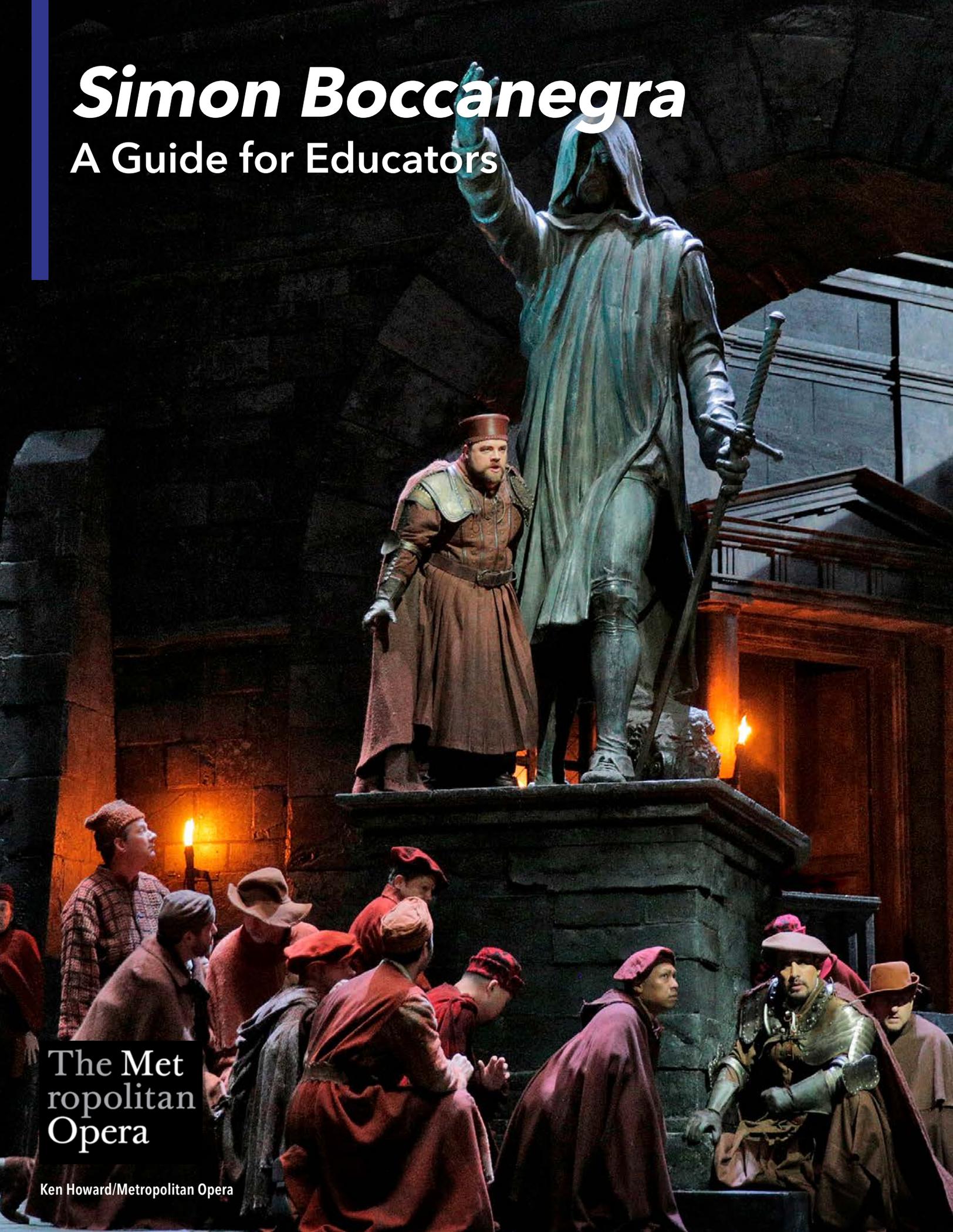


Simon Boccanegra

A Guide for Educators



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Opera

Ken Howard/Metropolitan Opera

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM *SIMON BOCCANEGRA*

SIMON BOCCANEGRA IS A STUDY IN THE COMPLEX POLITICS—AND BITTER HEARTACHE—that can arise when romantic love, familial honor, and civic duty place conflicting demands on us as individuals. The story of the first Doge of Genoa, *Simon Boccanegra* is thus absolutely typical of Giuseppe Verdi’s art. Myths and legends held little interest for the Italian composer (much unlike his German contemporary Richard Wagner). Instead, Verdi was frequently drawn to subjects from history: History told on a grand scale, to be sure—embellished for theatrical effect, its emotional stakes clarified and often raised—but history nonetheless. Verdi was supremely skilled at taking the imagined feelings of real-life historical figures and using them to create deeply touching, psychologically astute portraits of the flawed, all-too-human characters that walk the boards in his operas.

Simon Boccanegra is also a study in radical reimagining. The opera was not a great success when it was first performed in 1857. More than two decades later, however, Verdi would undertake a root-and-branch revision of the work, and it is this version (from 1881) that is most often performed today. The new version is a musical palimpsest, with Verdi’s mid-career style rubbing shoulders with his late manner. Yet despite this fractured creative history, the revised opera is widely thought to contain some of the composer’s most moving music. On the operatic stage, we see Boccanegra as both a visionary political leader and a loving father, and it is this double vision that gives the opera’s somber final scene (when the dying Doge must pass on his title and bid farewell to his long-lost daughter) its cathartic power. And thanks to Giancarlo del Monaco’s naturalistic production, which renders the grandeur of Renaissance Genoa in vivid detail, we feel as though we are witnessing the pages of history being written before our eyes.

This guide uses *Simon Boccanegra* to demonstrate how opera can turn obscure historical events into an emotionally charged drama. The materials on the following pages are designed to provide context, deepen background knowledge, and enrich the overall experience of this Final Dress Rehearsal performance. By presenting the opera in the context of the contemporary politics that inform its plot and setting, it will help students engage critically with the opera while relating the opera to other classroom subjects. This guide also includes biographical data about the composer, information on the opera’s literary source, and a series of activities to bring the opera and its music to life.

