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**Two firsts for Dorset Opera;
one first for Britain!**

Our opera choices for your exciting 2018
Dorset Opera Festival...

We hear that...

Catch up with your favourite Dorset Opera stars

Read the reviews of 2017

All the press comment on *Le comte Ory* and *Faust*

Events Dairy 2018

A tantalising foretaste of what's in store for the
new season...

Join us at the Wexford Festival

Time to sign up for our 2018 opera tour

Dorset Opera News | Christmas 2017 | Issue 25



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Le comte Or / Nico Demmanin & Jennifer France

Your 2018 operas revealed

Dorset Opera has a record for bringing unusual or neglected works to its audiences and participants, and one of the operas in our programme for 2018 very firmly ticks that box.

Massenet's *Le Cid* was first performed with a starry cast at the Paris Opera on 30 November 1885 in front of the French president. Until 1919, it received over 150 performances there before fading into obscurity until a new production was mounted in Marseille in 2011, finding its way to Paris some four years later.

Whilst it has been performed at the Met in New York, in San Francisco and Washington, as far as we (and our esteemed colleagues at Opera magazine) are able to ascertain, it has never been performed in the UK. Our performance of *Le Cid* on 24 July 2018 will therefore be the opera's British stage première!

But why did *Le Cid* lose its popularity? As a Bachtrack critic put it after the Paris production in 2015:

'Le Cid is a real masterpiece, bringing immense dramatic intensity to an opera stage and setting a high standard which many operatic adaptations of Shakespeare don't reach... I struggle to understand why this opera, such a huge success when it was first written, has vanished so totally from the repertoire...'

Now it will be your turn to judge. Don't miss our British première of *Le Cid*. Who knows, it might come back into the repertoire as a result of our efforts.

Le Cid will be performed on 24, 26 and 28 July (mat)

...and for our second production of 2018

It's time for Puccini's perennial favourite, *La bohème*. Our Summer School choristers will relish being a part of it - that famous Latin Quarter or Café Momus scene. It was first performed in 1896 - barely ten years after *Le Cid*, but what a difference in compositional style and construction.

Probably the most exciting news we can give you at this juncture is that our *La bohème* will hopefully be directed by someone whose only other production of the opera sustained the Royal Opera House for 41 years...the great John Copley. What a wonderful opportunity for our young singers to work in close proximity with one of the world's greatest opera directors.

John, who was our first Celebrity Lunch guest in 2016, is off to New York very soon. He will be directing Rossini's *Semiramide* - which we'll all be able to see Live from the Met on 10 March.

La bohème will be performed on 25, 27 & 28 July

Not a lot of people know this... Dorset Opera's première history

Dorset Opera and the Dorset Opera Festival have made significant impacts on British opera provision over the years. It began with the world stage première of Donizetti's *Gabriella di Vergy* back in 1985. The opera had been given in concert performance in Belfast where it was recorded, but no company had mounted an actual production of the work until we did so. This was followed in 1988 by another Donizetti first: the British stage première of *Maria Padilla*.

To mark the millennium, DO Artistic Director and founder, Patrick Shelley, lighted upon *Salvator Rosa* by the Brazilian composer, Carlos Gomes. Again, the production was a British première, and Patron David de Mattos was so taken with the piece that he put together a funding package to make a professional recording of it. At the time, it was the only available recording of the opera and was thus a world première (it is still available to buy online).

2003 saw Dorset Opera taking part in a year of cultural celebrations to mark Hungary's accession to the EU. The opera choice was simple. It would have to be Ferenc Erkel's *Hunyadi László* - staple fare in Hungary but never before staged in Britain. Thus our performances in Sherborne and in London, supported by the Hungarian Cultural Centre, were the British stage premières of the work.

In 2007, and now based at Bryanston, Dorset Opera was offered the opportunity to mount the very first British stage performances of the new ending to Puccini's *Turandot* by the contemporary Italian composer, Luciano Berio. Puccini had died before he could finish *Turandot* and the version performed by most opera companies uses the completion by his pupil, Franco Alfano. In 2007, under our new Music Director, Jeremy Carnall, we presented four performances of *Turandot* alternating both the Berio and Alfano endings.

Our next British stage première was in 2012 when we mounted the first performance of Lord Berners' *Le Carrosse de Saint-Sacrement*. It had been mounted in Paris in 1924 but had never made it to the UK. Paired with Puccini's glorious *Suor Angelica* and supported by a grant from the Berners Trust, our efforts on Berners' behalf were widely applauded in the British press.

