

# THE COST OF SINGING

ANTONY FEENY ANALYSES THE ECONOMICS OF PURSUING ARTISTIC SUCCESS

How many of us sitting motionless and mesmerized in a darkened auditorium spare a thought for the circumstances of the singers whose voices we relish intensely but whose labours we often criticize so wantonly? It's so easy to forget that they've all invested years of sweat and mountains of cash to reach that stage. We all know the names of the highest earners because, like players at the top of the Premier League, there are so few of them. But for every one of those stars, there are hundreds of other football players or singers who may train just as hard, but never 'make it' to that level—and certainly don't earn as much as, say, an average investment banker. Yet in these uncertain times, that average banker is likely to thrive, whereas even the best and most successful singers face an existential threat to their futures.

Perhaps the performers themselves are motivated less by money than by dedication, as they pursue careers in diverse venues, companies and circumstances. Or perhaps not. And that's what I want to explore here—what is the economic reality of being a singer? How much do singers typically have to invest before they can achieve an adequate living? What can they hope to earn during their careers? And how satisfactory a career is it in financial terms? Whatever the future may hold for opera and its musicians after the pandemic, we should ask ourselves whether the system has been working as well for the singers as it has been for us, the audience.

## Why sing?

First, we must acknowledge that money is not what it's all about for most singers. There are many easier ways to earn a living—ways that don't require long periods away from home and family in dull hotel rooms, or career-threatening health worries, or never-ending training, or weeks of solitary role-learning, or extended intervals without work (even before Covid-19), or constant exposure to public criticism, or the extensive unpaid working time that is not typically required in a 'normal' business. The many singers who agreed to speak to me for this article anonymously, and on whose information I have relied substantially, have talked about singing as something they just had to do, about the pleasures of the job, the teamwork and the interesting challenges.

There are no typical singers or careers. There are different types of voice, paces of development, arenas (opera, concerts, recitals, choral, etc.), and locations, all of which combine to create unique careers. While acknowledging the inevitable generalizations and simplifications, I focus here mainly on professionals in the UK with some foreign comparisons and quote financial data predominantly in pounds sterling. My chronology covers four broad periods—training, initial career, mature professional career and later-stage career—before commenting on the overall financial benefits of a singing career. The career path and financial figures relate to the prevailing norms prior to the full impact of the pandemic in March 2020.

## Training

Most singers start young: in local churches, amateur choral groups, folk and pop bands. A combination of love of singing and ability may lead to more formal study, although diminished provision has limited the accessibility of training, especially for less advantaged communities. Some may enter specialist music schools in their teens for which some bursaries are available, but formal training mostly starts at undergraduate level, when costs can become substantial. Although older singers will have benefited from student grants, in England now most students take out a government-supported interest-bearing loan covering tuition (£9,250 p.a.) and maintenance (up to £12,010 p.a. in London), so a four-year undergraduate conservatoire course could mean a total (pre-interest) debt of over £80,000.

Many singers advance to postgraduate or specialist training, such as two years in opera or performance studies, which may cost at least a further £40,000, including fees of £11,500 p.a. and living expenses. This long period of study reflects the scope of what a student has to learn, including singing technique, performing and acting skills, and several languages. The cost may be offset by private donations and scholarships or bursaries administered by the colleges or trusts, without which the courses would be unaffordable to many students. Not all singers follow this formal route, particularly if they start late, and may substitute private training for some components, although most undertake some years of formal training.

Apart from any non-musical earnings, advanced singers may earn minor income from engagements during their studies, via private or college-facilitated bookings, with a handful of these each year at perhaps £200 each. The net result is that, after six years or more, prospective professional singers emerge with enviable vocal skills but with debts possibly

*A tale of artists enduring poverty: 'La Bohème' at its most recent Covent Garden revival earlier this year, with Charles Castronovo as Rodolfo and Sonja Yoncheva as Mimì*



exceeding £120,000. Although such a figure may be no more alarming than for a doctor, vet or architect, a singer's employment prospects are far less certain. Nor will all singers have acquired the skills needed to flourish as a freelancer, such as marketing, presentation, finance and resilience to critical judgement and rejections in an overcrowded market.