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THE WORK:

SIMON BOCCANEGRA

An opera in a prologue and three acts,
sung in Italian
Music by Giuseppe Verdi
Libretto by Francesco Maria Piave;
revised by Arrigo Boito
Based on the play *Simón Bocanegra*
by Antonio García Gutiérrez
First performed March 12, 1857,
at the Teatro La Fenice, Venice, Italy
Revised version first performed March
24, 1881, at the Teatro alla Scala,
Milan, Italy

PRODUCTION

Carlo Rizzi, Conductor
Giancarlo del Monaco, Production
Michael Scott, Set and Costume
Designer
Wayne Chouinard, Lighting Designer

STARRING

Ailyn Pérez
AMELIA GRIMALDI

Joseph Calleja
GABRIELE ADORNO

Carlos Álvarez
SIMON BOCCANEGRA

Elchin Azizov
PAOLO ALBIANI

Dmitry Belosselskiy
JACOPO FIESCO

Production a gift of the Estate of Anna
Case Mackay

Additional funding from the
Metropolitan Opera Club, the Annie
Laurie Aitken Charitable Trust, The
Eleanor Naylor Dana Charitable Trust,
and Mr. and Mrs. Paul M. Montrone

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ABOUT THE METROPOLITAN OPERA HOUSE



**Jonathan Tichler/
Metropolitan Opera**

The Metropolitan Opera is a vibrant home for the most creative and talented singers, conductors, composers, musicians, stage directors, designers, visual artists, choreographers, and dancers from around the world. Founded in 1883, the Met first opened on Broadway and 39th Street, in a lavish opera house built by a group of wealthy businessmen who wanted their own theater.

Almost from the beginning, it was clear that limited stage facilities of the opera house on 39th Street could not meet the Met's technical needs. But it was not until the Met joined with other New York institutions in forming Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts that a new home became possible. The new Metropolitan Opera House, which opened at Lincoln Center in September of 1966, was equipped with the finest technical facilities of the day.

Each year, the Met stages more than 200 opera performances in New York, and more than 800,000 people attend the performances in the opera house during the season. In addition, the Met is a leader in new media distribution initiatives, harnessing state-of-the-art technology to bring performances from the Met's iconic stage to millions of people around the globe.

This guide includes a variety of materials on Verdi's *Simon Boccanegra*.

- **The Source, The Story, and Who's Who in *Simon Boccanegra***
- **A Timeline:** The historical context of the opera's story and composition
- **A Closer Look:** A brief article highlighting an important aspect of Verdi's *Simon Boccanegra*
- **Guided Listening:** A series of musical excerpts with questions and a roadmap to possible student responses
- **10 Essential Musical Terms:** Musical terminology that will help students analyze and describe Verdi's work
- **Student Critique:** A performance activity highlighting specific aspects of this production, and topics for a wrap-up discussion following students' attendance
- **Further Resources:** Recommendations for additional study, both online and in print

This guide is intended to cultivate students' interest in *Simon Boccanegra*, whether or not they have any prior acquaintance with opera or the performing arts. It includes activities for students with a wide range of musical backgrounds and will encourage them to think about opera—and the performing arts as a whole—as a medium of both entertainment and creative expression.

In particular, this guide offers in-depth introductions to:

- The relationship between Verdi's opera and Antonio García Gutiérrez's play
- The real-life people, politics, and events that inspired the opera's plot
- Verdi's use of music to create entertaining and memorable characters
- Opera as a multi-medial art form combining music, poetry, stage and costume design, and theater technology
- Creative choices made by the directors, designers, and performers of this production at the Met



Marty Sohl / Metropolitan Opera

SUMMARY

Simon Boccanegra tells the story of the real-life historical figure Simone Boccanegra, who became the first Doge of the Italian city-state of Genoa at a time when warring political factions fought bitterly over the city's leadership. In a Prologue set 24 years before the opera's main action, Boccanegra is elected in the wake of a bloody uprising against the city's aristocracy. But he also discovers that the woman he loves—Maria, daughter of the patrician Fiesco—has died and that their illegitimate daughter has disappeared.

A quarter-century later, the young lovers Amelia Grimaldi and Gabriele Adorno are caught in a whirlwind of political and familial intrigue. Gabriele, the Doge's sworn enemy, is forced to make a harrowing choice when his beloved Amelia learns that Boccanegra is her long-lost father. Fiesco, meanwhile, has never forgiven Boccanegra for the death of Maria and is hell-bent on revenge. And Paolo Albiani, who helped Boccanegra become Doge all those years ago, turns on his old ally—with deadly consequences.



Marty Sohl / Metropolitan Opera

THE SOURCE: THE PLAY *SIMÓN BOCANEGRA* BY ANTONIO GARCÍA GUTIÉRREZ

It is undoubtedly to the benefit of the Spanish playwright Antonio García Gutiérrez's reputation that his two most successful plays caught the eye of one Giuseppe Verdi, opera composer extraordinaire. Gutiérrez was a struggling playwright living in Madrid when his 1836 play *El Trovador* became an overnight hit; seven years later, he found success again with *Simón Bocanegra*. Ten years after that, the dramatist became a household name across Europe thanks to the overwhelming success of Verdi's opera *Il Trovatore* (1853), which was based on the first of Gutiérrez's big hits.

When Venice's Teatro La Fenice commissioned an opera in 1856, Verdi must have felt reasonably confident that a second Gutiérrez adaptation would find favor with the ever-fickle Venetian public, and he set about adapting *Simón Bocanegra* for La Fenice's stage. Gutiérrez's drama, like many 19th-century history plays, relates a real-life historical event through a closely focused (and more than a little fictionalized) tale of romantic and familial intrigue. In this case, the historical event was the election of Simone Boccanegra as the first Doge (i.e., leader) of Genoa in the mid-14th century, an event that took place against a complicated backdrop of in-fighting between plebeians and patricians, Guelphs and Ghibellines. The play is unusual in that it features several male characters circling around one central female character, who serves as the lynchpin for the plot's labyrinthine twists. Indeed, Gutiérrez's complicated plot and lopsided distribution of male and female roles would cause no end of problems for Francesco Maria Piave, Verdi's long-suffering librettist, as he attempted to wrestle Gutiérrez's intricate tale into a concise, efficient opera libretto. The complexity was reduced by excising one of the acts from the original play entirely (although this caused its own problems when it came to the intelligibility of the plot). But Piave could do little about the gender imbalance, and the opera is noteworthy for having one soprano surrounded by a tenor, a bass, and no fewer than three baritones.

Whether because of this preponderance of male roles, the confusing plot, or the opera's melancholy tone, *Simon Boccanegra* was a bona-fide flop at its 1857 premiere, much to the composer's puzzlement. The opera was soon forgotten. Yet the story of *Simon Boccanegra* was far from over. More than two decades later, the composer was encouraged by his publisher to revisit the work. With the help of Arrigo Boito, who would go on to write the libretti for Verdi's late operas *Otello* (1887) and *Falstaff* (1897), Verdi revised his earlier effort. Act I in particular was completely overhauled, with Boito and Verdi inserting a new scene set in the Doge's council chamber that has no equivalent in Gutiérrez's play. In fact, Gutiérrez might have been disappointed to learn that this scene is now the most famous extract from the opera—the crowning glory of a hybrid work straddling two decades, two librettists, and two very different periods of the composer's creative life.

