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Rivals battle over role of Puccini's granddaughter

Italy

Richard Owen Rome

In a tangled drama of love, passion and family rivalry that is worthy of one of Giacomo Puccini's own operas, the composer's granddaughter has started a furious public campaign against claims by another woman that she is his granddaughter as well.

More than a decade ago Simonetta Puccini (formerly Giurumello) won a legal battle to prove that she was the daughter of Puccini's son, Antonio. She owns and runs the composer's Tuscan lakeside villa at Torre del Lago — now a museum displaying his piano, manuscripts, hunting guns and photographs.

With this year marking the 150th anniversary of the composer's birth, Ms Puccini may have been hoping that the world would focus on her grandfather's musical legacy.

Instead, the waters of Torre del Lago have been stirred by claims that a woman from Pisa called Nadia Manfredi is also Puccini's granddaughter. A film to be presented next month at the Venice Film Festival purports to reveal that Ms Manfredi's grandmother Giulia had an affair with the composer — one of many women to do so.

The result of the affair, according to Ms Manfredi, was her late father, a night porter also called Antonio, who died in 1988 without knowing for certain his true parentage. She has made a legal request for a comparison between the composer's DNA and that of her father. She said that she was not interested in money — only in "knowing the truth".

Simonetta Puccini is outraged, calling the claims "an attack on the private life of the Maestro and his family". Insisting that she is the only heir, she has put up posters at Torre del Lago and Viareggio, where Puccini also had a villa, entitled *In Defence of Giacomo Puccini*. They ask residents and visitors to sign a petition asking for his memory to be protected against "exaggerations and inventions".

The saga has dragged some of the darker episodes of the composer's life back into the light. Paolo Benvenuti,



Simonetta Puccini with a bust of her composer grandfather. Another woman also claims to be his granddaughter

the director of the film, met Ms Manfredi while researching a film on her great-aunt, Doria. Doria was a maid in the Puccini household who poisoned herself in 1909 after being accused by Puccini's wife, Elvira, of having an affair with the composer — only for a post-mortem examination to prove that the maid died a virgin. Elvira was convicted of slander and Puccini had to pay substantial damages to the Manfredi family to keep his wife out of jail.

According to Mr Benvenuti, letters and documents found in Nadia Manfredi's house in Pisa show that the composer's mistress was not Doria after all, but her cousin Giulia, an independent-minded woman who ran a restaurant at Torre del Lago. The director added that he believed Giulia to have been the model for the saloon bar owner Minnie in Puccini's 1910 opera *La Fanciulla del West*.

Mr Benvenuti said that Puccini had

paid maintenance to Giulia until his death in 1924, presumably for the upbringing of Antonio.

Ms Puccini told the Tuscan newspaper *La Nazione* that "scandalous and offensive gossip" over her grandfather's love life had been "artificially created" on the anniversary of his birth. But the music critic Alberto Mattioli said that Puccini — who once remarked he was a hunter of "wild fowl, operatic librettos and attractive women" — had had a series of tumultuous love affairs, which underlay the "passion and tragedy" of his operas.

A further claimant on the Puccini legacy is the former caretaker at the Torre del Lago villa, Giacomo Giovannoni, who claims that his father, Claudio, the caretaker before him, was Puccini's illegitimate son by a maid. Mr Giovannoni is also asking for DNA tests to prove that he is the composer's grandson.

Life and loves

1884 Met Elvira Gemignani, the wife of a friend from school. They eloped two years later

1900 Fell in love with a mystery woman known as "Corrina"

1904 Met Sybil Seligman, wife of a banker, in England and began brief affair that appears to have ended after a private detective found out that she was seeing other men

1911 Start of a six-year affair with Baroness Josephine von Stangel, a German aristocrat. Other women linked to Puccini include the writer Margit Veszi, the opera singer Rose Adler, and Blanka Lendvai, the sister of Ervin Lendvai, a Hungarian composer whose career Puccini helped to foster

Sources: www.opera-gems.com; Opera Classics Library Puccini Companion — The Glorious Dozen



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Goldsmith caught up in 'oligarch riddle'

Dominic Kennedy
Mark Hollingsworth

Lord Goldsmith, the former Attorney-General, has become embroiled in a suspected sting that resulted in a top anti-mafia lawyer being put on trial in secret in Belarus today.

Emanuel Zeltser, who once testified on Capitol Hill about the Russian mob, is a key character in a wrangle over the \$12 billion (£6 billion) fortune of a Georgian oligarch found dead at his country home in Surrey. He was arrested after flying to Belarus and accused of possessing false documents. According to Amnesty International, he has been tortured in custody.

Quite how Mr Zeltser ended up in Belarus is a mystery. The lawyer flew there on a private aircraft owned by the exiled oligarch Boris Berezovsky — even though Mr Zeltser and Mr Berezovsky are on opposite sides in the fight for the fortune of the dead Georgian, Arkadi Patarkatsishvili.

A law firm representing Mr Berezovsky had already tipped off the authorities in Minsk that the lawyer might be carrying bogus material on his laptop. Lord Goldsmith, now a private lawyer and representing Mr

Patarkatsishvili's widow in the case, e-mailed the Belarus Prosecutor-General's office to support its investigation of Mr Zeltser and offering to swap information. His spokesman has insisted that, after mistreatment allegations were made, he urged that Mr Zeltser be dealt with properly and withdrew the offer to help.

Today's trial — to be held behind closed doors — is the latest twist arising from the death of Mr Patarkat-



Emanuel Zeltser: arrived in Belarus mysteriously

shvili, who was found dead at home in Leatherhead in February. A post-mortem examination showed that he had severe heart disease.

Mr Berezovsky wants half of the \$12 billion legacy, since he and Mr Patarkatsishvili were business partners as well as close friends. The widow, Inna Gudanadze, is also seeking a share. However, Josef Kay, Mr Patarkatsishvili's adviser, claims that he controls the estate. Mr Zeltser, a New

York lawyer, said that he was Mr Kay's lawyer and produced a laptop computer with scanned documents dated last November purporting to be a will appointing Mr Kay as executor.

On March 3 a letter was sent by Cadwalader, at that time acting for the widow and coincidentally Mr Berezovsky's law firm, to the Belarus Prosecutor-General alerting him to the alleged forgeries. There was no mention of any forthcoming visit by Mr Zeltser to Belarus.

On March 12 Mr Zeltser and his secretary boarded Mr Berezovsky's aircraft in London and flew to Minsk, where they were arrested. Lord Goldsmith sent his e-mail on March 19, saying that he now represented the widow and proposing co-operation.

Mr Zeltser has been accused of use of false documents and industrial espionage. He has also been charged with drug trafficking in relation to the prescription painkillers he takes for gout and arthritis, which contain codeine. He faces seven years in jail.

The US has demanded Mr Zeltser's release on humanitarian grounds, saying that his health may suffer irreversibly and that he may die. Friends of Mr Berezovsky denied he had anything to do with the arrest.