

THE WORLD OF MUSIC LA SCALA



BICENTENNIAL TALE OF TWO COMPOSERS CELEBRATING VERDI AND WAGNER

The yin and yang of opera unite to celebrate the 200th centenary of two composers in 2013. Wilhelm Richard Wagner, born in Leipzig, Germany on May 22, 1813, could be seen as yin, which literally translates as the dark or northern side. The same year, Giuseppe Fortunino Francesco Verdi was born on Oct. 10, in Roncole near Parma, Italy, and evokes yang, the sunny or southern side. Though they lived through the same tumultuous period in Europe, their approaches to life and the music they created were so different as to epitomize yin and yang — polar opposites which are complementary.



Stéphane Lissner is the general manager and artistic director of La Scala.

Their joint bicentennial, and their roles as the most influential operatic composers of their time, will create an abundance of riches for opera fans around the world — especially those at La Scala. Both composers had strong ties to the venerable Milan institution.

Verdi's ties are obvious since many of his operas were created here," says Stéphane Lissner, general manager and artistic director of La Scala. In fact, the opera house specially commissioned "Oberto, Conte di San Bonifacio," the Italian composer's first opera. The rarely performed work will be on the program with a new production.

Wagner also had strong links to La Scala, and it is customary to find at least one of Wagner's 13 operas each season. One of La Scala's greatest conductors, Arturo

Toscanini, had directed the Italian premieres of Wagner's "Götterdämmerung," "Tristan and Isolde" and "Die Walküre in Turin" in the mid-1890s. He made his debut as principal conductor at La Scala in 1898 with Wagner's "Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg." One year later, Toscanini led the Italian premiere of "Siegfried." In 1930, he became the first non-German conductor to appear at the Wagner Festspielhaus in Bayreuth, the theater designed by the composer to showcase his music.

During Toscanini's tenure in Milan, he conducted as much Wagner as Verdi, says Lissner. La Scala's Wagnerian tradition continued under the baton of Victor de Sabata, who conducted from 1930 to 1953 and was equally adept at Wagner and Verdi.

Because Wagner's masterpiece is the four-part "Der Ring des Nibelungen," which consists of "Das Rheingold," "Die Walküre," "Siegfried" and "Götterdämmerung," Lissner chose to commemorate the composer's bicentennial by presenting the entire Ring tetralogy in the same week, as Wagner had envisaged when he wrote it.

There will actually be two full cycles in two weeks: from June 17 to 22, 2013 and from June 24 to 29, 2013.

"We decided on this four years ago," says Lissner. "We have been planning for a long time."

Such planning is not surprising. Altogether, the operas run for 15 hours, and

the logistics of presenting all four in the same week are daunting. One director, Belgian-born Guy Cassiers, will oversee four separate stage productions with largely different casts. La Scala had done this only once before, in 1938 (though it has staged the Ring cycle eight times in the same season, most recently in 1962-63).

"We have been in touch with all the Wagner associations in the world and there are many," says Lissner. "They are willing to travel anywhere to hear the Rings." He adds that Daniel Barenboim, La Scala's musical director, is one of the world's greatest conductors of Wagner.

Barenboim modestly parries the compliment. "Perhaps Lissner describes me as more adept at Wagner because he has heard me conduct more Wagner," he says, adding: "I love conducting both composers. This is my third complete Ring cycle so it is not something new for me."

Nor is it new for Lissner, who has managed complete Ring cycles at the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris and in Aix-en-Provence. He finds the major problem to be musicians' fatigue, because the orchestration is long and difficult. Since Wagner favored a large orchestra, the La Scala's entire orchestral team will be involved. The Ring cycle is also tiring for singers, says Lissner. "It is just about the most complex thing you can do in music."

The Ring cycle will not be part of the regular La Scala season. It is being priced and sold separately, and aficionados have already bought 1,500 seats.

The two Ring Wagnerian operas for the bicentennial are "Lohengrin," which opens the 2012-13 season on Dec. 7, and "Der Fliegende Holländer" ("The Flying Dutchman").

