

20
THE DORSET OPERA
FESTIVAL
TWENTIETH YEAR AT BRYANSTON

2005 - 2025

President: Sir Mark Elder CH CBE

Dorset Opera News | Christmas 2025 | Issue 40

Rigoletto 2025 | Jihoon Son making his
British debut as the Duke of Mantua



We are delighted to continue our support of this wonderful festival of Opera. We look forward to seeing old friends and making new ones.

If you are interested in learning more about our specialist financial planning services, please contact our local experts.

mail@bottrielladams.co.uk

bottrielladams.co.uk | trinitybridge.com

The value of investments can fall as well as rise and you could get back less than you invested.



Bottriell Adams LLP is registered in England and Wales under company number OC308207. Bottriell Adams LLP forms part of the TrinityBridge group of companies and is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority. Registered office: Wigmore Yard, 42 Wigmore Street, W1U 2RY.



Cavalleria rusticana 2025 | Leonardo Capalbo as Turiddu

The Dorset Opera Festival Community...

As we unveil the programme for our 2026 Festival, we find ourselves reflecting on the remarkable community that stands behind us. Each year, the creation of our opera festival is both an artistic triumph and a profound act of collective belief. It is an undertaking that requires not only vision and dedication, but also substantial financial commitment: over £800,000 each year. This figure represents far more than a budget. It represents the trust you place in us.

While ticket income provides vital support, it covers only a portion of what it takes to bring the festival to life. The truth is simple and deeply felt; we could not continue without you. The majority of our funding comes from the unwavering generosity of our Patrons, Friends and Corporate Sponsors, whose individual commitment sustains everything we do - every rehearsal, every performance, every moment of artistry shared with our audiences.

Your support is not merely financial; it is an expression of faith in our mission and in the power of opera to move, uplift, and unite. You are the guardians of this festival's future, and each year you make it possible for us to dream a little bigger, reach a little further, and offer our audiences work that we remember long after the curtain falls.

Having announced the operas for our 2026 Festival, we stand on the threshold of the new season with profound gratitude to you. The Festival you will enjoy next summer will exist because of you - your loyalty, your passion, and your belief that opera - *the ultimate artform* - seriously matters.

Thank you for walking alongside us. Thank you for sustaining us. And thank you - sincerely - for ensuring that our unique opera festival continues to thrive.

With deepest appreciation.

FODO: Vital Information



Friends of Dorset Opera will recall that nearly 2 years ago our subscriptions were increased to £60 for single and £80 for a joint-membership. The Friends brought forward the date by which payments should be made, to 15th January.

If those who did not amend their standing order payments would like to receive priority booking benefits for next summer's Festival, they should contact their banks to make the appropriate amendments before booking opens.

Some Friends prefer to pay their subscriptions annually online and, again, the date by which these payments should be made is also 15th January.

The Friends of Dorset Opera make an invaluable contribution to the success of the Festival and we are most grateful for their continuing support.

AGM Date...

The Annual General Meetings of the charities, Dorset Opera and The Friends of Dorset Opera (FODO), will take place on Monday, 9th February 2026 at 18.30 for 19.00. Once again, the venue will be Duke's in Copper Street, Dorchester DT1 1GA - by kind invitation of our chairman, Garry Batt, and his fellow directors. (Please note, only registered Members of the Company are permitted to vote, if called upon to do so.)

Do let us know if you intend to join us. If you would like an electronic copy of the annual report and accounts, please send a request email to: info@dorsetopera.com



Suor Angelica 2025 | Eri Nakamura as Sister Angelica

A sad and heartfelt farewell to some of our most ardent supporters...



Captain Tim Lee: former Dorset Opera Chairman: Tim Lee, who has died aged 88, was a distinguished naval officer, fundraiser and opera devotee. Among the first to cross-train as both navigator and submariner, he commanded the frigate *Gurkha* during the Third Cod War in 1976 – a poignant posting, as his father had survived the sinking of her wartime predecessor. Under Lee’s command, *Gurkha* sustained only minor damage in a collision with the Icelandic vessel *Odin*, which was forced back to port.

Born in 1937, the son of naval officer and antiques dealer Morton Lee, he was educated at Pangbourne and Dartmouth, winning the Queen’s Sword. His early service included the cruiser *Newcastle*, the frigate *Troubridge*—which inspired the radio comedy, *The Navy Lark*—and as flag lieutenant to Admiral Sir Manley Power.

He navigated the submarine *Valiant* on her first submerged voyage from Singapore to the Clyde and later became a Director of Naval Intelligence.

In retirement in Dorset, Lee raised funds for local charities, chaired Dorset Opera and, championed various community projects. He married Susan Adams in 1970; she and their two sons survive him.

Captain Tim Lee, born 20 January, 1937, died 2 July, 2025.



Richard Haes: We were saddened to hear of the death of this truly fine gentleman—a man whose warmth, wisdom, and unwavering kindness touched us all. He was more than a friend; he was a beacon of generosity and vision, always seeing the potential in people.

It was he, alongside his beloved wife, who first planted the seed of an idea that would blossom into something extraordinary. With quiet conviction, they suggested bringing together like-minded individuals to form a group of Patrons—a circle dedicated to supporting the causes we hold dear.

Their insight recognized that true change comes not from solitary efforts, but from shared purpose and collective strength. Through their initiative, bonds were forged, ideas flourished, and lives were enriched. He didn’t just propose it; he lived it, embodying the spirit of patronage with grace and humility.

Though he has left us, his legacy endures in every gathering, every act of kindness, and every Patron who carries forward his vision. Let us honour him by continuing to unite, to uplift, and to remember the gentle force he was.

He would always rather be doing something than simply standing around whether taking on the role of sommelier at events, bell-ringing at the Festival or as self-declared ‘tea boy’ to the wardrobe team, Richard would always want to help.

Rest in peace, dear friend. Your light will guide us still.



Lord Phillimore: Lord Francis Stephen Phillimore, 5th Baron Phillimore, passed away peacefully at his home in Dorset on 14 May 2025, aged 80. Born on Treco in the Isles of Scilly in November 1944, he inherited the barony in 1990 and carried his responsibilities with deep humility. Educated at Eton and Cambridge, he trained as a barrister, yet his life’s work ultimately centred on quiet, steadfast public service.

