world for eight years as one of Caledon, Scotland's Tenors. Roles include: Tamino, Ferrando, Don Ottavio, Count Almaviva, Eisenstein, Camille de Rosillon, Colonel Fairfax, Nanki Poo and the Novice *Billy Budd*. He has performed the tenor solos in much of the central oratorio repertoire, including Handel, Bach's Passions, Haydn's *Creation* and Masses, Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, Rossini's *Stabat Mater*, Verdi's *Requiem*, Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* and Britten's *War Requiem*. He is a member of the Chorus of Opera North and his roles for the Company include: Captain *Carousel*, Cab Driver *Kiss Me, Kate*, Tsar Berendey *The Snow Maiden*, Chief Justice *Un ballo in maschera*, First Priest *The Magic Flute*, Schoolmaster *The Greek Passion*, Frid *A Little Night Music* (co-production with Leeds Playhouse), Grail Knight *Parsifal*.



## **ANTONY HERMUS** Conductor

is Principal Guest Conductor at Opera North and Chief Conductor of the Belgian National Orchestra. He is also Honorary Conductor of the North Netherlands Orchestra and Artistic Advisor of the National Youth Orchestra of the Netherlands. He was born in Holland and studied piano and conducting at the Tilburg Conservatory, becoming Music Director of the Theatre Hagen at the age of 29. From 2009 to 2015 he was Music Director of the Anhaltisches Theater in Dessau, where he conducted his first *Ring* cycle to great acclaim. He has an extensive repertoire, and has guested in many houses including Stuttgart, Komische Oper Berlin, Gothenburg, Strasbourg, Opéra de Rouen and Dutch Reisopera, all of whom have reinvited him. He also has a flourishing symphonic career, conducting, amongst others, the Royal Concertgebouw, Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, Netherlands Radio Philharmonic, Bamberg Symphony, Melbourne Symphony, Swedish Radio and Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestras. In the UK he has conducted the Philharmonia, BBC Philharmonic, BBC Scottish Symphony and Royal Philharmonic Orchestras. For Opera North: *Tosca*, *The Marriage of Figaro*, Bernstein double bill (*West Side Story* *Symphonic Dances* with Phoenix Dance Theatre and *Trouble in Tahiti*), *Carmen*, *Orfeo ed Euridice* and *Cavalleria rusticana/Aleko* (double bill), as well as several symphonic concerts.

**PJ HARRIS** Director

is a stage director based in the UK. In 2015, he was listed as 'one to watch' by the BBC and subsequently trained as a director at Scottish Opera. He has worked at opera houses across the UK and Europe. In 2020, he directed the first ever socially distanced drive-in production of *La bohème* for English National Opera, which won a BAFTA for its live broadcast on Sky Arts. In 2023 he co-founded 'coalign', a new arts organisation dedicated to reaching broader audiences for opera by presenting large-scale new works. Forthcoming work: *Displaced:*

*A Woolwich Arsenal Opera* (coalign); *Gianni Schicchi* (OperaUpClose). As Director: *Siegfried*, *Götterdämmerung* (London Philharmonic); *Gods of The Game: a Football Opera* (Grange Park Opera, Sky Arts); *La bohème* (ENO); *Vespers of 1610*, *The Bartered Brides* (Garsington); *L'étoile*, *Idomeneo* (Royal Conservatoire of Scotland); *Cupboard Love*, *Riders to the Sea*, *The Cunning Little Vixen* (Byre Opera); *The Creation* (Barbican). As Revival/Associate Director: *Billy Budd* (Finnish National Opera, Polish National Opera); *Jenůfa* (Royal Swedish Opera, Den Jyske Opera, Aarhus). As Assistant Director: *Billy Budd* (Den Norske Opera); *The Skating Rink*, *Eugene Onegin*, *Intermezzo*, *The Cunning Little Vixen* (Garsington); *Les contes d'Hoffmann* (ROH); *Madama Butterfly* (Glyndebourne); *Così fan tutte*, *Inès de Castro*, *Jenůfa* (Scottish Opera); *Benjamin*, *dernière nuit* (Opéra de Lyon). For Opera North: Director *Brundibár*, *Salome*; Assistant Director: *The Greek Passion*, *Tosca*, *Osud*, *Pagliacci*.

