

Detailed Syllabus and Selected Assignments: Opera and Race

Brooks, Spring 2021

Week 1: Introductions

Monday, February 1: Synchronous Meeting

- Course Intro
- Synchronous Meeting
- Syllabus Info, Etc

Wednesday, February 3: Asynchronous reading

Some Initial Frameworks, Thoughts, Themes

- Assigned Reading: André, Naomi. Excerpt from Chapter 1: "Engaged Opera" from *Black Opera: History, Power, Engagement*, 1-20. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2018
- Assigned Listening:
 - Leontyne Price and Simon Estes, scene from Act III of *Aida*. This scene is discussed in the assigned reading by Naomi André on pages 17-20, you'll find the description, lyrics, and a translation there.
 - Not required listening, but if you'd like: this is the very famous scene immediately beforehand, where *Aida* sings "O patria mia." I've attached an optional link of Leontyne Price's farewell performance of this at the Met in 1985.

Assigned Week 1 Response, due Thursday February 4, 11:59pm

Friday, February 5: Synchronous Zoom discussion (discussion of André responses)

Week 2: Thinking through the late 19th and early 20th Centuries

Monday, February 8: Asynchronous reading

This article focuses on the Black opera company run by Theodore Drury in the early 20th century. and gets at some of the barriers faced by artists of color in producing opera in the early 20th century United

States, but also some of the reasons opera had such powerful cultural value at the time.

- Turner, Kristen M. "Class, Race, and Uplift in the Opera House: Theodore Drury and His Company Cross the Color Line." *Journal of Musicological Research* 34 (2015): 320-351.

Wednesday, February 10: Asynchronous lecture

Assigned Lecture:

Looking Back to the 19th and early 20th Centuries:

- review Naomi André concept of "shadow culture"
Themes of the 19th Century:
- Opera's position in US Culture (imposter syndrome, how to write an American opera?, debates over Black music's role in American culture, class and elitism, history of the Met)
- the emerging operatic canon (what works start to be routinely performed, tensions between commerce and novelty)
- emergence of minstrelsy (definitions, history, connections with opera).
- Fisk Jubilee Singers (discourse about Blackness, high/low art, reception, cultural uplift).
- Big Questions: Cultural Uplift? Racial Uplift? Respectability?
- Additional composers/performers to discover: Harry Lawrence Freeman, Scott Joplin, Harry Burleigh, Will Marion Cook.
Musical Selections:
- Fisk Jubilee Singers performance of "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot"
- Samuel Coleridge Taylor, "Deep River" based on Fisk Jubilee Performance.

Assigned Week 1 Response, due Thursday February 11, 11:59pm

Friday, February 12: No Synchronous Zoom meeting (conference absence)

Week 3: "Indianist" Opera in the early 20th Century

Monday, February 15: Asynchronous reading

This week focuses on "Indianist" opera of the early 20th century, or some of the cultural encounters between Indigenous musics, opera, and White listeners and scholars in the early 20th century. As just a little more about this book, *Opera Indigene*: The representation of non-Western cultures in opera has long been a focus of critical inquiry. Within this field, the diverse relationships between opera and First Nations and Indigenous cultures, however, have received far less attention. *Opera Indigene* takes this subject as its focus, addressing the changing historical depictions of Indigenous cultures in opera and the more contemporary practices of Indigenous and First Nations artists.

Assigned article:

- Browner, Tara. "Native songs, Indianist styles, and the processes of Music Idealization." In *Opera Indigene: Re/presenting First Nations and Indigenous Cultures*, ed. Pamela Karantonis and Dylan Robinson (New York: Routledge, 2011), 173-186.

Wednesday, February 17: Asynchronous lecture

Assigned Lecture:

- A few terms and history: ethnographer, etc and emic, qualitative methodology, transcription (why? problems?); aids in transcription (Edison cylinders) .
- "Indianist" music": representation, sources, relationships, agency and power, historical context.
- Edward MacDowell
- Arthur Falwell
- The "Western" Indianist Operas, discussion of Zitkala Sa.
- The "Eastern" Indianist Operas, discussion of *Shanewis*.