### Initial career

After training, some singers may immediately win fee-paying engagements, and may get taken on by an agent who typically takes 12.5 to 15 per cent of gross fees, depending on the engagement. For most, there are broadly four ways forward: Young Artists' Programmes (YAPs); *Fest* contracts; chorus work; and freelance solo work. The most sought-after break is probably a place on one of the YAPs that have been established by many leading opera companies, such as the Royal Opera's Jette Parker, Zurich's International Opera Studio, the Houston Grand Opera Studio or English National Opera's Harewood Artists. For a period of around two years, these YAPs provide coaching, performing opportunities, contacts and an annual stipend of up to £20,000.

*Fest* contracts are specific to the German-speaking world, but those countries account for around 40 per cent of mainstage opera performances and engage many non-nationals. They vary in scope, duration and remuneration according to opera house classification, but typically require a young singer to sing and cover (understudy) a range of roles within his or her Fach for 35 to 60 performances a year in exchange for experience, coaching and around €2,000-€3,500 per month—and some pretty hard work within a systematic structure. Despite the potential risks of such a relentless schedule, some singers keep renewing as they value the security of a reliable job and pay which can eventually double.

Positions in a chorus also provide experience and security. In the UK a temporary position in the chorus of one of the summer opera seasons, such as Glyndebourne or Opera Holland Park, provides valuable career experience and pays from £3,000 to £10,000 for three to five months' work in good conditions. Such positions frequently dovetail with, or lead onto, the fourth way forward, as a freelance soloist.

For many singers the independent freelance path is their only option, however tough. Some may receive no engagements for a year or more despite regular auditions; circumstances force others to accept solo engagements for little or even zero pay simply to gain experience, even though the Singers' Rate Card for Equity (the union applicable to UK singers) stipulates a minimum of around £350 per week or £270 per performance under the Opera Guest Artists Agreement (OGAA). The ability of unions to enforce minimum wage rates varies substantially by country and according to the relative proportion of singers in their overall memberships.

A few singers will get parts with fringe companies and concerts for local choral societies paying perhaps £150-£400 per engagement, and a luckier few will sing for better rates and conditions at established companies such as English Touring Opera. Meanwhile, all are likely to need occasional singing lessons to keep in shape, sometimes provided below cost by generous teachers (e.g. at £30 rather than £100 per hour), and will incur substantial expenses for auditions, both successful and unsuccessful.

Many are therefore forced to rely on other sources of income, that might be musical, such as teaching, or non-musical, such as table-waiting. Things are especially difficult



*Money in the bank: 'Das Rheingold' at the Met, with Eric Owens as Alberich, Bryn Terfel as Wotan and Richard Croft as Loge*

for voice types that may take years to develop such as a budding Wagnerian baritone, or for voice types that are more common and have a limited 'shelf-life' such as a high soprano. This Darwinian selection favours those with external resources or connections, mimicking the unequal opportunities in society at large, although many argue that talent will rise to the top regardless. A select few will win one of the prestigious international singing competitions, such as Operalia, Neue Stimmen or BBC Cardiff Singer of the World, which can give a singer a short-cut through their struggles and act as a sorting mechanism for agents and casting directors.

In summary, more fortunate singers may be able to earn over £25,000 p.a. at this stage, but the less fortunate as little as £10,000. After deducting costs such as travelling and accommodation for auditions and concerts, singing lessons, website, insurance, and (if applicable) the agent's cut, pre-tax earnings are likely to be substantially less.

### Mature career

Withdrawals from a professional singing career happen for a range of reasons, but a large proportion occur around this time, sometimes for career-related reasons such as lack of success or insufficient income, and sometimes for lifestyle reasons such as partners or children. Since the number of singers who have graduated internationally over the previous 30-40 years far exceeds the annual singing opportunities available, constant departures are an inevitable feature of the business and not (in most cases) indicative of a lack of ability.

For those who make it through their first three to five years and establish a reputation and track record, the situation becomes (slightly) easier. Those who continue will have become accustomed to the contractual practices which govern the singing business, several of which are detailed overleaf:

### Common practices in the singing business

Singers will regularly have to attend auditions, for which they incur significant expenses without reimbursement.

