



Savonlinna Opera

The annual summer festival in lakeland Finland

7–11 July 2024 (MK 352)

5 days • £3,120

(including tickets to 3 performances)

Lecturer: Dr John Allison

Three operas at the renowned Savonlinna Opera Festival: Verdi's *Nabucco*, Wagner's *Lohengrin* and Mozart's *Don Giovanni*.

Productions here are musically and dramatically first-rate, in the incomparable setting of a medieval castle on an island.

Savonlinna is a pleasant, small town amidst the unassertive beauty of lakeland Finland.

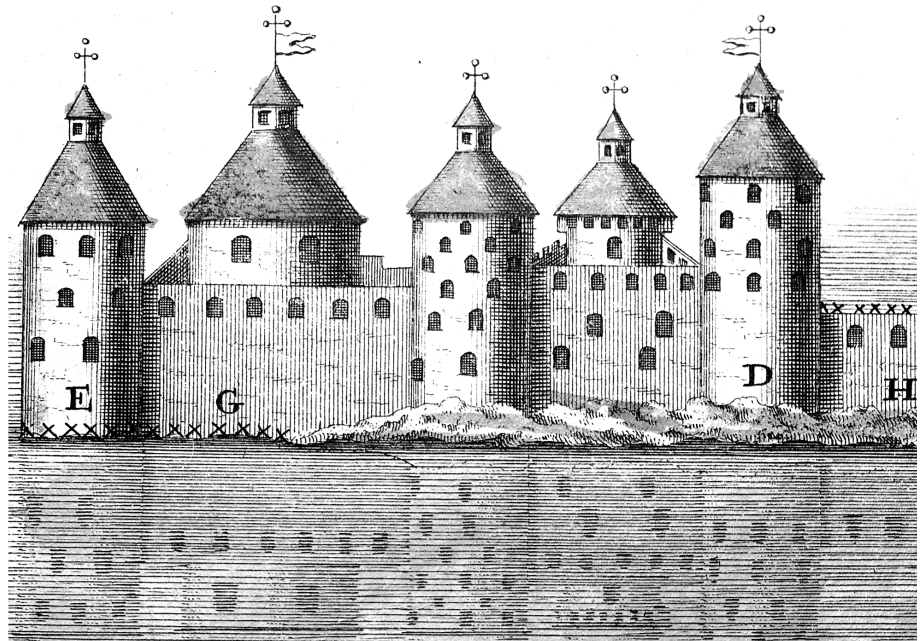
A massive structure of rough-hewn granite rising from a rocky islet, the castle at Savonlinna is the largest in Scandinavia. It was built in 1475 and frequently re-fortified during the next three centuries, for this was border country: Nordic occupancy alternated with Russian until modern times.

Opera has been performed here in the courtyard since 1912, so it even pre-dates Verona as a festival in a spectacular historic setting. During the last few decades its artistic achievements have placed this festival among the best in the world, yet its unlikely and rather inaccessible location keeps the number of international visitors well below what it deserves.

The courtyard is backed by a starkly beautiful wall of rough medieval masonry: its huge gateway and precipitous staircase make a wonderful setting for productions of operas. Musically, the acoustically-designed temporary roof allows both intimate scenes and vast choral ensembles to sound at their best. In all three performances, the Savonlinna Festival Orchestra and Choir – picked from among the best instrumentalists and singers in Scandinavia – will have the greatest opportunities to show their strength.

The lake district of eastern Finland is an area of gently beguiling beauty. Thousands of inter-connected lakes meet forests of birch and pine at an incredibly convoluted shoreline, the pattern varied with scattered patches of pasture and arable land neatly arranged around timber farmsteads. The scenery and pure air provide a restful and refreshing foil to nights at the opera.

This is one of our more leisurely tours with plenty of free time around a gentle programme of visits and excursions.



Savonlinna, after a pen and ink drawing, early 20th-century.

Itinerary

Day 1. Fly at c. 10.15am from London Heathrow to Helsinki (Finnair) and drive on to Savonlinna. The 200-mile journey is broken up by dinner in a manor house.

Day 2. After a morning lecture, visit the castle of St Olaf at Savonlinna by guided tour. The afternoon is free before an early dinner. Evening opera: *Nabucco* (Verdi) (sung in Italian). Rodula Gaitanou (director); cast to be confirmed.

Day 3. The morning is spent on a boat cruising through beautiful lakeland scenery. Some free time before a lecture and early dinner. Evening opera: *Lohengrin* (Wagner) (sung in German). Stephan Zilias (conductor), Roman Hovenbitzer (director), soloists include Tuomas Katajala, Karita Mattila, Sinead Campbell Wallace, Lucio Gallo and Timo Riihonen.

Day 4. Visit the Punkaharju nature reserve and the Finnish Forest Museum. Lunch is included here before driving to Kerimäki, the largest wooden church in the world (1840s). Return to Savonlinna for some free time. Evening opera: *Don Giovanni* (Mozart) (sung in Italian). Andrea Sanguineti (conductor), Paul-Émile Fourny (director); soloists include

Yuriy Yurchuk, Marjukka Tepponen, Frédéric Antoun, Henning von Schulman and Kristian Lindroos.

Day 5. Drive from Savonlinna to Helsinki for the flight to London, arriving at Heathrow at c. 5.00pm.

Lecturer

Dr John Allison. Editor of *Opera magazine* and music critic for *The Daily Telegraph*. He was born in South Africa and completed his PhD degree while playing the piano and working as assistant organist at Cape Town cathedral. Since moving to London in 1989 he has written for publications around the world, authored two books, contributed chapters to several other volumes and served on the juries of many international competitions. He has also held positions as music critic on *The Sunday Telegraph* and *The Times*.

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £3,120 or £2,840 without flights. **Single occupancy:** £3,560 or £3,280 without flights.

Savonlinna Opera continued

Included: flights (economy class) with Finnair (aircraft: Airbus A350-900); travel by private coach; accommodation as described below; 2 lunches and 3 dinners with wine; admissions to sites visited with the group; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer, tour manager and guides.

Music: top category tickets for 3 operas, costing c. £410.

Accommodation. Sokos Hotel Seurahuone (sokoshotels.fi): located by the lake in Savonlinna, this recently-renovated hotel is the best in town. It is basic but adequately equipped and with modern facilities. All rooms (including rooms for single occupancy) have twin beds and most have showers instead of baths.

How strenuous? We walk from the hotel to the castle, often on cobbled streets, for all performances (just over half a mile each way). The tour would not be suitable for anyone who could not cope with this. There is also a forest walk covering uneven ground. There are long coach journeys on days 1 and 5; average distance by coach per day: 86 miles.

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.

Combine this tour with: *Finland: Aalto & Others*, 27 June–5 July 2024; *Danish Art & Design*, 13–21 July 2024.