So to 2018 and Massenet's *Le Cid*. So popular throughout Europe when it was first published, it was deemed to have never received a staged performance in Britain. The Dorset Opera Festival looks forward to putting the record straight and already the press is champing at the bit to see and hear this great work. Those who know Massenet's operas, and perhaps saw our performances of *Hérodiade* in 2006, will know that he offers Grand Opera in the time-honoured tradition so beloved of Dorset Opera supporters: big set-pieces, wonderful choruses and tunes that you will remember long after leaving the theatre.

Gift Aid: have your tax circumstances changed?

We hold Gift Aid declaration forms for many of our supporters - some dating back several years. These enable us to claim 25% tax on every donation made to the Dorset Opera charity. To enable us to reclaim Gift Aid on your donation, you have to have paid the amount of money we claim (or more) in Income Tax or Capital Gains Tax in that tax year. Please be sure to let us know if your circumstances have changed.





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Mark S. Doss

We here that...

Don't Miss Mister Doss!

Don't forget that your favourite bass baritone, Mark S. Doss, is appearing at the Royal Opera House as Alfio in *Cavalleria rusticana* throughout December. The magnificent Latvian mezzo, Elīna Garanča, is his Santuzza and Bryan Hymel sings Turiddu. Tickets are still available and the performance dates are 29 November, 2, 6, 9, 12, 15, 19 & 22 December. We'll see you there!

Cavalleria rusticana is paired with *Pagliacci* which sees British baritone heart-throb, Simon Keenlyside, as Tonio heading another great cast. Full details of *Cav* & *Pag* are available online at: roh.org.uk

Can you have too much of a good thing? Surely not where Mr Doss is concerned! He'll be back in the UK in the new year to portray that real baddy, chief of police Baron Scarpia, in the Welsh National Opera's production of Puccini's *Tosca*. He is joined by another of our young basses, Daniel Grice, who sings Angelotti. Dan appeared in the role of Wagner alongside Mark in our production of *Faust* this summer.

Tosca is best seen at the Wales Millennium Centre with performances on 9, 11, 16, 21 & 23 February or closer to home at the Mayflower Theatre, Southampton, on 22 & 24 March. Other performances take place until April in Birmingham, Bristol, Llandudno, Milton Keynes and Plymouth. For further information, see the WNO website at: wno.org.uk

Meanwhile, soprano Jennifer France - the wonderful Countess Adèle in our adored production of Rossini's *Le comte Ory* - is currently finishing the Glyndebourne Tour. She has been making her mark as Ophelia in this year's must-see opera, Brett Dean's *Hamlet*, which The Guardian described as 'a career-making achievement'. The opera debuted at Glyndebourne during the summer to sensational reviews from press and public alike. In the new year, she will be found in Glasgow rehearsing Jonathan Dove's *Flight* and Richard Strauss' *Ariadne auf Naxos* for Scottish Opera. scottishopera.org.uk

Australian baritone, Nicholas Lester, has been incarnating *Eugene Onegin* for Welsh National Opera. Should you find yourself in the Oxford area on 30 November, you might just catch the last performance of the run. Nick was Marguerite's brother Valentin in our production of *Faust*.

...and back at the Royal Opera House, Comte Ory (Nico Darmanin) has been making his mark as Danieli in their production of Verdi's *Les Vêpres Siciliennes*.

A brief synopsis to whet your appetite...

The name *El Cid* is derived from the Arabic for 'lord' (*sayyid*) and was given to the original Rodrigo Diaz de Vivar (*Rodrigue*) who lived around 1043-99 and fought against the Moorish invaders. The Moors came to revere his fighting skills.

He is loved by two women - one is the Infanta who cannot marry him because he is not of royal lineage - the other is Chimène, daughter of the Comte de Gormas. Rodrigue kills Gormas in a duel to avenge an insult to his father, but when Chimène discovers who the killer is, she vows revenge. She is torn between love and vengeance as Rodrigue is sent off to battle once more.

News reaches the King that Rodrigue has been killed in battle, and whilst Chimène is content that revenge is now hers, she breaks down, confessing her love for him. When it is discovered that he is actually still alive, Chimène is inconsolable. The King tells her that if she still wants to avenge her father's death, she must carry out the sentence herself. Rodrigue pulls out his dagger and threatens to kill himself if Chimène refuses to become his wife. Moved with compassion, Chimène reveals that she has loved him all along...



Sophia Loren in El Cid

Le Cid or El Cid?

The late, great, Welsh soprano Dame Margaret Price used to tell the story of leaving college to join the Ambrosian Singers. They were an ad-hoc band of strong-voiced sight readers that provided the choruses on several superstar opera recordings, TV programmes and musicals made in London in the 60s to 80s. They also specialised in the background music to pop recordings and film soundtracks. Dame Margaret vividly recalled her very first job with the Ambrosians in 1961 - singing in the chorus for the soundtrack of the film *El Cid*!