SYNOPSIS

PROLOGUE: *A square in Genoa in the year 1339*

The city-state of Genoa is torn apart by a bitter civil war. On one side are the landowning aristocrats, known as “patricians”; on the other side are the wealthy traders, known as “plebeians.” In an effort to bring a fragile peace to the city, Genoa’s leaders have decided to elect a “Doge” to rule the city.

As the election approaches, Paolo Albiani, a plebeian, tells his ally Pietro that instead of voting for the moneylender Lorenzino (who Paolo thinks is being paid off by the patricians) they should elect the well-liked Simone Boccanegra, a privateer (a sea captain legally empowered by a state to commit acts of piracy against foreign ships). Boccanegra is unconvinced by Paolo’s plan—until Paolo reminds him that, as Doge, he will be able to marry his beloved Maria, the daughter of the patrician Jacopo Fiesco and mother of Boccanegra’s illegitimate child. Once Boccanegra leaves, Paolo gossips with his associates, insinuating that demonic forces are what keeps Maria imprisoned within the gloomy Fiesco palace.

Fiesco emerges from his palace in deepest sorrow: Maria has just died. He blames Boccanegra for her death and vows vengeance. Just then Boccanegra arrives, hoping to see Maria. Fiesco demands that Boccanegra turn his granddaughter (Maria and Boccanegra’s daughter) over to him, but Boccanegra cannot: The child has disappeared from the house near Pisa where he left her. Without the girl, Fiesco refuses to make peace. Boccanegra enters the palace looking for Maria and is horrified to find her lifeless body. At that very moment, Paolo enters with a crowd and announces that Boccanegra is the new Doge.

ACT I: *The gardens of the Grimaldi palace outside Genoa, 1363*

Twenty-four years have passed. The civil war between the patricians and plebeians continues, although many patrician leaders have been imprisoned or exiled. Dawn is breaking, and Amelia Grimaldi awaits her lover, the patrician Gabriele Adorno. Gabriele arrives singing, but Amelia is fearful: She has learned about his political activity against the Doge, Boccanegra. Suddenly a messenger announces the Doge’s impending arrival. Amelia fears that Boccanegra wants her to marry his ally Paolo.

On his way out, Gabriele runs into Amelia’s guardian, Andrea Grimaldi (actually Fiesco under an assumed name). Andrea tells Gabriele an important secret: Amelia is not really a patrician. The Grimaldi’s real daughter died in a convent years before, and an orphan girl was found in the same convent to take her place. Gabriele declares that he loves Amelia no matter who her parents are, and Andrea gives him his blessing.

A trumpet fanfare welcomes Boccanegra, who tells Amelia that he has pardoned her adoptive brothers. Overcome with gratitude, Amelia decides to entrust her secret to Boccanegra: She is not Grimaldi’s real daughter. Instead, she grew up orphaned in a ramshackle house outside Pisa, visited every so often by a mysterious seafaring man ... Thanks to matching portraits of Amelia’s mother, Boccanegra confirms his dawning suspicion that Amelia is none other than his long-lost daughter, Maria. They embrace, ecstatic to have found each other again after so many years. Once Amelia has left, Paolo asks hopefully after his prospective bride, but Boccanegra orders him to stop pursuing her. Outraged, Paolo decides to abduct Amelia and enlists Pietro’s help to do so.

The council chamber of the Doge’s palace in Genoa

A meeting of the Doge’s Council is in full swing. The patricians press for war against Venice, Genoa’s longtime enemy, while Boccanegra tries vainly to argue the case for peace. Suddenly, the noise of a riot outside the palace disturbs the meeting: It is a popular uprising led by the plebeians. Crying “Death to patricians! Death to the Doge,” the crowd drags two captives into the chamber: Gabriele Adorno and Andrea Grimaldi. The plebeians angrily claim that Gabriele has killed their leader Lorenzino in revenge for

abducting Amelia. Gabriele, meanwhile, thinks it was Boccanegra who planned the abduction, and he draws his sword on the Doge. But Gabriele is stopped in his tracks by the surprising arrival of Amelia herself. She tells the gathered crowd that she was indeed kidnapped, but she refuses to name her abductor. A violent riot is about to break out, but Boccanegra defuses the situation by appealing to plebeians and patri- cians to put aside their differences. Boccanegra then pronounces a solemn curse on the anonymous man behind the abduction, and he forces Paolo—the suspected culprit—to repeat the curse back to him. The guilty Paolo is crushed when he realizes that he has just cursed himself.

ACT II: *The Doge's private room in the palace*

Paolo has discovered that Andrea Grimaldi is actually Fiesco in disguise, and he commands Pietro to bring Fiesco and Gabriele from their prison cells. Then he empties a vial of poison into a jug of water intended for the Doge. Paolo is desperate to ensure Boccanegra's downfall, so he devises a backup plan, as well. When Fiesco is brought before him, Paolo proposes a deal: Paolo will give Fiesco his freedom if Fiesco will murder Boccanegra in his sleep. Fiesco refuses. So Paolo turns to Gabriele, who has been listening, and tells him that Boccanegra is in love with Amelia. Gabriele is instantly consumed with anger and jealousy.

Amelia enters the room, and Gabriele accuses her of infidelity. Amelia tries to explain her relationship with Boccanegra without revealing that he is her father. Suddenly the Doge himself is heard outside the room; Amelia implores the furious Gabriele to hide. Boccanegra enters and sees that Amelia is upset. Assuming that love is the cause, he asks who her beloved is—and is horrified when she names Gabriele Adorno, his sworn enemy. Left alone, Boccanegra takes a drink of the poisoned water and falls asleep. Gabriele creeps out of hiding. He is on the verge of striking the sleeping Doge when he is interrupted by Amelia. Boccanegra awakens. As he furiously confronts Gabriele, he accidentally lets slip that Amelia is his daughter. Shocked by this news, Gabriele begs him for forgiveness. Boccanegra agrees—on the condition that Gabriele fight for him against his enemies.

