



## If music be the food of love

The summer opera season of picnics and Puccini is upon us.  
Henrietta Bredin advises how best to enjoy this year's offerings

**S**UMMER used to be a fairly quiet time in the British opera world, with the big companies—English National Opera, the Royal Opera, Opera North, Scottish Opera, Welsh National Opera—taking a break or going on tour. These days, there is a proliferation of summer festivals, which is good news for those keen to experience opera in different, often more relaxed venues and also for performers, who lead an increasingly precarious existence with so much prevailing uncertainty about funding for the Arts.

I am caught on the hop every year by early-starter Glyndebourne in East Sussex, which kicks off the season in the middle of this month with *Don Giovanni*. It has already proved such a hot ticket that an extra performance has been added. Quick thinking and an imaginative, positive response to financial challenges are proving to be the hallmarks of Stephen Langridge's artistic directorship. Funding cuts have meant that the 2023 Glyndebourne Tour has had to be cancelled (*Town & Country, March 1*), a blow for audiences and performers. Despite huge regrets

at not being able to take operas to Norwich, Milton Keynes, Canterbury and Liverpool, with considerably cheaper ticket prices than the festival, Glyndebourne is now offering an autumn programme of operas, masterclasses and concerts. Tickets will be at lower prices and start time 7.30pm, with a short interval rather than a long supper break.

The alfresco supper is a central feature of these summer festivals and there are a number of different ways of dealing with it. Given the unreliability of British weather, the safe option is to book a picnic table in a tent or



**Left: A music lover's perfect summer's evening at Garsington Opera. Above: The dazzling soprano Jennifer France will sing Zerbinetta at the Buckinghamshire venue**

soprano Jennifer France, who will be singing Zerbinetta in *Ariadne auf Naxos* this year after previously taking the roles of Susanna in *The Marriage of Figaro*, Marzelline in *Fidelio* and Princess Elsbeth in the Offenbach rarity *Fantasio*. Natalya Romaniv

**‘Longborough’s secret weapon knows more about Wagner’s music than anyone alive’**

takes the title role in *Ariadne*—she was a heartrending Rusalka last summer and a determined, funny Mařenka in *The Bartered Bride* in 2019, taking her frustrations out on a loaf of bread to hilarious effect, and Katie Bray, who won the audience prize at Cardiff Singer of the World in 2019, will be a supremely stylish Rosina in *The Barber of Seville*. You’re in for a treat if you catch the joyous Nardus Williams as Adina in *Lesisir d’amore* at Glyndebourne, James Newby as Purcell’s Aeneas at the Grange Festival in Hampshire or Adam Gilbert as Rodolfo in *La bohème* at Opera Holland Park.

The last-named, a London venue under the energetic and resourceful leadership of →

the on-site restaurant; lolling on the grass is appealing, but potentially damp and hard on the knees. And never under-estimate the vest. Men are usually warm enough, unless obliged to lend their dinner jacket to female companions wearing unwisely flimsy outfits, who invariably start shivering over the poached salmon and have gone blue about the lips by the time the strawberries are served.

The key to a good picnic is simplicity of preparation and plenty of different things to eat during an interval that is often 90 minutes long. A sandwich and a packet of crisps might be

straightforward, but will disappear too fast. Go for easy, grabbable and shareable—crusty baguettes, charcuterie, cheese, pâté, tomatoes and chunks of cucumber, grapes, cherries, a slab of good chocolate, plus flasks of soup and coffee, not to mention a good bottle or two.

One of the great draws of the summer season is the chance to hear up-and-coming singers in roles they may later take on bigger stages and internationally. Garsington Opera in Buckinghamshire has been particularly strong on this, offering early opportunities to singers, including the dazzling coloratura



Josephine Barstow voiced the Virgin Queen in grand style in *Gloriana*; this year, she will sing in *The Queen of Spades* at the Grange

## ‘The Grange has tempted the resolutely unretired Josephine Barstow to sing the Countess’

James Clutton, is a sort of city-based version of country-house opera. Having made a speciality, when in harness with his equally redoubtable co-founder Michael Volpe, of presenting overlooked *verismo* operas, Mr Clutton has scored considerable success with rarities such as Mascagni’s *Iris* (heroine sings an ‘octopus aria’ and winds up dying in a sewer), Cilea’s *L’arlesiana* (boy is haunted by a story about a little goat fighting a hungry wolf, jealous lover assaults rival with a sledgehammer) and Catalani’s *La Wally* (hero sets off an avalanche by shouting to his beloved Wally who, seeing him swept to his death, hurls herself into a ravine).

