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in Vienna

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productions

New season,  
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# JONAS KAUFMANN

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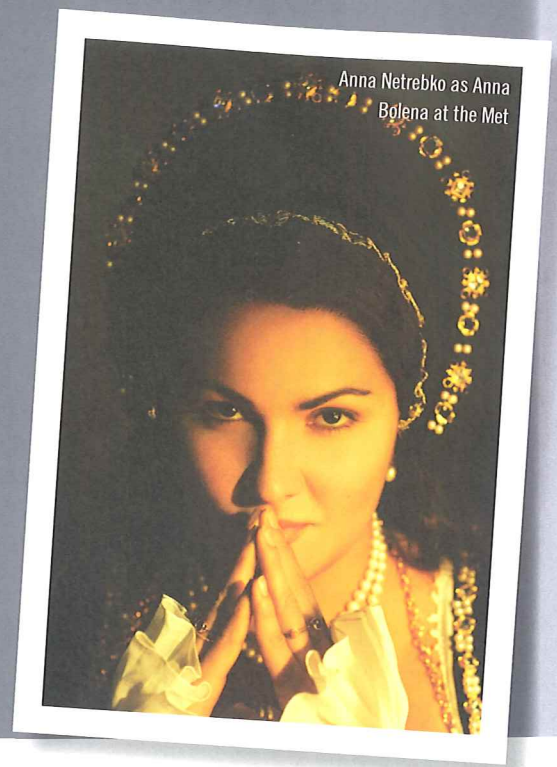


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# SEASON HIGHLIGHTS:

# USA

Five operas that top the bill in the forthcoming American opera season



Anna Netrebko as Anna Bolena at the Met

## 01 ANNA BOLENA *Donizetti*

Metropolitan Opera, Lincoln Center, New York  
September/October 2011 and February 2012

The sense of anticipation for this Met premiere eclipses even that surrounding the full *Ring* Cycle staged by Robert Lepage. The new production, by British powerhouse David MacVicar, opens the Met season and will be screened live in cinemas around the world. Donizetti gives a vivid account of the ill-fated Anne Boleyn, second wife of Henry VIII. Her confrontations with her rival Giovanna (Jane Seymour) make compelling theatre, and her mad scene is among the finest in all opera

### What to expect at the Met.

**Cast:** Anna Netrebko is the big draw here. She made her role debut as Anna Bolena in Vienna earlier this year, where she received standing ovations (see our Live Reviews section in this issue for a full report). In New York, the role of Giovanna is sung by the superb young Russian mezzo Ekaterina Gubanova, still in her early 30s, but already forging a stellar career.

**Director:** David MacVicar is much in demand at the moment. Judging by the pre-production photos of Netrebko in sumptuous Tudor garb, this will be a fairly traditional production, though with this director, tradition usually comes with a fascinating twist.

**Conductor:** Marco Armiliato is top of the rage as an opera conductor and has a particular affinity with the bel canto repertoire. He's very supportive of singers and brilliant at getting orchestras to accompany rather than overwhelm the vocal line.

### Go Prepared

There is a stack of books on the subject of Anne Boleyn. One that specifically deals with her demise is Alison Weir's *The Lady in the Tower: The Fall of Anne Boleyn*, packed with intrigue and gossip. For television fiends, there's the box set of *The Tudors*, a bodice-ripper if ever there was one. And for superlative music making, go for the Callas recording of 1957, recorded live at La Scala and available on EMI. As operatic introductions go, it's pretty unbeatable.

## 02 LUCREZIA BORGIA *Donizetti*

San Francisco Opera, War Memorial Theatre, San Francisco  
September/October 2011

Like *Anna Bolena* at the Met, *Lucrezia Borgia* is based on a real figure from the 16th century, but the events of the opera are even further from anything resembling historical truth. Poison, passion and complete mayhem reign in the aristocratic circles of northern Italy. Family secrets come to light and a horrible death awaits just about everyone.

### What to expect in San Francisco

**Cast:** Renée Fleming is star casting as the femme fatale of the title role, but there's an altogether terrific line-up, including one of Italy's leading tenors, Francesco Meli who recently partnered Netrebko in Vienna's *Anna Bolena*.

**Director:** John Pascoe's staging was first seen at Washington Opera in 2008. Pascoe is a master of the 'Modern Gothic' style in opera. Think '*Mad Max* meets the Renaissance'. It all has a very filmic air about it.

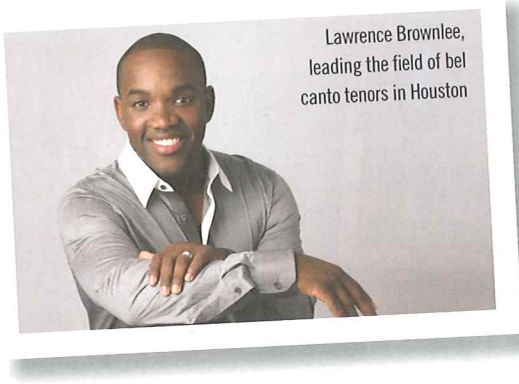
**Conductor:** The Italian maestro Riccardo Frizza is a leading name in European opera circles, but hasn't been much heard in the US until now. His superb *Aida* with Seattle Opera put him on the map in America and he's been snapped up by the Met too. This is his SFO debut.

### Go prepared

The opera is based on a French drama by Victor Hugo, but the best starting point is Royal Opera production featuring two legendary singers: Dame Joan Sutherland and Alfredo Kraus. This was recorded for TV by the BBC and is available on DVD in the Covent Garden Pioneer series.

