

Simon Boccanegra

dramma in a prologue and 3 acts

libretto Francesco Maria Piave

music Giuseppe Verdi

premiere: Venezia, Teatro La Fenice, 12 marzo 1857

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version 1881

PROLOGUE

A square in Genoa, around the middle of the 14th century – The struggle between the patricians and plebeians over the election of the new Doge is at its height. Paolo Albiani, an ambitious plebeian, confides in Pietro, a common man, that he wants to support the candidacy of Simone Boccanegra, a privateer in the service of the Genoese government, in the hope of gaining power and richness. Simone arrives. He is anguished because he has not had news of Maria, the woman he loves and with whom he has had a child, for some time. Maria's father, Jacopo Fiesco, is holding her prisoner in his palace in order to prohibit her from marrying Simone. Paolo convinces Simone to accept the candidacy (as once he is elected Doge, Maria's father will be unable to deny her to him). Paolo asks Simone to permit him to stay close to him during the struggle for power and its subsequent management. Simone accepts. Pietro asks the people to vote for Boccanegra. Paolo reveals that a young woman's cries have been heard coming from the Fiesco palace, and everyone fearfully observes that Maria has not appeared on the balconies of her home for some time and that only her father, a threatening and sinister shadow, has been seen moving through the empty rooms. Jacopo Fiesco comes out of the palace deranged. Maria is dead; mournful voices intone the Miserere. Simone arrives and implores Fiesco to forgive him and to bestow Maria to him. The inflexible patrician, who is more resolute than ever in his mortal hate for the privateer, sparks a hope of forgiveness on the condition that Simone entrusts Maria's child to him. Prey to a profound anguish, Boccanegra reveals that the child, entrusted to an elderly nurse in a distant country, has been mysteriously missing for some time. Every hope of peace vanishes: Fiesco distances himself and remains apart observing Simone who, exasperated, decides to enter the palace to find Maria. Shortly after, his desperate scream, «Maria! Maria!», is heard. It is in tragic contrast to the distant, exultant voices of the people acclaiming the new Doge, Simone Boccanegra.



ACT 1st

In the Grimaldi garden outside Genoa. Twenty-five years have passed – A young woman, Amelia Grimaldi, confusedly recalls her painful past while she awaits the arrival of the man she loves, the nobleman Gabriele Adorno. He arrives singing a love song. The girl says she is preoccupied for the young man's life as she knows that he is involved in a patrician plot against the plebeian Doge, along with the man who has raised her – the nobleman Andrea Grimaldi (whose name hides the identity of Jacopo Fiesco, who Simone believes to be dead) – and Lorenzino, a plebeian who has sold himself to the patricians. Pietro arrives and announces that the Doge wishes to visit the Grimaldi Palace. Troubled, Amelia warns Gabriele that Simone intends to ask for her hand for his favourite, Paolo Albiani, and she begs him to hurry their marriage. Left alone with Adorno, Andrea reveals to him the obscure origins of Amelia, an orphan taken from the convent where Grimaldi's real daughter died and given his name. The Doge enters, addresses Amelia offering peace to the Grimaldi home and asks her to tell him about herself. The girl confesses that she is desired by the perfidious Paolo, who aspires to seize the Grimaldi wealth. As she tells of her poor orphan background, she provokes a growing curiosity in the Doge. He presses her with questions and shows her a portrait of Maria, which is identical to the one the girl possesses of her mother. Profoundly moved, Simone recognizes Amelia as his lost daughter. He embraces her tenderly and reassures her that she will not be given in marriage against her will. Distancing himself from the girl, Simone asks Paolo to renounce her. Furious, Paolo decides to kidnap Amelia with the help of Lorenzino.

Council Chambers – The Doge asks his advisers' opinion about the war with Venice. He is sensitive to Petrarch's exhortation for peace and would like to avoid war, but he is violently opposed by Paolo and the advisers. Clamours of an uproar can be heard from the square. Simone appears on the balcony and sees Gabriele Adorno chased by the plebeians. Simone orders the doors to be opened to allow the contenders to enter and to be able to listen to their reasons. The crowd breaks in, Gabriele and Andrea are seized by the people who seek to revenge Lorenzino's assassination. Adorno declares to have killed Lorenzino because he kidnapped Amelia and states that, before dying, Lorenzino confessed to be pushed to the crime by a high ranking man. The young patrician makes it understood that he suspects the Doge and flings himself at him to kill him. He is stopped by Amelia, who comes between him and her father. She explains that she was kidnapped by three henchmen, that she fainted and reawakened in Lorenzino's house. Then, glaring at Paolo, she states that she can recognize the vile commissioner of her kidnapping. A tumult breaks out, plebeians and patricians accuse one another; Simone intervenes to calm their spirits with his authority, asking for peace and harmony among his people. Gabriele gives himself up to the Doge by offering him his sword. The Doge refuses before turning, with a terrifying strength, to Paolo, who he has understood to be to blame. After having confirmed the traitor's presence, Simone orders Albiani to join in the common execration of the coward. Horrified Paolo is constrained to execrate himself. Everyone present shouts menacingly «May he be damned!».



ACT 2nd

In the Doge's chambers of the Ducal Palace in Genoa – Banned from Genoa, Paolo wants to wreak revenge on the man he once helped rise to the Doge's throne before leaving in exile. After pouring a poison in Simone's cup, he sends for Gabriele and Andrea and asks the latter to strike the Doge in his sleep. The noble Fiesco refuses to comply with such a foul act, but Paolo does not stop. He evokes in Gabriele the suspicion that Amelia can be found in the Doge's chambers, and is a victim of his shameful attentions. Amelia arrives and tries in vain to convince Gabriele of the pureness of her sentiments for Simone without revealing her secret. Upon the arrival of the Doge, the young girl hides Gabriele on the balcony and begs her father to pardon him. Simone is perplexed and asks to be left alone. He pours water in the cup, drinks it, and dozes off. Gabriele approaches him to kill him but is impeded by the return of Amelia who, once again, comes between the two and beseeches the youth to hide the dagger. However, reawakening, the Doge challenges Adorno to strike him and accuses him of having stolen his daughter from him. In this way Gabriele learns the truth about Amelia's birth. Agitated voices are heard: the conspirators are assailing the palace. The Doge entrusts Gabriele to carry his peace proposals to the conspirators. The youth obeys and promises to return to fight at Boccanegra's side if the conspirators do not listen to him. The Doge offers him his daughter's hand.

ACT 3rd

Inside the Ducal Palace – The revolt has failed, the conspirators have been defeated. Before being led to the gallows, Paolo reveals to Fiesco that Simone is about to be killed by a poison. Mysteriously breathless, Simone seeks relief breathing the ocean air on the balcony, which reminds him of past glories. Suddenly Fiesco approaches him, revealing his own identity. The Doge responds to his propositions of revenge by revealing to him that Amelia is Maria's lost daughter. Emotion overcomes the old patrician who, too late, understands the futility of his long hatred, yields to Simone's embrace and, with voice broken with tears, tells Boccanegra that a traitor has poisoned him. Amelia and Gabriele enter, followed by the Doge's cortege. Simone asks his daughter to recognize Fiesco as Maria's father, blesses the two lovers and, after having proclaimed Gabriele Doge of Genoa, dies.