

Simon Boccanegra / Verdi

- 1 La Cenerentola
- 2 Aida
- 3 Die Zauberflöte
- 4 Fidelio
- 5 La Traviata
- 6 Tristan & Isolde
- 7 Otello
- 8 Der Rosenkavalier
- 9 Pelléas & Mélisande
- 10 Falstaff
- 11 Boris Godunov
- 12 Der fliegende Holländer
- 13 Carmen
- 14 La Bohème
- 15 Rigoletto
- 16 Tosca
- 17 Le Nozze di Figaro
- 18 Don Giovanni
- 19 Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg
- 20 Il Trovatore
- 21 Die Walküre
- 22 Così fan tutte
- 23 La Forza del Destino
- 24 Peter Grimes / Gloriana
- 25 Manon
- 26 Madama Butterfly
- 27 Turandot
- 28 Siegfried
- 29 The Operas of Michael Tippett
- 30 Arabella
- 31 Götterdämmerung
- 32 Simon Boccanegra

*Simon Boccanegra* exists in two versions: the 1857 opera was heavily revised for performance in 1881, when the famous Council Scene was added. Both texts are presented here, the 1881 version in a new performing translation by the poet James Fenton, so that a comparison can be easily made between them. The patriotic fervour of the *Risorgimento* flames through this second score: for the last time Verdi relived the ideals of his youth. Yet the earlier score contains much exhilarating and beautiful music so that the juxtaposition of old and new results in a wholly original dramatic experience.

Opera Guides  
In association with English National Opera and  
The Royal Opera  
Series Editor: Nicholas John

'Brilliantly produced and superb value'  
*The Sunday Times*

'The jolliest of bargains' *The Musical Times*

John Calder (Publishers) Ltd  
18 Brewer Street  
London W1R 4AS

Riverrun Press Inc  
1170 Broadway  
New York N.Y. 10001

U.K. £3.00  
U.S. \$5.95

ISBN 0 7145 4064 1





Tito Gobbi as the dying Boccanegra with Orianna Santunione as Amelia, Covent Garden, 1965 (photo: Donald Southern)

## Preface

This series, published under the auspices of English National Opera and The Royal Opera, aims to prepare audiences to evaluate and enjoy opera performances. Each book contains the complete text, set out in the original language together with a current performing translation. The accompanying essays have been commissioned as general introductions to aspects of interest in each work. As many illustrations and musical examples as possible have been included because the sound and spectacle of opera are clearly central to any sympathetic appreciation of it. We hope that, as companions to the opera should be, they are well-informed, witty and attractive.

The Royal Opera is most grateful to the The Baring Foundation for sponsoring this Guide.

Nicholas John  
Series Editor

32

---

# Simon Boccanegra

---

Giuseppe Verdi

*Opera Guide Series Editor: Nicholas John*

*Published in association with  
English National Opera and The Royal Opera  
and assisted by a generous donation  
from The Baring Foundation*



John Calder • London  
Riverrun Press • New York

First published in Great Britain, 1985 by John Calder (Publishers) Ltd.,  
18 Brewer Street,  
London, W1R 4AS

First published in the U.S.A., 1985 by Riverrun Press Inc.,  
1170 Broadway,  
New York, NY 10001

Copyright © English National Opera 1985 and The Royal Opera 1985  
An Historical Perspective © Rodolfo Celletti 1985  
An Introduction to the 1881 Score © James Hepokoski 1985  
Verdi and his Singers © Desmond Shawe-Taylor 1985  
English translation of the 1857 scenes © Sylvia Mulcahy 1985  
English translation of the 1881 libretto © James Fenton 1985

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

BRITISH LIBRARY CATALOGUING IN PUBLICATION DATA

Verdi, Giuseppe  
Simon Boccanegra. — (Opera guides; 32)  
I. Title II. Piave, Francesco Maria  
III. Fenton, James IV. Series  
782.1'2 ML50.V484

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING IN PUBLICATION DATA

Verdi, Giuseppe, 1813-1901.  
[Simon Boccanegra. Libretto. English & Italian]  
Simon Boccanegra.  
(Opera Guide; 32)  
Includes libretto by Francesco Maria Piave, rev. by Arrigo Boito, English translation by James Fenton, and commentary.  
Based on: Simón Boccanegra / Antonio Garcia Gutiérrez.  
Discography: p.  
Bibliography: p.  
1. Operas — Librettos. 2. Verdi, Giuseppe, 1813-1901.  
Simon Boccanegra. I. Piave, Francesco Maria, 1810-1876.  
II. Boito, Arrigo, 1842-1918. III. Fenton, James, 1941- IV. Garcia  
Gutiérrez, Antonio, 1813-1884.  
Simón Boccanegra. V. Title VI. Series.  
ML50.V484S2 1985 782.1'092'4 85-1831  
ISBN 0-7145-4064-1



John Calder (Publishers) Ltd, English National Opera and The Royal Opera House, Covent Garden Ltd receive financial assistance from the Arts Council of Great Britain. English National Opera also receives financial assistance from the Greater London Council.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, by any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying or otherwise, except brief passages for the purpose of review, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner and publisher.

Any paperback edition of this book whether published simultaneously with, or subsequent to, the hardback edition is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade, be lent, resold, hired out, or otherwise disposed of, without the publisher's consent, in any form of binding other than that in which it is published.

Typeset in Plantin by Margaret Spooner Typesetting, Dorchester, Dorset  
Printed by the Camelot Press Ltd., Southampton

## Contents

List of illustrations	vi
An Historical Perspective <i>Rodolfo Celletti</i>	7
An Introduction to the 1881 Score <i>James Hepokoski</i>	13
Verdi and his Singers <i>Desmond Shawe-Taylor</i>	27
Thematic Guide	36
'Simon Boccanegra' libretto by <i>Francesco Maria Piave</i> with additions by <i>Giuseppe Montanelli</i> and additions and alterations by <i>Arrigo Boito</i>	
'Simon Boccanegra' English translation by <i>James Fenton</i>	41
Prologue	43
Act One	51
Act Two	70
Act Three	81
Scenes from the 1857 libretto <i>English translation</i> by <i>Sylvia Mulcahy</i>	88
Discography <i>Cathy Peterson</i>	95
Bibliography	96
Contributors	96



Kiri te Kanawa as Amelia and Boris Christoff as Fiesco at Covent Garden in 1973  
(photo: Donald Southern)

new Italian situation: the unification of Italy about to be completed (*Boccanegra* in 1857) or actually completed. Verdi, as poet of the Risorgimento, as the musical voice of an oppressed people, stood to one side and was silent: his job was done. But the Council scene of the 1881 *Simon Boccanegra* is important because, for the last time, Verdi, one of the central characters in the new movement for unity within the young state, returned to the theme that he had so passionately supported in earlier years. He was then 68 years old, and perhaps disillusioned and embittered by the events following unification, but his voice still comes across firm and fervent, as he recalls the old ideals of the heroic years of the Risorgimento.