A thoughtful and compassionate figure, Lord Phillimore devoted many years to his community, serving as chairman of both the Shiplake and Binfield Heath parish councils, where his integrity and generosity left a lasting mark. Passionate about sport and culture, he founded the Binfield Heath Polo Club and was a committed trustee of the Venice in Peril Fund, marrying his love of rowing and Italy with a dedication to heritage conservation.

Diagnosed with Alzheimer’s in 2021, he faced his illness with courage, grace and an unwavering sense of duty. He is survived by his wife, Nathalie, their children Arabella, Tristan and Julian, and six beloved grandchildren.

Baroness Hodge publishes Recommendations for ACE...

Baroness Margaret Hodge has published her committee’s recommendations for the future of Arts Council England (ACE). Here are some of the most salient points that would make a real difference to the Dorset Opera Festival.

1. The government must retain the Arts Council.
2. The government should consider speeding up payments of tax relief to ease cashflow problems. Adopting a system akin to the VAT relief model where payments are made within 30 days should be explored.
3. The government should consider doubling the level of Gift Aid from £0.25 to £0.50 for shows, events and organisations that reach audiences outside London and the South East to encourage philanthropy outside the Capital.
4. ACE should work with all relevant organisations, whether or not they are ACE funded.
5. The state of Berlin, alone, spends £525million on Culture and the Arts... Arts Council England distributes just £477.2million in total!
6. The UK government spends less on culture than any other European country - apart from Greece! (0.25% of GDP)

Priority Booking 2026...

Priority booking for the 2026 Festival begins on 3rd February. Each Patrons’ Circle will get the opportunity to book online for at least a week, from the following dates:

President’s Circle	Tuesday 03 February 2026
Chairman’s Circle	Tuesday 10 February 2026
Director’s Circle	Tuesday 17 February 2026
Conductor’s Circle	Tuesday 24 February 2026
Overture Circle	Tuesday 03 March 2026
Friends	Tuesday 10 March 2026
General booking	Tuesday 24 March 2026

The box office will be open at 10.00am for online booking. Should you need to speak to a human, the telephone number is 07570 366186. Our booking brochures will be winging their way to you for the opening of your booking period, by which time the actual performance dates will be in place!

The performance week itself is 21-25 July, 2026.

Dorset Opera is a Registered Charity No: 1105318 and a Company Limited by Guarantee No: 5170704

Dorset Opera Festival, Cheselbourne, Dorset DT2 7NP

For advertising opportunities in DO News and in opera programmes contact +44 (0)1258 840000 or email js@dorsetopera.com | dorsetopera.com

Dress Rehearsal Photographs by Julian Guidera

Designed by Dorset Digital Print Ltd | 01202 620215



Would you kindly remember Dorset Opera in your will?

For over 51 years, Dorset Opera has brought high-quality opera to our wonderful county. Run by a dedicated team of enthusiastic unpaid volunteers, the company enables young people from Dorset and further afield to spend two weeks each year at our Summer School. As members of the chorus, wardrobe and stage crew, they work alongside professional opera practitioners and gain hands-on experience in every aspect of the production process. Around 50% of our participants are under the age of 23.

Dorset Opera is committed to showing that opera is not about elitism or prohibitive ticket prices. When audiences can understand and appreciate what is happening on stage, and how it relates to the music, opera becomes a truly thrilling and accessible experience.

We hope your enjoyment of our performances will inspire you to help secure the future of the Dorset Opera Festival by remembering us in your will.

By leaving a legacy gift to Dorset Opera (registered charity 1105318), you can make a lasting, tax-effective contribution to a well-established charity that brings high-quality operatic productions to Dorset, while also supporting and enriching the lives of young people.

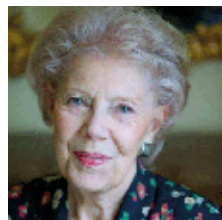
Including Dorset Opera in your will is straightforward. Your solicitor can provide the appropriate wording, or we can supply simple suggested text for a codicil.

Whatever the size, your gift would be a lasting tribute to your generosity.

Rigoletto 2025
Letitzia Vitelaru as Gilda &
Hansung Yoo as Rigoletto



Great Singers: an occasional view... No.1 Dame Janet Baker



What makes a great singer? People will have different views, but here I offer one interpretation which you may agree or disagree with. Since the Second World War I think there have only been two really great British female singers – Kathleen Ferrier and Janet Baker. True, there have been lots of *good* singers in the past and currently, but are they really great? Singers who encompass both opera and non-opera.

Kathleen Ferrier was before my time but I can recognize the sheer quality of the voice. Perhaps one that is out of fashion now but still great. Janet Baker was of my time and I heard her on many occasions from the late 60's to her retirement. It is interesting that both of them were from the North and both were mentored by Sir John Barbirolli who of course was famously a mentor to Jacqueline du Pre and Daniel Barenboim. It is often said that Janet Baker was the replacement to Kathleen Ferrier for Barbirolli.

So why Janet Baker and what makes her great in my mind? I think any great singer is born not made. Yes, they can be taught to bring out that greatness but it is innately in them. And you recognize it pretty much instantly. It makes you sit up in your seat – for me it has always sent shivers down my spine. There is an indefinable quality about the voice.

So are there criteria which defines a great singer? Let me offer three:

- The sheer beauty of the voice
- The interpretation of the music, song or aria – and with that real *involvement* with what is being sung
- Sheer presence – I don't how to define that but it is always there – maybe it is a function of the first two?

Janet Baker's voice is, I would say, slightly mournful, but beautiful. She was always totally involved in the music. Having

seen her in the *Dream of Gerontius* and several operas she was totally immersed in the music and what was being sung. I think it helped with *Gerontius* that she is a Christian and totally believed in Cardinal Newman's words. Few singers have this belief these days – fair enough, but unfortunately they treat a Requiem or oratorio as a concert with little involvement in what is being said. Often they dress in an operatic way for something that is solemn and meant to be humbling.

One quality that Janet Baker has is modesty and she dressed appropriately depending on the piece. Also her diction was impeccable – something which has deteriorated generally.

She was also extremely versatile and could sing both Purcell and Mahler. The profundity of the singer shows itself in Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* and her great interpretation of Mahler's *Ruckert Lieder*.

