

2013 Festival celebrates Verdi/Wagner bicentenaries

There's no secret about our opera choices for next year's Festival - they were advertised in the 2012 programme. For those who missed the announcement, the 2013 Dorset Opera Festival will mark the bicentenaries of the births of Giuseppe Verdi and Richard Wagner with three performances of *La traviata* and two of *The Flying Dutchman* (*Der fliegende Holländer*).

The dates for your diaries are as follows:

La traviata | July 24, 26 and 27 (matinee)

The Flying Dutchman | July 25, 27

For participants, the Dorset Opera Summer School dates are 12-27 July inclusive. The Box Office is expected to open for priority booking (for Patrons and Friends only) from Tuesday 2 April 2013

2013: Dorset Opera on Tour

In a yet another new move, the 2013 Dorset Opera Festival will be presenting a third opera in collaboration with our sister company, the Netherlands Touring Opera.

The National Reisopera, headed by Dorset Opera chorus director Nicolas Mansfield, will be bringing us a reduced version of Leonard Bernstein's *Candide* - based on the Voltaire novella.

Performances will take place in early July in venues in and around Dorset. Hopefully there will also be a performance at the Linbury Studio at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden.

More information on *Candide* - including a list of venues - will appear on our website and in the Spring newsletter.



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Press Reviews from 2012

The Spectator

Dorset Cream

My first visit to Dorset Opera, last year, left me very impressed. If anything this year was even better...This year's mainstay was *Il trovatore*, an opera that I have never seen satisfactorily performed, despite its musical unsinkability. Sally Burgess, the great mezzo who has now turned to training and directing, showed her experience by making this as straightforward a production as possible...

...Gerard Quinn's di Luna was a most striking performance, possibly the most interesting account of the role I've seen, making a character normally just thought of as 'the villain' into as rounded a figure as Verdi permits. Anne-Marie Owens, who had a bad patch some time ago, is back on full form, giving Azucena's gutsy music thrilling power, but without vulgarity. John Hudson sang a beefy, unsparing Manrico, he appears to be one of those fortunate artists for whom singing, especially singing loudly, is the most natural way of communicating. Lynsey Docherty's Leonora, after early tentativeness, bloomed into a warm account of her wonderful music...These characters are all demonic, driven by violent passions, which is why the opera is so great. Phillip Thomas conducted with the utmost care and brio.

The second opera was the rarity: Lord Berners's *Le Carrosse du Saint-Sacrement*, getting its UK première. I shouldn't wonder if it were its UK dernière too, at any rate for anyone who sat through this performance. Not that it was badly staged or sung or conducted. So far as I could tell, all of those were perfectly competent, and the only titters it evoked were production touches: maids with feather dusters naughtily showing their behinds, and so on... Berners, the 'last

Jeffrey Stewart (Martinez) & Graeme Danby (the Viceroy) in *Le Carrosse du Saint-Sacrement*



eccentric', who dyed his doves and was taken up by the Sitwells, wrote in an idiom that suggests that he was eager that Les Six should expand their membership to Les Sept...

...The Virgin Mary puts in a much-needed guest appearance...in Puccini's *Suor Angelica*, Dorset Opera's third offering, and thereby pushes this poignant piece even closer to sentimentality than one has felt it to be throughout. Excellent production that this was, that danger was avoided, and my tears were thereby jerked, without my feeling that I was letting Puccini make indecent overtures. Realised like this, with simplicity, little movement, and a passionate performance, exquisitely realised, by Julia Melinek as Angelica, I found myself moved as I haven't been before by this fascinating score, Puccini almost abandoning set pieces for a fluid drama which does build, gently but decisively, to a blazing climax...

Michael Tanner



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Maria Mirò (Sister Genovieffa) & the ladies' chorus in *Suor Angelica*



Gerard Quinn (Count di Luna) & Lynsey Docherty (Leonora) in *Il trovatore*

The Daily Telegraph

Le Carrosse du Saint Sacrement ★★★

Dorset Opera... has dusted off a quaint one-act opera that hasn't been heard since its Parisian premiere in 1924. It is the work of Lord Berners, that fascinating figure in the interwar camp elite sprinkling gaiety over a dour nation.

Le Carrosse du Saint Sacrement is an irredeemably dated period piece - a whimsical comedy about a gouty Peruvian viceroy and his flouncing mistress that could have been written by Ronald Firbank. The finely crafted, brightly coloured and wittily astringent music is thoroughly Frenchified in character - Ravel's *L'Heure espagnole* is palpably a direct influence - and proceeds conversationally without stopping for big or memorable melodies, perhaps to its detriment.