Engagement fees are paid in arrears. Whereas most freelance actors are contracted and paid weekly, singers are generally paid only after they've appeared and for those appearances only, regardless of preparation time. Some opera houses can take months or even years to pay, causing a singer significant cashflow problems, aggravated by the fact that many companies pay few if any expenses.

Major companies still employ a cover for large roles, for which a fee is paid under the OGAA, albeit seldom much above the Equity minimum of around £100, with chorus singers sometimes covering minor roles at a lower rate. External covers are less common in opera houses with full-time ensembles, such as in Germany.

Singers usually have to learn roles in their own time and sometimes will have to pay a coach at around £40-£60 per hour.

Most freelance singers are not paid for opera rehearsals. Some smaller UK companies like English Touring Opera pay a rehearsal fee of £450-£500 per week, which exceeds the Equity minimum of around £350; singers earning a performance fee higher than the cut-off under Equity's OGAA of £1,149 receive nothing. Some bigger companies will pay the equivalent of one performance fee for all the weeks of rehearsals, but most freelance singers are unpaid for rehearsals. And the governing principle is 'no show, no pay', so if a singer rehearses for four to six weeks and then falls ill, s/he will not be paid for missed performances.

Singers are usually unable to fill spare time with other work. Sometimes external performances are not contractually permitted without agreed 'NAs' (not available) or releases, and once they graduate to major roles their voices cannot easily sustain more than 50-70 opera performances a year, and that only for limited years. They may be able to do some concerts and recitals, but skills are not always easily transferable: a session musician needs particularly good sight-reading; an opera singer good language and acting; a recitalist a good memory; etc.

Freelance singers often start by believing that they can control their careers and choices and can choose roles on the basis of 'Kicks, Kudos or Kash' or 'Music, Money or Mates'. In practice, they are all too often in the hands of Intendants, casting directors, agents or others who control the agenda and cut them little slack. This may be unsurprising given that soloists, chorus and other singers typically account for less than 20 per cent of total opera house costs despite their importance to final output and to audiences.

Some countries have assistance schemes, such as France where unemployed singers may benefit from the Intermittent du Spectacle government-funded system, but in most places unemployed singers will at best receive only standard unemployment benefits.

The practices listed show that headline figures for performance fees are misleading. Singers do not just stand on the stage and sing for a couple of hours to pocket a tidy sum but have to pay substantial expenses, and any fee has to be spread over weeks of unpaid time. One singer told me that his engagement-related expenses would never be less than 50 per cent of his gross income, while another well-known international singer recounted similarly, saying that after also deducting tax, as well as agent's fee, travel and accommodation, accounting, medical and other insurances (substantial in America), and other charges, he would normally expect to see little more than 25 per cent of the total headline gross fee in his bank account.

While some singers specialize, most mix their work-types. Some sing primarily in choral groups, such as The Sixteen or the Monteverdi Choir. They earn £65-£120 for a three-hour session, but the workflow is unreliable and even at the top they are unlikely to clear £50,000 p.a. after expenses, with most earning considerably less. Earnings can sometimes match those of an opera chorus singer but are less reliable. Choral singing in churches is mainly part-time and occasional; in London it can pay £70-£90 per service, but outside London is mostly unpaid.

Jobs as chorus singers in opera houses are prized because of their comparative stability, although they lack further career prospects. Germany's 80-plus opera houses employ nearly 3,000 chorus singers (as well as some 1,200 in their ensembles), but only four British companies employ full-time choruses, offering a total of just over 150 positions. A member of a UK chorus might receive £28,000-£45,000 p.a. depending on the company, with the equivalent German company offering a slightly higher gross figure.

There are in addition temporary positions in the 'extra chorus' who appear as needed: these singers can receive £90-£150 per performance in the UK depending on the company and may be re-employed for further performances, especially of productions they've done before, which could generate £2,000 per run. Unlike the full-time chorus, they can expect only a few weeks' work each year with no benefits and are typically notified at the last minute about the following week's schedule, which makes childcare and other commitments difficult to arrange.