## An Introduction to the 1881 Score

James A. Hepokoski

Although undeniably a masterpiece, *Simon Boccanegra* presents us with complexities that, while by no means insurmountable, are not easily resolved. As audiences soon discover, the libretto is strained and problematic — a patchwork text produced by no fewer than three hands. And, as an opera that Verdi revised long after its first performance, *Simon Boccanegra* is a conflation of two separate musical visions, not a single, spontaneous unity. The original version of the opera was first performed (unsuccessfully) at Venice's La Fenice on March 12, 1857; the rather thorough overhauling of the work, whose extraordinary new music foreshadows the later *Otello*, was first given at La Scala on March 24, 1881. We are thus invited to absorb a stylistically checkered work, which juxtaposes two successful, but sharply contrasting, styles. The danger here, of course, is that of fragmentation, the division of the opera into separate, mutually exclusive moments.

Verdi wrote the 1857 *Simon Boccanegra* during a period of emerging experimentation, stylistic growth, and expansion. On the one hand it resounded with clear echoes of his earlier style. The basic musical conventions of the *Risorgimento* (separate numbers with breaks for applause, multi-movement arias and duets with repetitive codas, cadenzas, and repeated cabalettas, static *concertato* ensembles, and so on) were indeed present, if usually modified — sometimes in ways that seemed to mystify his contemporaries; the musical discourse was characteristically terse, angular, and muscular — often a succession of short, sharp blows or rising groundswells; the accompaniment patterns, although more ingenious, often still relied on pulsating, repetitive rhythms to generate their energy; and much of the orchestration perpetuated the simpler Italian tradition. On the other hand, the original *Simon Boccanegra* contained a number of 'progressive' (but not revolutionary) elements. Some of these are traceable to Verdi's growing knowledge of French grand opera (his last complete work had been *Les vêpres siciliennes* for Paris in 1855). Others stemmed from his increasing willingness to subordinate lyricism as an end in itself to the interests of general mood, dramatic flow, and character depiction and to heighten the dramatically active, non-formal sections — everything, that is, that surrounds the more static, lyrical pieces. But to many of Verdi's contemporaries this suggested a dangerous tilt away from Italianate melodic supremacy. The most famous remarks are those of the Florentine Abramo Basevi in 1859:

With this opera Verdi attempted a *fourth manner*, almost approaching Germanic music through its affected use of new forms to be adapted to the dramatic expression, its greater importance given to the recitatives, and its lesser concern about melody. I would almost say, to judge at least from the Prologue, that he wanted to follow (albeit at a distance) the footsteps of the famous Wagner, the subverter of present-day music. It is well known that Wagner would like to make music as determined a language as possible, almost the shadow of the poetry.

This 'non-lyrical' impression, particularly when coupled with the complicated

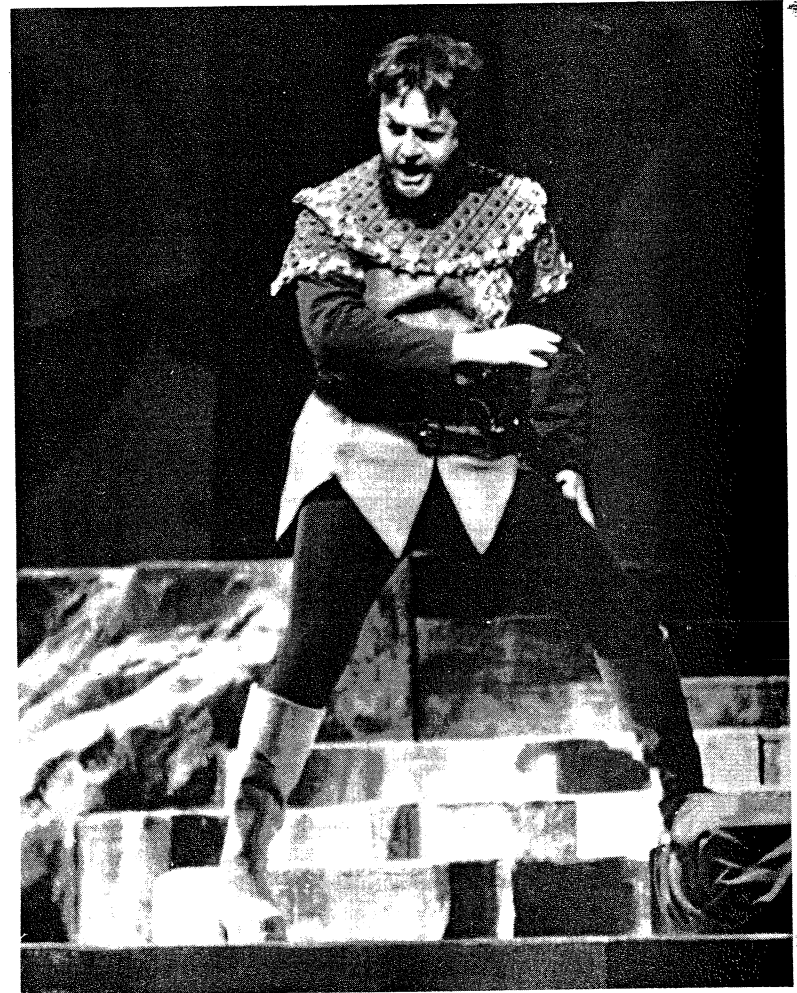
libretto, made *Simon Boccanegra* a 'difficult' work for 1857, and the opera failed to find a secure place in the repertoire. In the ensuing fourteen years it was mounted only some three dozen times, mostly in provincial theatres, with varying success. Its last production in a major theatre was at the Teatro Regio in Turin in 1864; its last gasp in Verdi's lifetime was a production in Trani in 1871.