Presented in tandem with Puccini's irresistible *Suor Angelica*, Dorset Opera's performance was lively and stylish in all respects (conductor Jeremy Carnall, director Paul Carr). The insuperable problem is that Berners offers far too much talk and not enough action, and one never understands exactly what the joke is meant to be. But it's certainly an intriguing oddity worth the revival.

Rupert Christiansen

Musical Opinion

Stunning triumph in UK premiere of comic opera by Lord Berners

Berners' only opera, his longest work which took him two years to write, was staged in Paris in 1924 and again in 1948. In one act, as half a double bill, the *Merimée* story gave Berners plenty of opportunities for showing people behaving badly, which amused him, and mocking heterosexual relationships - and the church...

...It is difficult to see why this gem of a comic opera had never been seen in England but the need for a large orchestra may have been a deterrent. Throughout, the orchestra is really centre-stage: the scoring is magical in every detail, well aware of Strauss and Ravel. The Dorset Opera Orchestra under Jeremy Carnall acquitted itself brilliantly.

As director, Paul Carr's approach was realistic with some witty touches and appropriate designs by Iain MacGregor. Graeme Danby was always convincing as the Viceroy, petulant, vacillating, bullying and irritable. Josephine Thorpe, although always vocally impressive, seemed rather staid to have behaved outrageously enough to cause so many scandals. The Viceroy's personal secretary (Jeffrey Stewart) made a strong impression and his valet (David Phipps-Davis) was fussily amusing...

...However, Berners' ending is abrupt and awkward to bring off. He stops dead just as he started straight in without an overture.

Dorset Opera, under their artistic director Roderick Kennedy, are to be congratulated in their enterprise in rescuing a missing link in English comic opera... and it is to be hoped that other companies will now take up *Le Carrosse*. The other half of the double-bill was Puccini's *Suor Angelica*, premiered six years before the Berners, with a large chorus of nuns; a strong cast headed by Julia Melinek, dramatic in the title role throughout, and Clare Shearer imposing as the nasty Princess.

Peter Dickinson

Opera Magazine

This was my second visit to the Dorset Opera Festival, and if anything I found it still more impressive than my first, last year...

...that meant a Saturday matinee of *Il trovatore*, and performances beset by crises but apparently bringing out the best in everyone involved. The set was a simple matter of walls and stairs, and suitably adapted, it served well for the other operas too. Sally Burgess, unfortunately no longer performing, showed her sense of theatre with directing that was straightforward, ungimmicky, and even contrived to make the plot easy to follow...

...Gerard Quinn, as di Luna, was outstanding in all respects. So was the Azucena of Anne-Marie Owens: after a difficult patch, she is back on top form, and this role suits her extremely well. The Leonora of Lynsey Docherty was well sung, both beautiful and exciting... John Hudson was the beefy, exciting Manrico. The [largely] amateur chorus gave its all, and the pick-up professional orchestra, under the expert Phillip Thomas, whose command of Verdian rubato is complete, offered fine support. The ballet music that Verdi provided for the 1857 Paris production preceded the second part - fun but expendable.

After the long supper interval, a rarity: the first UK performance of Lord Berners' *Le Carrosse du Saint-Sacrement*, to the same story as Offenbach's *La Périhole*, but not nearly as much fun. Berners is celebrated as the last eccentric, and reading about him is enjoyable. Watching this opera is not. It has all the appurtenances of a naughty, witty comedy, but no humour at all...

...In *Suor Angelica*... this dangerous opera of Puccini's - virtually begging to be given the saccharine treatment - was presented with moving directness and restraint. The main effect was of an ocean of white-clad nuns, with one or another emerging briefly before she returned to anonymity. Julia Melinek was a strikingly effective Angelica, heart-breaking in her scene with the Zia Principessa, played by Claire Shearer with haughty reserve rather than the usual aggressiveness. I was surprised to find myself misty-eyed at the end, and not ashamed to be.

Michael Tanner

Seen and Heard International

Better a Jolly Romp than a Depressing Dirge

Lord Berners...one-act opera, *Le Carrosse du Saint-Sacrement*, was being given its first stage performance in English by Dorset Opera. (It was first performed in French back in 1924, alongside Stravinsky's *The Soldier's Tale*, at the Théâtre des Champs Elysées, Paris.)...

