

# WE ARE ETERNAL

The fantastical memoirs of Lorenzo Da Ponte

Marie-Louise Bischofberger  
David Stern  
OPERA FUOCO

Creation on January 7th at the Opera of Massy  
Revival on April 19th and 20th, 2023 at the Philharmonie of Paris

Producer Opera Fuoco. Coproducers Philharmonie de Paris, Opéra de Massy, Compagnie B.  
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DAVID STERN  
*Opera fuoco*

# A NEW MELODRAMA INSPIRED BY THE MEMOIRS OF LORENZO DA PONTE

Excerpts of the memoirs of Lorenzo Da Ponte  
Excerpts of opera libretti by Da Ponte set to music by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Vicente  
Martin y Soler, Antonio Salieri and Peter Winter

## **CREATIVE TEAM**

Libretto - Marie-Louise Bischofberger and Dominic Gould  
Stage director - Marie-Louise Bischofberger  
Music director – David Stern  
Scenography & lights – Bertrand Couderc  
Costumes - Bernard Michel  
Makeup - Cécile Kretschmar  
Dramaturgy - Pedro Diaz  
Assistant director - Timothée Israël

## **CAST**

Da Ponte – Dominic Gould

Soloists from de the Young Artists Program of Opera Fuoco:

Axelle Fanyo / Anne-Lise Polchlopek / Guy Elliott / Adrien Fournaison / Aymeric Biesemans

Opera Fuoco orchestra (29 musicians)

performance in English, French and Italian

Duration: 2 hours



Da Ponte rose to fame writing the librettos for *Nozze di Figaro*, *Don Giovanni* and *Così fan tutte*. Beyond these three extraordinary works, his voice is also heard in his memoirs. Written at the end of his life in New York, in the era of Rossini, he brings us a very personal vision of the musical Europe of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Outsider, poet, genial storyteller: the lives he led make him a fascinating artist. His own adventures and experiences would eventually be the inspiration for many of the characters in his operas.

Da Ponte lived as he wrote. Based on his memoirs, Marie-Louise Bischofberger and David Stern have given him a theatrical voice by creating *We are eternal*. The irreverent librettist on stage challenges the audience with the same insolence and outspokenness he has distilled into his librettos. He crosses paths with Salieri, Joseph II, Casanova and the ghostly figure of Mozart. From Venice to New York, Da Ponte reinvents and recounts his past, weaving a tale as fantastical as that of his own *folle journée*, his *Nozze di Figaro*.

Prima le parole ...

Marie-Louise Bischofberger

With David Stern and his Opera Fuoco orchestra and young singers, I have created a musical and theatrical piece inspired by the memoirs of Lorenzo Da Ponte. Instead of trying to explain how this man was able to write three of the most beautiful operas in history, we ask the question: who was he? And why is he so hard to pin down? All the lives he lived make him a Zelig, an elusive and captivating being.

It is indeed Da Ponte's surprising life that has nourished his librettos, but it is his innate talent as a poet, as he calls himself, that has given us these works of art.

He wrote his memoirs at the age of 90 in America with the great flair of an entertainer. Successes, banishments and escapes follow one after another like theatrical backdrops. A cosmopolitan aesthete, his life trajectory took him from the Jewish ghetto in Venice, through Vienna, London, to America.

His memoirs take us back into the past, but in spirit, they are modern. We look at him as an irreverent survivor. With the orchestra and singers that accompany him, surrounded by the most iconic arias of Mozart, by music of Salieri and Martin y Soler - works that without his words would never have been written - from the Venice of masks to Vienna and his meeting with the Emperor Joseph and Casanova ...Da Ponte's life comes into focus.

A very light scenography conjures a canal in Venice, a corridor in the imperial palace in Vienna, a London cafe, a New York bookshop through lighting, a few accessories and some risers, and allows us to discover this creative and tireless spirit, this adventurer who brought together three historical eras and who probed the brightest and darkest sides of the human soul, who explored and brought to life human emotions in their most evocative dimensions.



