

Garry Walker

Selected Reviews

Peter Grimes
Opera North, February 2026

"The chorus is superb, particularly when hurling spine-shaking cries in our faces, and so is the orchestra. Garry Walker, conducting, doesn't just generate primordial fury, he also brings out the teeming detail that adds so much pace and atmosphere to this riveting show."

Richard Morrison, The Times

"Garry Walker, music director of Opera North unveils Britten's rich orchestral canvas of the unforgiving sea and the bigoted community in thrall to its elemental power. The orchestral Sea Interludes have a translucent, almost ethereal quality. Walker's innate judgement of pace and balance propels the opera while allowing the soloists space to colour their lines."

Geoffrey Mogridge, Ilkley Gazette

"...Opera North's music director, Garry Walker, conducts the score in vivid primary colours, at times devastatingly powerful, always atmospheric, often heart-rending."

Theatre Reviews North, Robert Beale

"Garry Walker drew a performance from the Orchestra of Opera North that leaned into the cinematic sweep of the score, and it's easy to see why this opera has inspired so much modern composition."

Northern Arts Review, Sean Sable

"Garry Walker seemed to take a fluid view of the opera... The result was undoubtedly a dramatic account of the opera, one that drew you into the drama. The orchestra was on fine form, and there was plenty to enjoy in the interludes but Walker made sure these were woven into the whole."

Planet Hugill

Pass the Spoon
Opera North, December 2025

"Opera North music director Garry Walker kept things tight, especially important given the orchestra was frequently required to sing and shout."

Clive Paget, The Guardian

"In 2011, when it debuted in a performance by Magnetic North in Glasgow, the music was conducted by Garry Walker. Now that he is Music Director at Opera North, it is clearly his enthusiasm that has brought about this first mainstream production."

Ron Simpson, The Reviews Hub

La bohème
Opera North, October 2025

"The conductor Garry Walker was thoroughly attuned to Puccini's specific demandsthrilling trumpets in Act 2..."

Martin Dreyer, Opera Magazine

Garry Walker

Selected Reviews

"Musically the gusto is apparent from the start. Garry Walker, the company's music director, conducts and gives a masterclass in performing Puccini. The initial sound from the pit is bold and brash, he sets off at a cracking pace and the energy doesn't let up for much of the first Act. He's a master of the romantic arias, too, giving the singers the flexibility to enjoy their big moments, and also bringing more tenderness to the later musical narrative, with a sense of the score's evolution from careless abandon to tragic outcome."

Robert Beale, The Arts Desk

"The Orchestra of Opera North, conducted by Garry Walker, bring their unrivalled dynamic sensitivity to the music, never overshadowing but empathically and with precision, driving forward the tragic story."

Hazel Davis, ON: Yorkshire Magazine

"... under Garry Walker's baton, the Orchestra of Opera North filled the theatre with colour and warmth. Every little tremor of flute, every grand sweep of strings felt buoyant, as if we were flowing in a current of sound."

Sean Sable, Northern Arts Review

"The Opera North chorus and orchestra, under the baton of Garry Walker, is magnificent and buoys the cast with Puccini's entrancing, romantic and passionate melodies."

Rebecca Carter, The Reviews Hub

The Flying Dutchman Opera North, February 2025

"From the start, under Garry Walker, the orchestra's treatment of the overture over a video of lashing waves is magnificent: bristling with repeated motifs, with the horns in dominant mood, it sets the tone for the evening."

Ron Simpson, The Reviews Hub

"There's vivid work from the Chorus of Opera North,..., and colour and Wagnerian muscle aplenty from the orchestra, conducted by Garry Walker."

Sarah Noble, The Guardian

"... there was tremendous support from the magnificent chorus and orchestra, to whom Wagner assigns a leading role in the drama. Indeed the constant rumbling video of the sea was rather less threatening than the music of the storm, unleashed by conductor Garry Walker and his orchestra (excellent horns)..."

