



Savonlinna Opera

The annual summer festival in lakeland Finland

6–11 July 2023 (MJ 792)

6 days • £3,370

(including tickets to 4 performances)

Lecturer: Simon Rees

Three operas at the renowned Savonlinna Opera Festival: Gounod's *Roméo & Juliette*, Mozart's *The Magic Flute* and Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia*.

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

A recital by Cuban-American soprano Lisette Oropesa completes the line-up.

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

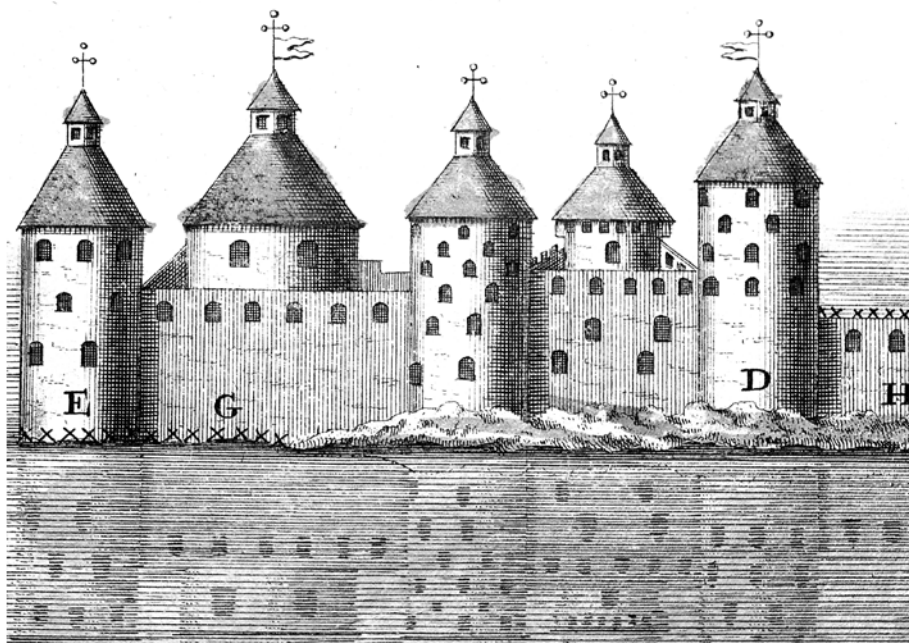
A massive structure of rough-hewn granite rising from a rocky islet, the castle at Savonlinna is the largest in Scandinavia. It was built in 1475 and frequently re-fortified during the next three centuries, for this was border country: Nordic occupancy alternated with Russian until modern times.

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 mediaeval 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



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

plenty of free time around a gentle programme of visits and excursions.

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: Roméo & Juliette* (Gounod) (sung in French). Yves Abel (conductor), Amy Lane (director); soloists include Marjukka Tepponen, Frédéric Antoun, Kevin Greenlaw, Sam Furness.

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: The Magic Flute* (Mozart) (sung in Finnish with English surtitles). Sakari Oramo (conductor), August Everding (director), soloists include Tuuli Takala, Johan Krogius, Anu Komsa, Mika Kares, Markus Schwartz.

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 recital with Lisette Oropesa* (soprano), programme tbc.

Day 5. The day is free with the option of an excursion to the small lakeside town of Sulkava. Here, walk the Vilkaharju nature trail (approx 2 miles). Late afternoon lecture followed by dinner. *Evening opera: Il barbiere di Siviglia* (Rossini) (sung in Italian). Michele Gamba (conductor), Kari Heiskanen (director); soloists include Ville Rusanen, Gayane Babajanyan, Vassilis Kavayas, Petri Lindroos, Päivi Pylvänäinen, Kristian Lindroos.

Day 6. Drive from Savonlinna to Helsinki for the flight to London, arriving at Heathrow at c. 5.00pm.

Lecturer

Simon Rees. A freelance dramaturg, Simon translates opera librettos for singing and surtitles and lectures and writes on opera, theatre, art and architecture. He is an Associate Lecturer at the Wales International Academy of Voice, and also teaches at the Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama. A novelist, poet and librettist, he was dramaturg at Welsh National Opera from 1989 to 2012.

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £3,370 or £3,110 without flights. **Single occupancy:** £3,880 or £3,620 without flights.

Included: flights (economy class) with Finnair (aircraft: Airbus A350-900); travel by private coach; accommodation as described below; 2 lunches and 4 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 and 1 recital are included, costing c. £440.

Accommodation. Sokos Hotel Seurahuone (sokoshotels.fi): located by the lake in Savonlinna, this functional 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.*

How strenuous? We walk from the hotel to the castle 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 are also forest walks covering uneven ground. There are long coach journeys on days 1 and 6; average distance by coach per day: 86 miles.

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.