

See our Adrienne's 'older' opera guy in HD

Leonard Turnevicius

When Adrienne Pieczonka steps onto the stage of the Metropolitan Opera to sing in Verdi's *Simon Boccanegra* on Saturday, things will be different.

The Burlington-bred soprano has, of course, sung there before. She debuted at the Met in 2004 as Lisa in Tchaikovsky's *Pique Dame*, then bowed in revivals of Wagner's *Die Walkuere* several times since. This time, not only is Amelia Grimaldi a role debut for her, but the Met's HD cameras will simulcast her every note and move to a worldwide audience.

Pieczonka has had the HD cameras trained on her before. Last June, her performance of Puccini's *Tosca* at San Francisco's War Memorial Opera House was beamed free to 27,000 fans in AT&T Park, home of the baseball Giants.

Singing opposite her as the Doge in the Met's remount of Giancarlo del Monaco's 15-year-old *Boccanegra* production will be a giant of another sort, Placido Domingo.



AP Photo/Metropolitan Opera, Marty Sohl

"I went and worked out today thinking I've got to lose 10 pounds before the cameras turn on me," joked Pieczonka during the Christmas holidays over the phone from the well-appointed Manhattan apartment she's renting from Domingo. (Yes, he's also a bit of a real estate mogul with properties in New York, Vienna, and elsewhere.)

"But you know, those cameras get awfully close. I think they have very good makeup people (at the Met)," continued Pieczonka in self-deprecating mode. "I have to watch: How much am I opening my mouth? Are my eyebrows going ...? I really want to keep it as relaxed and natural as possible. And maybe I'm lucky that it is the last (of six) performance(s) they're filming. I think if it were the first one, I'd be a bundle of nerves."

Those Jan. 18 opening night butterflies have long since fluttered away. Yet, while all eyes and ears will be on Pieczonka, they'll also be attuned to Domingo, who's making a much-ballyhooed switch from singing tenor to baritone for *Boccanegra*. That voice range however, isn't new to Domingo. In his very late teens, he debuted as a baritone in his adopted Mexico.

Pieczonka, 46, has known Domingo, who just turned 69, for 20 years. She says that in comparison to his Three Tenors colleagues Jose Carreras and the late Luciano Pavarotti, Domingo's voice always had that baritonal quality that allowed him to tackle roles such as Otello, Siegmund (*Die Walkuere*), and Herman (*Pique Dame*). According to Pieczonka, Domingo is making the right move.

"He sang the tenor role (Gabriele Adorno, Amelia's lover) in this opera for years," said Pieczonka. "It's quite a high role. He can't do that. It's just a natural progression down that you see many sopranos (do). You're a Brunnhilde one day and then you're singing the Witch in *Hansel and Gretel* after 20 years. I think he is wise to do it. It's such a beloved, deep, dignified role."

Adorno will be sung by Marcello Giordani. Just prior to Christmas, when Pieczonka was singing at the Vienna Staatsoper, she gave herself an extra little assignment. "I went and scoped him out," said Pieczonka of Giordani, who was singing in Verdi's *Un Ballo in Maschera* at the Staatsoper. "I'm very glad he's a very tall, good-looking man," said Pieczonka. "He's also, if I can say it, an appropriate age for me. As I get older I worry that I'll be paired with a 28-year-old guy." He turned 47 last week.

The role of Genoese nobleman Jacopo Fiesco, a.k.a. Andrea Grimaldi (yup, Amelia's grandfather in this convoluted plot), will be taken by James Morris, the affable American bass-baritone whose career keeps going like the Energizer Bunny. That leaves Pieczonka as the lone female lead in the cast, something she relishes.

"When I did my first *Tosca* I was so happy to be the only woman in the darn piece," explained Pieczonka. "Actually, I think you can really shine because I'm the only woman character. It's really a nice opportunity to break up all these tenors and baritones and basses and bass-baritones. So it's actually quite rewarding, and maybe that's a little bonus because there's not some dramatic mezzo that's stealing your thunder."

NEED TO KNOW

Who: Adrienne Pieczonka and Placido Domingo

What: *Simon Boccanegra* live in HD from the Met

When: Saturday, Feb. 6, at 1 p.m.

Where: participating SilverCity cinemas
Leonard Turnevicius writes on classical music for The Spectator.