On the opera stage her interpretation of Handel's *Julius Caesar* was recognized as ground breaking. I saw it at English National Opera and met her backstage in the interval with some friends. She was the very welcoming and we were very nervous! She asked where we were sitting and I said the cheap seats to which she replied they are excellent. She needn't have met us but she did. Again welcoming and modest, not a diva attitude.

A great singer can turn a slight piece into something more profound. One piece that defines this is Elgar's *Sea Pictures*. Beautiful but profound? – yes, at the hands of Dame Janet. Let's hope the next Janet Baker has all the qualities of the first.

As Harold Rosenthal said about her, '*Versatility, even when coupled with a fine vocal technique and personal commitment does not necessarily result in a singer becoming a great artist: there is one more hidden, almost undefinable element necessary. Some people call it genius, others empathy, and some 'star' quality. Whatever it is called Janet Baker possesses it...she can hold an audience enthralled as Maria Callas did. I have been present on several occasions when this has happened at a Janet Baker performance, when one could not only hear the silence in the audience but experience that moment when performer, orchestra and listener were united by that magic spark that is kindled only when a great artist is on stage.*'

Dr Roger Donbavand

CH Church House
Investment
Management

Church House extends Seasons Greetings to supporters of The Dorset Opera Festival

Sensible Planning. Smart Investing. Superior service

www.ch-investments.co.uk

HURN
COURT
OPERA
Supporting tomorrow's vocal stars

LA TRAVIATA

BY GIUSEPPE VERDI Fully staged production with orchestra

7pm - Thursday, 16 April 2026, Regent Theatre, Christchurch
4pm - Saturday, 18 April 2026, Coade Theatre, Blandford
7pm - Monday, 20 April 2026, Theatre Royal Winchester
Tickets £10 to £60 - www.hurncourtopera.org



LAIDLAW
OPERA
TRUST



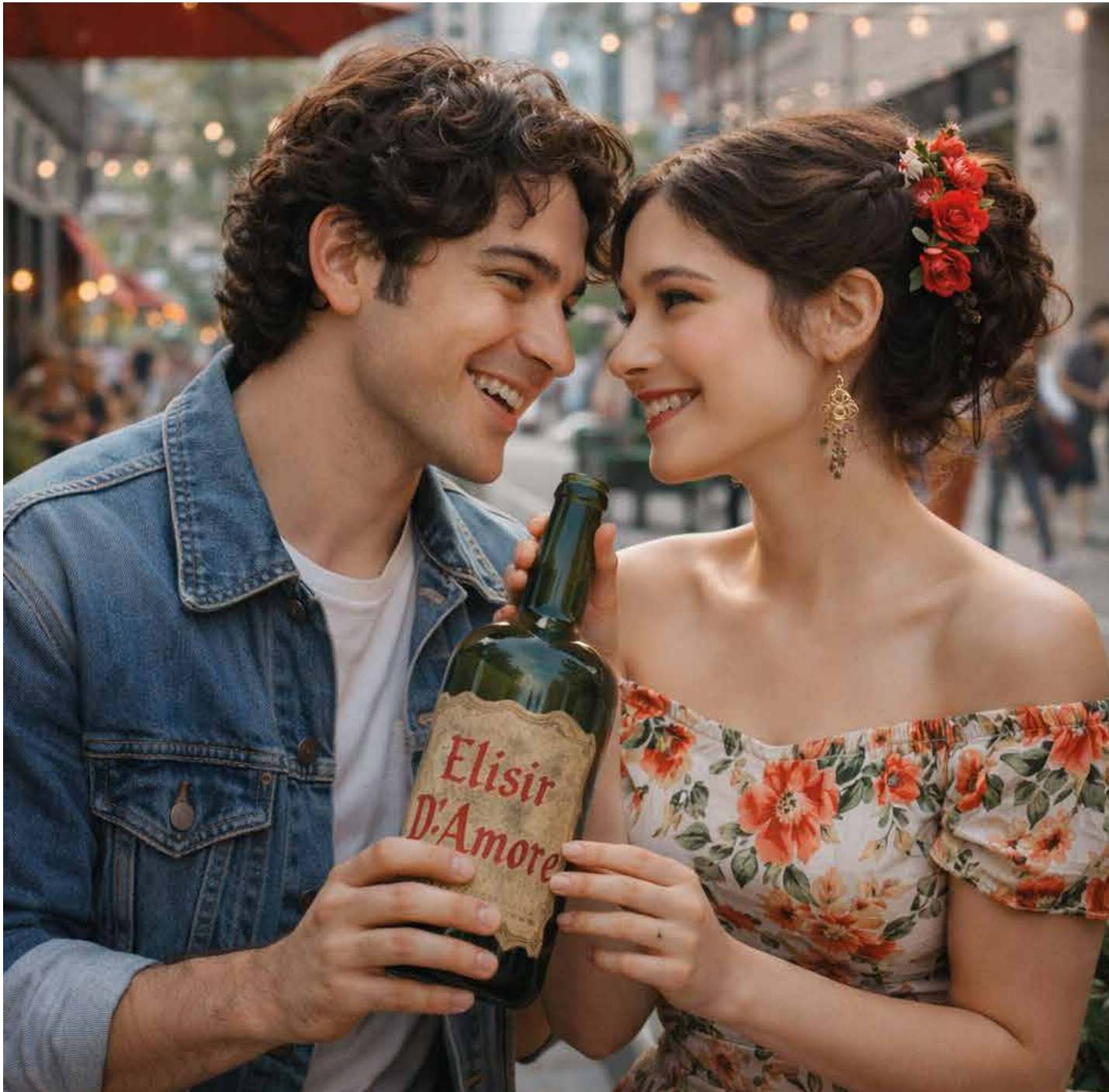
Laidlaw Opera Trust

Laidlaw Opera Trust champions live music as a uniquely thrilling art form, accessible to all. We invest in opera companies and houses who believe that opera should be part of everyone's cultural capital. Through strategic support and grants, we aim to expand Opera's reach and self-sufficiency.