Ensemble contracts, where a singer joined an opera company on a full-time contract to sing a range of roles, were once common. They remain the norm in Germany, offering perhaps €45,000-€70,000 p.a. depending on roles and experience, and in Eastern Europe. In recent decades ensembles have gradually disappeared in countries such as the UK, USA and France which have found it cheaper or simpler to employ freelance singers, although people argue about possible consequential adverse effects on quality or local arts communities.

Singers may hope to be hired for the occasional recording, including for commercials, television and films. Such opportunities can pay several hundred pounds per three-hour session but are relatively infrequent and unpredictable. The days of lucrative recordings are long gone and buy-outs (i.e. where someone else exclusively owns future rights rather than the singers receiving continuing royalties) are the norm. Many singers, including those who are well established, also teach, which supplements incomes as well as perpetuating the art. Pay can vary from £40 per hour in schools or conservatoires to over £100 at the top of the private market, but teaching work can be undependable.

Many freelance singers will work both nationally and internationally, but in practice one or other usually dominates. The choice may be influenced by past training, by contacts in another country, or by opportunities; for example, a Wagner singer will find more roles in the EU than in the UK or the USA because there are so many Wagner performances in the EU. Those singing internationally may be required to pay into the appropriate national pensions system in each country, such as the Bayerische Versorgungskammer civil service pension fund in Germany.

UK fees are generally lower than elsewhere. Excluding the Royal Opera, which pays rates competitive with other leading international companies, a singer of a principal role at another major British company may expect £2,000-£3,000 per performance, with smaller roles paying in the range of £350-£1,500. In contrast a top-tier Northern European opera house might pay double these rates, albeit probably also deducting higher taxes, and even second-tier houses pay considerably more than the UK. However, a singer has to view the offer as a whole. For example, a European repertory opera house might contract a singer for a few performances split over a long period, whereas Glyndebourne might pay a lower fee rate but offer 15 performances over a short period so the net earnings after expenses could be similar. Performing in their own countries may also offer singers easier access to occasional concerts between performances, the fees for which can range from £400-£1,500, but again the gross rates are higher in the EU and in this case also in the US.

By this stage of a singer's career, differentials will have emerged for several reasons, including technical skill, luck and lifestyle choices. Those opting for a more secure but relatively scarce chorus position might expect an annual gross income of around £40,000 with few expenses. Singers with a more precarious lifestyle combining extra chorus, church, concert and teaching work will probably have to settle for less. Those singing principal or comprimario roles with established UK companies for half a dozen productions a year plus some concerts might hope to earn an annual gross income of at least £60,000 before (often substantial) expenses. A successful singer with an international career might aspire to a gross annual income approaching or exceeding three-figure thousands.

### Later-stage career

By the time a singer reaches, say, 40, it should be clear whether s/he can sustain an enduring career. The later stages can be particularly challenging for women: there is an absence of meaty roles for older lighter-voiced sopranos and voices can change after childbirth or the menopause, which can have an impact on careers and earnings prospects.

Many singers will have developed into singing roles in the heavier areas of the repertoire, such as Wagner. These generally pay more than other roles: they take longer to sit easily in the voice; most singers can probably manage fewer performances; and, in the words of one singer, 'danger money' is required to compensate for the demands they place on the voice.

A very small 'elite' of singers can command the highest fees, including the most widely recognized, such as Anna Netrebko, Jonas Kaufmann and Bryn Terfel. Select private events may even command six-figure fees because that niche market is prepared to pay highly, and this group can also expect sponsorship deals. One leading administrator stated publicly that major opera houses have agreed a maximum gross fee of €17,000 per performance even for star names; that is usually above a house's normal maximum

rate, and programmes will often list 'role sponsors' who make up the difference. Commanding such fees may be possible for only a limited timespan and could be compared with either an average financial manager receiving a similar figure, or to top sportsmen such as Lionel Messi or Usain Bolt who have trained for years and are rewarded hugely when performing under similar pressure.

Although the big names occupy the headlines, they constitute a tiny minority of opera singers. A few more singers who are outstanding but less famous can command fees exceeding €10,000 per performance, and quite a few more lie in the €5,000-€10,000 range, especially if 'danger money' is required. These too are gross fees before expenses, as well as (often international) taxes. Their number of performances is limited to perhaps 40-60 per year, not just by the need to rest their voices, but also because they often have to rehearse for several weeks, for which they incur costs and typically receive no direct fee.