- Tsianina Redfeather
- Optional resource: NY Times article on how to add street dance to Rameau's *Les indes galantes* [Musical selections:](#)
- MacDowell, Second "Indian" Suite.
- Cadman, recording of "From the Land of the Sky-Blue Water" (Nordica recording).

Assigned Week 3 Response, due Thursday February 18, 11:59pm

Friday, February 19: Synchronous Zoom Discussion

- Questions around motivation of ethnographers and "Indianist" composers
- Cultural appropriation questions
- Questions around how to respect Indigenous collaborators such as Tsianina Redfeather

Week 4: Puccini—Popularity, Possibilities, and Problems in the early 20th Century

Monday, February 22: Asynchronous reading

This week our focus turns to Giacomo Puccini, who was one of the most popular composers of opera at the beginning of the 20th century (and obviously remains so today!). There are many issues and questions around race and Puccini's operas—this week we'll focus on two threads only, but I want to reiterate there's plenty of other things to talk about and investigate with Puccini, so let me know if you're interested in reading more!

Notes on assigned reading:

In the reading by Kunio Hara, we'll assess some of the complicated connections between Puccini's opera *Girl of the Golden West* (*La Fanciulla del West*), Italian nationalism and Italian identity, nostalgia, and American representations of minstrelsy. One of the things this reading focuses on is "reception history"—basically how audiences react to works of art and how those reactions vary according to different groups,

different places, or different points in time. In this case, Dr. Hara focuses on the reception of *La Fanciulla del West* by two different groups: English-language newspapers in the United States and Italian-language newspapers catering to Italian immigrants in the United States.

You might think about why reception history offers us particularly rich and nuanced ways of understanding race when analyzing musical works (and helps us get beyond just what the composer intended!)

- Hara, Kunio. "'Per noi emigrati': Nostalgia in the Reception of Puccini's *La fanciulla del West* in New York City's Italian-Language Newspapers." *Journal of the Society for American Music* 13, no. 2 (2019): 177-194.
- Listening Excerpt: *La Fanciulla del West*, "Canto Nostalgico"

Wednesday, February 24: Asynchronous lecture

Assigned Lecture: The Case of *Madama Butterfly*

- The Creation of *Madame Butterfly* (as novel and play): Background on American connections, socio-political timeframe
- Giacomo Puccini and the music boxes—video interview featuring Tony Sheppard and his discovery of these music boxes.
- Performing *Madama Butterfly*: Geraldine Farrar and American Women (discussion of US gender politics, exoticisms, and suffragettes during this era).
- Performing *Madama Butterfly*: Tamaki Miura and Exoticism. Discussed the complexities of first well-known Japanese opera singer who appeared as Butterfly. [Musical Selections](#)
- Shiba Mo" and its borrowings in *Madama Butterfly* in Butterfly's Entrance, Act I
- staged selection from Butterfly's conversion scene.
- Geraldine Farrar's recording of "Un bel di."
- Tamaki Miura recording of "Un Bel Di."

Assigned Week 4 Response, due Thursday February 25, 11:59pm

Friday, February 26: Synchronous Zoom meeting

- Questions around reception, Italian racial prejudice in early 20th century America, *La Fanciulla del West*.
- Initial discussion of *Madama Butterfly*, focus on cultural appropriation and Puccini.

Week 5: Finish *Madama Butterfly* ; Reflections on Language and Genre in the Early 20th Century

Monday, March 1: Asynchronous reading

In order to finish discussions about *Madama Butterfly* this week, I'm not assigning a new article this Monday. Rather, I'd like you to do two things:

1) Review your own responses from last week. If you're someone who only wrote about *La Fanciulla* last week, you might review last week's video and see what thoughts you have about *Madama Butterfly* (since we'll be spending part of our time on Friday finishing *Madame Butterfly* discussions).