ACT III: *Inside the Doge's palace*

Fiesco is released from prison. In the distance, a choir sings a wedding song for Gabriele and Amelia. At the same time, Paolo is being led to his execution. Fiesco, shocked, asks Paolo what he has done. Paolo admits that he allied himself with the Doge's enemies. But, he adds, he will have the last laugh—because he has poisoned Boccanegra. He also admits to having ordered Amelia's abduction. Fiesco is appalled; even Boccanegra, his enemy, deserved better than this.

Boccanegra arrives, suffering from the effects of the poison and longing nostalgically for the sea. When Fiesco emerges from his hiding place to confront Boccanegra, the ailing Doge at first does not recognize his old foe. Fiesco reveals his identity and prepares to take his revenge, but Boccanegra asks a question that makes him pause: Long ago, didn't Fiesco swear to make peace with Boccanegra if only he were reunited with his granddaughter? The missing Maria, Boccanegra reveals, is none other than Amelia Grimaldi. Fiesco is stricken to learn the truth so late—too late, in fact, for Boccanegra is dying. Amelia and Gabriele enter, but Amelia's joy is short-lived. Succumbing at last, Boccanegra blesses his daughter and her new husband, and with his dying breath he names Gabriele his successor as Doge. Everyone kneels to pay their respects as funeral bells across Genoa begin to toll.

VOICE TYPE

Since the early 19th century, singing voices have usually been classified in six basic types, three male and three female, according to their range:

SOPRANO

the highest voice type, normally possessed only by women and boys

MEZZO-SOPRANO

the voice type lying below the soprano and above the contralto; the term comes from the Italian word "mezzo," meaning "middle"

CONTRALTO

the lowest female voice type, also called "alto"

TENOR

the highest standard voice type in adult males

BARITONE

the voice type lying below the tenor and above the bass

BASS

the lowest voice type

WHO'S WHO IN *SIMON BOCCANEGRA*

Character		Pronunciation Guide	Voice Type	The Lowdown
Simon Boccanegra	The first Doge of Genoa	see-MOHN boh-kah- NEG-rah	Baritone	Formerly a privateer, Boccanegra was elected Doge by the people of Genoa. His lover Maria (daughter of the patrician Jacopo Fiesco) dies during the opera's prologue, and their daughter, also called Maria, disappears under mysterious circumstances. Throughout the opera, Boccanegra attempts to bring the city's warring plebeian and patrician factions together.
Amelia Grimaldi, born Maria Boccanegra	Boccanegra's daughter, in love with Gabriele Adorno	ah-MEH-lee-yah gree-MAHL-dee / ma-REE-yah boh-kah- NEG-rah	Soprano	Boccanegra's illegitimate daughter, she was brought up by the Grimaldi family after their real daughter died.
Jacopo Fiesco, also known by the pseudonym Andrea Grimaldi	A Genoese patrician	YAH-koh-poh fee-YES-koh / ahn-DREH-ah gree-MAHL-dee	Bass	Fiesco's daughter Maria was Boccanegra's lover, and Fiesco blames Boccanegra for her death. He is desperate to be reunited with his daughter's child.
Gabriele Adorno	A Genoese gentleman, in love with Amelia Grimaldi	gah-bree- YEH-leh ah-DOHR-noh	Tenor	A Genoese patrician, Gabriele is a sworn enemy of the Doge.
Paolo Albiani	A courtier, a favorite of the Doge	PAH-oh-loh ahl-bee-AH-nee	Baritone	A Genoese plebeian, Paolo pushed to have Boccanegra elected Doge. But when he is thwarted in his plans to marry Amelia, Paolo swears revenge on Boccanegra.
Pietro	A courtier, allied with Paolo	pee-YET-roh	Baritone	Pietro conspires with Paolo Albiani against Boccanegra.

- **1339** Simone Boccanegra becomes the first Doge of Genoa but is forced to abdicate just five years later. In 1356 he regains the title, which he holds until his death in 1364; he is succeeded by Gabriele Adorno.
- **1813** Giuseppe Verdi is born on October 9 in a small village near Busseto, a market town in the Italian province of Parma. His father and mother are both tradespeople: an innkeeper and an innkeeper's daughter. The composer is just a few months younger than Antonio García Gutiérrez, born on July 5 of the same year.
- **1832** The young Verdi, a promising musician despite a patchy musical education, sits the entrance examination for the Milan Conservatory. To everyone's surprise, he is rejected. Undeterred, he decides to study music privately in Milan.
- **1836** Gutiérrez, by now an aspiring playwright struggling to make ends meet in Madrid, writes a stirring Romantic drama called *El Trovador*. It is a huge success and makes Gutiérrez's reputation.
- **1839** On November 17 Verdi's first opera, *Oberto*, scores a modest success at the Teatro alla Scala in Milan, Italy's most famous opera house. But the next year, tragedy strikes. Verdi is midway through writing his second opera, a comedy, when his wife and daughter fall ill and die. The bereft composer is forced to continue working on the comic opera, but it flops miserably.
- **1842** Verdi finally scores a triumphant success with his biblical opera *Nabucco*, which premieres at La Scala on March 9. Among the cast is Giuseppina Strepponi, who will eventually become the composer's second wife. Over the next decade Verdi works tirelessly, writing at least one opera per year: He will later refer to this period as his *anni di galera*, or "galley years."
- **1843** Gutiérrez scores another hit with his historical play *Simón Bocanegra*, a highly embellished retelling of the Doge's rise to power.
- **1853** Verdi, whose status as the leading Italian composer of his generation is now unquestioned, writes his first opera based on a Gutiérrez play. *Il Trovatore*, an adaptation of *El Trovador*, premieres at the Teatro Apollo in Rome on January 19 and immediately becomes popular across Europe.

- **1856** Verdi signs a contract to write a new opera for the Teatro La Fenice in Venice. The composer is wary; his last opera for La Fenice, *La Traviata*, was received poorly. But he is confident that the new work, based on another popular Gutiérrez play, will win the public over. The libretto for *Simon Boccanegra* takes shape over the rest of the year, but progress is slow. Verdi is frequently detained in Paris for legal matters, and he turns to Paris-based collaborators to revise the words as he composes. Relations between Verdi and the opera's official librettist, Francesco Maria Piave, suffer.

- **1857** On March 12, *Simon Boccanegra* premieres at La Fenice. History repeats itself: The opera is received poorly, with critics reserving particularly harsh criticism for the convoluted libretto.

- **1861** At the culmination of a decades-long project of Italian nationalism known as the Risorgimento, the various states on the Italian peninsula are unified into a single Kingdom of Italy. Encouraged by the new prime minister to enter politics, Verdi serves in the Italian parliament until 1865.