The vast majority of singers will never reach those exalted pay levels, but still have the financial and lifestyle pressures, and in many cases the need or desire to maintain other jobs, such as teaching. The earning power of most singers levels off, and may decline slightly with age and a move into secondary rather than title roles. Singers at this level might hope to receive £2,000-£3,000 gross per performance for a principal role and up to £1,000 for a smaller role in the UK, with higher rates at the Royal Opera, and perhaps double for the same role on mainland Europe or in the US or Asia. The most successful

*Money matters: Simon Neal as Cardillac counting his gold, in the Opera Vlaanderen production of Hindemith's opera last year*



British singers might hope to net around £50,000 per year after tax and expenses, compared to the mean average annual earnings of all UK employees of £30,600 (or median average of £24,900) calculated by the UK's Office for National Statistics. Many 'ordinary' singers may still struggle to reach even those average figures.

### The financial return

The reader could infer from this simple chronology that singing is a career like accounting or marketing where there is a natural career progression path stretching from graduation to retirement. In reality singers deal with an unpredictable vocal instrument, and even if they maintain disciplined behaviours, they can suffer sickness and vocal problems. In addition to incurring high medical costs, at the extreme these problems can threaten their careers, not to mention their hopes of accumulating sufficient financial resources for retirement.

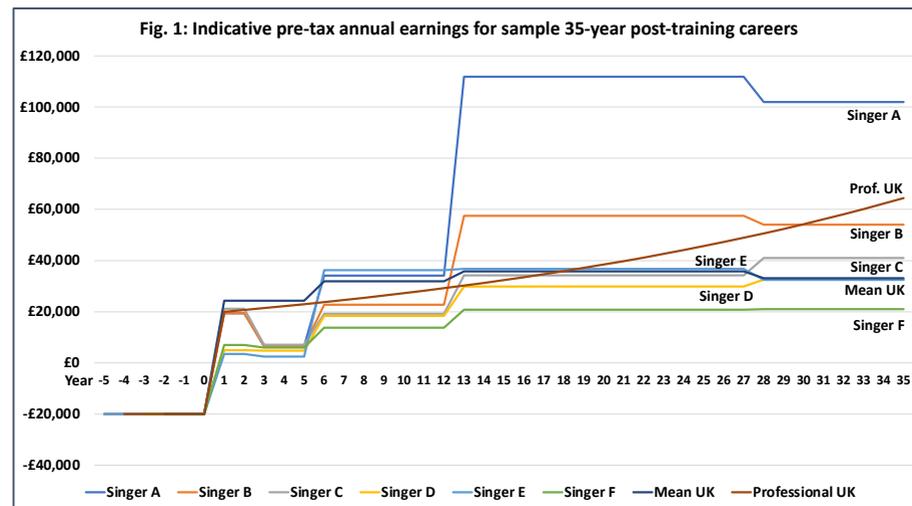
Singing may be a vocation that conveys immeasurable artistic pleasure to society as well as personal satisfaction, but individual singers have to make a living and have as much right to a reasonable remuneration as any other workers. Like other workers, however, they are also the victims or beneficiaries of other trends in the labour market, such as widespread cost-lowering outsourcing and the issue of 'winner takes all'.

It is impossible adequately to reflect and analyse the diverse nature of singers' earnings, but for illustrative purposes I have constructed six theoretical career profiles for UK-based singers drawing on the income data already presented, with broad assumptions about career stages and mix of income sources. It is inevitable that the income of any particular singer will be either above or below these figures, often substantially. Figures reflect current prices and assume a 35-year career after four to six years' training, and include two non-musical comparisons (with three to five years' training).