Those of us *d'un certain âge* will gleefully recall *El Cid* - the blockbuster movie starring Charlton Heston, Sophia Loren, and all the major British acting talent of the era. Who can forget the final denouement, accompanied by stirring organ and choral music, where the body of El Cid is strapped upright to his horse which then rides along the beach through the serried ranks of marauding Saracens, dispersing them into the sea. The stories of both the opera and the film are based loosely on the original play by Pierre Corneille.



Events Diary 2018...

The 2018 Events' Diary is packed with even more dates than ever. It will be landing on doormats with your priority booking information early in the new year. But let us tempt you with a just a few of the regular events as well as new highlights.

- There will be eight Bluffers' Lunches - featuring such revered speakers as Nigel Beale, Roger Graef, Simon Rees, Dougie Scarfe, Adrian Thorpe and Gwen Yarker
- An unmissable Celebrity Lunch - possibly at Bryanston
- 'Covent Garden Comes to Dorset' - a very special concert at Milton Abbey featuring the next generation of opera stars from the Royal Opera House's Jette Parker Young Artists' programme. Saturday 28 April - do put the date in your diary!
- Another glorious Ritz Tea Party

Our visits and trips will include:

- Summer Firework Fiesta - Swanage by boat (with fish & chips)
- Dinner on the Swanage Railway
- The Wexford Opera Festival in Eire

...and new this season: three Opera-on-Screen evenings!



The book!

We are still seeking anecdotes and memories for our 40th Anniversary book (yes, it's still under construction). Don't be shy, if you have been a participant or even an audience-goer over the first 40 years of Dorset Opera and have a fond memory connected with one or more of our performances, please don't hesitate to send an email to: info@dorsetopera.com

Going that little bit further...

Were you aware that during our performance week, Summer School participants have a little more time on their hands, so to keep them occupied, we give them the opportunity to take part in several masterclasses with industry experts. These could be vocal masterclasses with at least two of our star singers; an introduction to Alexander Technique; Italian coaching; a spatial awareness class; wig & makeup technique; Fight Club (the art of stage fighting including fencing); and if they wish, singers can elect to undergo solo auditions for the Artistic, Music and Chorus Directors.



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REVIEWS:

Dorset Opera Festival 2017

What the critics said about our production of:

Le Comte Ory

Sunday Express | ★★★★★☆

Clare Colvin

This year the contrasting operas were Gioachino Rossini's romp *Le comte Ory* and Charles Gounod's supernatural tragedy *Faust*. The chorus of mainly students from the annual summer school were joined by well-known opera singers.

The plot of *Le comte Ory* is in true Carry On tradition. While the men of the Castle of Fourmoutiers are away at the Crusades, the reprobate Count Ory, in love with Countess Adèle, hatches a cunning invasion plan by disguising himself and his men as nuns seeking shelter from the storm.

There is a saucy three-in-a-bed scene during the night's confusion with Ory (Nico Darmanin), his page Isolier (Heather Lowe), and Adèle, (Jennifer France) before the Crusaders return and Ory has to beat a hasty retreat.

Bachtrack | ★★★★★☆

Dominic Lowe

Threesome? Sheep? Le Comte Ory at Dorset Opera

So much of operatic history is a rush. Think of Rossini...locked in an attic until he had finished the overture to *La gazza ladra* needed for the première that same night and churning out *Il barbiere di Siviglia* in three weeks...Wasfi Kani, built a usable opera house in the grounds of West Horsley Place in just eleven months. Dorset Opera Festival performs a similar feat every year, setting up shop in Bryanston School, and drawing a crowd of young singers keen to take part in their Summer School. Roughly two weeks after arrival, the curtain goes up for their first production. Students sing on stage along with established singers, offering them a valuable learning experience as well as bringing opera to a part of the country that rarely has access to the art form.

Dorset Opera's 2017 season opened with... Rossini's *Le comte Ory*... in which he, true to form, recycled part of his earlier opera, *Il viaggio a Reims*. It's a fantastic piece, full of humour... David Phipps-Davis' production is refreshingly unpretentious...his greatest achievement was his skilful management of a large cast and the great humour he drew from them. Timing was precise, expressions were arch and the handling of the Act 2 trio, with an hilarious co-ordinated threesome, not to mention the appearance of a large (stuffed) sheep, was supremely funny.

The chorus was on excellent form for the first night: diction was clear, delivery confident and musicality obvious, but what really struck me was the quality of physical performance, with lifelike interaction between the singers. The 'nuns scene' was beautifully brought to life by the men, who clearly threw themselves into their habits with gusto. For such a professional performance put together in so little time, the whole chorus deserve congratulations.

