

The lower tessitura of the rewritten part made it an ideal role for Beth Taylor, and the title role went to Hilary Summers, whose Handelian career goes back more than 30 years. Her soft-grained, countertenorish timbre sounded undernourished against Taylor's possibly unstylish use of chest voice, but in their ravishing duet 'Ah mia cara', one of the score's undoubted highlights, their voices blended well. Taylor swept all before her as Elmira, given the most emotionally charged music of the score, especially arresting in the haunting *arioso accompagnato* sequence 'Notte cara'.

Christian Curnyn's stylish, laid-back conducting possibly lacked bite and I couldn't help feeling that rehearsal time had been too limited for such a rarity. Rowan Pierce's gleaming soprano contrasted well with Mhairi Lawson's cloudier tone as the secondary couple Rossane and Timante, their lively duet enriched by fine obbligato horns and bassoons. The basses were Jonathan Lemalu—by now a bit gnarly even for the role of Elmira's father, Oronte—and Matthew Durkan, taking the walk-on role of Coralbo effectively enough. Curnyn's orchestra of his Early Opera Company supplied thrills and spills in the trumpety ceremonial sinfonias that punctuate the drama, but I can't say that this performance had me clamouring for a staging.

HUGH CANNING

## La Cenerentola

*Hampstead Garden Opera at Jacksons Lane Arts Centre, London, April 11*

The mildly subversive circus came to town (or in this case, Highgate) with Finn Lacey's production of *La Cenerentola* for HGO. Once they had emerged through the wraparound lametta curtain that defined Finlay Jenner's set, emblazoned with the words 'Le bellezze di Don Magnifico', all the characters were seen to have red 'clown' circles painted on their cheeks. A gold lamé posing pouch adorned Dandini's

Myrna Tennant in the title role of HGO's 'La Cenerentola'



princely disguise of a muscle suit; the strapping Alidoro, once past his initial downbeat appearance, was kitted out as a fairy godfather in a baby-blue gown; Clorinda and Tisbe each wore a party dress that was basically a massive decorative bow, and the three gentlemen of the chorus, whose shirts were adorned with big white pom-poms, had their hair in long blond bunches.

Angelina, quite rightly, was not played in any way for laughs, and in Myrna Tennant's endearingly modest and sincere portrayal no one could have doubted her *semplicità* and *bontà* for a moment. It was of a piece with her singing, which flowed like balsam, whether in legato lines or coloratura.



'Non più mesta' became as touching as it was celebratory. The vocal projection of both her sisters—Helen Lacey as Clorinda and Charlotte Bateman as Tisbe—was appropriately more assertive and Lacey sounded like a future Donna Anna in her aria 'Sventurata! mi credea'. Greatly to their and the director's credit, neither overdid the pouting and flouncing. Tom Morss's likeable Don Ramiro was nimble, precise and fearless, and each of the lower-voiced male singers made a distinctive impression: Chris Murphy an expansive Don Magnifico, Henry Wright a swaggering Dandini, and Owain Gwynfryn an Alidoro of subtle power. The miniature chorus of courtiers—Lachlan Craig, Ted Day and Allyn Wu—was a delight on each of its appearances. Jonathan Darbourne, who over the past five years has built a reputation through his co-founding of the Vache Baroque festival, moved forward an era or two to conduct a fluent performance that took irresistible flight in the all-important ensembles. The ten instrumentalists (plus Darbourne at the harpsichord) were led with considerable style by the violinist Joe MacDonald.

YIHUDA SHAPIRO

## Turandot

### *Royal Opera at Covent Garden, April 12*

In the four decades since Andrei Șerban's production of *Turandot* first appeared on Covent Garden's stage, attitudes to 'Orientalism' have changed hugely: its first outing in 1984 followed the publication of Edward Said's game-changing book by just six years, after all. But somehow the ritualized cruelty of Șerban's all-singing, all-dancing show, with its gravity-defying dancers matching perfectly the airborne feel of even Puccini's most grandiose passages, survives intact. If anything, its defining deconstructive moment—amid the raucous celebration of the opera's final moments, Timur wearily drags across the stage a chariot bearing Liù's corpse—seems more relevant than ever.

This revival (overseen by Jack Furness) started in mid March but for the last three performances was equipped with a new conductor and roster of principals. The former, Francesco Ivan Ciampa, drew beguiling sounds from the ROH orchestra, albeit occasionally overwhelming the soloists in Act 1 (an endemic problem, especially in this act). Jerzy Butryn's Timur was finely shaped, and crowned by a moving peroration in Act 3. Gwyn Hughes Jones delivered a secure if somewhat rough-hewn Calaf. Gemma Summerfield's Liù was powerfully affecting. She had necessary heft in the ensembles, but took her two solos with a control of tone and legato that was altogether remarkable. Ewa Plonka, her steely antagonist, seems to be making *Turandot* into a signature role, and one can easily see why: 'In questa reggia' was transfixing from start to finish, with every aspect of the aria's extensive range expressively articulated.

ROGER PARKER

## Simon Boccanegra

### *Opera North at St George's Hall, Bradford, April 24*

Leaving its home base in Leeds, Opera North did obeisance to Bradford's status as UK City of Culture 2025 by opening its annual springtime concert staging there.