- **1879** At the urging of Giulio Ricordi, the son of Verdi's publisher, Verdi agrees to revise *Simon Boccanegra*. The composer is assisted by the poet Arrigo Boito, with whom he is already working on an operatic adaptation of Shakespeare's *Othello*.

- **1881** The revised *Simon Boccanegra* premieres on March 24 at La Scala. While more successful in its revised form than in its original version, the opera will only become a firm favorite in the 20th century.

- **1887** *Otello*, Verdi's first new opera in more than 15 years, premieres on February 15 at La Scala. The premiere is an international event, attended by critics and luminaries from around the world, and the opera is immediately acclaimed as a masterpiece.

- **1893** The elderly Verdi, now 80 years old, astonishes the world once more with a second Shakespearean opera, *Falstaff*.

- **1901** Following a stroke, Verdi dies in Milan on January 27. He is buried alongside his wife Giuseppina, who died four years earlier. On the day of his funeral, 28,000 people line the streets. The mourners spontaneously begin singing the chorus "Va, pensiero" from *Nabucco*—the opera, nearly 60 years before, that sparked Verdi's long career and international fame.

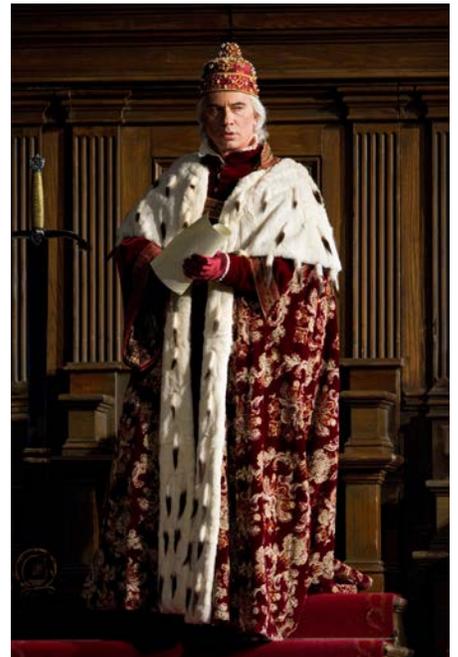
PLEBEIANS, PATRICIANS, AND PIRATES: THE POLITICS OF *SIMON BOCCANEGRA*

Simon Boccanegra is a highly political opera, dramatizing real-life rifts that tore Renaissance Italy apart. These divisions are most evident in the famed “council chamber scene,” in which the Doge begs the city’s warring factions to make peace. Verdi himself came up with the idea for the scene, which draws on two letters that Petrarch, a major poet and scholar of the Italian Renaissance, wrote to the historical Boccanegra. In his letters, Petrarch implores the Doge to put aside the war between Genoa and its longtime rival, Venice, on account of their shared Italian heritage. Verdi found Petrarch’s evocation of an Italian fatherland deeply stirring: In the 1870s, when the composer was revising *Simon Boccanegra*, the Italian peninsula had only recently been unified into a single Kingdom of Italy, thereby fulfilling Petrarch’s national ideal half a millennium after the poet had written to the Genoan Doge.

While the politics of Verdi’s time thus leave their mark on the opera, the real-life politics of 14th-century Genoa are far more evident in performances of the work. In particular, much of *Simon Boccanegra*’s story rests on the distinction between “plebeians” and “patricians,” and untangling these two terms aids greatly in understanding the opera’s plot. In Ancient Rome, patricians were aristocratic families that owned land, while plebeians were free (i.e., not enslaved) citizens of Rome. Certain state offices could only be held by patricians, but plebeians could be extremely wealthy and influential nevertheless. This social distinction was kept alive in Europe for centuries after the fall of the Roman Empire, including in city-states like Genoa, where the leading patricians amassed riches from the land they owned, while the leading plebeians built their wealth on trade empires. (Since then, the meaning of the terms has shifted, with patrician becoming a synonym for “upper class” and plebeian becoming a synonym for “lower class.”)

Another important political element in the opera, though mentioned only fleetingly in the libretto, is the dispute between “Guelphs” and “Ghibellines.” These terms refer to the supporters of two major powers in western Europe during the 1200s and 1300s: The Guelphs were aligned with the Pope, while the Ghibellines were sympathetic to the Holy Roman Emperor. Cities across northern Italy declared their allegiance to one or the other faction, and they fought often; some, like Genoa, changed sides multiple times. Generally speaking, the Guelphs were supported by rich traders (i.e., plebeians), and the Ghibellines were supported by the nobility (i.e., patricians). Somewhat confusingly, though, in *Boccanegra*’s Genoa the opposite was true: The plebeian faction was Ghibelline, while the patrician faction was Guelph. This helps explain some of the complexities of the opera’s plot. *Boccanegra* is a plebeian and leader of the Ghibellines. Fiesco and Gabriele, both patricians, are Guelphs. Paolo, a plebeian, supports the Ghibellines initially, but in his quest for vengeance against *Boccanegra*, he fights for the Guelphs against the Doge.

A final element of the opera’s politics is the threat of piracy. Before the opera begins, *Boccanegra* himself is a privateer—a sea captain, effectively a legalized pirate, employed by the Genoese republic to fight enemy ships. The operatic *Boccanegra* is best known for fighting back “Barbary pirates,” who attacked ships throughout the Mediterranean to capture prisoners for the slave trade, from the northern coast of Africa; in real life, it was actually Simone Boccanegra’s brother who was known for this feat. For Genoese patricians, however, there was little difference between governmentally sanctioned privateers and lawless pirates: In the grand ensemble at the heart of the council chamber scene, Fiesco despairs to see Genoa in the hands of “a corsair.”



Marty Sohl / Metropolitan Opera

The guided listening activities are designed to introduce students to a selection of memorable moments from the opera. They include an introduction to each excerpt's dramatic context, a description of the excerpt's musical style, and a roadmap with key musical features to listen for. intended to spark classroom conversations and prepare students to actively engage with the live opera performance, guided listening activities can be used by students and teachers of varying levels of musical experience.

IN PREPARATION

For this activity, teachers will need access to a recording of *Simon Boccanegra* and a libretto. Time stamps in the following activity correspond to the audio clips available at metopera.org/discover/education/access-opera/simon-boccanegra.