...This is a light-hearted romp performed with wit and humour. Graeme Danby gives a convincing portrayal of the suffering Viceroy. His servants are much better turned out including his chamber maids who look as if they have been recruited from the local Bunny club, his smartly dressed secretary (Jeffrey Stewart) who is aware of his employer's many foibles, and his powdered valet Balthasar, played with attitude by David Phipps-Davis who, like any self-respecting servant, holds his superiors in utter contempt. Josephine Thorpe in the role of La Pericola is clearly a lady intent on getting her own way and proves completely unstoppable...

...This is by no means a profound work, but when directed with a light touch, as Paul Carr has done here, it is an entertaining gem which deserves to be taken up by other companies. Of particular note is the orchestral contribution which mirrors the action deftly and is very tongue in the cheek; the orchestra under Jeremy Carnall's alert direction certainly brought out all its merits...Dorset Opera has, not for the first time, shown enterprise in putting on a neglected work and deserves praise for this production supported by the Berners Trust...

...As the curtain rose [on *Suor Angelica*] the audience were stunned by the appearance of a large chorus of nuns all immaculately turned out in nuns' habits topped by expansive headdresses, fully deserving of the spontaneous applause...Julia Melinek gave her all to the demanding part of Sister Angelica. This is not easy to bring off, particular towards the end when she is



Catherine Bouchier (Leonora) & Phillip Rhodes (Count di Luna) in *Il trovatore*

alone on the stage for ten minutes or more experiencing anguish, despair and hallucinations (perhaps) and finally deciding to kill herself - only to realise, when it is too late, that she has committed mortal sin...

...The nuns seem charming enough given the constraints they are under, except for the bossy and prissy abbess (Valerie Reid) who rules her girls with a rod of iron - no giggling in chapel or turning up late or you'll be for it! But the real monster is Angelica's aunt, a severe, pitiless harriidan played with distinction by Clare Shearer, who comes to inform her of her decision regarding her inheritance...

...The music was wonderful, the singing superb - proof that Dorset Opera with its conductor Jeremy Carnall, director Paul Carr, its excellent orchestra and band of singers...can put on powerful productions on the sunniest of evenings like this one.

Roger Jones

"An opera begins long before the curtain goes up and ends long after it has come down.

It starts in my imagination, it becomes my life, and it stays part of my life long after I've left the opera house."

Maria Callas

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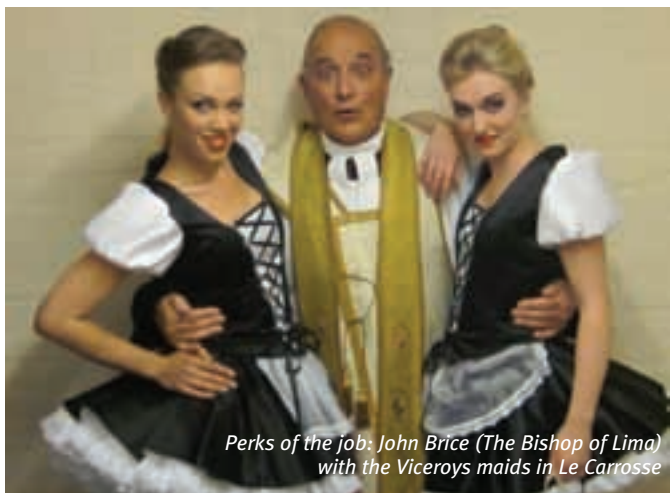


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*Perks of the Job: John Brice (The Bishop of Lima)
with the Viceroy's maids in Le Carrosse*



Julia Melinek (Suor Angelica)

The Blackmore Vale Magazine

Last summer the long-established Dorset Opera became Dorset Opera Festival, bringing Bryanston audiences two operas instead of one. This year it went one better, offering three productions, including a UK premiere...*Le Carrosse du Saint-Sacrement*...The eccentric Berners, the representatives of whose Trust attended the Saturday evening performance, took the same story by Prosper Mérimée that Offenbach used for his *La Périhole*...

Dorset Opera

**...consistently on a par with the UK's
five main opera companies**

(Opera Now)

...As the curtain opened on Paul Carr's production, conducted with familiar gusto by Jeremy Carnall, the stage was set for naughtiness. David Phipps-Davis amassed all of his pantomime experience as the mincing Balthasar, and Josephine Thorpe enjoyed every moment as the actress. It looked lovely, against Iain MacGregor's versatile set with costumes by Rebecca Hopkins.

But the music...is mostly recitative sung to ascending scales, without one single tune and totally forgettable, which is probably why most opera houses forget it. Congratulations for mounting the UK premiere, but this really is a panto.