Nicholas Kenyon, The Telegraph

"The famous overture set the blood racing, the horns calling for complete attention, conjuring up a frightening storm in the great watery abyss in the Grand Theatre, Leeds, just as it did in the 19th century, conductor Garry Walker making sure that the impetus continued to the closing pages of the score."

Garry Walker

Selected Reviews

Richard Wilcocks, Bachtrack

"The virtues of the musical achievement by the company, under music director Garry Walker's baton, are very strong indeed."

Robert Beale, The Arts Desk

A Midsummer Night's Dream Opera North, October 2024

"The orchestra, under the baton of Garry Walker, expresses Britten's ever-shifting score with subtlety and passion."

Mark Brown, The Telegraph

"ON Music Director Garry Walker lovingly nuances the kaleidoscopic colours of Britten's score to create an ethereal magic carpet of sound."

Geoffrey Mogridge, Ilkley Gazette

"Opera North's music director Garry Walker handles the score deftly - ... full of life, precision and energy."

Robert Beale, The Arts Desk

"From the opening moments, when conductor Garry Walker brings the low, swooping strings to life, and the fairies, in their matching blond wigs, white shorts and tops, with black, feathery wings, are visible behind the Perspex screen, the eerie atmosphere is set, and the orchestra brings out Britten's musical jokes and changes of style."

Catriona Graham, The Opera Critic

"Garry Walker conducts the Orchestra of Opera North in a reading that transports us to the land of fairies and sprites in an instant (almost inaudible at first) and crisply supports the singers while never overwhelming them."

Robert Beale, Theatre Reviews North

Tosca Opera Australia – May 2024

"Opera North music director Garry Walker conducted the score with pleasing sensitivity and thrust."

Australian Arts Review

"Orchestra Victoria – under the assured baton of Garry Walker – play that luscious, richly melodic score with great feeling"

The Guardian

Albert Herring Opera North – December 2023

"Both players and Garry Walker are in full view at one end of the set, maintaining admirable contact with the cast, ... , and revelling in Britten's playful, virtuosic writing."

Garry Walker

Selected Reviews

The Guardian ★★★★★

Falstaff

Opera North – October 2023

“...the engine-room of this sparkling evening was Garry Walker’s orchestra. Anyone who could wrest their attention away from the high jinks on stage would have found it hard to keep a smile off their face at what was going on in the pit.”

Martin Dreyer, *Opera Magazine*

REQUIEM Journeys of the Soul Mozart and Muryanga

Opera North (May 2023)

“The Opera North orchestra sound punchy under Garry Walker’s direction-”

Richard Morrisson, *The Times*

“... Garry Walker’s orchestra, ablaze with rhythmic fervor that could only have been an inspiration to the dancers.”

Martin Dreyer, *Opera magazine*

“The show was not as risky as *Orpheus*, in which the music itself was fused – here it remained discrete, perceptively conducted by Garry Walker – but the sense of adventure was equally strong.”

Fiona Maddox, *The Guardian*

NOS RESIDENCY

Cautionary Tales (May 2023)

"Through all the changes of role and composer on the stage, the presence of the vastly experienced Gary Walker and the Orchestra of Opera North kept the helm steady. It was fascinating to see how Walker and his team tackled (with great gusto and aplomb) such a wide variety of music in the space of two short hours, and his great passion for working with living composers was very clearly evident across the entire programme"

-Planet Hugill

PUCCINI Tosca

Opera North (January 2023)

“in the pit Garry Walker conducts a tremendously persuasive orchestral performance: not just thunderous in the climaxes but also full of beautiful things from, for example, solo clarinet and cello.”

-Richard Morrison, *The Times*

“Conductor Garry Walker presides over a performance of remarkable intensity, never stinting on the power of percussion and brass in one of the loudest and most dramatic *Toscas* you will hear.”