By investing in the future of this cherished art form, we enrich cultural landscapes and nurture the next generation of opera enthusiasts and artists. The trust has the following aims:

- Bring opera to new audiences, making it accessible, inclusive and future-proof
- Support new and outstanding productions
- Sustain and retain British singers in the industry
- Help opera to become more self-sufficient - encouraging innovation and collaboration

For further information please see the website: www.laidlawopera.org/#mission



Dorset Opera Festival 2026 | L’elisir d’amore

SYNOPSIS:

A comic opera in two acts by Gaetano Donizetti

Set in a rural Italian village, the opera tells a light-hearted yet tender story of unrequited love, deception, and emotional awakening. Many of you will have this opera etched upon your heart – it was a great favourite when we performed it just 11 years ago!

The shy and poor peasant Nemorino is hopelessly in love with Adina, a wealthy and independent landowner who treats love as a game and remains indifferent to his devotion. When the boastful soldier Belcore arrives and confidently courts Adina, Nemorino grows desperate. His hopes rise with the arrival of Dulcamara, a travelling quack doctor, who sells him a so-called ‘magic love potion’ – actually nothing more than cheap wine – claimed to guarantee ‘love’.

Believing in the elixir’s power, Nemorino behaves with newfound confidence, which Adina misinterprets as indifference. This apparent change stirs unexpected jealousy in her. Meanwhile, Nemorino learns he has inherited a fortune following the sudden death of a rich uncle, though he is unaware that the village women suddenly surround him for this reason but, further convincing him that the elixir is working.

When Adina realises the depth and sincerity of Nemorino’s love, she repents her earlier cruelty. She buys out his military contract and confesses her feelings. The opera concludes happily as Nemorino and Adina are united, Belcore departs in search of new conquests, and Dulcamara claims triumph for his miraculous elixir, leaving the audience to enjoy the gentle irony at the heart of the tale.



Dorset Opera Festival 2026 | Samson et Dalila

SYNOPSIS:

Opera in three acts by Camille Saint-Saëns

Samson et Dalila is a three-act opera by Camille Saint-Saëns, based on the biblical story from the Book of Judges. It recounts the tragic fate of the Hebrew hero Samson, whose God-given strength makes him a champion of his oppressed people... and Dalila, a Philistine woman whose betrayal leads to his destruction.

The opera begins with the Hebrews suffering under Philistine rule. Samson encourages them to resist and kills the Philistine governor Abimélech, becoming a symbol of divine power and hope. The Philistine leaders, seeking revenge, enlist Dalila to uncover the secret of Samson’s strength.

In the second act, Dalila seduces Samson through a mixture of passion, persuasion, and deception. Although he initially resists her advances, Samson ultimately reveals that his strength comes from his uncut hair, a sacred sign of his vow to God. Once he falls asleep, Dalila betrays him: his hair is cut, and the Philistines seize him. They blind him and imprison him, reducing the once-mighty hero to a figure of humiliation and suffering.

The final act takes place in a Philistine temple during a celebration in honour of their god Dagon. Samson, now blind and powerless, is brought out to be mocked by his enemies. In a final prayer, he asks God to restore his strength one last time. His power returns, and he pulls down the temple’s pillars, destroying the building and killing himself along with the Philistine leaders. The opera ends with Samson’s sacrificial act of vengeance and redemption.

REVIEWS:

Dorset Opera Festival 2025

What the critics said about our production of:

Rigoletto, Suor Angelica and Cavalleria rusticana

The Mail on Sunday | ★★★★★
David Mellor

Another especially successful summer for Dorset Opera Festival with a fine *Rigoletto* to follow up from last year's exceptional *Madama Butterfly*, and two lengthy one-acters that give the highly talented cast lots to chew on.

Suor Angelica by Puccini deals with the tragic Angelica, mother of an illegitimate child, who has been sent to a nunnery and dispossessed by her family who now want her money for a favourite relative. The awful aunt who appears to steal the cash hasn't even bothered to tell Angelica that her child has died, leaving Angelica in a terrible state taking us into one of Puccini's finest arias, *Senza Mamma*. This opera is coupled with one of my favourite actors, *Cavalleria rusticana* by Mascagni.

Dorset Opera specialises in recruiting keen singers who want to learn how to be members of a chorus. They turn up and are properly trained by the renowned Stephen Harris and the Dorset Opera team and then rehearse the productions and sing in the actual performances. Personally, I found *Cavalleria rusticana* the best of the lot because the wonderful melodies, exceptionally well-sung here, will not be readily banished from the memory.

Dorset Opera is a first class, immensely well-run festival that gives great pleasure to an enthusiastic packed house at every performance. So much of that is thanks to the efforts of their indefatigable artistic director Roderick Kennedy as well as music director and conductor Jeremy Carnall and an enthusiastic team of active supporters led by chairman Garry Batt and director of operations Susannah Hubert.

Dorset Opera has gone from strength to strength and offers every prospect of even better things to come. It's a joy to have it on my doorstep and I wouldn't miss it for anything, even if I had to travel further to see it.

Opera Now | ★★★★★☆
George Hall

Impressive vocal performances and focused acting allowed both operas to hit home.

Once again designed by Rufus Martin (sets) and Stewart J. Charlesworth (costumes), on this occasion working with lighting designer James Smith, Dorset Opera decided to pair *Cavalleria rusticana* with *Suor Angelica* in director Paul Carr's double bill.

As in some recent *Cav & Pag* productions, the stagings showed characters in one piece appearing silently in the other: thus Eri Nakamura's Sister Angelica encountered the young man who fathers her child in the 1960s Sicilian village setting of *Cav*, before moving on to inhabit the central role in Puccini's opera, set in a convent seven years later: such small connections worked well.

Some impressive vocal performances and focused acting allowed both operas to hit home. Both Leonardo Capalbo's Turiddu and Gyula Nagy's Alfio supplied top-flight vocalism, perfectly realising the headstrong, macho individuals they personified.

Suor Angelica relies largely on just two principals, neither of whom disappointed. The hard-hearted Princess was given pitiless grandeur by Maria Schellenberg, while Nakamura was an indelibly moving Angelica, her ability to soar up to the vocal heights unfailingly impressive.

Director Carr hit form in the Angelica's later scenes: the moment when the nun was handed a tiny teddy bear owned by her dead child was heartbreaking, as was the miracle at the close, when a little boy (Jules Malfait) arrived to take his mother's hand and lead her away.

Fine work in smaller roles, impressive playing from the Dorset Opera Festival Orchestra and a fluent account of both scores from conductor José Miguel Esandi underpinned another success for Dorset's valuable enterprise.