**ANNA REID** Designer

is a designer for stage based in London and a graduate of Wimbledon College of Art. Forthcoming work: *La Cenerentola* (Theater am Kornmarkt at the Bregenz Festival). Theatre includes: *BRACE BRACE* (Royal Court Upstairs); *Reykjavik*, *Rock 'n' Roll*, *The Memory of Water*, *Cash Cow*, *Paradise*, *The Hoes* (Hampstead Theatre); *For Black Boys Who Have Considered Suicide When The Hue Gets Too Heavy* (Royal Court Theatre/Apollo Theatre); *Accidental Death of An Anarchist* (Lyric Hammersmith/ Theatre Royal Haymarket); *The Vanishing Room*

(English Theatre Frankfurt); *The Ministry of Lesbian Affairs*, *Fury* (Soho Theatre); *Dust* (New York Theatre Workshop); *The Sweet Science of Bruising* (Wilton's Music Hall); *Twelfth Night*, *Collective Rage*, *Dear Brutus*, *The Cardinal*, *School Play* (Southwark Playhouse); *Rasheeda Speaking* (Trafalgar Studios); *Schism* (Park Theatre); *Sex Worker's Opera* (set only, national tour and the Compagnietheater Amsterdam); *Hippolytos* (Victoria and Albert Museum); *Hamlet* (Riverside Studios). Opera includes: *Larmes de Couteau / Full Moon in March* (Linbury Studio, Royal Opera House Covent Garden); *The Power of Paternal Love* (Barber Opera); *Mansfield Park*, *A Star Next to the Moon*, *Dead Man Walking*, *Miss Fortune*, *The Telephone* (Guildhall School of Music and Drama). This is her Opera North debut.

**RICHARD MOORE** Lighting Designer

trained at North Tyneside College in Performing Arts. He has worked on and lit shows covering most forms of theatre, including *Close the Coalhouse Door* (Live Theatre, Newcastle) and *Get Up and Tie Your Fingers* (NTC Touring Theatre Company). In his current position as Deputy Head of Lighting at Opera North he has re-lit more than 30 operas, including Tim Albery's production of *Madama Butterfly* (Canada, Lisbon and Leeds) and *The Snow Maiden*, *Hansel and Gretel* and *La Cenerentola* in the Company's fairy tales season in 2017. He was also Lighting Designer for Opera North's concert stagings of *Turandot* (2017) and *Aida* (2019), and for the Opera North/Phoenix Dance Theatre co-production of *The Rite of Spring* (2019).



## **ANTHONY KRAUS** Chorus Master

studied at Bristol University, Guildhall School of Music and Drama (winning the Ricordi Conducting Prize), and the National Opera Studio. He has worked throughout the UK and Europe as a conductor, chorus master and vocal coach, including The Grange Festival, Garsington Opera, Glyndebourne, English Touring Opera, Almeida Opera, Bampton Classical Opera, Opéra national du Rhin (Strasbourg) and the Rossini Festival (Pesaro). He has also worked at the Royal College of Music, Royal Northern College of Music (*Hansel and Gretel*), Royal Birmingham

Conservatoire (*The Enchanted Pig, Hansel and Gretel*), and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (*Dido and Aeneas, Trouble in Tahiti*); West Green Opera (*Gigi, High Society*). In 2000 he joined English National Opera, and in 2003 was appointed Chorus Master at Opera North.

He subsequently served as Acting Head of Music and Assistant Head of Music until 2018, and has conducted several productions for the Company, including: *Ruddigore, Carmen, The Marriage of Figaro, Così fan tutte, Don Giovanni, Madama Butterfly, Il tabarro, Suor Angelica, The Bartered Bride, L'Enfant et les sortilèges, The Adventures of Pinocchio, Carousel, Joshua* and *Cautionary Tales!* (Errollyn Wallen). He is Music Director of the British Philharmonic Concert Orchestra, and Associate Music Director of the Sinfonia of Leeds.



## **KATIE STILLMAN** Orchestra Leader

is a Canadian violinist who enjoys a multifaceted career as a chamber musician, soloist and now as Opera North's new Leader. During the past season, she has directed the Academy of St Martin in the Fields, Manchester Camerata and Northern Chamber Orchestra as well as being a guest leader with Opera North for several productions. She is first violinist of the Villiers Quartet, one of the leading string quartets in the UK, known for their Late Beethoven cycle and for championing music by British composers. Recent acclaimed recordings include quartets by

Ethel Smyth and Delius on the Naxos label. She has performed recitals throughout the UK at venues including the Purcell Room, Bridgewater Hall and Wigmore Hall. Committed to educating the next generation, she has regularly performed in concerts for children in the acclaimed *Bach to Baby* series, has taught at Chetham's School of Music and can be heard on the ABRSM violin syllabus which is distributed worldwide. Winning the Grand Prize at the Canadian Music Competition in Montreal at age 16, Katie came to the UK to study at the Royal Northern College of Music where she was awarded the John Manduell Prize for outstanding achievement. She plays a 1741 Nicolo Gagliano violin.