-Ron Simpson, *The Reviews Hub*

“it’s Opera North’s music director Garry Walker who grabs the ear with an interpretation of urgency and incipient horror. He begins with a shock as an abrupt blackout trip-wires Puccini’s baleful ‘Scarpia’ motif in a crash of sound, and the tension never lessens” thereafter.

-Mark Valencia, *Bachtrack*

“In the pit, Garry Walker drew a strong and vibrant account of the score, making sure the drama was in the pit as much as on-stage”

Garry Walker

Selected Reviews

-Planet Hugill

TURNAGE, BRITTEN, ELGAR Orchestra of Opera North (April 2022)

"Walker favored a slow, lingering approach to the more reclusive variations, countered by the contrasted brass-and-percussion-heavy passages where he gave his forces their head."

- Ron Simpson, *The Reviews Hub*

VERDI Rigoletto Orchestra of Opera North (January 2022)

"...Opera North achieves its customarily high musical standards. Garry Walker conducts very idiomatically, and the wind writing, in which Verdi achieved such breakthroughs, is particularly well played."

- Martin Kettle, *The Guardian* ****

"...conductor Garry Walker ensures good rapport between pit and stage."

- Richard Morrison, *The Times*

"As usual, the Opera North Chorus impressed, with terrific ensemble singing and tightly choreographed action, and the orchestra was relentlessly on top form under conductor Garry Walker."

- Richard Wilcocks, *Bachtrack* *****

"Under Garry Walker the orchestral playing, always polished and pointed, really catches fire after the interval."

- Ron Simpson, *The Reviews Hub*

"Saturday's premiere of Femi Elufowoju Junior's provocative new staging of Rigoletto was dedicated to Opera North star tenor Rafael Rojas. Last week's sad news of the acclaimed 59-year-old singer's death seemed to ignite principals, chorus and orchestra already supercharged by the presence on the conductor's podium of Garry Walker, Opera North's music director. Such was the crackle of electricity coursing through this performance."

- Geoffrey Mogridge, *Ilkley Gazette*

"As for the music on opening night (January 22) it was mostly distinguished, led by a sharply etched reading by Opera North's orchestra under its excellent Music Director Garry Walker and with a handful of exemplary solo performances on stage."

- Mark Valencia, *Musical America*

"Garry Walker conducted the whole thing in one single, restless sweep. The brass roars its curse, and Walker flexes and ebbs with his singers. Then he pings straight back on course; sleek and relentless. It hurtled by: the Leeds crowd was (as usual) slow to warm up, but by the end they were on their feet."

- Richard Bratby, *The Spectator*

"As ever the Opera North Orchestra and chorus under the confident and measured direction of conductor Garry Walker are in brilliant and impressive form."

- Richard Hall, *The Reviews Hub (The Lowry performances)*

MAHLER Resurrection Symphony Orchestra of Opera North (October 2021)

"The performance by the Orchestra of Opera North was by turn thrilling, terrifying and uplifting. Garry Walker, the Music Director of

Garry Walker

Selected Reviews

Opera North, seems to have inherited from his distinguished predecessor, Richard Farnes, the ability to marshal huge forces with minimum fuss, to express great emotional intensity while keeping a precise grasp of detail."

- **Rob Simpson, *The Reviews Hub***

"Opera North music director Garry Walker at the helm of the massed forces, revealed his absolute mastery of the architecture of this great work."

- **Geoffrey Mogridge, *Ilkley Gazette***

BIZET Carmen

Orchestra of Opera North (October 2021)

"Bizet's tuneful score is punchily played by the Opera North orchestra, conducted by Garry Walker."

- **Rebecca Franks, *The Times* ******

"Garry Walker gets his music directorship off to a good start, whipping the orchestra through Bizet's glorious tunes and getting real richness from the strings especially."

- **Erica Jeal, *The Guardian* ******

"Under Garry Walker the orchestra has the necessary fire and delicacy."