A total of eight Verdi operas will be part of the bicentennial celebration. In addition to "Oberto," they are "La Traviata" (chosen to open the season starting on Dec. 7, 2013), "Nabucco," "Falstaff" (in cooperation with Covent Garden), "Macbeth," "Ballo in Maschera," "Don Carlo" and "Aida." All but the last two are completely new productions, some with a contemporary slant.

"Our production of 'Ballo in Maschera' could be seen as a story about Sarkozy," says Lissner with a gleam in his eye.

These particular operas — from the 26 Verdi wrote — were chosen in part for historical reasons: "Oberto" had been Verdi's first opera, "Nabucco" his first big success at La Scala and "Falstaff," his final opera, was the only one that was not a conventional tragedy. "Falstaff" was a segue to modern opera," explains Lissner, while the



The soprano Diana Damrau will sing Violetta in the 2013-14 season opener, "La Traviata."

EXPO 2015 OPERA HOUSE STAYS OPEN FOR SUMMER

One of the most famous opera houses in the world faces unusual challenges in 2015. Tickets at La Scala are always in demand, but between May 1 and Oct. 31, 2015, requests will increase exponentially, as the city of Milan stages the 2015 World's Fair.



Riccardo Chailly will conduct "Turandot."

The Universal Exposition anticipates up to 29 million visitors during its six-month run (conservative projections are 20 million), and La Scala has about 2,000 seats. Already today, the La Scala Museum flanking the opera house is the second most-visited cultural attraction in Milan, with 230,000 visitors a year (Da Vinci's "The Last Supper" is No. 1).

To accommodate as many music lovers as possible during this period, the opera house will do something unprecedented in its 237-year history; it will remain open virtually all summer.

The exceptional schedule, with a total of 17 productions, does not mean that the institution's famed musicians will have to forego vacations; rather, a series of arrangements with other opera houses is being organized.

Stéphane Lissner, La Scala's general manager and artistic director, proposes a predominantly Italian-favored opera program during the fair, with 90 percent of the productions of national origin. The opening act on May 1, 2015 will be Puccini's "Turandot," directed by Nikolaus Lehnhoff and conducted by Riccardo Chailly. It will be followed the next night by a completely different opera, the world premiere of a newly commissioned work by the

modern Italian composer Giorgio Battistelli, based on "An Inconvenient Truth," the best-selling book (and movie) by Al Gore, the former U.S. vice president.

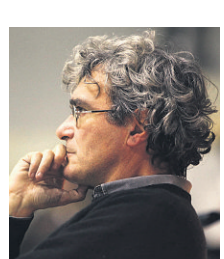
A new production of "Otello" is also being planned, mounted by the world-renowned architect Norman Foster (assisted by Jürgen Fimm), with Daniel Barenboim conducting.

Subsequent weeks and months will include many other popular works by Giuseppe Verdi, in recognition of the fact that many visitors to La Scala wish to hear the composer's work.

Lissner is a member of the committee overseeing cultural, musical, theatrical and sports events during the 2015 exposition. This 10-person group will be coordinating the calendar of events throughout the city and surrounding area, with a focus on highlighting Italian artistic creativity and outreach to an international audience. ■

MARIO MARTONE DIRECTOR IS BOTH DREAMER AND DOER

Before the age of 20, Mario Martone had found his calling. He had not only directed "Faust" in his native Naples, he had founded a theatrical group, Falso Movimento, that was to become known and respected throughout Italy in the 1980s. From theater



Mario Martone will direct "Luisa Miller" in June.

to cinema is a natural transition, and Martone's most recent title, "Noi Credevamo" ("We Believed"), was named best film at the Trieste Film Festival in 2011.

Moving from film to opera can be more challenging, but Martone proved he was up to the task, directing operas by Mozart, Rossini and Beethoven before his invitation to direct at La Scala last year. He was

asked to mount new productions of Mascagni's "Cavalleria Rusticana" and Leoncavallo's "Pagliacci" in January and February of 2011, with Daniel Harding conducting. While these two operas are often performed in bright folkloric style, Martone preferred a minimalist approach for "Cavalleria" and a contemporary slant for "Pagliacci," setting it in a refugee camp.

The result was very successful, says Stéphane Lissner, artistic director of La Scala, mentioning Martone's "refined style." Those productions paved the way for invitations to do four new stagings of Verdi operas in the next three years.