It's always a pleasure to see a cast that's solid across the board; my find at this production was soprano Jennifer France, singing Adèle. She...has a talent for *bel canto*; the higher register was assured and the top notes clean. Tone was warm and her ability to skim the voice down to pale thread was a treat. It was a generous vocal performance, nicely supplemented by a strong stage presence and credible acting.

Nico Darmanin threatened to steal the show as the Count with acting that was deliciously over the top. It's a role that calls for excess, and hopping forwards wielding his fake breasts, stepping into lovers' embraces or sneaking into bed, Darmanin nailed the role, visually showing his own amusement at proceedings...He doesn't have the biggest voice, but his top was solid and there was an elegance to the performance that matched the Count's rank. Isolier was sung by Heather Lowe...and she had the volume and vibrancy to do the role justice, showing a glimmering quality in her tone...In more minor roles, Szymon Mechlinski deployed an attractively dark baritone as Raimbaud and Sarah Pring did a good comic turn as Adèle's companion, Ragonde... The orchestra gave a lively performance under José Miguel Esandi...perfectly respectable and there was no absence of enthusiasm. This was a production at which Rossini himself would have chuckled.

Opera | Peter Reed

Rossini's shameless recycling of *Il viaggio a Reims* as *Le comte Ory* appears only occasionally in the UK, and Dorset Opera delivered the composer's adieu to comic opera with unforgettable panache and a dream team in the three lead roles. How Roderick Kennedy's festival gets two shows (*Faust* was their other production this year) up and running in their summer school of just over two weeks is anyone's guess, and the results were impressive.

With *Ory*, there is no point in pussyfooting around a plot in which a lascivious noble disguised first as a hermit/guru with wandering hands and then as a nun with a retinue of similarly en-habited 'sisters' preys on a chateau-load of women whose husbands have gone away on a Crusade-and David Phipps-Davis duly aimed his staging straight at the funny-bone. Steve Howell's set was French Renaissance viewed at some distance through a bright Disneyfied lens, and Rebecca Hopkins's costumes were just as cartoony. With sighing women in skimpy night attire and a platoon of bearded 'nuns' getting plastered on the contents of the castle's wine cellar, the visual humour was broad and bracing, and Phipps-Davis then surpassed himself in Act 2's saucy and briskly choreographed threesome scene, in which the hero, in love with the Countess Adèle, discovered her in bed with his page Isolier and anything, including a sheep, was up for grabs.

To complement the larky staging, the musical performance had Rossinian wit and brio to spare. The Maltese tenor Nico Darmanin's *bel canto* reputation is well established, and his voice has charm, security and personality. Occasionally I missed a bigger sound, but

his high range is warm and unforced, and the slight pressure with which he launches a phrase extremely elegant. He is also a natural buffo... It was no surprise that Ory was ensnared by Jennifer France's excellent Adèle in a performance that saw this singer's star well and truly risen. Her coloratura was agile and exciting, her stage presence ingratiating and downright sexy, and she proved herself an accomplished comedienne.

Heather Lowe brought the same ardour and warmth to the role of Isolier, Ory's lovesick page, as she did for Chelsea Opera Group last year, and turned out to be a dashing lover. In smaller roles, Sarah Pring's Ragonde (Adèle's imposing companion) was unfailingly funny and sonorously sung, Simon Mechlinski as Raimbaud was in complete control of the wine-cellar raid, and Steven Page...gave a fine account of the Tutor's Act 1 aria. The strongly directed chorus sang out with spirit and added many sharp-eyed details. From the overture onwards, it was clear that the conductor Jose Miguel Esandi was completely at home in this repertoire; he kept a close rapport with singers and orchestra and expertly juggled the score's humour.

The Fine Times Recorder | Gay Pirrie-Wier

Le comte Ory is a totally barmy story that just gets better with its added intricacies. It's all about a sex-mad young nobleman intent on storming the chateau of Fourmoutiers, where the women of the town are living in chaste loneliness while their husbands are off fighting the Crusades. First our anti-hero disguises himself as a wise hermit, and then as a holy sister, with his knights as the nuns.