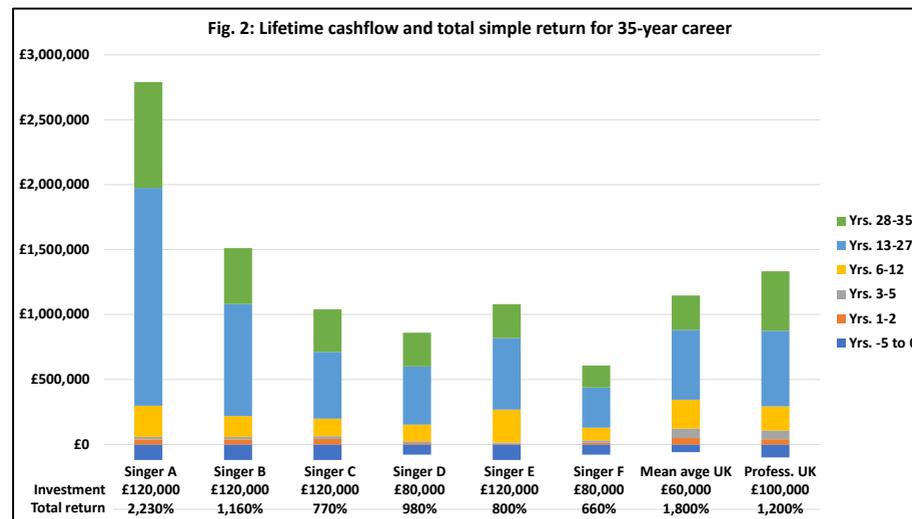
#### Six singing career profiles with two comparisons

- Singer A: Principal soloist, primarily in opera outside the UK
- Singer B: Principal soloist, primarily in opera in the UK
- Singer C: Comprimario/soloist, with occasional principal roles and some teaching
- Singer D: Soloist performing a mixture of opera, concerts, recitals
- Singer E: Full-time chorus member from relatively early in career
- Singer F: Mixed career including extra chorus, teaching and miscellaneous work
- Mean average UK: The mean average UK pre-tax income for comparable age bands (from UK's ONS)
- Professional UK: An assumed UK professional pre-tax salary increasing throughout at 3.5 per cent p.a.

These six profiles have decreasing levels of earnings from Singer A (high) to F (low). It is impossible to quantify the numbers of singers in each profile, although there are likely to be far more in the lower-earning profiles. The diagram (Fig. 1) maps possible annual pre-tax earnings over a 35-year period in current prices with stepped remuneration corresponding roughly to the categories discussed earlier but with a split later career, and assumes a deduction of 40 per cent for pre-tax expenses.



Evaluating rates of return for singers on their investment in training is no more straightforward. If you were to invest £100,000 in a financial instrument that provided an annual yield for 35 years at HM Treasury's 'Green Book' long-term project investment rate of 3.5 per cent, by the end it would have become £333,000—a total return of 233 per cent. On the other hand, Singer A would end up with a total lifetime cash flow of £2,671,000 from her top international career, or a total return of 2,230 per cent on her investment of £120,000; even the mean average UK worker would have ended up with more (£1,086,000 or 1,800 per cent) than Singers C-F, with the last managing only £528,000 or 660 per cent over a 35-year career, as illustrated in Fig. 2 below. It would appear from this (admittedly simplistic) calculation that few singers fare much better than the average worker, at least in the UK.



## Conclusion

So would you advise a young relative to become an opera singer? If you're a financial adviser, unlikely. If you're the proverbial bohemian, you'd say follow your heart regardless. The views of most of us probably lie somewhere between those extremes. No singer to whom I spoke had regrets, but one commented that the best piece of advice she received was to acquire an additional marketable skill. So perhaps a wise direction for singers entering a market that was saturated with talent even before the outbreak of Covid-19—and is considerably more uncertain in a pandemic-afflicted world—is to get that IT degree first, and then think about becoming a singer.

The rest of us may have mixed feelings. We may be concerned that we enjoy the results of what for many singers is a risky investment and insecure lifestyle. On the other hand, no one is forcing singers to choose a career which much of society may see as less than essential. The evidence shows that even in the pre-Covid-19 era, singing could be a precarious existence requiring significant investment and uncertain returns, and may turn out to be even more so in the future. The cost of pursuing artistic success (however defined) can be roughly quantified, but the benefits to the singer, to audiences, and to wider society are difficult to quantify or appreciate.