Photo Benoît Auguste



Photo Benoît Auguste



Photo Benoît Auguste



## **DAVID STERN - Conductor and artistic director of Opera Fuoco**

Whether conducting a symphony orchestra, baroque opera, teaching vocal master classes or defending cultural activities, Stern keeps his musicians, students and audiences riveted by sharing his strong musical convictions, his flexibility of approach and his belief that music is relevant and indeed essential in today's world. He is the founder and director of the Paris-based opera studio and period-instrument ensemble Opera Fuoco, as well as artistic adviser and chief conductor of the Shanghai Baroque Festival and chief conductor of the Palm Beach Opera in Florida.

Major Stern is known for his extensive range of repertoire. As music director of the Israel and the St. Gallen Opera houses, he championed eclectic works such as Simone Mayr's *Medea*, Berg's *Wozzeck*, Britten's *Turn of the Screw* and Weill's *Mahagonny*. He has premiered four new operas since 2010: Gil Shochat's *A Child Dreams* at the Israel Opera, Nicolas Bacri's *Così Fanciulli* commissioned by Opera Fuoco and performed at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris, Ben Moore's *Enemies*, *A Love Story* in Palm Beach and Jan Sandström's *The Rococo Machine* at the Drottningholm Festival, Sweden.

With Opera Fuoco, his Paris-based opera company, he has recently recorded "*Berenice che fai?*", a compilation of late Baroque and early Classical works with three members of Opera Fuoco's studio singers and very well received by the press. Previous recordings with Opera Fuoco include *The Romantic Cantatas* with Karine Deshayes, Johann Christian Bach's opera *Zanaida*, and two Handel oratorios, *Semele* and *Jephtha*. He also recorded Simone Mayr's *Medea* with the St. Gallen Opera, John Field's piano concertos with Concerto Köln and Andreas Staier, as well as works by Otto Nicolai and concertos of Albert Roussel.

Since launching the Aix-en-Provence Festival's Académie Internationale d'Art Lyrique with Stéphane Lissner in 1998, David Stern has been committed to developing young voices. He created Opera Fuoco in 2003 as a platform for young professional singers in France, combining both an young artists program, a period-instrument orchestra and a company which produces concertante and staged projects nationally and internationally. In 2016, he conducted Mozart's *Magic Flute* at the Juilliard School in New York, and since 2014, as artistic director of the Shanghai Baroque Festival, Stern has included singers from the Shanghai Conservatory in performances and master classes at the Shanghai Symphony Hall. He works regularly with the singers of the Benenson Young Artists Program in Palm Beach.





## **MARIE LOUISE BISCHOFBERGER - stage director**

Marie-Louise Bischofberger is a Swiss librettist, choreographer and director. She began collaborating with Luc Bondy in 1993 as his dramaturge for theater and opera productions in Lausanne (Ibsen's, John Gabriel Borkman), Berlin (Sacha Guitry's The Illusionist and Let us Dream), Paris at the Théâtre du Chatelet (Verdi's Don Carlos). After her collaboration with Philippe Boesman's Opera "Reigen" at the Théâtre de la Monnaie in Brussels, she co-wrote the libretto with Bondy for 3 operas with this same composer, including Winter's Tale based on Shakespeare (Théâtre de la Monnaie Brüssel and Opéra de Lyon, 1999), Julie, based on August Strindberg (Aix-en-Provence Festival 2005) and Yvonne, Princess of Burgundy based on Witold Gombrowicz (Opéra Garnier Paris, 2009). At the la Scala Opera in Milan she restaged Bondy's Salmone in 2007. In 1997 she created a 10 part radio-play version of Robert Louis Stevenson's the Master of Ballantrae for France Culture in Paris, and since then has been engaged in other radio dramatizations.

