

Detailed Syllabus and Assignments: Opera and Race

Brooks, Fall 2022

Week 1: Introductions

Tuesday, August 30: Course Intro

- Freewrite on "Opera and Race"
- A bit of background on course topic / informal sharing of books on the topic
- Course Syllabus / Course Evaluation

Thursday, September 1: Opening Ideas/Setting the Stage

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.
 - In-class viewing: Leontyne Price, TV appearance, *Aida*, 1964

Week 2: Opera Companies Today—Money, Admin, Commissions, Place, and Repertoire

Tuesday, September 6: Thinking about Companies: & Scope, Commissions, Site-Specific Works

Assigned Video Lecture:

- Opera tiers: various budget levels
Themes of the 19th Century:
- Tale of Two Companies: Houston Grand Opera
- Tale of Two Companies: Long Beach Opera
- Commissions/Co-Commissions
- Site-Specific Opera
- Locally Relevant Material

Assigned Week 2 Response, due Tuesday September 6, 11:00am

Groupwork in Class:

asked to look up the following questions

- 2023 opera seasons
- What operas are being given?
- Any world premieres?
- Any concert performances?
- Musicals?
- Operas by women or composers of color?

Groups researched: Houston Grand Opera, Santa Fe Opera, Opera Theatre of St. Louis, Seattle Opera, Chicago Lyric Opera.

Groups looked up the following operas: *Fire Shut Up in My Bones*, *Malcolm X*, *Troubled Island*, *Treemonisha*, *Blue*
Groups researched the following questions:

- 1) Different tiers of opera company budgets & Opera America Annual Field Reports
- 2) What opera companies in the US employ a Chief Diversity Officer?
- 3) How opera companies define "community outreach"?
- 4) Most performed operas in US last year
- 5) Research on Opera Ebony, Opera Creole, Opera Cultura

Thursday, September 8: Closer Look at Opera Administration, Money, and Race

Assigned Video Lecture:

- Assigned Reading: Some short excerpts and summaries from Antonio Cuyler, *Access, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Cultural Organizations—Insights from the Careers of Executive Opera Managers of Color in the U.S.* (New York: Routledge, 2021).
- Gemma Alexander, "Seattle Opera may have the country's only opera scholar in residence, helping make the art form more diverse and relevant." *Seattle Times*, 12 February 2020.

Assigned Week 2 Response, due Thursday September 8, 11:00am

- Additional Resources on Antiracism in Opera, 2020 Documents on Antiracist Work, Opera America Industry Resources, Seattle Opera Resources

Week 3: Thinking through the late 19th and early 20th Centuries

Tuesday, September 13: Thinking about American Opera in the 19th Centuries

Assigned Lecture:

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

- 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?

Assigned Week 3 Response, due Tuesday September 13, 11:00am

Thursday, September 15: Impresarios and Performers in the late 19th and early 20th century

- Short assigned reading: Lucy Caplan, "The Improbable Rise of the First African American Opera Impresario." *Classical Voice* 2017.
- Additional Resource: 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.
- Additional composers/performers to discover: Harry Lawrence Freeman, Scott Joplin, Harry Burleigh, Will Marion Cook.

Week 4: More Early History; Pellicciotti Prep

Tuesday, September 20: Groupwork/Small Research Projects on Impresarios, Performers, and Composers of Color in the early 20th century

Groupwork/Research on the following musicians:

- Theodore Drury
- Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield
- Sissieretta Jones
- Marie Selika Williams
- Flora Batson
- Caterina Jarboro
- Will Marion Cook
- Henry Thacker Burleigh
- R. Nathaniel Dett
- Emma Azalia Hackley
- Clarence Cameron White
- Hal Johnson

Thursday, September 22: Prepwork for Pelliocciotti

- Picking two of the finalist libretti to read/respond to

Assignment: Short Initial Work on Libretti, due September 22, 11:00am

Attendance—Pelliocciotti Competition, September 23-25

Assignment: Pelliocciotti Writeup, September 27

Week 5: Finish Pellicciotti Discussions, Finishing Language and Opera

Tuesday, September 27: Sum-Up Discussion about Pelliocciotti Finalists

- Class discussion
- Additional Resources: 5 links for how to commission new opera on issues of diversity, equity, inclusion

Thursday, September 29: "Finishing" Language and Opera

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).
- Questions around language, class, elitism, what has/has not changed since early 20th century
- 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 September 29, 11:00am

- Additional resource: In-class link to video about LA Opera and zarzuela project
- Additional resource: links to LatinaWomeninOpera, LatinasinOpera, etc

In-Class Group work on:

- Operas in Spanish that have premiered in the US in the last 30 years
- U.S. Opera companies who are doing something with zarzuela [what is it? when?]
- Latinx /Latine composers who have had operas premiered in the United States
- Latinx/Latine opera performers/creators [singers, conductors, executives, etc]

Week 6: "Indianist" Opera in the early 20th Century

Tuesday, October 4: Asynchronous video

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 the week's reading from *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 Video 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:

Thursday, October 6:

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.