Verdi's revision of the music in January and February 1881 (a kind of pre-*Otello* project) went hand in hand with a simultaneous revision of the text by the gifted Arrigo Boito — a revision that went so far as to produce an entirely new scene: Act One, scene two, the Council Chamber scene. (Julian Budden provides the details of this collaboration in his masterly study, *The Operas of Verdi*.) Clearly, the most dated music had to be excised or rewritten, the original breaks smoothed over with transitions, and the like, but Verdi's alterations went far beyond the minimum requirements. Nearly every piece was affected in some way — some entire sections recomposed, elsewhere a bass line altered here, a vocal phrase there, and so on. The principal passages of 1881 music (many of which were based on thematic and harmonic material from the corresponding passages of the 1857 version) are indicated in the discussion further below.

Verdi's revision of *Simon Boccanegra* merits attention as the threshold of his late style: the gateway that leads to a rich outpouring (including the 1882-83 *Don Carlos* revisions, *Otello*, *Falstaff*, and the *Four Sacred Pieces*) that remains one of the glories of nineteenth-century music. By 1881 he had deepened nearly every aspect of his music in intensity, motivic coherence, and variety of colour. His task in revising *Simon Boccanegra* amounted to recasting a work conceived in one aesthetic value-system (the 'old world' of the *Risorgimento*) according to the demands of another, more 'modern' one. Particularly noticeable is the increased sophistication and activity of the orchestra. In Verdi's late style the orchestra is frequently the bearer of developing motivic fragments that bind the larger sections of the work together. These motifs are continually being reshaped and varied; the composer seems to have come to consider literal repetition an aesthetic error, and scarcely any 1881 idea appears the same way twice. The reigning principle is that of spontaneous 'organic' growth. A hard-won mastery of this new organic style (one progressively defined in *Un ballo in maschera*, *La forza del destino*, *Don Carlos*, *Aida* and the *Messa da Requiem*) permitted Verdi to conceive music more flexibly and broadly, over longer stretches of time, than in 1857. This was precisely the remedy to bring to the earlier *Simon Boccanegra*. Moreover, by 1881 Verdi had also constructed a new lyricism, one that rounded the sharp edges of his earlier, Italian melodic style with the supple contours and ripe sensuousness of France, all underscored with a luscious *chiaroscuro* chromatic harmony. The practical effect of all of this in the revised opera is dramatic and palpable. At critical moments the characters break out of their 1857 limitations and into a more freely flowing, rapturous lyricism. This is the invasion of one world by another, the sudden breach of a ritualistic, honour-bound society with surges of 'natural feeling'. It is true that the danger for any apprehension of *Simon Boccanegra* as an aesthetic whole is that the richer, later music can diminish the effect of the earlier. But the very disparity of musical styles can function dramatically, particularly when one accepts the 1857 style as normative and prevailing, the ground for more 'spontaneous' excursions into heightened individual feeling.

## Prologue

The opening scenes of *Simon Boccanegra* begin in Verdi's purest 1881 manner and gradually drift back to his 1857 style. His mature present, that is, is called upon to conjure up the past, a procedure not unlike that of storytelling. Accordingly, the opera is launched in a relaxed, rocking, 'once-upon-a-time' vein — unique in Verdi's mature operas (and a radical change from the original, tense 1857 Prelude). The first scene, with Pietro and Paolo's plotting and Simone's ultimate acceptance of the offer to become Doge, centres around the opening theme [1], which, bobbing gently on sea-deep string harmonies, also suggests something of the marine atmosphere that will pervade so much of this opera. As is typical of late Verdi, this central theme is continually developed ('organically') and varied, moves into dialogue with interruptions and interpolations (some recalling 1857 music), and is



Tito Gobbi as the young *Simon Boccanegra* in the Prologue of his own production at Covent Garden in 1965 (photo: Reg Wilson)

fragmented and reshaped according to the demands of the drama. With Simone's exit and Paolo's withdrawal to one side, a new section of nocturnal music begins [2]. Hushed, delicately scored, and conspiratorial (and foreshadowing the conclusion of Act Three, scene one of *Falstaff*), these night whispers are shaped in much the same way as was the preceding section: an initial orchestral statement (for the entrance of Pietro and the sailors and workers) is repeated — and varied, developed, and interrupted — with dialogue. The chorus's surprise at Paolo's abrupt proposal of 'Simone Boccanegra' as the next Doge is one of the celebrated features of the 1881 score: a sudden, *forte* shout, 'Simone!', gives way to a stunned, quizzical 'Il Corsaro!', sung *sotto voce*.

With Paolo's E-minor *racconto* [3], the Prologue settles largely into 1857 music (although the original was up a step, in F-sharp minor). The squarer melodic cut, the pungently reedy woodwind doubling, and the propulsive drive of Verdi's earlier style are instantly perceptible. Still, for 1857, this was an advanced piece, both harmonically and structurally. It is built from two long musical strophes, the second freely varying the first (notice, for instance, its more active accompaniment). Each strophe begins with Paolo alone and warms up into a choral response. The second strophe's response, however, includes dialogue between Paolo and the chorus — an embedding of more ongoing drama into a 'formal' strophe. Verdi lightly touched up the piece's orchestration and accompaniment in 1881, and one passage is new: the *dolcissimo* conclusion of the first strophe, 'Passando ogni pietoso' [4] — a sudden, warm glow, again with *marinesco* flavouring. The orchestral 'exit-music', with its eerily gleaming high open-fifths, is an expansion of the original conclusion.

Despite its smooth accompaniment and evocative use of offstage chorus, Fiesco's bass *romanza*, 'Il lacerato spirito' [5], is the most traditional piece of the 1857 Prologue. Its antique feel (a reworking of the minor-major formula, with the usual formal, repeated coda lines) and deep severity of tone perfectly capture Fiesco's 'old-world' nobility. This is, after all, the first appearance of a proud Guelph, whose very life upholds ritualized patterns of honour and social status. An even more intensified ceremonial quality may be felt in the double-groundswell orchestral postlude (1857) as the mourners leave Fiesco's palace.