This year, in June, Martone will direct "Luisa Miller," with Giandrea Nossida conducting (Daniele Rustioni conducts on June 21). Verdi's first opera, "Oberto, Conte di San Bonifacio," follows in April and May of 2013, with Riccardo Frizza conducting. Martone will also spearhead productions of "Il Trovatore" in 2014 and "La Traviata" in 2015.

In an interview in La Repubblica in July 2011, Martone described his approach to art as that of a dreamer whose feet are firmly planted on the ground. "I am like my parents," he said. "My mother loved culture and I inherited her love of films and books. My father was an artisan, more used to doing than to reflecting. So I think of myself as a person who deals with thoughts, but isn't afraid to roll up my sleeves and work." ■



A scene from "Die Walküre," second of the four operas in Wagner's "Ring" cycle, which La Scala is presenting twice, in two weeklong runs in 2013.

others are part of classic repertoire. Another factor influencing the choice of productions (not only in bicentennial years) is the availability of singers. "You always start with the singers — which singers are available when," says Lissner. For "La Traviata," he began with the singer Diana Damrau, and worked from there.

Good Verdi singers are as hard to find as good Wagner singers, he says, but the expectations in Italy are higher for Verdi, especially at La Scala. The audience is less tolerant, explains Lissner, because every word is part of a collective memory.

Wagner, who wrote his own librettos, crafted his words to blend with the orchestration. Verdi did not. Wagner's theater at Bayreuth had a covered orchestra pit to soften the orchestral sound. Verdi did not.

The two composers' differences extend

to the stories and settings of their operas. Verdi wrote music largely about real people facing problems created by their families, society or governments. Born of modest means, he became wealthy yet never forgot his humble origins and remained a low-key but consistent philanthropist.

Wagner wrote about legends, gods and fables. His heroes and heroines were larger than life and twice as noble. Wagner's personal life was less noble: he had a comfortable childhood but died in debt. He wrote voluminously and brilliantly about music and art, influencing generations of composers and musicians that have followed.

Set designers like Angelo Sala, head of scenery production at La Scala, must distill the mind-sets of Wagner and Verdi into visual expressions.

"With Wagner you can be very creative in

the use of space," Sala explains, since Wagner's operas are based in fantasy worlds. "For Verdi, you should try to explain where you are. The scenery has to take account of the music. The two cannot be discordant."

Discordance is not something that is likely to occur at La Scala, certainly not in the bicentennial year of 2013. Hinting at what will likely be an unforgettable year, Lissner says: "This will be an extraordinary opportunity for opera lovers." ■

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BRITTEN'S 'PETER GRIMES' FRESH TREATMENT OF AN OLD STORY

The year 2013 not only marks the bicentennial of Verdi and Wagner, it is also the centenary of the birth of the British composer Benjamin Britten. So including Britten's acclaimed opera "Peter Grimes" in La Scala's 2012-13 season is a natural choice. It is also relevant, according to Stéphane Lissner, artistic director of La Scala, who enlisted the British theatrical and opera director Richard Jones to direct.

"Peter Grimes," which runs from May 19 to June 7, 2012, is based on an American poem about an English fishing community and a troubled fisherman, Grimes, who lives there. Jones's interpretation of the story suggests that because Grimes is different from his peers, he is ostracized by them, Lissner says. Jones's version "shows us the social and political implications of the loner, and the judgments of the collectivity versus the individual. It is very contemporary."

Jones, who began his career as a jazz musician, has directed plays, musical comedies and operas — including those of Verdi and Wagner. Although he listens to the music "compulsively" when directing opera, Jones is involved in set design and keeps a theatrical storyboard for his productions. Jones directed the Russian composer Shostakovich's "Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk" at La Scala three years ago. It was a great success, says Lissner, who praises Jones for presenting a new way for the audience to understand "Peter Grimes."

DANIEL BARENBOIM RETURNING TO HIS PIANIST ROOTS

Birthday and anniversary celebrations as well as a double bicentennial await audiences at La Scala in coming months. Many opera-lovers know about the 200th anniversary of the birth of Verdi and Wagner in 2013; however, some opera-lovers may not remember that Daniel Barenboim was named La Scala's music director in October 2011, and that he celebrates his 70th birthday on Nov. 15.