Rigoletto 2025 | Hansung Yoo as Rigoletto

Opera Now | ★★★★★☆
George Hall

Where this *Rigoletto* scored particularly highly was in its musical and especially vocal values.

Jamie Hayes’ staging moved Verdi’s revenge tragedy from the court of a 16th-century Duke of Mantua to the world of a Mafia boss in 1920s Chicago: the womanizing Duke had a definite touch of Al Capone about him.

Clearly there was an obvious likeness to the long-running, widely revived Jonathan Miller New York Mafia staging -- first presented by ENO back in 1982 but revived at the London Coliseum as recently as 2024.

Lit by Mark Jonathan, Rufus Martin’s sets and Stewart J. Charlesworth’s costumes offered a touch of glamour: the opening scene represented the Duke’s fancy-dress party, with a Hollywood theme. Sleazier ambiances such as *Rigoletto*’s home or Sparafucile’s bar looked a good deal less grim than usual.

Where this *Rigoletto* scored particularly highly was in its musical and especially vocal values. With his long experience as a leading bass, Dorset Opera’s artistic director Roderick Kennedy, picked voices for the principal roles that were close to ideal.

Hansung Yoo took on the most demanding role in the Italian baritone repertory; his tirelessly grand-scale jester proved a triumphant assumption. With every note delivered with ease, Letitia Vitelaru displayed considerable artistry as Gilda while Jihoon Son sang the Duke with flair and tonal brilliance. Julian Close’s trenchant Sparafucile was finely partnered by rich-voiced Maria Schellenberg’s Maddalena.

The courtiers were delivered by Thomas Humphreys (Ceprano), Jay Broadhurst (Borsa) and Tim Bagley (Marullo), with Amber Reeves a memorable Countess Ceprano, Eddie Wade a fearsome Monterone and Daisy Lapworth making her mark as Gilda’s venal nurse, Giovanna.

Working with the sizable Dorset Opera Festival Chorus and the handpicked players of the Dorset Opera Festival Orchestra, conductor Jeremy Carnall showed a keen appreciation of Verdian style.

The Stage | George Hall

“Both operas hit home”

Mascagni’s *Cavalleria rusticana* (1890) – known to all opera fans as *Cav* – is usually paired with another one-acter of the same period – Leoncavallo’s *Pagliacci* (1892). At Dorset Opera, though, it is played before Puccini’s *Sister Angelica*, a tragic tale of a young woman placed in a convent for the crime of giving birth to an illegitimate baby.

As in some recent productions of *Cav* & *Pag*, Paul Carr’s double bill shows characters in the first piece reappearing in the second. Thus, Eri Nakamura’s Angelica meets the young man who fathers her child in the 1960s Sicilian village setting of *Cav*, before moving on to inhabit the central role in Puccini’s opera, set seven years later in the convent where the nun will eventually take her own life. The relationship between the two operas works well as a device to bind their stories together: Santuzza, wronged heroine of Mascagni’s tragedy, finds herself in similar trouble – though she is merely excommunicated before (in one of the opera’s most moving gestures) leading her fellow villagers in the impassioned Easter Hymn.

The excellence of individual vocal performances and some keen acting initiative allow both operas to hit home: all too ready to strike the women they are involved with in *Cav*, both tenor Leonardo Capalbo’s Turiddu and baritone Gyula Nagy’s Alfio supply top-calibre vocalism matching perfectly with the headstrong, macho characters they personify.

Suor Angelica relies essentially on just two principals, neither of whom disappoints. The hard-hearted Princess who is responsible for niece Angelica’s virtual imprisonment is given full, pitiless mezzo grandeur by Maria Schellenberg. As for Nakamura, her ability to soar up to the vocal heights helps make her an unforgettably moving Angelica.

Director Carr is at his best in the opera’s latter scenes: the moment when the nun is handed a tiny teddy bear owned by her dead child is as heartbreaking as Puccini’s deeply felt music. Carr also makes something special out of the final miracle: just remembering how the little boy (Jules Malfait) comes on to comfort his mother is almost unbearable.

Fine work in smaller roles too many to single out, impressive playing from the Dorset Opera Festival Orchestra, and a fluent account of both scores from conductor José Miguel Esandi underpin another Dorset success.



Cavalleria Rusticana 2025
Leonardo Capalbo as Turiddu &
Gyula Nagy as Alfio

Opera Magazine | Hugh Canning

Jerking the Tears

Dorset Opera Festival stages Verdi's Rigoletto and an off-beat pairing of Mascagni and Puccini.

The programme of the ever-resourceful Dorset Opera extended this year to three operas - *Rigoletto* and an unusual double-bill pairing *Cavalleria rusticana* with *Suor Angelica*. All three were designed by Rufus Martin (decor) and Stewart J. Charlesworth (costumes), who had worked together so productively on last summer's world première - Paul Carr's *Under the Greenwood Tree*.

Dorset Opera differs from most summer festivals in having short rehearsal periods - around two weeks for this summer's operas, a schedule that would be hair-raising for most professional companies. But it makes up ground by operating a 'summer school' residency on the campus of Bryanston School, near Blandford Forum. The school's Coade Theatre provides the performing space, and the grounds offer acres of lawn for picnic tents and car-parking. The cost of tickets is notably cheaper than the country house outfits close to erstwhile stately homes. There is a friendly no-nonsense feel to this short festival - four performances of *Rigoletto*, three of the double-bill - but it is well supported by the local community, and standards are remarkably high considering the tight budgets available to Dorset's design teams.

Although this year boasted no rarity of the kind that won the company an International Opera Awards nomination in 2023 (Massenet's exotic *Le roi de Lahore*), at least the double-bill had novelty value: Mascagni's pot-boiler and Puccini's weepie may be standard repertoire pieces today, but the pairing was new to everyone I spoke to, as it was to me.

On the surface, these two works make unlikely bedfellows, and the decision of the director Paul Carr to stage *Suor Angelica* as a quasi-sequel to *Cavalleria rusticana* demanded extra suspension of disbelief from the audience.