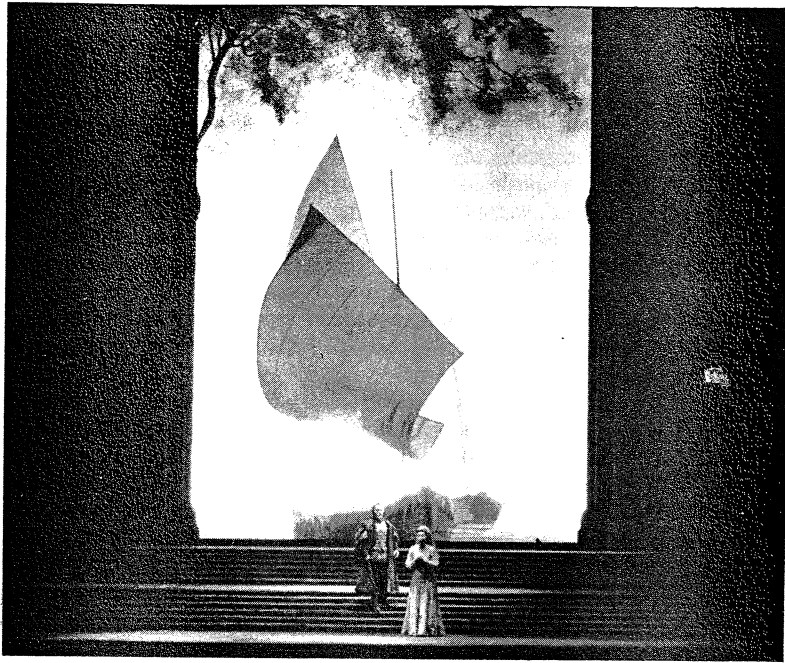
The bitter Simone-Fiesco duet that follows, however, violates the conventional expectations of 1857 and is a landmark of Verdi's maturing style. The traditional duet-pattern found so often in his earlier operas passed through five phases: an introductory *scena* (recitative-setting of unrhymed verse); a *tempo d'attacco* (dramatically active dialogue, typically without repeated lines and often set in *parlante* style, that is, with the principal melody in the orchestra — specifically, this movement begins with the onset of rhymed, regular verse and almost always signifies a sudden gain in dramatically shaped, directional energy); a break in the forward motion for the lyrical *adagio* (formal, static stanzas with coda — *adagio* here is a formal term, not a description of the tempo actually indicated); a *tempo di mezzo* (active connecting movement); and a brilliant, rousing *cabaletta* (like the *adagio*, formal stanzas, but characteristically featuring a large-scale musical and textual repetition before the coda proper). But this baritone-bass duet (small portions of which were retouched in 1881) becomes more structurally ambiguous as it proceeds. There are no truly 'static' sections in the traditional sense, and the text lacks formal *cabaletta* stanzas. The aesthetic point is clear:

the rapid current of the dramatic action is reluctant to relax into lyrical pools. The *tempo d'attacco* blazes forth (with a few 1881 retouchings) at Fiesco's 'Qual cieco fato' [6], but the argument burns on much longer than anticipated in juxtaposed, contrasting musical sections. Fiesco's *meno mosso* appeal for his grandchild, 'Se concedermi vorrai', may at first seem to begin a formal *adagio*, but this impression soon vanishes. The actual *adagio*, or *adagio* substitute, is Simone's *racconto*, 'Del mar sul lido' [7], with its salt-water tang (notice the 'sea-breeze' woodwind doubling). The decisive structural and dramatic point here is its breaking of the continuity of present time through a flashback into the past, not so much its internal structure: ultimately, the piece dissolves into dialogue. The whole duet up to the point of Fiesco's low-F 'Addio' is constructed of instantaneous music that parallels the unfolding drama. It is one of the most advanced structures of the original *Simon Boccanegra* — and one that drew especially heavy fire from Basevi, who considered the duet to have ended with the *racconto*. The Prologue concludes as in 1857: a dramatic '*scena*' (actually functioning as an appended *tempo di mezzo* and thus in some senses continuing the duet), as Simone discovers the dead Maria, leads to the final chorus (a dramatic substitute for a conventional *cabaletta*). Here the people unknowingly mock Simone's grief and goad Fiesco to even further wrath by hailing the corsair as Doge to the accompaniment of vigorous (and, for Verdi, purposely trivial) *Risorgimento* 'public-music' — very much in the old style.

## Act One

Scene One. A new, closed-curtain prelude (based on some of the 1857 material) presents us with one of the jewels of the 1881 score: an evocative tone-picture of dawn by the sea, graced with airy violin trills and tremolos, broad viola waves, and gentle woodwind bubbling. With the rise of the curtain onto the coastal garden of the Grimaldi palace — now twenty-five years later than the Prologue — Amelia begins her *cavatina* [8]. The French-influenced, ABA<sup>1</sup> melody is mostly from 1857, but the sophisticated accompaniment — more bubbling woodwind — is new. True to his 1881 principle of non-repetition, Verdi provides a different accompaniment for the musical reprise ('O altero ostel'). And entirely new to 1881 is Amelia's exquisite conclusion, 'S'inalba il ciel', which rises up to a delicious, *dolcissimo* high B-flat and rounds with the woodwind bubbling and string tremolos of the prelude: everything heard thus far has been, as Verdi put it, 'a unified piece'.

In 1857 Amelia followed Gabriele's Manrico-like offstage song [9] with a solo *cabaletta*, but in the revision we plunge at once (after some skilful 1881 stitching, 'Ei vien!' etc.) into the first of the three duets of Act One, scene one, the 'Duetto Amelia e Gabriele', mostly from 1857. The two lovers pass through the *scena* — Amelia reveals her knowledge of Gabriele's rebellious plotting with the other Guelphs — directly into the *adagio*, 'Vieni a mirar la cerula'. (In sharp contrast with the duet in the Prologue Verdi chooses not to include a *tempo d'attacco*. Here the dramatic point, one supposes, is either that it has been 'hushed away' by Gabriele or that Amelia's concern pushes her prematurely into her formal plea.) Amelia begins her melody by floating a perfectly still D natural (of which Basevi did not approve) on top of soft, wave-like string lappings and woodwind trills, then, more purposefully, expands into the broad, coquettishly tempting refrain [10], which Gabriele also shares at the end of his 1881-enriched *risposta*, or formal response. A rapid, recitative-like



Act One, scene six (above) and the Council Chamber scene (below) from the production at La Scala, Milan, by Giorgio Strehler, designed by Ezio Frigerio, which toured to Covent Garden in 1976 (photos: Ezio Piccagliani)



*tempo di mezzo* in which Pietro announces the Doge's imminent arrival (and we learn that Paolo hopes to marry Amelia) obliges the lovers to bring the duet to a hasty close with a shortened *cabaletta* [11], also retouched in 1881.

