Humanities Seminars

The Operas of Verdi

Dates and Time:
October 14; Dec. 2, 9, and 16, 2013 (four Mondays)
1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Instructor:
Jay Rosenblatt
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School of Music
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Course Description:
The year 2013 will commemorate the 200th anniversary of the birth of Giuseppe Verdi (1813–1901), and over four class sessions we will survey his vast output of operas. The focus will be primarily on the music, beginning with the forms and techniques of Italian opera that Verdi inherited and following his development over fifty years and twenty-eight operas, while at the same time reviewing Verdi’s life and career.

Each session will consider the operas in chronological order, with in depth examination of selected scenes through discussion of video clips and recordings. As part of the final class, we will focus on Verdi’s last operas, “Otello” and “Falstaff,” delving deeply into the music as well as the intimate relationship these works have with their Shakespearean sources.

The class will be predominantly a lecture format, with plenty of opportunity for musical discussion (the ability to read music is not required) as well as time for questions. Verdi’s music will be experienced predominantly through recordings and videos, and Dr. Rosenblatt will also illustrate musical details at the keyboard.

Dr. Jay Rosenblatt is currently Associate Professor of Music History at the University of Arizona, where he has taught since 1995. He has offered classes on the history of opera and seminars on the music of Liszt, Mozart, and Verdi. His scholarly research focuses on the life and work of Franz Liszt, and he has published articles and editions of his music.

Required Text (available in the UA bookstore):

Other Useful Books:

Session One (October 14): Youth and First Successes.
Suggested reading: Budden, chapters 1–3, 12–13, 18
Topics to be discussed:
Verdi’s musical training and background
The Code Rossini
First successes
Works to be discussed:
Oberto
Un giorno di regno
Nabucco
I Lombardi alla prima crociata
Ernani

Session Two (December 2): The Galley Years.
Suggested reading: Budden, chapters 4–5, 14
Topics to be discussed:
Librettists
Cities and their Opera Houses
The Risorgimento
Works to be discussed:
I due Foscari
Giovanna d’Arco
Alzira
Attila
Macbeth
I masnadieri
Jérusalem
Il corsaro
La battaglia di Legnano
Luisa Miller
Stiffelio

Session Three (December 9): Years of Mastery.
Suggested reading: Budden, chapters 6–7, 15–16
Topics to be discussed:
French Grand Opera
Censorship
Works to be discussed:
Rigoletto
Il trovatore
La traviata
Les vêpres siciliennes
Simon Boccanegra
Aroldo
Un ballo in maschera
La forza del destino

Session Four (December 16): “The Old Man’s Toys.”
Suggested reading: Budden, chapters 8–11, 17
Works to be discussed:
Don Carlos
Aida
Otello
Falstaff