CLICK HERE FOR LINKS TO ALL AUDIO CLIPS

"A TE L'ESTREMO ADDIO ... IL LACERATO SPIRITO"

In this aria, which introduces Jacopo Fiesco to the audience, we hear a father broken with grief: Fiesco's daughter Maria has just died. Maria was Simon Boccanegra's lover and the mother of their illegitimate child. Initially, Fiesco lashes out angrily at Boccanegra—and at the heavens themselves—for allowing his beloved daughter to die; later, he finds peace in the idea that Maria is praying for him from heaven.

What to listen for:

- The striking *timbre* (sound quality) of the deep bass voice
- How Verdi evokes the atmosphere of religious music by imitating the sonority of the organ and integrating the chorus into the aria
- How Verdi transfers Fiesco's melody into the orchestra after Fiesco has finished singing

- (00:00) Emerging from a loud orchestral outburst, sustained chords in the brass section resound like a powerful church organ. Against this backdrop, Fiesco bids farewell to his palace, now fit to serve only as his beloved child's tomb.
- (01:01) *Tremolando* (trembling) strings convey Fiesco's emotions as he desperately accuses the Virgin Mary: How could she allow his daughter to be seduced by Boccanegra? Broken bursts of strings accompany Fiesco's confused retraction of his blasphemous thoughts and his plea for forgiveness.
- (01:36) *Pizzicato* (plucked) strings rise step by step to introduce the aria itself. Mournful, organ-like brass chords accompany Fiesco's doleful melody: His soul has been torn to shreds. At (02:17), the chorus is heard from within the palace: "She is dead!" the women cry, while the men offer prayers.
- (02:31) Fiesco imagines his daughter surrounded by angels. The key switches from major to minor to mark this emotional change, while the chorus continues to sing in the background. "Pray for me, Maria," Fiesco begs to the accompaniment of tremolando strings; it is unclear whether the "Maria" in question is the Virgin or his daughter—or perhaps it is both.
- (03:13) Fiesco repeats this final prayer again and again in a sort of duet with the chorus. The last time he sings it, his vocal melody descends to a cavernous low note at the bottom of the bass's range.
- (04:14) The orchestra takes over with a sustained melody in the upper strings, and the voice drops out: It is as if Fiesco's grief is beyond words. This impassioned phrase builds gradually in volume and intensity until a drumroll brings it to a climax, like a wave breaking. At (04:43) this entire tune is repeated, the tension drawn out even further. Soft, slow string chords bring the aria to a close.

"PRELUDIO – COME IN QUEST'ORA BRUNA"

The prelude to Act I is a musical portrait of dawn breaking over the sea, and it flows seamlessly into Amelia's first aria. Amelia is in the garden awaiting her lover. As her anticipation increases, she marvels at the beauty of the scene, but her thoughts also turn to a less happy matter: the death of her guardian. In addition to its simple, lyrical vocal melody, Amelia's aria is notable for the delicate, evocative orchestration of the accompaniment.

What to listen for:

- How instrumental music is used to evoke the dawn, and how musical ideas from this prelude are used to accompany Amelia's aria
- How Amelia's darker thoughts in the middle section of the aria are mirrored by shifts in the music
- The variations in the instrumental accompaniment when the first part of the aria is repeated

(00:00)	The curtain goes up to sweet, fluttery trills (quick oscillations between two adjacent notes) in the high strings, perhaps evoking rippling waves or the sea breeze. A song-like melody in the lower strings is answered by jittery flourishes in the high woodwinds, like birds calling.
(00:50)	A wistful melody for solo clarinet is accompanied by tremolando high strings, interrupted at (01:24) by rocking woodwind calls evoking more birds in the distance. At (02:06), more trills prepare the way for the aria itself.
(02:21)	The woodwind flourishes from the opening of the prelude settle into a lilting, triple-time accompaniment for Amelia's vocal entry. "How the stars and the sea smile at this first blush of day," sings Amelia simply, gradually climbing higher and higher in her vocal register.
(03:14)	Pulsing strings move off in a new direction as Amelia imagines the moment her guardian died. The chords underneath the melody slip and slide unpredictably when Amelia describes that "dark, cruel night" and the old woman's final words: "May heaven watch over you!"
(03:59)	The melody from the beginning of Amelia's aria returns as she thanks the heavens for bringing love into her life. Save for a few embellishments, Amelia's vocal line is almost identical to what she sang before, but the orchestration is enriched with new woodwind chirrups.
(05:02)	Dawn has broken, but Amelia cannot yet hear her lover's voice, which "wipes away her tears like the dawn removes dewdrops from the flowers." With this thought, Amelia's melody leaps up to a glimmering high note before softly coming down to her last note. Trilling strings ascend to the very top of their register, like birds rising on a warm updraft, as the aria comes to its close.

"PLEBE! PATRIZI!"

A crowd of angry people has invaded the Doge's council chamber, crying out for vengeance against the patricians. Simon Boccanegra steps in decisively to quell the chaos, appealing to plebeians, patricians, and populace alike to put aside that which divides them and to focus instead on what they have in common. At first, only Amelia joins Boccanegra's call for reconciliation, but gradually the other characters on stage and the chorus join in to form a powerful ensemble piece. Boccanegra's robust defense of peace and national unity would have resonated powerfully at the revised opera's premiere, since Italy had completed the long process of unification only a decade earlier.

What to listen for:

- Verdi's use of flexible melodic declamation to capture the nuances of Boccanegra's passionate speech
- How the chorus, representing the populace, is integrated into the ensemble
- How characters with contrasting vocal ranges are given melodies that allow them to stand out of the ensemble at different moments

(00:00)	"Plebeians! Patricians! Populace!" Boccanegra's impassioned pleas to the gathered crowd are accompanied by powerful string chords before being answered by snarling figures from the full orchestra.
(00:37)	Having gotten everyone's attention, Boccanegra continues more quietly as he evokes the sea, Genoa's true dominion. But the orchestra bursts forth again as Boccanegra condemns the people for their determination to argue: They are tearing themselves apart!
(01:12)	"I weep for you," continues Boccanegra, "since you are unable to see the olive branch blooming on your shores." The orchestral accompaniment is sweeter, with low woodwinds burbling underneath the strings.
(02:24)	The chorus, stunned by Boccanegra's righteous anger, begins singing quietly. Amelia, Fiesco, and Gabriele come in separately, each reflecting on the situation in their own way. The music builds and recedes like ocean swells, falling back periodically to allow Amelia's gleaming high vocal line to come through more clearly.
(03:22)	A more agitated section begins, echoing the less happy emotions felt by Fiesco, Pietro, and Paolo. But at (03:47) Boccanegra reasserts control. "Hear me cry 'love!' Hear me cry 'peace!'" Boccanegra exclaims, and the full ensemble responds passionately.
(04:26)	In a quiet <i>coda</i> (ending passage), the chorus and protagonists affirm the new emotional state they have reached. The music dwindles to a sustained chord over which Amelia's final high note transforms magically into a shimmering trill, ending the ensemble.