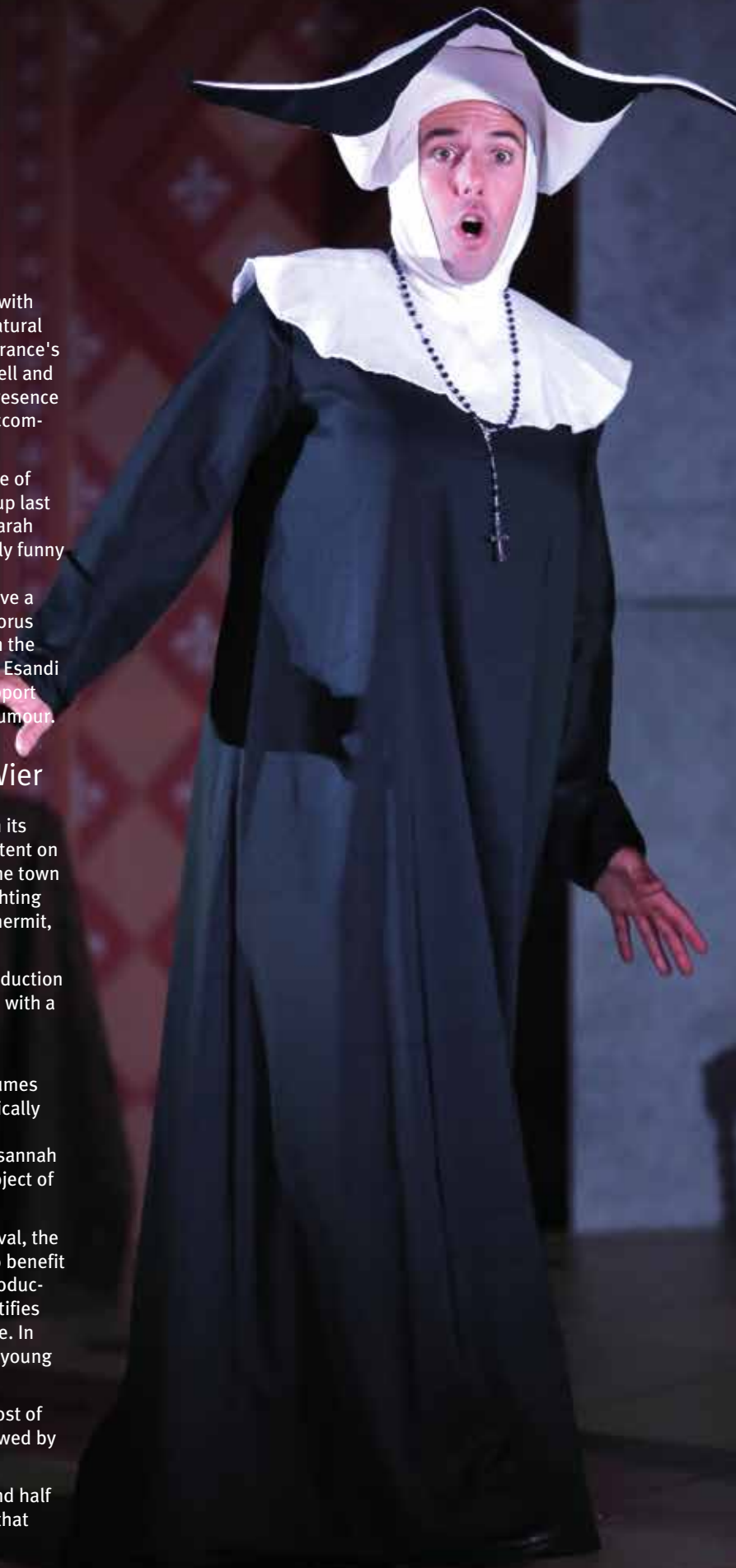
There is absolutely NOTHING politically correct about this production in its view of women - newly deflowered young girls celebrate with a quick fag, larger ladies are rejected, widows' mourning gives instantaneously way to lust for a younger man ...

But it is huge fun, accentuated by the colourful sets and costumes designed by Steve Howell and Rebecca Hopkins, and energetically sung by Nico Darmanin in the title role, Heather Lowe as his love-smitten page Isolier and Jennifer France (a wonderful Susannah in the recent Garsington *Figaro*) as the countess Adèle, the object of their affection.

The chorus is always a main feature at the Dorset Opera Festival, the result of an intensive summer school with participants able to benefit from master classes from the professionals involved in the production. The process not only marshals the vocal forces, but identifies performers whose stage abilities bring them out of the chorale. In this production it was [several small solo roles and] the three young nuns of the corps de ballet.

The orchestra, conducted by Jose Miguel Esandi, made the most of Rossini's colourful, if oddly tune-free, music, some of it borrowed by the composer from his *Il viaggio a Reims*.

The witty surtitles and a truly hilarious bed scene in the second half sent the audience smiling into the night, after a joyous romp that challenged the DOF *L'elisir d'amore* of 2015 for sheer fun.





Concrete Wind with Roderick Kennedy outside No. 10

Concrete Wind blows in...

Dorset Opera Patrons will remember having been introduced to this talented quintet of young musicians at the annual Patrons' Lunch at Bryanston during the 2017 Festival. They are just some of the fine academy players that joined our orchestra for the first time this year.