The second half, Puccini's tragic masterpiece *Suor Angelica*, was magnificently done by Dorset Opera. This story of a noblewoman nun abandoned by her family piles misery upon misery. Sister Angelica has waited seven years to hear from the family that sent her to a nunnery, taking her baby son born out of wedlock. She waits for news of the boy while working as the convent herbalist. One day her aunt, the Princess, comes to call, to tell her that her sister is to marry the child's father, her parents are dead and their estate is to be settled. And that the child has died.

Heartbroken, Sister Angelica decides to end her life and be with her son, but once she has swallowed the poison she realises she has committed mortal sin and will go to hell, where she will never see the child. Redemption comes as the Holy Virgin intercedes, sending the boy to his mother as she dies.

Julia Melinek made her magnificent Dorset Opera debut in the title role, reducing the audience to tears as the dreadful story reached its climax, and Clare Shearer managed the emotional complexity of the Princess with great skill.

The Saturday performance of *Il trovatore* was plagued with difficulties for the company, with three of the four principals unable to perform. Thankfully, all the roles had been double-cast and so the singers scheduled for other performances stepped in again, providing a seamless transition to go with the pre-performance announcement that always puts dread in the hearts of an audience.

This is the Blood Brothers of opera, and gave Sally Burgess...who has expanded her talents into directing, a chance to set the familiar story in a modern war...The opera has some of the greatest of Verdi's choruses, and the Dorset Opera chorus has never been in better voice than in this year's productions.

The splendid Anne Marie Owens chilled and thrilled as the gypsy, with John Hudson as her heroic son Manrico. Lynsey Docherty managed to overcome the very unsuitable outfits to produce a heart-rending Leonora and Gerard Quinn was a suitably evil Count di Luna.

In 2013 the company embarks on Verdi's *La traviata* and Wagner's *Flying Dutchman* - an appetising prospect. GP-W

Reviews from *Opera Now* will appear in the next edition of DONews.

Advertise in our programme

Do you have a business you would like to advertise in this year's souvenir opera programme? Do you know someone who might like to support Dorset Opera by taking advertising space? If you do, please call our advertising manager Althea Collier on 01963 250694

Volunteers Required

We are always looking for extra hands to assist us in bringing you Dorset's very own opera festival. We require:

- sewing ladies (seamstresses)
- dressers
- front-of-house personnel
- marquee hospitality personnel
- accommodation for soloists and musicians

If you think you could help or know someone who might be suitable, or if you would like to know more about the tasks, please e-mail info@dorsetopera.com or call 01258 840000 (leave a message and we will get back to you).

Act II, *La Bohème*Phillip Rhodes (Count di Luna), Arwel Huw Morgan (Ferrando), John Hudson (Manrico) with the Dorset Opera Chorus in *Il trovatore*

Puccini Opera Weekends

Join us for *La Bohème*

La bohème is possibly the best-loved and most performed of all operas, yet it is much less known in detail than it deserves to be. To address this, Dorset Opera is supporting a new two-day weekend course run by Puccini-phile Mark Strachan, to be held near Sherborne on 2nd/3rd March 2013.

If you love *La bohème* and wish to find out more in a relaxed, farmhouse setting, this course is designed for you.

The course itself will be led by the Puccini expert and ex-WNO Dramaturg, Simon Rees. Dorset Opera soloists Catherine Bouchier and Nicholas Ransley, with accompanist Caroline D'Cruz, will be on hand throughout the weekend to illustrate the course with excerpts from the opera.

Participants will explore Puccini's opera in depth - as well as looking briefly at the other *Bohème*, by Puccini's rival Leoncavallo - and get to know the four central Bohemians and their real-life models, as well as the characters of Mimì, Musetta and the minor roles. We will hear those beloved arias and duets and, over dinner on the Saturday evening, watch a DVD performance of the full work.

Simon Rees will base his lectures on his expert involvement with several *Bohème* productions during his years at Welsh National Opera, as well as his opera tours in Britain and the continent. By the end of the weekend, we will have learned much of what there is to know about this most enchanting, romantic, melodious, entertaining and heartbreaking of operas.

Please see www.weekendoperacourses.com for further details or contact Mark Strachan at mark@strachans.org or 07802 408133

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Fallen Women

It was probably the worst pun I have ever contrived. I was suggesting to Roderick Kennedy that both next year's operas were about fallen women because, in *La traviata*, Violetta is a traditional 19th century stereotype associated with prostitution which was regarded as both the cause and effect of a woman being 'fallen'. Senta, in *The Flying Dutchman*, jumps off a cliff at the end of the opera and thus by definition has become a fallen woman! In the case of *Dutchman* it's about redemption through love. Senta's sacrifice saves the Dutchman. As for *Traviata*, in the words of Denis Forman it's "the one where the call-girl is a social embarrassment to her lover's family so she gives him up, her golden heart is broken and she succumbs to terminal TB."

