

SILVIA HRONCOVÁ

Director of the National Theatre Opera and State Opera

The National Theatre to round off the season with a Verdi blockbuster – *Nabucco* directed by José Cura

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The new National Theatre production of Verdi's *Nabucco* will be premiered on **28 June 2018** at the Karlín Music Theatre, which has temporarily hosted State Opera performances during the time of its current refurbishment. The State Opera Orchestra and Chorus will be conducted by **Andreas Sebastian Weiser**, the music director of the State Opera. The production's direction has been undertaken by **José Cura**, who has also created the sets and lighting, while the costumes have been designed by **Silvia Cullazuol**. The lead roles have been assigned to **Martin Bárta** and **Miguelangelo Cavalcanti** (*Nabucco*), **Anda-Louise Bogza** and **Kristina Kolar** (*Abigaile*), **Veronika Hajnová**, **Ester Pavlů** and **Jana Sýkorová** (*Fenena*), **Jaroslav Březina**, **Martin Šrejma** and **Josef Moravec** (*Ismaele*), **Oleg Korotkov**, **Jiří Sulženko** and **Roman Vocel** (*Zaccaria*).

The opera *Nabucco*, treating the Old Testament story of Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon (c. 630–562 BC), became a hit immediately in the wake of its first night, on 9 March 1842 at the La Scala in Milan. Even those not overly fond of the opera genre know the melody of the Chorus of the Hebrew Slaves, *Va, pensiero* (Fly, thought), the best-known number of the opera, which so enchanted the premiere audience that they demanded that it be sung again. Similar was the response of the spectators at the following performances at our opera houses.

Noteworthy is the fact that *Nabucco* is only the third opera Verdi wrote. "It is a work of a young composer, who by experimenting with music outlined the future," said the new Prague production's director, José Cura, who besides singing has for years devoted to other artistic disciplines, including conducting, composing, stage direction, photography and nurturing young talent. "*Nabucco* marked the beginning of Verdi's new operatic style. Even though one can identify the influence of Donizetti, Bellini and Rossini, the purely virtuoso bel canto passages gave way to arias and ensembles serving to enhance the dramatic tension and drift. *Nabucco* is above all important because we can anticipate what Verdi would be like in the future. It is a kind of road map of opera. Without *Nabucco*, Verdi would not have written *Otello*."

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In the opera, Verdi for the very first time rendered the father-daughter relationship and assigned the lead role to a baritone, which would be typical of and frequent in his subsequent works.

Nabucco ranks among the most often staged and most popular operas in general, as also confirmed by Martin Bárta, who portrays the title role in the new production: “The part of Nabucco has been the one I have most frequently performed over the past few years. It affords a splendid opportunity for the singer to showcase his ability to express a variety of emotions, ranging from drama to innermost feelings. The role is a test of the artist’s prowess and skills. The character of Nabucco undergoes a compelling psychological development, from a haughty ruler, through a confused prisoner, to a humble man at the very end, a man who strives to appease and unite everyone.”

The opera’s seminal character is Abigaile, the driving force of the action, who, similarly to Nabucco, undergoes an immense transformation. The first to have sung the role was Giuseppina Streponi, Verdi’s future wife.

The costumes for the new production have been created by the Italian designer Silvia Cullazuol: “When designing the sets and costumes, we drew inspiration from Wassily Kandinsky’s paintings. According to his theory of colours, the art and soul influence one another. Kandinsky claimed that the soul is a piano with many strings, with its keys being colours, the hammers hitting the strings being the audience’s eyes and the artist is the hands playing the keys. Accordingly, the artist plays melodies by means of colours, touching the strings in the soul of every person, everyone who looks at and listens to the work of art. And we draw upon this concept, which means that the stage is a blank sheet, moving in the geometrical space, as we use the turntable. Theoretically, there is actually no need for changes of scene, curtain rises, we could have a continuous succession, within which the characters would tell their stories through their costumes and, above all, their colours.”

Silvia Cullazuol has collaborated with José Cura as a stage direction assistant and costume designer since 2006. The projects on which they have worked together include productions of *La commedia è finita* in Rijeka, *Samson et Dalila* in Karlsruhe (2010), *Otello* at the Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires and, most recently, *Peter Grimes* in Bonn.

The State Opera company had its first opportunity to co-operate with José Cura in the autumn of 2001 during a tour of Japan with a production of Verdi’s *Aida*, in which he performed as Radames. Subsequently, in January 2015, Cura appeared in Prague in the title role of the State Opera production of Verdi’s *Otello*.

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