Recently they performed to a packed house at a concert at 11 Downing Street as part of a lunchtime series organised by H.M Treasury Music Society - stalwarts of which are our company manager Caroline D'Cruz and one of her DOF assistants, Seymour Adams, our expert surtitle operator.

The Downing Street programme was deliciously eclectic, lively and humorous and covered Mozart, Taffanel, Ibert, Zemlinsky and even Ligeti. We certainly look forward to their return to Dorset next year.

Picnic pavilions & cabanas

Regular supporters will know that our individual pavilions and cabana were a real hit this year. Many patrons have already reserved theirs for the 2018 Festival.

If you are interested in hiring a pavilion or cabana, we recommend that you let us know now! Send an email to smh@dorsetopera.com or call the Dorset Opera Festival HQ on 01258 840000 indicating which one you would prefer and your chosen dates. Remember, the cabana can seat four comfortably - six at a push, and the pavilions seat 10 or 12.

The small Indian-style cabana is £75 per performance, or the Super Luxe version (to include crockery, glassware, cutlery, tablecloth, lighting, table decoration and one bottle of Pol Roger Champagne) is £120. The pavilions are £130 per performance or £220 for the Super Luxe version as above, but including two bottles of Pol Roger Champagne.

Ticket pricing for 2018

There will be no increase in ticket prices for 2018. There will again be two levels of pricing: tickets for the first night of *Le Cid* (Tuesday 24 July) will be slightly lower than the other performances.

Priority booking in 2018

Priority booking for the 2018 Festival begins as early as January. Each of our Patrons' Circles gets their opportunity to book in plenty of time. Do keep your DONews handy or diarise the date of your booking period:

President's Circle	Tuesday 23 January
Chairman's Circle	Tuesday 30 January
Director's Circle	Tuesday 6 February
Conductor's Circle	Tuesday 13 February
Friends of Dorset Opera	Tuesday 20 February
General Booking	Tuesday 6 March

Once again, we will be using the Regent Centre in Christchurch as our box office and, in a further improvement to the service they offer on our behalf, not only will you be able to print your tickets on your home printer, but in 2018 you will be able to reserve tables for your picnic in the marquee.

When booking online, you will be able to add dining and food options and reserve seats or tables in the marquee before completing your ticket purchase. If you prefer to think about your food ordering options nearer Festival-time, simply order picnics or dinners by going to the food ordering page on the Dorset Opera Festival website or re-visit the Regent Centre booking pages. Unless you have elected to have booking material sent to you electronically, you will automatically receive booking forms in time to make a postal application.

Almost uniquely in this country, the Regent Centre does not charge a booking fee, nor do they pass on any credit card fees. Please be aware that if you request tickets to be sent to you by post, you will incur a small administration charge of just £1.

For telephone booking, the box office number is 01202 499199.



Picnicking at the Dorset Opera Festival

New for 2018: reserve your picnic table in the marquee

We are aware that our picnic marquee and bar is becoming more crowded each year - especially if the weather is inclement. So now we feel we have no alternative other than to do what other country house opera companies have been doing for years: introduce a seat reservation charge.

If you would like to reserve chairs at a table in the marquee at which to eat your picnic, the charge will be £5 per person. You can also reserve a whole table (for 10 people) for £45. Please make this reservation when ordering your food. The places you have reserved will appear on a grid in the marquee at the performance you have chosen. A small number of tables will still be available without reservation, if you want to take pot luck.

Please do not remove tables from the marquee and do not bring tables and chairs from outside into the marquee. (Wherever you put them, they will be contravening fire regulations and will have to be removed.)





Wexford Harbour

Join our trip to the Wexford Festival in October 2018

Arrangements are in hand for our visit to the Wexford Opera Festival in Ireland, which will take place from 22 - 26 October 2018. Several of our regular travellers have already expressed an interest in the visit and Patron, Hugh Watkins, will be contacting them at the end of November, the itinerary and an explanation as to why our tour organisers, Travel for the Arts, require booking forms and deposits by 16 January 2018. If you have not informed him of your interest, please email: info@dorsetopera.com in the first instance.

AGM, Annual Report and Accounts...

The joint AGMs of Dorset Opera and the Friends of Dorset Opera will be held on Tuesday 16 January 2018 at 19:00 for 19:30 in the Tindall Recital Hall in the Sherborne School Music Centre. The Centre can be found in Hospital Lane, Sherborne and the SatNav postcode is DT9 3JF. There should be plenty of parking in the roads and on the school campus. Refreshments and canapés will be available before the meetings and there will be musical entertainment by pupils from the School under their Director of Music, former Dorset Opera chorus master, Jamie Henderson.