- **Ron Simpson, *The Reviews Hub***

"Garry Walker's pacing and balance of this and every dramatic confrontation is impeccable. Walker and the Orchestra of Opera North makes Bizet's glorious musical score sounds as if the ink had barely dried."

- **Geoffrey Mogridge, *Ilkley Gazette***

"...in the pit the ever-excellent Opera North orchestra sounds splendid in Garry Walker's first production as music director, relishing Bizet's superb orchestration and giving exactly the right rhythmic lift to this great, immortal score."

- **Nicholas Kenyon, *The Telegraph***

"Garry Walker's orchestra covers all bases beautifully, with lovely detail, punchy vivacity, gorgeous delicacy in the Flower Song and elsewhere..."

- **Robert Thicknesse****, *Opera Now***

Triumph over Tragedy: Britten, Elgar, Shostakovich

Orchestra of Opera North (September 2021)

"Walker guided the orchestra expertly through those mighty crescendos that suddenly grow from hushed strings and then die away just as suddenly; the orchestra showed off its solo power in the fun of the Scherzo; and the brass and percussion battered us into submission in a breath-taking final movement."

- **Rob Simpson, *The Reviews Hub***

"... the music director and his seventy five players basked in the glow of a Huddersfield Town Hall audience clearly delighted by their return after an absence of eighteen months. Opera North's 2021-22 Kirklees Orchestral Concert Season opened with Britten's Suite of English Folk Tunes 'a time there was'. Guy Johnston was the deeply expressive soloist in Elgar's gloriously autumnal Cello Concerto and Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony ended the concert on a triumphal note."

- **Geoffrey Mogridge, *Ilkley Gazette***

Garry Walker

Selected Reviews

MARTINU The Greek Passion Opera North (September 2019)

"[...] in his first production since being named Opera North's music director designate, Walker held the potentially stark and sprawling score together tautly, bringing out Martinů's trademark radiance. The styles move from mystery play via folk opera to even grand opera, and encompass Greek Orthodox chant, speech song and plain dialogue; whether shaping the wedding chorus that sets words from the Song of Solomon or allowing the accordion solos their space, Walker relished the entire patchwork."

- *Opera Magazine*

"Conducting was Garry Walker, now the company's Music Director Designate. It is a welcome appointment. He is an excellent musician who has yet to receive the recognition he deserves. His account of Martinů's great work fully realised its intensity and dramatic power. The Greek Passion, both in production and performance, is one of Opera North's finest achievements."

- **Anthony Arblaster, *Opera Now***

"Garry Walker conducts with a dark intensity that brings out both the score's violence and its extraordinary moments of ecstatic lyricism."

- **Tim Ashley, *The Guardian***

"Walker, in his first production since being named Opera North's music director designate, holds the potentially stark and sprawling score together tautly, bringing out Martinů's trademark radiance."

- **John Allison, *The Telegraph***

"The orchestra, under the music director designate Garry Walker, play with a suppleness and generosity that makes the score soar."

- **Rebecca Franks, *The Times***

"Martinů's luminous, eclectic score is handsomely conducted by new Music Director Garry Walker."

- **Graham Rickson, *The Arts Desk***

"With the excellent Chorus and Orchestra of Opera North on superb form under the company's principal conductor-designate, Garry Walker, a Scottish musician whose Billy Budd in Leeds a year or two back confirmed him as a talent for years to come, this Greek Passion transcended the obstacles of text and staging to provide a vivid, intense musical experience."

- **Mark Valencia, *Musical America***

"This is another excellent performance under the baton of Garry Walker."

- **Dawn Smallwood, *The Reviews Hub***

SAWER The Skating Rink Garsington Opera (July 2018)

"Garry Walker and the Garsington Opera Orchestra deliver it all with panache."