2) I'm attaching a brief reading about a really interesting way to approach *Madame Butterfly*. When Seattle Opera did this work in 2017, they held an event called "Asian Arts Leaders Respond to *Madame Butterfly*." Here's the description of the event: <https://www.seattleopera.org/classes-camps-clubs/for-adults/community-conversations/cultural-appropriation-madame-butterfly/asian-arts-leaders-respond-to-madame-butterfly/>

At this event, the following conversation took place (I've included a transcript of the Q&A). You might have a skim of this transcript—there's a lot in here that is powerful and relevant for our class. See what sticks with you from the Q&A.

https://www.seattleopera.org/globalassets/downloads/asian-arts-leaders-respond-to-madame-butterfly_transcript.pdf

[Note: later in the semester I also shared Kunio Hara's blog post on how to teach *Madama Butterfly*].

Wednesday, March 3: Asynchronous lecture

Assigned Lecture:

- Issues around opera in the early 20th Century United States: Class and Race, Nationalism, Geography and Race, Language (English language versus "foreign language" opera).
- Presentation on *Goyescas* (1915): first Spanish-language opera at the Met.
- Issues of Reception around *Goyescas* (tensions over language, nationalism, national identity).
Musical selections:
- Granados, "La Maja y el Ruiseñor."

Assigned Week 5 Response, due Thursday March 4, 11:59pm

Friday, March 5: Synchronous Zoom meeting

- Questions around Seattle Opera and *Madama Butterfly*
- Questions around language, class, elitism, what has/has not changed since early 20th century

Week 6: Opera in the 1930s-1960s—The Case of *Porgy and Bess*

Monday, March 8: Asynchronous reading

Porgy and Bess is an essential opera for us to unpack in this class; as Naomi André notes, this opera tells us things about Whiteness, Blackness, and Jewishness in the past and today, as well as multiple and complex portrayals connected to gender and sexuality. There's a lot to discuss (and some of you have already seen *Porgy and Bess* or talked about it in other classes, so you have preexistent knowledge to bring to the table here too!)

We could spend weeks talking about *Porgy and Bess*. As it is, we'll try to strike a balance between doing these complex histories justice and acknowledging there is MUCH more to be read and considered than

we have time for in this semester. We'll likewise try to balance acknowledging *Porgy*'s presence as one of the most-performed and influential "American" operas and the many problems connected to this work. There's a lot to delve into, so make sure to read this week's chapter excerpt carefully and come with good notes and questions!

- André, Naomi. "Contextualizing Race and Gender in Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*." Excerpt from *Black Opera: History, Power, Engagement*, 85-108. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois, 2018.

Wednesday, March 10: Asynchronous lecture

- *Porgy* synopsis
- *Porgy* handout with specific issues outlined
- Questions of Genre
- Questions of Folk Music—what does "folk" signify in 1930s America?
- What does it mean to call this an "American" opera?
- Discussion of the opera's musical style
Musical Selections:
- Opening (Jasbo Brown Blues), "Summertime," "Gone, Gone, Gone," "My Man's Gone Now," "Bess You Is My Woman Now," "It Ain't Necessarily So," "I Loves You Porgy."

Assigned Week 6 Response, due Thursday March 11, 11:59pm

Friday, March 12: Synchronous Zoom meeting

- Lecture presentation on Gershwin and DuBose Heyward's background
- Focus on positionality of authors
- Discussion of meaning of "folk"

Week 7: Opera in the 1930s and beyond—Continuing *Porgy and Bess*

Monday, March 15: Asynchronous reading

The second week we'll continue discussing *Porgy and Bess*. This week, we're focusing on interpretation and staging and the opinions of various performers of this opera (we spent a lot of last week talking about positionality in terms of the composer and librettist).

- André, Naomi. "Contextualizing Race and Gender in Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*." Excerpt from *Black Opera: History, Power, Engagement*, 108-119. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois, 2018.