During the *Cavalleria rusticana* prelude, four troubled-looking women took their places centre-stage - three of them being the female principals of *Cav*. But who was the fourth? It transpired that this was Angelica before taking holy orders - enjoying a Sicilian holiday à la Audrey Hepburn, slumming it with the working-class villagers. The action was updated to 1960 - or so the subtitles told us - and it sort-of worked, though I was less convinced by the way this Angelica picked up the future father of her illegitimate child on a walk through town during Mascagni's Intermezzo. Sure, this is a moment of dreamy romanticism in the middle of a brutal tale of jealousy and peasant *omertà*, but does it really need spelling out? The lover returned towards the end of *Suor Angelica*: after abandoning her nun's habit, the title figure appeared in a petticoat for an imagined embrace with him. Whereupon she was reunited with their dead infant son during an ecstatic religious vision of the Virgin Mary.

It was Eri Nakamura's devastating performance of the title role, all the exposed high notes nailed and shot directly into the

audience's hearts, that got the tear-ducts flowing - and this was well before the arrival of the child, as she descanted '*La grazia è discesa dal cielo*' (Grace has descended from Heaven) over the Nuns' Chorus while contemplating suicide. Puccini's opera never fails, of course, but Nakamura's petite stature and vocal security above the stave makes her singularly compelling in this part (as in her Butterfly), especially in contrast to the overpowering physical presence of Maria Schellenberg's strongly sung Zia Principessa. Among the smaller parts, Heather Shipp's stern Abbess and Caroline Taylor's Suor Genovieffa stood out. Dorset had assembled a terrific ensemble under the expert baton of José Miguel Esandi, who showed a real feeling for the ebb and flow of the Italian 'young school'.

As Turiddu, Leonardo Capalbo's singing was too muscular - and lacking seductive charm - for my taste, but he was undoubtedly effective in delivering the caddish ruffian aspect of the role, well matched with Gyula Nagy's macho pugilistic Alfio.

Rigoletto may be one of the most popular operas in the repertoire, but it, too, poses casting challenges. Dorset scored highly with its leads, especially the Jester of Hansung Yoo and the Gilda of Letitia Vitelaru (Dorset's alternative Butterfly last year, admired greatly by me). This pair had everything for these roles in an intimate auditorium such as the Coade. Yoo sang the lyric baritone part of Ping in Puccini's *Turandot* for the Royal Opera under Antonio Pappano in 2023, and for Dorset he delivered one of the most secure accounts of this tremendous role that I have heard from a singer in his thirties. The promise is immense and, in the duets with Vitelaru's big-voiced Gilda, the drama crackled.

But it looked handsome against the backdrop of Rufus Martin's detailed painted flats. Initially I thought the Duke's court suggested an Italian Renaissance setting, but Stewart J. Charlesworth's fancy party frocks quickly gave the game away. I remained unconvinced by the night-club setting of Sparafucile's tavern, with the Duke singing '*La donna è mobile*' while Maddalena lip-synched into a microphone. He then sang the opening of '*Bella figlia dell'amore*' like a karaoke number to a delighted crowd.

Jihoon Son dashed off the Duke's big solos with heady élan, but his persona seemed too cuddly for the womanising cad, his bright tenor short on honey.

Julian Close and Schellenberger were both splendid as the murderous brother-and-sister act, while Tim Bagley, Jay Broadhurst and Thomas Humphreys made much of their chief-courtier cameo parts.

That the musical performance had knockout impact was mostly thanks to Jeremy Carnell, whose conducting conveyed all the drama of Verdi's opera, securing remarkably disciplined orchestral playing and chorus singing. I came away with the renewed impression that Dorset Opera rarely disappoints.



Suor Angelica 2025 | Caroline Taylor as Sister Genovieffa

The Stage | George Hall

“All three principals are on a very high level”

Jamie Hayes’ staging moves the action of Verdi’s revenge tragedy from the court of a 16th-century Duke of Mantua to a mafia setting, perhaps in 1920s Chicago. The worthless Duke – a role sung with considerable vocal brilliance by tenor, Jihoon Son – has more than a touch of Al Capone about him.

There’s a certain broad likeness to the celebrated Jonathan Miller staging of this work, first presented by ENO back in 1982 and revived regularly until as recently as 2024. As with Miller’s production, there’s a potential conflict with the original – while no one would expect a mafia capo to behave nicely, more people might expect more from a duke (although these days, maybe not: but it was precisely this element that was considered so shocking back in 1851).

Be that as it may, the sets and costumes offer a touch of glamour. The opening scene represents the Duke’s fancy-dress party, with a kind of Hollywood theme – although such sleazier ambiances as *Rigoletto*’s home or hired assassin Sparafucile’s bar look a good deal less grim than usual. But where this production scores most highly is in its musical, and especially vocal, values.

With his long experience as a leading bass, Dorset Opera’s artistic director Roderick Kennedy is one of the best judges of voices around these days, and all three of the principals are on a very high level. In addition to the exciting Son, Hansung Yoo takes on what is generally considered the most demanding baritone role in the entire Italian repertoire, and his tirelessly grand-scale jester is a triumphant assumption.

In the role of *Rigoletto*’s innocent daughter Gilda, destroyed by her father’s own machinations against his hated employer, soprano Letitia Vitelaru is once again a considerable vocal artist with every single note sounding easy in her fluent, lithe vocalism. You would have to go a very long way to hear these three central roles better sung.

Secondary parts go well, too, with bass Julian Close’s trenchant Sparafucile finely partnered by rich-voiced mezzo Maria Schellenberg as his sister Maddalena, who attracts the men her brother kills for money. The vicious courtiers are expertly delivered by the likes of Thomas Humphreys (Ceprano), Jay Broadhurst (Borsa) and Tim Bagley (Marullo), with Amber Reeves a memorable Countess Ceprano, Eddie Wade a fearsome Monterone and Daisy Lapworth noteworthy as Gilda’s venal nurse, Giovanna.

Holding the musical score together with a real appreciation of Verdian style is conductor Jeremy Carnall, another big asset to Dorset Opera as the company’s music director. Together with the sizable and hard-working Dorset Opera Festival chorus and the hand-picked players of the Dorset Opera Festival orchestra, Carnall ensures high musical standards throughout.

The Fine Times Recorder | Gay Pirrie-Weir

This year is the 20th anniversary of Dorset Opera’s move from Sherborne School to Bryanston near Blandford Forum and, something special was needed to celebrate the occasion.

