



## Savonlinna Opera II

The annual summer festival in lakeland Finland

20–25 July 2025 (ML 743)

6 days • £3,630

(including tickets to 3 performances)

Lecturer: Dr John Allison

Three operas at the renowned Savonlinna Opera Festival: Kokkonen's *The Last Temptations*, Puccini's *Turandot* and Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov*.

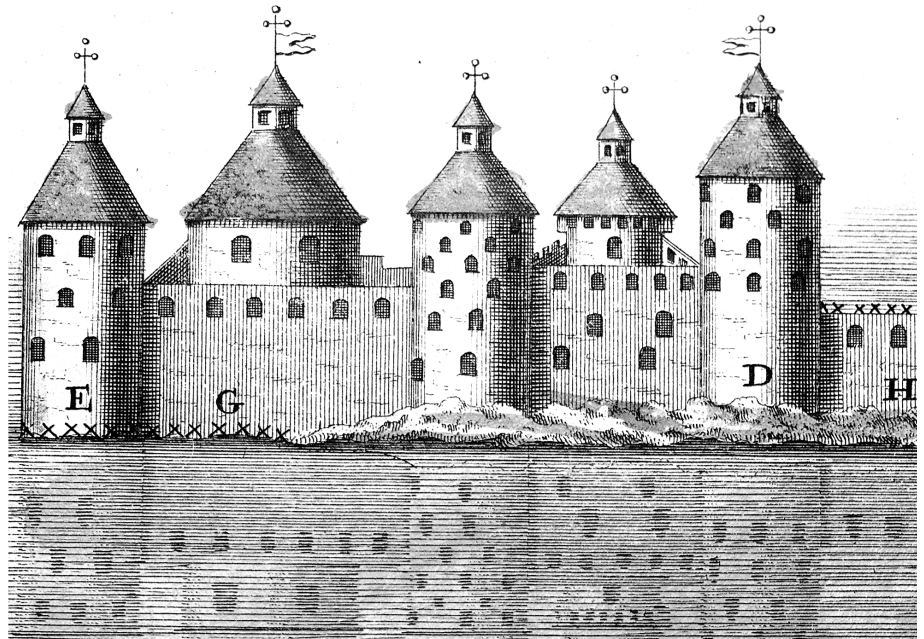
Productions here are musically and dramatically first-rate, in the incomparable setting of a medieval castle on an island.

Two nights in Helsinki allow a visit to Villa Kokkonen, designed for the composer by Alvar Aalto.

Location, location, location ... This oft-repeated estate agents' mantra holds true even – or especially – for opera festivals. At almost all the most memorable of these summer gatherings the festival setting plays an important role, and nowhere is that more true than of Savonlinna, a small, pleasant town in the heart of Finland's beautiful lakeland. In addition to waterscapes, forests and fresh air, this tranquil town boasts the magnificent castle of Olavinlinna, which in 2025 is celebrating its 550th anniversary. Built in 1475 as a fortress by the Swedes to deter Russian invaders, in the 20th century it found a more peaceful purpose as home to the Savonlinna Opera Festival, now one of the great annual events of the operatic calendar.

Savonlinna played an important role in the extraordinary flowering of modern Finnish opera in the 1970s, and Joonas Kokkonen's *The Last Temptations* was for several years a fixture there. As part of the 2025 celebratory season this landmark work returns, starring today's leading Finnish bass Mika Kares as the preacher Paavo Ruotsalainen, and audiences will get a chance to hear music by one of the most important Finnish composers after Sibelius.

Mika Kares has another major assignment at Savonlinna this coming summer: the title role in Modest Mussorgsky's mighty opera *Boris Godunov*. The new production is by Nicola Raab, and though this work drawn from Russian history never loses its resonance, it will surely resonate all the more powerfully today in eastern Finland. The third opera on our itinerary is Giacomo Puccini's swansong *Turandot*, among Savonlinna's most admired stagings and here starring one of today's most



Savonlinna, after a pen and ink drawing, early 20th-century.

admired exponents of *Turandot* herself, the Polish soprano Ewa Plonka.