Wednesday, March 17: Asynchronous lecture

Assigned Lecture:

- Requirements of performers; why performers are drawn to or steer clear of *Porgy*.
- Leontyne Price's particular history and viewpoints on *Porgy*
- Excerpts from a radio interview between Naomi André and bass Morris Robinson, "George Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* and its Complicated Legacy around Race."
- Different performances of *Porgy and Bess* and how they did or did not empower performers (and the racial politics of collaboration)
Musical selections:
- Leontyne Price recordings of "Bess You Is My Woman Now," "My Man's Gone Now," "Summertime."

Assigned Week 7 Response, due Sunday, March 21, 11:59pm
(extra days allotted due to spring pop-up day)

Friday, March 19: Synchronous Zoom meeting

- Interpretation as key: played excerpts from Kittiwah Island Scene (Glyndebourne and Broadway 2012), drawing on discussion in André, reading

Week 8: Race, Institutions, and Performing in Mid-Century America—Marian Anderson

Monday, March 22: Asynchronous video

Assigned work on Mid-Century American Opera

- 1-hour lecture video by Carol Oja, 2016-2017
Radcliffe Fellow: "Marian Anderson and the Desegregation of the American Concert Stage."

Wednesday, March 24: No Work assigned due to Spring pop-up day

Friday, March 26: No Synchronous Zoom meeting due to Crane Advising Day

Assigned Week 8 Response on Marian Anderson, due Friday March 26, 11:59pm
(extra days allotted due to spring pop-up day)

Week 9: A Deeper Dive into Performers and Institutions in Mid-Century America

Monday, March 29: Break Day—No Assigned Work

Wednesday, March 31: No Assigned Lecture

Work on mini- Project on Individual Performers: "A Deeper Dive Blog Post" (worth 10% of overall grade)—a short "blog post" (or short piece of writing) on an operatic performer in mid-century America.

Some guidelines:

First: According to the groups I assigned, choose a performer from a specific group. Singers include Roland Hayes, Robert McFerrin Jr., Mattiwilda Dobbs, Gloria Davy, George Shirley, Martina Arroyo, Junetta Jones, Reri Grist, Grace Bumbry, Gwendolyn Killebrew, Felicia Weathers, Shirley Verrett.

Second: Do a little research on chosen singer—Moodle includes more research hints and tips

Third: Write up a short "blog post" on your performer
Required elements:

- one photograph of the singer
- one link to a recording by the singer (choose your recording purposefully, not randomly)
- a blog post of at least one full page (12 point, double-spaced) of well-written prose on your singer. That page length does not include the photograph and link—make sure to write enough. You may write more, but not more than two pages.

Not sure what to include?

Think about the following questions. Not every question is relevant for every performer, and you may find certain sections more important for a specific individual.

Do NOT go overboard on background info—the point is to write a well-honed short blog post on your singer, which necessitates a good balance between bio and musical info.

Background Info:

- Their birth and death dates, place of birth, places lived
- educational background / musical training
- other relevant information about their personal life

Career info:

- What was their voice type (s)? Can you describe it beyond a one-word category? (ie was there something unique about their voice?)
- Did they win major musical awards or auditions?
- Did they sing at the Met? When? How frequently? What kinds of roles?
- Did they sing at other major opera houses? Or other major musical institutions (such as concert halls)?
- Were they known for other musical styles besides opera?

- Did they make recordings?
- Did they end up teaching voice anywhere?
- Any clue how successful they were overall?
- In your initial research, did you find this singer (or other scholars who worked on him or her) make any reference to racial barriers or institutional difficulties in working as a mid-century opera singer of color?

Friday, April 2: Synchronous Zoom meeting

- Additional information on Marian Anderson's career, gleaned from new PBS documentary (featuring work by Carol Oja, Kira Thurman, Alisha Lola Jones, etc).
- Initial student informal presentations on their "Deeper Dive Blog Post" research on individual performers.