The Gabriele/Fiesco duet that follows underwent a heavier revision. Fiesco, our severe noble, begins his *scena* account of Amelia's humble origins in smooth 1881 recitative ('Alto mistero'). His more prosaic telling-of-the-tale ('No, — la figlia dei Grimaldi') remains in an aged and bone-weary 1857 *arioso*. But when Gabriele re-declares his love for Amelia ('L'orfana adoro') the music swims wondrously into the wide-eyed richness of 1881. It is one of the most moving moments of the revised opera: the stiff, deep-bass Fiesco thaws in the warmth of more spontaneous, quasi-religious emotion. Even more striking than the C-major paternal blessing [12] (structurally considered, the onset of a compact *adagio*) is Gabriele's juxtaposed E-minor *risposta* [13], wafting ecstatically heavenward and climaxing with a 'sacred' pseudo-modal lift in the accompaniment as he reaches the peak of his vocal line (on the word 'voce').

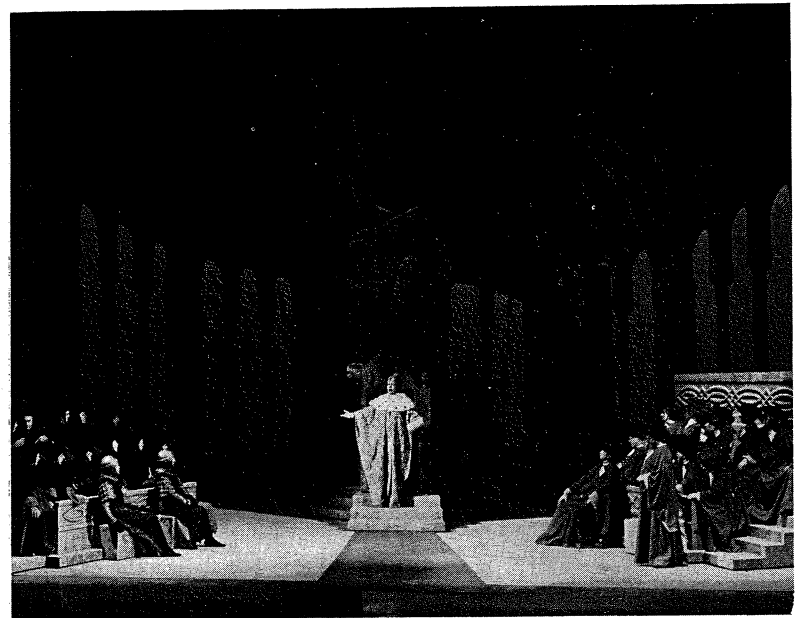
The ensuing duet between Amelia and Simone likewise mixes the 1857 and 1881 styles, but is more traditionally shaped: it is the first duet to pass through all of the five conventional duet-phases. In the *scena*, beginning immediately after the offstage trumpet fanfares announce the Doge's arrival, Fiesco and Gabriele withdraw, savouring the Guelph rebellion to come (the 1857 version had contained a much longer *giuramento*, or oath, between the two), Paolo gloats briefly over Amelia, and Simone pardons Amelia's exiled brothers — all to an 1881 recitative with carefully nuanced orchestral interjections. The *tempo d'attacco* [14] begins in Verdi's typically middle-period 'conversation-style', a relaxed *parlante* (whose rhythms, at least, recall the much slower, more grotesque Rigoletto/Sparafucile encounter), gaining in intensity and finally growing into the 1881 style for her dramatic revelation to Simone that she is not really a Grimaldi by birth. The largely 1857 *adagio* [15] resonates with a timbre and mood heard often in Verdi: a woodwind introduction — here an oboe, but in 1857 the scoring may have called for a clarinet — leads the way into a melancholy soprano solo. This *adagio*, once again, is not the traditional static reflection. It is another flexible, prolonged *racconto*, moving and changing along with the dramatic information that it contains — a bold procedure for 1857. It grows out of its initial G minor into G major ('Mi baciò' — the expected musical reprise is replaced by an entirely new melody), elicits a brief, hopeful *risposta* from Simone, who now suspects that she might be his long-lost daughter, and surges into rapturous 1881 lyricism in the coda, as Amelia and Simone sing simultaneously [16]. The *tempo di mezzo* brings back the rhythms of the 'conversational' *parlante* heard earlier [14] — the climactic 'Ah! stringi al sen Maria che t'ama' is from 1881, but most of the succeeding orchestral outburst was present in the early score — and leads to the *cabaletta* [17], an 1857 piece thoroughly reworked in 1881 (or, better, an 1881 composition with a good memory for its 1857 predecessor). Particularly invigorating is Amelia's *risposta* [18], impulsively springing forth and arching broadly over a wide range in the *Aida* style: in the 1857 score she had dutifully repeated her father's melody (even retaining its throbbing-pulse accompaniment). At the close of the coda father and daughter embrace to a beatified restatement of [17] (notice



Sherrill Milnes as Boccanegra and Leona Mitchell as Amelia, Covent Garden, 1981 (photo: Donald Southern)

the 'celestial' harp — *musica angelica*). After such a lyrically effusive duet, Simone's denial of Amelia to Paolo and Paolo's and Pietro's terse *parlante* plans to kidnap Amelia, although dramatically necessary, inevitably seem a letdown.

Scene Two. The 1881 Council Chamber Scene, the high point of the revised score, is a highly complex and fluid structure. It may be grasped, however, by realizing that it rests on three central musical blocks: the insurrection, Amelia's recounting of her abduction, and the climactic appeal for peace. Each block is preceded by introductory or transition material. After a rancorous and confrontational orchestral introduction that gets nowhere [19], giving us some idea of the deep-seated conflicts within the group that Simone is addressing, three swelling string chords — the depth of Verdi's new mastery of harmonic colour is felt at once — lead to Simone's initial requests for peace (one a message from Petrarch). Agitated refusals within the chamber give way to the muffled sounds of a rebellion outside. The insurrection motif [20a], strangely reminiscent of the second movement of Beethoven's Quartet, Op. 130, dominates the first large block of music — quintessentially late Verdi. The four-measure motif appears no fewer than eleven times in *crescendo* — a mounting whirlwind of varied settings through differing keys and textures, interrupted briefly by scattered episodic material. The music rushes towards two climactic statements: the C minor quasi-reprise, 'Armi, saccheggio' [20b] and (following a wonderful 'spatial' effect as the trumpet-call in the orchestra passes to the offstage trumpet and the immediate threat to the Doge is quelled) the E-minor *fortissimo* orchestral explosion ('Ecco le plebi!') as Gabriele, Fiesco, and the crowd burst into the chamber.



