Music UA 730 Section 001 Fall 2018 Tues/Thurs. 3:30-4:45 PM
An Introduction to Opera

Professor: Louis Karchin  /  LSK1@nyu.edu
Office hours: Tuesdays 4:45-5:45, Thursdays 2:00-3:00, or by appointment
Recitation Instructors:
Samantha Cooper smc867@nyu.edu
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Class location: Silver Center Rm. 320 (32 Waverly Place, 3rd Floor)

Course description:

This course will explore the world of opera through the lens of four primary works: Mozart’s *The Marriage of Figaro*, Bizet’s *Carmen*, Verdi’s *La Traviata*, and Wagner’s *Das Rheingold*. Taken together, these represent some of the greatest achievements of musical expression and explore a wide range of human emotions as the music adds depth to the stories, plays and legends on which they are based. Opera has contributed over four centuries of music and drama to our humanistic canon, and the most beloved works are constantly produced anew, sometimes with innovative stagings, sometimes with an eye towards authenticity. Opera, in general, has an enthusiastic following: in New York City alone, approximately 4000 people gather at Lincoln Center to hear live performances of operas at the Metropolitan Opera House virtually every evening during a season that extends from October through May.

This course will examine the challenges and possibilities of putting words to music within the specific conventions of the art form, and will discuss the effect of the music on listeners, and the music’s influence on society. We will examine opera’s various components: voice types of singers, the roles of the conductor, the orchestra, the stage director, the functions of lighting and costume designers, and the work of many people who are behind the scenes--producers, coaches, etc. Students will be encouraged to attend performances of operas, and several of the ones studied will be produced during the time period of the course at the “Met.” As a core course in Expressive Cultures, the aim of the course is to provide students with a sure background and understanding of the medium so that going to an opera performance will ultimately seem as natural as going to a concert of popular music.

Some questions that will be considered:

1. Can a work that is wholly sung be as effective as a play in which all words are spoken, or a music theatre piece in which speaking and singing are mixed?
2. How do the stories of opera relate to their time period in history? Why do some composers choose topics and stories of the remote past?
3. How are political and social issues represented?
4. How does the staging of an opera influence its message?
This course fulfills a "CORE " requirement in “Expressive Cultures.”

Assessment of Grading Components:
1. Class Participation (and attendance) 20%
2. Writing assignments (20%)
3. Three concert reports (20%)
4. Mid-term (20%)
5. Final (20%)

**Class participation and attendance.**
Students are expected to participate in classroom discussions, which will be based upon the lectures and the reading and listening assignments. Because much of the examination material will come from lectures and recitation sections, attendance is crucial. Therefore, please note that attendance at all meetings of the lecture and recitation is expected and required. Absences will adversely affect the participation component of your overall course grade, and students may be liable for an automatic failing grade for more than three unexcused absences from lectures and/or recitations, even if they have completed all other course requirements (please note that this is a university-wide policy for Core courses).

**Concert reports:** You will be asked to write two concert reports of 2-3 pages each. Please attend at least one fully-staged opera production. The 2nd and 3rd performances may be fully-staged operas as well, or concert performances of vocal music by composers who were active in the world of opera. Please describe your experience of the event, what was performed, the impact of the performance on the audience, and your assessment of the music and its presentation.

**Writing assignments:** In addition to concert reports, you will be asked to write two short essays on topics discussed in class during the semester (2-3 pages each), and towards the end of the semester, a longer essay on a topic to be developed within the recitation sections (5-6 pages). This might be a comparison of two stagings of the same opera, a comparison of two operas based on the same subject matter, comparisons of two different performances of the same opera, and there are many other possible topics. Please observe deadlines carefully.

**Guest lectures**
We are located in a city teeming with operatic talent, and many professionals working in the field live nearby. We will have guest lectures from two professionals working at the Metropolitan Opera: Cori Ellison, a longtime vocal coach who has worked with hundreds of singers, and Sarah Meyers, one of the Met’s regular stage directors. We will also have visits from two of the professors whose textbooks we are studying: Prof. Mary Hunter, and Prof. James Parakilas. We will discuss possible questions for each guest prior to their visit.
**Classroom atmosphere and etiquette**
This will be a large class, and certain procedures and rules that would not be necessary in a smaller seminar situation are necessary here. Please come to class on time. This means being prepared to begin discussion and taking notes at the class’s start time. We will also end promptly. Please do not carry on side discussions, particularly while we are listening to music, or viewing videos of operas. Please refrain from using computers and phones during the class. Although I am aware of the possibilities for note-taking on computer, these virtues are trumped by the seemingly ubiquitous temptation to check social media and email. Please keep your computers and phones off during class.