Assigned Week 6 Response, due Thursday October 6 , 11:00am

Week 7: Returning to Indigenous Opera in the late 20th and early 21st Centuries

Tuesday, October 11: No class, Fall Break

Thursday, October 13: Indigenous Opera

This week we return to questions around Indigenous opera and representation. 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 (Kwagiulth), a mezzo-soprano who performed in the production.

Assigned Week 7 Response, due Thursday October 13 , 11:00am

Class groupwork mini-research projects on the following operas:

- *Giiwedín* (2010)
- *Missing* (2017)
- *Sweet Land* (2020)
- *Shellshaker: A Chickasaw Opera* (2023?)

Week 8: Puccini—Popularity, Possibilities, and Problems in the early 20th Century

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!

Tuesday, October 18: *Madama Butterfly* #1

Assigned Video 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.
- "Shiba Mo" and its borrowings in *Madama Butterfly* in Butterfly's Entrance, Act I
- staged selection from Butterfly's conversion scene.

Assigned Week 8 Response, due Tuesday, October 18, 11:00am

In-class Discussion:

- 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
- Geraldine Farrar's recording of "Un bel di."
 - Tamaki Miura recording of "Un Bel Di."

Thursday, October 20: Recent productions of *Madama Butterfly*

- 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

Assigned Week 8 Response, due Thursday, October 20, 11:00am

In-class group work on 3-4 recent productions of *Madama Butterfly* in the United States

- Additional resource: 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.

Week 8: Individual Meetings about Term Project Ideas

- Individual Office Hour meetings to brainstorm term project ideas

Assigned Project on Mid-Century Performers, due Nov 1, 11:00am

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

Tuesday, November 1: Informal Presentations on Your Mini-Research Projects on Mid-Century Performers

Work on mini- Project on Individual Performers: "A Deeper Dive Blog Post": 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—Brightspace 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?

Thursday, November 3: Lecture/Discussion on Marian Anderson

- Additional information on Marian Anderson's career, including information from new PBS documentary (featuring work by Carol Oja, Kira Thurman, Alisha Lola Jones, etc).
- Additional resources: PBS Marian Anderson Documentary, Carol Oja Lecture, article by Kira Thurman

Week 11: Opera in the 1930s—The Case of Porgy and Bess

Tuesday, November 8: Situating Porgy

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!

Assigned video lecture & resources:

- 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."

Thursday, November 10: No in-class meeting, work on reading

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

Assigned Week 11 Response, due Tuesday, November 15, 11:00am

Week 12: Opera in the 1930s and beyond—Continuing Porgy and Bess; Opera Issues in Mid-Century America—William Grant Still and into the 1970s

Tuesday, November 15: Lecture Wrap-Up

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).

- 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."

Opera Issues in mid-Century America:

- 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.
- 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.

Thursday, November 17: Opera in the 1980s—*Nixon in China*

Assigned work on *Nixon in China*:

- Oxford Online synopsis of *Nixon in China*
- Assigned video lecture on plot, musical style, operatic structure
- Additional Resource: 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.

In-class discussion:

- 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.

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

Tuesday, November 22: No class meeting; reading on your own

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 do three short things this Tuesday:

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

Assigned Video 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;
- Includes listening clips from Anthony Davis and *X, The Life and Times of Malcolm X* (1986)

Assigned Week 12 Response, due Tuesday, November 29, 11:00am

Week 14: Returning to Indigenous Opera

Tuesday, November 29: Revisiting Indigenous Opera

In-class Work:

- 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
- Video interview with *Shell Shaker* by Jerod Impichchaachaaha' Tate
- Short Discussion of Issues around The Industry's *Sweet Land*

Thursday, December 1: Class Cancelled

Week 15: Dialogue, Change, and Paths Ahead

Tuesday December 6 and Thursday December 8: In-class presentations on final projects

Additional resources shared/discussed:

- 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)
- 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
- Lecture, context, and listening clips from Terence Blanchard/Kasi Lemmons, *Fire Shut Up in My Bones* (2019) and Jeanine Tesori/Tazewell Thompson, *Blue* (2019)
- 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

What else can YOU share on this subject?

Please never hesitate to send me interesting things you come across! :)