Week 10: Opera Issues in Mid-Century America—William Grant Still

Monday, April 5: Asynchronous lecture

- William Grant Still, particularly his operas *Blue Steel* and *Troubled Island*
- Summarizes points from:
 - Gayle Murchison, "New Paradigms in William Grant Still's *Blue Steel*." In *Blackness in Opera*, ed. Naomi Andre, Karen M. Bryan, and Eric Saylor. Urbana, Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2021.
 - Catherine Parsons Smith, *William Grant Still: A Study in Contradictions*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000.

Wednesday, April 7: Asynchronous lecture

Assigned Lecture on Opera in the 1970s:

- Summarizes points from my own research and the foundational work of Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans: A History*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1971, 1983, 1997.
Topics:
 - The Black Arts Movement

- The Metropolitan Opera's record on casting of singers of color from 1955-1972
- The founding of Opera in the South and Opera Ebony
- The 1970s premiere of *Treemonisha*
- The 1970s first production of *Porgy and Bess* by Houston Grand Opera.

Friday, April 9: No Synchronous Zoom meeting due to Spring pop-up day

Assigned Week 10 Response, due Sunday April 11, 11:59pm
extra days allotted due to spring pop-up day

Week 11: Opera in the 1980s—Nixon in China

Monday, April 12: Asynchronous reading

Assigned work on *Nixon in China*:

- Oxford Online summary of *Nixon in China*
- Matthew Daines. Excerpts from "Nixon's Women: Gender Politics and Cultural Representation in Act 2 of *Nixon in China*." *The Musical Quarterly* 79, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 6-34.

Wednesday, April 14: Asynchronous lecture

Assigned Lecture:

- Summarizes points from W. Anthony Sheppard, "The Persistence of Orientalism in the Postmodern Operas of Adams and Sellars." In *Representation in Western Music*, ed. Joshua S. Walden. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013.
- Includes listening and viewing clips from *Nixon in China* (1987)

Assigned Week 11 Response, due Thursday April 15, 11:59pm

Friday, April 16: Synchronous Zoom meeting

Week 12: The Operatic Shadow Culture in the 1980s—Anthony Davis and *X, The Life and Times of Malcolm X*

Monday, April 19: Asynchronous reading

We're continuing right about the same time period—the 1980s—as last week (when we discussed *Nixon in China*). This week, however, we're focusing on the composer Anthony Davis and his opera *X, The Life and Times of Malcolm X* (1984, 1986). Like *Nixon*, this opera was written by an American composer and focuses on a political figure—but Anthony Davis is an Black composer writing about a pivotal figure in Black political life in the United States (Malcolm X). So these operas make a really interesting pair to compare back to back.

Assigned Readings:

Rather than assigning a lengthy article, I'm asking you to read three short things this Monday:

- The *Oxford Encyclopedia* entry on Anthony Davis. Please pay particular attention to the second paragraph, which discusses his operas.
- The liner notes to the first recording made of this opera
- A piece of journalism by musicologist Ryan Ebright, "Anthony Davis's Revolutionary Opera: 'X'." *New Yorker* 22 May 2020.

Wednesday, April 21: Asynchronous lecture

Assigned Lecture:

- Background/ context on Davis, his operatic output, genesis, musical style, and reception of *X, The Life and Times of Malcolm X*; connections with film; finishing with *Central Park Five*
- Includes listening clips from Anthony Davis and *X, The Life and Times of Malcolm X* (1986)

Assigned Week 11 Response, due Thursday April 15, 11:59pm

Friday, April 23: Synchronous Zoom meeting

Week 13: Returning to Indigenous Opera

Monday, April 26: Asynchronous Reading

This week we return to a concept already covered this semester in class—questions around Indigenous opera and representation (we talked about this way back in week 3 when we discussed "Indianist" opera in the early twentieth century). This week, however, we're focusing on the diverse relationships between opera and First Nations and Indigenous cultures in the twenty-first century.

The case study we're looking at today comes from Vancouver Opera, just on the other side of the border from Seattle—the assigned reading is an interview with Vancouver Opera director Robert McQueen about a 2007 adaptation of Mozart's *The Magic Flute* that worked collaboratively with Coast Salish First Nations tribal members to create a new production mixing elements of Mozart and First Nations cultures.