# CHORUS OF OPERA NORTH

## Chorus Master

Anthony Kraus

### Sopranos

Miranda Bevin\*  
Katie Bird  
Gillene Butterfield  
Charlie Drummond  
Aimée Fisk  
Amy Freston  
Claire Lees  
Pasquale Orchard  
Victoria Sharp\*  
Kathryn Stevens

### Mezzos

Molly Barker  
Georgia Mae Bishop  
Helen Évora  
Joanna Gamble  
Laura Kelly  
Hannah Mason  
Beth Moxon  
Claire Pascoe\*  
Katie Sharpe

### Tenors

Kamil Bien  
Joseph Buckmaster  
Phil Clieve  
Peter Evans  
Robert Gardiner  
Warren Gillespie  
Brian McNamee  
Cameron Mitchell  
Tim Ochala-Greenough  
Campbell Russell  
Ivan Sharpe  
Vladimir Sima  
Tom Smith  
Lawrence Thackery

### Basses

Michael Burke  
Nicholas Butterfield  
James Davies  
Paul Gibson  
Simon Grange  
Gareth Long  
Ross McInroy  
Alistair Ollerenshaw  
David Porter Thomas  
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# ORCHESTRA OF OPERA NORTH

## Music Director Garry Walker

## Principal Guest Conductor Antony Hermus

### First Violins

Katie Stillman (Leader)  
Jack Greed (Guest Co-Leader) /  
Ed Pether (Guest Co-Leader)  
Byron Parish  
Tamsin Symons\*  
Claire Osborne  
Brian Reilly\*  
Susannah Simmons /  
Catherine Landen  
Anthony Banks  
Louise Latham  
Susan Voss

### Second Violins

Katherine New\*  
Oliver Bailly  
Helen Greig /  
Jacqueline Cima  
Alison Dixon  
Ian Bone  
Rachael England  
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Heloisa Ribeiro  
Tom Greed  
Laura Concar

### Violas

David Aspin  
Lourenço Macedo Sampaio  
Anne Trygstad  
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Vince Parsonage  
Ray Lester  
Dani Sanxis

### Cellos

Jessica Burroughs  
Daniel Bull  
Lydia Dobson  
Damion Browne  
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### Basses

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Catherine Lowe\*

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Andrew Mason

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Marianne Rawles

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David Baker\*

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John Pratt  
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Ben Jarvis

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Tom Berry

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Christian Jones

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Amplify supports artists at the heart of Opera North, from our versatile Orchestra and Chorus to the performers in our Youth Company, and the talented musicians and singers that we draw from across the globe.

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Find out more at [operanorth.co.uk/amplify](http://operanorth.co.uk/amplify) or by emailing [development@operanorth.co.uk](mailto:development@operanorth.co.uk)

### Thank you to our Amplify supporters

Thank you to the following individuals whose generous support of Amplify has enabled us to provide extraordinary opportunities for the talented artists in the Orchestra and Chorus of Opera North.

Dr Frances Cole  
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Howard Gatiss  
Dr Judith Hooper MBE  
Kate Olver and Jeremy Young  
Mrs Maureen Pettman  
Eleven anonymous donors





# OPERA NORTH AT NEVILL HOLT FESTIVAL

## MOZART'S *COSÌ FAN TUTTE*

6 – 12 JUNE 2025

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Opera North's new partnership with Nevill Holt Festival begins this summer with *Così fan tutte*.

It's difficult to think of an opera that contains more music of sheer beauty than Mozart's comic masterpiece, or has a libretto that is more unsettling. The plot – in which the cynical Don Alfonso bets that the fiancées of two young men won't stay faithful for long if put to the test – is a work of supreme artifice. Yet the opera charts the boundaries of real and feigned emotion, trust and deception, loyalty and desire, with unsparing truthfulness.

Each summer, Nevill Holt Festival welcomes internationally-renowned artists, musicians and writers to the beautiful grounds of the Nevill Holt estate in Leicestershire. Opera North is delighted to have agreed a five-year partnership with the Festival with the shared ambition to maximise opportunities for performers and creatives early in their opera careers to work alongside established artists.