### Feeling Adventurous?

Another highlight of the San Francisco season is the world premiere of *Heart of a Soldier*, commemorating the 10th anniversary of the September 11th terrorist attacks. The new opera, composed by Christopher YOUNG, is based on the book by James B Stewart recounting an extraordinary act of heroism in the Twin Towers. Thomas Hampson stars.



Lawrence Brownlee,  
leading the field of bel  
canto tenors in Houston

## 03 THE BARBER OF SEVILLE *Rossini*

Houston Grand Opera, Wortham Centre, Houston  
October/November 2011

*The Barber* ranks beside Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro* as the sine qua non of operatic comedy. It's basically the back-story to Mozart's opera, in which Count Almaviva wins Rosina's heart and steals her away from her crusty guardian. Rossini is brilliant at measured hysteria: you can hear the sustained crescendo of a heartbeat as comic adrenalin is pumped through the system.

### What to expect at HGO

**Cast:** This new production has an exceptional line-up. The handsomely ferocious Nathan Gunn is Figaro. Ana Maria Martinez is a gorgeous Rosina, with the sparky intelligence that the role needs. The young tenor Lawrence Brownlee is now prime property, just as virtuosic as Juan Diego Flórez and with more shades of colour in the voice.

**Director:** Joan Font is a hugely influential director in his native Spain, and he brings a distinctly Spanish flavour to an opera that's set in Seville. His Rossini credentials are proven – his delightful toy-town *Cenerentola* was a great hit. He will bring a sharp, colourful wit to this *Barber*.

**Conductor:** Still taking his first steps in what promises to be a major career, Italian conductor Leonardo Vordoni made quite a splash when he made his professional debut at the Rossini Opera Festival in 2008. Joyce DiDonato, who featured in the concert, was reportedly very impressed.

### Go prepared

An opera that really doesn't need any introduction: just sit back and enjoy the fun. But if you want to hear it at its best at home, try the superb recording with Vittoria de los Angeles, conducted by Tullio Serafin. It's available on the Regis label.

## 04 NABUCCO *Verdi*

Washington National Opera, Kennedy Centre, Washington DC  
April/May 2012

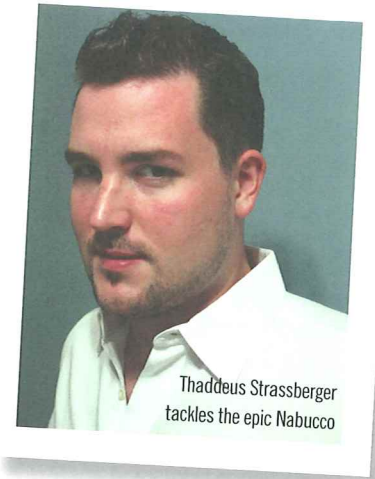
Considering the opera contains one of Verdi's most well loved choruses ('Va, Pensiero'). *Nabucco* crops up comparatively rarely in opera seasons. It's scope is epic, the casting is difficult, but this is classic Verdi, capturing the intensity of personal relationships at odds with extreme political events.

### What to expect at WNO

**Cast:** Baritone Franco Vassallo promises a fluent vocal line and idiomatic Italian style in the role of Nabucco. The Hungarian soprano Csilla Boross sings Abigaille. She has a big boned voice with plenty of heft and a fulsome, rather old-fashioned timbre that should suit this notoriously difficult role well.

**Director:** Thaddeus Strassberger is a young American director who manages to straddle the sometimes very different worlds of European and US opera production seamlessly. Strassberger's stagings are fresh and thoughtful, and he often presents us with modern parallels without being contrived.

**Conductor:** Washington National Opera's music director Philippe Augin is a very fine conductor who trained in his youth under Herbert von Karajan and Sir Georg Solti. The Frenchman stepped into the breach in Washington last year when then-music director Heinz Fricke fell ill. Augin immediately struck up an extraordinary rapport with the orchestra, and was asked officially to stay.



Thaddeus Strassberger  
tackles the epic Nabucco

### Go prepared

The biblical story of Nebuchadnezzar and his oppression of the Jews forms the basic premise of the opera. There's a very good version on DVD from the Met, with Maria Guleghina giving a barnstorming performance as Abigaille and James Levine on great form in the pit. Released by Deutsche Grammophon.

## 05 MACBETH *Verdi*

Boston Lyric Opera  
November 2011

Verdi sends out a pointed political message about the nature of power and the fight for nationhood with operatic high jinx thrown in as the hysterical witches brew up their cauldron of tricks. *Macbeth* is a curious homage to Shakespeare, highlighting the supernatural absurdities of the plot while brilliantly encapsulating the deranged psychological profile of its protagonists.

### What to expect at BLO

**Cast:** American baritone Daniel Sutin's career has been marshalled carefully over the past decade, and his Boston debut as Macbeth marks a major milestone for a real acting-singing talent. Carter Scott brings her considerable vocal resources to the monumental role of Lady Macbeth. She's actually a Wagnerian in the making, but this is one Verdi role which suits her impressively dark, powerful voice down to the ground.

**Director:** Based on an original production concept by Leon Major, David Schweitzer, a seasoned man of the theatre, stages Macbeth for BLO.

**Conductor:** British-born David Angus has found his stride in the US, taking over the music directorships of Boston and Glimmerglass in recent years. He has great clarity as a conductor and firm control over quixotic changes of mood.

### Go prepared

You should brush up your Shakespeare of course, but for musical thrills, track down the DVD of Claude D'Anna's 1987 film of the opera. Featuring Leo Nucci in the title role and the completely stunning Shirley Verrett as Lady M, it's undeniably gloomy but tremendously powerful stuff. **ON**