Artistic director Rod Kennedy could hardly have anticipated the extraordinary thrill that South Korean baritone Hansung Yoo would bring to Dorset in the title role of *Rigoletto* - Verdi’s bitterly cruel story of corruption, entitlement, bullying and parental love. Yoo brought not only a powerful, passionate and beautiful voice to the role, but he matched the characterisation as the hunchbacked jester forced to ingratiate himself to the Duke of Mantua and his courtiers whilst being despised and ridiculed by each of them. Letitia Vitelaru as his beloved daughter Gilda, wrung the audience heartstrings as she was duped by the callous, lascivious Duke (Jihoon Son).

Against a monumental set cleverly designed by Rufus Martin, the story progressed to its inevitably tragic ending in Jamie Hayes’s production. The Dorset Opera chorus, first seen in the colourful fancy dress ball at the 1920s Mafia-style Court of Mantua, has never sounded better, and the full orchestra, under the baton of Jeremy Carnall, squeezed every ounce of emotion and braggadocio from Verdi’s music.

Rigoletto is the centrepiece of the 2025 season, which is completed by the double bill of Mascagni’s *Cavalleria rusticana* and Puccini’s *Suor Angelica*.

All three operas, set in Italy, confront the issues of the Catholic church and sin. *Rigoletto*’s daughter loses her virginity to the carelessly lustful Duke. Turiddu’s passion has ruined Santuzza, and his return to his now-married lover Lola spells disaster for all. Angelica’s baby, born out of wedlock, means she is banished by her wealthy family to life in a convent. The Church hangs heavy over all.

Rufus Martin’s set, so effective in *Rigoletto*, is transformed to a Sicilian street scene for the torrid tale of Turiddu and his women but, in *Suor Angelica*, it is transformed yet again. The company, led by Eri Nakamura as the grieving Sister Angelica, Maria Schellenberg as her unbending aunt and Heather Shipp as the Abbess, give a fine account of Puccini’s heartbreaking story.

Leonardo Capalbo makes a welcome return to Dorset Opera as the arrogant, lovelorn and confused Turiddu, with Heather Shipp as his very Italian mother, Julia Mintzer as Santuzza, Gyula Nagy as the racy trucker Alfio and Heather Lowe as his wife, Lola. Capalbo’s easy animal magnetism makes Turiddu’s uncontrollable desires entirely convincing, and it is a joy to hear him at Bryanston again. José Miguel Esandi conducts the double bill.

The interesting programming provides a challenging trio of moods for the chorus, and congratulations to them all. Dorset Opera’s casts combine top class operatic professionals with graduating singers, offering a unique opportunity both for their development and for its loyal audiences.

The company has come a very long way since its move to Bryanston and the appointment of Rod Kennedy, an international bass from Bournemouth who had sung with them on several occasions in the Sherborne days.

Every season brings an exciting new programme. This year’s brings a truly great *Rigoletto*, and a fascinating combination of agony and passion sacred and profane. You won’t forget either the voice or the performance of Hansung Yoo as Verdi’s tragic fool.



Rigoletto 2025 | Jay Broadhurst as Borsa, Hansung Yoo as Rigoletto, Thomas Humphreys as Count Ceprano & Tim Bagley as Marullo

Opera Magazine | Hugh Canning

The annual summer course that results in professional opera performances on the spectacular campus of Bryanston School focused firmly on standard Italian repertory in 2025: Verdi's mid-period masterpiece *Rigoletto* and an unusual double bill, pairing (for the first time in my experience) Mascagni's popular verismo potboiler and the central work from Puccini's *Il trittico*.

Staged by Jamie Hayes and Paul Carr respectively, Dorset Opera regulars in recent seasons, both evenings demonstrated what near-miracles can be achieved on rehearsal periods of little more than a fortnight, steered by an artistic director, Roderick Kennedy, with a keen ear for rising young talent.

Hayes's production of *Rigoletto* may have owed much to Jonathan Miller's famous 'Little Italy' mafioso staging for English National Opera in the 1980s but he had plenty of ideas of his own, even if some of them were questionable. The set designer, Rufus Martin, opened the proceedings with a tease: the 'Mantuan' ballroom and chandeliers we saw on stage could have been from the Italian Renaissance of Piave's 1558 Opera, setting, but Stewart J. Charlesworth's mixed-period frocks soon gave the game away.

We were in New York (again, but perhaps a decade later, in the 1950s) at a fancy-dress party thrown by the 'Dook' Jihoon Son), with only Count Ceprano (Thomas Humphreys) wearing 16th-century costume. Oddly, Sparafucile Julian Close) had been invited to the ball, wearing a death mask (nudge, nudge), but this at least suggested the disreputable company kept by the host.

In the canal-side scene near Rigoletto's home, the Miller influence was more marked; one of the courtiers wore a Mickey Mouse mask for the abduction of Gilda (Letitia Vitelaru) and we were again in a run-down warehouse district.

Hayes knows how to direct a chorus, and thanks to the fine singing, especially from Hansung Yoo's youthful, expansive Rigoletto and Close's saturnine hired assassin, a murky crime scene was atmospherically evoked. Yoo – who sang Ping in the Royal Opera's most recent revivals of *Turandot* – is a remarkable find for this repertoire; indeed, his legato singing of Rigoletto's lyrical music, the sardonic humour he brought to his mocking of Monterone (Eddie Wade) and the rage he unleashed in his condemnation of the courtiers rather put to shame the performances of better-known Verdi baritones I had heard at both the Royal and Bavarian State Operas a week earlier. Yoo is young

to be singing this most emotionally demanding of Verdi's mid-period roles, but he is already a singer to be reckoned with in this rep. So too is Vitelaru, her lyric soprano more expansive than is customary even at international houses these days, with the necessary flexibility for *Caro nome* but the requisite heft for the Act 3 quartet and Storm trio, the latter excitingly sung with Maria Schellenberg's fruity mezzo (as Maddalena) and Close's dark bass.

As the Duke, Son sported an enviable technique and rhythmic elan to spare. Thanks to Jeremy Carnall's gripping conducting of the youthful and committed orchestra, this *Rigoletto* scored where recent metropolitan performances have proved something of a let-down.