For more information and to book, please visit:  
[nevillholtfestival.com](http://nevillholtfestival.com)

### CAST

#### **Fiordiligi**

Ella Taylor / Charlie Drummond

#### **Dorabella**

Heather Lowe / Siân Griffiths

#### **Ferrando**

Egor Zhuraskii / Stuart Jackson

#### **Guglielmo**

Seán Boylan / Andrew Randall

#### **Despina**

Gillene Butterfield / Claire Lees

#### **Don Alfonso**

William Dazeley

### **Chorus and Orchestra of Opera North**

**Conductor** Chris Hopkins

**Direction** Cecilia Stinton

**Designer** George Leigh

**Lighting Designer** Mike Lock



## LEARNING & ENGAGEMENT

### OPERA NORTH YOUTH ORCHESTRA

---

The Opera North Youth Orchestra (ONYO) is a pre-professional ensemble for career-minded instrumentalists aged 16–25 in full-time education. It aims to help dedicated young musicians transition from further or higher education into the world of professional music-making.

Since its launch in 2022, ONYO has supported the development of more than 130 young musicians, some of whom have gone on to take part in the Opera North Professional Experience Scheme, in partnership with the Royal Northern College of Music. We are also thrilled that ONYO alumni are now working with the Orchestra of Opera North as freelance musicians.

ONYO contributes to and supports a rich diversity of musical talent in the region, with members coming from across the north of England, including Leeds, Sheffield, Manchester and Liverpool.

Central to the programming of ONYO is the creation of opportunities for the ensemble to work together and perform with world class soloists, conductors, and ensembles from Opera North's performing company. The orchestra is led by conductor Oliver Rundell, and sections are coached by members of the Orchestra of Opera North.

Recent performances include Sibelius' Symphony No. 1, Kurt Weill's Symphonic Nocturne on *Lady in the Dark*, Shostakovich's epic Symphony No. 1 and Emmanuel Chabrier's *The Runaway Royal*.

We are excited that the Opera North Youth Orchestra will open Opera North's 2025/26 season with the UK premiere of the 'Hamburg' version of Judith Weir's *The Secret of the Black Spider*, performing alongside the Opera North Youth Company.

**For more information on ONYO, please visit [operanorth.co.uk/participate/](https://operanorth.co.uk/participate/)**

# INDIVIDUAL GIVING

**Opera North gratefully acknowledges the support of all the individuals who generously support the Company's work.**

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The Patrons' Initiative offers members a uniquely close relationship with the Company. Our annual programme of events enables members to gain unrivalled access to Opera North and explore all areas of the Company.

Annual membership starts at £550 per year (£46 per month).

The Patrons' Initiative brings together over 200 like-minded individuals who share a unique journey with Opera North.

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The Future Fund is Opera North's endowment fund, created in 2007 to support and extend the work of the Company through outreach, education and the main stage. Through the generosity of individual donors and trusts and foundations, who made gifts and pledges of over £4m in the Fund's first twelve months, this ambitious and passionate independent charity is making a positive difference to the lives of young people through music and opera.

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For further information on the  
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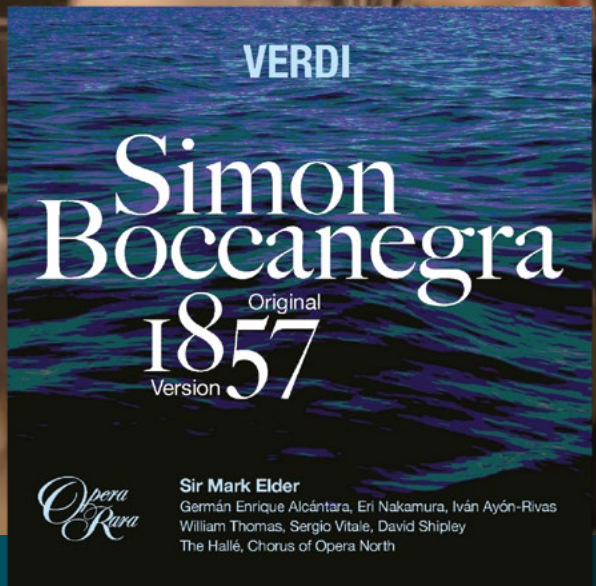
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## Neil Cowley Trio

Thu 22 – Tue 27

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## Images

Camoglia, Genoa / Photograph by Fabrizio Robba / Alamy (covers); Bradford City Hall / Photograph by Mick Flynn / Alamy (p1); Alamy (p2); Original set design for *Simon Boccanegra* at La Scala, Milan, 1881 / Alamy (p4); Caricature by Melchiorre Delfico (1825-95) of Verdi (at piano) rehearsing the original version of *Simon Boccanegra*, 1857 / Alamy (p8); Patrizi and Plebe banners designed by Anna Reid (pp11 & 12); Bogside, Londonderry, September 1971 / Photograph: Trinity Mirror / Mirrorpix / Alamy (p15); Boito and Verdi in the garden of Giulio Ricordi's house / Chronicle / Alamy (p16).

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