## OBITUARIES

### Vytautas Barkauskas

Lithuanian composer, in Vilnius, on April 25, aged 89. Born in Kaunas on 25 March 1931, he studied music and mathematics and by the 1960s had established himself as one of Lithuania's leading avant-garde composers. He wrote in most genres and his output included the three-act opera *Legend About Love* (1975), based on Nâzim Hikmet's drama.

### Aldo Filistad

Italian tenor, in Taormina, on May 20, aged 84. Born in Taormina on 14 December 1935, he studied locally and in Milan before moving to France as a young man. In 1962 he appeared in the premiere of Gilbert Bécaud's *L'Opéra d'Aran* at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées. His lyrical tenor was well suited to French and Italian repertoire, and Vincent in Gounod's *Mireille* became something of a calling card. He sang Alfredo, the Duke of Mantua and

Rodolfo and later added heavier parts including Pinkerton, Radames and Enzo Grimaldi; French operetta was also a speciality. He sang widely across western Europe, as well as in Bogotá.

### Zamile Gantana

South African baritone and choral conductor, in Cape Town, on July 15, aged 47. A victim of Covid-19, Gantana was born in Kimberley in 1973 and moved to Cape Town to study music and opera. A well-liked figure, he was conductor of the Hout Bay Ingoma Choir and had been a founding member of the Isango Ensemble, with whom he toured internationally.

### Sally Jacobs

British stage designer, in London, on August 1, aged 87. Particularly admired for her designs for productions by Peter Brook, Sally Jacobs enjoyed a close association with the Royal Shakespeare

Company but worked on a number of opera productions too. Born in Whitechapel, London, on 5 November 1932, she studied at St Martin's School of Art and the Central School of Arts and Crafts. She lived in the USA from 1967 to 1982. She had been designing—often making a powerful impact on shows—for over two decades when she made her debut in opera with Andrei Serban's *Turandot*, which began its long life at Covent Garden in 1984. She followed it there with another Serban staging, *Fidelio* in 1986, and at ENO she designed *Yevgeny Onegin* (1989) for Graham Vick and *Die Soldaten* (1996) for David Freeman. She also designed *Die Fledermaus* for the Paris Opéra.

### Bernard Ładysz

Polish bass, in Warsaw, on July 25, aged 98. The high-level state announcement of the death of one of the great Polish singers of the postwar period, just a day after his 98th birthday, was an indication of Bernard Ładysz's national stature. Although he enjoyed international success and was widely admired for the timbre—dark yet smooth, of the deepest velvet—of his bass, he devoted most of his career to Poland and was cherished in later life as an actor and remembered earlier for a brave wartime record. Born in Vilnius on 24 July 1922, he became a member of the Polish resistance during World War II, only to be sent to the Siberian gulag (1944-6) for refusing to swear an oath to the Red Army. He resumed vocal studies in Warsaw and made his stage debut as Gremi in 1950 at Warsaw's Teatr Wielki, where he remained a member of the company for almost 30 years.

Winning first prize in the 1956 Viotti Competition in Vercelli, he went on to sing in several major Italian houses, first



Bernard Ładysz

in Palermo and also in Parma and Naples. He appeared at the Bolshoy in Moscow. In 1959 Tullio Serafin invited him to sing Raimondo on his recording of *Lucia di Lammermoor* with Maria Callas. His major roles included the Grand Inquisitor and Philip II, Méphistophélès and Boris Godunov. In Polish repertoire he sang (and recorded) several Moniuszko roles, the Archbishop in *King Roger*, Zygmunt August in Tadeusz Szeligowski's *The Scholars' Revolt* and Priam in Witold Rudziński's *Dismissal of the Greek Envoys*, and he created Father Barré in the premiere of Penderecki's *Devils of Loudun* in Hamburg in 1969. An outstanding actor, Ładysz also appeared in many films, including Andrzej Wajda's *The Promised Land*.

### Camil Marinescu

Romanian conductor, in Bucharest, on July 27, aged 55. Born in Bucharest on 29 September 1964, Marinescu studied bassoon before taking up conducting. Principal conductor of the George Enescu Philharmonic in Bucharest from 2012 to 2019, he also worked around the world. In opera, he spent a decade from 1993 onwards as resident conductor of the National Opera in Bucharest. He died of Covid-19.