- **Mark Valencia, *WhatsOnStage***

"Conductor Garry Walker and the Garsington Opera Orchestra kept everything coherent, purposeful and slick"

- **Charlotte Valori, *Bachtrack (5*)***

"Praise to for the wonderfully vital and responsive Garsington Opera Orchestra under Garry Walker; translucent textures, rhythmic brio – especially in the jaunty dance sections. There is also great intensity when needed."

Garry Walker

Selected Reviews

- Alexander Campbell, *Classical Source* (5*)

"[...]conducted deftly by Garry Walker and making the keenest impact in a surprisingly vivid acoustic."

- Paul Driver, *The Sunday Times*

"Conducted by Garry Walker, the score is executed with aplomb."

- Louise Lewis, *British Theatre Guide*

"Garry Walker's conducting is first rate."

- Andrew Clements, *The Guardian*

"Sawer's intriguing score, excellently conducted by Garry Walker."

- Sam Smith, *MusicOMH*

"The score is vividly and virtuosically played under Garry Walker's impeccable direction."

- Richard Morrison, *The Times*

"As conducted by Garry Walker, Sawer's score is a beguiling patchwork of colours and effects."

- Michael Church, *Independent*

"Under Garry Walker's expert guidance the orchestra drew a wide range of colours and textures from Sawer's score, giving as thrilling and committed performance as the singers on stage and making the piece really count."

- Robert Hugill, *Planet Hugill*

"Garry Walker conducts the orchestra with panache."

- Rupert Christiansen, *The Telegraph*

"Garry Walker conducts the Garsington Opera Orchestra in a taut and cohesive performance."

- George Hall, *The Stage*

"As the story builds, so does the soundworld, from the chilly sparseness of strings alone to the full force of the Garsington Opera Orchestra [...] and conducted with pace and precision by Garry Walker."

- Claudia Pritchard, *CultureWhisper* (5*)

BRITTEN Billy Budd

Opera North at Aldeburgh Festival (June 2017)

"His reading of Britten's score has matured since last year's opening night, to the extent that I count this one of the most muscular accounts of it that I've heard. Walker's workout had the gruelling energy of sinews stretching and bones pumping as the Opera North Orchestra supplied a tireless display of physicality. [...] the orchestra openly revelled in Garry Walker's conducting."

- Mark Valencia, *Bachtrack* (5*)

BRITTEN Billy Budd

Opera North (December 2016)

"...Opera North's equally superb orchestra, which delivered a brilliantly vivid, sharply etched account under conductor Garry Walker, full of surging drama and also moments of exquisite contemplation."

- David Kettle, *The Scotsman*

Garry Walker

Selected Reviews

“The orchestra, conducted by Garry Walker, could hardly have been more alert.”

- Martin Dreyer, *Opera Magazine*

“Garry Walker conducts with finesse, and the Opera North orchestra sustains tension with aplomb.”

- Kate Kellaway, *The Observer*

“Garry Walker’s conducting [...] encourages some eloquent orchestral playing.”

- Rupert Christiansen, *The Telegraph*

“Garry Walker's razor-sharp Opera North players let rip, too. Goosebumps all round [...] The final word goes to Vere, whose musical liberation if not the words that go with it makes complete sense in Walker's postponement of the biggest climax to the last well-timed shattering chord.”

- David Nice, *The Arts Desk*

“Conductor Garry Walker has the measure of the smallest details as well as the overall scope of the score.”

- George Hall, *The Stage*

“The beautifully emotional singing is faultless and is complemented by Garry Walker’s wonderful conducting style”

- Sue Collier, *The Reviews Hub*

“Britten’s ominous orchestration [...] was handled with great skill by conductor Gary Walker (winner of the 1999 Leeds Conductors’ Competition) who was making his Opera North debut.”

- Richard Wilcocks, *Bachtrack*

VARESE Déserts

Red Note Ensemble, Lammermuir Festival (September 2016)

“Garry Walker’s conducting might have been cool and precise, but he delivered a red-hot account of Varèse’s Déserts [...] one of the festival’s most unconventional and unforgettable evenings.”