For Members, Patrons and Friends of Dorset Opera, an AGM calling notice is enclosed with this newsletter. Should you require electronic copies of the full Report and Accounts prior to the meeting, please send a request email to info@dorsetopera.com

DOF Events | change of bank details

The bank details for our events, including Bluffers' lunches, have changed. Please make a note of the new account and sort code numbers if you are intending to pay for anything by BACS electronic transfer. The new account is operated by CAF (the Charities Aid Foundation): Account No. 00030886 | Sort Code: 40-52-40

The Lloyds account will close in December.

The Dorset Opera Festival and Friends of Dorset Opera accounts remain the same. If you kindly support either or both organisations via Standing Order payment, you will not need to make any changes.

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REVIEWS:

Dorset Opera Festival 2017

What the critics said about our production of: **Faust**

Opera | Amanda Holloway

Dorset Opera's production, directed by Christopher Cowell, went for a sort of medieval melodrama version of Gounod's *Faust*, using the space within a curving wall of Gothic screens and windows (designed by Steve Howell)... to present a straightforward telling of the story, aided by excellent acting from soloists and chorus and lovely pre-Raphaelite costumes by Rebecca Hopkins.

Mark S. Doss as Méphistophélès gave a masterclass in swagger, a rock-star devil - Jimi Hendrix meets the *Pirates of the Caribbean* - alternating honeyed tones with dark bass-baritone menace. His presence was crucial to the coherence of the five acts: even when supposedly offstage he lurked behind the translucent screens or appeared at the shoulder of his victims with impeccable comic timing. As the elderly Faust, the Spanish tenor Alejandro del Cerro sounded muffled... Once transformed into the dashing young Faust, however, he revealed an open, resonant Italianate tenor delivered in time-honoured fashion... Anna Patalong sang a Marguerite of two halves - less comfortable with the girlish aspects of the character, which needed high soprano sparkle rather than earthy mezzo tones, she wrung hearts with the intensity of her singing in Acts 4 and 5. The final trio with Faust and Méphistophélès made the spine tingle, and Patalong's voice spoke of a radiant salvation as Marguerite's soul ascended to heaven.

As Valentin, the tall Australian Nicholas Lester was a classic hero with a ringing, battle-ready baritone and an ability to carry off chainmail tights with dignity. Simone Riksman made the most of the thankless trouser role of Siébel, contrasting well with the warm, sympathetic Martha of the mezzo-soprano Sarah Pring. The bass-baritone Daniel Grice made an impact in the small role of Wagner.

The large chorus, prepared by Benjamin Goodson and the music team during the summer school at the heart of this festival, created wonderful musical tableaux, full of personality and bold, fresh singing by performers from 18 to 81 years old. Dorset Opera's emphasis on supporting young talent was also evident in the orchestra, which included bursaried music students alongside more experienced mentors. Under the music director Jeremy Carnall the orchestra started vigorously and ensemble remained tight...

Music-lovers in the south-west can be proud of this small festival, whose high musical standards are guarded by the distinguished English bass Roderick Kennedy and his team.

Sunday Express | ★★★★★☆

Clare Colvin

The Dorset Opera Festival is unique in that it creates two full scale opera productions annually with only two weeks' rehearsal. Standards are consistently high, and the setting in the grounds of Bryanston School is as splendid as any country house festival. This year the contrasting operas were Gioachino Rossini's romp *Le comte Ory* and Charles Gounod's supernatural tragedy *Faust*. The

chorus of mainly students from the annual summer school were joined by well-known opera singers.

Gounod's *Faust* is more weighty in its morality tale of Faust's pact with the devil. Spanish tenor Alejandro del Cerro as the anti-hero Faust delivers his arias with exemplary style and distinguished bass Mark S Doss disguises Méphistophélès' balefulness with a careless charm.

Anna Patalong as Marguerite is delicate and heart-touching. Nicholas Lester as her brother, Valentin, who is felled by Faust's sword, delivers as devastating a death curse to his sister as I've heard.

The chorus members are outstanding in trenchant ensembles such as the famed 'soldiers' chorus'. Excellent work too from Dorset Opera Festival Orchestra

Bachtrack | ★★★★★☆

Dominic Lowe

French Grand Opera is not something to take on lightly; even the big houses think twice before staging those long works with large casts and traditionally expensive sets. It's a brave decision for Dorset Opera Festival to take on Gounod's *Faust* as the second opera of their season, but with its solid part for chorus, it's a useful vehicle for putting their summer school students through their paces... Gounod's tune-packed score is vibrant, sometimes erotic, sometimes menacing, and in the right hands it can be a thrilling experience.

