



## Aisle be on stage tomorrow

As she browsed the fruit and veg at her local supermarket, the last thing soprano Sabina Puértolas surely expected was an urgent call on her mobile to come and bail out the Royal Opera House. But with Lucy Crowe taken ill and a Gilda-sized hole having

suddenly appeared in the ROH's Verdi *Rigoletto*, such was the case. Luckily, 'Si!' was Puértolas's reply, and a flight from Madrid was duly booked. Within 24 hours, and after just three hours rehearsal, she was enjoying rapturous applause for a job well done. Beats shopping...

## DÉJÀ VU

History just keeps on repeating itself...



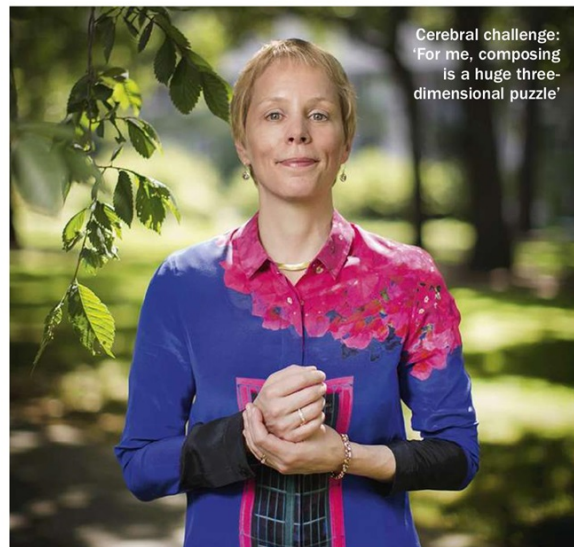
Angela Hewitt is made of tough stuff. When the Canadian pianist fell and twisted her ankle shortly before a concert in Oxford in January, cancelling was the last thing on her mind – taking to the stage at St John the Evangelist in a wheelchair, she transferred herself onto a stool to play Book One of Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*. In doing so, she joined a noble list of musicians to have performed in a state of disrepair.

Soprano **Birgit Nilsson** was a formidable figure, and certainly not one to be put off the small matter of a dislocated shoulder. When thus afflicted as the curtain was raised on the first night of a new production of Wagner's *Götterdämmerung* at the Metropolitan Opera in New York in 1974, the indomitable Swede simply carried on as before, wearing a sling and hiding her arm under a cloak. Mezzo **Joyce DiDonato**, however, was less able to hide her injury when, in 2009, she broke her leg on stage during Rossini's *Barber of Seville* at Covent Garden. Rather than call in sick, though, DiDonato completed the rest of the run of performances in a wheelchair – as, in 2016, did Russian soprano **Anna Virovlansky**, who was adamant that a torn ligament would not prevent her from playing the title role in *Lucia di Lammermoor* at Oper Leipzig. Donizetti's opera also took its toll on tenor **Michael Fabiano** who, in rushing off stage during a 2015 performance at the Met, managed to smack his head on a stage light. Ouch. With blood mopped up and head speedily stitched, he gamely carried on.

ANDREW NELLES ILLUSTRATION: JONNY CLARK

## MEET THE COMPOSER

# Augusta Read Thomas



As composer in residence at the Chicago Symphony Orchestra from 1997-2006, Augusta Read Thomas worked closely with conductors Pierre Boulez and Daniel Barenboim. A Pulitzer Prize finalist for her *Astral Canticle* in 2007, much of her eclectic body of work has been recorded by Nimbus Records.

**I have just finished a huge piece for orchestra and bells from all over the world.** Called *Sonorous Earth*, it was commissioned by the Chicago Philharmonic Society and Eugene Symphony Association, so had its premiere in Chicago in November and will get its second performance in Eugene in April. **When I'm composing a piece, I am completely dedicated to it.** I get obsessed about it, I dream about it – it is all-consuming. I only ever write one piece at a time, but on any one day, I might well touch on several others. I might be proofreading the manuscript of one, attending a concert of another, writing the programme notes of another and so on. **Usually, I am working by four o'clock in the morning.** In a perfect day, I'd then like to carry on until 11 at night in a composing marathon, but that rarely happens! I like to compose at home, where I usually play the piano, plus I also often find myself singing, drawing maps of the form of the piece, or dancing to feel the rhythm and the impulse of the line.

**I like to think of every element of sound being allied to every other element of sound in a kind of gestalt.** For me, you can't separate harmony from flow, counterpoint from colour or tessitura from instrumentation and so on, and I see composing as this huge three-dimensional crossword puzzle in which all of the elements are interlaced. Part of the process of working these very long days is about staying in the 'gestalt zone', figuring out how I make it all work. **My husband, Bernard Rands, is a fabulous composer.** I admire him immensely, though our music is so different. Sometimes, I would like to ask him what he thinks of a piece of mine – particularly if it's recently finished or recorded – but he's not really into that, and normally suggests we have a glass of wine instead. And besides, if I did show him, say, a huge orchestral score such as my recent work *Brio*, it would take him six or seven hours to read it properly and then be able to comment! It's not a simple ask.