These events will be marked by three concerts featuring Barenboim as piano soloist. The famed conductor began his musical career — at the age of seven — as a concert pianist.

Why did he choose to celebrate his birthday at La Scala without a baton in hand? "When you conduct an orchestra," he explains, "you must motivate the musicians, guide them, persuade them to produce the sound you want. Sometimes you succeed and sometimes you don't. When you play the piano, you produce the sound yourself."

He confesses to enjoying direct physical contact with the sounds, because he says he believes the soul of music is physical. On Oct. 25, he will play Brahms and Bartók, with the Venezuelan Gustavo Dudamel conducting. On Oct. 30, his program will include Chopin and Mahler, with the participation of the Mozart Orchestra. Native Milanese Claudio Abbado will be conducting, his first appearance at the venerable opera house in more than 20 years. (He had served as musical director of La Scala from 1968 to 1986).

On Nov. 7, Barenboim will play Liszt and Tchaikovsky, and the premiere of a new piece by Elliott Carter. The conductor will be Daniel Harding of the United Kingdom.

Asked to compare the styles of these three conductors from three different musical cultures, one older than Barenboim

and two rising stars almost four decades younger, he responds: "Don't ask me to compare conducting styles. I cannot compare women, wine and conductors. It is too dangerous."

What he does say is that he admires conductors who play musical instruments, because they have physical contact with the music they conduct. If a conductor is also a composer, so much the better, he says. "As a composer you have contact with the anatomy of the music. You see not only the blood of the music, you see the bones, muscles; it's an anatomical thing."

The blood, bones and muscle of the La Scala Symphony Orchestra will be on full display in Switzerland, Austria and Russia this summer, under Barenboim's guidance. He will direct Verdi's "Requiem Mass" at the Lucerne Festival Aug. 29 and at the Salzburg Festspielhaus Aug. 31.

Also in September, the Bolshoi Theater in Moscow will welcome the La Scala orchestra and chorus in a production of Mozart's "Don Giovanni."

A visiting orchestra to La Scala on June 24 will celebrate another anniversary. The Orchestra della Svizzera Italiana, based in Lugano, Switzerland, will perform a selection of Rossini, Paganini and Mendelssohn to commemorate 150 years of diplomatic relations between Italy and Switzerland. Juanjo Mena will conduct and Salvatore Accardo will be the featured violin soloist. ■



Daniel Barenboim will perform three piano concerts in the fall with the Scala orchestra.

GUSTAVO DUDAMEL CONDUCTOR CHARMS WITH 'ROMANTIC STYLE'

Few classical music conductors have hot dogs named after them, but then, few classical music conductors enjoy the rock-star celebrity that Gustavo Adolfo Dudamel Ramo enjoys. His fame is partly the result of his position as music director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic (a city eager to confer star status on its cultural icons and not embarrassed to name hot dogs after them). It is certainly enhanced by his long hair and beard, and his sharply based on Dudamel's proven musical abilities.

The 31-year-old conductor captured attention in his native Venezuela when he was appointed music director of the Orquesta Sinfónica Simón Bolívar, the country's national youth orchestra, in 1999. Dudamel was 18, but his musical background had begun almost at birth; his mother was a voice teacher and his father a musician.

Dudamel began studying the violin when he was 10, and began learning conducting when he was 14. He entered the international limelight upon winning the Gustav Mahler Conducting Competition in Germany in 2004, at the age of 23.

Two years later he became principal conductor of the Gothenburg Symphony in that city in Sweden. He was invited to serve as music director of the Los Angeles

Philharmonic, considered one of the five best orchestras in the United States, in 2009. His contract has already been extended through 2018-19, the orchestra's centennial season.

At the time of Dudamel's appointment in 2009, Charlotte Higgins, the chief arts writer of the Guardian in London described the "Dudamania," writing that he had "galvanized

This year, after conducting a concert of "Rigoletto" at the Hollywood Bowl in Los Angeles on Aug. 12, he will conduct that opera between Nov. 6 and 17 in Milan.