Carr's staging of the double bill attempted something I would not have thought possible. As is a fairly recent fashion with stagings of *Cavalleria rusticana* with its customary companion, Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci*, the director tried to treat Puccini's one-acter as a sequel. During Mascagni's Prelude, idiomatically conducted by José Miguel Esandi, four women came onstage: Santuzza (Julia Minzer), Mamma Lucia (Heather Shipp), Lola (Heather Lowe), but who was the fourth? It transpired that this was the pre-nunnery Angelica (Eri Nakamura), a princess vacationing in Sicily without chaperones (rather like Audrey Hepburn in Roman Holiday). Later, during the Intermezzo, she picked up a handsome fellow in the town square, presumably the father of the illegitimate child from whom she is separated in *Suor Angelica*.

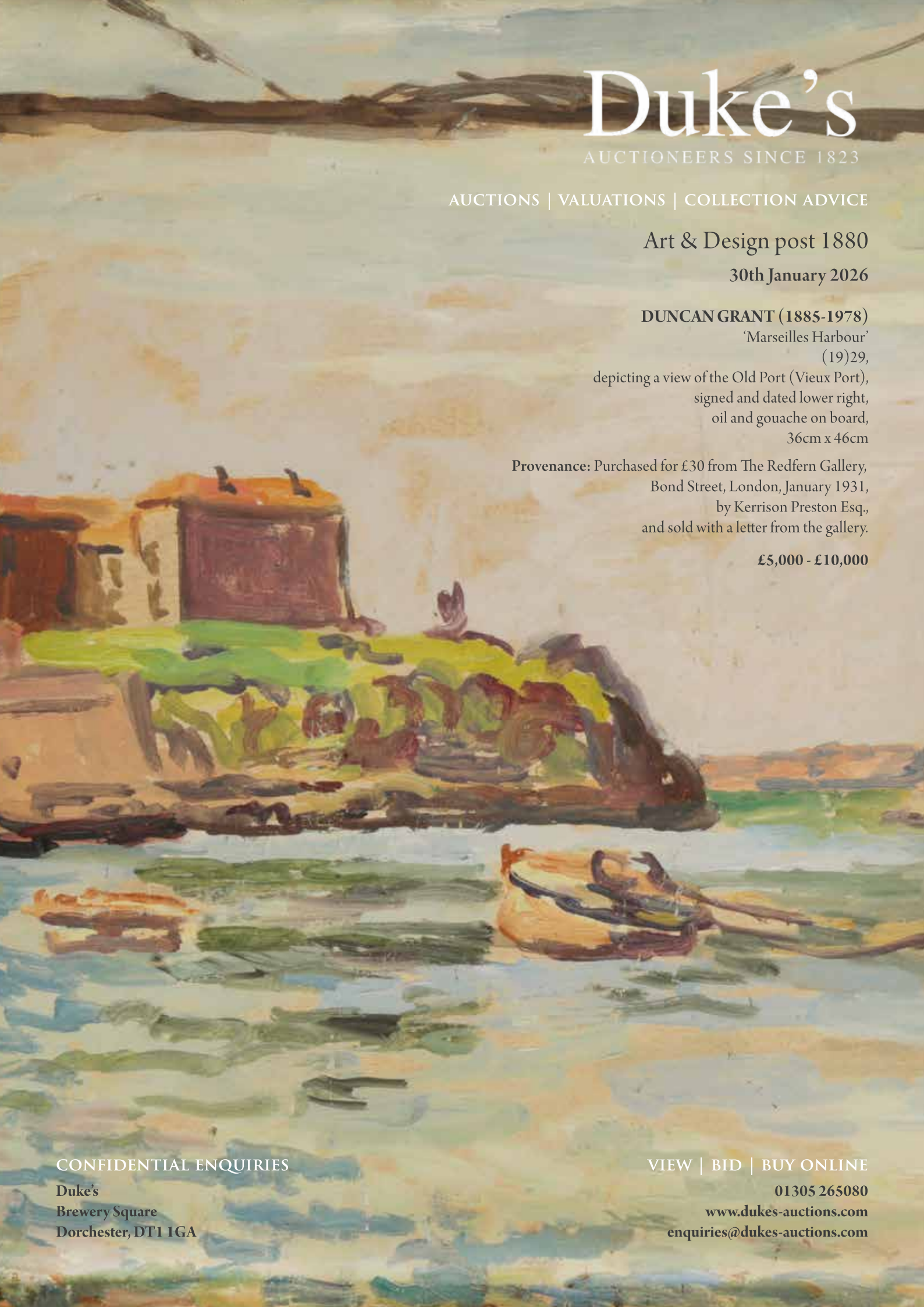
Gyula Nagy's powerful Alfio was the most convincing of the three principals, while Heathers Shipp and Lowe incarnated the roles of Lucia and Lola ideally.

Inevitably, perhaps, they were outshone by the star of Puccini's weepie, Nakamura singing her heart out, and nailing the high notes thrillingly as an Angelica who opened the tear ducts from the moment she sang *La grazia è discesa dal cielo* clutching her son's teddy bear-given to her in a brief moment of compassion by Schellenberg's physically and vocally formidable Zia Principessa.

In Carr's version of Angelica's vision, the Virgin Mary was replaced by her lover from the *Cav* Intermezzo, before her son arrived carrying his soft toy, but by then we were putty in Nakamura's-and Puccini's-hands.



Cavalleria Rusticana 2025 | Gyula Nagy as Alfio, Leonardo Capalbo as Turiddu & Heather Lowe as Lola

The background of the entire page is a painting of a harbor scene. In the foreground, there's a body of water with a small boat. In the middle ground, there's a rocky island or fort with some buildings. The background shows a hazy horizon.

Duke's

AUCTIONEERS SINCE 1823

AUCTIONS | VALUATIONS | COLLECTION ADVICE

Art & Design post 1880

30th January 2026

DUNCAN GRANT (1885-1978)

'Marseilles Harbour'

(19)29,

depicting a view of the Old Port (Vieux Port),
signed and dated lower right,
oil and gouache on board,
36cm x 46cm

Provenance: Purchased for £30 from The Redfern Gallery,
Bond Street, London, January 1931,
by Kerrison Preston Esq.,
and sold with a letter from the gallery.

£5,000 - £10,000

CONFIDENTIAL ENQUIRIES

Duke's
Brewery Square
Dorchester, DT1 1GA

VIEW | BID | BUY ONLINE

01305 265080

www.dukes-auctions.com
enquiries@dukes-auctions.com