In 2015-16 she revived Chekov's Ivanov at the Théâtre de l'Odéon in Paris and Molière's Tartuffe at the Berthier Studios and Puccini's Tosca at La Scala. She also completed Luc Bondy's film version of Marivaux's Les Fausses confidences, in 2015. In 2017 she revived Anna Bolena at the Bordeaux Opera.



## **DOMINIC GOULD - Da Ponte**

Born in Los Angeles, Dominic Gould has established himself in France as a renowned actor, appearing in both film and television roles. Educated at Amherst College and the Drama School at the Théâtre des Amandiers in Paris, he began his cinema career working with Patrice Chéreau, Virginie Thévenet and Jacques Doillon. He has also been in films directed by Edouard Molinaro, Michel Blanc, Mika Kaurismaki, Tsui Hark, Sofia Coppola, and Costa Gavras. He has appeared on stage under the direction of Antoine Gindt, Patrice Chéreau, Lucille O'Flanagan and Robert Hossein. In 2018 he appeared in Frank Zappa's *200 Motels*, at the Paris Philharmonie.

## **BERTRAND COUDERC - Scenography & lights**

Bertrand Couderc is designing the lighting for numerous performances, both for the theatre and the opera, and is collaborating with the greatest worldwide stages.

In 2005, he worked with Patrice Chéreau on *Così fan tutte* at the Aix-en-Provence Festival and at the Paris Opera. This was followed by *Tristan and Isolde* at La Scala in Milan conducted by Daniel Barenboim, as well as the play *Night Just Before the Forests*. His repertoire also includes *From the House of the Dead* under the direction of Pierre Boulez, which was performed at the Theater an der Wien, in Aix-en-Provence and in several major houses including the Paris Opera in 2017. He worked on Luc Bondy's last productions, *Charlotte Salomon* at the Salzburg Festival in 2014 and *Ivanov* at the Odéon-Théâtre de l'Europe in 2015.

Since 2015, he has been working with Bartabas and the Académie équestre de Versailles for the choreography of  *Davide penitente*, the *Requiem* at the Felsenreitschule in Salzburg and on *The Rite of Spring*.

He has closely worked with Éric Ruf in the theatre for *Romeo and Juliet*, *Life of Galileo* and *Bajazet* staged at the Comédie-Française, as well as in the opera for *Pelléas et Mélisande* and recently for *Romeo and Juliet* at the Opéra Comique. A loyal collaborator of Raphaël Pichon, he designed the lighting for the *Funeral of Louis XIV* at Versailles and for *Bach's St John Passion* at the Paris Philharmonie. In 2019, he worked on Monteverdi's *Vespers*, and in 2020, *Mein Traum*, *Dido and Aeneas* and *Immersion*s at the Bordeaux submarine base.

His work has recently been seen in *Manon* at the Paris Opera, *La Vie Parisienne* at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, *Anna Bolena* at La Scala, *Boris Godunov* in Monte Carlo, *Die Frau ohne Schatten* in Vienna, *La Cerisaie* and *Angels in America* at the Comédie-Française, *Silêncio* in Lisbon, and *L'incoronazione di Poppea* in Aix-en-Provence.

Bertrand Couderc was the theatre winner of the 2017 French Institute's Hors-les-murs grant for his project *L'Esprit du vide*, in Japan.





*La Bohème –la Grange aux pianos Festival (august 22). Stage director Elsa Rooke*

## OPERA FUOCO

**Opera Fuoco**, the **Paris-based international opera company** is dedicated to lyric repertoire from the mid- 18th century to the present. Founded and directed by American conductor David Stern in 2003, Opera Fuoco combines an ambitious young artist program and international performance season with one of the most versatile instrumental ensembles in Paris. Its growing world-wide reputation as a launchpad for young singers has made it one of the most sought-after young artist programs in France.

Opera Fuoco offers a unique, custom-made experience to young singers transitioning from conservatory to professional life. Singers are able to work with Maestro Stern, experienced vocal coaches and stage directors in various contexts ranging from masterclasses and recitals to large-scale performances with orchestra and fully staged opera productions. The repertoire spans not only several centuries but a variety of genres, from baroque to contemporary, including musical comedy and jazz.