**Note on the Syllabus**
The syllabus is a working document and we will update it from time to time.

**Note on Academic Integrity**
Crediting the work of others who are writing on your topic is an important aspect of academia. You should include citations of work you are quoting, and put the sources in a bibliography. The deliberate copying of material without citation is considered plagiarism, and you should know that I, and our teaching assistants, are required to report this if it occurs. It may result in disciplinary action. The Core office will send additional guidelines on this subject, and please read these carefully.

In addition, it goes without saying that you should do your own work. Please do not be tempted to purchase papers or have papers written for you by others. This can result in expulsion from NYU, and permanent damage to your record as a student.

**Textbooks**
There will be readings from many of the books listed in the bibliography. However, we will use one primary text, available at the bookstore for purchase, rental, or as an e-book: James Parakilas, *The Story of Opera*. Please acquire this book in one of these forms.

**COURSE SCHEDULE for 1st half of semester**

Sept. 4
Introduction to opera, its history and its sound world, introduction to *The Marriage of Figaro*
Homework for following class:
Watch Act I of *Marriage of Figaro* Met-on-Demand
Read: Abbate, 37-52
Hunter, Mary, pp. 131-144

Sept. 6
Guest lecture by Prof. Mary Hunter (Bowdoin College) on Mozart’s Operas in their Social Context
Homework for following class:
Read: Parakilas, pp. 3-65, 226-235

Sept. 11
Discussion of Act 1 of *Marriage of Figaro*; characteristics of Mozart’s musical language
Homework for following class:
Listening: *Figaro*, Act 1
Reading: Johnson, Paul, pp. 1-75

Sept. 13
Discussion of end of Act I, beginning of Act II of *Figaro*; Mozart’s characterization of drama.
Homework for following class:
Listening: *Figaro*, Act III
Reading: Johnson, Paul pp. 79-155

Sept. 18
Discussion of Finale of Act 2, beginning of Act III; extended forms in opera
Homework for following class:
Listening: *Figaro*, Act IV
Begin work on 1st paper: a discussion of 2 arias (TBD) from the 3rd or 4th act of *Figaro*

Sept. 20
Discussion of Acts III (conclusion) and IV of *Figaro*
Homework for following class;
Finish 1st paper
Read: Wikipedia entry on Merimee play about Carmen:

Sept. 25
**Mozart aria paper due this date (2-3 pages)**
Introduction to *Carmen*, discussion of source material, Georges Bizet
Homework for following class:
Listening: *Carmen*, Act I
Reading: Parakilas, pp. 301-307
Reading: McClary, pp. 15-28 (Genesis of Carmen)

Sept. 27
Study of *Carmen*, Act 1, beginning; Bizet’s idioms, the sound world of nineteenth century opera
Homework for following class:
Reading: McClary, pp. 29-61
Listening: *Carmen*, Act II
Oct. 2
Study of Carmen, Act I continued; dance forms, exoticism
Homework for following class:
Reading: McClary: pp. 111-146
Listening: Carmen, Act III

Oct. 4
Study of Bizet’s Carmen, Act II
Reading: Macdonald, pp. 3-55
Listening: Carmen, Act III

Oct. 9 (please note: legislative Monday)

Oct. 11
Guest presentation: Jeremy Hwu Williams, operatic baritone, Welsh National Opera
Homework for following class:
Begin work on second writing assignment 2-3 pages, tbd

Oct. 16
Study of Carmen, Act III
Homework for following class:
Finish second writing assignment

Oct. 18
Study of Carmen, Act IV
**Second writing assignment due**
Homework for following class:
Begin study of La Traviata, TBA

Oct. 23
Guest lecture by Prof. James Parakilas, (Bates College) on popular versions of Carmen

Oct. 25 Midterm exam

The remainder of the syllabus will be distributed at a later date. The operas following those discussed above, will be Verdi’s La Traviata, and Wagner’s Das Rheingold.

**Bibliography**

Books:
MacDonald, Hugh, *Bizet*, Oxford University Press, 2014
Scruton, Roger, *The Ring of Truth*, Random House, 2017,

Articles:

**About the professor and recitation instructors:**

Prof. Louis Karchin
In addition to my work at NYU, I am a composer of approximately 100 works, and frequently conduct new music as well. I will alert you to various performances taking place during the semester, but please feel free to check my web at LouisKarchin.com. For many years, I have been immersed in opera, writing two operas that have been produced in New York, and early on, producing and conducting a performance of Mozart's *Abduction from the Seraglio*. My first opera, *Romulus*, based on a play by Alexander Dumas, is available on a Naxos CD, and the second one, based on Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, is forthcoming on Naxos as well.

Recitation Instructors
Michael Rose is a graduate student in composition and theory in our department at NYU, and has written extensively for the voice. He has often performed on piano with singers, and coached them on his music and the music of others.

Samantha Cooper is a musicology graduate student in our department, with a wide and varied background in opera. She is planning a doctoral dissertation on the Yiddish theatre, and has researched operas of all periods and styles.