Christopher Cowell's production is an uncomplicated, uncluttered affair... A curved rear background of arched windows with a starry night sky added a touch of the fairy tale... *Personenregie* was reasonable and a dance scene in Act 2 was well choreographed; particularly effective was the parade of disgraced women in Act 5, Marguerite and others meandering across the stage in soiled white gowns, moral and physical cleanliness now dragged through the gutter.

"I was rooting for Méphistophélès and contemptuous of Faust," said one TV villain and the first half of that statement was true at this performance. Mark S Doss impressed as Macbeth in DOF's production last year and as Méphistophélès, he stole the show, his treacherously rich bass-baritone oozing seductively across the stage. He has an imposing stage presence and in his dark coat and scarlet waistcoat, he was a fine embodiment of the Devil, capturing not just the hellish, but the humorous. Technique was solid, diction characteristically attentive, and his projection made him audible through substantial ensemble scenes.

Faust was sung by Alejandro del Cerro... big voiced, his is an instrument that has a slight bray to it, but the registers seemed integrated and after a restrained start, he approached the high notes with enthusiasm and success; his 'Salut! Demeure chaste et pure' was one of the highlights of the evening... Anna Patalong impressed last year as Tatyana in *Eugene Onegin*; as Marguerite,

the characteristic expansive phrasing was there, and there was a lovely trill to the voice, but it was only towards the end of the third act that she really seemed to inhabit the character, and from the fourth act, when she projected the chill caused by Méphistophélès through to the fifth with her madness and subsequent redemption, her performance took off. Baritone Nicholas Lester's Valentin was stridently sung, an energetic assumption of the role which showcased his appealing middle voice and even tone. Simone Riksmán's naïve Siébel had a youthful freshness and an earnest delivery...

The student chorus gave another enthusiastic performance... Jeremy Carnall conducted a bold, colourful interpretation; there was character and there was drama. A commendable effort that showed that you don't need to be grand to perform grand opera.

The Fine Times Recorder | Gay Pirrie-Wier

The Devil, as the Salvation Army founder General William Booth observed, has all the best tunes. In Gounod's *Faust*, he certainly does, making the villainous Méphistophélès the undoubted star of the piece, and requiring a larger than life performance from a great singer to carry it off convincingly.

Satan-Méphistophélès, summoned to earth by the suicidal despair of the scientist Faust, promises him earthly wealth, power and the love (and body) of a beautiful young woman. Faust drinks a potion and is transformed into a handsome young man. With bottomless caskets of jewels and the honeyed words of the Devil, he seduces the pure and virtuous Marguerite. It all ends very badly.

The dark and dramatic opera, inspired by a German legend and loosely based on Goethe's *Faust*, was the second of this year's Dorset Opera Festival productions. It had an all-star cast, and was directed with great skill and clarity by Christopher Cowell and expert conducting from Jeremy Carnell, the whole adding up to what is probably the company's finest production yet.

Gen Booth actually asked WHY the Devil should have the best tunes - and Gounod gives his audience the answer. His Devil - like Milton's Lucifer in *Paradise Lost* - is an irresistible seducer, a charismatic charlatan who promises the earth and all that it is in it. All his willing victim has to do is promise his soul after death.

Gounod's devil is Méphistophélès, performed with seductive charm and terrifying power by Dorset Opera favourite Mark S Doss, a handsome bass-baritone with a voice that can soothe like warm treacle or shake you to the core, plumbing depths as dark and frightening as the deepest pits of hell. This was a performance which commanded the stage - vocally and physically.

His evil magic is too much for dashing young Spanish tenor Alejandro del Cerro's Faust, who willingly sells his soul when shown a vision of the beautiful Marguerite (Anna Patalong - even more moving than as last year's Tatyana in *Eugene Onegin*).

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Mozart

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Olivier Award-winning ETO presents an energetic new production of Mozart's classic comedy, one of the world's most beloved operas. During the course of one eventful day, Figaro and Susanna must overcome every obstacle put in their way by Count Almaviva and his cronies before they can finally be united as man and wife. Blanche McIntyre (*Tosca*, 2017) returns to direct this most warm-hearted of operas, equally acclaimed for its sublime music and huge sense of fun.

Sung in English with surtitles.



(Il tabarro & Gianni Schicchi, 2011)

Saturday 17 March

Puccini

IL TABARRO & GIANNI SCHICCHI

Puccini's one-act operas *Il tabarro* & *Gianni Schicchi* could hardly be more different: one is a moody romance ending in a grotesque murder on a barge in Paris, and the other is a sparkling comedy about a family inheritance in Florence. First performed in 2011 to great critical acclaim, this double bill shows Puccini at his finest as a master of the theatre that speaks to the heart.

Sung in Italian with English surtitles.

7.30pm (Pre-Show Talks, 6.30pm)

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