Dutchman/Traviata compared

Opera	<i>The Flying Dutchman</i>	<i>La traviata</i>
Composer	Wagner's 4th opera	Verdi's 19th opera
Composer's DOB	22 May 1813	10 October 1813
First performance	1843, Semper Oper, Dresden	1853, La Fenice, Venice
Source	<i>The Memoirs of Mister von Schnabelewopski</i> (Heine), Sir Walter Scott	<i>La dame aux Camélias</i> (Dumas, fils)
First reception	Mixed (bad?)	Complete fiasco according to Verdi but the critics liked it
Librettist	Richard Wagner	Francesco Maria Piave
First Conductor	Richard Wagner	Gaetano Mares
Number of Acts	1 or 3 according to taste	3
Odd instruments	Tam tam and wind machine	Flugelhorn and castanets
Location	The coast of Norway	Paris and environs
Type	Nautical fantasy	Tragic romance
Length	2 hours 20 minutes	2 hours 10 minutes

Each work is a five star classic. Highlights of the *Dutchman* include the famous overture, and arias by the Dutchman, Daland (a Norwegian skipper) and Senta, Daland's daughter. Towards the end of Act 2 there is a stunning duet between the Dutchman and Senta. Wagner uses *leitmotifs* throughout and it is regarded as the first of the true, mature Wagner operas which would culminate in the *Ring Cycle*.

Dorset Opera

...nothing short of phenomenal!

(Opera Magazine)

La traviata is renowned for its drinking song, some glorious arias from Violetta, Alfredo and Germont, the finale to Act 2 and Violetta's last aria as she dies. As an opera it is probably as close as one can get to perfection if only because it is one of the first operas to address real people and real issues. Prior to Verdi's innovation operas were mostly about historical, fictional or mythical characters. This was an *opera verismo* decades before Puccini and the rest.

The performance dates for next year are published elsewhere in this newsletter. Ensure you have the dates in your diary for both operas and await box office opening next spring. Meanwhile think of some friends to bring along and perhaps encourage them by sending them a CD at Christmas with extracts from the two works. There will be no shortage of reference to both Wagner and Verdi next year as 2013 is the bicentenary of their births.

Celebrate with us at Bryanston in July 2013.

Alan Frost

Wagner returns to Dorset

Next year's Festival brings a fully-staged live Wagner opera to Dorset for the first time since Sadler's Wells (the forerunner of the English National Opera) performed *The Flying Dutchman* at the Pavilion Theatre, Bournemouth, in the late 1960s.

The Dutchman - as it is affectionately known - is Wagner's fourth opera. Here, his style is more akin to Beethoven, with a nod towards what it is later to become with his ultimate creations. In *Dutchman*, we see clearly delineated arias and duets, linked by something approaching recitative.

The overture itself sets the scene perfectly. It combines all the main themes of the opera (one of few Wagner works so to do). The impact of the initial chords is arresting and immediate: audiences cannot fail but be gripped and transported from the outset.

If you believe that Wagner is not for you, this is the one opera that will prove you wrong. Unlike his more mature works, *Dutchman* is accessible - and at two and a quarter hours, is of acceptably 'normal' length. Don't write off Wagner. If you like Verdi, you'll love *Dutchman*!

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(sung in English)

Director Paul Higgins / Conductor James Burton

In many ways Mozart's most perfect opera score, *Così fan tutte* is a comedy of innocence and experience, funny and unnerving, touching and satirical. This new period production will be sung by a remarkable cast, including firm ETO favourites Laura Mitchell, Paula Sides, and Kitty Whately (Rosina in ETO's *The Barber of Seville* in 2012).

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SATURDAY 6 APRIL

VERDI
SIMON BOCCANEGRA

(sung in Italian with English subtitles)

Director James Conway / Conductor Michael Rosewell

ETO's first new Verdi production for several years is *Simon Boccanegra* – a mature masterpiece and intimate drama. The story comes from the history of Genoa, for centuries a great maritime republic, and represents an impassioned plea for Italian unity. Verdi's depiction of the shimmering Mediterranean is wonderful; so too are the characters he creates.

TICKETS £20.50 (DISCOUNTS AVAILABLE)