

Music 377a: Fall 2007
Opera c. 1925-present:
Opera in 20th-Century America

Location: TC202

Times: Monday 9.30-11.30am, Thursday 11.30am-12.30pm

Instructor: Emily Abrams Ansari

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Office hours: Mondays, 12.30-2.30pm

Course description

This class considers developments in opera since 1925 through a case-study country: the United States of America. In the 19th century, opera in the U.S. mostly imitated European developments. In the 20th century, as we shall see, it took these European conventions, built on them, and in many cases moved off into entirely new terrain. American opera is also attractive for its fascinating diversity, ranging from the eclectic and ultra-modern, to works that blur the lines between opera and musical theatre. Each week we will consider a new opera, with students presenting on the work and the class as a whole discussing articles written about it. As a group we will critique the many methodological approaches to opera and use this knowledge to find new ways to understand the works under consideration, many of which remain comparatively understudied.

Objectives

1. To gain an intimate familiarity with some of the most important operas written in America since 1925.
2. To understand some of the different methods with which scholars are today approaching opera, and to apply these methods to our own study of the operas considered in this class.
3. To gain skills in writing and in presenting before a group.

Readings, Scores and Recordings

I have put together a coursepack for this course (#M8612). Please purchase it as soon as possible. All the books from which the readings come are also on 1 day loan in the Music Library in Talbot College. If you find you are frequently referring to other sources and would like them to go on reserve too, please let me know. CDs, scores and DVDs for the works we will study in class are also on reserve (2 hour loan): I have included the call numbers of these in this syllabus (although for some works additional scores and recordings may also be available on a longer loan, should you need to study them).

Evaluation

Attendance and Participation	15%
2 quizzes	30%
1 in-class presentation/interview	20%
Final paper	35%

Assignments:

- 20-minute presentation or interview chosen from the following (please sign the list available from instructor in 1st week):
 - o present on an opera (when 2 present on one work, you can divide up the presenting as you like eg. one student could discuss the work as a whole and its history and the other could discuss a single movement in detail)
 - o OR conduct the interview of Omar Daniel on November 26

Try to find a coherent topic for your presentation and think hard about an interesting way to present it. Be sure to include your own ideas and your own take on the issues at hand: do not over-quote the work of others.

- 2 quizzes during the term (October 1 and November 12)
- final paper: write a paper about one of the operas we studied in class, analyzing one or two of the issues it raises eg. musical, political, gender- or sexuality-related, dramatic, text-setting etc. 1-page abstract due Monday 22 October. Final paper (10-15 pages) due December 3.
- Extra credit will be given to anyone who volunteers to perform one of our studied opera movements in class. If you are an instrumentalist, you are encouraged to make arrangements of the score or use an existing arrangement, if you can find one.

Course policies

- This course is all about discussion and participation. Please come to each class having done the reading and listening assignments and having considered the issues they raise. Your participation grade will be even higher if you also bring questions and issues of your own to discuss in class.
- How you present your thoughts in presentations and papers represents the major part of your grade. Please take time to craft these assignments so that they have a thesis and a clear, cogent argument. And don't forget to proof-read. An 'A' paper or presentation will contain a clear and thoughtful presentation of your ideas that brings new thoughts and ideas to the discussion.
- Please turn off your cell phone and don't surf the web during class.
- Plagiarism: Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea, or a passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major offense (see Scholastic Offense Policy in the Western Academic Calendar). All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between the University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).

Thursday 6 September: Introductions and course outline

Monday 10 and Thursday 13 September: Issues in opera study

Students to present on each of the following articles, to give their colleagues an overview of the sorts of approaches to opera that are out there.

Readings (CCB pp. 1- 41):

Mary Ann Smart, *Siren Songs: Representations of Gender and Sexuality in Opera*, 1-16.

Paul Robinson, "A Deconstructive Postscript: Reading Libretti and Misreading Opera," in Arthur Groos and Roger Parker (eds.), *Reading Opera*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 328-346.

Arthur Groos and Roger Parker (eds.), *Reading Opera*, 1-11.

Joseph Kerman, *Opera as Drama*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 1-17.

Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 1-9.

Monday 17 and Thursday 20 September: Virgil Thomson, *Four Saints in Three Acts* (1934)

Readings (CCB pp. 43-73):

Steven Watson, *Prepare for Saints: Gertrude Stein, Virgil Thomson, and the Mainstreaming of American Modernism* (New York: Random House, 1988), 3-62.

Listening:

recording MCD2470; score M1503.T484F68S3

Monday 24 and Thursday 27 September: George Gershwin, *Porgy and Bess* (1935)

Readings (CCB pp. 75-83):

Raymond Knapp, *The American Musical and the Formation of a National Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 181-4, 194-204

Charles Hamm, "Towards a New Reading of Gershwin," in Wayne Schneider (ed.), *The Gershwin Style: New Looks at the Music of George Gershwin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 3-18.