"UDISTI? ... VIL DISEGNO! ... SENTO AVVAMPAR NELL'ANIMA"

Paolo has just told Gabriele that Amelia is in the Doge's palace—and that the Doge is in love with her. This aria charts the course of Gabriele's reactions to Paolo's insinuations. Initially, Gabriele is almost choked with rage; he then falls prey to intense jealousy before finally despairing as he thinks of Amelia abandoning him. The opera's only real vocal showpiece for the tenor, this aria also grants the singer the opportunity to demonstrate his acting skills.

What to listen for:

- The three different sections of the aria, each of which receive strongly individualized musical treatment
- How the orchestral accompaniment evokes Gabriele's wrenching feelings of jealousy

- (00:00) A recitative sets the scene as Paolo lets Gabriele in on a secret: Amelia is in the palace, and Boccanegra has designs on her. As these allegations about Amelia and Boccanegra pile up, Paolo gets more and more upset.
- (00:42) An agonized outburst from the full orchestra reflects Gabriele's explosive emotions. "What torture!" cries Gabriele at the beginning of his recitative, delivered high in the tenor's vocal range. Such is his anger that Gabriele speaks in broken phrases, and the orchestra periodically interjects with drum strikes, shuddering strings, and blazing brass chords.
- (01:25) A snaking, unison string line descends into a swirling, sea-sick accompaniment pattern that conveys Gabriele's intense jealousy. Working himself up into a frenzy once more, Gabriele declares that killing Boccanegra a thousand times wouldn't be enough to satisfy him—a sentiment that brings forth an anguished cry.
- (02:10) "What am I saying?" Gabriele asks himself, slowly coming down from his outburst. The oboes and strings make tentative entries, but as Gabriele begs God to have pity on him, he cries out loudly again.
- (03:18) The strings set up a rocking, lilting accompaniment in triple time. Gabriele pours his heart out with lyrical fervor: If Amelia has abandoned him, he prays that he will never have to see her again.
- (04:40) Gabriele dwells on this final sentiment as the aria reaches its end, which is crowned with a final, impassioned high note.

aria

A song for solo voice accompanied by orchestra, traditionally used to express a character's emotions. 19th-century Italian arias often feature a two-part form that showcases an intensification of emotion from a lyrical first section (the *cantabile*) to a faster second section (the *cabaletta*). As Verdi's career progressed, however, the *cabaletta* fell out of fashion, and he increasingly tried to disguise this two-part form (or avoid it altogether). Most of the *cabalettas* in *Simon Boccanegra* were removed in Verdi's revision of the opera.

baritone

Literally "deep sounding," a baritone is a male singer with a vocal range between that of the low bass voice and the high tenor voice. Uncommon until the 19th century, baritone roles have grown in popularity in opera since the works of Verdi, who was extremely fond of this voice type and frequently employed it to depict morally ambiguous characters (or outright villains), authority figures (especially fathers), and sometimes both at once. *Simon Boccanegra* fits this trend well, as the Doge's relationship with his daughter Amelia is crucial to the plot.

chorus

A section of an opera in which a large group of singers performs together. Most choruses include at least four different vocal lines, in registers from low to high, with multiple singers per part. The singers typically play certain background roles on stage—soldiers, peasants, prisoners, and so on. In 19th-century operas, choruses often represented local populations, in which guise they have frequently been interpreted as metaphors for nationalist sentiments.

declamation

In the early 19th century, Italian operatic arias emphasized elaborate melismatic writing (many notes per syllable). After c. 1850, however, composers began to develop ways of writing arias that were more flexible and speech-like in their

construction. This style of melodic declamation, foregrounding syllabic writing (one note per syllable), was an innovative feature in the original *Simon Boccanegra* and is a defining characteristic of the revised opera.

ensemble

A musical piece for two or more soloists, accompanied by orchestra. Types of ensembles include duets (two soloists), trios (three soloists), and quartets (four soloists). Sometimes singers will respond directly to one another during an ensemble. At other times, singers will each sing to themselves as if the other singers were not on stage. *Simon Boccanegra* features multiple ensembles, including the council chamber scene and Boccanegra's death scene, which concludes the opera.

finale

The last portion of an act, a finale consists of several musical sections that accompany an escalation of dramatic tension. When it occurs at the end of an early act in the opera, a finale may create a messy situation that must then be resolved later in the opera. The council chamber scene in *Simon Boccanegra* is a good example, as the curse that Paolo is forced to place upon himself spurs him to take revenge in subsequent acts.

libretto

The text of an opera, including all the words that are said or sung by performers. Until the early 18th century, composers frequently set music to a pre-existing libretto. During the 18th and 19th centuries, collaboration between the author of the libretto, known as the librettist, and the composer became more frequent. Verdi was very demanding towards Francesco Maria Piave, the librettist for many of his mid-career works (including *Simon Boccanegra*), but he had a more collaborative relationship with Arrigo Boito, who helped him revise *Boccanegra*.

recitative

A type of vocal writing between speech and song that imitates the accents and inflections of natural speech. Composers often employ recitative for passages of text that involve quick dialogue and the advancement of plot, since the style allows singers to move rapidly through a large amount of text. Recitative may be accompanied by either a single instrument (such as a keyboard or harpsichord), a small ensemble, or the whole orchestra; as the 19th century progressed, however, orchestral accompaniment became the norm.

Romantic

A period of music history lasting from approximately 1830 to 1900. Beginning in literature and later adopted by composers, Romanticism reflected a newfound focus on individuality, nature, and emotional extremes. Music from the Romantic period often explores music's redemptive power, focusing on the sublimity of nature, love, and the mysterious. During the Romantic period, composers began to experiment with new forms and more expressive harmonies, often placing extreme technical demands on the performers.

tinta

Verdi often conceived his operas with a particular *tinta* (literally "hue") in mind: a flavor or atmosphere that made the music match the opera's setting. In *Simon Boccanegra*, the seaside setting of Genoa brought forth a particularly maritime *tinta* from Verdi, seen not only in those passages of the opera that explicitly seek to depict the sea (like the prelude to Act I) but also in the frequent use of lilting rhythms and wave-like patterns in the accompaniment to arias.

IN PREPARATION

For this activity, students will need the reproducible handout “Opera Review: *Simon Boccanegra*,” found in the back of this guide.