The tour begins with two nights in Helsinki, whose art and architecture are key to understanding the Finnish national movement that led to the country's independence in 1917. Completing our cultural picture are visits to the architecturally significant Villa Kokkonen – the composer's home designed by Alvar Aalto – and Sibelius's house Ainola, sights within easy reach of Helsinki.

### Itinerary

**Day 1, Helsinki.** Fly at c. 10.15am from London Heathrow to Helsinki (Finnair). Begin with a walk through the Neo-Classical heart of the city: the Esplanade, Senate Square, cathedral and Market Square. First of two nights in Helsinki.

**Day 2, Helsinki.** In the morning visit Tuusula Lake with its turn of the century villa for Sibelius as well as the Kokkonen Villa by Aalto. The Ateneum, Finland's foremost art museum houses a collection of brilliant National Romantic pictures.

**Day 3, Helsinki, Savonlinna.** Drive on to Savonlinna. The 200-mile journey is broken up by lunch in a manor house. *Evening opera: The*

*Last Temptations (Kokkonen) (sung in Finnish). Ville Matvejeff (conductor), Mikko Kouki (director); Mika Kares (Paavo Ruotsalainen), Silja Aalto (Riitta), Johan Krogius (Juhana), Petri Lindroos (Jaakko Högman), Tuomas Miettola (1st man), Laura Malmivaara (Anna Loviisa).* First of three nights in Savonlinna.

**Day 4, Savonlinna.** After a morning lecture, visit the castle of St Olaf at Savonlinna for a guided tour. *Evening opera: Turandot (Puccini) (sung in Italian). Yves Abel (conductor), Pet Halmenr (director); Ewa Plonka (Turandot), Amadi Lagha (Calaf), Tuuli Takala or Sonja Herranen (Liù), Petri Lindroos (Timur)*

**Day 5, Savonlinna.** The morning is spent on a boat cruising through beautiful lakeland scenery. Some free time before a lecture and early dinner. *Evening opera: Boris Godunov (Mussorgsky) (sung in Russian). Dima Slobodeniouk (conductor), Nicola Raab (director); Mika Kares (Boris), Timo Riihonen (Pimen), Olga Heikkilä (Ksenia), Arttu Kataja (Tschelkalov), Tuomas Katajala (Grigori), Matti Turunen (Varlaam).*

**Day 6, Savonlinna, Helsinki.** Drive from Savonlinna to Helsinki for the flight to London, arriving at Heathrow at c. 5.00pm.

Savonlinna Opera II  
continued

## Lecturer

**Dr John Allison.** Editor of *Opera magazine* and music critic for *The Daily Telegraph*. He was born in South Africa and completed his PhD while playing the piano and working as assistant organist at Cape Town cathedral. Since moving to London in 1989 he has written for publications around the world, authored two books, contributed chapters to several other volumes and served on the juries of many international competitions. He has also held positions as music critic on *The Sunday Telegraph* and *The Times*.

## Practicalities

**Price, per person. Two sharing:** £3,630 or £3,360 without flights. **Single occupancy:** £4,090 or £3,820 without flights.

**Included:** flights (economy class) with Finnair (aircraft: Airbus A350-900); travel by private coach; accommodation as described below; 2 lunches and 3 dinners with wine; admissions to sites visited with the group; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer, tour manager and guides.

**Music:** top category tickets for 3 operas, costing c. £430.

**Accommodation. Hotel Haven, Helsinki** ([hotelhaven.fi](http://hotelhaven.fi)): smart, boutique hotel close to the harbour. **Sokos Hotel Seurahuone** ([sokoshotels.fi](http://sokoshotels.fi)): located by the lake in Savonlinna, this hotel is the best in town. It is basic but adequately equipped and with modern facilities. All rooms (including rooms for single occupancy) have twin beds and most have showers instead of baths.

**How strenuous?** In Savonlinna we walk from the hotel to the castle, often on cobbled streets, for all performances (just over half a mile each way). The tour would not be suitable for anyone who could not cope with this. There is also a forest walk covering uneven ground. There are long coach journeys on days 1 and 5; average distance by coach per day: c. 86 miles.

**Group size:** between 10 and 24 participants.

**Combine this tour with:** [Santa Fe Opera, 27 July–3 August 2025](#).