

Press Text: Terrace Talk *Simon Boccanegra*



Singer René Pape, director Andreas Kriegenburg and singer Luca Salsi. Photos: SF/Anne Zeuner

(SF, 12 August 2019) The difference between a good singer and a great artist lies in the courage to transport emotions with the voice, and to risk singing an ugly note if the story demands it – says René Pape, who sings the role of Jacopo Fiesco in Verdi's *Simon Boccanegra*, premiering on 15 August. To him, it is also a role debut in a *fach* he rarely performs in, he discloses during the Terrace Talk. Still, his colleague Luca Salsi, who takes on the role of Simon Boccanegra, praises him highly: "René Pape is a great artist, for during the course of the rehearsals he has managed to transform not just his character into Fiesco, but also his voice." That is a rare feat in basses. In Verdi's music, it is of enormous importance not to shout, but to lend the tones colour. At the same time, he frequently demands transitions from *fff* (*fortissimo*) to *pppp* (*pianississimo*). "What I care about is conveying the text and telling a story," says René Pape, adding that not only in Verdi, but in any repertoire, colours are important. "Many singers have a tendency to want every single note to sound very beautiful," he explains. However, if the character demands it, it is important to allow individual notes to sound ugly or even to break. After all, the voice transports emotions.



Luca Salsi sings the role of Simon Boccanegra.

Simon Boccanegra is a dark work, and he has tried to make this visible at all moments, but without exposing anyone unduly, says director Andreas Kriegenburg. Especially the chorus is often portrayed in a cold and cynical manner. The issue, however, is a society full of ill-will and envy, divided and prone to baiting and agitation. The subject of social media plays a major role – the chorus members all have mobile phones they stare at, twittering. One of the tweets reads “Make Genoa great again”. “All we need to do is look around – such is the very society we currently live in. We keep avoiding each other more and more, to the point of radicalization,” says the director. Although the political references of the time of its writing resonate wonderfully within our present times, his focus is not primarily on the political issues. Rather, he is interested in the interpersonal relationships in this opera. “To me, humanism is in the foreground,” Andreas Kriegenburg says, the point being to break through this wall of hatred. Simon Boccanegra makes a radical decision against society by investing in youth and ignoring existent depravity. This is a sign of humanism: to place the future in the hands of innocents. Luca Salsi goes a step further: “To me, *Simon Boccanegra* is an opera of love,” he claims. The figure of Simon Boccanegra works in favour of encounters between peoples, opposing war and promoting love. Salsi considers him a kind of prophet, who transforms the grief the loss of his beloved causes into love for humanity.



Director Andreas Kriegenburg and singer René Pape.

To remove the audience from its daily life and offer it entertainment – that is the task of a singer, says René Pape, adding that it is a shame the opera is only performed so rarely. This may be due to the difficulty in casting it appropriately – in addition, the immense leaps in time pose a huge challenge to the dramaturgy. He points to the difficulty of crowding the entire story into this relatively short opera. On the other hand, music speaks for itself: “The music conveys different dimensions, it gets under our skin,” says René Pape.

Press Office of the Salzburg Festival/Anne Zeuner

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Giuseppe Verdi (1813 - 1901)

Simon Boccanegra

Melodramma in a Prologue and Three Acts (1857/1881)

Libretto by Francesco Maria Piave with additions by Giuseppe Montanelli

based on the drama *Simón Boccanegra* by Antonio García Gutiérrez

New version by Arrigo Boito

New Production

Premiere: 15 August 2019

Further Performances: 18, 20, 24, 27 and 29 August 2019

Großes Festspielhaus

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Andreas Kriegenburg Director

Harald B. Thor Sets

Tanja Hofmann Costumes

Andreas Grüter Lighting

Peter Venus Video

Julia Weinreich Dramaturgy

Luca Salsi Simon Boccanegra

Marina Rebeka Amelia Grimaldi

René Pape Jacopo Fiesco

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Concert Association of the Vienna State Opera Chorus

Ernst Raffelsberger Chorus Master

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