COMMON CORE STANDARDS AND *SIMON BOCCANEGRA*

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-12.1
Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-12.1d
Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.

ENCOURAGING STUDENT RESPONSE IN ATTENDING THE FINAL DRESS REHEARSAL

Watching and listening to a performance is a unique experience that takes students beyond the printed page to an immersion in images, sound, interpretation, technology, drama, skill, and craft. This performance activity will help students analyze different aspects of the experience, engage critically with the performance, and express their views in a respectful and supported environment.

The enclosed performance activity is called “Opera Review: *Simon Boccanegra*.” The reproducible handout for this activity, available at the back of this guide, will invite students to think of themselves as opera critics, taking notes on what they see and hear during the performance and critiquing each singer and scene on a five-star scale. Students should bring this activity sheet to the final dress rehearsal and fill it out during intermission and/or after the final curtain. When they return to class, students can use their “Opera Review” sheets as they review and discuss their experience.

FOLLOW-UP DISCUSSION

Students will enjoy starting the class with an open discussion of the Met performance. What did they like? What didn't they like? Did anything surprise them? What would they like to see or hear again? This discussion should be an opportunity for students to review their performance activity sheets and express their thoughts about the visual design of the Met production, the singers' performances, and *Simon Boccanegra's* music and story.

Simon Boccanegra forces us to ask difficult questions about our priorities: Is your family more important to you than your political allegiances? Or are your political convictions more important than your familial ties?

In the opera itself, Fiesco's refusal to accept his daughter Maria's relationship with Boccanegra is partly due to their being on opposite sides of the patrician-plebeian dispute. Paolo and Boccanegra, meanwhile, are both from the plebeian faction, but when Paolo is prevented from marrying the Doge's daughter, he turns against Boccanegra not only personally but also politically. Gabriele, meanwhile, does the opposite: He puts his political disagreement with Boccanegra to one side when he discovers that Amelia is Boccanegra's daughter. It is Amelia who forms the crucial connection in all of these cases, and she is in many ways defined by her relationships with the men surrounding her: Paolo desires her, Gabriele is in love with her, and Fiesco and Boccanegra both care for her as a daughter.

Your students will find it illuminating to dissect how these relationships evolve and change over the course of the opera. The following questions can serve as starting points for discussion; you may also find it helpful to refer to the essay "Plebeians, Patricians, and Pirates: The Politics of *Simon Boccanegra*."

- Fiesco's thirst for revenge against Boccanegra is crucial to the opera's plot. But do you think Fiesco's grudge is justified? What about Gabriele and Paolo?
- Amelia grows up in a patrician household (the Grimaldi family), but she seems not to feel the same political prejudices as her guardian Andrea or her exiled brothers. Why do you think this is?
- In the council chamber scene, Boccanegra seeks to unite Genoa's opposing factions. Is Boccanegra an effective politician? Why or why not?
- How might events have turned out differently if Boccanegra hadn't been elected Doge? Would Boccanegra be happier?
- Do you think Boccanegra did the right thing in passing the Doge's title on to Gabriele?
- Is the fight between plebeians and patricians still relevant today? What might modern equivalents be?

In conclusion, remember that opera is a multi-medial art form: Any and all aspects of the performance your students have just seen, including the act of seeing it live, are important factors contributing to the overall experience. Ask students for any final thoughts and impressions. What did they find most memorable?

IN PRINT

Abbate, Carolyn and Roger Parker. *A History of Opera*. Updated edition. New York and London: W. W. Norton & Sons, 2015.

- Two of the world's most famous opera scholars come together in this accessible single-volume history of opera from its invention to the present day, written for a non-specialist audience.

Budden, Julian. *Verdi*. The Master Musicians Series. London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1985.

- A scholarly biography of Verdi that considers the man, the myth, and the music in an accessible and engaging way.

Epstein, Steven A. *Genoa and the Genoese, 958–1528*. Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996.

- A more in-depth look at the city in which Verdi's opera is set.

Kahn, Gary, ed. *Simon Boccanegra*. Overture Opera Guides in association with English National Opera. Richmond, Surrey: Overture Publishing, 2011.

- An accessible guide to the opera containing both the original Italian libretto and a parallel English translation.

ONLINE

"Overview: The Italian City-States." YouTube video, 16:27. Posted by A Bit of History, June 15, 2017:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZLyzQO4t-xs>

- An informal but informative overview of Italy's fractured political map in the centuries before its unification, including sections on the Republics of Genoa and Venice.

Reviewed by _____

Have you ever wanted to be a music and theater critic? Now's your chance!

As you watch *Simon Boccanegra*, use the space below to keep track of your thoughts and opinions. What did you like about the performance? What didn't you like? If you were in charge, what might you have done differently? Think carefully about the action, music, and stage design, and rate each of the star singers. Then, after the opera, share your opinions with your friends, your classmates, and anyone else who wants to learn more about Verdi's opera and this performance at the Met!

THE STARS:	STAR POWER	MY COMMENTS
Ailyn Pérez as Amelia Grimaldi	*****	
Joseph Calleja as Gabriele Adorno	*****	
Carlos Álvarez as Simon Boccanegra	*****	
Elchin Azizov as Paolo Albiani	*****	
Dmitry Belosselskiy as Jacopo Fiesco	*****	
Conductor Carlo Rizzi	*****	

THE SHOW, SCENE BY SCENE	ACTION	MUSIC	SET DESIGN/STAGING
Paolo conspires to elect Simon Boccanegra Doge of Genoa			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
Paolo gossips with a group of plebeians			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
Fiesco mourns the death of his daughter, Maria			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
Fiesco confronts Boccanegra			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
Boccanegra discovers Maria's death and is pronounced the new Doge			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5

THE SHOW, SCENE BY SCENE	ACTION	MUSIC	SET DESIGN/STAGING
Amelia awaits her lover at dawn			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
Amelia and Gabriele declare their love			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
Gabriele receives Andrea's blessing			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
Boccanegra discovers that Amelia is his long-lost daughter			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
A popular uprising interrupts a meeting of the Doge's Council			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
Paolo plots Boccanegra's murder			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
Gabriele swears revenge			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
Gabriele accuses Amelia of infidelity			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
Boccanegra discovers that Amelia loves Gabriele			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
Gabriele threatens Boccanegra but relents when he learns a surprising truth			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
Paolo is led to the scaffold, and Fiesco is released from prison			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
Fiesco confronts Boccanegra one last time			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
Boccanegra dies, naming Gabriele his successor			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5