Listening:

recording MCD656; vocal score with piano M1503.G478P67G4

Monday 1 and Thursday 4 October: Marc Blitzstein, *The Cradle will Rock* (1937)

MONDAY 1ST – QUIZ #1

Readings (CCB pp. 95-139):

Raymond Knapp, *The American Musical and the Formation of a National Identity*, 103-4, 110-118

Carol J. Oja, "Marc Blitzstein's *The Cradle Will Rock* and Mass Song Style of the 1930s," *Musical Quarterly* 73/4 (1989), 445-75.

David Schiff, "The Labor Pains of a Leftist Musical in an Angry Era," *New York Times*, December 5, 1999.

Bruce Weber, "Questions Raised by a Political Period Piece," *New York Times*, August 29, 2000.

Listening:

Watch DVD – MVD135

Monday 8 October (NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING)

Thursday 11 October: Aaron Copland, *The Tender Land* (1938)

Readings (CCB pp.141-163):

Aaron Copland and Vivian Perlis, *Copland Since 1943* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1989), 205-226.

Daniel E. Mathers, "Expanding Horizons: Sexuality and the Re-Zoning of *The Tender Land*" in Peter Dickinson (ed.), *Copland Connotations: Studies and Interviews* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2002), 118-135.

Listening:

score M1003.C66T4.B6; recording MCD5452

Monday 15 and Thursday 18 October: Kurt Weill, *Street Scene* (1946)

Reading (CCB pp.165-185):

Foster Hirsch, *Kurt Weill on Stage: From Berlin to Broadway* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), 254-275.

Ronald Sanders, *The Days Grow Short: The Life and Music of Kurt Weill* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1980), 342-359.

Listening:

Score M1503.W45S87C4; recording MCD3776

Monday 22 and Thursday 25 October: Gian Carlo Menotti, *Amahl and the Night Visitors* (1951)

1-PAGE ABSTRACT OF FINAL PAPER DUE MONDAY 22.

Reading (CCB pp. 187-215):

Ken Wlaschin, *Gian Carlo Menotti on Screen: Opera, Dance and Choral Works on Film, Television and Radio* (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 1999), 1-24.

Jennifer Barnes, *Television Opera: The Fall of Opera Commissioned for Television* (Woodbridge, UK: The Boydell Press, 2003), 15-41.

Listening:

Watch DVD with score: score M1500.M543A4, DVD MVD84, (also recording MCD3129)

Monday 29 October: Interlude--Opera in Modern life

Reading for Monday 29 (CCB 217-244):

Nicholas Payne, "Opera in the Marketplace," *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth Century Opera* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 306-320.

Elise Kirk, *American Opera*, pp. 160-183.

Thursday 1 November: NO CLASS (INSTRUCTOR AT AMERICAN MUSICOLOGICAL SOCIETY CONFERENCE)

Monday 5 and Thursday 8 November: Leonard Bernstein, *West Side Story* (1957)

Reading (CCB pp. 245-297):

Humphrey Burton, *Leonard Bernstein* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 265-277.

Block, Geoffrey. "The Broadway Canon from Show Boat to West Side Story and the European Operatic Ideal," *The Journal of Musicology* 11/4 (Autumn, 1993), 525-544.

Elizabeth Wells, "West Side Story and the Hispanic", *Echo* (online journal) 2/1.

Listening:

Score M1500.B5537W4 1994; recording MCD95

Monday 12 and Thursday 15 November: Philip Glass, *Einstein on the Beach* (1976)

MONDAY 12TH – QUIZ #2

Reading (CCB pp. 299-327):

Philip Glass, *Music by Philip Glass* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), 27-62.

Joseph Roddy, "Listening to Glass," in Richard Kostelanetz (ed.), *Writings on Glass: Essays, Interviews, Criticism* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1997), 167-175.

Listening:

Watch DVD about producing *Einstein*: MVD120 (recording also available: CD MCD682)

Monday 19 and Thursday 22 November: Adams, *The Death of Klinghoffer* (1991)

Reading (CCB pp.329-351):

Various authors, "The Klinghoffer Controversy," in Thomas May (ed.), *The John Adams Reader: Essential Writings on an American Composer* (Pompton Plains, NJ: Amadeus Press, 2006), 299-342.

See also:

<http://www.earbox.com/inter027.html>

Recording:

Watch DVD: score M1503.A23D4 1994; DVD on reserve provided by instructor – please do not remove from library. (also recording available: MCD8468)

Monday 26 November: Prof. Omar Daniel in class

2 students will interview Prof. Daniel about his recent opera compositions with the goal of gaining insight into the challenges of writing opera in the 21st century.

Thursday 29 November

We will study an American opera written in the last ten years chosen by students in the class.

Monday 3 December: Conclusions

FINAL PAPER DUE TODAY