The Council Chamber scene in Tito Gobbi's production, designed by Giancarlo Bartolini Salimbeni at Covent Garden, 1965 (photo: Houston Rogers, Theatre Museum)

Freer, dramatic transitional material for the Simone-Gabriele confrontation and the sudden appearance of Amelia leads to the second, smaller block: her narrative of her abduction [21], the first portion of which is based on 1857 material. Its rounded, but freely organic construction, however, is distinctly in the later style: notice, for instance, the radically varied reprise, in the strings only, beginning two measures before her words, 'Confuso di tema'. Another strife-torn transition (Amelia having claimed knowledge of who originated the plot, the rival factions begin again to accuse each other) brings us to the third block of the scene. This *pezzo concertato* begins with Simone's desperate appeals to end the dissension [22]: it is Verdi's political credo as well, underpinned by an ardent faith in a unified, healed *patria*. Every line is carefully and rhetorically nuanced ('Patrizi!' is set higher than 'Plebi!'; the unifying concept, 'Popolo', highest of all, etc.), and the whole grows from stern reprimands to warm evocations of the soil itself ('Piango su voi!') and climaxes in the most memorable lines of this scene, perhaps of the opera: a quotation from Petrarch [23], who by this point in the scene has been elevated to a quasi-mystical symbol of Italian unity. The *concertato* proper that follows is one of Verdi's most effective and is built around Fiesco's factional laments, Amelia's sweepingly beautiful, personal appeal to Fiesco [24], and Simone's more generalized repetition of the Petrarch quotation [23]. After the close of the *concertato* (i.e., in a *tempo di mezzo* without *stretta*) all eyes turn penetratingly onto the treacherous Paolo, and the music (beginning with a *tutta forza*, almost 'Brucknerian' orchestral unison) resounds with Iago-like ferocity in its twisted shape and nasty trilling [25]. A dry, bass-clarinete solo, a writhing minor-key compression of [24], underscores the Doge's suspicions. As Simone forces Paolo to lay a curse upon his own head [26], the bass clarinet, almost



inaudibly, begins to groan repeatedly downward in three descending half-steps. In the next act Paolo will turn this motif into a symbol of deadly revenge.

### Act Two

After a few 1857 words between Pietro and Paolo, the former leaves and the latter gives vent to a venomous dramatic *scena* from 1881; one of Boito's and Verdi's many deepening of the character of Paolo in the revised score. Like *Rigoletto's* much earlier 'Pari siamo' (except now in cleverly rhyming poetry) this monologue consists of enhanced recitative delivered as dramatically as possible. In this instance its binding forces are fearful echoes of the preceding scene [26]: Simone's curse, rising thrice like searing apparitions in the trumpets and trombones, and the groaning, three-note chromatic descent of Paolo's self-curse, which now becomes the Poison Motif of his assassination plot.

Another largely 1857 'conversational' *parlante*, this time with Paolo attempting unsuccessfully to tempt the ever-proud Fiesco into murdering the Doge in his sleep [27] — a boldly separate musical structure (like that of the *Rigoletto-Sparafucile* dialogue), unattached in any conventional way to a larger, more predictable unit — brings us to a similarly early *scena ed aria* for Gabriele. Here again the 1857 Verdi has defied the expected conventions, this time by reversing the positions of the two formal portions of the standard aria structure. And the innovation, as always, matches and articulates the flow of the drama. Incited by Paolo's insinuations that Amelia may have already fallen victim to the Doge's love, Gabriele (of course unaware that the two are father and daughter) assumes the worst and plunges into plans for revenge: a premature, truncated *cabaletta*-howl [28], raging over furiously rushing, chromatic strings (which had already threatened to erupt in the *scena*). Only after Gabriele's thoughts turn fearfully to the possibility of Amelia's deflowering does he soften into a more conventional *adagio* [29] with coda and cadenza (the most old-fashioned solo of the opera). Suddenly Amelia herself appears and a new formal duet is launched directly with the *tempo d'attacco* (emotions are running too high for a mere *scena*), which proceeds breathlessly with Gabriele's tormented fears and accusations and concludes with Amelia's pronouncement (rewritten in 1881) that the reason for her love of Simone must temporarily remain a secret. The *adagio* that follows [30], Gabriele (over an anguished-heartbeat string accompaniment) begging her to reveal the secret and Amelia trying gently to reassure him, is pure 1857 Verdi: two three-phrase melodies, each climaxing on their third phrase. The coda, as their voices join, suddenly 'elevates' for eight measures in the luscious 1881 style. As was the case with their earlier duet in Act One, this duet is cut short by the prospect of Simone's imminent arrival. Accordingly, the *tempo di mezzo* and *cabaletta*-substitute ('All'ora istessa'), both products of 1857, are again telescoped and quickly disposed of: the still-distraught Gabriele vows to assassinate the Doge — his presumed rival — and Amelia hides her furious lover on the balcony before her father arrives.

