

Midterm Essay Questions:

Pick 2 of the following questions.

- For **EACH** of these 2 questions, provide an answer of **at least 500 words**.
- **Do not exceed 1000 words for each question.**
- Indicate your choices by typing the number at the beginning of each essay.
- You may use your class notes, the slides on Moodle, class readings, etc. If you choose to directly quote from any of the readings, please use proper citation methods (i.e. use quotation marks and provide either a footnote or an in-paragraph citation for your source).
- **Please supply your answers in a single typed Word, Pages, PDF or RTF document and upload this file to Moodle no later than Sunday, March 19, 9:00 p.m.**

Please note that in your answers for this midterm, you should only discuss works up to week 8 chronologically, and you should primarily focus on our in-class works and discussions. If you would like to briefly mention other pre-World War II operas about which you are knowledgeable, that is acceptable, but please do not discuss post-1945 works in these essays.

Question Prompts: (pick 2)

1) One of the things we've learned this quarter is that twentieth-century opera began "in the shadow of Wagner." Indeed, though Wagner died in 1883, the powerful influence of his nineteenth-century operatic style endured well into the twentieth-century. Briefly, (using specific examples) explain what was so influential about Wagner's operatic innovations. Next, choose **two** examples from the operas we've discussed so far in class. For each opera, analyze how the composer/librettist created a work **influenced by** and/or **in reaction to** Wagnerian opera. Make sure to use detailed examples and discuss the musical style as well as the plot, staging, or other important elements.

2) We've talked briefly in class about scholars who have claimed that opera is about the "undoing of women," or the desire to see the soprano die at the end of the opera. While such claims are too broad to really help us much, there's no question that twentieth-century operas give us powerful (and at times ambiguous) messages about gender—the societal roles of both men and women. In your essay, **choose two operas** from our class assignments and discuss **how they present gender roles**. Make sure to acknowledge that there are different ways of interpreting these presentations: for each opera you pick, you should acknowledge

“the other side” of the argument as well. Use **detailed** examples and discuss the **musical style** as well as the plot, staging, or other important elements.

3) The scholar Tia DeNora has claimed that “music is much more than a decorative art...it is a powerful medium of social order.” Music can control and oppress, she states, as well as articulate emotions that empower. Opera is a particularly rich stage for representing encounters of race and class. Choose **two operas** from our class assignments **and discuss how race and/or class are represented in that music**. While discussing how your different examples were shaped by class and/or race, be sure to discuss the **musical style** in detail as well. Make sure to acknowledge some of the problematic consequences of these racial representations on the operatic stage.

4) One of our major course themes has focused on the collaborative nature of opera. Instead of seeing opera as the work of a single hand (the composer), we want to draw out all the rich means in which opera is a multi-faceted collaborative work forged by multiple artists. Frame your essay with an opening paragraph or section discussing general concepts about opera and collaboration. Then, in the body of your essay, analyze **two** examples from our class that demonstrate the collaborative nature of opera. How does someone other than the composer have an important voice in determining the creation, interpretation, or reception of an opera? As you discuss collaboration, **make sure to provide specific details about how these collaborations influence the staged work**.