

September 17, 2020 – Giuseppe Verdi's *Simon Boccanegra*

On this edition of the Thursday Night Opera House we're pleased to present an encore broadcast of Giuseppe Verdi's twentieth opera, *Simon Boccanegra*, hosted by the late **Al Ruocchio** (1937-2007). This three-act work with a prologue was set to an Italian libretto by Francesco Maria Piave, and was based on the 1843 play *Simón Bocanegra* by Antonio García Gutiérrez. It was first performed at the Teatro La Fenice in Venice on March 12, 1857. Given the complications of the original plot and the generally poor popular response, the opera dropped out of favor after 1866. Finally, twenty-three years after the premiere, Verdi's publisher persuaded the composer to revise the opera, with textual changes to be prepared by Arrigo Boito. The revised version, with the now-famous Council Chamber scene, was first performed at Teatro alla Scala in Milan on March 24, 1881.

The story takes place in fourteenth-century Genoa. In the Prologue, the corsair Simon Boccanegra (baritone **Piero Cappuccilli**) has had a daughter, whose whereabouts are unknown, by the daughter of the patrician leader Jacopo Fiesco (bass **Nicolai Ghiaurov**), who refuses to make peace with Boccanegra until the young woman is found. The plebeians, under the leadership of the goldsmith Paolo (bass-baritone **José Van Dam**), engineer the election of Boccanegra as Doge, leader of the city-state, to the great annoyance of Fiesco.

Twenty years later, Boccanegra encounters the orphan Amelia (soprano **Mirella Freni**), who's been brought up by Fiesco and is in love with the patrician gentleman Gabriele Adorno (tenor **José Carreras**). Boccanegra discovers that Amelia is in fact his own long-lost daughter. Paolo asks Boccanegra's permission to marry her but is rebuffed. He has her abducted but she escapes. Boccanegra, realizing Paolo's treachery, forces him to pronounce a curse on himself in front of the Genoese Council. Paolo poisons Boccanegra's drink. But before dying, Boccanegra is finally reconciled with Fiesco, blesses Amelia's union with Adorno, and names the latter as his successor as Doge, which Fiesco graciously proclaims.

Claudio Abbado conducts the Chorus and Orchestra of the Teatro alla Scala, Milan, in this 1977 Deutsche Grammophon recording.

In a televised 1978 La Scala performance, **Nicolai Ghiaurov** sings Fiesco's aria "Il lacerato spirito" from the Prologue: <https://youtu.be/UIQEMt0HI0U>.

Be sure to join me next Thursday, September 24th, for Vincenzo Bellini's *Il Pirata* starring **Montserrat Caballé** as Imogene, **Bernabé Martí** as Gualtiero, and **Piero Cappuccilli** as Ernesto. **Gianandrea Gavazzeni** conducts this 1971 EMI recording.

The Thursday Night Opera House is heard at 7:00 p.m. Eastern on 89.7 FM in central North Carolina. We're also streamed online, and you can listen as well on WCPE's Android or iPhone apps.

Bob Chapman

W. Robert Chapman, Host of the Thursday Night Opera House