Everything that follows in Act Two is conceived as a single unit: a finale in 1857 style, retouched here and there in 1881. The culmination of the extraordinarily lengthy *scena* is Simone's soliloquy and inadvertent self-poisoning: the insertion of a semi-formal monologue into a section of

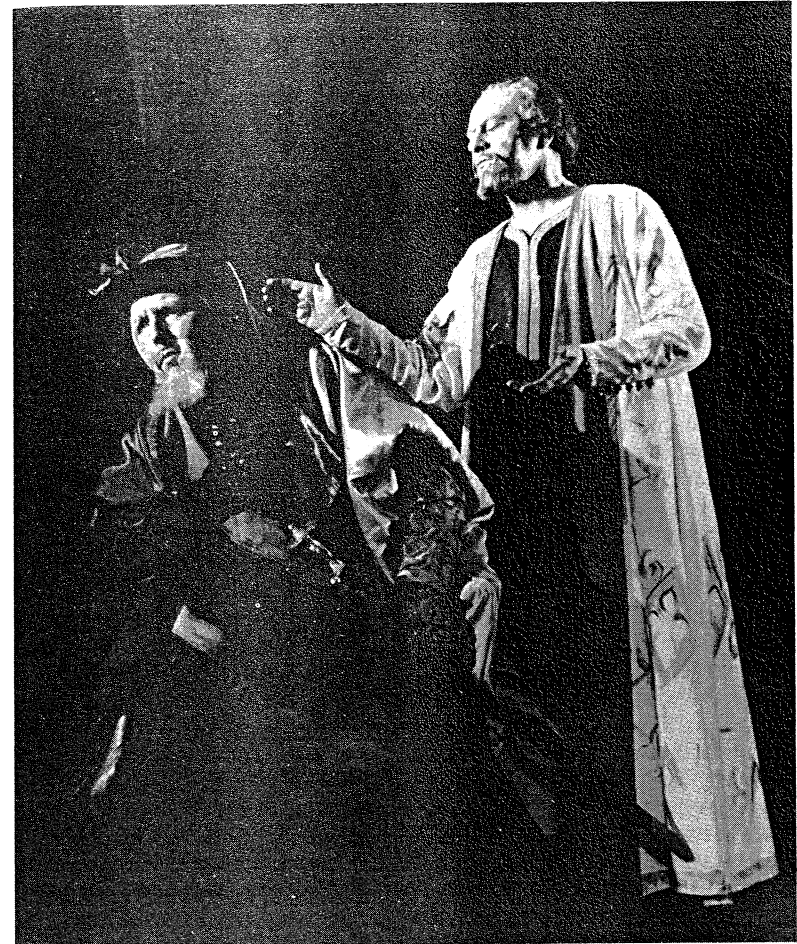


Ingvar Wixell as Boccanegra and Ruggero Raimondi as Fiesco, Covent Garden, 1972  
(photo: Donald Southern)

heightened recitative. Verdi revised its opening in 1881 (the bass-pizzicato music immediately surrounding the Doge's sipping of the poison), but with the onset of the light staccato strings the music is from 1857. Simone nods asleep — the staccato string figures yawn further apart — and begins to dream, deeply troubled by what he has just learned: that his daughter (symbolized by the recall of the theme of their recognition *cabaletta* [17] in the woodwind) loves Gabriele, his enemy and fierce partisan of the rebellious Guelphs. After Gabriele emerges to murder the sleeping Doge, the music follows a more predictable course. With Amelia's sudden interposition the *tempo d'attacco* shoots forth [31], tumbling forward to orchestral hammerblows as Simone calls upon Gabriele to strike with his dagger, and concluding in a march-like passage for Simone that contains — finally — the stunning revelation that he is Amelia's father. The *terzetto* that follows (the static, formal movement, heavily retouched in 1881) is one of Verdi's most beautiful short ensembles [32]. Surely no finer example of close psychological depiction can be found than that in Gabriele's opening solo exposition. It consists of three contrasting phrases. In the first he begs Amelia's pardon in E-flat minor. He then turns nobly to the Doge in an open, hand-on-heart passage in the relative G-flat major, admits his assassination plot, and shifts to an anguished third phrase (intensified in 1881) [33] whose end ('il ciglio a te non oso alzar') perfectly traces the course of his shame-filled eyes. The 1857 offstage Guelph chorus that concludes the act [34] functions as the *stretta* (rapid conclusion) of the ensemble. In its muscular, clipped vigour it is a typical *Risorgimento* product (like the concluding chorus in the Prologue). In 1881 Verdi did, however, add women's voices and rewrite the onstage switching of Gabriele's loyalties to the forces of the Doge.

### Act Three

Another closed-curtain prelude (from 1881: notice the racing bass line) brings back the vigorous Guelph-rebellion music with which the last act ended [34]. From behind the curtain cries of victory for the Doge overturn the nobles' musical forces, and, by curtain-rise, the initial A-flat minor has brightened into A-flat major. Inside the Doge's palace the captain of Simone's crossbowmen releases Fiesco, restores his sword, and informs him of the Guelph defeat. At this point Fiesco sees the traitor Paolo being led to execution. Paolo's 1881 music here, parallel to his dramatic *scena* at the opening of Act Two (and as Iago-like as ever), is organised around a *forte*, serpentine motif [35] heard at its beginning and end, varied restatements of the Poison Motif [26] as he reveals to Fiesco that Boccanegra is doomed, and his free, jealous remarks (including his admission that it was he who abducted Amelia) as he hears Amelia's and Gabriele's serene, offstage (1857) wedding chorus. After Paolo is led off, Fiesco, although Simone's bitter enemy, shudders (with tremolo strings) at the horror of the poisoning and withdraws into the shadows to await the stricken Doge, who is still unaware of his fate. The Doge's captain enters once again, to a ceremonial, circular 1881 phrase for horns, and proclaims that the lights of the city are to be extinguished in honour of the dead (all of this to music that seems to recall the Trial Scene in *Aida*). At the moment that Simone enters, the strings begin to slide upward in parallel chromatics [36], and we rejoin the 1857 version. It is an extraordinary sound in the early score: the whole scene is a kind of radicalizing of the Doge's



Howell Glynn as Fiesco and Arnold Matters as Boccanegra in the 1948 British premiere at Sadler's Wells, produced by John Moody, with sets by John Piper and costumes by Reginald Woolley (photo: Start Walter)

poisoning and dream-scene in Act Two. In the later score the chromatics take on even more significance as inversions of the Poison Motif [26]. The feverish Doge is momentarily refreshed by the sea-breeze [37] — again, airy string tremolos, a cool, trilling flute, and wave-rocked triple-time melodies, all so important to the musical atmosphere of the opera.