- David Kettle, *The Scotsman* (5*)

BERIO, BARTOK, BRAHMS Symphony No. 2

Teatro dell’Opera di Roma (May 2016)

In any case it is thanks to the Scottish conductor Garry Walker that the entire evening had a consistent high-sounding spirit. Both excellent and informative. Tempi are always taken with ease and he makes the outline of the score both clear and transparent [...] The Orchestra is responsive and its growth is noticeable.

- Mario Gamba, *Alfabeta2*

CRANE Chamber Symphony No.2 & JIMENEZ XL111 – Memoriam Vivire (Premieres)

London Sinfonietta (October 2015)

“Walker ensured scrupulous and dedicated playing. The descent into silence at the end was meticulously observed and added an eerie, almost otherworldly, quality which seemed entirely appropriate.”

- Brian Barford, *Classical Source*

MUSSORGSKY/RAVEL Pictures at an Exhibition

Adelaide Symphony Orchestra (March 2015)

Garry Walker

Selected Reviews

“There is a lightness of touch to Walker’s conducting that can be heard in each moment of the music.”

- Diana Carroll, *The Adelaide Independent News*

ADAMS Short Ride in a Fast Machine Auckland Philharmonic Orchestra (February 2015)

“Conductor Garry Walker was a fearless driver for a four-minute zoom through John Adams' Short Ride in a Fast Machine...it was a brilliant workout, as colours shimmered and shifted around Eric Renick's deadpan, metronomic woodblock.”

- *New Zealand Herald*

HARRIS Symphony No. 4 Auckland Philharmonic Orchestra (October 2014)

“Garry Walker and Brett Dean secure exemplary results from the Auckland orchestra [...] most truthful sound and useful presentation, too. An enterprising pairing that can be welcomed with open arms.”

- *Gramophone Magazine*

JANACEK The Cunning Little Vixen Garsington Opera (June 2014)

“Presiding musically over the show is conductor Garry Walker, who shows a profound understanding of the colours and textures of Janacek's idiosyncratic writing, and draws exceptional playing from the Garsington Opera orchestra.”

- *George Hall, The Stage*

“The playing under Garry Walker's expert thrust is mostly first-rate...with woodwind nature-noises clearer than I've ever heard them.”

- *David Nice, The Arts Desk*

“...the conductor, Garry Walker, kept the performance on its toes.”

- *Richard Fairman, The Financial Times*

“Garry Walker's handling of the music is sharp-eared, to say the least, and he and his superb house orchestra remain totally alive to the score's nervous, tumbling surface throughout as well as to the darker currents bubbling underneath.”

- *Guy Dammann, The Guardian*

DILLON New York Triptych & FENNESSY Hauptstimme (Premieres) Red Note Ensemble (November 2014)

“Garry Walker conducted with cool authority and the ensemble played with deceptive ease, making relaxed work of very difficult music.”

- *Herald Scotland*

RIMSKY-KORSAKOV Scheherazade The Pacific Symphony (August 2013)

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Garry Walker

Selected Reviews

"The highlight of the concert for this listener (and one of the highlights of the season, actually) was Walker's performance of "Scheherazade." The Scottish conductor, permanent guest conductor of the Royal Philharmonic and principal guest conductor of the Royal Scottish Orchestra obviously has a thing for it. His affection came through in almost every bar."

- **Drew A. Kelley, *Orange County Register***

BRUCH, MALAGINI, ELGAR BBC Philharmonic (January 2012)

"Walker's transition to the heartbreaking theme of the wonderfully lyrical Adagio was impressive, creating intensely passionate music that combined with the scent and sounds of nature. On splendid form under Garry Walker the BBC Philharmonic strings improve each time I hear them, especially the silver-toned high strings."

- **Michael Cookson, *Seen and Heard***