This year at Opera Holland Park, the company is in rather more familiar territory with *Rigoletto*, *Hansel and Gretel* and →

### Summer opening nights

#### Buxton Festival, Derbyshire

July 8 *La sonnambula*; July 9 *Il re pastore*  
([www.buxtonfestival.co.uk](http://www.buxtonfestival.co.uk))

#### Garsington Opera, Buckinghamshire

May 31 *The Barber of Seville*; June 1 *Mitridate*;  
June 18 *Ariadne auf Naxos*  
([www.garsingtonopera.org](http://www.garsingtonopera.org))

#### Glyndebourne, East Sussex

May 19 *Don Giovanni* (pictured in rehearsal); June 10 *Dialogues des Carmélites*;  
July 23 *Semele* ([www.glyndebourne.com](http://www.glyndebourne.com))

#### Grange Festival, Hampshire

June 8 *Così fan tutte*; June 9 *Orfeo ed Euridice/Dido and Aeneas*; June 23 *The Queen of Spades* ([www.thegrangefestival.co.uk](http://www.thegrangefestival.co.uk))

#### Grange Park Opera, Surrey

June 8 *Tristan and Isolde*; June 10 *Tosca*; June 17 *Werther*  
([www.grangeparkopera.co.uk](http://www.grangeparkopera.co.uk))

#### Longborough Festival Opera, Gloucestershire

May 29 *Götterdämmerung*; July 11 *Orfeo*; July 29 *The Fairy Queen* ([www.lfo.org.uk](http://www.lfo.org.uk))

#### Nevill Holt Opera, Leicestershire

June 11 *War Horse, The Concert*, with Michael Morpurgo; June 22 *La Cenerentola*  
([www.nevillholtopera.co.uk](http://www.nevillholtopera.co.uk))

#### Opera Holland Park, London W8

May 30 *Rigoletto*; July 22 *Itch*; August 9 *Ruddigore* ([www.operahollandpark.com](http://www.operahollandpark.com))



# Music

*Ruddigore*, but it has also commissioned *Itch*, a new work by the composer Jonathan Dove, based on the series of young-adult novels by Simon Mayo about Itchingham Loft, schoolboy scientist and element-hunter. The Dove opera *Flight* was a big success here in 2015 and this story, turned into a libretto by the dramatically dexterous Alasdair Middleton, is a spills-and-thrills adventure that should appeal to any age group.

At Longborough Festival Opera in the Cotswolds, the organisers have a secret weapon. His name is Anthony Negus and he probably knows more about Wagner's music, its interpretation and performance than anyone alive. Having spent much of his career assisting great conductors in the preparation of operas by Wagner, and others, he is enjoying a musical Indian summer of his own and, this year, conducts *Götterdämmerung*, with all four operas of the 'Ring' cycle to come next year. It's an astonishing achievement and he has developed a skilled ensemble of singers and players who do full justice to these most complex and grandly emotive of operas.

Another thrilling prospect is Tchaikovsky's *The Queen of Spades* at the Grange Festival,




**Wagner specialist Anthony Negus leads Longborough Festival Opera's offering**

where the company has tempted the evergreen and resolutely unretired Josephine Barstow to sing the Countess, reuniting her with the conductor Paul Daniel. Together, they created one of Opera North's great triumphs back in 2007, with Dame Josephine unforgettable as Elizabeth I in Benjamin Britten's *Gloriana*.

In this production, they will be joined by an extraordinary cast, including the Ukrainians Eduard Martynyuk in the lead role of Herman and Andrei Kymach as Count Tomsy and the Russian Ilya Kytyukhin as Prince Yeletsky, alongside the Armenian soprano Anush Hovhannisyanyan. It's a heady mix and should be very exciting indeed.

Buxton spa town is always a treat, both for its Peak District backdrop and its wonderful opera house, designed by that great theatre architect Frank Matcham and an ideal setting for Bellini's *La sonnambula* and Mozart's early work *Il re pastore* (he was a mere 19 years old when he wrote it).

Finally, there's Massenet and Wagner at Grange Park Opera's base in West Horsley Place, Surrey (*A future in the Arts*, April 19), with its glowingly russet-bricked crinkle-crinkle wall and garden full of apple trees. The company is presenting *Werther*, the opera based on the book that caused impressionable young men all over Europe to dress with dishevelled glamour and languish with unrequited love, plus that outpouring of love and illicit passion, *Tristan and Isolde*.  Henrietta Bredin is deputy editor of 'Opera'



**Don't forget your vest: the idyll is a warm, balmy evening at Glyndebourne in East Sussex, but this is England and it may be chilly**