

Session I: Claude Debussy's *Pelleas et Melisande*

The original setting is a distant time, in an imaginary, primitive kingdom of Allemonde (in French, all the world). In a dark forest, the prince Golaud (baritone or bass-baritone) finds the enigmatic and frightened Melisande (lyric soprano or lyric mezzo-soprano), who he persuades to follow him. They are married, and after a time- still knowing nothing of her origins- Golaud brings her to the household of his grandfather, the king Arkel (bass). There she meets her husband's mother Genevieve (contralto) and half-brother Pelleas (tenor or high lyric baritone): an attraction grows between Pelleas and Melisande. Melisande allows herself to lose her wedding ring, setting in motion a buildup of hostility and suspicion in Golaud. Eventually, he sends Yniold (treble), his son by his first wife, to spy on the pair. And though nothing incriminating emerges, his jealousy provokes him to violence against his wife. Then, shortly after the lovers have finally declared their suppressed feelings for one another, Golaud murders Pelleas. Melisande flees, is found, and lies dying. Torn by remorse, Golaud still cruelly presses her to tell whether she betrayed him with Pelleas. After saying that she has done nothing to be ashamed of, she dies.

Session II: Alan Berg's *Wozzeck*

The soldier Wozzeck (baritone) is the subject of manipulative experiments by the Doctor (bass) and confusing preachments and exhortation by the captain (tenor). With his common-law wife Marie (soprano) he has had a son, to whose support he contributes the money he receives for participating in the Doctor's experiments. Wozzeck begins to have hallucinations, and his discovery that Marie has begun an affair with the Drum major (tenor) plunges him deeper into a frenzied state of agitation. After seeing the pair together at a dancing hall, he leads the unsuspecting Marie into a wood and cuts her throat. He throws the knife into a lake and flees but is compelled to return to the scene in a fearful search of the weapon: he walks into the pool and drowns himself. Marie's body is found, and the neighbor children tell her little son that his mother is dead.

Session III: George Gershwin's *Porgy & Bess*

In Catfish Row, a black neighborhood on the Charleston waterfront, 1920s. During a crap game, a fight breaks out and the belligerent Crown (baritone) kills a man. He escapes, leaving his lover Bess (soprano) to fend for herself. She rests the advances of the drug dealer Sportin' Life (tenor) and moves in with the crippled beggar Porgy (baritone or bass-baritone). At Porgy's urging, she goes without him to a community picnic on Kittiwah Island, where Crown has been hiding out; he finds her and, unable to resist him, she stays on the island. When she reappears in Catfish row, sick and distraught, Porgy takes her back. Later, Porgy seizes an unexpected opportunity to kill Crown as he passes the cripple's house. But he is jailed for a week when he superstitiously refuses to identify the corpse for investigators. During that time, Sportin' life tempts the desperate Bess with "happy dust," and they leave for New York. Upon his release from jail, Porgy sets off in search of his Bess.

Session IV: Dimitri Shostakovich's *Lady MacBeth of Mtensk*

Page 2

The opera is set somewhere in Russia, originally in the 19th century. Katerina (soprano), the bored and frustrated wife of the merchant Ismailov (tenor), has an affair with Sergei (tenor), an employee of her husband's family. When her father-in-law Boris (bass) interferes she poisons him, and later kills her husband and hides his corpse in the basement. After she marries Sergei, the murder is discovered, and they are both exiled to Siberia. On the way, having rejected Katerina, Sergei flirts with another woman; as they cross a bridge, Katerina seizes her and jumps with her into the river.

Session V: Benjamin Britten's *Peter Grimes*

The opera setting is a fishing town on the East Coast of England in the 19th century. Peter Grimes (tenor), a fisherman, stands trial for the unexplained death of his apprentice and is acquitted. But the townspeople, distrusting his standoffish ways and inexplicable temper, widely suspect him of doing the boy in. The widowed schoolmistress Ellen Orford (lyric soprano) rises to befriend Grimes and supports him in his effort to secure another apprentice. Grimes confides to Captain Balstrode (baritone) his ambition to prosper as a fisherman and to marry Ellen. Ellen's own suspicions about Grimes' behavior are aroused when she discovers a tear in the new apprentices' jersey and a bruise on his neck. Later, as Grimes prepares to set out fishing, the boy slips and falls down the cliff to his death; Grimes, terrified, puts out to sea. A posse from the town invades Grimes' hut but finds nothing and departs. Grimes' disappearance makes the townspeople suspicious, and when the boy's jersey washes ashore Ellen and Balstrode believe their worst fears confirmed. Grimes wanders ashore, confused, in the fog. Ellen and Balstrode encounter him, and, finding him nearly deranged, Balstrode advises him to take his boat out to sea and sink it.

Session VI: Igor Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress*

The opera setting is 18th century England. In the idyllic rural world of Anne Trulove (lyric-soprano), her father (bass), and her sweetheart Tom Rakewell (lyric tenor), comes the sinister figure of Nick Shadow (baritone or bass-baritone), announcing that Tom has inherited a fortune from an unknown uncle, and drawing him off to London, business, and a web of influence. While Anne waits at home with no word from her beloved, Tom is introduced by his "servant" Shadow to brothels and commerce. Anne seeks him out and, though rejected, remains faithful. Egged on by Nick, Tom marries the bearded Baba the Turk (mezzo-soprano or contralto) and stakes his fortunes on a fantastical invention supposed to turn stones into bread. Tom's profligate ways bring ruin, and his possessions are sold at auction. At the end of a year, he comes with Nick- who has emerged as an overtly Mephistophelean figure to a cemetery, where they play cards for Tom's life. Tom wins one more chance and resolves to seek forgiveness from Anne, but the vanishing Shadow takes away his sanity. In the madhouse of Bedlam, where Anne visits him, Tom believes himself to be Adonis, and recognizes her only as Venus; when she leaves, he dies of grief.