Fiesco suddenly emerges ('Era meglio per te!') to challenge his foe with fierce resolution, underscored by his initial insistence on a single pitch supported by rock-solid, but oscillating, 'modal' harmonies. (The Council Chamber Scene notwithstanding, Simone is not supposed to have seen — or at least recognized — Fiesco since the Prologue.) In several respects recalling the structure of the radical Simone-Fiesco duet in the Prologue, this second baritone-bass confrontation, largely from 1857, again expands the *tempo d'attacco* into a series of sectionalized contrasts. (As before, the dramatic point is to postpone the *adagio* in favour of prolonged dramatic

action: Verdi's resolute experimentalism in the later 1850s can scarcely be better exemplified than in these two duets.) Fiesco never sounds graver than at the beginning of the *tempo d'attacco* [38], an 'old-world' proclamation of Boccanegra's doom. Even the musical shape of Fiesco's eight lines, evoking the standard lyric-form pattern aa'bc — but with all four phrases obsessively retaining the same dotted-rhythm figure until the final triplet-spilling concluding cadence — adds to the severity. After this initial proclamatory stanza the music breaks up into dialogue over thumping death-rhythms in the orchestra, as the lights of the piazza outside begin to be extinguished and Simone gradually recognizes Fiesco. In the forward-rushing 'Come un fantasima', still another section of the prolonged *tempo d'attacco*, Simone finally reveals to Fiesco (in a momentary shift to broadly arched 1881 music) that Amelia is his granddaughter. This leads to a tearful reconciliation, the duet's *adagio*. Fiesco's initially 'rhetorical' exposition [39] (compare the similarly E-flat minor openings of [22] and [32]) gives way not to a *risposta* in standard shape but to similarly rhetorical groundswells: the whole procedure seems to be more that of an ensemble reduced to two voices than that of a traditional duet. Towards the end of the *adagio* (the textual repetition of 'Vien, ch'io stringa al petto') we hear a new, rocking 'reconciliation theme', as the two link their voices together (Verdi had used this theme near the close of the 1857 Prelude). In the concluding section (the structure of the text suggests that it is a *tempo di mezzo* fused onto the end of the *adagio* as a kind of kinetic coda-pendant) Fiesco tells Simone that he is poisoned. As the 'reconciliation theme' swells up again in voice and orchestra, Simone requests to bless Amelia/Maria, whom he hears approaching with Gabriele and a respectful crowd of Genoese.

The final quartet, which the generally displeased Basevi judged in 1859 to be 'the most beautiful piece of the opera', begins with an initial section largely in recitative that passes quickly from happiness (Amelia's learning that Fiesco is her grandfather, and that Fiesco and Simone, through their joint relationship to her, have been reconciled) to sorrow (Simone reveals his imminent death). The more formal portion of the ensemble begins with Simone's nearly motionless blessing of his daughter and Gabriele [40] (notice the resemblance to the Preludes to Acts One and Three of *La traviata* as he mentions his 'martyrdom'). Rhythmic momentum is regained as Amelia and Gabriele respond sympathetically with parallel, similarly arched melodies. Fiesco, true to character, declares in a funereal four-measure shift to 1881 music that all earthly happiness is a deception. Finally, the Doge, gasping for breath, leads them all into a repeated, swelling *concertato* — much of it generously enriched in 1881. Instead of resolving at the end, the quartet-with-chorus crashes up against a *forte* diminished-seventh chord — a traditional musical symbol of disaster. The opera concludes with eight sombre lines from 1857 (the aim, similar, for instance, to that in the final five lines of *Il trovatore*, was to close the opera with a brief dramatic action: a '*tempo di mezzo*', but here with freer, *scenaique* poetry). Just before his death Simone chooses Gabriele to succeed him as Doge. Fiesco proclaims this to the people in the piazza outside. The last sounds — unusually quiet for Verdi, especially in 1857 — include ritual bell-strokes (compare the bells at the end of the Prologue) and the kneeling chorus gently praying for the dead Boccanegra in the dotted rhythms of a funeral march.

## Verdi and his Singers

### The vocal character of the two versions of 'Simon Boccanegra' in relation to the original casts

Desmond Shawe-Taylor

Among the innumerable comments on singers made by Verdi in the course of his long life, biographers and critics usually seize on those in which he speaks disparagingly of the species: expressing, for instance, his annoyance at the careless use of the word 'creator' to describe the first performer of a role. 'No', he said in a well-known letter to Giulio Ricordi (April 11, 1871); 'I want only one creator, and am satisfied if what is written is simply and correctly executed; the trouble is that this is never done. I often read in newspapers about "effects unimagined by the composer"', but for my part I have never come across any of these.'

Conversely, biographers incline to overlook the equally numerous occasions when Verdi showed how much a particular singer had impressed or moved him. When the name of Gemma Bellincioni came up in 1886 as a possible Desdemona, the composer supported Boito's adverse view (January 23, 1886) against the enthusiasm of Ricordi; but a decade later we find him praising Bellincioni's famous Violetta, and sending her his photograph with the message 'To you who could give new life to the old sinner'. Thirty years before, there had been a pleasant and revealing little episode in his dealings with the famous baritone, Antonio Cotogni. Cotogni was suggested for the role of Rodrigo in the first Italian production of *Don Carlos* at Bologna in 1867; and Mariani, the conductor, brought him along to sing to Verdi. As a matter of fact, Verdi had already heard Cotogni four years earlier in a Madrid performance of *La forza del destino* which he described at the time as very poor except for the soprano and the tenor; but he may have forgotten this, and, if so, Cotogni, now 36 years old and approaching the peak of his career, might well have been too tactful to remind him.

Verdi accompanied the baritone at the piano in what Mariani calls Rodrigo's *aria di sortita* ('Carlo ch'è sol il nostro amore'), and then himself sang with Cotogni the Friendship Duet — 'with tenderness and exquisite finesse', says Mariani of the composer's vocal style. 'At the end of the piece', Mariani continues, 'the composer's face was lined with tears; the singer could count on a successful outcome.' You might say, perhaps, that Verdi was weeping at the beauty of his own singing — or, more probably, of his own music; but the implication of Mariani's words is that he was moved by Cotogni's voice and art. Cotogni himself had no doubt about the matter, if we may believe a slightly different account of the episode which the notoriously unreliable Gino Monaldi ascribed to the singer in his *Famous Singers of the Nineteenth Century*. The baritone is reported as having said that it was his singing of Rodrigo's death scene, 'io morrò, ma lieto in core', that had so affected Verdi, and moreover as attributing to the emotionally moved composer the uncharacteristic comment: 'You sing it, not as I wrote it — but no matter; by all means sing it like that since it goes splendidly so . . . indeed, even better.'

We know also of Verdi's admiration for the Spanish tenor, Julián Gayarre,