In 2008, Opera Fuoco began developing its young artist program, not as an academy, but as a professional company for young singers engaged for a period of three to four years. In its 10-years of existence, Opera Fuoco's Young Artist Program has trained approximately 40 singers from 10 different countries. Our 18 current members come from 5 different countries, and candidates from the last round of auditions represented 22 nationalities. Opera Fuoco's activities are largely Paris-area based, with a residence in Levallois' Salle Ravel, masterclasses held in smaller city venues and regular concerts at the Paris Philharmonie. An exciting recital series will begin at the Petit Palais Museum in 2020. The company has also enhanced its international reputation by developing regular performance partnerships with the Bachfest in Leipzig, the Beethovenfest in Bonn, the International Telemann Festival, the Swedish Chamber Orchestra as well as the Shanghai Baroque and Beijing Music Festivals in China.

## Press Review

### We are eternal – Opera of Massy – 2023 January 7th

ClassicNews – Alexandre Pham – 2023, January 8th

"The technique, the dramatic intuition, the acting between the instrumentalists and the conductor create this incredible stage presence and make the glue of the production."

"Axelle Fanyo's raw, clear and powerful soprano (...) performs the aria *Deh vieni non tardar* with tact and a sober and committed style, totally overwhelming."

"The tenor Guy Elliott deploys a suave and timbred voice, with easy high notes (sumptuous *Un aura amorosa* from *Così*)."

Ôlyrix – Charles Arden – 2023, January 9th

"The evening unfolds in a very fluid and dynamic way (...) The five singers all invest themselves fully in the show and the coherence between theater and music goes as far as to offer (...) exciting resonances."

"David Stern's dynamic ease is especially invested in his conducting of the orchestra, which is always intense and elegant. This dynamism avoids the juke-box effect of this show despite the many excerpts performed."

"Baritone Halidou Nombre (5th Generation Opera Fuoco) deploys (...) an explosive vocal and stage richness, while sculpting his characters with nobility."

"The mezzo-soprano Anne-Lise Polchlopek (4th generation of Opera Fuoco) constantly deploys a great scenic and vocal investment, appropriating the emotions of her different characters to offer them the outbursts of her voice with its vibrato and its accentuated and slender projection. The roundness of her mezzo has ample support on a roundly phrased low register and rises to velvety high notes."

"Aymeric Biesemans (5th Generation Opera Fuoco) asserts the warm roundness of his articulation in the middle register."

"All this is made possible with (...) the magic of Cécile Kretschmar's make-up and hair creations, and (...) the costumes from Mozart's operas or da Ponte's era (made by Bernard Michel), as well as the "limpid scenography as well as the lights, signed Bertrand Couderc."

"And finally, how can we not mention the true incarnation of Da Ponte's character that the actor Dominic Gould, who co-signs the libretto with the director Marie-Louise Bischofberger, offers us."

OPERA MAGAZINE – Bruno Villien –2023, january 30th.

"The reception of the Massy audience is warm, auguring well for the continuation of a performance that is as instructive as it is entertaining."

"David Stern combines drive and vivacity to lead the phalanx he created, moving with dexterity from one composer to another."

"Halidou Nombre lends his beautiful deep voice and presence to Don Giovanni."

"In a red dress, adorned with four strings of pearls, Anne-Lise Polchlopek elegantly resurrects Salieri's *Il ricco d'un giorno*."

"Guy Elliott gives great charm to his aria *Un aura amorosa* (*Così fan tutte*)."

"Marie-Louise Bischofberger's staging avoids the trap of a disguised concert version. As for Dominic Gould, he humorously portrays a young, and, with the help of a long white wig, elderly Da Ponte."

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Opera Fuoco is a member of Fevis, Profedim, ROF as well as young member of Opera Europa.