Assigned Reading:

- Interview, "West Coast First Peoples and The Magic Flute: Tracing the Journey of a Cross-Cultural Collaboration." In *Opera Indigene : Re/presenting First Nations and Indigenous Cultures*, edited by Pamela Karantonis and Dylan Robinson. Farnham: Taylor & Francis Group, 2011.

Note: The interview is conducted by Dylan Robinson (an ethnomusicologist who is also Indigenous, of Stó:lō descent). Robinson talks with McQueen, director of Vancouver Opera's Coast Salish adaptation of Mozart's *Magic Flute*. After this interview concluded, members of the collaborative process and audience were invited to respond to the interview. Respondents include: Cathi Charles Wherry (Anishnabeque, Rama Mnjikaning) and Tracey Herbert (Shuswap, Bonaparte) from the First peoples' Heritage, Language, and Culture Council Dr. Lorna Williams (lil'wat), Canada Research Chair of Indigenous Knowledge and Learning at the University

of Victoria, and Marion Newman (Kwagiułth), a mezzo-soprano who performed in the production.

Wednesday, April 21: Asynchronous lecture

Assigned Lecture:

- A few tidy-up points from last week—and *The Life and Times of Malcolm X* (1986)—concerning whether/how opera is accused of being “political/too political” and how problematic these arguments tend to be (discussion of Lincoln Center, protests around 2013 Met *Eugene Onegin* gala, Gelb remarks about *Agrippina* in 2020).
- Indigenous opera: some history after the 1920s, discussion of indigenous civil rights movements, lifting of restrictions on indigenous dance, etc.
- list of works to consider in the 1990s and 2000s
- Case study on *BONES* (2001)
- Video interview with *BONES* creator Sadie Buck
- Short discussion of future directions, including opera *The Missing* (2017)

Assigned Week 13 Response, due Thursday April 29, 11:59pm

Friday, April 30: Synchronous Zoom meeting

Week 14: A Tale of Two Companies: Space, Site, Meaning, and Language

Monday May 3:

No assigned reading or lecture—partial podcast assignment script given, look at that assignment and begin working

Wednesday, May 5:

Assigned Lecture:

- opera companies in the United States—their finances, tiers, budgets
- topic #1: a capsule history of Houston Grand Opera & a capsule history of Long Beach Opera
- topic #2: co-commissioning opera
- topic #3: site specific opera
- topic #4: locally relevant commissions and productions
- Small case studies on four operas: *Frida* (1991); *Florencia en el Amazonas* (1996); *Cruzar la Cara de la Luna* (2010); *Únicamente la verdad* (2008/2010)

Assigned Week 14 Response, due Thursday May 6, 11:59pm

Friday May 7: Synchronous Zoom meeting

- Additional resources shared on indigenous opera: the First Nations Opera lab out of Calgary Opera with Marion Newman and the upcoming work by *Shell Shaker* by Jerod Impichchaachaaha' Tate
- rest of the hour spent discussing topics from the Wednesday lecture

Week 15: Dialogue, Change, and Paths Ahead

Monday May 10

Assigned Video viewing:

- June 2020 LA Opera panel on opera and race, hosted by J’Nai Bridges. Featuring Morris Robinson, Russell Thomas, Karen Slack, Julia Bullock, Lawrence Brownlee

Wednesday May 12

Assigned Lecture:

- Returned to Naomi André concept of “shadow culture operas,” and shared a list from André about historical and recent works connected to this concept
- Includes lecture, context, and listening clips from Terence Blanchard/Kasi Lemmons, *Fire Shut Up in My Bones* (2019) and Jeanine Tesori/Tazewell Thompson, *Blue* (2019)
- inclusion of extended *NY Times* quote from Thompson on genesis and inspiration for *Blue*
- additional reference provided for Nkeiru Okoye
- summary thoughts for how to consider opera and race beyond the scope of this class

Assigned Week 15 Response, due Thursday May 13, 11:59pm

Friday May 14: Synchronous Zoom meeting