

MSC Essential Opera: Saints and Sinners Course Syllabus

Session One-

We'll begin this course with Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, one of the three Italian operatic masterpieces that the composer wrote in the final ten years of his life while living as a freelance musician in Vienna. The plot of this work, based on an old folk tale, has been rewritten countless times as plays, operas and even ballets by notable authors such as Moliere, Goldoni, Gluck, Tolstoi, Shaw and Rimsky-Korsakoff. We'll be looking at highlights of a performance from 2000 of a Met Opera production by Franco Zeffirelli and perhaps learn why Mozart may have labeled this piece a *Dramma giocoso*.

Session Two-

This session is all about Charles Gounod's most famous opera *Faust*. Much like *Don Giovanni*, this morality tale has a long history that has been retold in many versions including at least twenty operas adapted from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's two-part verse drama. As we take in some highlights of a somewhat controversial staging from a Royal Opera House performance in 2010, we'll examine Gounod's unique lyric style and how it differs from the ornate spectacles of French grand opera of the same period.

Session Three-

Next on the docket is Richard Wagner's *Tannhauser*. In this piece, the composer's 4th opera, Wagner continued to draw on medieval sources as well as a recent collection of stories and legends about medieval Thuringia by scholar Ludwig Bechstein. Although the opera has many of the characteristics of a typical German Romantic opera of the period, we will attempt to discover how Wagner is beginning to move toward the revolutionary, through-composed approach of his later works. This session will feature highlights of a Metropolitan Opera production from 1982

Session Four-

Returning to the French operatic repertoire of the 19th century, we'll be looking at highlights from Jules Massenet's *Thais*. The composer's *Manon* or *Werther* are more familiar to the opera public, but this piece has justifiably been produced more often in recent years. The lush late romantic style he is identified with continued the refined lyricism of Gounod, but we shall also learn why Massenet is sometimes labeled the French Puccini.

Session Five-

Although a relatively short opera (approx. 90 minutes), Richard Strauss's *Salome* packs quite a punch. Based on the play by Oscar Wilde, it received over 35 curtain calls when it premiered in Dresden in 1905, but it was often censored or cancelled elsewhere due to its lurid subject. As for the music, we will attempt to ascertain how the young composer extended the innovative compositional techniques of Richard Wagner.

Session Six-

We conclude this survey course with one of Giacomo Puccini's late works, *Suor Angelica*. It is the 2nd of three short, diverse operas that are part of *Il Trittico* commissioned and produced by the Met Opera in 1918. As we view a performance of the complete work, we shall see how Puccini masterfully paces this intense drama that requires a superb singing actress for the title role.

