

Humanities Seminars

The Operas of Verdi

Dates and Time:

September 25, October 2, 9, 16, 23, 30, 2023 (six Mondays)
10:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon

Instructor:

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Course Description:

The year 2023 commemorates the 210th anniversary of the birth of Giuseppe Verdi (1813–1901), and over six class sessions we survey his vast output of twenty-eight operas. The focus is primarily on the music, beginning with the forms and techniques of Italian opera that Verdi inherited and continuing with his development as a composer over fifty years.

An overview of Verdi's life and career takes up the initial class session, including the musical influence on his earliest works by his most important contemporaries (Rossini, Bellini, and Donizetti). The succeeding sessions consider the operas in chronological order, with in depth examination of selected scenes using video clips and recordings. As part of the final class, we discuss Verdi's last operas, "Otello" and "Falstaff," delving deeply into the music as well as the intimate relationship that these works have with their Shakespearean sources. The sessions are predominantly in lecture format, with plenty of opportunity for musical discussion (the ability to read music is not required) as well as time for questions.

Dr. Jay Rosenblatt is currently 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:

Julian Budden, *Verdi*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2008; also available as a Kindle edition).

Other Useful Books:

Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi*, rev. ed., 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).
Mary Jane Phillips-Matz, *Verdi: A Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).
Frank Walker, *The Man Verdi* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

Session One (September 25): Overview of Verdi's Career and His Important Predecessors.

Suggested reading: Budden, chapters 1, 11–12

Topics to be discussed:

Verdi's background and musical training
The Code Rossini
Gioachino Rossini (1792–1868)

Vincenzo Bellini (1801–1835)
Gaetano Donizetti (1797–1848)

Session Two (October 2): First Successes.

Suggested reading: Budden, chapters 2, 13, 18

Works to be discussed:

Oberto
Un giorno di regno
Nabucco
I Lombardi alla prima crociata
Ernani

Session Three (October 9): The Galley Years I.

Suggested reading: Budden, chapters 3–4, 14

Topics to be discussed:

Librettists
The Risorgimento

Works to be discussed:

I due Foscari
Giovanna d'Arco
Alzira
Attila
Macbeth
I masnadieri
Jérusalem
Il corsaro
La battaglia di Legnano

Session Four (October 16): The Galley Years II.

Suggested reading: Budden, chapters 5, 15

Topics to be discussed:

Censorship

Works to be discussed:

Luisa Miller
Stiffelio
Rigoletto
Il trovatore
La traviata

Session Five (October 23): Years of Mastery.

Suggested reading: Budden, chapters 6–8, 16

Topics to be discussed:

French Grand Opera
Censorship

Works to be discussed:

Les vêpres siciliennes

Simon Boccanegra
Aroldo
Un ballo in maschera
La forza del destino
Don Carlos
Aida

Session Six (October 30): “The Old Man’s Toys.”

Suggested reading: Budden, chapters 9–10, 17

Works to be discussed:

Simon Boccanegra (revised version)
Otello
Falstaff