The La Scala production, conceived by the director Gilbert Deflo, features scenes by Elio Frigero and costumes by Franca Squarciapino. Deflo's opera reproduces the time and the historical milieu of Renaissance Mantua, ruled by Gonzaga family.

La Scala's autumn lineup also gives Dudamel the opportunity to showcase his background with symphonic orchestras. On Oct. 25, 2012, he will lead the opera house orchestra in a program featuring Bartók and Brahms, with Daniel Barenboim as piano soloist. Stéphane Lissner, artistic director of La Scala, says that Dudamel's "romantic, 19th-century style" is a natural fit for this kind of program. ■



Gustavo Dudamel has several conducting engagements at the Scala in 2012.

ANSALDO WORKSHOP MAGIC AND HARD WORK BEHIND THE SCENES

The fanciful sets of La Scala — such as Aida's ancient Egypt or an underwater realm of Rhine maidens — do not happen by magic. They require paint, plywood, planning and perspiration, all of which can be found at La Scala's workshop in a converted factory in Milan.

The site is the former Ansaldo factory, where locomotives, railway cars and tram carriages were once produced. Today, 122 painters, carpenters, sculptors, blacksmiths, mechanics and wardrobe specialists work together to create five to seven new operas and ballets each year. They also refresh the scenery for 10 productions that may date back to the 1960s.

Scenery development is assigned to one of three teams. Scenery for a new production is created three or four months ahead of opening night, while refreshing an existing production takes some three weeks, explains Angelo Sala, head of Ansaldo's workshop.

For a new production, the eight-man team's job — as well as that of the costumers — is to communicate the director's vision. "Sometimes we work as creative collaborators and sometimes as developers of sets conceived by the directors," says Sala, who has done both in his 40 years with La Scala. Director and producer Franco Zeffirelli, he explains, started out as a set designer. Later, as a director, he remained closely involved in set and costume creation.

When the scenery for a production already exists, the team consults La Scala's archives to check the colors and arrangement of the original sets, repairs any damage and ensures that all mechanisms are functioning. The wardrobe team is required to adjust existing costumes — there are more than 80,000 in storage — for new cast members. These can usually be refitted for any physique. Says Sala, "If you have a soprano envisaged in a white dress and a new proposed singer is, say, rather large, you may rethink the color to avoid having a white snowball rolling around on the stage."

La Scala converted the Ansaldo site to a workshop in 2001, when the need for additional space could no longer be ignored. When La Scala first opened in 1778, space constraints were tolerable, says Sala, because scenery consisted of two-dimensional, painted backdrops. But today's sets, he says, "have become more complex, more three-dimensional, with more technical demands. We needed more space."

La Scala's first external workshop was created in the 1940s. The opera house was bombed in 1945, and reconstruction included both the theater and expanding a workshop in Milan's Bovisio district, for doing carpentry and storing costumes and scenery.

In recent times, the growing size and complexity of scenery, the need for additional work and warehouse space, new technologies and the opera house's planned renovation between 2002-04 were the catalysts for the move. Sala said the new workshop required having a large space near the

theater for handling logistics, plenty of open space, good lighting and natural light for the well-being of employees.

The change was as dramatic as any operational plot. At Bovisio, set designers had worked in 3,000 square meters (some 32,000 square feet) of space; at Ansaldo they have 9,000. The wardrobe department is six times larger. Of two rehearsal halls, one replicates the La Scala stage precisely to enable full-scale rehearsals. ■

Being a set worker requires skill and patience.



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Conductor: Robin Ticciati
Director: Richard Jones
May 19 to June 7
- "Luisa Miller" by Giuseppe Verdi
Conductor: Giandrea Nossida
Director: Mario Martone
June 8 to 23
 - "Mannon" by Jules Massenet
Conductor: Fabio Luisi
Director: Laurent Pelly
June 19 to July 7
- "Marguerite and Armand," "Concerto DSCH"
Choreographers: Frederick Ashton, Alvaro Retmansky
May 31 to May 23
 - "Don Pasquale" by Gaetano Donizetti
Conductor: Enrique Mazzola
Director: Jonathan Miller
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